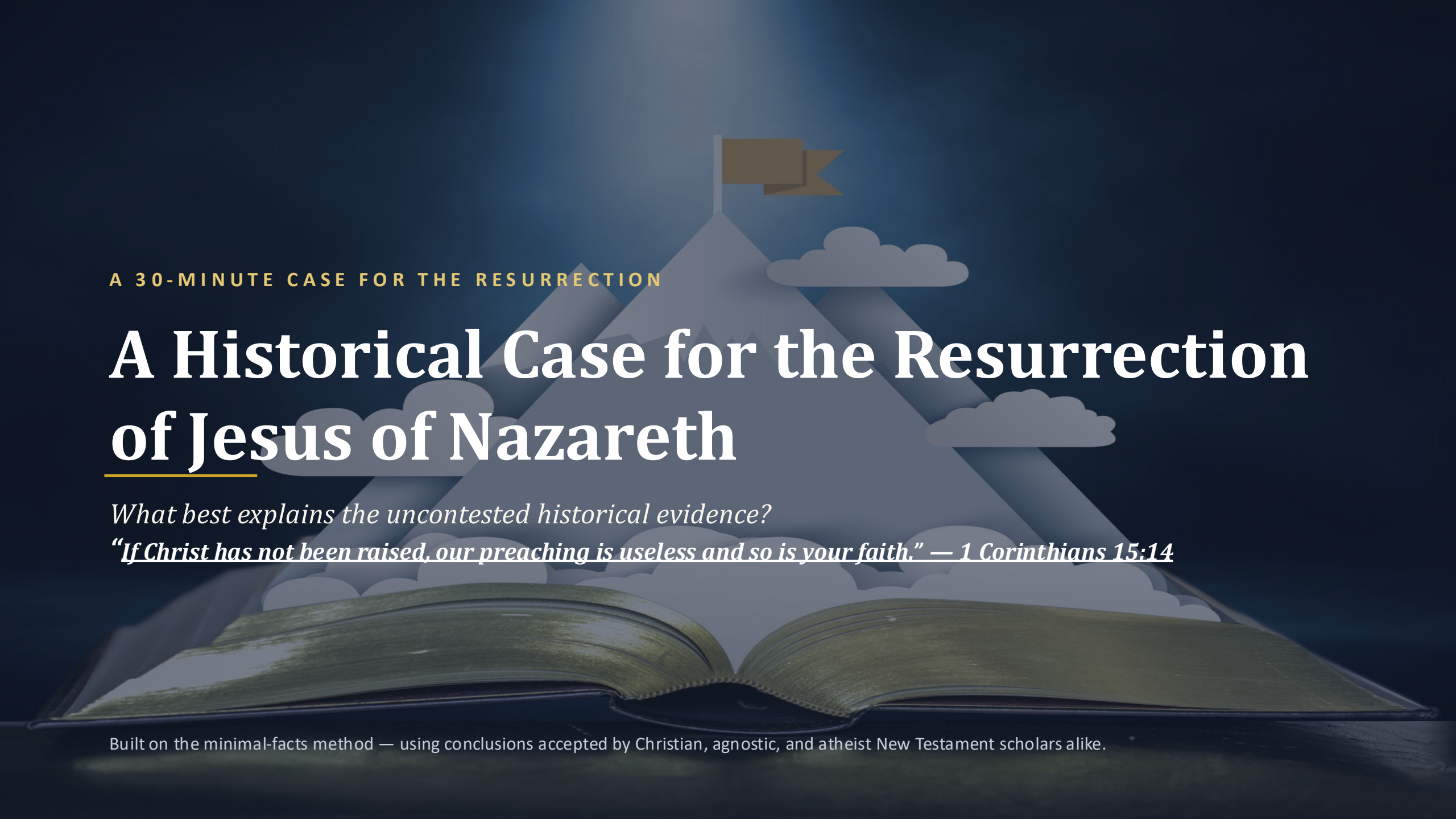




A 30-MINUTE CASE FOR THE RESURRECTION

A Historical Case for the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth

What best explains the uncontested historical evidence?

“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” — 1 Corinthians 15:14

Built on the minimal-facts method — using conclusions accepted by Christian, agnostic, and atheist New Testament scholars alike.

