

Is Jesus Really God?

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Chapters

Introduction	3
Documentation	4
Witnesses To The Deity of Jesus	8
Apostolic Teaching	23
Paul and the Gentiles	31
Did Jesus Claim To Be God?	39
I Believe That Jesus Is God!	46

Introduction

This question is the most important one we can ask and answer in our lifetime. If Jesus is God, then everything He does impacts everyone in the world in every imaginable way. However, if Jesus is not God, then nothing He has done impacts anyone in any substantial way. So, how can we know for sure? What historical methods are there for proving that Jesus is or is not the Son of God? Are there credible ancient documents available for our investigation? Are there trustworthy accounts of credible witnesses that can help us know which it is? Did Jesus ever address the question about whether He is God? Did the Apostles believe Jesus is God? Did the early Church believe Jesus is God? The answer to all of these questions is – YES!

Chapter One

Documentation

The Bible (Old and New Testament) is a compilation of many ancient documents of tremendous credibility (we will go into detail about the Bible's credentials in a future study). The Bible is also the history of God and His people. Does this historical document offer us any insight into whether Jesus Christ is God? It does in many of the Old Testament Scriptures that foretell the coming of God's Anointed One – the Messiah of Israel.

The Hebrew Prophet Isaiah wrote – “the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14) The word Immanuel translates as “God with us.” The Apostle Matthew quoted this verse from Isaiah and added the translation for those who did not speak Hebrew so they would know that Jesus is “God with us.” (Matthew 1:23) Isaiah carried this teaching further several paragraphs later as he described a future time when God would send a great light to Israel and increase its joy – “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)

Notice carefully the names Isaiah said this “Son” would be called – Wonderful, Counselor, **Mighty God, Everlasting Father**, Prince of Peace. The true prophets of God had taught the people of Israel for centuries that there was only One God. Isaiah was involved in fighting against the pagan influences on Israel. So, it seems clear that a prophet of the One God would not have written that the Son of a virgin would be born to lead and govern Israel and be called Mighty God unless He really was the Mighty God.

Keep in mind that the proof of whether a Hebrew prophet was a true prophet of God was whether everything they said was true and everything they prophesied came to pass. If Isaiah's prophecy about the Son born of a virgin being the Mighty God was not true, then Isaiah was not a true

prophet of God. Interestingly, the text for proving true and false prophets is found in a writing of Moses that includes a Messianic prophecy.

“And the LORD said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require *it* of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’— when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” Deuteronomy 18:17-22

The Hebrew Prophet Daniel saw many visions from God about future events. Many of those events have already come to pass just as Daniel prophesied. Many others are still in the future. In one of those visions, Daniel saw God – The Ancient of Days – judging the “beasts” of the earth (world leaders who opposed God). It was during that vision that Daniel saw the “Son of Man” receive dominion, glory and a kingdom that would never pass away.

“I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed.” Daniel 7:13-14

Daniel was troubled by what he saw in the visions, so he asked an angel of the Lord what it meant. In his answer to Daniel, the angel tells us more about the kingdom that would belong to the Son of Man.

Is Jesus Really God?

“Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.’ ” Daniel 7:27

The angel correlated the future kingdom of the Most High with that of the Son of Man. That is why the religious leaders of Israel were so upset when Jesus referred to Himself as the “Son of Man” (scores of times in the Gospels). He was claiming to be the One Daniel saw in his vision – the One Who would rule the everlasting kingdom as the Most High.

We could also reference Genesis 1:26 where God said – “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”

Even earlier evidences of Jesus being God are found in His relationship to people in the Old Testament. This relationship is often called “Pre-incarnate” because Jesus is meeting with people prior to His Incarnation (Christ’s Birth to the Virgin Mary). Here are several examples from the Old Testament. Notice in these examples that the Angel of the Lord speaks as God, is recognized as God, and is worshiped as God.

The first example is when the Angel of the Lord spoke to Hagar, the servant of Sarai and mother to Abraham’s son Ishmael. The Angel told Hagar to return to Sarai and submit to her and that He would multiply her descendants exceedingly. Here’s what Hagar said about the Angel of the Lord Who spoke to her – “Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?” (Genesis 16:13) Hagar knew that the Angel Who spoke with her was God.

The next example is when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac. The Angel of the Lord spoke to Abraham as only God could or would – “And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me ... By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only *son*— blessing I will bless you, and multiplying

Is Jesus Really God?

I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Genesis 22:12, 16-18)

The Angel of God spoke to Jacob many years later and again referred to Himself as God – “*I am* the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar *and* where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.” (Genesis 31:13)

The Angel of Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire from the middle of a bush. Here’s how Moses described the Angel of the Lord – “God called to him from the midst of the bush ... Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground.’ Moreover He said, ‘*I am* the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.” (Exodus 3:4-6) Clearly, the Angel of the Lord called Himself God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Angel of God Who went before Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 14:19) is spoken of as the One Who would not forgive their sins if they provoked Him (Exodus 23:20-21). The Man Who said He was the Commander of the Lord’s army accepted worship from Joshua and told Israel’s leader to take off his sandals because the place where he stood was holy (Joshua 5:13-15). When the Angel of God ascended to Heaven in the flame of fire after speaking to Samson’s parents, Manoah said to his wife – “We shall surely die, because we have seen God!” (Judges 13:22). More evidences of Appearances of Jesus Christ as God in the Old Testament – before His Incarnation revealed in the Gospels.

Chapter Two

Witnesses To The Deity of Jesus

It is our belief that Jesus Christ is God – not “a god” as many religions would have us believe – but **The GOD** of Creation. We saw in the previous chapter that many people saw Jesus Christ before His Incarnation and responded to Him as God, but what about in the New Testament – did any witnesses acknowledge that He is God? The answer is – YES!

Angels

The first witnesses we see in the New Testament are God’s **angels**. God Created them before human beings. They’ve been with God in Heaven for a long time and would know Who is God and who is not. They stood in the Presence of God, heard Him Speak and received assignments directly from Him. The Bible says there are millions of angels in Heaven, which is a large number of witnesses. Their testimony would certainly be accepted in a court of law.

In Luke 1 we see the angel **Gabriel** appearing to an elderly Hebrew priest named Zacharias. The angel told Zacharias that he and his barren wife would have a son (John the Baptist) and that he would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of the Prophet Elijah and “make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:17) As we will see, John the Baptist was preparing people to meet Jesus Christ.

