

History, Philosophy, and the Resurrection of Jesus



Dr Max Baker-Hytch

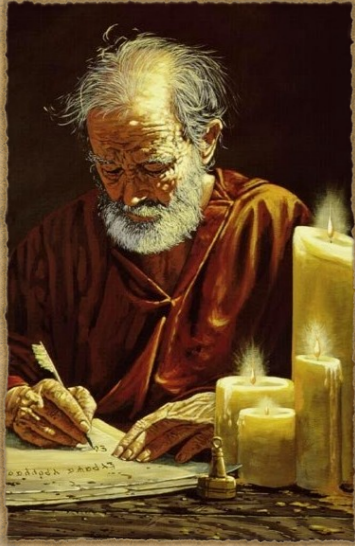
The centrality of the resurrection

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.”

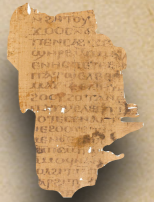
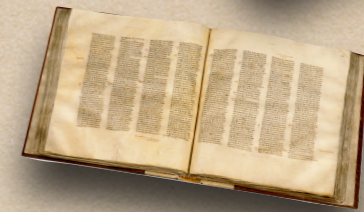
(1 Corinthians 15.17-20)

Structure of this lecture

- ◆ Examining the historical sources
- ◆ Assembling a list of 'minimal facts'—the historical facts pertaining to the fate of Jesus that are accepted by a strong majority of contemporary historical scholars of Jesus.
- ◆ Explaining the minimal facts: which hypothesis best accounts for the historical data?
- ◆ Assessing the prior probability of the resurrection hypothesis



Historical Sources

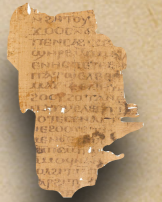
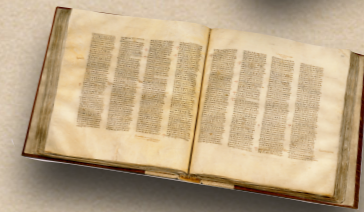


Paul's letters:

- ♦ Widely agreed to be the earliest writings in the New Testament, spanning a period from roughly 50-60 AD. Virtually all modern scholars accept that I Thessalonians, I and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Philippians, and Philemon were written by Paul.
- ♦ Key aspects of Paul's letters:
 - ♦ They preserve some very early Christian creeds and hymns about Jesus (e.g., I Cor 15.3-5, I Cor 8.6, I Cor 16.22, Rom 1.3-4, Phil 2.6-11).
 - ♦ Attest that Jesus was crucified, buried, raised, and appeared to individuals and groups.
 - ♦ Jesus' resurrection is treated as a fact which is taken for granted.
 - ♦ Attest that Paul was initially a fierce persecutor of the early church but converted because he believed the risen Jesus appeared to him.
 - ♦ Paul is clearly teaching that Jesus was *bodily* resurrected, and that his teaching is fully in agreement with that of the Jerusalem apostles.



Historical Sources



The Gospels and Acts

- ♦ Most scholars think Mark was written first, around 70 AD, followed by Matthew and Luke, between 70-90 AD, and lastly John, between 80-95 AD. Given these dating timeframes, the Gospels and Acts were written within the living memory of the eyewitnesses.
- ♦ The Gospels and Acts were written in Christian communities in which eyewitnesses were in positions of leadership.
- ♦ Luke indicates that he accompanied Paul on some of his travels (Acts 16, 20-28), including to Jerusalem, and claims to have had access to eyewitnesses (Luke 1.1-4); John's Gospel claims to incorporate eyewitness testimony (19.35; 21.24); an early and credible tradition from Papias states that Mark's Gospel preserves the testimony of Peter.
- ♦ Luke and Matthew appear to have used Mark as a source; Luke and Matthew also share some material not found in Mark; also, Luke and Matthew each have unique material.
- ♦ Most scholars view John as substantially independent of the Synoptics.



Historical Sources

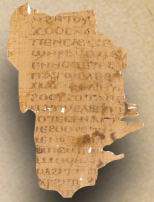
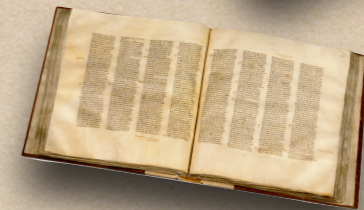


The Gospels

- ♦ the basic outlines of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection:
 - ♦ the trial and subsequent crucifixion of Jesus outside the walls of Jerusalem, ordered by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate at the instigation of the high priest Caiaphas.
 - ♦ the burial of Jesus in a tomb by a member of the Sanhedrin named Joseph of Arimathea, witnessed by Mary Magdalene and some other women followers of Jesus.
 - ♦ the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb on the first day of the week by Mary Magdalene along with some other women followers of Jesus.
 - ♦ multiple meetings between the risen Jesus and his followers (including Mary Magdalene, two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, Peter, and the eleven disciples as a group).



Historical Sources



Acts

- ◆ key in the book of Acts:
 - ◆ many scholars accept that the sermons in Acts 2 and 3 have a basis in the earliest preaching of the Jerusalem apostles.
 - ◆ according to Acts, the disciples begin proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem around six weeks after Jesus' crucifixion, rapidly winning over large numbers of converts.
 - ◆ they endure imprisonment and beatings on several occasions for the sake of proclaiming Jesus' resurrection, and one of the new converts, Stephen, is stoned to death.
 - ◆ Paul, who was initially a violent persecutor of the Christians, is unexpectedly converted (en route to arrest Christians in Damascus) due to an appearance of the risen Jesus.



Historical Sources

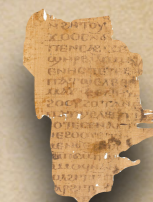
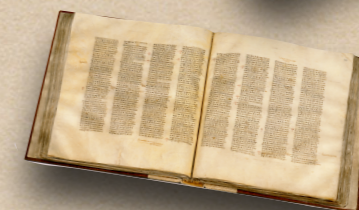


Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jewish People*, 18.63-64

- ♦ Josephus was the son of a Jewish priest, born in Jerusalem in AD 37. In his *Antiquities*, written around 94 AD, Josephus refers to numerous people named in the New Testament, including Jesus, John the Baptist, James the brother of Jesus, Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas, and Herod.
- ♦ “Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, [*if it be lawful to call him a man*]; for he was a doer of surprising works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. [*He was the Christ.*] And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for they reported that he appeared alive to them [*for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him.*] And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.” (18.63-64)



