

Resurrection: Fact or Fiction

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Jesus and the Resurrection

The Christian faith is a faith grounded in history. While the Christian faith is certainly *more* than a historical faith, it is certainly not anything *less*. Without the literal, bodily, historical resurrection of Jesus from the grave, there is no Christianity (1 Corinthians 15:12–19).

In one of the earliest letters written to an early church, the apostle Paul declared that Christ was truly raised from the dead and this fact is central to the gospel-message of Christianity.

For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me.
— 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 CSB

Scholars are almost unanimous in dating the writing of 1 Corinthians to between 53–55 AD, which means that within about twenty years of Jesus’ ministry, the apostle Paul was declaring the physical resurrection of Jesus from the grave. Moreover, Paul was declaring that Jesus “appeared” to numerous people, even “over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time.”

These are very interesting claims. The question we want to ask here is: *are they true?* Is there any historical reason to believe that Jesus did in fact live, die, and rise again? Is there any historical *evidence* for the notion that Jesus may have appeared to people after he died?

In this article, we’re going to explore some of the common reasons why people reject the claim that Jesus rose from the dead and then examine a positive case for believing that Jesus rose from the dead.

Was Jesus a Copycat?

One of the most common reasons for objecting to the historical resurrection of Jesus is the claim that Jesus is just a copycat savior. This argument is especially popular on the internet, although most historical scholars don’t take it very seriously.

The argument goes like this: long before Christianity was around, there were various pagan religions who worshiped some kind of dying and rising savior. The New Testament writers simply borrowed and adapted these stories to describe Jesus and establish a new religion.

For example, take a look at this impressive list of attributes ascribed to one of the ancient Persian mystery-saviors:

- Born of a Virgin
- Born in a cave
- Traveling teacher
- Had 12 disciples
- Sacrificed himself
- Rose from the grave

At first glance, any normal person would say these descriptions match well with the historical description of Jesus. But, this is actually the description of the ancient Persian god, Mithras, who lived around 1200 B.C. Mithras is just one example of several ancient “savior-gods” that

could be mentioned—all of whom shared almost identical features to the story we know as the story of Jesus and Christianity.

Proponents of this argument advocate that the writers of the New Testament copied and pasted these descriptions to Jesus, creating their own version of a legendary myth-religion. The end result is a Jesus that is not unique, not authentic, and not the Lord of our lives. In his book, *The Pagan Christ*, Tom Harpur makes this point very clear when he says:

There is nothing the Jesus of the Gospels either said or did... that cannot be shown to have originated thousands of years before, in Egyptian Mystery rites and other sacred liturgies...Not one single doctrine, rite, tenet, or usage in Christianity was in reality a fresh contribution to the world...The Church converted a whole mass of romantic legends or myths into so-called history, a multiplication of "fictitious stories." What emerged was in many ways a cult of ignorance.³²

If Harpur is correct, then Christians may as well stop gathering on Sunday to worship Jesus. Instead, we ought to turn our attention to other matters and be on our way. As the apostle Paul said, "If the dead are not raised, then 'let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

But before we jump to conclusions, let's just ask some honest questions: is any of this *true*? Is there any *evidence* for these parallels? Contrary to Harpur and many bloggers on the Internet, virtually no serious scholar takes this position seriously. Why? Because scholars have long-known that the descriptions popularly ascribed to these ancient mystery gods has almost *zero* historical evidence to support them. These arguments are often based on *assertion*, not *evidence*.

For example, when you look at the actual evidence we have for Mithras, what you discover is that he:

- Was born out of a rock (*not a virgin*).
- He didn't have 12 disciples.
- He didn't sacrifice himself, but he may have sacrificed a bull.
- We don't know anything about his death (*there was no resurrection*).³³

As you can see, the historical evidence doesn't demonstrate a parallel between Mithras and Jesus. When we consider some of the more central claims about the death of Jesus in particular, we further realize these mystery religions had little-to-nothing in common with the kind of death Jesus is said to experience in the New Testament. For example:³⁴

1. They are not *sacrificial*: Unlike Jesus, none of the other mystery-saviors die in place of someone else (see Romans 3:21–26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 4:10).
2. They are not *global*: Unlike Jesus, the mystery-saviors do not die on behalf of the whole world. Instead, their deaths provided a limited benefit to people within a specific geographic locale (cf. John 3:16–18; 1 John 2:1–2).
3. They are not *singular*: Unlike Jesus, the mystery-saviors follow a cyclical pattern of dying & rising mimics the agricultural cycles for planting & harvesting crops (John 19:30; Hebrews 7:25–27)

³² Tom Harpur, *The Pagan Christ* (New York: Walker and Company 2004), 10.

