

DISCOVERY SERIES

IS JESUS GOD?

The Answer Matters





introduction

Is Jesus God?

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Jesus isn't known for the things that usually make people famous—politics, business, or entertainment. He is known for revolutionary wisdom and calling for high moral standards.

These things don't make Him a particularly controversial figure, but the claims of miracles do. The most significant, and debated, thing about Jesus

was His actual identity. Jesus claimed to be God, and for centuries His followers have accepted and staked their lives on that claim. His identity is the source of controversy not simply because of the logical difficulty of a "God-man" but because of what it means if Jesus really is God.

The pages that follow examine the biblical evidence about Jesus' identity. So who is He?

RBC Ministries

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MANAGING EDITOR: J.R. Hudberg
COVER DESIGN: Stan Myers
INTERIOR DESIGN: Steve Gier
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one

Looking in the Right Place

An interview with U2 singer Bono revealed the diversity of views about Jesus. He stated, "The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world."

His interviewer replied, "That's a great idea, no denying it. Such great hope is wonderful, even though it's close to lunacy, in my view. Christ has his rank among the world's great thinkers. But Son of God, isn't that farfetched?"¹

Many people peer back through the cloudy windows

of history and glimpse an obscure picture of Jesus. It is difficult to accept the 2,000-year-old claim that Jesus is God. How could anyone believe that a small-town Jewish carpenter could have been the creator of the world? It is easier to accept that He was a moralist, a teacher, even perhaps a prophet, anything less sensational than that He is God.

If Jesus was only a moral teacher or a prophet or a great thinker, then those who insist He is God are wrong. But if He is God, then the view that He was merely a man, even an exceptional man, is wrong. Both ideas about Jesus cannot be true.

Why Is This Important?

The belief that Jesus is God is the foundational belief of Christianity. But it is this very claim that often presents a stumbling block—intellectual or spiritual. Jesus' followers call Him Lord and God as well as Messiah and Savior. ▶

▶ *“Messiah” and “Savior” refer to Jesus’ role in delivering people from the punishment of sin. His life, death, and resurrection were all necessary parts of what it took to redeem humanity from the curse of sin.*

Is this issue really that important? Isn't it enough simply to learn from His wise sayings and admire His good life?



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Is it vital that we make a decision about whether or not He is God?

Jesus' identity is the linchpin of Christianity. Why? Because Jesus claimed to be divine—He claimed to be God Himself.

This leaves us with a dilemma. How can we trust the word of someone who claims he is God—regardless of his good works or wise teaching—unless he really is God? Anyone who would call himself God without actually being God doesn't deserve our worship, only our pity and concern; he certainly wouldn't deserve to be called good or moral or wise. Where can we look to help us answer this question?

Historical Records

Some have claimed there is no evidence outside of the Bible for Jesus' existence. They assert that someone who had actually performed miracles and gained a national following should have received substantial attention from secular history.

Because Palestine comprised a tiny section of the Roman Empire, it is unlikely that much would appear in official Roman annals about the execution of a man who did not even hold political office. But regardless, we still find well-documented references to Jesus in official sources other than the Bible.

Josephus (37–C.100 AD) provides us with the most substantive history of Jesus from outside Scripture. He was a Pharisee and a military leader who fought against the Romans in 67 AD. After his capture by the Romans,

Josephus was freed by Emperor Vespasian. He wrote an extensive history of the Jewish people called *Antiquities*, in which he refers to the ministry of John the Baptist, James the brother of Jesus, and Jesus Himself. In his written history, Josephus calls Christ "a wise man" and "a doer of surprising works." He specifically states that Pilate condemned Jesus to the cross.²

In correspondence from the Roman senator **Pliny the Younger** (61–C.113 AD) to Emperor Trajan, Pliny inquires if his handling of the Christians is appropriate. The senator implemented a policy that attempted to get Christians to renounce Christ and swear allegiance to the emperor and the pagan gods. Pliny noted that they worshiped "Christ as a god" and mentions that Christians observed the Lord's Supper.³

When the Roman historian Tacitus (C.56–117 AD) wrote about the fire of 64 AD, he noted that Nero falsely blamed the Christians. Tacitus was by no means sympathetic to Christians and wrote that they were "hated for their abominable crimes." In his account, written about 115–117 AD, Tacitus cites "Christ" as the founder of a subversive religion, and mentions that He was executed by Pontius Pilate during Tiberius' reign.⁴

Another reference made by the lawyer **Suetonius** (C.69–122 AD) mentions "Chrestus," which seems to be derived from the term *Chrestiani* for Jesus' followers. Apparently this Chrestus was the reason for Jewish insubordination in Rome, which caused Emperor Claudius to expel all the Jews from Rome. Luke writes in Acts 18:2 how Aquila and Priscilla "left Italy when Claudius Caesar

deported all Jews from Rome."⁵ Suetonius penned his account around 120 AD.

