

EXCURSUS – THE FOUNDATION FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND ITS TRUTH

A special section of the work: “The Life and Teachings of Christ From the Gospels”

By: Bob Stewart and his study group

INTRODUCTION

The Gospels leave us with the portrait of a group of disciples who were confused and unsure about Jesus until His resurrection. Then an excitement began to grow until the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon 120 of His closest followers.

2000 years later the modern church is the proclaimer of their message,

Acts 2:32-33, "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."

There are people today having a difficult time believing that Christ was raised from the dead or that the dead could be raised in any way whatsoever. Christ's resurrection is the key issue for our faith and we must never forget it. The Christian faith, from earliest times to the present is based first and foremost as well as solely on Christ's resurrection from the dead. Paul makes this fact clear in I Corinthians 15.

1Corinthians 15:13-20, “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

Paul makes it clear that what Jesus did here on earth including His sacrifice on the cross is null and void if He is not risen. In addition, he implies that God as the Bible describes Him, and in fact, the Bible itself, in its entirety, is a worthless religious document without truth or power.

When you look at the human situation, one finds that the greatest personal grief and pain occurs when a loved one is taken in death. Death is the unstoppable reality in all creation. We can prevent birth, but death, though frequently postponed for a short time, is ultimately the victor leaving people devastated and in shambles. If God exists in any form, one would think that He and He alone would have an answer to death. If God has the power to create life in whatever manner one believes it to have come about, one would think that God, with that kind of power and with an eternal nature - as most believe Him to have - would be able to cope with human mortality.

So if one believes in God, what sense does it make to limit Him to a role only slightly greater than that of a human being? What hope is there in that? I have found that if one believes in God, seldom is his/her belief limited to a God of such weakness. But if one's belief in God denies Him the

power over life and death, what good is that - ultimately? In other words, if He has no power over death, what good does it do anyone to believe in this kind of God? Therefore, if the God of the Bible is the God one places their faith in, then that belief is useless unless He has power over the greatest enemy - death. And if He does have such power, would it not be comforting to know about it by, say, a demonstration so one would know that his/her faith is sound and true? And if He offers such a demonstration, what cause would there be not to believe in Him? There would be none. Instead, there would be cause for rejoicing!

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:26) There must be sufficient evidence for believing that what He claimed is true. Does this evidence exist and what is the consequence if Christ did not rise from the dead? Is Jesus' resurrection the demonstration we need to give us hope and truth, or is it all some myth or hoax?

The early church made the resurrection of Christ from the dead the cornerstone of their preaching and faith.

For example,

Acts 4:1-2, "As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple *guard* and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."

Acts 4:33, "And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all."

Acts 17:18, "And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"--because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection."

Acts 17:32-34, "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them."

Acts 23:6, "But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"

Acts 24:21, "...other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.'"

Romans 1:1-4, "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord"

1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"

These examples raise other questions. How is it that Paul and Peter ever came to believe, preach and suffer, finally being executed for their faith in this doctrine? And why would they carry it to the extreme, final punishment if it were a hoax? And these questions must be asked in reference to the hundreds of other people in the early church who followed suit for the same reason.

Some, to answer these questions have resorted to sheer fantasy claiming that Jesus never lived, the entire story and all the events surrounding the early church is a fable and that the men who wrote the New Testament never actually lived either. All of this, apparently, was made up by hucksters sometime later for the express purpose of fleecing the crowds. Well, they also must have fooled the Romans and their historians, eye-witnesses and the testimonies of those who were actually there, as well as those who knew the apostles personally and wrote about it, such as Polycarp and Clement who were not on the scene. However, there is absolutely no credible historian today who would make such foolish claims whether he is a believer or not. I suspect those who want to make it all go away by claiming it is all fictitious do so not from a desire to know the facts, but from a desire to avoid the consequences one must consider if it is all really true.

In addition, it is an interesting fact that several cultic religious groups used the teachings of Jesus and the apostles to foster their own distorted views as they tried to create new religions. These groups were already in existence during the time Jesus lived. For example, the Gnostics wrote about the events of Jesus' day outside of the gospel accounts and we have those writings with us today as well as many other extra-Biblical sources.

But, this brings us back to our question, why did Peter and Paul as well as others have such a firm belief in the occurrence of the resurrection that they willingly suffered and died for the message? Paul admitted that if the resurrection never happened,

"...then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless".

Over the centuries, many have tried to explain away the resurrection of Christ by offering other possibilities. We will examine all of them, even some of the most absurd, to see if any hold water against the simple light of reason and evidence. Further, the consideration of each argument and rebuttal will be done most thoroughly.

First we'll look at the arguments for denying the resurrection of Jesus, and then we'll examine the evidence substantiating the resurrection. To refute the resurrection of Christ from the dead, it is necessary to deal with three elements of the gospel accounts stated as facts by the writers. Four primary factors that must be dealt with are:

- 1) The empty tomb.
- 2) The proclamation of the resurrection of Christ from the dead by those who saw Him.
- 3) The behavior of the disciples and of Saul of Tarsus.
- 4) The motive behind why the resurrection was recorded and included in the accounts, and why these historical events occurred, if indeed none of it is true.

If the resurrection did not occur, each of these elements must be refuted and satisfactorily explained. We will examine the theories proffered by the nonbelievers and the questions that result from these theories that must be addressed.

The principle arguments denying Christ's resurrection are:

- 1) The disciples stole Jesus' body.
- 2) The disciples were under some mass delusion, hypnosis, or genuinely deceived.
- 3) Jesus didn't really die on the cross, but revived in the tomb.
- 4) It wasn't Jesus on the cross, but a substitute.
- 5) The women went to the wrong tomb.
- 6) The Jews and/or Romans stole Jesus' body.
- 7) Someone pretended to be the resurrected Jesus.
- 8) The resurrection was not in the original writings of the authors.

Lastly we'll present the substantiating evidence.

- 1) The Biblical Testimony
 - a) From eyewitnesses
 - b) From associates of the eyewitnesses
 - c) From Old Testament prophets.
- 2) Extra-Biblical Testimony
- 3) Historical, Geographical, and Archeological Testimony
- 4) Writings of Dedicated Skeptics
- 5) The Testimony of "Silence"

ARGUMENTS FOR DENYING THE RESURRECTION

1. The first argument proffered immediately was that the disciples came by night and stole Jesus' body from the tomb, hid it and later proclaimed He had risen from the dead.

This argument is actually recorded in the gospels of Matthew itself, chapter 28:11-15. After the resurrection appearances Matthew writes,

“Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted

together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, *and is to this day.*"

It seems odd, that if the disciples actually did this, that one of them would write it down as a suggestion leading to the incrimination of themselves and to invalidation the resurrection of Christ. But there are a number of arguments and plain facts that make this conjecture an impossibility. And frankly, every one of the objections to Christ's "in fact" resurrection comes down to motive.

A. Why would they do this? There is no question they had given up any hope after Jesus was crucified and buried. It is odd that the authors of the gospels are clear about the reason the disciples followed Jesus and it was not to see their hoped for Messiah killed, if in fact they are trying to present a document of "faith". Not only that, there is testimony and evidence that they were frightened of suffering the same horrible fate. What good would a hoax do if they were to die for proclaiming it? What would be their motive to do so in the face of these threats? Their motive is extremely important, for mankind normally looks to his own best interest in pursuing such an act. Money? Even when the proclamation was made and persecution of the church began in earnest, the apostles not only did not request money, but gave everything they had to support others in need. Were they seeking fame? Ambition? To what end? To make themselves public figures so they could be easily found and suffer the sword or stoning or crucifixion? Jesus, who was innocent of any provable crime, was tortured and killed. The disciples, in stealing the body would be guilty of not only bribing or killing the posted guard, but of breaking an official seal. These were punishable offenses, and one wonders why there were no arrests or protests of disciples following these deeds. We'll come back to this later.

Perhaps they wanted to perpetuate the Messianic ideal for the benefit of the Jews who so desperately sought the Messiah. The trouble with this is the Messiah the Jews looked for was a traditional Messiah who would overthrow Rome and set up a divine kingly rule under which the Jews would be free and prosper. A crucified Messiah was not in their thinking. In fact, had Jesus succumbed to the traditional (but not fully Biblical) Messianic model, He would have failed miserably. So to proclaim a resurrected Messiah but leave Him impotent to deal with the Romans or any future enemies of the Jews would have been ludicrous in the eyes of the Jews. There would not only have been no following, but the disciples would have been laughed out of town.

Perhaps they were so devoted to Jesus they wanted to perpetuate His teachings or perhaps justify the three years they had committed to him. There would be no need to perpetrate a resurrection hoax to do this. In fact, this goal could have been met without a resurrection at all, just as it has for other prophets, founders of religions, philosophers and rabbis. The resurrection claim, in fact, is a stumbling block rather than an aid to reaching this goal. But then, part of Jesus' teachings, as reported in all the gospel accounts, was the claim to rise from the dead. Perhaps they wanted to falsify the resurrection to give legitimacy to His persona. But this is a contradiction. Why legitimize a person one knows to be a fraud, a liar, and a deceiver. The Jewish leadership who sought His demise called Him "the deceiver"

and worse. There is no evidence that Jesus' disciples were so enthralled with faith that they fell to this desperation. Quite the contrary. They were emotionally devastated and defeated.

If man seeks to gain something through a change of lifestyle or an act of violence and risk as would have to have occurred here, he does so for the purpose of accruing pleasure or security or in the effort to avoid loss or pain. None of these normal quests is present in a tomb robbing, resurrection falsifying caper. So the motive must be established in order to have some reason for the action imposed upon the disciples by skeptics of the resurrection.

