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The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

By Jim Norman

As a child, I accepted the truth of Bible stories in the same way I believed in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. Adam and Eve, Noah and the great flood, Moses and the Ten Commandments, David and Goliath, and the resurrection of Jesus were all familiar stories I learned in Sunday school. With respect to Jesus, Christmas and Easter helped to substantiate the various stories I heard about Him.

Even at the age of 12, when I had my “I don’t want to go to hell” experience in a little country church, I had no doubt that Jesus had been crucified and was subsequently raised from the dead. Somehow his death and resurrection could “save” me, but I did not really understand how it worked.

As the years passed and I began to drift into atheism and agnosticism, I developed the opinion that the Jesus story was merely an ancient myth. This opinion was strengthened over the years because I associated with people like me, who were running away from God rather than to Him. Since my friends and I shared the same opinions about Jesus, that was good enough to verify we had established the real truth about Him. The concept of transcendent truth had not yet dawned on me and I still believed I could decide what was true.

I had three doubts that made it difficult for me to accept the resurrection story as truth. My first doubt was couched in a general distrust in the accuracy of the Bible. My friends, and a few “experts” I met, assured me they had looked into the Bible and determined that it had been changed quite a bit from the time it was originally written; there was no way to tell what had been added or removed over the centuries. The second presupposition was based on a generally negative opinion of the human beings who lived in ancient times. I believed them to be much less sophisticated than people of our day and gullible enough to believe anything. The third bias I nurtured was a general denial of the existence of supernatural influence in human affairs. However, the more I studied, the more difficult it became to sustain my doubt.

With respect to the first issue about the accuracy of the Bible, I did not have to read many books before I was overwhelmed with evidence that the Bible is probably the

most reliable written document we have from ancient times. By reliable I mean that the words we read today are, without question, the same words that were originally written. I could find no credible scholars or critics who challenged that fact. What I discovered did not necessarily mean that what was written was true, but it did mean that the words I was reading were the same as when they were written. I spent about six months investigating this one issue and when the investigation was concluded, my first presupposition about inaccurate text was totally demolished. Now I was forced to deal with the truth or error of the words themselves.

Our “Gullible” Ancestors

I began this phase of my search by deciding to take a look at the “ignorant” people who lived in Biblical times. I soon found that I had given myself too much credit by assuming I was more intelligent than people of antiquity. About all I could determine in that regard was that modern society has better technology. Raw intelligence has nothing to do with technology.

Modern society has a larger information base from which to function. But does it require more intelligence to invent a wheel or merely find additional uses for it? Does it require more intelligence to invent bronze and iron, or to find new ways to use it once it exists? Does it require more intelligence to create principles of law and society, or to change and modify that which already exists?

The conclusion I reached on this subject is verified by the record of humanity. There have been great thinkers and achievers in all the ages and many from antiquity still challenge and inspire us today. Homer, Plato, Confucius, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Jefferson, and Lincoln mark a progression of incredible intelligence and cognitive ability that has been a part of the human record since the invention of writing. And there is no reason not to assume that equally intelligent people lived before writing was invented. After all, they had to invent writing.

Death Has Always Been Terminal

When it came to the issue of the supernatural resurrection of Jesus, I truly wanted to believe that modern people are more astute and intelligent, but history did not support that idea. I then had to ask myself how much more modern science knows about death itself, and how likely it was that a person of antiquity would believe in a resurrection without compelling evidence.

Today, more is known about mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology, but how much more is known about death? The truth is: Nothing! From a physical perspective, death is death and it has always been final. More is known about the medical causes of death, but nothing more is known about the pure condition. First century humans were aware of the finality of death, and were no more likely to believe in the resurrection of a dead man than people of today.

Convincing evidence would be required for any person, in any age, to believe in the truth of such an event. And for it to be believed it would actually have had to have been witnessed by real people who were credible and trusted to speak and record the truth.

Is Resurrection Possible?

Putting the history issue aside for a moment, one might first ask if resurrection from the dead is possible? But a better question might be: Is resurrection impossible? There is certainly no factual evidence to indicate resurrection is impossible. As a matter of fact there are cryogenic facilities in existence today that freeze bodies in the belief that technology will someday learn how to restore them to life.

