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Can Historians Prove the Resurrection of Jesus?

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Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

Where do miracles fit into historians' examinations of the past? How do we define miracles? Is a miracle an event for which natural explanations are inadequate, or is it the least probable explanation of an occurrence? Most historians accept that Jesus was put to death by crucifixion. Does this support the claim that Jesus rose from the dead? Are Paul and the disciples' reports that the risen Jesus appeared to them unique, or have others described similar experiences? Dr. Mike Licona and Dr. Bart Ehrman square off on these issues in their first-ever debate, held in 2008 at Midwestern Theological Seminary, where they argue whether the resurrection of Jesus can be proven as a historical fact or can only be taken as a theological conclusion.

Transcript

Welcome to the Risen Jesus Podcast with Dr. Mike Licona. I'm your host, Dr. Kurt Jairus. Join me today as we walk down memory lane to Dr. Licona's first debate with the well-known skeptic, Dr. Bart Ehrman.

Listen as the two scholars discuss the definition of a miracle, the role of miracle accounts in historical investigations, the history of crucifixion as a method of execution, persecution, post-death appearances, and more. Good evening. Good evening.

Good evening. It's good to see you here tonight. My name is Anthony Allen.

I'm Senior Vice President for Administration here at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Midwestern Baptist College. I want to welcome you tonight to our debate. Is the resurrection of Jesus provable? If you're here for another reason, you're in the wrong place.

But we are delighted to see you here tonight. Thank you so much for coming. Let me tell you a little bit about Midwestern.

We're an entity, an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. This year we celebrate our 50th anniversary. And we have the assignment by our convention to help train and equip men and women for Christian ministry all around the world.

And we're so very delighted to have you here tonight. And we're looking forward to a wonderful evening, wonderful lively discussion. And we hope you'll enjoy that very, very much.

I want to ask our academic dean, Dr. Forematson, to come at this time to say a prayer for our time together tonight. And again, it's a wonderful delight to have you here. God bless you.

Okay. Would you pray with me, please? Heavenly Father, as we gather tonight, we are mindful of our duty always to do what pleases you. And Father, we ask your blessing upon our speakers tonight is your instruments that as a result of what they say and what they do tonight.

That your name would be magnified, that the name of Jesus would be lifted up. Father, that our confidence in your word would increase, that the gospel would be proclaimed. Father, at all times, that you would receive glory in all that we do.

And in all that we say, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

Thank you, Dr. Matson. I'd like to introduce you tonight to our president, Dr. R. Philip Roberts. He's going to moderate our event tonight and introduce our speakers and tell us about what we're going to do tonight.

Thank you. And welcome to chapel and to the special event. It wasn't that the election seminary seems like an appropriate time right now to invite all of you to chapel this Tuesday morning at 10 o'clock.

And maybe it's a good occasion, too, to take an offering for our new chapel, which we hope will be quite expanded. We apologize to many of you who are having to watch over closed-circuit to link up with the chapel this evening. We've done our best to cram a number of people in here, like Sardines, as the old proverb says.

We implore your patience if you're in the library or in the student center, but we think you'll have the quality experience as well that will benefit your understanding and your appreciation for the topic of the evening. And our topic this evening, the formal expression of it is, can historians prove the resurrection of Jesus? And we're especially honored to have two distinguished guests to participate. First of all, I introduce to my right, Mr. Mike Lycona.

Mike serves as director of apologetics and interfaith evangelism at the North American Mission Board of the Southwest Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. He received his master of arts degree in religious studies from Liberty University and is a PhD candidate in New Testament at the University of Pretoria, where his topic of research is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He co-authored the 2005 award-winning book, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*.

His latest book, *Paul meets Mohammed*, is a fictional debate between the apostle Paul and the prophet Mohammed on the topic of the resurrection of Jesus. To my left, taking the composition and the debate and the discussion this evening is Dr. Bert Airmen. Dr. Airmen is the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North

Carolina.

He holds the BA degree from Wheaton College, the Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary and the PhD degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. He also is the author of numerous articles and books, to the most notable, would be perhaps for you misquoting Jesus as well as his most recent release, God's Problem, that has just been released to the public. We look forward to a profitable time together.

Let me tell you a little bit about the structure of the debate, and then we'll begin with its commencement. First of all, we'll have opening statements from each of the debaters. Coming first will be Mike Lacona.

We'll have a 20-minute statement, as will be followed by Dr. Airmen for 20 minutes as well. Following those two opening presentations, there'll be a first rebuttal on the half of each participant. After the first rebuttal, you have on your chair, a three-by-five card.

If you would like to ask a question, we would like for you to think about that, and at the end of that first set of rebuttals, write that question out, and I assume, Anthony, someone will pick them up from the center aisle. And then we will select from them. Obviously, we only have a few that we can select.

We will select from them a few to be placed to the presenters tonight at the end of our experience. Following the second rebuttal, there'll be closing statements by each gentleman, and then a question and answer time of about 30 minutes. Both of them have advised me, give us the type of questions, so we'll do our best to accommodate them.

Let me encourage you, if you have a cell phone, this would be, as it will be, for me, the appropriate time to turn it off. So if you don't mind doing that in courtesy to all of our listeners here tonight, as well as everyone who will be watching, eventually and subsequently by video. We welcome you.

We hope it will be a profitable time for everyone. As well, especially if you are having to view the debate from a remote site, on the reverse side of our three by five card, if you would like to have a DVD copy of this debate, please give us your name and address contact for you. Simply put remote on that, and we will ensure that you get a free copy of the DVD.

Not true for all of you here in this room this evening. But if you'd like to have a copy, put your name and address and express that desire. We'll see that communication happens so that you can acquire one, and I'm told it'll take us about a week to get all the copies we need.

If for some reason you're left out of the loop, or you don't have to hear anything, you're free to contact our offices within about a week to ten days, and we'll make sure that that happens for you. All right, gentlemen, thank you for being with us this evening, and we trust and pray all the best for you in our time together. And I introduce to you Mike Lightkana.

Thank you. Thank you. It's great to be with you this evening.

Obviously, I have a handicap to get started off, and I don't mean my voice. I'm going against Bart Erman here. But I also have a handicap with my voice, so please forgive me for that bear with me as we go through, and hopefully I'll make it through this evening.

I would like to thank Phil Roberts, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Missouri Baptist Convention for sponsoring this evening's debate. And I would also like to thank Professor Erman for our collegial email correspondences to this evening's event. Well, a number of years ago, my wife, Debbie, was involved in a car accident and sustained serious injury to her back.

The other driver's insurance company was stubborn and didn't want to pay the medical expenses, so it went to trial. Why was one of the first witnesses called? And at one point, I stated that the insurance company didn't even want to provide, didn't even want to pay for a ransom car while ours was being repaired. Well, the moment I said that, the defensive attorney jumped to his feet and yelled, Now, objection, and just a few moments later, the judge dismissed me, then he dismissed the jury, and then a few moments later I discovered that the judge had declared a mistrial.

You see, I wasn't aware that the term insurance company was forbidden during a trial. Well, something similar often happens in the field of historical Jesus research. There's a lot of discussion today over what the real Jesus actually said and did.

But when the terms miracle or resurrection come up, it's not uncommon for scholars to jump to their feet and shout, Objection, you can't go there as a historian. Well, I'm not an attorney, but I would bet that there are some of the reasons for why witnesses are forbidden from using certain terms. But I am a student of history, and I'm convinced that the reasons typically provided for why historians are barred from investigating miracle claims are quite poor.

Well, now you may be wondering why this is important. You see, if historians are barred from investigating miracle claims, then those like myself were interested in investigating the truth claims of particular religions such as Judaism or Christianity are barred from doing so. Well, we could investigate, say, the death of Jesus by crucifixion, or that a number of people afterward believe that he had risen and had appeared personally before them.

But as historians, we would be barred from answering the real question of whether Jesus actually rose from the dead. Now, I suspect this will be the main course Professor Erman takes this evening, and I look forward to addressing his objections in my rebuttals. But for now, let me contend that historians can investigate miracle claims.

For the past several years, I have voted myself to the investigation of matters in the philosophy of history and historiography, and I'm convinced that if an event occurred and left traces of its occurrence, that it's possible for historians to investigate it, even if that was a miracle. So I'd like

to take a journey with you down History Highway and show you how this is done. We're going to visit four crucial checkpoints along the way in order to complete our journey successfully.

And we must be careful not to go off course into a different road that may be interesting to go on, but if it doesn't relate directly to what we're discussing this evening. At our first checkpoint, we're going to discuss some terminology. For example, the term history.

Now, you may be surprised to learn that historians can't even agree among themselves in the meaning of this term. I found 13 definitions of history in the literature, but for this evening's debate by history, I mean the study of the past. Miracle.

I felt 23 definitions of this term for tonight's debate by miracle. I mean an event in history for which natural explanations are inadequate. Now, that's not to say that there could be a natural explanation coming up in the future that may work.

What it is to say is that the nature of the event itself is such that a miracle or I'm sorry that a natural explanation simply won't suffice. So here I'm only defining a miracle establishing criteria for identifying one as a separate issue. Can you all understand me? Okay.

Okay. Thank you. Resurrection.

The Greek word for resurrection is *anastasis* and simply means to stand up. It can mean to stand up from sitting or it can mean to rise from the dead for tonight's debate. When I say resurrection, I'm referring to Jesus bodily resurrection from the dead.

Prove. Historians occasionally use the term prove to mean that something has been established with reasonable or adequate certainty. As in a courtroom trial to prove someone's guilt means to establish it beyond reasonable doubt, not beyond all doubt.

So when carefully nuancing their statements, historians talk in terms of probability. And although they may conclude that a particular hypothesis is an accurate description of the past, they regard their conclusions as subject to future revision. We often simply don't add qualifiers for purposes of economy.

Otherwise, historians might sound like a disclaimer at the end of a radio commercial saying, giving the available day-to-best explanation in case we're warned and having a reasonable degree of certainty that this occurred, that appears more certain at the moment it could be impossible. However, our conclusion is subject to revision or abandonment since New Day every service in the future showing things happen differently than presently proposed. You don't know how tough that goes.

The bottom line is this. When I claim that historians can prove something, I mean that it's possible to establish it with reasonable or adequate certainty and that we are warranted in holding our conclusions firmly. Now, as we approach our second checkpoint, we need to proceed cautiously when we see a sign indicating that there are hazardous road conditions

ahead.

One hazardous condition is our horizon, which is how we see things. We all have our biases, and we see things through our biases, our worldviews, our knowledge, education, experiences, and beliefs. Horizons are like sunglasses through which we look, and everything we see is covered by the lenses of our horizons.