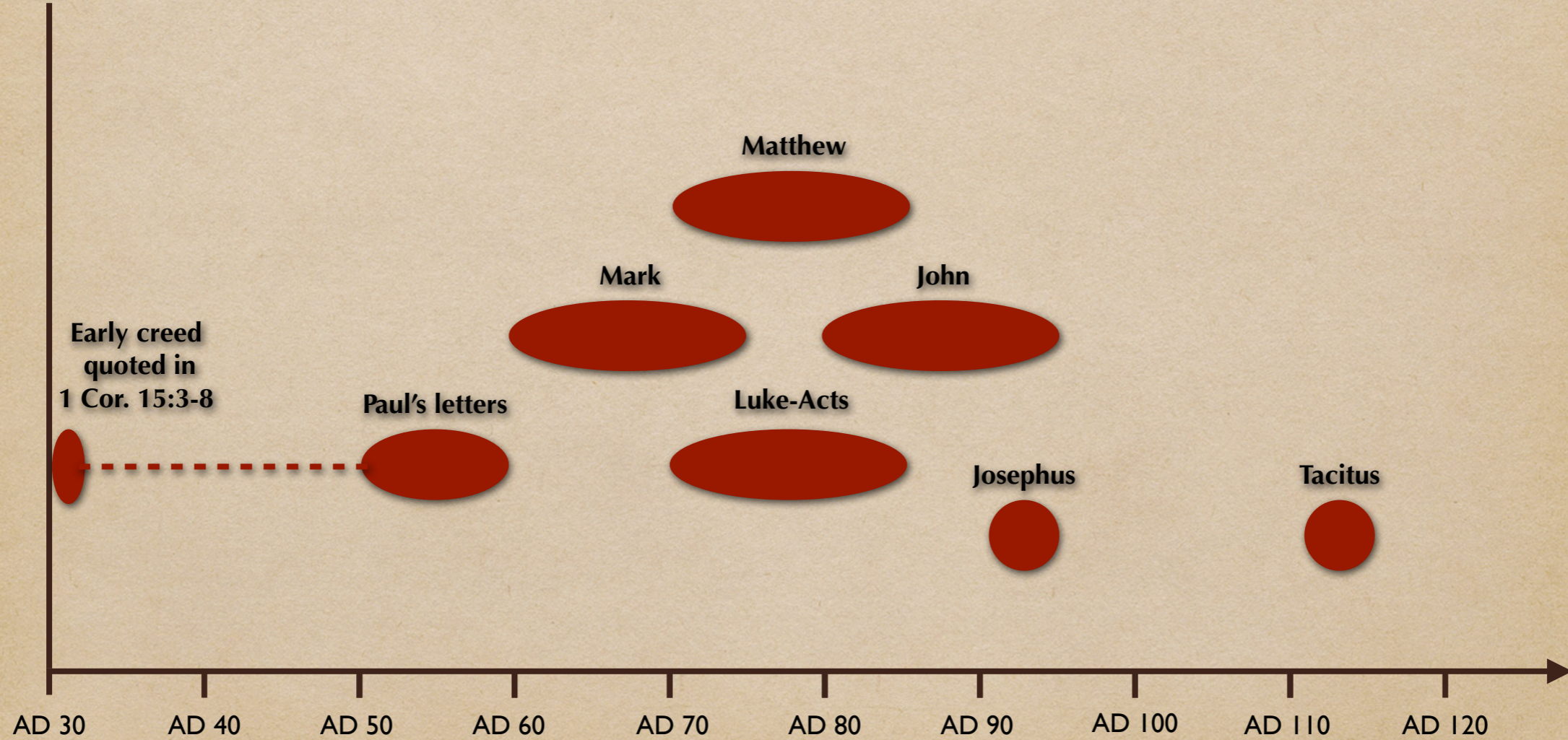
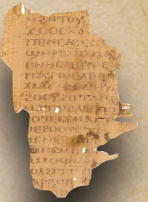
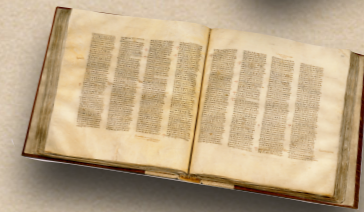
Historical Sources



Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*, 15.44

- ♦ Generally regarded as the greatest of Roman historians, Tacitus was the proconsul of Asia from AD 112-113. He wrote his *Annals of Imperial Rome* in around 116 AD. His mention of Jesus occurs in the context of a report on Nero's handling of the aftermath of the burning of Rome, an incident which Nero was rumoured by some to have started, and which Nero tried to blame on the Christians in Rome.
- ♦ “Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.” (15.44)

Historical Sources



The Historical Data



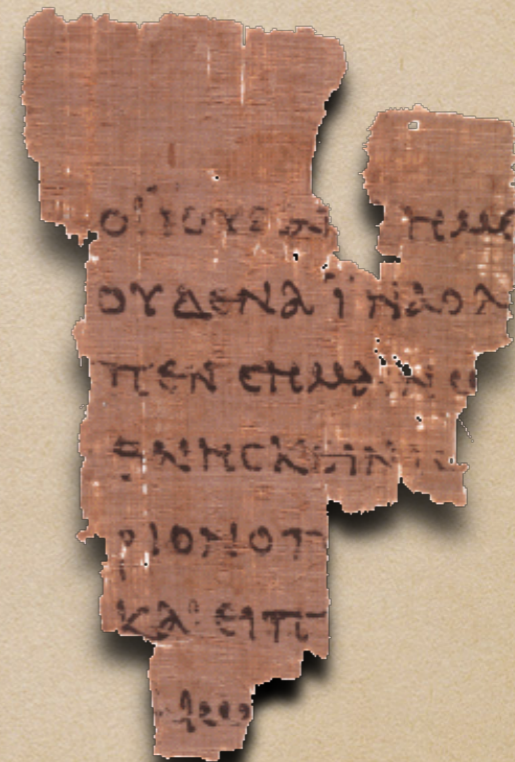
Facts affirmed by a strong majority of historical majority of historical scholars:

1. **Jesus died by crucifixion** during the passover in Jerusalem in AD 30 or 33
2. **His tomb was found empty** a couple of days later by some of his female followers
3. **Jesus' followers were convinced they met the risen Jesus** on several occasions during the following days and weeks
4. **Skeptics were converted**—James, the previously skeptical brother of Jesus, and Paul, the former persecutor, became followers of Jesus after Jesus' death because they were convinced they met the risen Jesus
5. **They weren't expecting a resurrection (before the end of history)**—there was previously no notion in Second-Temple Judaism of one person in isolation being raised from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of history

Historical Criteria of Authenticity

Historians acknowledge that all sources are written from a particular perspective. But that doesn't mean we simply discard a source because the author had certain interests. The following are good indicators of truthfulness:

- ◆ Multiple attestation
- ◆ Earliness
- ◆ Criterion of embarrassment
- ◆ Eyewitness testimony
- ◆ Background plausibility

