

**Power of Eyewitness Testimony for the Resurrection:  
A Trial Lawyer's Review of the Historical & Objective Evidence**

**I. Overview**

The Resurrection stands at the very core of Christianity. As Paul famously testified, our faith hinges upon the Resurrection – and without it, our “faith is worthless.” 1 Corinthians 15:13-19 (NASB). But the Resurrection did, **in fact**, happen. And among many other proofs, eyewitness testimony provides compelling evidence that Jesus Christ rose on the third day.

This analysis focuses specifically upon eyewitness testimony for the Resurrection, addressing the following three issues:

- Why Seek Proof Supporting the Resurrection?
- What Eyewitness Proof Confirms the Resurrection?
- Why Are the Skeptics Wrong?

No ancient document comes close to the depth and breadth of Resurrection eyewitness proof found in the New Testament. When combined with additional internal and external evidence to follow in later analyses, Christians have an unmatched record for testifying to the Resurrection and carrying out the Great Commission “to make disciples of all the nations.”

**II. Why Seek Proof Supporting the Resurrection?**

If we are saved by faith alone,<sup>1</sup> why seek proof? Quite simply, proof can be a stepping-stone to faith, as Jesus demonstrated in his post-Resurrection ministry.

**A. Proof Works: Jesus' Ministry with Proof**

After the Resurrection, Jesus used proof not only to convince Thomas, but also the other apostles.

1. Thomas: From Doubt to Belief

Without seeing proof of Jesus' wounds, Thomas expressly refused to believe until Jesus showed him. Then he believed and preached until his martyrdom.

- Doubt. Thomas said to the other disciples, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” John 20:25 (NASB).
- Eyewitness Proof. Jesus brought the very proof that Thomas sought, inviting him to “Reach here with your finger, and **see** My hands; and **reach here with your**

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<sup>1</sup> James Beilby & Paul Eddy, eds., *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, p. 33 (2009) quoting Timothy Luke Johnson; see also Ephesians 2:8 (“by grace you have been saved through faith”).

**hand** and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” John 20:27 (NASB) (bold added).

- Belief. “Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” John 20:28 (NASB).<sup>2</sup>
- Martyrdom. After his eyewitness encounter, Thomas became a powerful witness to the Resurrection, preaching through persecution and even until martyrdom.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The Apostles: From Doubt and Fear to Bold Preaching

To drive away their fears and doubts after the crucifixion, Jesus presented “many convincing proofs” to the apostles after the Resurrection.

- Fears. Despite hearing from Mary Magdalene that Jesus had risen, the disciples hid in “fear” behind closed doors. John 20:19 (NASB).
- Doubts. Even after Jesus appeared to them, some disciples remained “doubtful” (Matthew 28:17), as Jesus asked: “why do doubts arise in your hearts?” Luke 24:38 (NASB).
- Convincing Proofs. “To these [apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by **many convincing proofs**. . .” Acts 1:3 (NASB) (bold added).<sup>4</sup>

Backed by the force of the Holy Spirit, Jesus empowered the apostles with eyewitness evidence, thus propelling their ministry to vast multitudes across the known world.

From Few to Many. Coupled with the power of the Holy Spirit, these “convincing proofs” led the apostles to preach boldly, starting with a small band of 120 (Acts 1:15), then saving “about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41), followed by “about five thousand” who believed. Acts 4:4 (NASB). Even “a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” Acts 6:7 (NASB).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jesus contrasted how Thomas only believed after eyewitness proof, compared with others who believed without seeing Jesus: “‘Because you have **seen** Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not **see**, and yet believed.’” John 20:29 (NASB) (bold added); *see also* Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, p.158 (2008) (“The Gospel of John makes it clear that Thomas *personally* saw Jesus after his death and believed that he was the Lord.”) (italics in original).

<sup>3</sup> Acts 5:17-25 (apostles jailed for preaching about Jesus and the Resurrection); Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, pp.172-73 (2008) (later Christian leaders and records reported that Thomas died as a martyr while preaching about Jesus and the Resurrection in India).

<sup>4</sup> *See also* Luke 24:39 (NASB) (Jesus said: “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”).

<sup>5</sup> *See* J. P. Moreland quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 272 (2016) (“But five weeks after [Jesus is] crucified, over ten thousand Jews are following him and claiming that he is the initiator of a new religion”); Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, pp. 218-19 (1997) (explaining these numbers of Christian conversions were reasonable, given the flood of Jews into Jerusalem during Pentecost).

From Jerusalem to the World. Christianity soon spread over 1,500 miles to Rome and the rest of the empire, as confirmed by both the Scriptures and even non-Christian sources.<sup>6</sup>

- AD 64 (34 years after Resurrection). Roman historian Tacitus (a hostile source to Christians) recorded that, of “the crowd called ‘Christians,’” a “vast multitude” already resided in Rome and had been “condemned” by Nero.<sup>7</sup>
- AD 112 (82 years after Resurrection). Roman administrator Pliny the Younger observed “that the Christian influence was so strong in his area [Bithynia in Asia Minor] that the pagan temples had been nearly deserted, attendance at pagan festivals severely decreased, and few purchased sacrificial animals.”<sup>8</sup>

Proof Works. Thus, within 100 years after the Resurrection, Christianity “triumphed over a number of competing ideologies and eventually overwhelmed the entire Roman empire.”<sup>9</sup> When coupled with the force of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of Jesus and the apostles demonstrates as a historical fact the power of eyewitness proof.

## **B. Proof in Today’s World**

Proof works today. In fact, atheists and other nonbelievers have accepted Christianity after investigating the evidence for Jesus Christ and the Resurrection.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Gary Habermas (professor). From being a “near Buddhist,” he followed the evidence to become a Christian and one of the leading authorities on the Resurrection.

- Skeptic & “Near Buddhist.” From having “serious doubts about Christianity” in his youth, Gary Habermas studied “various world views” and once told his mother that he was “close to becoming a Buddhist.”<sup>11</sup>
- Investigation. After focusing on proof of the Resurrection, he wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on the Resurrection – but on the panel’s condition that he “could not

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 1:8 (“your faith is being proclaimed through the whole world”); Acts 28:16-25 (Paul in Rome); Philippians 4:22 (“All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household”) (NASB); Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 219 (1997) (Christianity spread to “Rome 1,500 miles away” from Jerusalem).

<sup>7</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* xv, 44, quoted in Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 219 (1997).

<sup>8</sup> Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, translated by William Melmoth, rev. W. M. L. Hutchinson, Loeb Classical Library, pp. 2:401-5 cited in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 184 (2024).

<sup>9</sup> J. P. Moreland quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 276 (2016); see also Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 219 (1997) (“For [Christianity] to spread this far, this fast in the ancient world is absolutely unparalleled”).

<sup>10</sup> Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity*, p. 13 (2023); Lee Strobel, *The Case for Easter*, p. 8 (2003); Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 280, 336 (2016); Strobel, *The Case for Creation*, pp. 18-19 (2004); Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One*, pp. 24-26 (2016).

<sup>11</sup> Gary Habermas, “A Short Life of Gary Habermas,” <https://www.garyhabermas.com/vitainnuce.htm>.

use the New Testament as evidence, unless the individual passages could be affirmed by ordinary critical standards, apart from faith.”<sup>12</sup>

- Belief. He concluded that the Resurrection “could be known according to probability as a normal historical fact.”<sup>13</sup>

Since his dissertation, Dr. Habermas has dedicated his life to defending Christianity, publishing over 50 books, 80 book chapters, and 100 articles and becoming one of the world’s leading authorities on evidentiary bases for the Resurrection.<sup>14</sup>

Josh McDowell (evangelist & author). From a hard-core skeptic, he became a best-selling author and leading college-campus evangelist for Christianity.

- Skeptic. Once calling religion “garbage,” Josh McDowell “decided to write a book that would make an intellectual joke of Christianity” and “gather evidence to prove that Christianity is a sham.”<sup>15</sup>
- Investigation. Travelling “throughout the United States and Europe” to research Christianity, he accumulated “overwhelming evidence” that “Jesus Christ was God’s Son.”<sup>16</sup>
- Belief. Although he still remained skeptical during this investigation of the proof, he kept hearing a voice saying “Josh, you don’t have a leg to stand on” for this doubt and he finally prayed, accepted Jesus Christ, and became a devoted Christian.<sup>17</sup>

Since coming to faith, Josh McDowell has witnessed to over seven million students and professors on more than 700 campuses and written leading apologetics works defending Christianity and the Resurrection.<sup>18</sup>

Frank Morison (advertising agent & author): After refusing to believe in the Resurrection, Albert Henry Ross (pen name Frank Morison) became a believer and wrote one of the classic defenses of the Resurrection.

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<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Gary Habermas, “Publications,” <https://www.garyhabermas.com/publications.htm>; see, e.g. Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, “Reviews” (2024); Gary Habermas’ chapters in Norman Geisler & Paul Hoffman, *Why I Am a Christian*, pp. 120-134, 161-174 (2006).

<sup>15</sup> Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, pp. xxiv-xxv (1999).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*, p. xxv.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> William Bright, Foreword in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. xi, (1999); see also, Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection* 145 (2009); Josh & Sean McDowell, *More than a Carpenter* (2009).

- Skeptic. Originally believing Jesus' Resurrection was a "primitive mythology" and miracles did not happen, he refused to say the last passage of the Apostles' Creed – "The third day [Jesus] rose again from the dead."<sup>19</sup>
- Investigation. Ten years later, he "thoroughly investigated the last seven days of Jesus' life," reviewing both the Gospel accounts and ancient Christian and non-Christian historical sources.<sup>20</sup>
- Belief. After sifting the evidence, he found the empty tomb to be a "formidable fact," concluding that "a deep and profoundly historical basis" existed for the Apostles' Creed that "'The third day [Jesus] rose again from the dead.'"<sup>21</sup>

Frank Morison (aka Albert Henry Ross) not only wrote one of the classic defenses of the Resurrection (*Who Moved the Stone*), but his work also served as "an important early link in a long chain of evidence that God used to bring [Lee Strobel] into his kingdom," thus illustrating again how proof can open the door to faith.<sup>22</sup>

### C. Proof to Rebut the Skeptics

As skepticism grows in the modern world, Christians have a duty to set the record straight about the truth and authenticity of the Resurrection.

- What are the skeptics saying?
- How do we defend against such challenges?

While the skeptics are many, Christians not only have powerful historical evidence to meet these challenges, but also have a Great Commission duty to defend against such attacks.

#### 1. What are the Skeptics Saying?

Worldwide, approximately 1.1 billion people are **unaffiliated** – meaning that they are atheists, agnostics, or people not identifying with any religion.<sup>23</sup> Many more assert that the Resurrection never happened. From atheists to radical Christian scholars, many have challenged historical facts regarding both Jesus and the Resurrection.

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?* pp. 7-10, 67 (1958) (foreword by Lee Strobel).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*, pp. 7, 11-12, 43.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*, pp. 12, 112, 193.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*, pp. 7-8 (foreword by Lee Strobel).

<sup>23</sup> Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions," (Apr. 2, 2015) <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

- John Dominic Crossan (historian & former Catholic priest). “I do not think anyone, anywhere, at any time brings dead people back to life.”<sup>24</sup>
- Sam Harris (atheist & author). “[T]here is no more evidence to justify a belief in the literal existence of Yahweh and Satan than there was to keep Zeus perched upon his mountain throne or Poseidon churning the seas.”<sup>25</sup>
- Jesus Seminar. This seminar described the Gospels as “folklore” and “an imaginative theological construct” in which over 80% of the words and deeds of the historical Jesus never happened.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, more than 100 books and essays “in the past two hundred years have fervently denied the very existence of Jesus.”<sup>27</sup>

## 2. How Do We Defend Against Such Challenges?

We must tackle such challenges head-on for at least three reasons: (1) the apostles did; (2) such defenses serve the Great Commission; and (3) our defenses can bring others to faith.

Apostles’ Defense. Faced with stout opposition to sharing his faith, Paul consistently and boldly preached in “defense” of the gospel: “I am appointed for the **defense** of the gospel.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, both Peter and Jude called for believers to “make a defense” and “contend earnestly” for the gospel message:

Peter. “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, **always being ready to make a defense to anyone who asks** you to give an account of the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” [1 Peter 3:15 (NASB) (emphasis added)].