Also in Luke 1, we see the angel Gabriel going to a city in Galilee named Nazareth. Gabriel’s assignment was to visit a young girl named Mary and deliver a special message to her. Mary was a virgin who was promised in marriage to a man named Joseph. Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her that she would conceive a child Who would be called Jesus. Gabriel said ”He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:32-33) Gabriel explained further that the Holy Spirit would come upon

Is Jesus Really God?

her and the Power of God would overshadow her. Gabriel called Jesus “that Holy One” and said He would be called the “Son of God.”

In Matthew 1, an angel of the Lord also appeared to Joseph in a dream. Joseph was Mary’s espoused husband. The angel told Joseph that the baby Mary carried in her womb was conceived of the Holy Spirit of God and that His Name would be Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. The angel of God came to Joseph with an unusual message. Mary, Joseph’s wife to be, was pregnant with a child that the Holy Spirit of God had conceived in her. That is a supernatural occurrence. Something else supernatural was that Jesus would save His people from their sins. Saving the people of Israel from their sins is something only God can do, so the angel attributed the Character and Work of God to Jesus. Another thing to ask is how did the angel know the baby was conceived of the Holy Spirit and that Jesus would save His people from their sins? Only God would know these things. The angel’s message was from God.

An angel of God appeared to a group of shepherds and told them about Jesus’ birth. The angel said, “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11) The angel called Jesus three things – Savior, Christ, and Lord. The shepherds would have understood the angel to say that the baby born that day in Bethlehem would be the promised Messiah of Israel Who came with the Authority of God to save Israel. The next thing the shepherds saw was a large number of angels praising God by saying – “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:13-14)

We also see angels in the New Testament serving Jesus after Satan tested Him in the wilderness (Mark 1:13), witnessing Jesus’ Crucifixion (1 Corinthians 4:9), appearing to Jesus when He was on the Cross (Luke 22:43), being witnesses to Christ’s Resurrection from the dead (Matthew 28:2-7), witnessing the Ascension of Jesus to Heaven (Acts 1:9-11), helping those involved in the early ministry of preaching that Jesus is God (Acts 5, 8, 10, 12), responding to God’s command that they worship Jesus (Hebrews 1:5-7), and witnessing the great Glory of Jesus as the God of Heaven (Revelation 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22).

The angels of God are a powerful and continual witness to the world that Jesus is God and that faith in Him and submission to Him are required of all men.

Is Jesus Really God?

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.” 1 Timothy 3:16

Mary and Elizabeth

God chose a young Jewish girl named Mary to become the earthly mother of Jesus. The angel Gabriel told Mary that the Holy Spirit of God would come upon her, and the Power of the Highest would overshadow her, and she would conceive and give birth to “that Holy One” Who would be called “the Son of God.” God did as He said He would do and Mary supernaturally became pregnant with Jesus.

Mary went to visit an elderly relative named Elizabeth. Elizabeth, the wife of the priest Zacharias, was already pregnant with the baby boy who would grow up to become the prophet John the Baptist. As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby inside Elizabeth leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Here’s what Elizabeth said about Mary:

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.” Luke 1:42-45

Notice that Elizabeth called Mary “the mother of my Lord.” That’s another term for God. Elizabeth prophesied and said that what God had told Mary would be fulfilled.

Mary was also filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied after Elizabeth:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered

Is Jesus Really God?

the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.” Luke 1:46-55

Mary knew that what God was doing in her was something so great that all generations that followed would call her **blessed** because of it. The Greek word used here is *makarizo* and means “to pronounce happy, fully satisfied.”

Mary had a front row seat to what God was going to do for Israel and the world. She witnessed the visits of shepherds and wise men who came to visit her Child. She saw the wise men bow before Jesus and worship Him. Mary witnessed Simeon take the baby Jesus in his arms and speak as the Holy Spirit came upon him:

“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.” Luke 2:29-32

Mary watched as the elderly prophetess Anna told everyone looking for redemption in Israel about Jesus as she gave thanks to the Lord. (Luke 2:36-38) Mary was also witness to the 12-year-old Jesus astounding teachers in the Temple in Jerusalem with His knowledge and understanding of the Law of God. When Mary asked Jesus why He left them to go to the Temple, He answered: “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49) It might seem strange for Jesus to talk about teaching in the Temple as His Father’s “business” since Joseph, Mary’s husband, was a carpenter, but it demonstrates that Jesus had come for one Holy Purpose.

Mary was a witness to her Son’s earthly ministry, including His Death, Resurrection and Ascension. She knew for certain when she saw Him alive after His Death on the Cross that her Son was everything the angel had told her He would be – God in Flesh.

Joseph

Though Joseph, Mary's husband, helped raise Jesus and acted as His human father, Joseph died before Jesus began His earthly ministry. We do know that Joseph was witness to the angel's message about Mary and the Baby she carried in her womb. "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20-21) Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took Mary as his wife and did not have sexual union with her until after she gave birth to her Son. Joseph called His Name Jesus.

Joseph was also a witness to the visit of the shepherds and wise men. He heard what Simeon and Anna said about Jesus. An angel of the Lord appeared again to Joseph to warn him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod. After Herod died, the angel told Joseph to return to Israel from Egypt. Joseph was afraid to return when he learned that Archelaus had become King of Judea, so God told Joseph in a dream to go instead to the region of Galilee and live in Nazareth (Matthew 2:13-23). Joseph was witness to the time when Jesus as a 12-year-old Child confounded teachers of the Law in the Temple with His Knowledge. Joseph also had the amazing privilege of teaching Jesus the carpenter trade. They worked side by side for many years. Joseph did not live long enough to share with Mary in her experience of watching Jesus teach, preach, heal, forgive, raise the dead, be Crucified and Resurrected. Joseph was not a witness to those events, but he knew Jesus would accomplish great things in His Life. He had seen the evidence.

Jesus' Brothers and Sisters

We know that Mary and Joseph had several children of their own because of what the Gospel writers mentioned about Jesus (Matthew 12:46-47; 13:55-56). Here's an interesting exchange between Jesus and people in His own synagogue at Nazareth. They had a hard time understanding Jesus' Message because they were so familiar with Him as a person who grew up in their village.

Is Jesus Really God?

“Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?” So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.’ Matthew 13:55-57

We learn that Joseph had at least four brothers and two or more sisters. The brothers were named James, Joses, Simon, and Judas. Here’s what we know about them and their relationship to Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

James

James was the Lord’s younger half-brother. He knew Jesus well, but didn’t understand His Deity until after the Lord’s Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). James became a powerful leader of believers in Jerusalem, especially after the death of James the brother of John (Acts 12:2, 17). James was a direct and powerful connection to Jesus Christ because he was a member of the Lord’s earthly family and because of the power of God’s Hand on his ministry.

James may be best known for the Letter he wrote to believers – we know it as the Book of James. It is obvious from his writing that James believed Jesus is God. James called Jesus the “Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1) and “our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory” (James 2:1).

Judas

Judas, also called Jude, was another of the Lord’s earthly half-brothers. He wrote a short letter to believers that is included in the New Testament as the Book of Jude. In it, Jude writes that he is a “bondservant of Jesus Christ.” He wrote that believers are “sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ.” Jude wrote about the Father and Son in similar phrasing – “Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” He spoke of the “Lord” saving His people out of the land of Egypt. He told them to “remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jude placed Jesus alongside of the other Members of the Trinity.

Is Jesus Really God?

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Jude 20-21

As powerful as that statement is, it is just a prelude to one of the strongest verses in the New Testament attesting to the Deity of Jesus Christ, the Savior of His people.

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.” Jude 24-25

Joses and Simon

Joses and Simon are not mentioned in the New Testament as followers of Jesus, but some early Christian writings identify Simon as bishop of Jerusalem following the death of his brother James in about A.D. 62. Joses is also mentioned by early Christian writers as being a believer and leader in Jerusalem.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ had a profound effect on the Lord’s earthly family. They realized He is God and served Him as Lord for the rest of their lives.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist was the man God used to prepare the way for “the Lord.” John preached a baptism for the remission of sins and the coming wrath of God. He also preached - “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:7-8) John was preparing the way for the Messiah of Israel – Who would baptize people with the Holy Spirit and fire – Who would thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, gather His wheat into the barn, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. The Old Testament Scriptures attributed this same Power to God alone.

Is Jesus Really God?

Jesus came to John for baptism – not for remission of sins, but to fulfill righteousness and for special anointing as God’s Priest, Prophet, and King of Israel. John immediately knew who Jesus was and said – “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” (John 1:29-30) There was no doubt that John knew that Jesus was the One about Whom he preached. He also knew that Jesus existed “before” him even though John was several months older by his earthly birthday.

The exchange between Jesus and John is very telling of what John knew about Him:

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” (Matthew 3:13-17)

John the Baptist was arrested sometime after baptizing Jesus. He heard about the works of Christ and sent two of his disciples to ask Christ an important question:

“Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: 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. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.’” Matthew 11:4-6

John’s question is surprising on the surface because God had shown him that Jesus was His Anointed One, but we need to understand what Jews believed about the Messiah. The Old Testament prophets presented Messiah as a Conquering King. They also presented Messiah as the Suffering Savior, but so many Jews missed the significance of what God was going to do for them by suffering for them. Even though it was in their Scriptures, they didn’t comprehend the

Is Jesus Really God?

significance of Messiah dying for their sins and being raised from the dead for their justification. What Jesus did in answering John's questions was to point him to the "evidences" of the Messiah – the blind seeing, the lame walking, lepers being cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dead rising to life, and the poor having the Gospel preached to them. Those were prophetic evidences John the Baptist would recognize. He went to his death knowing that Jesus is the Promised Messiah of Israel.

The Apostles

Jesus selected 12 men who would become His closest disciples – men we know as the Twelve Apostles of Christ. They spent 3+ years traveling the country with Jesus. They witnessed His Miracles and Teachings. They saw Jesus heal the suffering multitudes and cast thousands of demons out of oppressed people. 11 of the Apostles were witnesses to His Death, Resurrection and Ascension. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and experienced His Great Power in their own lives and ministries as they preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Did these men who knew Jesus best believe He is God? Let's see what the Gospels shows us about the beliefs of the Apostles about the Deity of Jesus Christ.

“Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away ... Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’” Matthew 14:22, 33

These Jewish men would have only worshiped God. They really believed that Jesus is God.

“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.’” Matthew 16:15-17

The Apostle Peter understood from what he had witnessed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

Is Jesus Really God?

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” John 1:1-4

The Apostle John made it clear in his account of the Gospel that Jesus is the Word of God and that the Word of God is God. John believed that Jesus was in the beginning with God and that every created thing was Created by Jesus.

“Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” John 1:49

The Apostle Nathanael (also called Bartholomew) recognized Jesus as the Son of God, the King of Israel. This was on their first meeting when Jesus told Nathanael He had seen him standing under a fig tree before Philip called him to meet Jesus. Nathanael knew that Jesus had not been near him and immediately saw that Jesus is the Son of God.

“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” John 20:28

When Thomas saw Jesus after His Death and Resurrection, he recognized that Jesus is God and testified to his belief.

It is clear from reading the Gospel accounts that while Jesus was with them on earth the Apostles believed Jesus is God, but what did they believe after He Ascended into Heaven? What about the early years of their ministries? Did their experiences change their minds about the Deity of Christ? What do we learn from the letters they wrote to other believers decades after Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension? Did they still believe He is God?

The Apostles in the Book of Acts

Jesus ascended into Heaven in full view of His followers. As they were watching Jesus, two angels appeared to them and said – “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11) The apostles witnessed the Son of God do something that

Is Jesus Really God?

is humanly impossible and heard angels say that He would come again in the same way. They left the mount called Olivet and returned to Jerusalem to the “upper room.” All of the Apostles were there, except for Judas who had hanged himself. Mary, the mother of Jesus, along with the Lord’s earthly brothers and other disciples continued with one accord with the Apostles in prayer and supplication.

Peter stood before them and said it was time to choose someone to take Judas’ place. The Lord had chosen 12 Apostles to take the message of the Kingdom of God to Israel, so Peter gave them the requirements for making their selection – “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” The group proposed two men – Joseph called Barsabas (surnamed Justus) and Matthias – then prayed for God’s leading in choosing the 12th Apostle – “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” After they prayed, they cast their lots and the lot fell on Matthias, so he was numbered with the 11 Apostles. (Acts 1:21-26)

The stage is now set – Jesus ascended to Heaven to take His Place with God the Father – the Lord’s followers chose a replacement for Judas – the only thing left was to wait for what Jesus promised them – “... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) They didn’t wait long -

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Acts 2:1-4

Is Jesus Really God?