If the supernatural is allowed to be included as part of the thought process and an omnipotent God is a part of the equation, resurrection from the dead might not be considered that big of a deal. *If God created life, it might be a fair assumption that He has the ability to restore life, if and when He wants to.* But from a purely natural perspective, resurrection appears to be impossible because it is not what normally happens to dead people.

In other words it is not the kind of thing we naturally expect. Just because I do not expect a thing to happen does not mean it is impossible. When confronted with what is reported to be an instance of resurrection, my personal opinions about possibility are not relevant. The truth of the event will rise above any personal opinion I have based on preconceived notions about the supernatural.

The real issue involves evidence. By definition, evidence consists of anything that makes something clear, whether taken singly or collectively. When a thing becomes clear, it can be believed. In the case of a resurrection many things have to be considered and it is the combined weight of these things that lead to the truth. The presupposition of impossibility is not one of those things, because impossibility is an *opinion* that cannot be validated.

Even if there had never been a reported instance of resurrection, the most that could be said is that a resurrection had never happened. It could not be said to be impossible. The impossibility of resurrection would be more plausible if there were not reports that such a thing had actually happened. As a matter of fact, the claim that such an event did happen is about the only reason we have for discussing its possibility. Without such a claim the question would be a matter of non-interest.

I normally do not focus on things until they happen, or until I have a reasonable expectation that they might happen. Because of this, it is obvious to me that the first element of proof for the resurrection of Jesus was that it is reported as an historical event. It must be considered and discussed in that context because that is what it claims to be. If I doubt the validity of an event (even though I doubt it because I think it should be impossible) I still have to prove that it did not happen based on the facts. And

if disproving the event is the real issue, somehow I have to factually undermine the evidence that says it did happen.

Many of the modern discussions I read that attempt to cast doubt on the resurrection of Jesus place the burden of proof on the event, demanding that it somehow justify itself against the argument of impossibility. When I was studying the history of the Bible so I could evaluate the accuracy of the text, I read material that took positions on both sides of the resurrection issue. As previously stated, I found little or no argument that the text in the Bible had been changed from the original. The argument and disagreement comes in the acceptance or challenge to the truth of what is written.

The Bible critics who challenge the truth of the Bible text universally begin their arguments by reasoning as follows:

1. Miracles are impossible.
2. Events that require supernatural intervention are impossible.
3. Since supernatural events are impossible, one must look behind the written text and seek other explanations for what was written.

The critics then go on to produce all kinds of theories about what they suppose the text really means. And none of the critics take on the issue or defend why they think supernatural events are impossible. The critics simply accept impossibility as fact and treat it as the foundational truth of the debate, instantaneously requiring all of their theories to agree with their platform of impossibility. Personally, I found this approach to be intellectually dishonest because history is not validated or disproved by merely introducing an assumptive opinion that the event in question is impossible.

History stands in the written and spoken record of events, which have completed themselves and have been witnessed. Historical events either happened or they did not happen; a reported historical event cannot be honestly required to defend itself against a subjective presupposition or bias.

For example, history indicates George Washington was the first President of the United States, which will stand as a fact until someone accumulates the factual evidence to disprove it. People saw him become the first President, talked to him when he was the first President, and wrote about him as the first President. To merely say it was impossible for George Washington to have been the first President is not an argument. To disprove Washington was the first president, I would have to find reports claiming someone else held the job first, and compile evidence that the people who claimed Washington was the first President were lying.

In our courts, a defendant is considered innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. The prosecution must prove the guilt of the defendant to the satisfaction of a jury. If there is any doubt, the defendant is declared not guilty. In the case of the resurrection of Jesus, the event and the people who claimed to be witnesses to the event are recorded in history and could be considered defendants. If I

want to prosecute them I must produce the evidence that would convict them and disprove their claims. In two-thousand years no prosecutors have been able to prove the defendants guilty on the basis of conflicting evidence. The last resort for conviction is the assertion of impossibility.

The decision each person makes about the truth of the resurrection of Jesus is a trial of sorts. As I made my decision, I found myself sitting as prosecutor, judge and jury. The decision I had to make was simple: Would I convict the defendant (the alleged event and the people who reported the event) on the basis of evidence or on my own preconceived notions? I found that the evidence to acquit the defendant goes far beyond reasonable doubt. On a common sense basis alone I found the evidence to be overwhelming.