³³J. Warner Wallace, "Is Jesus Simply A Retelling of Mithras Mythology?" *Cold Case Christianity Website*, May 5, 2014, accessed October 15, 2016 <http://coldcasechristianity.com/2014/is-jesus-simply-a-retelling-of-the-mithras-mythology/>

³⁴ The following points are adapted from Ronald Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2003), 160–61.

4. They are not *historical*: Unlike Jesus, the stories about the mystery-saviors are not grounded in historical documents that can be cross-checked with other sources (Luke 1:1–4; 3:1–2).³⁵
5. They are not *loving*: Unlike Jesus, the mystery-saviors do not voluntarily lay down their life as an act of compassion or love (John 3:16–18; 10:17–18; 1 John 4:10)³⁶

In light of these obvious contrasts, why is the “copycat” thesis so popular? Ronald Nash helps us understand:

During a period of time running roughly from about 1890 to 1940, scholars often alleged that primitive Christianity had been heavily influenced by...pagan mystery religions... [However], largely as a result of a series of scholarly books and articles written in rebuttal, allegations of early Christianity’s dependence on its Hellenistic environment began to appear much less frequently in the publications of [various scholars]. Today most Bible scholars regard the question as a dead issue.³⁷

According to Nash, even though this argument was dealt with long ago in the hallways of scholarship, the refutations have taken a long time to become mainstream in our culture. This is not too surprising, given that it often takes a few decades for matters of academic dispute to reach its way to popular circles.³⁸

Nevertheless, it is sad that some of those who promote this argument don’t take the time to investigate the credible responses made to it. In his book, *The Gospel and Greeks*, Nash looks at each potential parallel with ancient pagan religions to see if they truly compare to the Jesus of Christianity. The end result is that these mystery religions aren’t even in the same category as New Testament Christianity.³⁹

Nash’s book is only one example of books written to demonstrate the uniqueness of the historical Jesus, but the general consensus of scholarship on this subject is: there is simply no historical evidence that connects Jesus and pagan mystery religions with each other. Even the agnostic New Testament scholar, Bart Ehrman acknowledges this when he says, “...the claim that Jesus was simply made up falters on every ground. The alleged parallels between Jesus and the “pagan” savior-gods in most instances reside in the modern imagination.”⁴⁰

³⁵ Nash observes, “Jesus’ death was an actual event in history. The death of the god described in pagan cults is a mythical drama with no historical ties; its continued rehearsal celebrates the recurring death and rebirth of nature...the early church believed that its proclamation of Jesus’ death and resurrection was grounded upon what actually happened in history.” *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 161.

³⁶ J. Gresham Machen observed, “‘He loves me’ says Paul, ‘and gave himself for me.’ There is absolutely nothing like that conception in the case of the pagan religions. Osiris, Adonis, and Attis were overtaken by their fate; Jesus gave his life freely away.” *The Origin of Paul’s Religion* (New York: McMillan, 1921), 315.

³⁷Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 1.

³⁸William Lane Craig, “In Intellectual Neutral,” in William Lane Craig and Paul Copan, ed., *Passionate Conviction* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 2007) 2–16 accessed online on October 14, 2016 <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/apologetics-ministry-advice-to-christian-apologists>

³⁹ Rhodes-Eddy and Boyd observe, “The differences between Christianity and the mystery religions are far more pronounced than any similarities. While there are certainly parallel *terms* used in early Christianity and the mystery religions, there is little evidence for parallel *concepts*. For example...both Christianity and the mystery religious spoke of salvation—as do many religions throughout history. But what early Christians meant by this term had little in common with what devotees of mystery religions meant by it. To site just one difference, there was in the mystery religions nothing similar to Paul’s idea that disciples participate in the death and resurrection of their Savior and are adopted as God’s children by placing their trust in him.” Paul R. Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 142.

⁴⁰Bart Ehrman, “Did Jesus Exist?” *The Huffington Post*, March 20, 2012, accessed October 17, 2016 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bart-d-ehrman/did-jesus-exist_b_1349544.html

A Resurrection? Really?