Take baseball, for example. If there's a close play at second, it's the runner safe or out. Well, it depends if your son is the guy trying to steal second or the shortstop tagging him.

When we read books about Jesus, we find ourselves in agreement or disagreement with certain authors, and if we think about it, it's usually on the basis of whether the Jesus they reconstruct is like the one we prefer. So for better and for worse, historians are influenced by their gender, race, ethics, nationality, as well as their political, philosophical, and religious convictions. No one is exempt, and virtually every historian in the world will tell you that there is no such thing as a neutral, unbiased, or disinterested historian.

Historians outside of the community of biblical scholars contend that horizons are responsible more than anything else for conflicting conclusions, even in non-religious matters. And when a religious matters, the subject of inquiry horizons come even into more play. So many times it boils down to our worldview, and that's a matter for which there is no neutrality.

Now this doesn't mean that no one's got it right. It does mean that many times there's not going to be a consensus on the matter. So in response, we may lay down a few speed bumps to minimize the hazardous effects of our horizons, since speed bumps slow us down and cause us to proceed cautiously.

Our first speed bump was Method. And hearing two specific methodological procedures keeps a check on less disciplined and poorly supported historical reconstructions. The second speed bump involves submitting one's ideas to hostile or unsympathetic experts.

You see, I'm inclined to catch weaknesses in opposing views, but I'm not as inclined to catch them in my own. What critics are. And so peer reviewed articles, book reviews, papers read at conferences, participation in panel discussions, and debates such as this evening event exposes one's methods and conclusions to public scrutiny.

The third speed bump involves, it requires the historian to account for the relevant historical bedrock. Some facts are so strongly evidence that they are virtually indisputable. This is referred to as our historical bedrock, since any legitimate hypothesis must be built upon it.

If a hypothesis fails to account for all the historical bedrock, then that hypothesis needs to be dragged back to the drawing board or relegated to the trash bin. The fourth speed bump requires deliberate and sustained effort of detaching oneself from personal bias. Historians must primarily be concerned with finding out things really happened and not whether their conclusions confirm their own beliefs, whatever they may be.

Temporarily adopting views in conflict with our own and empathizing with those holding them can go a long way in accomplishing this. Now these four speed bumps assist us in our journey and justice driving too quickly over actual speed bumps in a real highway can damage your car. Proceeding too quickly without deliberative sustained effort to minimize our horizons and the influence of them can rent a good historical investigation.

We'll now stop at our third checkpoint and gather some tools needed for conducting a proper historical investigation. When historians employ method, they typically use arguments to the best explanation. This is where specific criteria are employed in order to compare hypotheses and hypotheses that best meets that criteria wins.

We'll give you three of the most important criteria for weighing hypotheses. Explanatory Scope. According to this criterion, the best explanation includes all of the relevant data.

So imagine trying to complete a jigsaw puzzle like winning the poo here, and that each puzzle piece represents a historic effect. The best solution includes the most pieces. Explanatory Power.

According to this criterion, the best explanation accounts for all the known facts without having to force any of them to fit and without leaving much ambiguity. Hypothesis that does as best as to be preferred. And you can see in this case, we do have some pieces that do fit, but you can tell they've been forced.

That's what we're trying to avoid. Less ad hoc. Sometimes it appears as though historians are attempting to salvage their failing hypothesis by appealing to an explanation for which there is no independent evidence.

And when this occurs, that hypothesis may be said to be ad hoc. So in this solution to the puzzle, not only are some pieces stranded while there's a force, but you can see that there's an outside solution here that makes the whole thing quite convoluted in tortures. And that's what we're trying to avoid.

Now, these three criteria are very important. And while most fail-safe, they serve as guides for historians. The more criteria that are solidly met by hypothesis, the greater the probability it has of being accurate.

So when may I hypothesis be said to be proved? Well, we may think of a staircase, and the higher we go, the more certainty we can have. Historians may firmly hope their hypothesis is correct. When it is the best explanation and is far superior to its competitors.

Now, I place a hypothesis meeting these conditions somewhere between quite probable and very probable. And in the literature I've read, I find that most historians will place it somewhere around this category, although they may give different terms here, and some even place it lower on the steps. Now, let's put our method together, our method to practice and see how it works.

This will be our fourth and final checkpoint. There are three facts pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus that are virtually undisputed and are granted by virtually all scholars who study the subject, including skeptical ones. Fact number one is Jesus' death by crucifixion.

Fact number two, Jesus' original disciples believed they had rose from the death and had appeared to them. In short, we'll call this the appearances to the disciples. Fact number three, Paul, the persecutor of the Christian Church, converted to Christianity when he too had an experience that he believed was the risen Jesus appearing to him.

In short, we'll call this the appearance of Paul. Now, let's apply our method and see how it works. Given time constraints, I can't possibly deal with all of the natural explanations proposed during the past 2000 years, but I can deal with one another.

And that Professor Erman has defended. We'll call it the wishful-baking hypothesis. It states that after Jesus' death, his disciples turned to their scriptures in order to make sense of what had happened.

They read passages like Psalm 16, 22, 69, Isaiah 52, and 53, and concluded that Jesus had been resurrected. With this knowledge, some of Jesus' disciples had visions of him. Now, let's see how it holds up.

This hypothesis accounts for Jesus' death by crucifixion nicely since Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 described situations remarkably similar to a crucifixion. So, we'll give it a green light. However, it doesn't do so well in the second fact.

Josephus, in the first century, reports that there were a number of proclaimed messiahs around the time of Jesus within a couple of centuries. And that in every instance, the movement fell apart after the Romans executed the Messiah figure. Well, this shows that the same would have probably occurred which Jesus' followers had to remain dead.

And even more importantly, at least biblical passages, only one may be interpreted to suggest bodily resurrection. That's Psalm 16, 10, which in Greek says, you will not allow your holy one to undergo decay or in Hebrew to see the grave. Psalmist is not referring to post-mortem existence, but has stated his belief that everyone or that God will rescue him in his immediate situation from being killed and buried.

Now, since everyone would have known that God had not rescued Jesus from being killed and buried, it's a stretch to claim that the early Christians would have used this text. That is, unless their experiences had convinced them that the bodily resurrection had appeared before them. In other words, given Jesus' bodily resurrection, we can understand why the early Christians interpreted Psalm 16, 10 as they did.

However, it's doubtful that they would have come to this interpretation given a happy hunch or nice feeling that Jesus was alive and still among them. So the second fact gets a red light since it possesses a bit of exegetical strain to the biblical texts and a bit of ambiguity in relation to the

experiences of the disciples in Paul. So the wishful thinking hypothesis does it do well either with the third fact since Paul is not a Christian at the time and would not have been trying to make sense of Jesus' death and the experiences of the disciples.

For pre-Christian Paul, Jesus died the rightful death of a false prophet and the disciples were either liars or psychotics, so it too gets a red light. So what are the three facts? The wishful thinking hypothesis can only comfortably account for the first, so I would encourage those who think they see the light on this explanation to be careful. That light ahead isn't what you think.

Now let's look at the resurrection hypothesis in comparison. It accounts for Jesus' death by crucifixion, the appearances to the disciples, and the appearance to Paul. So in other words, it explains all three facts without a bit of strain, and so it easily beats wishful thinking hypothesis in explanatory scope and power.

Ad hoc criterion, wishful thinking hypothesis, left having to postulate the sort of experience that convinced Jesus' disciples in Paul that he had been raised bodily and appeared to them. I'm not going to try to do this for Professor Erman, but I will say this, unless he can present a scenario that comfortably accounts for these, and for which there is independent evidence and support, his hypothesis will lack even greater explanatory power or possess an ad hoc component. Resurrection hypothesis doesn't have to do this, and so it easily passes the less ad hoc criterion.

Therefore, when we wait both hypotheses, the wishful thinking hypothesis is very light and loses to the resurrection hypothesis on every criterion. Historically speaking, the resurrection hypothesis is far superior, and I discovered that when we perform this exercise against other hypotheses, resurrection comes out on top every time. It's the best explanation of the historical facts and out distances, competitors by a significant margin.

So we've arrived at our destination, so let's be brief on our journey. We have taken a journey down history highway, and we visited four crucial checkpoints along the way in order to complete our journey successfully. We clarified some terminology at the first.

At the second, we discovered that Horizons posed a serious challenge that compromised their work of historians, and that no historian is exempt from this challenge. We laid down several speed bumps in order to slow us to a cautious pace in order that we may achieve some degree of objectivity. At the third checkpoint, we discussed method and identified three tools or criteria for weighing hypotheses.

When an hypothesis fulfills three criteria and beats competing hypotheses hands down, the historian is warranted in holding firmly to that hypothesis as representing what actually occurred. At the fourth checkpoint, we applied method. We discussed three relevant facts that make it the historical bedrock pertaining to the fate of Jesus.

We then weighed the wishful thinking hypothesis against the resurrection hypothesis and found that the resurrection hypothesis wins by a significant margin. So can historians prove

that Jesus rose from the dead? Since it's the best explanation of the known facts and beats others by a significant margin as historians, we may say that it's quite probable to very probable that Jesus rose from the dead. Enough confidence to hold her conclusion firmly.

Stated in more popular terms, yes, historians can prove that Jesus rose from the dead. Thank you. I understand there's a little problem of hearing in the clock.

I don't know if we can play with the sound at all to help them or not. I don't know. I just refer these gentlemen back here.

If you can actually help them, please. I rigged it. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. O'Connor. Now we'll hear from Dr. Erma. Well, thank you very much for having me and thank you all for coming.

How many of you believe that Jesus was physically raised from the dead? Yes, right. So although I've had these visions of Daniel in the lion's den, I don't know why. But thank you for coming anyway.

Well, I'd like to thank Mike for that learned and clear opening statement. I had heard that Mike was a skilled and thoughtful speaker, and now I can see why he has that reputation. In this first speech of mine, I'm not going to be dealing directly with what he just said because I have prepared speech.

And I will try and answer his point in my first reputation. So I won't be dealing directly with what he'd say. I would like to say that I used to believe absolutely everything that Mike has just presented about the resurrection of Jesus.

I have my undergraduate degree from Wheaton College in Evangelical School where these things are taught. Even before that, I went to a yet more conservative school, the Moody Bible Institute, where Bible is our middle name. And these things are taught quite avidly there.

I took several courses on apologetics, the subject in which Mike is an expert. I used to believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus with my entire heart and soul. I used to preach the resurrection of Jesus, and I used to try and convince other people that Jesus in fact was physically raised from the dead.

