Origin of the Christian Faith
D. Origin of the Christian Faith

1. On the whole
   - **Transformation of the disciples** from disillusioned deserters of Jesus to bold proclaimers of His resurrection even to the point of death.
     - Clement of Rome – 1 Clem. 5:2-7
     - Polycarp – Pol. Phil. 9:2
     - Dionysius of Corinth – Eusebius EH 2:25:8
     - Tertullian – Scorpiace 15
     - Origen – Contra Celsum 2:56, 77

"That it was the Easter experiences which affected [the disciples'] transformation is beyond reasonable doubt."

Ben Meyer
*The Aims of Jesus, p. 60*
"Only the appearances of Jesus brought about a new change of mood in them."

D. Origin of the Christian Faith

- Sincere belief evidenced by their willingness to suffer and die.
- Public accessibility to the death, burial, empty tomb and appearances makes the disciples' dedication unlike any other religious belief before or since.
- They had an evidenced experience unlike any other "religious experience"

- (Belief in the resurrection was universal in the early church)
- (The criterion by which the Jerusalem church determined that Paul's mission to the gentiles was unified was the shared proclamation of the resurrection)
"What Paul preached was never the subject of controversy between Paul's gentile mission and the church in Jerusalem. Jesus' death and resurrection was the event upon which their common proclamation was based."

Helmut Koester
Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development, p. 51

"The Easter faith of his first disciples...was not the peculiar experience of a few enthusiasts or a peculiar theological opinion of a few apostles, who in the course of time had the luck to prevail. No, they were all one in the belief and the confession to the Risen One."

Gunther Bornkamm
Jesus von Nazereth, p. 159
D. Origin of the Christian Faith

2. For Skeptics

- **PAUL**
  - **Conversion** – 1 Cor. 15:9-10; Gal. 1:13-16; Phil. 3:6-7; Acts 9;22;26

D. Origin of the Christian Faith

- **Suffering and Martyrdom**
  - Clement of Rome – 1 Clem. 5:2-7
  - Polycarp – Pol. Phil. 9:2
  - Tertullian – Scorpiace 15
  - Dionysius of Corinth – Eusebius EH 2:25:8
  - Origen – Commentary on Genesis cited by Eusebius EH 3:1
D. Origin of the Christian Faith

- **JAMES**
  - **Conversion**
    - Unbelieving – Mark 3:21,31; 6:3-4; John 7:5
    - Appeared to – 1 Cor. 15:7
    - Leader in the Church – Gal. 1:19; Acts 15:12-21

D. Origin of the Christian Faith

- **Suffering and Martyrdom**
  - Josephus – Antiquities 20:200
  - Hegesippus – quoted by Eusebius EH 2:23
  - Clement of Alexandria – quoted by Eusebius EH 2:1
"It is difficult to overemphasize what a disaster the crucifixion was for the disciples' faith. Jesus' death on the cross spelled the humiliating end for any hopes they had entertained that he was the Messiah.

The testimony of Jesus' followers is suspect because they are biased. They should be disregarded.

Problems
1. Paul and James were biased against Christianity.
2. By this standard, most historical accounts would be rejected.
3. Bias can work in favor of the account. A biased author is motivated to make an accurate record (e.g. Jewish historians reporting on the holocaust)
4. We must address the data offered more than the bias of the reporter. Otherwise we end up with the genetic fallacy or even an ad hominem argument.
Swoon Theory
Aka Apparent Death Theory

Jesus didn't really die. He passed out and later revived in the tomb.

Problems
1. Does not match what we know about the proficiency of Roman executions and the medical reality of flogging and crucifixion
2. A half-dead Jesus would not lead to a belief in a resurrected messiah.
3. Jews in that context would have thought he survived rather than rose based on a belief in an end times general resurrection.
4. Does nothing to account for the conversions of skeptics like Paul, James and Thomas

"Ancient Judaism did not know of an anticipated resurrection as an event of history. Nowhere does one find in the literature anything comparable to the resurrection of Jesus. Certainly resurrections of the dead were known, but these always concerned resuscitations, the return to the earthly life. In no place in Judaic literature does it concern a resurrection to doxa as an event of history."
"Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge"

"It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at least yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conquerer of death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship."
Stolen Body Theory

Aka Fraud Theory or Conspiracy Theory

The disciples secretly stole the body and lied about the resurrection.

