LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JESUS' RESURRECTION: A HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL

BY

BENJAMIN C. SHAW

LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA

MAY 2010

"The views expressed in this thesis do not necessarily represent the views of the institution and/or of the thesis readers."

Copyright © 2010 by Benjamin C. Shaw
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

This thesis will investigate Jesus' resurrection from a historical perspective. This investigation will begin by evaluating historical criteria that help historians determine the authenticity of past events. The historical approach to this investigation will be the minimal facts approach as pioneered by Gary Habermas. Using this approach, twelve historical facts relevant to the resurrection will be explored. We will evaluate why these twelve facts are agreed upon by a large variety of critical scholars. Next, an argument will be made demonstrating that the earliest reporting of eyewitnesses who experienced the resurrection can be traced to within three years of Jesus' death on the cross. Lastly, a chapter will be devoted to Bart Ehrman and his various objections regarding the historian's ability to determine whether or not a miracle has occurred and other limitations of historical inquiry related to the resurrection of Jesus.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank our Lord Jesus Christ for His sacrifice for our sins, His resurrection, and His victory over death. That He is faithful and pursued me long before I had realized.

To my beautiful wife for being the type of godly woman I never thought existed.

To my parents who have always demonstrated their love for me and always encouraged me.

To the Parrish family for taking me to church when I was very young.

To all my friends and family who have encouraged and challenged me.

To Jerry Falwell Sr. and Liberty University.

To the Liberty Men's Ice Hockey team for bringing me to Liberty.

To all of the professors who have dealt with my constant questioning.

To Dr. Martin for helping a Marketing Major to excel in religious studies.

To Dr. Provenzola for teaching me how to think critically.

To Dr. Jones for his help in philosophy.

To Dr. Wheeler for being a role model.

To Dr. Smither and Dr. Percer for being on my committee and challenging me to be a better writer.

To Dr. Ehrman who took the time to answer several questions regarding his historical methodology and views on Jesus' resurrection.

To Dr. Licona for also taking the time to answer several questions regarding his historical methodology and views on Jesus' resurrection.

To Dr. Habermas for all of his work on the resurrection and time he spent helping me on my thesis. I would especially like to thank Dr. Habermas and Dr. Licona for their book *The Case For the Resurrection*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICALLY APPROACHING THE RISEN JESUS **1**

Methodology 3

Historical Epistemology 3

Historical Method 5

Minimal Facts Approach 7

Justification for Historical Data 8

Justification for Historical Conclusions 12

Investigation Process 13

CHAPTER TWO: TWELVE HISTORICAL FACTS **14**

The Elite Eight 14

1. Jesus Death by Crucifixion 14

2. Jesus' Burial 20

3. His Death Caused the Disciples to Lose Hope and Experience Despair 24

4. The Empty Tomb 26

5. The Disciples Had Real Experiences That they Believed were Literal Appearances of the Risen Jesus 33

6. The Disciples Were Transformed and Were Willing to Suffer and Die for Their Faith 37

7. James, the Skeptical Brother of Jesus, was Converted When He Believed He Saw the Resurrected Jesus 41

8. Paul, the Famous Church Persecutor, Converted After He Believed He Saw the Risen Jesus 43

The Final Four 46

9. This Resurrection Message was Central in Early Christian Preaching 46

10. The Resurrection was Especially Proclaimed in Jerusalem 47

11. The Christian Church was Established and Grew 49

12. Sunday was Featured as the Primary Day of Worship 49

Conclusion 50

CHAPTER THREE: EARLY EYEWITNESS ARGUMENT **53**
Jesus' Death and the Gospels 54
Paul's Reports 55
Paul's Conversion 59
Early Tradition Linked to Eyewitnesses 62
Dating of the Early Eyewitnesses' Tradition 63
Conclusion 66
CHAPTER FOUR: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND BART EHRMAN **68**
Bart Ehrman 68
Ehrman, History, and Miracles 69
History and Miracles 71
History and Theology 74
Ehrman and Hume 75
Problematic View of Miracles 76
Probability of Life After Death 82
History and the Natural Realm 84
History and the Supernatural Realm 88
An Internal Problem 90
Conclusion 91
CHAPTER FIVE – DID JESUS RISE FROM THE DEAD? **95**
Twelve Historical Facts 96
Early Eyewitness Accounts 97
Historiography and Bart Ehrman 100
Conclusion 101
APPENDIX A **103**
BIBLIOGRAPHY **104**

Chapter One:
Historically Approaching the Risen Jesus

The resurrection of Jesus after His death and crucifixion is a belief at the heart of Christianity. Therefore, if the resurrection of Jesus did not happen, then the faith of the Christian is pointless. This statement is not made simply by skeptics of Christianity, but by one of the very writers of the New Testament. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:17, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is *worthless*."[1] Additionally, it is interesting to note that after this statement concerning the resurrection of Jesus, Paul then writes in verse 32, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Thus, for Paul, faithfulness to Jesus Christ and the reality of the resurrection went hand in hand. One cannot find a more powerful statement in the first century that confirms the importance of the resurrection for the Christian faith than Paul's in 1 Cor. 15.[2]

Evangelist John MacArthur lists six major problems that are posed to the Christian if the resurrection did not happen. MacArthur highlights the problems given to Christians in 1 Cor. 15:13-19,

> In these verses, Paul gives six disastrous consequences if there were no Resurrection: (1) preaching Christ would be senseless (v. 14); (2) faith in Christ would be useless (v.14); (3) all the witnesses and preachers of the Resurrection would be liars (v.15); (4) no one would be redeemed from sin (v.17); (5) all former believers would have perished (v. 18); and (6) Christians would be the most pitiable people on the earth…The two resurrections, Christ's and believers', stand or fall together; if there is no resurrection, then Christ is dead.[3]

Christianity, therefore, would be fatally wounded if the resurrection never happened.

Yet, if it did happen, then the resurrection *should* have an influence on one's life. It is such an important event because belief or disbelief in the resurrection affects one's

---

[1] All translations will be from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

[2] Gary Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry" (PhD diss, Michigan State University, 1976), 7.

[3] John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2005), 1606.

Weltanschauung, or worldview. Either Jesus rose from the dead and we should faithfully follow Jesus' teachings *or* Jesus did not rise and we should "eat and drink for tomorrow we die." The debate surrounding Jesus' resurrection has been discussed throughout the history of Christianity. From the very beginning we find writers of the New Testament giving accounts of those questioning the historical resurrection of Jesus.

Thus, the central aim of this thesis is to determine if the historian can accept Jesus' resurrection as a historical fact. The historical methodology to be used for this investigation will be the minimal facts approach.[4] The chapters will be divided in such a way that first examines the historical facts and then philosophical issues surrounding history and the resurrection. Thus, initial data will be collected which are pertinent to studies of the resurrection. The data will be collected in a specific manner that only accepts facts that are almost universally agreed upon by both conservative and skeptic alike, and equally important, *why* they are agreed upon. Moreover, a look into why both conservatives and skeptics agree on the evidence will be crucial because it will map out the reasons these facts are generally agreed upon by both sides. Not all of the facts will be given equal attention in this discussion, but several will be discussed.

A subsequent investigation will be made into the widely popular author, Bart Ehrman.[5] We will examine his historical approach and methodology to determine whether or not it is appropriate. One key area of Ehrman's methodology is that he denies that the historian could ever report that a miracle had occurred, even if one in fact did occur. Another area worth investigating is Ehrman's historical approach to the resurrection and how he applies his historical

[4] Both will be discussed in detail below.

[5] Barth Ehrman is currently the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has studied under the distinguished Bruce Metzger at Princeton where he received his Ph.D. with honors.

method to determine the historicity of an event. Lastly, we will examine how Ehrman works out his historical method and if he does so consistently.

Methodology

Before we begin our historical inquiry into the resurrection a few items must be clarified. Due to the investigatory nature and purpose of this paper it will be important to minimize as many assumptions as possible. For example, there is still dispute among theologians on whether or not the resurrection was a literal and physical event or a spiritual event. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly define the term "resurrection" for the purposes of this study.[6] In this paper, the term 'resurrection' will refer to the claim made by the writers of the New Testament of Jesus in a literal and physical way, unless otherwise mentioned.[7] Additionally, the Bible will *not* be treated as inerrant, inspired, or even trustworthy, but more details will be given in the minimal facts approach section.

Historical Epistemology

There are important questions that all historians must ask. How can we determine whether or not a person or event is truly historical? At what point can we consider a past event truly historical? When are we justified in claiming knowledge of a past historical event? These questions require an appropriate philosophy of history and historical methodology. New Testament historian Mike Licona describes historiography as the "history of the philosophy of history and as writings about the past. Historiography is not historical method but includes it, since method enables one to write about the past…philosophy of history concerns

[6] John Dominic Crossan, N. T. Wright, and Robert B. Stewart. *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

[7] Gary Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry," 4.

epistemological approaches to gaining knowledge of the past."[8] In essence, historiography is the philosophy of history and the methods historians use to gain knowledge of past events. Therefore, it will be important to address some epistemological approaches to the history of philosophy.

History is a unique discipline that stands quite opposite of science because history's findings and data cannot be repeated.[9] Scientists may repeat an experiment many different times in a lab before coming to a conclusion. Historians are not so fortunate because they only have one time events to work with. For example, the sixteenth American President, Abraham Lincoln, was assassinated in 1865 by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre. This is not an event that can be repeated in a lab, yet we still can know that this was an actual event in history. We can verify this event through newspaper reports, government documents, Lincoln's tombstone, etc. There is evidence for the historian through these other avenues that allows us to gain knowledge about past events.

Another surprising aspect of history is the role of belief or faith. The question may arise, what role does belief or faith play in history? It is quite well-recognized by historians that we cannot know history with 100% certainty. Historians can only know whether or not an event in the past occurred or not with varying levels of probability. When we look back to the past we can only *believe* with a certain degree of probability regarding a past event or person. Moreover, if a person or event from the past affects how we act or behave in the present and future it will even require faith in the reality of that past event occurring.

---

[8] Mike Licona, "The Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus: Historiographical Considerations in the Light of Recent Debates" (Phd Diss., University of Pretoria, 2008), 16.

[9] However, even science has similar limitations. While experiments can be repeated, the experiment will never be exactly the same as it was in its previous trial. A simple illustration is that we never step in the same river twice. The water has changed since we have last put our foot in it. In a similar way this works with science experiments because it is never the exact same material being used. Therefore, in a sense science and history intertwine with each other in this aspect.

Famed writer and Oxford University professor C.S. Lewis wrote brilliantly on this aspect of faith. Lewis describes how our belief in past historical events can be challenged by our imagination and emotions. Lewis writes concerning our knowledge of contemporary medicine and how our faith in this history has its part as well:

> I was assuming that the human mind once accepts a thing as true it will automatically go on regarding it as true, until some real reason for reconsidering it turns up. In fact, I was assuming that the human mind is completely ruled by reason. But this is not so. For example, my reason is perfectly convinced by good evidence that anesthetics do not smother me and that properly trained surgeons do not start operating until I am unconscious. But that does not alter the fact that when they have me down on the table and clap their horrible mask over my face, a mere childish panic begins inside me. I start thinking I am going to choke, and I am afraid they will start cutting me up before I am properly under. In other words, I lose my faith in anesthetics. It is not reason that is taking away my faith: on the contrary, my faith is based on reason. It is my imagination and emotions. The battle is between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination on the other.[10]

This is a great example of how our faith in the contemporary medicine is challenged by our situation. Since we do not know with certainty that anesthetics always work we must "put our faith in anesthetics." We can see that our current situation can affect the way we look at the facts. This example shows that we can all reasonably know that anesthetics work, but when our situation changes and we are in the operating room we can doubt the knowledge that anesthetics work. Therefore, it is important to establish objective data and a methodology that prevents its data from changing with our presuppositions as best it can.

Historical Method

Graham Twelftree describes a common methodological problem confronting historians: "One fundamental issue involved in historical method is the question of who should bear the

[10] C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2002), 115-116.

burden of proof—the so-called skeptical historian or the proponent of historicity. In colloquial terms, is a document from the past guilty or innocent until proven otherwise?"[11] Those who do research bring with them individual experiences and presuppositions that could affect their studies. These presuppositions or worldviews can affect conclusions that are made even when the same data are used. A good example of this is the current debate between Creationists and Evolutionists. While both look at the exact same data, it is presuppositions that can cause scientists to arrive at completely opposite conclusions.

Historians often struggle with the same dilemma. The factors that can influence our conclusions are ethnicity, gender, nationality, values, political and religious convictions, concepts of the external world and of the nature of history itself. Licona defines the bias that historians bring to their research as "horizons." He has defined horizons as: "One's pre-understanding. It is how historians view things as a result of their knowledge, experience, beliefs, education, cultural conditioning, and preferences, presuppositions, and worldview."[12] He continues to write about how horizons affect our conclusions, "They [historians] cannot look at the data vacuous of biases, hopes, or inclinations. No historian is exempt…How can so many historians with access to the same data arrive at so many different conclusions regarding what actually occurred? Horizons."[13] Therefore, there is a difficulty for historians to reach historical conclusions objectively because their horizons can affect their conclusions regarding the data.

---

[11] Graham Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 249.

[12] Mike Licona, "The Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus: Historiographical Considerations in the Light of Recent Debates," 22.

[13] Mike Licona, "The Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus: Historiographical Considerations in the Light of Recent Debates," 22. According to Licona, other scholars agree with this include: Richard Evans, C.B. McCullagh; Dale Allison; and J.P. Meier.

Due to these problems historians have developed different criteria designed to eliminate, as best as possible, biases from affecting historical inquiries. It is this criterion in which our historical investigation into the resurrection will best determine whether or not the resurrection can be historically established. Additionally, it will also give us insight into some the veracity of alternative explanations. Moreover, in order to best eliminate my worldviews and any presuppositions that I bring to the investigation, I will be using the minimal facts approach.

Minimal Facts Approach

The minimal facts approach, as pioneered by Gary Habermas, requires two criteria for an event to be considered historical: (1) data that is well evidenced and (2) data that is accepted by virtually every scholar.[14] Therefore, this approach will *not* be arguing that Christians are justified by faith in the resurrection as an historical event. Nor will it assume the Bible is inerrant, inspired, or trustworthy.[15] We will treat the Bible simply as another book of ancient literature. The Bible will be treated as a collection of individual writings and not as an entire book.[16] Skeptics, atheists, and agnostics agree that the Bible, at the very least, can still provide us with some historical data. Historians can gather historical data and events from ancient literature by employing certain methods that add to a document's authenticity. With regard to the Bible, the only data that will be considered are those that are strongly evidenced and considered historical by almost every scholar who specializes in the subject.[17]

---

[14] It is virtually impossible to have *complete* consensus on any subject regarding history. Even many skeptics disagree with each other and some skeptics still hold to views they know to be radical despite lack of evidence for their position. Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 44; Gary Habermas, "Evidential Apologetics," *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven B. Cohan, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 100, 186-190.

[15] Although I do believe this, *none* of the evidence to be provided will consider the Bible this way in order to be considered a historical fact.

[16] The Bible itself is a collection of letters, historical narratives, biographies, and apocalyptic and poetic literature.

[17] Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 45.

I am going to argue from data that is conceded by scholars across a wide theological spectrum in order to help prevent my own views from affecting the conclusion of this research. In other words, I will be using data upon which both sides of the argument can agree. This will avoid the possible objections that I am only presenting evidence that supports my worldview. To avoid making the evidence fit our presuppositions, the data to be explored will come from Christian (conservative and liberal), agnostic, and skeptical perspectives. If all three can agree on the data, then we can reasonably view the historical data as objective data because it is agreed upon by scholars with differing presuppositions.[18]

Justification for Historical Data

How do all of these scholars from varying worldviews across a wide theological spectrum determine historical data? Several criteria are used for determining the authenticity of a past event or person such as early testimony, eyewitness testimony, multiple and independent sources, enemy attestation, embarrassing testimony, and consensus. However, these criteria only add to the authenticity of a past person or event.

One of the most important criteria that historians use for determining the historicity of an event is the *early testimony* of the event. Historians like earlier dates because they typically argue against any legendary development within a document. Brandeis University history professor David Fischer writes that historians should "not merely provide good relevant evidence, but the best relevant evidence. And the best relevant evidence…is evidence which is most nearly immediate to the event itself."[19] However, when it comes to ancient history the word "early"

---

[18] This is simply because it takes a great deal of evidence for opposing views to agree. Therefore, if a Christian and skeptic agree on data, it must be because it is an actual event and not *just* because it supports their views.

[19] David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Towards a Logic of Historical Thought* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 62. Hackett goes on to write that, "The very best evidence…is the event itself,

needs to be clarified because the invention of the printing press, television, and internet have all revolutionized how we can record and report events today.[20] For example, the earliest reports that we have concerning Alexander the Great come from Arrian and Plutarch about 400 years after Alexander's death in 323 BC. Yet, most historians believe that we can establish what historical events happened in Alexander's life with a reasonable amount of accuracy.[21] This is not what many of us today would consider early. Yet, many reports historians use are earlier than this example, but a large number of historians in the first few centuries can be dated between 100-150 years after the event.[22]

Eyewitness testimony has the ability to validate a past occurrence. Eyewitness testimony is considered more veracious than second or tertiary hand testimony. It may be more difficult to obtain direct eyewitness testimony in ancient history, but this testimony carries with it far greater evidential weight. This is not something that is in any way new to historians today. Early Greek historians also wanted to build their history on eyewitness accounts. However, for events that were not contemporary to the Greek historians they had to rely on the most authoritative sources

---

and then the authentic remains, and then direct observations, etc." With regard to ancient history, when eyewitness testimony can be coupled with early attestation, the position is significantly strengthened.

[20] Despite even these technological advancements, there are some today who do not believe in very well-evidenced historical events. The holocaust is a good example of a well-documented historical event, but some people, such as David Irving, do not believe this happened.

[21] A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 188-191. Historians are also able to discern what has later developed as legend as opposed to what we can reasonably know as an actual event. Most of the legendary material developed about 500 years or more after Alexander's death.

[22] The reports historians have concerning Tiberius Caesar would be a good example of documents that are in this timeline. There are ten sources concerning Tiberius that fall within 150 years, while there are 42 that record Jesus. Gary R. Habermas and Antony G. N. Flew, *Resurrected: An Atheist and Theist Dialogue*, ed. John F. Ankerberg (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2005), 78 f.n. 58.

in their possession.[23] One of the strongest pieces of evidence that scholars look for is whether or not an event is early, close to the date of the actual event, and contain eyewitness accounts.

As historians review documents of historical significance to determine whether or not an event is historical they look for *multiple independent sources* to determine an event's historicity with a higher degree of certainty. Several facts of ancient history are verified by only one source, but multiple sources in agreement can allow historians to consider the event undeniable.[24] William Lane Craig carefully defines multiple attestation as, "An event mentioned in several independent documents is more likely to be historical then it would have been had it been mentioned in only one."[25] Paul Maier of Western Michigan University concludes that "Many facts from antiquity rest on just *one* ancient source, while two or three sources in agreement generally render the fact unimpeachable."[26]

Enemy attestation is the criterion whereby an antagonistic source is in agreement about a person or event even though it is against his or her best interest.[27] A simple example of this

---

[23] Ernst Breisach, *Historiagraphy: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983),38-39. Yet, because of their focus on eyewitness testimony their focus was centered on contemporary history of their time. Additionally, Breisach writes that the Greeks wrote with a purpose for their history that varied from "the preservation of noble memories to the education of its active citizens."

[24] Paul L. Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 197.

[25] William Lane Craig, "The Work of Bart Ehrman," Lecture given at Gracepoint Berkeley Church (Berkeley, CA April 17, 2010), http://www.rfmedia.org/av/audio/gracepoint-the-work-of-bart-ehrman/ (accessed on May 7, 2010). Craig is criticizing Bart Ehrman for using a sloppy definition of multiple attestation that is, "An event mentioned in several independent documents is more likely to be historical than an event mentioned in only one." Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millenium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 90-91. Craig rightly considers this definition to be comparative measure between two different events. A comparative nature based on single attestation is false because it is evident that an event that only has single attestation may be considered historical for other reasons. Yet, Ehrman does rightly argue that this criterion cannot reduce the historical authenticity of an event, but only add to its authenticity. Additionally, James D.G. Dunn agrees that when historians find events or phrases that appear in multiple independent sources and literary forms in the Bible, it decreases the likelihood that it was a creation of the early church. James D.G. Dunn, Scott McKnight, *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 133.

[26] Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, 197.

[27] Gary Habermas, "Recent Perspectives on the Reliability of the Gospels," *Christian Research Journal* 28, Vol. 28, n. 1 (2005): 16-26.

would be if a criminal, who was recently arrested by law enforcement, were to admit the agents who arrested him had treated him fairly and justly: in this case we could reasonably conclude the criminal was telling the truth in this regard. The criminal would have nothing to gain by admitting the fair treatment he received. Therefore, although the criminal may have lied about other aspects of his or her arrest, one can reasonably conclude that the officers had treated him fairly.

The *embarrassing admission* criterion is based on the principle that authors will leave out any possible details that may portray them in a negative way. However, those who are committed to writing the truth of an event will include all the details, even the ones that may potentially embarrass them. Moreover, authors are not likely to invent stories that would reflect poorly on their character. Thus, any details that contain information that could be considered embarrassing to the author are almost certainly true.[28] For example, if a husband and wife were recorded as having a discussion about another woman and the husband admitted to having an affair with that woman, then historians can more than reasonably assume that the husband did in fact have an affair with that woman because this claim is, or at the very least should be, embarrassing for him.

Habermas considers *consensus* to be one of the strongest criterion for historicity because it builds on historical data that is agreed upon by a wide range of otherwise diverse historians to be well established, that is, data historians with varying backgrounds can affirm as having been historical events of the past.[29] Habermas writes, "Certainly one of the strongest indications of

---

[28] Norman L. Geisler, Frank Turek, and David Limbaugh, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 231, 275-276.