- B. How did they overcome the guard? The same author who wrote about the rumor starting that the disciples stole the body also makes reference to the security of the tomb. He writes,

Matthew 27:62-66, "Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I *am to* rise again.' "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it *as* secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

This guard is deemed to be a contingent of Roman soldiers assigned to the temple authorities for crowd control during the festivals as well as during the crucifixion of Jesus. Matthe wrote earlier, (27:54) "Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" The term used by Pilate is "Custodia" denoting a contingent of Roman sentries. So here is a trained Roman guard of soldiers with weapons now set and established to keep the disciples from stealing the body of Jesus and perpetrating a hoax. The tomb is also sealed, meaning that it was bound in a rope with a Roman clay seal stamped upon it. Breaking the seal could be punishable by death. So what happened? The guards fell asleep and the disciples sneaked by? All of them at once? Sleeping on guard duty brought severe consequences. Even if that could have happened, how did the movement of a very heavy stone as well as the noise the disciples must have made not awaken the guard?

The disciples overpowered the guard? How? And the only way to do this was to kill them, for the "Custodia" were sworn to hold their ground to the death. But the guard all showed up after the event alive and well. Why would the disciples risk this? In addition, the One they followed deplored violence. Even at His arrest, when Peter cut a man with a short sword, Jesus stopped him and healed the man who had been cut. So what was there to be gained by trying to overpower the Roman guard? It would be ridiculed as a denial of the very message the Master taught and the disciples' attempts to proclaim the message of peace would have been dismissed along with themselves and their "Messiah". In every aspect then, there is absolutely nothing to be gained from this. People do not risk what was at stake when there is absolutely nothing to be gained from it. One insane, deluded man might do this, but many? And the many grew to hundreds and the hundreds to thousands.

Perhaps, as has been proffered by some, the disciples somehow drugged the guards into sleep. This would have had to have happened prior to the grave robbing and would have

been a better excuse for the guards when facing inquiry. But since the report of the guards does not mention any problem until after the tomb is opened and the body is gone, the excuse was proffered that they fell asleep.

Did people really believe the story of the guards or the Jewish leadership about this? Since there is no further account of either the guards or the disciples getting into trouble with the “law” over this, one is forced to ask, “Why?” The only answer is that the story was not believed. The idea of these disciples drugging or overpowering a Roman contingent of guards and making off with the body of Jesus is simply too far fetched to be believed, let alone that they all simply fell asleep and stayed that way while the disciples crashed about with this effort. And then of course, we are back to “why?”

Maybe they bribed the guard to leave the tomb prior to stealing the body. Could this explain why the guard came to the Jewish leadership with such a fanciful tale, that is, the truth? They were apparently bribed again to falsify their false tale. Very greedy guards indeed! This plot by the guards is almost as creative as the one by the disciples in that case. I suppose one could argue that the disciples came into a lot of money somewhere in order to bribe the guard with sufficient funds that they would be willing to risk their lives. And we could suppose that the guard would anticipate another bribe so they could escape a report to Pilate by the chief priests. And the Jewish leadership, they knew, would cover their risk of severe punishment or even capital punishment, if the report came to Pilate. Amazing insight for these guards. But nothing was ever done to anyone after it was reported that Jesus was resurrected. If you were Pilate, wouldn't you want to know how on earth this happened? Or did Pilate not hear of it? Perhaps he believed it. Or perhaps he chose to ignore it. It makes no difference. The fact is, even if there were no guard, no sealed tomb, the entire purpose and motive for stealing the body must be examined as must the post-resurrection appearances to those not among them that were gathered together. One is hard pressed to account for this in a reasonable way.

- C. How did a dead man appear to other people besides the disciples if he actually never rose from the dead? There are numerous reports from others that they actually saw Jesus alive after He had been crucified, dead and buried. How does one account for these reports? Why would the Jewish persecutor of the early church, Saul of Tarsus, of all people, claim that he had seen Jesus alive and that is what turned him into the phenomenon we call the Apostle Paul? He himself notes,

1 Corinthians 15:3-10, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is either the most mysterious, unexplainable anomaly of history for which there is no answer, or what he says happened actually happened. The result was the most effective spread of the Christian gospel in history. Not only that, but the Jew, Saul (Paul) became the missionary to the Gentiles, something unheard of among Jews and an event that caused controversy in the early church (See Acts 15). Other than accept his account there is no reasonable explanation for his conversion.

- D. Why were the books of the New Testament written? It could be stated that the disciples were trying to perpetrate the hoax through literature. But this raises more questions. First, they used their own names. Why do this when a great persecution was under way? Few will deny, for example, the execution of hundreds of Christians under Nero who used their crucified flaming bodies to light the streets of Rome. Second, to perpetrate the hoax, one must conclude that all the writers were deliberate liars. This might be said of the disciples, but what of Luke, Mark, Paul and the author of Hebrews? They were not disciples at all, and Luke was a Gentile commissioned by Theophilus to ascertain the truth about all these stories years later (see Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-3). Again, if the disciples and followers of Jesus were deliberate liars, this would be discovered soon enough through their character and behavior. But there is no record of any of them being con men, deceivers, thieves or the like. Quite the contrary, even their enemies admit they were good men. But perhaps they themselves were under a delusion, hypnosis of some sort or genuinely deceived.
- E. If the disciples truly believed that Jesus was going to be raised from the dead on the third day, why did they go to steal the body while there was more than twelve hours left in the third day? Remember, the Jewish day begins (and began then) at sunset. The third day (which was the first day of the week or our Sunday) began as the Sabbath (Saturday) faded into sunset. So the disciples still had until Sunday at sunset as a part of the “third day”. So why not wait? This is a potent argument that cannot be ignored. Secondly, if the disciples had lost all hope and had no confidence in a real resurrection, why steal the body and perpetrate a hoax? Again, to what end? So whether they truly believed in Jesus and what He said or not, it makes no sense to steal the body and less sense to do it more than twelve hours pre-maturely.

2. The disciples were under some mass delusion, hypnosis or genuinely deceived.

If they were good people, and nothing can be found to discredit their character, then perhaps they were simply and innocently deluded, led astray or under a mass hypnotic spell or hallucination or deception. The question arises, who did this to them? Who had the power to pull this off, and what would be their motive? The Jews? Why? They wanted it all to go away. The Romans? The same. The last thing Pilate needed within his precarious position in these days was more trouble. Did Jesus do this? Wait, He is dead! Maybe before His crucifixion? To what end? He would be dead so He could not benefit. And how does one mass hypnotize hundreds of people, some of whom He never met? A person would have to be God to do this. And if He is, then mass hypnotism or delusion is not necessary.

We can concede that a person or maybe two could be caught up in something like this. But a mass or crowd of people from all over the world? Even if a few were deluded to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, how would they convince a bunch of skeptics? Even the disciples did not believe it until Jesus appeared to them. John records the event with Thomas in 20:24-25, “But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus

came. So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

This is what people say today. "If Jesus appears to me then I will believe." Actually this is not true. They would soon dismiss it as a delusion or a hallucination. In addition, no one would believe this of a single encounter. People would be as skeptical of an account like this as they are of UFO sightings and abduction reports. Their impact would fade quickly. People are hard pressed to believe something like this without sufficient evidence to do so. It is normal to be skeptical. It is important. Still, people are led astray every day by slick shysters and deceivers eager to separate people from their cash. Masses have been led astray like those who followed Jim Jones, David Koresh or even Adolph Hitler. So those who want evidence of truth before they follow along are on the right track.

So if Jesus was a deceiver, as most of the Jewish leadership believed Him to be, something extraordinary would have to happen to dispel this belief. The disciples were no different. No one denies that they were Jewish, with Jewish expectations like all the rest of the community. The Jews abhorred any false religion. For example, they were entrenched in their own tradition and were persecuted because they refused to comply with the simplest of requests made by Roman authorities including dress regulations (under Claudius in Rome) and the recognition of the festivals or holidays of the empire. The Jews would revolt at the invasion of their religion and culture by any foreign religious or cultural influence. So to expect that the disciples and hundreds of other Jews would simply fall for any old line is ludicrous. Something extraordinary would have to occur for them to change their whole lives and thinking in a matter of a few days. A single report of Jesus' resurrection would not do the trick. Even today, if one comes to you and says "Jesus appeared to me!" you will think him or her a lunatic. But when a mass of people begin to state it, people from all over the place, and then they give up everything they ever valued, including in some cases, their relationships, families, and lives, in exchange for an ignominious death, one is pressed to take notice and wonder.

Think of it, it is one thing to influence people with religious philosophy and wisdom and have a religion begin. This could be understandable as it has happened throughout history. It is another to proclaim a risen Messiah. And why risk death for this claim? Wouldn't it have been easier to simply state that Jesus was a great teacher, a good man, a philosopher, as well perhaps a prophet and a seer and learn from His great mind? Of course it would. All the problems would have been solved and the world would be comfortable with the choice of which teachings to follow. But then, we are left with three things. First, the disciples did claim He rose from the dead – for no apparent or necessary reason if He didn't. Second, if Jesus was such a good man and a great teacher, then how can we affirm this when He is obviously a megalomaniac and deceiver, a liar and a con-man, for His claims about Himself are that He is The Son of God, even God incarnate, the invisible creator revealed to us in human form. He also taught that he came to redeem mankind from their sins and that to prove this was true that He would rise from the dead. Why would anyone want to believe what this kind of man would say? And why would the disciples all write this stuff if He wasn't risen, knowing it would make their efforts all the more difficult to accept? So if we cannot accept the incredible contradiction of the man Jesus, what is left? Third, with the resurrection swept away, that still leaves us with an impotent god, one unable to deal with our most serious challenge, death itself. We are back where we started, as Paul noted.

So the witnesses to Christ's resurrection are not one or a few, but many, and among the many were those outside of the followers of Jesus. Paul being one noted, "After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." His statement to the church at Corinth that "most of whom remain until now" is an invitation to interview these witnesses themselves because they are still alive and well. Some had died to be sure ("fallen asleep") but they died believing and with hope and truth to cling to.

A mass delusion, hypnosis, hallucination among these particular people is preposterous. Among the Greeks or Romans, maybe, for they indulged in narcotic use, and debauchery of all kinds based on their pantheon of gods and goddesses. But not the Jews. They would have none of it. So we are left with their witness, not backed up by debauchery, fleshly indulgence, lust, war or ambition for personal gain like so many other religions, but by sacrifice, love, compassion, commitment, even to the point of giving their lives with nothing - in this world - to gain.