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Ostling (AP), “Opposing Views on Jesus’ Resurrection,” *The Spokesman-Review* (Apr. 15, 2006) quoting John Dominic Crossan.

<sup>25</sup> Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, p. 16 (2004).

<sup>26</sup> Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus*, p. 6 (1998); Robert Funk, Roy Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, p. 4 (1993) cited in Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, & Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, pp. 21, 29 (2006); Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, p. 16 (2007) citing Funk, Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *Five Gospels*; and Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *Acts of Jesus*.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence*, p. 6 (2000) quoted in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p.162 (2024).

<sup>28</sup> Philippians 1:16 (NASB) (bold added); see Acts 21:1 (after being seized in the temple, Paul said “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you”) (NASB) (italics in original); Acts 25:16, 18 (after being brought to trial, Paul asked for “an opportunity to make his defense against charges” by his accusers who complained that he preached about “a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive”) (NASB); Philippians 1:7 (while imprisoned, Paul spoke “in the defense and confirmation of the gospels”) (NASB); see Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. xxx (1999) (list of citations).

Jude. “I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you **contend earnestly** for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” [Jude 3 (NASB) (emphasis added)].<sup>29</sup>

Great Commission. The crucifixion and Resurrection are based on historical facts.<sup>30</sup> To “make disciples of all the nations,” we need to be ready to defend these historical facts:

An intelligent Christian ought to be able to point up the flaws in a non-Christian position and to **present facts and arguments** which tell in favor of the gospel. If our apologetic prevents us from explaining the gospel to any person, it is an inadequate apologetic.<sup>31</sup>

For example, Nabeel Qureshi became a Christian after investigating the factual bases for Christianity and Islam, ultimately accepting Christianity as historically true.<sup>32</sup>

Faith With Facts. The Resurrection’s historical basis has been tested in head-to-head debate between the world’s leading atheist at the time (Anthony Flew) and one of the top experts on the Resurrection (Gary Habermas). With a five-judge panel, the debate specially addressed the Resurrection: “Did Jesus rise from the dead?”

Anthony Flew, one of the leading philosophical atheists in the world, . . . tangled with [Gary] Habermas in a major debate on the topic, ‘Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?’ The results were decidedly one-sided. Of the five independent philosophers from various colleges and universities who served as judges of the debate’s content, four concluded that Habermas had won. One called the contest a draw. None cast a ballot for Flew.<sup>33</sup>

Not only did Gary Habermas’ defense of the Resurrection prevail overwhelmingly, but the “strong evidence for God’s existence” led Anthony Flew to become a theist.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See also 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 the faith”).

<sup>30</sup> See Acts 1:3 (“many convincing proofs”); Luke 1:2-3 (“eyewitnesses” and investigation); J.N.D. Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History*, p. (1970) (Christianity based on “indisputable facts”) quoted in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. xxx (1999).

<sup>31</sup> Clark Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case*, p. 7 (1967); see also C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, p. 50 (1949) quoted in Geisler & Paul Hoffman, eds., *Why I Am a Christian*, p. 7 (2006).

<sup>32</sup> Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One* (2016); see also Gary Habermas, *The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ Among the Major World Religions* (2016) <https://www.garyhabermas.com/Evidence2/>

<sup>33</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case for Easter*, p. 61 (2003).

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Flew & Gary Habermas, “My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: A Discussion between Antony Flew and Gary Habermas,” *Philosophia Christi* 6, pp. 200-202, 210-11 (2004) cited in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 20-21, n. 28 (2024) (Flew attributing his “conversion” to “his having to go along with the evidence” and the “strong evidence for God’s existence”).

In summary, we have a Scriptural duty to defend the truth – including the historical proof – of the Resurrection. As real-world examples show, such a defense serves the Great Commission “to make disciples of all the nations” and has a proven track record of bringing even atheists to faith in God.

### **III. Eyewitness Testimony as Evidence for the Resurrection**

Whether for historical validity or courtroom proof, eyewitness testimony carries great evidentiary weight. Overwhelming eyewitness testimony fully supports the Resurrection.

#### **A. Gathering the Proof of Eyewitness Testimony**

Proof of New Testament eyewitness testimony comes from multiple sources, any one of which provides compelling evidence for the Resurrection:

- (1) the plain language of the New Testament itself;
- (2) the earliest oral traditions (creeds) about the Resurrection;
- (3) the most ancient records following the New Testament; and
- (4) the top scholars on Resurrection eyewitness testimony.

Each of these categories of proof are examined below. In combination, this mass of evidence not only confirms the Resurrection, but also lacks any effective historical rebuttal.

#### **1. What Do the Scriptures Say?**

By its express language, the New Testament identifies multiple eyewitnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- **The Disciples – Multiple Times & Places**
  - **Jerusalem (without Thomas)**. “So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, **Jesus came and stood in their midst** and said to them, “Peace be with you.” John 20:19 (NASB) (bold added); *see also* John 20:25 (“We have seen the Lord!”).
  - **Jerusalem (with Thomas)**. “After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them, **Jesus came**, the doors having been shut and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace be with you.’” John 20:26 (NASB) (bold added).
  - **Jerusalem**. “To these [disciples/apostles] **He also presented Himself alive** after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” Acts 1:3 (NASB) (bold added).

- Galilee. “But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. **When they saw Him**, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.” Matthew 28:16-17 (NASB) (bold added).
- Sea of Tiberias. “After these things **Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias**, and He manifested Himself in this way.” John 21:1 (NASB) (bold added).
- Bethany. “And He led them out as far as Bethany and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.” Luke 24:50 (NASB).
- Ascension. “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 – 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**.” Acts 1:21-22 (NASB) (bold added).
- Generally. “He appeared . . . then to the twelve.” 1 Corinthians 15:5 (NASB).
- Simon Peter – Multiple Sources
  - “And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying ‘The Lord has really risen and **has appeared to Simon**.’” Luke 24:33-34 (NASB) (bold added).
  - “He appeared to Cephas.” 1 Corinthians 15:5 (NASB).
  - “But that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord.’ So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work) and threw himself into the sea.” John 21:7 (NASB); *see also* John 21:15-22 (Peter speaks with Jesus).
  - “we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” 2 Peter 1:16 (NASB).
- Mary Magdalene & Other Women
  - Mary Magdalene. “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him in Hebrew ‘Rabboni!’ (which means, Teacher).” John 20:16 (NASB); *see also* John 20:18 (“Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord,’ and that He said these things to her.”).
  - Mary Magdalene & “other Mary.” “And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped him.” Matthew 28:9 (NASB).

- Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, & Salome. “And he said to them, ‘Do not be amazed, you are looking for Jesus of Nazarene, who has been crucified. **He has risen**; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid him.’” Mark 16:6 (NASB) (bold added).
- Others (including women). “And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and **those who were with them** . . . While they were telling these things, **He Himself stood in their midst** and said to them ‘Peace be to you.’” Luke 24:33, 36 (NASB) (bold added).<sup>35</sup>
- John as Part of Disciples & Individually
  - “Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord.’” John 21:7 (NASB).
  - “And he who **has seen** has testified, and his testimony is true.” John 19:35 (NASB) (bold added); *see also* John 21:24 (“testifying to these things”).
  - “and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us.” 1 John 1:2 (NASB).
- Two Travelers to Emmaus. “Then their eyes were opened and **they recognized Him**; and He vanished from their sight.” Luke 24:31 (NASB) (bold added).
- James. “then He appeared to James.” 1 Corinthians 15:7 (NASB).
- Apostles. “then He appeared . . . to all the apostles.” 1 Corinthians 15:7 (NASB).<sup>36</sup>
- 500 Persons. “After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of who remain until now, but some have fallen asleep.” 1 Corinthians 15:6 (NASB).
- Paul. “and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.” 1 Corinthians 15:8 (NASB); *see also* 1 Corinthians 9:1; Acts 9:1-6; Acts 22:6-10; Acts 26:12-18 (appearance of Jesus to Saul/Paul).

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<sup>35</sup> The women saw the empty tomb and heard from the angels that “He was alive.” Luke 24:22-23 (NASB). Based upon this and other passages in Luke regarding the central role of women in the Resurrection events, “those who were with them” included the women as eyewitnesses to the Resurrection. Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, pp. 281-82, particularly n. 57 (2002); *see also* Acts 1:15 (“along with the women” indicates that the women were part of the 120 “persons” as witnesses).

<sup>36</sup> Given that Paul specifically refers to “the twelve” in verse 5, the subsequent reference to “the apostles” in verse 7 must be the broader group of eyewitnesses. *See* Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 578 (2017) (“Clearly ‘apostles’ refers to a much larger category than just the Twelve”).

Many accounts of ancient history “rest on just one ancient source,” thus making two sources virtually “unimpeachable.”<sup>37</sup> No other event in ancient history can claim dozens of eyewitnesses, much less hundreds of eyewitnesses, as documented in the New Testament’s multiple sources proving the Resurrection:

Jesus’ resurrection appearances and the number of people who claimed to witness them is **unparalleled in history**. [James] Dunn concurs, “Appearances of Jesus which impacted on the witnesses as resurrection appearances did not conform to any known or current paradigm.”<sup>38</sup>

As the testimony above shows, the eyewitnesses not only heard and saw the risen Jesus, but some of them even touched him. What an eyewitness saw, heard, or touched represents the foundation for firsthand personal testimony readily admitted into the courtroom.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the New Testament’s eyewitness testimony meets both legal and historical standards for proof.

## 2. What Do the Earliest Oral Traditions Say?

Long before the Gospels were recorded, Christians preached the Resurrection from the earliest days. Some of these earliest preachings became known as creeds – short, easy-to-memorize, easy-to-repeat statements of faith.<sup>40</sup> Paul captures perhaps the best-known creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 (NASB) (bold added):

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to **Cephas** [Peter], then to **the twelve**. After that He appeared to more than **five hundred** brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to **James**, then to all the **apostles**.

As a creed dating back to shortly after the Resurrection, this oral tradition provides powerful historical evidence corroborating the Gospels and validating the Resurrection:

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church*, p. 197 (1998).

<sup>38</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 134 (2020) quoting James Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making 1*, pp. 874-75 (2003) (bold added).

<sup>39</sup> Irving Younger, “No. 1: The Art of Cross-Examination,” *American Bar Association (ABA) The Litigation Monograph Series*, p. 3 (1976) (“what did you see or hear or smell or touch or taste?”); see also Federal Rule of Evidence 602 (witness may testify about matters of “personal knowledge”).

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 371 (2024) (“brief, originally oral reports” about “what the earliest church actually taught, preached, believed, and practiced” before the first New Testament books had been written); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 54 (2024) (“formalized statements circulated in the earliest period of Christianity”); Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, pp. 98-99 (2002) (identifying 8 linguistic factors confirming 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 as an early oral tradition (creed)).

- “the earliest, most authoritative, and most detailed list of Jesus Christ’s resurrection appearances in a single text;”<sup>41</sup>
- “the bedrock, most ancient source of Christianity;”<sup>42</sup>
- “This account meets all the demands of historical reliability that could possibly be made of such a text as things stood.”<sup>43</sup>

As discussed below, 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 readily meets the best standards for historical evidence that is: (1) close in time to the Resurrection; (2) based on actual eyewitnesses; (3) received directly from eyewitnesses (Peter and James) in Jerusalem; and (4) confirmed at least twice by Paul with the Resurrection eyewitnesses.

Early in Time. Scholars generally date Paul’s conversion experience (when Jesus appeared to him) as being within two to three years after the crucifixion.<sup>44</sup> The overwhelming consensus of the experts is that Christians had already been preaching the 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed even before Paul’s conversion.

- “All scholars recognize here an early tradition that was formulated **even before Paul’s own call** to be an apostle (to which he refers in v. 8).”<sup>45</sup>
- “It preserves the **most ancient statement of Christianity** and ‘the oldest record of Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth,’ as Joseph Fitzmyer notes. It is unparalleled in the New Testament. In fact, it is unparalleled in all of ancient literature.”<sup>46</sup>
- “There is almost universal scholarly consensus that 1 Cor. 15.3-5 contains a carefully **preserved tradition pre-dating Paul’s apostolic activity** and received by him within two to five years of the founding events.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 371-72 (2024).

<sup>42</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 23 (2020).

<sup>43</sup> Hans von Campenhausen, “The Events of Easter and the Empty Tomb, *Tradition and Life in the Early Church*, p. 44 (1968) *quoted in* Gary Habermas, “The Early Christian Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus: A Response to Thomas Sheehan,” *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations*, 401 n. 10 (1992).