Problems

1. Does not account for the embarrassing inclusion of women as the primary witnesses.
2. Why would conspiracists draw attention to the theory that they stole the body?
3. Liars are not the type to become martyrs.
4. This does not fit with the character of the disciples.
5. Based on Jewish belief, they had no background beliefs or motive to make up a suffering servant story.
6. Does nothing to account for the conversions of skeptics like Paul, James and Thomas.

"If your favorite Messiah got himself crucified, then you either went home or else you got yourself a new Messiah. But the idea of stealing Jesus' corpse and saying that God had raised him from the dead is hardly one that would have entered the minds of the disciples."
Wrong Tomb Theory

The women and disciples went to the wrong tomb, found it empty, and concluded that Jesus rose from the dead.

Problems
1. This does not account for the appearance reports.
2. No one but John was convinced by the empty tomb.
3. There is no evidence offered that this occurred.
4. The family tomb of a Jewish leader would be sufficiently well-known.
5. Why think that they would not go to greater lengths to double check before concluding that he rose from the dead?

Displace Body Theory

Joseph put Jesus' body in his family tomb temporarily but later moved it to the criminals' graveyard leaving the disciples to infer the resurrection based on the vacant tomb.

Problems
1. This does not address the post-mortem appearances or the subsequent belief in the resurrection based on them.
2. Based on custom, law and the proximity of the criminals' graveyard, Joseph would have buried Jesus' there that night.
3. The error by Jesus' followers would have been easily corrected. There is no reason to think that Joseph or his servants would withhold such information.
The disciples believed they saw Jesus but these were hallucinations.

Problems
1. The reports of appearances all claim it was a physical Jesus. There is no hint of it being a figment of their imagination.
2. Group hallucinations do not happen and even if there were a variety of individual hallucinations they would not be univocal in their description.
3. Hallucinations, visions, delusions would be evidence that He was dead or spiritual not that he was physically resurrected. Their prior beliefs would inform their hallucinations.
4. This does not address the fact of the empty tomb.
5. This does nothing to account for the conversions of skeptics like Paul and James.

"Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature only one person can see a hallucination at a time. They certainly aren't something which can be seen by a group of people. Neither is it possible that one person could somehow induce an hallucination in somebody else. Since an hallucination exists only in this subjective, personal sense, it is obvious that others cannot witness it."
"Hallucinations, as projections of the mind, can contain nothing new. Therefore, given the current Jewish beliefs about life after death, the disciples, were they to project hallucinations of Jesus, would have seen Jesus in heaven or in Abraham's bosom, where the souls of the righteous dead were believed to abide until the resurrection. And such visions would not have caused belief in Jesus' resurrection."

Jesus' story is borrowed from a former pagan mythology with similar dying and rising elements.

Problems
1. It makes no sense given the context of first-century Jews in Palestine.
2. Anything remotely close to Jesus' resurrection story is 100 years later than Jesus minimum.
3. The existence of "similar" stories does not disprove Jesus' resurrection. It stands or falls on its own historical merits.
4. The nature of "resurrection" in these other accounts is unclear and/or dissimilar.
5. Ample alternative explanations exist to explain these myths.
"The crucifixion of Jesus, understood from the point of view of any onlooker, whether sympathetic or not, was bound to have appeared as the complete destruction of any messianic pretensions or possibilities he or his followers might have hinted at."

N.T. Wright
Christian Origins, 3:557-58

"Liberal efforts to undermine the uniqueness of the Christian revelation via claims of a pagan religious influence collapse quickly once a full account of the information is available...The birth and rapid rise of the Christian church...remain an unsolved enigma for any historian who refuses to take seriously the only explanation offered by the Church itself."

Ronald Nash
Was the New Testament Influenced by Pagan Religions?
Summary Conclusion

There is considerable good historical evidence accepted by the majority of scholars for the following facts. Jesus Christ was crucified by the Romans and died. The tomb was later found empty by a group of his women followers. A number of people reported that he appeared to them physically after his death, including skeptics. These occurrences led to a belief so sincere that his followers were willing to suffer and die for it. Aside from a metaphysical bias against the resurrection, there is no theory available that provides a better explanation for these facts than the resurrection itself. In fact, while the resurrection hypothesis accounts well for all these facts, the rival theories each have explanatory gaps or implausibilities leaving them with much less explanatory power and scope. Given the evidence we have, it is most reasonable to infer, considering the historical evidence, that Jesus was raised from the dead.