Method



1

Agreed Facts

Use historical conclusions and facts accepted by most serious New Testament scholars — atheists, agnostics, and Christians alike.



2

Competing Explanations

Lay every proposed explanation for those facts side by side, on equal footing.



3

Best Inference

Infer the explanation that accounts for the total evidence with the fewest unexplained gaps.

WHO WE'LL HEAR FROM

Three Scholars, Three Starting Points

THREE DIFFERENT THEOLOGICAL VIEWPOINTS



Gary Habermas

Christian — Apologist

Leading scholar on the resurrection's historical evidence; developed the “Minimal Facts” approach used in this talk.



Bart Ehrman

Agnostic — Textual Critic

One of the world's most influential NT scholars. Rejects the bodily resurrection, yet accepts many facts central to this case.



Gerd Lüdemann

Atheist — Historian (1946–2024)

A prominent skeptical voice on the historical Jesus and Paul — respected even by scholars who rejected his conclusions.

The Minimal Facts

Nine facts about the days after the crucifixion that virtually all respected New Testament scholars — skeptical or not — accept as historical.

1

Jesus was crucified

2

Disciples believed they saw the risen Jesus

3

Disciples scattered at his arrest, denied knowing him

4

Paul, an enemy, converted

5

James, a skeptic, converted

6

The belief of the resurrection began immediately in Jerusalem

7

The tomb's location was known

8

No corpse was ever produced

9

Disciples suffered for their claim — with no recantation

FACT 1

The Crucifixion

- Accepted by virtually all historians — Christian and non-Christian alike. No historical record of anyone ever surviving a Roman execution
- Corroborated by both Christian and Roman sources, including Tacitus and Josephus.
- 1986 JAMA medical review: severe scourging, cardiovascular collapse, and a spear wound to the chest cavity — conclusive evidence of death.
- The medical evidence rules out survival: the “swoon theory” finds almost no support today.



JAMA, 1986

“On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ” — Edwards, Gabel & Hosmer, Journal of the American Medical Association, 255(11).

Two physicians and a theologian concluded the medical evidence strongly refutes any theory that Jesus merely survived the cross.

Independent, Non-Christian Sources



Tacitus

Roman Senator & Historian, c. AD 56–120

- Openly hostile to Christianity — called it a “pernicious superstition.”
- Confirms Jesus existed, was executed under Pilate during Tiberius's reign, and that Christians reached Rome by AD 64.
- A hostile witness with no motive to help — which is exactly why historians weigh him so heavily.
- Even Bart Ehrman treats Tacitus as solid independent confirmation.



Josephus

Jewish Historian, AD 37–c.100, Antiquities (AD 93–94)

- Mentions Jesus twice; scholars regard the core of both passages as authentic.
- Confirms Jesus existed, was called “the Christ,” and was condemned by Pilate.
- Independently records the execution of “James, the brother of Jesus who was called Christ” (c. AD 62).
- Writing for a Roman audience with no theological agenda — an incidental, and therefore credible, confirmation.

FACT 2

The Transformed Disciples

Something turned frightened followers into public proclaimers — in the very city that had just executed Jesus.

BEFORE

- Fled at Jesus' arrest (Matthew 26:56)
- Peter denied him three times
- Hid behind locked doors “for fear” (John 20:19)
- “We had hoped he was the one...” — Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:21)
- Dismissed the empty tomb report as “nonsense” (Luke 24:11)

AFTER

- Preached the resurrection publicly in Jerusalem (Acts 2)
- Confronted the very authorities they'd feared (Acts 4–5)
- Continued despite imprisonment and beatings
- Several — Peter, James, Paul — died without recanting
- Launched a movement that spread across the empire



The transformation itself is not in dispute

BART EHRLMAN — AGNOSTIC NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR

“It was not years later that the disciples came to think Jesus was raised. They came to believe it very soon after his death.”

From *How Jesus Became God* (2014). Ehrman treats the disciples' sincere belief — and its early timing — as historical facts requiring an explanation, even though he rejects a bodily resurrection.

