

And In Jesus Christ His Only Son

(The Essential Christian Truth About the Nature of Jesus)



Asking the Right Questions

Over the millennia, seekers and believers have examined the person of Jesus in an effort to understand who He was, and what He said about Himself. Most of us, whether we are believers or not, come to a decision about the man named Jesus. Let's take a look at some of the possibilities and examine some of the groups who hold to differing ideas about the nature of Jesus.



Is He A Real Man?

Before we can even begin to examine the claims that Christians make about Jesus, we're going to have to decide if He ever actually lived. It's a simple first step in our study of the historical Jesus...



The Claim

Jesus was a real person. He actually existed in history. He was as human as you or me. People who accept this first level of understanding about Jesus are simply acknowledging that He was a real man in the course of history.



The Basis

This claim is based on the strength of the eyewitness accounts (known as Gospels) and on the secondary secular accounts of historians who recorded the subsequent movement in the 1st Century called "Christianity". The Gospel writers claimed that they were simply recording their eyewitness observations:



2 Peter 1:16-17

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.



1 John 1:1-2

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

And non-Christian accounts also record the movement that resulted from Jesus' life (more on that [HERE](#)). The following writers recorded the historicity of Jesus and His followers:

Thallus (52AD)

Pliny the Younger (61-113AD)

Suetonius (69-140AD)

Tacitus (56-120AD)

Mara Bar-Serapion (70AD)

Phlegon (80-140AD)

Lucian of Samosata: (115-200 A.D.)

Celsus (175AD)



The Challenge

But many would challenge the historicity of Jesus. A growing number of “New Atheists” are claiming that Jesus never actually lived and that He is simply a recreation of prior mythologies such as Mithras (more on that [HERE](#)). These doubters typically challenge the reliability of the Gospels eyewitness accounts, although much can be offered as evidence that the accounts are timely and accurate (more on that [HERE](#)).

In addition, many skeptics have argued that there are no contemporary early NON-Christian eyewitness accounts that actually date back to the lifetime of Jesus. The only eyewitness records we have are from men who became followers of Jesus, and they simply don't trust these Christian writers. The problem here is that the eyewitnesses who observed Jesus so closely, those men who witnessed his life, teachings and miracles, were so convinced by what they saw that they did eventually become followers of Jesus. In essence, those who SAW came to BELIEVE. To discard their testimony later is unfair. They began as the very sort of skeptic you would want to make an eyewitness account, but along the way they were impressed by what they saw. They moved from skeptic to believer, and as this happened, their observations should not be viewed as losing their credibility.

Some critics also argue that the appearance of Jesus on earth did not draw the kind of attention that it should have if He was in fact, the Savior of mankind. Why do we only have four eyewitness accounts? Why aren't there more? Why wasn't there more of a ripple effect in recorded history? Shouldn't there have been more written about Him? Well, as it turns out, there was quite a bit more written about Him. The appearance of Jesus DID cause quite a stir in recorded history. In fact, in addition to the trustworthy eyewitness accounts, an incredible amount of LEGEND arose around the figure of Jesus. For hundreds of years following His life, that legend continued to grow and hundreds of documents were written about Him. There is an impressive list of legendary Gospels in the libraries of “Apocrypha” that have circulated over the years. The vast majority of these documents are simply that: legends. But isn't this what we would expect? When a legendary figure appears on the landscape of history, legend begins to appear alongside that figure. This is what we would expect if Jesus did actually live and do what the Gospels say He did.



The Adherents

Now let's take a look at those who would accept this first claim about

Jesus; the claim that He was simply a man who lived in the course of history. The following people would accept this first incremental definition of Jesus:

Christians, Most Atheists, Muslims, Jews, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'i, Many Eastern Religions



Is He A Great Moral Teacher?

Now, beginning with this assumption that Jesus was a real man, let's take another step in our understanding of Jesus in an effort to better describe His nature. Was Jesus a real man who was also a great moral teacher?



The Claim

Even those who reject the possibility of the supernatural or the existence of God may accept the idea that Jesus was a real man who lived in the ancient past. And many of these folks also have no problem accepting the additional truth that Jesus was a real man who was also a great moral teacher.



The Basis

Few people would argue that Jesus was among the greatest of moral teachers based on his sermons and discussions on moral behavior. Even atheists who attack the moral character of the God of the Old Testament (citing the God-directed treatment of the enemies of Israel), will usually embrace the moral teaching of Jesus. They are aware of the moral proclamations that Jesus made in His most famous sermons:



Luke 6:27-38

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

Few fail to recognize the moral power of Jesus' teachings and the concepts of love and mercy He proposed are still as radical today as they were over two thousand years ago. Most people in our culture embrace Jesus' moral teaching even if they are not Christians, and most other world religions reflect similar moral principles that seem to transcend time and place.