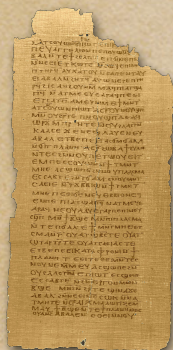


1. Jesus died by crucifixion

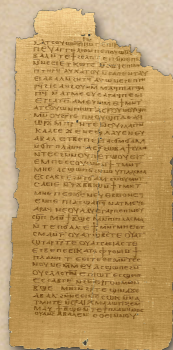


1. Jesus died by crucifixion

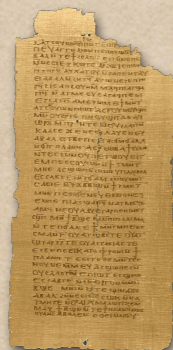
Paul's Letters



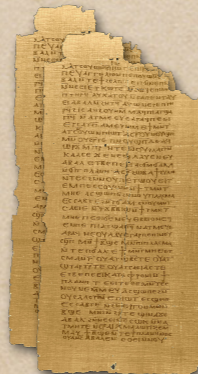
Mark's Gospel



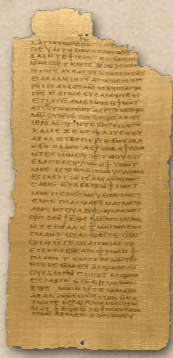
Matthew's Gospel



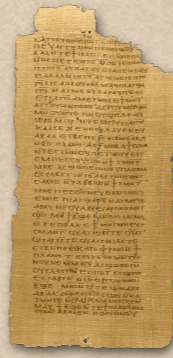
Luke-Acts



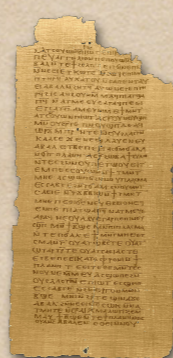
John's Gospel



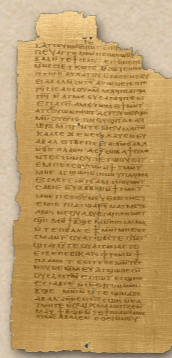
Epistle to the Hebrews



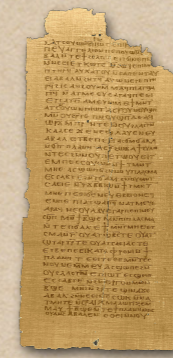
Petrine Epistles



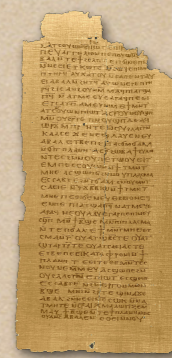
Josephus' Antiquities



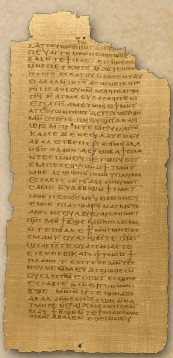
Tacitus' Annals



Mara bar Serapion's Letter



Talmud

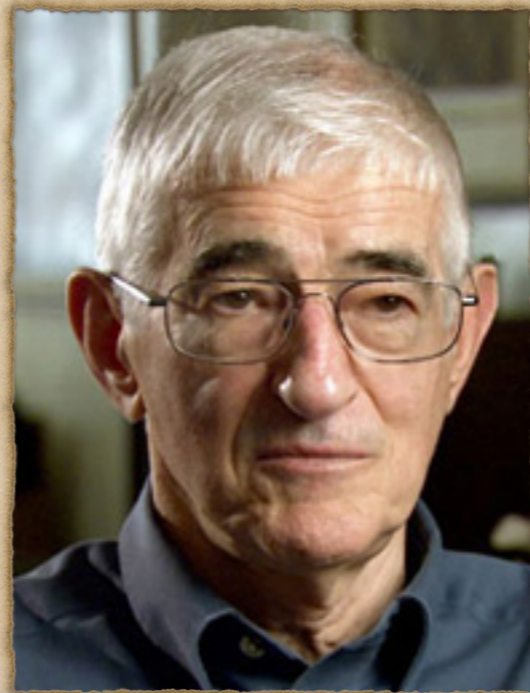


1. Jesus died by crucifixion

- ◆ **Josephus:** “Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross” (*Antiquities of the Jewish People*, 18.63-64).
- ◆ **Tacitus:** “Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus” (*Annals of Imperial Rome*, 15.44)
- ◆ **Mara bar Serapion:** “What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king?” (*Letter to his son*)
- ◆ **Talmud:** “On the day before the Passover they hanged Yeshua.” (*Sanhedrin 43a*)



1. Jesus died by crucifixion



John Dominic Crossan: “That Jesus was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be.”

2. Jesus' tomb was found empty



2. Jesus' tomb was found empty

The burial story is historically credible:

- ♦ The burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea is attested in all four Gospels, and the fact of the burial is summarised in the very early creed (1 Cor 15.4): “that he was buried [ἐτάφη]”
- ♦ Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to have been invented (use of proper name; embarrassment for early church—noble Sanhedrin member)
- ♦ The Gospels' description of the tomb and its surroundings fits well with archaeology (arcosolium tomb; near to Golgotha; Garden Gate)
- ♦ The background likelihood of Jesus being properly buried is high—Josephus: “the Jews are so careful about burial rites that even malefactors who have been sentenced to crucifixion are taken down and buried before sunset.” (*Jewish War* 4.317)
- ♦ If Jesus was buried in a known location, a belief in a bodily resurrection wouldn't have arisen without an empty tomb.



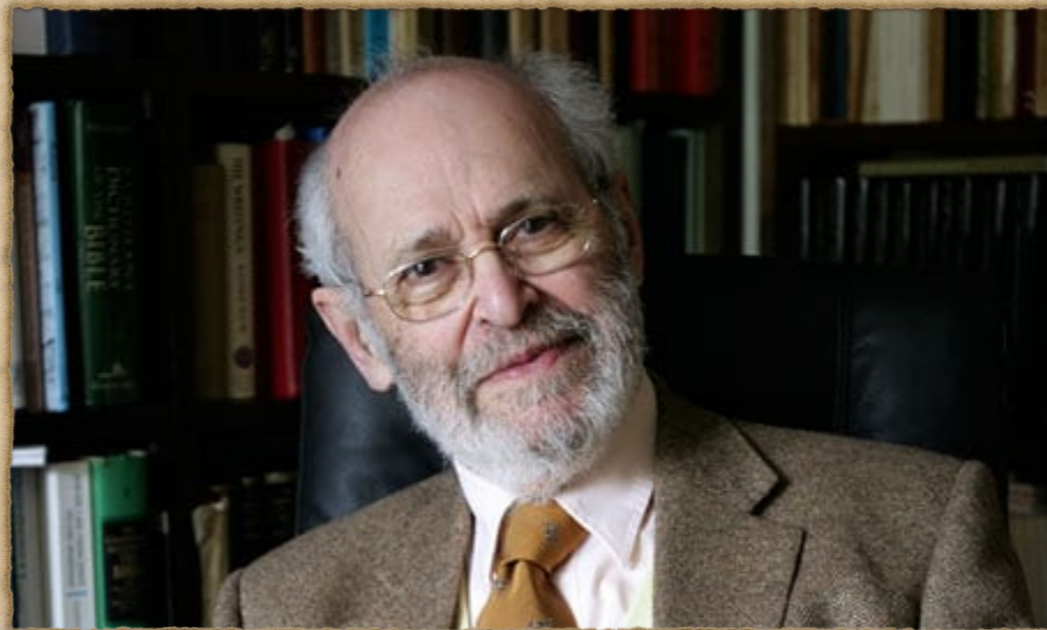
2. Jesus' tomb was found empty



Female witnesses:

- ♦ **The Talmud:** “Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women.” (Sotah 19a)
- ♦ **Josephus:** “But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex.” (*Antiquities* 4.815)
- ♦ **Celsus:** [A]fter death he rose again and showed the marks of his punishment and how his hands had been pierced. But who saw this? A hysterical female, as you say.” (*apud* Origen, *C. Cels.* 2.55)
- ♦ A fictional empty tomb story would very probably have used male witnesses.

2. Jesus' tomb was found empty



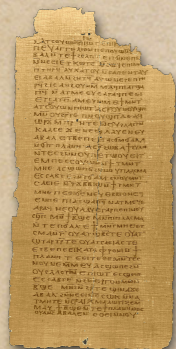
Geza Vermes: “The evidence furnished by female witnesses had no standing in a male-dominated society... If the empty tomb story had been manufactured by the primitive Church to demonstrate the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, one would have expected a uniform and foolproof account attributed to patently reliable witnesses.”

3. Jesus' followers had apparent meetings with the risen Jesus

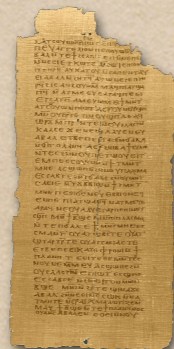


3. Jesus' followers had apparent meetings with the risen Jesus

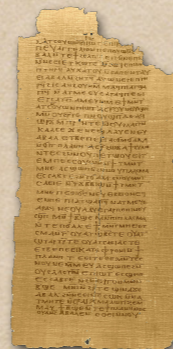
Paul's Letters



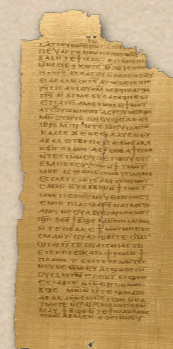
Implied in Mark's Gospel



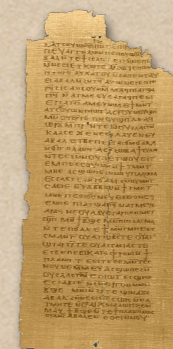
Matthew's Gospel



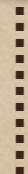
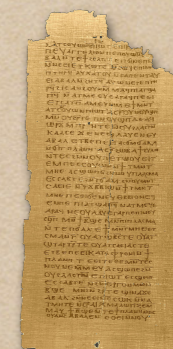
Luke's Gospel



John's Gospel



Josephus (?)



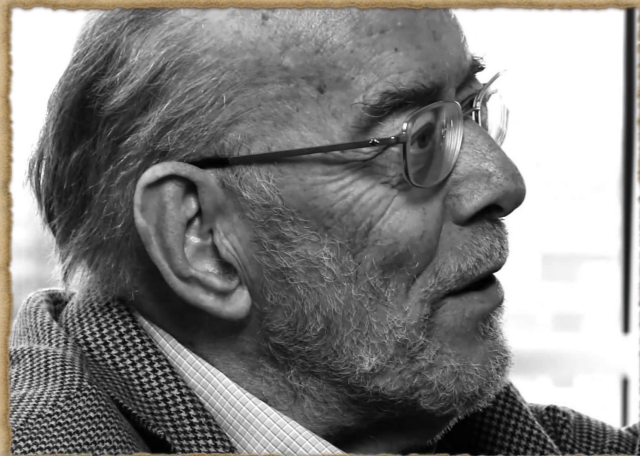
Very early creed

ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφάς,
καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη,
καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς,
καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ, εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα

3. Jesus' followers had apparent meetings with the risen Jesus

- ♦ **I Corinthians 15.3-8:** “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me [Paul].”
- ♦ ‘I received’ [παρέλαβον] ‘I handed on’ [παρέδωκα], is formal rabbinic language for the careful transmission of important information.
- ♦ Paul himself received this creed from the Jerusalem apostles shortly after his conversion, 1-2 years after Jesus’ crucifixion.
- ♦ **Galatians 1.18:** “Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord’s brother.”