<sup>44</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 376, n. 17, 453 (2024) (citing a multitude of sources); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 57 (2024) (“conversion around AD 32”). Even the radical Jesus Seminar agreed: “Most Fellows think the components of the list reported there were formed prior to Paul’s conversion which is usually dated around 33 C.E.” Funk & the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, p. 454 (1998).

<sup>45</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 578 (2017) (bold added).

<sup>46</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 85-86 (2020) *quoting* Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 543 (2008) (emphasis added); *see also* Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*, p. 98 (1982) (“this oldest faith statement about the resurrection”).

<sup>47</sup> James Ware, “The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15.3-5,” *New Testament Studies*, p. 60 (2014) *quoted in* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 386, 454, n.56 (2024) (bold added).

According to leading scholars, this creed arose “**within months** of Jesus’ death”<sup>48</sup> and represented a “tradition in 1 Cor 15.3b-5, which goes back **very close to the events themselves**, attests appearances to both individuals and groups.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, this creed readily meets the historical standard for early dating because Christians began reporting the Resurrection very soon after the crucifixion.

Actual Eyewitnesses. In both the historical arena and the courtroom, eyewitness testimony serves as compelling – even decisive – evidence.<sup>50</sup> On its face, 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 identifies multiple eyewitnesses to the Resurrection:

There can be no doubt that in his own recital of a kerygmatic summary in 1 Corinthians 15[,] Paul is citing the *eyewitness testimony* of those who were recipients of resurrection appearances, including the most prominent in the Jerusalem church: Peter (Cephas), the Twelve, and James the brother of Jesus.<sup>51</sup>

Even non-Christians agree. Jewish historian Pinchas Lapide analyzed this creed, concluding that “this unified piece of tradition which soon was solidified into a formula of faith may be considered as **a statement of eyewitnesses** for whom the experience of the resurrection became the turning point of their lives.”<sup>52</sup> Atheist Bart Ehrman admits that Peter and James were “two good people to know if you want to know anything about the historical Jesus” and then candidly asks: “Can we get **any closer to an eyewitness report** than this?”<sup>53</sup> Thus, this creed satisfies the second major historical criterion – proof by eyewitness testimony.<sup>54</sup>

Meetings with Eyewitnesses. Paul did not simply teach the creed to the Corinthians. Long before he wrote to the Corinthians, he talked directly with actual eyewitnesses listed in the creed. During the first Jerusalem trip, he met with Peter and James (“the Lord’s brother”), followed by a second Jerusalem trip where he met with Peter, James, and John.

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<sup>48</sup> James Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, p. 855 (2003) quoted in Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 81 (2020) (bold added); see also Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 382 n.28 (2024); Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 125 (1977) (dating 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 as early as AD 30) cited in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 450 (2024)..

<sup>49</sup> Gerd Theissen & Annette Merz, *Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, p. 490 (1998) quoted in Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 80 (2020) (bold added).

<sup>50</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 38, 45 (2024) (“the strongest evidence possible”); Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, p. 29 (2008) (“best evidence”); Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 109 (2007) (“strongest evidences that these events did happen”).

<sup>51</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 308 (2017) (italics in original); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 376 (2024) (creed “came from the most influential apostles themselves – the eyewitnesses”).

<sup>52</sup> Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*, p. 99 (2002) (bold added).

<sup>53</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?* pp. 144, 145 (2012) (bold added).

<sup>54</sup> For ancient historians, eyewitness testimony represented the gold standard for proof. See, e.g., Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 8-11 (2017).

- 1<sup>st</sup> Jerusalem Trip (AD 35). “Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.” Galatians 1:18-19 (NASB).<sup>55</sup>
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Jerusalem Trip (AD 49). “Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. . . . and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” Galatians 2:1, 9 (NASB).<sup>56</sup>

The scholars nearly all agree that Paul received the 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed directly from Peter and James – *i.e.*, Resurrection eyewitnesses expressly named in the creed.<sup>57</sup>

Corroboration of Resurrection. For the first Jerusalem trip, Paul sought out Peter and James to “inquire” (*i.e.*, to learn directly from the eyewitnesses) when he received the creed.<sup>58</sup> On the second Jerusalem trip, the “pillars” of the early Church (Peter, James, & John) met Paul to verify that they all preached the same message – and they all agreed as underscored by sharing “the right hand of fellowship” (Galatians 2:9) on the message.<sup>59</sup> In 1 Corinthians 15:11, Paul confirmed that he and the other apostles all preached the same message on the Resurrection.<sup>60</sup> Thus, long before Paul wrote to the Corinthians around AD 55, he had fully vetted the fact of the Resurrection directly with the leading eyewitnesses – Peter, James, and John.<sup>61</sup>

In summary, the 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed delivers powerful factual evidence of the Resurrection meeting the most demanding historical criteria: (1) early proof within two years (AD 32) of the crucifixion; (2) multiple eyewitnesses (Peter, James, John, “the twelve,” and more); and (3) verification of the Resurrection by these eyewitnesses in two meetings.

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<sup>55</sup> The first Jerusalem trip occurred around AD 35. Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 58 (2024).

<sup>56</sup> The second Jerusalem trip took place about AD 49. Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 58 (2024).

<sup>57</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 453-4, 421, 402; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 266-67 (2017); James Ware, “The Resurrection of Jesus in the Pre-Pauline Formula of 1 Cor 15.3-5,” *New Testament Studies*, p. 60 (2014); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 83, 67 (2020).

<sup>58</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 377 (Greek terms “indicate that Paul went to Jerusalem to ‘investigate’ or to ‘inquire’ of the other two apostles to obtain knowledge and/or information”); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 266 (2017) (presume that “Paul was becoming thoroughly informed of the Jesus traditions as formulated by the Twelve, learning them from the leader of the Twelve, Peter”).

<sup>59</sup> “Critical scholars acknowledge rather freely the agreement here between these four leaders on the essentials of the gospel message.” Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 391 & n. 70 (2024); *see also* Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 57 (2024).

<sup>60</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:11 (NASB) (“Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed”); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 266 (2017) (Paul “asserts the unanimity between himself and the other apostles on the key matters he has just rehearsed”).

<sup>61</sup> As “pillars” of the early Church, these eyewitnesses (Peter, James, John, and Paul) wrote 20 of the 27 books of the New Testament. Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 20 (2020).

### 3. What Do Post-Gospel Ancient Records Say?

Beyond the New Testament's plain language and the oral traditions (creeds) discussed above, both Christian and non-Christian sources corroborate the Resurrection.

Non-Christian Sources. Numerous non-Christian sources (many hostile to Christianity) verified fundamental facts about Jesus.<sup>62</sup> Key facts included that: (1) Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate; (2) His disciples believed He rose from the dead; (3) His disciples were willing to die for this belief; (4) Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome; and (5) His disciples worshiped Jesus as divine.<sup>63</sup> Specific to the Resurrection, Jewish historian Josephus made the following report around AD 95:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. **They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive;** accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, within 63 years after the crucifixion, non-Christian sources had confirmed not only the crucifixion itself, but also the disciples' belief in the Resurrection.

Christian Sources. Shortly after the completion of the New Testament, the earliest Church records corroborated the Resurrection and New Testament Scriptures. Three such Christian sources included the early church's apostolic fathers: (1) Clement writing from Rome (about AD 95); Ignatius writing from Smyrna in Asia Minor (about AD 107); and (3) Polycarp writing from Smyrna in Asia Minor (about AD 110).<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> These non-Christian sources include, among others, Tacitus (Roman historian), Josephus (Jewish historian), Thallus (historian), Suetonius (Roman historian), Pliny the Younger (Roman administrator), Emperor Trajan, Emperor Hadrian, Mishnah and Talmud (two Jewish sources), Lucian (Greek historian and satirist), Mara bar Serapion (Syrian writer), and Celsus (Greek philosopher). See Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 167-209 (2024); Mark Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, pp. 187-88, 199-201; Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, pp. 54-59 (1999); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy: Thirteen Arguments for the Reliability of the New Testament*, pp. 90-99 (2024).

<sup>63</sup> Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 223 (2004).

<sup>64</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, Chap. 3, § 3 translated by Shlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and Its Implications* (1971) quoted in James Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, p. 95 (1988) (bold added); accord Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 200 (1997). While some have questioned other versions of Josephus' text, this Arabic version has solid support. See Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 178 n. 78; *id.* at 410 ("Perhaps even a majority of researchers would mention Josephus as at least (probably) recording the *disciples' belief* in Jesus's appearances to his disciples"); James Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, pp. 96-7 (1988) ("as certain as historical research will presently allow that Josephus did refer to Jesus in *Antiquities* 18.63-64").

<sup>65</sup> Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 235-36 (2004).

- New Testament Validation. “[I]n letters written between A.D. 95 and 110, three early church fathers – Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp – quoted passages out of 25 of the 27 books of the New Testament.”<sup>66</sup>
- Resurrection References. “The earliest authors, known as the ‘apostolic fathers,’ include numerous comments from just the first decade after the date of the traditional close of the New Testament canon, including **many references to Jesus’s resurrection**.”<sup>67</sup>
- Ignatius’ Letter to Magnesia. Ignatius encouraged believers “to attain full assurance in regard to the birth, and passion, and **resurrection** which took place in the time of the government of Pontius Pilate, being truly and certainly **accomplished by Jesus Christ**, who is our hope from which may no one of you ever be turned aside.”<sup>68</sup>

Thus, within 80 years of the crucifixion, the early church’s apostolic fathers had confirmed both the New Testament Scriptures, including the Resurrection. In combination with the non-Christian sources above, this powerful evidentiary record corroborates both the Scripture’s plain language and the early oral traditions (creeds) discussed above.

#### 4. What Do the Scholars Say?

The top scholars, skeptical scholars, and the overwhelming consensus of scholars agree upon the factual pillars supporting the Resurrection.

##### a. Top Resurrection Experts

Many scholars have written about the Resurrection.<sup>69</sup> However, two particular scholars stand out.

Dr. Gary Habermas. Few scholars can match the depth and breadth of Dr. Habermas’ publication record focused heavily on the Resurrection.<sup>70</sup> His latest series – *On the Resurrection* – now spans over 1,800 pages, covers 4,500 sources, and represents the definitive analysis of the

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<sup>66</sup> Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 223 (2004); see also Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, pp. 261-63 (2007).

<sup>67</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 410 (2024) (bold added); *id.* at 425.

<sup>68</sup> Ignatius, *To the Magnesians* 11 *quoted in* Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 104 (2024) (bold added); see also Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 9 (“Him who died for us, and for our sakes was **raised again by God from the dead**”) *quoted in* Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 106 (2024) (bold added).

<sup>69</sup> For the “minimal facts” standard, Gary Habermas generally defines “critical scholars” as including those with relevant research, academic, and publication credentials. Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 94-98 (2024).

<sup>70</sup> Gary Habermas, “Publications,” <https://www.garyhabermas.com/publications.htm> (over 50 books, 80 book chapters, and 100 articles).

evidentiary basis for the Resurrection.<sup>71</sup> Unless someone can discredit the hundreds (perhaps thousands) of well-supported facts documented in *On the Resurrection*, Dr. Habermas’ analysis prevails under preponderance-of-evidence standard governing both law and history.<sup>72</sup>

Dr. Richard Bauckham. Just as Dr. Habermas published the premier analysis of the Resurrection, Dr. Bauckham has done the same for eyewitnesses to the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.<sup>73</sup> While some have questioned eyewitness testimony in the New Testament,<sup>74</sup> no one has assembled a factual rebuttal of comparable scale and depth to Dr. Bauckham’s compelling eyewitness analysis.

b. Admissions by Skeptical and/or Non-Christian Scholars

Regarding the core facts for the Resurrection, Dr. Habermas notes that “the current list of recognized facts pertaining to Jesus’s resurrection are so widely admitted that even the most radical critical scholars generally accept their historicity.”<sup>75</sup> Examples of these skeptical and/or non-Christian scholars include the following.

- Paula Fredriksen (agnostic New Testament scholar). “I know in their own terms **what they saw was the raised Jesus**. That’s what they say and then all the **historic evidence** we have afterwards attests to their conviction that that’s what they saw.”<sup>76</sup>
- Pinchas Lapide (Orthodox Jewish theologian). “I accept the resurrection of Easter Sunday not as an invention of the community of disciples, but as a **historical event**.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 101 n. 26 (2024) (4,500 sources); *On the Resurrection: Refutations* (2024).