The Evidence

To me, one of the most compelling pieces of evidence is the two-thousand year existence of Christianity. Without a literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus, it is unlikely that Christianity would exist today. As I studied the history of Christianity it became clear that it began and grew as a result of personal testimony given by eye witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. This testimony originally came from the immediate followers of Jesus, his disciples. The disciples must be examined in order to evaluate the history of the resurrection event.

Who Were These Guys Anyway?

Once I understood the magnitude of the political and emotional circumstances that surrounded the trial, execution, and death of Jesus it became very difficult for me to believe twelve simple men could have formulated the theology of the most successful religion in the history of the world in the three days following the execution, and base the credibility of that religion on a literal bodily resurrection of a dead person.

Before the twelve disciples of Jesus became powerful witnesses of His resurrection, they had been reduced to a trembling group of cowards hiding behind a locked door. The man they had followed for three years was dead and in their opinion he had failed in his mission. They had expected him to take over the government and establish an earthly kingdom.

Even with this sobering realization in mind, their most immediate concern was their own safety. The Jewish leaders who engineered the crucifixion of Jesus had demonstrated their antagonism against him, and Jesus' disciples probably had good reason to suspect they might be the next to go. It is probably too strong a word to call these men cowards. They were merely being human and they had a legitimate reason to be afraid. The human response to fear is to run and hide. They did. I am sure many of us would have run farther and faster.

Jesus had been their friend and spiritual mentor. Their emotional state must have been a disaster. All they had hoped and dreamed for in Jesus was gone. If I had been in their position, I believe I would have been emotionally paralyzed, engulfed in depression and grief, feeling rather stupid, and very anxious to return home and get on with my life. That seems to be what the Bible account of these men indicates they were in the process of doing.

Yet, something happened to these men that became Christianity. They claimed that Jesus was no longer dead and was in fact alive. All but one of these men were eventually executed, and they went to their deaths telling the same story. They said they saw him. They said they touched him. They said they ate with him. They said he was alive. And when they started reporting these things people started to become Christians. This caused much discomfort for the Jewish leaders who had caused Jesus to be executed.

A simple way for the Jewish leaders to discredit the Christian movement would have been to produce the corpse of Jesus. Why was the corpse never produced? I am unable to believe that no serious attempts were made to find the body.

It requires strong feelings to engineer the execution of a human being in the way it was done to Jesus. The Jewish leadership despised the man and everything he said. As they saw Jesus hanging on the Roman cross, they must have felt the human emotion of fulfilled revenge. They exulted in his agony and no doubt relished their victory. This was an event filled with passions of hate, revenge and self-righteous superiority. Jesus was an abomination to these men, and they would have done everything in their power to disprove any claims made about a resurrection.

The reality of a resurrection would prove that Jesus might have been who he claimed to be: God in human flesh! The fear of a resurrection was present in the minds of the Jewish leaders because Jesus had predicted that he would be executed, but would rise from the dead. As he was dying on the Roman cross, witnesses jeered and challenged him to miraculously save himself.

The fear of a resurrection claim was real among them, because it was the Jewish leadership that petitioned the Roman Governor to post a contingent of guards at the tomb to prevent anyone from stealing the body. So, when reports of the resurrection began to surface on the third day following his execution, Jesus' enemies no doubt made an immediate response. The first thing on their agenda was probably an inspection of the tomb where Jesus' body had been placed.

Upon arrival at the tomb of Jesus, the realization that it was in fact empty would not immediately prompt an assumption of resurrection from the dead. The argument of impossibility was probably as valid for them as it is for the modern Bible critic. And if they believed it was impossible, their first suspicion would be that the body was taken by his followers. This question soon becomes a matter of how.

Let's Steal the Body

The tomb was hewn from solid rock, and had been surrounded by Roman guards. The entrance had been sealed with a huge stone. Such a theft would have required some ingenious planning on the part of the body-snatchers and problems of how to subdue the guards and how to move the stone are the first that come to mind.

I have always enjoyed a good challenge, and I tried to construct a plan which would allow me and a few friends, in the dark of the night, to sneak up on a contingent of Roman soldiers, move a boulder, steal a body, and hide it forever. I kept in mind that we only had two days to conceive, plan and execute the entire mission, as well as come up with a reason for the disappearance of the body. It was also clear that if there was one mistake in my plan, my friends and I would either be executed on the spot, or crucified the following day.