[29] Gary Habermas, "Historical Epistemology, Jesus' Resurrection, and the Shroud of Turin," in *Proceedings of the 1999 Shroud of Turin International Conference*, ed. Bryan Walsh (Magisterium Press, 2000).

historicity occurs when a saying or event can be constructed from data that are admittedly well-established even across a wide range of otherwise diverse historical opinions."[30]

Justification for Historical Conclusions

One of the most notable historians to provide criteria to determine the historicity of a past event is C.B. McCullagh. McCullagh provides several criteria that are designed to help historians establish the best explanation given the historical data.[31] These criteria are designed to remove biases from the observer's conclusions and therefore are highly relevant to our analysis of the resurrection.[32] This method is so highly effective that it is used by Craig and others in debates investigating the historicity of the resurrection.[33]

Explanatory scope seeks a hypothesis that will incorporate a greater number of facts. Doctors typically seek a diagnosis that has the greatest explanatory scope. When doctors are looking at the symptoms of a sick patient, they look for a cause or diagnosis that has the greatest explanatory scope or that can account for as many of the symptoms as possible. Moreover, any good hypothesis should not rest on one line of evidence. A good hypothesis should have multiple lines of evidence supporting it. Hypotheses with strong explanatory power are ones that are more probable than other hypotheses regarding the same information. Plausibility must be implied to

---

[30] Gary Habermas, "Recent Perspectives on the Reliability of the Gospels," 16-26.

[31] C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 19.

[32] Graham Twelftree has a list of eighteen criterion for historical descriptions. Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 247-257; John Meier also presents a series of criterion. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1:167-95.

[33] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus? A Debate between William Lane Craig and Bart D. Ehrman, College of the Holy Cross, March 28, 2006* (Worcester, MA: The College, 2006); William Lane Criag, Gerd Ludemann, Paul Copan, and Ronald K. Tacelli. *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?: A Debate between William Lane Craig and Gerd Ludemann* (Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 37. Mike Licona uses fewer of the same criteria in his debates with Bart Ehrman as well. Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?* DVD, Southern Evangelical Seminary, April 2, 2009. All references to Licona and Ehrman debating will be from this debate unless otherwise noted.

some degree by a greater variety of the facts (explanatory scope) and it must be implied more strongly than any other (explanatory power).

Hypothesis that are less ad hoc are more probable than ones that are more contrived. This means that a hypothesis that requires many other hypotheses to account for the known data is less likely. It is disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs, or, conversely, it is in agreement with more accepted beliefs. Lastly, it must surpass all other hypotheses with regard to the previous criteria.[34]

Investigation Process

Through the use of the minimal facts approach, the five criteria for justifying historical data, and six criteria for justifying historical descriptions, we will historically investigate the resurrection of Jesus and objections brought against it. This methodology will help prevent us from pre-judging or pre-determining the outcome before the investigation has begun and allow us to critically examine evidences for the resurrection before addressing any objections. Moreover, it will allow us to use facts granted by the vast majority of scholars studying the subject from a wide spectrum of theological beliefs.

[34] Another criteria that McCullagh mentions is that "the hypothesis should be simpler than any competing hypothesis…" C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, 19.

Chapter Two:
Twelve Historical Facts

When examining the historicity of a specific event it is important to first evaluate the relevant historical bedrock. In the case of the resurrection, nearly all scholars who study the subject, Christian or skeptic, agree upon twelve key facts.[35] Since we are using historical facts that critical scholars can agree on, we will take notice of why these scholars believe these facts.

The Elite Eight

Jesus Died by Crucifixion

The death of Jesus by crucifixion is important to the discussion of resurrection because if there is no death, then there can be no resurrection; death is a prerequisite for resurrection.[36] Of all the data to be examined, the fact that Jesus died due to crucifixion is one of the least disputed by scholars.[37] There are several reasons why scholars do not deny the fact that Jesus died by crucifixion.

First, several early sources, both from Christian and non-Christian accounts, record the death of Jesus. Some sources even pre-date the New Testament writings. Scholars have observed that there are early creedal passages in the New Testament that were in circulation pre-dating the actual writing of the New Testament. The most respected creed in the New Testament concerning Jesus' death is 1 Cor. 15:3-7. This pre-Pauline creed has been dated to the early AD

---

[35] These facts will come from the extensive work of Gary R. Habermas. Antony Flew, former Vice-President of the British Humanist Society and now deist, is a great example of how someone with a distinctively differing viewpoint, yet agrees with the data because it is so strongly evidenced. See Gary R. Habermas, Antony Flew, and Terry L. Miethe. *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?: The Resurrection Debate* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

[36] Ehrman has objected to the relevance of Jesus' death by crucifixion. However, one cannot be resurrected if they have not died. This is precisely why Muslim scholars attempt to discredit Jesus' death, because without it Jesus never resurrected. Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[37] This objection is typically brought my Muslims as it contradicts the Quran, Sura 4:157.

30's.[38] There are over ten other respected texts mentioning the death of Jesus found in the New Testament.[39] All four of the Gospels mention the death of Jesus by crucifixion.[40] Additionally, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr are three non-canonical sources that mention the death of Jesus.[41]

There are also over ten non-Christian sources that mention the death of Jesus.[42] The Roman historian Tacitus (ca. AD 55-120) wrote around AD 115 that "Christus…suffered the extreme penalty…at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate…"[43] The Roman and Jewish historian Josephus (ca. AD 38- 97) wrote around AD 90 that "Pontius Pilate caused him [Jesus] to be crucified."[44]

In AD 52 Thallus wrote, possibly before Tacitus and even the Gospels, a history of the Eastern Mediterranean. However, since then only fragments or citations in other writings have been discovered. Yet, in one such citation from AD 221, Thallus implies that the death of Jesus was linked to a worldwide darkness, an earthquake, and an eclipse.[45] The Jewish Talmud (Mishnah), describes Jesus' death, "…he [Jesus] was hanged on the eve of Passover."[46]

---

[38] We will look specifically at this creed in the next chapter.

[39] We find creedal passages and sermon summaries that refer to Pontius Pilate and Jesus dying on the cross. These respected texts include the Acts 2:22-36 (which mentions nails!), 3:13-16, 4:8-10, 5:29-32, 10:39-43, 13:28-31; Rom. 4:25; Phil. 2:8;1 Pt. 3:18; Ga. 3:13, and 1 Cor. 15:3, which is considered the most respected creed.

[40] Mt. 27:26-56; Mk. 15:20-47; Lk. 23:26-56; Jn. 19:16-42.

[41]Clement of Rome, *1 Clement*, 7, 12, 21, 49; Ignatius, *Trallians* 9*; Smyrneans* 1*; Barnabas* 5*;* Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 32, 35, 50; *Dialogue with Trypho* 47, 108.

[42] For a complete list of non-Christian sources that mention Jesus see. Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, (Joplin, MO: College Press 1996), Ch. 8.

[43] Tacitus, *Annals*, 15:44, Perseus Project Digital Library and Tufts University www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/ (accessed April 30, 2010).

[44] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.3.3. Although this is a disputed passage, the statements regarding his death are not in question. All citations for Josephus and the early church fathers will be taken from Christians Classics Ethereal Library (www.ccel.org) unless otherwise noted.

[45] Julius Aficanus, *Extant Writings*, XCIII in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), vol. VI, 130 as cited in Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 197. Habermas notes that a fair objection is that, "we are not specifically told if Jesus is mentioned in Thallus' original

Second, crucifixion was a form of execution specifically designed to kill its victims slowly and the chances of someone surviving were very minimal.[47] This method was so intense that it where the word 'excruciating' was derived.[48] It was so severe that even Cicero, who was no friend of Christianity, wrote that crucifixion was, "a most cruel and ignominious punishment."[49] Prior to a crucifixion, floggings were typically administered with a short whip, or flagellum, that have varying pieces of leather tied together. Metal beads and/or small sharp bones were tied to each strap in order to cut into the flesh with each strike.[50] Repeated strikes could cause hanging ribbons of flesh and expose veins, muscles, and bowels. Josephus recorded a whipping in which the victim's bones "laid bare."[51] This initial could very easily send its victims into hypovolemic shock due to an immense amount of blood loss.[52]

After the flogging, the victim would then be placed on the cross. Medical Doctor Alexander Metherell has said, "[C]rucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death due to

---

history at all." However, it does seem probable that it was as well as that Jesus' death was known throughout the Mediterranean by the middle of the first century.

[46] The Talmud was comprised of a large amount of oral tradition that was passed down each generation. This material began to be collected in 135 AD and was completed in 200 AD. As quoted from *The Babylonian Talmud*, transl. by I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935) col. III, *Sanhedrin* 43a, 281 as cited in Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 203.

[47] Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977); William D.Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer. 1986. "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ" *JAMA.* 255, no. 11. are excellent resources pertaining to crucifixion practices and procedures.

[48] From the Latin "out of the cross."

[49] Cicero, *Against Verres*, 2.5.165. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Cic.+Ver.+2.5.165&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0018

[50] In Jewish practices thirty-nine lashes were typically given, however the Romans had no such limitation. The number of strikes often depended on the soldiers administering the punishment.

[51] Jospehus, *Jewish Wars*, 6.5.3., 2.21.5; *Jewish Antiquities*, 12.5.4.

[52] Lee Strobel, *Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 196; William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association.* 255, no. 11(1986): 1457.

asphyxiation."[53] Asphyxiation occurs to crucifixion victims because the intercostals, pectoral, and deltoid muscles are stretched and prevent one from exhaling as long as they are in the hanging position. In order to exhale, the victims must push up using their feet, which have nails in them.[54] Thus, Roman soldiers, who were already expert killers, knew that the victim was dead if they have been in the hanging position for an extended period of time. Additionally, there is only one account of someone surviving crucifixion. Josephus reports that Titus Caesar had allowed for three of his friends to be taken down from the cross and given the best medical treatment possible at that time, yet two of them still died.[55] Therefore, even those who were taken down from a cross and given the best possible medical treatment had a very minimal chance of survival.

The process of crucifixion was a process that was designed to kill its victims. Before the process began, scourging was also administered to further weaken the victim. The Roman soldiers were experts in execution and knew how to do their job effectively. Given this process alone, we can reasonably conclude that Jesus did in fact die on the cross.

---

[53] Lee Strobel, *Case for Christ*, 198; William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," 1457.

[54] Archaeology evidence in an ossuary with the name Yohanan Ben Ha'galgol made in June 1968 demonstrated that the use of nails was used during crucifixion. A 7-inch spike was found driven through the heel of the victim that was dated to approximately 70 AD. Moreover, this discovery confirmed the following. Nails were used in crucifixion practices, breaking of legs was practiced to quicken a death, and the victim was also put in a position that made it difficult to breathe. N. Haas, "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar," *Israel Exploration Journal 20* (1970), 38-59; V. Tzaferis. 1970 "Jewish Tombs at and near Giv'at ha-Mivtar." *Israel Exploration Journal 20* (1970) 18-32 as cited in Gary Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 173-175. Moreover, some contend that Jesus had been tied to the cross instead of nailed. This is not likely because (1) we have multiple attestations of nails being used in John 20:25 and Acts 2:23 (also part of an early sermon summary). (2) Martin Hengel's *Crucifixion*, which is considered an authoritative work on the subject quotes Josephus's description of the Jews being nailed in different postures and (3) that the tying of victims to the cross was typically a Egyptian practice. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 31-33.

[55] Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, 75.

Third, a final death blow could be administered by the executioners, if needed, to expedite the execution.[56] Jesus is reported as being pierced in the side by a Roman soldier.[57] This would have eliminated all doubt regarding the death of Jesus to friends and enemies alike.[58] Moreover, there is a strong medical opinion that suggests Jesus was stabbed in the heart and had his pericardium pierced in the process.[59] This explains why a mixture of blood and water was recorded after the stabbing. If the soldier heard any type of breathing or sucking after the stabbing (which may suggest a punctured lung), then he would have immediately known that Jesus was still alive and would have surely administered another strike.

Fourth, surely Jesus' enemies were satisfied that He was dead and if not, then they would have been the first ones to alert the Roman soldiers. We cannot reasonably expect that Jesus' enemies would have taken Him by force early in the morning, delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, demanded that He be crucified, and then leave a chance that He might survive.

Fifth, while the above are strong reasons for believing that Jesus died due to the severity of crucifixion, most scholars believe Jesus died on the cross because of the famous critique of the Apparent Death Theory (or Swoon Theory) given by David Strauss, who was part of the German

---

[56] Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 70. There are varying method used by the Romans and the breaking of legs is the most popular method since it prevented the victim from pushing up on their legs anymore to exhale.

[57] Jn. 19:34.

[58] For those who doubt that Roman soldiers would stab a crucifixion two things may quickly be said. First, a spear was standard weaponry for a Roman soldier and this would be most likely something readily available to the Roman soldiers. Second, we have reports from Roman historian who mentions that crucifixion victims were stabbed. *Declamationes maiores* 6:9: "As for those who die on the cross, the executioner does not forbid the burying of those who have been pierced." As cited in Mike Licona, "Can We Be Certain that Jesus Died On A Cross? A Look at the Ancient Practice of Crucifixion," *Historical Jesus*, http://www.4truth.net/site/c.hiKXLbPNLrF/b.2903303/k.BFEB/Can_We_Be_Certain_Jesus_Died_on_a_Cross__Apologetics.htm (accessed April 5, 2010).

[59] Dr. Alexander Metherell in Lee Strobel, *Case for Christ*, 199; William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," 1455-1463; J. E. Holoubek and A. B. Holoubek, "Execution by Crucifixion: History, Methods and Cause of Death," *Journal of Medicine* 26 (1995): 1-16.

Liberalism movement.[60] Strauss persuasively argues that if Jesus somehow survived the crucifixion, then He could not have convinced the believers that He now had a resurrected body. If Jesus had not died, His body would have been pale (from loss of blood), had multiple lacerations, been bruised, unable to walk because of the nails, and in desperate need of a doctor.[61] Yet, Jesus would then have had to somehow move the large stone covering the entrance of the tomb, defeat the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb, and do all of this after just having been beaten mercilessly and having nails driven in his hands and feet. Then Jesus would have to walk on these pierced feet to meet the disciples, and then somehow convince His disciples that He had conquered the death. Without a doubt the disciples would have thought that Jesus was in serious need of medical attention and far from being a risen Savior. A glorified and resurrected Jesus is entirely different than one that has merely survived. Moreover, this is not the type of body that would encourage and embolden the disciples from hiding in fear to boldly proclaiming the resurrected Jesus. Former Cambridge and Oxford professor N.T. Wright concludes, “Roman soldiers knew how to kill people especially rebel kings. First-century Jews knew the difference between a survivor and someone newly alive."[62] Since 1879, this critique has convinced many scholars that Jesus must have died on the cross.[63]

Jesus’ death is so well attested that even liberals not only agree with the data, but have defended the data as well. The overwhelming majority of scholars today do not give the death of Jesus a second thought. John Dominc Crossan writes, “That he was crucified is as sure as

---

[60] David Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879), 1:408-12.

[61] As Josephus’ friend had needed one.

[62] N.T. Wright, “Jesus Resurrection and Christian Origins,” *Gregorianum,* 83, no 4 (2002): 615–635.

[63] Albert Schwitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1910), 56-57; 62-67 agrees with Strauss’ assessment critiquing Paulus’ and Schleiermacher’s view that Jesus did not die on the cross. Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003) 40 f.n. 71.

anything historical can ever be."[64] Bart Erhman, who is exceptionally critical of the New Testament writings, believes that "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."[65]

Jesus Was Buried

Jesus' burial plays an important role with regard to Jesus' resurrection. It is an important piece of evidence that confirms that the body of Jesus was buried in a specific place. While the burial plays an important role, it is not necessary for a resurrection. A resurrection occurs when a person is dead and then is seen later alive; in other words, there can be a resurrection without a burial.[66] Additionally, many of the evidences we will observe for Jesus' burial will overlap with evidences for the empty tomb as well.

First, there are multiple and early attestations from the New Testament and non-canonical writings that report Jesus' burial. The four Gospels, Acts, and Paul record Jesus' burial.[67] The earliest tradition we have is in creedal form from Paul in 1 Cor. 15:4.[68] The burial is part of the early pre-Markan material that is widely considered noncontroversial.[69] One reason scholars

---

[64] John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 145, cf. 154, 196, 201.

[65] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 256. Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[66] Resurrection should be distinguished from resuscitation and near death experiences in that a resurrected person does not experience a second physical death, while a resuscitated or NDE person does experience a second death.

[67] Mt. 27:57-61; Mk. 15:42-47; Lk. 23:50-56. Jn. 19:38-42; Acts 13:28-31. The writings of Paul include Rm. 6:4; 1 Cor. 15:4; and Col. 2:12. Habermas writes, "In fact, scholars think that there could be as many as three or four independent traditions in the Gospels, which very strongly increases the likelihood that the reports are both early and historical." Gary Habermas, "The Empty Tomb of Jesus," *His Resurrection*, http://www.4truth.net/site/c.hiKXLbPNLrF/b.2903683/k.67DD/The_Empty_Tomb_of_Jesus.htm (accessed March 2, 2010).

[68] We also find them in the respected sermon summaries of Acts. For example, Acts 13:28-31.

[69] William Lane Craig, "Visions of Jesus: A Critical Assessment of Gerd Ludemann's Hallucination Hypothesis,"*Historical Jesus*, Edwin Mellen Press. http://www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5208 (accessed on March 2, 2010).

believe that this is part of a pre-Markan passion narrative is that the passion narrative in Mark runs very smoothly in comparison to the rest of his Gospel. This, along with other reasons, indicates that Jesus' burial was part of Mark's original source material.[70] Thus, with Mark as the earliest Gospel, plus the creeds in 1 Cor. 15 and Acts 13:28-31, there are multiple and very early reports of the burial of Jesus.

Second, we have indirect enemy attestation that Jesus' tomb was empty. Matthew, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian all describe the earliest Jewish polemic aimed towards the Christian claim of the resurrection that would actually confirm an empty tomb.[71] All three report Jewish authorities claiming the disciples had stolen the Jesus' body. By offering a naturalistic explanation for the empty tomb they knew the tomb was empty. Without the tomb actually being empty, there would be no reason for the Jewish authorities to give an explanation for its being empty. Moreover, this is the only account offered by early enemies to explain the resurrection and empty tomb. This strongly suggests that there was a tomb, that it was known by both the disciples and authorities, and that Jesus was buried there.

Third, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus and the burial story are highly doubtful to be Christian innovations. There was hostility between the early Jews and early Christians. It is unlikely that the early Christians would create Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, to give Jesus an honorable burial unless he actually did. This is somewhat embarrassing for the disciples because it was their leader, and they should have been the ones to bury Him.[72] Additionally, Arimathea itself is of minimal historical or

---

[70] William Lane Craig, "Visions of Jesus: A Critical Assessment of Gerd Ludemann's Hallucination Hypothesis," Craig also argues that, "Like the burial account, it is remarkably straightforward and unembellished by theological or apologetic motifs likely to characterize a later legendary account."

[71] Mt. 28:13; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Tryphyo*, 108; Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, 30.

[72] Nicodemus does assist Joseph in Jn. 19:39. William Lane Craig also feels that this fact can satisfy the criterion of dissimilarity (A criterion not mentioned in the previous chapter because it can be overly skeptical.). It

theological importance; thus, this location does not seem to have any metaphorical meaning. Therefore, we have very good reasons to believe that the burial story by Joseph of Arimathea is a historical account.

Fourth, all four Gospels report women being present at Jesus' tomb and being the first ones there. This is an embarrassing testimony for the New Testament writers given the significantly low value of women's testimony in the Mediterranean during this period. For example, the Jewish Talmud considers a woman's testimony equal to thieves and robbers.[73] If the Gospel writers were adding a legendary or fictitious burial story, then they would have certainly eliminated the women's testimony and at least placed the disciples at the burial and empty tomb. The women at the tomb display the exact opposite type of material we would expect if this were to be considered a later legendary development. There is no reason to add or mention the women at the tomb unless it was factual.

Fifth, the burial story itself lacks any traces of legendary development because it is very simple in nature. However, some skeptics, such as Ehrman, claim that this burial story is a possible legend because the creed in 1 Cor. 15:3-7 does not mention Joseph or the women at the tomb.[74] This is an interesting objection, but the creed in 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is a summary, or outline, of the passion narrative and simplified so that it could be easily remembered and accurately repeated. The sermon summary in Acts 13:28-31 is very similar in nature in that it simply records Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and appearing to others. Acts 13:28-31 also does not

---

does do because, "For given the hostility in the early Church toward the Jewish leaders, who had, in Christian eyes, engineered a judicial murder of Jesus, the figure of Joseph is startlingly dissimilar to the prevailing attitude in the Church toward the Sanhedrin." William Lane Craig, "Visions of Jesus: A Critical Assessment of Gerd Ludemann's Hallucination Hypothesis."

[73] Talmud, *Rosh Hashannah* 1.8; Josephus also writes concerning the low value of women's testimony, Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 4.8.15.

[74] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 20-21.

include Joseph or the women, but Luke does. Regardless of whom the skeptic may think authored Luke and Acts, it is the same author writing the two volumes. It is highly improbable that the author added legendary material into Luke and then removed it from Acts. Creeds could be simplified in order to provide a better mode of memorization for new believers to articulate their new faith.[75] It could also be done so in order to give a simplified version of the passion narrative. An additional problem would be that these creeds also mention the burial. The burial portion appears to certify that the body was buried in a specific place and once resurrected, the body was then also gone.

Sixth, it was a very important tradition for the Jews to bury the dead, even to bury traveling foreigners.[76] While the Romans would prefer for a condemned criminal to remain on the cross, the burial law for the Jews required that they bury the dead before sunset.[77] Josephus states that the Jews revered burial and were allowed to bury those who were crucified.[78] Pilate would undoubtedly be aware of this tradition. New Testament scholar Craig Keener argues, "If Pilate accommodated for execution, he would surely accommodate local sensitivities concerning disposal of the corpse."[79]

Seventh, the Jewish authorities would have seen the execution all the way through to completion. It is difficult to believe they would leave prematurely. We can reasonably believe that they would have at least seen Jesus taken down from the cross and carried to the burial site.

