

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Defending the Resurrection of Jesus through the Reliability of the Credible Witnesses**

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## Introduction

*“To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; credible we must be truthful.”* Edward R. Murrow<sup>1</sup>

Former American broadcaster Edward R. Murrow hit the nail on the head with the above quote in his testimony before The House Subcommittee on African Affairs as the Director of the United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1963. Murrow was addressing the reporting of information and defending the reason for explaining events with insight and through persuasiveness which allows for a better understanding in a larger context. One must have a truthful and credible basis for making a believable persuasive argument. In order to deliver a persuasive argument for the resurrection of Jesus, one must be believable. In order to be a believable witness for Jesus, credibility must be established. The credibility of the witnesses is established through their truthfulness. This thesis will lay out the case for the reliability and credibility of the witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus in order to establish the believability of their testimonies.

Defining and describing exactly what it means for a witness to be deemed reliable and credible will be established. It will examine western law in the twenty first century as to how an investigation is conducted and how to determine whether a witness is credible or not. It will also describe what first century law in Jerusalem looked like for both the Jews and the Romans. Contemporary investigations are more advanced than two thousand years ago and to put twenty-first century expectations on first century evidence is unreasonable. Both perspectives are needed in order to obtain a fair and reasonable conclusion. A witness list of the credible

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<sup>1</sup> Edward R. Murrow, Testimony before a Congressional Committee as the Director of USIA, May 1963.

witnesses will be presented. These witnesses will be of both the death and the resurrection of Jesus. Corroborating evidence from extra-biblical sources from Roman, Jewish, and Christian texts will be presented in defense of the witnesses. This thesis will deliver a persuasive argument for the reliability of the credible witnesses for the resurrection of Jesus.

We live in a strange period of time which demands proof and evidence of some claims such as the resurrection of Jesus, but accepts other ideas such as gender identity without proof or good reasoning. Western society is mesmerized by television crime shows and real life trials of the rich and famous or even the infamous. There have been major advancements in recent decades with the use of forensic sciences in the world of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Forensic science has exploded on the scene as an invaluable tool for solving mysteries and major crimes. Although DNA has been an amazing scientific and investigative tool, it has not been helpful in the proving or disproving of the resurrection of Jesus. It cannot help because there is not a body of Jesus. Christians must rely on other forms of investigation to defend the resurrection of Jesus. Two thousand years ago they did not have the luxuries of advanced technologies to assist with investigations. There are no fingerprints to match, no hair fibers to compare, and no bodily fluids to test. Christians are limited to the amount of evidence which can be used in a defense of Jesus. The original investigation of Jesus and his trial did not follow a chain of custody for handling evidence as we would see today. According to twenty-first century standards, one could argue that the Roman Empire and the Jewish leaders during the first century had botched the investigation of Jesus. Their focus was simply on persecution and not on preservation. The people involved in the crucifixion of Jesus had no concern for the preservation of evidence. They simply wanted Jesus to go away for good and put an end to his ministry. They left no physical evidence for a cold case. However, this was the way trials and executions were conducted in first

century Judea under Roman rule and even for hundreds of years later. Evidence collection and preservation had not yet been perfected. According to a Columbia Law Review “even into the middle of the eighteenth century, the modern law of evidence was not yet in operation.”<sup>2</sup>

Skeptics of today want to use that fact of no physical evidence to hinder a reasonable belief in the divinity of Jesus. However, it does not mean that there is no evidence to review. There are known “eyewitnesses” to the death and resurrection of Jesus. A background check of these witnesses can be conducted and gather an understanding into their character and reliability. There is also corroborating evidence which enhances the credibility of the eyewitness testimony. The problem concerning the credibility of the eyewitnesses will be addressed and shown that these witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus should be deemed credible.

Skeptics of the resurrection of Jesus have a valid technical argument. One can easily claim there is not enough physical evidence of a miracle such as the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> This is true, but does one necessarily need physical evidence to believe something? There are several cases in which a suspect has been convicted of murder without there being any evidence of a dead body. One case in point is the conviction of Patrick Frazee in November, 2019. Frazee was convicted in Teller County District Court, Colorado for the murder of Kelsey Berreth. Berreth was the mother of Frazee’s child. The entire case was based on the testimony of one woman. According to the *Application and Affidavit for Arrest Warrant*, Krystal Lee testified that she assisted with the destruction of evidence and provided testimony as to how the body was

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<sup>2</sup> John H. Langbein, Columbia Law Review, *Historical Foundations of The Law of Evidence: A View From The Ryder Sources*, 1170.

<sup>3</sup> The Shroud of Turin should be noted here. The shroud is a 4.4 x 1.1 meter (14 ft. 5 in. x 3 ft. 7 in) linen cloth bearing a negative image of a man. Some claim this is the shroud that had wrapped the body of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion. The shroud has undergone extensive investigation over the past several decades and there continues to be no scholarly consensus or conclusion. The shroud has remained inside the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Turin, Italy since 1578.

burned.<sup>4</sup>

CBS Denver reported Frazee was ultimately sentenced to life without parole plus 156 years for the murder of Berreth.<sup>5</sup> Frazee never confessed to the crime and the body of Berreth was never found. The entire conviction was based on the testimony of one female witness. The law enforcement investigators, The Teller County District Attorney, and the judge along with the twelve-person jury must have believed that she was a credible witness. One female witness was able to persuade several intelligent people “beyond a reasonable doubt” that Frazee killed Berreth. The guilty verdict was delivered even though Frazee never confessed to the crime and there was no direct physical or forensic evidence confirming his involvement. In other words, without the testimony of a “credible witness” the State of Colorado would not have had enough evidence to convict Frazee. Essentially, the whole case rested on the reliability and testimony of the witness.

Another case which resulted in a murder conviction without a dead body was that of the State of Oklahoma vs. Katherine Rutan (2002-2006). Rutan was accused of killing her six year old son Logan Tucker. The body of Logan was never found and only presumed dead based upon circumstantial evidence and witness testimony. There was never any physical evidence used to convict Rutan and no “eye-witnesses” to the murder. However, according to Julie Bisbee with *The Oklahoman*, “The prosecution has a witness list that includes 128 people, including a man who has been in jail in Phoenix.”<sup>6</sup> Based only on the circumstantial evidence and witness

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<sup>4</sup> “Application and Affidavit for Arrest Warrant,” District Court, Teller County, State of Colorado, Colorado Judicial Branch Official Website, December 21, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Rick Sallinger, “Patrick Frazee Insists He Did Not Murder Kelsey Berreth In New Letter To CBS4,” CBS Denver, April 20, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Julie Bisbee, “Search for justice: Logan Tucker's mother goes on trial in the child's death,” *The Oklahoman* (August 19, 2007).

testimony, Rutan was convicted of first degree murder by a jury even though there was no physical evidence, no dead body, and no confession to the crime.

One can see the importance and the evidential value of the testimony of a credible witness. There are witnesses who give testimony to different parts of a story or an incident. This allows investigators to see the bigger picture of an event. The issue most skeptics have with witness testimony is not credibility, but rather suspect identification and memory. Is the witness absolutely certain that he or she had seen this exact person or only someone resembling their appearance? Also, are they absolutely certain they remember and are clear as to the facts of what they have witnessed. Gary L. Wells is a psychologist and professor at Iowa State University along with being a scholar in the world of eyewitness memory and how it relates to criminal law cases. Wells claims, “In cases where the eyewitness knew the suspect before the crime, issues of the reliability of memory are usually not contested.”<sup>7</sup> He also goes on to explain, “In cases where the eyewitness knows the alleged perpetrator (e.g., a friend or relative), the chances of an honest mistaken identification are not usually considered to be high.”<sup>8</sup> Concerning the resurrection of Jesus there is not a conflict with the identity of Jesus. All the witnesses were absolutely certain as to the man who died on the cross and then later resurrected and they could never forget what they had witnessed. The purpose of this paper is to shine light on all the different forms of witnesses concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus. It will focus on analyzing the problem and defending the credibility of the witness testimonies. The defense will show that not only what the witnesses stated was true, but why the witnesses should be considered trustworthy, reliable, and credible.

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<sup>7</sup> Gary L. Wells, “Eyewitness Testimony,” Iowa State University Digital Repository (Psychology Publications, 2002), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 4.

The problem faced in today's current society is people want physical and scientific 'proof' and 'evidence' for a claim to be deemed credible. They have a false idea of what it really takes for them to believe something. This is certainly no different with the claim of the resurrected Jesus. However, what if there is no physical evidence remaining? What if there is no proof? Is the testimony of a "credible witness" enough for proof or evidence? Without physical evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, evidence lies heavily with establishing the credibility of the witnesses and the reliability of their testimonies. The problem or concern with credible witness testimony alleged in the resurrection of Jesus must be addressed and defended. There is a preponderance of evidence through the reliability of the credible witnesses which should be able to sway any skeptic to believe in the resurrection of Jesus beyond a reasonable doubt.

A major concern or problem that skeptics raise concerning the resurrection of Jesus is with the reliability of the witnesses. Skeptics will claim that the Gospel accounts were written "35 or 65 years after his death, not by people who were eyewitnesses, but by people living later."<sup>9</sup> Ehrman goes on to claim "These are not eyewitness accounts."<sup>10</sup> The position of this paper will defend the reporting of the eyewitness accounts and will demonstrate that Ehrman's claim and that of other skeptics regarding the accounts being eyewitness accounts is incorrect. It will provide an overview of how a witness is regarded in both the twenty-first century western world and was in the first-century under Roman rule in Jerusalem. A clear understanding shall be delivered as to why the first-century witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus should be deemed credible.

Lack of belief in the resurrection of Jesus often comes in the misconception that there is

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<sup>9</sup> "Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus? The Craig-Ehrman Debate," William Lane Craig vs. Bart D. Ehrman (College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts, March 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

not enough evidence to believe in such a claim. This thesis will clearly reveal there is actually evidence and corroborating evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Two modern methodologies will be used to lay out the defense of the witness testimonies. An examination of the witnesses will be conducted using a fourteen question list to determine the credibility of the witnesses. This list is used by twenty-first century criminal investigators to determine reliability of testimony. More will be covered on this list in chapter one and chapter four. An argumentation scheme for corroborative evidence will also be presented which will shine light on the fact that an argument for the resurrection of Jesus Christ can be made using logical reasoning. This scheme is addressed in chapter five.

The ability to defend the resurrection of Jesus Christ using logical reasoning reveals the fact that the problem is not with evidence for such a claim. The problem lies more with the internal struggle between faith and reason within each person. This paper will show there is not only a preponderance of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, but rather it should lead to a conviction of the heart beyond a reasonable doubt.

## **Chapter 1: Western law in the Twenty First Century**

The two topics of *conducting a proper investigation* and the *credibility of witness testimony* are of extreme importance when dealing with documentary and testimonial evidence. Miriam J. Metzger and Andrew J. Flanagin describe that, “credibility is the believability of a source or message, which is made up of two primary dimensions: trustworthiness and expertise.”<sup>11</sup> Both of these dimensions have subjective and objective components to them.

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<sup>11</sup> Miriam J. Metzger and Andrew J. Flanagin, *Digital Media, Youth, and Credibility* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 8.

Trustworthiness is clearly more subjective, however, it can have objective measures such as previous established reliability. Expertise has objective characteristics because of credentials or certifications which they possess which allow them to be considered credible in their field of study. However, expertise must also possess trustworthiness.

### Conducting an investigation

An investigation into a crime or a claim in twenty-first century western society is often extensive. The investigation usually starts with examining the victim and witness statements. According to what the witnesses say, the investigator will know where to begin to look for evidence pertinent to the particular crime. Investigators search the crime scene for physical evidence which would correspond with the reported crime or incident. The kind of evidence being searched for is determined by what type of surrounding and what type of crime or incident occurred. However, there are four basic types of evidence:

1. Real evidence
2. Demonstrative evidence
3. Documentary evidence
4. Testimonial evidence

*Real evidence* is also known as *physical evidence*. This can be nearly any form of physical evidence such as biological (blood and semen), latent (fingerprints), Trace (minute quantities of materials such as human hair, animal hair, textile fibers and fabric, rope, soil, glass, and building materials.), tire tracks, shoe impressions, surveillance video, etc. *Demonstrative evidence* is evidence which is provided by a witness in order to visually show investigators exactly what they had seen. For example, a parent may need to demonstrate in detail every step they had taken just prior, during, and after a child drowning. This helps to determine whether something may have been accidental or intentional. It would have been wonderful to have had

an inquiry to the resurrection of Jesus at the time. The women, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and all the eyewitnesses could have walked the investigators through every detail of what they had seen with their own eyes. This of course did not happen, but their testimonies were documented. *Documentary* evidence is any written form of evidence such as diaries, journals, documents, blogs, and social media posts. Pertaining to the death and resurrection of Jesus, this would be any original manuscripts written by the original authors which would be physically secured as evidence. *Testimonial* evidence is the ability of a witness to provide their recollection of an event. Testimonial evidence from the eyewitnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus was documented in letters written during the first century and were later passed on to further generations.

During twenty-first century investigations, there is great concern for collecting and securing the physical evidence. Detectives, investigators, crime scene technicians, evidence custodians, and lab technicians go to great lengths to protect the integrity of the evidence before being presented at trial. The evidence is collected using gloves to ensure there is not cross contamination during the collection process. The evidence is then placed into a bag or box which is then secured with evidence tape along all openings. The collector of the evidence then places their initials on the tape along with the date and time. Along with the evidence is an evidence tag which documents its contents and the time, date and location of the recovery of the evidence. The evidence is then placed into a secured evidence locker and the evidence is logged into an evidence book. The evidence is now in the care of evidence custodians until the time of trial or any further need of the evidence. Any time the evidence is opened or moved it is documented.

Prosecution and defense must now prepare for trial. During any investigation, everyone

involved with the investigation provides a report of their participation with the investigation. Even the smallest involvement by a member must be documented to ensure all areas of the investigation are covered. All those providing written reports must sign their names to the report and swear to its truthfulness. All reports and evidence logs are presented to the prosecution for review and in preparation for trial.

One can see how an investigation, witness testimony, and evidence collection is carefully handled in twenty-first century western society. However, it is not just or fair to view the evidence involved in the resurrection of Jesus according to twenty-first century knowledge and advancement. There was no possibility of preservation of evidence for further review and discovery. There was not a neighborhood canvass conducted to interview all potential witnesses. Official 'sworn' written or verbal statements were not taken by the government or prosecuting officials. Only a handful of men wanted to preserve the story in written form. The testimonial evidence of the eyewitnesses was not conducted through the legal system of either the Jews or the Romans of the day. However, their testimonies were preserved through the faithfulness of the few who wanted the truth to be carried on to future generations. The limited amount of physical evidence in reference to the resurrection of Jesus is not isolated. There is also a lack of physical evidence in such figures as Homer, Confucius, Muhammad, and Gautama Buddha (popularly known as the Buddha). The focus of this paper will be on the credibility of the testimonies provided by the eyewitnesses and corroborating evidence provided by extra-biblical sources and historical documents.

### The Witnesses of Today

There are three basic types of witnesses. The United States Department of Justice

identifies the first one as “A lay witness.”<sup>12</sup> This can also be described as an eyewitness referring to someone who had personally seen an event happen and can testify to the incident. The second type of witness is an expert witness. “An expert witness is a specialist — someone who is educated in a certain area. They testify with respect to their specialty area only.”<sup>13</sup> The third type of witness is a character witness. A character witness usually did not physically witness the event themselves. They are used to testify to the character and credibility of the eyewitness, defendant, or complainant. They are typically people that are close to the individual such as family, friend, neighbor, co-worker, and clergy. This paper will focus solely on reliability of lay witnesses, as this corresponds most closely to the type of witness testimony one sees documented in scripture. It will be shown that their testimonies should be deemed reliable and that they should be considered credible witnesses.

Defining a credible witness is necessary to determine whether a witness can be trusted and their testimony is reliable. One can help define a credible witness by using the fourteen questions provided by J. Warner Wallace, himself a retired homicide detective, in his book entitled *Cold-case Christianity*. These are the standards by which a secular investigator would judge the credibility of a witness:

1. How well could the witness see, hear, or otherwise perceive the things about which the witness testified?
2. How well was the witness able to remember and describe what happened?
3. What was the witness’s behavior while testifying?
4. Did the witness understand the questions and answer them directly?
5. Was the witness’s testimony influenced by a factor such as bias or prejudice, a personal relationship with someone involved in the case, or a personal interest in how the case is decided?

