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**A DEFENSE OF THE RESURRECTION MIRACLE
AND CRITIQUE OF THE HALLUCINATION THEORY**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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Introduction

Differences in belief regarding the resurrection are what divides two of the world's largest religions. Over the years, there have been many claims against the resurrection. One hypothesis, known as the hallucination theory, disputes the disciples' claims, suggesting that the followers of Jesus were experiencing something like corporate psychosis. This argument is much more complex than many scholars realize and often does not receive the amount of attention it deserves. Therefore, this thesis will provide an argument for the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ and a critique of the hallucination theory. Reviewing the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus will strengthen this thesis' claims for the resurrection of Jesus. The case for the historical resurrection of Jesus will be defended by this thesis looking into psychology to determine if the minds of the disciples could truly be hallucinating and if philosophers are qualified to make statements regarding people's psyche from the first century. Further, this thesis will review why the disciples could not have lied about the things they saw.

Chapter 1: The Claim

In this chapter, this work will discuss a range of topics for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Starting with the claims of both Mark and John, readers can begin to see the significance of the resurrection. In order to understand the resurrection, one must also discuss the topic of miracles and how they relate to history. Having a firm foundation for miracles to stand upon allows this work to build a positive case for the resurrection. In addition, to comprehend the resurrection as more than just a story in the Bible, this thesis will investigate the historical context of the resurrection and the Gospels' reliability. Reflecting upon all this information will build the necessary framework for defending the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Miracles

How could this be? In the natural order of the world, Jesus should be a corpse decomposing in His borrowed tomb. Would not the Romans be skilled enough in their crucifixion art to ensure they killed Jesus on the cross? What explanation is there for the resurrection of Jesus? Orthodox Christianity claims that the resurrection of Jesus is a miracle. This thesis is not the place to debate miracles; it would not give justice to either side of the conversation. However, it would be wrong not to discuss miracles before going any further briefly. Many scholars have devoted their time and some even their lives to researching miracles. C.S. Lewis wrote a book titled *Miracles* and is cited by many when the topic of miracles arises. Many have heard stories on the news or social media where something happened that should not have otherwise happened. For example, a family is involved in a car crash, but everyone walks away without harm. Alternatively, a hospital patient dies on an operating table only to start breathing again after being declared dead.

Humans cannot quite wrap their heads around such events. Nevertheless, some are quick to claim the events are not miraculous, while others hold firm to the notion of the events being miraculous. C.S. Lewis states, “The argument up to date shows that miracles are possible and that there is nothing antecedently ridiculous in the stories which say that God has sometimes performed them.”¹ Now, it is crucial to read Lewis’ words carefully. Lewis mentioned “that God has sometimes performed” miracles, which means that not everything that appears to be miraculous is. Lewis says that scholars and believers do not need to believe all claims of

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Harper Collins e-book, 2009), 202, <https://books.apple.com/book/id360639700>.

miracles since many of them are false or exaggerated.² To be clear, just because one believes in a miracle does not mean they believe in everything that is claimed to be a miracle. For example, just because one believes that Jesus rose from the grave does not mean they believe John Doe has managed to walk on water. So, the question must be asked, “what is a miracle?” This thesis will also ask, “who is appropriately qualified to define miracles?” Some would claim miracles are events in which there is no natural explanation. Others will claim that an event can still be miraculous despite natural evidence.³ David Basinger indicates the difficulty of defining a miracle. Basinger states, “In its most general sense, a miracle is something quite unusual or unexpected.”⁴ If this definition is allowed to be the standard for defining a miracle, scholars are in trouble. Unfortunately, many people will use the term miracle for things that are not miraculous.

The task of determining if an event is miraculous is a tremendous task for any one person to accomplish. Who is to say that the lost item that is found is not a miracle? Or how about the person who received a job offer that was well above their skill level? Let us not forget the lucky winner of the lottery! Which of these three should be classified as a bona fide miracle? The challenge here is that if every unexpected event is classified as a miracle, the risk is to make miracles no longer miraculous but ordinary. Miracles just become everyday life. Can a definition that inserts that unexpected or unusual events are miracles be true? Realistically, the

² Ibid.,

³ Graham H. Twelftree, *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3, <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/F0E6612D>.

⁴ David Basinger and Graham H. Twelftree, *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles* (n.p.: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 19, <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/core/books/cambridge-companion-to-miracles/what-is-a-m>.

answer is no. Thus, bringing about the original question. What is a miracle, and how is it defined? During a lecture, Dr. Gary Habermas defines a miracle as,

A miracle is a dynamic specialized event which nature is capable of producing that temporally supersedes or appears to supersede the normally observed known latter of nature. Such an event is brought about by the power of God or another supernatural agent for the purpose of verifying or drawing attention to a person of message.⁵

Habermas' definition is one of the most air-tight definitions one will be able to find. However, while Basinger's definition is unbiased, it leaves too much room for unexpected things to be classified as miracles.

Mark and John's Claim

Mark's Gospel is one of the earliest accounts of Jesus' resurrection.⁶ For that very reason, this thesis will use Mark's claim as the central claim of Jesus' resurrection. Many of the other Gospel authors and New Testament authors would base their claims around not only what they saw but potentially from Mark's Gospel. Mark 16:5-7 (HCSB) states,

When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; they were amazed and alarmed. 'Don't be alarmed,' he told them. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has been resurrected! He is not here! See the place where they put Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there just as He told you.'⁷

⁵ Dr. Gary Habermas, "Defining a Miracle" (lecture, Liberty University, Lynchburg, TN, 2014), https://learn.liberty.edu/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id=_674622_1&content_id=_43835776_1.

⁶ Dr. Travis Dickinson, Dr. Keith Loftin, and Dr. Paul Gould, *Stand Firm: Apologetics and the Brilliance of the Gospel* (n.p.: B&H Publishing Group, n.d.), 75, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/workspace>.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

Here can be seen the core claim surrounding Jesus' resurrection. The women arrive at the tomb on the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus to find an empty tomb and a messenger from Heaven telling the ladies that Jesus was no longer dead but alive and meeting them in Galilee. Now, it is at this point that the traditional text of Mark's Gospel ends. Later verses 9-20 were added based upon the information of the other Gospels.⁸ For example, John 20:19-21 states,

In the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews. Then Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, 'Peace to you!' Having said this, He showed them His hands and His side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'

According to these passages, not only was Jesus' tomb empty, but He also appeared to His disciples and showed them his hands and his side. Mark's account of the risen Jesus is fascinating in that he never mentions seeing a risen Jesus. Investigating Mark's Gospel ending at verse 8 and not continuing with verses 9-20, the case for the resurrection is left asking, "what about the resurrection appearances?" This does not mean that Mark's Gospel is to be viewed as unreliable. Mark was ending his gospel when he did to show readers his faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Michael R. Licona comments,

Moreover, although Mark may have ended his Gospel at Mark 16:8, without any appearances, his readers probably suspected them. Mark mentions Jesus' resurrection a number of times throughout his Gospel and twice says that Jesus will meet his disciples in Galilee after his resurrection (Mk 14:28, 16:6). Thus the lack of an appearance of the risen Jesus is not enough to postulate that Mark did not know of one or more of them. This is especially true given Mark 14:28, where Jesus predicts the very thing the angel announces.⁹

⁸ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (n.p.: WordSearch, n.d.), 273, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/library/title/005814712>.

⁹ Ibid,238.

Additionally, scholars believe that the Gospel of Mark was written roughly in 50 A.D.¹⁰. This means that those around to see the events Mark is reporting could have made corrections or added the details to their accounts. The gospel authors do not add verses 9-20, but readers can see where the other authors made sure to add the details in their gospels, as seen in John's case. At the very core of the resurrection of Jesus, readers can see the minimal fact that the tomb was empty.¹¹ Also, readers see that Mark includes the same information as the other gospel authors, including Mary Magdalene's visitation to the tomb of Jesus. Again, just because Mark does not recount an actual sighting of Jesus post-death does not discredit any statements of seeing a post-death Jesus by the other disciples. His claims simply lay the foundation on which the other gospels, like John's, describe their own experiences of seeing and touching the risen Jesus. Mark's lack of initially disclosing the resurrected Jesus is remedied when the truth of Jesus and the resurrection is found in history. Further, David E. Garland states,

If it can be reasonably established that a historical continuity exists between the tradition about Jesus and the historical Jesus, then the tradition regarding Jesus' understanding of his death found in Mark's gospel should not be dismissed simply as the inventive and wishful thinking of anonymous post-Easter Christian communities.¹²

In other words, if history can prove the existence of Jesus and the resurrection, then the lack of details in Mark's original text is irrelevant. In addition, John's Gospel is seen as independent of Mark's Gospel. Some believe that John was influenced when he wrote his eyewitness account

¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹ Dr. Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus* (n.p.: WordSearch, n.d.), 9, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/workspace>.

¹² David E. Garland and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News About Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 49, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=5397747&ppg=1>.

using the words of Mark; however, it can be viewed that John is not the typical synoptic Gospel.

Kirk R. MacGregor writes,

This question can only be settled by a comparative textual analysis of John and Mark. At face value, such an analysis points decisively to John's ignorance of Mark. Here it should be emphasized that over 90 percent of the vocabulary in the Gospel of John is distinct from Mark (as well as from Matthew and Luke), where the less than 10 percent of Markan overlap consists of stock words and phrases.¹³

This fact adds to the credibility of the original text by Mark and the text written by John. If John's text is primarily independent of Mark, this means he produced a pure testimony of the events he witnessed. They were further adding to the evidence in support of the resurrection. In this thesis, the synoptic Gospels, like Matthew or Luke, fail to further the case for the resurrection. While the synoptic Gospels are proof of the resurrection in and of themselves, they do not provide the same amount of originality that Mark and John present. If the Gospels are to be reviewed, one can see what is referred to as "multiple attestations." Multiple attestation is one of the strongest arguments when defending the resurrection on a historical basis since not just one source proclaims to have seen the event take place but multiple. The more sources that attest to the sighting of an event add to the probability of the event's actual occurrence.

Historical Basis for the Miraculous

History can show patterns that may help readers and students understand and prove the existence of the miraculous. Thomas Fabisiak states, "Furthermore, if the divine is inscribed in nature, this opens the range of miracles that can be deemed historically plausible."¹⁴ Some

¹³ Kirk R. MacGregor, *A Historical and Theological Investigation of John's Gospel* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2020), 47, https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-030-53401-1_2.pdf.

¹⁴ Thomas Fabisiak, *The "nocturnal side of science" in David Friedrich Strauss's Life of Jesus critically examined*. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 83, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/j.ctt15nmhx9.7?seq=15#metadata_info_tab_contents.

would claim that miracles and history do not belong together. Some would even state that miracles cannot be seen as a historical topic because historians who attribute miracles to God do not have the means to do so effectively. Alternatively, those who oppose miracles could claim that those who hold to miracles allow their agendas or biases that influence their historical views. Therefore, if this is true, history is subjective to everyone's interpretation of historical data. History will not be valid if it is simply subject to one's interpretation of historical evidence. After all, no one currently living was present during these events to prove what happened. Francis J. Beckwith states, "That is to say, there can be no objective history that can tell us how events in the past really happened, since historians' work is shaped by their own ideas, value judgments, worldview, prejudices, and perspective."¹⁵ History cannot be merely subjective to the historian's views or beliefs. History is built upon evidence which points towards the objective truth. Carl Becker states regarding historians, "Very well, the historian is interested in some event of this sort. Yet, he cannot deal directly with this event itself since the event itself has disappeared. What he can deal with directly is a statement about the event."¹⁶ Thus, to look to history for proof of a miracle, what is needed are statements about the event. It is not reasonable for scholars to simply take one's comments about an event as doctrine. However, if there are multiple attestations to an event, one can begin to affirm the accuracy of the event.

Regarding historians, Becker states, "He deals in short not with the event, but with a statement which affirms *the fact that the event occurred*. When we get down to the hard facts, what the historian is always dealing with is an *affirmation*—an affirmation of the fact that

¹⁵ Francis J. Beckwith, Dr. Gary Habermas, and Douglas R. Geivett, *In Defense of Miracles* (n.p.: WordSearch, n.d.), 88, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/workspace>.

¹⁶ Carl L. Becker and Phil L. Snyder, *Detachment and the Writing of History: Essays and Letters of Carl L. Becker* (n.p.: Cornell University Press, 1958), 47, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/10.7591/j.ctv3s8r5k.8?seq=7#metadata_info_tab_cont.

something is true.”¹⁷ Moreover, numerous sources affirm the reality of miracles. These sources will be addressed further in this chapter. Additionally, viewers can affirm a miraculous event with the use of historical evidence. If students are to approach miracles from a historical basis, one must weigh the statements of those who were there, next to what is known about miracles. Thus, using their statements as the affirmation needed to show the probability that something miraculous indeed happened.

The Historicity of the Resurrection

Scholars, both believers, and critics have researched and studied the resurrection of Jesus for many years. For some, it is not the matter of if the resurrection happened but how it happened. For others, the issue at hand is the very claim of the resurrection. Nonetheless, this thesis is in support of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. Norman L. Geisler states, “Jesus Christ rose from the dead to a transformed body on the third day after his death. In this resurrected state, he appeared to more than five hundred of his disciples on at least eight different occasions over a forty-day period; he conversed with them, ate with them, let them touch him, and cooked breakfast for them.”¹⁸

Nevertheless, before going any further, one must first examine what is unique about the resurrection of Jesus. First, the evidence must be shown to prove that the miraculous happened at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This thesis will investigate some of the evidence that supports Jesus Christ’s resurrection in the following sections.

¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁸ Norman L. Geisler, and Ronald Brooks. *When Skeptics Ask*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 122.

Nonetheless, this thesis must report what makes the resurrection significant. To do so, one must first determine if the resurrection was a miracle after all. Did something supernatural indeed happen at Calvary, or is there a reasonable explanation for what happened? If one first looks at the resurrection from the viewpoint of the Christian believer, then they must note the tremendous significance of Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus states in John 11:25-26, "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?'"¹⁹ Therefore, if Jesus died but did not rise from the grave, He would be no different from any other prophet or teacher in the Bible. Dr. Gary Habermas states, "Either Jesus rose from the dead confirming his claims to divinity, or he was a fraud."²⁰ Thus, the Christian is left with the task of proving whether or not the resurrection happened, and if it did, what makes it miraculous. By nature, if Jesus returned from the grave after His death on the Cross, it indeed would be a miracle. Usually, dead people simply do not come back to life. Hence, scholars can safely call the resurrection a miracle. As mentioned previously, Dr. Habermas defined a miracle as something that "supersedes" the known laws of nature. Would not someone returning from the grave constitute a miracle? The real issue at hand is not determining whether or not the resurrection is a miracle but whether or not the resurrection took place. Still, there is significance in highlighting that the resurrection is a miracle discussed more in the following chapter. Regarding the resurrection miracle, Timothy and Lydia McGrew state,

Fortunately, we do not need to offer necessary and sufficient conditions for something's being a miracle in order to pursue the present line of argument, since our discussion is focused on the resurrection of Jesus, and all parties to the

¹⁹ John 11:25-26.

²⁰ Dr. Gary Habermas and Michael L. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (n.p.: WordSearch, n.d.), 28, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/library/title/005812672>.

discussion are agreed that the resurrection of Jesus if in fact took place, would be a paradigm case of a miracle.²¹

In other words, if the resurrection is proven to be accurate, then the miraculous claims are also proven to be true.

The nature of the resurrection is also significant because of the claims which Christ made. No other teacher, prophet, leader, or religious figure ever made the claims that Jesus made. Emphasis must be made on this point. No other person in history other than Jesus made claims to be divine and that they would return from the grave. As discussed before, in the natural world, dead people do not simply get out of their grave after being dead for three days; therefore, what is known in the natural world was interrupted in the case of Jesus' post-death claims. Orthodox Christianity claims that Jesus was God incarnate, meaning that Jesus was God-made flesh. Regarding Jesus' divinity, John Scott exclaims, "He was not God pretending to be human, nor a human being with divine faculties, nor semi-divine and semi-human, but fully human and fully divine (the unique God-man)."²² Understanding who Jesus was and who Jesus is allows readers to begin to grasp what happened on that very first Easter morning.

The resurrection is stated numerous times throughout the Bible. Still, some believe the Word of God to be an untrustworthy source which is an *a priori* statement. Upon strenuous study by many scholars, readers can see that the Bible is trustworthy and can provide reliable information about the historical events mentioned in the Scriptures.²³ To narrow the statements

²¹ Timothy Mcgrew et al., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (n.p.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 596, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/doi/book/10.1002/9781444308334>.

²² John Scott, *The Incomparable Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 92.

²³ Walter C. Kaiser Jr and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 159, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/workspace>.

of biblical reliability, one must focus their attention on the Gospels. The Gospels are reliable for many different reasons. The Gospels are the testimonies of those who either were there when the event happened or are reporting the events of their day.

Additionally, if John wrote that he saw Jesus in a post-death state, then John's testimony is to be taken as reliable. As mentioned previously, historical work revolves around the statements of those who were there. Richard Swinburne asserts, "Just as apparent testimony must be read as real testimony, so real testimony must be believed, in the absence of counter-evidence."²⁴ Unfortunately, the standard used for the rest of history is not always applied when evaluating the Gospels or the resurrection of Christ. Critical scholars may point out where there are "gaps" in the testimonies or the historical claims of the bible authors. If this is true, the Gospel accounts cannot be trusted and should be seen as unreliable. However, Walter C. Kaiser Jr. remarks, "In short, we must read the Gospels and Acts with the expectation that there will be gaps of information and imprecise descriptions that make it difficult — sometimes impossible — to resolve apparent discrepancies. This does not mean for a moment that the biblical writers are not dependable."²⁵ With this in mind, one can take the Gospels as a reliable source to account for Jesus' resurrection. To hold the Gospel authors to an inappropriate standard of depicting every single detail is virtually impossible. Readers must apply this to all history and data analysis forms if this is the standard viewers use.

The reliability of the Gospel's account of Christ's resurrection is evidenced further by William Lane Craig in *Reasonable Faith*. Craig states, "If the Gospels were actually written by

²⁴ Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003), under "2.4," <https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/view/10.1093/0199257469.001.0001/a>.

²⁵ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics, Revised and Expanded Edition* (n.p.: WordSearch, n.d.), 159, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/library/title/005820542>.

the disciples, then quite simply they were either true accounts or they were lies.”²⁶ This statement could not be any more valid. Therefore, one must examine the contents of the Gospels and determine if the claims match other known sources of events in that day and time. In other words, Craig claims the Gospels contain correct names, locations, dates, ethnic accuracy, and many other supporting pieces of evidence to its claims. The Gospels are self-supporting documents that, when aided by external evidence, are viewed as legitimate. There would be many telltale signs in which readers could see if someone were to forge the stories or events of the Gospels. John Warwick Montgomery states,

If, as we have seen, the New Testament records are sound historical documents, how good is their testimony of Jesus? This is a question of great importance, since the accounts tell us plainly that Jesus claimed to be nothing less than God-in-the-flesh, come to earth to reveal God’s will for the human race and to save human beings from the penalty of their sins.²⁷

When evaluating the discrepancies between each Gospel author, such as mentioned above, one can conclude that they would not have these discrepancies if these documents were to be forged. Moreover, all four Gospels would read the same and not show any difference from author to author. Nevertheless, this is not the case. When the Gospels are read, readers can notice the differences between each author and their viewpoints of the events that transpired.

Nevertheless, some may be concerned about why each Gospel is not synoptic and why things in one Gospel may not translate to the next. For example, there is never any interaction of a risen Jesus with His disciples in the original text when Mark is read. However, when one reads

²⁶ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith (3rd Edition): Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 335, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=355122&ppg=336>.

²⁷ Khaldoun A. Sweiss, Chad V. Meister, and John Warwick Montgomery, *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 342, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/workspace>.

John, one sees several instances where a post-death Jesus interacts with His disciples. Mark L. Strauss answers this dilemma by stating, “The Gospel writers are clearly selective, omitting many extraneous details and including features important to their narrative purposes. Sometimes abbreviation or omission leaves readers with the impression of contradiction.”²⁸ Again, this would be an incorrect line of thinking. Just because Mark did not choose to detail the events of a risen Jesus does not negate the testimony of John. Christians must consider that the disciples were humans.

Moreover, when one approaches the Gospels with this understanding, they no longer become hindered by the idea that the differences between the two authors spoil the truth of the Gospels. The truth is that each author recounted the events that they deemed most important based on their personal writing preferences. Mark chose not to be as detailed as John, but that does not mean that Jesus did not return from the grave or that the Gospels are unreliable.

The Historical Evidence

Previously, the foundation for viewing Jesus’ resurrection as historical was noted. Nevertheless, now one must examine Jesus’ resurrection in-depth as an event of history. Many have rejected the testimonies of Jesus’ resurrection because they originate from the Gospels. Strauss asserts, “Much of the rejection of the historicity of the Gospels arose from the recognition that these are documents written for a theological purpose. Beginning with the work of William Wrede, the Gospels were viewed first and foremost theological works intended to promote the perspective of the author and his community.”²⁹ Nevertheless, these documents

²⁸ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 389.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 395.

were written with a theological intent, which does not mean they cannot be viewed as historical.

