

Chapter Three

The Awakening

I read the first two books of the New Testament (Matthew and Mark) in about four days. I turned back on my old medical school brain that had been inactive for a while. Luckily it was still there. Both books were pretty similar in their story. I didn't get it. Why tell the same story twice? Many of the parables were difficult. I had to slow down and really think about their meaning. I did not believe the miracles. I was captivated by the fact that Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh. I didn't believe it, but it got my attention.

Luke was next and again the same story. Why? Several things caught my eye this time though. He was a physician like me, and was noted to have been an excellent historian. Luke also made a strong statement at the beginning that he really researched the story and made sure he got it right. This gave it more validity to my scientific mind, and now I read a bit more intently. I thought more deeply and read slower.

The next book was John and I was immediately taken in by the strong language. I was drawn into what the words of Jesus were much more this time. In no uncertain terms he was claiming to be God visiting His creation called earth. This was also true in the other three Gospels, but it was more powerful here. This thought was fascinating to me. I never really thought of it that way before. I never considered the possibility that if it were true then it would be the most remarkable event in all of human history. I did not know a lot about religion, but I knew no other religion ever claimed that God Himself came to earth as a savior.

As I read on the words seemed alive. It was more than just reading a story. They seemed to be talking to me directly. I was reading on a plane trip to New Orleans, and I must admit I was holding back tears for some strange reason. Yes I was almost crying reading the Bible. I was glad no one was around. The words had power and did something to me I cannot fully describe. They even made me dwell on them when I was not reading the Bible.

The other thing that grabbed me was the meaning behind the words. It was deep with many layers. The level of understanding of human nature was profound. I kept wondering what human could come up with such words, lessons, or revelation. I had to stop and really think about what was being said.

When Lazarus and the little girl were raised from the dead I was awestruck. I can't say I believed it for certain, but I was captivated. I could not put it down. The real zinger came at the end when John said I was there, this is an eyewitness account. My heart sank. I was really pondering this. The implication was that he was there and witnessed God on the earth. I kept thinking this man walked, ate, and talked with God if it was true. What a fascinating concept. I had no idea the Gospels had this information, because I had absolutely no prior knowledge about Jesus.

I had no idea that two of them were eyewitness accounts. I did not know that the basic concept was God in the flesh on earth to save it. I wasn't sold at all though, but captivated by the concept. I also had the feeling that the writings were genuine. Who would lie about such a thing? I investigated a bit and found out that no one ever claimed any of these events to be lies. This included the Pharisees.

There was also something much more profound about the apostles. Eleven of them died tortuous and cruel deaths because they believed in Jesus as God and His resurrection. The key fact that haunted me is that they would have known it was a lie if the story wasn't true. This was incredibly compelling to me. Many people die for a lie but they don't know it's not true. The disciples would have known they were dying for a lie they made up. Who would do such a thing?

It was also very interesting that they had to be convinced it was true. They did not believe at first. After Jesus was raised from the dead they were changed and became very courageous. This really spoke to me that they actually saw Jesus alive after his burial. What else would make them change so quickly? Everything they were hoping for died on the cross. A falsified story about a risen carpenter would be absolutely useless to them.

The transformation of Paul also made me very curious because he was persecuting Christians. For a religious Pharisee to suddenly proclaim Jesus as God was suicide in his day. I just couldn't think of any reason other than Paul seeing Jesus resurrected to explain his behavior. These stories also circulated while all of the unbelievers were alive. They were never once challenged or accused of lying. Some of the apostles even appealed to the religious leaders that they themselves had seen these miracles themselves.

The final aspect that caught my attention was that Jesus left no room to call Himself a great moral teacher or a mere wise man. I had heard this before and even believed it myself. There was no room for that now though, since I had read all four Gospels. Even I, the greatest skeptic of all time, could not make such a claim when somewhere deep down inside I wanted to. There was no room for such a theory and I was trapped. He was either God, a liar, or the greatest lunatic of all time. I had to either reject or accept but not yet. By this time the search for ammunition and any thoughts of the neighborhood were gone. I was in search of truth if it existed.