But then I started studying these matters, not simply accepting what my teachers had said, but looking into them deeply myself. I learned Greek and started studying the New Testament in the original Greek language. I learned Hebrew and studied the Old Testament.

I learned Latin, Syriac, and Coptic to be able to study New Testament manuscripts and the non-canonical traditions of Jesus in their original languages. I immersed myself in the world of the first century, reading non-American Jewish and pagan texts from the Roman Empire and before. And I tried to the best of my ability to master everything written by a Christian from the

first 300 years of Christianity.

I became a historian of Christian antiquity. And for 25 years now, I've done my research in this area night and day. I'm not a philosopher.

I am a historian, and I'm dedicated to finding out the historical truth. In all of my study, I've had one objective, to learn the truth and to dedicate my life to it. After my years of study, I finally came to the conclusion that everything I had previously thought about the historical evidence for the resurrection, was absolutely wrong.

Let me begin by explaining in simple terms. This will be covering similar grounds to what Mike has just covered, but in a very different way. What is it that historians do? Historians try to establish what probably happened in the past.

They try to establish what probably happened in the past. We can't know what happened in the past. We can have levels of probability of what happened in the past.

What was Bill Clinton doing in the year 1992? We're actually pretty well informed about that, what Bill Clinton was doing. And we have relatively high levels of certainty of what he was doing in 1992. Those of us who were awake and alive at the time.

What about 1972? Well, that's a little bit more difficult, because we don't have as good of documentation. What if we go back several hundred years? What about Shakespeare? Do we really know Shakespeare wrote all of his plays? Well, there are debates about it. Why are there debates about it? Because it's a long time ago and there isn't very good evidence, one way or the other.

Did Caesar cross the Rubicon? Well, we have some evidence for it. In fact, something from Caesar's own hand, but it was 2,100 years ago. And it's a little bit harder to establish what Caesar was doing 2,100 years ago than what Bill Clinton was doing 15 years ago.

How about Simon Peter, the apostle of Jesus? What do we know about his death? In fact, what we know are legends that were written hundreds of years later. What do we actually know about his death? As a historian, I would say we know very little about his death. There are different levels of probability for different things that happen in history and what historians do is they try to establish what those levels of probability are for certain things having happened.

What kind of evidence do historians hope for when they're trying to establish what probably happened in the past? Historians want to have contemporary accounts of the events that they narrate. They want these accounts to be close to the time of the events themselves. They want to have lots of these accounts, multiple sources, if possible.

They want these sources to be independent of one another. You don't want sources that had collaborated with one another. You want independent multiple sources for different accounts.

You want these independent multiple sources to be consistent with one another. If they contradict one another, then you've got a problem because you don't know which source them to rely upon. Moreover, you want sources that are not biased toward their subject.

You want sources that in fact are not simply promoting their own beliefs. You want independent sources that are not biased toward their subject if possible. This is what you want.

This is what historians hope for. What do historians have when it comes to the gospels of the New Testament? Our sources for knowing about the life of Jesus and if it happened, his resurrection. Do the sources that we have coincide with what we hope for? First thing to point out is the dates of these sources.

The gospels of the New Testament are much later than the accounts that they narrate. Most historians date the first gospel as the gospel of Mark and indicate that it was written sometime around the year 65 or 70 AD. In other words, 35 or 40 years after the death of Jesus and it is our first gospel.

Matthew and Luke were written 10 or 15 years later, maybe 80 to 85. John has written 10 or 15 years after that, maybe 90 to 95. In other words, our gospels are separated from the life of Jesus anywhere from 35 to 65 years.

That's the time gap between the death of Jesus and the first accounts of his life. 35 to 65 years, they are not contemporary accounts. These accounts are not written by eyewitnesses and they don't claim to be.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John do not claim to be written by people named Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Those are the titles in our Bibles, but those titles were added by later editors. Whoever wrote the gospel according to Matthew didn't call it the gospel according to Matthew.

Somebody else is telling you who they think wrote the gospel and those descriptions aren't found until the second century. They're not original to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These authors of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are writing later and in fact, they're not even speaking the language that Jesus spoke Aramaic, they write in Greek.

They're highly literate, Greek speaking Christians living decades later. Jesus own disciples, by the way, were Aramaic speakers who were peasants of the lower class and were illiterate. They did not write the gospels.

Where did the gospel writers get their stories from if they're writing decades after the fact? They got their stories from oral traditions that were in circulation year after year after the death of Jesus. Jesus died and people started telling stories about him in order to convert people to the faith. When somebody converted, they told the story to somebody else.

That person told the stories to somebody else. That person told the stories to somebody else and that person told the stories to somebody else. This went on for year after year after year,

decade after decade before the gospel writers were themselves writing.

What happens when stories are put in circulation orally? Stories get changed. If you ever had your children play the game, telephone in a birthday party where one kid tells a story to the next kid, sitting at the birthday party, then the story goes to the next kid. The next kid goes around the circle until it comes back to the first kid.

It's a different story. If it were a different story, it would be a pretty dumb birthday party game to play. Did stories change? What happens if you play this game, not in one living room with a bunch of kids from the same socioeconomic class or speak the same language? Why do you play the game for 35, 45, 55 years? In different languages, in different countries, telling stories that the people who are telling stories are not there to witness.

What happens to the stories? The stories get changed. Do I have evidence that the stories get changed? Yes, indeed. There's very solid evidence, namely that you have different sources telling the same stories and in almost every instance when different sources tell the same stories.

In the New Testament, the stories are different. Sometimes in little ways, sometimes in big ways, somebody was changing the stories. You can see this for yourself.

The reason people don't see this normally is because the way people normally read the Bible, the way you normally read the Bible is you're going to read the Gospels and so you start reading the Gospel of Matthew. When you start Matthew 1 verse 1, the first 16 verses are genealogies, not very interesting. You read them anyway because it's the Bible and there you go on through.

You get down then to chapter 17 and the action starts picking up and you read Matthew, you go through chapter 1, then chapter 2. Chapter 3, you go all the way through chapter 28, you've read Matthew. Then you start reading Mark. You start at the beginning of Mark, you go to the bottom, chapters 1 through 16.

Then you read Luke. Mark, by the way, sounds a lot like Matthew. Then you read Luke and it sounds a lot like Mark.

You read John, it's kind of different, but it sounds pretty much like the others. They're all basically saying the same story. The reason it sounds that way is because you're reading them vertically.

The way to notice differences in the Gospels is to read them not vertically, but to read them horizontally. Read a story in Matthew, then read the same story in Mark, then read the same story in Luke and compare them in detail. In almost every instance you will find differences.

Let me just give you some examples from the death accounts and resurrection accounts of Jesus. The accounts of Jesus' death. What day did Jesus die on and what time of day? Did Jesus

die on the day before the Passover meal was eaten, as John explicitly says, John 19 verse 14, or was he executed on the day after the Passover meal was eaten, as Mark explicitly says, which was it, before or after the meal.

Did he die sometime after noon, as John explicitly says, or did he die at 9 o'clock in the morning? As Mark explicitly says, it depends which account you read. Did Jesus carry his cross the entire way himself, or did Simon of Sireini carry his cross? It depends which Gospel you read. Did both of the robbers crucified with Jesus mock him, or did only one of them mock him, and the other come to his defense? It depends which Gospel you read.

Did the curtain in the temple rip in half before Jesus died, or did it rip in half after he died? It depends which Gospel you read. Those are simply examples from Jesus' death. You can do this with any story found commonly throughout the gospels, and more than one gospel you will find that in fact you have different stories.

Now look at the resurrection. Can we trust these sources to give us a reliable account of what happened at the resurrection? Well, look at the stories themselves in the Gospels and ask yourself, are they telling the same story or not? Who went to the tomb on the third day? Was it Mary Magdalene alone, or Mary with other women? If it was with other women, how many other women were there? Which ones were they, and what were their names? It depends which Gospel you read. Was the stone rolled away before they got there, or not? It depends which Gospel you read.

What do they see when they got to the tomb? Did they see one man? Did they see two men, or did they see one angel? It depends which Gospel you read. By the way, people try and reconcile all these differences. I mean, for example, with this one here, what people will say is, well, what they actually saw were two angels.

So that one gospel says there was two men because they must stick the angels for men. Another says there was one angel because there was one angel, but there was also another one. And there was also one man because there was an angel with a mistake for a man, but there was also another one.

So the way you solve the problem is you say there were two angels. In other words, you solve the problem by saying something that none of the Gospels say. That's how you reconcile it, by creating your own Gospel.

What were the women at the tomb told to tell the disciples? Were the disciples supposed to stay in Jerusalem, or were they supposed to go to Galilee to see Jesus? It depends which Gospel author you read. Did the women tell anyone what they saw or not? It depends which Gospel you read. All of these differ depending on which Gospel you read.

Did the disciples leave Jerusalem to go to Galilee, or did they stay in Jerusalem? Did they never leave, or did they leave right away? It depends which Gospel you read. These Gospels are all

different from one another in their details. Are they the kind of sources that historians would rely upon for historical information? I would argue that in fact these are not the kinds of sources that can be relied upon by historians.

Now, let me emphasize something, because I do want to get out of here alive. I am not, this might sound weird to you, I actually am not disputing the theological value of the Gospels. I'm asking about their historical merit.

There is a difference between having a book that is theologically useful and a book that is historically accurate. Theology and history are not the same thing, and what I'm going to be maintaining in this debate is that claims about Jesus' resurrection are theological claims, they are not historical claims. And the Gospels are theological documents, they're not historically accurate documents.

By conclusions about the Gospel narratives, these are not reliable historical accounts. The accounts that we have are based on oral traditions that have been in circulation for decades. Year after year Christians tried to convert other people, they had an intention when they told these stories, they told these stories in order to convince other people that Jesus was raised from the dead.

The authors who wrote down these stories decades later were not eyewitnesses, they were great-speaking Christians, living 35 to 65 years after the events that they narrate. These authors are telling stories that Christians had been telling during those years. There was no one there at the time of Jesus' death taking notes.

The stories, many of them were actually invented, most of the stories were in fact changed. For these reasons, the Gospel accounts are not as useful as we would like them to be for historical sources, they're not contemporary, they're not this interested, they're not consistent with one another. Now, as emphatic as I've tried to be about that, the reality is what I've just told you the last 15 minutes is not the big problem.

The big problem with arguing that the resurrection can be proved by historians is something else. It's a major obstacle that no historian can overcome no matter what. This is the obstacle.