While attempting to construct my plan, it became apparent I would have to overcome some significant strategic problems: To subdue the Roman guards would require a method of rendering all of the guards unconscious simultaneously, without warning. Furthermore, when they awoke, they would have to be unaware that they had been unconsciousness, and all of them would have to be suffering from the same hallucination: that the stone was moved supernaturally.

It soon became obvious that chemically induced, undetected, simultaneous unconsciousness, resulting in identical hallucinations would require drugs and a delivery system not available in the first century, much less our own. However, for my plan to succeed, I would have to think of some way to accomplish all of this.

. If I found a way to zap the guards, I would be faced with the problem of moving the huge stone that sealed the entrance of the tomb. Because the stone was large, moving it would require several men, some equipment, some time, and making some unavoidable noise in the middle of the night.

Avoiding panic among my friends would also be difficult. I would have to convince everyone that body-snatching under the nose of Rome would be no big deal.

If we overcame those obstacles and managed to get our hands on the body, we would then be faced with the problem of disposal. While making my plan, I had to consider that the tomb was near the gates of Jerusalem and the time of year was Passover, when there are thousands of visiting Jews in the city, moving around at all hours of the day and night. Robbing a grave and transporting a corpse unnoticed would be no small problem, and finding a place to hide it would be even more difficult because of the stench of decay. If anyone saw us in circumstances that even appeared to be suspicious, the entire plan would be defeated and the hoax exposed.

To cap the entire puzzle, permanent success would require all participants in the operation to keep their mouth shut forever about what we had done. To me, that

seemed to be the most insurmountable obstacle. Virtually every conspiracy in recorded history has eventually been exposed by the people who participated in them. The nature of people incorporates a strong need to share their secrets with someone, and once a leak occurs, conspiracies are exposed.

No doubt, a television writer for Mission Impossible might dream up a plan to steal the body, if they could employ the use of sophisticated electronic equipment and a number of other modern aids. But, even with all the electronic assistance available today, it would still be incredibly difficult. The biggest single factor working against any attempt to steal the body was the factor of time, coupled with basic human nature and fear.

The Disciples Were Not Commandos

The disciples of Jesus were not professionally trained commandos. They were simple fishermen and the entire scenario of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion had terrified them. The speed of the way it was done no doubt overwhelmed them. Jesus was abruptly arrested in the middle of the night and by the next morning he was hanging on the cross.

Only one of the disciples was reported to have witnessed the execution. All of the rest scattered and hid. Am I expected to believe these terrified, simple men could have regrouped physically and emotionally, and concocted a perfect body-snatching plan within forty-eight hours? If I have any correct understanding of human nature, to believe the disciples could accomplish such a feat is unthinkable. Yet, on the morning of the third day, there was an empty tomb. Shortly thereafter, these disciples were claiming a literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Lying in the Name of God

Obviously, if there was no resurrection the disciples knew it, and their subsequent testimony was a lie. When people lie, there is generally a motive for the deception. Since these men were faithful, orthodox Jews, we must first see and understand they would have been lying in the name of God. The motivation for the lie may have been to establish a foundation for something they wanted to do or accomplish. Well, what did they do?

The remainder of their lives were dedicated to spreading a message. Here was the message: God loves you so much He came to die for you that you might have life. God wants you to be with Him forever, and He wants you to know peace. God wants you to love each other as He has loved you. God wants you to forgive others as He has forgiven you. God wants you to be in a personal, loving relationship with Him and to walk with Him in the truth. Essentially, that was their message. If the disciples lied they did so to spread love and the knowledge of God.

How About Some Money?

Another motive for the lie may have involved some hope of financial gain, or high position of honor. The actual conditions enjoyed by these Apostles are clearly stated by the Apostle Paul in the following description:

“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men...To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.” (1 Corinthians 4:9-13)

From this description, it is becoming more and more difficult to identify a motive for the lie. Are we to believe they concocted this story of resurrection for the privilege of preaching love and forgiveness, and the experience of being treated like human garbage?

Eventually, all the apostles, save one, were executed for their belief in Jesus. They never stopped telling the resurrection story. The only logical explanation is this: They were telling the truth.