Paul — Persecutor to Missionary



Across the ideological spectrum — Christian, agnostic, and many atheist scholars — there is broad agreement that:

- Paul actively persecuted the early Christian movement but abandoned his status as a respected Pharisee.
- He underwent a sudden, dramatic conversion, gave up an established life to proclaim the gospel and live in abject poverty.
- He claimed the risen Jesus personally appeared to him. He exchanged prestige for persecution.
- He sincerely believed that experience occurred
- That experience made him Christianity's greatest missionary. Beheaded in Rome, under Nero, likely around AD 64–68.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Paul's own undisputed letters — Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Philippians — are among the earliest Christian documents we have.

Paul never recanted. He lived a life marked by suffering and was executed in Rome.

FACT 4

James — the Skeptical Brother

Neither a grieving disciple nor an outside enemy — a skeptical family member. That makes his change an independent problem to explain.

DURING JESUS' MINISTRY

- “His brothers did not believe in him” (John 7:5)
- Family thought he was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21)

AFTER

- Paul: “He appeared to James” (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- James becomes leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15)
- Josephus independently records his execution, c. AD 62, as “the brother of Jesus who was called Christ”

Even skeptical scholars — Bart Ehrman, E. P. Sanders, Gerd Lüdemann — accept that James underwent this change.

Early Proclamation



1 Corinthians 15:3–8

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received...”

- Nearly all scholars accept 1 Corinthians as an authentic Pauline letter, c. AD 53–55.
- Paul is widely believed to be quoting an even earlier creed — dated by many to c. AD 30–35, within a few years (possibly months) of the crucifixion.
- Too early for the legend to have grown gradually over generations.
- The disciples proclaimed it in Jerusalem — where producing a body would have ended the movement instantly.

EVEN SKEPTICS AGREE IT WAS EARLY

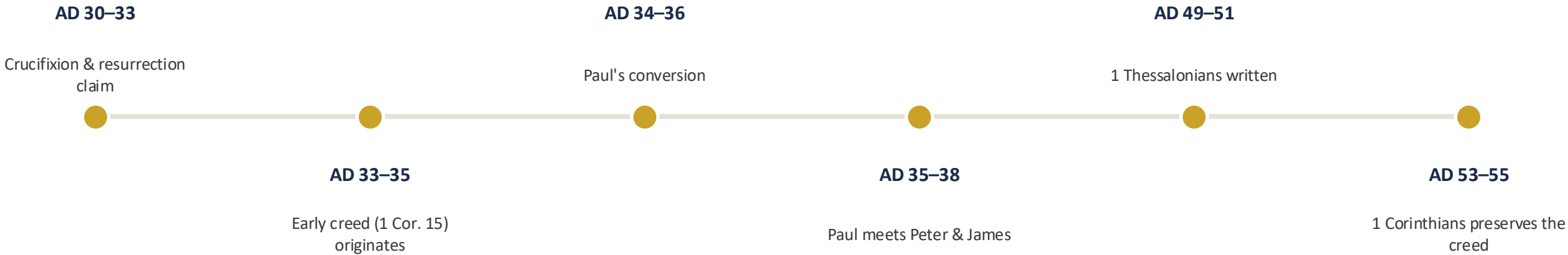
“It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences... in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ.”

— Gerd Lüdemann, atheist historian

Maurice Casey (atheist) likewise rejected “Jesus mythicism” and dated the belief to immediately after the crucifixion — not centuries later.

PUTTING IT ON A TIMELINE

From Crucifixion to Creed



The resurrection creed sits at the very front of this timeline — not decades into it. That's the historical problem the legend theory has to solve.

WHY TRUST THE SOURCES

Written Within Living Memory

Every New Testament book was written while people who had known Jesus — friend or foe — were still alive to dispute it.



Early Sources

Paul's letters start ~15–20 years after the crucifixion; the Gospels follow within one lifetime.



Eyewitness Generation

Events recent and public enough that contemporaries — friendly or hostile — could still check the claims.



External Corroboration

Tacitus, Josephus, and Paul's letters confirm the core facts from outside the Gospel tradition.



Manuscript Tradition

Thousands of early manuscripts let scholars cross-check the text unusually closely.

THE EYEWITNESS WINDOW

A person who was 20 in AD 30 would still be alive — in their 80s–90s — when the last Gospel was written.