Richard Swinburne inserts,

Most of St Paul's epistles are totally reliable historical sources. The synoptic gospels are basically historical works, though they do sometimes seek to make theological points (especially in the Infancy narratives) by adding details to the historical account. St John's Gospel is also basically reliable, at any rate, on the later events of the story of Jesus, but it contains more 'theologizing' than the others.³⁰

If viewers look closely at Christianity, they see something significant, unlike any other world religion or belief. At the very core of Christianity are the claims of the disciples. The disciples were not men of influence or tremendous wealth. However, they were able to spread a message of a risen Jesus far and wide and have written documentation within the lives of those who would have witnessed the events. There are many recordings in which people documented sightings of a post-death Jesus. For example, Jesus appeared not only to His twelve disciples but also to a crowd of 500 people. There is also the stunning account in 1 Corinthians 5:6 where Paul explains, "Then He appeared to over 500 brothers at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep."³¹ If this claim were to be false, would not another historical author speak up? Therefore, one can see that the resurrection made a historical impact on the immediate disciples of Jesus and people outside the close group of disciples.

Also, if the resurrection is to be viewed as historical, several interesting facts must be addressed. These facts will also be mentioned further at a later time in chapter 3. Nonetheless,

³⁰ Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003), under "2.4," <https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/view/10.1093/0199257469.001.0001/a>.

³¹ 1 Corinthians 5:6.

Dr. Gary Habermas in *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* lists 12 specific historical facts supporting the resurrection of Jesus. Habermas states,

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.
2. He was buried, most likely in a private tomb.
3. Soon afterward, the disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope.
4. Jesus's tomb was found empty very soon after his internment.
5. The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.
6. Due to these experiences, the disciples' lives were thoroughly transformed, even being willing to die for this belief.
7. The proclamation of the resurrection took place very early, at the beginning of church history.
8. The disciples' public testimony and preaching of the resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and buried shortly before.
9. The Gospel message centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus.
10. Sunday was the primary day for gathering and worshipping.
11. James, the brother of Jesus and a former skeptic was converted when, he believed, he saw the risen Jesus.
12. Just a few years later, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) became a Christian believer due to an experience that he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.³²

These facts are upon the most fundamental known things about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moreover, both believing scholars and critical scholars typically accept these points. Therefore, to not see them as the foundation for a historical resurrection would be to ignore the best evidence.

In addition, the resurrection is supported historically by these initial facts, but non-Christian sources validate the resurrection. In other words, people outside the circle of Jesus and His disciples wrote about the resurrection. The famous Jewish historian Josephus mentions Jesus

³² Dr. Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus* (n.p.: WordSearch, n.d.), 9, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/workspace>.

in his writings twice. However, Michael R. Licona states, “There is much dispute by scholars over the first, since it appears that a Christian doctored the text sometime between the first and fourth centuries. However, the second mention possesses no such traits, and the large majority of scholars regard it as authentic in its present form.”³³ What makes Josephus’ reports of Jesus interesting is that Josephus would never have contacted Jesus during his lifetime. However, he may have interacted with one of the disciples or even someone close to the disciples.

Regardless, Josephus recognizes Jesus in his writings. Josephus states,

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.³⁴

Scholars report that the “Christ” statement in Josephus’ text was added at a later date. However, that does not negate his referencing of Jesus and the belief of the disciples seeing a risen Jesus.

In addition to Josephus, the Roman historian Tacitus references Jesus’ death in his *Annals*.

Tacitus states,

Therefore, to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital

³³ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (n.p.: WordSearch, n.d.), 235, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/library/title/005814712>.

³⁴ Flavius Josephus and Kathleen O'Bannon, *Josephus: The Complete Works* (n.p.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2015), under “Chapter 3 Paragraph 3,” <https://ccel.org/ccel/josephus/complete/complete.i.html>.

itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.³⁵

It is interesting to see that the news of Jesus' death made it to the *Annals* of Tacitus.

Additionally, what is more intriguing is Tacitus' remarks about Jesus' resurrection. Tacitus references the resurrection of Christ when he states, "the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment." Moreover, there are many more writers outside the Christian circle who referenced or remarked on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These non-Christian writers add to the credibility of the statements made by the disciples and the other Christian authors. So, when students look to the historical credibility of the Gospels, they not only take into consideration the non-Christian authors, but they must also recognize that the Gospels are best seen in some areas as summaries. The authors summarized select events because it was more accessible and more efficient than transcribing all the information as it was happening. Craig A. Evans, in a debate for the historicity of the Gospels, states, "The Gospels are not photographs; they are not videotapes. No history is a videotape unless it's a videotape in modern times. It is an interpretive portrait and, therefore, a historical personage from George Washington to Julius Caesar, or whomever, is a construct. History is not a mirror or a videotape of a word for word. Think about it."³⁶ As this work debates the resurrection, one must think about how the Gospels capture the big picture, so these are the reasons they see discrepancies between the authors.

Cultural Context of the Resurrection

³⁵ Tacitus, *Annals: Books 13-16* (n.p.: Harvard University Press, n.d.), 282, https://www-loebclassics-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/view/tacitus-annals/1931/pb_LCL322.283.xml.

³⁶ Craig A. Evans, Bart D. Ehrman, and Robert B. Stewart, *Title: Can We Trust the Bible On the Historical Jesus?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 596, <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzI2NDc3OTVfX0FO0?si>.

When examining the resurrection, one must examine the historical proofs, reliability of the Gospels, and the cultural context in which the resurrection of Jesus Christ took place. If one interjects a 21st century-American culture in their understanding of the resurrection, they could miss extensive details that highlight the likelihood of Jesus' resurrection. Looking closer into the culture, readers can see that the Jewish people had been awaiting the promised Messiah for many centuries. They looked forward to the Messiah because they believed He would free them from their oppression. At this time in history, the Jewish people were being oppressed by the Roman Empire. Therefore, it would make sense for the people of that day to see a prominent religious leader as their Messiah. Strauss inserts, "The intense desire among Jews for God's intervention in human history increased hope for the coming of an 'anointed one' or a 'messiah' who would act on God's behalf to set up a just and righteous kingdom on earth."³⁷ However, many did not view Jesus as the Messiah. This is because there were several different religious parties within Judaism. Two of the most known parties were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. In truth, it would be the Sadducees who were the most unbelieving of Jesus' messianic claims. Again Strauss, states, "While the expectation of a messiah from David's line was widespread among first-century Jews, it was not universal. Groups like the Sadducees were not expecting a messiah at all but were content with the present rule by the priestly leadership."

Moreover, it would be the religious leaders of Israel that were the ones responsible for having Jesus put to death. Thus, culturally readers can see that the Jewish people had little tolerance for things they deemed heretical. Further, the disciples would have then known the risks of reporting false claims of a risen Jesus. Not only would the immediate disciples of Jesus

³⁷Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 139.

know this, but those who would come to the faith from the disciples teaching would know this. Moreover, the disciples would have also been educated in Judaism. Judaism teaches against the spreading lies or bearing false witness.³⁸ The Law had particular punishments for such actions³⁹. In other words, the disciples would have religious convictions that would play a factor in their testimonies of seeing a risen Jesus.

Nevertheless, the culture in which Jesus and His disciples were from was diverse. Religious parties determining how people live, oppression from the Roman empire, and the long desire for a messiah all make up variables why Jesus's resurrection was significant. If the resurrection were forged, it would have fit the narrative of the religious parties of that day. The beauty of the resurrection is that it does not fit the agendas of those in support or those opposed to a messiah.

In review, this thesis has shown that miracles can be defined and observed in history. Further, despite the differences between Mark and John, the resurrection is proven by multiple attestations. Also, the historical evidence for the resurrection and the credibility of the Gospel claims of the disciples are validated by historical proof.

Chapter 2: The Opposition

A Case Against the Resurrection

This thesis will now present the opposing argument for the resurrection. Throughout this chapter, this work will discuss one alternative naturalistic theory against what Christians refer to

³⁸ Leviticus 19:11.

³⁹ Deuteronomy 19:16-19

as the resurrection of Jesus Christ—the hallucination theory—and expose its flaws and inconsistencies. The hallucination theory has been chosen over some of the more popular naturalistic arguments because the hallucination theory has not been refuted in many years. This has resulted in certain aspects of the hallucination theory being left without being critiqued or corrected. Before the hallucination theory can be discussed and reasonably understood, one must see miracles from skeptics' perspective and discuss naturalism. Both the skeptic's view of miracles and the naturalist worldview play significant factors in the emergence of the hallucination theory. Finally, once a base level knowledge of naturalism and the skeptic's view of miracles has been conveyed, scholars can dive into the hallucination theory and those who have contributed to this heretical concept over the years.

Christians may not always care about what skeptics have to say about their beliefs. However, if Christians fail to pay attention to those who oppose them and what they are saying, believers may become blindsided by an argument they could have avoided if they remained alert. Nevertheless, the issue of miracles is one of the most debated topics between skeptics and Christians. For the remainder of this section, this thesis will explore a skeptical definition of miracles. In his book titled *Hume, Holism, and Miracles*, David Johnson quotes Hume's two definitions, "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; A miracle may be accurately defined, a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent."⁴⁰ In other words, Hume believes miracles cannot happen because they go against the commonly observed laws of nature. With this ideology, the world and everything in it is placed into a box. Therefore, naturalism concurs that there must be a natural explanation

⁴⁰ David Johnson, *Hume, Holism, and Miracles* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 5, <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/10.7591/j.ctv5qdjh9.1?refreqid=excelsior%3A79689e37>.

when something seems to happen outside of that box because nothing happens outside the box. Hume was one of the leading philosophers who challenged miracles and pushed the agenda of naturalism. Therefore, it is not a surprise that naturalism is present at the core of Hume's definition of miracles. Hume's definition of miracles has been popularized by skeptical scholars whose worldview is naturalistic by nature. Of course, there are many other skeptical definitions of a miracle but none as prominent as Hume's.

Interestingly enough, David Johnson comments on Hume's definition of a miracle. Johnson inserts, "If we begin, naturally enough, with the notion that a miracle is 'a violation of the laws of nature,' then, to stave off an illusory a priori proof that there are no miracles, we must tinker either with the definition of 'miracles' itself or with the definition of 'violation,' or with the definition of 'laws of nature.'"⁴¹ Johnson makes a great point. To make Hume's definition of miracles fit, readers must alter a few other things, such as words or concepts, to twist them into his intended purpose. Considering that Hume's definition needs revising, it can be viewed as flawed and unable to stand independently.