The Apostles had already received the Spirit of God on the day Jesus Rose from the grave when the Lord breathed on them and gave them His Spirit (John 20:22). On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus sent His Spirit to them as a group of believers in great Power and they began to preach. What they preached that day tells us a lot about what they believed concerning the Deity of Jesus Christ.

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’ Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one

Is Jesus Really God?

of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:22-39)

Peter presented Jesus as being “exalted to the right hand of God.” No human could ever attain to that level because to be at God’s Right Hand was to be God Himself. Peter also presented Jesus as the “Lord” and “Holy One” of King David’s prophecy. Peter told the crowds of Jews in Jerusalem that day that God had made Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ. This message from the Apostle Peter about the Deity and Supremacy of Christ was so powerful that thousands were cut to the heart, repented and were baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins – and they all received the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Peter called Jesus Christ “the Holy One and the Just” and told Jews in Jerusalem that they had “killed the Prince of life.” Peter claimed that “faith in His name” was what healed people (Acts 3:14-16). Peter also reminded the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel and the Prophet Moses had promised centuries before (Acts 3:18-26). Peter was as bold in his proclamations about Jesus with the chief priests, scribes, elders, and rulers of Israel as he was with the people on the streets of Jerusalem. Peter stood up to them after he was arrested and told them they had “murdered” Jesus by hanging him on a tree, but “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 5:31) That statement greatly angered the chief priests and rulers and they plotted how to kill Peter and the other Apostles.

The rulers of Israel had more to be concerned about than just the Apostles. The Jews who believed the Apostles’ teaching were also becoming a problem. Their faith and knowledge was growing stronger every day. A powerful example of that was a man named Stephen. He was described as a man “full of faith, power and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5, 8). Stephen’s teaching and wisdom was so powerful that a group of men secretly induced men to lie about Stephen and say that he spoke blasphemous words against Moses and God. The group stirred up the people, elders and scribes to seize Stephen and bring him to the ruling council. False witnesses came before the council and lied about what Stephen was teaching.

Is Jesus Really God?

The council looked at Stephen and his face was like that of an angel (Acts 6:15). The high priest asked Stephen if the things being said against him were true. That question gave Stephen the opportunity to proclaim one of the most powerful messages in the Book of Acts. He began with God calling Abram out of Mesopotamia and continued to rehearse the history of Israel through the days of Moses. Then, Stephen aimed his message directly at the priests and elders of Israel.

“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” Acts 7:51-53

That enraged the rulers and they gnashed at him with their teeth, but Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into Heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. That’s when Stephen said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:56) When the rulers heard Stephen call Jesus the “Son of Man” and place Him standing at the right hand of God, they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord. That’s because Stephen was equating Jesus with God Himself. They dragged Stephen outside of the city and stoned him to death. Even as Stephen was dying, he asked God not to charge the sin against the men who were killing him (Acts 7:57-60).

We see evidence of what people believed about Jesus from the teaching of the Apostles. For instance, Philip had been chosen along with Stephen to help the Apostles with the daily feeding of the widows in Jerusalem. Many of the disciples were scattered after Stephen’s death, including Philip who went to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to the people there. Acts 8 tells us that Philip worked miracles before the people – casting out demons and healing the sick – and the people believed Philip’s message and there was great joy in the city (Acts 8:6-8). What was Philip’s message and what did people believe about Jesus?

“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great

authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Acts 8:26-37

Philip preached what he had been taught by the Apostles – he preached Jesus. What does that mean? According to what we see in Acts 8, it means Philip preached that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Keep in mind that the eunuch did not have time to attend seminary and learn what to say when people asked him theological questions. He said what he believed at the earliest moment of his faith – “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” That was the Apostolic teaching.

Chapter Three

Apostolic Teaching

As we read through the early chapters in Acts, we see the Apostles' primary message was that Jesus Christ was Israel's Messiah – “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). The number of believers in Jerusalem continued to grow and the Apostles needed help so they could continue in prayer and preaching. That led to the selection of seven godly men to help in the daily distribution of food to the Grecian widows. One of those men was named Stephen. Stephen was “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). Stephen was full of faith and power and did great wonders and signs among the people. Some Jews from the Synagogue of the Freedmen tried to dispute Stephen's claims about Jesus being the Messiah, but they were not able to resist his wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Those Jews induced men to lie about Stephen, saying he spoke blasphemous words against Moses and God. They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes to seize Stephen and drag him before the Sanhedrin Council. They set up false witnesses who continued to say that Stephen spoke blasphemy against the Law of Moses and the Temple of God.

The Council gave Stephen the opportunity to answer the charges against him and he did so with great power. Stephen rehearsed the history of Israel and things seemed to be going along alright until he said these words:

“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” Acts 7:51-53

Is Jesus Really God?

Those words cut so deep into the minds and hearts of Stephen's enemies that they gnashed at him with their teeth. Then, Stephen did something that brought everything crashing in on him. Being full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into Heaven and saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" The leaders of Israel instantly understood that Stephen was identifying Jesus with God and ran at him with one accord. They pushed Stephen outside the city and stoned him to death.

Before we move on, let's look at the term Son of Man. Jesus referred to Himself as the "Son of Man" more than 80 times during His Ministry. It was a term the Jews of that time knew well because it was part of a famous prophecy in the Old Testament concerning the promised Messiah.

"I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed." Daniel 7:13-14

Jesus often called Himself the Son of Man while describing activities ascribed only to God. Here are some examples from Matthew's Gospel.

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, 'Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.'" Matthew 9:6

"For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Matthew 12:8

"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 13:41-42

Is Jesus Really God?

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 16:13-17

“So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Matthew 19:28

“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Matthew 24:30

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.” Matthew 25:31

“Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Matthew 26:64

No wonder that the leaders of Israel attacked Stephen with such rage. He was accusing them of murdering Jesus and saying that Jesus was alive in Heaven and standing at the Right Hand of God Himself!

“And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul ... Now Saul was consenting to his death.” Acts 7:58; 8:1a

This was the beginning of a great attack on those who followed Jesus. Saul of Tarsus was a young law student who was determined to destroy the sect of the Way in Jerusalem. Saul became

Is Jesus Really God?

a leading persecutor of believers and “made havoc” with them, “entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” (Acts 8:3)

This persecution did not deter the disciples of Christ from preaching about Jesus. What it did was spread God’s Message throughout the land. So, Saul went looking for followers of the Way.

