

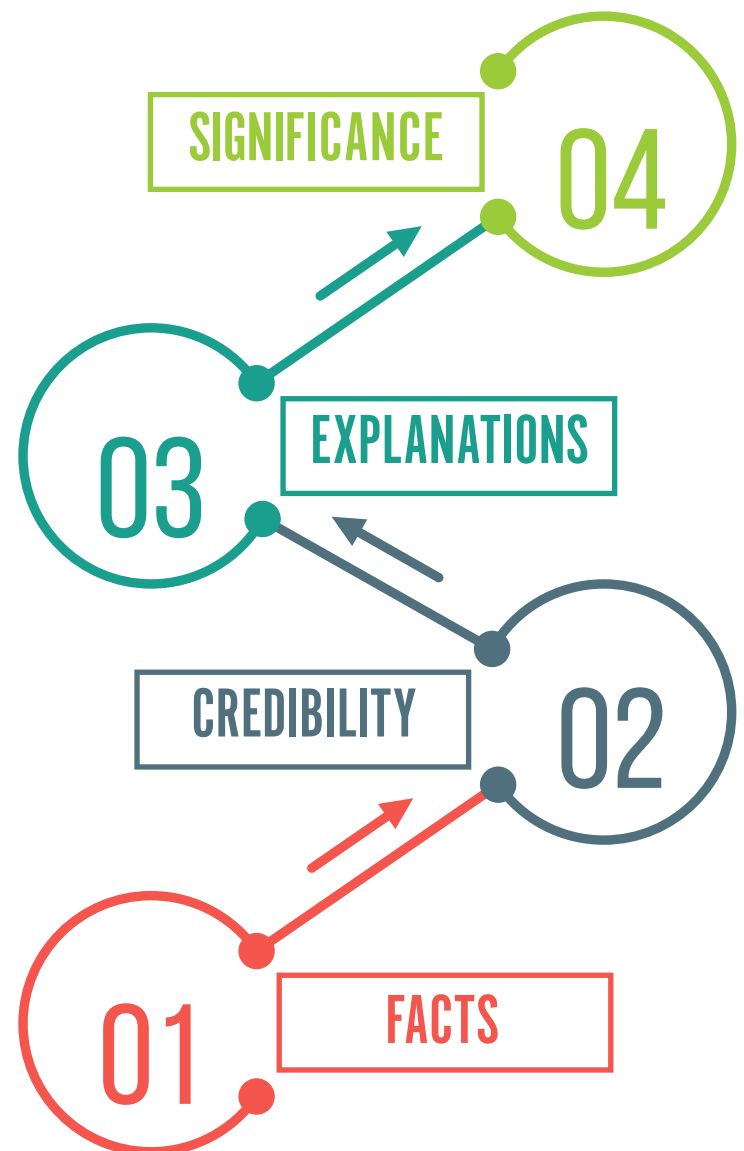
JESUS' RESURRECTION

FACT or *Fiction*

Why Most Scholars Have Come to Accept Jesus' Resurrection as a Historical Fact.

Although one would have been scoffed at in academic circles for believing in the resurrection 50 years ago, around 75% of scholastic publications (in English, French, and German) over the last 35 years now present it as a historical fact.¹

Moreover, almost 100% of scholars (including the most skeptical atheist and agnostic scholars who do not accept the gospel accounts) acknowledge at least three things as indisputable, historical events:



3 HISTORICAL FACTS :

CRUCIFIXION - Jesus died by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate.

RESURRECTION Numerous individuals and groups experienced the risen Christ.

TRANSFORMED LIVES - These experiences radically transformed those who had them and birthed the Christian movement.

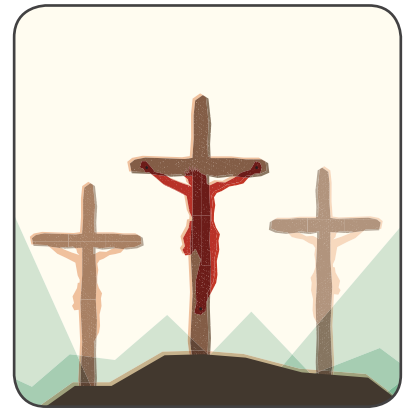
CRUCIFIXION

01

Jesus died by **crucifixion** under Pontius Pilate.