With this issue aside, we must still answer the question: is there any *positive* evidence for the resurrection of Jesus? To answer that question, we must further ask: what can we know about the events surrounding the rise of the early church?

In search of an answer, many scholars have utilized what they call a “minimal facts” argument.⁴¹ The essence of this argument is that we can know with a high degree of certainty a *bare minimum* of facts surrounding the rise of the early church. These facts are widely agreed upon by both skeptical and believing scholars in the relevant disciplines of history and New Testament studies. It’s important to clarify: while the skeptical scholars don’t believe a resurrection accounts for the facts, they still believe in these facts.⁴²

This argument is helpful because it establishes a common ground that both believers and non-believers can agree on. Once this common ground is established, the question becomes: what’s the best explanation of the facts? Since we’re all looking at the same information, what’s the best conclusion we can draw? Here are four of those facts:

1. After his crucifixion, Jesus’ empty tomb was discovered by a group of his women followers.
2. After his crucifixion, various people reported appearances of Jesus.
3. The earliest followers of Jesus sincerely came to believe God raised Jesus from the dead.
4. Saul of Tarsus converted to Christianity and became the apostle Paul.

Again, these facts are just four of the minimal facts (there’s about 12 in total) that scholars—believing and non-believing—say we can believe with a high degree of historical certainty. The question is: what is the best explanation of these facts?

Over the years, much has been written to explain these facts apart from appealing to supernatural intervention of any kind. We’ll examine two of them.

Explanation #1: Conspiracy

This explanation amounts to saying the disciples lied about Jesus’ resurrection in order to gain some form of political or social advantage. In other words, it’s an explicit rejection of fact #3.

Let’s consider this scenario for moment: the disciples have just witnessed their leader brutally crucified at the hands of the Romans. They are in hiding, afraid that the Jews or the Romans might come for them next (see Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:15; John 20:19). But then one of the disciples (probably Peter) gets the bright idea to come out of hiding and publicly confront these people with the same message that got Jesus killed. Not only that, but they decide to announce that the physical resurrection of Jesus is clear evidence that God endorses Jesus as His unique messenger. By implication, God endorses the very message Jesus proclaimed and everyone—Jews and Gentiles—need to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus, otherwise they will fall under the eternal judgment of God (Acts 2:32–41).

Here’s the point: this scenario is incredibly unlikely. Additionally, to believe the disciples lied about the resurrection requires us to believe that they fabricated a story for *no benefit whatsoever*. The disciples knew they had nothing to gain by making up such a story—no

⁴¹Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 43–77 and William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd Edition (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 361–370.

⁴² To learn more about the reasons and background to this argument, see William Lane Craig, “The Resurrection of Jesus,” *Reasonable Faith Website*; Amy K. Hall, “Where Did These Minimal Facts about the Resurrection Come From?” *Stand to Reason Website*, July 26, 2014.

political power, no financial reward, and no social advantage. Quite the contrary, history shows that the disciples proclaimed the resurrected Jesus to their deaths. They all died alone, poor, and unpopular.⁴³

The reason why fact #3 is so well supported among historical scholars is because *liars make terrible martyrs*. You may go to your death for what you *believe* to be true, but you don't go to your death for what you *know* is a lie. In order to believe the disciples lied about the resurrection, you have to believe they went to their deaths for a known lie and that no one cracked under the pressure of persecution.⁴⁴

This evidence alone leads many scholars to conclude the disciples sincerely believed God raise Jesus from the dead. That doesn't demonstrate that God *actually* raised Jesus from the dead; but the disciples *belief* in Jesus' resurrection is hard to deny given the powerful personal transformations they experienced. William Lane Craig notes:

Critics...have universally recognized, one cannot plausibly deny that the earliest disciples at least sincerely believed that Jesus was risen from the dead, a conviction on which they staked their very lives...The transformation in the lives of the disciples is not credibly explained by the hypothesis of a conspiracy. This shortcoming alone has been enough in the minds of most scholars to sink the old Conspiracy Hypothesis.⁴⁵

Pinchas Lapide was a New Testament scholar who was also an Orthodox Jew. While Lapide didn't believe Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, he did believe the resurrection of Jesus best explained the historical evidence. At one point, he observed how astonishing it would have been for this early band of Jewish disciples to believe God raised Jesus from the dead without some kind of supernatural event.

