

FORTIFY YOUR FAITH SERIES

WHO IS JESUS?

JESUS CHRIST—LORD AND SAVIOR

A study on the identity, deity, and mission of Christ.



Who do you say that I am? — Matthew 16:15

 **LONG ISLAND
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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JESUS CHRIST—LORD AND SAVIOR

On Tuesday, prior to Christ's crucifixion the following Friday, Jesus engaged in a discussion with the Pharisees, who made no secret of their hatred for Him. When Matthew recorded the scene in his Gospel, he first commented on an earlier skirmish the Lord had with the Sadducees: "But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together" (22:34). Indeed, Jesus had routed the Sadducees completely. No doubt the Pharisees thought they could do better. Yet they were about to endure the same embarrassing treatment.

In the midst of His discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus asked: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" (Matthew 22:42). They were unable to answer the questions correctly because their hypocrisy prevented them from comprehending both Jesus' nature and His mission. The questions the Lord asked on that day, however, are ones that every rational, sane person must answer eventually.

The two questions were intended to raise the matter of Christ's deity. The answers—had the Pharisees' hardened hearts not prevented them from responding correctly—were intended to confirm it. Today, questions concerning Christ's identity still are being raised. Who is Jesus? Is He, as He claimed to be, the Son of God? Was He, as many around Him claimed, God in the flesh? Is He, as the word "deity" implies, of divine nature and rank?

CHRIST AS A MAN

The Scriptures teach that Jesus, unlike any other being who has ever lived upon the Earth, possessed two natures—one divine and one human. As an eternal Being (Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1ff.), He was God; yet He became man (1 Timothy 2:5), made in the likeness of sinful flesh though without sin (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 4:15). Isaiah observed that Christ would be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" Who would grow up "as a tender plant and as a root out of dry ground" (Isaiah 53:2-3).

As a human, the prophets had said, Christ was to be the seed of woman (Genesis 3:15), and a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. The New Testament confirms that indeed, He was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4) who was a virgin (Matthew 1:23), and that He was the descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David (Matthew 1:1ff.). The apostle John stated that He had become flesh and had dwelt among men (John 1:14). Paul wrote that Christ was "found in appearance as a man" (Philippians 2:7-8).

Jesus experienced the same kind of frustrations and joys that all humans occasionally experience. After living without food for forty days and forty nights, He was tempted by the devil to turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:2-3). He knew what it was like to be hungry, and to be tempted at the same time. Jesus knew what it was like to face temptation when one's flesh is weak. He experienced such things as weariness (John 4:6), anger (Mark 3:5), frustration (Mark 9:19), joy (John 15:11), and sadness (John 11:35). He was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). But most significant is the fact that He was able to die (Mark 15:44). In every respect, He was as human as you and I, which is why He could, and did, refer to Himself as the "Son of Man" (Matthew 9:6).

But the impact He had on the world was not due to His physical appearance. In fact, Isaiah foretold that He would have "no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isaiah 53:2). Rather, it was His nature and His character that made Him so intriguing, so commanding a figure, and so worthy of honor, respect, and worship. Here we see a man—but no mere man, for He is the only man ever to be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25), and to whom the inspired prophets dared to apply the revered name of "Jehovah" (Isaiah 40:3).

You might wonder why the Scriptures place importance upon the human nature of Christ? One writer has suggested:

If Christ had not become a man, He could not have died. Deity, as pure Spirit-essence, possesses **immortality** (1 Tim. 6:16—the Greek word denotes deathlessness). The writer of Hebrews makes it wonderfully plain that Christ partook of "flesh and blood" that "through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). If Christ had not died, there would have been no atonement, no forgiveness of sins—the human family would have been hopelessly lost forever! Thank God for Christ's humanity (Jackson, 1979, p. 66).

CHRIST AS GOD

The Scriptures do not speak of Christ as **just** a man, however. They also acknowledge His divine nature. In most of its occurrences, the name "Jehovah" is applied to the first person of the Godhead (i.e., the Father—Matthew 28:19). For example: "Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psalm 110:1). Jesus later explained that this verse pictures the Father addressing the Christ (Luke 20:42).