“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” Acts 9:1-2

Jesus had other plans for Saul and revealed Himself to the chief persecutor in a unique way.

“As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’” Acts 9:3-6

Saul had a heart for God, but it was misguided. Nothing Saul had seen so far had influenced him to change his mind about Jesus – not the faith of the believers, not their testimony of believing that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel, not even their personal sacrifice. Jesus had a plan for Saul’s life and knew how to reach him. Saul immediately recognized that he was in the presence of a superior power – “Who are You, Lord?” – Saul said. Jesus revealed Himself in the clearest terms Saul would understand – “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

A quick note about “the goads.” A goad was a long rod with a pointed end (often a sharp piece of metal attached to a wooden rod) used to control oxen. The sharp end of the goad was placed on the flesh of the oxen to control and guide them. If the oxen didn’t go where they were supposed to go, the farmer would push a little harder on the goad to move the oxen in the right direction.

Is Jesus Really God?

Oxen would often kick against the goad because of the pain, but the farmer would just push harder until the oxen finally submitted to the farmer's will. Jesus used that terminology in showing Saul that what he was doing was misguided and he needed to submit to God's Will.

God's will for Saul was something the Lord determined for him before Creation. That's an amazing thing to consider, but it was Paul (Saul) who said -"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." (Ephesians 1:4) Paul included himself in that "us." God chose Paul and other believers in the sphere of Christ before He Created the world to be "holy and blameless in his sight." The Lord's calling to Saul on the road to Damascus had been determined long before – thousands of years before. Here's what happened next:

"The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered. The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.' 'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.' But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.' Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength." Acts 9:7-19

Is Jesus Really God?

Did you see that? Jesus told Ananias that Saul was His “chosen instrument” to carry His Name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. Fascinating! Saul was a “chosen instrument.” The Greek words are *skeuos ekloges* – “a vessel of choice.” The word *skeuos* was used for **vessels** or **implements** of various kinds – often used to carry out household duties. As we will see later, God was going to change the way He managed His household and would use Saul (Paul) as His vessel for that change. The word was also a common Greek metaphor for the human body because people in the 1st Century viewed souls as living temporarily in the body. Paul was a vessel of God’s **choice**. The word *ekloges* means “to pick out, choose for ones self.”

Jesus personally called Saul (Paul) to follow Him and carry His Name before the Gentiles, their kings, and before the people of Israel. So what did Saul tell people about Jesus?

“Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, ‘Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?’ Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.” Acts 9:19-22

How does someone go from arresting people who believed that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God, to preaching that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God? Simple. Saul personally met Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That first meeting had a profound impact on Saul’s heart and mind and on the plans he had for his life. That life-changing event was Saul’s testimony and he often told the story when he spoke with people about the change in his spiritual life.

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. While thus occupied, as I journeyed to

Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’ Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” Acts 26:9-20

Paul discovered that he had been fighting against God, but instead of God destroying him Jesus said He would make Paul a minister and a witness of the things which he had seen and the things Jesus would reveal to him in the future. The purpose? “... to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

Paul did receive many revelations directly from Christ. He made it clear throughout his ministry that the Gospel message he preached came through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:3) and not from the teachings of any man. Paul told the Corinthians that Jesus had given him many visions and revelations and that he had even been caught up into Paradise.

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or

Is Jesus Really God?

out of the body I do not know, God knows— how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” 2

Corinthians 12:2-4

This was a remarkable experience for Paul and one that would strengthen him throughout his life. Jesus showed Paul Paradise and allowed him to hear “inexpressible words” which he was not allowed to repeat. The Greek is *arrhetos rhema* and carries the idea of words that are too sacred to be spoken.

When Paul taught, preached and wrote, he spoke as a man who had been with God – similar to how Moses spoke with God face to face. Paul met Jesus Christ face to face and was well qualified to speak about the Lord’s Deity.

Chapter Four

Paul and the Gentiles

The Book of Acts was written by a Gentile (Luke) to a Gentile (Theophilus), so that should be our first clue to what God did during the 1st Century. Acts begins as primarily Jewish in fulfillment, direction and tone, but quickly becomes predominantly non-Jewish. Why is that? In the Gospels, Jesus presents Himself to the people of Israel as their Messiah King. He explains to them how His Kingdom works and what He expects from them. Many of the people like what they see and hear, but many don't – especially the religious leaders of Israel. That begins a tension that builds until the leaders of Israel demand that Israel's occupying force (Rome) kill Him. The local leader of the occupying force (Pilate) doesn't see any reason to kill Jesus, but yields to the will of the people and sends the Lord to the Cross. Jesus dies to save people from the death penalty of their sin – which is the primary reason He came from Heaven to earth – and rises from the dead, teaches His disciples about “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3) and returns to His Father in Heaven (Acts 1:9).

In Acts, we see the same leaders rejecting Jesus again, even though the Lord proved Himself to them through His Resurrection. Since Israel's leaders couldn't kill Jesus again, they opposed His followers (Acts 4-5). That opposition eventually led to the death of Stephen and a great persecution and scattering of most believers in Jerusalem (Acts 7-8). Saul of Tarsus became the point man in the charge against followers of Jesus and was successful in his work. So much so that the high priest of Israel gave Saul letters to the synagogues of Damascus so that if Saul found any who were “of the Way,” he could bring them bound to Jerusalem. However, Jesus had other plans for Saul.

Is Jesus Really God?

The Book of Acts takes a huge directional turn after Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. Everything becomes transitional – from God working primarily with the Jews – to God working primarily with the Gentiles. The transition begins in Acts 9 with Paul's conversion and reaches its zenith in Acts 15 when the 12 Jewish Apostles come to an understanding about the changes God instituted in calling Paul to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:1-29; Galatians 2:1-10). It's interesting to note that after Acts 15 almost nothing is said about the ministries of the 12 Jewish Apostles (except when Paul visited the Lord's half-brother James in Jerusalem – Acts 21:18). From Acts 15:30 to the end of the Book, it's all about Paul the Apostle and the Gospel to the Gentiles. So, what did Paul preach and teach about the **Deity** of Jesus Christ?