Naturalism

Again, naturalism is not the focus of this thesis, but it must be explored if this thesis is to dive into the hallucination theory. Naturalism does take on many forms, and there are many variations of naturalism that one can believe. However, this analysis will focus on the broad spectrum of naturalism. Moreland and Craig comment, "Naturalists, believe only in the universe; philosophers who are sometimes called ontologists believe in the world. For the

⁴¹ Ibid, 7.

naturalist, therefore, nothing exists that does not have spatial (or temporal) location and/or duration.”⁴²

Nevertheless, C.S. Lewis states, “What the Naturalist believes is that the ultimate fact, the thing you can’t go behind, is a vast process in space and time which is *going on of its own accord*. Inside that total system every particular event (such as your sitting reading this book) happens because some other event has happened; in the long run, because the Total Event is happening.”⁴³ Thus, naturalism is a closed system in which nothing outside the system is allowed to interfere.

In fact, according to naturalism, there is nothing outside the system. Lewis's ultimate fact is the concept that aside from the ever-expanding universe, there is nothing else. Everything can be defined and contained within the box that is nature. Also, naturalism attempts to explain the coming about of certain events by basing them on the concept of the Total Event. The Total Event essentially is the snowball effect. One event happens, which leads to another and then another and so forth. Nothing is random but is merely a result of a previous event. This ideology excludes miracles because, according to naturalism, nothing miraculous can happen since that would be outside the closed system in which the world works. Naturalism is not a worldview that has recently come into fruition but instead has been around for quite some time. Naturalism has been seen used by many figures throughout history. One of those figures is Friedrich Nietzsche, who is known for being one of the greatest German philosophers. Nietzsche was skeptical about the supernatural and believed that the western world would see the fall of

⁴² J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 189, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/workspace>.

⁴³ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Harper Collins e-book, 2009), 15, <https://books.apple.com/book/id360639700>.

religion. Christian J. Emden, in his book *Nietzsche's Naturalism*, quotes and speaks on Nietzsche's ideas. Emden asserts,

While, on the surface, such skepticism might be seen as clashing with a thoroughly naturalistic perspective on the world, Nietzsche nowhere seriously denies the existence of the natural world, or that human experience is part of this natural world; he rather seeks to question the ways in which we articulate knowledge about the world and in which our normative commitments and values, in science as much as in morality, have come about in the first place. The fact, for instance, that '[t]he world, as far as we can recognize it, is the activity of our own nervous system, nothing more,' does not entail that what we regard as the world would be simply irrelevant and of no value to our existence⁴⁴

What is interesting about the remark Emden quotes from Nietzsche is that according to Nietzsche, the things that happen in this world are no more than the activity of our nervous system. In other words, one may think a miracle has happened, but they only perceive it to be a miracle because their nervous system sees the event as such. Nietzsche's view of naturalism calls upon the people's beliefs and casts skepticism upon them to find out what is true. This thesis must clarify that not all naturalists hold the same values as Nietzsche, but the core roots of naturalism are the same. Again, nothing can happen outside the box. If someone believes it did, they only perceive it to have happened outside the box, but the "truth" of the matter is a natural explanation.

In addition, naturalism denies the existence of things like souls or spirits because they are not made of matter. Loosely, naturalism can be viewed as a "see it to believe it" worldview. Steve Wilkins and Mark L. Sanford explain, "If nonphysical things like souls or minds exist, we

⁴⁴ Camden J. Emden, *Nietzsche's Naturalism: Philosophy and the Life Sciences in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), under "Introduction," <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/core/books/nietzsches-naturalism/introduction/7287BFD8>.

can conceive of how they would be exempt from causal laws that govern matter.”⁴⁵ Naturalism takes an a priori approach to the existence of nonmaterial or nonphysical things. According to naturalism, there simply cannot be anything governed by the laws of matter. Again, Wilkins and Sanford state, “Things cannot be other than they are. Thus, the effects in a physical organ such as the brain are the inevitable result of previous causes. As a result, our entire story, like the story of the cosmos, is told most accurately in the language of chemistry, biology, and physics, not the ideas of philosophy, religion or other nonscientific forms of explanation.”⁴⁶ Moreover, with these statements in mind, one can see naturalism aspires to denounce the existence of anything that cannot be explained naturally.

Much like science, naturalism uses the predictable patterns of this world to make assumptions or conclusions. One thing that must be understood is that science and naturalism are based upon theories. Mario Alai remarks, “Even if referred just to predictions and technological applications, the success of a theory is a somewhat vague concept, which can be understood in different ways.”⁴⁷ Naturalism can hide behind the fact that it is indeed a theory. When confronted about inconsistencies or indisputable facts, the worldview responds with statements like what is listed above. This is a double standard, and the response from Christianity has not been welcomed the same way that it is from naturalism in the scientific and philosophical world. Further to prove the point, Mario adds,

Besides, in principle the *exact* truth of an empirical consequence transcends our observation abilities: due to the limited precision of instruments and of our own

⁴⁵ Steve Wilkins and Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eighth Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 102-3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁷ Mario Alai, “Levin and Ghins On the “no Miracle” Argument and Naturalism,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Science* 2, no. 1 ((07/13/2011): 86, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1939530205?pg-origsite=summon>.

sense organs, poor environmental conditions, subjective mistakes, etc., our data (the intentional content of our own experience, or the instruments' readings) cannot be expected to make the empirical reality exactly.⁴⁸

In review, readers must see that naturalism's defense to unanswered questions is to blame poor equipment or state that arriving at the exact truth is not a reality. Thus, in this claim, naturalism continues to believe that nothing exists outside of its closed system.

The Hallucination Theory

When naturalism is used to refute the claims of the resurrection, it can take on many different forms. One of those forms is the “hallucination theory.” While this claim may have seen its prime in years past, this thesis will discuss further the resurgence and those who still hold to the hallucination theory. In simplest terms, the hallucination theory claims that the disciples of Jesus never indeed saw Him return from the grave. Those who hold to this belief claim that the disciples merely hallucinated seeing a post-death Jesus. Doug Powell states, “The hallucination theory claims that in the midst of their profound grief, the disciples and other followers of Jesus experience hallucinations in which they saw him raised from the dead”⁴⁹ At face value, this theory seems weak. However, if one looks closer, they begin to see more to this hypothesis than meets the eye. Some have attempted to dismiss this theory by simply stating that mass hallucinations are not probable, and thus the disciples could not have been hallucinating. However, this is a short answer for a much bigger problem. This theory claims that mass hallucinations are possible, but it claims a more plausible case for singular hallucinations. Again, Powell says, “These hallucinations were private in some cases yet corporate in others. In

⁴⁸ Ibid.,

⁴⁹ Doug Powell, *Holman Quick Source Guide to Christian Apologetics* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishersman Reference, 2006), 278.

these corporate hallucinations, Jesus imparted the same information to everyone having the experience.”⁵⁰ So, one can see that simply dismissing mass hallucinations is not enough to appropriately defeat the claims of those who hold to the hallucination theory.

Furthermore, philosophers and teachers like Gerd Lüdemann offer concepts that make believing the vision theory more likely. This once dormant hypothesis is now active and alive yet again. Before this study can debate the validity of the hallucination theory, one must understand the ins and outs of this idea. As noted above, the hallucination theory, or vision theory as some call it, has changed and has different viewpoints in which some may hold. Could it be that the disciples envisioned his return in their guilt, shame, trauma, and remorse for their dead friend and then convinced others to believe what they saw? Is it possible that more than one person experienced the same vision at the same time? These questions must be asked as this study begins to dig into the roots of the hallucination theory.

David Strauss / Subjective Vision Theory

David Strauss is one of the earliest thinkers to describe the resurrection of Christ as a vision. In his book *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, published in 1846, Strauss helped begin an era of Biblical criticism when he chastised the notion of a physical resurrection of Jesus. He claims that the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection cannot be objective but instead subjective. He criticizes Paul’s testimony as being “vague” and not concise enough to trust valuable data. Strauss states, “But in fact the testimony of Paul, which is intrinsically consistent and is otherwise most important, is so general and vague, that taken by itself, it does not carry us

⁵⁰ Ibid.,

beyond the subjective fact, that the disciples were convinced of the resurrection of Jesus....”⁵¹

Therefore, according to Strauss, the disciples were so convinced in what they believed that it influenced Paul’s testimony. Also, the disciple’s claims were subjective to their intentions and what they wanted to believe and not what truly happened. Strauss comments further, “while the more fully detailed narratives of the gospels, in which the resurrection of Jesus appears as an objective fact, are, from the contradictions of which they are convicted, incapable of being used as evidence....”⁵² Again, Strauss argues that Paul’s testimony is worthless, and the testimonies of those in the Gospels support the resurrection of Jesus. According to Strauss, it is the subjective nature in which both Paul’s testimony and the testimonies of the Gospels are discredited. Once more, Strauss asserts, “and in general their account of the life of Jesus after his resurrection is not one which has connection and unity, presenting a clear historical idea of the subject, but a fragmentary compilation, which presents a series of visions, rather than a continuous history.”⁵³ Strauss’ verbiage of visions is his way of highlighting what he believes to be the inconsistencies of the Gospels; Strauss believed that the claims of the Gospels were simply myths and could be explained using nature. This could not be further from the truth. The Gospels may be different from each other but are far from inconsistent. In other words, because each Gospel is not precisely identical with the next, Strauss argues that the resurrection could not have taken place and was a subjective vision. In addition, Strauss claims that the expectancy of the Jews for a Messiah would lead them to believe that Jesus had returned from the grave based

⁵¹ David F. Strauss and George Elliot, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 365, <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/1D7A96D1>.

⁵² Ibid.,

⁵³ Ibid.,

on their hopes for freedom from Roman oppression. This hope and expectancy would cause the disciples to have subjective visions. Strauss states, “After the resurrection of Jesus, those who were friendly to him in Jerusalem being filled with thoughts of resurrection from the dead, these thoughts, together with the circumstance of the graves being found empty, excited in their dreams and visions....”⁵⁴ Moreover, the issue, as Strauss claims, is that because the disciples wanted to believe in a risen Jesus, they convinced themselves into seeing a risen Jesus. This subjective mindset and eagerness to receive their long-desired Messiah was the prescription needed for them to have visions and convince each other of their visions.

Strauss’ view of the hallucination theory sets the basis for all other vision theories to build upon. Without the work laid by Strauss, other scholars’ concepts may look very different. For example, this thesis will discuss Hans Grass, who has a different view of the vision theory than David Strauss in the next paragraph. Moreover, as one looks to establish a leading contributor to the vision theory, one must attribute the hypothesis primarily to David Strauss.