Yet the name Jehovah also is used on occasion to refer to Christ. For example, Isaiah prophesied concerning the mission of John the Baptizer: "The voice of one that crieth, 'Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of Jehovah; make level in the desert a highway for our God'" (Isaiah 40:3; cf. Matthew 3:3). John was sent to prepare the world for Jesus Christ (John 1:29-34).

But Isaiah said that John would prepare the way of **Jehovah**. Clearly, Jesus and Jehovah are the same. The writer of Hebrews quoted the Father as addressing His Son in this way: “You, Lord [Jehovah—Psalm 102:25], in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands” (Hebrews 1:10). This verse not only applies the word “Jehovah” to Jesus, **but actually attributes the quotation to the mouth of God!** Again, Jesus and Jehovah are used synonymously.

Furthermore, Jesus spoke and acted like God. He affirmed that He was “one” with the Father (John 10:30). He forgave sins—a prerogative of God alone (Mark 2:5,7). He accepted the worship of men (John 9:38), which Jesus explained to the devil is due only to God (Matthew 4:10), and which good angels and good men refuse (Revelation 22:8-9; Matthew 4:10).

In addition, Jesus plainly is called “God” a number of times within the New Testament. In John 1:1, regarding Him “Who became flesh and dwelt among us [men]” (1:14), the Bible says that “the Word was God.” And in John 20:28, one of the disciples, Thomas, upon being confronted with empirical evidence for the Lord’s resurrection, proclaimed: “My Lord and my God!” Significantly (and appropriately), Christ accepted the designation. Additional passages that reveal Christ as God include Philippians 2:5ff., 2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15, and numerous others.

CHOICES REGARDING CHRIST’S DEITY

When Jesus was put on trial before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high priest asked: “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” To that question Christ replied simply, “I am” (Mark 14:62). In view of the exalted nature of such a claim, there are but three possible views that one may entertain. In his book, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell listed and discussed them in a chapter on the deity of Christ titled “Significance of Deity—Lord, Liar, or Lunatic?” (1999, pp. 155-163). In that chapter, McDowell pointed out that Jesus was: (1) a liar and con-artist; (2) a madman; or (3) exactly Who He said He was. No other options exist. One cannot logically accept Jesus as a great moral teacher and then claim that he was not God. Anyone who was merely a man and said the things Jesus said cannot be considered a great moral teacher. Concerning this point, the renowned British apologist of Cambridge University, C.S. Lewis, once wrote:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make

your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to (1952, pp. 40-41).

McDowell and Lewis are correct. Jesus must have been a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. But which one? What does the evidence say?

Was Christ a Liar?

Was Christ a liar? An impostor? A “messianic manipulator”? Some have suggested that Jesus manipulated His life in such a way as to counterfeit the events described in the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. At times, this required arranging events to ensure that the predictions of the prophets would be fulfilled by Him in His lifetime. Supposedly, Jesus even planned to fake His own death on the cross, but a Roman soldier unexpectedly pierced His side with a spear. Thus, instead of recovering from His stupor, Jesus died unexpectedly. On Saturday night, His body was moved to a secret place so that His tomb would be empty on the next day, thus leaving the impression of His resurrection and, simultaneously, His deity.

But how did Jesus manipulate the events that were beyond His control? How could an imposter plan his betrayal price? How could he know that money would be used to purchase the potter’s field (Zechariah 11:13; Matthew 27:7)? How did he know that men would gamble for his clothing? Furthermore, if Christ was little more than an accomplished liar, how could He have possessed the purest and most dignified character known to history? And what sane man would be willing to die for what he knows is a lie? How in the name of common sense could Jesus have invented all of this? A person who lived as Jesus lived, taught as Jesus taught, and died as Jesus died, could not have been a liar.

Was Christ a Lunatic?

Was Jesus merely a psychotic lunatic who sincerely (but mistakenly) viewed himself as God incarnate? Such a view rarely has been entertained by anyone aware of Christ’s life and teachings. How could a lunatic answer questions with such profound wisdom and authority? Would a raving lunatic teach that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us? Would a lunatic teach that we should pray for our enemies? Would a lunatic teach that we should “turn the other cheek,” and then set an example of exactly how to do that—even unto death? Would a lunatic present an ethical code like the one found within the soul-stirring text of the Sermon on the Mount? Hardly! Lunacy of the sort ascribed to Christ by His critics does not produce such genius. Christ was no lunatic!

