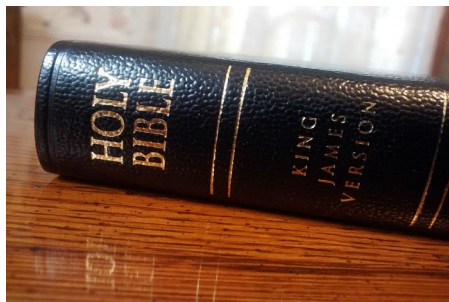




Eyewitness Testimony & Gospel Reliability: A Trial Lawyer Reviews the Historical & Objective Evidence

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Trial Lawyer & Member of First Baptist Church of Oak Island



Eyewitness Proof in a Doubting World

- **Why Seek Proof for the New Testament?**
 - Proof in Jesus' Ministry & Today's World
 - Proof to Rebut the Skeptics
- **What Eyewitness Proof is in the New Testament?**
 - Scriptural Proof & Ancient Christian Records
 - Legal Experts & Eyewitness Scholars
- **Why Are the Skeptics Wrong?**
 - Overwhelming Eyewitness Proof
 - Gospel Written during Lives of Eyewitnesses



Why Seek Proof Supporting the New Testament?

- **Jesus' Ministry with Proof**
- **Proof in Today's World**
- **Proof to Rebut Skeptics**



Jesus Teaching: Peakpx image

Jesus' Ministry with Proof

- **Follow Jesus' Example – Use Proof**

- “To these [apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing **proofs** . . .” [Acts 1:3](#).
- “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the **works** themselves.” [John 14:11 \(NASB\)](#).

- **Worship with our “Minds” – Use our Minds for God**

- “And he said to him: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and **with all your mind.**’” [Matthew 22:37 \(NASB\)](#).

- **Witness to All Faiths – Use Proof as Needed**

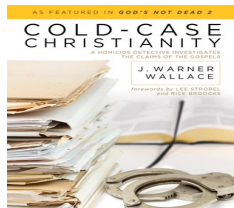
- “Go therefore and **make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” [Matthew 28:19-20 \(NASB\)](#).

Proof in Today's World

A Detective's Journey

Question

“Isn't true faith *blind*? Can someone come to a 'saving faith' by following *evidence*?”



Answer

“But this book *is* my ‘salvation story.’ It describes . . . the **evidential journey** I took to become a follower of Jesus.” [p. 13]

*Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity* (2023)

Renewed Focus on Proof

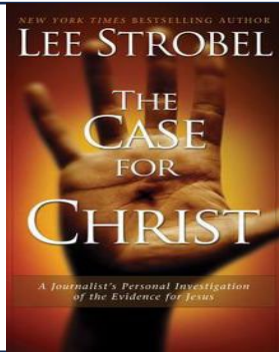
2000-2024 = Focus on Evidence

- *Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences* (2024)
- *Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Refutations* (2024)
- *Shaw, *13 Arguments for Reliability of NT* (2024)
- *Bauckham, *Jesus & the Eyewitnesses* (2017)
- *Blomberg, *Historical Reliability of NT* (2016)
- *Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (2016)
- *Qureshi, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus* (2016)
- *McDowell, *The Evidence for the Resurrection* (2009)
- *Geisler, *Why I Am a Christian* (2006)

Proof in Today's World: Proof Works

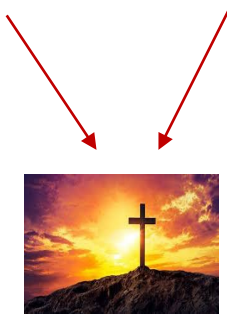
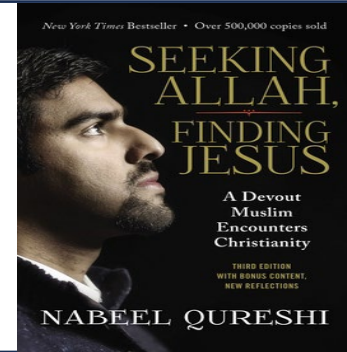
Lee Strobel
(Yale Law Graduate
& *Chicago Tribune*
Crime Journalist)

Atheist → Christian



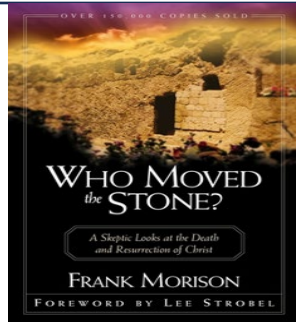
Nabeel Qureshi
(MD, Author,
& Theologian)

Muslim → Christian



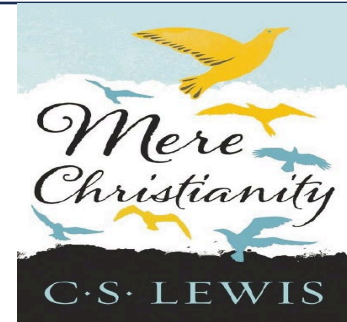
Frank Morison
(Advertising Agent)

**“mythology” →
“historical basis”**



C. S. Lewis
(Professor & Scholar)

Atheist → Christian



Proof to Rebut the Skeptics

What are the Skeptics Saying?