Hans Grass / Objective Vision Theory

Nevertheless, the two main contributors to the objective vision theory are Theodore Keim and Hans Grass, but this study will focus on Grass. Hans Grass’ ideals are prime examples of the hallucination theory as not as simple as some may think. Grass’ thoughts on this topic leave the natural realm behind and attempt to allow divine intervention into the vision hypothesis. Unlike Strauss, Grass moves from a subjective vision to an objective vision. In other words, these visions had a purpose and were not the cause of random chance but intentionally caused by God. Dr. Habermas describes Grass’ thoughts as, “This view is not another naturalistic alternative, but an appeal beyond nature, usually in terms of the eternal or eschatological realm

⁵⁴ Ibid.,

breaking into time.”⁵⁵ Again, unlike the subjective vision theory of Strauss, the objective vision theory allows a more supernatural approach to the post-death sightings of Jesus. In further detail, Dr. Habermas asserts, “For example, Hans Grass concludes that the apostles actually saw Jesus. The quite literal (though noncorporeal) resurrection appearances were of divine origin, imparting the truth of the living Lord.”⁵⁶ However, while this theory may sound more on the side of orthodox Christianity than the previous, this is not the case. Without a physical resurrection of Jesus, the Christian faith is still left without a true Messiah. Christianity claims that Jesus was resurrected from the dead and did not appear in objective visions. While this is not the time to critique the objective vision theory, it is essential to note the differences in ideologies and understand that the vision theory, no matter its form, is still in opposition with Christianity. One cannot dismiss Grass’ and Keim’s hypothesis with the rebuttal of mass hallucinations. This is why it is vital for students of the Word to know the differences in both the subjective vision theory and the objective vision theory. Either hypothesis must be addressed differently since each view is drastically different from the other.

Gerd Lüdemann

Gerd Lüdemann is one of the leading teachers of the hallucination theory in the modern world. Lüdemann is known for his dogmatic approach to theology and his cold criticisms of the historicity of Christ’s resurrection. In an interview with Luís F. Rodrigues, Lüdemann reveals his true thoughts on the resurrection of Christ. When asked about his beliefs on the resurrection, Lüdemann states,

⁵⁵Dr. Gary Habermas and R. Douglas Geivett, *In Defense of Miracles* (n.p.: WordSearch, n.d.), 272, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/library/title/005811031>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

Well, I'm reading the stories, the texts about the Resurrection we have in the New Testament, and I see that they are contradictory. On the one hand they describe the visionary experience—Paul says, “I saw, I saw, I saw, something appeared to me”—and this visionary experience then is connected in the Gospels with the discovery of an empty tomb. Thus, the historical character of the Resurrection is defended, and that's a contradiction. I had to explain to myself how the rise in the Resurrection belief came into existence and my answer was, to begin with, hallucination. Well, I now avoid hallucinations. I describe it as a vision, a visionary experience. From that visionary experience, the disciples concluded that the Resurrection had happened.⁵⁷

What makes Lüdemann a leading voice in the resurrection is that he was a believer and a very educated New Testament scholar. According to Lüdemann, the post-death appearances of Jesus were only visions, and they originated with both Peter and Paul, who then acted as the building blocks for future claims about sightings of a resurrected Jesus. Lüdemann states, “The critical investigation of the various resurrection appearances produced a surprising result: they can all be explained as visions. Here those of Peter and Paul are to be termed the original visions because they took place without external catalysts.”⁵⁸ Thus, all further Easter claims can be, according to Lüdemann, traced back to the two original visions of Peter and Paul.

Further, Lüdemann explains, Peter received the first vision, which is interpreted psychologically as failed mourning and overcoming a severe guilt complex. He had 'sinned' against Jesus by denying him. However, under the impact of Jesus' preaching and death, through an appearance of the 'Risen Christ,' Peter once again referred to himself God's word of

⁵⁷ Luís F. Rodrigues, *Open Questions Diverse Thinkers Discuss God, Religion, and Faith: Diverse Thinkers Discuss God, Religion, and Faith* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 194, <https://web-b-ebcsohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzMzMTkxMI9fQU41?sid=>.

⁵⁸ Gerd Lüdemann and Alf òOzen, *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 129, <https://web-b-ebcsohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzQxMDgwX19BTg2?sid=>.

forgiveness which was already present in the activity of Jesus, this time in its profound clarity.⁵⁹

In other words, Peter only had the vision he did because he felt guilty for denying Christ and suffered mental trauma from his actions. Thus, resulting in a psychological vision of his friend Jesus. Lüdemann goes on to critique the claims of Paul and his vision as well. Moreover, Lüdemann inserts,

This first vision became the initial spark which prompted the further series of visions mentioned by Paul in I Cor.15. The subsequent appearance of Christ can be explained as mass psychoses (or mass hysteria). This phenomenon was first made possible by Peter's vision. By contrast, Paul's appearance did not depend on Peter's vision, since here it was not a follower but an 'enemy' of Jesus or his supporters who was affected. Here Paul's biography gives strong indications that his vision of Christ is to be explained psychologically as an overcoming of a smoldering 'Christ complex' which led to severe inner (unconscious) conflicts in him and finally released itself in this vision.⁶⁰

Here one can see the culprit to the dilemma of resurrection according to Lüdemann's theology.

Upon his comments of the resurrection Lüdemann also begins to challenge the authority of God to give visions and proclaims that God cannot be in control in the way that Christians believe Him to be.

All the information above has been laid out to provide a foundation for which one can observe the hallucination or vision theory fleshed out in our modern-day world that they now live. Again, the vision theory that was once deemed unreasonable is now active and alive once more. When philosophers or teachers like Gerd Lüdemann step up to debate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and hold to the claims of physiological illness as it relates to the disciples, Christians may find themselves ill-equipped to combat those very claims.

⁵⁹ Ibid,129-130.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 130.

If Lüdemann is right and Peter and Paul both influenced thousands to believe their mental illness, then Christianity as believers know it is flawed and failed. When focusing on the hallucination theory, readers begin to see the roots of naturalism appear. As mentioned previously, naturalism is a closed system in which nothing can exist outside of it since there is nothing outside of the system. Lüdemann's statements claim that nothing miraculous could have happened after Christ's death, and natural causes explain the sightings of the post-death Jesus. As a historian, Lüdemann casts out the possibility of the miraculous. He will not even entertain the notion of such things potentially happening and claims that history proves that miracles do not exist. This creates a closed-minded study that lives in a one-sided viewpoint; without first having the root of naturalism, he holds the vision theory would not exist. The vision theory provides the ground for those who disbelieve the resurrection to chalk the claims of the disciples and those associated with the disciples up to a simple mental illness formed out of guilt. Admittedly, upon first glance, the vision theory does provide a feeling of common sense. Many have experienced guilt and know the effects of knowing they did something they should not have done and fantasized about themselves having never done the thing they did.

Further, for Peter, who denied his friend, and Paul, who put many Christians to death, it makes sense for them to feel guilt for their actions, both of which were very traumatic things in their lives. Still, the question must be asked, and will be examined later in this thesis, "are visions enough to convince an entire culture of people?" Lüdemann would claim that the culture where the disciples lived was eager to accept the disciples' visions as accurate. Nevertheless, another question must be asked, "was the Jewish culture that receptive to claims of visions and dreams?" Again, these questions will be answered further later, but they must be asked now. Nonetheless, scholars like Lüdemann are paving the way for the hallucination/vision theory to

emerge back onto the philosophical scene concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This theory is not dead but very much alive and deserves proper study and our proper attention.

Objective and Subjective Theories Today

As mentioned previously, many Christian scholars would not take the time to debate the vision theory because they assume that the concept of mass hallucinations defeats the vision theorist's view. However, with the evidence listed above, one can see that the hallucination theory is indeed more profound than most may think. In this portion of reflection, this thesis will show how both sides of the vision theory are separate groups of ideals on their own. The subjective vision theorists claim that nothing supernatural could have happened at the resurrection, and both Peter and Paul both suffered trauma and, due to that trauma, had visions of their friend Jesus risen from the grave. On the flip side, the objective vision theorists claim that the disciples did see Jesus in these visions and that the visions were objective because Jesus used them to speak to His followers. Regardless of which view is considered, readers must note that both are in disagreement with orthodox Christianity. Also, both views are now playing roles in today's society. Subjective vision believers like Gerd Lüdemann are pushing their views and beliefs every day.

In contrast, Hans Grass's objective vision theory was reestablished in the late twentieth century and is still used today. The objective vision theory is often grouped into a category known as "theistic theories." Theistic theories allow the criticism of events like the resurrection but do not take the event entirely away from the actions of God. Nevertheless, even theistic theories like the objective vision hypothesis have their roots in naturalism. Though Grass may claim God sent these visions to the disciples, he negates the possibility of the miraculous. By stating that Christ did not rise physically and there must be another explanation and the

explanation is something such as a vision, even if that vision is from God, objective vision theorists allow the root of naturalism into their ideals. Moreover, today's world lives in an era where the miraculous must be explained by something natural or limited to how much of the supernatural is allowed to exist. Regardless of which vision theory one finds themselves facing, they must know the depth in which the hypothesis goes and understand the unique differences of each theory.

Chapter 3: The Solution

For the remainder of this work, this project will discuss the flaws of the hallucination theory. This study will examine the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ and determine if a solution can be made. All previous questions that were left unanswered will be addressed at length in this portion as well. This section serves as the platform for a strong defense for the resurrection against the hallucination theories.

A Critique of the Hallucination Theories

Instead of starting with the root of naturalism, this work will start directly with the main issue, the hallucination/vision theories. To critique the vision theories adequately, one must address the concept of post-death hallucinations of Jesus as a whole and individually as they respect the different stances on how said visions occur.

Starting with the subjective vision stance of the hallucination theory, one must begin with a proper definition of hallucinations before they can adequately dive into the issues of this theory. Webster's dictionary defines a hallucination as "a sensory perception (such as a visual image or a sound) that occurs in the absence of an actual external stimulus and usually arises from neurological disturbance (such as that associated with delirium tremens, schizophrenia,

Parkinson's disease, or narcolepsy) or in response to drugs (such as LSD or phencyclidine).”⁶¹

The subjective theory bases its claim that the disciples were facing trauma from the loss of their friend Jesus and believed to see Him return from the grave but only did so due to psychological trauma. The death of Christ was a traumatic event for sure, but in a culture ruled by Roman oppression, would not a crucifixion be commonplace? Would the sight of a crucifixion be as traumatizing to the disciples as one would think if they have potentially witnessed others? Also, the visions the disciples had would have had to be very convincing for them to cause others to believe what they saw. Speaking on hallucinations in his book titled *Perception, Hallucination, and Illusion*, William Fish states,

As we have seen, a mental event qualifies as a hallucination only inasmuch as it has the same kinds of cognitive effects that a particular veridical perception would have had, so it would be misguided to demand any further explanation of why hallucinations, considered as a mental kind, have effects like those of veridical perceptions.⁶²

This quote serves to provide a basis for what constitutes a hallucination. If Peter and Paul both had hallucinations or visions, those hallucinations would have had effects that veridical perception would convey. In other words, a veridical perception appears to be authentic and is often perceived as authentic in every sense. John R. Searle explains veridical perception as, “Just as when I have a belief, it seems to me that the belief represents how things are in the world when I have a visual experience, it seems to me that the world is the way that I am perceiving it

⁶¹ Merriam Webster, “Hallucination,” Merriam Webster.com, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hallucination>.

