

Harvard Law Professor Puts Jesus' Resurrection on Trial

Legal scholar, Dr. Simon Greenleaf (1783–1853), decided to put Jesus' resurrection on trial by examining the evidence. Greenleaf helped to put the Harvard Law School on the map. He also wrote the three-volume legal masterpiece, *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, which has been called "the greatest single authority in the entire literature of legal procedure."^[1] The U.S. judicial system today still relies on rules of evidence established by Greenleaf.

As a legal scholar, Greenleaf wondered if Jesus' resurrection would meet his stringent tests for evidence. He wondered whether or not the evidence for it would hold up in a court of law. Focusing his brilliant legal mind on the facts of history, Greenleaf began applying his rules of evidence to the case of Jesus' resurrection.

Contrary to what skeptics might have expected, the more Greenleaf investigated the record of history, the more evidence he discovered supporting the claim that Jesus had indeed risen from the tomb.

So, what was that evidence? Greenleaf observed several dramatic changes that took place shortly after Jesus died, the most baffling being the behavior of the disciples. It wasn't just one or two disciples who insisted Jesus had risen; it was all of them. Applying his own rules of evidence to the facts, Greenleaf arrived at his verdict.

After evaluating all the evidence, Greenleaf accepted Jesus' resurrection as the best explanation for the events that took place immediately after his crucifixion. To this brilliant legal scholar, it would have been impossible for the disciples to persist with their conviction that Jesus had risen if they hadn't actually seen the risen Christ.^[2]

To this legal expert, the case for Jesus' resurrection was so compelling that he had no doubt it would hold up in a court of law. In his book, *The Testimony of the Evangelists*, Greenleaf documents the evidence supporting his conclusion. He challenges those who seek the truth about the resurrection to fairly examine the evidence.

Greenleaf believed that any unbiased person who honestly examines the evidence, as in a court of law, will conclude what he did—that Jesus Christ has truly risen.^[3]