The Challenge

But if we are going to consider the total truth of Jesus' totality of teaching, we simply cannot limit ourselves to those teachings that we happen to like or admire. We are going to have to consider ALL of Jesus' teaching. And this is going to force us to have to reconcile and wrestle with the most important truth that Jesus ever taught. Jesus taught His followers that He was God Himself.



John 8:58-59

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am (Jesus used the very title God Himself used in Exodus 3:14)!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.



John 14:6-9

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father".

So, how do we reconcile this? How do we view a guy who claims to teach moral truth, yet is crazy enough to claim He is God Himself? Was he simply LYING to us? If that is true, how can He be a moral teacher and a liar at the same time? Do you see the problem here?

The Adherents

Now if we add the additional claim that Jesus was a great moral teacher, some people will fall off our list of adherent's. For one reason or another, many atheists will resist the moral teaching of Jesus as it limits their own personal behavior. So let's see how our list has changed:

Christians, ~~Most~~ Some Atheists, Muslims, Jews, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'i, Many Eastern Religions



Is He A Prophet of God?

Let's raise the bar a little higher on this man we know as Jesus. We've already made the claim that He was a real man who lived in history, and the

claim that He was a great moral teacher. Let's add the additional claim that He was a prophet of God:



The Claim

Those who believe that Jesus was a great moral teacher may look for the source of this teaching, and when they do, they often decide that God Himself was the source of moral truth Jesus quoted. Speaking as a prophet of God, Jesus had special revelation from God in the tradition of other prophets who spoke for God and had predictive powers.



The Basis

This belief that Jesus is a prophet of God is often based on two observations. First, it is clear that Jesus had the power to predict the future. He made several predictions that have come to pass:



Luke 22:33-34

But he (Peter) replied, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.'



Luke 21:23-24

There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.



Matthew 24:1-2

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'



Matthew 16:16-18

Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.'



Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.



Luke 21:33

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

And in addition to this, Jesus also made proclamations about what is blessed and what is cursed in a manner very similar to the Old Testament prophets who spoke for God:



Luke 6:20-26

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say,

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.

Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But...

Woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full.

Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.

Over and over again, Jesus proclaimed truth as though He was speaking from some authority greater than Himself, and in this way, He seems to be acting as a prophet in a manner consistent with Old Testament prophets.



The Challenge

But there is something distinctly different about the way that Jesus speaks when compared to other prophets of old. Look at how Old Testament prophets preface their statements when speaking for God:



Isaiah 10:24

Therefore, this is what the Lord, the LORD Almighty, says: "O my people who live in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians, who beat you with a rod and lift up a club against you, as Egypt did."

This is the typical preface given by Old Testament prophets. They would typically begin by saying, "Thus saith the Lord" or "the word of the Lord came to me", or in more modern translations, "This is what the Lord says" (More on this [HERE](#)). But this is NOT how Jesus prefaces HIS statements. Over and over again, Jesus typically started His teaching with the expressions we so often remember from the King James Bible, "verily, verily, I say to you...", or in more modern language, "I tell you the truth..."



Matthew 5:18

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the

smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished

Jesus speaks NOT as someone who is speaking FOR God, but as someone who is speaking AS God. Can you see the difference? Jesus appears to be making a claim that EXCEEDS that of “prophet”.



The Adherents

For now, at least, let’s simply deal with the claim that Jesus is a mere prophet of God. Even if this is as far as we are going to go, we are going to lose a few more people from our list of adherents:

Christians, ~~Some Atheists~~, Muslims, Jews, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Baha’i, ~~Many~~ Eastern Religions



Is He A Prophet of God with Supernatural Powers?

Now let’s chase this idea that Jesus appears to be speaking as more than a prophet and see where it leads. If we are to raise the bar once again on the claims we make about Jesus, the next logical step in our understanding would be to make the claim that Jesus is actually more than just a man, more than a man who was a great moral teacher, and more than a prophet of God. The next level of “claim” is that Jesus is a prophet of God who had supernatural powers.



1 The Claim

People who accept the fact that Jesus spoke prophetically and made proclamations with the authority of God, generally make an easy transition into this additional claim; that Jesus had power to control the forces of nature and perform miracles. After all, if we trust that the scripture is accurately recording the prophetic and proclamational words of Jesus, why not trust the scriptures for descriptions of Jesus’ supernatural abilities?