"That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be." ²

John-Dominic Crossan, the late co-founder of the Jesus Seminar - one of the leading groups in discrediting the historicity of the gospel accounts by rejecting 80% of the sayings attributed to Jesus.



"One of the most certain facts of history is that Jesus was crucified on orders of the Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate." ³

Bart Ehrman, one of the most prominent agnostic scholars in American today

RESURRECTION

01

Numerous individuals and groups experienced **the risen Christ**.



"It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ." ⁴

Gert Lüdemann, one of the leading German critics against the resurrection who accepts only 5% of the New Testament sayings attributed to Jesus

"The more we study the tradition with regard to the appearances, the firmer the rock begins to appear upon which they are based."

Norman Perrin, a late NT critic from the University of Chicago.

TRANSFORMED

01

These **experiences radically transformed** those who had them and birthed the Christian movement

They turned persecutors into martyrs (Paul), skeptics into believers (James), and the ashamed into bold proclaimers (the disciples). The movement grew despite persecution and all but one of the apostles were killed for their faith (John was exiled).



*"If the defeated and depressed group of disciples overnight could change into a victorious movement of faith, based only on autosuggestion or self-deception without a fundamental faith experience—then this would be a much greater miracle than the resurrection itself."*⁵

Pinchas Lapide, a late Orthodox Jewish scholar at Hebrew University in Tel Aviv whose studies led him to accept the historicity of Jesus' resurrection.

*"Some sort of powerful, transformative experience is required to generate the sort of movement earliest Christianity was"*⁶

Luke Timothy Johnson, professor of New Testament at Emory University

*"That is why, as a historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him."*⁷

N. T. Wright, professor of NT at the University of St. Andrews

Early, independent, and even antagonistic sources confirm the surrounding historical data.

CRUCIFIXION

02

These include both Roman and Jewish historians who rejected Christianity.

Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (ca. AD 55-120) in Annals 15.44

"Christus...was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also."

Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (ca. AD 37-97) in Antiquities 18.3

"At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the messiah, concerning whom the prophets had recounted wonders." ⁸

Opposing accounts even confirm facts (e.g., the empty tomb), by presuming upon them in their alternative explanations. Interestingly, these alternative theories are now rejected by contemporary scholarship since they cannot account for other historical data.

"Jesus, a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb, where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven."

Reported in **Justin Martyr**, Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter CVIII (ca. AD 150; see also Matthew 28:11-15 [ca. AD 70-85]; Tertullian, On Spectacles, 30 [ca. AD 200]; and the continuation of this tradition in the later Jewish compilation, Toledoth Yeshua [at least fifth century]).

Eyewitness accounts date within 5 years of the resurrection

RESURRECTION 02_a

Five years is the max. Even highly critical scholars commonly date these within 1-3 years. Below is a timeline showing how this is derived.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians from Ephesus in the early 50s C.E.

“But he says in 1 Corinthians 15:3 that ‘I handed on to you as of first importance which I in turn received.’ The most likely source and time for his reception of that tradition would have been Jerusalem in the early 30s when, according to Galatians 1:18, he ‘went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas [Peter] and stayed with him fifteen days.’”⁹

John-Dominic Crossan, the late co-founder of the Jesus Seminar
Jonathan L. Reed, Professor of Religion at the University of La Verne

Since these traditions had to have already been in existence and crafted into their concise creedal form, the German critic, **Gerd Lüdemann**, concludes,

*“the formation of the appearance traditions mentioned in 1 Cor. 15:3–8 falls into the time between 30 and 33 C.E.”*¹⁰



Here is the early eyewitness report that critics accept as historical evidence:

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve.⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;⁸ and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also"

The early eyewitness claims were local and verifiable.

RESURRECTION

02_b

Hundreds of eyewitnesses were alive and available for investigation.

"There can hardly be any purpose in mentioning the fact [in 1 Corinthians 15:6] that most of the 500 are still alive, unless Paul is saying, in effect, The witnesses are there to be questioned." "

C. H. Dodd, a late New Testament professor at Oxford, Manchester, and Cambridge

Moreover, the Christian movement exploded out of Jerusalem, the very city where these historical events took place. It is difficult to explain how it would gather and sustain such a localized following if there was any evidence to disprove it.