⁶² William Fish, *Perception, Hallucination, and Illusion* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2009), under “4.10,” <https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195381>.

as being.”⁶³ Unfortunately, no one living today was there to examine Peter or Paul to determine whether or not they had visions and if their mental state appeared healthy. So, scholars must go off the information presented. The visions theories attempt to say that Peter and Paul both suffered these hallucinations but were completely healthy and fully operable people capable of leading a religious revolution. Would not they have had known issues aside from their claims of seeing a risen Jesus? For example, would those closest to Peter have previously witnessed or heard him make claims about things that were not true? Would Paul, a leader in the Jewish faith, not have shown signs of mental disruption in his life?

Still, the questions must be asked about what exactly could have triggered these two men to have their hallucinations. Regarding hallucinations, André Aleman and Frank Larøi assert, “In summary, although the results from Structural MRI studies are not entirely unequivocal, the vast majority of findings strongly suggest that reducing gray matter volumes in the temporal lobe are associated with auditory hallucinations.”⁶⁴ Further, the claim is that the disciples not only heard Jesus but that they saw Him post-death. Nevertheless, the information listed above shows that there is typically a deficiency in gray matter for an auditory hallucination to occur. In addition, Aleman and Larøi comment, “Volume reductions in the prefrontal and cerebellar cortices have also been reported and may be associated with impairments in monitoring or awareness and volition of internal speech.”⁶⁵

⁶³ John R. Searle, *Seeing Things as They Are: A Theory of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online University Press USA, 2015), under “Chapter 2,” <https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199385>.

⁶⁴ André Aleman and Frank Larøi, *The science of idiosyncratic perception*. (American Psychological Association: Washington, 2008), 157, <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/results?vid=0&sid=a76cb5e1-4262-476c-8fbc-e27d>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.,

Furthermore, this proves the following point to claim the disciples were hallucinating assumes they suffered mental illness. Their mental illness with the reduction of gray or white brain matter would reveal itself with the claim of seeing a risen Jesus but in other areas of their life. Remember, Jesus and His disciples lived, traveled, ate, and spent much time together. Would not one of them have noticed something was wrong with Peter? Nevertheless, of course, that is if this study holds to the notion that Peter was the original contributor to the resurrection claims of Jesus. Thus, to claim that the disciples hallucinated seeing Jesus is a substantial claim with truly little evidence, even if one is to say that the disciples subjective thinking caused them in their grief to see a post-death Jesus that is not enough to speak on the psyche of the apostles.

In the same criticism of the hallucination/vision theory, this thesis will examine human behavior. It is said, as mentioned above, that the subjective desires of the disciples caused them to see a resurrected Jesus in their grief and trauma for watching their friend die. The questions asked are grief or trauma or triggers enough to constitute radical life change for the disciples? What then is the motivation for their claims? Rolf Reber remarks, “Human behavior is more complex than simple responses to triggers.”⁶⁶ Just because the disciples were triggered by the horrors of seeing Jesus suffer on a cross does not mean they assumedly had a vision and then convinced their friends of their vision. Before this case can continue to comment further on the mental status of the disciples, readers must look at one of the most famous resurrection appearances in the Bible. John 20:19 states, “In the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews. Then

⁶⁶ Rolf Reber, *Psychology the Basics* (London: Routledge, 2019), 41, <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/books/psychology-rolf-reber/10.4324/9781315148045>.

Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you!’”⁶⁷ Notice the detail in the passage where John reveals that the disciples had “the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews.” Does this sound like a group of people who were subjectively expecting their Messiah to appear?

On the contrary, this group of men were afraid for their lives and had lost hope in ever seeing their Savior again. Remember that many of the disciples did not believe that Jesus would return because their idea of a Messiah was different from the life Jesus lived. Also, why would John report a sighting of Jesus when Peter was the one who had the vision, according to some skeptics? The continuous inconsistency of the hallucination/vision theory is genuinely remarkable.

At this time, this project has only surveyed the inconstancy of just the subjective vision theory, and already the fallacious claims of this hypothesis can be seen as shallow. Not only does the psychological evidence stand against the claims of the subjective vision theory, but so do the claims of the disciples. The distress the disciples faced with the loss of Jesus is not enough to constitute a mental disorder. Reber mentions, “Clinicians have to distinguish distress that indicates psychological disorder from distress that is normal, such as intense grief after the death of a parent, spouse, or child. In this case, grief is not seen as abnormal unless it worsens over time, leading to feelings of emptiness, avoidance of social relationships, and ultimately depression.”⁶⁸ From the writings of the apostles, readers see anything but avoidance of social

⁶⁷ John 20:19(HCSB).

⁶⁸ Rolf Reber, *Psychology the Basics* (London: Routledge, 2019), 137, <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/books/psychology-rolf-reber/10.4324/9781315148045>.

relationships and depression! One can see them travel and spread the Good News of Jesus' resurrection. Students can see the disciples filled with joy during their persecution.

Further, if these actions consider the information listed above, can observers say that the disciples were indeed mentally distressed? This thesis believes that to say the disciples were mentally distressed or subjectively cast their hopes and desires into a vision/hallucination and to carry that delusion into certain death is an insult to the disciples. In this section, readers have seen the shortcomings of the subjective vision theory but later will see the issues of the objective vision theory.

Mass Hallucinations

To be clear about the topic of mass hallucinations, one must understand that this is utter ridiculousness. Still, without making *a priori* remarks about the possibility of mass hallucinations, readers must examine the evidence to conclude correctly. When the information above is observed, readers can begin to see the issue of just one person having a significant enough hallucination to convince them to devote their lives to said hallucination. Therefore, would not the task be much more significant for a mass hallucination? Still, it is interesting to note that when the topic of hallucinations, particularly mass hallucinations, is brought up, it is as if those said hallucinations fit the narrative of the one bringing them up. To elaborate further, Howard Robinson states,

Philosophers are (mainly, at least) interested in what I shall call 'philosophers' hallucinations.' These are not, as far as we know, hallucinations as they actually occur; they are, it is argued, the hallucinations that would occur if the perceptual system and brain were stimulated in just the way they are stimulated in genuine perception, but directly and not by the usual external objects. This would give, it is supposed, a hallucination indistinguishable to the subject from the

corresponding perception, which is not the case, at least in general, for hallucinations as they actually occur.⁶⁹

Moreover, the type of hallucination needed for the disciples to have all had the same vision is as Robinson categorizes a “philosophers’ hallucination.” This hallucination has to fit all the right circumstances and work out in a hypothetical realm that does not ever truly interact with the real world. One can hypothetically speak about the apostles all having a mass hallucination, but the reality is that hallucinations do not operate in that manner. If readers look again to the Gospels and the Epistles of the New Testament, they can see a group of men and women who lived beyond the trauma of seeing their friend Jesus crucified. If this group of people was suffering from a mass hallucination based on the trauma they witnessed, would their lives not reflect a sense of paranoia? Peter Bullimore says, “Our mind has the ability to create thoughts and ideas that we do not fully understand, thus stopping us from seeing the world around us as we should. This often creates suspicion and fear, commonly known as paranoia.”⁷⁰ This thesis highlights the quote from Bullimore for two reasons. First, if the disciples had all hallucinated, they would be living a life of paranoia. Second, in Marius Romme and Sandra Escher’s book *Psychosis as a Personal Crisis: An Experience-Base Approach*, Peter Bullimore recounts a horrifying story of his past. In his chapter, Bullimore mentions being abused physically, mentally, and sexually by a babysitter from the age of five till thirteen. He began to hear voices, and the voices would tell him to do horrible things, typically acts of violence. His life of paranoia eventually impacted his marriage and his home life with his children. This information is vital because if the disciples

⁶⁹ Fiona Macpherson et al., *Hallucination: Philosophy and Psychology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 313, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=3339663&ppg=15>.

⁷⁰ Marius Romme and Sandra Escher, *Psychosis as a Personal Crisis an Experience-Based Approach: An Experience-Based Approach* (Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 74, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=957449&ppg=7>.

were genuinely disturbed like Bullimore following their traumatic experiences, would they have gone out to do the great deeds they did? Would they be interested in feeding the poor and risking their own lives for the sake of the delusion? The voices that Bullimore heard usually were out of self-preservation. His paranoia was working to keep him from being harmed again, resulting in him hurting others first! The disciples went out into all the surrounding nations and ministered to the people. That does not sound like paranoia or people suffering from hallucinations. The simple fact is that there is no possible way the disciples could have all had a mass hallucination from trauma for them to all go out and serve those around them and help people in need.

Are Philosophers and Theologians Psychologists?

The question this thesis desires to pose at this time is, “are philosophers and theologians psychologists?” The question is asked because who are philosophers and theologians to comment on subjects related to psychology? Reporting that the disciples all had hallucinations is a claim that must be made by qualified personnel. Still, this does not mean that someone cannot study and obtain a good base knowledge on a topic and then make assumptions in the field of that particular study. However, how qualified is this person? How qualified was David Strauss to proclaim anything about the mental status of the disciples? Strauss was simply a protestant theologian, and if he had made a claim in the realm of theology, he would have more credence to do so.

Nevertheless, the question that must be answered is if he was qualified to comment on the mental psyche of the apostles. The same can be said of Hans Grass and Gerd Lüdemann. Does either of these men possess the proper education or training to comment on things of psychological nature? If a psychologist were to make an assumption about the nature of God or

comment on anything in the theological realm, many would be quick to call into attention the qualifications of the psychologists. The same is said about many other fields of study if one were to make comments outside their field of practice. Therefore, are those who have created and publicized the hallucination/vision theory qualified to teach such a hypothesis? None of these scholars are qualified in the realm of psychology but have made statements about psychology. Even if one were qualified, there would be no way for them to test this hypothesis logistically. Scholars must hold to the integrity of their fields of study and respect the work of other scholars from different fields of study. Much can be said about the lack of respect for the field of psychology when theologians make psychological claims to push their theological agendas. There is no difference in theologians improperly using psychology than a customer at a mechanic shop telling the other customers they were the ones who fixed their car, not the mechanic. The point is, one cannot use the work of others for their agendas, especially when they are not qualified in the realm of the other person's study. As students of any practice, one can report the information from other fields of study, but he/she cannot and should not begin to make claims that they are not qualified to make.