The Criterion of Embarrassment

Ancient authors had every reason to flatter a movement's founders. These Gospel details do the opposite.



Women Discover the Tomb

In first-century Jewish and Roman society, a woman's testimony carried little legal standing (Josephus, Antiquities 4.8.15). Yet all four Gospels name women as the first witnesses to the empty tomb — not a detail anyone inventing a persuasive case would choose.



Peter's Denial, Disciples' Flight

The movement's future leader denies even knowing Jesus three times, and the inner circle scatters at his arrest (Mark 14:50, 66–72). Ancient writers didn't invent cowardice for their own founding leadership.



The Cry of Dereliction

Jesus' anguished “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34) and his baptism by John — which implies subordination — are hard sayings later writers soften, never sharpen. That points to an early, unembellished source.

Fabricated propaganda flatters its heroes and smooths their rough edges. These accounts do neither — a pattern historians call the criterion of embarrassment.

The Text Isn't the Debate

Scholars across the spectrum agree on what the text says. Where they disagree is what it means.



5,800+ Greek Manuscripts

No other document from antiquity is preserved anywhere close to this well — thousands of early copies let scholars cross-check readings against one another with a precision no other ancient text allows.



99%+ Recoverable

Textual critics across the spectrum — evangelical and skeptical alike — hold that the original wording is reconstructable with very high confidence. The remaining handful of open variants affects no core Christian doctrine.



Wes Huff & the Modern Case

Wes Huff — a New Testament textual scholar completing his PhD at Wycliffe College, Toronto — has carried this manuscript case to tens of millions on Joe Rogan, The Diary of a CEO, and Piers Morgan Uncensored.

Even Bart Ehrman — textual criticism's most prominent skeptic — concedes: “Essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants.” The dispute was never about what the manuscripts say.



Even His Fiercest Critics Don't Doubt He Existed

BART EHRLMAN — AGNOSTIC, AUTHOR OF "DID JESUS EXIST?"

"...not taken seriously by the vast majority of scholars in the field."

From Did Jesus Exist? (2012). Ehrman is an agnostic with no stake in Christianity's truth, and wrote an entire book refuting "mythicism" — the fringe theory, popular online but rejected across the field, that Jesus never lived at all.

FURTHER CONVERGING EVIDENCE

Independent, Multiple Attestation

The belief that Jesus rose isn't reported by a single source — it surfaces independently across several separate streams of tradition.



The Pre-Pauline Creed

1 Cor. 15:3–8 preserves a creed older than the letter, dated to within a few years of the crucifixion.



The Markan Tradition

The earliest connected passion and resurrection narrative, composed independently of Paul's letters.



L and M Traditions

Material unique to Luke and Matthew, found in neither Mark nor each other, implies further independent strands.



Johannine and Acts Traditions

John's Gospel and Acts preserve a distinct memory stream that still converges on the same core claim.

WHY IT MATTERS

When independent witnesses who couldn't have copied from one another converge on the same core event, historians call it multiple attestation — one of history's strongest tests for what actually happened.

Pre-Pauline Creed

Markan Tradition

L Tradition

M Tradition

Johannine & Acts

Paul

Mark

Luke

Matthew

John & Acts

The Scandal of the Cross

- The earliest Christians were Jews steeped in Deuteronomy 21:23: "anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse."
- A crucified man was the least likely candidate imaginable for "Messiah" — Rome's most degrading execution, reserved for slaves and rebels.
- Paul admits the message was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23) — hardly a winning sales pitch.
- No group trying to win converts invents a crucified founder — exactly what the criterion of dissimilarity flags as authentic.



Deuteronomy 21:23

"Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." Quoted by Paul himself, applying it directly to Jesus, in Galatians 3:13.

Historians call this the criterion of dissimilarity: a claim so contrary to a group's own hopes and interests that its presence is best explained by its being true — not invented.

FURTHER CONVERGING EVIDENCE

High Christology, Astonishingly Early

Worship-level claims about Jesus appear within a few years of the crucifixion — not after centuries of legendary growth.