3. Jesus' followers had apparent meetings with the risen Jesus



- ♦ **James Dunn:** “This tradition, we can be entirely confident, was formulated as tradition within months of Jesus’ death.”
- ♦ **Gerd Theissen & Annette Merz:** “The analysis of the formula tradition about the resurrection of Jesus allows the following conclusion: a tradition in I Corinthians 15:3b-5, which goes back very close to the events themselves, attests appearances to both individuals and groups. The credibility of this tradition is enhanced because it is in part confirmed by the narrative tradition [i.e. the Gospel accounts], which is independent, and because in the case of Paul we have the personal testimony of an eyewitness who knew many of the other witnesses.”

3. Jesus' followers had apparent meetings with the risen Jesus



- ♦ **Paula Fredriksen:** “I know in their own terms what they saw was the raised Jesus. That’s what they say, and then all the historic evidence we have afterwards attest to their conviction that that’s what they saw. I’m not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn’t there. I don’t know what they saw. But I do know that as a historian that they must have seen something.”

3. Jesus' followers had apparent meetings with the risen Jesus



Gerd Lüdemann: “It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus’ death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ”

3. Jesus' followers had apparent meetings with the risen Jesus



- ♦ Jesus' followers were thoroughly sincere—virtually all modern scholars grant this.
- ♦ Paul's testimony about how he formerly persecuted the Christian movement indicates that the persecution faced by the early church was a serious business: "You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it" (Gal 1.13).
- ♦ Solid evidence of the martyrdoms of several key figures in the first generation of Christians: Peter, James the brother of Jesus, Paul, Stephen, James the brother of John.

4. Skeptics were converted— James and Paul



4. Skeptics were converted— James and Paul



- ♦ Multiple sources indicate that James was a skeptic during Jesus' ministry (Mark 3.21,31; 6.3-4; John 5.5).
- ♦ Early creed reports an appearance of the risen Jesus to James "then he appeared to James" (1 Cor. 15.7).
- ♦ Multiple sources indicate that James later rose to prominence as a leader in the early Christian movement (Acts; Paul's letters; Josephus *Antiquities*) and eventually died as a martyr (Josephus, Hegesippus).

4. Skeptics were converted— James and Paul



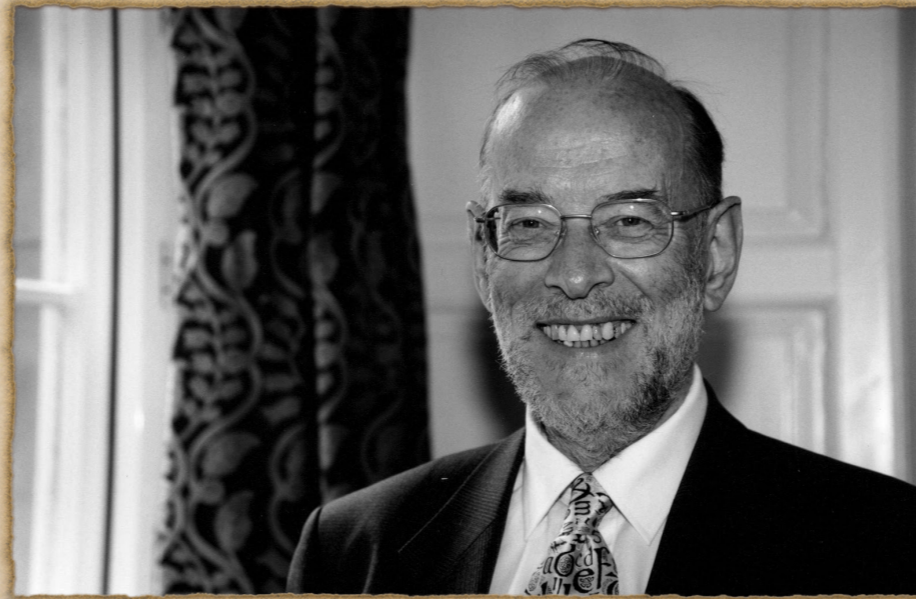
Ben Witherington: “It appears that James, like Paul, was a convert to the Jesus movement because at some juncture he saw the risen Jesus, for nothing prior to Easter can explain his having become a follower of Jesus, much less a leader of Jesus’ followers... It seems clear that it was Jesus’ appearance to him that mainly accounts for his conversion to the movement and his rise to prominence.”

4. Skeptics were converted— James and Paul



- ♦ Multiple sources testify that Paul (originally known as Saul of Tarsus) was a ferocious persecutor of the early Christian movement (Paul's own letters; Acts).
- ♦ Paul's letters and the book of Acts testify that Paul met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (en route to arrest Christians).
- ♦ Paul subsequently became one of Christianity's most effective missionaries ever, establishing churches throughout the Mediterranean region. He was eventually martyred.

4. Skeptics were converted— James and Paul



James Dunn: “There can be no doubt, then, that Saul, the persecutor of the first Christians, dramatically turned around 180 degrees, and became one of early Christianity’s most effective missionaries and teachers. No doubt either that Paul himself attributed this astounding *volte-face* to what happened on his way to Damascus. Equally no doubt that Paul himself believed that he had encountered Jesus in that event. And that it was this encounter with the risen Jesus which had transformed him from a zealous opponent of the early movement into its most effective advocate that the good news of Jesus was for Gentiles as well as Jews.”

5. They weren't expecting a resurrection (before the end of history)



5. They weren't expecting a resurrection (before the end of history)

- ◆ Other, much more obvious categories existed within Second Temple Judaism for talking about the post-mortem fate of important individuals (Enoch—Gen. 5.24; Elijah—2 Kings 2.11-12; 2 Macc. 15.13-14): *translation into heaven, vindication, exaltation.*
- ◆ Second-Temple Jews looked forward to the bodily resurrection of the righteous dead of Israel on the last day—but no one expected an individual in isolation to be resurrected in advance of the last day.
- ◆ The Gospels depict the disciples' initial reaction to the resurrection as one of surprise and doubt—this is probably not fictitious.



5. They weren't expecting a resurrection (before the end of history)

N.T. Wright: “Resurrection, in the world of Second-Temple Judaism, was about the *restoration of Israel* on the one hand and *the newly embodied life of all YHWH’s people* on the other... nobody imagined that any individuals would be raised in advance of the great last day... There are no traditions about a Messiah being raised to life: most Jews of this period hoped for resurrection, many Jews of this period hoped for a Messiah, but nobody put those two hopes together until the early Christians did so.”



Explaining the historical data

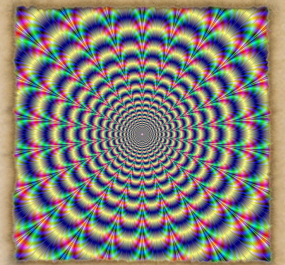
1. **Jesus died by crucifixion** during the passover in Jerusalem in AD 30 or 33
2. **His tomb was found empty** a couple of days later by some of his female followers
3. **Jesus' followers were convinced they met the risen Jesus** on several occasions during the following days and weeks
4. **Skeptics were converted**—James, the previously skeptical brother of Jesus, and Paul, the former persecutor, became followers of Jesus because they were convinced they met the risen Jesus
5. **They weren't expecting a resurrection (before the end of history)**—there was previously no notion in Second-Temple Judaism of one person in isolation being raised from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of history; the Gospels confirm that they weren't expecting Jesus to rise.

Naturalistic explanations: Fraud, swoon, wrong tomb?