Finally, to the consternation of many Jewish non-believers (there are millions of believers) Jesus birth, life, teachings, miracles, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection fulfill dozens if not hundreds of Old Testament prophecies. The odds of this occurring have been estimated to be impossible. What is even more aggravating, not one Jewish opponent has ever written or said that Jesus existence was any different than portrayed by the evangelists. More on this later.

3. Jesus was not dead, but drugged and revived in the tomb.

This theory has been perpetrated by many and most notably by Hugh Schoenfield in his 1994 book, "the Passover Plot", a fanciful and unbelievable creation that weakly collapses from the sheer weight of its own foolishness and incredulity.

Basically, the gist of this general view is that when Jesus was on the cross, he was given a potent drink, a drink that rendered Him in an unconscious, death like state. Assuming Him to be dead, He was then laid into the tomb, and then revived later only to escape and claim He was risen from the dead. Possible? Let's see. Remember, this theory is based on the text of the writing apostles and assumed to be truthful and accurate. Otherwise, no one would know Jesus was given this drink would they?

A) The texts noting this giving of Jesus a drink on the cross are as follows:

Matthew 27:33-35,

"And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting *it*, He was unwilling to drink. And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots."

Gall is the juice from a very poisonous and bitter herb we know as "Hemlock" from the Greeks, or as "Wormwood" throughout the Bible. In various quantities mixed with water or wine it could cause a deadening of pain, a stupor, a coma or death.

The context in Matthew proves that this was the contingent of Roman guards. The drink was in common use among the soldiers as a pain dampener. First, why would the Romans want to perpetuate a hoax? Obviously, they wouldn't. Second, the text notes that He refused this drink.

Matthew 27:48 (Mark 15:36)

“Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink.”

The context shows that this was one of the Jewish onlookers, not a disciple. Why would the Jews want to perpetrate this hoax? And we are not told here that He drank it. If He did, it was not to perpetrate a hoax. The flogging, loss of blood and the torture of crucifixion would leave a person tormented in thirst and in pain. He may well have tasted it, but to assume He survived everything else because He drank this concoction stretches the limits of credulity.

John 19:28-30, “After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a *branch of hyssop* and brought it up to His mouth. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.”

Here again, in the context, it is the soldiers who gave Him the sour wine and it suggests he drank some of it just prior to His death. Again, why would the Romans want to perpetrate a hoax? And supposing someone exchanged “sponges” where does that put us? Well, those who use this account of the disciples as the truthful base for their theory must also include some of the other facts:

- a. The Jews demanded that the three men crucified be killed before sundown because it was unlawful to have them unburied on the Sabbath (which was only an hour or two from occurring). See: Mark 15:42-45; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:31-42. In each of these passages, the death of each man had to be confirmed by a Roman Centurion. This was indeed confirmed by the Centurion and his soldiers, breaking the legs of the two crucified near Jesus and plunging a spear into the heart of Jesus Himself. The very account noting Jesus drinking of the “sponge” is the same account that tells of this confirmation. Pilate himself would not release the body of Jesus to Joseph of Arimathea until the Centurion assured him Jesus was dead (Mark 15:44). This was, of course, to prevent a bungling error by Pilate which would come back to haunt him.
- b. There is no question that Jesus was placed in a tomb the entrance of which was covered with a large stone. These ancient tombs and their covering stones have been excavated by archeologists. The stones weighed up to several tons each. Further, Jesus’ body was wrapped with linen cloths and anointed with ointments and spices. Finally, the tomb was sealed and a Roman guard was set to watch for any attempt to steal Jesus’ body. So we are to believe that Jesus, after the beatings, floggings, falling under the weight of the cross, a torturous crucifixion, and after a great loss of blood, not only did not die, but even after being pierced with a spear and entombed, was able to revive (with no medical help), in the dark and cold of a tomb (not the most invigorating of environments), tear out of his ointment weighted wrapping cloths, push back and uphill a stone weighing easily a thousand pounds or more, overcome a trained Roman guard with weapons killing them all, and make good His escape into the night so He could proclaim He had risen from the dead. For what reason? To impress the Jews? Unlikely, for the Roman eagle still flew.

B) First, this “plot” was not by the Son of God, but by a madman. What else could have gone wrong to mess it up? Second, who in his right mind would either create or submit to this kind of a plot and for what reason? Third, if the disciples helped Him, why? Again, they would know it was a hoax, and sooner or later, probably at the point of a Roman spear, they would confess, or even lie to say it was all a hoax after all (perhaps even if they knew it wasn’t) just to save their skin. But they didn’t! And again, how did the disciples overcome the guard?

C) Why would this kind of hoax be planned let alone perpetrated? There were other ways to attract a following. After all, Gamaliel, a respected and historical Rabbi alive at the time, had a devoted following. Previous Rabbi’s like Hillel and Shammai had their devotees. Surely Jesus would have had dedicated students and teachers as well. His reputation would have at least labeled Him as a great prophet and teacher and a school or following would easily have occurred. Why screw that up with a hoax, especially one of this risk and magnitude? After all, other religions flourish without the claim of a risen founder. Finally, this kind of preposterous presumption is totally out of character for Jesus, His family, and the Jews in general. Would Jesus who treasured the truth desire His followers to build their faith upon a lie?

D) Perhaps the most damning truth destroying this theory is that if Jesus had been drugged on the cross and passed out into a “death like state” undetectable to even trained Roman soldiers, He would not have been able to push Himself up with His legs and asphyxiation would have occurred in a matter of minutes, killing Him. This was the nature and torture of crucifixion. Hanging from ones arms caused a severe cramping of the upper body muscles so the victim could not breathe. In order to breathe, he had to push himself up on feet that were nailed to the beam. The pain was excruciating. After a time the legs also cramped. It could happen in a matter of minutes, hours or even days. Once the legs cramped, the victim could no longer push himself up to get a breath and died shortly thereafter. To hasten death, the Romans would take a beam and smash and break the legs. If Jesus was drugged, He was dead in minutes.

4. There was a substitute on the cross.

Jesus later appeared to claim He had risen from the dead. This view is held by those who believe in Islam. Some in Islam believe that the individual on the cross was an “eidolon”, a representation or a phantom. Others state that it was a substitute looking so much like Jesus that even His mother and disciples were fooled. This is based in part on Isaiah 52:14, “Just as many were astonished at you, *My people*, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men.”

A) The simple question is, who exactly was the volunteer for this job, and why on earth would anyone go to this extreme to pull off a hoax when he had no “Messianic” power to do anything anyway?

B) This means that Judas identified the wrong man.

C) This means that neither Jesus’ mother nor His disciples recognized Him as He was led to be flogged, or on the cross afterwards...or they were terrific actors.

D) Even if this were true, there was a body still missing from the tomb to be accounted for. How did this happen? Perhaps there was a secret and concealed back door to the tomb that no one knew about except Joseph. He reveals this to the disciples. Then Jesus could have been

removed even if the guard was alert and posted. But then, why was the stone removed? Who did it? There is no purpose for the stone's removal if this occurred. A claim of resurrection would be more effective with the stone in place. Once Jesus' resurrection was proclaimed, the stone would be removed to prove the body was gone. All would be in wonder. But then, the guards would not have needed to come up with their cockamamie story and then be bribed to change it. In addition, it is likely a thorough search of the tomb would have been made and the secret entrance discovered. And we are still left with the motive, the post-resurrection appearances, and all the rest.

E) Why would anyone go to these lengths and then die defending it as true for no gain whatsoever as the disciples did?

F) How can we justify the conversion of Saul of Tarsus who hated the entire matter about "Christ" let alone justify the conversion of Jesus' brother, James, who questioned Jesus' sanity early in His ministry and then became so strong a believer he remained in Jerusalem while others left to protect the disenfranchised Jewish believers. He was executed with the sword for his role as head of the church.

5. The women went to the wrong tomb on the first day of the week.

The argument goes that they were so distraught that they got disoriented in the early light and found an empty tomb somewhere and ran and told the disciples Jesus had risen.

A) How is it possible for the women to go to the wrong tomb when only a matter of hours had passed. Mark makes the comment in 15:47, "Mary Magdalene and Mary the *mother* of Joseph were looking on *to see* where He was laid." Luke notes, (23:55-56) "Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment." One might get lost somehow, but more than one?

B) This means Peter and John also went to the wrong tomb and never did discover where the "lost tomb" was. This is a greater mystery than the resurrection itself.

C) To compound matters, poor Joseph of Arimathea forgot where his own tomb was, even after placing Jesus inside it.

D) The Roman guards would have then reported that everything was secure, not knowing that all the others had gone to the wrong tomb. So when the claims of resurrection were pronounced, it would have been a simple matter for the Roman guard to show the Jews where Jesus still lay! Unless, of course they got lost as well.

E) If they did go to the wrong tomb, and Jesus never did rise from the dead, why then go out and proclaim it? To what purpose? Thomas surely wouldn't have believed it would he? Then, all the Jews had to do to disprove that Jesus was still dead was to open the real tomb and display the dead body of Jesus for all to see.

6. The Jews and/or the Romans stole and hid the body so a hoax would not be perpetrated.

A) If this happened, then when the disciples claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead, all that had to be done to crush this claim was for the Jews or Romans to produce the body they themselves hid.

B) Then, why would the disciples make such a claim based on an empty tomb by itself? Would they not want to know what happened to the body of Jesus? This was their first question when they got to the empty tomb. John 20:1-2, "Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb. So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." The empty tomb does not support the resurrection of Christ from the dead by itself. It had to take an actual appearance to many disciples, non-disciples at different times and places to even begin to believe it actually happened. And that is what took place.

7. The followers of Jesus were persuaded that Jesus was alive after the burial because someone pretended to be Jesus and convinced them that He had risen from the dead.

A) Surely Jesus' mother or members of His family would have blown the whistle unless they were a part of the plot or went along out of their misguided sorrow. This seems out of character for Mary, and for James who was skeptical to begin with, not to mention Thomas.