Philippians 2:6–11

Most scholars — including skeptics like Bart Ehrman — hold that Paul is quoting an existing hymn here, not composing it, in a letter written around AD 55.



Colossians 1:15–20

Calls Jesus the one "in whom all things were created" — placing him alongside God at creation itself, within about three decades of the cross.



John 1:1–14

Opens with a Greek philosophical prologue identifying Jesus as the eternal Word "with God, and was God" — the boldest claim of the three, from the last Gospel written.

Legendary development is supposed to take generations. Here, Jesus is already being worshiped as divine within the lifetime of people who knew him — the legend theory has no runway.

The Sociological Puzzle

- ~1,000 believers by AD 40

- ~40% growth every decade, for 260 years

- No political power, army, or wealth behind it

- Spread first among the very people it scandalized

- ~10% of the Empire within three centuries

Sociologist Rodney Stark modeled this growth as statistically ordinary — but ordinary growth still needs a starting cause. Something got this movement's engine running in Jerusalem, within weeks of a very public execution.

The Empty Tomb

- Roughly 75% of specialist scholars affirm the tomb was found empty — one of the stronger majorities in resurrection scholarship
- Reported independently in all four Gospels and implied by the pre-Pauline creed's own wording: Christ was "buried, and... raised" (1 Corinthians 15:4).
- Jerusalem is the worst possible place to fabricate this claim — hostile authorities could have opened the tomb and ended the movement in a day.
- No opponent, Christian or not, ever produced a body or pointed to an occupied tomb — the debate was only ever about how it became empty.



Habermas, 2005

"...roughly 75% favor one or more of the arguments for the empty tomb." — Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus, 3.2.

Gary Habermas's survey of over 2,200 scholarly publications (1975–2003, in English, French, and German) remains the most systematic count of specialist opinion on the empty tomb to date.

FURTHER CONVERGING EVIDENCE

Joseph of Arimathea's Burial

A member of the very council that condemned Jesus gives him an honorable burial — an awkward detail few would invent.



Multiply Attested

Joseph is named as Jesus' burier in all four Gospels — including Mark, widely held to be the earliest and closest to the events.



An Awkward Detail to Invent

The earliest Christians were sharply critical of the Sanhedrin. Crediting one of its own members with Jesus' burial isn't flattering fiction — it's the kind of detail you only include because it happened.



Archaeology Confirms the Practice

A 1968 Jerusalem discovery — the ossuary of Yehohanan, a crucified man given a normal Jewish burial — shows Rome's crucified victims could and did receive proper burial nearby.

Objectors have long argued Rome never let the crucified be buried. Jewish and Roman sources, and now physical remains, say otherwise — leaving Joseph's story exactly where the evidence points.



Even His Opponents Conceded the Tomb Was Empty

MATTHEW 28:13 — THE EARLIEST RECORDED JEWISH REBUTTAL

“His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.”

The earliest recorded Jewish response to the empty tomb wasn't "there was no empty tomb" — it was an alternative story for it. Justin Martyr records the same accusation still circulating a century later (Dialogue with Trypho, 108). Disputing the cause while conceding the vacancy is itself a form of testimony.

FURTHER CONVERGING EVIDENCE

Willing to Suffer for What They Saw

People die for what they sincerely believe is true all the time. What's harder to explain is dying for a claim you invented yourself.



Stephen

Stoned to death by a Jerusalem mob for his testimony about Jesus (Acts 7) — one of the earliest layers of the tradition, and among the earliest Christian deaths on record.



James, Son of Zebedee

Executed by Herod Agrippa I around AD 44 (Acts 12:2) — a member of Jesus' inner circle, killed within about a decade of the crucifixion for continuing to preach.



Paul and Peter

Their deaths under Nero are attested by 1 Clement (c. AD 96), written from Rome within living memory — remarkably early external confirmation of what the Gospels only imply.

None of this proves the resurrection happened — sincerity isn't the same as accuracy. But it does rule out the theory that the leadership was simply lying. Liars make poor martyrs.

FURTHER CONVERGING EVIDENCE

More Voices Outside the Faith

Beyond Tacitus and Josephus, three more non-Christian sources confirm this was a real, fast-spreading movement worth a government's attention.