Was Christ Deity?

If Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic, then the questions that Jesus asked the Pharisees still remain: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” Was Jesus, in fact, exactly Who He claimed to be? Was He God incarnate? The evidence suggests that, indeed, He was.

EVIDENCE FOR THE DEITY OF CHRIST

In Mark 10, an account is recorded concerning a rich young ruler who, in speaking to Christ, addressed Him as “Good Teacher.” Upon hearing this reference, Jesus asked the man: “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (v. 18).

Was Christ suggesting that His countryman’s loyalty was misplaced, and that He was unworthy of being called “good” (in the sense that ultimately only God merits such a designation)? No. In fact, Christ was suggesting that He **was worthy** of such designation. He wanted the ruler to understand the significance of the title he had used. One writer paraphrased Jesus’ response as follows: “Do you know the meaning of this word you apply to me, and which you use so freely? There is none good save God; if you apply that term to me, and you understand what you mean, you affirm that I am God” (Foster, 1971, p. 1022).

What is the evidence that establishes Christ’s deity? Among other things, it includes Christ’s fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, His confirmation of His Sonship via the miracles He performed, His crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, and His post-resurrection appearances.

Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecies

Scholars have documented over 300 messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. From Genesis through Malachi, the history of Jesus is foretold in minute detail. Bible critics who wish to disprove Christ’s deity must refute fulfilled prophecy. To accomplish this, one would have to contend that Jesus did not fulfill the prophecies **genuinely**; rather, He only **appeared** to fulfill them. Yet with over 300 prophecies relating to Christ—none of which can be dismissed flippantly—this is an impossible task.

Could Christ have fulfilled more than 300 prophetic utterances **by chance**? In their classic text, *Science Speaks*, Peter W. Stoner and Robert C. Newman documented the absurdity of such an idea. They selected eight specific prophecies and then calculated a low estimate for the probability of one man fulfilling each of them. Their conclusion was that 1 man in 10^{17} could do it (1976, p. 106). The probability that a single man could fulfill—by chance—**all** of the prophecies relating to Christ and His ministry would be practically incalculable, and the idea that one man did so would be utterly absurd.

Performance of Genuine Miracles

Christ also verified His claims by working miracles. Throughout history, God had empowered other people to perform miracles. But while their miracles confirmed they were **servants** of God, Jesus' miracles were intended to prove that He **is** God (John 10:37-38; cf. John 20:30-31).

While locked away in prison, John the Baptizer sent his followers to ask Jesus: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (Matthew 11:3). Jesus' response was: "Go and tell John...the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:4-5). Over seven hundred years earlier, the prophet Isaiah predicted that those very things would be accomplished by the Messiah (Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1). Jesus wasn't saying merely, "Look at all the things I am doing." He was saying: "I am doing **exactly what the Coming One is supposed to do!**"

When Peter addressed the very people who had put Jesus to death, he reminded them that Christ's unique identity had been proved "by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know" (Acts 2:22). The key phrase here is "even as you yourselves also know." The Jews had witnessed Christ's miracles occurring among them while He was on the Earth. And, unlike the pseudo-miracles allegedly performed by today's "spiritualists," Jesus' miracles were feats that truly defied naturalistic explanation. In the presence of many witnesses, the Nazarene not only gave sight to the blind, healed lepers, fed thousands from a handful of food, and made the lame to walk, but also calmed turbulent seas and even raised the dead! Although not overly eager to admit it, Jesus' critics often were brought face-to-face with the fact that no one could do what Jesus did unless God was with Him (John 3:2; cf. John 9).

The Resurrection, and Post-Resurrection Appearances

Likely, however, the most impressive miracle involving Jesus was His resurrection. In agreement with Old Testament prophecy, and just as He had promised, Christ came forth from the tomb three days after His brutal crucifixion (Matthew 16:21; 27:63; 28:1-8). His resurrection was witnessed by the soldiers who had been appointed to guard His tomb. In the end, those soldiers had to be bribed to change their story so that the leaders of the Jews would not lose credibility, and in order to prevent the Jewish people from recognizing their true Messiah (Matthew 28:11-15). It is a matter of history that Christ's tomb was empty on that Sunday morning almost 2,000 years ago. If Jesus were not raised from the dead, how came His guarded (and sealed!) tomb to be empty?