<sup>72</sup> Under the “preponderance of evidence” standard, a party must offer “the stronger evidence, however slight the edge may be.” *Black’s Law Dictionary* (2009); see also Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute (2023): “the 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”; FED. R. EVID. 402 (evidence is “relevant” when it has “any tendency” to prove a fact as more probable than not). See also Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 23-24 (2024) (historians do not seek “absolute certainty,” but ask whether a fact is “probable”).

<sup>73</sup> Regarding Dr. Bauckham’s 615-page book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Dr. Habermas described it as a “sophisticated” and “most noteworthy” work that “may well be the single best book of all here” on Gospel reliability. Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 271, 46 n. 27, and 110 (2024).

<sup>74</sup> While they make allegations, their claims lack the extensive factual support found in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*. Compare Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, pp. 48 (“None of these writers claims to be an eyewitness”), 210 (“people who were not eyewitnesses”) (2004). The Jesus Seminar made a similar conclusory argument. See, e.g., Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *Five Gospels*, p. 16 (Gospel authors not eyewitnesses) cited in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 268, n. 65-66 (2024).

<sup>75</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 106 (2024).

<sup>76</sup> From an interview in Peter Jennings’s *The Search for Jesus* (ABC News) (July 2000) quoted in Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p.141 (2020) (bold added).

<sup>77</sup> Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 13 (2002) (bold added).

- Bart Ehrman (atheist religion professor). “Historians, of course, have no difficulty speaking about the **belief in Jesus’ resurrection**, since this is a matter of **public record**. It is a **historical fact** that some of Jesus’ followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution.”<sup>78</sup>
- Dale Allison (skeptical professor & theologian). “I am **sure** that the **disciples saw Jesus after his death**.”<sup>79</sup> [Dr. Allison is “sure” of this fact, even though he skeptically claims that “the gospels contain mythical elements”<sup>80</sup>].

c. Consensus of the Scholars

When it comes to the core facts relating to the crucifixion and Resurrection, the critical scholars generally agree.

- Crucifixion. “These lines of evidence have convinced **virtually all scholars** across a wide theological spectrum that Jesus’ death is a historical fact.”<sup>81</sup>
- Empty Tomb. “At present, hundreds of scholars who have provided their views have been counted, with those who favor the **historicity of the empty tomb** having risen to **80.1 percent** in my personal survey.”<sup>82</sup>
- Belief in Resurrection. “The appearances to Peter, to the Twelve, to James, and to Paul are all bedrock appearances in that **99 percent of scholars** agree that these three individuals (Peter, James, and Paul) and a group of Jesus’ followers *believed* the risen Jesus appeared to them.”<sup>83</sup>
- Transformed Lives. After the crucifixion, the disciples fled and hid behind closed doors; after the Resurrection, they changed dramatically, preaching the risen Jesus despite persecution and eventual martyrdom. *See* Section II.A.2 above and Gospel citations. As Gary Habermas states, “the data indicate and **scholars**

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<sup>78</sup> Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, p. 276 (2004) (bold added); *accord* Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, p.231 (1999).

<sup>79</sup> Dale Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, p. 346 (2005) *quoted in* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 479 n. 118 (2024) (bold added).

<sup>80</sup> Dale Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Criticism, History*, p. 21 (2021) *quoted in* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 41 n. 15 (2024); *see also* William Craig Lane, *Reasonable Faith* (As a skeptic, “He’s far more persuasive than Crossan, Ludemann, Goulder and the rest who actually deny the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection”) (<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/historical-jesus/dale-allison-on-jesus-empty-tomb-his-post-mortem-appearances-and-the-origin>).

<sup>81</sup> Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 133 (2024) (bold added); *see also* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 343 (“vast majority of critical scholars who have studied this material also agree that Jesus’s crucifixion is a historical event”); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 96, 7 (2020) (“Jesus’ crucifixion is a bedrock fact,” meaning that it passes the 99-percent threshold of agreement among scholars).

<sup>82</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, p. 632 (2024) (bold added).

<sup>83</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 150-51 (2020) (bold added, italics in original); *see also* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 433 (2024) (“scholarly consensus on the historicity of these early Christian experiences” and this fact “is rarely contested”); *see* notes 76-80 above regarding skeptical scholars.

**overwhelmingly agree** that the disciples were willing to give their lives, if necessary, specifically because of an experience: *they were absolutely and sincerely convinced that they had seen the risen Jesus alive after his death.*<sup>84</sup>

Resurrection facts cannot be determined simply by a vote of the world’s leading scholars. However, the negligible opposition to these fundamental Resurrection facts is telling. If the skeptical scholars could refute these facts, they presumably would. Thus, the consensus of scholars on these core issues convincingly shows where the real facts stand. As the Supreme Court has stated, when one party brings documented facts to the courtroom and the other party only comes with unsupported allegations, the one with the facts wins.<sup>85</sup>

## **B. Weighing the Proof of the Resurrection**

How good is the factual record for the Resurrection? Quite simply, this record is unmatched in ancient history: (1) it surpasses the most rigorous criteria for historical reliability; (2) the credibility of the factual sources is unimpeachable; and (3) the weight of the facts far exceeds the applicable standard of proof. This Section address the following issues:

1. What are the historical criteria for assessing the Resurrection proof?
2. How credible are the eyewitness sources for the Resurrection?

As discussed below, no record in ancient history comes even close to the volume and credibility of eyewitness testimony and other proof supporting the Resurrection.

### 1. What Are Historical Criteria for Assessing Resurrection Proof?

When weighing evidence for ancient history, scholars generally converge on specific historical criteria.<sup>86</sup>

- Early Sources. How early is the evidence (*i.e.*, how close is the proof to the historical event)?
- Eyewitnesses. Do eyewitnesses support the recorded history?

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<sup>84</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 535 (2024) (bold added; italics in original). Even “quite critical scholars acknowledge their widespread agreement” and “contemporary critical scholars, even including skeptics of several varieties, rarely challenge or doubt that Jesus’s disciples were radically transformed from fearful followers of Jesus or even unbelievers into courageous proclaimers of their faith.” *Id.* at 530, 529.

<sup>85</sup> “[A] party opposing a properly supported motion [*i.e.*, supported by 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”).

<sup>86</sup> See *e.g.*, Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 44-52 (2024); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 28-29 (2020); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 65-66 (2024); Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist*, pp. 40-42 (2012); Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 231 (2004).

- Number of Sources. Is the event multiply attested (*i.e.*, do multiple sources agree on the historical fact)?
- Enemy Attestation. Does a hostile source admit a fact contrary to the person's interest (*e.g.*, an unbeliever concedes facts supporting the Resurrection)?

While historians may consider additional factors,<sup>87</sup> this list includes the key factors that have direct parallels to evidentiary standards applied in the courtroom.

Early Sources. An earlier source (closer in time to the event) is preferred to a later source. For example, atheist scholar Bart Ehrman has excluded sources more than 100 years after the event as being too distant to be historically relevant or reliable.<sup>88</sup> Many non-Christian ancient histories fail this 100-year test, such as: (1) Julius Caesar's death and Augustus' birth (150-year gap);<sup>89</sup> (2) Buddha's life (nearly 500-year gap);<sup>90</sup> (3) Krishna's life (nearly 4,200-year gap);<sup>91</sup> and (4) Alexander the Great's life (more than 400-year gap).<sup>92</sup> In stark contrast, more than a dozen separate sources (both Christian and non-Christian) about the Resurrection readily pass this "earliness" test:

- AD 30 Jesus' Crucifixion.<sup>93</sup>
- AD 32-33 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed (*see* § III.A.2 above).
- AD 32-33 Luke 24:34 creed ("The Lord has really risen").<sup>94</sup>
- AD 32-33 Acts sermons/creeds (various Resurrection references).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> For example, Aramaic terms may indicate an ancient origin from an early date close to the event. *See, e.g.*, John 20:16 (NASB) (Mary Magdalene calling Jesus "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher)" when He appeared to her).

<sup>88</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?* pp. 56, 97, 171(2012); *see also* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 459 n. 66 (2024).

<sup>89</sup> Suetonius wrote these histories over 150 years later. *See* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 118 (2024).

<sup>90</sup> The first biography did not appear until the first century AD, nearly 500 years later. *See* Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 79 (2020).

<sup>91</sup> Krishna's "words were not recorded for approximately 4200 years." Gary Habermas, *The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ Among the Major World Religions*, p. 21 (2016).

<sup>92</sup> Alexander the Great's biographies by Arrian and Plutarch came about 400 years later. *See* Craig Blomberg, "Where Do We Start Studying Jesus?" *Jesus Under Fire*, p. 21 (1995) cited in Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, p. 143; *see also* Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 12 (2009).

<sup>93</sup> Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 57 (2024).

<sup>94</sup> The Luke 24:34 creed may be older than the 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed. *See* John Kloppenborg, "An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula 1 Cor. 15: 3b-5 in Light of Some Recent Literature," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 no. 3, pp. 351-67 (1978) *cited in* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 449, 457 n.64 (2024).

<sup>95</sup> The Acts sermon summaries all refer to the Resurrection. *See* Acts 1:21-22; 2:22-36; 3:13-16; 4:8-10; 5:29-32; 10:39-43; 13:28-31; 17:3; 17:30-31; Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 452 n. 52, 459-60 (some Acts sermon summaries date within 1-2 years after crucifixion – *i.e.*, early AD 30s).

- AD 37 “Long” Mark 16:9-20 creed (Resurrection).<sup>96</sup>
- AD 48 Galatians (1:1: “raised Him from the dead”).<sup>97</sup>
- AD 50 1 Thessalonians (1:10: “raised from the dead”).<sup>98</sup>
- AD 53-57 1 Corinthians (various Resurrection references).<sup>99</sup>
- AD 57 Romans (various Resurrection references).<sup>100</sup>
- AD 45-59 Matthew (Resurrection references).<sup>101</sup>
- AD 57-62 Luke (Resurrection references).<sup>102</sup>
- AD 62 Acts (Resurrection references).<sup>103</sup>
- AD 95 John (Resurrection references).<sup>104</sup>
- AD 95 Josephus (Resurrection reference) (*see* § III.A.3 above).<sup>105</sup>
- AD 107 Ignatius (Resurrection references) (*see* § III.A.3 above).
- AD 110 Polycarp (Resurrection references) (*see* § III.A.3 above).

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<sup>96</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 459 (2024) (“The end of Mark is usually thought by most critical scholars to be based in large part on a prior passion narrative that was composed no later than AD 37 . . .”).

<sup>97</sup> The Galatians epistle has been dated between AD 48 and 55, with some analyses supporting AD 48. *See* Paul Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 210 (2005); F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, p. 9 (1981) (AD 48).

<sup>98</sup> The 1 Thessalonians epistle is generally dated around AD 50. *See* Paul Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 210 (2005); F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, p. 9 (1981) (AD 50); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 447 (2024) (about 20 years after crucifixion).

<sup>99</sup> Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 39 (2024) (“usually dated around AD 53-57”).

<sup>100</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, p. 9 (1981) (AD 57); Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition*, p.4 (2022) (“majority view” of AD 56-57).

<sup>101</sup> *See* Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition*, pp.277-78 (2022) (AD 45-59).

<sup>102</sup> Luke wrote the Gospel prior to Acts. *See* Acts 1:1 referring to Luke’s “first account” to Theophilus. As discussed in the note below, the best evidence shows Acts to have been written in AD 62, meaning that the Gospel of Luke would be earlier. *See* Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 240 (2004) (“at or before A.D. 60”); Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition*, pp.277-78 (2022) (AD 59).

<sup>103</sup> In his comprehensive analysis spanning over 40 pages, Colin Hemer evaluated 15 individual factors, many prior studies, and the “immediacy” factor (Acts ending with the extraordinary detail of an eyewitness). *See* Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, p. 376-408 (1990). Based upon this evidence, he dated Acts in AD 62. *Id.* at 408.

<sup>104</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, p. 7 (1981) (“majority of modern scholars” date John between AD 90-100); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 459 (2024) (“in the ancient world, sources from only 65 years after the events in question, like the Gospel of John, are prized highly”).

<sup>105</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 31 (2020) (Josephus dated around AD 95).