Pliny the Younger, c. AD 112

A Roman governor writes to Emperor Trajan that Christians met before dawn to "sing a hymn to Christ, as to a god" — worship of Jesus was already routine within a few decades.



Suetonius, c. AD 121

Rome's own biographer of the Caesars records Nero punishing Christians and notes unrest in Rome linked to "Chrestus" under Claudius — a Roman historian's independent brush with the movement.



The Babylonian Talmud

Rabbinic tradition (Sanhedrin 43a) records that Jesus was executed on the eve of Passover — a hostile source, yet one that agrees on the basic fact and its timing.

None of these writers had any sympathy for Christianity — Pliny executed Christians, Suetonius mocked them, the Talmud condemns Jesus outright. Yet all three confirm the basic outline the Gospels report.

FURTHER CONVERGING EVIDENCE

Archaeology Confirms the Names

Independent digs have unearthed physical, inscribed proof for figures and places the Gospels name — evidence no text alone can provide.



The Pilate Stone, 1961

A limestone block found at Caesarea Maritima names "[Pon]tius Pilatus... [Praef]ectus Iuda[ae]" — the only inscription of Pilate found to date, matching the Gospels' title for him exactly.



The Caiaphas Ossuary, 1990

An ornate burial box discovered south of Jerusalem is inscribed "Yehosef bar Qayafa" — Joseph, son of Caiaphas — widely identified as the high priest who presided over Jesus' trial.



First-Century Nazareth

A 2009 excavation uncovered a first-century house and, nearby, a synagogue, settling a once-popular skeptical claim that Nazareth didn't exist in Jesus' lifetime.

None of this proves the resurrection — archaeology can't confirm a miracle. But it confirms the Gospels wrote about real people, real titles, and a real town, not a story invented from nowhere.



Even a Mocking Satirist Confirms the Core Claim

LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA — PAGAN SATIRIST, C. AD 165

Christians, he wrote, still worship “that crucified sophist” who founded their cult.

From "The Passing of Peregrinus," a satire mocking Christians as gullible. Lucian had every reason to belittle the movement, not corroborate it — yet he confirms Jesus was crucified and that his followers organized around that fact, decades before Constantine and centuries before any "legend had time to grow" objection can explain it away.

Competing Explanations

Given the same agreed facts, five explanations have been proposed. Which one leaves the fewest facts unexplained?



Legend



**Hallucination /
Vision**



Conspiracy



Wrong Tomb



Resurrection

Why the Natural Explanations Fall Short



Legend

Legends need time to grow. The 1 Cor. 15 creed dates to within a few years of the crucifixion — too early for gradual embellishment. Notice Paul's language:

I received

I delivered



Swoon

Roman crucifixion was designed to kill. A half-dead survivor could hardly have convinced anyone he'd conquered death.



Vision / Hallucination

Explains sincerity, but not group appearances, nor the independent conversions of a persecutor (Paul) and a skeptic (James). Does not explain the empty tomb.

Why “Just a Vision” Doesn't Fit

Hallucinations are private, individual, and driven by expectation. The appearances don't behave that way.



Forty Days, Many Settings

Acts 1:3 places the appearances over roughly forty days — to individuals, to the Twelve, and to “more than five hundred” at once (1 Cor. 15:6). Group and cross-occasion hallucinations shared by that many people have no real psychological precedent.



Paul: No Grief to Explain It

Grief- or expectation-driven visions don't fit an active persecutor. Paul wasn't mourning Jesus — he had every incentive to reject the claim, not embrace it.



James: No Expectation to Explain It

A bereavement vision requires longing for the person back. James was a skeptical brother who thought Jesus was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21) — not primed to see him at all.

If the disciples had only seen visions, the more natural conclusion within their worldview would have been that Jesus was exalted to heaven — not that he had bodily risen.

The Strongest Version of the Vision Theory

Before answering it, let's grant it full force — the way leading agnostic scholars actually present it.



Grief Visions Are Real

Bereavement hallucinations are a recognized psychological phenomenon. Seeing, hearing, or sensing a deceased loved one shortly after loss is common across cultures and eras.



Expectation Shapes Belief

First-century apocalyptic Jews expected a coming resurrection. Agnostic scholar Bart Ehrman argues that intense expectation and religious awe make vivid visionary experiences more likely.