---

[75] A further point may be made about the purpose of these creeds. Since they were used to help communicate beliefs and by catechumens as they prepared for their baptism. Their development came not with an apologetic agenda, but one of teaching and communicating the beliefs of the Christian.

[76] Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.30. He also mentions that anyone walking by a funeral should join in their lamentations (2.27).

[77] Deut. 21:23.

[78] Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 4.5.2.

[79] Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 326.

Eighth, there are no other competing burial stories. If the burial story was invented or a product of legendary development, then we would expect to find a competing story. Thus, due to the consensus of the burial reports and no other competing stories we have a further reason to believe the burial account given.

Several lines of evidence have led scholars to believe the historicity of Jesus' burial.[80] Dale Allison agrees that clearly Jesus' burial is well attested.[81] Raymond Brown concludes that "While high probability is not certitude, there is nothing in the basic pre-Gospel account of Jesus' burial by Joseph that could *not* plausibly be deemed historical."[82]

His Death Caused the Disciples to Lose Hope and Experience Despair

The death of Jesus caused his disciples to lose hope in Him as the Messiah and also caused them to despair as they had followed Him for years before He was executed. First, this claim is multiply attested by different New Testament texts.[83] We find the disciples "deserting and fleeing" Jesus as well as locking themselves in a room to hide for fear of the Jews.

Second, probably the strongest reason scholars have for attributing Jesus' disciples to lose hope is that they devoted their lives (and afterlife) to Jesus only to see Him be taken away by the use of force and then executed in such a way that was considered to be a curse according to Jewish tradition. The disciples would have no rational reason, prior to the resurrection, to have

---

[80] One line of evidence that was not included was the Shroud of Turin as burial shroud of Jesus. This would actually be considered a piece of archaeological evidence for Jesus' burial. For a summary of the evidence see Gary Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 177-184.

[81] Dale Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Traditions and Its Interpreters*, (T and T Clark International: New York, 2005), 354.

[82] Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1241(emphasis added).

[83] Mt. 26:56; Mk. 16:14; Lk 24:11, 40; Jn: 20:19, 24-31. The ending in Mark may be somewhat controversial, but not in regards to this fact because Mark still describes Peter's denial of Jesus (Mk. 14:66-72) and the embarrassing fact that none of the disciples buried Jesus.

hope or a positive outlook regarding their current situation since the one whom they have placed all their hopes upon had been taken from them and violently executed.

In Jewish culture, according to Deuteronomy 21:23, "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse."[84] Not only were the disciples discouraged because they believed that Israel's Messiah was dead, they were also shocked because He died in such a way that signified that He had died under a curse by God.

Third, reports of Peter, and others, deserting and denying Jesus is not something we would expect to read concerning Jesus' closest followers. This certainly would be amended had it been a legend developed later. We would imagine that the disciples would have put themselves in a better light during Jesus' death instead of fleeing. The fact that these close followers of Jesus are described as hiding and denying Jesus are recorded is the Gospels further add to their being grounded in actual history.

Fourth, further embarrassing testimony follows from the burial story. If the disciples had not deserted Jesus, we would expect to find them burying Jesus. None of the Jesus' earliest disciples are portrayed in a positive light regarding the burial story which is something that we would not expect if this account was fabricated. Instead, Joseph of Arimathea is unanimously recorded as taking Jesus' body away for burial.

A combination of multiple and early attestation, psychological atmosphere of the disciples, denial and desertion of the disciples, and the lack of burial by Jesus' followers allow historians to confidently assert that the disciples had lost hope and experienced despair.

[84] Paul references this in Gal. 3:13.

The Empty Tomb

Before looking at the evidence for the empty tomb, it is important to note that an empty tomb alone does not equal a resurrection.[85] The empty tomb by itself would not prove that a resurrection occurred; there could be other reasons for a tomb to be empty. However, an empty tomb does increase the probability of a physical resurrection. This data is consistent with a resurrection and at the same time presents problems for many naturalistic hypotheses.[86]

First, there are early and multiple attestations to the empty tomb. They are mentioned in Mark, M (the source material behind Matthew), John, and probably in L (the source material behind Luke).[87] William Lane Craig, a resurrection expert, has argued that Mark is not strictly the only source for Matthew and Luke's burial and empty tomb accounts, but that they had additional sources, along with Mark, for their accounts.[88] Habermas writes, "In fact, scholars think that there could be as many as three or four independent traditions in the Gospels, which very strongly increases the likelihood that the reports are both early and historical."[89]

---

[85] Although not as recognized to the same degree as the other findings here, most scholars seem to hold that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was found empty just a few days later. Habermas and Licona write, "Nevertheless, there is strong evidence for it, and it is accepted as a fact of history by an impressive majority of critical scholars." About 75% of scholars agree that the tomb was empty and that the rest of the facts enjoy a significantly higher degree of agreement. A brief list of critical New Testament scholars who believe in the empty tomb, according to Habermas and Licona, include, "Blank, Blinzler, Bode, con Campenhausen, Delorme, Dhanis, Grundmann, Hengel, Lehmann, Leon-Dufour, Lichtenstein, Manek, Martini, Mussner, Nauk, Rengstorff, Ruckstuhl, Stuhlmacher, Trilling, Cogtle, and Wilckens." We can also add, "Kremer…Benoit, Brown, Clark, Dunn, Ellis, Gundry, Hooke, Jeremias, Klappert, Ladd, Lane, Marshall, Mould, Perry, Robinson, and Schnackenburh" according to William Lane Craig. Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 70, 287 f.n.27.

[86] For example, it creates problems for the hallucination hypothesis. Additionally, it signifies that the resurrection was not a spiritual event, but a physical one.

[87] Gary Habermas, *Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, 23.

[88] William Lane Craig, "Visions of Jesus: A Critical Assessment of Gerd Ludemann's Hallucination Hypothesis."

[89] Gary Habermas, "The Empty Tomb of Jesus."

The Gospels are both early and good, but they are not our only sources that support an empty tomb. Acts 13:28-31, 36-37 implies the empty tomb.[90] Even more respected, 1 Cor. 15:3-7 also implies an empty tomb. However, skeptics may challenge these texts because they do not directly refer to the tomb being empty. As we have seen in the case of the Jesus' burial the authors, instead of directly referencing the empty tomb, both contain a burial account and claim He was raised and seen by others. Luke does mention the empty tomb in his Gospel, but then omits it from this text in Acts. Again, it is doubtful that he would simply omit or forget the empty tomb, but it is clearly implied in the shorter context of the Acts text and similarly for Paul's letter as well.[91] To describe one reason they did not mention the empty tomb directly in these texts Michael Licona comments, "It is like when you say a baby died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. No one has to speak about an empty crib, it's clearly implied."[92] Additionally, as we previously mentioned, an empty tomb itself does not equal resurrection.

Second, one of the most popular reasons given for an empty tomb is that women are reported as the first ones to find it empty.[93] As discussed in Jesus' burial, the fact that women are reported as finding the empty tomb significantly increases the historicity of this event. Again, women's testimony was not regarded as trustworthy unless they were the only source available.[94]

---

[90] We will evaluate more closely when we evaluate what was meant by resurrection, that it is physical, by both Jews and pagans.

[91] Luke probably assumed that his readers read part one of his account then we can understand why he may have omitted the empty tomb wording in Acts. A fair comparison could be made with Paul and the Corinthians. Paul most likely spoke about the empty tomb in his first visit to Corinth, but in 1 Cor. 15:3-7 Paul is simply reminding them in a similar fashion that Luke was reminding his readers.

[92] Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus,*145.

[93] Some may argue we do not know which women went to the tomb. The authors may have listed different women of the same group. John is often inaccurately described as having one woman at the tomb, however we know that multiple women appeared at the tomb because Jn. 20:2 "…*we* [Mary and at least one other] do not know where they have put him" (emphasis added).

[94] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 4.8.15. Josephus writes, "But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex…" However, it should be noted that Josephus did use women

The most probable reason women are cited as finding the empty tomb, while the disciples have deserted Jesus, must be that this is in fact what happened, because for the authors to include them in this time period would have damaged their claim's credibility. To include women as witnesses in this time period and culture would have been counterintuitive. Keener asserts, "The witness of women at the tomb is very likely historical, precisely because it was so offensive to the larger culture – not the sort of testimony one would invent."[95] Jewish historian Geza Vermes considers the women finding the empty tomb, "the only acceptable conclusion to the historian."[96]

Third, the Jerusalem location of the death, burial, and the following resurrection claims made by the disciples strongly attest to an empty tomb.[97] Craig rightly comments on the Jerusalem factor "that the Christian fellowship, founded on belief in Jesus' resurrection, could come into existence and flourish in the very city where he was executed and buried seems to be compelling evidence for the historicity of the empty tomb."[98] Habermas describes the problem confronting early Christianity:

> But it is precisely since Jesus' grave was located nearby that we have a serious problem if it was anything but empty. Unless Jesus' tomb was unoccupied, the early Christian preaching would have been disproved on the spot. How could it be preached that Jesus had been raised from the dead if that message were starkly confronted by a rotting body? Exposing the body would kill the message and be an easy disproof of Christianity before it even gained momentum. Thus, Jerusalem is the last place for the early Christian teachings to gain a foothold unless Jesus' grave was empty.

---

witnesses when they were the only ones available. For example, only 2 women and 5 children are reported as surviving the Roman siege of Masada. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 7.8.8.

[95] Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 331.

[96] Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981) 41.

[97] The New Testament books give multiple attestation to Jesus' public death and burial in Jerusalem and so does Tacitus' reference to Jesus' death in Judea (*Annals* 15:44).

[98] William Lane Craig, "The Historicity of the Empty Tomb of Jesus." *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 39-67.

> A Sunday walk to the tomb could have settled the matter one way or another.[99]

Habermas rightly addresses three critical issues regarding the location of the tomb. The tomb was at a nearby location that was well-known and easily verifiable. First, the situation is not one in which the disciples, Jews, Romans, or any interested party would have to travel a great distance in order to verify; nor was it in some mythical location. It was local, available for all to verify. Second, the disciples could have very easily posited a claim that was more difficult to verify, but they claimed a physical resurrection and that the tomb was empty. All the Jews and Romans would have had to do to dismiss the early Christian claims would be to simply present the body. However, they do just the contrary and claim the disciples stole the body. Third, the Jewish authorities did not produce a body, but instead claim the disciples stole the body. Even a decaying, rotting body in the tomb would be evidence against the disciples claim; it would at the very least be stronger than claiming the disciples stole the body since a stolen body implies an empty tomb. The disciples never would have believed in Jesus' resurrection if confronted with His dead body in the tomb.

Thus, the Jerusalem location of the tomb provides evidence of an empty tomb. The Jewish authorities were in the best position to refute the disciples and had a strong motive to do so. The authorities had the opportunity to investigate the nearby tomb and act as fact checkers for the claims made by the early Christians. However, despite their motive and ideal location to expose the disciples as frauds, the only claim they made was that the disciples had stolen the body, which supports the empty tomb.

Fourth, enemy attestation of the empty tomb by Jewish authorities is reported from early sources. Matthew is our earliest source in which he records the Jewish authorities admitting to an

---

[99] Gary Habermas, "The Empty Tomb of Jesus."

empty tomb. Matthew 28:11-15 describes how the Jewish authorities attempted to discredit the early disciples by claiming they stole the body. However, if the disciples had stolen the body as the Jewish authorities claimed, then the tomb would be empty as a result. This early polemic against the disciples presupposes an empty tomb for which the Jewish authorities are attempting to explain away.[100] It would be impossible to accuse the disciples of stealing Jesus' body unless the tomb really was empty. Justin Martyr and Tertullian also mention Jewish authorities claiming that the disciples had stolen the body, which presuppose an empty tomb.[101]

Fifth, the resurrection was a bodily notion. N.T. Wright has written an extensive volume,over 700 pages, in which he argues the meaning of resurrection in pagan, Jewish, and Christian cultures meant a physical and bodily resurrection.[102] Wright argues that although the empty tomb is not included in the 1 Cor. 15:3-7 creed, Jesus' burial as being included in 1 Corinthians as important for at least two reasons:

> …first, to certify that Jesus was really and truly dead…second, to indicate that when Paul speaks of resurrection in the next phrase it is to be assumed, as anyone telling or hearing a story of someone being raised from the dead would assume in either the pagan or the Jewish world, that

[100] The theory that the disciples had stolen the body is highly improbable and is one that critical scholars have rarely held in the past 200 years. The two most recent and well known scholars to suggest this theory are Herman Reimarus who lived in 1694-1768 and Gotthold Lessing who lived from 1729-1781. Craig Keener comments that, "Yet one would not expect disciples guilty of the corpse's theft to maintain the truth of their claim in the face of death, nor others to withhold the body when bringing it forward to challenge the emerging Jesus movement might have secured a substantial reward. If the disciples did not protect Jesus while he was alive, surely they would not have risked their lives to rob his tomb after his death." We would not expect others to steal the body, because grave robbers are more concerned with the treasures in the tomb and not the body. Additionally Keener again comments, "grave robbers were more common in Gentile rather than Jewish areas…our evidence of the theft of corpses appears in Gentile regions, never around Jerusalem." Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 341.

[101] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 108. Justin writes, "…whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb…" Tertullian, *Spectacles*, 30. Tertullian writes, "This is He whom the disciples secretly stole away to spread the story of His resurrection, or whom the gardener removed lest." Tertullian cited from http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/LostBooks/tertullian_spectacles.htm (accessed on April10, 2010).

[102] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN; Fortress Press, 2003).

> this referred to the body being raised to new life, leaving an empty tomb behind it.[103]

Therefore, we can conclude that whether a pagan or Jew heard the story regarding Jesus' resurrection, they knew that it meant a physical and bodily resurrection. The terms *anastasis* and *egeiro*, and their cognates, meant a physical and bodily resurrection.[104] Wright contends, "Until second century Christianity, the language of 'resurrection' had been thought by pagan, Jew, and Christian as some kind of return to bodily and this-worldly life."[105] Keener agrees, "…bodily resurrection was a Palestinian Jewish idea."[106] The importance of this is that it would have to imply an empty tomb.

Sixth, Jesus' tomb was not venerated as a shrine. In the time of Jesus there was an importance in honoring the tombs of Jewish martyrs, prophets, and others. The significance of the tomb was that the remains of the Jew were still inside and that gave the site its religious value.[107] However, as James D.G. Dunn points out, "…there is no evidence whatsoever for Christians regarding the place where Jesus had been buried as having any special significance."[108] Dunn then concludes that this strange silence, in spite of the practice of tomb veneration at the time, has only one obvious explanation. The earliest Christians did not consider the tomb of Jesus as important because it did not contain Jesus' earthly remains. Thus, the tomb was not venerated, nor did it become a place of pilgrimage because the tomb was empty.[109]

---

[103] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN; Fortress Press, 2003),321.

[104] Gary R. Habermas, "Resurrection Research from 1975 to the Present: What are Critical Scholars Saying?" *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 3.2 (2005), 135-153.

[105] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 83.

[106] Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 333.

[107] William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981) 63 and 84.

[108] James D.G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville, KY; Westminster, Press, 1985), 67.

[109] Ibid., 67-68. It was not until Constantine's mother made trips to Jerusalem in the 4th century, do we find an attempt to venerate the tomb of Jesus.

Seventh, the reliability of the burial story supports the empty tomb. As we have seen concerning the reliability of the burial story, we also have strong reasons to believe in the reliability of the empty tomb accounts as well. The reliability of the burial story informs us that the location of the burial site was known. Upon checking the tomb, the disciples would not have believed in a resurrected Jesus if His body lay there. The problem for those who wish to deny the empty tomb is that they are then also forced to deny the burial account also. However, as we have seen the burial story is widely accepted by critical scholars.[110]

Eighth, the empty tomb account is simple and lacks legendary development when compared to apocryphal writings such as the Gospel of Peter. We find a surprisingly straightforward and unembellished report, particularly regarding the Markan account of the empty tomb.[111] Moreover, there is an absence of the "Three-Day" style of communication is not found in the empty tomb narratives.[112] The "third-day" style was used for mentioning the resurrection because the Old Testament uses this type of phrasing when referring to God's acting. Yet, we find the expression "the first day of the week," which is considered to be an earlier expression than the "third-day" description. Additionally, "the first day of the week" informs us the actual day that the women discovered the tomb. Thus, there are two different descriptions that refer to Easter Sunday, either a "third-day" style or a "first day of the week" style. Craig argues that since the "on the third day" referent can be traced back to approximately five years after the death of Jesus, then the "first day of the week" description can be considered even earlier.[113] Therefore, in Mark's passion narrative we have a very early reference to the empty tomb.

---

[110] William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises*, 46.

[111] William Lane Craig, "Visions of Jesus: A Critical Assessment of Gerd Ludemann's Hallucination Hypothesis."

[112] It is found, for example, in 1 Cor. 15:4.

[113] William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises*, 75.

Although an empty tomb alone does not, by itself, mean that a resurrection has occurred, it does strengthen the case for the resurrection. We can be confident in the empty tomb as part of our historical data. It is because of these reasons, as well as others, that several critical scholars agree.[114] Jacob Kremer, an Austrian specialist in the resurrection writes that "by far, most *scholars* hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements concerning the empty tomb."[115] Maier concludes:

> Accordingly, if all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, according to the canons of historical research, to conclude that the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea, in which Jesus was buried, was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter.[116]

Michael Grant of Edinburg University writes, "…if we apply the same sort of criteria that we would apply to any other ancient literary sources, then the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty."[117] Wright concludes that the empty tomb is a conclusion that a historian must draw.[118] Keener writes, "Though the corpse remaining in the tomb would have easily publicly refuted a resurrection claim, had the authorities been able to produce it, an empty tomb by itself would not be self-explanatory."[119]

The Disciples Had Real Experiences That They Believed Were Literal Appearances of the Risen Jesus

Regarding the disciples experiences, Ehrman writes:

---

[114] Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 70, 287 f.n.27 and William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises*, 85.

[115] Jacob Kremer, *Die Ostervangelien—Gescichten um Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 49-50; as cited in William Lane Craig, "Opening Statement," *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 27. Craig clarifies Kremer's term *Exegeten* as "scholars" rather than "exegetes" for clarity's sake.

[116] Paul L. Maier, "The Empty Tomb as History," in *Christianity Today*, 29/13, (1975): 5.

[117] Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1977), 176 as cited in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 215.

[118] N.T. Wright, "Jesus Resurrection and Christian Origins," 615–635.

[119] Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 342.

> Historians, of course, have no difficulty whatsoever speaking about the belief in Jesus' resurrection, since this is a matter of public record. For 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.[120]

Scholars widely recognize that the disciples had these experiences for several reasons and we will briefly look at some of the reasons why scholars have come to this conclusion.

First, there are several early and independent sources in which we find the disciples claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. We have it documented in all four Gospels. We also have it recorded in the sermon summaries of Acts.[121] The very early creed, which Paul received from an earlier source, in 1 Cor. 15:3-7 records Peter, the twelve disciples, 500 witnesses, James, and lastly Paul adds himself to this list of those who witnessed the risen Jesus. Additionally, Paul made at least two trips to Jerusalem, according to Gal. 1-2, in which He interviewed the disciples about the Gospel and later writes in 1 Cor. 15:11 that they preach the same Gospel. Paul wanted to be sure that he was not running his race in vain and without the resurrection. Therefore, Paul undoubtedly discussed Jesus' resurrection with these disciples.

We have Christian claims from the early church writings.[122] Clement of Rome, who wrote around AD 95, refers to their belief in his letter to the Corinthians. [123] Polycarp, around AD 110, also refers to the resurrection and the beliefs of the disciples. [124] Both Clement of Rome

---

[120] Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 231.

[121] Acts 1:21-22; 2:22-36; 3:13-16; 4:8-10; 5:29-32; 10:39-43; 13:28-31; 17:1-3; 17:30-31.

[122] H. Wayne House and Joseph M. Holden, *Charts of Apologetics and Christian Evidences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), Chart 56. This chart provides a list of fourteen early church father quotes that mention the resurrection.

[123] Clement, *1 Clement*, 42. "Therefore, having received orders and complete certainty caused by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and believing in the Word of God, they went with the Holy Spirit's certainty, preaching the good news that the kingdom of God is about to come."

[124] Polycarp, *To the Philippians*, 1,2,9, and 12.

and Polycarp are contemporaries of the disciples and both are reported as knowing the disciples.[125]

There are also reports from non-Christian sources. Josephus reports that those who loved Jesus had seen him alive again.[126] This text has some areas of dispute, but the content of this passage is generally agreed as authentic. However, for some that may dispute this controversial passage we can still defer to a text from Agapius. This Aramaic text is very similar to Josephus' *Testimonium* and contains a report that the disciples had seen Jesus after His crucifixion.[127]

Second, James, who was formerly a skeptic, had converted after witnessing the risen Jesus. James is mentioned as a skeptic on more than one occasion.[128] Yet, after he had witnessed Jesus after the crucifixion he had become a bold believer who would eventually be martyred.

Third, Paul, who formerly persecuted Christians, had converted as a direct result of an experience with the risen Jesus. Paul had admittedly persecuted the Christians, according to 1 Cor. 15:9, and now he claims to have seen the risen Jesus personally in 1 Cor. 15:8. Moreover, Paul records that the disciples are also preaching the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Cor. 15:11 and 15.

Fourth, when compared to earlier movements, the Christian one stands out. Other movements had previously been put to an end with the death of their leader. Gamaliel in Acts 5

---

[125] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.3.3, "This man [Clement], as he had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes…But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time…having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true." Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, 32. "…Polycarp was placed therein by John; as also the church of Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter."

[126] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:3.3.

[127] While much can be said regarding the Agapian Text, it cannot be addressed here. See Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 266-270 f.n.42.