During this period the woman from work said to me one day "I pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal Himself to you." I thought about this comment a lot. What did she mean? Sometimes late at night when I was reading I would look around the room and at the ceiling. I wasn't sure whether something might jump out. I just had no idea what this meant and didn't ask. Once again I had never heard the Holy Spirit ever mentioned before. What Holy Spirit?

I then proceeded to read the rest of the New Testament in about a week. I just wanted to get through it and see its content. By the time I was finished I was impressed but far from believing it all, certainly not all of the miracles. I also thought of a few new difficult questions. How did the writers remember what was said thirty to sixty years later? If the words were not exactly what Jesus spoke then Christianity falls apart. I then decided to examine the historicity of the New Testament. I examined the Bible with a microscope, since I was a scientist and scholar. I would not make a decision without checking out the evidence and answering all of the difficult questions.

I took two to three steps backwards when I first ordered some lectures from two University professors. I figured where better to start than listening to lectures on the New Testament from college professors at major universities. They were heads of their departments with many degrees in their field. I could relate to their academic background, and I was sure anyone with a Ph.D in the New Testament would know and tell the truth.

I started listening to both of these professors, but I quickly found a profound sense that they didn't believe any of the New Testament as true historical events. They did not come out and say it, but I could tell. I was actually disappointed and very troubled since by now I really wanted it to be true. I had a sick feeling inside. They were professors at major universities and must be right. The more I listened the worse I felt.

I had proven to myself it wasn't true by their wisdom and trusting in their education, degree, and stature in society. It was now becoming just a bunch of nice stories people manufactured to promote their cause. Some truth was mixed with fiction and impossible supernatural acts. Sure the authors believed in what they wrote but truth is relative right?

One of the professors presented the characters of the New Testament like they were fictional characters which I thought was odd. The other one was even a bit sarcastic a few times. It was very subtle, but I caught it. This professor even taught that Jesus did not claim to be God. Now I knew something was funny. I was searching with an open heart and mind and clearly understood Jesus was claiming to be God. These clues were critical, since I was close to packing it in. I suspected a motive and decided to look elsewhere for facts.

I was blown away to find out that the New Testament is the most historically attested book of all time. It embarrasses any other piece of ancient literature by leaps and bounds. Not only are there far more manuscripts than other ancient historical writings, but the time gap between the actual events and their writing was far shorter.

I found out there are more than 20,000 copies of New Testament manuscripts compared to 643 for the Iliad. Most other ancient writings that are taken as historical fact today don't even have over a hundred! More than this the dates of the copies are over 1,000 years after the actual historical events took place and were first written compared to less than 60 years for the New Testament.¹ Now I was really suspicious. Why in the world had no one ever told me these facts!?! The data was so profound it almost seemed like an intentional cover up or suppression of evidence.

The icing on the cake was I also discovered for both the Old and the New Testaments that the scriptures were preserved through time with 99.5% accuracy.² None of the "errors" or changes affected the message at all! Jesus was still God dying for the sins of the world from cover to cover. I did not believe it, but I knew the text claimed it and that it was well preserved. I read carefully about things added to the Bible and which books were excluded, but none of them held water. I was absolutely astounded.

I had already found a sound reason to trust the authors' ability and reliability to tell the truth, but now I also found the Bible to be more than historically sound and well preserved. I was excited again, but still not convinced. My next step was to email one of the professors in the New Testament who didn't believe it as historical reality. They were very gracious to answer my questions.

This professor basically claimed that the writers of the Bible were not objective. Their religious beliefs affected their view of historical reality (e.g. because they were a Christian they believe that Jesus rose from the dead). This professor neglected the parallel though that our beliefs about historical reality affect our religious beliefs (e.g. because I believe Jesus rose from the dead I am a Christian). Without historical reality, our religious beliefs are unfounded; thus, our religious beliefs cannot be said to be creating our historical reality. It seemed that that they felt if you were objective you could not believe in anything for certain, agnosticism. Truth was unknowable since supernatural events were invoked.

Here's an example:

How did Julius Caesar die?

- A. He hanged himself
- B. A heart attack in bed
- C. Stabbed to death in the Roman senate
- D. Chariot accident.