None of these chroniclers were followers of Christ, as evidenced by their disparaging references to Christians in general. Yet these citations all refer to Jesus using the title of Christ, which means "anointed one." Even nonbelieving historians acknowledged that Jesus existed and that His followers esteemed Him as the Christ.

The Best Source

The key to finding convincing evidence is finding a credible source. Without a reliable source, the inquirer is left only with speculation, opinion, and unnecessary conclusions.

C. S. Lewis illustrates the impact of credibility in his classic children's story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the story, young Lucy Pevensie has discovered the magical land of Narnia. Her brother Edmund has been there as well, but for selfish reasons refuses to admit its existence. Their older siblings, Peter and Susan, believe Edmund over Lucy. Her story sounds too fantastic to be true.

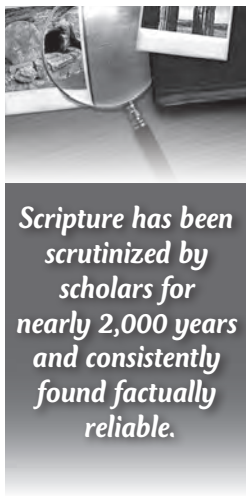
Lucy's continued insistence that Narnia is real drives the older children to Professor Digory



Without a reliable source, the inquirer is left only with speculation, opinion, and unnecessary conclusions.

Kirke, owner of the house where the children are staying for the summer. Hearing their dilemma, the professor asks: "Does your experience lead you to regard your brother or your sister as the more reliable? I mean, which is the more truthful?" Peter and Susan quickly realize that Lucy is unfailingly honest but not Edmund. Lucy had a history of, and reputation for, honesty. Peter and Susan, therefore, change their stance on whom to believe. Because Lucy has proven trustworthy, it is likely that she is telling the truth now too. A proven record of honesty and accuracy in some areas suggests trustworthiness in other areas.

The source containing the most evidence about Jesus' identity is a book that can be trusted—the Bible. That's where the belief that Jesus is God finds its fullest and best support. Archaeological research has shown the Bible to be trustworthy in historical and geographical matters. Scripture has been scrutinized by scholars for nearly 2,000 years and consistently found factually reliable.



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Engraved stones or cylinders from ancient civilizations verify biblical accounts. For example, the Taylor Prism confirms the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem that the Bible describes in 2 Kings 18–19, 2 Chronicles 32,

and Isaiah 36–37. The discovery of the Tel Dan Stele confirms the existence of Israel’s King David. The Cyrus Cylinder records Cyrus of Persia’s decree that allowed Babylonian captives to return to their homes and resume their religious practices. The Moabite Stone substantiates the events of 2 Kings 3. The stone not only chronicles the rebellion led by Mesha king of Moab but even mentions the name Yahweh.⁶

This is significant for our question. As with Peter and Lucy Pevensie, we must take into account the Bible’s track record for accuracy and reliability. Because we know the Bible is accurate in areas we can verify (historical accounts), to disregard it in other areas (the miracles and identity of Jesus, for instance) is a serious matter.

It makes sense then to investigate the Bible’s claims about the identity of its central figure and to follow that evidence to its conclusion. If the Bible can be trusted, and if its message has been preserved across the centuries, then it is a reliable source. Let’s look at what the Bible says about the idea that Jesus is God.

¹ <http://www.thefish.com/music/interviews/11617924/Bono%3a-Grace-over-Karma/>

² John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1:61.

³ Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2002), 50–51.

⁴ Bock, 48–49.

⁵ Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 83–84.

⁶ Dennis Moles, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt: The Truth of The Bible*. Discovery Series, 2012.



two

The Claims of the Bible

The Old Testament

The idea of a coming **Messiah** was familiar to those who knew the Old Testament Scriptures. Many details about the Messiah were predicted by the prophets and recorded in several books of the Old Testament. Jesus' life and death fulfilled these prophecies with incredible accuracy.

It's clear that the Messiah's coming was an expected event. Some prophets in the Old Testament stated that

the Messiah would be God Himself. Several passages emphasize the identity and character of the pre-announced Messiah.

Isaiah 7:14. "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." The key to this verse is found in the title *Immanuel*. The word literally means "God with us" and is a prediction that the coming Messiah would be God. Surely this prophecy must have been a mystery to those who heard it. How could a human child be God?

