THE CASE IN ONE PAGE

The resurrection of Jesus: the claim, the evidence, the objections and the finding.

QUESTION	Can the claim be tested fairly, or is the verdict written before the witnesses speak?
SHORT ANSWER	Weighed openly, without a rule that excludes one verdict in advance, the resurrection is the best explanation of the facts taken together.

I. THE CLAIM

What is to be decided

Jesus was condemned for claiming to be God. He forgave offences against God, and his hearers asked, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" *Mark 2:7* Asked at his trial, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?", he answered: "I am. You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of the sky" *Mark 14:61-62; cf. Dan 7:13-14*, a claim to share God's throne. The court ruled: "You have heard the blasphemy!" *Mark 14:64*

So a resurrection here is not just any miracle. It is God's reversal of that verdict. God does not raise a blasphemer from the dead. The court is not asked to examine his divine nature directly, only whether the man condemned for that claim was raised. If he was, the claim stands on his own testimony, confirmed by the reversal. If he stayed dead, the verdict stands.

II. EXHIBITS

Facts accepted by most scholars, skeptics included

EXHIBIT 1. **Crucified under Pontius Pilate.** All four Gospels; also Tacitus and Josephus. *Annals 15.44; Antiquities 18.63-64* (Full treatment: ch. 3)

EXHIBIT 2. **Buried in a known tomb** owned by a named council member, Joseph of Arimathea *Mark 15:43-46*, whom anyone could ask. Not a mass grave: the Law forbade leaving a hanged man overnight *Deut 21:23*, and the bones of Yehohanan, a man crucified in the first century, were found in 1968 in a family tomb in Jerusalem, the nail still in his heel. (Full treatment: ch. 4)

EXHIBIT 3. **The tomb was empty.** The first witnesses were women, whose testimony then carried little legal weight; an invented story would hardly choose them. The opponents' reply, as Matthew reports it, assumes it: "Say that his disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept." *Matt 28:13; Justin, Dialogue 108* The earliest creed already implies it: he "was buried" and "was raised on the third day" *1 Cor 15:4*. For a Pharisee like Paul, "raised" meant that the body left the grave. (Agreement is somewhat lower here than for the other facts.) (Full treatment: ch. 5)

EXHIBIT 4. **The earliest record, 1 Cor 15:3-7.** Paul hands on a formula he had "received": Christ died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to Cephas, the Twelve, over five hundred at once, James and all the apostles. Paul met Peter and James about three years after his conversion *Gal 1:18-19*; by broad scholarly agreement the formula goes back to the first few years after the crucifixion. (Full treatment: ch. 6) The text survives in 5,700 to 6,000 Greek manuscripts. (Full treatment: The Document in Evidence)

EXHIBIT 5. **Early worship.** Within a few years Jews who confessed one God worshipped Jesus as Lord: Philippians 2:6-11, widely held to be an older hymn, calls him "existing in the form of God" and gives him the bowing of every knee that Isaiah 45:23 reserves for God. (Full treatment: ch. 9)

III. TESTIMONY

The witnesses

TESTIMONY 1. **James, the skeptic** (see Objection 5). After an appearance *1 Cor 15:7* he led the Jerusalem church and was stoned around AD 62. *Josephus, Antiquities 20.200* (Full treatment: The Witness James)

TESTIMONY 2. **Paul, the persecutor**, became the church's foremost missionary at the cost of prison and, by early tradition, his life. (Full treatment: The Witness Paul)

TESTIMONY 3. **Frightened men made bold.** They fled at the arrest and hid behind locked doors "for fear of the Jews" *Mark 14:50; John 20:19*. Weeks later they preached the resurrection in the city that crucified him.

TESTIMONY 4. **No one recanted.** No source records any of them retracting, though they suffered and several died. They said they had seen him, touched him and eaten with him *Luke 24:39; Acts 10:41; 1 John 1:1*, so they knew whether it was true. People die for what they believe is true, not for what they know is a lie; the Watergate conspirators held out only weeks. (Full treatment: ch. 7)

IV. OBJECTIONS OF FACT

The rival theories, and what each must assume

No single natural explanation covers all the facts. The resurrection does.

THEORY	IT MUST ASSUME	WHAT IT LEAVES UNEXPLAINED
Theft	That frightened men invented it and then suffered for decades for what they knew was false.	Their sincerity; James; Paul.
Group visions	That many people, in groups and at different times, had matching visions of a bodily Jesus.	The empty tomb; a skeptic and a persecutor who were not looking for him.

THEORY	IT MUST ASSUME	WHAT IT LEAVES UNEXPLAINED
Legend	That the story grew over generations.	A creed dated within a few years, while witnesses lived.
Wrong tomb	That everyone, the authorities included, lost track of a known tomb.	The appearances; the authorities could show the right tomb.
Swoon	That a man crucified by professional executioners survived and, half-dead, inspired worship.	Roman execution practice; the disciples' boldness.