Modern Group Parallels Exist

Ehrman points to modern reports of crowds witnessing Marian apparitions as evidence that group visions can occur without any physical referent.

This is the most serious naturalistic alternative on the table. If it explains all nine facts, it deserves to win — so let's test it fully.

Where the Vision Theory Breaks Down

Even granting its full force, the strongest version of the theory still leaves core facts unexplained.



Physical, Not Just Visual

The accounts describe touch and shared meals, not just sight (Luke 24:39–43; John 20:27; 21:12–13). A hallucination has no external object — it can't be touched or eaten with.



No Documented Group Case

A clinical psychologist's survey of the literature found no documented case of an identical hallucination shared by a group. Marian sightings don't help: witnesses at the same event typically describe different things, not one shared encounter.



The Tomb Still Needs Explaining

A vision, however vivid, doesn't move a body. Even granting the hallucination fully still needs a second theory for the empty tomb — no ancient source, friendly or hostile, ever produced the corpse.

A vision explains why someone might see something. It cannot explain why the belief was physical, group-verified, felt by hostile skeptics, and paired with a body that never turned up.

Where's the Body?

- Historians widely regard the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea as the known, identifiable burial site. Opponents of the resurrection accuse the disciples of stealing the body. That's an admission of an empty tomb. **Matthew 28:11–15.**
- The apostles began publicly proclaiming the resurrection in Jerusalem — within walking distance of that tomb — within weeks. The disciples had neither motive nor expectation to steal the body. Jerusalem is the **WORST** place to try to pull this off.
- If the body were available, producing it would have ended the movement instantly. Theft does not explain the disciples' later sincerity. It does not explain Paul or James. The conspiracy grows increasingly complicated (add Paul, James, persistence of the movement despite persecution)
- No surviving ancient source — friendly or hostile — claims that anyone ever did.



An argument from silence — but a loud one

This silence doesn't by itself prove the resurrection. But it's one more piece of cumulative evidence any explanation of Christianity's origin has to account for.

The Resurrection Explains All of It

- The empty tomb

- The disciples' dramatic transformation

- The independent conversions of Paul and James

- The immediate proclamation in Jerusalem

- The rapid rise of the Christian movement

One coherent explanation, versus a separate ad-hoc theory needed for each fact. History asks which hypothesis accounts for all of the evidence with the fewest assumptions.

Stated Plainly

Nearly all scholars — Christian, Jewish, agnostic, and atheist — agree on the same core facts: Jesus was crucified under Pilate; his disciples sincerely believed they encountered him alive; that belief arose immediately, not centuries later; and Paul and James each underwent dramatic, independent conversions after experiences they took to be appearances of the risen Christ. First-century Jews expected a resurrection at the end of history. They did not expect one man to rise bodily while everyone else remained dead.

The legend theory can't explain the timing. The swoon theory can't survive the medicine. Vision theories can't explain Paul's, James's, the group's appearances, the empty tomb, or the lack of a body. What remains is the explanation that accounts for all of it at once. The theft theory requires us to believe that the earliest leaders of Christianity knowingly proclaimed a falsehood despite imprisonment, persecution, and—in the cases of Peter, Paul, and James, for whom the historical evidence is strongest—deaths traditionally associated with their witness. That is possible in principle, but many historians regard it as an implausible explanation.

“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” — 1 Corinthians 15:14

OVER TO YOU

Questions for Discussion

1 Peter 3:15 — engage with gentleness and respect.

? What happened to the disciples?

? What changed James?

? Why proclaim it in Jerusalem, of all places?

? Where's the body?

? What caused Paul to convert?

? Why did belief begin so early?

? What best explains the appearances?

? Why did no one venerate Jesus' tomb — unlike Elvis, Jefferson, or Thatcher?

THE ULTIMATE QUESTION

If the resurrection historically and factually occurred, would you be willing to follow wherever that evidence leads?

And if it did not occur — what explanation best accounts for the historical facts that scholars across the spectrum largely agree upon?

www.crossexamined.org, www.leestroble.com; www.garyhabermas.com; www.ehrmanblog.org;