Isaiah 9:6. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Again the prophet Isaiah uses clear and strong language to tell Israel that the Messiah would not merely be a great ruler or a just king but that He would be "Mighty God."

These passages show that the Old Testament taught that the promised anointed one, or Messiah, would be God. But what else does the Old Testament tell us about the Messiah?

Isaiah 53. In just one chapter of Scripture, Isaiah 53, we



Many details about the Messiah were predicted by the prophets and recorded in several books of the Old Testament.

read several illuminating predictions about the Messiah's life and death.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed (vv. 3–5).

Not only will the Messiah be God Himself, Isaiah says that He will suffer as a means of bringing peace and healing to humanity. His death would be the means by which the sin-caused rift between God and us would be mended. The prophecy in Isaiah 53 continues by telling us that the Messiah will not only take up the infirmities and sorrows of people but He will do so willingly and that without resistance He will give up His own life.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth;



Jesus' death would be the means by which the sin-caused rift between God and us would be mended.

he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. . . . He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death (vv. 6–7, 9).



Why is it important that the Old Testament makes some predictions about a special person, a Messiah who would be God?

Micah 5:2. "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Micah's prophecy has two key elements. He predicts the birthplace of the coming ruler, Bethlehem. But he also gives one of the characteristics of the ruler, that His origins will be of old, from ancient times. This implies that He will not be an ordinary king, but one of special significance.

The New Testament

"Why does all this matter?" you might ask. "Why is it important that the Old Testament makes some predictions about a special person, a Messiah who would be God?" It matters because of what the New Testament says about Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament is virtually all about Jesus. It begins with His family tree and ends with His future triumph.

Included are amazing accounts of His life, death, and resurrection. Let's look at how His life correlates to the prophecies we just discovered.

The New Testament Gospels record that Jesus of Nazareth, as was predicted of the Messiah, was born of a virgin. Matthew 1:22–23 says:

All this [an angel appearing to Joseph in a dream to explain Mary's pregnancy] took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

This passage in Matthew presents Jesus' birth as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 7. Matthew 2 goes on to state that Jesus was also, as the promised Messiah would be, born in Bethlehem (MATTHEW. 2:1–6; CF. MICAH 5:2).

The prophecy of Isaiah 53:6–7 was fulfilled by Jesus when He was arrested and taken to the Roman authorities. The New Testament gospel of Mark records that when Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, "Pilate asked him, 'Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.'" Fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus did not reply (MARK 15:3–5).

Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:9 when Joseph of Arimathea, a "prominent member of the Council" (MARK 15:43), buried Jesus' body in his own tomb (MATTHEW 27:59–60).

As Jesus hung on the cross, He uttered the anguished phrase: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (MATTHEW 27:46), which is a direct quote from Psalm 22:1.

That psalm, written centuries before crucifixion had been devised, says, "A band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet" (v. 16). It also says, "They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing" (v. 18), prophetic statements about the manner of the Messiah's execution and the Roman soldiers' gambling for Jesus' clothes (SEE LUKE 23:34; JOHN 19:23–24).

There are many other prophecies about the Messiah that were fulfilled by Jesus. His birth, life, and death undeniably fulfilled centuries-old prophecies. If we can trust the prophetic accuracy of Jesus' life, then it seems clear that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah of Israel. If the Messiah was to be God, then was Jesus God?



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Prophecies about the Messiah that were fulfilled by Jesus' life and death.

- *Lived in Egypt* (NUMBERS 24:8; CF. MATTHEW 2:15)
- *Healed Many* (ISAIAH 53:4; CF. MATTHEW 8:16)
- *No Broken Bones* (PSALM 34:20; CF. JOHN 19:33–36)
- *Took on Our Sin* (ISAIAH 53:5–7; CF. ACTS 8:30–35)
- *Resurrected* (PSALM 16:8–11; CF. ACTS 2:25–32)

To find out, we have to go behind the stories and discover what those who observed Jesus said about Him.

A biographer who writes about a historical figure looks for firsthand information—the closer the source of the information to the subject, the better. We have access to the memoirs of those who actually knew Jesus. In this way, we can allow Jesus' contemporaries to clarify our understanding of Him.

The Words of the Apostle John

Let's first look at the opening words of John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (1:1–4).

The following characteristics of Jesus listed in John 1:1–4 are traits that can belong only to God.

"In the beginning" (v. 1). Anyone in John's day who was familiar with the sacred Scriptures would have recognized his allusion to the book we call Genesis. During John's time, Genesis was commonly referred to as "The Beginning." John boldly declared that the Word was with God before the world began.

"The Word was with God" (v. 1). This indicates that the Word was a distinct entity who had communion and fellowship with God the Father.