Historians, by their very nature, try to establish what probably happened in the past. You can't repeat the experiment of the past. That's why you have people who can deny that certain things that almost certainly happen happen.

University of Tennessee ranked number one in college basketball, lost the game three nights ago. We in Chapel Hill are glad to know. It's almost certain, but you can't repeat it.

How do you know? Well, you have newspaper accounts, but you can't repeat the experiment. Did the Holocaust happen? Yes. But people deny it.

Why? Because you can't repeat the experiment. Historians can only establish what probably

happened in the past. And what are miracles, exactly? Well, Mike has already told us what miracles are.

Miracles, in any given instance, are the least probable occurrence. They violate what we think of as the natural working of the natural order. If they weren't spectacularly unusual, they wouldn't be miracles.

By definition, miracles are the least probable occurrence. No human being in this room can walk on water. What are the chances that anyone can walk on water? Well, the chances are less than one in five billion because there's nobody on the planet who can walk on water unless the water happens to be frozen.

Can you demonstrate that somebody ever probably walked on water? Not if it's the least probable occurrence for something having happened. The probabilities are infinitesimally remote. So too, with the resurrection of Jesus.

I am not saying, and I want to be emphatic about this point, I am not saying that Jesus was not raised from the dead. That's not my argument. My argument is that if Jesus was raised from the dead, historians cannot prove it because of the nature of historical evidence.

A theologian may say that it's true, and then you'd have to argue about it on theological grounds, but the historians cannot show it. The historians dilemma is this. How can the least probable occurrence, a miracle, ever be the most probable? By definition, it's the least probable occurrence.

Historians can never establish the least probable occurrence as being the most probable, which means historians can never establish that the resurrection ever happened. It cannot be proved by historians. Maybe it happened, maybe it didn't happen, but you can't use historical evidence to prove it.

Now, Mike's going to say, well, that means that you can't test the truth claims of Christianity using history. And that's absolutely right. You cannot.

Just as you cannot use mathematics to prove the truth claims of Christianity. Or chemistry to prove the truth claims of Christianity. The reality is historians cannot prove what is the least probable occurrence as having happened in the past.

Our sources are contradictory and late and not by eyewitnesses, and historians simply cannot prove miracles because of the nature of the case. Thank you. Thank you, Bart.

I appreciate that. In my own statement, I said that I would be sound a lot worse than Bart does this evening. My open statement, I said that we take a journey down the history highway, and that we would visit four crucial checkpoints along the way.

So what I would like to do is to revisit each of those checkpoints in light of what Professor

Ermentus said. At our first checkpoint, we looked at definitions. And here, Bart defines miracles the least probable explanation.

I'm able to deal with that, but I'd like to reserve that until we get to the third checkpoint. At our second checkpoint, we discussed horizons and how that these can severely handicap a historian's investigation. Bart didn't comment on this in his opening statement.

And I would expect him to. We agreed that he would give his negative case. And so, and we both probably agree on this equally anyway.

On our third checkpoint, we discussed method. And I argue that historians use arguments to the best explanation. And they do this by applying specific criteria such as explanatory scope, explanatory power, less ad hoc.

Here's where I think Bart's definition of miracle comes into play. He defines miracles the least probable explanation. And I think this is very problematic.

Let me explain why. If we're going to say that a miracle, if we know ahead of time that God does not exist, then certainly it's the least probable explanation. And if we knew ahead of time that God exists and wanted to act in a specific period of history, such as the resurrection of Jesus, then we would say that that particular miracle is the most probable explanation.

The problem is that historians don't have this knowledge. And so, they can't say that something is probable or improbable in these cases. What historians need to do is to look at the evidence without prejudice in either direction and form hypotheses based on that evidence and weigh those hypotheses using specific criteria such as explanatory scope, power, et cetera.

This is how probability should be determined and not according to the theological speculations that Bart imports into his historical investigation prior to an examination of the evidence. At our fourth checkpoint, we talked about applying method, and here we talked about historical bedrock as well as weighing hypotheses. For the historical bedrock, I mentioned that there are three facts for which virtually a consensus of historians, including skeptical ones, agree Jesus' death by crucifixion, the appearance of the disciples, and the appearance of Paul.

Now, Professor Ermine came back and said, well, wait a minute, the gospels aren't as reliable as we'd like. They were written somewhere between 35 to 65 years after the events they purport to describe. They were anonymously written by Greek speaking Christians.

It's kind of like a telephone thing to one to another to another. And so, you have all these differences, these discrepancies within them. And so, he says, these are not sources historians can rely on.

They're not contemporary, not consistent, and not disinterested. But this objection, I believe, is irrelevant, and let me explain why. I did not build my case for the resurrection this evening on Bill Cohenerancy.

I didn't build it on the trustworthiness of the gospels, in particular dating of them, or who wrote them. One of the things I did in my investigation to minimize my own bias was to go with the facts and only those facts that were virtually in dispute by historians. That's what I built my case on.

And Professor Ermine agrees with these facts. So, for example, fact number one, Jesus died by crucifixion. He says one of the most certain facts of history is that Jesus was crucified on orders of the Roman prefect of Judea of Pontius Pilate.

Fact number two, the appearance is to the disciples. It is a historical fact that some of Jesus' followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution. We know some of these believers by name.

He goes on and explains Paul, and he also says, these others also claim to have seen him alive afterward. Fact number three, the appearance to Paul. There was no doubt that Paul would leave that he saw Jesus real by glorified body raised from the dead.

Paul taught that resurrection meant the total transformation of his body. So we can see that Professor Ermine agrees with these three facts, and rightly so, virtually every scholar in the world who studied the subject agrees on these, including skeptical ones. So, what I'm saying is the case that I built for the resurrection, despite Bart's hesitancy about the Gospels, my case has been built upon three facts that are virtually indisputable.

And just as survivors of the Titanic contradicted one another, and whether the ship broke in two priors sinking, or whether she went down a tack, no one therefore concluded that the Titanic didn't sink. They just said that there were peripheral details that we just don't know the answer to. And I would love to discuss some of these in the Q&A period.

I just don't think that they're pertinent for tonight's debate. And so what Professor Ermine's going to have to do is attack the method that I've applied. My approach to these three facts, rather than the sources themselves, because he still thinks that they're reliable enough to get these three facts.

Now, for the second half, we discussed weighing hypotheses. The first hypothesis had to do with the wishful thinking hypothesis. And Professor Ermine didn't comment on this in his opening statement.

And again, I understand that. That's fine. Perhaps he can address this in his rebuttal.

That's forthcoming. Excuse me. Regarding the resurrection hypothesis, he said this is a theological hypothesis.

Not historical. And I disagree. I think that what he's doing is he's confusing a historical conclusion with his theological implications.

So I think he's doing history backwards. I think what he's saying is, listen, if Jesus was from the dead, we can do all kinds of logic chopping. But I think we all realize that God is the best candidate for the task.

And he's saying, well, but historians can't get the God, at least as historians. And so that eliminates and makes his whole practice of analyzing the resurrection as illegitimate. I don't think so.

I think what historians can do is analyze the data, weigh hypotheses, and come up with a historical conclusion. If the resurrection hypothesis is the one that has the greatest explanatory scope, power, and less at hug, then it should be the best explanation, the most probable explanation. And the one that we can be confident is what occurred in the past.

But that leads them to say, well, then, but if Jesus rose, that means God raised him. Well, that is a theological implication. And we can divorce the historical conclusion with the theological implication.

So we can conclude as historians that Jesus rose from the dead without going on to the second question and saying, God raised Jesus from the dead. Again, I think we could all admit that God's probably the best candidate, but we're not going to get there as a historian. We can get that Jesus rose from the dead without saying God raised it from the dead.

And historians do similar things like this, like in the case of Charlemagne in the eighth century. Charlemagne and his brother co-ruled the Roman Empire, and they hated each other. In three years into Charlemagne and his brother's reign, his brother died.

Historians can conclude that Charlemagne's brother died in 717, but they don't have to conclude because it's indeterminate whether he died of natural causes or Charlemagne had him killed. So in the same way, again, I'd say we can conclude that Jesus rose from the dead while leaving a question mark of who raised him. All right, yep, his points to that.

So let me just conclude this first rebuttal. I just say in terms of historians analyzing miracle claims, I'm not the only one who's saying that historians can do this. In the 2016 issue of history and theory, it focused on religion and history.

And numerous historians acknowledge that we are now at a turning point that the interaction between religion and history is not where most historians have thought, and that we need to reassess our attitudes toward religious phenomena and either revise or defend our methods. Many of the contributors noted a philosophical bias against miracles on the part of many historians. This recognition is also taking place amongst a number of biblical scholars as well.

For example, Sarah Coakley, a distinguished professor at Harvard, writes that New Testament scholarship of this generation is often downright repressive about supernatural events in general and bodily resurrection in particular. Ben Witherington writes, even some contemporary Bible scholars assume that miracles must be left out of account if we're going to

do scholarly work like the other critical historians. This is a carryover from the anti-supernatural bias of many Enlightenment historians, but it seems a very odd presupposition today.

Our postmodern world is experiencing a newfound openness to miracles, magic, the supernatural, the spiritual, or whatever you may want to call it. So even though there are numerous biblical scholars and historians who believe and prohibit it from investigating miracle claims, a number of professional historians and biblical scholars are calling for a new paradigm. So I think the epistemological ice age of modernity is coming to an end.

Spring is in the air, the trees are blooming, birds are singing, and the air is warming to the investigation of miracle claims. And those scholars who exercise their rights to do so will find themselves amid a growing number of colleagues. So in just summarizing, I think we've seen that the case that I presented, that historians can prove that Jesus rose from the dead.

It still stands, and that Professor Erman's arguments to the contrary fail under critical scrutiny. Thank you. Now, good for the Bible back there.

Well, so I've got a tall text. Mike wants to insist that there are three undisputed facts that prove that Jesus was raised from the dead. Historically, the facts are that Jesus died by crucifixion, number one.

Number two, that his disciples afterwards came to believe that he had been raised from the dead on the basis of what they said were appearances to them. Number two, and then number three, that the Apostle Paul converted. First, let me point out that I don't see that he actually has three rock-solid facts that point to the resurrection.

Take fact number one, that Jesus was crucified. How exactly does the crucifixion of Jesus provide evidence that he was raised from the dead? There were thousands of people who were crucified in the first century. Is this evidence that thousands of people were raised from the dead? Some people have a mistaken idea, of course, that Jesus alone was crucified.