- ♦ The sincerity of Jesus' earliest followers is beyond reasonable doubt—virtually no modern scholar entertains fraud as an explanation.
- ♦ Modern medical understanding of how crucifixion works (asphyxiation) and the Romans' use of death insurance (breaking legs; spear to the abdomen; checking for breathing) rules out the swoon theory; but even if Jesus had swooned, he would've been in a state of horrendous disfiguration and trauma.
- ♦ There would be many reasons for the women to note carefully the location of the tomb (mourning; secondary burial), and the tomb seems to have been close to the crucifixion site. But even if the wrong tomb had been identified by the women, Joseph of Arimathea would quickly be able to correct the mistake.

Naturalistic explanations: Hallucinations?



- ♦ The appearances of Jesus to the disciples as a group are solidly attested in multiple sources—“In our view there is no doubt that it really happened” (Theissen & Merz). But hallucinations are private experiences whose contents can’t be shared between multiple individuals, especially if the contents are detailed. Parallels with Bigfoot or UFO mass sightings are very weak.
- ♦ Grief visions in ancient Judaism were a known phenomenon, but in no other case we know of did such visions give rise to belief that the deceased person had been bodily resurrected.
- ♦ In order to give rise to an unprecedented belief in the bodily resurrection of one man within history, the experiences of the disciples would need to have been extremely convincing, probably involving multiple sensory modalities (including touch), extended conversation, and so on.

Weighing the probabilities

Probability that: God raised Jesus from the dead

versus



Probability that:

Jesus' followers engaged in an act of co-ordinated fraud

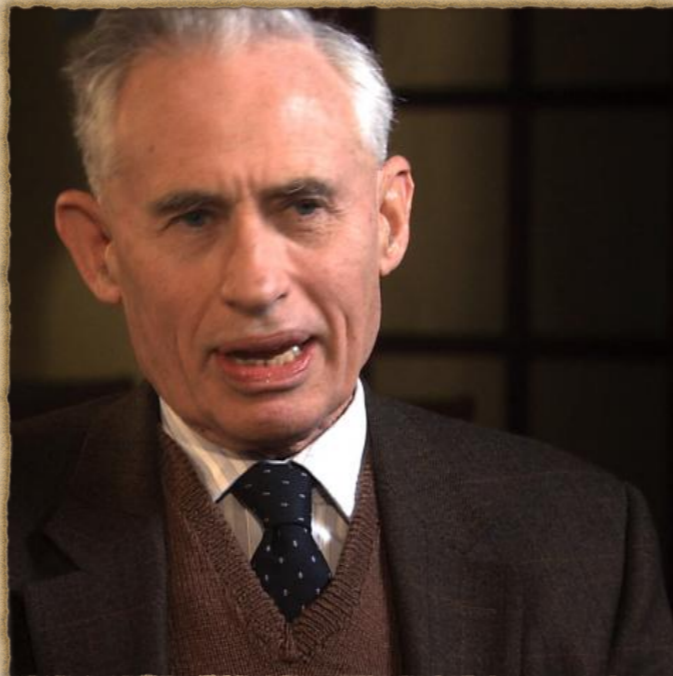
or

Jesus swooned and managed to convince his disciples that he'd been resurrected

or

Jesus' followers had a series of highly convincing, polymodal group hallucinations of Jesus, of such a kind as to convince them that Jesus had been bodily resurrected

Weighing the probabilities



Richard Swinburne: “There is, in my view, so much testimony to the main outlines of the traditional account that *if this event was of a kind which we might expect to happen...*, we would have no problem in accepting the main point of the testimony.”

Weighing the probabilities

Reasons to expect a loving God to become incarnate:

1. To atone for sin
2. To identify with us in our human condition and especially in our suffering
3. To provide us with teaching



Weighing the probabilities

Jesus' life bore the marks of an incarnate God:

- ◆ His ethical teaching is plausibly true and profound, and has had an immense impact on human history
- ◆ He demonstrated radical humility and compassion for the marginalised
- ◆ He had a widespread reputation as a healer during his lifetime and even among his opponents
- ◆ He said and did things which implied his divinity:
 - ◆ He taught as though he was God's spokesman ("Amen, I say to you...") and believed he had the authority to revise the Mosaic Law
 - ◆ He spoke of himself as God's unique Son (Matt 11.25-27; Mark 13.32; Mark 12.1-12)
 - ◆ He called Twelve disciples, representing the twelve tribes of Israel
 - ◆ He implied that he himself would replace the Temple
- ◆ His followers, including his original disciples and members of his family, came to believe that he was God incarnate from a very early stage (e.g., 1 Cor 1.2; 1 Cor 8.6; 1 Cor 16.22; Phil 2.6-11)