B) How did this pretender get all the marks of scourging and beatings on his body not to mention the punctured wrists and feet?

C) This assumes that all the hundreds of people who had known Jesus were also fooled.

D) It begs the question, "Why perpetrate this plot?" And, what happened to this imposter? We are still left with a Messiah unable to deal with the Romans or with the expectations of the Jews. Who would believe this fellow?

D) Even if this were true, the dead body of the real Jesus was still somewhere. In the tomb? Open it and prove it all false. Not in the tomb? How did it come to be missing and why?

8. The account of Jesus' resurrection was never in the original writings.

It was interpolated or added later to justify church belief that Jesus was the Son of God and to keep people from joining other religions. This theory has been put forth, in some form, for a century now by "scholars" who believe they have the answers.

A) If Jesus never rose from the dead, what was the motive for the disciples to write the gospels and letters in the first place? They were crushed with disappointment, and had they written the documents simply to exhibit Jesus' teachings (As the Gospel of Thomas does), why did others later on add so much about His deity, mission and so on? This would serve no purpose in a "later" church. It is common that these same skeptics and critics also remove any miraculous element from the narratives in their "search" for the historical Jesus. If the miraculous and the resurrection are removed we have some serious observations and questions to propose.

First, there would have been no church into which to add these elements and no purpose for doing so. The church was well underway immediately following Jesus' "resurrection". So

there would be no church about which we read in the New Testament for the church was built upon the firm belief that Christ rose from the dead. If He neither rose from the dead nor performed the miracles recorded in the Gospels, there would be no church. Hence, there would have been no motivation for the writing of the Gospels, no Apostle Paul to write to his readers. In fact there would have been no “Paul” at all!

Second, much of Jesus’ teachings related to His personage, mission and purpose, often prophesying His impending arrest, death and resurrection. He was crucified for “making Himself God” and making statements that resulted in strong opposition from the Jewish leadership. If He made these claims and was unable to back them up, and was never resurrected, then He was not only a failed Messiah, but a fraud, liar, and deranged false prophet. In this case, something entirely different would have been written of Him, and He would be nothing more than a small footnote in Jewish history noting His tragic and deranged appearance, if that. If He did not make these claims or do the miracles attributed to Him, there would have likely been no effort to have Him crucified. It is possible that He, along with rabbis Shammi, Hillel, Gamaliel and others would simply be listed as a controversial teacher with a sect of followers like these others. Then today, the only “church” would be a Jewish denomination who followed the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, a rabbi from Nazareth – maybe. But for that to happen, Jesus would have to have been approved and ordained by other rabbis of note in a council. But He was not. In fact, His “authority”, along with John the Baptist’s, was constantly under question.

“... for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:29).

“When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. "The baptism of John was from what *source*, from heaven or from men?" And they *began* reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet." And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” (Matthew 21:23-27)

“... and they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority” (Luke 4:32).

“The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken” (John 2:18-22) .

So, without rabbinic approval, and in fact with rabbinic opposition, plus their universal condemnation of Jesus as a fraud and a deceiver, it would have been extremely difficult for Jesus to have found a faithful, public audience from among so many Jews – unless of course, there was some extraordinary reason to do so.

Third, even if He was just a teacher with a different approach to Judaism, the very first “church” would have been simply a group of Jews dedicated to recording and propagating His teachings. So why insert all the miraculous claims, works and the resurrection? What would be the motive?

Fourth, then John the Baptist becomes a tragic figure and a comedy. There is no point to his existence, let alone to his message. What about this man’s testimony? The tragic and comic pathos would also extend to Paul the apostle, to all the early writers and disciples, and to all the believers from that time onward.

The fact is, however, that the presentation of Jesus’ miraculous prophecies, works and the fact of His resurrection was the first claim and proclamation of the church. If not, then how did Luke of Troas, a Gentile come to hear of these things? And what about the spread of the gospel before the Apostles or Paul even set out from Jerusalem? The proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection was known early on by those who were not disciples. Luke is the prime example. Luke, a gentile, probably from Troas in Asia Minor (North-Western Turkey), came to be a believer due to the message coming to him while he was residing in his hometown. Later, he and Saul of Tarsus set out on their miraculous journeys specifically because they believed Jesus had been raised from the dead. The resurrection was at the core of Paul’s message. He mentions it in many of his letters. One would have to claim that not only were the gospels doctored, but so were the letters of Paul and the rest of the writers. But since copies of these documents were circulated around the Empire, there is no record of discrepancies between them of this magnitude. In fact, in the more ancient documents and records recently discovered that date earlier and earlier, we find no absence of the resurrection account in any of the canonical documents. In non-canonical documents, the consistency remains as well.

It has been noted that there are relatively few documents supporting the life and career of Julius Caesar, but no one seems to disbelieve what is written about him. Yet, with the abundance of documents (tens of thousands) attesting to the life of Christ there remains a large constituency of skeptics and critics. One might be led to conclude that more than honest objective skepticism is involved here.

B) Why would anyone follow a dead and failed Messiah before the records were changed? The famous Jewish rebel, governor and military commander, Bar-Kochba (or Cochba), had a great following and some success against the Romans until he was killed in battle in 135 A.D.. He apparently claimed to be the Messiah of Israel or else others attributed this hope to him. But after his death and failure, his following ceased. In fact his name meant “Son of the Stars”, (Numbers 24:17) and was a self designated Messianic title. After the failure of his rebellion, he was called Bar-Cosiba (Son of Falsehood). So why follow and preach about an even more anemic Messiah (Jesus) for hundreds of years before the documents were created to justify this? There would have simply been no church! And since it was made up of Jews seeking a Conquering Messiah, word of Jesus would have never left the mouths of the few followers He had before His death – unless something extraordinary happened to turn the whole society up-side down.

C) It is humanly impossible to believe that hundreds, even thousands of people would endure torture, suffering and even death for a hoax. Perhaps for an active attempt to overthrow Rome, but for a failed Messiah? A madman might endure this suffering. But there is no record that the early Christians were madmen. Quite the contrary.

D) Why would devoted people want to justify Jesus as the Son of God at some later date by adding these divine elements into a text (which probably wouldn't have been written in the first place) when they knew He really wasn't anything more than a failed Messiah and prophet? Why would they worship Jesus as the Son of God if they knew it was a fraud? Why, especially, would Jews? All it resulted in was persecution by several Roman emperors over hundreds of years. And even more significant, if you take away all the divine attributes attached to Jesus as would have to be the case in this scenario, Jesus would have never been crucified in the first place and all of this discussion would not be occurring!

The above lists the primary arguments for denying the resurrection of Christ and their rebuttals. In summary, there had to be a fraud perpetrated by one of the following parties: The disciples, Jesus Himself, Jesus' family, the Jews, or the Romans. One is forced to take each possibility and let the light of reason, history, science, and truth shine on it. Further, either Jesus was the greatest fraud, deceiver, liar, manipulator, and con man the world has ever seen – an act beyond human comprehension in view of the facts and records, or - He was exactly who He claimed to be.

This latter section then, has dealt with the arguments denying the resurrection of Christ. The interesting thing is that all the critics and doubters use the Biblical narrative as the tool with which to discount the resurrection, the miraculous or the divine. In other words, they give credence and veracity to (at least) the core of the record as being historically accurate and reliable. Why? Because it cannot be denied (except by those in total denial that any history has ever occurred) that these events took place. What caused them is the issue. For some, the cause cannot be outside the verifiability of scientific testing – in other words – spiritual or divine.¹¹ For others, the very events themselves are proof of the spiritual and divine. This next section deals with the evidence substantiating His resurrection.

SUBSTANTIATING EVIDENCE

1. Biblical testimony.

The Biblical testimony is divided into three sections as delineated below. Those that would malign the testimony because they simply choose not to believe it must be dismissed even though they call into account “their expert testimony and study” to do so. For every one of these “scholars” there are a dozen scholars who accept the testimony of the Scripture as valid. Of course it is to be admitted that many of the accounts of Jesus' miracles, for example, are outside the ability of science or history to prove. If they were within the area of science or history, they would not be miracles, would they? And that which was extraordinary about Jesus would be reduced to commonality thus bringing into question His deity, would it not? That is the whole point.

The unique thing about the Scriptures is that they introduce the supernatural and spiritual as real events. Yet, these events are not without sufficient evidence or witness to bring one to a point of faith. It is incumbent upon the teachers of the Scriptures to give those who seek for truth enough evidence to persuade them to seek further into the realm of the spiritual.

¹¹ See this author's work entitled “ “Something Must Be Eternal”. In this essay, it is shown that Dr. Carl Sagan's attempt to disavow the eternal and spiritual actually demonstrates the very probability of its existence.

In the case of the New Testament accounts, it becomes more and more difficult to disregard their narrative as invented or made up when the documents are closely examined. For example, in telling the story of the resurrection of Christ, all four authors have something different to report or add. Critics point to these differences and say something like, “With all these confused and conflicting reports, it must be concluded that the New Testament is invalid as a source for truth let alone as a source of God’s word!” On the other hand, if each of the accounts were exactly the same, the critics would be saying, “It is obvious that these men conspired to concoct a single unified story proving that the New Testament is invalid and not worthy of the attention so many give it!”

But let’s look at it in an honest way, from a very human point of view. This was an extraordinary, unexpected, startling and shocking moment in the lives of these simple followers of Jesus. After His death and burial the women, after their Sabbath obligation was over, returned to the tomb to complete their anointing of the body. They brought products they had prepared shortly before. There was no expectation of resurrection. In fact, when they saw the open tomb, it was a shock and John says they ran immediately to get the men. After the men returned followed by the women, the men saw the empty tomb and went away puzzled. Remaining behind, Mary, confronted by a “stranger” told him, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him”. Is this not a natural question when discovering the tombstone rolled away and the tomb empty. Wouldn’t we all wonder, “What happened? Where is the body? Who would have taken it away and put it somewhere else? What’s going on? Of course this is the normal response. But if the story is an invention, why include this?