"The Word was God" (v. 1). This is a simple yet definitive statement of deity.

"Through him all things were made" (v. 3). The first

verse of Genesis reminds us that "God created the heavens and the earth." Here John revealed the Word as the active agent in creation. How else can this be reconciled but to conclude that the Word is also God the Creator?

The link to all of these ideas is found in verse 14. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (v. 14). Verse 14 makes it clear that "the Word," who is clearly God, was also a man. By putting on flesh God came near to humanity and made a life among us. The rest of John's gospel makes it clear that this Word (who was God) that became flesh was Jesus Himself. ¹⁴

🔗 *On several occasions Jesus spoke in less than ambiguous terms about His identity. See John 8:12, 23, 58; 9:5; 10:30; 17:21.*

The Words of the Apostle Paul

John wasn't alone in saying that Jesus was God. The apostle Paul also stressed Jesus' deity in his writings. He wrote many letters to different people and churches, but never wavered in attributing deity to Jesus. With simple statements and lengthy eloquent prose, the apostle Paul affirmed and underscored the fact that Jesus was God.

Romans 9:5. "From them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised." Paul is writing here about his fellow Israelites ("them") who have

rejected Christ. The meaning of the text is straightforward: Christ is God.



He voluntarily laid aside His majesty and glory to become the God-man—the humble Servant, obedient to death.

Philippians 2:5–7. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Here Jesus is presented in both of His essential natures—God and man. First, He always existed as God in His essential nature. Second, He voluntarily laid aside His majesty and glory to become the God-man—the humble Servant, obedient to death. Jesus, then, was God and remained God by nature, even when He became a man.

Philippians 2:10–11. "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, . . . every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." God would not allow anyone other than Himself to be worshiped. This would violate the first commandment (SEE EXODUS 20:3; DEUTERONOMY 5:7; MATTHEW 4:10).

Titus 2:13. "While we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." The grammar of this sentence indicates

that “God and Savior” refers to a single person: God the Son, Jesus.

Could a few misguided individuals have made these statements about Jesus’ deity? Was their desire to worship someone so strong that they dreamt up the idea that Jesus was God on their own? Not at all. They were echoing His own words. Jesus Himself claimed He was God.

Jesus’ Own Words

Jesus often spoke in terms that left His listeners unsure of His meaning. This can be seen in certain exchanges between Jesus and His disciples. [▶] We can picture them walking away, scratching their heads.

▶ Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John record several instances where the crowds and even His own disciples didn’t understand Jesus’ meaning: Matthew 16:5–12; Mark 4:1–20; Luke 9:43–45; John 8:21–30.

They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it (MARK 9:30–32).

When Jesus spoke of His deity with those who were not His followers, however, they didn’t reach to scratch



When Jesus spoke of His deity with those who were not His followers, however, they didn't reach to scratch their heads, they reached for rocks.

their heads, they reached for rocks. There was no confusion over what He was saying. They knew exactly what and who He was claiming to be, and they wanted to stone Him for it.

John 8. In a tense exchange between Jesus and a group of Jewish leaders who doubted His identity, He was accused of being demon-possessed (JOHN 8:48). In the discussion that followed, Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (v. 56). They couldn't believe their

ears. They wanted to know how a man who wasn't even 50 years old could have seen Abraham (v. 57).

🔗 *The Jews understood Jesus' statement, "I am" as referencing the name He told Moses to give when sending him to speak to the people of Israel who were slaves in Egypt. Its basic meaning is "I exist." Read Exodus 3; note especially verse 14.*

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (v. 58). The Jews were aghast. By using the term *I am*, Jesus reminded the Jews of God's statement to Moses in Exodus 3:14.🔗 Because of their familiarity with the Scriptures, they knew that with these words Jesus had claimed deity. They understood exactly

what Jesus was saying, and He had to make a quick getaway to avoid becoming a target for their religious zeal—blasphemy was a capital offense in the Judaism of Jesus' day (v. 59). A similar situation is recorded in John 10.

John 10. As Jesus walked through the temple, some Jews demanded, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (v. 24). Jesus replied:

I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one (vv.25–30).



The Jewish religious leaders knew exactly what Jesus was saying. He was claiming to be equal with God, to be God Himself.

This statement infuriated the Jewish religious leaders. They knew exactly what Jesus was saying. They knew what He meant when He called God "my Father" and not "our" Father (v. 25), claimed to be able to give eternal life (v. 28), and said, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30). He was claiming to be equal with God, to be God Himself. Again

Jesus had to leave the scene in order to avoid the mob justice of the death required for such a claim.