All these sources fall within a range of 2 to 80 years of the crucifixion in AD 30 – well within a 100-year threshold and far earlier than other ancient records. This rich harvest of early sources has been described as “a brevity without parallel” in the world of ancient history.<sup>106</sup> As Craig Blomberg notes, historians accept the biographies such as Alexander the Great despite a 400-year gap, yet all four Gospel writers published these accounts of Jesus within a fraction of that time:

That we have four biographies of Jesus within thirty to sixty years of his death is nothing short of astonishing by ancient standards. **No other examples from antiquity** have been preserved of this abundance of information from multiple authors in writings so close to the people and events being described.<sup>107</sup>

Thus, this multitude of early sources for the Resurrection not only passes the historical criterion of “earliness,” but also surpasses other ancient histories for early dates.

Eyewitness Evidence. Both as a historical criterion<sup>108</sup> and a courtroom staple,<sup>109</sup> eyewitnesses provide essential testimony for proving facts. As discussed in Section III.A above, eyewitnesses prove the Resurrection as shown by: (1) the Scriptures’ plain language; (2) the very early oral traditions (creeds) like 1 Corinthians 15:3-7; (3) the corroborating Resurrection proof in both Christian and non-Christian ancient sources; and (4) the weight of authority by the prevailing modern scholars. Additional corroboration includes the following.

- Courtroom Experience. Legal professionals (attorneys, detectives, and law professors) with courtroom experience have identified the New Testament, including the Resurrection, as being based on eyewitness testimony.<sup>110</sup>
- Conclusory Denials. Scholars denying Resurrection eyewitness testimony generally depend upon conclusory assertions that not only lack evidentiary

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<sup>106</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 210 (2005); see also Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 477 (“Even the Gospels and Acts . . . date far closer to the events in question than virtually any sources for any other major world religious founders”).

<sup>107</sup> Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*, p. 18 (2016) (bold added).

<sup>108</sup> See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 8-11 (2017) (eyewitness testimony as the first choice for ancient historians); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 45-46 (2024) (“ancient sources that are *both* very early *and* based on eyewitness testimony” are “very difficult to dismiss”).

<sup>109</sup> A trial without actual witnesses would be a true rarity. See, e.g., *United Technologies Corp.*, 04-1 BCA ¶ 32,556, *affirmed on recon.* 05-1 BCA ¶ 32,860, *affirmed* 626 F. 3<sup>rd</sup> 313 (Fed. Cir. 2006) (\$299 million Air Force claim denied after 33-day trial and more than 40 trial witnesses).

<sup>110</sup> W. Mark Lanier, *Christianity on Trial: A Lawyer Examines the Christian Faith*, pp. 193-96 (2014); Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 14-15 (background); see, e.g., pp. 9-13 (Dixon case), 19-20 (Carter testimony), pp. 40-41 (McCullough testimony), pp. 58-9 (Ford Pinto), pp. 78-80 (Aleman trial), pp. 99-100 (McDonald case), pp. 119-20 (Moss case) (2016); J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity*, pp. 19-20 (2023); Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists*, p. 12 (originally 1874; reprinted 1995); *id.*, pp. 21 (Matthew as eyewitness), 23 (Mark based on Peter’s eyewitness testimony), 25-26 (Luke based on investigation and eyewitness accounts), 26-27 (John as eyewitness); see also David Z. Bodenheimer, *The Defective Pricing Handbook*, pp. 297-326 (2025) (discussing proof in federal contract pricing litigation, including use of eyewitness testimony).

support, but also reflect a lack of courtroom experience for recognizing real eyewitness testimony.<sup>111</sup>

- Living Eyewitnesses. The New Testament apostles preached and wrote about the Resurrection during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses – *i.e.*, those who could vouch for the facts and/or answer questions about the Resurrection itself.<sup>112</sup>
- Eyewitness “Belief” in Resurrection. As discussed above (§ III.A.4(c)), nearly all scholars agree that “these three individuals (Peter, James, and Paul) and a group of Jesus’ followers *believed* the risen Jesus appeared to them.”<sup>113</sup> Such testimony (even as an “opinion”) qualifies as evidence.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, whether for historians or legal professionals (or both), eyewitness testimony for the Resurrection fully satisfies this fundamental criterion to qualify as evidence.

Multiple Attestation. As a general rule, more evidence is better than less. For an ancient record, the New Testament documents an unmatched number of Resurrection eyewitnesses. *See* Section III.A. 1 (including Peter, John, James, Mary Magdalene, Paul, the “Twelve” disciples (minus Judas), the “apostles,” and the 500 witnesses). Ample support exists for these witnesses.

- Multiple Sources. “[T]he extended use of the criterion of multiple attestation seems to be applicable to **at least twenty sources** that mention Jesus’s resurrection and/or appearances, with these totals being about evenly split between canonical and noncanonical sources.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, pp. 48 (“None of these writers claims to be an eyewitness”), 51 (“Were the stories told by other eyewitnesses? Equally impossible.”), 210 (“people who were not eyewitnesses”) (2004). The Jesus Seminar and others made a similar argument. *See, e.g.*, Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *Five Gospels*, p. 16 (Gospel authors not eyewitnesses); Fossum, *Understanding Jesus’ Miracles*, p. 23 (Gospels not based on eyewitness testimony) cited in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 268, n. 65-66 (2024). *See Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 256 (1986) (a party cannot simply rest upon “mere allegations or denials” when the other party offers evidence); *United Technologies Corp.*, 05-1 BCA ¶ 32,860 at 162,812, *affirmed* 463 F.3d 1261 (Fed. Cir. 2006) (rejecting Air Force’s position as “lacking in specificity” and “unpersuasive”).

<sup>112</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 7 (2017) (“The Gospels were written within the living memory of the events they recount”); Craig Blomberg, “Where Do We Start Studying Jesus?” *Jesus Under Fire*, p. 29 (1995) *quoted in* Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, pp. 143 (2009) (Synoptic Gospels written “well within the period of time when people could check up on the accuracy of the facts they contain”); Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*, p. 17 (2016); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 153 (2020) (witnesses could be questioned about Paul’s statement that Jesus “appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time” in 1 Corinthians 15:6).

<sup>113</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 150-51 (2020) (bold added, italics in original); *see also* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 433 (2024) (“scholarly consensus on the historicity of these early Christian experiences” and this fact “is rarely contested”).

<sup>114</sup> *See* FED. R. EVID. 701 (witness testify about an opinion based on the “witness’s perception”); *McCormick on Evidence*, pp. 19-21 (5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1999) (explaining admissibility of opinions by lay witnesses).

<sup>115</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 427 (2024) (bold added); *see also id.* at 412; Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church*, p. 197 (1998) (italics in original) (identifying “at least seven ancient sources” for the Resurrection).

- Group Appearances. “In total, *counting duplicates* in the separate texts, up to **thirteen group appearances** are mentioned in the literature [note omitted], three of these from the creedal tradition in 1 Cor. 15:3-7 (which likely preceded Paul’s conversion).”<sup>116</sup>
- Skeptic Admissions. Despite denying 80% of the deeds and sayings of Jesus, the Jesus Seminar identified four specific sources for “Appearance to the eleven,” one to “Doubting Thomas” (which includes the other ten disciples), and one to the “Appearance to seven at the Sea of Tiberias.”<sup>117</sup>

As ancient historian Paul Maier explained, “Many facts from antiquity rest on just one ancient source, while two or three sources in agreement generally **render the fact unimpeachable**.”<sup>118</sup> Similarly, Gary Habermas noted that “There is nothing like this **mountain of evidence** in ancient history for any other persons.”<sup>119</sup> Thus, the Resurrection appearances not only meet the historical criteria of multiple attestation, but do so better than any other ancient record in history.

Enemy Attestation. No evidence in the courtroom is as powerful as when your opponent admits that you are right.<sup>120</sup> As ancient historian Paul Maier noted, “such positive evidence within a hostile source is the **strongest kind of evidence** and becomes self-authenticating.”<sup>121</sup> Several examples provide compelling evidence for the Resurrection.

- Skeptical Scholars. “Gerd Lüdemann, Michael Goulder, and [Bart] Ehrman have all acknowledged the historicity of the disciples’ real experiences after the death of Jesus as well as their very early reports of these events.”<sup>122</sup>
- Jesus Seminar. Despite questioning over 80% of the deeds and sayings of Jesus, the Jesus Seminar made the following admissions on Resurrection appearances:

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<sup>116</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 422-23 (2024) (bold added: italics in original).

<sup>117</sup> Robert Funk & The Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, p. 449 (1998). After identifying these multiple appearances, the Jesus Seminar simply brushes them off as “doubtful” (p. 484) or “without historical foundation” (p. 486) with no hard facts for these assumptions nor any attempt to square their allegations with other ancient records or modern scholarship. As discussed above, conclusory denials carry no evidentiary weight.

<sup>118</sup> Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church*, p. 197 (1998) (bold added).

<sup>119</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 477 (2024) (bold added).

<sup>120</sup> See, e.g., *United Technologies Corp.*, 05-1 BCA ¶ 32,860 at 162,812-13, *affirmed* 463 F.3d 1261 (Fed. Cir. 2006) (citing federal government witnesses’ testimony as contrary to the agency’s litigation position); *Alloy Surfaces Co., Inc.*, ASBCA No. 59625, 20-1 BCA ¶ 37,574 (2020) (finding government contracting officer’s testimony to be contrary to the agency’s litigation argument); compare FED. R. EVID. 801(d)(2) (allowing an opposing party’s statement as a non-hearsay admission against interest).

<sup>121</sup> Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church*, p. 198 (1998) (bold added).

<sup>122</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 105 (2024).

- Paul. Jesus “appeared to me [Paul] as well” (1 Corinthians 15:8) = “relatively high level of confidence.”
- Peter. “He [Jesus] then appeared to Cephas” (1 Corinthians 15:5) = “event probably occurred.”
- Mary Magdalene. “Mary was among the early witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus” (based on John 20:11-18) = “relatively high level of confidence.”<sup>123</sup>
- Atheist Michael Martin. “We have only one contemporaneous eyewitness account of a postresurrection appearance of Jesus, namely Paul’s.”<sup>124</sup>

As a practical matter, even a single eyewitness suffices to establish a fact, whether in ancient history<sup>125</sup> or in the courtroom.<sup>126</sup> In combination with the vast factual support already confirming Resurrection eyewitnesses, these atheist/skeptic admissions make arguments against such eyewitness testimony effectively untenable.

Paul’s Conversion. From Christian persecutor to Christian apostle, Paul’s conversion readily illustrates – and meets – each of these historical criteria.

- Early Sources. Paul’s epistles represent the earliest known and undisputed written sources about Jesus and the Resurrection.<sup>127</sup>
- Eyewitness. Nearly all scholars recognize Jesus’ appearance to Paul not only as very early, but also as an eyewitness.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Robert Funk & the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, pp. 1 (summary of color-coded rating system), 453 (Peter), 454 (Paul), and 479 (Mary Magdalene).

<sup>124</sup> Michael Martin, *The Case against Christianity*, p. 81 (1993) quoted in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 89 (1993).

<sup>125</sup> Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church*, p. 197 (1998)

<sup>126</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 19-20 (2016) (only surviving eyewitness provided sufficient evidence for murder verdict); Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity*, pp. 75-6 (2023) (single eyewitness for robbery verdict); *Alloy Surfaces Co., Inc.*, ASBCA No. 59625, 20-1 BCA ¶ 37,574 (2020) (contractor’s only technical witness testified on pivotal issue regarding impact of 300% production ramp-up on labor efficiency).

<sup>127</sup> See e.g., Paul Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, p. 26 (2005) (“Paul the early convert is chronologically the first (extant) Christian theological writer”); Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History*, pp. 41-42 (1997) (“Paul’s letters are the earliest written sources of information about Christianity”) quoted in Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 38 (2024); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 578 (2024) (“Paul’s authentic letters are the earliest sources for the historical Jesus”). See also Section III.A.2 above regarding the early dates for the 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed.

<sup>128</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 453 (“The appearance to Paul is usually dated at either two or three years after Jesus’s crucifixion.” “Paul’s testimony is regarded by almost all scholars not only as very early but also as being that of an eyewitness”); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, p. 54 (2020) (“why Paul is our bedrock eyewitness of this earliest stage of the Christian movement”); *id.* at 55-69 (Paul as eyewitness).

