

Something Happened

It breaks my heart to talk to an increasing number of people who reject Jesus and the Bible. They may declare themselves as atheists or agnostics. Or they may claim to be spiritual, but simply don't see Jesus as The Way to God. I've even met and heard of people who call themselves Christians but their approach to following Jesus isn't remotely like what is presented in the Bible. They claim that while Jesus was a fascinating character, He couldn't possibly have been anything like what we read in the New Testament. To these, Christianity was a naturally occurring religion and therefore can be twisted to fit modern ideas if we so choose.

In any event, it leaves us wondering if we are somehow backwards, backwoods believers who don't have a leg to stand on. So many are abandoning the faith. Should we continue to pursue it?

I think one thing that is completely overlooked by the masses of unbelievers is an alternative to explain The Way. The fact is something happened. Something happened to produce a large number of followers all over the known world from multiple backgrounds that were not at all sympathetic to the story of Jesus.

Remember what Paul said about the story of Jesus in his culture: "For Jews demand signs and Greek seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (**I Corinthians 1:22-25**, ESV). Neither the Jews nor the Greeks were sympathetic with the story of a crucified and resurrected savior. Yet, something happened that appealed to many in both groups throughout the Roman Empire.

Something happened in and around Jerusalem. **I Corinthians** was written in the first half of the 50s in the first century. That is about 20 years after Jesus reportedly died and was resurrected in Jerusalem. In **I Corinthians 15:3ff**, Paul seemingly adapts a creedal statement. Please don't be upset at that term. I'm not referring to some kind of denominationally sanctioned document that governs congregations. I simply mean that to refer to a statement of belief. Most scholars believe Paul was not writing something completely new in this passage, but was actually using a statement that he believed was already so well known among the Christians that it would help make his point. What does this tell us? Within less than 20 years, people as far away as Corinth believed that Jesus died and was resurrected in Jerusalem. These folks didn't believe this because they were stupid and gullible. Having that view of them is a modern arrogance that says all ancient people were foolish. In fact, Paul had asserted that folks were actually very critical of the message. But something happened that caused people to believe a man performed great works in Galilee and Judea, was executed, and then resurrected in Jerusalem.

Something happened on the road to Damascus. Many people seem to have the idea that we can only trust objective sources. That is, we can't trust sources that are sympathetic with the movement that followed Jesus because they will exaggerate on His behalf. Often, when they say objective, they actually mean opposed. So, we can't trust that the crucifixion, resurrection happened unless someone who was opposed to it testified to it. We could get all upset about that and explain that is really an unfair criteria. But why bother, we actually have that. We have a fellow named Saul who was breathing threats against the Christians, despised the Way, and was actively seeking them out to destroy them. Then, as he travelled to Damascus with letters permitting him to bind up those belonging to the Way and take them prisoner back to Jerusalem, something happened. You can see what the Bible claims happened in **Acts 9**. Something happened to turn this antagonist into Jesus Christ's greatest proponent.

Something happened throughout the world. As already stated, within 20 years, there were pockets of believers all over the Empire. Some believers were from among the Jews who would not be willing to accept Jesus as the Son of God because that causes such struggles with the monotheism they claimed. Some believers were from among the Gentiles who were critical people that simply couldn't imagine the divine offering Himself as the sacrifice for sins. Yet, people from both groups heard the preaching and decided it was true. We have to put ourselves in these folks' shoes. If someone came into town proclaiming that a few years ago a fellow died in Jerusalem and was then resurrected and He is the Way to God, would we jump on that bandwagon? Or would we need to see something that was pretty compelling? The fact is, there had been many claimants to this Messianic story. But they always died and their followers dispersed (see **Acts 5:36-39**). The story of the Way is one where the claimant to Messiahship died, but His following simply grew after that.

Something happened in their hearts. On top of all this, this was not something that produced a group of fair weather followers. I understand a group of people jumping on an appealing bandwagon that says they are going to be rewarded greatly. But these people were tormented and persecuted. But many hung on. What produced that kind of faith?

Now, it may well be that the record found in the Bible is not what happened. Maybe something else happened. But I think one of the issues most folks miss is that something happened. And if it isn't what the Bible records, then what other plausible thing happened? Through purely natural means, how did an average, ordinary fellow die as a criminal on a cross in a backwater land, among a troubled and rebellious people, but become the center piece of a world religion such that in less than 20 years, people all over the empire claim He is divinely resurrected.

People find it simple to discount Jesus and His Way, but when you start listening to the explanations of how all of this supposed legend developed in less than 20 years, you begin to realize it takes more faith to explain away the Bible's account than to actually accept it.

So, here is my challenge. You have to admit that something happened around 30 A.D. Something produced this religion that seems to defy all logic and nature that we enlightened people hold dear. But it is a copout to simply say we can't accept it. Rather, we need to figure out what really happened if the Bible's account isn't true. Please don't tell me it's just not true. Tell me what actually happened that fits the evidence better.

Something happened? What was it?

I accept the Bible's record. What do you think happened?

—Edwin L. Crozier