"That Jesus died and was buried in the same city in which the disciples did their earliest preaching, Jerusalem, is very strong evidence. They could have preached in Rome or Egypt, but why in Jerusalem, where their message could be checked out easily, unless the tomb really was empty?"¹²

Gary Habermas, a leading specialist on the resurrection and professor at Liberty University

The criterion of embarrassment strengthens the credibility of the New Testament accounts of Jesus's death and resurrection.



One example of this mentioned in all four gospels is how Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council which just sentenced Jesus to death. This is an odd story to make up. Not only does it expose how the twelve disciples all abandoned Jesus, it would have been easily refuted by the Sanhedrin if it were not true. There is not one account of this being questioned in extant literature from antiquity.

"The point of the criterion is that the early Church would hardly have gone out of its way to create material that only embarrassed its creator or weakened its position in arguments with opponents."¹³

John P. Meier, professor of theology at Notre Dame

“when the tendency of the tradition was to shift blame to the Jewish council, the creation ex nihilo of a sympathizer from among their number would be surprising; and ‘Arimathea,’ a town very difficult to identify and reminiscent of no scriptural symbolism, makes a thesis of invention even more implausible.” ¹⁴

James D. G. Dunn, professor of New Testament at the University of Durham

So, how do scholars account for these THREE universally accepted HISTORICAL FACTS?

Below are FIVE OF THE MOST PROMINENT EXPLANATIONS:

- a) Swoon Theory,
- b) Stolen Body Theory, c) Legend Theory, d) Hallucination Theory,
- e) Jesus truly rose from the dead

It should be noted that objections to the resurrection are not based on any historical evidence; rather, they originate from a preexisting philosophical orientation (often naturalism). As one can see, these alternative accounts fail to adequately explain the historical data. This realization has led the majority of contemporary scholars to accept the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection. It alone has the explanatory scope and power to account for the historical evidence.

“It is extremely difficult to object to the empty tomb on historical grounds; those who deny it do so on the basis of theological or philosophical assumptions.” ¹⁵

D. H. Van Daalen, the late scholar, reverend, and prominent translator of German theological writings

"One interesting illustration of this failure of the naturalistic theories is that they were disproved by the nineteenth-century older liberals themselves, [the very ones] by whom these theories were popularized. These scholars refuted each other's theories, leaving no viable naturalistic hypotheses... Although nineteenth-century liberals decimated each other's views individually, twentieth-century critical scholars have generally rejected naturalistic theories as a whole, judging that they are incapable of explaining the known data.... That even such critical scholars have rejected these naturalistic theories is a significant epitaph for the failure of these views." ¹⁶

Gary Habermas, a leading specialist on the resurrection and professor at Liberty University



"Swoon" (or Apparent Death) Theory

Skeptics say: Jesus was crucified but did not actually die. His disciples mistook his reappearance in three days as being raised from the dead.

Died- Early non-Christian texts affirm not only Jesus' crucifixion, but also his death (e.g., Tacitus, Annals 15.44). Moreover, this view does not adequately account for the nature of crucifixion. Medical investigations have shown that one cannot survive such an ordeal.

"Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge." ¹⁷

Journal of the American Medical Association

Appeared- Beyond the implausibility of a crucified man surviving and then escaping the tomb, it is unlikely that someone half dead would convince anyone that they had risen from the dead. Since David Friederick Strauss presented this argument in 1835, scholarship has ceased holding this theory.¹⁸

“It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, would have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror of death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship”¹⁹

David Friederick Strauss, a prominent nineteenth century German scholar who popularized the hallucination theory

Transformed - This theory does not account for Paul’s experience with the risen Christ and his following transformation.

RESURRECTION 03_b

Stolen Body Theory

Skeptics say: Jesus' body was stolen from the tomb to make it appear as if it were empty.

Crucified - YES

Appeared- This theory provides no account for the appearances of the risen Christ.

Transformed - If it were the disciples who stole the body, this argument provides no support for their transformation and martyrdom.

"It was, of course, a mere makeshift hypothesis [referencing Reimarus' stolen body theory] to derive the beginnings of Christianity from an imposture. Historical science was not at that time sufficiently advanced to lead even the man [Reimarus whom he commends] ... to the historical solution of the problem.... which Reimarus had been forced to bridge with that makeshift hypothesis of his." ²⁰

Albert Schweitzer, a nineteenth and twentieth century French-German theologian who famously documents the quest for the historical Jesus up to his time. Schweitzer lists no advocates for this view from 1768 onwards.