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<sup>12</sup> United States Department of Justice, Office of the United States Attorneys, Justice 101. <https://www.justice.gov/usao/justice-101>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

6. What was the witness's attitude about the case or about testifying?
7. Did the witness make a statement in the past that is consistent or inconsistent with his or her testimony?
8. How reasonable is the testimony when you consider all the other evidence in the case?
9. Did other evidence prove or disprove any fact about which the witness testified?
10. Did the witness admit to being untruthful?
11. What is the witness's character for truthfulness?
12. Has the witness been convicted of a felony?
13. Has the witness engaged in (other) conduct that reflects on his or her believability?
14. Was the witness promised immunity or leniency in exchange for his or her testimony?<sup>14</sup>

When determining the credibility of a witness, it is always of the utmost importance to consider whether the witness is capable of knowing thoroughly about what he or she testifies. In other words, can the witness testify to an actual event which they have witnessed? This does not necessarily mean the witness understands thoroughly what they had seen or why the incident occurred. Someone may have witnessed something, but they have no explanation for what they had seen. The eyewitness must also have been physically present during the incident and the witness 'paid full attention' and actually observed the incident in question. For a witness to have 'paid full attention' is to say that the witness can testify and is absolutely certain about a detail because of their attentiveness to that fact. For example, an incident may have occurred and there are three 'witnesses' to the event. Each witness may have observed or have knowledge concerning three different aspects of the event such as the vehicle description, the driver description, and time of day. The witnesses need only understand and be certain of their particular testimony and the entire puzzle is put together by the investigator who possesses all of

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<sup>14</sup> J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013), 71.

the testimonies. For the witness to be deemed credible, it should be determined (if possible) if the witness had reported the entire event or is trying to withhold some of the information in order to suppress or add to the truth. James Schouler writes, “In American practice, “credible” signifies witnesses who are not disqualified to testify by the common-law rules of evidence at the time of attestation.”<sup>15</sup> One can clarify the term “credible” here to mean competent.

According to rule 601 of the federal rules of evidence which dictates the competency to testify in general, “Every person is competent to be a witness unless these rules provide otherwise. But in a civil case, state law governs the witness’s competency regarding a claim or defense for which state law supplies the rule of decision.”<sup>16</sup> This rule clearly places the burden of proof on the objector in order to prove incompetency of the witnesses.

Simon Greenleaf, a New England lawyer and professor of law at Harvard University writes, “In trials of fact, by oral testimony, the proper inquiry is not whether it is possible that the testimony may be false, but whether there is sufficient probability that it is true.”<sup>17</sup> One can say the same thing with documentary evidence and this paper will show that there is more than sufficient probability that the documentary testimony and evidence is true. Greenleaf brings up the point that “In the absence of circumstances which generate suspicion, every witness is to be presumed credible, until the contrary is shown; the burden of impeaching his credibility lying on the objector.”<sup>18</sup> Just as one is innocent until proven guilty, a witness should also be deemed

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<sup>15</sup> James Schouler, *Law of Wills, Executors, and Administrators*, Revised by Arthur W. Blakemore (Albany, New York: Matthew Bender & Company, 1923), 610.

<sup>16</sup> Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute, *Federal Rules of Evidence, Rule 601, Competency to Testify in General*, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/fre/rule\\_601](https://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/fre/rule_601).

<sup>17</sup> Simon Greenleaf, *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists: By the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice* (Greenwood, WI: Suzeteo Enterprises, 1847), 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

honest and credible until facts show otherwise. Greenleaf adds, “No lawyer is permitted to argue in disparagement of the intelligence or the integrity of a witness, against whom the case itself afforded no particle of testimony.”<sup>19</sup> In the matter of the witnesses of the resurrection, one could ask, “Where are the disqualifiers?” Where are those who can testify to the fact that the witnesses should be disqualified? If there are no such testimonies, then the witness testimonies should be deemed credible. This paper will weave its way through the witnesses for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The witnesses will be identified individually as to what type of witness they represent. The witnesses will also be examined using Wallace’s fourteen questions to establish a credible witness.

## **Chapter 2: Law in First Century Jerusalem**

### **Jewish Law and the Convicting of Criminals**

The Jewish court system in first century Judea ran quite different than the twenty first century western world. If one can imagine, there was actually no prosecutor. According to Hirshberg, The actual witnesses of the event would present the accused before the court.<sup>20</sup> A minimum of two witnesses were needed to bring a suspect before the court and “both witnesses had to be conscious of the presence of each other, and had to testify that they both saw the main incidents of the particular crime.”<sup>21</sup> This is a clear contrast with the demands placed on twenty-first century witnesses and the courts of today.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Hirshberg, “Jurisprudence Among the Ancient Jews,” Volume 11 Issue 1 (Marquette Law Review, 1926), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

According to Hebrew laws and customs, written witness statements were not accepted as testimony and the witnesses were not sworn by an oath for truthfulness as we know of today.<sup>22</sup> It was assumed that one would not want to be caught lying in court and face the consequences for that lie which would be the same penalty the accused would have suffered. Whatever came out of one's mouth was meant to be truthful and whether one swears under oath to God or not, God is always watching and listening. This was in line with the ninth commandment which states, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16). King Solomon would write, "A false witness will perish" (Proverbs 21:28). Witnesses were "very earnestly and solemnly admonished by the Presiding Judge, when they appeared before the judges, as to the responsibility that was in their hands."<sup>23</sup> According to Mendelsohn, Talmudic jurisprudence deems the following persons incompetent to be witnesses:

1. Women
2. Slaves
3. Minors
4. Demented Persons
5. Deaf, mute, or blind
6. Persons convicted of irreligion, immorality or strongly suspected thereof
7. Gamblers
8. Usurers
9. Farmers
10. Collectors of imposts
11. Illiterate or immodest persons
12. Relatives by consanguinity or affinity
13. Persons directly interested in the case<sup>24</sup>

Twenty-first century society would have an issue with many of the persons on this list being discredited as a witness without warrant. Many on this list were thought of as unintelligent

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Mendelsohn, *Criminal Jurisprudence of the Ancient Hebrews* (Baltimore: M. Curlander, 1891), 116-119.

or of questionable character and deemed unable to be listed as a credible witness. However, today women, minors, farmers, etc. would be given a chance to deliver reliable testimony. These potential first-century witnesses were being pre-judged and excluded prior to even hearing their testimony.

There were credible witnesses to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus which could have been interviewed along the way for a proper investigation. If documented properly at the time, there would have been substantial evidence today as to the divinity of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus was a threat to the Jews of the day. There was no concerted effort to preserve testimony or evidence of any kind which could have been used today to prove the death and resurrection of Jesus. Many of the testimonies of the resurrection of Jesus were in front of more than two witnesses. However, leaders of the day did not want to accept their testimonies. The fact of two witnesses for a court proceeding was of extreme importance in reference to prosecuting Jesus for the crime of blasphemy, but not concerning the reliability of the witnesses for the Messiah and his resurrection. There were in fact many more than two witnesses for the resurrection of Jesus, but the Sanhedrin were not interested. Had the Jewish leaders conducted a proper investigation they could have prevented the fight which continues to this day. They could have documented the claim of the resurrection of Jesus and fulfillment of prophecy with authority. The mishandling of the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus in 33 AD should not reflect the reliability of the witness testimony which has been preserved and can be investigated today.

#### The Law According to Rome in First Century Jerusalem

The arrest and trial of Jesus- which would lead to his death and resurrection- would be based solely on eyewitness testimony. Oral testimony was relied upon heavily in first century

Rome. Capogrossi writes, “the required presence of witnesses, suggest that orality – as opposed to an increased circulation of written documents – continued to be central to Roman law well beyond that time.”<sup>25</sup> Capogrossi goes on to say, “although the pontiffs may have recorded many of their legal procedure and solutions in writing, their preservation was still primarily entrusted to the priests’ collective memory rather than to texts.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, it is not strange to find a lack of written evidence concerning trials or other events in first century Jerusalem under Roman law because of the primary use of orality. One cannot claim the death and resurrection of Jesus did not occur simply because of the lack of overwhelming written documentation in first century Roman writings. Much of what occurred on a regular basis was not documented in writing and the Romans at the time had no concern with the possibility of a Hebrew Messiah. However, there was documentation from non-Christian sources which give credibility to the stories of the eyewitnesses. Tacitus was a Roman historian and Josephus was a Roman-Jewish historian and both have contributed to the documentation of a resurrected Jesus which will be used as corroborating evidence.

This thesis is concerned with establishing the credibility of the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. However, one must be familiar with the other factors leading up to that particular event in order to understand the entire picture. The chief priests came to Pontus Pilate with the problem of Jesus and Pilate explained to them that he found no charge against Jesus (Luke 23:4). Pilate went as far as sending them before Herod because Jesus was a Galilean and Herod found no cause for charges against Jesus. Pilate even stated that Jesus did not deserve

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<sup>25</sup> Luigi Capogrossi Colognesi, “The Evolution of Roman Law and Jurisprudence,” Chapter. In *Law and Power in the Making of the Roman Commonwealth*, translated by Laura Kopp, 126–147 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 127.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

death (Luke 23:13-15). Pilate found no cause for death even though Jesus confessed to him. Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews and Jesus replied, “Yes, it is as you say” (Luke 23:3; Matthew 27:11 NIV).<sup>27</sup> This statement made by Jesus in front of Pontius Pilate should be seen as a confession of Jesus’ divinity. Pilate only conceded to the crucifixion of Jesus after relentless pressure from the Jewish leaders and in the prevention of a riot. Pilate had even ordered a titulus which is an inscription or label to be placed on the cross of Jesus which read, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” (John 19:19). It was a practice used to report the crime which had been committed in capital executions. Had a commission been established after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Pilate himself would have been considered a credible and reliable witness. Pilate has no bearing on the resurrection of Jesus, but his testimony of Jesus’ confession and the handing of Jesus over to be crucified is substantial. This account shows the deep conviction Pilate and his wife had with the conviction of an innocent man (Matthew 27:19). Pilate wanted nothing to do with the crucifixion of Jesus and even made a public display of washing his hands in front of the crowd releasing himself of the blood of Jesus (Matthew 27:24-26).

The Romans were satisfied in their system and they were not quick in adopting other forms of customs and laws into their own legal system. “Emperor Justinian accepted custom as a source of unwritten law.”<sup>28</sup> Roman law enjoyed the freedom of convictions being delivered at the leisure of the judge. Roman law was opposed to codification. “Classical Roman law was truly a case-law system, not a statute-law system.”<sup>29</sup> This would imply the using of past cases to

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<sup>27</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Rafael Domingo, *Roman Law: An Introduction*, First edition (London: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

determine any ambiguities in a current case. “The Romans, however, always recognized degrees of dignity as an inherent element of a stratified society. Free people had more dignity than slaves.”<sup>30</sup> This certainly did not help Jesus during his Roman trial. Jews were under Roman protection and allowed to practice their religion freely in Judea, but they were also treated as second-class citizens. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC- 43 BC) was a Roman statesman, philosopher, scholar, and lawyer. “Cicero himself criticized democracy because it does not allow various degrees of dignity (De re publica 1.43).”<sup>31</sup> That does not make for a fair trial for anyone under Roman authority. Domingo posits, “In the realm of criminal law, humanity demanded that punishment would be moderated and controlled by the state; that only the guilty would be punished; and that the accused and witnesses should be protected and must not be tortured.”<sup>32</sup> That did not seem to be the case for Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was certainly never protected by the Romans. He was presented back to the Jews at which time they demanded to ‘crucify him’ (John 19:15).

Upon the death and burial of Jesus, the chief priests and the Pharisees were concerned that the followers of Jesus would try to steal the body and then claim that he had resurrected. Pilate agrees to have the tomb secured “by putting a seal on the stone” (Matthew 27:66). The seal was a sign of authentication that the tomb was occupied and the power and authority of Rome stood behind the seal. Anyone found breaking the Roman seal would suffer the punishment of an unpleasant death. This seal implies that the dead body of Jesus was placed inside the tomb. It also makes it impossible for anyone to steal the body. No one could have overpowered the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 22.

Roman soldiers of the day who were considered elite and ruthless. The Roman soldiers and the Centurion will be covered in Chapter three of this essay.

If the writers of the Gospels wanted to tell a fictitious story of Jesus dying and later resurrecting, why involve the Roman Empire? The less people involved in a story the better. There were so many people described to be involved in the investigation and prosecution. The Roman historians and scribes must have felt no need to document the event which was not strange for the time. Pilate was confused himself as to the charges against Jesus. The Romans and even the Jewish leaders of the day had no idea that Jesus was going to be so significant in history and for the kingdom of God. It was incomprehensible for them at the time. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John felt the need to document the event for posterity. It was for all humanity to understand what had happened. Had they been telling a fictitious story, they would have been risking their lives for a lie. It would make no sense. However, the gospel writers risked it all which lends to their credibility and reliability as historical writers. The mere fact that Jesus was dragged through the Roman court system and died at the hands of Roman soldiers in front of a crowd is of great importance. This signifies and authenticates Jesus physical death which is confirmed later in this paper by the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus. This dispels any myth that Jesus did not physically die on the cross.

In the first century, Roman law was similar to Jewish law in reference to who was considered a credible and reliable witness. Criminals, slaves, and women would not be deemed credible witnesses. Roman civil law required five witnesses and praetorian law required seven witnesses.<sup>33</sup> This confirms that Roman law relied heavily on the testimony of witnesses and their

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<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth A. Meyer, *Legitimacy and Law in the Roman World Tabulae in Roman Belief and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 273.

credibility would be of the utmost importance. Twenty-first century law typically chooses solid physical evidence over eyewitness testimony. Scientific and forensic evidence is routinely demanded for conviction. However, as demonstrated by the two criminal cases in Colorado and Oklahoma, as explained above, convictions can be secured based on credible witness testimony alone. First century Jerusalem under Roman law did not have the luxuries of forensic science as evidence. Evidence was based nearly solely on eyewitness testimony. There were clearly no cameras to take pictures of evidence. There was not video cameras to collect video surveillance of a crime in the act. There was no DNA analysis, fingerprints, or any form of forensic science to assist with the investigation. There was also no form of evidence collection and evidence retention. The credibility of the testimony given by the eyewitnesses for the resurrection of Jesus is of great importance. The individual witnesses or groups of witnesses of the death and burial of Jesus can now be presented.

### **Chapter 3. The Witness list of the Death and Burial of Jesus**

This chapter will examine four groups of witnesses for the crucifixion of Jesus. It is important to establish that Jesus was first physically dead before the resurrection had occurred. This may seem self-explanatory, but there are theories which deny that Jesus actually died on the cross and that is why there were later appearances of him.<sup>34</sup> These theories will be touched upon later in this chapter under the Roman soldiers and the centurion. One should note that these are four groups of witnesses and not simply four individual witnesses. The exact number of soldiers,

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<sup>34</sup> There are skeptics to the fact that Jesus Christ actually even died on the cross. Some theories include the “swoon theory” which claims Jesus did not die, but rather only passed out and was later seen. Some also claim it was simply a mass hallucination. Some claim the body was stolen from the tomb or that it was entirely the wrong tomb. There is also the theory that Jesus had a twin or that someone else died in his place. There is absolutely no credibility to any of these theories. This thesis stands on the belief that Jesus of Nazareth (John 18:4-8) was arrested by Roman soldiers and in their custody until he actually physically died on the cross at his crucifixion between two thieves.

priests, and Jewish leaders is unknown. However, it is clear that the number is more than four.

The groups are as follows:

1. The chief priests and the Jewish leaders
2. The two thieves
3. The Roman soldiers and the centurion
4. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus

This paper will establish the credibility of the documentary evidence along with the reliability of the witnesses referenced therein. These are two distinct focuses of attention. It is of great importance to establish the credibility of the documents themselves in order for the testimonial evidence within the material to be deemed reliable. Matthew and Luke were professionals. Matthew was a Jewish tax collector for the Roman government and a direct disciple of Jesus Christ. Luke was a physician and a travel companion of the Apostle Paul. This reveals the type of character and intelligence for such writings by these two authors. The gospel of Mark should be considered an original writing, written at the dictation of Peter who was with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry and an eyewitness. Irenaeus of Smyrna (Bishop of Lyon) wrote in the second century, “Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, handed down to us in writing what Peter had preached.”<sup>35</sup> “Federal Rule of Evidence 602 allows a witness to testify, even though that witness may not have knowledge in the literal sense.”<sup>36</sup> This rule would apply to Mark’s gospel because Mark was actually transcribing the words directly from the Apostle Peter himself. “Irenaeus affirmed that ‘Mark the disciple and interpreter of Peter also

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<sup>35</sup> James R. Payton, Jr., and James R. Payton, *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of 'Against Heresies'* (James Clarke Company, Limited, 2012), 56.

<sup>36</sup> Pamela Binnings Ewen, *Faith on Trial: Analyze the Evidence for the Death and Resurrection of Jesus* (B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 49.

transmitted to us what he had written about what Peter had preached', while Clement of Alexandria adds that this occurred during Peter's lifetime."<sup>37</sup> In a court of law, Mark would have been able to testify on that behalf. Blomberg would posit, "If the early church tradition is correct that Peter was martyred during the persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Nero between ad 64 and 68, then obviously Mark's Gospel had to have been written by that time."<sup>38</sup> The Roman historian Tacitus would provide corroborating evidence to this fact which is addressed in chapter five.

John is considered the youngest of all the apostles and was with Jesus during His ministry. There is no evidence which would question the credibility of John. Luke writes in his introduction the following message to ensure the credibility of his message:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4).

This writing from Luke describes his truthfulness and reliability in his message. If Luke were to lie about any parts of the letter, he would not have explained that it had been handed down to him by those who were eyewitnesses. Luke also goes as far to say that he has investigated the claims himself. He writes the letter to a specific person for him to understand the truth. Luke went above and beyond in documenting for posterity the eyewitness testimony. There is nothing more he could have done to ensure his truthfulness of his letter to Theophilus and secure his credibility. Without evidence to the contrary, Luke's message should be deemed reliable and the burden of proof lies with skeptics.

