WP-04 HISTORY

The Resurrection and the Minimal Facts

STATEMENT

A small set of historical facts about Jesus is accepted by most scholars who study the period, including skeptics. The resurrection is the explanation that accounts for all of them.

Read time **3 min** Sources & resources **4** Series **History**

01 ABSTRACT

The “minimal facts” method, developed by Dr. Gary Habermas from a survey of thousands of scholarly works, uses only facts that are well-evidenced and accepted by a large majority of critical scholars, regardless of religious belief. It sets aside questions such as whether the Bible is inspired and asks a narrower question: what best explains the data a historian would accept?

02 THE CORE FACTS

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.
2. His disciples sincerely believed they saw Him risen, individually and in groups.
3. The disciples were transformed, willing to suffer and die for that claim.
4. Paul, a persecutor of the church, became a follower after what he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.
5. James, Jesus’ skeptical brother, became a church leader for the same reason.
6. The tomb was found empty (accepted by a strong majority of scholars, though fewer than the facts above).

Supporting observations: the resurrection was proclaimed first in Jerusalem, where it could most easily have been refuted; the church grew out of that message; and Jewish believers moved their main day of worship to Sunday.

03 EVIDENCE

OBSERVATION	DATA & SOURCE	CONFIDENCE
Non-Christian sources	Tacitus (Annals 15.44) records Jesus’ execution under Pilate. Josephus refers to Jesus and to “James, the brother of Jesus.” Habermas counts roughly as many non-Christian sources for Jesus within 150 years as for the emperor Tiberius.	HIGH
Very early creed	1 Corinthians 15:3–8 preserves a creed listing appearances to Peter, the Twelve, 500 people, James and Paul. Most scholars, including skeptics, date it within a few years of the crucifixion: too early for legend.	HIGH
Willingness to die	Many people die for what they believe is true. The disciples were in a position to know whether their claim was true. People do not willingly suffer and die for what they know is a lie.	HIGH

OBSERVATION	DATA & SOURCE	CONFIDENCE
Skeptics converted	James and Paul were not followers before the appearances. Their conversions require an explanation.	HIGH
Jerusalem origin	The message began in the city where the tomb was. Producing the body would have ended the movement immediately.	MODERATE

High = directly measured or widely accepted across worldviews. **Moderate** = well-supported, with recognized scholarly debate. **Interpretive** = consistent with the text, but depends on how the passage is read.

04 OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

OBJECTION

The disciples hallucinated.

RESPONSE

Hallucinations are individual experiences, not shared by groups. The creed lists group appearances, including to 500 people. Hallucinations also don't empty a tomb or convert a hostile skeptic like Paul.

OBJECTION

The story grew into legend over time.

RESPONSE

The creed in 1 Corinthians 15 dates to within a few years of the events, while eyewitnesses were alive and could contradict it. Legends take generations to develop.

OBJECTION

The body was stolen or the women went to the wrong tomb.

RESPONSE

Neither explains the appearances, the transformation of the disciples, or the conversions of James and Paul. Authorities could also have corrected a wrong-tomb mistake by pointing to the right one.

05 CONCLUSION

Each naturalistic theory explains one or two facts and fails on the rest. The resurrection explains all of them. If it happened, it validates Jesus' claims about Himself.

> *"He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said." 1 Corinthians 15:4*

06 FURTHER RESOURCES

VIDEO **Summary of the Minimal Facts** Dr. Gary Habermas
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XO-hq4r_jR0

VIDEO **Evidence for the Minimal Facts** Dr. Gary Habermas
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aiPCeDku_k

VIDEO **Minimal Facts Resurrection Timeline** Dr. Gary Habermas
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4rZMEzj9qQ

VIDEO **The BEST FACTS: Truth About Jesus** GCA
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Na1M0RRdqHc&list=PL59Qh4Scw7PebBz1Q-ixu5G7RPxCLWMt1&index=6

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