- Multiple Attestation. Multiple sources confirm Jesus’ appearance to Paul, including Paul’s epistles, Acts, and the early church fathers.<sup>129</sup>
- Enemy Attestation. From burning with “zeal” to persecute Christians “to their death,”<sup>130</sup> Paul experienced “one of the most dramatic turnabouts in history”<sup>131</sup> after Jesus appeared to him, causing Paul to become a zealous advocate and martyr for Jesus Christ and the Resurrection.<sup>132</sup>

Thus, Paul not only served as an eyewitness to Jesus’ appearance, but he also met with, and confirmed, other eyewitnesses including the “pillars” of the early church – Peter, James, and John. *See* Section III.A.2 above. Given that few critical scholars dispute the early date and source of the 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed, Paul has documented powerful eyewitness evidence for the Resurrection that meets the well-recognized historical criteria for authenticity.

In summary, the Resurrection proof meets – and beats – the rigorous criteria for assessing the historical authenticity and reliability of ancient records. Furthermore, this Resurrection proof offers earlier evidence, more eyewitnesses, a greater number of sources, and more opponent admissions than any of the ancient histories (*e.g.*, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar) that historians routinely use. Quite simply, Resurrection proof has no equal in ancient history.

## 2. How Credible are the Resurrection Eyewitness Sources?

As discussed above, nearly all critical scholars (including skeptics and atheists) agree that the Resurrection eyewitnesses **believed** that they saw the risen Jesus Christ.

The appearances to Peter, to the Twelve, to James, and to Paul are all bedrock appearances in that **99 percent of scholars** agree that these three individuals (Peter, James, and Paul) and a group of Jesus’ followers *believed* the risen Jesus appeared to them.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> In addition to his own epistles (*see, e.g.*, 1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:8; Galatians 1:13-21; Philippians 3:12), *see also* Acts 9:1-9, 22:6-11, 26:12-18-18); *see* Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 49-50 (2020); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 589 (multiple attestation includes Paul’s epistles, Acts, Clement (about AD 95), Ignatius (about AD 110), and Polycarp (about AD 110)).

<sup>130</sup> *See, e.g.*, Philippians 3:6 (“as to zeal, a persecutor of the church”); Galatians 1:14 (“extremely zealous”); Acts 22:4 (“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons”); *see also* Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, p. 293 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2004) (“Far from adhering to the gospel, [Paul] violently opposed it, setting himself on destroying the church”); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 39-49 (2020).

<sup>131</sup> Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, p. 285 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2004).

<sup>132</sup> Paul’s radical transformation from Christian enemy to advocate meets multiple historical criteria, including both enemy attestation and embarrassment. *See* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 589-90 (2024). Ultimately, Paul died as a martyr for his Christian advocacy. *See* Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, p. 113 (2008) (“martyrdom of Paul” assessed as the “*highest possible probability*”) (italics in original).

<sup>133</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 150-51 (2020) (bold added, italics in original); *see also* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 433 (2024) (“scholarly consensus on the historicity of these early Christian experiences” and this fact “is rarely contested”); *id.* at 535; *see* notes 76-80 above regarding skeptical scholars.

This overwhelming consensus negates any rational basis for calling the Resurrection eyewitnesses “liars.” Thus, the eyewitnesses’ credibility is already firmly established.

Three additional facts further bolster the Resurrection eyewitnesses’ strong credibility: (1) on penalty of death and blasphemy, the eyewitnesses had powerful motives to tell the truth; (2) the eyewitnesses stuck to the truth despite persecution, beatings, and even martyrdom; and (3) no evidence exists that the witnesses ever recanted their testimony even at death.

Motives for Truth. Few witnesses in history (ancient or modern) ever had stronger motives to tell the truth.

- Ten Commandments. “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Exodus 20:16.<sup>134</sup>
- Jewish Heritage. “No religion has ever stressed the importance of truth or truthful testimony more than the Jewish religion.”<sup>135</sup>
- Death Penalty. False statements or testimony could be punishable by death.<sup>136</sup>
- Blasphemy. Even worse, if the disciples falsely testified about Jesus’ divinity and Resurrection, the crime would be blasphemy against God.<sup>137</sup>

Thus, the Resurrection eyewitnesses had powerful reasons to tell the truth, given that false witness would be both a death penalty and blasphemy (bringing eternal death).

Die for a Lie. Early Christians suffered brutal persecution and even martyrdom as both Christian and non-Christian sources confirm.<sup>138</sup> In fact, major eyewitnesses preached the Resurrection of Jesus Christ despite beatings and eventual martyrdom, including Peter, Paul,

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<sup>134</sup> See also Leviticus 19:11 (“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another”); Proverbs 19:5 (“A false witness will not go unpunished”); Colossians 3:9 (“Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices.”).

<sup>135</sup> John Ankerburg & John Weldon, *Knowing the Truth About the Resurrection*, p. 20 (1996) quoted in Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, p. 146 (2009).

<sup>136</sup> Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone*, p. 16 (2002; first published 1930) (“if the testimony given was demonstrably false, the witness should have been sentenced to death by stoning”); *id.* at 21; Lary Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* P. 169 (“Phinehas-type action [killing] for idolatry, apostasy, seduction by false prophets, and perjury”); Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, p. 146 (2009) (disciples knew false testimony “could be punished by death”).

<sup>137</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:14-15 (if Christ had not been raised, “Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ whom He did not raise”); Acts 7:52-60 (stoning Stephen to death for telling the Jewish priests that they were “murderers” of Lord Jesus, “the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God”); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 446-47 (2024) (Saul and other priests viewed the earliest Christians as heretics that “deserved death for blaspheming the God of Israel” based on their preaching of Jesus “co-occupying God’s throne, receiving worship, and posing God’s nature”).

<sup>138</sup> Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, pp. 47-51 (2015) (summarizing Christian and non-Christian evidence of persecution); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, p. 540 (2024) (“scholars overwhelmingly agree that disciples were willing to give their lives”); *id.* at 165-85 (summarizing non-Christian sources); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 93-98 (2024).

James (son of Zebedee), James (brother of Jesus), and Thomas.<sup>139</sup> Their willingness to testify to the Resurrection despite such martyrdom underscores the credibility of their testimony:

Although disillusioned at his untimely death, [the apostles] became the **first witnesses of the risen Jesus** and they endured persecution; many subsequently experienced martyrdom, **signing their testimony**, so to speak, **in their own blood**. The strength of their conviction, marked by their willingness to die, indicates that they did not fabricate these claims; rather, without exception, they actually believed Jesus to have risen from the dead.<sup>140</sup>

The apostles did not “die for a lie.”<sup>141</sup> Instead, these martyred eyewitnesses passed a far tougher credibility test than the “mere” perjury penalty for witnesses in modern courtrooms.

No One Recanted. No evidence exists that any of the Resurrection eyewitnesses ever recanted their testimony that they had seen the risen Jesus.

- Gary Habermas. “We have already mentioned some ancient accounts of apostolic martyrdoms, and these cases effectively indicate that **no defections** occurred with at least these apostles! Further, there are no early accounts where these apostles, singly or in groups were given the opportunity to recant and left the faith . . . .”<sup>142</sup>
- Warner Wallace. “Each story of martyrdom is more gruesome than the prior as we examine the list of apostolic deaths . . . yet **none of the Twelve recanted** their claims related to the resurrection. Not one.”<sup>143</sup>
- Josh & Sean McDowell. “The disciples went to the grave with the conviction that they had seen the risen Jesus.”<sup>144</sup>

Given the horrific deaths of Christians during Nero’s reign (“torn to pieces by dogs,” “nailed to crosses,” and “burned to death to furnish light at night”),<sup>145</sup> the record would surely be filled

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<sup>139</sup> Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, pp. 91-92 (Peter by crucifixion), pp. 113-14 (Paul by beheading), pp. 134 (James, brother of Jesus, by stoning), pp. 172-3 (Thomas martyred in India), p. 192 (James, son of Zebedee, martyred) (2015); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 533-4, n. 37 (2024).

<sup>140</sup> Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, p. 2 (2015) (bold added); see also Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, p. 342 (2009) (willingness to die for their beliefs confirms the sincerity of their testimony).

<sup>141</sup> “Liars make poor martyrs.” Gary Habermas & Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 59 (2004); see also, Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 533 (2024) (same).

<sup>142</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 526-27 (bold added).

<sup>143</sup> Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity*, p. 128 (2023) (bold added).

<sup>144</sup> Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, p. 146 (2009).

<sup>145</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* quoted in Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, p. 49 (2015); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 167-68 (2024); John Mauck, *Paul on Trial*, p. 42 (2001) (“hundreds of believers in Jesus were executed by being hung on stakes throughout the city and burned alive”).

with many recanting their faith – if it happened. Yet the historical record has no such reports, thus reinforcing the credibility of these Christian witnesses.

In summary, the Resurrection proof not only includes a multitude of early sources documenting Resurrection eyewitnesses who reported and believed that they saw the risen Jesus, but also reinforces credibility of the eyewitnesses who testified till their death without ever recanting. No other ancient source can offer such a wealth of credible eyewitnesses.

#### **IV. Why Are the Skeptics Wrong?**

Some scholars and non-scholars have challenged the truth of the Resurrection. *See, e.g.*, Section II.C.1 above. Why are they wrong? In a nutshell, they lack proof. This Section will address the following issues.

- What is the Standard of Proof?
- How does the Resurrection Proof Stack Up?
- What are Failed Theories Against the Resurrection Proof?

The reoccurring theme in the debate over the Resurrection is this: the Resurrection proof rests upon objective historical facts, while the skeptics rely upon doubts, denials, and questions.

##### **A. What is the Standard of Proof?**

How much evidence is enough to prove a fact?<sup>146</sup> Neither historians nor lawyers must prove absolute certainty. Instead, the question is whether the fact is “probable.”

- Historical Standard. Historians do not seek “absolute certainty,” but ask whether a fact is “probable.”<sup>147</sup>
- Legal Standard. Under the “preponderance of evidence” standard, a party must offer “the stronger evidence, however slight the edge may be.”<sup>148</sup>

In other words, even a tiny advantage in proof (*e.g.*, 51% vs. 49%) can make a fact “probable,” thus establishing a winning “preponderance” of evidence. As discussed below, the early, multi-pronged, richly sourced Resurrection proof far exceeds a mere “preponderance” of evidence, thus putting the skeptics at a steep evidentiary disadvantage.

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<sup>146</sup> The evidentiary standard in a criminal trial (“beyond a reasonable doubt”) is higher than a civil trial, but our objective here is not to try Pontius Pilate (or anyone else) for murder.

<sup>147</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 23-24 (2024).

<sup>148</sup> *Black’s Law Dictionary* (2009); *see also* Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute (2023): “the 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”; FED. R. EVID. 402 (evidence is “relevant” when it has “any tendency” to prove a fact as more probable than not); *see also* W. Mark Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, pp. 35-36, 191 (2014); David Z. Bodenheimer, *The Defective Pricing Handbook*, p. 298 (2025).

## B. How Does the Resurrection Proof Stack Up?

For the Resurrection, the record of objective historical proof is decisively one-sided, confirming with eyewitnesses and corroborating records that Jesus did, in fact, rise.

### 1. One-Sided Eyewitness List

Before major trials, the judge typically issues a pre-trial order requiring (among other things) a witness list.<sup>149</sup> Imagine the following:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Party. “Your honor, here is our witness list (Peter, Paul, Mary Magdalene, John, Matthew, & Thomas), plus our rebuttal list if they contest our witnesses’ credibility (Josephus, Clement, Ignatius, & Polycarp).”
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Party. “Your honor, we have no witnesses.”
- Judge. “Are you sure you want to go to trial?”

For the Resurrection, the same applies: a multitude of eyewitnesses for the Resurrection and zero eyewitnesses to contest it.

No Witnesses Against Resurrection. Repeatedly, the apostles boldly and publicly preached the Resurrection message, thus giving opponents ample opportunities to rebut it.<sup>150</sup> Multiple historians and lawyers have noted the lack of witnesses contesting the Resurrection, despite ample notice.

- John Warwick Montgomery (law professor & theologian). “This rule underscores the reliability of testimony to Christ’s resurrection which was presented contemporaneously to the synagogues – in the very teeth of opposition, among **hostile cross examiners** who would certainly have destroyed the case for Christianity had the facts been otherwise.”<sup>151</sup>
- F. F. Bruce (Biblical professor and author). “Had there been any tendency to depart from the facts in any material respect, the **possible presence of hostile witnesses** in the audience would have served as a further corrective.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> W. Mark Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, pp. 186-88 (2014) (witness list).