Brief Argument Against Hume's Stance on Miracles

While this thesis is not intended to defend miracles as a whole, it is intended to defend the greatest miracle of all. That miracle is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Time must be spent briefly defending the existence of miracles before this work can adequately defend the resurrection. As mentioned previously, Hume believes a miracle is something that "violates" the natural law of the world. One of the biggest problems with Hume's statements on miracles is that he denies the possibility of any evidence ever coming to light in support of miracles. This is an *a priori* argument that must be addressed. Dr. Habermas states, "Additionally, he insists that

no quantity of evidence could ever establish a miracle. This is anything but an unbiased look at the facts.”⁷¹ As presented earlier in chapter one, readers see plenty of evidence to support miracles not just from a religious standpoint but also from a historical stance.

Further commenting on Hume’s argument, Dr. Habermas says, “Hume commits several logical fallacies, especially regarding his definition of miracles and his assumption that human experience always favors the law of nature and opposes the miraculous”⁷² Hume believed that human experience is the key which locks the door to the possibility of miracles. In other words, as humans experience things, they learn about the natural order of this world and see that the miraculous is not possible. Continuing his remarks on Hume, Habermas states, “For instance, he defines these occurrences in such a way that, from the very outset, they cannot even be termed miracles unless all human experience opposes them!”⁷³ Hume’s argument is structured in a way to rig or sabotage all evidence that supports miraculous claims. If the evidence does not fit his narrative, he shuts down the probability of that evidence supporting miracles. Again, this is an *a priori* argument and not a scholarly argument but one that is far too firm in its ideals. The issue against Hume’s argument and all other arguments like Hume’s is that they are circular. They never lead to any significant substance or resolve the issue at hand. The argument dances around the issue and claims that miracles are impossible without accurate substantive data to prove this assumption. In order for Hume’s argument to work, everything must be the same across natural law. In other words, there are no irregularities in nature, and things are always the same. Hume

⁷¹ Dr. Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus* (n.p.: WordSearch, n.d.), 5, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/workspace>.

⁷² Ibid.,

⁷³ Ibid.,

does not allow the possibility of probability into his argument, which leads to the downfall of this argument.

C.S. Lewis states, “the whole idea of Probability (As Hume understands it) depends on the principle of the Uniformity of Nature. Unless Nature always goes in the same way, the fact that a thing happened ten million times would not make it a whit more probable that it happen again. How do we know the Uniformity of Nature?”⁷⁴ How can Hume, and others like him, prove that gravity will always act in the same manner it does at this moment? How can naturalists determine that the sun will always rise from the east? Who is to say that in the blink of an eye, things do not change, and the observed law of nature changes? Lewis comments further on Hume’s argument, “Now of course we must agree with Hume that is there is absolutely ‘uniform experience’ against miracles if in other words, they have never happened, why then they never have.”⁷⁵ If the evidence were to be genuinely uniform and one could guarantee that miracles never happened because nature is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow then he/she would have to accept Hume’s ideas.

Nonetheless, this is not the case, and the evidence is not uniform. Finally, Lewis states, “Unfortunately, we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.”⁷⁶ Indeed, Lewis’ comments are valid as naturalism and Hume’s arguments argue in a circular manner. This is because

⁷⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Harper Collins e-book, 2009), 114, <https://books.apple.com/book/id360639700>.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*,

arguments from naturalism tend to be self-defeating in nature. The section to follow will observe the significance of why the resurrection is essential to Christianity.

No Resurrection = No Christianity

The argument against the hallucination/vision theory is significant because if Jesus did not physically return from the grave, then the claims of the Bible are void. When readers look to the early church, they can see the steadfast belief of early Christians that has shaped the Church and Christianity today. Graeme Smith concludes, “The early church did not believe in a Jesus who was simply a great teacher, giving them wisdom to live by; nor in a Jesus who simply lived a life of love and holiness, setting them an example to follow; nor in a Jesus who simply died a martyr for what was right.”⁷⁷ Without the body of Jesus being fully resurrected from the grave, Jesus cannot be considered victorious over death. If Jesus did not return from death, He simply becomes another prophet or good teacher who inspired the masses. If this thesis cannot defend against the hallucination theory, be it the subjective or objective or any other form of this theory, then it cannot pretend Christianity’s claims of Jesus’ resurrection are valid. If Christianity’s claims for Christ’s post-death return are false, Christians believe in a flawed religious system that promises believers nothing. Some would claim that the vision theories have no actual argument against the resurrection of Jesus, then they are helping to defeat the resurrection claims of Christianity ultimately. This is true because if the Church continues to turn a blind eye to the vision theories of the past, they will find themselves defenseless in the future when these theories present themselves full force again.

⁷⁷ Graeme Smith, *Was the Tomb Empty? A Lawyer Weighs the Evidence for the Resurrection* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2014), 118, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=5633387&ppg=5>.

The Disciple's Claims

Previously, this thesis reviewed the claims of the disciples. However, this study will examine the fine details of the disciple's claims and see how they are confirmed in this section. Again, the very credibility of their claims is at stake, and the goal is to defend the disciple's claims at all costs. So, as one begins to look at the disciples' claims, he/she must acknowledge that the disciples' claims are those made by the very first disciples. These are not claims made hundreds of years later by followers who never met Jesus but people who were there for all of these events as they unfolded. From an article in *The American Journal of Theology* from 1909, Shirley Jackson Case remarks,

The first Christians confidently believed that Jesus really died, was truly buried, and actually arose from the dead and appeared to his disciples. The testimony of Paul alone is sufficient to convince us, beyond any reasonable doubt, that this was commonly accepted opinion in his day—an opinion at that time supported by the highest authority imaginable, the eyewitnesses themselves.⁷⁸

As Case highlights, the opinion of the resurrected Jesus was supported by none other than the eyewitnesses. One would have reasonable doubt if he/she found these claims were created decades after the death of Christ, but that is simply not the case. Further, these claims were made by the disciples who were present during the unfolding of these events. While this may seem like an unnecessary highlight, it is part of the process when proving the resurrection of Christ.

One of the most remarkable displays for the truth of the resurrection is the beliefs the original disciples held regarding the resurrection. The first disciples believed what they saw! This proof is seen in many different ways. If one investigates the stories and accounts of Jesus'

⁷⁸ Shirley Jackson Case, "The Resurrection Faith of the First Disciples." *The American Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (1909): 169-92. Accessed April 1, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3155189>.

death and the actions of the apostles right before and after the death of Jesus, he/she sees that when times got hard, the disciples all abandoned Jesus. These men closest to Jesus, who walked, talked, ate, and traveled with Jesus, all deserted Him when the fear of harm came their way. So, what caused them to have a sudden change of heart? Would it be that they saw Jesus return from the grave? Indeed, this is the case. The disciples saw the post risen Jesus and believed in what they saw! Dickinson says, “Their momentous change of mind is our first supporting evidence that the disciples did indeed come to believe in Jesus’s resurrection—for apart from believing in Jesus’s resurrection, the disciples’ belief in Jesus as the Messiah cannot be explained.”⁷⁹ How can one know the disciples truly believed what they saw? Readers can see this by looking into what the disciples did with the rest of their lives.

The disciples believed in what they had seen so much that they were willing to face whatever harm may befall them. Again, Dickinson argues, “Tellingly, they came to preach this despite the tremendous risk to their own well-being, including threats, imprisonment, beatings, murder attempts, and in most cases, violent death.”⁸⁰ Who would be willing to die for something they did not wholeheartedly believe? These men could have very quickly gone back to their homes and their places of business and moved on with their lives, but their experiences with the post-death Jesus changed the course of their lives forever. This evidence is one of the greatest proofs in combatting the vision theories. One might claim that it is the visions they saw and believed, but this is where this study must note again that if the disciples were suffering from the mental trauma, that trauma would show in other areas of their lives. They would not have had the vast influence they did with the people they met. While advances in modern psychology

⁷⁹ Dr. Travis Dickinson, Dr. Keith Loftin, and Dr. Paul Gould, *Stand Firm: Apologetics and the Brilliance of the Gospel* (n.p.: B&H Publishing Group, n.d.), 118, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/workspace>.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 117.

allow us to notice signs of mental trauma more easily, now does not mean that the people of the disciple's day could not recognize when something was wrong with another person. Therefore, again this thesis must conclude that the disciples believed what they saw to the point that they were willing to lay down their own lives for the cause.

Briefly, the question must be asked, "what is the gain?" What would the disciples have to gain from making false claims about what they did or did not see? None of these men became rich or rulers of kingdoms due to their claims, so what benefit would they have in conjuring a false story? This is an essential question in which must be addressed. For example, if Peter had a hallucination, all the other disciples knew Peter to be mentally ill but chose to capitalize on his mental illness. What would they gain? Death? Persecution? Also, what gain would James, the brother of Jesus, have for joining a belief he once deemed to be a lie? There is no rational reason why the disciples would lie about their sightings of a post-death Jesus and then carry out their work as disciples into the surrounding nations. J.P Moreland makes an interesting observation and states, "Remember, they believed in the existence of hell and the God of the Old Testament, and they were not about to lie in this way. People often die for mistaken beliefs, but that is not what we have here. We have people dying for something they saw, heard, and physically touched. That's very different."⁸¹ This exciting detail highlights another reason why the disciples would not lie or quickly believe something they were unsure of being true. For the disciples, their eternity was in the balance for their actions, so they knew they had to be honest about what they saw.

⁸¹ J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind, Revised and Updated* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 215, <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com/workspace>.

As mentioned previously, the disciples believed in what they saw so much that they willingly laid down their lives for their beliefs. If Jesus' post-death sightings were only the results of a few hallucinations, would the rest of the disciples still be willing to die for the cause? The simple and obvious answer is no. If one person were to tell another person of a dream or a vision, it would not be uncommon for the other person to deny the plausibility of their claims. Sean McDowell states,

We can count the deaths of the apostles as evidence for the sincerity of their convictions about the risen Jesus only if the apostles had a *resurrection* faith. That is, (1) the resurrection must lie at the heart of the earliest Christian *kerygma*, and (2) the faith of the disciples must be based upon their belief that Jesus truly rose from the grave.⁸²

Therefore, the driving force behind the disciples' actions had to be that they believed what they saw and were willing to die. Some may say that, of course, they believed what they saw because they were hallucinating. Could one who suffers from such mental illness, as asked earlier, lead the most significant religious revolution this world has ever seen? While modern theologians and philosophers try to find a natural reason for what the disciples saw, they lose practicality. Further, C. Bernard Ruffin comments,

If the modern theologians are correct, the astounding miracle is how from such a crazy jumble of personal idiosyncrasies, from such a confusion of primitive superstition, from a class of men so stupid and ignorant that they were in 'sheer ignorance' of a man, Jesus, who lived in their very midst, could come a Church for which millions have willingly given their lives, a Church which won over the imperial might of Rome, a Church which all concerted powers of hell in twenty centuries have not been able to destroy.⁸³

⁸² Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles* (London: Routledge, 2016), 17, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4324/9781315558196>.