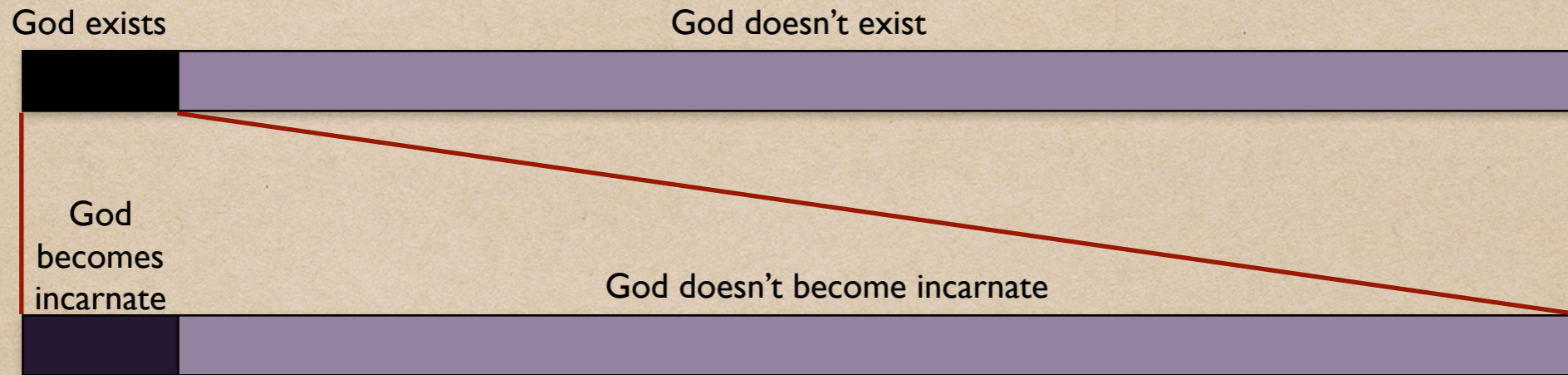
Weighing the probabilities

God exists

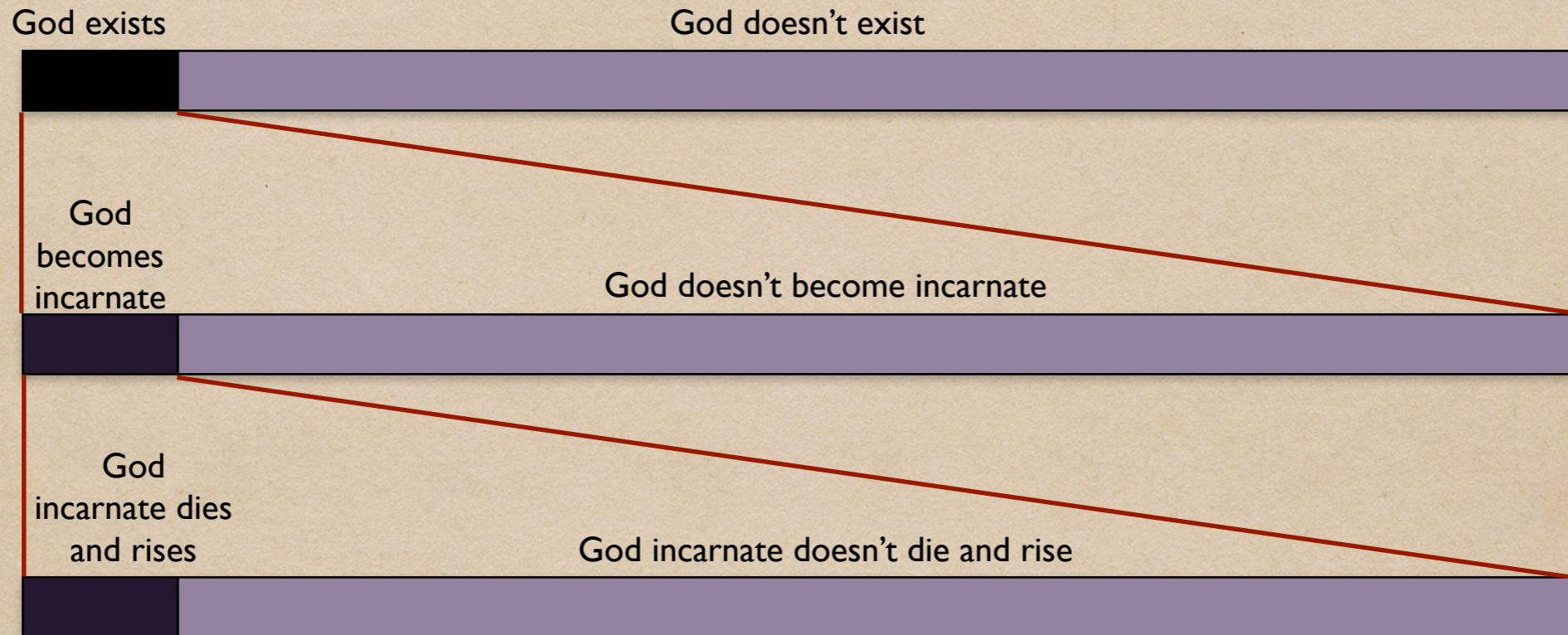
God doesn't exist



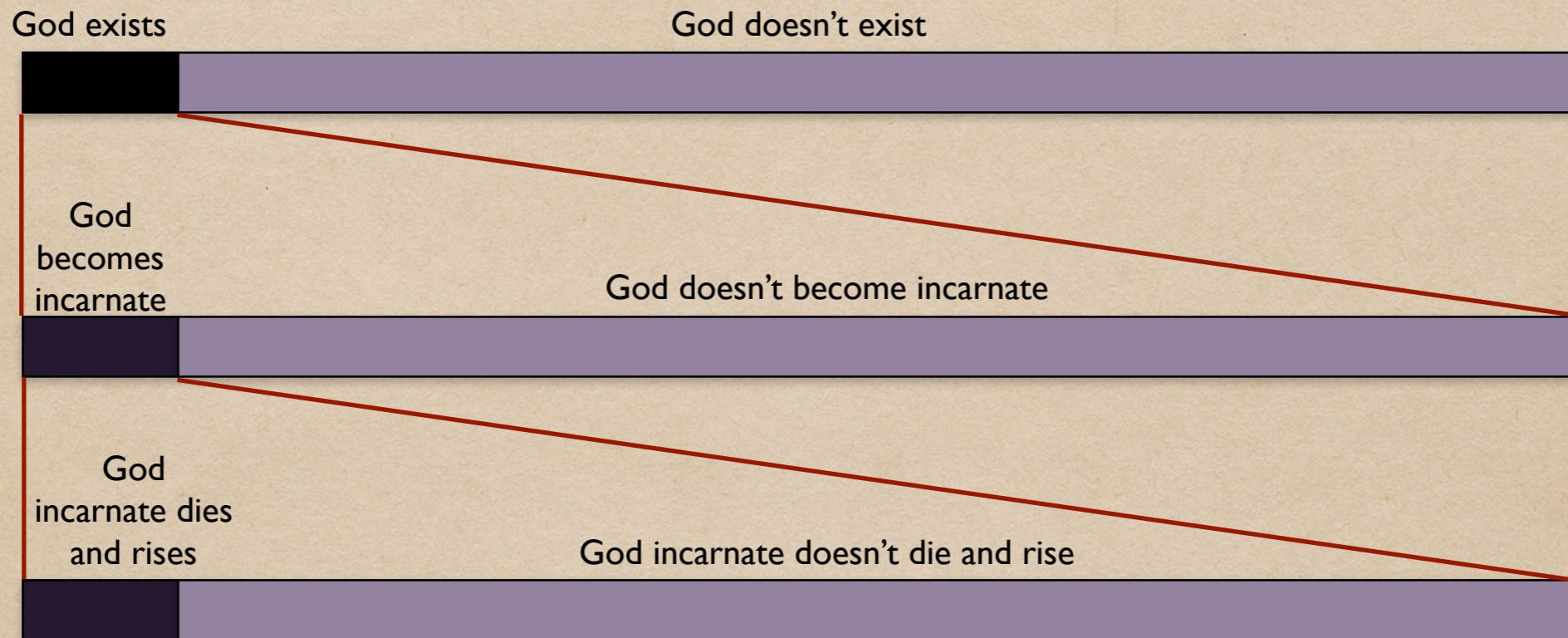
Weighing the probabilities



Weighing the probabilities



Weighing the probabilities



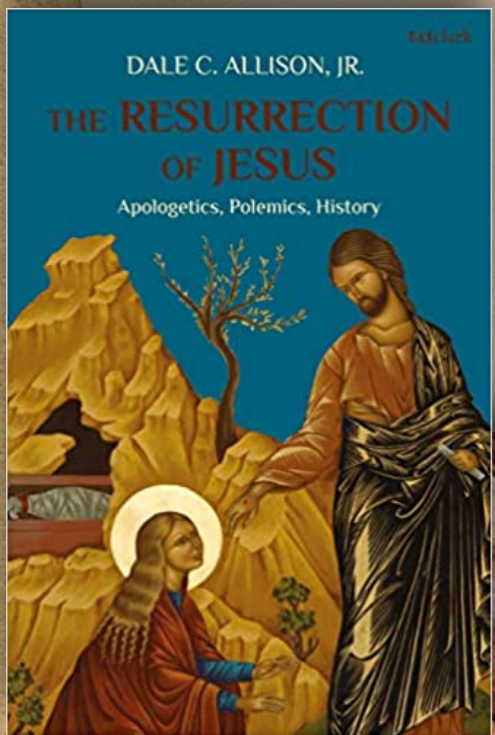
God exists: 1 in 10

Given that God exists, God becomes incarnate: 1 in 10

Given that God becomes incarnate, God incarnate dies and rises: 1 in 10

$$1/10 \times 1/10 \times 1/10 = 1/1000$$

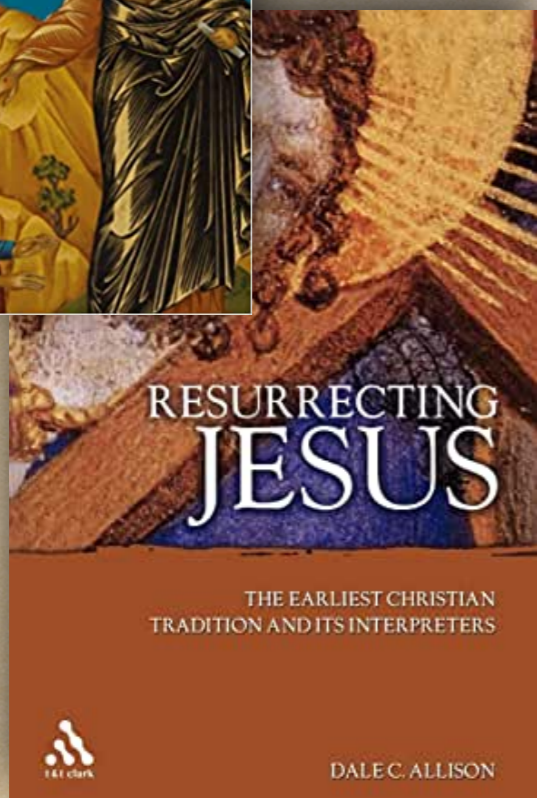
1/1000 >>> the probability that we'd have the evidence given no resurrection



DALE C. ALLISON, JR.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Apologetics, Polemics, History