<sup>150</sup> See, e.g., Acts 2:13, 22-41 (preaching to a crowd of over 3,000 people (including some mocking him as drunk on “sweet wine”), Peter said “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses,” a fact that Peter says “just as you yourselves know”); Acts 26:23-26 (preaching Christ’s Resurrection (“His resurrection”) to both Festus and King Agrippa, Paul explained that King Agrippa knew about the Resurrection: “For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice, for this **has not been done in a corner**”) (bold added); Acts 7:1-60 (Stephen spoke of Jesus’ Resurrection to a group of Jews and then testified to the high priest and council).

<sup>151</sup> John Warwick Montgomery, “Legal Reasoning and Christian Apologetics,” pp. 88-89 (bold added) quoted in Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, p. 147 (2009).

<sup>152</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable*, p. 43 (1981) (bold added).

- John Mauck (40-year lawyer & litigator). “The Jewish leadership had an immediate and timely **opportunity to refute** the Resurrection.”<sup>153</sup>
- Norman Geisler (professor) & Frank Turek (apologist). “By naming so many people who could verify what Paul was saying [in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8], Paul was, in effect, **challenging his Corinthian readers to check him out . . .** If the Resurrection had not occurred, why would Paul give such a list of supposed eyewitnesses? He would have immediately lost all credibility with his Corinthian readers by lying so blatantly.”<sup>154</sup>

Despite ample opportunities to refute or challenge the Resurrection, the opponents resorted to persecution and violence, rather than simply refuting the facts. Thus, Resurrection skeptics confront a fundamental problem of proof: many documented eyewitnesses for the Resurrection and zero skeptical witnesses to deny the Resurrection.

No Witnesses Recanted. In many trials, a litigator may build a case based on admissions by the opposing party’s witnesses.<sup>155</sup> However, none of the Resurrection witnesses recanted their testimony. See Section III.B.2 above (notes 142-44). As a result, the skeptics cannot make their case based upon eyewitnesses who later denied the Resurrection.

Conclusory Denials. In denying the Resurrection, the skeptics rely upon assumptions, conjecture, and unsupported claims. The Jesus Seminar illustrates these tactics.

- “Matthew’s sources beyond Mark **may be** no more than his fertile imagination.”<sup>156</sup> [“may” indicates conjecture & no supporting facts].
- Luke “**may** only have drawn on his own imagination.”<sup>157</sup> [classic conjecture].
- “The appendix to John contains an **extended legend** in which Jesus appears to seven disciples on the Sea of Galilee.” [no factual basis stated].<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> John Mauck, *Paul on Trial*, p. 36, item # 12 (2001) (bold added) *citing* Acts 1-21 where Peter and John preached to 5,000 (Acts 4:4) and defended the Resurrection before the senior Jewish “rulers and elders and scribes” who questioned Peter and John, but then resorted to threatening them rather than refuting the Resurrection.

<sup>154</sup> Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, pp. 242-43 (2004) (bold added).

<sup>155</sup> See, e.g., *United Technologies Corp.*, 05-1 BCA ¶ 32,860 at 162,812-13, *affirmed* 463 F.3d 1261 (Fed. Cir. 2006) (denying \$299 million government claim where government witnesses contradicted the agency’s litigation position); *Alloy Surfaces Co., Inc.*, ASBCA No. 59625, 20-1 BCA ¶ 37,574 (2020) (finding government contracting officer’s testimony to be contrary to the agency’s litigation argument); *compare* FED. R. EVID. 801(d)(2) (allowing an opposing party’s statement as a non-hearsay admission against interest).

<sup>156</sup> Robert Funk & the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, p. 451 (1998) (bold added).

<sup>157</sup> *Id.* (bold added).

<sup>158</sup> *Id.* (bold added). With detailed analysis and facts, Richard Bauckham debunks the Jesus Seminar’s theory that John 21 represents a late addition to the Gospel. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 364-69 (2017).

- “[T]he Fellows were **dubious** about the inclusion of the appearances to James, the brother of Jesus, [and] to the ‘twelve’ as a group.”<sup>159</sup> [unsupported assumption].
- “Luke wrote Acts some thirty years after Paul’s letters.”<sup>160</sup> [incorrect assumption].
- “[T]he earlier strata of the New Testament contain **no appearance stories**.”<sup>161</sup>

The courts consistently hold that allegations and assumptions do not qualify as evidence.<sup>162</sup> Thus, such arguments against the Resurrection fail for lack of proof.

Supreme Court Standard. When one party brings evidence to the courtroom, the opposing party cannot show up empty-handed, as the Supreme Court has explained:

[A] party opposing a properly supported motion [*i.e.*, factually supported] 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.<sup>163</sup>

Historians apply the same evidentiary test: evidentiary facts are conceded if not challenged with facts to the contrary.<sup>164</sup> Thus, allegations without evidence are losers.

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<sup>159</sup> Robert Funk & the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, p. 454 (1998) (bold added). Gary Habermas’ thorough analysis of James as an eyewitness directly refutes the Jesus Seminar’s label of “dubious” for James. Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 549-573 (2024). Regarding the “twelve,” the historical record includes more than a dozen sources confirming the appearance of Jesus to groups, thus refuting the Jesus Seminar’s “dubious” assumption. See Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 397 (“group appearances are multiply attested, which is highly significant in evidential terms”), 412 (“the attestation in favor of Jesus’s initial group appearance to the apostles has the strongest overall corroboration), 422 (“up to thirteen group appearances are mentioned in the literature”).

<sup>160</sup> Robert Funk & the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, p.455 (1998). The Jesus Seminar inexplicably disregards the most authoritative analysis dating Acts to AD 62 – about 10 years after Paul’s earliest letters and about 5 years after the later letters. In his comprehensive analysis spanning over 40 pages, Colin Hemer evaluated 15 individual factors, many prior studies, and the “immediacy” factor (Acts ending with the extraordinary detail of an eyewitness). See Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, p. 376-408 (1990). Based upon this evidence, he dated Acts in AD 62. *Id.* at 408.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Funk & the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus*, p.462 (1998) (bold added). This incorrect assertion is fully refuted by, among other evidence, the 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 creed that nearly all scholars agree to be very early (2-3 years after crucifixion), based on eyewitness testimony, supported by multiple sources, and confirmed even by skeptical scholars. See Section III.A.2 above (notes 40-61).

<sup>162</sup> See, e.g., *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986); *Long Island Savings Bank v. United States*, 503 F.3d 1234, 1244 (Fed. Cir. 2007); *L.P. Consulting Group, Inc. v. United States*, 66 Fed. Cl. 238, 243 (2005); see also *Lockheed Aircraft Corp., Lockheed-Georgia Co. vs. United States*, 202 Ct. Cl. 787, 792, 485 F.2d 584 (1973) (rejecting federal government’s position as being based on “speculation” and “conjecture”).

<sup>163</sup> *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 256 (1986) (opposing party must offer “significant probative evidence”).

<sup>164</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 25 (2024) (an event established by research is a proven fact when uncontested by evidence).

## 2. Scholarly Consensus

In addition to witness lists, a judge’s pre-trial order generally requires parties to identify expert witnesses.<sup>165</sup> Imagine this scenario:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Party. “Your honor, here is our expert witness list. Their positions agree with 99% of the critical scholars in the field.”
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Party. “Your honor, our experts agree with 1% of the scholars in the field.”
- Judge. “Are you sure you want to go to trial?”

For the Resurrection, skeptics face the same problem, as the critical scholars (even many skeptics) overwhelmingly agree on the factual cornerstones that build up to the risen Jesus.

- Crucifixion. Virtually all scholars (including atheists and skeptics) agree that Jesus’ crucifixion is a historical fact.<sup>166</sup>
- Empty Tomb. About 75-80% of a broad spectrum of scholars now agree with the historicity of the empty tomb.<sup>167</sup>
- Belief in Resurrection. About 99% of scholars agree that individuals (Peter, James, and Paul) and the disciples (“the Twelve”) **believed** that Jesus appeared to them.<sup>168</sup>
- Transformed Lives. Scholars overwhelmingly agree that the disciples radically transformed after the crucifixion; instead of hiding in fear, they preached the Resurrection despite brutal persecution and eventual martyrdom.<sup>169</sup>

In combination, these historical building blocks add up to only one viable conclusion: the Resurrection is a historically verifiable fact.

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<sup>165</sup> W. Mark Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, pp. 190, 205 (2014).

<sup>166</sup> Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, p. 133 (2024); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 343 (“vast majority of critical scholars who have studied this material also agree that Jesus’s crucifixion is a historical event”); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 96, 7 (2020) (“Jesus’ crucifixion is a bedrock fact,” meaning that it passes the 99 percent threshold of agreement among scholars); *see also* Section III.A.4.(c).

<sup>167</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, p. 632 (2024); *see also* Section III.A.4(c).

<sup>168</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 150-51 (2020); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 433 (2024) (“scholarly consensus on the historicity of these early Christian experiences” and this fact “is rarely contested”); *see* Section III.A.4(c) above (scholarly consensus); notes 76-80 above (skeptical scholars).

<sup>169</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 535 (2024). Even “quite critical scholars acknowledge their widespread agreement” and “contemporary critical scholars, even including skeptics of several varieties, rarely challenge or doubt that Jesus’s disciples were radically transformed from fearful followers of Jesus or even unbelievers into courageous proclaimers of their faith.” *Id.* at 530, 529; *see also* Section II.A.2 above (Scriptural citations for radical transformation); Section III.B.2 notes 138-145 (persecution and martyrdom).

### C. What Are the Failed Theories Against Resurrection Proof?

Over the centuries, skeptics have advanced a number of theories against the Resurrection. This analysis addresses the following theories:

- “Swoon” Theory (Jesus did not really die);
- “Stolen Body” Conspiracy (disciples stole Jesus’ body);
- “Wrong Tomb” Mix-up (women and disciples went to wrong tomb);
- Hallucination Hypothesis (individuals & groups hallucinated).

These theories share a common theme: lack of proof. Furthermore, except for internet theorists, hardly any real scholars even try to argue these theories in the modern era.

#### 1. “Swoon” Theory

On this “swoon” theory, Jesus allegedly passed out after being scourged, crucified, and speared in His chest. This theory flunks multiple evidentiary tests.

Multiple Sources. Overwhelming historical proof confirms Jesus’ death by crucifixion.<sup>170</sup> Even atheists and non-Christians agree:

- Atheist Bart Ehrman. “That Jesus died by crucifixion is almost universally attested in our sources, early and late.”<sup>171</sup>
- Atheist John Dominic Crossan. “That [Jesus] was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be.”<sup>172</sup>
- Skeptic Gerd Lüdemann. “[T]he fact of Jesus’ death as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable.”<sup>173</sup>

Medical Evidence. As professional killers, the Roman soldiers had a proven history of finishing off those who received a death sentence. The medical evidence confirms that a

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<sup>170</sup> See, e.g., Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 283-365 (2024); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 91-102 (2020); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 132-35 (2024).

<sup>171</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?* p. 163 (2012); see also Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, p. 256 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2004) (“The most certain element of the tradition about Jesus is that he was crucified on the orders of the Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate. The crucifixion is independently attested in a wide array of sources is not the sort of thing that believers would want to make up about the person proclaimed to be the powerful Son of God”).

<sup>172</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, p. 145 (1994) quoted in Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 133 (2024).

<sup>173</sup> Gerd Lüdemann, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 38 (2004) quoted in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 301 n. 57 (2024).

crucifixion (even without a spear in the chest) is lethal.<sup>174</sup> Nobody in ancient history ever survived a crucifixion, except for one man that the Romans took down early at Josephus' request.<sup>175</sup>

Radical Transformation. Nearly all critical scholars agree that the disciples radically transformed from cowering in fear to boldly preaching after seeing the risen Jesus. *See* Sections III.A.4(c) and IV.B.2 above.<sup>176</sup> Despite being a fierce critic of the Resurrection, even David Strauss agreed that the “swoon” theory could not be squared with the disciples’ conduct:

It is impossible that a being who had been stolen half-dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life . . . Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which he had made upon them in life and in death . . . but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.<sup>177</sup>

Resurrection Belief. The historical record proves that the disciples **believed** that Jesus rose from the dead. *See* Section III.A.4 above. They held this belief so strongly that they chose persecution and martyrdom, rather than recant this belief. *See* Section III.B.2. For this additional reason, the “swoon” theory is a fiction that could not pass either the historical or legal standards discussed above.

Finally, if even an atom of life remained in this “swoon” allegation, Gary Habermas’ latest opus puts an end to it. *See On the Resurrection: Refutations*, pp. 469-505 (2024) (refuting the “Swoon or Apparent Death Theory”). Without facts, the bare allegations propping up the “swoon” theory fail under both the historical and legal standards discussed above.

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<sup>174</sup> William Edwards *et al.*, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, pp. 1455-63 (Mar. 1986) *quoted in* interview of Dr. Alexander Metherell (MD, PhD) in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Easter*, p. 28 (2003); *see also* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 302-35 (2024) (medical evidence of the crucifixion).

<sup>175</sup> Josephus, *Life* 75; Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, pp. 311-2 (2010) *cited in* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 300 n. 52 (2024).

<sup>176</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 535 (2024). Even “quite critical scholars acknowledge their widespread agreement” and “contemporary critical scholars, even including skeptics of several varieties, rarely challenge or doubt that Jesus’s disciples were radically transformed from fearful followers of Jesus or even unbelievers into courageous proclaimers of their faith.” *Id.* at 530, 529; *see also* Section II.A.2 above (Scriptural citations for radical transformation); Section III.B.2 notes 138-145 (persecution and martyrdom).

<sup>177</sup> David Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet* (8<sup>th</sup> ed. 1864) *quoted in* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 336 (2024).

## 2. “Stolen Body” Conspiracy

As another argument against the Resurrection, some have alleged that the disciples stole Jesus’ body from the tomb.<sup>178</sup> Both historical evidence and common sense defeat this theory.

Eyewitnesses Generally. Layers of multiple sources confirm that the risen Jesus appeared to both individuals and groups. *See* Section III.A.1-4.

- No Explanation. Regardless of whether a theft occurred, this conspiracy theory cannot explain how so many eyewitnesses still saw the resurrected Jesus.
- Group Appearances. Jesus repeatedly appeared to multiple groups – the “Twelve,” the “apostles,” and the 500 (*see, e.g.,* 1 Corinthians 15:3-8).<sup>179</sup>

The “stolen body” theory is irrelevant to the eyewitness evidence and therefore cannot refute the wealth of such evidence in the Scriptures, other ancient sources, and the oral traditions (creeds), as detailed in Section III.A.1-3 above. Accordingly, the eyewitness proof still prevails.

Skeptical Eyewitnesses. Neither Paul nor James believed in Jesus as the Son of God at the time of the crucifixion (meaning no reason to steal), yet the risen Jesus appeared to both.

- Paul. No one could claim that Saul stole Jesus’ body (as he persecuted many Christians after the crucifixion), yet he still saw the risen Jesus about 2 years after the crucifixion. *See* Section III.B.2 (notes 127-32).
- James (brother of Jesus). James did not believe Jesus to be the Son of God<sup>180</sup> (and thus had no motive to steal Jesus’ body), yet Jesus “appeared to James.”<sup>181</sup>

The “stolen body” theory is irrelevant to Jesus’ well-established appearances to Paul and James. Thus, the eyewitness proof of Paul and James still fully supports the Resurrection.

No Motive. What could the disciples possibly gain by stealing the body of Jesus from the tomb?

- Dishonesty. Stealing Jesus’ body and lying about it would violate Jewish law, thus leading to death by stoning for the lie. *See* Section III.B.2 (notes 134-36).

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<sup>178</sup> Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*, pp. 705-6 (2016).

<sup>179</sup> Regarding the “twelve,” the historical record includes more than a dozen sources confirming the appearance of Jesus to groups. *See* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 397 (“group appearances are multiply attested, which is highly significant in evidential terms”), 412 (“the attestation in favor of Jesus’s initial group appearance to the apostles has the strongest overall corroboration”), 422 (“up to thirteen group appearances are mentioned in the literature”). Thus, the “stolen body” theory cannot be squared with this proof.

<sup>180</sup> Regarding the unbelief of Jesus’ family (including his brothers), *see, e.g.,* Mark 3:21, 31; Mark 6:3-6; John 7:3-5; John 19:26-7.

<sup>181</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:7; *see* Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 549-73 (James as an initial unbeliever, eyewitness to Jesus, and later a leader of the Jerusalem church).

- Martyrdom. On this theory, the thieves would preach a lie after the theft and then get killed as heretics – *i.e.*, **die for a lie**. See Section III.B.2 (notes 138-41).
- Blasphemy. If they stole Jesus’ body, they would know their preaching to be a lie, thus condemning them to hell for blasphemy. See Section III.B.2 (note 137).

Rejecting the 10 Commandments, making false statements, getting stoned to death, committing blasphemy, and going to hell are a lot of powerful reasons against stealing Jesus’ body.

Failed Conspiracy. In the real world, a conspiracy often collapses quickly when one of the co-conspirators breaks the silence and tells the truth to “save his own skin.” As one of the Watergate collaborators, Chuck Colson explains why the “stolen body” conspiracy would have quickly failed:

Watergate involved a conspiracy perpetuated by the closest aides to the president of the United States – the most powerful men in America, who were intensely loyal to their president. But one of them, John Dean, turned state’s evidence, that is, testified against Nixon, as he put it, “to save his own skin” – and he did so only two weeks after informing the president about what was really going on – two weeks! The cover-up, the lie, could only be held together for two weeks, and then everybody else jumped ship in order to save themselves. Now, the fact is that all those around the president were facing embarrassment, maybe prison. Nobody’s life was at stake.

But what about the disciples? Twelve powerless men, peasants really, were facing not just embarrassment or political disgrace, but beatings, stonings, execution. Every single one of the disciples insisted, to their dying breaths, that they had physically seen Jesus bodily raised from the dead. Don’t you think that one of those apostles would have cracked before being beheaded or stoned? That one of them would have made a deal with the authorities? None did. Men will give their lives for something they believe to be true; they will never give their lives for something they know to be false.<sup>182</sup>

Finally, Gary Habermas thoroughly debunks the “stolen body” theories in his second volume of *On the Resurrection*.<sup>183</sup> Accordingly, the “stolen body” conspiracy fails on two fronts as being: (1) unsupported by historical facts; and (2) contrary to the wealth of historical facts proven by Resurrection eyewitnesses.

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<sup>182</sup> Charles Colson, *Breakpoint Online Commentary* (Apr. 29, 2002), quoted in W. Mark Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, p. 208 (2014).

<sup>183</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Refutations*, pp. 417-33 (refuting “Disciples Stole the Body”) and 435-68 (“Someone Else Stole the Body”).

### 3. “Wrong Tomb” Mix-up

Some have argued that the disciples and women went to the wrong tomb, thus explaining why the tomb could be empty. Again, this theory fails for lack of evidence.

Known Location (Women). The Gospels show that the women knew the tomb’s location both before and after the burial.<sup>184</sup> Thus, the plain language refutes the “wrong tomb” theory.

Known Location (Joseph of Arimathea). Because he used his own tomb, Joseph of Arimathea knew the location where he buried Jesus, as all four Gospels confirm.<sup>185</sup> If anyone forgot, Joseph of Arimathea could readily guide others to the tomb.

Easy Resolution. If the women and/or disciples went to the wrong tomb and then announced an empty tomb and Resurrection, the Jewish leaders would have pointed out the error immediately. Given that Christianity arose in Jerusalem, any mix-up about the location of the tomb could have been readily resolved:

This would presumably be the least likely location for teaching that Jesus had been raised from the dead if his grave, presumably located just a very short distance away, had still been occupied. After all, some questioning followed by a brief walk could solve the matter in a minimal amount of time. Walter Kasper considers this as the “most important argument” since otherwise the proclamation of the empty tomb “would not have lasted there a single day.”<sup>186</sup>

Eyewitness Testimony. Regardless of whether someone went the wrong tomb, the multi-sourced evidence of eyewitness testimony remains unrebutted, as discussed above relating to the “stolen body” theory. Accordingly, the “wrong tomb” allegation fails to rebut this weighty eyewitness testimony of the Resurrection.

In summary, the “wrong tomb” theory fails for the same reasons as the others: overwhelming proof of the Resurrection weighed against factually unsupported allegations.

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<sup>184</sup> Matthew 27:61 (Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” attended burial); Matthew 28:1 (both Marys went to grave after the Sabbath); Mark 15:47 (Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James looked “to see where He was laid”); Mark 16:1 (Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome came after the Sabbath); Luke 23:55 (“women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid”); Luke 24:1 (same women return to the tomb “on the first day of the week”); John 20:1 (Mary Magdalene came to the tomb “on the first day of the week”); *see also* Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, pp. 257-310 (discussing the women as “authoritative witnesses” to the empty tomb and Resurrection); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 607-09 (2024) (“majority of recent critical scholars support the notion that female testimony is the one of the strongest”).

<sup>185</sup> Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:38-42.

<sup>186</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 610 (2024) quoting Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, pp. 127-28 (1977).

#### 4. Hallucination Hypothesis

Some have argued that the disciples and other witnesses did not see a risen Jesus, but instead a mere hallucination. This theory does not fit the facts.

Multiple Eyewitness Scenarios. As the Scriptures say, the eyewitness appearances occurred at varying times, to multiple individuals and groups, and under differing conditions:

The records also report that the risen Jesus was observed by men and women alike, indoors and outdoors, during both the daytime as well as the nighttime, by some unbelievers as well as by others who doubted. Some sources add the risen Jesus was even touched and observed to eat.<sup>187</sup>

The Scriptures confirm the wide variety of conditions under which Jesus appeared to a multitude of eyewitnesses. *See* Section III.A.1 above.

Inapplicable Conditions. Supporters of the “mass hallucination” hypothesis have failed to show hallucinations under these diverse conditions:

But detailed studies of accounts of mass hallucinations have shown that they always occur in conjunction with some fixed entity – a statute, a painting, a portion of the sky, or a landscape – something which under the “right” conditions can appear in a paranormal fashion. [footnote omitted]. Yet that is precisely what is never recorded inside or outside the Bible in the early Christian accounts of the resurrection.<sup>188</sup>

As these studies show, the “mass hallucination” theory does not match the factual diversity of the Resurrection appearances.

Unmet Criteria. In surveying the scientific literature, Dale Allison identified four criteria that rarely happen in cases involving a deceased loved one:

- “Hallucinations are rarely, if ever experienced numerous times by both individuals and groups over an extended amount of time.”
- “Hallucinations of apparitions are not usually seen by large groups, as Jesus is seen by the Twelve or even more than five hundred!”
- “Hallucinations have never led to the claim that a dead person had been resurrected.”

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<sup>187</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 367-68 (2024).

<sup>188</sup> Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*, pp. 697-98 (2016) *citing* John Johnson, “Were the Resurrection Appearances Hallucinations? Some Psychiatric and Psychological Considerations,” *Churchman*, p. 115 (2001).

- “Hallucinations do not involve the person’s enemy.”<sup>189</sup>

Based on these criteria, the “hallucination” theory fails on multiple counts, rendering it inapplicable to the Resurrection appearances.

Finally, Gary Habermas thoroughly analyzes and refutes the “hallucination” hypothesis in his latest volume in this series.<sup>190</sup>

For these reasons, the hallucination hypothesis fails on multiple fronts: (1) lack of evidence; (2) contrary to science; and (3) contrary to the Resurrection eyewitness evidence.

## V. Conclusion

Individually, each of the reasons above comes with strong eyewitness evidence supporting the reliability and historicity of the Resurrection. In tandem, these big proofs build an overwhelming case validating the historical and factual accuracy that the risen Jesus appeared to multiple individuals and groups. Compared with other ancient records and works, these Resurrection eyewitness accounts have no equals in the depth and breadth of eyewitness proof establishing their historical truth and authenticity.

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<sup>189</sup> Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 144-45 (2020) summarizing Dale Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, pp. 269-85 (2005). Dale Allison’s analysis carries considerable weight, given that he has scrubbed the “historicity of Jesus’ resurrection” with greater vigor than even atheists like John Dominic Crossan and Gerd Lüdemann. See William Lane Craig, “Dale Allison on Jesus’ Empty Tomb, His Post-Mortem Appearances, and the Origin of the Disciples’ Belief in His Resurrection,” *Reasonable Faith*.

<sup>190</sup> Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Refutations*, pp. 595-633 (Illumination and Illusion Hypotheses) and 635-85 (Hallucinations) (2024).