And when you see artistic representations often, of course, you'll see Jesus nailed to the cross and the two robbers tied to the cross. Have you noticed that? Why is that? It's to show that Jesus suffered more than anyone else. In fact, lots of people suffered crucifixion in the year 70 when the Roman general Titus overthrew Jerusalem after a two and a half year siege of the city of Jerusalem.

They breached the city walls. They went in to slaughter the opposition. Titus crucified all of the opposition so much so he ran out of lumber.

Crucifixion was a common form of execution in the Roman Empire for the lowest of the low. The fact of crucifixion simply shows that Jesus was executed for some kind of crime against the state. It has no relevance to whether he was raised from the dead.

Any more than the crucifixion of anyone else is evidence that he was raised from the dead. So

we no longer have three rock-solid facts that point to resurrection. We have two.

The crucifixion is irrelevant to the question. So let's look at these two. The disciples believed in Jesus because he allegedly appeared to them and Paul was converted.

Now, by my reasoning, those two are actually one because Paul is one of the people who claimed that he saw Jesus alive afterwards and was converted on the basis of that appearance. Now, true, some of the people who converted were allegedly were probably Jesus followers and Paul was not a follower, but it's the same phenomenon we're looking at. The phenomenon is that Jesus allegedly appeared to people after his death.

So let's take on that as a piece of evidence. That is the only piece of evidence that Mike has marshaled, namely that people claim to see Jesus alive after his death. So we have one fact that I agree with.

There were people who claim they saw Jesus alive after his death. The question is, can a historian on the basis of that fact establish that Jesus was probably raised from the dead? I'd like to look at several considerations. First, I'm a little puzzled that Mike hasn't looked at parallel phenomenon in the ancient world.

As it turns out, there are numerous instances of ancient people who were dead as doornails who allegedly appeared to their close companions and followers after their death. Were all of these people raised from the dead? Let me give you one example. A famous holy man in the first century, a pagan holy man, was named Apollonius.

He was from the city of Tiana. We know about Apollonius and the life of Apollonius because one of his later followers wrote down an account of his life. Apollonius had a life that was very interesting indeed.

Before he was born, an angelic visitor came to his would-be mother and told her that she was going to bear a special son. Her son would not be a mere mortal. Her son would be the son of God.

He was born supernaturally. After his birth as a young boy, he impressed the teachers of his people with his religious knowledge that was superior in every way. When he became an adult, he left his home and went from one village in town to the other, preaching his message that people shouldn't be concerned about material things in this world.

People should be concerned with the spiritual things in life. He gathered a group of followers around him who were convinced that he was the son of God, and he confirmed their belief by doing miracles. He could cast out feelings, he could heal the sick, and he could raise the dead.

At the end of Apollonius' life, he got in trouble with the Roman authorities who ended up putting him on trial, but he ascended to heaven, and afterwards he appeared alive to his followers, and his followers talked about it. Some of them wrote books. One of the books has

survived.

Now, if the rock-solid evidence of Jesus' resurrection is that somebody claimed they saw him alive afterwards, then I think we have rock-solid evidence that Apollonius of Tiana was raised from the dead. How is it any different? And it isn't just Apollonius who is a candidate for resurrection from the dead. What about Romulus? What about Heracles? What about Theomides? What about all the other people from the Greco-Roman world who were allegedly seen by their followers after their death? Are they all people who have been raised from the dead? If Mike wants to base his argument solely on this one fact that he says is not based on biblical inerrancy, which by the way I didn't mention, because I didn't think he did hold a biblical inerrancy.

If he wants to hold this not on the basis of biblical reports, but on this one idea that people later said they saw him alive afterwards, then what about these other people? Secondly, what about modern people who are seen after their death? It turns out there's an entire literature of studies done by experts, psychologists, social historians, parapsychologists, about people who have visions of loved ones after their death. Why hasn't Mike investigated this information? As it turns out, it's a very common phenomenon for people to claim to have seen somebody that they were close to after their death. These occurrences are well documented.

Sometimes the person comes to a person through a wall or through a door and disappears suddenly. These people are not seen to be ghosts. They're seen to be real physical people who can be touched and held and experienced.

Sometimes these people are seen by multiple people at the same time. Maybe some of you even have had the experience of a loved one who you were sure that you had some experience of after their death. Does that mean that they were raised from the dead? Jesus' disciples claimed they saw him alive afterwards, so have many thousands of people, not just in American culture, but cross-culturally throughout the world.

This is extremely well documented. Well, were all those people raised from the dead? If this is the only piece of evidence you have for a resurrection and other people meet the same criterion? Third, we have appearances of other religious figures that are well documented in the modern world. In 1968-69, in Zetun, Egypt, at the Coptic Church, where both Muslims and Christians were gathered, the mother Mary appeared, Virgin Mary, the blessed Virgin Mary herself.

She appeared over a number of months between 1968 and 1969. Believers and unbelievers claimed that they saw her. The total was over 10,000 people who claimed that they saw her.

Now, as a historian, am I going to say that the Virgin Mary actually appeared to these 10,000 people? Well, if I follow Mike's criterion, I think I have to say that. Because we have 10,000 eyewitness accounts of people who claimed they saw the Virgin Mary. Do I personally think she appeared to them? No.

But as a historian, can I prove it? No. Here's what I think happened with the historical Jesus. Jesus had an avid following among his disciples who were convinced that he was somebody special.

Jesus proclaimed that God was going to intervene in history and overthrow the forces of evil and bring in a good kingdom on earth. Jesus believed that there were evil forces in the world, demons and sickness and sin and death, that this world was controlled by the forces of evil, but that God wasn't going to allow it to go on forever. That God was going to soon intervene and overthrow the forces of evil, to bring in a good kingdom on earth.

This kingdom was going to happen very soon, according to Jesus. In his first recorded words, Mark chapter 1 verse 15, Jesus said that time has been fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news.

This is what scholars call an apocalyptic image, an apocalyptic image meaning an image of the end time that is soon to come. The time has been fulfilled, says Jesus. In other words, there's a certain amount of time allotted for life in this age, this evil age run by the forces of evil.

It's almost over though. Soon, God is going to intervene and overthrow those forces of evil. The kingdom of God is at hand, says Jesus.

As he says elsewhere to his disciples, truly I tell you, some of you standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come in power. The disciples would see the kingdom of God come. God was going to intervene.

He was going to vindicate his righteous ones. And who was more righteous than Jesus? Jesus went to Jerusalem the last week of his life, entered into the temple, overturned tables in the temple, upset the ruling authorities who decided to have him arrested and taken out of the way. They subjected him to crucifixion, a form of death that was reserved for the lowest of the low.

His disciples had hoped that he would be the one who would restore the kingdom to Israel, and then he was killed. They loved him. What are they to think? God was soon going to intervene on behalf of his righteous people.

He would vindicate his righteous ones. The disciples of Jesus came to believe that God did vindicate his righteous one, Jesus. Just as so many thousands of people have since, his disciples after Jesus' death had visions of him.

They experienced him as still in their lives. They remembered his words, but they also had some kind of experience of him. A real tangible experience of him where they could feel him and touch him and talk to him.

Just as widows today, sometimes experience their dead husbands. Or as children today experience their dead parents. They had experiences of Jesus.

Experiences that happened multiple times throughout history and still down to today. On the basis of their experiences, they believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. What would be more natural? They saw him.

They talked to him just as people do today. Historians cannot prove that Jesus was raised from the dead. I should point out that I think Mike is being a little bit slippery when he says that it's possible to say that Jesus was raised from the dead, but that maybe God didn't do it.

Well, who else did it? If you're not going to say God raised Jesus from the dead, then as a historian, I want you to tell me who did raise Jesus from the dead. If you're going to say God did it, then you're making a theological statement, not a historical statement. It's a statement about God and God's activities.

It's a statement about a miracle, the least likely occurrence, which is more likely that the followers of Jesus who loved him had visionary experiences of him after his death, visionary experiences that are documented thousands of times, or that God raised him from the dead, a unique miracle that would have happened only once, which is more historically probable. If you're a historian, you can only deal with probabilities. You can only deal with what most probably happened, not with what least probably happened.

If you're a Christian, you are welcome to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, but that is a theological belief that you have about something that God did. It is not based on historical proof because the historical proof cannot be adduced. Thank you.

We'll now give you an opportunity to ask a question, and if you take a three by five card and you have a question you'd like to ask, just write it out on one side of it. We obviously will not be able to handle but a few of these, so they'll be screened for the most pertinent one or remove the ones that are repetitious, and if you have already written your question out, just if you will, move them to the center aisles of these gentlemen, take them up, and then at the end of our program, they will address those and speak to them. We'll go from here into a second rebuttal, which will be, first of all, given to us by Mike Lycona and then by Dr. Airmen following him, and then each one will have a closing statement.

First, Mike Lycona and then Bart Airmen. I'll leave you men uninterrupted to finish both the last rebuttal and the closing statement. At the end of the closing statements, we'll have the Q&A time, and since Dr. Airmen will have had the last closing statement, we'll go from one of our participants to the other, and we'll give Mr. Lycona the chance to answer the last of those questions to close our evening tonight.

So for our first rebuttal, for the second half of the program, Mike Lycona. Thank you. Again, I said tonight we would take a journey down history highway and stop at four checkpoints.

So I'd like again to revisit those four checkpoints. I have what Professor Airmen has just said. In terms of the first checkpoint, the definition of history, nothing further was said here, horizons,

nothing further at the second.

On to the third, he did say again at the very end, he said that historians can only deal with what most probably occurred, and I agree with that. But I would say that that is just half true, because the point that he's trying to make, well, it's the wrong half. I'm going to go inside with, let me put it this way.

I agree with him that historians must choose the most probable explanation, but where we disagree is that miracles must be the least probable explanation. I agree that they must be at least probable by natural causes, but no one ever claimed that Jesus rose by natural causes. The claim is that God raised Jesus from the dead, and if God exists and wanted to raise Jesus, there's no reason why they shouldn't be the most probable explanation.

The difficulty for historians is we can't know whether God wanted to raise Jesus. And so we have to leave this in terms of prior probability to be settled by which hypothesis fulfills the criteria best of explanatory scope power, et cetera. This is how we determine probability, and not according to these theological speculations that Barv has to report into his history prior to assessing any of the evidence.

When we do look at the explanatory scope power, et cetera, we do find that the resurrection is the most probable explanation. If we look at it purely according to how well it fulfills those criteria rather than the theological and philosophical ideas that go along with it. Now, at our fourth checkpoint, we looked at applying method.

We talked about the historical bedrock of those three facts. And Barv says that these are not rock-solid facts. But remember, these are things that he admitted to in his opening statement.

I'm sorry, in his writings. He admits that Jesus' death by crucifixion is one of the most certain facts of history. He admits that it is a historical fact that some of Jesus' followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead, and that Paul, he says of Paul, there is no doubt that Paul believed that he saw Jesus real, but glorified body raised from the dead.

So it's this transformed physicality of the body that is raised from the dead. So he believes on these three facts right here and tells them as facts. He says, well, you can't have our, just because you don't have, just because you have crucifixion, these were common.

It doesn't mean a resurrection. I never said it did, but you can't have a resurrection without a death now, can you? And so that's why I said Jesus' death by crucifixion. In terms of the appearances to the disciples and the appearance to Paul, the reason I distinguished them is because not only was it his friends who believe that he rose from the dead, but also a sworn enemy.

Someone who would be the equivalent of a modern Osama bin Laden, who, I mean, imagine Osama bin Laden comes out and appears before his group someday and you hear all these gunshots and yelling and he comes out and says, brothers, I'm here to tell you, I was in a cave

the other day, and I was praying with my colleagues and a loud voice fellow throughout the cave and a bright white came in the cave and said, Osama, Osama, why are you persecuting me? He said, well, who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting and so forth. And I'm here to tell you today, most of the brothers and sisters, that Jesus is Lord and we need to follow him. And they pelt him with stones.

That's the big difference between the disciples believing and Paul believing. Now, Professor Herman makes an issue out of the parallels, but I don't think that these are very effective. For example, he mentions Apollonius of Tiana.

What we need to do is we need to compare the sources, like are there early sources, multiple sources, eyewitness sources, embarrassment sources, are there any plausible naturalistic explanations? And when we look at Apollonius of Tiana versus Jesus, we say that Apollonius fails in every single one of these categories, whereas Jesus passes. The earliest account that we have 125 years after the death of Apollonius is we don't have multiple sources. We only have the one source.

Yes, there were others, but we don't have them. And we could have more sources about Jesus if we're going to go that way. Eyewitnesses, we don't have that with Apollonius.

Embarrassing? No. Because Philasticus is only biographer, was very pro-Appollonius. In fact, there are reasons to suspect that this was perhaps propaganda meant to answer the Christian view.

So there were plausible naturalistic explanations, but the thing with Jesus' resurrection passes in every one of these categories. Regarding Romulus, he mentioned that, well, we're not even certain of his death. That's not mentioned in the historical records.

So that's why death is important. We do at least have an apparition of the dead. And this is something that Professor Ermin mentioned, and he said, well, Mike just hasn't studied the literature on this.

And I have. In fact, I noticed the book Resurrecting Jesus by Dale Allison. I wrote the review for a review of biblical literature on that book.

And in fact, hosted a panel discussion at AR and EPS this past fall, where Professor Allison gave a paper on his studies about apparitions from the dead. And it was responded by Gary Habermas, William Lane Craig and Steven Davis. I think apparitions of the dead actually occur.

I have no problems with that. I have a friend in Virginia Beach named Pat Ferguson. He was told me of an amazing corroborated account of an apparition of the dead.

Just the other day I was talking to my friend Bill Johnson down in Atlanta, Georgia who had an apparition of the dead just last week. And he's had him before, and some of these are corroborated. So I do believe in these, but in no case did these people go back and check the

persons too.

They don't think that it's a bodily resurrected of a transformed corpse. So I do believe that sometimes you have these apparitions of the dead. I don't have problems with that.

In terms of the Virgin Mary in 1968-69, I've been really looked at this. That must be fast. So I can't really comment on this.

If there were 10,000 or plus eyewitnesses to this, I would just say that if I were to look in it, I would have to weigh the hypotheses. I'm not Catholic, so my bias to begin with would be to say that these must be a naturalistic explanation. But as a historian, I would have to be open to this.

I would have to weigh hypotheses and be open to a phenomena going on. Could I prove that it's the Virgin Mary? No. Could I prove that this was perhaps a supernatural event? Well, maybe.

Maybe I'd have to be open to that as a historian if there were no plausible naturalistic explanations. And if this happened in a context that was charged with religious significance, which I'd be having to unpack, if a professor would like me to, regarding the wing of hypotheses, he brought up the wishful thinking hypothesis, and he stated what he thought happened, but he didn't defend it. And it's easy to state.

I could say Jesus rose from the dead, but unless I give evidence for it, it falls on deaf ears. So I'm still waiting to hear Professor Erman's explanation for that. Again, it lacks explanatory scope, power, and may possess an ad hoc component.

Regarding the, he says, of God didn't do it with the resurrection. Who did? Well, as historians, as I mentioned in my first rebuttal, we may have to leave that as a question mark, but that doesn't justify a saying that Jesus didn't rise from the dead just because we can't stomach the possibility that maybe a God did it. I think that's doing history backward.

And we have to divorce ourself of our theological and philosophical presuppositions for the most part in terms of our beliefs about God when we are doing a historical investigation. Let me just give a real quick analogy. Let's say that during his next rebuttal, Mark drops dead.

I hope that doesn't happen what say he does. And a couple of physicians come up and work on him, and the paramedics coming after an hour, they declare him dead. And at that point, Phil Roberts jumps up and says, Bart, God did this in order to show you that your journey from Christianity to agnosticism was wrong-headed.

Now, in the name of Jesus, get up and walk. And at that moment, he opens his eyes and stands up. Well, maybe he would say, whoa, whatever happened.

I don't understand what happened there, but it wasn't a miracle because we can't know that. And I would say, no, I think it was a miracle. Maybe we can't say anything about the God who did that as historians, but we could say that a miracle has happened here.

So in conclusion, I think I'd just say that I think my case that historians can prove that Jesus rose from the dead still stands and Bart's contentions to the contrary continue to fail under critical scrutiny. Well, thank you, Mike, for those clarifications. And I think Mike would agree that these debates get increasingly difficult because what you're tempted to do is to give a point-by-point reputation, and frankly, it's kind of boring to do it that way, but that's sort of what you're stuck with.

So it goes. So, yeah, so let me answer just a few of his points. I am insisting that he doesn't have three facts.

He's got one fact. That there are people who claim you see Jesus alive afterwards. He says that his first point that Jesus was crucified is necessary because if he wasn't crucified, he wouldn't be raised from the dead.

That's true. Yes, right. Okay, fine.

But it's not evidence that he was raised from the dead. But we're not talking about just bedrock facts. If you want to talk just about bedrock facts, you could say things like, Jesus came from Galilee.

It's a bedrock fact. Does that have anything to do with the resurrection? No. Jesus' parents were named Mary and Joseph.

Is that anything to do with the resurrection? No. Jesus had brothers, one of whom was named James. Bedrock fact.

Anything to do with the resurrection? No. Jesus was crucified. Bedrock fact.

Anything to do with the resurrection? No. Yes, he had to die. We all have to die.

And to argue that the difference with Romulus is that we don't have any account of his death, I think the alternative is to say that Romulus never died. And none of us thinks that. So the reality is we do have accounts of Romulus and others being seen or disappearing from this earth and it's showing up in heaven after their death.

It was a very helpful point for him to clarify that his second and third facts that Jesus disciples claim to see him alive afterwards and Paul saw him alive afterwards are two different things because one you have his friends and the other you have his enemy. Absolutely a very good point. That's a great point.

So let's talk about this for a second. Are we going to say that when somebody converts from being an enemy to being a friend that that is evidence of a miracle? Let me give you an example. A well-known example from the Middle Ages of one of the most famous Jews of the Middle Ages, Shabbatites v, who was thought to be the Messiah by many Jews who in fact thought of himself as Messiah but near the end of his life converted to Islam.

He joined his enemies. Does that show anything about the truth claims of Islam? Does that show that Muslims are right and that Jews are wrong, biologically because somebody converts from being an enemy to being a friend? Paul did convert from being an enemy to being a friend. It's not unheard of.

In fact, it happens a lot. Mike might point to me as an example. The other interesting thing in Mike's recent rebuttal was that it came out that there are other things lurking behind the scenes when it comes to what he considers to be historical evidence of the resurrection.

He didn't mention these things in his beginning speech, so I haven't referred to them in my rebuttal, which is in contrast, by the way, with Mike attacking my wishful thinking hypothesis that I haven't talked about because it's not the position I'm taking. So his rebuttal of it is somewhat beside the point because it's not what I'm arguing. Mike, on the other hand, appears to have a couple things lurking behind the scenes that are he seeing as evidence.

The two things that he's relying on are the reliability of our sources and the fact of an empty tomb. This became clear in his rebuttal, and I don't want him to deny it because I just heard him talk about them. When I talked about Apollonius, he said the difference is that with Apollonius we have late sources, they are not eyewitnesses, and they are biased.

That's what he said. Now, that's what I said about our sources for the resurrection of Jesus, and he said it was irrelevant. Now, it's either relevant or it's not relevant.

If it's relevant, then you have to discount the gospels, and if it's irrelevant, you cannot discount the sources for Apollonius. With respect to apparitions, he acknowledged that there are apparitions. He has friends who have had apparitions.

In other words, we know that apparitions are historical phenomena. They are well established that people have visions of people who have already died. I'm arguing that Jesus followers had visions like the visions his friends have had.

These are historically documented. They can be historically documented because they're events that transpired. What about resurrections? Are they events that transpired? We don't know.

They would be miracles. He points out, though, that with these apparitions nobody goes to check to see if the tomb is empty. This is my point.

The empty tomb is lurking behind his apologetic. It's the empty tomb that at the end of the day convinces him about the apparitions, but you'll notice he hasn't marshaled any evidence for the empty tomb. He's simply asserting that if people had apparitions, they would have gone to check the tomb.

This is where historians have some things to say. As it turns out, historians know what happened to crucified people in the Roman Empire. They generally were not allowed to be buried in family tombs.

In most instances, they were thrown in common graves where their bodies deteriorated and disintegrated within days. If he wants to talk about the empty tomb, then we will have some more things to talk about. If he doesn't want to talk about the empty tomb, then his statement about apparitions is no longer applicable if you see what I mean.

Mike has pointed out that historians need to consider their bias. Let's talk about biases for a minute. Mike is a believing, conservative, evangelical Christian who believes in his heart of hearts that Jesus was physically raised from the dead.

He approaches his historical study with that as his firmly held belief. I too once believed that, and I approached my study of the New Testament with the same belief. The result of my scholarship led me to renounce my former beliefs, and I have to say I left the evangelical fold kicking and screaming.

I did not go easily. I wanted to hold on to my faith. I tried to hold on to my faith.