[128] Mk. 3:21; 6:2-4,6; Jn 7:5; 19:25-27.

makes exact mention of this historic trend of ending revolts by killing the leaders.[129] Wright argues that Jesus had not done what Messiahs were supposed to do, namely die (and die a cursed death on a tree at that), nor had He done other things expected by the Messiah.[130] Yet, the disciples had claimed Him as such, but why? Nobody had said such things about previous failed movements, such as Judas the Galilean (AD 6), Simon bar-Giora (AD 70) Bar Kochbar (AD 135). What in fact did happen after these so-called Messiahs died? The followers went to look for a new Messiah. There must be a reason why early Christians were different as Wright concludes:

> The fact that the early Christians did not do that, but continued, against all precedent, to regard Jesus himself as Messiah, despite outstanding alternative candidates such as the righteous, devout and well-respected James, Jesus' own brother, is evidence that demands an explanation.[131]

Fifth, the transformation of the disciples shows the sincerity of their belief that they had seen a resurrected Jesus. The disciples had been hiding and Peter had even denied knowing Jesus three times, but they had transformed into bold proclaimers of the risen Jesus. This at the very least shows that the disciples actually believed they had seen the risen Jesus, even to the point that they were willing to suffer and die.

Sixth, the belief that Jesus rose from the dead and the Christian movement originated at some specific point in history. The early Christian church claims responsibility for these teachings and maintaining their purity. Tertullian wrote around AD 200 and described how the church kept the true teachings of the disciples and how heretics did not.[132] Tertullian also offers a challenge to others to provide authenticity for their teachings. He cites that only the Christians

---

[129] Acts 5:34-40.

[130] N.T. Wright, "Jesus Resurrection and Christian Origins," 615–635.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, 32.

have an accurate succession list of bishops that can be shown to lead to the original disciples. Additionally, it was important for the early church to keep teachings of the apostles.

Seventh, the ability for the disciples to conceive of a resurrected Messiah is problematic. The Jewish idea of resurrection was an event that was expected to happen sometime in the future. It was expected that there would be a general resurrection of everyone at the same time and not that one person would be resurrected before others. Vermes writes, "But above all…neither they nor anyone else expected a resurrection."[133]

The fact the disciples had real experiences that they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus is very strongly established. Keener writes, "These disciples plainly believed that Jesus had risen; and not only that, but that they had *seen* him alive."[134] The eminent E.P. Sanders writes, "That Jesus' followers (and later Paul) had resurrection experiences is, in my judgment, a fact."[135] Norman Perrin of the University of Chicago writes, "The more we study the tradition with regard to the appearances, the firmer the rock begins to appear upon which they are based."[136] The arguments presented have led these scholars to the conclusion that the disciples had experiences they believed to be of the risen Jesus.

The Disciples Were Transformed and Were Willing to Suffer and Die for Their Faith

The disciples were willing to suffer and/or die for their belief in Jesus' resurrection, indicating the sincerity they had in their experiences, Before continuing to the reasons for this we must make one aspect of the apostles' persecution very clear. Many people today (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc.) die for their beliefs and it does show that they are sincere in those beliefs.

---

[133] Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historians Reading of the Gospels*, 40.

[134] Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 342 (emphasis in original).

[135] E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (England; Penguin Books, 1995), 280.

[136] Norman Perrin, *The Resurrection according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 80.

However, it does not mean that these beliefs themselves are true. Yet, the situation with the disciples is remarkably different from people today who die for their religious beliefs. The disciples were the ones who claimed to have personally seen Jesus alive. While other people today may die for what they believe to be true, the disciples suffered and/or died for what they *knew* to be either true or false. This means the disciples were sincere in their experiences of the risen Jesus even to the point of death. Moreover, these experiences of Jesus had transformed the disciples from hiding to bold proclaimers who seemed to mock death.

The resurrection provides the best answer the historians' question: What caused this transformation? It will now be imperative to look at some of the evidence we have for believing that the disciples were, in fact, willing to suffer and/or die for their belief in a resurrected Jesus. First, there are multiple independent attestations for the disciples suffering persecution. The book of Acts provides several examples and records the resurrection as a central message. In Acts 4 we find that the resurrection is being proclaimed and that Peter and John are imprisoned, in Acts 5 the apostles are arrested, imprisoned, and flogged, and Acts 12 records the martyrdom of James, the brother of John, and another imprisonment of Peter.[137] We also have reports that John had suffered persecution and was eventually exiled to Patmos in Rev. 1:9.

The former antagonist Paul details his persecution after he had become a Christian. In 2 Cor. 11:24-27 Paul provides us with a list of persecution he had personally suffered. Paul reports in 2 Cor. 11:25 that just some of the persecution he experienced consisted of being whipped forty minus one lashes, and three other occasions he was beaten with rods and stoned (recorded in

[137] Acts 7 we find the martyrdom of Stephen who was a Christian in Jerusalem. It would be only speculation to say whether or not Stephen saw the risen Jesus. Additionally, for those skeptical regarding the book of Acts, Acts is widely considered historical and every archaeological discovery has supported the writing of Acts. While some have posed Acts as a Novel, Bart Ehrman suggests, "…we can more plausibly conclude that Luke meant to write a history of early Christianity, not a novel. Indeed, all of the ancient Christian authors who refer to the book appear to have understood it in this way." Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 134.

Acts 14:19.). Additionally, Paul admits to persecuting Christians himself prior to his conversion.[138]

Clement of Rome mentions the persecution and martyrdom of Peter and Paul. Clement writes, "Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labors and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him…Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance…and suffered martyrdom under the prefects."[139] This reference to the suffering and death of Peter and Paul is recorded around AD 95. Josephus even provides us with the martyrdom of Jesus' brother. James, who was a skeptic until he had seen the risen Jesus, was reportedly stoned by judges put together by Albinus.[140]

Second, Peter had been transformed from denying that he even knew Jesus to becoming a bold follower and martyr. Peter's denial is mentioned in all four Gospels and is an embarrassing admission for the early church because one of its most prominent leaders had denied Jesus multiple times before the crucifixion. Yet, something happened to Peter that caused him to change from fearing for his life, to becoming a bold proclaimer and willing to suffer and die.

Third, the disciples were transformed into bold proclaimers who even despised death. Paul emphatically taunts death in 1 Cor. 15:55 writing, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" Paul taunts death and what it has done to human history in light of the hope of the resurrection. Jesus, for Paul, has conquered the grave and reversed the affects of death and Jesus is the first fruits of this reversal.

---

[138] Ga. 1:13 and Phil. 3:6. Luke also mentions it in Acts 8:1.

[139] Clement, *1 Clement*, 5. Barth Ehrman agrees that Peter and Paul were martyred for their faith. See Q&A section of Ehrman's first debate with Mike Licona, Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman, *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?* Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, February 28, 2008, http://www.4truth.net/site/c.hiKXLbPNLrF/b.4742567/k.F1D9/Debate_Video_Mike_Licona_vs_Bart_Ehrman_2008.htm (accessed March 3, 2010). Tertullian also makes mention of their martyrdoms. Tertullian, *Scorpiace*, 15.

[140] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.9.1.

With the proclamation and hope of a future resurrected body, Paul was not the only one who became courageous despite pain and death. The other disciples had an equal disregard for death. Ignatius of Antioch wrote around AD 110 that "on this account [of experiencing the risen Jesus] also did they [the disciples] despise death."[141] Origen, a few decades later writes precisely about the fact that the disciples would not have despised death if they did not in fact experience the risen Jesus.[142] It is unlikely the disciples would have been so bold in regards to suffering or death for their preaching unless they had an experience which they believed to be the risen Jesus.[143]

Critical scholars agree the disciples had a transformation after what they believed to be an experience of the risen Jesus. Ehrman holds that at the very least Peter, Paul, and possibly James were martyred for their faith.[144] E.P. Sanders concludes the possibility of the disciples committing a deliberate fraud is not a viable option because "Many of the people in these lists [of witnesses] were to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming that they had seen the risen Lord, and several of them would die for their cause."[145] Larry Hurtado of Edinburg University comments, "In short, from a surprisingly early point after his death, Jesus' followers were according to him at a level of devotion that far exceeded their own prior and impressive commitment to him during his lifetime."[146] Habermas concludes, "Virtually no one, friend or foe, believer or critic, denies that it was their convictions that they had seen the resurrected Jesus

---

[141] Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*, 3.

[142] Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 2:56 and 2:77.

[143] Additionally, there is no evidence of even one of the disciples recanting their faith.

[144] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[145] E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 279-280. Sanders adds that if there were intentional deception, then there would have been greater unanimity and disagreement regarding the claims of who saw Jesus first.

[146] Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions About Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 5.

that caused the disciples' radical transformations. They were willing to die *specifically for their resurrection belief.*"[147]

James, the Skeptical Brother of Jesus, was Converted When He Believed He Saw the Resurrected Jesus

One of the most interesting facts concerning Jesus and the resurrection is that Jesus' half-brother, James, was skeptical regarding Jesus. Yet, James would eventually be the head of the church in Jerusalem and later suffer martyrdom. This would be strong evidence for the resurrection because we have a skeptic, James, during Jesus' lifetime that later converts to Christianity and is eventually martyred.

First, Jesus' brothers, including James, are considered skeptics in early and multiple sources, such as Mk. 3:21; 6:2-4, 6 and in Jn. 7:5.[148] These sources indicate that Jesus' brothers did not believe in Jesus during His lifetime ministry. The skeptic Gerd Ludemann agrees that "James had no religious link with his brother during Jesus' lifetime."[149]

Second, James' skepticism in Mark and John carries great historical reliability because it would be embarrassing for these Gospel writers to admit that Jesus' own brother was skeptical of His claims. This would have demonstrated an embarrassing flaw of the leader of the Jerusalem church. These statements could have been insulting to James and the church at Jerusalem since he was their leader, unless he was skeptical regarding Jesus prior to His appearances. Habermas concludes, "For it to be remembered over many decades, James' unbelief was probably rather staunch."[150]

---

[147] Gary Habermas, "The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus."

[148] Licona also includes John 19:25-27 because Jesus is reported as having told a disciple to take care of His mother instead of one of His brothers. Mike Licona, "The Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus: Historiographical Considerations in the Light of Recent Debates," 316-317.

[149] Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 109.

[150] Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, 22.

Third, James is cited by Paul as seeing the resurrected Jesus in the very early creed cited in 1 Cor. 15:3-7. This evidence is so strong that it has led Ludemann to write, "Because of 1 Cor. 15:7 it is certain *that* James 'saw' his brother."[151] Paul had direct access to James and spoke with him regarding the Gospel on at least two separate occasions in Galatians 1-2.

Fourth, James' leading role in the Jerusalem church from an early point is significant.[152] Something dramatic must have happened in order for James to go from skepticism during Jesus' lifetime to a leader in the early church. Additionally, James is recorded as being among the disciples, in Acts 1:14, just after the resurrection appearances.

Fifth, James went through such a conversion that he was then willing to suffer and die for his Christian faith. We have both non-Christian and Christian sources that describe James' death. The non-Christian source comes from Josephus. In his *Antiquities* James is recorded as "the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ… [was] delivered to be stoned."[153] Hegesippus, a church historian who wrote from AD 165-175, records a similar account that James was stoned.[154] Later the church historian, Eusebius, quotes Josephus, Hegesippus, and Clement of Alexandria regarding the martyrdom of James.[155]

Sixth, James' martyrdom eliminates the possibility that James may have claimed to have seen the risen Jesus in order to become the head of the Jerusalem church. If this had been the case he surely would have recanted in the face of death. Martyrdom is not something those

---

[151] Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 109.

[152] So much so that Paul goes there specifically to verify that he had not been running in vain. James is mentioned first in the list of disciples by Paul in Gal. 2:9.

[153] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.9.1. Origen also cites a similar version of this in *Against Celsus*, 1.47.

[154] Hegesippus, *Fragments from His Five Books of Commentaries on the Acts of the Church*, 1.

[155] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.23.

seeking personal gains hope to achieve. Losing one's life for the claim of Christ would not be what we would expect of those who are seeking selfish gains.

These highly evidenced reasons help explain why so many critical scholars have come to agree that James, the skeptical brother of Jesus, was converted after he believed he saw the resurrected Jesus. The evidence is so convincing that the late Reginald H. Fuller writes, "It might be said that if there were no record of an appearance to James the Lord's brother in the New Testament we should have to invent one in order to account for his post-resurrection conversion and rapid advance."[156]

James presents historians with a very important and interesting figure in the early church. He was the brother of Jesus, yet he did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah during Jesus' lifetime. However, for some reason, after Jesus' death James then became a devoted follower and leader of the early Christian church. Moreover, it was not just any church, but the church in Jerusalem. He then suffered martyrdom for his belief in the resurrected Jesus. John Shelby Spong describes the situation, "We can be certain of the fact that the brothers of Jesus were not impressed, were not followers of Jesus during his lifetime…But something happened…Look at James before Easter. Look at James after Easter. What caused a change that was this dramatic?"[157]

Paul, the Famous Church Persecutor, Converted After He Believed He Saw the Risen Jesus

Paul's conversion needs to be distinguished from James' conversion, because James was only skeptical, but Paul was a former persecutor of the early church. He witnessed and sanctioned the persecution of Christians. He was not only skeptical of Jesus and the apostle's claim that Jesus resurrected, but Paul thought they should be stopped at all costs. Yet, something

---

[156] Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 37.

[157] John Shelby Spong, *The Easter Moment* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980) 68 as cited in Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, 22.

dramatic happened to him on his way to Damascus. He claimed to have had an encounter with the risen Jesus. Moreover, this transformation had changed him from someone persecuting the Christian church to becoming a missionary for the church, despite persecution and eventual martyrdom. The importance of Paul's life and contribution to the church cannot be underestimated and leads Ehrman to write, "Paul was undoubtedly the most important convert in the history of the Christian religion."[158]

Scholars believe in Paul's conversion for several reasons. First, Paul's own accounts provide early and eyewitness testimony of his experience with Jesus. This is virtually accepted by all critical scholars; even the most skeptical of scholars will accept Paul as an eyewitness. For example, the author of *The Case Against Christianity*, Michael Martin, writes, "However, we have only one contemporary eyewitness account of a post resurrection appearance of Jesus, namely Paul's."[159]

Second, there is eyewitness testimony from Paul where he admits his past as a persecutor of the early church in three separate works which are considered to be undisputedly Pauline.[160] Paul's persecution is also confirmed through Luke's references to Paul's persecution in Acts.[161] In all Paul's own early eyewitness testimony and Luke's account provide multiple attestations about Paul's persecution.

Third, Paul's testimony provides us with overlapping enemy and embarrassing testimony. Paul was an enemy of the church until he claimed to have seen the resurrected Jesus, but it was also embarrassing for him, as a former enemy, to submit to those whom he was initially

---

[158] Barth D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 101.

[159] Michael Martin, *The Case Against Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 81.

[160] 1Cor. 15:9-10; Gal. 1:12-16, 22-23; Phil. 3:6-7. We will look more into the books written by Paul that are considered unquestionably Pauline in the next chapter.

[161] Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:9-23.

persecuting, such as in Galatians 1-2. Additionally, we could expect Paul to leave out the fact he had persecuted the church since it could damage his credibility, but he mentions it in at least three different texts in the New Testament. However, when he does include his past it does not put Paul in a greater light, but rather emphasizes the person of Jesus.

Fourth, Paul lived a life dedicated to ministry and was willing to suffer and die for his faith. Again, there are early eyewitness accounts from Paul himself. Paul gives an account of his own sufferings in 2 Cor. 11:24-27 which included imprisonment, floggings, beatings with rods, stonings, and being in constant danger. Paul also mentions that in Phil 1:12-30 that everyone is aware that he is in chains for Christ.

We have early and multiply attested accounts of his suffering and martyrdom. Acts provides reports of Paul being persecuted.[162] Clement of Rome writes that "[Paul] after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned…and suffered martyrdom under the prefects."[163] Polycarp mentions Paul's martyrdom, Tertullian writes that "Paul was beheaded," and others report the suffering and martyrdom of Paul.[164]

Paul goes from being an enemy of the church, to a convert, and then a martyr. What made him go from seeking to kill those of this early Christian movement, to willing to be killed himself for the same movement? Some naturalistic explanations have attempted to account for Paul's conversion, but fail miserably in light of other historical data.[165] These reasons have led many critical scholars to recognize Paul's martyrdom as a historical fact. Even agnostics, such as

---

[162] 13:50; 14:14, 19; 16:19-24, 37; 18:12, 21:27-36; 23:12.

[163] Clement, *1 Clement*, 5.

[164] Polycarp, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 9, Tertullian, *Scorpiace*, 15, and Eusebius quotes Dionysius of Corinth in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.25.8 writing that "I have quoted these things in order that the truth of the history might be still more confirmed." Eusebius also quotes Origin regarding both Peter and Paul's martyrdom in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.1.1-2.

[165] For a brief assessment see Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, 49 f.n. 157.

Ehrman, have agreed that we have good reason to believe that Paul was a martyred follower of Jesus.[166]

The Final Four

This Resurrection Message was Central in Early Christian Preaching

One core teaching in early Christianity was Jesus' resurrection. This is very rarely doubted and we will briefly cover why this is the case. First, the resurrection was an essential part of the Christian faith. The New Testament mentions the resurrection over twenty times. In Paul's writings we find the resurrection at the heart of his preaching. As previously discussed, Paul writes in 1 Cor. 15 that without the resurrection the Christian's faith is worthless. Throughout the book of Acts, the disciples constantly preached the resurrection confidently and boldly, as observed in Acts 4:33.[167] Additionally, it was the resurrection that had provided hope and comfort for believers because Jesus' resurrection had verified heaven for them.[168]

Second, interestingly, N.T. Wright has also articulated that the disciples had introduced a form of resurrection that was a mutation of what was to be expected by the Jews.[169] Wright has argued that there are several mutations regarding the view of resurrection that must have an origin in the disciples' claims. One of these mutations is that the Jews were expecting a general resurrection of everyone at once, but Jesus was reported as having resurrected individually. Craig comments that "Jewish beliefs about the afterlife precluded anyone's rising from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of the world."[170] To speak of an individual as having risen

---

[166] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[167] This text specifically demonstrates that the apostles were proclaiming their testimony of Jesus' resurrection.

[168] 1 Pt. 1:3-5; 2 Cor. 1:10; 1 Th. 4:13.

[169] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God,* for a shorter summary see N.T. Wright, "Jesus Resurrection and Christian Origins," 615–635.

[170] William Lane Craig, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up,* 28.

from the dead would be something different, albeit not dramatically different, from what was commonly believed.

Third, the resurrection was constantly attacked; yet it stood firm despite opposition. According to Acts 4:1-2, the resurrection significantly annoyed the Jewish authorities. The Jerusalem location provided several opposing authorities a chance to show the resurrection to be false. Habermas writes, "The importance of the resurrection led to increased attention from believers and unbelievers alike. Yet, it repeatedly passed the test."[171]

The resurrection vindicated Jesus' claims. The disciples believed that Jesus had died for the sins of the world and that this claim had been justified by the resurrection. The resurrection gave the disciples comfort that the sufferings in this world were only temporary and that ultimately death had been conquered. Geoffrey Bromiley writes, "Certainly the early [c]hurch was built on the preaching of the [r]esurrection. If there had been no Resurrection there could have been no preaching: the Resurrection was central for the believers and gave them their message."[172] Dunn adds, "It is beyond dispute that the core claim of the first Christians is that God had raised Jesus from the dead."[173]

The Resurrection was Especially Proclaimed in Jerusalem

Since we can know that the preaching of the resurrection began with the earliest Christians, we can also trace where the preaching began. The fact that the resurrection was preached in Jerusalem is important because it is the setting of the event in question. Thus, we

---

[171] Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, 25.

[172] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encylopedia:Q-Z* (Grand Rapids: MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 150. George Ladd, another Fuller Theological Seminary Professor, writes in his most well known book, *A Theology of the New Testament* that, "In fact, the resurrection stands as the heart of the early Christian message." George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993),353.

[173] James D.G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem,* Vol. 2 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 212.

will briefly look at how historians know that Jerusalem is a city in which the resurrection was proclaimed just after Jesus' death.

This fact is attested by multiple and independent sources. It is recorded in both the New Testament and secular sources. In Acts 2 at Pentecost, the disciples (specifically Peter) proclaimed that they had seen the risen Jesus. Additionally, Paul reports traveling to Jerusalem to discuss the Gospel according to Gal. 1-2.

Another source that we have on the preaching of the resurrection comes from the Roman historian Tacitus. In the *Annals* Tacitus writes that "a most mischievous superstition [Christianity], thus checked for a moment [at Jesus' death], again broke out in Judea, the first source of the evil."[174] Tacitus reports that Judea was the source of Christianity. As we have just observed above, the resurrection was a central claim for the disciples. Therefore, if Judea, where Jerusalem is located, is where Christianity originated according to skeptics and Christians, then we can also know that it is where the resurrection was first preached.

The Jerusalem location provided the best possible atmosphere to disprove the resurrection and claims of the disciples because the Jewish authorities and other skeptics were present along with the rest of the Jerusalem community. Jerusalem provided the best location because it was a central place for the Jews at that time because of the Passover. Lastly, Jerusalem provided an ability to verify the claims made by the apostles because it was local and skeptics could easily investigate. Dunn concludes that the idea that Christianity started in Jerusalem is "very likely."[175] Both Raymond Brown and John P. Meier agree, "Since Jesus lived in Galilee and Judea, most of the people to whom he spoke were Jews; and inevitably the earliest preaching

---

[174] Tacitus, *Annals*, 15:44.

[175] James D.G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 171.

by his Jewish followers was to fellow Jews, *first* in Jerusalem and then in the cities of the [D]iaspora."[176]

The Christian Church was Established and Grew

The origin and growth of the Christian church are facts of history that needs to be appropriately explained. This fact is not one that needs a list of supporting evidences, as it is quite obvious. However, it is a fact that requires a cause. Why would devout Jews believe that Jesus, who died a cursed man's death, was Lord? This question, along with the church's growth, must be accounted for when discussing the resurrection.