Paul was part of the teaching team at the first primarily Gentile church at Antioch in Syria. That's where believers in Christ were first called **Christians** (Acts 11:26) Paul taught there for about a year and, along with Barnabas, took a special relief gift to the elders in Jerusalem during that time (Acts 11:27-30). Remember what Jesus told Ananias about the ministry of Paul extending to the Gentiles and their kings? That ministry expanded when the Holy Spirit directed the Christians in Antioch to separate Barnabas and Paul “for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:1-2) The leaders fasted and prayed and laid hands on Barnabas and Paul and sent them on their way.

“So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.” Acts 13:4-5

This is the beginning of Paul's missionary journeys to preach the Gospel to the Gentile world. Antioch was several miles from the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, so Paul and Barnabas traveled to the port city of Seleucia, boarded a ship and sailed to Cyprus – where Barnabas was born. Salamis was the closest port city to Seleucia, so the ship landed there. That's where Paul and Barnabas began their missionary preaching. Synagogues would be a favorite beginning point for Paul for several years. Jesus had also appointed Paul to represent Him to the people of Israel, so Paul often visited synagogues when he arrived in a new place. Even though Paul's ministry would be primarily to the Gentiles, he was a Jew and had a great love for his people.

Is Jesus Really God?

Remember that the Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas on their mission. That is a supernatural calling because the Holy Spirit is Supernatural. Paul often used the supernatural powers of God during his missionary journeys and we see evidence of that power on Cyprus.

“Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, ‘O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.’ And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” Acts 13:6-12

Paphos was on the opposite side of Cyprus from Salamis. That means Paul and Barnabas preached the Word of God in synagogues across the island of Cyprus. One of the notable people to believe Paul’s preaching about Jesus was Sergius Paulus, who was the proconsul of Cyprus. Historical documents of the 1st Century record his full name as Lucius Sergius Paulus. His name has been found on ancient inscriptions from the middle of the 1st Century, which goes to supporting the reliability of Luke’s historical accounts in Acts. Sergius Paulus governed Cyprus for the Roman Empire. He was a Gentile, but had come under the influence of a Jewish sorcerer. Sergius heard about Paul’s preaching and wanted to hear the Word of God. The Jewish sorcerer, most likely not wanting to lose the dark spiritual hold he had on the proconsul, tried to keep Paul from speaking with Sergius. Paul dealt with the opposition directly and powerfully. Sergius witnessed the power of God’s Spirit and believed “being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.”

Paul and Barnabas sailed from Cyprus to the mainland port city of Perga in Pamphylia. That’s where John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas traveled many miles

inland to the city of Antioch in Pisidia and, as was their custom, they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. After the traditional reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue invited Paul and Barnabas to share a “word of exhortation for the people.” (Acts 13:15) Paul stood up and explained the history of God’s salvation to Israel, beginning in Egypt. When Paul reached the point where God raised up David to be King of Israel, he said these words about Jesus.

“From this man’s seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus— after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.’ Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’ And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’ Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’ For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which

Is Jesus Really God?

you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: ‘Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.’” Acts 13:23-41

Jews understood the power of what Paul was claiming about Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Messiah and King of Israel – the Holy One of Israel. Paul also told them that the Law of Moses could not save them. They could experience forgiveness of sins only through the Name of Jesus the Savior.

What you just read from Acts 13 is Paul’s first recorded lengthy sermon. We know from Acts 9:20 that Paul preached that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, but the Holy Spirit did not inspire Luke to record the specific words of Paul’s sermons. We know from Acts 9:29 that Paul spoke boldly in the Name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but Luke does record the bold words of Paul. We know from Acts 11:26 that Paul spent a year teaching at the Church in Antioch, but Luke does not record those lessons for us to read. We know from Acts 13:5 that Paul preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews on Cyprus, but Luke does not tell us what Paul’s words were.

That’s the reason Acts 13:16-41 is so important to a student of apologetics. It is the first time the Holy Spirit tells us the specific words Paul preached about Jesus. Some have called Paul’s sermon in Antioch in Pisidia an amazing “history” lesson about God’s dealings with Israel – and it is that – but it is so much more. It presents clearly from the beginning of Paul’s missionary journeys what the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to preach. It’s important to remember that the Holy Spirit called Paul to a specific work and that He would give Paul the words to speak.

Paul preached this sermon and ones like it multiple times. Why? Because, as he said, it is the Word of salvation to everyone who believed. Paul proved that over and over again throughout his ministry. Look at what he told the Jews in Antioch in Pisidia – “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Paul was giving to Jesus something the Jews believed only God could do – forgive their sins, justify them, and save them. From an apologetic viewpoint, this sermon details

Is Jesus Really God?

Paul's grounds for Faith Defense in the early years of his public ministry. We might call it the "base line" of his *apologia*.

Important question: did Paul's teaching about Jesus Christ and salvation ever change from that first sermon? I don't mean did Paul add more insight as the Holy Spirit inspired him through years of visions, dreams and other supernatural insight. I mean did Paul ever "change" his teaching about Christ and salvation? Did he later say that Jesus was not God and not the Source of forgiveness and justification?

The quick answer is, **no**. Paul never changed his base line teaching about Jesus. In fact, Paul wrote the churches in Galatia years after he preached in Antioch in Pisidia and said that if he or an angel from heaven preached any other Gospel to them than what he had already preached to them – "let him be accursed." If that wasn't enough to say once, Paul repeated it so there would be no misunderstanding about the impact it should have on his audience – "As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8-9)

Read through the rest of Acts and you will see Paul consistently telling people across the Gentile world that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that salvation – forgiveness of sins and justification – come through Him alone. Through three major missionary journeys that covered hundreds of miles and years of hard work and tremendous opposition, Paul never veered off the straight path of his base line message about the Deity of Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote many letters to Gentile churches and leaders of the 1st Century. Did his letters to Christians differ from his public messages? Might Paul have had a secret doctrine that he taught only to believers about the Deity of Christ? Again, the quick answer is **no**. The reason the answer is no is because Paul was not making up doctrine as he preached and wrote. He was speaking what the Holy Spirit inspired him to say and write.

"I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." 1 Corinthians 2:3-5

Is Jesus Really God?

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:12-13

“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” 1 Thessalonians 1:5

With that fact in mind, let’s look at what Paul told Christians about the Deity of Jesus Christ.

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Acts 20:28

“... of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.” Romans 9:5

“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” Philippians 2:5-6

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things

Is Jesus Really God?

were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” Colossians 1:15-17

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” Colossians 2:8-10

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.” 1 Timothy 3:16

“I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.” 1 Timothy 6:13-16

“... looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Titus 2:13

As we carefully search Paul’s life and teachings – both public and private – we see his consistent message that Jesus Christ is God manifest in flesh. That’s important to remember as we defend the Faith against those who would say otherwise.