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<sup>37</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (InterVarsity Press, 2007), 25.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

There comes a point when we must have full trust in something and not continually demand further evidence. Schnabel writes, “Trusting the testimony of eyewitnesses is not naive but, rather, a function of the everyday experience in which we rely on facts for which we only have the testimony of others”<sup>39</sup> It is clear that the Gospel writers are promoting faith in Jesus, “But there is also no doubt that all four Gospels convey historical information: they are not writing theological expositions of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, nor homilies, but biographies.”<sup>40</sup> They are actually documenting history as it unfolds.

The point of the writings from the Gospel accounts is to document the events as any historical writer would do. There were no press credentials at the time for only certain writers to be allowed to document the event. These authors took it upon themselves to see the importance of the event and want it documented for future generations to understand what had happened. Even if what happened is not easy to understand. Skeptics may point toward minute differences in the accounts from different authors. However, Greenleaf points out “There is enough of discrepancy to show that there could have been no previous concert among them, and at the same time such substantial agreement as to show that they all were independent narrators of the same great transaction, as events actually occurred.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, some discrepancy is actually good for credibility.

It would not have been wise for the apostles to document the death of Jesus in the manner that they did had it been a lie. “The trial of Jesus may have been private, but his execution was

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<sup>39</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, *Jesus in Jerusalem: The Last Days* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 24.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>41</sup> Simon Greenleaf, *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists: By the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice* (Greenwood, WI: Suzeteo Enterprises, 1847), 37-38.

ruthlessly public.”<sup>42</sup> It would have been easily exposed as false had it not happened as reported. Documents and texts have been recorded and Habermas writes, “Historians must consider testimony of secondhand witnesses as they attempt to arrive at a conclusion regarding what happened.”<sup>43</sup> All the documents provided over the centuries must be considered for gaining a complete understanding as to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Habermas posits, “In the real life of historical study, there is no magical truth-sensing scale, and one historian’s evaluation often differs from another’s.”<sup>44</sup> One must assess all possible forms of evidence concerning historical matters and use them all in order to have a better understanding of the historical event.

In reference to assessing historical testimony, Habermas provides the following “common-sense” principles:

1. Testimony attested to by multiple independent witnesses is usually considered stronger than the testimony of one witness.
2. Affirmation by a neutral or hostile source is usually considered stronger than affirmation from a friendly source, since bias in favor of the person or position is absent.
3. People usually don’t make up details regarding a story that would tend to weaken their position.
4. Eyewitness testimony is usually considered stronger than testimony heard from a second- or third hand source.
5. An early testimony from very close to the event in question is usually considered more reliable than one received years after the event.<sup>45</sup>

The testimony and the letters of the four Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) should be considered reliable and credible. It is inconceivable to think that the writers would

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<sup>42</sup> Mark D. Smith, "Summum Supplicium: The Death and Burial of Jesus," In *The Final Days of Jesus: The Thrill of Defeat, The Agony of Victory: A Classical Historian Explores Jesus's Arrest, Trial, and Execution*, 181-215 (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Lutterworth Press, 2018), 195.

<sup>43</sup> Gary R. Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004), 39.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 40.

have used real names of prominent individuals such as (Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus) had the story not been true. The claims could have easily been found false and they would have certainly faced an excruciating death. However, these four writers were so certain of their testimonies that they had no problem risking their lives for the sake of the Gospel message because they were actually reporting the truth. The writers also include stories of Jesus which would not shine light on his divinity. Some questionable stories of Jesus would be, why would Jesus need to be baptized by John the Baptist if he is already the Son of God? The other difficulty is, why would an all-powerful God allow his son to hang on a cross and die a criminal's death? John Meier would call this "The criterion of embarrassment"<sup>46</sup> and he explains that these stories would "hardly have been invented by the early church, since such material created embarrassment or theological difficulties for the church even during the NT period."<sup>47</sup> The Gospel writers were trying to convince people of the resurrection of Jesus and his divinity. If the disciples were to lie about the divinity of Jesus, they would have told wonderful stories of only the miracles and the power of Jesus. Meier posits, "the crucifixion of Jesus was the last thing the first Christians would have invented if left to themselves."<sup>48</sup> The Gospel writers were reporting and documenting everything without having full understanding of what they were witnessing. They never chose to use their own wisdom in deciding what to write. This lends to their credibility as writers and reporters concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Blomberg writes, "General presumptions about the trustworthiness or untrustworthiness of any document, moreover, prove crucial when one comes to evaluate its details that have no clear confirmation or

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<sup>46</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume IV: Law and Love* (Yale University Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 15.

contradiction elsewhere.”<sup>49</sup> This is why the corroborating evidence provided by extra-biblical sources in this matter is crucial in substantiating the historical reliability of the Gospels.

### The Chief Priests and Jewish Leaders

The chief priests and Jewish leaders were obvious witnesses to the death of Jesus. They requested it. This portion will cover their presuppositions concerning the divinity of Jesus. They were adamant that Jesus was not the Messiah and viewed him as a blasphemer. The key in this portion is not whether Jesus is the Messiah or not. It is that they were witness to his death. One cannot have a resurrection without a dead body.

The Sanhedrin of Jerusalem were the Jewish leaders of the time during the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. They were considered the legislative, judicial, and executive body all in one organization. They had total power over their fellow Jewish people in Judea. This council was responsible for the Jewish people, “except for matters in which the Syrian proconsuls and the Roman prefects in Judea had jurisdiction, such as conscription of military troops, taxation, and death penalty cases.”<sup>50</sup> The council consisted of both the chief priests and prominent Jewish citizens which carried political and influential status over the area of Judea. Schnabel writes, “Later sources suggest that the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem had seventy-one members (seventy members plus the president), but it is not certain that this was the case in the first half of the first century.”<sup>51</sup> Although the exact number of the Sanhedrin council is uncertain, it is safe to say there were several members present during the trial of Jesus. “Named members of the Sanhedrin in the New Testament are Annas (as former high priest), Caiaphas (high priest), Nicodemus (lay

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<sup>49</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (InterVarsity Press, 2007), 305.

<sup>50</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, *Jesus in Jerusalem: The Last Days* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 77.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

nobility), Joseph of Arimathea (lay nobility), and Gamaliel (Acts 5:34– 39).”<sup>52</sup> Two of these five named leaders (Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea) later helped prepare the body of Jesus in the tomb.

Caiaphas was the chief priest during the trial of Jesus and his crucifixion. This was no easy task for Caiaphas and assumedly not envied by any other members of the council. Professor and Historian Mark D. Smith posits, “Anyone who could carry on the duties of high priest for nearly two decades, and work effectively under three prefects, had much to commend him.”<sup>53</sup> Caiaphas was obviously well versed in scripture, intelligent, and able to work and handle himself under pressure. The term ‘chief priests’ was used in scripture throughout the last days of Jesus’ life. According to scripture the chief priests were present when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane (Mark 14:43). They are also mentioned to be present during the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53). In Mark 15:1 the chief priests come to a collective agreement along with the elders, the teachers of the law, and the whole Sanhedrin to transfer Jesus to Pontius Pilate. The chief priests were present during the interrogation of Jesus by Herod Antipas mentioned in Luke 23:10. According to scripture, the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the law all mocked Jesus while he was being crucified (Mark 15:31, Matthew 27:41). They appear for the last time when the guards whom they had posted at Jesus’ tomb, shaken by the earthquake and the light that shone from the face of an angel, came into the city and told the chief priests what had taken place (Matt 28:11); the chief priests conferred with the elders and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>53</sup> Mark D. Smith, "Summum Supplicium: The Death and Burial of Jesus," In *The Final Days of Jesus: The Thrill of Defeat, The Agony of Victory: A Classical Historian Explores Jesus's Arrest, Trial, and Execution*, 181-215 (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Lutterworth Press, 2018), 90.

decided to give the soldiers money so that they would say that Jesus' disciples had stolen his body while they were sleeping (Matt 28:12– 13).

In one sense, the chief priests and the Jewish leaders would make excellent credible witnesses. They would have had first-hand knowledge of everything that was happening with Jesus during his last week on earth. They would have come from good families and were well educated. They were believed to be Godly men of character. However, they also would not have made good witnesses. If an inquiry had been conducted for all the witnesses that have information concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus, these men would actually be considered questionable. They would more likely than not have been considered what is known as “hostile” witnesses. They were witnesses to an event, but they would not want to provide a true and accurate account of what they had observed and know. They already proved their inability to be truthful when they conspired with the guards of the empty tomb to say the body of Jesus had been stolen (Matthew 28:11-15). The chief priests were present at the crucifixion of Jesus and they were certain of his death. Otherwise Joseph of Arimathea would not have offered his tomb, and Nicodemus offered spices for the burial of Jesus (John 19:38-42). However, had an inquiry been conducted at the time of the resurrection in the early first century, the chief priests and the Jewish leaders would have needed to speak the truth in the matter before God. Today they would be placed on the witness stand and risk committing perjury because of credible testimony provided by the Romeo-Jewish historian Josephus who chronicled in his *Antiquities of the Jews* in AD 95 that they persuaded Pilate to have Jesus condemned to the cross. This is of great importance because Josephus is providing non-biased historical writings to the fact that the chief priests clearly knew that Jesus would die on the cross. More concerning corroborating evidence in chapter five.

## The Two Thieves

The two thieves are interesting because they put Jesus at the cross. Again, according to Jewish law and customs there needs to be at least two witnesses to the same event. Here we have two men, one on each side of Jesus (Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27-28; Luke 23:32-34; John 19:18), as all three hang on their individual crosses and slowly die together. The testimony of the one thief should be considered extremely credible because of his status. The thief is on his death bed when he acknowledges Jesus and his divinity. He can also see that Jesus is about to physically die because he cries out and asks Jesus to remember him when he comes to his kingdom (Luke 23:42). The one thief making this statement of Jesus being the Messiah and to remember him when he comes to his kingdom is a matter of excited utterance. It is the same evidence which comes with the statements from the Roman soldier and the Centurion. Today, their statements would be allowed in a court of law based on the rule of excited utterance. More on excited utterance is covered in the section concerning the Roman soldier and the Centurion.

However, the other thief had no kind words for Jesus as he hang on the cross. “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” (Luke 23:39). This thief was mocking Jesus and had absolutely no loyalty or belief in Jesus as to his divinity. But, he certainly was an eyewitness to his physical death on earth. Habermas writes, “If testimony affirming an event or saying is given by a source who does not sympathize with the person, message, or cause that profits from the account, we have an indication of authenticity.”<sup>54</sup> This thief would not have made any such statement had Jesus not been physically dying on the cross next to him.

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<sup>54</sup> Gary R. Habermas and Michael Licona. *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004), 37.

It is interesting that the story of Jesus death on the cross detailed by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John included the two thieves. It was perhaps a detail that was not necessary in documenting Jesus' crucifixion. However, had the four Gospel writers not included the presence of the two thieves we would not have had these two extra witnesses to the death of Jesus. Their small testimony in the Gospel writings is quite significant. It is also believed to have fulfilled Old Testament prophecy recorded in the Book of Isaiah which reads:

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,  
And he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
Because he poured out his life unto death,  
And was numbered with the transgressors.  
For her bore the sin of many,  
And made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)

These two thieves had absolutely nothing to lose nor gain by making any kind of a statement during the crucifixion. They were all going to lose their lives that day no matter what was exclaimed. It is fair and reasonable to believe that the two thieves were not followers of Jesus or his teachings and their statements were made with no prior knowledge of scripture and with no capability of comprehending a future resurrection of Jesus. No one at that time was truly foreseeing a resurrected Jesus in the way it was later revealed.

As small as this point may seem, it is another piece to be collected and used toward the plausibility of a resurrected Jesus. It's not meant to be direct evidence, but rather a piece of circumstantial evidence which continues to build the case for a resurrected Jesus. One can point to the human behavior of the statement. Is it considered a normal reaction for a criminal dying on a cross to make such a statement? Why was the one thief so interested in Jesus and where he will be going? Why would he exclaim to take him with him? In addition, Luke is one who documented this statement and he uses the first four verses of his book to explain how he has carefully investigated everything he is about to proclaim. The documentation of the two thieves

should be identified as circumstantial evidence and their testimony deemed significantly valuable toward the death of Jesus on the cross which points toward his divinity and resurrection.

### The Roman Soldiers and the Centurion

An argument for some skeptics is that Jesus did not actually die on the cross as reported in the Gospel recordings. The ‘swoon theory’ is something that has been circulated for quite some time and implies that Jesus did not physically die on the cross. The story “has been put forward by its proponents as a challenge to the historicity of the resurrection.”<sup>55</sup> The idea is that Jesus simply fell unconscious and after he was placed in the tomb he regained consciousness. This theory would make a claim that there was not a resurrection of Jesus, but rather a resuscitation which would have allowed him to escape from the tomb in his original physical body. It must be pointed out that there is no eyewitness evidence or documentation from the first century which would support such a claim. Frederick Zugibe was the Chief Medical Examiner and Forensic Pathologist from Rockland County, New York. He is known as one of the most prominent forensic experts in the United States. Zugibe concluded his investigation and stated, “The extent and severity of His injuries dictate that He would not have survived the crucifixion.”<sup>56</sup> There is no legitimate reason to believe or evidence to substantiate that Jesus could have possibly survived such an ordeal.

The Jewish leaders asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified broken and to have the bodies taken off the cross as to not disturb the Sabbath. The soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves, but not that of Jesus because they found he was already dead (John 19:31-33). One of

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas A. Miller, *Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?: A Surgeon-Scientist Examines the Evidence* (Crossway, 2013), 44.

<sup>56</sup> Frederick T. Zugibe. *The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Forensic Inquiry* (New York: M. Evans and Co, 2005), 161.

the soldiers pierced the side of Jesus with a spear while he still hang on the cross at which time blood and water exited the body of Jesus. The Apostle John then writes, “The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe” (John 19:35). This also fulfills Old Testament scripture which states “He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken” (Psalm 34:20).

The Roman soldiers and the Centurion are great non-bias witnesses. They also put Jesus at the cross and have great reason not to lie and to make sure he really was dead. Immediately after the death of Jesus there was a reported earthquake. The centurion and the soldiers witnessed the earthquake at which time they spontaneously exclaimed “Surely he was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). This is where and when *excited utterance* can be admitted into evidence. *Excited Utterance* is “a statement relating to a startling event or condition, made while the declarant was under the stress of excitement that it caused.”<sup>57</sup> What is most exciting about *Excited Utterance* is that it is an exception to the *hearsay rule*. Most twenty first century western courts will not accept ‘hearsay testimony’ into evidence. Unless it is one of the exceptions according to rule 803. Excited utterance is an exception to the rule and can therefore be used as witness testimony. According to the United States Department of Justice, *Brunsfing v. Lutsen Mountains Cop.*, in the 8<sup>th</sup> circuit court states, “The statement must be “made before there has been time to reflect and fabricate.””<sup>58</sup> The exact amount of time between

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<sup>57</sup> Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute, Federal Rules of Evidence, *Rule 803, Exceptions to the Rule Against Hearsay*, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/fre/rule\\_803](https://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/fre/rule_803).

<sup>58</sup> United States. Department of Justice. Office of Legal Education, *Courtroom Evidence*, Third edition (Washington, D.C.: Published by Office of Legal Education, Executive Office for United States Attorneys, 2011), 187.

the incident and the excited utterance is not specifically stated. However, the U.S. Department of Justice lists the following as important factors to consider in the matter:

- The amount of time between the event and the statement.
- The nature of the event.
- The subject matter of the statement.
- The age and condition of the declarant.
- The presence or absence of self-interest.
- Whether the statement was volunteered or in response to questioning.<sup>59</sup>

When Jesus took his last breath and an earthquake occurred, while still standing in front of Jesus, the centurion and the soldiers stated “Surely he was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). No significant time had passed to consider what they had witnessed or to devise a statement together or act in cooperation with each other. The nature of the event and the subject matter was that of a miracle. The incident was so overwhelming that they could not hold back their expression of what they were witnessing before their very eyes. These were strong and healthy men. They were Roman soldiers and the centurion was a supervisor of approximately eighty men. These men had absolutely no self-interest in the matter. They were the very men that were crucifying Jesus. The statement was also made completely voluntary and without any coercion.

Unlike the two thieves, the Roman soldiers and the centurion witnessed the death of Jesus on the cross. This makes them eyewitnesses. When Jesus officially dies on the cross and an earthquake occurs, the Roman soldiers and the centurion immediately identify that it was not a coincidence through their excited utterance. As with the reaction of the thief on the cross, one must consider human behavior. Is it reasonable to think that a Roman soldier or centurion would

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

make such a statement concerning someone dying on a cross? Or, had something so miraculous occurred before their eyes that it caused them to spontaneously exclaim that Jesus was exactly who he said he was?

The Roman soldiers and the Centurion are probably the most unbiased witnesses on the list. They were not concerned with the accusation of blasphemy nor interested in proving that Jesus was the Messiah. They were simply doing their job as instructed. Roman soldiers were recruited in Roman Judea from areas such as Idumea and Samaria. “Soldiers served for twenty-five years and received Roman citizenship upon discharge.”<sup>60</sup> They would have taken their positions very seriously. When Joseph of Arimathea came to ask Pontius Pilate for the body of Jesus, Pilate summoned for the centurion. The centurion confirmed to Pilate that Jesus was dead (Mark 15:44-45). If an inquiry had been conducted by unbiased investigators after the resurrection, the soldiers and centurion would have been key eyewitnesses to the death of Jesus. They would be able to testify to being the executioners. Based on the information above, the Roman soldiers and the centurion should be considered direct eyewitnesses to the death of Jesus on the cross and their excited utterance as circumstantial evidence toward a resurrected Jesus and his divinity.

#### Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus

According to the Gospel of Luke, Joseph of Arimathea was “a member of the counsel, a good and upright man” (Luke 23:50). Describing Joseph of Arimathea as a “good and upright man” would mean that he was noble, righteous, and faithful. To be a right-minded man, Walter Adeney would claim “they naturally hesitate between party loyalty and enlightened

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<sup>60</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, *Jesus in Jerusalem: The Last Days* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 102.

conscience.”<sup>61</sup> Being “a member of the counsel” would imply that he was educated as a Jewish leader and was respected and trusted by his peers and fellow members of the counsel. Joseph’s only intention was to ensure Jesus receive a proper burial after his brutal crucifixion on the cross. Nicodemus is a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council (John 3:1). Nicodemus is described by Jesus as “Israel’s teacher” (John 3:10). “Nicodemus evidently belonged to a very wealthy, prominent family living in Jerusalem dedicated to national, indeed nationalistic, affairs and affiliated with the Pharisaic movement.”<sup>62</sup> This would explain his ability to have access to the body of Jesus after his death and to provide a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing approximately one hundred litrai (Greek) or seventy-five pounds (John 19:39).

The testimonies of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are combined in the Gospels. This is important because according to first century law in Jerusalem (as discussed in chapter 2) two witnesses were needed to bring a suspect before the courts. Samuel Hirshberg would write, “both witnesses had to be conscious of the presence of each other, and had to testify that they both saw the main incidents of the particular crime.”<sup>63</sup> This would have satisfied first-century Jewish law concerning the body of Jesus in the tomb. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus certainly would have had knowledge of the others actions during preparation for the burial of Jesus and their testimonies stand as witness to each other. In the Gospel of John it is reported that Nicodemus assisted Joseph of Arimathea with the preparation of Jesus dead body for burial. Again there are two witnesses present for this process which is needed according to Jewish law.

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<sup>61</sup> Walter F. Adeney, *Men of the Bible - Some Lesser-Known Characters* (Andrews UK Ltd., 2012), 82.

<sup>62</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, *Jesus in Jerusalem: The Last Days* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 102, 51.

<sup>63</sup> Samuel Hirshberg, “Jurisprudence Among the Ancient Jews,” Volume 11 Issue 1 (Marquette Law Review, 1926), 5.

Jesus had an impact on the lives of many and according to Walter Chandler, “The friendship of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea is proof that He had standing even in the Sanhedrin itself.”<sup>64</sup> This friendship Jesus had with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea speaks highly of the credibility in Jesus from the perspective of these two Jewish leaders.

The chief priests and the Pharisees wanted to arrest Jesus. Nicodemus being confused and concerned asked, “Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing” (John 7:51)? Nicodemus was certainly sympathetic toward Jesus. He wanted to be open to a fair trial. Nicodemus arguably sat on the fence when it came to the divinity of Jesus. He was baffled as most people were because Jesus was like no other man. Nicodemus had just heard a guard make a statement to the chief priests and the Pharisees declaring that, “no one ever spoke the way this man does” (John 7:46). Nicodemus made a stand before the other leaders, but his thoughts were dismissed. Joseph of Arimathea is identified by the apostle John as a “secret disciple” (John 19:38). This would not have been strange because Joseph would have feared for his life if he would have sided with Jesus and the Jewish leaders had discovered his alliance.

All four Gospel writers explain that Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body. The Gospel of Mark writes that Joseph “went boldly to Pilate” (Mark 15:43). As Walter Adeney would posit, “Joseph must be regarded as a common soldier, rather than as a general in Christ's army; but when the officers had fallen, or deserted their Leader, he bravely stepped to the front and proved himself a hero.”<sup>65</sup> If the story was not true and the disciples planned to steal the body

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<sup>64</sup> Walter M. Chandler, *Trial of Jesus from a Lawyer's Standpoint* (New York, The Federal Book Co., 1925), 276.

<sup>65</sup> Walter F. Adeney, *Men of the Bible - Some Lesser-Known Characters* (Andrews UK Ltd., 2012), 81.

and collude with Joseph, they would not have mentioned in their testimony that Joseph was the last person in possession of the body. They could have made the body disappear some other way. However, Joseph placed the body of Jesus in his own family grave considered to be a ‘new tomb’ implying that no one had ever been buried there before. (Matthew 27:59-60; John 19:41). It is also safe to assume that Joseph never would have buried a criminal in his own family tomb.

The women who had traveled with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and they witnessed the tomb and the wrapped body (Luke 23:55). Had women been able to testify at a trial, this could have been used as corroborative testimony. Joseph of Arimathea was also accompanied by Nicodemus and helped to prepare the body. Schnabel writes, “Nicodemus’s lavish attention to Jesus’ body suggests that he did not expect Jesus to be imminently raised from the dead, but neither did the disciples (John 20:2, 9).”<sup>66</sup> Why go to the pain staking lengths of preparing a body according to Jewish burial customs with myrrh and aloes, along with wrapping it, if the plan was to steal the body? Or even if they had knowledge that Jesus would resurrect so suddenly, they never would have wrapped the body so carefully. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were both well respected members of the Jewish community. Their testimony at the time would have been considered reliable and credible to an unbiased investigator. There is no documentation from the time period which would conflict with or discredit any of the testimony reported by all four of the Gospel writers. As a result of all the information listed above, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus certainly should be considered credible eyewitnesses to the physical death of Jesus.

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<sup>66</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, *Jesus in Jerusalem: The Last Days* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 52.

## Conclusion

This chapter has covered the importance of establishing the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. The Gospel writers have documented the crucifixion with historical accuracy which will later be shown to be supported by corroborating evidence in chapter 5. The crucifixion of Jesus was a public event in front of several witnesses. Had the disciples wanted to deceive the people into thinking Jesus had died, why allow the Romans and Jews to be part of the process? They could have simply claimed he died and then allowed him to reappear.

The witnesses of the resurrection comprised of at least chief priests, Jewish leaders, two thieves, Roman soldiers, a centurion, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. This is a wide range of witnesses from all different walks of life. It would be strange to think that the disciples could have fooled all these individual witnesses when they were in control of absolutely nothing at the time of the arrest, trial, and death of Jesus. Everything was out of their hands. The Jewish leaders and the Roman authority were in complete control of everything that was taking place. There is no credible reason to doubt that Jesus Christ was a physical man that was beaten and left to die on a cross. He did die and witnesses also observed an empty grave. We can now address the reliability of the credible witnesses concerning the resurrection of Jesus.

### **Chapter 4. The Witness list of the Resurrection of Jesus**

It is clear that any investigation, trial, or court proceeding always favors as many credible witnesses as possible. The investigation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is no different. There are arguably upwards of hundreds of witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. These witnesses were amazed, confused and even doubted what they were witnessing. Their mere testimony alone could cost them their lives. All of the witnesses are not testifying to the exact same observation.

They each had different experiences at different times and locations. This would dispel any claim of a single collective hallucination. The witnesses include women followers of Jesus, Peter, the disciples collectively, James, five hundred witnesses at one time, and Paul (Saul of Tarsus). Paul arguably is the best witness of the resurrection because he was not even a follower of Jesus. He was actually a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. The witness testimonies and their credibility are of great importance to case of the resurrected Jesus due to the lack of physical evidence.

### The Women and the Empty Tomb

The women followers of Jesus are an essential part of the investigation into the resurrection of Jesus. One woman or another, or several women, are at all aspects of the end of Jesus life including his death, burial, and resurrection. Although first century Jewish culture and tradition did not allow for the testimony of women, we can see the great importance of their testimony today. Below is a breakdown of the events witnessed by the women disciples of Jesus described in the four Gospels:

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Cross	women	women	women	
	Mary from Magdala	Mary from Magdala		Mary mother of Jesus
	Mary mother of James And Joseph	Mary mother of James and Joses		Mary wife of Clopas
	Mother of sons of Zebedee	Salome		Mary from Magdala
Burial	Mary from Magdala	Mary from Magdala	women	
	Mary mother of James And Joseph (the other Mary)	Mary mother of Joses		
Empty tomb	Mary from Magdala	Mary from Magdala	Mary from Magdala	Mary from Magdala
	Mary mother of James And Joseph (the other Mary)	Mary mother of James (and Joseph)	Joanna	
			Mary mother of James	

The four Gospel accounts are slightly different and focus on different perspectives, but this actually lends more credibility to their individual stories. If the stories were too eerily similar it would cause alarm for suspicion. The same as if there were four witnesses of a bank robbery today. You would get four different, yet non-contradicting testimonies. One witness may have focused on the suspect description, and another witness may have focused on the get-away vehicle. One may have thought it necessary to describe the weapon which was used, and the fourth witness may have focused on the conversations and the words which were said. One can tell by the four independent descriptions of the event that the story was not fabricated or rehearsed.

A prime example of this is the apostle John describes Mary the mother of Jesus as an eyewitness to the crucifixion of her very own son (John 19:25). Luke later reports that Mary was in Jerusalem with the remaining eleven original disciples (Acts 1:14). Schnabel would posit that this “implies that Mary was also an eyewitness to the reality of the risen Jesus.”<sup>68</sup> Some skeptics would argue that because Mary the mother of Jesus is not mentioned by the other three writers that would imply she was not present at the crucifixion. This skepticism cannot be supported by any documented testimony and is unwarranted. In first-century Jerusalem women were not even acknowledged as witnesses. The writers have expressive freedom in choosing how to document the witnesses of the events. The mere fact that Mary was not mentioned by name in some of the scripture does not imply she was not present because it was common to simply include her as

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 62.

“the women.” Schnabel adds, “Mary for the last time in connection with Jesus’ presentation in the temple (Luke 2:34), mentions Mary and Jesus’ brothers as being in Jerusalem when the risen Jesus appeared to and instructed the Eleven and a larger group of disciples (Acts 1:3– 8).”<sup>69</sup> Mark writes, “Many other women” were there at the cross (Mark 15:41). Luke explains the women “stood at a distance” (Luke 23:49) and was watching as Jesus breathed his last breath. The women were clearly eyewitnesses to the crucifixion of Jesus.

The women were also clearly at the tomb and observed the dead body of Jesus. Mark writes, “Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid” (Mark 15:47). Matthew documents that Mary Magdalen and the other Mary were present at the tomb when Joseph of Arimathea wrapped the body of Jesus (Matthew 27:59-61). This testimony allows the story of the women to be corroborated by that of Joseph of Arimathea. Luke even describes the women seeing the body inside the tomb and then went home to prepare spices and perfumes (Luke 23:55-56).

Mary from Magdala, or (as she is commonly referred to as) Mary Magdalen, was arguably the most prominent of all the female disciples of Jesus. She is referred to in nearly all of the Gospel accounts concerning Jesus’ last days. She was an individual with a troubled past. She had been described as the woman “from whom seven demons had come out” (Luke 8:2). To this very woman is whom Jesus chose to first appear after his crucifixion and burial. After the disciples had discovered the empty grave and went home, Mary Magdalene stay behind at the tomb. She was crying because she thought someone had taken the body (John 20:13). Jesus then calls out to Mary and Mary turns to see her Lord at which time “She turned toward him and cried

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

out in Aramaic “Rabboni!” (which means teacher)” (John 20:16). Jesus then said to Mary, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:17). This sounds like an unlikely statement to make had it not been true.

It is quite fascinating that all four Gospel writers chose to document so much testimony from the women disciples of Jesus. The Jewish law and culture would have deemed the testimony null and void. Craig writes, “The testimony of women was not only worthless, but actually embarrassing.”<sup>70</sup> However, this actually credits their involvement. All four Gospel writers would never had placed so much emphasis on their testimonies had it not been absolutely true. When Mary Magdalene makes the comment at the empty tomb, “They have taken my Lord away” (John 20:13) she is speaking out of shock because Jesus is missing. She had no idea that he had resurrected. It would later show that the body had not been stolen by the disciples because the women report the missing body to the disciples and they don’t believe the women. They even call the claim made by them that the body was missing “nonsense” (Luke 24:11). Peter himself runs to the tomb to witness the missing body with his own eyes and wonders what had happened (John 24:12). The chief priests and the elders advised the guards and paid them to say the disciples came during the night and stole the body (Matthew 28:13). The claims of the disciples stealing the body should be disregarded due to lack of any credible testimony toward such a claim. At that point and time the disciples were just as confused as anyone as to what had happened to Jesus.

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<sup>70</sup> William L. Craig, *The Son Rises: Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 33.

Today there is absolutely no reason to discredit the testimony of ‘the women.’ They were at the crucifixion, they were at the burial, and they experienced the resurrected Jesus. Graeme Smith is a District Court Judge of High Court and County Court in Great Britain. He writes, “The importance given to the female witnesses in the Gospels is highly noteworthy.”<sup>71</sup> There is no legitimate documentation or testimony disproving the claims of the women and should therefore be deemed reliable evidence received from credible witnesses.

### The Five Hundred Brothers

The mention of ‘the five hundred brothers’ as witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus is only mentioned in one location in all of scripture. The Apostle Paul mentions it in his first letter to the church in Corinth. Paul visited Corinth during his second missionary journey and he was accompanied by Silas and Timothy. “We can date Paul’s arrival in the city on the basis of a letter of the Roman emperor Claudius, which relates to the accession of the proconsul L. Iunius Gallio, who was the brother of the famous Stoic Seneca.”<sup>72</sup> Below is a timeline provided by Schreiner concerning the Apostle Paul and his association with the church in Corinth:

146 BC	Ancient Corinth destroyed in war with Rome
44 BC	Corinth founded as a Roman colony
AD 50– 51	Paul spends 18 months in Corinth (Acts 18:11)
AD 51– 52	Gallio proconsul of Achaia (cf. Acts 18:12– 17)
AD 54– 55	Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8)
AD 55– 56	Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:5) <sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Graeme Smith, *Was the Tomb Empty?: A Lawyer Weighs the Evidence for the Resurrection* (Lion Hudson LTD, 2014), 87.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (InterVarsity Press, 2018), 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

The Apostle Paul writes his first letter to the church in Corinth ca. AD 54-55. This letter is actually the first letter to be written by any of the followers of Jesus. It is written approximately twenty-one to twenty-two years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The skeptic Bart Ehrman would even agree and state, “in the case of Paul, we have a number of letters that survive from his own hand.”<sup>74</sup> He would continue and concur that in regards to Paul’s writings to the church in Corinth, it was written “twenty to thirty years after Jesus’ death, mainly in the 50s CE.”<sup>75</sup> In this letter, Paul is explaining the good news of the fact that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of man and that he was raised on the third day. He appeared to Peter and the other disciples (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). Paul goes on to explain “After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:6). Below is the scripture written by the Apostle Paul concerning the five-hundred brothers.

<sup>3</sup>For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup>and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

George Albert Wells is a professor of German and well known atheist and rationalist. He believes the portion of scripture concerning ‘the five hundred brothers’ may not have been in the original text. He posits this scripture, “may have been originally compiled as evidence of the credentials of the persons named in it, and the reference to the five hundred added later when the list came to be understood not as stating who had apostolic credentials, but as evidence for the

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<sup>74</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (Oxford University, 2008), 92.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

resurrection.”<sup>76</sup> However, Wells has no solid evidence for such a claim. We therefore must accept the words of the Apostle Paul as written.

In a conversation between Strobel and Habermas concerning the authenticity of this account, Habermas states, “it just so happens to be the earliest and the best-authenticated passage of all! That counts for something”<sup>77</sup> The fact that Paul includes the statement “most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:6) is significant. Paul is essentially explaining that anyone can go to any of these five-hundred brothers at any time and confirm the story for themselves. This was twenty-one or twenty-two years after the resurrection, so it would make sense that some may still be alive and some may have passed away by the time this letter was read to the church in Corinth.

Paul is basically telling his audience that all these five-hundred brothers can corroborate the good news that he is delivering to them. The point is that Jesus did not die and then appear to just one disciple. Paul is giving a detailed account of how Jesus appeared to Peter and then the other disciples. Jesus then appears to the five-hundred, James, and all the apostles. Only at the very end does Paul humbly mention himself as a witness. There would be no reason for Paul to make up such a story in strange detail had it not been true. “For our present purpose it is quite sufficient that Paul relates this as a tradition he himself received — surely from the Jerusalem church — and handed on to the Corinthian Christians when he founded their church”<sup>78</sup> One should not see this as five-hundred individual testimonies which were never collected, but rather

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<sup>76</sup> George Albert Wells, *Cutting Jesus Down to Size: What Higher Criticism Has Achieved and Where It Leaves Christianity* (Open Court, 2009), 122.

<sup>77</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 231.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017), 251.

a large gathering of five-hundred brother that all witnessed Jesus resurrected at the same time. Paul writes of these five-hundred brothers with no concerns of it possibly being investigated. Opponents of the claim could have located some or even many of the members of the crowd in order to prove it as a false claim. However, this did not happen. This also shows that all five-hundred brothers could not have been hallucinating at the same time. Had Jesus resurrection been a hallucination, it would most likely had been a story from one man and did not have corroborating testimony. “The collective testimony of the 500-plus witnesses more than validates the assertion that Jesus rose from the dead.”<sup>79</sup> There is simply no credible counter testimony to this claim and should therefore be deemed reliable.