⁸³ C. Bernard Ruffin, *The Twelve: The Lives of the Apostles After Calvary* (n.p.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1998), 104, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5197560>.

One must conclude that the disciples were genuinely seeing Jesus resurrected after His crucifixion was enough to inspire these men to lay down their lives and inspire others to do the same. Therefore, the section to follow this study will examine the evidence for the physical resurrection of Jesus as this is one of the most important details surrounding the resurrection.

Jesus' Physical Resurrection

As mentioned previously, the objective vision hypothesis believes that Jesus returned to His disciples but only in a vision. In other words, He never physically rose from the grave but only returned from death in spirit form. If Jesus was not resurrected, then there is no Christianity, and the same can be said for His physical resurrection. If Jesus did not return physically, then the claims of Christianity are false. While it may seem that the objective vision theory meets the Christian halfway, the reality is that the two can be no further apart. In other words, if Christians hold to the notion that Jesus only visited His disciples in spirit form through these said visions orchestrated by God Himself, they cancel out all the previous claims of defeating the grave and being resurrected. The solution to this problem is simple. Christianity must prove that Jesus experienced a physical resurrection. While the event in and of itself is indeed supernatural, Christianity must hold to the fact that Jesus returned physically and not spiritually. If one looks at the testimonies of the disciples, he/she can tell by the nature of their confessions that Jesus appeared physically. Michael L. Brown says, "This was not a matter of cognitive dissonance or of failed prophecy syndrome. This was a matter of life from the dead, of literal physical resurrection, right in front of their eyes. And they met with their Master and King day after day for a period of forty days. The doubts were gone, and the questions erased.

He is risen, indeed!”⁸⁴ This is interesting because the disciples were not only just seeing Jesus but also touching Jesus. As the objective vision theory suggests, how can they have touched Jesus if He was only there in spirit form? Matthew Levering remarks, “The ‘confessional’ testimonies to Jesus’ Resurrection condense the elements that appear in more detail in the ‘narrative’ testimonies. The narratives testify that Jesus appeared in his risen flesh in Jerusalem and in Galilee.”⁸⁵ If one is to look to the Gospels, he/she can see the claims of Jesus eating with the disciples after his death in both Luke and John. John 21:12-14 proclaims, “Jesus said, ‘Come and eat!’ But none of the disciples dared ask who he was. They knew he was the Lord. Jesus took the bread in his hands and gave some of it to his disciples. He did the same with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from death.”⁸⁶

The account in Luke mentions a different occasion in which Jesus appears to the disciples, and they accuse Him of being a ghost, but Jesus reassures them that a ghost cannot be touched and allows them to feel His body and see the holes in His hands. Still, Luke 24:41-43 states, “But while they still were amazed and unbelieving because of their joy, He asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ So, they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and He took it and ate in their presence.”⁸⁷ Continuing the proof of Jesus' physical resurrection, one must be interested in the statements about His hands. This is important because these hands would have

⁸⁴ Michael L. Brown, *Resurrection: Investigating a Rabbi from Brooklyn, a Preacher from Galilee, and an Event That Changed the World* (Lake Mary: Charisma House, 2020), 119, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=6153068&ppg=11>.

⁸⁵ Matthew Levering, *The Crucifixion of Jesus, Completely Revised and Expanded: A Forensic Inquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press USA, 2019), 175, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5720905>.

⁸⁶ John 21:12-14.

⁸⁷ Luke 24:41-43.

undergone much physical trauma, and the disciples would be familiar with the type of hand wounds inflicted during a crucifixion. In a forensic study of the crucifixion of Jesus, Frederick Zugibe comments, “A large, square, spikelike, rusty nail made of iron and measuring about 12 centimeters (about 4 ¾ inches) was nailed through the palm of the hand just below the bulge at the base of the thumb and into the crosspiece.”⁸⁸ Regardless of where one believes the wounds of Jesus’ hands, this case has a testimony of the disciples validating those very wounds! John depicts an instance where the apostle Thomas denies the resurrection of Jesus and proclaims that he would need to see the wounds in his master’s hands before he could believe the news. John 20:27 states, “Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and observe My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Don't be an unbeliever, but a believer.”⁸⁹

Therefore, this thesis can lay the claims of the objective vision theory to rest with the information presented. It is evident that Jesus returned in a physical form and dwelt amongst his friends. Moreover, Merrill C. Tenney comments on the disciples Thomas’s doubt, “The reversal of the critical attitude of the disciples, and especially of Thomas, obviates the objection that the resurrection faith was a product of hallucination or gullibility.”⁹⁰ If scholars take a moment and observe that the evidence shows many of the disciples, especially Thomas, were not quick to believe the claims of a risen Jesus. Further, if one of the disciples were to hallucinate, it seems likely the other simply would be slow to follow. Again, Tenney comments, “the disciples were

⁸⁸ Frederick Zugibe, *The Crucifixion of Jesus, Completely Revised and Expanded: A Forensic Inquiry* (New York: M. Evans & Company., 2005), 66, <https://web-a-ebsohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzQ4MjMwNi9fQU41?sid>.

⁸⁹ John 20:27.

⁹⁰ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection* (Wheaton: Barakaldo Books, 2020), 98, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=6223875&ppg=13>.

in no mood to accept statements without investigation, and they were compelled to lay aside fixed prejudices in order to believe in so stupendous a miracle. Their final commitment to the proposition that Jesus arose from the dead was founded on incontrovertible experience.”⁹¹ Still, another factor that proves the physical resurrection of Jesus is the fact that His tomb was empty. The section to follow this thesis will discuss this concept at length.

The Empty Tomb

Aside from scholars' claims against mass hallucinations, one of the biggest arguments against the hallucination theory is that the tomb of Jesus Christ was empty. While this thesis can argue conspiracies (that the disciples stole the body and many other similar ideas), the fact remains that the body of Jesus Christ was not in the tomb. If the disciples were having subjective visions, then the solution to this would be to find the corpse of Jesus. Undoubtedly, if the disciples had these visions, then the body could be produced and should have been produced by now. It is known that Jesus would have been buried in this tomb because he was a Jewish man, and the Jewish people have stringent burial customs. Craig A. Evans remarks, “The burial of Jesus, in light of Jewish tradition, is almost certain for at least two reasons: (1) strong Jewish concerns that the dead—righteous or unrighteous—be properly buried; and (2) desire to avoid defilement of the land.”⁹² Therefore, the death of Jesus would have been an issue that must be addressed whether or not one supported Him or His beliefs. Jews would not be careless with handling Jesus' body because it was their custom to be very careful with their dealings with the dead. Still, some would claim that Jesus might have been buried, but the tomb in which He was

⁹¹ Ibid.,

⁹² Craig A. Evans, “Jewish Burial Traditions and the Resurrection of Jesus,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3, no. 2 (January 1, 2005): 233, <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=31af611c-56ba-4d3c-81bc-2f7632295a57%40sdc-v-sessmgr01>.

placed was not well known. It is observed that Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy man and would not have a tomb in which was subpar or unidentifiable. Considering Jesus was placed in Joseph's tomb, one must note that the tomb would be easily found.

Further, Evans asserts, "Scholarly discussion of the resurrection of Jesus should reckon with the likelihood that Jesus was buried in an identifiable tomb, a tomb that may well have been known to have been found empty."⁹³ Also, the question must be asked how many other tombs would have Roman guards standing outside them? Indeed, there were not many Jewish tombs being guarded by Roman centurions. Again, the fact of the empty tomb is crucial in proving the fallacious claims of the hallucination theory, both objective and subjective. While at first glance, one can see how the empty tomb rules out a subjective vision hypothesis, it may be skewed from vision how it denies the objective vision claims. The claims of the subjective theory are disproved by the fact that the resurrection was a miracle that involved a physical resurrection. If Jesus returned, as suggested by the objective vision theory, in a spirit form, then there is reason to believe His body would still be in the tomb. Why would His body have to leave the tomb for an encounter in which was objectively spiritual? Also, if one thinks that the resurrection of Jesus was a hallucination or a lie that the disciples conjured up, then why would they all admit the embarrassment of the women finding the tomb? Craig L. Bloomberg comments, "But if there were not empty tomb for anyone to discover and the Gospel writers simply invented the story, why would they all, seemingly independently of each other, make women the first primary witnesses to the resurrection in a culture that often didn't allow women's testimony in a court of law."⁹⁴ Moreover, one can see how the claims of the hallucination theory crumble under the

⁹³ Ibid.,

⁹⁴ Craig L. Bloomberg et al., *Resurrection: Faith or Fact?* (Durham: Pitchstone Publishing, 2019), 137, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=5751925&ppg=7>.

weight of the empty tomb. Once the stone of Jesus' tomb was rolled away, make the hallucination hypothesis claims.

Conclusion

The evidence presented serves to disprove the claims of the hallucination theory. The resurrection of Jesus is validated in both history and credible eyewitness account. It has become apparent that neither the objective nor subjective vision theories can stand when presented with historical evidence and the disciples' testimonies. Christian scholars must not dismiss the hallucination theory so quickly as has been practiced in recent years. Again, the evidence provided serves to show the depth in which the hallucination theory exists. This hypothesis possesses much more than meets the eye and requires special attention. In defense of the disciples, Dr. Gary Habermas explains,

When alternative explanations fail to explain the known data, the impressive evidences that established the disciples' experiences as firmly as anything in the New Testament now become impressive evidences for the Resurrection appearances themselves. So given a reasonable explanation, the disciples' experience in light of the failure of alternatives indicate that the disciples were vindicated: they witness Resurrection appearances of Jesus.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, in the review of all the material presented, this thesis concludes that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is validated historically and miraculously through the disciples' testimonies despite the claims of the hallucination theory.

⁹⁵ Dr. Gary Habermas, Anthony G.N. Flew, and John F. Ankerberg, *Resurrected? An Atheist and Theist Dialogue*(Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 93, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=616348&ppg=6>.

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