- **Atheists & Agnostics**
 - 450-500 million worldwide
- **College Campuses**
 - More than half of college professors call Bible “**fables**” and “**legends.**”
- **Pop Culture**
 - More than 100 books “denied the very **existence of Jesus.**”
- **Jesus Seminar**
 - Questioned over **80%** of sayings & deeds of Jesus



**See, e.g., Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, pp. 15-16; Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Historical Jesus*, p. 14 (2007); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 162 (2024); *The Light of Christ Journey* image.*

Proof to Rebut the Skeptics

What is Our Response?

- **Peter: “make a defense”**
 - “**always being ready to make a defense** to anyone who asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you . . .” 1 Peter 3:15
- **C. S. Lewis: Christian duty to defend**
 - “meet the enemies on their ground” & answer “intellectual attacks”
- **Great Commission: “all the nations”**
 - “make disciples of all the nations” Matthew 28:19-20

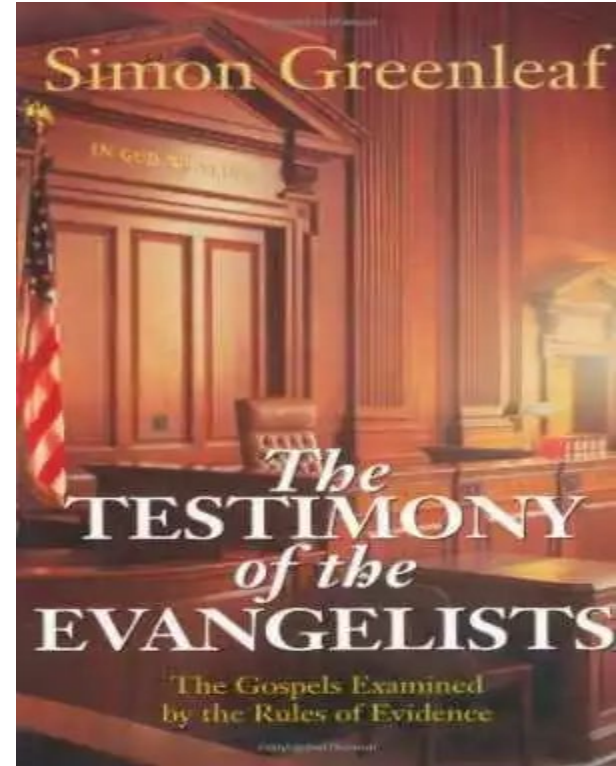


Freepik image: josephheath9004

*See Norman Geisler & Paul Hoffman, eds., *Why I Am a Christian*, p. 7 (2006) (“Indeed, we are instructed by three different apostles to defend attacks on faith”); C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, p. 50 (1949).

Eyewitness Testimony as Evidence

- **Gathering the Eyewitness Testimony**
 - What is the proof?
- **Weighing the Eyewitness Testimony**
 - How good is the proof?



Eyewitnesses: What the New Testament Says

- **John 15:27 (NASB)**

- **Jesus:** “[A]nd you will **testify** also, because you have been **with Me from the beginning.**”

- **Luke 1:2**

- “[J]ust as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and servants of the word.”

- **2 Peter 1:16**

- “[W]e were **eyewitnesses** of His majesty.”

- **1 John 1:1**

- “What was from the beginning, what we have **heard**, what we have **seen** with our own eyes, what we have looked at and **touched** with our hands, concerning the Word of Life –”

- **John 19:42**

- “And he who has **seen** has testified and his testimony is true . . .”

- **Acts 1:21-22**

- “Therefore it is necessary that of the men **who have accompanied us all the time** that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us and beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us – one of these must become a **witness** with us of His Resurrection.”

- **And More**

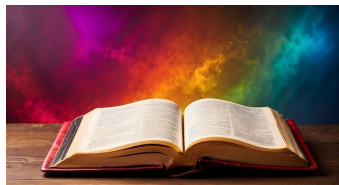
- Apostles (Acts 4:33; 5:29-32); James (1 Cor. 15:7); Paul (1 Cor. 15:8); Matthias (Acts 12:1-2); the **500** (1 Cor. 15:6).