### The Disciples Collectively

There are several accounts of Jesus appearing to his disciples after his resurrection. Luke explains he appeared to them for over forty days and spoke with them and had even eaten with them (Acts 1:4). On one occasion, Cleopas and another disciple were walking on the road to Emmaus outside of Jerusalem. Jesus began to walk beside them, but they did not recognize him. Jesus conversed with them and they were saddened because Jesus was missing from the tomb. However, they still had no idea Jesus was with them. Jesus agreed to stay with them because it was near nightfall. While at the table, Jesus broke bread and handed it to them at which time they recognized it was Jesus (John 24:13-33). Immediately these two disciples wanted to tell the others. They found the Eleven and the Eleven confirmed that Jesus has risen and has appeared to Simon (John 24:33-34). The two disciples were so elated to discover Jesus was alive they wanted to share the news with the other followers. Jesus was starting to show himself to all the disciples.

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas A. Miller, *Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?: A Surgeon-Scientist Examines the Evidence* (Crossway, 2013), 76.

This would debunk the claim of individual hallucinations. Jesus wanted to make sure they all had seen him resurrected. It would appear to be an unlikely story to tell had it been false. It would make them sound foolish, as if they could not recognize the very person they believe to be the Son of God. If one were to lie, chances are they would have had a greater story to tell shining themselves in a better light. There is no reason to doubt these two disciples and their story.

Jesus now presented himself in the room before the Eleven, Cleopas, the other disciple, and others that were present. They were all startled and frightened and had thought they had seen a ghost (Luke 24:37). Although it was not a ghost because Jesus wanted them to touch him and feel his flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). Jesus then asked for food and they gave him a piece of broiled fish and he ate it (Luke 24:41-43). One can certainly imagine they could have thought it was a ghost. Jesus death was still recent and his body was missing from the tomb. They could not fathom that Jesus really had resurrected from the dead. It was beyond their comprehension at the time. It is quite significant that Jesus asks the disciples for something to eat and he eats broiled fish which they had given him (Luke 24:41-42). Jesus is wanting to show the disciples that he is not a ghost. Jesus also wanted them to touch him and feel his flesh and bones. A spirit or ghost would not manifest in such a manner. Jesus then goes on to explain to the disciples that he is fulfilling scripture written about him by Moses, the Prophets, and in the Psalms (Luke 24:44). Jesus continues to explain to them the reason he needed to rise from the dead for the repentance of forgiveness of sins. Jesus tells them, "You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:48). Jesus made sure he appeared before several witnesses and not only one. Here we have thirteen plus witnesses to this one appearance and all are in agreement as to what they have witnessed. It is noteworthy that not one of these witnesses ever stepped forward and contradicted the others.

The Apostle John also describes the account where Jesus appears before the disciples without Thomas being present. They explained to Thomas that Jesus appeared to them. Thomas did not believe. Thomas stated, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it” (John 20:25). A week later Jesus appeared to the disciples again, but this time Thomas was present. Jesus wanted Thomas to touch him and had him place his finger in his side. Thomas from then on believed (John 20:26-28). It is interesting that the account of Thomas reveals that it was an entire week later before Jesus appeared again. Had it been a fake story they could have easily written that Thomas arrived later and saw Jesus standing there. Jesus also knew the conversation between the disciples and that Thomas was having doubts. That is why Jesus wanted Thomas to touch his side. This would allow for Thomas — just as Thomas had wished for — to believe such a crazy accusation. Thomas was wanting physical proof of what he was being told. “Thomas’ reception of the hard proof he demands, the flesh-and-bone risen Lord, demonstrates the physical nature of the resurrection.”<sup>80</sup> Thomas’ account is reliable testimony concerning a physical resurrection of Jesus Christ because he himself had doubts until he was convinced beyond a reasonable doubt.

Jesus chose also to appear to the disciples while they were fishing on the Sea of Tiberias. The Apostle John lists the disciples present to be Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples (John 21:1-2). The disciples caught no fish all night. Jesus was standing on the shore, but they could not tell it was him. Jesus yelled to them to cast the net on the right side of the ship and they caught a large number of fish. After realizing the man on the shoreline was Jesus, Peter swam to shore (John

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<sup>80</sup> W. Bonney, and W Bonney, *Caused to believe: The Doubting Thomas story at the climax of John's Christological narrative* (BRILL, 2002), 8.

21:4-7). The other disciples followed with the boat full of fish in the net. John is specific in his writing and describes one hundred and fifty three fish (John 21:11). Had this not been an actual account of a true incident there would not need to be such an accurate account of the amount of fish caught in the net that day. This leads to the belief that the account was not a hallucination. Several of the disciples were present and Jesus had a fire already burning as he invited them to breakfast. At this point Jesus had appeared to his disciples for the third time after he was raised from the dead (John 21:14).

Jesus had appeared to several of His followers and disciples and even appeared to a non-believer in Saul of Tarsus (Paul). Below is a list of Jesus' fourteen post resurrection appearances to the disciples and followers of Jesus. It is documented in scripture that Jesus appeared to approximately one hundred persons excluding the claim of five-hundred brothers by the apostle Paul. These accounts are documented by four separate authors (Matthew, Luke, John, and Paul):

	<b>DISCIPLES</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>TIME</b>
1.	John 20:15-17 Mary from Magdala	Jerusalem	Sunday early morning
2.	Matt 28:9-10 Mary mother of Joseph and Salome	Jerusalem	Sunday early morning
3.	Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5 Simon Peter	Jerusalem	Sunday (time unclear)
4.	Luke 24:13-32 Cleopas and another disciple	near Emmaus	Sunday late afternoon
5.	Luke 24:33; 36-49 the Eleven, Cleopas, the other Disciple, and others who are present	Jerusalem	Sunday evening
6.	John 20:19-23; 1 Cor 15:5 the disciples (without Thomas)	Jerusalem	Sunday evening
7.	John 20:26-29 The disciples and Thomas	Jerusalem	eight days later (Nisan 23, April 16-17)
8.	John 21:1-22 Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, the Beloved Disciple,	Sea of Tiberias, in Galilee	“after these things”

		Two other disciples		
9.	Matt 28:16-17	the Eleven	Galilee	undated
10.	1 Cor 15:6	more than five hundred followers	unnamed	undated
11.	1 Cor 15:7	James (brother of Jesus)	unnamed	undated
12.	Acts 1:3; 1 Cor 15:7	the Eleven (the apostles)	unnamed	during forty days
13.	Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:6-14	the disciples, the Eleven (named), Mary the mother of Jesus, women Followers, Jesus' brothers	Bethany, Jerusalem	after forty days
14.	1 Cor 15:8; Acts 9:3-6	Saul/Paul of Tarsus	near Damascus	probably AD 31/32 <sup>81</sup>

### The Apostle Peter

Peter is often identified throughout scripture as a fisherman by trade and described to be from Bethsaida (John 1:44). He was in the fishing business together with his brother Andrew and James and John known as “the sons of Zebedee” (Luke 5:10). Peter is one of the earliest recruited disciples of Jesus. Peter and his brother were fishing off the coast of the Sea of Galilee when Jesus told them to follow him and he would make them “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Jesus saw a worth in Peter and his brother Andrew that possibly the Jewish leaders of the day would not have noticed by them being simple fishermen. However, Jesus saw their worth and trusted them both.

Peter’s given name was Simon. Jesus gave Simon the name Peter (Mark 3:16) meaning “rock.” There was the Aramaic version of his name and the Greek version of his name. According to Helyer, “The fact that he had both an Aramaic and a Greek name is significant; he

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<sup>81</sup> Eckhard. Schnabel, *Jesus in Jerusalem: The Last Days* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 339.

was bilingual and lived in an environment that was heavily influenced by Hellenism.”<sup>82</sup> The Sanhedrin would identify both Peter and John as “unschooled” and “ordinary” men. (Acts 4:13). This more likely than not did not apply to their particular education or intelligence but rather that of their knowledge of the Torah. One could describe Peter as an ordinary man or a working man.

Peter was a devoted follower of Jesus. He was a loyalist to his teachings and was amazed by his works. However, Peter was a man. He also came with his own doubts or insecurities in his faith. Jesus predicts Peter’s denial in which Peter declares not knowing Jesus three times during his trial (Matthew 26:31-35; 69-75). Peter feared for his life if he acknowledged being a follower of Jesus Christ. This adds credibility to Peter’s testimony. Peter would not declare Jesus risen from the dead had he not actually witnessed it himself.

Luke and John both describe Peter running to the tomb of Jesus after being told of his resurrection by the women (Luke 24:12; John 20:1-9). Luke writes that Cleopas and another disciple reported to the Eleven and said, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon” (Luke 24:34). Helyer comments that “A mystery surrounds Jesus’ appearance to Peter; we have no narrative account of the circumstances.”<sup>83</sup> This is true. However, that does not mean that Jesus did not appear to Peter. As the Apostle John explains, “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (John 21:25). Luke did not witness the resurrection, but his accounts documented in the Gospel according to Luke and in the book of

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<sup>82</sup> Larry R. Helyer, *The Life and Witness of Peter* (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 19.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

Acts can be viewed as a biography of sorts of the testimony of Peter. As mentioned earlier, Luke writes the following in his introduction to his gospel message:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke had certainly done his due diligence in documenting himself and the sources from which he is giving his account. It is unreasonable to think that Luke could have done any better of a job in clarifying the authenticity of the message which was given to him. Luke even goes as far as writing that he has ‘carefully’ conducted his own investigation into the matter. There should not be any question as to the credibility and reliability of the scriptures and accounts handed down by the Apostle Luke.

In the Gospel according to John, Peter is reinstated by Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish. Peter and Jesus (post resurrection) carry on a conversation concerning his prior denials and gives Peter the command to “feed his sheep” (John 21:15-25). One of the first things Peter writes about in his first letter is praising God for giving man new birth and a living hope “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). This is a clear and concise statement from an eyewitness delivered in his own writing. Luke continued to document statements made by Peter in his Acts of the Apostles. Peter addresses a crowd of people as ‘Men of Israel’ and explains what has recently happened with Jesus. Peter explains that Jesus had a set purpose from God and with the help of wicked men he was crucified (Acts 2:22-23). Peter goes on to explain that God raised this very Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24) and “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact” (Acts 2:32). Peter makes the statement again while at the house of Cornelius and says “We are witnesses of everything he did” (Acts 10:39). Peter does not stop there; he explains that Jesus was killed by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him

from the dead on the third day and ‘caused him to be seen’ (Acts 10:40). Peter and ‘the other apostles’ also make the following bold statement when they testified in front of the Sanhedrin:

The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead-whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him (Acts 5:30-32).

Peter here is delivering a truth statement as an eyewitness to the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is being made in front of elders and rabbis as the tribunal for the Sanhedrin. Instead of listening to the truthful testimony and being thankful to God that he sent the Messiah, their hearts became hardened. Luke writes, “They were furious and wanted to put them to death” (Acts 5:33). Skeptics as to Peter being a credible witness to the resurrection of Jesus should feel satisfied in his truthful statements. Peter had nothing to gain and everything to lose.

Peter’s credibility could be brought into question after his denial of knowing Jesus during his path to crucifixion. However, there is a clear distinction between the Peter in the gospels and the Peter described in the Book of Acts. Pre-crucifixion Peter was confused and wavering in faith because of a lack of complete understanding as to what is truly going on with Jesus. Post-resurrection Peter is changed. Wiarda writes, “Traits such as initiative, boldness of expression and confidence are still evident, but these are now transformed as Peter acts with a new level of leadership, courage, authority and reliability; weakness and misunderstanding are gone.”<sup>84</sup> This new change in Peter can only be described by his experience with the post-resurrection Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within Peter. Pre-resurrection Peter should not be identified as a person with character flaws. He was simply human and did not have the capability of fully understanding the workings of God. However, the transformation of Peter post-resurrection is

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<sup>84</sup> Timothy J. Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels: Pattern, Personality and Relationship* (Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 223.

astounding and cannot be denied and should lend to his credibility. If Peter did have a character flaw, John and Luke could have chosen another disciple to write about who would have seemed stronger. But they were not concerned about Peter's character, they were concerned with telling the truth no matter how it happened.

### James- The Brother of Jesus

James is known as the half-brother of Jesus. But this does not automatically mean that James is a believer in his brother Jesus. John even wrote, "For even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:5). The apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Corinth specifically identifies James as one whom Jesus had appeared to after his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7) and "this appearance was enough to convince James that his brother was indeed God."<sup>85</sup> "Since James the brother of Jesus is the only James Paul mentions elsewhere in his letters, the reference here is surely to the person Paul calls a pillar of the Jerusalem church in Galatians 1 and the "Lord's brother."<sup>86</sup> Paul would not have singled out James had it been one of the eleven. There are no details of the appearance of the resurrected Jesus before his half-brother James, but it is documented that it occurred. McKnight would explain that "The evidence is not completely clear, but it leans in the direction of James having become a believer after the death of Jesus and perhaps as a result of encountering the resurrected Jesus."<sup>87</sup> James is never mentioned in any of the Gospels concerning him being a follower of Jesus during his ministry. However, James later comes to believe and becomes a leader of the church in Jerusalem. A change from non-follower

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas A. Miller, *Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?: A Surgeon-Scientist Examines the Evidence* (Crossway, 2013), 78.

<sup>86</sup> Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington III, *The Brother of Jesus: The Dramatic Story and Meaning of the First Archaeological Link to Jesus and His Family* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publisher, 2003), 107.

<sup>87</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 40.

of Jesus to leader could imply a post-resurrection experience for James. One could imagine not believing in their very own brother as the Messiah. However, a significant event such as the resurrection would completely dispel any disbelief in anyone. It would simply be undeniable at that point.

The letter written by James the brother of Jesus does not mention the death, nor the resurrection of Jesus. However, James does begin his letter by calling himself “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (James 1:1). He also writes, “as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (James 2:1). James calls his brother Jesus ‘glorious’ and ‘Lord’. He also calls him Christ. *Christ* comes from *Christos*, a Greek word that means “the anointed one,” or “the chosen one.” Had James not absolute certainty about the resurrection of Jesus, he never would have used such terminology to describe his very own half-brother. Shanks and Witherington believe “The letter was probably written ten years prior to James’s death or a bit later (around the year 52).”<sup>88</sup> “He wrote the letter probably after Paul’s message was either known or beginning to be heard.”<sup>89</sup> It would be reasonable to state that the book of James was written sometime in the 50’s. That would make the text written by an eyewitness approximately twenty to thirty years after the resurrection of Jesus.

The question of James is not necessarily whether he was a witness or not to the resurrection of Jesus. It would be concerning whether or not he should be deemed a reliable and credible witness. James was a man of righteous character and piety. He was also known for being

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<sup>88</sup> Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington III, *The Brother of Jesus: The Dramatic Story and Meaning of the First Archaeological Link to Jesus and His Family* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publisher, 2003), 146.

<sup>89</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 52.

ascetic. He believed in the denying of himself and his own desires in order to be faithful to God the Father. Such things as the time-honored practice of fasting would be common for James. James was known as ‘James the Just’ or ‘James the Righteous’. This would imply “that James took very seriously the importance of being faithful to both the Law and various Jewish traditions not specifically recorded in the Law.”<sup>90</sup> Knowing this about James allows one to see that James was at least sympathetic toward the Pharisees and the ways of the Law. “While in the end James turned out to be a mediating figure between the Pharisaic Jewish Christians to his right and Paul and those interested in a Law-free gospel to his left.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, James was not a radical for either side of the coin. He was level-headed and reasonable.

James writes about ‘faith and deeds’ and uses the story of Abraham and Isaac along with the story of Rahab as examples. James wrote, “faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:26). This shows his indoctrination and faithful loyalty to the Torah and God the Father. James would not have just believed and supported any Rabi walking down the street. He would have taken blasphemy very seriously. In James heart he was not part of the Jerusalem church of a new religion; he was a faithful Jew who was following the Jewish Messiah. James would have been the first person to testify that Jesus was a fraud and not the Messiah had he not experienced the post-resurrection Jesus. The resurrection was the proof James needed to believe in his half-brother. Due to this information and the lack of any documented testimony of character flaws, James should be considered a credible eyewitness to the resurrection of Jesus.

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<sup>90</sup> Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington III, *The Brother of Jesus: The Dramatic Story and Meaning of the First Archaeological Link to Jesus and His Family* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publisher, 2003), 112.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

## The Apostle Paul

Paul was arguably the greatest apostle of Jesus Christ. However, before we can defend the resurrection of Jesus with the testimony of the Apostle Paul, we must first ask and answer the question of, who is Paul? Prior to being named Paul, he was given the name Saul at birth. Saul was likely named after King Saul and he grew up in a Jewish home. Saul's family were likely tentmakers which is where he learned the trade and could earn a living. Research professor and New Testament scholar Charles Quarles writes, "Paul was a Roman citizen by birth. Many interpreters speculate that Paul's father or grandfather was honored with citizenship because of some special service rendered to a military proconsul, such as the provision of tents for soldiers."<sup>92</sup> This would explain Paul's Jewish heritage and his Roman citizenship.