"...the disciples had nothing to gain by lying and starting a new religion. They faced hardship, ridicule, hostility, and martyrs' deaths. In light of this, they could have never sustained such unwavering motivation if they knew what they were preaching was a lie." ²¹

J.P. Moreland, professor of philosophy at Biola University



Legend Theory

Skeptics say: The story of the resurrection was a legend which the early church developed by borrowing from surrounding resurrection myths.

Crucified - It typically accepts that Jesus was a historical person who was crucified.

Appeared - This theory provides no account for the appearances of the risen Christ.

Transformed - This theory provides no account for the transformation of the disciples, especially James and Paul who were originally opposed to Christianity.

This theory does not actually explain the historical data at the foundation of Christianity. Even contenders for this theory acknowledge this,

"But the Christian myth is not to be derived from this nature-myth, because it has its most direct source in the historical fact of the death of Jesus, and the following visions seen by His disciples." ²²

Otto Pfliegerer, one of the prominent advocates of this theory at the turn of the twentieth century

Moreover, after extensive survey, historians have found that legendary accounts take far longer than five years to develop and displace historical fact. Even two generations is not enough.

"For these stories to be legends, the rate of legendary accumulation would have to be unbelievable; more generations are needed... The span of two generations is too short to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical fact." ²³

A.N. Sherwin White, the late classical historian from Oxford University

Furthermore, there is no evidence even for their basic claim that Christianity merely borrowed from surrounding resurrection myths

"The majority of scholars agree... there is no unambiguous evidence that any pagans prior to Christianity believed in dying and rising gods. Anyone who thinks that Jesus was modeled on such deities needs to cite some evidence—any evidence at all—that Jews in Palestine at the alleged time of Jesus's life were influenced by anyone who held such views." ²⁴

Bart Ehrman, prominent agnostic and professor at University of North Carolina

Hallucination Theory

Skeptics say: The eyewitnesses thought they saw the risen Christ, but in reality were only hallucinating

Crucified - YES

Appeared- While this account seeks to explain the disciples' experiences of the risen Christ, it does so in a highly improbable way. Not only are hallucinations rare in and of themselves, the theory becomes even more improbable in that the experiences are shared by a diverse set of people in a variety of settings, all around the same time, and then suddenly cease to exist altogether. If that were not enough, the theory becomes utterly implausible since it would require group hallucinations. But hallucinations, by their very nature, do not happen in groups - much like dreams don't happen in groups. Moreover, this account provides no explanation for what happened to Jesus' body.

Transformed- Hallucinations are rarely transformative. People are typically talked out of their hallucinations when reasoned with. It is hard to account for this scale of transformation, both in number and intensity, simply through hallucinations

"Not one of the five hundred repeats the ecstasy [hallucination] ... Just when fervid minds are beginning to grow fanatical, the fanaticism absolutely and entirely ceases. . . . [and then, oddly, they all] recover their mental equilibrium." ²⁵

Theodor Keim, a prominent German scholar who delivered a series of arguments which many have considered to deliver the death-blow to this theory in the nineteenth century

RESURRECTION

03_e

Jesus truly rose from dead

Crucified - YES

Appeared - YES

Transformed - YES

So if all the **evidence** affirms Jesus' resurrection what does this mean for us?

CRUCIFIXION & RESURRECTION

04

It means that the historical person of Jesus needs to be taken seriously. He cannot be dismissed simply as some made-up myth. Given this weighty evidence for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, deep consideration is called for on who this man really is.

“So if a person is going to say, ‘Jesus is not going to be important in my life – I’m not going to believe in Him,’ then they’re going to have to say that for other reasons besides historical....the evidence is there, the sources are there, the picture is clear and coherent, and in my academic opinion, the picture is quite compelling.” ²⁶

Craig Evans, professor of Christian origins at Houston Baptist University who also lectures at schools such as Cambridge, Oxford, Durham, and Yale.

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection makes him unique amongst the world religions. There is no other religious leader who has claimed such a thing, let alone has the historical evidence to back it up.

"So that the claim of the resurrection of Jesus alone makes Him unique among religious figures of the world. The fact that we have good evidence for it makes it more than unique. It makes it astonishing." ²⁷

William Lane Craig, professor of philosophy at Talbot School of Theology

If Jesus rose from the dead, his claims are true and need to be taken seriously. His resurrection means that God has publically vindicated Jesus' claim to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). God does not affirm heretics. If Jesus were not who he claimed to be, it makes no sense for God to raise him from the dead. However, the resurrection evidences God's establishment of "one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). God has confirmed Jesus' claim, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

It also affirms that Jesus' death was not a mistake, but that he willingly laid it down "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

As Jesus said before he died, "No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded" (John 10:18).