John, who was there with Peter, makes an odd, non-event, a part of his story. He includes a foot race between himself and Peter to the tomb after the women report the stone rolled away (probably flung away). This adds nothing to what “inventors” of a story would want to convey. These were not professional authors, so why include it? Because John won the race! None of the other writers included this account.

Another oddity, if this was an invented story, is that the angels did not appear to the men at all, but only to the women. In a Jewish, patriarchal society, women and especially their testimony was looked upon with skepticism. So why write it this way as all four do? Very odd if they were seeking to be believed. Why and how would the men even come to believe what women were saying. Most men in those days thought the women were hysterical and were prone to fable and fantasy as well as exaggeration. Why would the men believe their tales? – unless they themselves ultimately verified them.

Then, all four have a slightly different story as to what happened that day. Think about it. Women come rushing back to a group of disintegrated disciples cooped up in a house in Jerusalem and tell the leaders the stone covering Jesus’ tomb is cast aside and the tomb is empty. In the chaos that followed the story told to one person by one woman and then told to another person by another woman. Blending in the general wonder and confusion, would this not lead to differences in the remembering and recounting the story? Do we not have exactly this same phenomenon today with multiple witnesses to an event? A shock and stunning event such as this would lead each direct witness to fix on something that struck them particularly and it could well be a different element than that which struck others, couldn’t it? So do the different versions add to the honesty, genuineness and credibility of the accounts? As much so, if not more so than to their lack thereof, if one takes into consideration human nature.

A. The testimony of the eyewitnesses.

1. The testimony of Matthew, Mark, Peter, James (the brother of Jesus) and John.

These writers were direct eyewitnesses to the resurrection by their own account. Two of them were not among the disciples of Jesus, namely, Mark and James. One of the most startling of these eyewitness testimonies is James, the brother of Jesus, who is credited with writing the book of James. He is also mentioned prominently in Luke's book of "Acts".

James, who is seen by Mark and John as highly skeptical of Jesus' sanity throughout His ministry, is known by the Biblical writers as becoming a self sacrificing believer and head of the church. He was well known outside of the early Christian community. Clement, Hegesippus, Eusebius, and Josephus all mention James and all agree that: 1) He was the brother of Jesus, the eldest son of Mary and Joseph (after Jesus), 2) He came to his faith after a direct post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to Him, 3) He became the head of the church at Jerusalem, and, 4) he was executed in the early sixties because of his firm and unshakable faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

The question, of course, is why would James' life have changed so radically if Jesus was really dead, a hoax discovered about Jesus' "supposed" resurrection, and all the disciples were found to be frauds and con-men? There is no rational answer for this except to say that James at least believed Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to him. So the best critics can come up with is that James, not one of the twelve, and opposed to Jesus' ministry early on because it did not meet Messianic expectations of the Jews, decided to fake this encounter with Jesus or was under some delusion (as were hundreds of others).

2. The testimony of Saul of Tarsus.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is the strongest witness to the resurrection of Christ outside of those closest to Jesus because, not only was Saul not among the followers of Jesus, but he was actively engaged in trying to stamp out and destroy the early movement that proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. Early documents apart from the Bible bear this out.¹²

The historicity of Saul and this change from persecutor to Apostle for the very cause he hated is not disputed by any historian or even by any reasonable critic. It just remains a mystery to those who can't believe Jesus rose from the dead. Saul's story is much like James' except for his total separation from the early ministry of Jesus. It cannot be taken lightly. To assume for a moment that Saul came under some delusion like the rest of the disciples is unaccepted by any scholar or psychologist who might lean toward this theory.

B. The testimony of the associates of the eyewitnesses. These include Luke, the unknown author of Hebrews and Jude.

¹² Clement of Rome, Epistle to the Corinthians, c. 95; Sulpicius Severus, Chron. 29:3; Eusebius, H.E. II.25.5-8, etc.

1. There are some who would try to discount the witness of these authors as “hearsay” and so discredit it as valid. This is a shallow attempt to do so because if all this was contemporary and everyone of these writers were called into court to testify, the testimony of these three would be accepted in our courts and not relegated as hearsay.¹³
2. Not only that, it was Luke’s commission to carefully write down the “exact truth” of everything that had occurred so that all the stories, myths and legends that had sprung up might be culled out, and there were hundreds all claiming to be true. Luke was a gentile from Troas of Asia minor, the location of ancient Troy. He was also a physician and apparently did not become a believer until the ministry of Paul in the fifties. His purpose was to clarify for his mentor or friend Theophilus the true story of Jesus. He has no axe to grind, no motive for perpetrating a hoax. Luke writes at the beginning of his work,

1:1-4, “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.”

His manner and style of writing radiate his goal. For example, in the resurrection account, Luke notes:

24:1-11, “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. 2: And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3: but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4: While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; 5: and as *the women* were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, *the men* said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? 6: “He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, 7: saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” 8: And they remembered His words, 9: and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10: Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the *mother* of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. 11: But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.”

If one looks closely, one will see the dispassionate way Luke writes this. His account is a summary. He only includes that which he feels states the basic story. First, note in verse 4, he talks about the two men standing “near” them. He knows there are some differences in how this was reported and declines to state or speculate where exactly these men were standing. Second, he does not identify the “men” as angels. Third, the statement of these two men to the women is a general narrative

¹³ Careful research on United States’ “hearsay” laws will bear this out.

comprised of the essence of the reports of the women. It captures the truth of the matter without any extraneous emotion. Fourth, the response of the men to the report of the women is noted as appearing “as nonsense, and they would not believe them.” This is Luke’s editorial summary of the response of the men, not the words of the men themselves. So Luke has a flavor of impartiality throughout his book, but it still describes the events as witnesses he believed retold them.

Where did Luke get his material? Well he traveled with Paul for several years but his material is far too intimate and personal to have received it from the great apostle. This intimacy from beginning to end reveals a contact with the family of Jesus itself, and quite probably with Mary the mother of Jesus and with many of Jesus’ family members. How and when could he have gotten this information? It happens that Luke accompanies Paul to Jerusalem where Paul is arrested and incarcerated for a year and a half. Luke writes about this in great detail in his book of Acts (chapter 21-26) notes his own presence at many of the events. It is easily concluded, that with the commission from Theophilus, Luke took the opportunity to travel to wherever he could locate the best sources for his history and wrote it down as we have it today. Luke was an educated man. His Greek is formal and impeccable which is not the case with the other writers. His work shows his medical training here and there as he observes, for instance, that Jesus’ sweat as He prayed in the garden was “like drops of blood, falling upon the ground”. This is a comment by Luke and only he employs it. There is evidence that Luke took months and months to get his book together. Why do this if it is all a fraud?

- a. The actual author of the book of Hebrews is not known for absolute certain. Some conclude that it was written by Paul. To be certain, Pauline influence is evident, but the content is of a different style and purpose than anything else Paul wrote. Yet, whoever the author is, Paul’s influence and teaching is present. Here is a theological treatise proclaiming such lofty things about Jesus, and the Old and New Covenants that it boggles one’s mind to believe this is a work of fiction. The book, like so many, primarily addresses both believing and non-believing Jews and is designed to evangelize and persuade those Jews outside of faith in Christ as the promised Messiah to believe in Him. He uses both Jewish tradition and Old Testament stories and passages to persuade his readers. It is presented as a life and death matter. The writer seeks nothing for himself or anyone else (unlike some of the writers of false gospels and epistles) except to save his people from the fate of those who are unbelievers and unfaithful. Why do this if the only reason is concern for the ultimate fate of others? Why perpetrate a fraud?
- b. Jude claims to be the brother of James and the Lord’s brother. The gospel records the names of Mary and Joseph’s other children after Jesus and among them is “Judas” (Matthew 13:55). Judah or Judas was a common and respected name taken from the son of Jacob, Judah. After the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot, those with the same name began to alter its form. So we have Jude. It is possible he was also a direct eyewitness to Christ after the resurrection. He does not mention this, however. He opens his brief epistle with,

“Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

If we are to believe the gospel accounts (Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; John 4:24) all four record Jesus’ stating that He was not honored in His own home or town. Don’t we find this true today as well? And, again, we have a family member who was not a disciple and showed Jesus no respect or honor. Sibling rivalry was alive and well then as now. Yet note Jude’s words of awe about Jesus. Jude is writing to Christians being caught up in false teachings about Jesus – the Gnostic movement. Why do this if he was also perpetrating a fraud? Why not join this very strong and persuasive cult rather than fight it? In addition, all the other writers spent time in some of their writings fighting the same battle with false teaching and religion, some their total effort. Does this make sense if they themselves were among the deceivers? It is also interesting to note that those who taught false gospels were not so ready as the true believers to be executed for their beliefs.

C. The witness of the prophets.

The prophets of the Old Testament as well as the Old Testament itself present a dilemma to skeptics. Here is a book comprising 39 books (in the English non-apocryphal versions) having been written over a period of at least a thousand years if not longer, by dozens of different authors at different times and different places all within a sequence of unified events and themes and all agreeing to the things they wrote both past, present and future. The prophets not only spent time addressing the religious matters of their own people in their own time over hundreds of years, but also offered insight to the coming of The One God would send to deliver His people. The insights were not always repeated from one writer to the next. As the centuries passed, the prophets added different and unusual insights to the nature and identity of this coming Messiah.

In all of human history, regardless of how long one believes that to be, no one has even come close to fulfilling even a few of these prophecies, let alone all of them. Estimates of dozens to hundreds of prophecies are made but Jesus of Nazareth is the only person whose birth, life, death (including the manner), burial, resurrection and dual fulfillment of both aspects of the prophecies regarding the Messiah fulfills them all but one – His triumphal return.