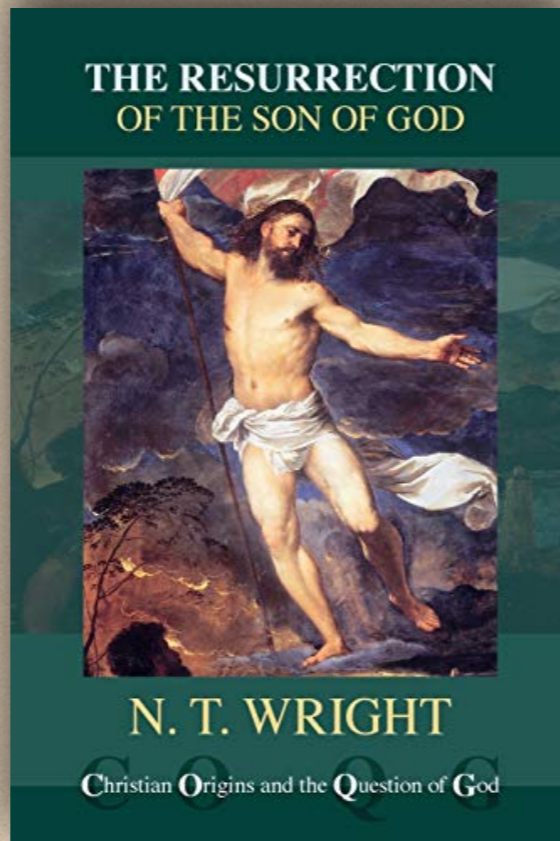


RESURRECTING JESUS

THE EARLIEST CHRISTIAN TRADITION AND ITS INTERPRETERS



DALE C. ALLISON

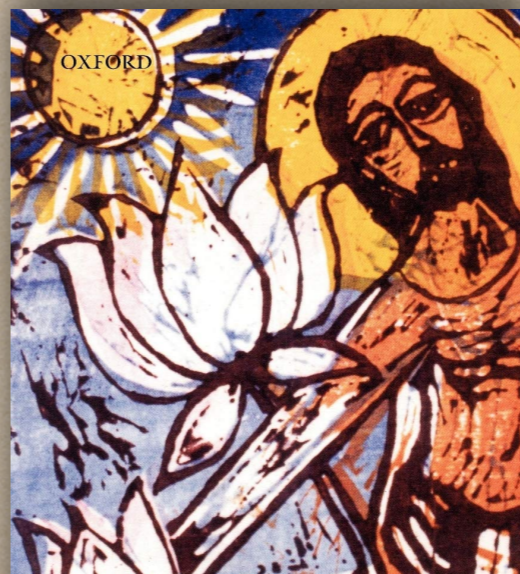


THE RESURRECTION OF THE SON OF GOD



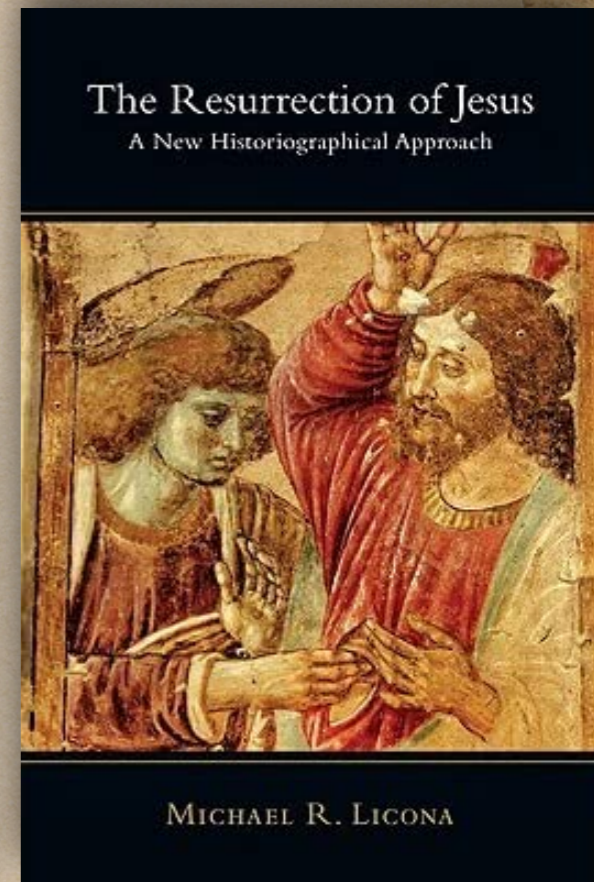
N. T. WRIGHT

Christian Origins and the Question of God



The RESURRECTION of GOD INCARNATE

RICHARD SWINBURNE



The Resurrection of Jesus

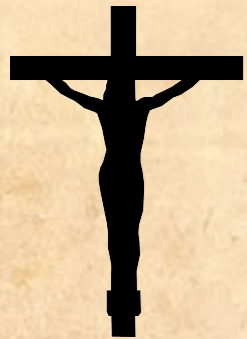
A New Historiographical Approach

MICHAEL R. LICONA



Appendix: The earliness of the summary in I Corinthians 15:3-5

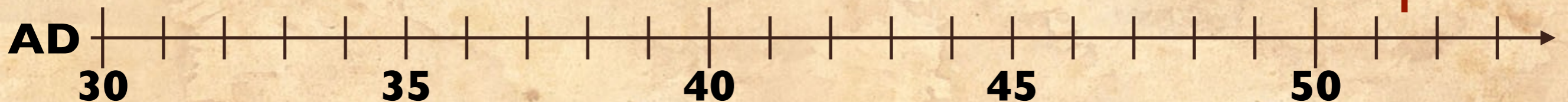
Jesus is crucified



Paul plants the church in Corinth

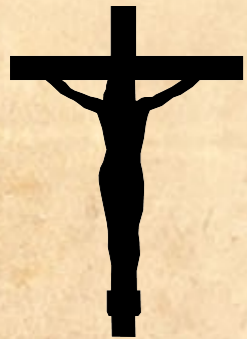


“For I handed on to you
as of first importance
what I in turn had
received...” (I Cor 15.3)



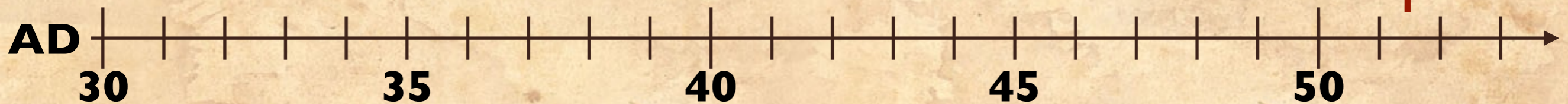
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Jesus is crucified



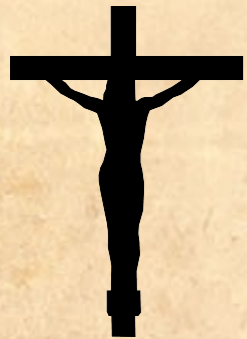
Paul plants the church in Corinth

“For I handed on to you
as of first importance
what I in turn had
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Appendix: The earliness of the summary in I Corinthians 15:3-5

**Jesus is
crucified**



**Paul's
conversion**



**Paul plants
the church
in Corinth**



AD

30

35

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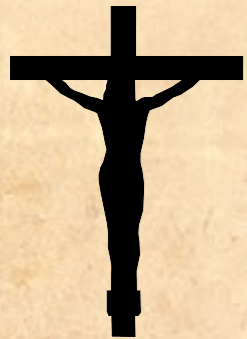
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Appendix: The earliness of the summary in I Corinthians 15:3-5

Jesus is crucified



Paul's conversion

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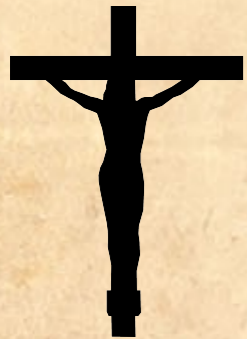
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“Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas [Peter] and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother.” (Galatians 1.18-19)