I did everything I could to hold on to my faith, but I got to a point where I realized that the historical evidence did not support my faith. I did not go with my personal bias. Quite the contrary, I ended up changing my mind despite my bias.

So it won't do to say that I am biased against the resurrection because for the majority of my adult life I believed in the resurrection and wanted to believe in the resurrection and tried to believe in the resurrection. Mike on the other hand has wanted to believe in the resurrection and he does believe in the resurrection. Which of us is taking a historical approach? I'm not disputing Mike's beliefs or your beliefs.

The vast majority of you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. What I'm arguing is that that belief of yours is not founded on historical evidence. The resurrection of Jesus, if it happened, goes beyond anything like historical evidence.

Historical evidence cannot establish the resurrection. It is a faith claim. It is a claim that there is a God who is in control of this world, who created this world, who sent a son to the world and raised his son from the dead.

Those are theological statements. I'm not saying they're true or false. I'm saying they're not historical.

Historical statements have to do with what historians can establish is probably having happened in the fact. Historians can be believing Christians. They can be Jews.

They can be Muslims. They can be Buddhists. They can be Hebrews.

They can be apostates. They can be atheists. They can be agnostics.

They can be all of the above. But the evidence they do has to be available to everybody that I've named or it's not historical evidence. If it's historical evidence, it's based on presuppositions

that everybody I've just named can agree on, not people with only one particular theological point of view.

If the historical conclusion requires the theological point of view, then it's not a historical conclusion. It's a theological conclusion. Thank you.

Okay. Well, excuse me. Can we start over on that one? Okay.

Now, Professor Erman talked about a consensus. It's something we all have to agree on. I don't think so.

Mark Gilderhaus, who was a history professor, wrote an introductory to history textbook that she used in dozens of universities in North America. Here's what he says. The body of literature on almost any historical subject takes the form of an ongoing debate.

By the very nature of the subject, history tends to divide scholars and set them at odds. We no longer possess a past commonly agreed upon. Indeed, to the contrary, we have a multiplicity of versions competing for attention and emphasizing, alternatively, it leads to not only its men and women, whites and persons of color, and no way of reconciling all the differences.

Chris Moran's a historian who writes for history and theory says discussions of historical reconstructions seldom lead to a consensus and that therefore pluralism is a basic characteristic of history as a discipline. So this consensus simply isn't required, even in non-religious matters, such as they're talking about here. So, of course, they're not going to be required with religious matters.

And if we're talking about what he just said in here, a Muslim could never agree that Jesus died by crucifixion because their theology won't allow them to, just as an atheist philosophy won't allow them to acknowledge a resurrection. Now, in terms of might be unbiased, yes, I'm biased. But that's why I describe four speed bumps that I take along the way, checks that I put to manage and minimize the impact of my own horizon.

So the question is that this evening, whether Michael is biased, we all are. The question is what arguments part and I have used tonight to support our positions and which arguments are the best ones, which positions supported best. He says, yes, which of the two of our approaches are historical? Well, I ask which of us has presented their historical method and based their case on that method rather than theology.

He says the evidence that Jesus was raised, there's not evidence just because Jesus died. Well, like anything else with this evidence of the crucifixion and the appearances, you have to form hypotheses to explain these phenomena and the best hypothesis. This is what you determine what happened.

Savathai said, the notice doesn't prove his claims to be true. But the difference is the Muslims said that we would torture you to death unless you did convert and he did. That's evidence that

he wasn't who he claimed to be if he was the true Messiah in a prophet.

Paul, on the other hand, converted and then was tortured and submitted to torture because of his belief. So I do whatever you want. I believe he runs and appeared to me personally.

According to the operations, he said the empty tomb lurking behind it. Well, I do believe in the empty tomb, but I don't see it lurking behind it. What I meant by that to clarify is that modeling resurrection is consistent with an empty tomb, of course.

And both part and I agree that Paul did believe that Jesus was raised in his transformed physical course. So now I just conclude with the story. And that was about 20 years ago.

My wife and I lived in Northern Virginia. And my brother in Lautari who's here this evening came and visited us. And one evening we went up to Washington, D.C., which was close by.

We took a ride. We tried to go down Embassy Row because that's where all the embassies to the U.S. are lit up. And you remember Lautari? They're lit up and they're beautiful.

I was driving and we got lost and ended up in a bad section of town. And contrary to the stereotypical mail, I pulled into a gas station and asked for directions. Well, it was one of those places where you have a thick bulletproof window that you had to pay the attendant from.

So I got on the car and walked up toward the window, but before I could get there, I was approached by five, six guys standing there in the parking lot. And they said, can we help him or something? I said, yeah, I'm looking for Embassy Row. The guy was the parent and the leader of the group gave me directions, which were almost certainly wrong.

But I realized we were in danger at that point. So I said, hey, thanks. Appreciate it.

Started to walk away. But before I could get two steps away, the guy said, hey, wait a minute. I gave you directions that you gave me money.

And at that point, the other five, six guys surrounded me. I knew I was in danger, but I was a second-degree black belt in techno at the time. Had my own martial arts studio.

I was in my 20s. Thought myself invincible. So I took a step toward the guy and looked him right in the eye and said, not tonight, gentlemen.

Well, often in the world of scholarship, those who investigate Jesus' resurrection get surrounded by other scholars who say, hand over your evidence for the resurrection. We don't use that in our hood. Well, this evening I've shown that we can use it and conclude that Jesus rose from the dead.

So I'm not handing it over. Not tonight, gentlemen. I wish I had a nice story to end with.

Mike has cited a number of experts on history as to support his various points of view. This is a

very common way of proceeding when talking about one's perspective. I want to just kind of stress a subsidiary point, which is that I hope that you all, as we say, where I live, you all, I hope you all realize that expert opinion is opinion.

Mike's opinions are his opinions, my opinions, my opinions, the people he quoted are their opinions. Opinions are not evidence. Expert opinions are not evidence.

2000 years ago, if you would have asked the scientific experts about the solar system, you would have gotten a particular point of view. The fact that it was an expert opinion has nothing to do with the reality of the case. You, yourself, have intelligence, and you should use your intelligence to weigh the pluses and minuses of what we've been talking about.

Mike has stressed rightly so that there are data in history and that you need hypotheses to explain them. The reality is you don't need the hypothesis of the resurrection to explain the three data that he continually has stressed. You don't need a resurrection to explain that Jesus was crucified.

He was crucified whether or not he was raised from the dead. The crucifixion is not evidence of a resurrection. The visions that his disciples had need to have some kind of hypothesis, and I've given you one, namely that people often have visions of people of those who have died that they're close to and that they love and that are dear to them.

Mike acknowledges that that happens. It may have happened in the time of Jesus. It may have happened to his disciples that at least is plausible.

It's a historical hypothesis that I have. Is it more probable than the hypothesis of the resurrection? Well, historically speaking, yes, it's more plausible and more probable because we know this sort of thing happens all the time. So if you're just talking in terms of probabilities, it's the more probable hypothesis.

Does the conversion of Paul require the resurrection of Jesus? No, it requires that Paul came to think that Jesus got raised from the dead. That's historically certain, I think, that Paul thought that Jesus got raised from the dead. Yes, that's certain.

Was Paul historically right? We have no historical grounds for saying that Jesus was raised. He may have been raised. He may not have been raised.

What we're asking is whether history can demonstrate it. And the reality is that it can't simply because of the nature of the case. The sources for Jesus' resurrection are not eyewitness accounts.

There are accounts that were written decades after the fact by people who were not there to see these things happen. The stories they tell about Jesus' resurrection and his life were changed year after year, decade after decade as they were told or retold. These stories are not internally consistent with one another.

They have discrepancies among them so that they're not the kind of sources that historians look for when they're looking for reliable historical sources. The accounts of the resurrection embody faith claims of those who are telling the stories. They're not disinterested.

These kinds of sources have to be used very carefully by historians in trying to figure out what really happened. There are some things we can say for certain really happened, I think. I think we can say for certain that Jesus was crucified on orders of the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate that he was crucified.

Certainly we can say that. Can we say that he was resurrected? The problem is that historians cannot establish miracles as having happened because miracles are not probable events. There wouldn't be miracles if they were probable.

They're highly improbable. That's why we call them miracles. But historians can only deal with what probably happened.

Jesus may have been raised from the dead, and many of you, most of you think that he was. But the reason you think he was is not because there's historical evidence. The reason you think he was is because you've had some experience of Jesus in your life, and the way you explain that is on the basis of this having been raised from the dead.

It's an experiential statement rooted in a theological claim. It is not based on historical proof. We have seven questions, and three of them are for Dr. Airmen.

Three of them are for Mike Waikon. I'm sure there are questions that they have not faced before, so we'll trust their ability to respond immediately to the question after a moment of reflection. So then we have a seven question that's simply asked for their opinion on this one issue.

We'll ask both of them to respond to that one. In fact, they're all addressed to the gentlemen in each of the questions. So this one's to Dr. Airmen.

According to your definition of miracle as the least probable explanation of resurrection, how do you explain the birth and growth of the church without the resurrection of Jesus? That would be the least probable occurrence had Jesus not been raised. Yes, thank you. This is an excellent question.

It's a very difficult question. I teach a PhD seminar at UNC Chapel Hill on this question. We spend an entire semester with PhD students trying to answer this question.

It takes us an entire semester to get to the bottom of the answer, so let me give you the 25 second version. I sometimes get asked, doesn't the fact that Christianity succeeded showed that Jesus must have been raised from the dead? I think the answer to that is no, because if you want to say that the success of religion has to be based on the truth of its truth claims, then what do you do about all the other religions in the world? Is long true because it succeeded? Is

Hinduism true because there are so many millions of Hindus, or Buddhism, or Judaism, or Christianity? Religions are true whether they're true independently on the historical basis. Religions grow, I'm told to stop.

Religions grow, not because necessarily something miraculous happened at the beginning of those religions, but for other circumstances. And a question for Mike Vaikona. How significant is it that women are called as witnesses to the resurrection? Yes, if you'd like to.

I would allow you the 30 second response side of the response. I agree with Professor Ermin on this one. And you can't explain the belief or the growth of a church without belief in the resurrection.

So that's what we're looking at, not the resurrection, but belief in the resurrection. But tonight's debate is on the best explanation for how they came to that belief in the resurrection. And I've argued that the resurrection is the best cause of that belief.

No, that's right. Mike, how significant is it that women are called as witnesses to the resurrection? How significant for the witnesses? How significant is it that women are called as witnesses to the resurrection? Well, that has to do with the empty tomb, which I haven't argued this evening because it's the empty tomb. One of those facts that belongs to historical bedrock, I believe it, but I haven't included it because of that.