This does not even begin to mention the mass of prophecies about other individuals, kings, cities, nations, and so forth replete in the Old Testament. The Gospel writers draw upon the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies to buttress their work showing

Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah. It is an additional witness from the past, a witness no one could have invented to support their claims. How can this be explained away? ¹⁴

2. Extra-Biblical Testimony

- A) The pro-Christian witnesses. Already mentioned are the writings of Clement, Hegesippus, Eusebius, and Josephus all mentioning James. But we also have the testimony of Polycarp, a disciple of John, who was so beloved that, as he was burning at the stake, he blessed his persecutors. In the early second century we have personalities such as Irenaus, Ignatius, Papias and Tertullian with much to offer in support of the authenticity of the gospel writers. Some of them were companions of the apostles themselves or of their close followers. Papias writes, for example, what Mark said about his own gospel record. We have Papias' works. In addition to the New Testament documents, we have collections of non-canonical writings numbering in the dozens that attest to the valid testimony of the New Testament.

- B) The anti-Christian writers. Among the writings of the first and second century, we have the writings of dozens of witnesses of competing religions against which the Christian church fought so hard for the purity and truth of the Gospel story. Yet they all attest to the genuineness of the gospel story even though they want to use the information for false or twisted purposes. In fact, if it wasn't for those who sought to subvert and twist the truth for their own purposes, much of the New Testament would have never been written for much of the writings of the Apostles was to refute these teachings.

Among the most noted of these "enemies" of Christ and the truth of the gospel is Marcion, who actually copied and published a "New Testament". This book contained the four gospels and much of Paul, but Marcion cut and pasted the writings into contrived texts he wanted to thrust upon the unsuspecting. This was done as early as about 140 A.D. Though his work was ultimately discredited, his sources were not. For further information regarding several kinds of unorthodox movements, one can study several quality books on the history of the early church.

- C) Contemporary non-Christian and Christian documents. These include the histories of Romans such as Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, who refer to the Christian movement and its roots and history, as well as letters by Pliny, governor of Bithynia, to Trajan, Emperor of Rome. These are all written well within 70 years of Jesus ministry and during the times when some of the apostles and early church leaders still lived. Numerous correspondences are extant between Roman officials and church leaders regarding Christians.

3. Historical, geographical, and archaeological evidence.

- A) It is odd that the further away we get from the actual events how much more information we have access to. It is not a boon to the skeptics and critics. From the late 19th century on through today monumental discoveries have been made supporting the Biblical

¹⁴ A list of these prophetic passages and their fulfillment is readily available. There have been many studies produced on this subject.

record. It continues to occur. Scrolls, inscribed walls and stones, coins, discovered tombs and graves, ossuaries, pottery, historical excavations such as cities, wells, caves, plus the finding of tablets, writings, books, manuscripts and inscriptions are among the monumental quantity of recent elements adding to the veracity of the Biblical documents.

The critics that attempted to discredit the Biblical account a hundred years ago for example, are quiet. They have no followers or disciples anymore. They themselves have been silenced by, of all things, science. These discoveries are available to any who wish to pursue this avenue of ancillary Biblical support. This does not mean that there is no debate as each of these discoveries is made. But the overwhelming evidence attesting to the historical accuracy and apostolic veracity becomes more difficult to ignore as the years go by. Isn't it odd that in a great age of skepticism all this is being uncovered?

Finally, it is encouraging that recent findings have given incredible support for the faithful transmission of the gospel record over these two millennia. When the Reformation Bibles were published (16th –17th century) in concert with the invention of the Guttenberg Press, they had to rely on a handful of rather late manuscripts, none predating the ninth century and all either translations or copies of some version. So the reliability of the transmission of the actual accounts written by the apostles was in question. But with the discovery of hundreds if not thousands of manuscripts during the last century, many dating back to the fourth century and earlier, it has been discovered that no significant differences had occurred during the copying and transmitting of the New Testament for over a thousand years.

- B) There is no possible way to ignore the growth and history of the Christian Church itself. It is still with us today, and its constituency numbers in the millions if not the billions. Of course there is controversy, just as there was in the early church, about how the worship is to take place or as to the methods and practices of the church are to be conducted or about what some of it all means. There are those claiming to be “Christian” who have simply grown up in a national heritage and have no idea whatsoever about any of it. Some “Christian” peoples or nations have created atrocities beyond measure among which can be counted the Crusaders of the Middle Ages as well as the Nazi's under Hitler. But examples like these are neither true reflections of the teaching of Jesus of His manner, nor of the apostles as any thinking person would agree. Some might argue that Islam, for example, also has a great following and the necessity of a “risen founder” is not essential to their religious fervor. This is true, but the point of Jesus coming and His purpose would be negated by a dead Savior, and Christianity would be nothing more than a sect of Judaism and Jesus just a teacher or philosopher in the pattern of Hillel or some other Jewish sage for which we have no separate following. There would have been no New Testament, for there would be no reason for writing it. A simple collection of Jesus' sayings might exist such as we find in the Gnostic based “Gospel of Thomas”. But neither Jesus nor the apostles give us the option of placing Jesus in such company. One is compelled to ask “Why”?

So we have the testimonies and convictions of devoted Christians for two thousand years regarding a real and viable encounter with the unseen spiritual realm revealed to them through their simple faith in Jesus Christ as risen Lord and Messiah. Though one could

argue that a similar faith holds true for the followers of Mohammed, Buddha, Krishna or any other religious teacher or philosopher, one is still compelled to ask why the Christian Church would set up such an incredible roadblock to the possibility of having an even greater influence by claiming that its founder and teacher has risen from the dead? This question must be taken seriously for since the event occurred two thousand years ago it has not been dismissed nor can it ever be dismissed by those attempting to do so.

C. Personal testimonies.

Many Christians today (hundreds of thousands, if not millions) will tell you of a personal experience that is impossible to prove except that they swear that their lives were dramatically altered and changed for the good from the moment they placed their faith in Jesus Christ and asked Him in prayer to make the truth and His living presence real to them. Now this experience is either a continuation of some mass hallucination from two thousand years ago, or a delusion, or something phony that still carries on today or there is something to it which is attributed by these people to the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and is actually spiritually working in the lives of people who come to Him in faith. If it is a mass delusion or some religious or psychological phenomenon, then why can't we twenty-first geniuses figure out what it is and how and why it works so effectively? In my own case, I set out on a lengthy journey to prove I was not manipulated or tricked. I was not the first.

4. The effort of some dedicated skeptics and opponents of Christianity.

There have been some credible and qualified scholars who set out to prove once and for all that the entire Christian foundation as described in the gospels is without substance. These have not been simple critics who throw out an argument and do no work of investigation to determine once and for all whether their hypothesis holds water. The people described in this section did so and their record is available to anyone who wishes to examine it.

Here is the premise. The resurrection of Christ is the most heinous, heartless, evil fraud ever imposed upon the minds of countless millions of men and women throughout history, or it is the truth. If it is the truth, it thereby establishes that Christ is indeed God's son and all that He said and did is verified, true and demonstrates that God revealed Himself to us in Christ for only God can raise the dead. The existence and nature of God Himself as pictured in the Scriptures is at stake for if Christ is not raised from the dead then all is false and faith is futile. Finally, if it is true, it is life effecting, and a choice to ignore it carries dire consequences. So the stakes are pretty high. Many have determined this to be true and so have set out to disprove the resurrection of Christ.

A) One was Dr. Simon Greenleaf, one of the great 19th century American legal minds. He helped put Harvard Law School on the map. He wrote a standard legal work still referenced today, a three-volume set on the rules of legal evidence acceptable to a court of law. He did this while serving as the Royal Professor of Law at Harvard University. He is listed in the Encyclopedia Britannica. This man often ridiculed the Christian faith in his classroom as he

was a noted skeptic and found opportunity to frequently mock the faith of his Christian students.

One day the Christians in his class challenged him to either disprove the resurrection by the laws of legal evidence that he himself had developed, and that were accepted by the United States courts, or shut up. It was a pretty good challenge. He was taken aback at this. He didn't immediately pursue this but over the years the challenge intrigued him. So he took a leave of absence to meet the challenge and assumed the role of prosecuting attorney. He studied the evidence for a lengthy period of time and, after examining the evidence according to the rules he himself had established, came both to a conclusion and a decision. His conclusion was that there was no way, according to the evidence, that Jesus could not have been actually raised from the dead. His decision was to personally believe in and accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He then adopted the role of defense attorney for the faith in his book entitled, *The Testimony of the Four Evangelists*”, published by Baker Book house. In the book he confirms the fact of Jesus resurrection according to the laws of legal evidence acceptable in a court of law. This book is still in print today.

B) In 18th century England two other scholars, Lord George Lyttelton and Gilbert West published books also in print today. West, the son of a clergyman, departed from the traditions of his family as a college student and pursued the life of the world, first taking up a military commission and then entering civil service in the capacity of legal clerk and then as chief clerk for the Secretary of State. After some years he married, settled in Wickham in Kent, and began to once again examine the roots of the Christian faith. It appears he had been a critic of Christianity to this point. West wrote about many things and was a poet of note, but he spent considerable time examining the foundation of the faith, which was the veracity of the resurrection accounts. In 1747 he published his, *“Observations on the Resurrection”* for which he was awarded a *“Doctor of Laws”* by Oxford University in 1748. Many who bought his book expecting it to be a scholarly destruction of Christianity (not knowing his change of heart) were taken aback and responded in a variety of ways, some persuaded to faith and other ridiculing him. But West's life was transformed and he soon gathered both his family and his servants into a regular time of teaching, devotion and prayers each morning for his family, Sunday for his servants. On the flyleaf of his book he wrote, *“Reject not until you have examined the evidence”*. Good counsel. He did not live long enough to complete his work on *“The Evidences for the Truth of the New Testament”*.

During this time at Wickham, West was frequently visited by his friend George (Lord) Lyttelton. Lyttelton was an objector to the Christian faith and labeled an *“infidel”* by those who knew him. His frequent visits to West and West's delving into the evidences for the Christian faith moved Lyttelton to do likewise. His goal was to set aside the foolishness of the resurrection once and for all. But he approached the work as objectively as possible not wanting his efforts to be dismissed as prejudicial. Lyttelton was also trained in law. So as he set out to discredit the faith, he took up the challenge of the conversion of the Apostle Paul while West was examining evidences for the resurrection of Christ. After much research he also was convinced that Paul's conversion and subsequent life well could not have occurred outside of a life-changing phenomenon. This phenomenon could only be ultimately traced and credited to the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. His book, *“Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul”*, published in 1785 is still available today.

