When I first met soft-spoken Leo Carter, he was a seventeen-year-old veteran of Chicago's grittiest neighborhood. His testimony had put three killers in prison. And he was still carrying a .38-caliber slug in his head—a grisly reminder of a horrific saga that began when he witnessed Elijah Baptist gun down a local grocer.

Leo and a friend, Leslie Scott, were playing basketball when they saw Elijah, then sixteen years old, slay Sam Blue outside his grocery store. Leo had known the grocer since childhood. “When we didn’t have any food, he’d give us some,” Leo explained to me. “So when I went to the hospital and they said he was dead, I knew I’d have to testify about what I saw.”

Eyewitness testimony is powerful. One of the most dramatic moments in a trial is when a witness describes the crime that he or she saw and then points confidently toward the defendant as being the perpetrator. Elijah Baptist knew that the only way to avoid prison would be to somehow prevent Leo Carter and Leslie Scott from doing just that.

So Elijah and two of his pals staged an ambush. Leslie and Leo’s brother, Henry, were brutally murdered, while Leo was shot in the head and left for dead. But somehow, against all odds, Leo lived. The bullet, in a place too precarious to be removed, remained in his skull. Despite searing headaches
that strong medication couldn't dull, he became the sole eye-witness against Elijah Baptist and his two cohorts. His word was good enough to land them in prison for the rest of their lives.

Leo Carter is one of my heroes. He made sure justice was served, even though he paid a monumental price for it. When I think of eyewitness testimony, even to this day—thirty years later—his face still appears in my mind.²

**Testimony from Distant Time**

Yes, eyewitness testimony can be compelling and convincing. When a witness has had ample opportunity to observe a crime, when there's no bias or ulterior motives, when the witness is truthful and fair, the climactic act of pointing out a defendant in a courtroom can be enough to doom that person to prison or worse.

And eyewitness testimony is just as crucial in investigating historical matters—even the issue of whether the Christmas manger really contained the unique Son of God.

But what eyewitness accounts do we possess? Do we have the testimony of anyone who personally interacted with Jesus, who listened to his teachings, who saw his miracles, who witnessed his death, and who encountered him after his alleged resurrection? Do we have any records from first-century “journalists” who interviewed eyewitnesses, asked tough questions, and faithfully recorded what they scrupulously determined to be true?

I knew that just as Leo Carter's testimony clinched the convictions of three brutal murderers, eyewitness accounts from the mists of distant time could help resolve the most important spiritual issue of all. To get solid answers, I flew
INTERVIEW: CRAIG L. BLOMBERG, PHD

Craig Blomberg is widely considered one of the country’s foremost authorities on the biographies of Jesus, which are called the four gospels. He received his doctorate in New Testament from Aberdeen University in Scotland, later serving as a senior research fellow for Tyndale House at Cambridge University in England, where he was part of an elite group of international scholars that produced a series of acclaimed works on Jesus. He is currently a professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary.

As he settled into a high-back chair in his office, cup of coffee in hand, I too sipped some coffee to ward off the Colorado chill. Because I sensed Blomberg was a get-to-the-point kind of guy, I decided to start my interview by cutting to the core of the issue.

“Tell me this,” I said with an edge of challenge in my voice, “is it really possible to be an intelligent, critically thinking person and still believe that the four gospels were written by the people whose names have been attached to them?”

Blomberg set his coffee cup on the edge of his desk and looked intently at me. “The answer is yes,” he said with conviction.

He sat back and continued. “It’s important to acknowledge that strictly speaking, the gospels are anonymous. But the uniform testimony of the early church was that Matthew, also known as Levi, the tax collector and one of
the twelve disciples, was the author of the first gospel in the New Testament; that John Mark, a companion of Peter, was the author of the gospel we call Mark; and that Luke, known as Paul's 'beloved physician,' wrote both the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.’”

“How uniform was the belief that they were the authors?” I asked.

“There are no known competitors for these three gospels,” he said. “Apparently, it was just not in dispute.”

Even so, I wanted to test the issue further. “Excuse my skepticism,” I said, “but would anyone have had a motivation to lie by claiming these people wrote these gospels, when they really didn’t?”

Blomberg shook his head. “Probably not. Remember, these were unlikely characters,” he said, a grin breaking on his face. “Mark and Luke weren’t even among the twelve disciples. Matthew was, but as a former hated tax collector, he would have been the most infamous character next to Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus!

“Contrast this with what happened when the fanciful Apocryphal Gospels were written much later. People chose the names of well-known and exemplary figures to be their fictitious authors—Philip, Peter, Mary, James. Those names carried much more weight than the names of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. So to answer your question, there would not have been any reason to attribute authorship to these three less respected people if it weren’t true.”

That sounded logical, but it was obvious that he was leaving out one of the gospel writers. “What about John?” I asked. “He was extremely prominent; in fact, he wasn’t just one of the twelve disciples but one of Jesus’ inner three, along with James and Peter.”