However, Paul was no mere tentmaker. He was well educated. Paul was highly educated in his knowledge of scripture. But he was also highly educated in secular knowledge. His education is in rhetorical writing and one must assume that Paul was educated in that style and was brought up among the educated elite. Dominican Priest Murphy-O'Connor states, "The quality of Paul's secular education is manifest not only in his command of Greek, but in the way in which he organized the content of his letters."<sup>93</sup> Paul was obviously also trained in Hebrew scripture. "Acts 22:3 says Paul was trained by Rabbi Gamaliel I, the member of the Sanhedrin mentioned in Acts 5:33–39. Gamaliel was a leading Jewish teacher in Paul's day."<sup>94</sup> Paul declares in his letter to the Galatians that he was a good student. Paul writes, "I was advancing in

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<sup>92</sup> Charles L. Quarles, *Illustrated Life Of Paul* (B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 14.

<sup>93</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: His Story* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2004), 5.

<sup>94</sup> Charles L. Quarles, *Illustrated Life Of Paul* (B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 14.

Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Galatians 1:14).

In Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi, Paul describes himself as being born of the tribe of Benjamin and he declares himself a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5). “Typically, Pharisees are described as uniquely zealous for Old Testament law. In fact, most of the Jewish sects of the first century shared this characteristic.”<sup>95</sup> Pharisees were defenders of the law and every word of God. “Josephus said the Pharisees lived “by reason,” which apparently meant they applied logic to the interpretation of the Scriptures.”<sup>96</sup> This would imply that Paul was not only knowledgeable in the scriptures, but he was also highly educated in Greek Philosophy and was intelligent according to the world’s standards. Quarles writes, “The Pharisees, unlike the Sadducees, believed in the resurrection of the body, the immortality of the soul, and eternal reward or punishment after death.”<sup>97</sup> This is very interesting because Paul believed this as a Jew and a Pharisee. But He believed at the time that Jesus was a Blasphemer. When Paul encounters Jesus on the Damascus road it changes everything. We will explore this more in the next section.

In his early days, Paul was a lover of God, but an ardent persecutor of the Christians. He was at the stoning of the first Christian Martyr named Stephen. Rufus M. Jones writes, “He thought Stephen was wrong and he believed that he must be stopped or he would bring harm to God’s people.”<sup>98</sup> Paul was extremely passionate and he felt he was defending God by supporting the persecution of these followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Jones also said of Paul, “He had tried,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>98</sup> Rufus M. Jones, *St. Paul the Hero* (Anboco, 2016), 55.

with almost superhuman effort, to make his own life perfect so that he might be one of the little inner circle of perfect Jews, who would help to bring the Messiah and the perfect age and who would be ready for this glorious king when he should come.”<sup>99</sup> This would explain Paul’s passion and disdain for anyone claiming to be the Messiah or one of his followers.

The Apostle Paul even describes himself as a persecutor of the Church in his letter to the church in Galatia (Galatians 1:13). Australian Theologian Michael Bird writes, “He was once a militant Pharisee (Phil. 3:5; Acts 23:6; Acts 26:5) and was committed to the law of Moses, to the purity of Israel and to an apocalyptic world view where the salvation of the present evil age would come directly from God.”<sup>100</sup> One could say that Paul had feared God and would never have gone against Him. Quarles writes, “Jesus’ criticisms of the Pharisees have prompted some modern readers to conclude that all Pharisees were hypocrites whose piety was a masquerade.”<sup>101</sup> Knowing all of this about the Jewish Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus, it begs the question. Why would he support and defend the resurrection of Jesus Christ? He hated Christians and they feared him. Jesus criticized the Pharisees. Something revolutionary and miraculous must have happened, and it did.

The most significant part of Paul and his testimony was his encounter with the resurrected Jesus. Paul was continuing his persecution of the church and the followers of Jesus. Paul requested letters from the high Priest which gave him authorization to travel to Damascus in pursuit of Christians and arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem for prosecution (Acts 9:1-

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>100</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Introducing Paul: The Man, His Mission and His Message* (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 16.

<sup>101</sup> Charles L. Quarles, *Illustrated Life Of Paul* (B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 23.

2). Picirilli writes, “The Sanhedrin’s religious (not civil) authority was considered binding even on Jewish synagogues outside Palestine.”<sup>102</sup> Paul had a hard time believing in the divinity of Jesus because “if God had sent Him and He had been divine, He would not have had to suffer, but He would have come in glory and power.”<sup>103</sup> At this point and time Paul did not have a full understanding of the workings of God the Father and could not conceive the understanding of God the Son.

The Apostle Luke describes the story of Paul’s encounter with Jesus after his resurrection in the book of Acts in Chapter 9. As Paul is on the road to Damascus and in route to arrest the followers of Jesus, he sees a sensational light from heaven and falls to the ground. The light is so bright that it causes Paul to lose his eyesight. Paul then hears a voice saying “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). In a later account (Acts 26:14) we read that Paul describes hearing the voice in Hebrew or Semitic language which was most likely Aramaic. The voice also identified him by his Jewish name of Saul. Paul must have instantly known who was speaking to him because he was in the process of persecuting followers of Jesus. But Paul still asks the question, who are you Lord? (Acts 9:5). This force which was speaking to Paul was so powerful that he immediately acknowledges Him and calls him “Lord”. This was not any ordinary man walking down the road and calling out to Paul. The voice identifies Himself as “Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5). Jesus had already died by Roman crucifixion, was placed in a grave, and was resurrected. This had already been witnessed by Jesus’ disciples and other witnesses. Now Paul was having his own personal experience with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. “Before Jesus, he sought a right relationship with God through sacred violence for the propagation of

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<sup>102</sup> Robert E. Picirilli, *Paul the Apostle* (Moody Publishers, 1986), 34.

<sup>103</sup> Rufus M. Jones, *St. Paul the Hero* (Anboco, 2016), 63.

God's Law and the purity of God's people; afterward, he sought it— or better, he discovered that it had found him— in the person and work of Jesus.”<sup>104</sup> This was an overwhelming experience for Paul which caused him to instantaneously believe in a risen Jesus.

Even critics of miracles and the resurrection of Jesus must concede at times. Ehrman writes, “There is little doubt, historically, about what converted Paul. He had a vision of Jesus raised from the dead. This is what he himself says, and it is recorded as one of the key incidents in the book of Acts.”<sup>105</sup> Ehrman goes on to explain, “The vision showed Paul beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus— who had been crucified, dead, and buried— had come back to life. There was only one possible explanation for Jesus coming back to life: God must have raised him from the dead. And if God raised him from the dead— well, that changed everything.”<sup>106</sup> Because of this supernatural personal experience that Paul had with Jesus, Paul should be deemed a “credible witness”. Paul had absolutely no reason to lie about any such encounter and had everything to lose including his own life. There is no logical reason as to why Paul would make up a story and be passionate about an untruthful act which would have caused him shame, embarrassment, arrest, and possible execution.

After Saul's conversion to Paul, He became incredibly passionate for preaching the gospel message of the resurrected Jesus. Even the other apostles were taken back by the news of Paul's conversion and were skeptical at first. They still feared him in the beginning of his ministry. However, today “Paul is celebrated as the greatest theologian of the first-century

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<sup>104</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 79.

<sup>105</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (University Press, Incorporated, 2008), 112.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

church, and the depth of his intellect is perhaps matched only by Augustine in the fourth century.”<sup>107</sup> Paul was a man on a mission. He was always a defender of the truth, but now he had confirmation of that truth. Michael Bird writes, “Paul dares to defy an empire by claiming that the seat of judgment is occupied by Jesus Christ and not by Caesar (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10).”<sup>108</sup> Would a man in that time dare go against Rome if he was not truly convicted by his faith? Paul knows that the power of Rome is nothing compared to the power of God. And Paul experienced the true God. Bird would add, “Paul never gets over the fact that he has been saved by the same God he once strenuously opposed in his persecution of Christians.”<sup>109</sup> That could not happen without total confidence in his new belief in a resurrected Jesus.

Paul uses this to fuel his passion and make sure that everyone understands the truth concerning Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to plant several churches in the region to include Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Philippi, and more. His writings and letters have become half of the entire New Testament of the Bible. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “I am not ashamed of the gospel” (Romans 1:16). That is clear. Paul’s passion was driven by his unwavering faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Traditional views hold that Paul died a martyr’s death and was beheaded under the reign of Roman Emperor Nero circa AD 62-68. Some doubt this traditional history because of no hard evidence to the fact. However, Paul was clearly writing from a Roman prison and he never wrote about his release from prison. Paul is clearly at the end of his life when he writes his second letter to Timothy. Paul writes, “For I am already being poured out like a drink

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<sup>107</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Introducing Paul: The Man, His Mission and His Message* (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 21.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:6-7). McDowell writes, “Paul does not fear death, but views it as the climax of his ministry, the consummation of his apostolic calling.”<sup>110</sup>

Although Paul was strong in his faith, he was also humble in himself as not being the great apostle. Marguerat writes, “Paul never presents himself as the first in a line, and Ephesians portrays him as “the very least of all the saints” (Eph 3:8).”<sup>111</sup> This helps to understand the true character of Paul.

As mentioned earlier in the portion covering Jesus appearing (post-resurrection) to the five hundred brothers, Paul documents his knowledge of the resurrection in his first letter to the church in Corinth. Paul explains that he is passing on information that he has received. He declares that it is of “first importance: that Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). He then goes on to say he was buried and was raised on the third day (15:4). Paul is convicted by the importance of Christ dying and being resurrected. This would not happen to any ordinary member of the Pharisees. This conviction can only be contributed to the personal encounter that Paul had with the resurrected Jesus.

Paul’s conversion is extremely significant toward the understanding and reliability of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul is a significant credible witness for a few reasons. Paul was an educated person. He understood Greek philosophy, but was also trained and educated in the ways of Old Testament scriptures. He was both Greek and Jew at the same time. He understood both

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<sup>110</sup> Sean McDowell, *Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus* (Routledge: New York, NY. 2016), 101.

<sup>111</sup> Daniel Marguerat, *Paul in Acts and Paul in His Letters* (Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 13.

cultures. Paul was considered a Roman citizen, but also was a Pharisee. He was a defender of Judaism. He was a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. His heart was aligned with the God of heaven and he wanted to arrest any blasphemer of the word of God. Paul had a remarkable experience with Jesus Christ after His Roman crucifixion. Paul had nothing to lie about concerning his experience on the road to Damascus. He had nothing to gain and all to lose by sharing his story. Paul was passionate about his writings concerning the gospel message, even to the point of risking his own life. Saul of Tarsus (The Apostle Paul) should certainly be deemed reliable and credible witness in reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

#### Establishing the Credibility of the Witnesses

It is important to establish the credibility of any witness. Establishing the credibility of the witnesses of the resurrection of the proclaimed Messiah is no exception. In chapter one, J. Warner Wallace provided a fourteen question list which is used by secular investigators to evaluate the credibility of a witness.<sup>112</sup> This list will now be used and each witness or witness group will be evaluated using this standard of measurement for a credible witness. One should keep in mind that obviously these witnesses are not available to stand trial today. However, based on their stories — or the stories told concerning them — would they be deemed credible witnesses today? The complete witness list is as follows:

#### Witnesses of the death and burial of Jesus:

The Chief Priests and the Jewish Leaders

The Two Thieves

The Roman Soldiers and Centurion

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus

#### Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus:

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<sup>112</sup> J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013).

The Women and the Empty Tomb  
The Five Hundred Brothers  
The Disciples Collectively  
The Apostle Peter  
James- The Brother of Jesus  
The Apostle Paul

1. *How well could the witness see, hear, or otherwise perceive the things about which the witness testified?* The Chief Priests and the Jewish leaders are considered a group of witnesses that would testify to the fact of Jesus' physical death. They were eye-witnesses to the crucifixion because they were hurling insults at Jesus as he was hanging on the cross. They were mocking him claiming he can save other, but he can't save himself (Matthew 27:41-43). The two thieves were in the same position as Jesus. They had a conversation with Jesus on the cross. Although they may have died prior to Jesus, their words live on through scripture and can be used because of the rule of excited utterance. The Roman soldiers and the Centurion are also placed at the cross to physically observe the death of Jesus. The Centurion even exclaims, "Surely this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47). Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus actually wrapped the body of Jesus in cloth and covered him with spices and placed him in the tomb.

There are many mentions of "the women" in reference to the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. They are all reports of what they had observed. The five-hundred brothers cannot be taken as separate witnesses because we are uncertain as to their identity. However, Paul did write that the resurrected Jesus did appear to the five-hundred brothers at the same time (1 Corinthians 15:6). This would imply that they had all physically seen the resurrected Jesus. The disciples collectively had a post-resurrection appearance by Jesus and Jesus even made another appearance specifically

for Thomas because of his initial disbelief. Luke wrote the risen Lord had appeared to Simon (aka Peter). Paul wrote in his first letter to the church in Corinth that Jesus appeared specifically to James. Paul had heard the direct post-resurrection voice of Jesus and had no doubt as to the voice. All of these witnesses were able to see, hear or otherwise perceive the things in which they would be able to testify.

2. *How well was the witness able to remember and describe what happened?* Several of the witnesses or witness groups are unable to be evaluated on their ability to remember or describe what happened because they personally did not record their testimonies. However, the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul are ways in which the women and the disciples were able to preserve their testimonies in which they were able to remember the series of events.
3. *What was the witness's behavior while testifying?* None of the witnesses concerning this case were afforded the opportunity to testify to what they had observed.
4. *Did the witness understand the questions and answer them directly?* As with the above question, the witnesses were not afforded the opportunity and not asked any direct questions by an investigative council.
5. *Was the witness's testimony influenced by a factor such as bias or prejudice, a personal relationship with someone involved in the case, or a personal interest in how the case is decided?* The Chief Priests and Jewish leaders, along with the two thieves and the Roman soldiers and Centurion had no bias or personal relationship with Jesus and had no interest in the outcome of the case. The women and the disciples had a personal

relationship with Jesus, but did not even understand themselves what was going on and how to explain what they had actually witnessed. Their testimony would not be used in order to allow Jesus to be free from a crime. Rather, it was in witness to a miracle that they had no earthly gain and even placed their lives in danger.

6. *What was the witness's attitude about the case or about testifying?* The Chief Priests and the Jewish leaders would have absolutely been considered *hostile witnesses*. They would not have wanted to testify in the matter of an empty tomb. They would have needed to risk perjuring themselves and bearing false witness before God. The last thing this group of witnesses would want would be an inquiry into the resurrection of Jesus. The women and the disciples' attitude was that of utter amazement. Although they did not fully understand how the resurrection could be possible, they were not confused as to their testimony.

7. *Did the witness make a statement in the past that is consistent or inconsistent with his or her testimony?* There is no known testimony that is contradictory to the testimony given by any of the witnesses.

8. *How reasonable is the testimony when you consider all the other evidence in the case?* To be reasonable means to be of sound judgement and sensible. Much of what any of the witnesses would testify about concerning the resurrection of Jesus would not sound sensible. No one had ever seen a man resurrect from the dead before. It goes beyond comprehension. However, this should not discredit the testimony of any of the witnesses. They had observed a miracle which would defy human logic. The strangeness of the testimony should not be held against any of the witnesses because they are simply doing

their best to explain the unexplainable.

9. *Did other evidence prove or disprove any fact about which the witness testified?* There is no known evidence which can disprove any of the eye-witness testimony. However, there is corroborating evidence in writings from unbiased Jewish and Roman historians which validate the testimonies of the eye-witnesses. This evidence is covered in chapter six.

10. *Did the witness admit to being untruthful?* There is no known writings in which any of the witnesses admit to be untruthful concerning their testimony.

11. *What is the witness's character for truthfulness?* The Chief Priests and the Jewish leaders certainly had hardened hearts for Jesus and his followers. However, if they were to take the stand they would inevitably need to tell the truth in fear of God. There is no evidence that the Roman soldiers and Centurion did not have character for truthfulness. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were two upstanding members of the Jewish leaders and were respected by all in reference to their character. There is no known reason to doubt the character for truthfulness of the women and all the followers of Jesus. Paul was actually a persecutor of the followers of Christ. His testimony and character stand tall because he stood absolutely nothing to gain and everything to lose by telling his testimony of having an encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus.

12. *Has the witness been convicted of a felony?* The only known witnesses to have been convicted of a crime are the two thieves. The thieves would certainly not be of great

character if it had been concerning something they were involved in. However, the exclamation made by the one thief asking Jesus to remember him when he comes to his kingdom is important. This statement was made knowing they were going to die that day no matter what. No promise was made to them for a lesser sentence either way. The thief did not need to make any statement at all. This statement was profound because it acknowledges the divinity of Jesus by someone who had only recently experienced a limited amount of time with him. The thief did not even have knowledge of any of the miracles of Jesus. The mere fact that the thief was a criminal and died at the scene with Jesus should not affect his recorded statement and should be able to be used as evidence under the rules of excited utterance.

*13. Has the witness engaged in (other) conduct that reflects on his or her believability?* The only witness on the list that is known to have had an issue with believability or withholding truth is Simon Peter. After Jesus was arrested until his crucifixion, Simon Peter denied being a follower of Jesus three times. However, Peter was not withholding evidence in a trial in which he was under oath. Peter was simply trying to save his own life knowing that Jesus was going to be crucified on the cross and he could have been next.