That Christ had been raised from the dead was witnessed by many different types of people: the soldiers who guarded His tomb; the women who came early in the morning to anoint Him with spices; eleven apostles; and more than 500 other witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:4-8). When they saw the living, breathing Jesus—just days after His death—they had concrete proof that He was Who He claimed to be all along! Even his detractors could not deny successfully the fact, and significance, of the empty tomb.

Thousands of pilgrims travel annually to the graves of the founders of the Buddhist and Muslim religions to pay homage. Yet Christians do not make treks to pay homage at the grave of Jesus Christ—for the simple fact that **the tomb is empty**. A dead Savior is no good! For those who accept, and act upon, the evidence for Christ's deity provided by the resurrection, life is meaningful, rich, and full (see Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 15). For those who reject Christ's resurrection, the vacant tomb will stand forever as eternity's greatest mystery, and one day will serve as their silent judge.

CONCLUSION

Who is Jesus of Nazareth? He had no formal rabbinical training and possessed no material wealth (John 7:15; Luke 9:58; 2 Corinthians 8:9). Yet, through His teachings, He turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Clearly, as the evidence documents, He was, and is, both the Son of Man and the Son of God. He lived, and died, to redeem fallen mankind. He gave Himself a ransom (Matthew 20:28). He is God, Who predates, and will outlast, time itself (Philippians 2:5-11).

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Questions—Lesson 4

TRUE OR FALSE

DIRECTIONS: Write TRUE or FALSE in the blanks before the following statements.

- _____ 1. The Bible teaches that Jesus possessed two natures—one divine and one human.
- _____ 2. Jesus was born of a virgin.
- _____ 3. Jesus was a descendant of Jacob's brother, Esau.
- _____ 4. Anyone who was merely a man and yet claimed to be the Son of God cannot be considered a great moral teacher.
- _____ 5. It is very likely that a single man could fulfill—by chance—all of the prophecies relating to the Messiah.
- _____ 6. Christians worship God on the first day of the week because Christ is still in the tomb.
- _____ 7. Jesus never became weary, frustrated, or sad.
- _____ 8. Jesus lived and died to save men from their sins.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the correct answer(s).

- 1. Which of the following does **not** establish Christ's deity?
 - (a) His fulfillment of prophecies
 - (b) His miracles
 - (c) His loyalty to His parents
 - (d) His resurrection
- 2. All of the evidence that we have reveals that Jesus is/was:
 - (a) A liar
 - (b) The Son of God
 - (c) An imposter
 - (d) A lunatic
- 3. The soldiers who guarded the tomb of Jesus claimed that His body had been stolen because:
 - (a) They were bribed
 - (b) They were scared
 - (c) That was what they saw
 - (d) An angel told them so

4. Which Bible writer claimed that the “Word was God” and the “Word became flesh”?
(a) John (b) Moses (c) Matthew (d) Luke
5. At least this number of people saw Jesus alive and well after His death.
(a) 15 (b) 500 (c) 40 (d) 0

MATCHING

Match each statement with the person who made it (place the correct letter in the space provided by each number).

- | | | |
|----------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. _____ | “You are the Son of God!” (John 1:49). | A. Andrew |
| 2. _____ | “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). | B. The centurion and guards |
| 3. _____ | “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” (Mark 14:61). | C. John the Baptizer |
| | | D. Peter |
| 4. _____ | “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). | E. Thomas |
| | | F. Nathanael |
| 5. _____ | “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41). | G. Jewish high priest |
| 6. _____ | “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” (Matthew 22:42). | H. Jesus |
| 7. _____ | “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). | |
| 8. _____ | “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54). | |

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. If _____ had not died, there would have been no _____ of sins.
2. There are only _____ possible choices one may entertain in regard to Christ's claim of being deity.
3. One cannot logically accept Jesus as a great moral _____ and then claim that he was not _____.
4. Scholars have documented over _____ messianic prophecies in the _____.
5. Jesus' miracles were intended to prove that He is _____.

NOTES/COMMENTS

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