Based on the testimony of these disciples, thousands of Jews were converted, and the followers of Jesus Christ steadily increased. The movement grew based on the credibility of the resurrection claim, and the reality of the spiritual relationship produced by conversion in Christ. The sincerity of the faith of these believers was ultimately tested in martyred deaths and persecution that culminated in the spectacles of carnage at the Roman games. There is no question the resurrection was accepted as an historical event, based on the personal testimony of the eye witnesses. People do not give up their lives for a hunch, or a fanciful myth.

Encounter on the Road

One of Jesus' Apostles demonstrated a transformation in his life that is incomprehensible unless a literal, historical resurrection can be accepted as fact. Without such an event, the life of this man makes no sense. The man was Saul of Tarsus. He became the Apostle Paul, author of approximately thirty-percent of the material known today as the New Testament. Paul is the unquestioned source of the major Christian doctrines, which characterize the faith.

When we think about people of the Bible, we tend to forget they were like us. They were no better and no worse, yet we somehow fail to see their humanity and the authenticity of their lives. It is when we can see Saul of Tarsus as someone like us, that we begin to appreciate his story. This forces some serious thinking about what happened to him, and it is impossible to fully appreciate the conversion of Saul, without some understanding of Judaism in the first century.

During the fourteen-hundred years between the time of Moses and the first century of our era, God's people (the Jews) were not idle in evaluating His commandments. The material in the Old Testament is but the framework of a much larger body of commentary and religious discipline, developed over a period of a thousand years by Jewish theologians. The Old Testament is considered to be breathed of God and the commentary is the human interpretation of the revelation. By the time of Saul, the human commentary had become the most visible influence in the daily life of the average Jew.

The commentary contained detailed interpretations of the scriptures and eventually developed into an enforced religious system of right and wrong, with respect to the details of Jewish life. It was an extremely legalistic religious system that enslaved

its practitioners, and no doubt produced feelings of guilt, fear, depression and futility in the common Jew. It was also very unrealistic. Once the Jews started rendering human decisions about right things, they were unable to stop the process. Almost every detail of human life was eventually evaluated in the commentaries. And like a lot of human opinion today, the scriptures were used to justify the evaluation.

At the time Christ was crucified this religious system was supervised and enforced by two major theological factions composed of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. A simple description, to help us get a feel for their importance, would be to say they were the Republicans and Democrats of first century Judaism. Republicans and Democrats have different political views, but they share political power. The Pharisees and Sadducees had different theological views, but they shared power in the spiritual affairs of the Jews. The Pharisees were absolute fanatics in many ways, and Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee.

If you would like a mental picture of a first century Pharisee, try to think of the most stubborn, obstinate, self-righteous fanatic you have ever known. You might be approaching a Pharisee. I must admit that I have some Pharisee in me. When I believe I am correct, it is very difficult for anyone or anything to change my mind. When I reach basic conclusions that are foundational to a position I hold, it requires the strongest evidence possible to move me to a new position. This is another way of saying I am obstinate and hard-headed about certain things. By comparison, the Pharisees of the first century would have considered me to be wishy-washy and weak. They were a tough group.

The reason Jesus of Nazareth wound up on a Roman cross was because of the things he said, as he traveled around the countryside. He locked horns with the Pharisees early in his ministry and never got off their backs. They absolutely hated him. He made fools of them by merely telling stories and asking questions. One of the points of his teaching ministry to the Jews was to expose their misunderstanding of the Law. Jesus regularly condemned the hypocrisy that had been developed and perpetuated by extreme legalism. His major point was that the condition of the heart transcends the deed.

Jesus also demonstrated the ability to perform supernatural acts that involved healing, sight restoration, and control of the natural elements. The Pharisees were aware of these things and were fearful of him, because he had a significant amount of support among the common people. Whether or not all of the Pharisees believed Jesus was actually performing miracles is unclear. They did believe there were many Jews who believed, who were openly reporting the miracles as facts.

The most offensive thing Jesus did, which was the ultimate cause of his death, was leaving his listeners with the distinct impression he claimed to be God in the flesh. This was the reason the Pharisees had him executed, and the chief reason for their extreme hatred. If I was an important religious leader and believed it was unlikely that I could make a mistake, a person confronting me with reasoning that made me appear to be an idiot would certainly have my attention. About the time that person began to claim to be God, I would probably become unfriendly.

We lose sight of much of the human drama in the Bible, because we forget these were real people, living real events, involving issues of great importance to them. We must remember that Saul of Tarsus was a devout Pharisee, and that the Pharisees hated everything Jesus said and did.