2 The Basis

There are, after all, a long number of miracles ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels of the New Testament (more on that [HERE](#)). A quick review of the Gospels reveals a partial list:

He turned water into wine (John 2:1-11)

He healed a nobleman's son (John 4:46-54)

He healed an impotent man at Bethsaida (John 5:1-9)

He healed a man who was born blind (John 9:1-7)

He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44)

He produced the catch of fishes (John 21:1-14)

He cured two blind men (Matt 9:27-31)

He produced a piece of money in a fish's mouth (Matt 17:24-27)

He healed a deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:31-37)

He healed the blind man of Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26)

He passed unseen through the crowd (Luke 4:28-30)
He produced the miraculous catch of fishes (Luke 5:4-11)
He raised the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-18)
He healed a woman with the spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:11-17)
He healed a man with the dropsy (Luke 14:1-6)
He healed the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19)
He healed Malchus (Luke 22:50, 51)
He healed the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Matt 15:28; Mark 7:24)
He miraculously fed four thousand (Matt 15:32; Mark 8:1)
He withered the fig tree (Matt 21:18; Mark 11:12)
He healed the centurion's servant (Matt 8:5; Luke 7:1)
He healed a blind and dumb demoniac (Matt 12:22; Luke 11:14)
He healed a demoniac in a synagogue at Capernaum (Mark 1:23; Luke 4:33)
He healed Peter's wife's mother (Matt 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38)
He calmed the storm (Matt 8:23; Mark 4:37; Luke 8:22)
He healed the demoniacs of Gadara (Matt 8:28; Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26)
He caused the evil spirits to flee into swine (Mark 5:1-20)
He healed a Leper (Matt 8:2; Mark 1:40; Luke 5:12)
He raised Jairus' daughter (Matt 9:23; Mark 5:23; Luke 8:41)
He healed a woman with a blood disease (Matt 9:20; Mark 5:25; Luke 8:43)
He healed a man sick with palsy (Matt 9:2; Mark 2:3; Luke 5:18)
He healed a man with a withered hand (Matt 12:10; Mark 3:1; Luke 6:6)
He healed a lunatic child (Matt 17:14; Mark 9:14; Luke 9:37)
He healed two blind men (Matt 20:29; Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35)
He walked on water (Matt 14:25; Mark 6:48; John 6:15)
He miraculously fed 5,000 (Matt 14:15; Mark 6:30; Luke 9:10; John 6:1-14)
He was transfigured (Matt 17:1-8)
He was resurrected (John 21:1-14)
He ascended to Heaven (Luke 2:42-51)

When we read through this list of miracles, the skeptical side in each of us begins to wonder if we can trust ANY record of the miraculous found in the scripture. In fact, why should we trust ANYTHING from the New Testament (whether it be miraculous in nature or otherwise)? Well, we DO have good reason to trust the historical accuracy of the New Testament, that is for sure (more on that [HERE](#)). Over and over again, historical details from the New Testament that were once challenged have been validated by archeology. The New Testament correctly records large and small historical details:

That there was a census taken during the term of Governor Quirinius
That there was a real historical man named Lysanias
That a "pavement" (Gabbatha) truly existed
That Pontius Pilate really existed

That crucifixion occurred as described by Luke
That Iconium was a city in Phrygia
That was even such a word as "Politarchs"
That Sergius Paulus was really the Proconsul of Cyprus
That Gallio was the Proconsul of Achaia

If the Bible can be trusted for these sorts of historical details, why doubt it for its descriptions of the miraculous?



The Challenge

Well, skeptics doubt records of the miraculous based on their presupposition that nothing outside of that which can be explained naturally can occur in the first place! In other words, they presuppose naturalism and automatically eliminate the possibility of the 'extra'-natural (aka: the 'supernatural') from the very start.

But let's think about this for a minute. Can everything we know about the universe be understood from a purely naturalistic perspective? We know, for example, that the natural universe appears suddenly as a result of what scientists now call the "Big Bang". Science still struggles to explain the origin of what appears to be a limited, changing universe that clearly has a beginning. Beginnings require beginners, and whatever began the caused, natural universe in which we live must itself be from outside the caused, natural universe. This would mean that we have to believe that something 'extra'-natural (outside the natural realm) has to exist in the first place. So you see, all of us agree that there is at least one 'extra'-natural occurrence in history – the sudden appearance of the universe (more on this [HERE](#))!

From a theistic (supernatural) perspective, this sudden appearance of the universe is the greatest of all 'miraculous' (unexplained by natural causes) events that has ever occurred. If something can act in such an 'extra'-natural (supernatural) way to create the entire universe, how unreasonable is it really to presume that a force like this could also act in a relatively minor way to cause something we would see as miraculous? The argument for miracles begins with the sudden appearance of the universe. If this can be attributed to something 'extra'-natural, why isn't it possible, at least on principle, that other 'extra'-natural events ('miracles') could also occur?