*14. Was the witness promised immunity or leniency in exchange for his or her testimony?* None of the witnesses of the death and burial or the resurrection were ever promised anything in exchange for their testimony. Their testimonies were in fact more likely to cause them excommunication, humiliation, imprisonment, and even death.

After reviewing all the witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus through the fourteen questions concerning establishing the credibility of a witness, it is clear that all of the witnesses should be able to stand trial and their testimonies be considered credible and reliable. The witness statements should be used and entered as evidence in the case of the resurrection of Jesus. A jury would then be able to convene and determine that there is a preponderance of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus based solely on the credibility of the eye-witness testimony. Although this should be enough witness testimony to secure a conviction, there is more in the form of corroborating evidence.

### **Chapter 5: Corroborating Evidence**

Corroborating evidence is one form of evidence which can be extremely helpful in proving one's case or theory. According to the Cornell Law School, "Corroborating evidence is evidence that strengthens or confirms already existing evidence."<sup>113</sup> Corroborating evidence is not necessary, but it can tip the scales in one's favor concerning credibility. Especially if the corroborating evidence is coming from a non-biased source. Douglas Walton is a Canadian academic and he uses the argumentation theory which shows how an argument can be made through logical reasoning. Below is an *Argumentation Scheme for Corroborative Evidence*:

Premise P1: There is an item of evidence E1 for claim C.  
Premise P n: There is an item of evidence E n for claim C.  
Premise P 0: All of the items of evidence E1 . . . . E n corroborate C.  
Conclusion C1: There is corroborative evidence for claim C.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/corroborating\\_evidence](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/corroborating_evidence). Retrieved on September 1, 2021.

<sup>114</sup> Douglas Walton, *Witness Testimony Evidence: Argumentation and the Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 301-302.

One can use this form of logical reasoning for the evidence in the resurrection of Jesus. Below is a list of direct evidence and circumstantial evidence. Circumstantial evidence is used every day in courtrooms in order to help substantiate or corroborate direct evidence. Extra-Biblical documentary evidence is also provided here as circumstantial corroborating evidence and listed in length in the appendix. When there is overwhelming circumstantial evidence it can lead to a belief in a claim beyond a reasonable doubt. Below is direct evidence collected from what has been determined to be credible witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. Circumstantial evidence through excited utterance testimony from the thief and the Roman soldier and centurion has been collected. The evidence list ends with extra-Biblical documents (some of which are non-Christian) which add to the totality of the claim. Every minute piece of evidence should be considered when determining such a claim. The preponderance of evidence regarding this claim should convict a human heart beyond a reasonable doubt of the resurrection of Jesus.

#### Evidence List

##### Direct evidence

Item 1	Mary Magdalene	John 20:15-17
Item 2	Mary Magdalene and the other Mary	Matthew 28:9-10
Item 3	Simon	Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5
Item 4	Cleopas and another disciple	Luke 24:13-32
Item 5	The Eleven, Cleopas, the other disciple & those with them. (Luke 24:33; 36-49)	
Item 6	the disciples (without Thomas)	John 20:19-23
Item 7	The disciples and Thomas	John 20:26-29; 1 Cor. 15:5
Item 8	Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples	John 21:1-22

Item 9	the eleven disciples	Matthew 28:16-17
Item 10	more than five hundred brothers	1 Cor. 15:6
Item 11	James (brother of Jesus)	1 Cor. 15:7
Item 12	the Eleven (the apostles)	Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:7
Item 13	the disciples, the Eleven (named), Mary the mother of Jesus, Women Followers, Jesus' brothers	Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:6-14
Item 14	Saul of Tarsus/ Paul	1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 9:3-6

#### Circumstantial evidence (Excited Utterance)

Item 15 Jesus is about to physically die on the cross when the one thief cries out and asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom (Luke 23:42). The thief could sense that Jesus was no ordinary man or criminal. He spontaneously makes the unbiased statement sensing divinity within Jesus which leads to the plausibility of a future resurrection.

Item 16 Immediately after the death of Jesus there was a reported earthquake. The centurion and the soldiers witnessed the earthquake at which time they spontaneously exclaimed "Surely he was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). This excited utterance from another unbiased source leads again to the plausibility of a miracle such as the resurrection.

#### Circumstantial Evidence (Extra-Biblical Sources)

Item 17 There are several pieces of first and second century (Christian and non-Christian) documents which have survived over the centuries which add mention to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are written by Jewish and Roman historians along with

disciples that had studied under the original apostles. The appendix will go into details of the works of Tacitus, Josephus, Clement of Rome, and Polycarp. As with the Old Testament scriptures, these works will be collected together as one single piece of corroborative evidence in support of the resurrection of Jesus.

Seventeen items of evidence have been collected in reference to this claim. However, there are more individual witnesses and extra-Biblical texts than seventeen. Each and every single piece of direct or circumstantial evidence holds significance in corroborating the claim of Jesus' resurrection. They tell a separate part of the story and collectively allow the claim to be plausible. The argumentation scheme can now be seen as:

Premise P1: There is witness evidence E1 for the resurrection of Jesus.  
Premise P 17: There is witness evidence E 17 for the resurrection of Jesus.  
Premise P 0: All the witness evidence E1...E 17 corroborate the resurrection.  
Conclusion C1: There is corroborative evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

It is fair to say that the Christian faith weighs heavily on the resurrection of Jesus. Christianity is not based simply on a book of great stories, proverbs, and teachings. It rests in the resurrection of Jesus Christ which is the proof of his divinity. The resurrection of Jesus is certainly and understandably a difficult claim to understand for the human mind. There is clearly no physical evidence to be used to build a case. However, do we need physical evidence to believe something? It has been shown that even in twenty first century homicide cases, convictions have been secured based solely on the reliability and credibility of witness testimony. These witness testimonies were sometimes not even "eye-witness" testimonies. As mentioned earlier, in 2019, Patrick Frazee was sentenced to 156 years in prison in Colorado for the murder of Kelsey Berreth. There was no physical evidence putting Frazee at the crime scene,

no dead body ever discovered, and no confession. The only strong evidence provided was that of a witness that claimed she cleaned the crime scene after the murder. There were actually no witnesses to the act of murder itself. This one testimony of a witness (after the fact) was enough to sway a jury of twelve people beyond a reasonable doubt of murder and secure a conviction for the prosecution. Why then do so many humans have a hard time believing the testimony of many witnesses in regards to the resurrection of Jesus and securing a conviction of the heart?

It is not only a matter of several witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus, but also their credibility. J. Warner Wallace provided a list of fourteen questions to consider when establishing the credibility of a witness. It is fair to say that the witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus passed Wallace's test. There is no legitimate reason to claim that any of the witnesses are not credible or reliable. The burden of proof lies with skeptics and there is no known documentation to dispute their reliable testimony. Where are the disqualifiers? Where are the first century witnesses who can testify against such a claim as the resurrection of Jesus? Where are the second or third generation hearsay witnesses who can claim their grandfather passed down to them orally that they were with Saul on the road to Damascus and he never saw or heard anything out of the ordinary? Where is the fisherman who says he had observed Peter out fishing on the day of the alleged claim? Where is the neighbor who could testify that Thomas was with him the entire time on the day in which it was said that Jesus appeared specifically for Thomas? Without such disputable testimony, one must lean heavily toward the credibility of the witnesses.

The resurrection of Jesus has no known testimony or documentation to dispute the testimony of the witnesses or the authors of the event. Theories have surfaced over the years in attempt to explain away the possibility of the resurrection. Some will claim the body of Jesus was stolen from the grave by the disciples while being guarded by Roman soldiers. A mass

hallucination has been mentioned which happened to be seen by five hundred people. A thought is that there was no actual burial in a tomb, but rather that of a mass grave for criminals. Another theory is the “swoon” theory. This would imply that Jesus never actually died on the cross, but rather simply fainted and had later walked away from his accusers and any sort of burial. All four of these theories have absolutely no physical evidence and no testimonial or documentary evidence which would defend their theory. The written accounts of the resurrection of Jesus are documented with authority and with no concern of counter testimony and should therefore be deemed a credible and reliable source.

Collectively there is reported to be hundreds of witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. All of these witnesses corroborate the claim. There is also extra-Biblical accounts which lend to the reliability of the witness testimonies. Tacitus was a Roman historian during the late first century and early second century. He references in his *annals* in circa AD 116 that Christ had been executed during the reign of Tiberius and by the procurator Pontius Pilate. This is the documentation of a Roman citizen and historian with no known ties to Christianity. He is simply documenting a historical event. Josephus was a Romeo-Jewish first century historian. Josephus documented Jesus and stated he was the Christ. He is another historian without any known Christian ties. There was also extra-Biblical documentation provided by both Clement of Rome and Polycarp. Clement of Rome was a first century Bishop who documented in a letter the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Polycarp was a second century Bishop of Smyrna who documented that Jesus reached death and was raised again. Detailed information is provided in the appendix. This is all corroborating documentation which adds to the preponderance of evidence already established concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How much evidence is enough evidence? How much testimony is enough testimony? Saul of Tarsus was a persecutor of Christians until his encounter with the risen Jesus. Once he experienced Jesus Christ after his death and resurrection, Saul (Paul) was convinced beyond a reasonable doubt to his divinity. What this thesis has shown is that there is enough evidence for the resurrection of Jesus through the reliability of the credible witnesses. The decision relies on each and every human being to determine whether or not there is reasonable doubt. After all the evidence has been presented and one looks at the entire picture through corroborating evidence, one should be able to determine beyond a reasonable doubt that there is sufficient and substantial evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

## Appendix

There are many extra-biblical sources that refer to the ministry of Jesus. One may look toward Pliny the Younger, Mara bar Serapion, Thallus, Lucian, Celsus, and Seutonius. However, they are not necessarily deemed the most useful or credible. The four strongest testimonies of corroborating evidence for the resurrection of Jesus are Tacitus, Josephus, Clement of Rome, and Polycarp. This appendix will cover the extra-biblical writings of these four authors. These are clearly not to be viewed as eyewitness statements, but rather as corroborating evidence to the eyewitness accounts. They are some of the only non-canonical documented sources found which provide written corroborating evidence for the credibility of the Biblical accounts of Jesus and his death and resurrection.

Figure 5.1 below delivers a visual of the credible witnesses of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus along with the credible testimony of the authors of the corroborating evidence. This corroborating evidence is enhanced by the fact that two of the four authors are not Christian believers. Both Tacitus and Josephus are historians with no Christian influence and should be considered non-biased.

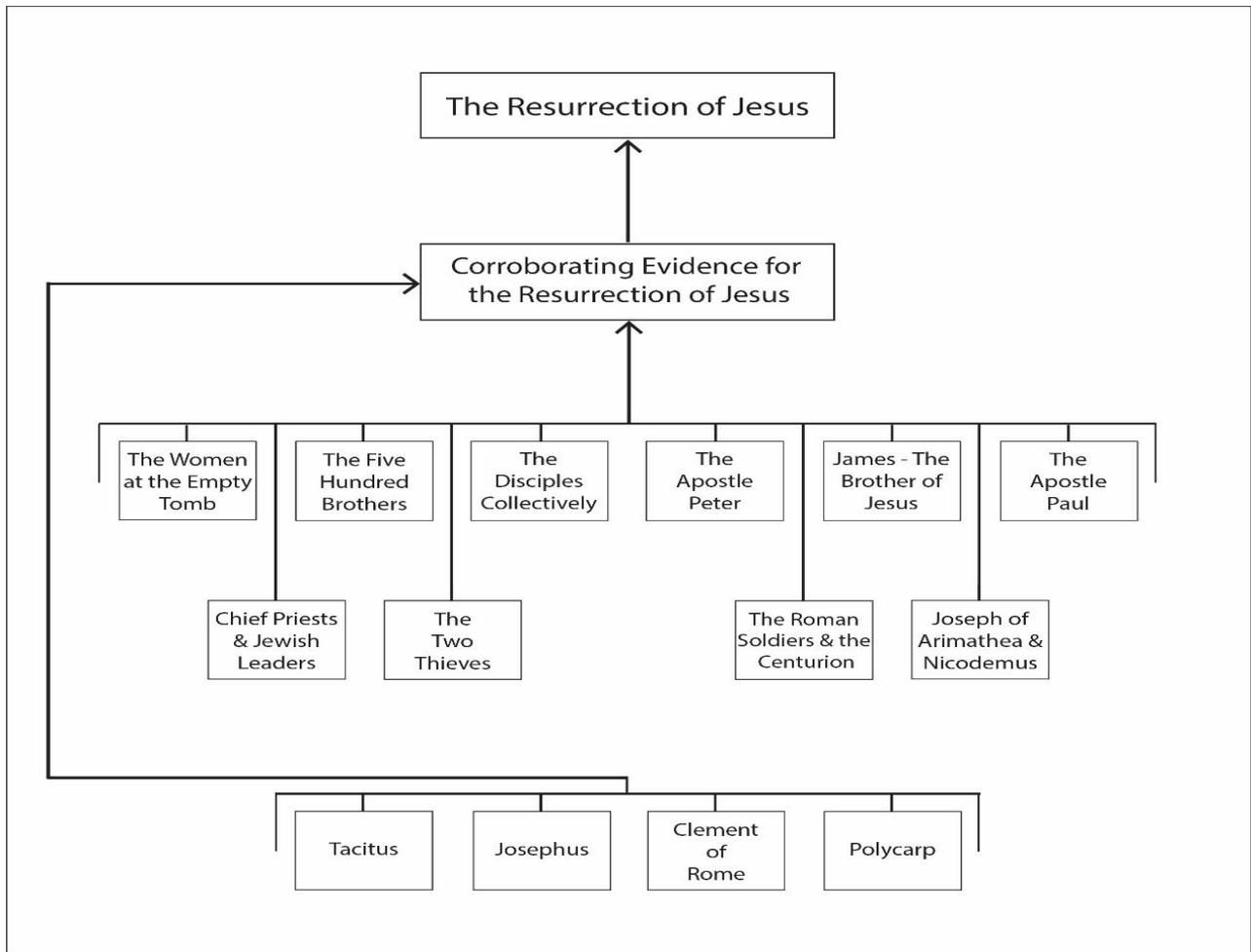


Figure 5.1 Diagram for corroborative witness testimony evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

### Tacitus

Publius Cornelius Tacitus is a Roman historian and politician who lived between 56 and 120 AD and known as “ancient Rome’s greatest historian.”<sup>115</sup> The exact date of death for Tacitus is unknown and “at best we can perhaps say that he died between 117 and 130.”<sup>116</sup> Tacitus has written five known pieces of work which have survived over the years. Below is a list of the five

<sup>115</sup> Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals: The Reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero*. Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2008), ix.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

works of Tacitus along with the year they were written. For the purpose of this thesis ‘The Annals’ will only be discussed.

(AD 98) *De vita Iulii Agricolae (The Life of Agricola)*  
(AD 98) *De origine et situ Germanorum (Germania)*  
(AD 102) *Dialogus de oratoribus (Dialogue on Oratory)*  
(AD 105) *Historiae (Histories)*  
(AD 117) *Ab excessu divi Augusti (Annals)*

The *annals* was written by Tacitus circa AD 116 toward the end of his life. He is writing about the reigns of the Roman Emperors Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero. The time period of discussion is between AD 14 and AD 66. This coincides with the time period of the ministry of Jesus along with his death and resurrection. A portion of the *annals* is lost and is incomplete. However, it does not interfere with the text of importance which is located in book fifteen and verse forty four (15.44). This particular text is referring to the six day great fire of Rome which took place in history during the reign of Nero in July AD 64. Nero is targeting Christians as those responsible for the fire. Below is the key portion from the Annals which identifies Christ.

But neither human resourcefulness nor the emperor’s largesse nor appeasement of the gods could stop belief in the nasty rumour that an order had been given for the fire. To dispel the gossip Nero therefore found culprits on whom he inflicted the most exotic punishments. These were people hated for their shameful offences whom the common people called Christians. The man who gave them their name, Christus, had been executed during the rule of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilatus. The pernicious superstition had been temporarily suppressed, but it was starting to break out again, not just in Judaea, the starting point of that curse, but in Rome, as well, where all that is abominable and shameful in the world flows together and gains popularity.<sup>117</sup>

Tacitus describes the people who started the fire as ‘Christians’ named after ‘Christus.’ Being the good historian that he is, Tacitus explains that this very same man named Christ was executed during the time of Tiberius by Pontius Pilate. This statement alone from a credible Roman historian should dispel any thought that Jesus Christ was a myth or fable. It should also sway and confirm the belief that Jesus had actually been crucified. Tacitus refers to the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 359-360.

resurrection of Jesus and calls it a ‘pernicious superstition.’ Tacitus is obviously not a believer in the resurrection of Jesus. However, he did feel compelled enough to document this Jesus in a historical text. Whether Tacitus believed in the resurrection or not is irrelevant here. What is of great importance is the fact that a non-biased credible historical writer has included the fact that Jesus Christ was crucified as a matter of historical fact. No one today should be able to question this piece of corroborating evidence.