After Jesus was crucified by the Romans, the problem he had presented to the Pharisees did not go away. It got worse. Three days after Jesus was executed, stories began to float around Jerusalem that he had risen from the dead and had physically appeared to his followers. For the Pharisees it was a huge problem, because large numbers of Jews were becoming convinced Jesus had really been raised from the dead.

People were believing as a result of the testimony of the poor fishermen who had traveled with Jesus during his ministry. They were going about proclaiming that Jesus was alive, and that they had personally seen and touched him. I believe they were believed because it is hard to imagine several people simultaneously going crazy and suffering from the same delusion. Ultimately, there were about five-hundred people who saw Jesus alive.

Saul, the Pharisee, was involved in hunting down these believers and throwing them in jail. Some of his victims were executed for their faith. Saul was on his way to Damascus from Jerusalem, for the purpose of searching out believers in that city, when a most remarkable thing happened to him in broad daylight. His experience is reported in the New Testament book of Acts, where the following testimony of the event appears:

I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me,

“Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?”

“Who are you Lord?” I asked.

“I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

“What shall I do Lord,” I asked

. “Get up,” the Lord said, “and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.” (Acts 22:3-10)

Saul, who subsequently became Paul, joined the believers he had been persecuting to death. A stubborn, obstinate Pharisee had become a personal witness of the resurrection.

The significance of this cannot be overstated when we relate to the kind of evidence that would have been necessary to change the mind of someone like Saul. There are only two options that can explain the change in him:

1. The event happened, or
2. Saul lost his mind.

To determine if the event happened, is dependent upon Saul/Paul's own testimony, which was confirmed by his action. He went to his death many years later telling the same tale. In between his conversion and his death, the man revolutionized religion and provided the doctrinal foundation for Christianity. To read the writings of Paul in the New Testament, the picture is not of a man who has lost his mind. It is a mind of piercing clarity that presents spiritual concepts that have challenged the world for the past two-thousand years. Thousands of books have been written evaluating the words of this man, and the truths revealed in his writing have provided peace, joy, and contentment for millions.

With the exception of Jesus himself, no other man has so impacted the world in such a dramatic way. The amazing thing is that Paul said he had not received his message from any human source, and neither was it a product of his own thinking. He claims he received the message by direct revelation from Jesus Christ, and that he was merely a messenger.

I have tried to imagine myself as Saul on the road to Damascus, and to feel his attitude prior to meeting Jesus. Saul must have been one of the most sanctimonious, self-righteous, pompous, characters we could ever hope we would never meet. He believed

the Jesus followers were evil people who were blasphemers of his God and The Law. Everything Saul had lived for to that point, was grounded in The Law and the teachings of the Pharisees. He had spent years studying the minutia of the Jewish commentaries and was a brilliant man.

Saul had probably thought through every precept he held to be true, and was firmly rooted in his tradition. There is no doubt a theological debate with this man would have been a difficult proposition for anyone because Saul was convinced of the error being preached by the Jesus fanatics. He was fully committed to their elimination from Jewish society.

When I can see this Saul, his account of meeting Jesus takes on incredible meaning that reeks of truth. The slightest understanding of human nature would indicate the last thing Saul of Tarsus would have wanted in his life, was a personal revelation of Jesus Christ. If someone had told Saul before he left Jerusalem that he would see Jesus on the road to Damascus, he would have had the person arrested and flogged. Yet, Saul was converted and changed from a proud, self-righteous, Pharisee into a willing servant.

From my study of Saul I can see he was the kind of man who would have required compelling evidence. The event that convinced Saul is the same event that faces each person today, as they consider the claims of Christianity. That event is the historic, literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If this event did not occur, Christianity is the biggest lie that has ever been foisted upon the world, and those who have believed are fools of the first order.

Skeptics Need Facts

Since the time of the disciples, skeptics have been attempting to find the body of Jesus by formulating possible theories to explain its disappearance. It has been supposed that Jesus only appeared to be dead. It has been supposed that the witnesses suffered hallucinations. It has been supposed that the body was taken. Every conceivable possibility has been proposed at one time or another, and none of them have been able to withstand the tests of common sense, logic and evidence. The reality of the historical event stands in tact to this very day, and the primary argument against it is the presuppositional argument of impossibility.