Eyewitnesses: Scripture & the Law

What Bible Says

“What was from the beginning, what we have **heard**, what we have **seen** with our eyes, what we have **looked at** and **touched** with hands, concerning the Word of Life.”

1 John 1:1 (NASB)
(bold added)



What Law Says



Litigation Training

“what did you **see** or **hear** or **smell** or **touch** or **taste**?”

Federal Rule of Evidence 602

- “personal knowledge” of witness

*Irving Younger, “Art of Cross-Examination,” *ABA Litigation Monograph*, p. 3 (1976); Fed. R. of Evid. 602

Eyewitnesses: Ancient Christian Leaders

Gospels & Eyewitnesses

Matthew = Apostle

- Eyewitness

Mark → Peter

- Peter as source

Luke → “eyewitnesses”

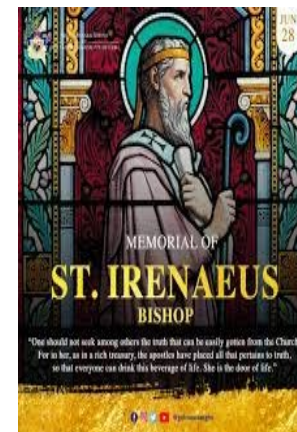
- Relied on interviews

John = Apostle

- Eyewitness

Ancient Leaders & Records

- Papias (Bishop of Hierapolis)
- Muratorian Fragment (AD 160)
- Irenaeus of Lyons
- Justin
- Tertulian



Eyewitnesses: Top Legal Experts

Legal Experts Know Eyewitnesses

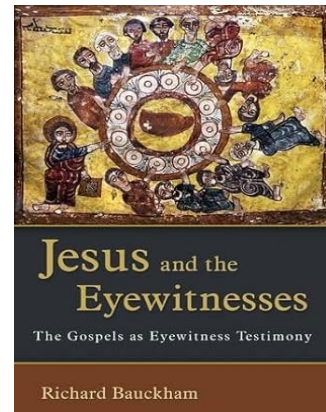
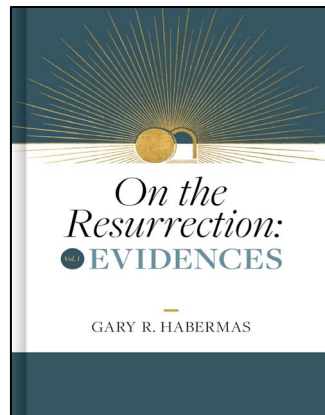
- **Mark Lanier (top trial lawyer)**
 - *Christianity on Trial: A Lawyer Examines the Christian Faith* (2014)
- **Warner Wallace (former LAPD homicide detective)**
 - *Cold-Case Christianity* (2023)
- **Lee Strobel (Yale law graduate & former crime reporter)**
 - *The Case for Christ* (2016).
- **Simon Greenleaf (Harvard Law Professor & author of law of evidence)**
 - *The Testimony of the Evangelists* (1874)



Eyewitnesses: Top Eyewitness Scholars

Top Scholars Know Eyewitnesses

- **Generally**
 - “eyewitness sources and testimony”
- **12 Disciples**
- **Gospel Women (Marys & more)**
- **Jesus’ relatives (e.g., James & Jude)**
- **Feeding 5000**
- **Healed People (e.g., Lazarus & Bartimaeus)**



*Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences* (2024); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the Eyewitnesses* (2017); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy: Thirteen Arguments for the Reliability of the New Testament* (2024); Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection* (2009); Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One* (2016); Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Truth* (2007)

Eyewitness Weight: How Strong?

- “the **strongest** evidence possible”
 - Dr. Gary Habermas
- “the **best relevant** evidence”
 - Historian David Hackett Fischer
- “**best** evidence . . . from eyewitnesses”
 - Sean McDowell
- “evidence that the historian should **not discard**”
 - Dr. Richard Bauckham
- “**strongest evidences** that these events *did* happen”
 - Dr. Timothy Paul Jones



*Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences* (2024); David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies* (1970); Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles* (2008); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the Eyewitnesses* (2017); Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Truth* (2007)

Eyewitness Weight: How Many Witnesses?

One Witness = Enough

- Leo Carter

- Sole witness to 2 homicides.
- Defendants killed other witnesses.
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 19 (2016).



- Jerry Strickland

- Sole witness to robbery at night.
- Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity*, p. 75 (2023).

- Other Litigation

- *Astro Dynamics* trial (company CEO).
- *Alloy Surfaces* trial (manufacturing head).

Multiple Witnesses

“As historian of antiquity Paul Maier attests, ‘Many facts from antiquity rest on just one ancient source, while **two or more sources** in agreement generally render the fact **unimpeachable.**’” Dr. Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 46 (2024) quoting Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 197.