Grief visions do not explain James and Paul. Grief may bring visions of someone loved and trusted, but James did not believe in his brother *John 7:5; Mark 3:21*. Grief does not create faith in one you rejected, let alone worship of your own brother as Lord. Paul was not mourning Jesus; he was persecuting his followers *Gal 1:13*. (Full treatment: The Fifth Theory)

The patchwork ("visions, a moved body and later embellishment together cover the data"). Each patch fails on its own: visions do not empty a tomb or turn opponents like James and Paul; a moved body does not explain the appearances; embellishment comes too late for the creed. Possible is not probable: the question is not whether an alternative can be imagined or "cannot be wholly ruled out", but which explanation actually covers all the facts. (Full treatment: The Combinations)

V. OBJECTIONS OF LAW *Answered*

OBJECTION 1. *"Method excludes miracles: prefer natural explanations when they suffice."* **That is a working rule, not a finding.** If the natural always "suffices", no evidence could ever change the verdict, and then it is not a trial. (Full treatment: Free Evaluation of Evidence)

OBJECTION 2. *"It is not proved beyond reasonable doubt."* **This page applies the historian's standard: the best explanation of the sources, on the balance of probabilities.** "Beyond reasonable doubt" is the criminal standard for convicting a person. History is decided by inference to the best explanation; by the criminal standard few ancient events could be established at all. (Full treatment: Standard of Proof)

OBJECTION 3. *"It rests on a metaphysical premise, that God exists."* **The premise is argued, not assumed.** Each known contribution to the energy of empty space comes out about 10^120 times larger than the value measured; for the total to be as small as it is, they must cancel to between 53 and 120 decimal places, or no stars or galaxies form. That gives grounds, independent of the Bible, for a Creator who can act in what he made, though not by itself his name. A multiverse does not remove the problem: a machine that makes universes needs finely set laws of its own, and there is no independent evidence that one exists. "No God acts" is just as metaphysical. (Full treatment: Twenty Spinning Coins) (Full treatment: Countless Universes)

OBJECTION 4. *"Hannibal is within the naturally possible; a resurrection is not."* **Deciding what is possible before reading the sources is the closure in advance.** Hume assumes what he must prove: to call experience uniformly against miracles, one must already know every report is false. The evidence is of the same kind: Polybius' account of Hannibal crossing the Alps, the earliest surviving, came more than half a century later; the creed within a few years. Demanding more of one is a double standard. (Full treatment: The Fourth Watch)

OBJECTION 5. *"The witnesses were partisan."* **Two key witnesses were opponents at the time they say they saw him.** James was an unbelieving brother *Mark 3:21; John 7:5*; Paul was a persecutor *Gal 1:13*. Hostile witnesses who change sides weigh most. And the first proclaimers gained nothing: it cost them standing, freedom and, for several, their lives. (Full treatment: ch. 7)

OBJECTION 6. *"The five hundred are hearsay."* **Paul offers them for checking.** Of the five hundred he writes, "most of whom remain until now" *1 Cor 15:6*: an open invitation, within living memory, in a letter to a church that could ask. A fraud does not invite cross-examination. (Full treatment: ch. 6)

OBJECTION 7. *"Sincere belief in a vision also produces martyrs."* **Martyrdom shows sincerity, not truth.** Later martyrs died for what others said they saw; the apostles for what they themselves said they had seen, touched and eaten with. (Full treatment: ch. 7)

OBJECTION 8. *"Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence."* **The evidence is of the kind and strength historians accept elsewhere, and the prior is not near zero.** It is early, multiple and named, with converted opponents. Fine-tuning gives independent grounds for a Creator (Objection 3), so a God who acts is a live possibility from the start. A background of "no God acts" only repeats Objection 1. (Full treatment: Improbable Is Not Impossible)

VI. SUBMISSION *The best explanation*

The resurrection explains every exhibit at once. The tomb was empty, they saw him, James and Paul changed and frightened men became bold, because he was alive. Its one premise, that God exists and can act, is argued, not assumed. And God does not vindicate a blasphemer: by raising Jesus he reversed the blasphemy verdict and confirmed his claim to be God. (Full treatment: The Resurrection on Trial)

VII. WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

If the claim stands

If Jesus rose, he is who he said he is, and he offers you a free gift. Everyone has broken God's law and is accountable to him for those offences. (Full treatment: The Law as a Mirror) But God loves us: "not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son" *1 John 4:10*. The Judge himself took our punishment in our place. (Full treatment: The Judge Who Paid)

Faith is trusting that Jesus is who he said he is, and that he took your punishment in your place. Forgiveness is not earned; it is a gift, received the moment you trust him: whoever believes "has eternal life, and doesn't come into judgment" *John 5:24*. A changed life, and baptism, follow as fruit, never as the price or the condition. (Full treatment: The Acquittal)

FINDING

On the balance of probabilities, the resurrection of Jesus is the explanation that covers all the facts, and with it God reversed the verdict on his claim to be God. What remains against it is not a new fact but a rule about which verdicts are allowed.

What evidence would be enough? If none could ever be, is it the evidence that decides, or a rule written in advance?

QUOTATIONS: WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE · THE TESTIMONY · RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS