

CHAPTER 5: Is Jesus Really God?

Discovering that He Often Said So!

Reference: *Surprised by Faith*, pages 55-62 (fourth edition); pages 59-65 (third edition)

Getting Focused

- Did Jesus ever claim to be God?
- How could Jesus be a man on earth and God of the universe at the same time?
- What makes Jesus different from others who have claimed deity?

A unique element of the Christian faith is the teaching that Jesus Christ is the incarnation to earth of the infinite and personal God. Was this only the idea of the later church, or did Jesus, Himself, ever make such a claim? Fortunately, we now know that we have first century records of integrity and historicity—the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Through them we can step into the shoes of Jesus’ disciples—the eyewitnesses—to discover the answer to this question. Their writings are clear—they all say that Jesus claimed to be both Messiah and God.

Making the Discovery

1. Jesus made extraordinary claims that He was _____ incarnate. The concept of the incarnation is the biblical teaching that God came to earth in the form of the man Jesus Christ who had both the nature of God and nature of man.
2. Jesus claimed that He was the Divine _____ (Matthew 22:41-46). Jesus, the Christ (Messiah or “anointed one”) was prophesied in the Old Testament as both the One who would die for the sins of the people and reign forever as King on David’s throne. David’s “son” (Messiah) was David’s God!
3. Jesus claimed that His name is _____, the name of God (John 8:56-59; Exodus 3:14-15). The Jews tried to stone Him for what they thought was blasphemy. To speak blasphemy is to speak about God or sacred things with abuse or contempt, cursing or reviling God and being irreverent. (See Leviticus 24:16.)
4. Jesus claimed to be _____ (equal) with the Father (John 10:30). The Jews again tried to stone Him for what they thought was blasphemy, for making Himself out to be God (John 10:33).
5. Jesus claimed He could give _____ life to anyone (John 5:21). Only God has this authority and power.
6. Jesus claimed He was “from _____” and “not of this world” (John 8:23-24). He also said that everyone will die in their sins unless they believe that He is God.
7. The New Testament cites many other occasions on which Jesus claimed to be God. Responses of those who were eyewitnesses reinforce the fact that His claims about Himself were extraordinary. People around Him were clearly astonished. Some even considered His claims blasphemous and determined that He should be put to death (Matthew 26:63-66).

DISCOVERY #5

“Ah-ha!” Eyewitnesses testified that Jesus claimed to be God!

Application and Reflection

1. **The Bible says** that Jesus is God by identifying His death as a ransom for the sin of humankind, thus declaring Him uniquely qualified as sinless and divine.

No man can by any means redeem his brother, Or give to God a ransom for him... (Psalm 49:7).

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

2. **The Bible says** that Jesus claimed to be God by promising eternal life to His followers, something only God—with absolute power and authority—could deliver.

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27-28).

3. **The Bible says** that Jesus claimed to be God by accepting worship, something He taught belonged to God alone.

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him... (Matthew 28:16-17).

And he [the healed blind man] said, “Lord I believe.” And he worshiped Him (John 9:38).

As identified above, Jesus made several statements claiming deity. Read John 5:18; 8:58-59; and 10:30-31, and write down the reactions of those who heard Jesus. How does this reinforce that He actually was claiming to be God?

Invariably when Jesus is discussed, someone will boldly proclaim that He wasn't actually God, but the Son of God. What would you say? (The discussion below will help you prepare an answer.)

The contrast is unwarranted—it's not either/or but both/and. Jesus' identity as the Son of God includes having the same attributes as the Father, that is, He is from eternity, has all authority, etc. (see John 5:18). They are one in essence, equal, as demonstrated in John 10:30 and claimed by Jesus in John 14:7-11. Jesus is also recorded as saying He has complete authority over heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18) and that He alone is the means for people to know the Father (John 14:6).

Yet they are also separate persons of the Triune God. According to Matthew 11:27, Jesus taught that they enjoy a relationship which is unique and exclusive, i.e., no one else knows the Father as He does, and the Father knows Him as He knows no other. So intimate was His relationship that He never talked to His disciples about “our Father,” but rather as “my Father” and “your Father” (John 20:17), and employed the family word “Abba” (daddy) when talking to Him.

However, it does not follow from such intimacy that Jesus is the “Son” of God in any literal, biological sense. Jesus was not conceived into existence, for He existed eternally with the Father (John 1:1). His use of the term “Son” for Himself is to reflect a special relationship with the Father, not kinship.

Jesus is, nevertheless, the self-expression of God. As already cited above, He told Philip, “*He who has seen me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9). British theological scholar F.F. Bruce stated that, “The words He spoke, the works He performed, the life He led, the person He was—all disclosed the unseen Father. He is, in Paul's words, the visible ‘image of the invisible God’ (Colossians 1:15)” (F.F. Bruce, *Jesus: Lord and Savior* [InterVarsity Press, 1986], p.158).

Jesus shares the essence and nature of the one true God—He is not a secondary deity. “As the Son, He is the very expression of the Father; in Him we see the ‘human face of God’” (Bruce, p.159).

4. The Bible demonstrates that Jesus is God in that He fulfilled prophecies declaring Him to be from eternity and bearing the name of “Mighty God.”

But as for you, Bethlehem...From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity (Micah 5:2).

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us...And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

What if someone suggested to you that this claim of fulfilled prophecy in Jesus' life is just coincidence? Become familiar with some of the other fulfillments listed below to refute such an allegation.

One of the most persuasive lines of evidence that Jesus is the Messiah is that His life fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies. There are at least 456 Old Testament prophetic references that pertain to a future person which all were fulfilled in Jesus' life. Many of these He could not have any control over, such as His place of birth. The following is a brief outline of some of these Old Testament prophecies and their New Testament fulfillment.

1. Jesus fulfilled the predicted family tree of the Messiah (Genesis 3:15; 49:10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 1:20-23; 22:41-42)
2. Jesus fulfilled the predicted time of the coming of the Messiah (Daniel 9:25-26)
3. Jesus fulfilled the predicted details of the Messiah's life (selected examples from many):
 - a. Bethlehem as birthplace (Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:1-6)
 - b. Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:18-23)
 - c. Hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16 and John 20:25)
 - d. Betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12ff and Matthew 26:14-16)

The odds that so many Old Testament prophecies would be fulfilled in one man are beyond imagination. What is the chance that any man might have lived from the day of these prophecies down to the present time and have fulfilled even eight of them? It has been estimated that the odds are one chance in 10^{17} (one followed by seventeen zeros!).

The Christian religion began by the conversion of Jews from Judaism. A major argument that persuaded them was the evidence that Jesus' life was the fulfillment of Old Testament Messianic prophecy (Luke 24:25-27; John 5:46; Acts 8:30-35; 28:23). The apostles Peter, Paul, and John all taught that Jesus was the promised Messiah (Acts 2:36; 17:1-3; 1 John 2:22). There is overwhelming evidence to link Jesus' life with the prophesied Messiah.

How did the information in this chapter increase your understanding of who Jesus is?

Looking Ahead

Why should we believe Jesus when He claims to be God? Surely some other people have claimed the same thing. What makes Jesus different? We will find out in the next chapter.

Answers to "Fill in the Blanks": 1. God; 2. Messiah; 3. I AM; 4. one; 5. eternal; 6. above