Chapter Five

Did Jesus Claim To Be God?

The Apostle Paul believed and taught that Jesus Christ is God. Now, to what may be the biggest issue facing Christians defending the Faith. Did Jesus claim to be God? Atheists and agnostics, cultists and liberals say that Jesus never claimed to be God – that the doctrine of Deity surrounding Christ was something His followers made up to make the Gospel more appealing to the superstitious masses of the 1st Century. Is that true?

Quick answer – **no**. Jesus knows He is God and taught His followers and others that He is God. It's a simple truth, but one that has caused considerable problems for theologians through the centuries. Let's look for the evidence in the words of Jesus.

Jesus was raised in a Jewish home. He grew up in a Jewish village. He attended a Jewish synagogue. Jesus knew the Hebrew language. He knew the Hebrew Bible. He knew Jewish history. He knew Jewish prophecy concerning the coming of Messiah. He knew what Jews would understand about words and phrases He used during His Ministry on earth. Jesus knew what He was doing when He claimed to be Deity.

Jesus did not ease into His claims to being God. He didn't develop a good rapport with everyone around Him and slowly drop hints that maybe He was different from everyone else, and maybe, just maybe He was God.

After revealing Himself to John the Baptist, Jesus went into the wilderness for the express purpose of being tested by the devil (Matthew 4:1). Jesus fasted 40 days and nights and was hungry, then Satan came to Him. In each test (Greek – *ekpeirazo* – an intensive form of *peirazo*, meaning to test, try, prove), Jesus answered the devil from words in the Hebrew Bible. Here is the exchange from the second test of Satan.

Is Jesus Really God?

“Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: *‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’* and, *‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’* Jesus said to him, ‘It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’” Matthew 4:5-7

Who was Satan testing? Jesus. Who did Jesus tell Satan not to test? **The Lord your God.** What Hebrew reference did Jesus quote in answering Satan? Deuteronomy 6:16 – “You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah.” The context is Moses speaking to the people of Israel in the wilderness about the commandments God had given them. They were to obey God and not go after other gods. Massah is the name Moses gave to the place where the children of Israel tested God by asking, “Is the LORD among us or not?” (Exodus 17:7). Of course God was with His people. That’s why Moses reminded Israel of the lesson of Massah. That is why Jesus chose that Scripture to answer Satan. Jesus is the Lord God and He was with His people, Israel.

After Satan left, angels did attend to the physical needs of Jesus (Matthew 4:11). Then, Jesus went into Galilee and began preaching a message that was similar to the message of John the Baptist – “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17) Jesus called several men to follow Him and become His disciples. One of them was Philip. Philip was excited to become a follower of Jesus and told his friend Nathanael about Him. “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” (John 1:45) Nathanael was a bit surprised and said – “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip responded well to his friend – “Come and see.”

Jesus spoke first as He saw Nathanael and Philip walking toward Him – “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” (John 1:47) Nathanael’s response to Jesus was certainly understandable given the fact he and Jesus had never met – “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ Nathanael answered and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say

Is Jesus Really God?

to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” John 1:48-51

This exchange between Jesus and Nathanael is powerful on many levels – one of which is Jesus’ claim to be God at the **beginning** of His preaching ministry. Nathanael recognized that Jesus was the Son of God and King of Israel. He knew from his training in the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus was the promised Messiah of Israel. Jesus took Nathanael to another level – “you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” What Jesus said about Himself at that moment was nothing less than the claim to be Deity.

It’s important for us to study the Bible in context – including word structure, word meaning, and historical meaning. The words that Nathanael used for Jesus – Rabbi, Son of God, and King of Israel – are clear to us even though they were uttered almost 2,000 years ago in Israel. Nathanael recognized that Jesus was the promised Messiah of Israel, just as Philip had said. What Jesus said next was perfectly clear to Nathanael in both the Scriptural and historical context of his day. However, it is not as clear to us. What did Jesus mean when He told Nathanael that he would see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the **Son of Man**?

We find the answer in the Old Testament Book of Daniel.

“I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.” Daniel 7:13-14

Daniel was a great prophet of God and saw many amazing things in dreams and visions. He was from Judah and was taken into captivity by the Babylonians during the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon and told the master of his eunuchs to bring some of the Hebrew children to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was looking for handsome young men who were “gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to

understand, who had the ability to serve in the king's palace." Nebuchadnezzar wanted to teach this special group of Hebrew young people the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

Historians estimate the dating of Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Judah at about 605 B.C. That matches the dating of King Jehoiakim's reign as well. The Egyptian pharaoh made Jehoiakim his puppet king in Judah in 608 B.C. However, when Babylon defeated the Egyptian armies in 605 B.C., Jehoiakim switched sides and paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar for a time. It was during that time that Daniel and his friends were taken captive to Babylon. Daniel was given the Babylonian name Belteshazzar, and because of the wisdom and insights God gave him, King Nebuchadnezzar made Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon. God gifted Daniel with the prophetic ability to interpret dreams and visions. That gift opened the way for Daniel to become a ruler in both the Babylonian and Persian empires.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions (Daniel 7). He wrote down the main facts of what he saw, which began with the four winds of heaven stirring up the Great Sea and four great beasts coming up from the sea. After describing what each beast looked like, Daniel wrote about seeing God.

"I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire; A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened. I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time." Daniel 7:9-12

Daniel's vision reads remarkably like the Apostle John's vision of Jesus Christ judging the devil and the dead in Revelation 20. It is in the context of that judgment of God that Daniel sees "One

like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of Heaven.” God, the Ancient of Days, gave to the Son of Man “dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.” Daniel wrote that the Son of Man’s dominion would be everlasting, “Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.”

Daniel received the interpretation of the vision from “one of those who stood by.” The person Daniel talked with was probably an angel; similar to angels explaining visions of the Revelation to the Apostle John. The interpretation of the beasts in the vision was of four great kingdoms on earth. Daniel was especially interested in the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others. The description of the fourth beast is similar to the beast in John’s vision in Revelation. He would speak pompous words against the Most High and persecute the saints of the Most High for a period of time. However, the fourth beast would be defeated and his kingdom given to the saints of the Most High – “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”(Daniel 7:27) It is clear from Daniel’s vision and its interpretation that the everlasting Kingdom belongs to the Most High, which refers back to the Kingdom of the Son of Man.