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. In a purely logical analysis, the resurrection of Jesus is “the lesser of two evils” for all those who seek a rational explanation of the worldwide consequences of the Easter faith. The true miracle is that this Jewish group of Jesus' followers came to faith Any kind of deception is excluded in any case, be it the theft of the body, trance, or the invention of a miracle.⁴⁶

In addition to this, proponents of the conspiracy hypothesis must explain fact #2: how numerous people came to have some kind of supernatural experience of Jesus after his crucifixion. While skeptical scholars don't believe these experiences are explicable in terms of a literal resurrection from the dead, almost everyone agrees these people experienced *something*.

⁴³ McDowell and McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, 360–367.

⁴⁴For additional study on this claim, see Sean McDowell, “Were the Apostles of Jesus Misguided?” *SeanMcDowell.org*, December 8, 2015.

⁴⁵Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 372.

⁴⁶ Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 126. More recently, religion scholar Reza Aslan made the following claim, “One could simply . . . dismiss the resurrection as a lie, and declare belief in the risen Jesus to be the product of a deludable mind. However, there is this nagging fact to consider: one after another of those who claimed to have witnessed the risen Jesus went to their own gruesome deaths refusing to recant their testimony. That is not, in itself, unusual. Many zealous Jews died horribly for refusing to deny their beliefs. But these first followers of Jesus were not being asked to reject matters of faith based on events that took place centuries, if not millennia, before. They were being asked to deny something they themselves personally, directly encountered.” *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Random House, 2013), 174

Gurd Ludeman, an agnostic New Testament scholar, notes that, “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.”⁴⁷ Norman Perin, who was a New Testament scholar at the University of Chicago, once noted, “The more we study the tradition with regard to the appearances, the firmer the rock begins to appear upon which they are based.”⁴⁸ Michael Licona helpfully summarizes the state of historical scholarship on this issue:

Historians may conclude that, subsequent to Jesus’ death by crucifixion, a number of his followers had experiences in individual and group settings that convinced them Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to them. We may affirm with great confidence that Peter had such an experience in an individual setting, and ... the same may be said of an adversary of the church named Paul. We may likewise affirm that there was at least one occasion when a group of Jesus’ followers including “the Twelve” had such an experience... This conclusion is granted by nearly unanimous consensus of modern scholars and may therefore be added to our “historical bedrock.”⁴⁹

Explanation #2: Hallucinations

The second explanation for the four facts above is one commonly known as the hallucination theory or the hallucination hypothesis. In the history of discussion on the resurrection, this explanation is the most popular counter-theory to the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead. Like the Conspiracy hypothesis above, the problems with this theory are many. Let’s observe a few:

First, while this theory might explain the motivation of the *disciples* to die for their belief, it would not explain the rise of early Christianity in the city in which Jesus was killed. William Lane Craig drives home the point when he says:

The Gospels were written in such temporal and geographic proximity to the events they record that it would have been almost impossible to fabricate events. Anyone who cared to could have checked out the accuracy of what they reported. The fact that the disciples were able to proclaim the resurrection in Jerusalem in the face of their enemies a few weeks after the crucifixion shows that what they proclaimed was true, for they could never have proclaimed the resurrection under such circumstances had it not occurred.⁵⁰

In the presence of a hostile audience, the disciples of Jesus were able to proclaim the tomb of Jesus was empty. If there was one thing the people could’ve done to silence these disciples was go to the tomb and verify that Jesus’ body was present. If it was, they could’ve let the evidence speak for itself, or they could’ve exhumed the body and paraded it around the city. If they wanted to prevent an uprising or put a stop to a new movement, either of these options would’ve been readily accepted by the authorities in Jerusalem.

But that’s not what happened. In fact, Matthew tells us the authorities acknowledged the tomb was empty by trying to tell people that the disciples stole the body (Matt. 28:11–15). The problem is easy to see: if you have hallucinating disciples, then you have an *entombed Jesus*. If you have an entombed Jesus, then you don’t get thousands of converts in the city he was killed

⁴⁷Gerd Ludemann, *What Really Happened to Jesus?*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville, Kent.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 8.

⁴⁸Norman Perin, *The Resurrection according to Matthew, Mark ,and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 80.

⁴⁹ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 372.