Eyewitness Weight: How Much Proof?

Legal Standard

“Preponderance of Evidence”

- Party must offer “the stronger evidence, however slight the edge may be.” *Black’s Law Dictionary* (2009).
- “[T]he burden of proof is met when the party with the burden convinces the fact finder [e.g., judge] that there is a **greater than 50% chance** that the claim is true.” Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute (2023).

51% is the Winner!

Historical Standard

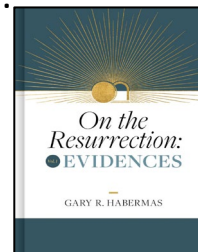
“Probable”

- Is the event **“probable”**?
- “Probable” is the prevailing test.
 - History, “hard” sciences (e.g., medicine), and “soft” sciences (e.g., psychology).
 - Historians & scholars apply “probable” standard.
- “Absolute certainty” not required.

Dr. Gary Habermas,

On the Resurrection: Evidences, pp. 23-24

(2024)



Eyewitness Weight: No Rebuttal?

Supreme Court Says

Facts vs. Allegations

- 1st party presents concrete **facts**;
- 2nd party makes **allegations & denials**;
- 2nd party loses – not rebut facts.

“[A] party opposing a properly supported motion [i.e., **facts**] may not rest upon **mere allegation or denials** of his pleading, but must set forth **specific facts** showing that there is a genuine issue for trial.” *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 256 (1986) (opposing party must offer “significant probative evidence”).



Common Sense Says

Evidence > Allegations

- **Evidence** is better than bald **denials**.
- **Facts** are better than **mere allegations**.
- **Witnesses** are better than **NO witnesses**.

So where are the non-believer witnesses??

*Dr. Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 25 (2024) (event established by research without evidential challenge).

The “Doubters” →



Why are the Skeptics Wrong?

- **Did Eyewitnesses Support the New Testament?**
- **Who Wrote the Gospels & Acts?**
- **When Were the Gospels & Acts Written?**



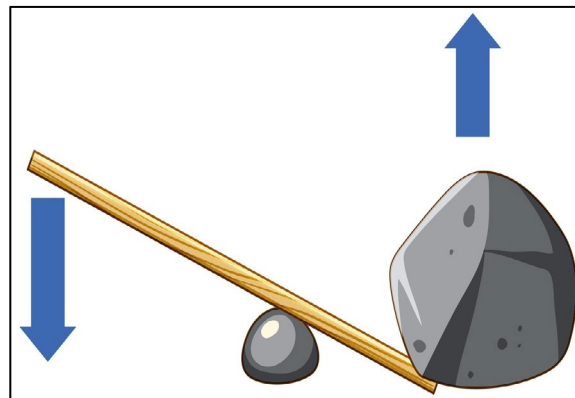
Skeptics vs. Eyewitness Proof

Did Eyewitnesses Support the New Testament?

Skeptic Says: “None of these writers claims to be an eyewitness” [Bart]

But the Evidence Says Otherwise:

- **Scriptures**
- **Ancient Christian Leaders & Records**
- **Top Legal Experts**
- **Top Eyewitness Scholars**



Bottom Line: Evidence is better than No Evidence

Skeptics vs. Eyewitness Proof: Who Wrote?

Ancient Sources Confirm

Gospel Writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke & John

- **More than 10 ancient sources**
- **100% agreement**

*Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the Eyewitnesses* (2017); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy* (2024); Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (2003); Simon Gathercole, "The Alleged Anonymity of the Canonical Gospels," *Journal of Theological Studies* 69 No. 2 (2018)

No Rebuttal

No Other Authors Identified

- **None!**

"Gospel Writer Scoreboard"



Gospels vs. Skeptics

10+

0

Skeptics vs. Eyewitness Proof: When Written?

Skeptics' Theory

Skeptics Say: Gospels written 50 to 150 years after crucifixion.

But Bad Methodology

- “unexamined assumptions”
- “willful blindness”

*John A. T. Robinson cited in Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection* (2009); Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament* (2016)

Life of Eyewitnesses

Evidence Says: **Gospels written during lifetime of eyewitnesses.**

- “living voice”
- “historically undeniable”
- 30 years “of Christ’s death”

*Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the Eyewitnesses* (2017); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy* (2024); Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (2003); Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (2007); Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament* (2022); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy* (2024).

Closing Trial Statement

Unmatched Evidence for New Testament:

1. **Multiple Eyewitnesses**
2. **Earliest Corroboration**
3. **Best Legal Assessments**
4. **Strongest Eyewitness Scholarship**

Means a Winning Case.

David Z. Bodenheimer

“This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.” Acts 2:32.