History is filled with accounts of people who have attempted to disprove the resurrection through factual investigation. More often than not, these people became convinced that the resurrection is one of the most verifiable events in history, and became Christians themselves. None ever completed a factual investigation that would disprove the historical resurrection.

Today, the only argument left to skeptics is the theory of impossibility. The resurrection is cast aside as an obvious myth and fable, because such a thing is obviously impossible. No "modern mind" could even begin to entertain such a thought. I

eventually found this argument to be worthless and dishonest for the reasons stated. It appears to me to be an attempt to avoid discussion of the facts, ignore the evidence and convict the defendants without a trial. I reached the conclusion that my former argument of impossibility was an intellectually dishonest presupposition, and a sham.

As I struggled with the issue of the existence of God during my life, I thought I should be given some sort of supernatural sign that would verify His presence. I wanted physical evidence to prove there was a God so the step of faith would be easier for me. For me, the historical reality of the resurrection is that proof. What could be more of a supernatural sign than the resurrection of a dead man?

Today, I believe the truth of God is evident to any person willing to see it, but during the early years of my God investigation it was not clear at all. Once I could see the reality of the resurrection, however, the middle ground of agnosticism was eliminated. It either happened or it did not happen. When I became convinced it had happened, I was faced with compelling evidence that required an examination of the life of the man who was raised from the dead. What did he tell the world and what did his life, death and resurrection mean? A much greater mystery also presented itself: Why was all of it necessary?

The resurrection appears from nowhere in the history of humanity. There is nothing else like it, and it hits us from a blind side with the same uncanny sense of awe we feel about eternity, the universe, and the creation of life itself. It is the manifestation of a power we cannot comprehend. It is the power of calling forth something from nothing. It is the same creative power we see in every part of our world, that we cannot touch, taste, or smell, yet is very real.

The reality of the resurrection is a straight-forward proposition from an historical perspective. The theology and religion of the resurrection is another matter entirely. I had hoped making a decision about the historical validity of the resurrection would resolve some things for me and it did. However, the resurrection soon presented more complicated questions that related to the need for it all. Jesus, who was raised from the dead, and the disciples who witnessed his resurrection, revealed amazing information about the nature of God, the world, and man's position in the world. Many of the revelations are very disturbing and include some ideas human beings do not want to accept or believe.

Jesus said he came that people might have eternal life and that he was the only way to that life. Somehow, his life, death and resurrection were the keys to the mystery and in some way could result in a person being "born again." This was very hard for me to understand and the questions raised were many and complicated:

1. What was meant by eternal life?
2. Why couldn't a person have eternal life without Jesus being a part of it?

3. Where would this eternal life be experienced?
4. What does sin have to do with all of this?
5. What does “born again” mean?
6. Why did Jesus have to die and how can his death “save” me?
7. Why did Jesus say I needed to be “saved” in the first place?
8. If Jesus was the only way to God, what was going to happen to the people who would never hear of him, and those who had lived before him?
9. Is there really a place called hell, and if so what is it like?
10. What is Christianity really about and how does it work?

I did not like these questions but was forced to try to find answers to them. The historical reality of the resurrection required that much. The problem was where to begin. As I thought about it I realized that most of my doubt about the reality of the supernatural was based on “scientific” information I had been exposed to. It involved a belief that man had evolved from the primordial ooze and that everything we see in the natural world must have a natural explanation. The historical reality of the resurrection and the message of Jesus disrupted those ideas, but I still felt a need that they somehow had to be resolved in harmony with each other.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the starting point for anyone examining the meaning of Christianity. The real issue of faith in this matter involves the power of God. If I cling to the argument of impossibility to refute the resurrection I am really saying: “God does not have the power to raise the dead.” But in all the debate and discussion of Christianity, the historical resurrection of Christ is not a negotiable item. The line is drawn at the empty tomb.

I reached the conclusion that if I believed in the truth of the resurrection, I was going to have to attempt to interpret its meaning in relationship to what I could see in the natural world. Jesus claimed to originate from a spiritual realm, but was introduced into the natural world and embraced it as reality. He said the two (the natural and the supernatural) coexist with each other and that he was the bridge for humanity between them. For me to understand what he meant, I had to take a look at beginnings and evaluate what we know as time within the context of his ever-present now, which we label as eternity.