Paul plants the church in Corinth

Appendix: The earliness of the summary in I Corinthians 15:3-5

Jesus is crucified



Paul's conversion

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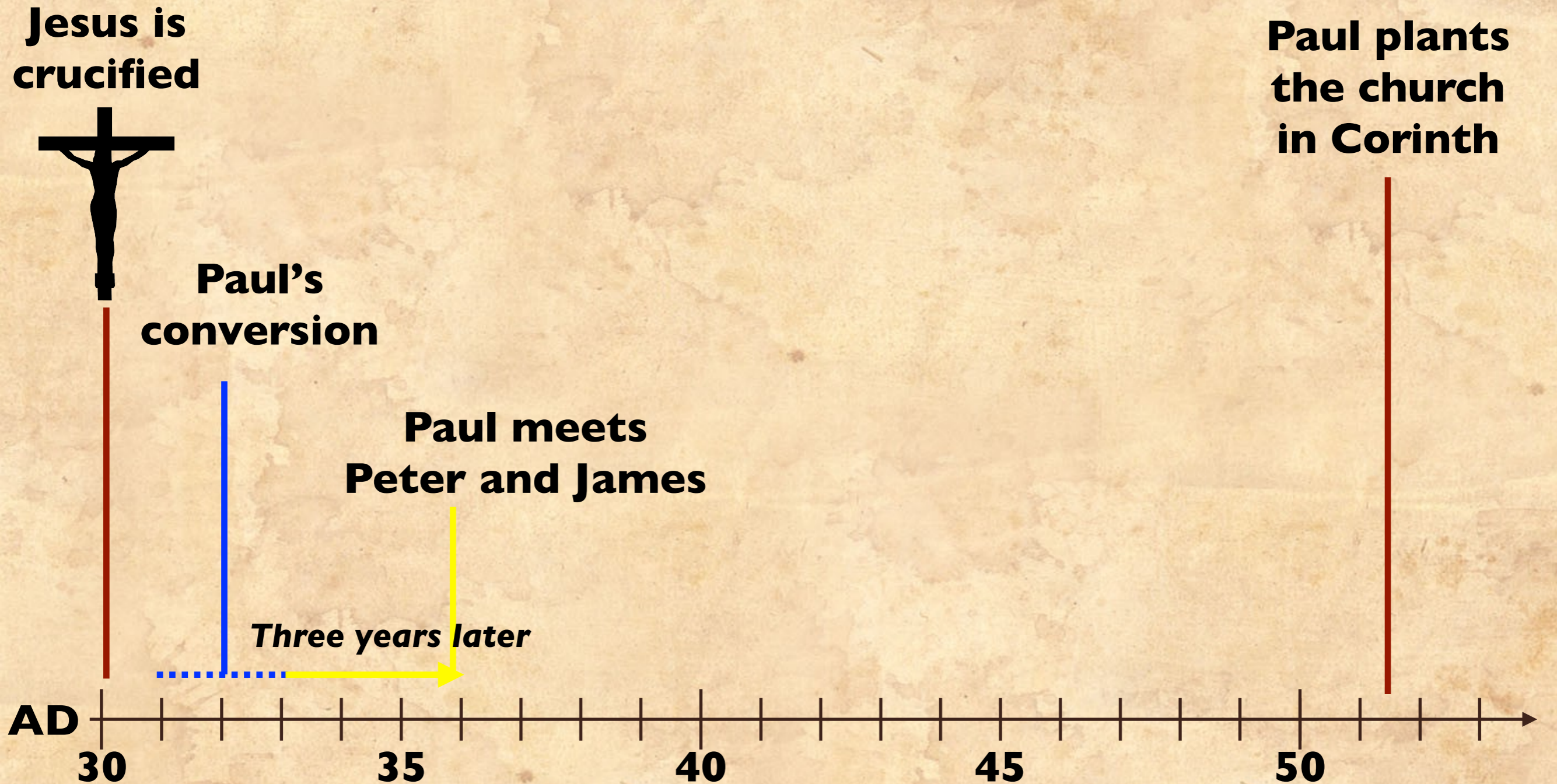
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Three years later

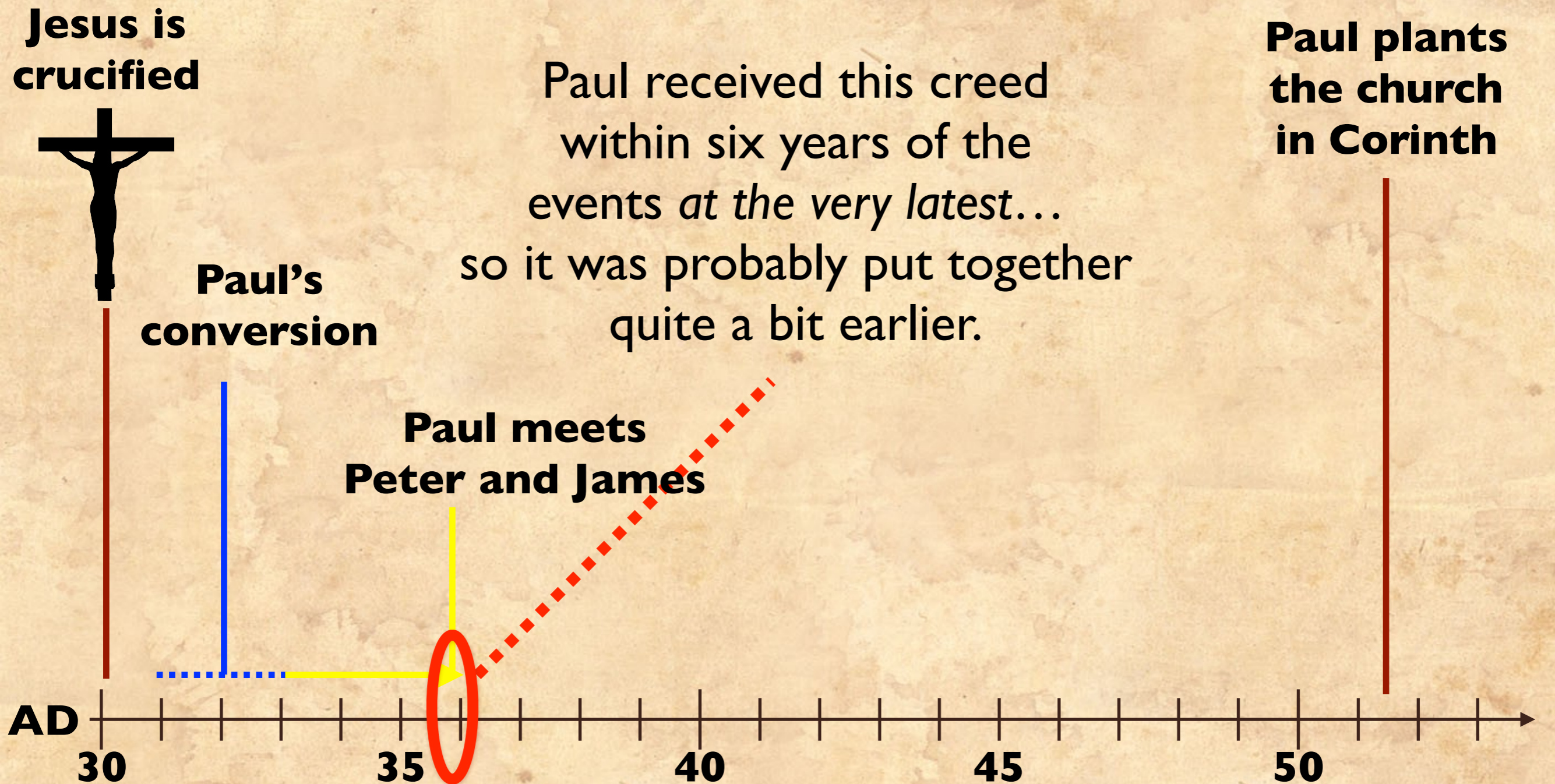
Paul plants the church in Corinth

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Appendix: The earliness of the summary in I Corinthians 15:3-5

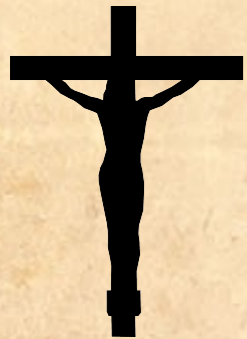


Appendix: The earliness of the summary in I Corinthians 15:3-5



Appendix: The earliness of the summary in I Corinthians 15:3-5

Jesus is crucified



Paul's conversion

Paul meets Peter and James

Paul received this creed within six years of the events *at the very latest...*

so it was probably put together quite a bit earlier.

Paul plants the church in Corinth

AD

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