Sunday was Featured as the Primary Day of Worship

Why does Sunday become the primary day for Christian worship? Why would early Christians, many of whom were former Jews, gather on Sundays to sing hymns, read Scripture, pray, and share meals? All four Gospels claim that Jesus had risen from the dead on the first day of the week and it is evident that following the resurrection appearances the disciples began to gather on the first day, or Sunday. Acts 20:7 specifically describes a gathering of Paul and others to break bread and hear preaching on the first day.

Justin Martyr wrote around AD 151-155 describing the way and why Christians worship on Sunday. He describes Sunday as, "the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead."[177]

We find that worship on Sunday is found both in early and in multiple sources. Justin also provides the reasons why Sunday is the day for Christian assembly. This fact is rarely

---

[176] Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 1-2 (emphasis in original).

[177] Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 67.

debated, although the reason for Sunday worship has been attributed to pagan causes. This seems highly unlikely and today the theory of a pagan origin is completely abandoned.[178]

Conclusion

These highly evidenced data present a strong cumulative case for the resurrection. These facts easily satisfy the criteria suggested by C.B. McCullagh for justifying historical descriptions.[179] Using McCullagh's criteria, we can see that Jesus' resurrection easily accounts for all of the twelve facts giving it exceptional explanatory scope. It has strong explanatory power and plausibility because it explains why the tomb was empty, why the disciples were transformed, why they were willing to suffer for these beliefs, and the conversion of James and Paul.

More importantly, other theories do not need to be added to the resurrection hypothesis in order to account for other data and is therefore not *ad hoc* and surpasses all other theories with regard to explanatory scope, power, and plausibility. Naturalistic theories that attempt to explain the above facts fail to explain the data and eventually become *ad hoc* themselves in order to account for all of the facts. Naturalistic theories suffer from weak explanatory scope and an inability to account for all of the facts. They require us to add other theories in order to account for all of the data. These theories usually have weak explanatory power and plausibility as well.

For example, one naturalistic theory that attempts to explain the empty tomb is that the disciples stole Jesus' body and then lied about seeing the risen Jesus. However, this theory, like most naturalistic theories, has been largely abandoned since the nineteenth century for several

---

[178] William Lane Craig, "The Historicity of the Empty Tomb of Jesus," 39-67.

[179] C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, 19.

reasons.[180] First, it fails to take into account the fact that the disciples were willing to suffer and die for their claims. While it is true that many today will die for what they believe to be true, it is highly unlikely that the disciples were willing to suffer and die for what they *knew* to be a lie. People generally lie to get themselves out of suffering and death, not the other way around. Second, it fails to explain the conversion of the skeptic James. James was a skeptic during Jesus' lifetime and was not predisposed to believe in Jesus as the Messiah nor was he likely to believe the disciples. James' conversion needs an explanation as to what would cause him to leave his skepticism and become a bold believer and prominent member of the Jerusalem church who would eventually suffer martyrdom. Third, this theory also fails to explain the conversion of the church persecutor Paul. Paul's conversion from an enemy of the church to one who willingly dies for the church cannot be accounted for by this theory. Therefore, this theory would need to add additional hypotheses to account for these other facts, but by adding hypotheses to an explanation would cause it to become more *ad hoc.* Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of our investigation to evaluate every naturalistic theory here, but we can begin to see how these historical facts have caused major difficulties for naturalistic theories.[181]

These twelve facts are highly evidenced and present the consensus of scholarship. Each fact has several lines of evidence to justify its historicity. Additionally, if each of these twelve facts were not highly evidenced it would be much more difficult for historians to agree to them. However, there is scholarly consensus regarding these facts precisely because they are so well

---

[180] Gary R. Habermas, "The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus' Resurrection," *Trinity Journal* (2001) 179-196 http://www.garyhabermas.com/articles/trinityjournal_latetwentieth/trinityjournal_latetwentieth.htm (accessed on March 27, 2010).

[181] Other reasons could be given why this theory fails, but the point is to show how these basic historical facts already begin to significantly trouble the hallucination hypothesis. For a brief illustration of how naturalistic theories fail see Appendix A. For a more in depth look at natural hypotheses that fail in light of the evidence surrounding the Jesus' resurrection see Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 81-132.

attested. Moreover, they provide a cumulative case for the resurrection that far surpasses any naturalistic theory. In the words of Dunn, "The Christian interpretation of the basic data (empty tomb and appearances) as 'God raised Jesus from the dead' is a surprising fact for which alternative interpretations of the data fail to provide a more satisfactory explanation."[182]

[182] James D.G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus*, 72.

Chapter Three:
The Early Eyewitness Accounts

While many people want to demonstrate the reliability of the resurrection by referencing the Gospels, the present argument bypasses such an approach entirely. Why bypass the Gospels? While the Gospels can be used to demonstrate the resurrection, many who are skeptical often change the direction of the discussion from the resurrection to the alleged contradictions in the Gospels. In an effort to avoid this discussion and provide an earlier account concerning Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and appearances, we will defer to the work of Paul.[183]

Paul's writings were written before the Gospels and provide an earlier source. Skeptics agree that Paul provides an account from an eyewitness who had an experience they believed to be a post-resurrection appearance.[184] Gary Habermas writes, "In any study that employs the principles of historiography, whether ancient or modern, arguably the two major requirements are to secure testimony that is both eyewitness and as close as possible to the events in question."[185] Paul provides historians with both early and eyewitness accounts which make him a very important source for both skeptics and conservatives to investigate.

Two of Paul's works—1 Corinthians and Galatians—will be used to demonstrate the earliest references to Jesus. They are extraordinarily early, are cited by an eyewitness, are linked to other eyewitnesses, and refer directly to Jesus' resurrection. This reveals that the events surrounding Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and appearances were based on actual historical

---

[183] This will help avoid any digressions that may be made into the Gospel accounts supposed contradictions. While I do believe that these 'contradictions' can be reconciled, it is important to resolve the resurrection issue before the Gospel reliability issue, especially if the resurrection can be demonstrated without having to cite the Gospels.

[184] John W. Loftus, *Why I Rejected Christianity: A Former Apologist Explains* (Victoria, B.C., Canada: Trafford, 2007), 201; Michael Martin, *The Case Against Christianity*, 81.

[185] Gary R. Habermas, "Tracing Jesus' Resurrection to Its Earliest Eyewitness Accounts," *God is Good, God is Great*, eds. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 203.

events, recorded by original eyewitnesses, and carefully transmitted from the eyewitnesses to others. Moreover, eyewitnesses, such as Peter, James, and John (who, along with Paul, were the most influential apostles), are linked directly to the tradition. Finally, this tradition of Jesus is linked very close to the events and, thus, making it virtually impossible for any legend or myth to develop.

Jesus' Death and the Gospels

The starting point of the timeline will be Jesus' death, which is dated around AD 30 or 33. The majority of scholars are placing Jesus' death at AD 30.[186] While there is some debate on the actual date of Jesus' death, this will have no bearing on the argument. Jesus' death provides us with an initial starting point for the argument. We will use the earlier date of 30 AD because it enjoys the most scholarly consensus.

The dates of the Gospels vary as to when they were written with respect to Jesus' death. Ehrman contends, with others, that Mark was written first around AD 65-70, then Matthew and Luke at about AD 80-85, and lastly John at AD 90-95.[187] This means that John was written about sixty-five years after Jesus' lifetime which is quite remarkable in ancient history.[188] Matthew and Luke are about fifty to fifty-five years after Jesus' death which is even better. Finally, Mark, written thirty-five to forty years after Jesus' death, provides the earliest account. Thus, the Gospels themselves provide early enough accounts that would be within the living memory of

---

[186] Bart Ehrman agrees that this is considered to be the more likely date of Jesus death as well. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 48; James D.G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 212.

[187] Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 48.

[188] For ancient history, historians typically like to have sources within 150 years of the event. Again, sixty-five years for John is, in relation to ancient history, impressive. We must remember that our first biography from Alexander the Great comes from about 400 years after his death.

the events they record.[189] However, even though these dates are strong, our argument will seek to get even closer to the time of the actual events.

Paul's Reports

There are seven books which all scholars, both conservative and skeptic, consider to be undoubtedly written by Paul.[190] Ehrman lists Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon as the books scholars are convinced are "indisputably" Pauline.[191] As noted, only two texts will be used for this argument, 1 Corinthians and Galatians, both of which are considered indisputably Pauline.

In 1 Corinthians 15 we find one of the most discussed and important texts regarding Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and appearances. 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is widely considered an early Christian creed by virtually all critical scholars.[192] Raymond Brown writes, "What is significant in this formula is that for the first time a reference is made to the appearance(s) of the risen Jesus."[193] It is also very well agreed that Paul is here citing tradition he personally received.[194] Paul writes in 1 Cor. 15:3-7:

> 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*,

---

[189] Richard Bauckham argues specifically that "The Gospel texts are much closer to the form in which the eyewitnesses told their stories or passed on their traditions than is commonly envisaged in current scholarship."Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2006), 6.

[190] This is an important point to note that the Minimal facts approach uses only facts that are agreed by a wide range of critical scholars. While I personally hold to a conservative view, this approach uses only the data that virtually all critical scholars agree upon.

[191] Barth D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene*, 93.

[192] It is very important to note that just before this text Paul reminds the Corinthians that the resurrection is part of the Gospel in 1 Cor. 15:1-2.

[193] Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), 84.

[194] Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 10.

> *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 (1 Cor. 15:3-7).[195]

According to Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide there are at least eight reasons that suggest this is the oldest faith statement about the resurrection that Paul had received.[196] The vocabulary, sentence structure, and diction are clearly un-Pauline. There is a parallelism between the three individual statements. There is a threefold use of "and that" which is characteristic of Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew ways of narrating. The phrase "being raised" reflects God's action without having to mention "God" in such a way that shows the Jewish reverence of the name of God. Peter's name is in the Aramaic form of Cephas, which suggests an earlier origin. The fact that "According to the Scriptures" is given twice in three lines corresponds with the faithfulness of the early church to the Hebrew Bible. The phrase "the twelve" refers to a closed group of the first witnesses.[197] This statement provides the most basic understanding of salvation that is repeated in almost all later reports of the resurrection.

Another very important indicator that Paul is passing on tradition is the words "delivered" and "received." Placed just before the creed are these Greek equivalents for the technical rabbinic terms for passing oral tradition along. Scholar Richard Bauckham writes:

---

[195] There is still some debate on the length of the creed, but these questions are irrelevant to this argument. Additionally, Robert Price and Kenneth Humphreys have suggested that this verse was not in the original and is the result of Christian interpolation. This seems highly unlikely. One main reason is that we have it in one of our earliest papyri. The entire chapter of 1 Cor. 15 can be found in P 46 of the Cheaster Beaty papyri which is dated roughly 200 AD.

[196] Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection: A Jewish Perspective*, transl. by Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1983), 98-99.

[197] Bauckham adds, "This is the only occasion on which Paul ever refers to the Twelve as such. In Paul's understanding of apostleship – as referring to all who had been commissioned by the risen Jesus to proclaim the Gospel – 'all the apostles' were a wider category than the Twelve." Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 308 (emphasis in original). Bauckham quotes from Birger Gerhardsson, "Illuminating the Kingdom: Narrative Meshalim in the Synoptic Gospels," in H. Wansbrough, ed., *Jesus and the Oral Gospel Traditions* (Journal Study of the New Testament 64; Sheffield, England: Sheffield University Press), 306.

> We have unequivocal evidence, in Paul's letters, that the early Christian movement did practice formal transmission of tradition. By "formal" I mean that there were specific practices employed to ensure that tradition was faithfully handed on from a qualified traditioner to others…Rather, handing on a tradition "means that *one hands over something to somebody so that the latter posses it,"* while receiving tradition "means that *one receives something so that one possesses it*." While this need not entail verbatim memorization, it does entail some process of teaching and learning so that what is communicated will be retained.[198]

These Greek words were used in the Hellenistic schools for formal transmission and would have been familiar to Paul's readers. This is perfectly consistent with Paul since we know he was a Pharisee and very zealous in keeping the Law.[199] Thus, he would have known and used these rabbinic terms frequently. Moreover, Bauckham considers it "obvious that Paul took over the technical terminology for tradition from the usage with which he would have been familiar as a Pharisaic teacher."[200]

As Bauckham described above, Paul is providing a tradition that requires an authoritative teacher to pass down this material.[201] Paul clearly considers himself an authority, yet he still provides additional references that substantiate his teachings to skeptics who may question him or his message. Paul reports in 1 Cor. 15:11that the other apostles are also preaching the same message. Hurtado argues that Paul does not specifically state where he received this tradition because it represents the central message proclaimed by both Paul and other apostles.[202] Paul's goal here is to present the Christian beliefs in question as "nonnegotiable and unquestioned" among the authoritative figures of the church (such as the "pillars" Peter, James, and John) and

---

[198] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 264-265.

[199] Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:5.

[200] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 264-265.

[201] Ibid. See especially Ch. 10, 11, and 12 for Bauckham's appraisal of how early oral traditions were transmitted and early church tradition. He especially argues that the oral traditions passed were formal and controlled as they were delivered and received in Ch. 11 and 12.

[202] Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 168.

these also provide a basis for reaffirmation of historical and reliable death, burial, resurrection, and appearance accounts.[203]

Hurtado rightly acknowledges that Paul never indicated in his letters that the devotional claims and practices toward Jesus were anything innovative from him, but they are pre-Pauline material.[204] In 1 Cor. 15:8-9 Paul acknowledges he is an apostle who was "untimely born" because he persecuted the church.[205] Yet, in 1 Cor. 15:11 Paul insists that in the matters of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and appearances he and the other church leaders have the same common faith. Additionally, it seems highly unlikely that Paul was inventing any of these core teachings. Hurtado writes, "In fact, all the evidence points to the opposite conclusion: that the devotion to Jesus that Paul affirms in his letters was manifest already in the very earliest circles of Jewish Christians, including those of the very first years (perhaps *months*) in Roman Judea."[206]

In addition to the "authoritative figures" listed by Paul, the mention of the 500 witnesses further emphasizes this point of verification. Paul tells us that these witnesses are still alive (though some have "fallen asleep") and, therefore, could be questioned regarding Jesus' appearances. This would add authenticity to his message because one could go to the sources that Paul is listing and dialogue with them directly. Thus, Paul presents a list of witnesses that are still accessible for verification which range from several hundred unnamed witnesses to very significant leaders in the early church, such as Paul and James.[207]

---

[203] Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 168.

[204] Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God*, 36.

[205] We can imagine Paul being questioned about his apostleship because of his persecuting background and later appearance of Jesus. This is precisely what he defends in Galatians 1-2. These chapters will be further evaluated below.

[206] Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God*, 36 (emphasis added).

[207] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 308.

It is important to note the developing timeframe thus far. 1 Corinthians is often dated around AD 54-56 by most critical scholars.[208] We will take the average date of AD 55. In any event, this book comes to us only about twenty-five years after the death of Jesus. Although Paul wrote to the Corinthians around AD 55, Paul is reminding them of what he had previously delivered according to 1 Cor. 15:1,3. Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that Paul had given the Corinthians this tradition during his initial visit to Corinth and, more importantly, Paul would have had to receive it himself prior to this trip. Scholars have dated Paul's journey to Corinth around AD 50. This means that Paul had this tradition passed to him sometime prior to his visit to the Corinthians.[209] Thus, we have evidence that Paul was preaching Jesus' resurrection and appearances within twenty years of the cross and that he had received this tradition sometime prior to Paul's trip to Corinth in AD 50.

Paul's Conversion

Paul's conversion from a persecutor of Christians to a follower of Jesus came sometime shortly after Jesus' death. James D.G. Dunn places Paul's conversion two years after the crucifixion.[210] Hurtado dates Paul's conversion to a scholarly consensus of couple of years, *at most*, after Jesus' death.[211] His conversion can accurately be dated in the time frame of AD 31-33.[212]

---

[208] For example, Marcus Borg believes that 1 Corinthians was written about 54 AD. Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 261.

[209] Barth Ehrman agrees with this conclusion, but does not believe we can know for sure when he received it. Additionally, the dates for Paul's visit vary from 49-51 AD. Reginald Fuller holds to 49 AD, James D.G. Dunn holds to 50 AD, and Gary Habermas uses 51 AD.

[210] James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, Vol. 1of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 143.

[211] Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God*, 33 and, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 59, 169.

[212] William Lane Craig, "Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *Truth* 1 (1985): 89-95; Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 260 f.n. 25.

Paul reports that three years after his conversion he traveled to Jerusalem to visit (*historesai*) with Peter and the other disciples.[213] In Gal. 1:16-17, Paul claimed to travel to Arabia and back to Damascus immediately after his experience with the risen Jesus so that he might first preach to the Gentiles. Paul did not go immediately go to Jerusalem to verify the message he was preaching and it seems very clear from Paul that he felt God's revelation had much more authority for him than mere "flesh and blood." Additionally, the context in which Paul is writing is to demonstrate to the Galatians that he had gone above and beyond to verify the Gospel which he preached. Paul reports that he first received his message from God, he then traveled to Jerusalem to inquire with Peter and James, and he then went at least one more time to Jerusalem and this time John was also there with Peter and James.[214]

Paul makes a first trip to Jerusalem three years after his conversion to become "acquainted" with Peter and the other apostles, but none of the other disciples were there except for James, the Lord's brother. Paul spent fifteen days there with Peter and James. If Paul was converted between two to three years after the death of Jesus, then we can accurately date this trip with a high degree of certainty between four and six years after Jesus death in AD 30.

The Greek word *historesai,* used in Gal. 1:18 to refer to Paul's trip to become "acquainted" with Peter, carries with it a significant investigative tone. *Historesai* is often translated "acquainted," "visit," or "see." Dunn agrees that the element of "inquiry" in the "visit" is difficult to exclude.[215] Ehrman also acknowledges that these simplistic descriptions can be better translated as "to learn something" or "to convey some information."[216] *Historesai* is

---

[213] Gal. 1:18-19.

[214] Gal. 1:12; 1:18-19; 2:1,9 respectively.

[215] James D.G. Dunn, *Beginning from* Jerusalem, 168.

[216] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 335.

closely related to gaining knowledge through personal interview or even investigation. This trip for Paul was more than just a simple visit; it was much more investigative and inquisitive in nature.

What would Paul want to interview Peter about? C.H Dodd quips, "[W]e may presume they did not spend all the time talking about the weather."[217] The context of Galatians 1 and 2 sheds light as to why Paul traveled to Jerusalem. Paul was defending the Gospel he had been preaching and his apostleship.[218] He explains that he was a former persecutor of the church and is now preaching the Gospel he once persecuted. Paul then describes how he went to Jerusalem to meet with Peter, an eyewitness, to "interview" and stay with him for a time longer than is normally offered to a visitor. [219] Bauckham writes, "We should rather 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."[220]

1 Cor. 15 gives us even greater insight as to what Paul would have been inquiring about during his fifteen-day stay in Jerusalem. Paul writes that he delivered to the Corinthians what was of "first importance" that he received (v. 3). The resurrection was absolutely central for Paul and, more importantly, without it he considered his faith worthless (v. 14). Clearly, the resurrection was of the highest importance for Paul, and if he was to discuss anything during his first visit to the disciples it was certainly going to be the resurrection. Bauckham writes, "Paul learned (in a strong sense of learning a tradition such that he could later recite it) from Peter

---

[217] C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 16.

[218] Ehrman provides only one option for Paul's trip to Jerusalem to speak inquisitively to Peter. This was to see that if the chief apostle in Jerusalem apprised of Paul's actions. Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 335.

[219] James D.G. Dunn, *Beginning from* Jerusalem, 368.

[220] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 266.

during that significant fortnight in Jerusalem."[221] Thus, it is very probable that Paul had in fact learned the traditions of the Jerusalem church during his visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion.

What we have up to now is Jesus' death at AD 30. Paul's conversion is dated around AD 31-33. Three years later Paul travels to Jerusalem to inquire with Peter, and also James. Therefore, we have Paul inquiring from Peter and James, two major eyewitnesses and leaders of the Christian movement, about the Gospel message a mere four to six years after the crucifixion. Paul also reports that they had been preaching the same Gospel in 1 Cor. 15:11,14.

Early Tradition Linked to Eyewitnesses

Whether or not this is where Paul received the exact creed as written in 1 Cor. 15 is irrelevant. Rather, it is the content of that creed which is important. Hurtado agrees that "What matters is the content of this tradition."[222] What is critical here is that Paul questioned at least two key eyewitnesses, Peter and James, and confirmed the content of that creed. The foundational content of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and appearances found in 1 Cor. 15 is verified by Paul and affirmed by the Jerusalem leaders. Bauckham writes:

> 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.[223]

Therefore, Paul is giving a kerygmatic summary in 1 Corinthians 15 that has eyewitness content that can be traced to less than five years after the resurrection.

---

[221] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 268.

[222] Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 169. Others who agree are: Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 307; Gary R. Habermas, "Tracing Jesus' Resurrection to Its Earliest Eyewitness Accounts," 208-209.

[223] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 308 (emphasis in original).

We should note that Paul makes another trip to verify the content of his message. If Paul's experience on the Damascus Road and trip to Jerusalem were not enough, he makes yet another trip to Jerusalem fourteen years later to discuss the Gospel. Paul decides to make this second trip to Jerusalem in order to make sure that the Gospel he had been preaching to the Gentiles had not been preached in vain.[224] Paul brought with him Barnabas and Titus, according to Galatians 2:9, and this time John is also there in Jerusalem. Paul considers Peter, James, and John the "pillars" of the church and thus, reputable sources.

At this meeting, we have the four most prominent men in the early church: Peter, James, John, and Paul.[225] Paul has come to Jerusalem multiple times to verify that he had not preached his message in vain. Paul writes, "But from those who were of high reputation…contributed nothing to me."[226] In other words, the Gospel message that Paul preaches is the same message that the "pillars" of the church preach, just as Paul reports in 1 Corinthians 15:11. Additionally, Peter, James, and John gave their hand in fellowship to Paul.[227] It is interesting to see that a second trip reveals that the same message is still being preached and affirmed by Peter, James, John, and Paul.

Dating of the Early Eyewitnesses' Tradition

Jesus' death is dated AD 30 and the Gospels are dated between AD 65-95. Paul had written down an early creedal tradition that contained the Christian *kerygma* in 1 Corinthians which is considered undisputedly Pauline. He had received this tradition as of first importance at a date prior to his first visit to Corinth around AD 50-51. Paul's conversion is dated around AD

---

[224] Gal. 2:1-2.

[225] Along with Barnabas and Titus according to Gal. 2:1.

[226] Gal. 2:6.

[227] Gal. 2:9-10.

31-33 and three years later Paul reports in Gal 1:18 that he had 'interviewed' Peter and also met with James in Jerusalem. The content of the tradition was passed to Paul within at least five years of Jesus' death.

Yet, there is evidence that these early Christian traditions existed prior to Paul's visit. If Paul received this tradition from the apostles, then they must have had it before Paul in order to deliver it to Paul. It would take some time to formulate this tradition so it could be passed on to others. This tradition was probably preached prior to Paul's conversion since he claimed to be persecuting Christians. Paul would have been aware of the Christian view he was persecuting. Dodd asserts, "We must assume some knowledge of the tenets of Christianity in Paul even before his conversion."[228] Paul Barnett agrees, "This would mean that the [C]hristology he [Paul] articulates was formulated within the brief span between the crucifixion of Jesus and the conversion of Paul."[229]

In order for Paul to persecute the Christian movement they must have been preaching this tradition prior to his persecution. As the resurrection is of first importance, this tradition was at the heart of the Christian movement. These Christians seem to have been spreading the tradition in such a way that got Paul's attention and caused him to persecute Christians full time. Therefore, we can very accurately date this tradition prior to Paul's conversion from around AD 31-33. This provides evidence for the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus more than thirty years before the Gospels. This early tradition comes from Paul, an eyewitness, which cites a tradition directly linked to eyewitnesses and is dated equally early by several critical

---

[228] C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 16.

[229] Paul W. Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years*, (Cambridge, Eerdmans, 2005), 26. Dunn agrees that, "Paul's role as 'the persecutor' ('he who persecutes us') (Gal. 1:23; also 13) obviously predated his conversion (possibly even within eighteen months of Jesus' crucifixion) by some months at least, which confirms the fact of 'persecution' within months (one or two years) of Jesus' death. James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 837.

scholars. These comments from Paul have convinced a large majority of critical scholars to date this tradition between AD 32-36. [230]

The top New Testament and Pauline critical scholars across a broad theological spectrum comment on this early date. Wright, a conservative, argues that this is precisely the type of foundational story that a community is not at liberty to tamper with and was probably formulated within the first two or three years of Easter itself. [231] Wright concludes, "We are here in touch with the earliest Christian tradition, with something that was said two decades or more before Paul wrote this letter."[232] Bauckham has also argued very convincingly for this early date.[233]

The more liberal Hurtado also agrees with the early dating of this tradition:

> Perhaps within only a few days or weeks of his crucifixion, Jesus' followers were circulating the astonishing claim that God had raised him from death and had installed him in heavenly glory as Messiah and the appointed vehicle of redemption. Moreover, and still more astonishing, these claims were accompanied by an emerging pattern of devotional practices in which Jesus figured with an unprecedented centrality.[234]

Dunn dates this tradition amazingly early, writing, "This tradition, we can be entirely confident, was *formulated as tradition within months of Jesus' death*."[235] Dodd comes to a similar conclusion and writes, "Thus Paul's preaching represents a special stream of Christian tradition which was derived from the main stream at a point very near to its source."[236]

---

[230] For lists of scholars see Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, 41 f.n. 82 and f.n. 86; Gary R. Habermas, "The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, 314 f.n. 9.

[231] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 319.

[232] Ibid., 319.

[233] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 264-269.

[234] Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God*, 4-5. Hurtado adds, "In short, from a surprisingly early point after his death, Jesus' followers were according to him at a level of devotion that far exceeded their own prior and impressive commitment to him during his lifetime."

[235] James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 855 (emphasis in original).

[236] C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 16.

Even those who are skeptical agree with this early tradition that was passed down to Paul. For example, the skeptical scholar Gerd Ludemann writes, "We can assume that all the elements in the *tradition are to be dated to the first two years after the crucifixion of Jesus*…not later than three years after the death of Jesus."[237] Even the controversial Jesus Seminar is in agreement that Paul had received this tradition at an earlier date: "The earliest version of the oral Gospel preserved for us in written records is the 'gospel' Paul reports in 1 Cor. 15:3-5 as something he learned from his predecessors."[238]

Scholars have attributed the content of this early creed to the actual eyewitnesses of these events. Lapide writes, "…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."[239] Bauckham stresses that this is undoubtedly "*eyewitness testimony* of those who were recipients of resurrection appearances, including the most prominent in the Jerusalem church." [240]

Conclusion

The creedal tradition of 1 Cor. 15 was received prior to Paul's visit to Jerusalem five years after Jesus' crucifixion. This tradition was formulated prior to Paul's Jerusalem visit and perhaps even months after Jesus' death. This data places the claims of the early church extraordinarily close to the events, over ten times earlier than the Gospels. More than that, this tradition provides critical scholars and historians with the most desired elements in ancient

---

[237] Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 38 (emphasis added). For a list of other skeptics who agree to this early date see Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, 18 and 41-42 f.n. 86.

[238] Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1993), 24.

[239] Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection: A Jewish Perspective*, 99 (emphasis added).

[240] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 308 (emphasis in original).

history. Paul links other eyewitnesses along with himself to the actual events by citing an incredibly early tradition that even skeptics date very early. This provides exceptionally early eyewitness testimony for the appearances of Jesus. This argument demonstrates the uniqueness of the Christian faith and firmly grounds the resurrection in historical tradition. Barnett concludes, "It may be asked why the subject of [C]hristology is raised so soon in this, a professed work of history. The answer is clear. It was [C]hristology that gave birth to Christianity, not the reverse…The chronology drives us to this conclusion."[241]

[241] Paul W. Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 26.

Chapter Four:
Historiography and Bart Ehrman

In the previous chapters, twelve historical facts and an early report of Jesus' resurrection and appearances were presented to demonstrate historical evidence for the risen Jesus. This data has proven extremely troublesome for naturalistic theories. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, historical facts surrounding Jesus' resurrection were used by many liberal scholars to challenge naturalistic theories.[242] The very early tradition of Jesus' death, burial, and appearances cited by Paul presents a devastating problem for legendary development theories.

If these twelve facts and early eyewitness argument can eliminate all naturalistic theories, then is the historian justified to conclude that Jesus rose from the dead? Bart Ehrman argues that the historian cannot justifiably conclude that Jesus was raised from the dead because it is beyond the scope of the historian. In this chapter, we will evaluate the possibility of the historian's ability to conclude that Jesus rose in light of challenges made by Ehrman.

Bart Ehrman

Bart Ehrman holds the chair of the Department of Religious Studies at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and received his PhD (with honors) from Princeton University studying under the eminent New Testament scholar Bruce Metzger. Ehrman's area of expertise is in evaluating Greek manuscripts of the New Testament to establish the actual words that were in the original texts. Ehrman has had three major debates on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection

---

[242] Gary Habermas summarizes, "For example, David Strauss belittled the swoon theory held by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Heinrich Paulus, and others. Strauss concluded that such a scenario would utterly fail to account for the disciples' passionate belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead as the Lord of life. Schweitzer noted that these rationalistic approaches suffered the "death-blow at the hands of Strauss." On the other hand, Schleiermacher, Paulus, and later Theodor Keim took aim at subjective responses like Strauss's hallucination hypothesis." Gary Habermas, "The Late Twentieth-Century Resurgence of Naturalistic Responses to Jesus' Resurrection," 179-196. Cambridge Scholar B.F. Westcott (1891) "Indeed, taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it." Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel of the Resurrection: Thoughts on Its Relation to Reason and History* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1891), 137.

with two different scholars: William Lane Craig and Mike Licona.[243] Ehrman's objections did not focus on the texts that have been copied and transmitted, although he does address alleged contractions in the Gospels, but rather he centers his argument on the limitations of the historian.

Ehrman's main problem is not with the evidence, but instead his foremost objection is that the historian is unable to confirm Jesus' resurrection because of the limitations of history and its ability to conclude that a miracle has occurred. He calls this, "The Historical Problem of Miracles."[244] Thus, Ehrman's current popularity today, as a bestselling author of Oxford University Press, provides a large number of readers with a textual critic's historical approach to Jesus and the resurrection. Therefore, as Ehrman proposes an authoritative view of miracles and historiography to a very large audience it is important to discern whether his historical objections to miracles and his historiography are appropriate.

Ehrman, History, and Miracles

Ehrman presents a very interesting historical approach to Jesus' resurrection. He readily agrees that Jesus' resurrection has explanatory scope and explanatory power in light of the historical facts.[245] However, he does not agree that the resurrection hypothesis is the most plausible.[246] It is unexpected that Ehrman would agree that the resurrection has explanatory scope and power, but not plausibility. One would expect that if a hypothesis had both explanatory scope and power it would necessarily have to be plausible. Yet for Ehrman,

---

[243] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus? A Debate between William Lane Craig and Bart D. Ehrman, College of the Holy Cross, March 28, 2006*, debate transcripts, (Worcester, MA: The College, 2006), 36.; Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman, *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*; Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?* DVD, Southern Evangelical Seminary, April 2, 2009.

[244] This does not mean Ehrman does not have objections to evidence, such as the empty tomb. Ehrman certainly has many objections to the specific details surrounding the resurrection, but there is a focus on the historian's ability to record these miraculous events. Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, Ch. 14.

[245] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[246] Ibid.

"Plausibility is the big issue, because unless you posit the existence of God, you cannot claim that it's plausible that Jesus was raised from the dead if he were truly dead."[247]

In the first chapter, the approach used for justifying historical descriptions was given by the Cambridge historian, C.B. McCullagh. McCullagh presented definitions of explanatory scope, power, plausibility, and other methods used to justify one's acceptance of a historical hypothesis. McCullagh describes explanatory scope as implying the greatest amounts of historical data and explanatory power must make the observation statements it implies stronger than any other.[248] Interestingly, what makes a hypothesis more plausible than competing hypotheses is that it has both explanatory scope and power. Ehrman's claim that the resurrection is not plausible, but does have explanatory power and scope, is then especially problematic because explanatory scope and power give a hypothesis its plausibility.

Ehrman comes to this peculiar conclusion because of his historical methodology. Ehrman ultimately argues from his methodology that Jesus' resurrection is unable to be confirmed by historical methods and, thus, it is not possible for the historian to grant the resurrection as possible. According to Ehrman, one can believe the resurrection, but one is doing so as a theologian, not a historian.[249] The historical problem of miracles is that historians are unable to comment on God's action in the world and anyone commenting on God's action in the world is not doing so as a historian, but as a theologian.[250] He then argues that miracles are by definition

---

[247] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[248] C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, 19.

[249] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[250] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, Ch. 14.

always the least probable occurrence.[251] Given that historians can only consider what most probably happened, one can never demonstrate that a miracle probably happened.[252]

History and Miracles

The discussion of miracles is one of the most interesting topics in both philosophy and history. The very definition of a miracle has proven difficult for philosophers and historians. Licona has cited over fifteen definitions for a miracle.[253] Miracles, then, challenge us from the very outset of the discussion. Ehrman summarizes the modern understanding of miracles (as separate from his own definition of miracle) as "events that contradict the normal workings in such a way as to be virtually beyond belief and to require an acknowledgment that supernatural forces have been at work."[254] However, he later adds his own nuance to this definition that the chances of a "miracle happening, by definition, are infinitesimally remote, historians can never demonstrate that a miracle *probably* happened."[255] Thus, Ehrman presents a reason why historians cannot demonstrate that a miracle has actually occurred. He argues that since miracles by their very definition are the least probable and since historians can only consider what most probably happened, a miracle cannot be considered the most probable event. Therefore, the historian is unable to demonstrate a miracle, even if one had occurred.

---

[251] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[252] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 228-229.

[253] Mike Licona, "The Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus: Historiographical Considerations in the Light of Recent Debates," 94 f.n. 3. Without a doubt the most widely discussed essay on miracles comes from David Hume (d. 1776) and his work "Of Miracles" Section X of *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. The influence of this work cannot be underestimated and that is probably why many still discuss this essay today.

[254] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 226. Ehrman also rightly addresses the shift from the scientific understandings of the nineteenth century natural law.

[255] Ibid., 228 (emphasis in original).

To demonstrate why a miracle is never the most probable event, Ehrman first highlights the difference between history and the sciences.[256] The main difference is that the natural sciences use repeatable experiments to determine the predictive probability of future events that are based on repeated past occurrences. Ehrman then provides an example to help clarify:

> To illustrate on the simplest level, suppose I wanted to demonstrate that a bar of iron will sink in a tub of lukewarm water but a bar of Ivory soap will float. I could perform a relatively simple experiment by getting several hundred tubs of lukewarm water, several hundred bars of iron, and several hundred bars of Ivory soap. By tossing the bars of iron and soap into the tubs of water, I could demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that one will sink and the other will float, since the same result will occur in ever instance. This does not necessarily prove that in the future every bar of iron thrown into a tub of lukewarm water will sink, but it does provide an extremely high level of what we might call presumptive possibility. In common parlance, a 'miracle' would involve a violation of this known working of nature; it would be a miracle, for example, if a preacher prayed over a bar of iron and thereby made it float.[257]

On the other hand, historical disciplines focus on establishing what has happened in the past. Historical events, unlike scientific experiments, only happen once. Thus, historians will be less certain in their conclusion because they cannot repeat past occurrences. Ehrman rightly describes the historian's responsibility: "Historians try to determine what happened in the past. Since they can't *prove* the past, they can only establish what *probably* happened."[258] Yet, since miracles are the least probable events, the historian is limited and cannot establish that a miracle has happened. Thus, the dilemma that confronts the historian with respect to miracles is "How can the least probable occurrence be the most probable?"[259]

---

[256] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 227.

[257] Ibid.

[258] Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 227-228.

[259] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

Given Ehrman's aforementioned objections, we should not be surprised to find him object to the historian's ability to recognize whether or not a miracle can be known historically. While the questions regarding miracles are often philosophical in nature,[260] Ehrman chooses to grant the philosophical argument for "miracles—that is, events that we cannot explain within our concepts of how 'nature' normally works."[261] He does this so that he may focus specifically on the historical problem of miracles.[262]

Ehrman elects not to address the philosophical issue because there is an objection that has a higher priority for the historian. For Ehrman, "Even if miracles *are* possible, there is no way for the historian who sticks strictly to the canons of historical evident to *show* that they have ever happened."[263] One point that is repeatedly made clear by Ehrman is that it is irrelevant to historians whether or not miracles are possible, because they are unable to demonstrate a miracle even if one did actually occur.

Ehrman takes a hard agnostic position in respect to miracles in order to deny the historical resurrection of Jesus as a knowable historical event. Although historians do not have to deny the actual possibility of miracles, they must deny the ability to know whether or not a miracle has occurred, according to Ehrman. Yet, Ehrman believes that miracles are by their very nature highly improbable occurrences so it is impossible to have a highly improbable event be the most probable explanation.[264] This leads Ehrman to come to the conclusion that "virtually

---

[260] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 294.

[261] Ibid., 225.

[262] Ibid., 225-230.

[263] Ibid., 226 (emphasis in original).

[264] Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 227-228.

any explanation for the appearances is more historically probable, or plausible, then a claim for the resurrection...Any explanation is more probable than a miracle."[265]

History and Theology

"[H]istorians by the very nature of their craft can speak only about events of the natural world, events that are accessible to observers of every kind, how can they ever certify that an event outside the natural order—that is, a miracle—occurred," argues Ehrman.[266] In other words, historians are only capable of writing what can be observed in the "natural order." Anything that is outside of the natural world or events that are beyond observation cannot be considered historical.

Ehrman goes into more detail on this point in one of his latest debates on Jesus' resurrection.[267] Ehrman argues that historians cannot prove what God has done. Even if God has acted in history, there would be no way for the historian to show one occurred. Historians do not have criteria by which to evaluate the way that the Almighty works in the world, so those who think they know how the Almighty works in the world are making theological statements and not historical statements.[268] Ehrman concedes that one can believe in Jesus' resurrection, but that is not a historical statement; it is a theological statement. Historians have no access to the divine realm and, therefore, are unable to comment on God raising Jesus from the dead.

---

[265] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[266] Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 193.

[267] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[268] Ibid.

Ehrman and Hume

After an initial look at Ehrman's historical objections one is immediately reminded of the famous critique against miracles given by David Hume.[269] Hume argued in part one of his essay, "Of Miracles," that miracles cannot be known epistemically. Ehrman follows this same line of reasoning, but claims the critiques that Hume is confronted with are irrelevant for Ehrman's approach. Ehrman contends these critiques do not apply because

> Hume, in fact, was not talking about what I'm talking about. Hume was talking about the possibility of whether miracles happen. I'm not talking about whether miracle can happen. I don't accept Hume's argument that miracles can't happen. I'm asking, suppose miracles do happen, can historians demonstrate it? No, they can't demonstrate it.[270]

However, Ehrman is emphatically wrong regarding Hume's argument. Hume is not arguing whether miracles happen, but whether it is epistemically possible to know whether a miracle has happened. Hume's argument, in fact, parallels Ehrman very closely and argues that "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined."[271] In exactly the same way, Ehrman excludes our knowledge of miracles occurring in such a way for the historian to demonstrate it had actually happened.[272] Hume similarly uses historical background knowledge of others' past experiences and his own to argue that the occurrence of a miracle can be demonstrated as an event that has taken place. Hume and Ehrman both argue that any other option is more probable

---

[269] David Hume, "Of Miracles,", *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, eds. *R*. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Ch. 1.

[270] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 25; Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 225-226.

[271] David Hume, "Of Miracles," 33.

[272] Ehrman does this both by his definition of miracles and by his historical approach to the miraculous that excludes the historians ability to know whether or not such an event has ever occurred.

than a miracle, although miracles may be possible. Thus, Hume's and Ehrman's arguments parallel one another more than Ehrman initially realizes. However, since Ehrman appears to admit that he does not agree with Hume's argument we need not give any more attention to this aspect of Ehrman's position.[273]

Problematic View of Miracles

Ehrman's definition of *miracle* is difficult to accept because it ignores a supernatural element and defines miracles in such a way that does not allow for one to be demonstrated, regardless of the amount of evidence that could be provided. Ehrman's definition of a miracle as the least possible event is very problematic. First, Ehrman fails to acknowledge any supernatural intervention in his definition in any strict sense.[274] Richard Purtill gives a more appropriate definition of a miracle, "an event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that God is acting."[275] Purtill's definition appears to be a more fitting definition because it gives an appropriate cause to the suspension of the natural order of things, for example that dead men stay dead, that would be specifically designed by God to show that God is acting. Ehrman's definition only allows for anomalies that happen beyond our concepts of how nature normally works. Purtill's definition allows for God's direct action for a specific event taken in a religio-historical context, such as the preacher praying over the iron bar to make it

---

[273] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 25. However, in this statement Ehrman is admitting that he disagrees with Hume's argument that miracles are impossible, but Hume in fact argued that they are unknowable. Thus, it is rather unclear whether or not Ehrman would disagree with a correct understanding of Hume's objection. Throughout the rest of the chapter, aspects which are difficult to both Hume and Ehrman's view will still be presented, even if not directly connected to one another.

[274] It does appear that he does assume some action of the divine.

[275] Richard L Purtill, "Defining Miracles," *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, 62-63. One may object that I had criticized Ehrman that what is considered to be the natural order of things to have changed. However, given this definition if the event can be shown to be within the natural order of things, then the probability that it was a miracle can be doubted in that God would not have had suspended the natural order of things and, thus, it would not show that God is directly acting. Moreover, non-theistic religious claims of miracles would still require some sort of supernatural agent to will the miracle to occur.

float. If historians or scientists were to observe a floating iron bar without the prayer, they would be more likely to assume some natural anomaly. But from Ehrman's own example, it is the context that aids in determining the cause of the anomaly.[276]

Second, by Ehrman's definition, a historian is forced to reject the idea of a miracle *a priori*, because "miracles are so highly improbable that they are the least possible occurrence in any given instance. They violate the way nature naturally works."[277] Yet, how can an event be considered the least possible event in any given instance, without looking at the evidence? An argument against Hume's definition of miracle that is equally applicable to Ehrman's definition is put forth by Purtill:

> To assume at the outset of framing the definition that the sort of event being defined has "never been observed in any age or country" assumes a premise what is supposed to be proved as the conclusion and is therefore guilty of questions begging. Nor is defining a miracle as something against which there is uniform experience at all useful. It would be an argument against the possibility of any unique event that has not happened, for example, landing a human being on Mars.[278]

Historians must be willing to follow the evidence where it leads, but Ehrman is assuming that these events are always the least possible event, regardless of any evidence.[279] Yet, it is precisely the evidence that shifts a presumably more improbable thesis into a more probable one. This is the type of evidence we find for the resurrection and the type that also allow for Ehrman to consider Jesus' resurrection to have explanatory scope and power.

---

[276] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 227.

[277] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 12.

[278] Richard L Purtill, "Defining Miracles," 65.

[279] Again, many disciplines would be significantly handicapped if they followed this type of methodology.

We can agree that we should look for natural solutions first, but if in light of all the evidence they all fail, then we can reasonably consider alternative theories.[280] Jesus' resurrection is one such event for which natural explanations cannot account for the data and has explanatory scope and power (as admitted by Ehrman). Given the facts surrounding Jesus' resurrection the historian can grant that Jesus did rise from the dead and considering the religio-historical context of Jesus, we can reasonably infer that a miracle did in fact happen.

Yet, given Ehrman's approach to miracles he demands that the historian accept other admittedly implausible scenarios. For example, he argues that there is a Syriac tradition that says Jesus had a twin and maybe it was this twin the disciples saw.[281] Yet Ehrman even admits, "It's highly unlikely. I don't buy it for a second, but it's more likely than the idea that God raised Jesus from the dead…"[282] Yet, accepting admittedly poor hypotheses simply cannot be considered an acceptable historical approach. Historians need to look for explanations with the best inference of a set of given facts. An appropriate historical methodology should never accept admittedly weak hypotheses, but hypotheses that should be accepted as hypotheses to the best explanation are ones with strong explanatory scope, power, and plausibility, and hypotheses that are not *ad hoc*. Ehrman accepts this methodology, but when he argues a hypothesis that admittedly lacks in one or more of the above criteria, then he is being duplicitous in his application of the criteria. Ehrman admits that these criteria are most effective for objectively and accurately describing past historical events.[283] Therefore, we should consider these criteria in light of the facts surrounding Jesus death, burial, and appearances.

---

[280] This does not mean that natural events cannot be providentially miraculous events caused by God.

[281] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 26.

[282] Ibid., 25-26.

[283] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

Third, this definition of miracle coupled with Ehrman's definition of a probability centered history equates the probability of an event with the quality of its evidence. This is simply unreasonable because it would eliminate the possibility of a historian from recording a person who has won the lottery twice because the odds are one in seventeen trillion.[284] Under Ehrman's strict view the historian would be unable to say that this event had occurred. Yet this very sort of thing has happened, even though the probabilities of its occurring are very low.[285] Events that are not probable are distinctively different from ones that are not possible. There is a maxim that says "extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence." Thus, greater claims require greater evidence, but by Ehrman's definition, no amount of evidence will suffice to grant an extraordinary claim.

Fourth, what would it take to consider that a miracle has occurred? Hume argued that the only way he would be able to consider a miracle as a fact would be if he was given the choice between two miracles. However, even in this situation he will always reject the "greater miracle."[286] In a similar way, Ehrman is saying that these highly improbable events are still more likely than the resurrection. Nonetheless, we must evaluate the evidence to see if this is the case. We would agree that the natural is more common than the supernatural; after all that is why it is supernatural. Yet, when we confront the data and the data does not work for a natural theory, then we must begin to reconsider our position.

---

[284] Jessica M. Utts and Robert F. Heckard, *Statistical Ideas and Methods* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2006), 237.

[285] Ibid. In the 1980's Evelyn Marie Adams had won the New Jersey lottery on two separate occasions.

[286] David Hume, "Of Miracles," 33.

Let us consider one of the more common hypotheses that Jesus did not rise from the dead, but that the disciples all had hallucinations of the risen Jesus.[287] The hallucination hypothesis is considered as highly improbable for several reasons. Ehrman could agree that it is improbable, but that is irrelevant because even though it is improbable, it is still more probable than the resurrection. One could respond to this hallucination theory that it is highly doubtful that all of the disciples had hallucinations since Jesus was seen by groups of people and it is all but impossible for a group to share in another individual's subjective hallucination without an external reality.[288] Therefore, this theory is improbable because group hallucinations have very rarely, if ever, occurred.

The strongest objection the skeptic may present to this response is to argue that Jesus' resurrection is still highly improbable because while group hallucinations are unlikely, they are more likely than one coming back to life after being dead for three days. In other words, the skeptic could claim that while group hallucinations do not happen, neither do resurrections.[289] Therefore, the Christian is arguing that group hallucinations have not been observed in our experience, but the skeptic would respond that neither do resurrections occur in our experience. The skeptic is arguing that the Christian is trying to uphold one natural law that group hallucinations do not happen, while willing to allow the suspension of another natural law, that

---

[287] Ehrman prefers the use of vision because he believes hallucination has carries a negative connotation to it, but will accept the term hallucination if necessary. Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[288] Moreover, this theory would also fail to account for other historical facts, such as the empty tomb, James' conversion, and Paul's conversion. The group hallucination hypothesis has several fatal objections, for several examples see Gary R. Habermas, "Explaining Away Jesus' Resurrection: The Recent Revival of Hallucination Theories" *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 23, no. 4, (2001) http://www.garyhabermas.com/articles/crj_explainingaway/crj_explainingaway.htm (accessed on May 14, 2010).

[289] This is also known as the "natural miracle objection." Ehrman has argued for mass hallucinations, but it would be fair to say that these fall into the category of delusions that are on an external referent. Bart Ehrman agrees that Peter and Paul were martyred for their faith. See Q&A section of Ehrman's first debate with Mike Licona; Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman, *Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?* Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

dead people come back to life.[290] Thus, for Hume, and the skeptic, a group hallucination would be more probable because it is the lesser miracle between the two.

This would be an impressive observation and an appropriate consideration of the skeptic. However, it is incorrect because it would be a greater miracle to have group hallucinations over a resurrection because there would have to be more than one group hallucination to explain each time a group of people are reported to have experiences of the risen Jesus, despite the fact that a group hallucination has arguably never occurred at any other time in history.[291] This keeps the natural miracle objection of group hallucinations a difficult position to accept because it is really an objection that argues for multiple group hallucinations. Group hallucinations are constantly being disproved by our experience (to use Ehrman's methodology). Yet, for this objection to work these hallucinations would have occurred around the time of the most unique person in history. If naturalistic explanations can be shown to be a greater miracle than the resurrection, then we can all the more accept the resurrection as the most probable hypothesis.[292] This certainly makes for the group hallucination to be a "greater miracle" than the risen Jesus. Therefore, the resurrection is a more acceptable conclusion, even under Hume's view.

---

[290] Gary Habermas, "Recent Objections to Miracles," *European Leadership Forum*, downloaded from iTunes podcast April 18, 2010.

[291] Mike Licona interviewed Gary A. Sibcy, a licensed clinical psychologist with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology who has as interest in the possibility of group hallucinations. Sibcy comments, "I have surveyed the professional literature (peer-reviewed journal articles and books) written by psychologists, psychiatrists, and other relevant healthcare professionals during the past two decades and have yet to find a single documented case of a group hallucination, that is, an event for which more than one person purportedly shared in a visual or other sensory perception where there was clearly no external referent (personal correspondence with this author on 3.10.09)." Michael R. Licona, "Were the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus Hallucinations?" *His Resurrection*, http://www.4truth.net/site/c.hiKXLbPNLrF/b.5285035/k.AB97/Were_the_Resurrection_Appearances_of_Jesus_Hallucinations.htm (accessed on May, 5 2010).

[292] Gary Habermas, "Recent Objections to Miracles."

Probability of Life After Death

The resurrection is not itself the only evidence of a realm of life after death. Ehrman argues that it is not probable for dead people to come back to life because our background experience tells us that dead people stay dead, something the ancients certainly knew as well. Initially one can consider that whether the probability is low depends on whether or not our background information includes the existence of God. If one's background information is that the evidence for God is very probable, then the probability of the resurrection is much higher, as the former atheist and Oxford University professor, Antony Flew, agrees.[293] The probability of the resurrection based on our background information of whether or not God exists and the evidence surrounding Jesus' death, burial, and appearances, plays a critical role in one's belief in the historicity of Jesus' resurrection.

Another factor that may point against one's background information on the resurrection being very low (i.e., dead men stay dead), can be challenged due to some recent research in near-death experiences (NDE).[294] NDEs can be used to demonstrate that there is a realm after this life here on earth and this would add to the probability of Jesus' resurrection. It is very important to clarify the difference between subjective and evidential NDEs. Many people have claimed to have had a NDE, but we are not referring to the ones that may be subjective. Some examples of a subjective NDE report would be ones where the person describes traveling through a tunnel or seeing a light. However, the types of reports that can be used to demonstrate the possibility of a life after death are highly evidenced cases where the patient was able to give corroborated objective data that they would not have otherwise known.

---

[293] Gary Habermas, "Recent Objections to Miracles."

[294] NDE's fall into different classifications. Someone who has had a flat EEG, flat EKG, both flat EEG and EKG, also known as a flatline), or has even been declared dead by a physician mysteriously regains consciousness is an example of someone who has been near-death.

One of the best examples of an evidential NDE case has been reported by a pediatrician named Melvin Morse.[295] He reports that a nine-year-old girl, Katie, had a swimming accident. In this accident she was underwater for almost twenty minutes. Dr. Morse was the pediatrician who resuscitated Katie at the hospital. Dr. Morse believed it was certain that Katie was going to die. Katie was hooked up to a machine to keep her alive and was in a comatose state until she unexpectedly regained consciousness three days later. Dr. Morse reports when she walked into his office, "Her eyes revealed an intelligence that hadn't been dimmed by the deprivation of oxygen to the brain that *always* accompanies drowning. There was nothing abnormal in her walk or mannerisms."[296]

After Katie had regained consciousness she was able to accurately report what had happened to her in the emergency room despite lacking brain activity at that time. She also claimed that an angel named Elizabeth had been with her as she had looked in her family home, and commented on what her family was wearing, as well as what her mother was cooking, roast chicken and rice. Dr. Morse was able to later confirm these details with the family.[297]

Some may object and say that Katie was simply experiencing room stimuli unconsciously, such as the lights from the emergency room, to explain how she was able to report what happened in the emergency room. Yet this objection fails to account for Katie's description of her family's cooking and clothing. The example of Katie is not unique. In fact, even the widely recognized atheist philosopher A.J. Ayer experienced an NDE and commented, "On the face of it, these experiences…are rather strong evidence that death does not put an end

---

[295] Melvin Morse, *Closer to the Light: Learning from the Near-Death Experiences of Children* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1990), 1-9.

[296] Ibid., 4.

[297] Melvin Morse, *Closer to the Light: Learning from the Near-Death Experiences of Children*, 1-9; Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 147, 317 f.n.34.

to consciousness."[298] Ayer claims that his experiences have "slightly weakened my [Ayer] conviction that my genuine death, which is due fairly soon, will be the end of me, though I continue to hope that it will be."[299]

It becomes evident that evidential NDE cases provide reports of people being able to accurately report, without brain function, events at other locations. Even if it is conceded that those who had these experiences are not completely dead, as some have argued,[300] they provide evidence which a coherent and responsive person would not be able to provide. The evidential value of NDEs has significantly increased the probability of a realm of life after death. In a personal message to Habermas, the former atheist Antony Flew commented that NDEs:

> Certainly constitute impressive evidence of the possibility of the occurrence of human consciousness independent of any occurrences in the human brain…This evidence equally certainly weakens if it does not completely refute my argument against doctrines of a future life.[301]

History and the Natural Realm

Ehrman appears to overstate his case when he argues, "[H]istorians by the very nature of their craft can speak *only* about events of the natural world, events that are accessible to observers of every kind, how can they ever certify that an event outside the natural order."[302] It would be important to clarify that Ehrman is correct in that historians should speak about events

---

[298] A. J. Ayer, "What I Saw When I was Dead," PDF download from www.commonsenseatheism.com, 3 (accessed on May 5, 2010).

[299] Ibid., 6.

[300] Gary Habermas and Keith Augustine, *Radio Dialog: Near Death Experiences, Dr. Habermas vs. Keith Augustine*, dialogues found on http://www.garyhabermas.com/audio/audio.htm (accessed on May 5, 2010); Gary Habermas and Reginald Finley, *Dialog with a Skeptic on the Resurrection of Jesus* dialogues also found on http://www.garyhabermas.com/audio/audio.htm (accessed on May 5, 2010). This topic cannot be pursued further in the present work except to say that the discussions regarding whether or not these people are actually dead seems to be due to the lack of confidence some have in the sensitivity of medical machinery to determine whether someone is completely brain dead and the limitations of language of referring to someone who everyone had thought to be dead, yet later is alive.

[301] Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection* , 147, 317 f.n.34.

[302] Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 193 (emphasis added).

in the natural realm. However, he is incorrect in arguing that historians can only speak about the events of the natural world.

The first problem with only allowing historians to speak on matters of the natural realm is that what has been considered the "natural order" has changed overtime. Presumptions about the natural world would have to be made before conducting any history. Yet everyone has different presuppositions about their material world. Ehrman concedes that what is considered the natural order has changed over time. He writes:

> People today typically think of miracles as supernatural violations of natural law, divine interventions into the natural course of events. I should emphasize that this popular understanding does not fit particularly well into modern scientific understandings of "nature" in that scientists today are less confident in the entire category of natural "law" than they were, say, in the nineteenth century.[303]

Thus, we can see what is considered to be the "natural order" has changed in the last 200 years, let alone over thousands of years. This creates a seemingly subjective historical approach that is directly connected to scientific views of natural order. Thus, Ehrman's approach is no longer strictly historical but overlaps into other disciplines of science and metaphysics.

Under this theory, the historical method is restricted to record only the inside of the current view of natural order. This methodology also seems to ignore the presuppositions that all historians carry with them and their own correct view of nature and the natural order. History and science would both be affected by this approach. For example, consider for a moment a time when scientists, along with the rest of the known world, believed the world to be flat. However, perhaps someone had sailed around the world or to another land over the horizon. Ehrman's method would prevent a historian from writing the details of someone who traveled around the world simply because it was not considered within the natural realm at that time. While this

[303] Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 193.

scenario would be, and is, an entirely possible scenario today, Ehrman has limited the historian to the scientific thoughts of the day. Philosopher and historian Craig argues, "And in exactly the same way [as Hume], this argument that he's giving is one that really would be a positive impediment to science, if you say that we can never have enough testimony"[304]

Suppose Ehrman responds that we must make our decisions based on the facts we have at the present time. We must use the evidence we have today for the natural realm and not what may change in the future. Yet, this objection misses the point. Historical events should be recorded the same regardless of current trends, while theories of what caused the historical events may change. For example, many ancients considered the cause of an eclipse to be a supernatural work.[305] However, due to the advancement in astronomy we know that an eclipse is an event that takes place as a result of natural causes. The historical record of an eclipse can still be made even though the theory about its cause may have changed.

Ultimately, we find that Ehrman is committing the genetic fallacy by requiring the cause of the belief of an event, specifically the resurrection, to determine whether or not it has actually occurred. The genetic fallacy "is a type of argument in which an attempt is made to prove a conclusion false by condemning its source, or genesis."[306] Yet, one of the main reasons Ehrman argues the historian cannot believe in the resurrection is that it can only be caused by God.[307] The historian cannot deny an argument or the historicity of an event because of its cause or even if the cause is unknown. As demonstrated above, the historians of antiquity would have been

---

[304] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 36.

[305] Plutarch, *Nicias*, transl. by John Dryden, found on "The Internet Classic Archives," http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/nicias.html (accessed on May 9, 2010).

[306] S. Morris Engel, Angelika Soldan, and Kevin Durand, *The Study of Philosophy*, 6th edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group Inc., 2008), 141.

[307] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

forced, according to Ehrman's historical methodology, to deny an eclipse because they referred to God as the cause. However, we can use astronomy today to verify that eclipses did in fact happen.[308] Similarly, the reports that Jesus died, was buried, rose again, and appeared to several people can still be considered historical, regardless if the historian is able to comment on the cause of the facts. Moreover, this explains why Ehrman can agree that the resurrection has explanatory scope and power, but not plausibility. If there are evidential reasons to reject the resurrection, we would expect Ehrman to deny the resurrection's explanatory scope and power as well as plausibility, but he does not reject either of the two.

Another problem is that if we are to assume the natural world as our gauge for reporting history we would be making several other metaphysical assumptions. Licona rightly asked Ehrman to comment on this aspect of his historiography during the question and answer period of Ehrman's debate with Craig:

> But you really can't presuppose belief in the past, period, or that we can even partially know it. We have to be able to back that up. So the historian can't have a presupposition; they have to back up whatever their metaphysical beliefs that they're going to bring to the table. And so if you're going to believe in God, like Dr. Craig, you have to justify that. But I don't see that as outside the realm of historians, since historians have to cross disciplines often.[309]

This question is very relevant to historiography because a Hindu historian, for example, may start with completely different metaphysical presuppositions than Ehrman. Many Hindus do not believe that the world itself is the ultimate reality, but rather they see it as an illusion.[310] The

---

[308] Additionally, as historians record events without knowing the cause they could be reporting important scientific anomalies that could further future scientific investigations. However, under Ehrman's view this type of progress may be limited.

[309] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 32.

[310] A.L. Herman writes, "The creation is said to be appearance or maya even though it is produced by the power or maya of Brahman. To be caught in maya is to be ensnared in the delusion that the created worlds are Real; it is to mistake this world or heaven for the highest or the ultimately valuable; and it is to be trapped in the shadows

point of Licona's question is to demonstrate that in order for Ehrman to show his historiography to be correct he would need to cross discipline into other areas, such as metaphysics, to show that his view is the correct view of reality.[311] However, Ehrman would not be able to do this under his own view because he argues that the only assumptions that historians can share are those that are rooted in things that we observe and not theological assumptions.[312] Yet, historians do not operate in a vacuum. We all approach data with certain metaphysical presuppositions. Thus, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a historian may cross disciplines.

History and the Supernatural Realm

Another difficult problem in Ehrman's methodology is that he repeatedly argues that the historian does not have access to the divine realm; therefore, the historian cannot say that God raised Jesus.[313] Again, historians can agree that they first look for natural explanations before considering supernatural explanations in order to avoid misinterpreting historical events.[314] However, Ehrman contradicts his own dogmatic historiography that states historians have no

---

of mere appearance." A. L. Herman, *A Brief Introduction to Hinduism*: *Religion, Philosophy, and Ways of Liberation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 73.

[311] McCullagh's criteria are not limited to historical justification, but also philosophical justifications. Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias has described how similar criteria are used for the justification of worldviews, whether they are Christian, Hindu, Atheistic, etc. Credibility for one worldview is deemed reliable on five different aspects: the *pragmatic basis* (Does it really work?), *experiential basis* (Can I sense it in my experience internally?), *metaphysical basis* (Does it fit the big picture?), *historical basis* (Did it really happen, is there evidence?), and a *community basis* (Does it provide relational support?). It is important to take these areas into considerations because even historians must attempt to answer these "big picture" questions. As we have seen earlier from Licona, historians and scholars do not conduct their research in a vacuum. Moreover, Zacharias similarly continues that in order for a worldview to then be *persuasive* it must also have the following: a *strong foundational correspondence* to factual support, a high degree of coherence and *internal consistency*, *explanatory power* enough to integrate all the relevant facts and deductions, *avoiding the extremes* of too complicated or too simplistic, and *able to refute contrary worldviews*. Thus, it does appear that justification, or truth, and persuasiveness seems to be the same with regard to history and philosophy. Ravi Zacharias, *Foundations of Apologetics: Establishing a Worldview*, volume 4 DVD-ROM (Norcross, GA: RZIM, 2007) and book, 12.

[312] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 30.

[313] Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 193; Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[314] Gary R Habermas, "Experiences of the Risen Jesus: The Foundational Historical Issue in the Early Proclamation of the Resurrection" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2006): 288-297.

access to the divine realm by arguing that the only explanation for Jesus' resurrection is that God had caused it to happen. However, how can a historian make such a claim as to the cause of an event if God and the supernatural are beyond the scope of historical methods? Thus, using his own historical methodology, Ehrman cannot deny a historical event because he believes God is the only explanation.

However, this is exactly what Ehrman does. For example, he writes:

> Let me illustrate the problem with a hypothetical example. Suppose that three otherwise credible eyewitnesses claimed to see Reverend Jones of Plymouth Baptist Church walk across his parishioner's pond in 1926. The historian can certainly discuss what can be known about the case: who the eyewitnesses were, what can be known about the body of water in question, and so forth. What the historian cannot claim, however, at least when discussing the matter as a historian, is that Reverend Jones actually did it. This is more than we can know using the canons of historical knowledge. The problem of historical probabilities restrains our conclusions.[315]

Ehrman is correct in asserting that the historian cannot *immediately* say that God caused Reverend Jones to walk across the water.[316] However, Ehrman is assuming several things here that his methodology does not allow him to say as a historian. If the historian cannot address the supernatural in any way, then Ehrman cannot assume that God is or is not the cause for Reverend Jones' walking across the water. The historian would absolutely be justified in concluding that Reverend Jones did in fact walk across the water even if it is unknown how it happened.

Natural explanations in this scenario could be equally possible. For example, Reverend Jones did actually walk across the parishioner's pond, but it just so happened to be during the middle of a winter on a frozen pond. Perhaps all natural explanations cannot adequately explain

---

[315] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 229.

[316] While some historians may disagree with Ehrman's historiography regarding miracles and argue that it is possible to know that God has acted in history, we will grant Ehrman's methodology. The debate regarding whether or not the historian can know epistemically if a miracle has occurred is relevant to our discussion. However, because we are using the minimal facts approach we will grant Ehrman's approach.

the data surrounding Reverend Jones. Although initially unlikely, if no natural explanations can explain the data and all the evidence supports Reverend Jones did walk on the unfrozen pond, then we are left to accept the hypothesis as most likely. This conclusion is one that historians of all backgrounds could accept based on the evidence and does not require any theological conclusions to be given by the historian.[317] Additionally, this type of acknowledgement to the facts would allow for scientific progress, which is prohibited under the Humean view of miracles as previously mentioned by Craig.[318]

An Internal Problem

The problem for Ehrman is that he lets his unacknowledged presuppositions come in and affect his approach. Ehrman has a theological presupposition that the only explanation for Jesus rising from the dead is that God did it, for he cannot imagine any other possible explanation.[319] Yet, he then goes on to argue that the historian cannot speak on the divine or that "historians can't presuppose belief in God."[320] If this is the case, then Ehrman cannot historically suggest that God is the only possibility for Jesus' resurrection, if we maintain, as Ehrman does, that the historian has no access to the divine. If Ehrman wants to be consistent within his own methodology, then he cannot consider God as the cause of Jesus' resurrection.