Jesus' statements continually angered many Jews. When He asked them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" (v. 32), they replied, "We are not stoning you for any of these, but for blasphemy, . . . because you, a mere man, claim to be God" (v. 33).

John 14. Not everyone responded to Jesus' claims of deity with accusations of blasphemy. While eating with the disciples, Jesus told them that He was "the way and the truth and the life" (v. 6). And when Philip asked Him to show them the Father. His answer again reflected a claim to deity: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. . . . Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?" (vv. 9–10).

The Response of Jewish Observers

The Jews who followed Jesus knew He was claiming to be God. But they weren't the only ones. Many others heard Jesus say He was God. Their reactions and Jesus' response to them reveal much about how people in Jesus' day understood who Jesus was.

Matthew 16. Jesus conducted a kind of first-century poll: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (v. 13). After hearing a list of who the crowds thought He was—John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet—He posed the question directly to His closest followers, "Who do you say I am?" (v. 15).

Simon Peter boldly declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). This would have been a perfect opportunity for Jesus to dispel any idea that He was more than just a man. But He didn't. Instead, He commended Peter for his declaration. Acknowledging Peter's confession, Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (v. 17). Jesus willingly received reverence from His disciples.



This would have been a perfect opportunity for Jesus to dispel any idea that He was more than just a man. But He didn't.

This wasn't the only time Jesus accepted worship. On at least two other occasions, He allowed His followers to give Him the praise and honor that belong only to God.

Matthew 21. Jesus had just come into the city of Jerusalem to the welcome of an admiring crowd. "Hosanna² to the Son of David" they cried (v. 15). This public acclaim incensed the chief priests and scribes. How could Jesus accept this blasphemous kind of adoration!

² **Hosanna** means "help" or "save." The people who were shouting this as Jesus was entering the city were both celebrating what He had already done and asking Him to continue saving them.

In response to their indignant question, "Do you hear what these children are saying?" Jesus referenced Psalm 8:2. "Yes, . . . have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?" (MATTHEW 21:16). Unmistakably, Jesus was telling them that the children's worship was approved *by* God for worship *of* God. Allowing and accepting those "hosannas" was a declaration of deity.

John 20. A second dialogue between Jesus and one of His disciples demonstrates Jesus' willingness to receive worship. More than a week after Jesus had risen from the dead, Thomas was the only disciple who had not yet seen Him. No one could convince him that Jesus was alive. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (v. 25).

Later, when Thomas and the other disciples were together, Jesus suddenly appeared among them. "A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it



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JOHN 20:25

into my side. Stop doubting and believe'" (JOHN 20:26–27). Awestruck, Thomas responded, "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28). With these words, he proclaimed the deity of Christ—Lord and God.

Two thousand years later, Jesus' identity still creates questions and stirs controversy.



three

Who Do You Say He Is?

Jesus' life and teachings are models of integrity and goodness. His acts of healing the sick, raising the dead, and demonstrating gentle love match His teachings on kindness, compassion, and morality. Jesus' words matched His actions.

He said He was God. This claim was supported by His words and actions and the commitment of His followers.

C. S. Lewis once mused that there are only three reasonable options about Jesus' identity:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God—or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.⁷



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come with any
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C. S. LEWIS

1. A Lunatic. If Jesus is not God, then He could be accused of having delusions of grandeur. Yet those who knew Him best recognized that Jesus' claim to deity was not outlandish. It corresponded perfectly to whom He showed them He was, a reality the disciples were willing to die for.

2. A Liar. If Jesus is not God, then He was lying. In this case, He would have had to know that He was not who He claimed to be. This becomes increasingly difficult to accept the more one looks at His life. How could He, in every other instance, convey the essence of honesty and credibility if on this one major point He continued to lie? How could He deceive so many godly people if He were doing such an ungodly thing?

3. God. What Jesus said and what He did support this option. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about the One who would be God on Earth. He displayed the attributes of the eternal God. He did things only God could do.

A lunatic can claim anything, but he can't deliver. A liar can play amazing mental games, but he can't prove anything he says. Jesus was born where the God-man was to be born, lived as the God-man should have lived, died as the God-man was to die, and lived again as only the God-man could.

What do you call Jesus? Only when you accept that Jesus is God can you come to Him as the source of life. Only as you trust God's Word—not just in regard to Jesus' life but also in regard to His deity—



Only as you trust God's Word—not just in regard to Jesus' life but also in regard to His deity—will you understand the importance of His death.

will you understand the importance of His death. Your eternal life depends on what you call Jesus. Who do you say He is?

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. HarperCollins Publishing, New York, New York, 1980.