C) Early in the twentieth century, another scholar, Dr. Frank Morrison, like West, had abandoned his religious roots (Methodist) and sought truth in the rationalistic tradition of Jefferson, Paine and others. He had admired the life and teachings of Jesus, concluding, as many do, that Jesus led the most beautiful lifestyle a person could commit to and taught impressive philosophy but stopped at the point of believing that Jesus was deity or that he performed miracles, died “for our sins” or rose from the dead. In other words, he deleted all the testimony of the gospel writers except that which he felt was acceptable to the rational mind. The gospel writers had, in his thinking, simply tacked on the spiritual and mythical attributes of Jesus for some perverted reason. But the kernel of how Jesus lived and what He taught was admirable.

Still, he was challenged to prove that the apostolic account was untruthful. So he set out to dispel the myth of the resurrection, which he recognized was the crux of the entire matter. He believed that a rational, intelligent approach to history would do the job. Morrison was so determined to set the record straight that he spent much of his own money and several years in Israel to study on his own. After this work, he finally published a book telling of his discoveries and conclusions. In his preface he stated, “It (this book) is essentially a confession, the inner story of a man who set out to write one kind of book and found himself compelled by the sheer forces of circumstances to write another.” In his first chapter, “The Book That Refused To Be Written” he notes his unbelief in the miracles and resurrection and determination to sift out the fiction of the apostolic writers and report on what was really the truth. He ends his book with this statement, “There may be, and, as the writer thinks, there certainly is a deep and profoundly historical basis for that much disputed sentence in the Apostles Creed – the third day He rose again from the dead”. So that which he formerly denied he now believed – Jesus rose from the dead just as the apostles stated. Morrison’s intellectual, rational approach to history concluded with him becoming a Christian. His book, “Who Moved The Stone?” is still in print and asks an excellent question.

D) In 1937, Dr. C.E.M. Joad held the chair of Philosophy at the University of London. He was such a worthy enemy of Christianity that one rector of the Church of England preached a sermon on, “God, The Devil and Professor C.E.M. Joad”. Professor Joad held that there was nothing wrong with human nature that better education, better opportunity, and a better environment could not cure. He laughed at the “problem of sin”. Then came World War II which brought desolation to half of Europe. The blitzkrieg brought the war and reality of human nature to Joad’s doorstep and refugees, telling the stories of concentration camps, mass torture and executions of the Jews cause his “righteous soul to revolt”. His mind was challenged and he changed his views completely. “What”, he thought, “is history but the records of the follies of mankind, man’s inhumanity to man”. Dr. Joad decided that theologians had a better grasp and deeper insight into human nature than that of contemporary science. The doctrine of “original sin” he once derided began to make sense to him. His struggle to admit the possibility that the Biblical teachings and accounts are true is easily seen in a cursory glance at his writings.

But Cyril E. M. Joad continued on further than that. He followed the argument until he reached an inescapable conclusion, that though the truth of the spiritual is impossible to believe solely on rational grounds it is, nonetheless, true. As David A. Noebel, Ph.d. wrote of Joad, “Philosopher C.E.M. Joad found Christ and Christianity because he was seeking ethical truth. ‘I now believe,’ he wrote, ‘that the balance of reasoned considerations tells heavily in favour of the religious, even of the Christian view of the world.’”³ Joad recognized the need for

absolute truth, rather than a truth that evolves with each new discovery: “A religion which is in constant process of revision to square with science’s ever-changing picture of the world might well be easier to believe, but it is hard to believe it would be worth believing.”⁴

3,4 C.E.M. Joad, *The Recovery of Belief* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), p. 22.

E) Similar stories of the changed lives of noted skeptics and opponents of the Christian are numerous. Included, for example, are: Martin Luther, John Bunyan, John Wesley, C.S. Lewis, Billy Graham, Josh McDowell, Charles Colson and a multitude of others in every field of work including the sciences.

5. The argument from silence, a letter to Dr. James Kennedy, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church .

Dr. Kennedy,

I have spent a number of years in studying the validity of the resurrection because this is what I direct my listeners to as the foundation for the truth of the gospel and the Christian faith. To buttress this fact as much as possible in the minds of the hearers, I believe I can contribute to its invulnerability with a simple observation or two I have yet to see or hear presented in other efforts. Having either gathered or read as much information as possible opposing the resurrection, arguments going back to the early church era, there is one I have never come across and I believe it is telling. It is simply the argument from silence.

I have found no argument, document, letter, papyrus, codex, any statement of any kind or the report of a statement of any kind simply stating that what the disciples proclaimed or wrote was false, or a lie, or without foundation.

One would think that after the centuries of vociferous attacks upon the Christian faith that the emotions behind them would have even been more heated in the first century. This is stating the obvious of course, in light of the brutal murder of Jesus and of Stephen and of many or the church including Polycarp, Paul, Peter and others. One would think, in the heat and hate of the time against the disciples and the early church, that someone with first hand knowledge in the first century would have written a contrary statement stating that he was a witness to the fact that the disciples were liars, and had first hand knowledge of this fact because he witnessed the dead body himself.

(Even the Koran, written over 600 years later, validates the resurrection by denying that it was Jesus who was crucified. Instead, it claims the crucified individual was a “phantom” or substitute. This tacitly underscores that the foundational book of Islam agrees that the disciples confronted a living Jesus after the crucifixion and burial, albeit it claims, so foolishly, that it wasn’t Jesus on the cross.)

The reason why there is no such extant document or recording of such an eyewitness claim is perplexing in light of the furor over this event, both for the Romans as well as for the Jews. The world was being turned “upside down” (Acts 17:6 KJV). The last thing Pilate wanted was another criticism by the Jews at Rome against his already shaky position. There is also ample evidence of Antipas’ effort to quell both the man Jesus and his follower’s devotion to him as it raised a division in his territory. His difficulty over the beheading of John was not yet over as John’s martyrdom endeared him even more to his followers. One would think that the death of Jesus would shut it all

down. Imagine what emotion reports of His resurrection caused. Then, the Jewish leadership was in no mood for further anarchy and later, Saul of Tarsus, who had had it with this movement, went to the defense of the cause of “peace” in Israel. So why wouldn’t there be simple, eyewitness accounts preserved stating clearly and factually that the disciples claims were blatantly false? I have discovered none. Have you heard of any legitimate documents of the early first century or copies thereof stating such a thing?

If not, perhaps this is because the Jews, though willing to hire false witnesses against Jesus, could not bring themselves to actually state a lie in voice or writing for fear of being accused by their Jewish Christian brothers (according to the flesh) or other Jews who were not believers, of violating the commandment regarding false witnesses thus putting themselves in jeopardy. The legal penalty for being a false witness could be as extreme as death, but certainly removal from position and ostracized by the community. Further, if the claim was put forth that the disciples were lying, then the burden would be upon those making such a statement to provide evidence underscoring the truth of the accusation. But neither is the statement nor the evidence in existence. Investigation of a false accusation would, perhaps, not only bring the matter to even wider public attention and perhaps even persuade more to believe the disciples message. So it apparently was left alone. Why?

But if what the disciples claimed was untrue, then why didn’t someone with credentials say so? And, if the church quashed such documents, why isn’t there complaint or report of this? Where are the nay Sayers? Isn’t it odd that there is the continual haranguing regarding the resurrection but stumbling about when it comes to accusation the disciples and Paul were lying. The claims that the disciples preached an untrue gospel exist in arguments against the resurrection today, but they are very weak and can’t stand up under scrutiny. But more importantly, where were these claims during the period of the early evangelism when they would carry maximum weight?

Along this same line, if Jesus was never crucified or never rose from the dead, the consequences of this would be astounding in that none of us would be believers today. The influence of early Gospel truth has captivated millions over thousands of years. The influence of true evidence and testimony confuting the disciple’s claim would have a similar effect (Note: Bar-Kochba’s attempt at Messianic overthrow of Rome. Do we have a Bar-Kochba church full of worshippers today?). Further, we haven’t needed the sword to force people into sheep-like submission to a religion as has Islam, for example, and, when we have used the sword it has backfired. Neither Constantine nor the Crusades bring credit to the church founded on Jesus - quite the contrary, the crusades discredit Christianity as nothing else ever has. Yet Christianity thrives. The Gospel (or the Holy Spirit) has never need the help of weapons to motivate people to believe. If anything, a combination of the sword and a false religion would never have convinced people of our national stock to believe, not here, not in Europe, not with the mentality we inherit from the Greeks, Celtics, Nordics and Goths which is unlikely to submit to so much sentimental prattle-unless it were true on its own merits!

Again, if Jesus never was crucified or raised from the dead, how much investigation would it have taken to find this out? With the resources in place in that day, no method was spared to get Jesus tried and arrested, including paying an informant. And yet, the very best the Jews could muster did not convince Pilate of His guilt, a governor who was desperate to prevent another uprising. Did Pilate hear of the incredible news a few days later? Probably so. Why then didn’t he launch a complete investigation himself and arrest disciples for interrogation? His seat was on the line. It wouldn’t have taken C.S.I. or the F.B.I. to prove the falsehood of the claim. Someone or something would have cracked easily, and the case of the disciple’s foolish claim solved quite easily I’m sure -

especially if it were false. Didn't the disciples and early believers all see the consequences of resisting when they saw what happened to Jesus? There were probably more than a few that would have taken another thirty silver coins to lie. Please! It was just too phenomenal. I can remember as a youth that all a bully had to do was put me in a hammerlock and force it until I cried "uncle". I cried it out, even though I didn't want to. And look at Peter. He denied Christ at just the thought of discovery. So what provoked Peter and the rest to remain staunchly faithful to their story to the point of severe torture and sure death?

Silence, so much silence!! It is a huge silence! It is unnatural considering the temperament of the times.