C is the correct answer. A,B,D are false. The correct answer excludes the others. We don't as a society say "Well you can't say which is right or it's ok if you believe A and I believe D and another B. It's nice we all have different opinions." Truth is exclusive by nature. I was frustrated with them because I knew this either really occurred or it simply did not. I knew that only one set of historical events has occurred on this earth. Many events from the ancient world were accepted as fact and doctrine on substantially less evidence and documentation. Something was wrong I just didn't know what. Jesus and miracles changed the way history was evaluated and I had no idea why, but I was determined to find out.

I did agree, however, that due to the implications of Jesus as God the Bible deserved the utmost scrutiny. It was clear that I had reliable eyewitness accounts of God on earth as a true historical event. The only question was could I really believe it. I also realized that if I simply couldn't decide I was still rejecting Jesus. I was uncomfortable with this truth because of His claims.

I next read "The Case for Christ" by Lee Strobel. In this book he visits many top notch well respected scholars in all areas. In every area he answered all of my questions. The professors he interviewed were excellent. I sensed no bias even though they were arguing that Jesus is God. I trusted them. I suddenly was really excited. As I read on, all of the most difficult questions had an answer. Sure there could be counter arguments, but the answers were sound. Even the pickiest of detailed questions that I had were somehow in there. I could have escaped by unbelief, but I was in search of truth instead of escaping it. The message of Jesus was all good! I had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Right around this time I had *The Patient* who worked for a church. He was odd in a way I could not put my finger on. Right before he was about to leave he said to me out of the blue "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord & savior?" This was when I was struggling. He took me completely by surprise. I said "Oh yeah yeah" and quickly moved out of the room.

I was now really thinking about "I hope the Holy Spirit reveals Himself to you." I will have a hard time putting this to words but I could feel something in the air especially when I was alone. It was like something was there just like that night in *Marco Island*. It was swirling about me in a strange aurora I could only feel and sense. I didn't tell anyone since I knew they would think I was crazy.

A tug of war then ensued in my mind between the two sides. Two particular verses kept popping into my head:

1. I know very well how foolish the message of the cross sounds to those who are on the road to destruction. But we who are being saved recognize this message as the very power of God. As the Scriptures say,

I will destroy human wisdom and discard their most brilliant ideas. So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made them all look foolish and has shown their wisdom to be useless nonsense. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never find him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save all who believe. ¹

2. Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. ²

I was already almost convinced by Lee Strobel and my research on the Bible. Then like a ton of bricks it hit me. I didn't realize that IF the story is true then miracles are nothing and God giving man the words of the Bible thirty years later is easy. If the Bible was true then God made the entire universe. It was illogical to then question miracles and writings. I had taken God out of the equation when evaluating the New Testament when it was all about Him!? It all came down to did it really happen?

Finally, I thought "Ok, I believe it. I can intellectually accept Christianity. Now I can go to church and my wife will leave me alone." I knew it wouldn't kill me, but I didn't think there was anything else to it. A few days later late in my office one night something strange happened. I started thinking about all of my bad habits, character flaws, and many things that I had done that were wrong. I started remembering things from childhood to adulthood. My heart was sinking as I realized how I had many bad qualities like bitterness, jealousy, hostility, arguing, a short temper, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition and feeling like I was always right. Everything I had ever done was racing through my mind. I hated myself as I reviewed it in my mind. I was crying alone in the office. This now took on a life of its own. The real me that everyone including myself knew would never be doing such a thing. I could not stop it though.

I saw myself dead in my sins before a Holy God. I had broken the Ten Commandments, and knew I was guilty before God's judgment seat. I briefly sensed how fallen man is and felt afraid. I then just let it all out sobbing and crying harder than I ever have in my entire life. I went to the bed and pleaded to God (I had never prayed before and didn't know I was praying). I do not recall the exact words but it was something like: "God please help me. I am sorry. I was so wrong about the world. Please help me. I believe in Jesus Christ your Son as Lord and Savior. I believe He died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me. I don't want to be like this anymore. I want it to all go away. Jesus please help me. Please make me the person you want me to be."

