

SESSION FIVE

*MINIMAL FACTS
APPROACH*

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I. MINIMAL FACTS APPROACH IN DEFENSE OF THE RESURRECTION¹²

A. Minimal Facts Approach Defined

1. The Minimal Facts Approach makes the case for the Resurrection using only data agreed upon by the majority of historians and scholars who specialize in Christ and His Resurrection. The approach uses the Bible as a historical document rather than the inspired Word of God. No appeal to the inspiration of the Scripture is required.
2. Lowest common denominator of the facts and effective when responding to skeptics
3. These minimal facts can be used to answer most of the common objections to the resurrection (See Session Four, Appendix E, p.84)

B. Methodology

1. There is a significant body of data that scholars of almost every religious and philosophical persuasion recognize as being historical.
2. Scholars = degreed, authors of peer-reviewed publications; specialists in this area
3. Two major prerequisites for an occurrence to be designated as a minimal fact:
 - a. Each event had to be established by more than adequate scholarly evidence, and usually by several critically-ascertained, independent lines of argumentation (most important).
 - b. The vast majority of contemporary scholars in relevant fields had to acknowledge the historicity of the occurrence.
4. Numbers of minimal facts may vary among scholars due to these prerequisites.

¹ Gary Habermas, www.GaryHabermas.com.

² Gary Habermas, "The Minimal Facts Approach to the Resurrection of Jesus: The Role of Methodology as a Crucial Component in Establishing Historicity," (2012) Faculty Publications and Presentations. 14. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/sod_fac_pubs/14.

II. HABERMAS' SIX MINIMAL FACTS

A. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion

1. Unanimous scholarly agreement
2. Recorded by all four Gospels and Josephus³

B. Jesus' followers had real experiences that they thought were actual appearances of the risen Jesus

1. Unanimous scholarly agreement

C. The Apostles' lives were transformed as a result, even to the point of being willing to die specifically for their faith in the Resurrection message (doubters to bold proclaimers).

D. The Resurrection was taught very early, soon after the Crucifixion and very early in church history.

E. James, Jesus' unbelieving brother, became a Christian due to his own experience that he thought was the resurrected Christ.

F. The Christian persecutor Paul (formerly Saul of Tarsus) also became a believer after a similar experience.

III. HABERMAS' ADDITIONAL SIX FACTS⁴

A. The empty tomb⁵

B. Jesus was buried, most likely in a private tomb.

C. Soon after the Resurrection, the disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope.

◆ *INSIGHT*

A common objection to the claim that people saw the risen Jesus was they were simply hallucinating (Hallucination Theory). However, modern-day science teaches that the most common causes of hallucinations are neurodegenerative diseases (i.e. Parkinson's, Alzheimer's), migraines, schizophrenia, brain tumors, epilepsy, sleep deprivation, high fever, drugs, and alcohol.

³ Flavius Josephus, *Josephus, The Complete Works*, William Whiston (transl), Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1988, 978.

⁴ Eric Chabot, *Revisiting Gary Habermas' 12 Facts about the Resurrection of Jesus*, ThinkApologetics.com, Jan 20, 2016, accessed on 7/7/2024, <https://chab123.wordpress.com/2016/01/20/revisiting-gary-habermas-12-facts-about-the-resurrection-of-jesus/>.

⁵ Many scholars place the empty tomb in the top five minimal facts supported by the many reasons discussed in Session #2.

- D. The disciples' public testimony and preaching of the resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and buried shortly before.
- E. The Gospel message centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus (Resurrection was the central message).
- F. Orthodox Jews who believed in Christ made Sunday their primary day of worship.

IV. **MICHAEL LICONA'S HISTORICAL BEDROCK⁶**

A. Historical Bedrock

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. The disciples' experiences what they believed to be appearances of the risen Jesus.
3. Paul's experience that convinced him similarly

B. Second Order Facts

1. The conversion of James, the brother of Jesus, which was probably due to an experience that he also considered as a Resurrection appearance of Jesus
2. The empty tomb⁷ (75% of scholars agree)
3. Jesus' predictions of his violent, imminent death as well as His Resurrection afterwards
4. The earliest apostles held that Jesus appeared in a bodily form.

V. **NT WRIGHT'S MINIMAL FACTS⁸**

- A. The "belief" among the early Christians that Jesus rose from the dead
- B. The empty tomb

⁶ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 462.

⁸ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 685-696.

C. The appearances to the disciples and Paul

VI. OTHER FACTS USED TO DEFEND THE RESURRECTION

A. As Gospel writing timeline advances, stories remain stable. They don't grow in legend. The early church was not so quick to invent sayings about Jesus.

B. Matthew, John, and Paul were eyewitnesses.

C. Christians mutated from Jewish resurrection thought.

D. The rapid growth of the Christian church⁹

E. The Apostles were willing to identify Jesus as deity equal to YHWY and, in so doing, risk eternal damnation. Breaking the Shema (affirmation of Judaism and declaration of faith in one God) could only make sense if they were convinced that the Resurrection occurred. Then, subsequent redevelopment of the Shema to include Jesus in the Godhead is further early proof that this high Christology developed prior to the writing of the Gospels^{10 11} (See Session Four, Appendix E, p. 84-86).

VII. SUMMARY

A. Minimal-facts approach uses only data agreed upon by the majority of scholars and historians to make the case for the Resurrection. The approach uses the Bible as a historical document rather than the inspired Word of God. No appeal to the inspiration of the Scripture is required.

B. Habermas' minimal-facts approach uses the following: Jesus died by crucifixion. Jesus' followers had real experiences that they thought were actual appearances of the risen Jesus. The Apostles' lives were transformed as a result, even to the point of being willing to die specifically for their faith in the Resurrection message. The Resurrection was taught very early, soon after the Resurrection itself. Both James (brother of Jesus) and Paul each became believers in Christ after encountering the risen Jesus.

⁹ Some scholars suggest this reason should be in the top 5 minimal facts.

¹⁰ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans: 2008, 1-59.

¹¹ Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord; How On Earth Did Jesus Become God?* London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark: 2015, 93-125.

- C. There are numerous historical objections to the Resurrection. A few of these include the swoon theory, stolen body theory, wrong tomb theory, hallucination theory, conspiracy theory, and simply, it's all a myth. Each of these objections can be responsibly discredited (see Session Four).

VIII. STUDY QUESTIONS

- A. How would you explain to a friend the minimal-facts approach to the Resurrection?

- B. List six of Habermas' minimal facts that he uses to argue for the Resurrection. What other facts can you name to add to this list?

- C. How many objections to the Resurrection can you name? How would you refute each objection?

- D. Muslims do not believe that Jesus died by crucifixion. The Qur'an (4:157) states, "And their saying, 'indeed we killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, messenger of Allah.' *But they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him*, but it was made to appear so to them. And those who disagree about it are in doubt about it. There is not anything of knowledge in this for them except the pursuit of conjecture. *They did not kill him, for certain*" [emphasis added]. How would you respond?