Further, even if such a single document or testimony were found, how much validity would it have? For example, if someone witnessed such a thing and it was true, he or she would be rushing about to share this discovery. Multitudes would be in on it and the hoax discovered! The disciples and their message would have been the laughing stock of the world, a humiliation and embarrassment of the highest magnitude (I Corinthians 15:15-19). But, in light of a discovered hoax, how does one explain the growth of the church? Liars in religious positions are hardly respected let alone believed to be the Son of God! (Admitting that there are folks that will believe just about anything if they see a personal advantage in doing so) Still, the fact that the church grew and still exists is testimony in itself of the actual truth since the evidence contrary to the resurrection is non-existent. Bring on the doubters and the nay sayers. We can handle all of this. But bring on a consistent and proven testimony of authentic and reliable first century witnesses against the truth and we may well be done. But they don't exist. The silence is deafening.

A final note on the - on again, off again - debate on who is responsible for Jesus' torture and death. It wasn't the Jews, it wasn't the Romans, it wasn't our sin or even me. I am not the causation for my own salvation! As I read my Bible, it says, "For God so loved the world that He gave..."

Thank you for looking over this brief document. If these are not fresh thoughts then my apologies for taking your time. On the other hand, if they are, I hope they add to the arsenal!! They are a part of a study I use to help Christians to know why we believe what we believe (so many have no idea) and to persuade non-believers to focus on Christ as the Way, Truth and Life. -Robert Stewart

SUMMARY

To refute the resurrection of Christ from the dead, it is necessary to deal with three elements of the gospel record stated as facts by the writers. First, it is true and factual that Jesus actually lived in history. Second, Jesus' contemporaries and followers wrote the accounts. Third, the facts reported by the writers about Jesus' life are assumed to be true and historical. None of these factors is seriously questioned by critics. So, the four seminal considerations,

- 1) The empty tomb.
- 2) The proclamation of the resurrection of Christ from the dead by the witnesses
- 3) The behavior of the disciples and of Saul of Tarsus.
- 4) The motive behind why all this was written about and why these historical events occurred if indeed none of it is true.

If the resurrection did not occur, each of these elements must be explained. But we've seen more questions are raised, for example the most mysterious, "Then what actually caused these things to be written?" "How can the fervor of the early disciples, followers and believers be explained?"

This excursus is not exhaustive, but has attempted to deal with these elements in a brief way.

Bibliography

There are extensive expansions on these themes in recently published books. Among them are:

The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict Fully Updated To Answer The Questions Challenging Christians Today

by Josh McDowell

The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ

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The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?

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by William Lane Craig

Who Moved The Stone

By Frank Morrison

The Testimony of The Four Evangelists

by Simon Greenleaf

Observations On The Resurrection

By Gilbert West

I Believe In The Resurrection

By George E. Ladd

CONCLUSION

After careful study, the sincere seeker for truth must make a decision and must recognize in his or her own heart the reason for the decision. If one decides to act in faith in these presentations of truth, then the next step is to simply come to God in prayer asking for the evidence to become real in their own lives in the person of the Living Savior, Jesus Christ.

Letter to: Dr. D. James Kennedy, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Florida

May 6, 2004

I have spent a number of years in studying the validity of the resurrection because this is what I direct my listeners to as the foundation for the truth of the gospel and the Christian faith. To buttress this fact as much as possible in the minds of the hearers, I believe I can contribute to its invulnerability with a simple observation or two I have yet to see or hear presented.

Having either gathered or read as much information as possible opposing the resurrection, arguments going back to the early church era, there is one I have never come across and I believe it is telling. It is simply the argument from silence.

I have found no argument, document, letter, papyrus, codex, any statement of any kind or the report of a statement of any kind simply stating that what the disciples proclaimed or wrote was false, or a lie, or without foundation.

One would think that after the centuries of vociferous attacks upon the Christian faith that the emotions behind them would have even been more heated in the first century. This is stating the obvious of course, in light of the brutal murder of Jesus and of Stephen and of many of the church including Polycarp, Paul, Peter and others. One would think, in the heat and hate of the time against the disciples and the early church, that someone with first hand knowledge in the first century would have written a contrary statement stating that he was a witness to the fact that the disciples were liars, and had first hand knowledge of this fact because he witnessed the dead body himself.

(Even the Koran, written over 600 years later, validates the resurrection by denying that it was Jesus who was crucified. Instead, it claims the crucified individual was a “phantom” or substitute. This tacitly underscores that the foundational book of Islam agrees that the disciples confronted a living Jesus after the crucifixion and burial, albeit it claims, so foolishly, that it wasn’t Jesus on the cross.)

The reason why there is no such extant document or recording of such an eyewitness claim is perplexing in light of the furor over this event, both for the Romans as well as for the Jews. The world was being turned “upside down” (Acts 17:6 KJV). The last thing Pilate wanted was another criticism by the Jews at Rome against his already shaky position. There is also ample evidence of Antipas’ effort to quell both the man Jesus and his follower’s devotion to him as it raised a division in his territory. His difficulty over the beheading of John was not yet over as John’s martyrdom endeared him even more to his followers. One would think that the death of Jesus would shut it all down. Imagine what emotions reports of His resurrection caused. Then, the Jewish leadership was in no mood for further anarchy and later, Saul of Tarsus, who had had it with this movement, went to the defense of the cause of “peace” in Israel. So why wouldn’t there be simple, eyewitness accounts preserved stating clearly and factually that the disciples claims were blatantly false? I have discovered none. Has Dr. Kennedy heard of any legitimate documents of the early first century or copies thereof stating such a thing?

If not, perhaps this is because the Jews, though willing to hire false witnesses against Jesus, could not bring themselves to actually state a lie in voice or writing for fear of being accused by their Christian brothers (according to the flesh) or other Jews who were not believers, of violating the

commandment and putting themselves in jeopardy. The legal penalty for being a false witness could be as extreme as death, but certainly removal from position and ostracized by the community. Further, if the claim was put forth that the disciples were lying, then the burden would be upon those making such a statement to provide evidence underscoring the truth of the accusation. But neither is the statement nor the evidence in existence. Investigation of a false accusation would, perhaps, not only bring the matter to even wider public attention and perhaps even persuade more to believe the disciples message. So it apparently was left alone. Why?

But if what the disciples claimed was untrue, then why didn't someone with credentials say so? And, if the church quashed such documents, why isn't there complaint or report of this? Where are the nay Sayers? Isn't it odd that there is the continual haranguing regarding the resurrection but stumbling about when it comes to accusation the disciples and Paul of lying. The claims the disciples preached an untrue gospel exist in arguments against the resurrection today, but they are very weak and can't stand up under scrutiny. But more importantly, where were these claims during the period of the early evangelism when they would carry maximum weight?

Along this same line, if Jesus was never crucified or never rose from the dead, the consequences of this would be astounding in that none of us would be believers today. The influence of early Gospel truth has captivated millions over thousands of years. The influence of true evidence and testimony confuting the disciple's claim would have a similar effect (Note: Bar-Kochba's attempt at Messianic overthrow of Rome. Do we have a Bar-Kochba church full of worshippers today?). Further, we haven't needed the sword to force people into sheep-like submission to a religion as has Islam, for example, and, when we have used the sword it has backfired. Neither Constantine nor the Crusades bring credit to the church founded on Jesus - quite the contrary, the crusades discredit Christianity as nothing else ever has. Yet Christianity thrives. The Gospel (or the Holy Spirit) has never need the help of weapons to motivate people to believe. If anything, a combination of the sword and a false religion would never have convinced people of our national stock to believe, not here, not in Europe, not with the mentality we inherit from the Greeks, Celtics, Nordics and Goths which is unlikely to submit to so much sentimental prattle-unless it were true on its own merits!

Again, if Jesus never was crucified or raised from the dead, how much investigation would it have taken to find this out? With the resources in place in that day, no method was spared to get Jesus tried and arrested, including paying an informant. And yet, the very best the Jews could muster did not convince Pilate of His guilt, a governor who was desperate to prevent another uprising. Did Pilate hear of the incredible news a few days later? Probably so. Why then didn't he launch a complete investigation himself and arrest disciples for interrogation? His seat was on the line. It wouldn't have taken C.S.I. or the F.B.I. to prove the falsehood of the claim. Someone or something would have cracked easily, and the case of the disciple's foolish claim solved quite easily I'm sure - especially if it were false. Didn't the disciples and early believers all see the consequences of resisting when they saw the Passion of The Christ? There were probably more than a few that would have taken another thirty silver coins to lie. Please! It was just too phenomenal. I can remember as a youth that all a bully had to do was put me in a hammerlock and force it until I cried "uncle". I cried it out, even though I didn't want to. And look at Peter. He denied Christ at just the thought of discovery. Come on!

Silence, so much silence!! It is a huge silence! It is unnatural considering the temperament of the times.

Further, even if such a single document or testimony were found, how much validity would it have? For example, if someone witnessed such a thing and it was true, he or she would be rushing about to share this discovery. Multitudes would be in on it and the hoax discovered! The disciples and their message would have been the laughing stock of the world, a humiliation and embarrassment of the highest magnitude (I Corinthians 15:15-19). But, in light of a discovered hoax, how does one explain the growth of the church? Liars in religious positions are hardly respected let alone believed to be The Son of God! (Admitting that there are folks that will believe just about anything if they see a personal advantage in doing so) Still, the fact that the church grew and still exists is testimony in itself of the actual truth since the evidence contrary to the resurrection is non-existent. Bring on the doubters and naysayers. We can handle all of this. But bring on a consistent and proven testimony of authentic and reliable first century witnesses against the truth and we may well be done. But they don't exist. The silence is deafening.

A final note on the on again, off again debate on who is responsible for Jesus' torture and death. It wasn't the Jews, it wasn't the Romans, it wasn't our sin or even me. I am not the causation for my own salvation! As I read my Bible, it says, "For God so loved the world that He gave..."

Thank you for looking over this brief document. If these are not fresh thoughts then my apologies for taking your time. On the other hand, if they are, I hope they add to the arsenal!! They are a part of a study I use to help Christians to know why we believe what we believe (so many have no idea) and to persuade non-believers to focus on Christ as the Way, Truth and Life.

Blessings,

Bob Stewart