⁵⁰Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 341

(Acts 2:42–47) and you most certainly don't get a new worldwide movement that became the most widespread religious movement in the history of the world. N.T. Wright observes:

We may insist...that whatever else had happened, if the body of Jesus of Nazareth had remained in the tomb there would have been no early Christian belief of the sort we have discovered...Many other Jewish leaders, heroes and would-be Messiahs died within the same [time-period], but in no case did anyone suggest that they had been raised from the dead...The specific faith of the earliest Christians could not have been generated by a set of circumstances in which an empty tomb did not play a part.⁵¹

The first problem with the Hallucination theory is the problem of the empty tomb. The second problem is a general problem about the nature hallucinations altogether. Psychologists have noted that hallucinations rarely (if ever) occur among groups of people and if they did, groups of people would never experience the *exact same* hallucination. In this regard, hallucinations are a lot like dreams: they are subjective mental events that are unique to each person. They are not shareable or reproducible among groups of people. Dr. Gary Collins, the former president for the National Association of American Psychologists, has noted:

Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature only one person can see any given hallucination at a time. They certainly are not something which can be seen by a group of people. Neither is it possible that one person could somehow induce a hallucination in somebody else. Since hallucinations exist only in the subjective personal sense, it is obvious that others cannot witness it.⁵²

In order to believe the disciples and the townspeople in Jerusalem experienced the same hallucination, you have to believe that multiple people and multiple *types* of people (eg. believers like Peter vs. non-believers like Saul of Tarsus) had the same hallucination of Jesus. Such a theory flies in the face of what the scientific evidence suggests.

Along with this problem of hallucinations is the fact that hallucinations are often experienced by people who fit a particular description. Licona summarizes the evidence: They are typically *female, elderly, and grieving* the loss of a loved one. As such “Approximately 15 percent of the general population will experience one or more hallucinations in their lifetime...[But] it should be of no surprise to learn that senior adults who are grieving the loss of a loved one are among those most likely to experience a hallucination.”⁵³

Now, let's consider how this relates to the disciples. At most, the disciples could be described as individuals in a grieving state after they lost Jesus to a brutal and public form of execution. However, these men were not females and they were not elderly. Moreover, it's not hard to imagine *one* of the disciples experiencing a grief-hallucination, but the odds of *all* of them experiencing this are slim given how seldom hallucinations occur.

⁵¹ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 695.

⁵² Gary Collins, quoted in J.P. Moreland and Gary Habermas, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 119–120. Clinical Psychologist Gary Sibcy likewise notes, “I have surveyed the professional literature (peer-reviewed journal articles and books) written by psychologists, psychiatrists, and other relevant healthcare professionals during the past two decades and have *yet to find a single documented case of a group hallucinations*, that is, an event for which more than one person purportedly shared in a visual or other sensory perception where there was clearly no external reference.” quoted in Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 484 (Personal Correspondence)

⁵³ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 483–84.

The problem becomes even worse, however, when we consider how this would apply to the hostile audiences who became followers of Jesus. None of these criteria would fit the hostile Jewish authorities in Jerusalem and they most certainly wouldn't describe one person in particular: Saul of Tarsus.

Saul was a passionate persecutor of the church and was eager to stamp out the Christian movement (Acts 7:58–8:3; 9:1; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 1 Timothy 1:15–17). If anybody *wasn't* grieved by the crucifixion of Jesus, it was Saul. If anybody *wasn't* predisposed to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, it was Saul.

One day when Saul was on his way to persecute more Christians, something happened. William Lane Craig summarizes the event and its implications:

The incident on the Damascus Road changed Saul's whole life. He was a rabbi, a Pharisee, a respected Jewish leader. He hated the Christian heresy and did everything he could to stamp it out...he was even responsible for the execution of Christian believers! Then suddenly, he gave up everything—including his position as a respected Jewish leader— and became a Christian missionary. He entered a life of poverty, labor, and suffering. He was whipped, beaten, and stoned; left for dead; shipwrecked three times; and remained in constant danger, deprivation, and anxiety. Finally, he made the ultimate sacrifice and was martyred for his faith at Rome. And it was all because on that day outside Damascus, he saw “Jesus our Lord” (I Cor. 9: 1).⁵⁴

The reason why the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to become the apostle Paul is considered one of the four “minimal facts” of the resurrection is because this conversion is so hard to explain outside of a significant event like what we find described in the New Testament. A grief-hallucination simply won't fit the bill and one is hard pressed to demonstrate why Saul would trade everything to be involved in a self-defeating conspiracy. The better explanation of the historical data is that something happened that fundamentally changed the lives of these men and swept of the ancient world in its wake.