If the miraculous is possible, and the records of Jesus that describe his miraculous deeds are reliable (more on this [HERE](#)), we can then reasonably deduce that Jesus was more than a man, more than a great moral teacher and even more than a prophet of God. He had the supernatural ability to control the natural environment and perform miracles.



The Adherents

Now, there are many fewer people who would make this claim and believe

this to be true about Jesus. Our list of adherents is continuing to shrink as we raise the bar on the nature of Jesus:

Christians, ~~Some Atheists~~, Muslims, Jews (but the early Jews attributed this power to Satan), Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'i, ~~Many Eastern Religions~~



Is Jesus God Himself?

There is a final step we can still take in our understanding of the nature and person of Jesus Christ. If the first four incremental steps are reasonable (that He was a man, a great moral teacher, a prophet and someone who possessed supernatural power), it really isn't that farfetched for us to take the final step and claim that Jesus was God Himself.



The Claim

If we trust that the miracles recorded in the New Testament are true, then we've got to spend some time trying to understand how Jesus would be able to do what He was clearly able to do. The best explanation for the miraculous ability of Jesus is simply that He is God Himself; the same God that created the Universe. He is uncreated and part of the Triune Godhead.



The Basis

Why would we believe this to be true? Why would we presume not that Jesus had the POWER of God, but that He WAS God? Are there any good reasons to believe this aside from the miracles that He performed? Well, there are several good reasons:

Jesus displayed God's nature of omniscience (John 4:16-19, 28-30)

Jesus displayed God's nature of omnipresence (Matthew 18:20)

Jesus displayed God's nature of omnibenevolence (Romans 5:6-8)

Jesus spoke as God (Matthew 5:18)

Jesus said he was God (John 8:58-59)

Jesus was worshiped as God (Matthew 2:10-11)

Jesus rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12-19)



The Challenge

Many would argue that the Triune nature of God (more on that [HERE](#)) and the Deity of Jesus (more on that [HERE](#)) are not expressly affirmed in the Bible, but there is little other way that the nature of God and Jesus can be interpreted in light of the abundant circumstantial evidence that the scriptures provide. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are said to exhibit the exact same characteristics that are possessed by God the Father, and Jesus clearly displays all the signs of Deity. At the same time, the Bible affirms the fact that there is only ONE God. The only way this can be reconciled is by recognizing that God's nature is TRIUNE, and that Jesus is the same God that created the universe. Jesus Christ, the "Word" is the God who caused the universe to suddenly come into being:



John 1:1-3

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 came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.



The Adherents

This final characteristic and claim about Jesus is the dividing line that separates Christianity from all other faith systems; the claim that Jesus is God Himself, the ONE uncreated God of all things and the ONE God who has ever existed. God came to men in the form of a man. There are not a number of Gods, just the one creator God who is the first uncaused cause of the Universe. This claim, this truth, is held by Christians alone. Jews and Baha'i deny the deity of Jesus, Mormons deny that there is only one God, Jehovah's Witnesses deny that Jesus was uncreated. Only Christians hold to the truth that Jesus is God Himself:

~~Christians, Some Atheists, Muslims, Jews, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'i, Many Eastern Religions~~



More Than a Man

As a Christian I hold to many essential truths about the nature of man, the nature of salvation, the nature of God, and the nature of Jesus. The essential truth about Jesus is that he is more than simply a man. In fact, the following could be said about Jesus:



1 He was a Fully Human Man Who Lived in History

Based on the strength of the canonical eyewitness Gospel accounts, the non-canonical (apocryphal) accounts and the non-Christian witnesses who recorded his impact on the world



2 He was a Great Moral Teacher

Based on the transcendent power and moral stature of His teachings and their impact on the world and virtually every other faith system



3 He was a Prophet of God

Based on His ability to proclaim the future and His stance as someone who repeatedly spoke for God. While He was clearly more than a mere prophet in the tradition of Old Testament prophets, it is safe to say that He also displayed the attributes that are often attributed to prophets



4 He was a Prophet of God with Supernatural Ability

Based on the miracles He performed while with us here on earth



5 He was God Himself

Based on the fact that He said He was God, displayed all of God's

attributes, and demonstrated His supernatural command over the natural realm

The essential truth of the Christian faith related to Jesus Christ is that He was quite simply God Himself, the one God who has ever existed and the uncreated creator of heaven and earth.