The term “Son of Man” was Jesus’ favorite description of Himself during His Ministry on earth. The Gospel writers quoted Jesus using the phrase to describe Himself more than 80 times. Interestingly, that phrase is not found in any of the Apostles’ letters. The only other person to use the phrase was Stephen in Acts 7:55-56 as a description of his vision of Heaven – “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’” That remark by Stephen led to his death by stoning. Jews in the 1st Century A.D. understood that Stephen was claiming that Jesus, Who they had murdered, was alive in Heaven and the Son of Man from Daniel’s vision centuries earlier.

Here are some of the more than 80 times in the Gospels where Jesus used the term “the Son of Man” for Himself. Remember that the interpretation of Daniel’s vision included the Son of Man being the Most High King with an everlasting Kingdom. Notice how Jesus weaves His being the Son of Man with actions that only God could do.

Is Jesus Really God?

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—then He said to the paralytic, ‘Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’” Matthew 9:6

“For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Matthew 12:8

“Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 13:40-42

“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.” Matthew 16:27

“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.” Matthew 18:11

“So Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’” Matthew 19:28

“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Matthew 24:30

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.” Matthew 25:31

“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” John 3:13

“For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.” John 5:26-27

Is Jesus Really God?

“So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.’ John 13:31

Read all of these in context and you will see how powerful Jesus’ statements were about Himself. Now, to the Lord’s usage of “the Son of Man” that led to His death on the Cross.

“But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, ‘I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!’ Matthew 26:63-65

The religious leaders had been trying for months to get Jesus to say something that would support their desire to kill Him. Finally, in answer to the high priest’s direction question – “Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God’ – Jesus replied, It is as you said.” Jesus answered a direct question with a direct answer – He is the Christ, the Son of God. Then, Jesus added one more description of Himself – “... the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” It was at that point the high priest tore his clothes, saying that Jesus had spoken blasphemy. The high priest, and all the other Jews who were watching, knew that Jesus had quoted from Daniel 7 claiming to be the Most High God.

Here is how the same occasion is recorded in the Gospel of Mark.

“And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, ‘Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?’ But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, ‘Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ Jesus said, ‘I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?’ And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.” Mark 14:60-64

Is Jesus Really God?

In less than 10 seconds Jesus summed up everything He had claimed about Himself during His earthly ministry. Jesus presented Himself to the religious leaders of Israel as the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Blessed (Son of God), and Son of Man (Daniel's vision of the Most High coming on the clouds of Heaven to establish His eternal Kingdom). The high priest and all those who were with him believed that Jesus had blasphemed by claiming to be God and was deserving of death. Several hours later Jesus died on the Cross. Three days later He rose from the dead, just as He said He would.

“The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” Luke 9:22

Chapter Six

I Believe That Jesus Is God!

It's one thing to claim to be something – it's another to be consistent in your claim. It is clear from the language and intent of the Gospel accounts of what Jesus said about Himself that He claimed to be God. Some have said that Jesus was a liar or a lunatic. Others have said that Jesus was simply a legend of the Christian church. I used to believe that – that Jesus was just a legend. I now believe He is Lord.

One of the reasons I believe Jesus is the Lord God is because of the consistency of how He lived His Life on earth. It's what I would expect from Almighty God. Think about it for a minute. You've just finished reading the Old Testament. You have this high view of God. He is the Almighty God of Israel, the Lord of Heaven, the King over all the earth. You've read about how He spoke to Moses from a burning bush and the top of a mountain. You've seen how God led the nation of Israel as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Turn the page in your Bible and the next thing you read is about God becoming flesh and blood to save His people from their sins. What would you expect God to do as He lived among His creation? What would He say to the humans He made? What would He do for them? What would He prove to them?

As I read the pages of the New Testament and see how Jesus lived His amazing Life on earth, He does exactly what I would expect the God of the Old Testament to do. He loved His people deeply and did what was necessary to save them from their sins. He told them how to live in His Kingdom and showed them the path to walk on their spiritual journey. He healed their broken and diseased bodies, fed their hunger, cast out their demons, and refreshed their weary souls. He had superior knowledge and wisdom and shared it with them at every opportunity. He proved to them the power of His Kingdom through His Life, Death, and Resurrection.

Is Jesus Really God?

As an investigative journalist for many years, I know people make mistakes. Those mistakes, those inconsistencies, are often the reason people are caught in their lies, in their crimes, in their duplicity, in their schemes. Whether a person is a liar or a lunatic, they will be found out. Someone will know they are not real. Jesus is not afraid of “being found out.” He consistently lived up to all His claims about being God. He said it, lived it, and proved it.

Jesus presented the demands of His Kingdom early in His Ministry. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told the multitudes what it would mean to live in His Kingdom. Then, Jesus showed them how to live it. He walked about the streets and hills and valleys of Israel demonstrating the perfection of His Kingdom and the Perfect King. Never has a man walked like Jesus walked. Never has a man talked like Jesus talked. Never has a man lived like Jesus lived.

Jesus forgave sins, walked on water, knew the thoughts and intents of people’s hearts, and accepted worship from men and women, boys and girls. He demonstrated an absolute power over spiritual darkness. He prophesied about future events with complete knowledge of what would be. He called His disciples to follow Him and live lives of devotion to Him, even as He was devoted to His Father in Heaven. Jesus demonstrated His great Love for them by dying on the Cross and called on them to love as He Loved. He rose from the grave and promised His followers that they too would rise from the dead.

Jesus was consistent in His attack on the teachings of the religious leaders of Israel. They had brought spiritual poverty to God’s chosen people and Jesus consistently opposed them to their face: *“Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”* (Matthew 23:26-28) Though the religious leaders set many traps for Jesus, He evaded them all through a direct declaration of God’s Truth and Power. Mere men who were learned in the ways of men were no match for the Eternal Son of God. Jesus never flinched, never stumbled. He never changed His story. He never lied. He always told the Truth. Jesus is the Perfect Messiah. He is the Christ, the Son of God. He is the prophet Daniel’s “Son of Man.” Jesus is exactly Who He said He is – **God**.

Is Jesus Really God?

I pray that as you read the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the Letters of the Apostles, you will see the Deity of Jesus on every page. The Bible is the Revelation of God. The Old Testament points to God coming to earth in the flesh. The New Testament shows you God on earth in the flesh. He is **Jesus**.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

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