The Power of the Resurrection

It's beyond question that the resurrection of Jesus is the central event in New Testament theology. Everything leads to it and everything flows from it. It's the pivotal event in the Biblical story and the stunning reversal in the great battle against good and evil.

When we examine the historical record about this event, we discover several things: first there is a good historical bedrock of scholarly consensus about certain events that took place surrounding the early church's confession that God raised Jesus from the dead. This historical bedrock is known as the “minimal facts” and they give us a common ground by which to discuss the evidence with each other.

Additionally, when we look for naturalistic explanations to these facts, the impression we're left with is that there are more problems to believing them than with believing the historical confession that God raised Jesus from the dead.

Finally, the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead genuinely explains all four of these facts in the following ways:

- *Explanatory Power*: the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead better explains each of the four facts individually and lacks the problems associated with naturalistic counter-theories.

⁵⁴ *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?* (Impact 360 Institute, 2014), Kindle Locations: 623–627.

- *Explanatory Scope*: the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead better explains all of the facts and the surrounding details involved in them than any of the counter-theories.
- *Simplicity*: the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead is not contrived or overly-complex, but explains these four facts without having to conjure up far-fetched scenarios.

In the end, there is good evidence to believe that Christ has indeed been raised from the dead—as the apostle Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15. For these reasons we can have genuine hope that our faith is not grounded in wishful thinking, but in the actual events God brought about in time-space history.

Appendix #1: Addressing the Miracle Objection

One of the main reasons why non-Christian scholars don't believe God raised Jesus from the dead is because by definition, the resurrection would be a miracle. In the eyes of many, this simply cannot be what happened, because we live in an age that only accepts *naturally* provable explanations. Bart Ehrman articulates this view quite well when he says:

The resurrection claims...not only that Jesus' body came back alive; it came back alive never to die again. That's a violation of what naturally happens, every day, time after time, millions of times a year. What are the chances of that happening? Well, it'd be a miracle... and by definition, a miracle is the least probable occurrence.⁵⁵

While Ehrman is right to point out that by definition a miracle is something that is rare, that doesn't mean that it's not a plausible explanation. Just because something is rare doesn't mean it didn't happen. On this logic, we'd have to rule out a number of events from happening—the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, the creation of Avengers: Infinity War, and even the individual birth of a person!

You cannot rule out an explanation simply because it's rare. Moreover, when you have a strong body of evidence that testifies to a miraculous event, the most responsible thing you can do is examine the evidence. Doug Groothuis observes:

The likelihood of... a miracle occurring is generally quite low. Yet, if we (1) have good evidence for the existence of a supernatural God who could work a miracle and (2) have a constellation of evidence supporting a miracle claim (as we do with Jesus' resurrection), the likelihood increases considerably.⁵⁶

While it is true that many reject the evidence for the Jesus' resurrection, they often do so because of an anti-supernatural bias that leads them to rule out the possibility of miracles from the beginning. It should come as no surprise then that many New Testament scholars rule out the resurrection when they employ this method of research. Their anti-supernatural framework will simply not allow for a miracle.

Yet, the problem remains for them to devise a plausible explanation for the events that occurred after Jesus' crucifixion. Why did the disciples die for their faith? Why were thousands of people converted to belief in a resurrected Christ in the very city he was crucified in? Why did so many people have experiences of the risen Jesus when such experiences defy the boundaries of a hallucination?

A very good explanation of all the evidence is that God raised Jesus from the dead. No other theory accurately explains either the scope or the depth of the facts as the miracle of the resurrection does. Anyone is welcome to reject this conclusion and hold out for the possibility of natural explanation one day, but this would have to be done *in spite* of the evidence we have, not *because of* it.

⁵⁵Quoting from Barth Ehrman's debate with William Lane Craig, "Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus?" College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts, United States – March 2006, accessed online on October 17, 2016 <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/is-there-historical-evidence-for-the-resurrection-of-jesus-the-craig-ehrman>

⁵⁶Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2011), 535.