So I do think it's significant. However, the women, because a woman's testimony in the first century was not regarded very highly. And in fact, most Jews thought that it was men who would be the recipients of divine revelation, not women.

So this double type of embarrassment there, plus the fact that it's in a patriarchal society, the men are cowering behind closed doors. If you were making this up in the first century, you just would not have made this up if you want them to follow and believe in the resurrection. Any seconds? Sure.

So, yeah, no, this is a really interesting argument that a lot of people have made. Nobody would have made up the idea of women discovering the empty tomb, because, as Mike was saying, women were not seen as credible witnesses. There are several problems.

First of all, Paul is our first witness to the resurrection. He mentions the resurrection appearances, and he never mentions any women. The first source that mentions any women is the gospel of Mark.

But you have to ask, is Mark unbiased when he's talking about women? Mark has an overarching emphasis that nobody could understand who Jesus was. His family doesn't understand who he was. The Jewish leaders don't understand who he was.

The disciples don't understand who he was. The only one who understands who Jesus was in the gospel are the demons and the centurion who crucified him. So, who's going to discover

the empty tomb? It's not going to be his family or the religious leaders.

It's going to be people on the outside. It's women. In other words, this fits a particular mark in motif.

So, it's somewhat questionable as a historical data. Thank you. Let's give them how much time you've given them for this period.

Let's give them at least two to three minutes, don't mind. Dr. Airmen, one of the criteria, excuse me, this thing is packed in that bone middle bed. One of the criteria given for evaluating evidence were independent accounts.

Doesn't the fact that some of the accounts are difficult to reconcile, as soon as the gospel is meant here, indicated that they were independent. Aren't these discrepancies similar to what one would find between witnesses and a courtroom? Yeah, excellent question. Did everybody hear the question? Here.

Okay. Yeah. So, okay.

So, I pointed out you need independent witnesses for historical evidence. And the question is, since you have discrepancies between the accounts, doesn't that show that they're independent witnesses? And so, doesn't that, in fact, doesn't that increase the probability that you've got independent at a station or the resurrection? And it's an excellent point. But the way you have to establish whether the gospels are independent of one another is by a detailed analysis of their similarities and their differences.

Scholars have been doing this for hundreds of years. And what scholars have pretty much shown, I mean, it's pretty standard. I assume Mike's going to agree with this.

Marking priority? No? Yes, yes, okay. I mean, what most scholars think is that Mark was the first gospel written and that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a sword. So, whenever they change Mark, whenever they're different from Mark, it's because one of them has changed it for some reason on their own.

And this is significant because they can show you that if Matthew is different from Mark in any particular, it means Matthew has intentionally changed something in Mark. That can show you Matthew's over-arching intentions, or Lou, and so forth. And so it's interesting that, for example, in some of the later gospels, it's not the women who discover the tomb.

The women go off, and the men discover the tomb. And the men then serve as the witnesses. Why is that? Because the point Mike is pointing out that, in fact, people were low to attribute testimony value to what women had to say.

So I don't think the mere fact that they're different shows their independent accounts, what it shows is that some accounts are being changed in the process of the transmission. Mike, do

you have any response? Because I'm having trouble with my voice. I think I'll save it for something in which we're going to have greater disagreement on.

Okay, and for Mike, like Kona, are there continuing claims of Messiah's ship following Jesus' recorded death and resurrection? Or does this period of Son of God claim subside following Jesus implying that the true Son of God had indeed come? I'm going to have to apologize. I really don't understand that question. I would like to answer it.

This is going to be tough. Maybe if I stand it will help. But maybe I can know more with the Son of Man in my jury.

I think what the question is. Do people stop expecting a Messiah after Jesus? I mean, did anybody expect another Son of God or the fact that Jesus was Son of God show that no more sons of gods were expected? Okay. Well, of course, the Christians didn't expect another Messiah.

But other Jews did in coming years. They expected a Messiah. So, like, Sanitize, he said he was a Messiah, and then he gave that up under threat of torture.

So, yeah, Jews later on believed that Jews today still wait for a Messiah. But Christians thought that Jesus was a Messiah. They didn't continue to look for someone else.

Dr. Herman? Yeah, I should let you all know that we had dinner together tonight. Mike is having trouble. I did volunteer to state his case for him.

Okay, we'll go to the next question. Dr. Herman, how do you explain the disciples and Paul's willingness to suffer and die for Jesus' bodily resurrection? If they had the merely ghostly experiences referred to in your rebuttal? Yeah, excellent question. You know, another thing I get asked a lot is a similar question.

The way it's usually phrased is, why would all the disciples willingly be martyred if they didn't know that Jesus was raised from the dead? If they just, you know, made it up or something, would they really be willing to go to their deaths? And there are several things I want to respond to with respect to that. First of all, this may come as news to you, but the reality is, we don't know how most of the disciples of Jesus died. We don't have evidence.

We have legends from hundreds of years later. But the idea that all of the 11 disciples were martyred for their faith is simply a legend. We don't know how they died.

Now, the question is asking, would people like Paul be willing to die for a mere apparition as opposed to the real resurrection? My view is not that Paul thought he had a mere apparition. My view is that Paul had an apparition that he interpreted as Jesus being physically present to him. Just as people today have an apparition of their lost husband, their lost child, their lost grandmother.

And they think that the person is actually in the room. And the person is tangible, can be touched, can be smelled. And so Paul interpreted this vision as Jesus actually being raised from the dead.

And I think Paul probably was killed for his faith. And probably Peter, we have evidence from the first century for those two, but for no one else. Any response? I agree, except I would add James to that equation in addition to Paul and Peter.

We do have about eight different sources, relatively early sources, relatively. Some dating from 30 to 200 years after Jesus, the disciples were all willing to suffer continuously and die for their beliefs. So yeah, I think while we can only establish those three with pretty much certainty, we can establish with pretty good certainty that they were willing to go to their deaths for their conviction that Jesus had appeared personally to them.

And we have to explain that willingness. Why were they so convinced Jesus appeared to them? And I don't think, I mean, your apparition, apparition of the dead does it. Because if I'm understanding part of this, a grief hallucination could qualify as an apparition.

And some of the apparitions I know about in that Alison speaks of a net book are corroborated. And so they can't be accounted for as grief hallucinations corroborated in terms of that person didn't know that that person was dead. And then the next morning they discovered that they have died and yet they appeared to them just moments after their death.

Yeah, that's the same thing with Jesus. The thing is about the disciples. We don't even know really if the, I'm not going to go there.

They have to take us all night. Never mind. No.

Question for Mike and then we'll throw one out for both participants to respond to. Mike, is there any historical evidence independent of the Bible for the resurrection? Well, it depends. You know, I think we could look at something like Tacitus who in his Annals Book 15, section 44 talks about how after Pilate had crucified Jesus that Christianity was checked for the moment and then it broke out again in Judea where the evil mischievous superstitions started.

I think this just shows a consistent scene with what we find in the Gospels and Acts. Same thing with Josephus in a disputed passage, but most Josephus scholars agree that Josephus mentions Jesus in that passage that he was crucified by Pilate and that his disciples continued to follow him. So in a strict sense, I'd say, no, we have to look at the New Testament as ancient documents here and that we can, I could look at the Quran and I don't believe it's divinely inspired, but I still can, as a historian, look at different things and conclude different things such as there's one surah that has Jesus in God talking and God says, did you tell them you're my son or did you tell them that you marry and me or God's? And Jesus says, no, far be it from me.

You know, I never said that. I've only said I'm your servant. Why don't believe that that conversation happened? But it tells me that Muslims and Christians were having a debate on

who was Jesus.

Is he divine or just a man? And the same thing with the New Testament. The case I've given this evening wouldn't assume at all divine inspiration. We can look at it simply as an ancient compilation of 27 different sources, ancient sources, and make our conclusions based on that.

Dr. Aaron? Yeah, yeah, it is a really good question. People are surprised to know how little information we have about Jesus outside of Christian sources from antiquity. You would think you'd have, you know, birth records or accounts of the trial or his enemies talking about him or Roman officials saying something.

In fact, nobody says anything about him during the entire first century, except for Josephus, the Jewish historian, his two references to him. Within 100 years of Jesus death, he's only mentioned four times in any non-Christian source. In Tacitus, the reference Mike was giving, in Pliny the Younger, three years earlier, and possibly in Suetonius, the Roman historian, and in Josephus.

There, in Josephus, there's two references, so there's five references to Jesus. These references tell us almost nothing about who Jesus was or what he did or what he said. And strikingly, none of them says anything about Jesus being raised from the dead.

I had something there. I agree with some of that, but I don't think it's as bad as that might lead us to believe the Roman emperor at the time of Jesus ministry for him. We have just as many non-Christian sources as many non-Christian sources who mentioned him within 150 years of his death as we have of Jesus.

Non-Christian sources who mentioned him within 150 years of his death, and Caesar, Augustus, the most prominent emperor of Rome. We only have four primary sources that mention him, and most of these are more than 100 years after his death. One last question, a response from both sides, I'll read it to each of you.

In the Passover of Yahweh, as written in Leviticus 23, on the 14th of Abi, whereas the rabbinical Jews celebrate the Passover on the 15th of Abi, do you agree? Yeah, Mike, do you agree? I feel like I'm on my PhD, Sam again. I don't know how I do. Let me tell you what that meant.

The problem is Mark explicitly indicates that Jesus celebrated the Passover meal. John explicitly indicates that he was crucified the day before the Passover meal. And so the question is saying that there are different groups of Jews celebrating the Passover meal on two different days, so both Mark and John could be right.

On the surface, that sounds plausible, but the reality is Jews in Jerusalem in the first century did not celebrate Passover on two different days. They celebrated it on one day, because there's only one day that the lambs were killed in the temple on the day of preparation for Passover. John says that's the day that Jesus was killed on the day of preparation.

Mark says he was killed the next day, and so there's an inconsistency. I do. I do.

Oh, man. Maybe I should type it in and you can see it on the screen. I do hope to be able to go in here and see.

However, I have to admit, I don't know the answer to this one. Okay. All right, let's give both of these gentlemen now.

Thanks for joining us today. If you'd like to learn more about the work and ministry of Dr. Mike Lacona, visit RisenJesus.com, where you can find authentic answers to genuine questions about the reliability of the Gospels and the resurrection of Jesus. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast, visit Dr. Lacona's YouTube channel, or consider becoming a monthly supporter.

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