Anthony A. Barrett writes in his explanatory notes, “the manuscripts originally read *Chrestiani* and were corrected to *Christiani* by a later hand. *Chrestiani* may possibly be the form by which early Christians were known, perhaps through confusion with the Greek *chrestos*, ‘worthy’ or ‘good’.”<sup>118</sup> There is no way of knowing for certain if this is true. However, what we do know is that Tacitus is describing a group of people who were following a man that is called ‘Christus’ and he was executed by Pontius Pilate. This is completely in line with the timeframe of the Gospel accounts concerning Jesus’ death and resurrection. They are completely different texts written by different authors and explaining the same set of circumstances. This is no mere coincidence. This passage written by Tacitus from the *Annals* should be handled and considered as non-biased corroborating evidence contributing to the defense of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### Josephus

Flavius Josephus is a Romeo-Jewish historian who lived between 37 and 100 AD. He was brought up in a priestly family and “he even boasted of his Hasmonean descent, albeit

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 495.

through a maternal ancestor.”<sup>119</sup> Josephus describes it himself as being of “the royal blood.”<sup>120</sup>

There are four major works of Josephus which are sources of great understanding into first century Jewish life and history. Below is a list of these works and the dates they were written:

(AD 75) *The Jewish War*.

(AD 95) *Antiquities of the Jews*.

(AD 97) *Against Apion*.

(AD 99) *The Life of Flavius Josephus*. (Autobiography).

This paper will focus its attention on *Antiquities of the Jews* written in AD 95. This could be considered his *magnum opus* and covers a period of time from creation through the first century. Josephus was living in Rome and his works “are certainly addressed, at least in part, to interested Greco-Roman Gentiles who knew little about Judea, Jews, or Judaism.”<sup>121</sup> There are two notable references to Jesus in this work by Josephus. Below is the first and most significant writing from book 18.

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.<sup>122</sup>

The term ‘about this time’ is used when describing this portion of text. One must keep in mind that Josephus did not set out to write a letter or book about Jesus Christ. He is a historian and he is documenting incidents of importance which are occurring during this period of time.

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3. <sup>119</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013),

<sup>120</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Life of Flavius Josephus* (Project Gutenberg, 2001), 1.

4. <sup>121</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013),

<sup>122</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (Project Gutenberg, 2017), Book 18, Chapter 3.

Just prior to the portion of text referring to Jesus, Josephus is writing about Pontius Pilate bringing a current of water from a distance stream. This sets the tone to the intentions of Josephus. He was un-biased in his writings concerning Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is mixed in with other forms of historical events.

Josephus is hesitant to even call Jesus a man. He does not know for certain as to how to describe Jesus because of his miraculous works and then calls him the ‘Christ’. Christ literally means ‘anointed one’ and “the Latinized form of Χριστός (Christos), which in turn is the Greek term for “Messiah.”<sup>123</sup> Josephus adds that Pilate had condemned Jesus to the cross at the suggestion of the accusers and most importantly that Jesus became alive again after the third day. This all aligns with the accounts reported by the witnesses. He also refers to the life and works of Jesus as being foretold by prophets and in fulfillment of what today would be known as Old Testament scripture.

Below is the second portion of text which is relevant, but less descriptive, comes from book 20.

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.<sup>124</sup>

This section of text reads as a police blotter of sorts. Josephus is describing prior to this text about the succession for the high priesthood which then leads to the stoning of James. Festus was the procurator of Judea and upon his death Caesar appointed Albinus as the new procurator. James is brought before the council of judges and is identified specifically as the brother of Jesus

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<sup>123</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Baker Academic, 2017), 138.

<sup>124</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (Project Gutenberg, 2017), Book 20, Chapter 9.

and Jesus is identified again as the Christ. There were many teachers, rabbis, and even false prophets during this time. However, Josephus clearly identifies Jesus as the Christ. There cannot be more than one Christ. The name alone implies that only *one* can be anointed and that *one* is the Messiah. The Messiah could be described as a liberator for a group of people and we find that with the resurrection of Jesus. One would not be called ‘Christ’ or ‘Messiah’ had there not been overwhelming credible testimony at the time to believe such a miracle had occurred.

### Clement of Rome

There is not much known about Clement of Rome except that he lived from 35 to 99 AD and was the Bishop of Rome from 88 to 99 AD. Clement’s first letter to the church in Corinth was written circa 95-96 AD and “it is the earliest extant Christian writing which is not a part of our New Testament canon.”<sup>125</sup> Clement was one of the early leaders of the church in Rome and “Clement stands at the head, the first of the Apostolic Fathers, the first "Doctor" of the Church.”<sup>126</sup> However, some will attempt to proclaim that Clement of Rome did not even exist. American Latin scholar Elmer Truesdell Merrill is one such skeptic as to the true existence of Clement of Rome. Merrill would go as far to say “the reputed Bishop Clement probably never had an actual existence.”<sup>127</sup> However, the mere fact that Merrill uses the word “probably” in his statement is evidence that there is nothing to substantiate such a claim.

There is no legitimate reason to believe that Clement of Rome did not exist. Irenaeus lived circa 130 to 202 and was Bishop of Lyon in France. “According to Irenaeus, after Peter and

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<sup>125</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome* (Brill, 1973), 1.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Elmer Truesdell Merrill, “On ‘Clement of Rome,’” *The American Journal of Theology* 22, no. 3 (The University of Chicago Press, 1918), 18.

Paul had established the Church in Rome they entrusted the administration of the 'Επισκοπή to Linus. Linus is succeeded by Anencletus, and after him Clement inherits the 'Επισκοπή 'in the third place from the apostles'.<sup>128</sup> Irenaeus would certainly have had access and knowledge of such important church history at that time. It is inconceivable to believe that Irenaeus would have inserted the name of Clement into the history of the church. There would have been no motive at that time. According to Hagner, “Irenaeus alleges that Clement was a disciple of the Apostles Peter and Paul (Comm. in Joann. 6,36); Tertullian writes (with the Pseudo Clementines) that Clement was consecrated by Peter himself.”<sup>129</sup> There is no written evidence to such a claim and is more likely than not been passed down orally by generations. However, it certainly could have been possible that Clement had interactions with Peter and Paul during their visits to Rome. Clement was born only two years after the crucifixion of Jesus and could not have become the fourth official leader of the early church in Rome without having some sort of clout within the group of early followers of Jesus.

Below are two references from Clement’s first letter to the church in Corinth. Both of these texts from chapter 42 and 58 refer to a resurrected Jesus.

#### Chapter 42

The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent from God. Christ, therefore, is from God and the Apostles are from Christ. Both, accordingly, came in proper order by the will of God. Receiving their orders, therefore, and being filled with confidence because of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and confirmed in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Spirit, they went forth preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God that was about to come.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Maurice Bévenot, “Clement of Rome in Irenaeus’s Succession-List,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 17, no. 1 (Oxford University Press, 1966), 5.

<sup>129</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome* (Brill, 1973), 3.

<sup>130</sup> Francis X. Glimm, Joseph M.-F. Marique, and Gerald G. Walsh, “The Letter of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians,” In *The Apostolic Fathers. The Fathers of the Church, Volume 1*, 3–58 (Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 43.

## Chapter 58

Take our advice, and there will be nothing for you to regret. For, as God lives and the Lord Jesus Christ lives and the Holy Spirit, the faith and hope of the elect, so shall he who with humility of mind, and ready gentleness, and without turning back, has performed the decrees and commandments given by God be enrolled and chosen among the number of those who are saved through Jesus Christ, through whom is the glory to Him forever and ever. Amen.<sup>131</sup>

Clement writes ‘the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ’ in chapter 42 and ‘the Lord Jesus Christ lives’ in chapter 58. It is true that there is not much content from these two writings concerning the resurrection. But it must also be acknowledged that the intent of the letter was not that of proclaiming the message of the resurrected Jesus to non-believers. This was a letter to a church of believers in Corinth. The intent was to encourage and provide confidence in the faith for the church body as did Paul some forty years earlier. There is not a name nor signature on the letter to be certain as to the author of the text. However, “all the known manuscripts, six in number, attribute it to Clement, who is, moreover, named as its author by Dionysius of Corinth, Origen, Irenaeus, and Eusebius.”<sup>132</sup> For the purpose of this paper it should be accepted that Clement was the author of the letter and that he provided corroborating evidence to the resurrection of Jesus.

## Polycarp

Polycarp lived from 69 to 155 AD and was known as an early Bishop of Smyrna. More importantly, he was a direct disciple of the Apostle John. Ehrman writes, “Tradition held that in his youth he was the follower of the disciple John and that later in life he became the teacher of Irenaeus, famous bishop of Gaul, forming a link between the apostles themselves and the emerging proto-orthodox community (Eusebius Eccl. Hist. 5.20; 4.14; see Mart. Pol. 22.2).”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>133</sup> *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume I: I Clement. II Clement. Ignatius. Polycarp. Didache*, edited and translated by Bart D. Ehrman, Loeb Classical Library 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 357.

Polycarp authored a letter to the Philippians which is known as (*Pol. Phil.*). Polycarp likens his writings to that of Paul because he is writing to the church in Philippi which Paul had founded. “This letter praises Paul and uses Pauline literature, repeatedly cites 1 Peter, and is probably the first external witness to 1 John and the Pastoral Epistles.”<sup>134</sup> Being a disciple of John would likely have given him direct testimony from an eye-witness to the resurrection of Jesus.

Below is 7 of the 39 verses of Polycarp’s Epistle to the Philippians (*Pol. Phil.*) which is approximately 18% of the entire letter referring to specifically the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All the following verses were translated from the Greek into English except for 12.2 which was translated from Latin into English and edited by Paul Hartog. There are no known complete Greek manuscripts. A complete letter is translated into Latin with only thirteen or fourteen manuscripts dating no later than the ninth century.<sup>135</sup>

1.2

And [I rejoice] because the firm root of your faith, which has been proclaimed from early times, remains until now and bears fruit unto our Lord Jesus Christ, who endured-reaching the point of death for our sins, whom God raised, having loosed the birth-pangs of Hades.

2.1

Therefore, having girded your loins, serve God in fear and truth, having abandoned the vain prattle and the error of the crowd, trusting in the one who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and who gave him glory and a throne at his right hand. To him all heavenly and earthly things were subjected, whom every breath worships, who comes as judge of [the] living and [the] dead, whose blood God will require from those who reject him.

2.2

And the one having raised him from the dead will also raise us, if we do his will and follow in his commandments and love what he loved, abstaining from all unrighteousness, avarice, calumny, [and] false witness, not rendering evil for evil, or insult for insult, or blow for blow, or curse for curse.

7.1

For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in [the] flesh is an antichrist. And whoever does not confess the testimony of the cross is of the devil. And whoever distorts the sayings of the Lord for his own desires and alleges [there is] neither a resurrection nor a judgement, this one is a firstborn of Satan.

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<sup>134</sup> Polycarp’s Epistle to the Philippians and the Martyrdom of Polycarp: Introduction, text, and commentary, edited by Paul Hartog (Oxford University Press. Oxford, UK. 2013), 1.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

8.1

Therefore, let us persist unceasingly in our hope and in the pledge of our righteousness, who is Christ Jesus, who bore our sins in his own body upon the tree, who did not commit sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. But for our sake he endured all things, in order that we might live in him.

9.2

Be persuaded that all these did not run in vain, but in faith and in righteousness, and that they are in the place appointed them with the Lord, with whom they suffered. For they did not love the present world but rather he who died for us and was raised by God for our sake.

12.2

Now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the eternal high priest himself, the Son of God Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and truth and in all gentleness, and without wrath and in patience and in longsuffering and tolerance and purity. And may he grant to you a share and portion among his saints, and to us along with you, and to all who are under heaven who will believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and in his Father who raised him from the dead.<sup>136</sup>

Polycarp has referred several times to Jesus being raised from the dead in this particular letter. Ehrman posits that this letter of Polycarp to the church in Philippi is believed to “lack originality and insight”.<sup>137</sup> However, the reason of the importance of this letter is not its originality. The importance is of the continual mention of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as corroborating evidence. Polycarp could have written on all different kinds of things including the teachings of Jesus, but he understood the most significant topic is that of the resurrection of Jesus. This writing from Polycarp is significant because Polycarp was a direct disciple of the Apostle John. This provides a direct link between one of the original disciples of Jesus who witnessed his death and resurrection, and that of his student. Polycarp would have had first-hand knowledge of everything witnessed by the eye-witnesses.

This very same Polycarp went to his grave as a martyr never denying his faith in Jesus Christ. A letter was later written about Polycarp with an unknown date by an unknown author. The letter was likely written by a relatively unknown person by the name of Marcion. The letter is called *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* and simply known as (*Mart. Pol.*). Below are several

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 81-93.

<sup>137</sup> *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume I: I Clement. II Clement. Ignatius. Polycarp. Didache*, edited and translated by Bart D. Ehrman, Loeb Classical Library 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 324.

passages from this letter which point toward Polycarp's unwavering belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

9.3

But when the proconsul insisted and said, 'Swear, and I will release you. Revile Christ!', Polycarp said, 'For eighty-six years I have been serving him, and he has done me no wrong. Indeed how can I blaspheme my king who saved me?'

10.1

And when he [the proconsul] persisted still, likewise saying, 'Swear by the genius of Caesar', he [Polycarp] answered, 'If you vainly imagine that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as you say, and pretend to be ignorant of me-who I am-listen clearly: 'I am a Christian. And if you intend to learn the message of Christianity, appoint a day and hear [me out].'

14.1

So they did not nail [him], but they tied him instead. And he, having put his hands behind [him] and having been bound, was prepared for sacrifice as an outstanding ram out of a great flock, a whole burnt offering, acceptable to God. He looked up to heaven [and] said, 'Lord, God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received knowledge of you, the God of angels and of powers and of all creation and of the entire race of the righteous who live before you:

14.2

'I bless you because you have considered me worthy of this day and hour, to receive a portion in [the] number of the martyrs in the cup of your Christ, unto [the] resurrection of eternal life-both of soul and of body-in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be welcomed before you today among them, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, just as you, the undecieving and true God, prepared beforehand and revealed in advance and accomplished.

15.1

And when had offered up the 'Amen' and finished his prayer, the men [attending] the pyre lit the fire. And when a great flame blazed forth, we-to whom it was granted to see-saw a miracle. And we were preserved in order to announce to the rest the things that happened.

15.2

For the fire made the form of a vault, as ship's sail filled by the wind, walling around the body of the martyr. And it was in the middle not as flesh burning, but as bread baking, or as gold and silver refined in a furnace. For we also experienced such strong fragrance, like a waft of incense or some other of the precious spices.

16.1

Eventually, when the lawless ones saw that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they ordered an executioner who had approached him to plunge a dagger. And when he [the executioner] had done this, a dove came out and an abundance of blood, so that it quenched the fire. And the whole crowd marveled at such a great distinction between the unbelievers and the elect.

17.2

So he incited Nicetas, the father of Herod and brother of Alce, to appeal to the ruler not to hand over his body. 'Lest,' he said, 'forsaking the crucified one, they should worship this one.' And the Jews were inciting and urging these things, and they kept guard as we were about to take him from the fire, not knowing that we will never be able to abandon the Messiah (who suffered for the salvation of the whole world of the saved, the blameless on behalf of sinners) or worship someone else.

## 22.2

Gaius transcribed these [materials] from those of Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp; he also resided as a fellow citizen with Irenaeus. And I, Socrates, wrote it out in Corinth from the copy-materials of Gaius. Grace be with [you] all.

## 22.3

And again, I, Pionius, copied from the aforementioned [material], having searched for it-when the blessed Polycarp disclosed it to me in a revelation, just as I will make it clear in the follow-up. I gathered it together, now nearly worn away by time, in order that the Lord Jesus Christ may gather me also with his elect into his heavenly kingdom. To whom be the glory with [the] Father and Holy Spirit, unto the ages of the ages. Amen.<sup>138</sup>

Although this letter is not written by Polycarp, it still holds significance. It is written from the perspective of a reporter of the execution of Polycarp. Polycarp never denies his Savior Jesus Christ and identifies him as ‘my king who saved me’ (9.3). That ability of Jesus to ‘save’ is only accomplished through his death and resurrection. Despite there being unknowns with this particular letter (*Mart Pol.*), “A copy of the letter, we are told, was preserved in the personal library of Irenaeus.”<sup>139</sup> There were also great lengths taken by the scribes to preserve the integrity of the letter and its copies. We read in (22.2) ‘Gaius transcribed these [materials] from those of Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp’. Here we have a disciple of Polycarp, who was himself a disciple of the Apostle John. This portion goes on to identify a man by the name of Socrates also writing a copy and ending with Pionius as another man entrusted with copying the letter.

The scribes had no concerns with assigning their names to the document. This could be considered a form of a “chain of custody.” The same today if Officer Smith collects evidence and gives it to Officer Brown. Officer Brown then keeps it for some time and gives it to Officer Johnson. Officer Johnson then turns it over to Officer White and so on. Each person is claiming they were in possession of the evidence. It is clear that the scribes were not trying to deceive

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<sup>138</sup> Polycarp’s Epistle to the Philippians and the Martyrdom of Polycarp: Introduction, text, and commentary, edited by Paul Hartog (Oxford University Press. Oxford, UK. 2013), 253-269.

<sup>139</sup> *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume I: I Clement. II Clement. Ignatius. Polycarp. Didache*, edited and translated by Bart D. Ehrman, Loeb Classical Library 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 363.

anyone with this letter. Unless there is some legitimate reason to believe that the evidence has been tainted or there is obvious signs of deception, both (Pol. *Phil.*) and (*Mart Pol.*) must be acknowledged as true corroborating evidence in defense of the resurrected Jesus.

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