This prayer will become very important later. The words just came out. I really did not know what I was saying or doing. I did not expect God to hear me, but I was on autopilot. I had not planned to have such an emotional episode, and certainly didn't want to as a proud adult male. Something just came over me that made me apologize, surrender, and beg for mercy. I had no concept that I was accomplishing anything other than a private emotional meltdown.

I must have gone on and on like this for at least fifteen minutes. I was crying so hard the words were disjointed. I had surrendered. I had thrown myself at the mercy of God and begged like a timid animal to be forgiven. I could somehow feel His power which made my cry harder. Then I slowly re-gathered

myself. I felt really weird and embarrassed. I got into bed and went to sleep. As I laid there in bed I felt an immense sense of peace. I slept like a baby. I figured I purged many years of guilt through a good cry. I went to bed with no idea what had actually happened to me.

Now let me digress for just a bit. I was never an evil person. I never physically abused anyone or my family. I did have many bad qualities that a lot of people have. I had a short temper with outbursts of anger even over stupid things. I was bitter and resentful at times. I wasn't nearly as loving and caring to my wife as I should have been. I was self centered and wanted it my way now. I thought I was always right. I was jealous, materialistic, and had a competitive pride. I was impatient which really equates to selfishness. I felt better and ahead of others by my achievements and possessions. I enjoyed pushing people's buttons and would dig at what I knew hurt them in a subtle way. It was all about me and what I wanted to do. I was empty, lonely, and completely unsatisfied with life despite having everything the world had to offer.

In the morning when I woke up everything was completely different in every conceivable way. I will never be able to explain what it was like. If you were born blind and lived this way your entire life, and suddenly one day you could see is the closest analogy to capture the magnitude of what I was experiencing. Everything was dramatically different. I first thought I just needed a cup of coffee to wake up. I was very relaxed and peaceful with my normal feeling of stress gone. Over the course of the day I began to realize all of my bad qualities were simply gone. It was like someone had drugged me. It took me about three days to realize I wasn't dreaming. In fact on day three I started waking up scared. I was afraid I would go back to my old self. I kept waiting for it to return, but it never did.

I first thought it was some kind of self induced euphoria, but it was too radical of a change to make sense. I did not know what had happened nor could I understand it. I didn't even consider any relation to my religious studies. Even if God was real and somehow Jesus died for people's sin almost two thousand years ago how could there be any direct relation to me in the year 2003? The mind cannot consider what it does not think is even possible.

I did feel great in an indescribably peaceful way. The only way to describe it is by these nine qualities: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Overnight I had traded the old self for this ?! I felt all nine of these qualities, and I looked at everything differently. I did not get mad or angry. I was patient in lines and traffic jams. I decided to put it to the test!

I went in stood in line at Walmart at Christmas time which was unthinkable for the old and impatient Greg Viehman. I couldn't believe it! I wasn't the least bit upset or mad. I could care less the line was long and not even moving! This was crazy! I just couldn't get over it but who could I tell? I knew they would think I was a kook. I even checked my beta-blocker pills to make sure somehow they didn't get switched out for valium.

I had no desire to snap or mock anyone. Everything I had described earlier was simply gone. I felt love for others that I didn't even like! Now this is a very strange feeling to have overnight. It's a feeling of compassion and love that is coming from you but somehow you know it's not you. This was especially the case for me. It's very difficult to put to words without losing the tremendous magnitude of what had happened. Those first few days were some of the strangest days I have ever lived. A man comes to know what he is like and how he feels after thirty six years. I had experienced some good cries in the past, but this was something far beyond description or comprehension.

Now my physician, analytical, and scientific mind began to work. This was no self induced psychological job, not even infinitely close. I had known myself all of my life, and I was blown away at what had happened to me. I then began to analyze it all. I had to piece it together since I had no expectations that anything like this could happen. I had no answer and couldn't tell anyone or they would think I was crazy. Suspension of my medical license was a real fear. I did not even tell my wife. I also feared maybe something was wrong with me physically. It's not easy for a proud doctor who thought he understood the human body to not understand what has happened to his own existence. I was different in every way. I did not have an experience but a transformation. The very nature of my existence had been changed. Religion, emotions, feelings, desires, and even the deepest yearnings cannot produce this. What in the world was going on?