The internal contradiction in Ehrman's methodology is further demonstrated by his view of "shared assumptions." Ehrman says:

---

[317] I think this is best displayed in the two examples of the occurrence of a miracle given by Ehrman. A priest praying over a bar if iron that causes it to float would be considered a miracle by Ehrman, but by his own method Ehrman could not say that this event has happened, like he does in the Reverend Jones example. Yet, we have been arguing that Ehrman could say as a historian that a priest had prayed over the bar of iron and that the bar of iron did in fact float without positing God as the cause.

[318] Perhaps Reverend Jones had walked onto a mysterious body of water that allowed him to walk on top of it. Science would be very interested in such a discovery, but the Ehrman/Humean methodology would not allow for this type of scientific progress because it would deem such an event as non-historical.

[319] Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

[320] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 25.

> But my point is that for the historian to do his or her work, requires that there'd be certain shared assumptions. And it's fine to say what those assumptions are, but there are some assumptions that have to be agreed on by people of various theological persuasions.[321]

Atheist historians would not posit God as the cause of the resurrection because they do not presuppose God's existence. Craig had accused Ehrman of doing just this in their debate, but Ehrman denied the accusation.[322] However, in a later debate, Ehrman argued that he could not imagine any other cause for Jesus' resurrection other than God.[323] Yet, for Ehrman to even postulate God as the cause is contradictory to Ehrman's own historical approach because he is unable to presuppose God's action causing the resurrection because the historian is unable to speak about the works of the Almighty.

Conclusion

Ehrman is confronted with multiple challenges to his definition and view of miracles. First, he used an overly simple definition and ignored a supernatural purpose that would be involved in a miracle. Second, the definition itself had defined miracles in such a way that required an *a priori* rejection of the possibility of demonstrating that a miracle occurred. Third, he defined miracles that emphasized their probability based on the quantity of evidence and not the weight, or quality, of the evidence. Lastly, when given the option between the resurrection and other hypotheses, it seems as though the resurrection is not always the greater miracle.

Ehrman had further methodological problems when he argued that the resurrection could not happen because of his assumption that God could be the only cause for a risen Jesus. First, it

---

[321] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 30.

[322] Ibid., 25.

[323] Ehrman argued this by saying, "You have to have belief in God to believe in the resurrection…What other option is there if God didn't raise Jesus from the dead? Is there another historical option that I have not thought of, that has never come out before, that Jesus physically got raised from the dead after having been dead, completely dead, and then brought back to life? Is there some other way to think of that other than God?" Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman. *Debate: Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?*

would be a genetic fallacy to reject the resurrection based on its cause. Second, historians can still report events even if they are unable to comment on the cause of the actual event. Third, to assume God as the cause is contradictory to Ehrman's claim that historians have no access to the divine. Using his own criteria, Ehrman would be speaking as a theologian when it comes to the cause of the resurrection, not as a historian. Yet, it is this theological statement which causes him to deny the resurrection historically.

After evaluating Ehrman's historical approach it would be important to present an alternative methodology. One can easily offer critiques of another historical approach, but it is equally important to provide an arguably better methodology. We can look at the core values of Ehrman's historical approach and present a view that may be acceptable to him and other historians. While it may appear that we have been very critical of Ehrman's approach, his method has many similarities with the minimal facts approach advocated by Gary Habermas.

Ehrman desires a historical approach where "People who are historians can be of any theological persuasion…the theory behind the canons of historical research is that people of every persuasion can look at the evidence and draw the same conclusions."[324] Yet, people today do not come to the same conclusions about historical events. For example, some people have denied that the Holocaust happened, but how would Ehrman approach such skepticism? "Well, one gets together materials of eyewitness reports and photographs and movies, and you get information that historians agree is valid information and you try to make a case. However, it has to be the kind of information that historians of every stripe agree is valid information."[325]

---

[324] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 25.

[325] Ibid., 30.

Ehrman's methodological goal is very similar to the minimal facts approach because it seeks to establish historical facts that can be agreed upon by scholars of every stripe.[326] The minimal facts approach seeks the same criteria, but nuances the approach in such a way that it is not an appeal to authority. Ehrman comments that "I think historians, when working as historians, can adduce as evidence only data that are accessible to all concerned, whatever their personal religious beliefs."[327] The minimal facts approach does exactly the same by seeking to find data so strongly attested that historians over a broad theological spectrum can regard them as historically authentic. For example, the minimal facts approach uses data that both Christians and atheists can agree upon, such as Jesus' death by crucifixion.

Where does this leave the historicity of Jesus' resurrection? It seems as though the most probable explanation is that a person named Jesus was killed on the cross and was seen healthy and alive a few days later by apostles, skeptics, and persecutors. Ehrman does not have to refer to God, but simply assert what the historian can determine by the canons of historical research. Ehrman has already considered that Jesus' death, burial, and appearances have explanatory scope and power, but rejects plausibility. However, if the historian is not allowed to comment on God as the cause, then the historian can at least contend that Jesus did rise from the dead because of the highly evidenced facts presented in chapter two. Historians do not necessarily need to comment on the cause, but they can report the actual events themselves. Jesus' resurrection can be considered even more plausible when we consider the documented evidential near-death experiences that suggest a realm after death.

---

[326] William Lane Craig, and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 30.

[327] Bart Ehrman, e-mail message from Ehrman, May 5, 2005.

The minimal facts approach can argue that the twelve facts presented in chapter two and the early eyewitness reporting to the resurrection can lead historians to conclude that Jesus was dead, but soon after was seen physically alive and healthy. Ehrman's view is similar to the minimal facts approach, but when his approach does deviate from the minimal facts approach he runs into trouble. Ehrman does this by placing his own assumptions into the approach and then attempting to discredit the resurrection. Additionally, Ehrman's historiography fails to account for the fact that historians can cross disciplines and have metaphysical assumptions, while the minimal facts approach takes these factors into consideration.

Chapter Five:
Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?

The aim of this work was to determine whether or not Jesus rose from the dead historically. The most natural place to begin the historical investigation of Jesus' resurrection is first to examine the historical criteria that are used to justify historical events. These criteria cannot discredit an account, but only add to their authenticity.

Early testimony adds to the historicity of an event and is highly valued by historians because it provides reports as near to the event as possible and typically contains less legendary development. Eyewitness testimony is another type of evidence that historians desire because it provides a firsthand account of an event. Historians also want to have multiple and independent sources describing an event or person. Enemy attestation can be used to authenticate a claim because a positive statement from an antagonist is against his or her interests. Embarrassing testimony was described as the type of testimony that portrays the author, or the author's position, in a negative light. Authors would not record such events unless they were true. Lastly, consensus among historians is important because it is building on historical data that is agreed upon by a wide range of otherwise diverse historians.

After a discussion of what type of evidence historians desire from sources, the focus shifted to C.B. McCullagh's method for selecting the best explanation of given facts.[328] Hypotheses that have strong explanatory scope, power, and plausibility, are not contrived, are disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs, and surpass all other hypotheses in these categories are ones that provide the best explanation of a historical event. This method is given to help provide objectivity to the historian when viewing the data and making conclusions.

[328] C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, 19.

Lastly, the third checkpoint we discussed was the minimal facts approach that was used in our inquiry. This approach only seeks data that is highly evidenced and accepted by an overwhelming majority of critical scholars. The theory behind this method is that if critical scholars from different backgrounds can agree on the data, then there must be good reasons to believe the data. Thus, the data is also highly evidenced and this is what leads scholars with various backgrounds to agree to the data.

Twelve Historical Facts

In the second chapter, twelve historical facts relevant to the resurrection were presented, as well as some reasons scholars have for believing them. Most scholars agree that Jesus died by crucifixion and one of the strongest reasons for that is Strauss' critique of the swoon theory.[329] Jesus' burial was another fact that critical scholars agree because it is also highly evidenced. Similarly, scholars accept that after Jesus' death His disciples began to lose hope and experience despair. The tomb was found empty soon after Jesus' death.[330] Three strong reasons that scholars believe the tomb was empty are because of the reports of women at the tomb, the Jerusalem factor, and enemy attestation of the empty tomb.

After the discussion of the empty tomb we then evaluated the evidence that has led scholars to believe that the disciples had real experiences they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus. We have this from several independent accounts—Paul's is the most noteworthy. After these experiences, the disciples were transformed from hiding and denial to becoming bold proclaimers of Jesus and the resurrection.

---

[329] David Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, 1:408-12.

[330] Although not as recognized to the same degree as the other findings here, most scholars, about seventy-five percent, seem to hold that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was found empty just a few days later.

The disciples were transformed to such a point that they were willing to suffer and die for their faith. The martyrdom reports of James (Jesus' brother), Paul, and Peter are all recorded before the end of the first century. The next two facts that were presented were the conversion of the skeptic, James, and the church persecutor, Paul. The conversion of these two has been very important to resurrection discussions because it creates significant difficulties for many naturalistic theories. The final four facts are that the resurrection was central to Christian preaching, it was especially preached in Jerusalem, the Christian church was established and grew, and Sunday became the primary day of worship.

We then took these facts and applied McCullagh's criteria for justifying historical events. Jesus' resurrection more than adequately accounts for all of the known facts in explanatory scope, power, and plausibility. Moreover, the resurrection accounts for the facts without being contrived, or *ad hoc*. Yet, when naturalistic theories have been applied to the known historical facts they show themselves to be very problematic. While they often can account for some of the data they rarely are able to account for all the facts. Thus, more hypotheses must be added, but make the overall account more contrived. Jesus' resurrection ultimately outstrips any naturalistic hypothesis and is the best explanation of the data.

Early Eyewitness Accounts

We then took a deeper look into the writings of arguably the most notable Christian convert, Paul. A timeline was presented using Paul's writings to help discover who was preaching Jesus' resurrection and when. The timeline originated with Jesus' death being placed at AD 30 with minimal controversy.[331] After Jesus' death was established we then looked at two main writings that are considered undisputedly authored by Paul.

[331] Whether the 30 AD or 33 AD date is chosen does not affect the argument.

One of the texts examined came from 1 Cor. 15:3 and following. Paul, who is an eyewitness, provides the Corinthians with a creed that refers to Jesus' death, burial, being raised three days later, and His appearances. This provided us with one of the earliest documents containing a reference to Jesus' resurrection. Most scholars have dated 1 Cor. 15 between AD 54-56.

One of the aspects of the 1 Cor. 15 creed is that Paul is reminding the Corinthians of a tradition that he received himself and passed down to them.[332] Paul uses technical terms to remind the Corinthians of a creed he had already given to them. They had received this tradition prior to the actual writing of 1 Corinthians. Many scholars have placed Paul's first trip to Corinth at AD 49 or 50. Thus, it is reasonable to at least date this creed about twenty years or so after Jesus' death.

However, if Paul delivered it to the Corinthians and mentions that he had received it prior to giving to them, then from who and where did Paul receive the creed? This is where we turned to our second text, which was Gal. 1 and 2. In these texts, Paul wrote that immediately after his experience with the risen Jesus he did not go directly to Jerusalem to see the disciples, but traveled to Arabia and back to Damascus.[333] However, Paul informs us that three years after his conversion he did travel to Jerusalem to inquire with Peter and the other disciples. Paul ended up staying with Peter for fifteen days and saw no other disciples except for James, Jesus' brother. Many think it is during this trip that Paul received the content of the tradition that he delivered to the Corinthians.

---

[332] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 264-265.

[333] It seems very clear that for Paul, Jesus is enough of an authority for him.

If an experience with Jesus and a trip three years later to Jerusalem was not enough, Paul then made another trip to Jerusalem fourteen years later with Titus and Barnabas with him.[334] This time Paul was also able to speak with John, as well as Peter and James. Paul, again in an attempt to make sure he was not running in vain, presented the Gospel that he had been preaching. He reports that the other apostles, who he considered to be "pillars," added nothing to his Gospel.

Ultimately, then, what we observed is that three years after Paul's conversion he had made a trip to Jerusalem in which he more than likely discussed Jesus' resurrection; after all, Paul does refer to this as "first importance" in 1 Cor. 15:3. Most scholars, both conservative and skeptic, dated Paul's conversion between two and three years after Jesus' death.[335] This meant that Paul received this information about five years after the events had taken place. Yet, if Paul received the tradition, then those who passed it on to him would have had to have it prior to delivering it to Paul. Therefore, Peter and James would have had it prior to their meeting Paul in Jerusalem three years after Paul's conversion.

This has convinced several scholars across a very large theological spectrum to conclude that the content of the tradition has come within about three years or less after the event. James D.G. Dunn argued that it could even possibly be within months of the cross.[336] This is absolutely amazing when we consider the fact that we could have reports of Jesus' resurrection reasonably within a few months or years compared to documents recording the biography of Alexander the Great that are recorded almost 400 years later by Plutarch.

---

[334] Ga. 2:1.

[335] James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 143; William Lane Craig, "Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," 89-95; Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 260 f.n. 25.

[336] James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 855.

Historiography and Bart Ehrman

The last chapter of our investigation centered on some potential methodological objections that could be raised by the historian. Bart Ehrman presents some interesting historical considerations regarding miracles and the supernatural. One of Ehrman's problems is that miracles are by definition the least probable event, but the historian can only record the most probable event. This then leads Ehrman to the conclusion that even if a miracle did occur in history, then the historian would have no way to show that it did actually happen.[337] Ehrman also argues that the historian has no access to the divine. Historians only have the tools to record observable events. Thus, the historian is unable to comment on God's action in the world, whether it is miracles or Jesus rising from the dead.[338]

Yet, we observed that Ehrman's historiography was problematic for a few reasons. His approach to miracles had four separate issues. First, it ignored the supernatural element that would be involved in a miracle, while creating an overly simplistic definition for *miracle*. Second, he defined miracle in such a way that it required an *a priori* rejection of the possibility of knowing a miracle occurred. Third, he defined miracles in a way that emphasized their probability based on the quantity of evidence and not the weight, or quality, of the evidence. Lastly, when given the option between the resurrection and other natural hypotheses, the resurrection is the lesser miracle and naturalistic theories can become the "greater miracle."[339]

Ehrman also had methodological problems when he argued that the resurrection could not be argued by the historian because for God to raise Jesus from the dead is something that the historian cannot conclude. First, it would be a genetic fallacy to reject the resurrection based on

---

[337] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 225-226.

[338] Ibid., Ch. 14.

[339] David Hume, "Of Miracles," *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, 33.

its cause since historians are as equally subjected to logical rules and principles as those in other disciplines. Second, historians can still report events even if they are unable to explain the cause of the actual event. Therefore, they could still argue that Jesus had risen from the dead. Third, Ehrman contradicts his own methodology by assuming God as the cause for Jesus' resurrection because he asserts that historians have no access to the divine. Yet, he is making a claim that the divine is what in fact raised Jesus.

However, Ehrman is headed in the right direction when he argued that historians of every stripe should be able to agree on historical data. This is one of the criteria for the minimal facts approach. If Ehrman agrees to the data that is agreed upon by historians of every stripe, but disagrees with the resurrection as the best explanation because of his methodology, then it is important to critically evaluate his methodology.

We have seen that not only is Ehrman's methodology problematic, but additional evidence can be given for Jesus' resurrection because of near-death experiences (NDE). Highly evidenced NDEs that can be objectively verified and corroborated are highly suggestive of another realm of life. Evidence for NDEs is so strong that the famous former atheist Antony Flew admitted that this type of evidence significantly weakens and possibly defeats his arguments against an afterlife.[340]

Conclusion

When we follow the historical criteria for establishing authentic historical events and the criteria to determine the best explanation, as described by McCullagh, then Jesus' resurrection far surpasses all competing theories. When we look at the twelve historical facts, the early eyewitness testimony, and NDE evidence then Jesus' resurrection presents itself as an actual

[340] Gary Habermas and Mike Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*, 147, 317 f.n.34.

historical event. If historians follow the historical criteria and evidence, then they can come to the conclusion that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead historically, regardless of one's theological views. Historians of every stripe should be more than willing to grant that Jesus rose from the dead. It seems one reason to disbelieve the historicity of Jesus' resurrection is to have a prior commitment to disbelieve in its cause or to adopt a historical approach that would prohibit the resurrection from being considered historical *a priori*. Using the words of the German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg we can conclude our investigation that

> As long as historiography does not begin dogmatically with a narrow concept of reality according to which "dead men do not rise," it is not clear why historiography should not in principle be able to speak about Jesus' resurrection as the explanation that is best established of such events as the disciples' experiences of the appearances and the discovery of the empty tomb.[341]

[341]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977), 109.

APPENDIX A

Explanatory Scope Table[342]

Historical Facts

1. Jesus Death by Crucifixion
2. Jesus' Burial
3. His Death Caused the Disciples to Lose Hope and Experience Despair
4. The Empty Tomb
5. The Disciples Had Real Experiences That they Believed were Literal Appearances of the Risen Jesus
6. The Disciples Were Transformed and Were Willing to Suffer and Die for Their Faith
7. James, the Skeptical Brother of Jesus, was Converted When He Believed He Saw the Resurrected Jesus
8. Paul, the Famous Church Persecutor, Converted After He Believed He Saw the Risen Jesus
9. This Resurrection Message was Central in Early Christian Preaching
10. The Resurrection was Especially Proclaimed in Jerusalem
11. The Christian Church was Established and Grew
12. Sunday was Featured as the Primary Day of Worship

Natural Theories	**Historical Facts Unaccounted for by Theory (does not include other reasons theory may be problematic).**
Wrong Tomb	2, 5-12
Hallucinations by Disciples	4, 7, and 8
Existential Resurrection	4, 5, 7, and 8
Jesus' Had a Twin	4, 7, and 8
Legend – Embellishment Over Time	1-12 + Early Reporting from Paul (Ch. 3)
Spiritual Resurrection (Not Physical)	4, 5, 7, and 8
Disciples Lied and/or Stole the Body	6, 7, and 8
Someone Else Stole the Bode – i.e. Grave Robbers	5-12
Jesus Swooned on the Cross	1 and 6
Jesus' Physical Resurrection	Accounts for All the Facts

[342] Modified from H. Wayne House and Joseph M. Holden, *Charts of Apologetics and Christian Evidences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), chart 58.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barnett, Paul William. *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans. Co, 2005.

Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels As Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans. Co, 2006.

Breisach, Ernst. *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Craig, William Lane. *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981.

_____. "Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ" *Truth* 1 (1985): 89-95.

_____. "The Historicity of the Empty Tomb of Jesus." *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 39-67.

_____ and Bart D. Ehrman. *Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus? A Debate between William Lane Craig and Bart D. Ehrman, College of the Holy Cross, March 28, 2006*. Worcester, MA: The College, 2006.

_____ and Chad V. Meister. *God Is Great, God Is Good: Why Believing in God Is Reasonable and Responsible*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009.

_____, Gerd Ludemann, Paul Copan, and Ronald K. Tacelli. *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment? : A Debate between William Lane Craig & Gerd Ludemann*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Crossan, John Dominic, N. T. Wright, and Robert B. Stewart. *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.

Dunn, James D. G. *Jesus Remembered*. Vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making.* Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003.

_____. *Beginning from Jerusalem*. Vol. 2 of *Christianity in the Making.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009.

Ehrman, Bart D. *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

_____. *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

_____. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Fischer, David Hackett. *Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.

Geivett, R. Douglas, and Gary R. Habermas. *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.

Habermas, Gary "Historical Epistemology, Jesus' Resurrection, and the Shroud of Turin," in *Proceedings of the 1999 Shroud of Turin International Conference*, ed. Bryan Walsh. Magisterium Press, 2000.

Habermas, Gary. *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

_____. *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*. Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co, 1996.

_____. "Explaining Away Jesus' Resurrection: The Recent Revival of Hallucination Theories" *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 23, no. 4, (2001) http://www.garyhabermas.com/articles/crj_explainingaway/crj_explainingaway.htm (accessed on May 14, 2010).

_____. "The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry." PhD diss.,Michigan State University. 1976. Found on www. Garyhabermas.com (accessed February 23, 2010).

_____, "Recent Perspectives on the Reliability of the Gospels," *Christian Research Journal* 28, Vol. 28, n. 1, 2005.

_____. 2005. "Resurrection Research From 1975 to the Present: What Are Critical Scholars Saying?" *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus.* 3, no. 2: 135-153.

_____, Antony Flew, and Terry L. Miethe. *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?: The Resurrection Debate*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989.

_____ and Mike Licona. *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004.

Hengel, Martin. *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977.

Hurtado, Larry W. *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions About Earliest Devotion to Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2005.

_____. *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2003.

Keener, Craig S. *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009.

Lapide, Pinchas. *The Resurrection: A Jewish Perspective.* transl. by Wilhelm C. Linss. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1983.

Lewis, C. S. *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2002.

Licona, Michael. "The Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus: Historiographical Considerations in the Light of Recent Debates." PhD Diss., University of Pretoria, 2008.

_____. *Paul Meets Muhammad: A Christian-Muslim Debate on the Resurrection*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006.

_____ and Bart Eherman. *Debate Can Historians Prove that Jesus Rose from the Dead?* DVD, Southern Evangelical Seminary, April 2, 2009.

Loftus, John W. *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008.

MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Bible Commentary: Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2005.

Maier, Paul L. *In the Fulness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1991.

McCullagh, C. Behan. *Justifying Historical Descriptions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

McDowell, Josh, and Ahmed Deedat. *The Islamic Debate*. Dallas, TX: Josh McDowell Ministry, 1985.

Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol. 1, The Roots of the Problem and the Person*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991.

Moreland, James Porter. *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Jesus, God and Man*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968.

Ravi Zacharias, *Foundations of Apologetics: Establishing a Worldview*. Vol. 4. DVD-ROM Norcross, GA: RZIM, 2007.

Schwitzer, Albert. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study from Reimarus to Wrede*. trans. W. Montgomery. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1910.

Sherwin-White, A.N., *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.

Strauss, David. *A New Life of Jesus.* 2 Vols.; Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879.

Strobel, Lee. *Case for Christ.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Twelftree, Graham H. *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical & Theological Study*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.

Vermes, Geza. *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981.

Wright, N.T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004.

_____. "Jesus Resurrection and Christian Origins," *Gregorianum*, 83, no 4 (2002): 615–635.