WHY DID HE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE?

The Bible explains that Jesus had to die because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Our sin is no light matter before a holy and just God; “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). But the Bible says that “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:21). “Jesus was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God” (Romans 4:25). By dying in our place and bearing the punishment we deserve, “Jesus canceled the record of the charges against us” (Colossians 2:14).

HOW DO I RECEIVE THIS?

The Bible says that “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). It says, “If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9).

Jesus' resurrection provides assurance and hope to the haunting question: what will happen to me when I die?

With so much evidence to affirm that Jesus has indeed conquered the grave, those who believe in him can live confidently assured that his words are true: “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19). The historical reality of Jesus' victory over death can set “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:15).

For, indeed, we now have “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

¹ This statistic is published by Brill in a respected, peer-reviewed journal which typically takes a more skeptical approach towards the historicity of the New Testament. See Gary R. Habermas, “Resurrection Research from 1975 to the Present: What Are Critical Scholars Saying?” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 3 no. 2 (2005): pp. 139-140.

² John-Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: Harper One, 1995), 145.

³ Bart Ehrman, *The Historical Jesus: Lecture Transcript and Course Guidebook*, Part 2 of 2 (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2000), p. 162.

⁴ Gerd Lüdemann, *What Really Happened to Jesus?*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 80.

⁵ Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1982), p. 126.

⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), p. 136.

⁷ N. T. Wright, “The New Unimproved Jesus,” *Christianity Today* (September 13, 1993), p. 26.

⁸ This quotation draws upon the Arabic version which Jewish historians such as Schlomo Pines and David Flusser from Hebrew University accept as the original words of Josephus. For more engagement on this, see Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), pp. 192-196.

⁹ John Dominic Crossan & Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (New York: Harper, 2001), p. 254.

¹⁰ Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), p. 38. Beyond Paul’s writings, the eyewitness testimony behind the gospel accounts is becoming increasingly accepted by even critical scholars. Mark Allen Powell, the chair of the Historical Jesus section of the Society of Biblical Literature, reports, “The dominant view is that the passion narratives [the stories in the gospels that surround Jesus’ death and resurrection] are early and based on eyewitness testimony.” Mark Allen Powell, “Review: The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus by John Dominic Crossan,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68 (2000): p. 171.

¹¹ C. H. Dodd, *More New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 128.

¹² Gary Habermas, *Resurrected?: An Atheist and Theist Dialogue* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), pp. 26-27.

¹³ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume I: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 168.

¹⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 782.

¹⁵ David H. Van Daalen, *The Real Resurrection* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 41.

¹⁶ Gary Habermas, *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus: Historical Records of His Death and Resurrection* (New York: Nelson, 1984), pp. 20-21.

¹⁷ William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 255, no. 11 (March 21, 1986): p. 1463.

¹⁸ Albert Schweitzer documents various publications on the historical Jesus over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After 1838, he ceases to list scholars contending for the swoon theory. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1906, 1968); Gary R. Habermas, “Explaining Away Jesus’ Resurrection: The Recent Revival of Hallucination Theories,” *Christian Research Journal* 23 no. 4 (2001): pp. 26-31, 47-49.

¹⁹ David Frederick Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, authorized trans., 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), 1: p. 412.

²⁰ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 23.

²¹ J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), pp. 171-172.

²² Otto Pfleiderer, *The Early Christian Conception of Christ: Its Significance and Value in the History of Religion* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1905), pp. 157-158.

²³ A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), p. 190.

²⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012) 230.

²⁵ Theodor Keim, *The History of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Arthur Ransom, vol. 6 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1883), 356.

²⁶ This statement by Craig Evans was presented on The John Ankerberg Show, “Jesus: The Search Continues,” segment 8, 2001.

²⁷ This statement by William Lane Craig was presented on The John Ankerberg Show, “Jesus: The Search Continues,” segment 8, 2001.

THE JOHN ANKERBERG SHOW

For more information visit JAShow.org

write us at jasnews@jashow.org.

call 423-892-7722

by Jeff Pallansch