

Who Is Jesus?

Jesus once asked his disciples, “*Who do people believe me to be?*”

His disciples reported, “*Some say, John the Baptist; and others Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets*” (The Gospel According to Matthew 16:14). From the report received from His disciples there was certainly no consensus of opinion! In fact the majority of people seemed quite confused as to the identity of Jesus. It has not changed today. People are still confused about who Jesus is.

If you would take a survey of 50 people, how many different opinions would you get?

Some think he was simply a man, even a very special man.

- He was a great teacher of morality and philosophy.
- He was an outstanding example of moral living.
- He was a great prophet and religious leader.

Others think of Jesus as more than a man.

- He was a great angel from heaven, an archangel.
- He was a spirit being who taught secret things of the spirit world.
- He was a god who inhabited a man.
- He was the Son of God who became a man.

Others think Jesus to be less than these.

- He was a failed prophet who was crucified.
- He never existed. He is a myth.
- He was a liar and charlatan.

These opinions do not exhaust the ideas of whom people believe Jesus to be, but with all of these conflicting ideas how can anyone ever be sure who Jesus is?

This challenge may not be nearly as difficult as you think. For example, if someone asked you, “who are you?” How would you prove your identity to them?

First, you would tell them who you are – you would be your own witness.

Second, you would have them talk to your friends, to have them verify your identity.

Third, you would produce verifiable evidence of your identity.

If you could produce this kind of evidence, then you could prove your identity even in a court of law. Because there is a significant difference between people’s unsubstantiated opinions

(after all anybody can have an opinion about anything) and verifiable evidence. Let's briefly apply these three lines of evidence to see who Jesus is.

First, who did Jesus say he was?

The historical documents of Jesus' conversations and sermons are the first four books of the New Testament. They are called "*Gospels*" meaning "*Good News*." Four different disciples of Jesus gathered them: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

After Jesus had asked his disciples who people believed him to be, he asked, "*who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, 'you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'*" Then Jesus agreed with him. He said, "*Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven*" (The Gospel According to Matthew 16:16, 17). (The "*Christ*" was the prophesied King who would come from God to deliver His people. "*The Son of the living God*" was a specific reference to the one and only Son, not a son as the result of being created by, but "*the only begotten*" of the God, who was the eternal Son of God.)

On another occasion Jesus said, "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father. . .*" Then at another time he said, "*I and the Father are one*" (The Gospel According to John 14:9 and 10:30). The Jewish crowd was offended and intended to stone Jesus for blasphemy (claiming to be God). They said to him, "*because You, being a man, make yourself out to be God*" (John 10:33). So it was clear to them what Jesus meant.

Here is another of many more. At Jesus' first trial before the high priest, Jesus was asked, "*Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One? And Jesus said, I am, and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven*" (The Gospel According to Mark 14:61, 62). Once again, those in hearing this admission had no question as to whom Jesus was claiming to be. The high priest said, "*You have heard the blasphemy. . . And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death*" (Mark 14:64). ("*The Son of Man*" was the name given to describe the Christ coming to earth to establish His Kingdom in the appearance of a man.)

From these very brief quotations of Jesus' own words we can conclude that Jesus identified himself as more than a man or a prophet. He identified himself as "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Second, Who did Jesus' friends and disciples believe him to be?

This second set of evidence for Jesus' identity would be the testimonies of his friends, his disciples, and people who knew him. We have already mentioned Simon Peter's testimony.

Another testimony is from a friend of Jesus. Her name was Martha of Bethany. Her brother, Lazarus, and dear friend of Jesus had just died. "*Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?'*"

She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world'" (The Gospel According to John 11:25-27).

One of Jesus' apostles, Thomas, could not believe that Jesus had come back from death. Jesus appeared before his apostles and told Thomas, *"Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to Him, 'Because you have seen me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed'" (The Gospel According to John 20:27-29).*

His apostle, John, opened one of his letters with this statement, *"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also. . ."* (The First Letter of John 1:1-3). In the opening statement of John's Gospel he wrote, *"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 by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (The Gospel According to John 1:1-4, 14). (The *"Word"* was a title used to describe the essential expression God to His creation thus the Word was God. The *"Word"* was inseparable from God as a word from a person is inseparable from the person.) John concluded his Gospel with this statement, *"Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name"* (20:30, 31).

From these examples of the testimonies of Jesus' friends and disciples we can conclude that there was no doubt that they believed Jesus to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God." We might add that many of them were martyred rather than recant their testimonies. These are representative testimonies of which there are many, many more, but let's look at the third and last group of evidence.

Third, verifiable evidence* of Jesus' identity

What could Jesus present that would establish that He truly is the Christ, the Son of the living God? He chose four, and we will add a fifth.

First, He fulfilled the prophecies about the Christ or the Messiah. (Christ is Greek, and Messiah is Hebrew; they are transliterations of the same term.) He fulfilled some 55 prophecies written no less than 400 years, and many more than a 1000 years before His birth. Each of these were recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible (the first part of Bible), and its fulfillment is found in the New Testament (the last part of the Bible). For example, He was prophesied to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), so He was (Matthew 2:6). His mother was to be a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), so

* By "verifiable evidence" we mean evidence which can be collaborated. In some cases it is collaborated by historical criticism and in others by literary criticism. The first looks for historical consistency and the second for internal consistency. Further, there is the collaboration of secondary witnesses and the absence of contradiction. These means and others verify historical documents.

she was (Matthew 1:23). His death was to be with ridicule, His hands and feet pierced, no bones broken, lots cast for His clothes, and He would cry out, *"My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"* (Psalm 22:7, 8, 16-18, 24), and so it was (Matthew 26:39; 27:39, 43; John 19:24, 33-36; 20:25; Hebrews 5:7).

Second, thousands witnessed Jesus' miracles. There are some 35 miracles recorded in the four Gospels to which the Apostle John added, *"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence's of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name"* (The Gospel According to John 20:30, 31). Jesus gave sight to the blind, made the crippled walk, gave hearing to the deaf, healed lepers, healed diseases, and raised people from death. These miracles were public. It was this fact which the apostles later argued when any doubt was cast upon them. The apostle Paul testified before King Agrippa and Governor Festus noting this fact, *"I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner"* (The Acts of the Apostles 26:25, 26).

On one occasion a paralytic was brought to Jesus for healing. Jesus first said to him, *"Son, your sins are forgiven."* The religious teachers reasoned *"He is blaspheming who can forgive sins but God alone?"* To which Jesus responded, *"Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven; or to say, Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' – He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.' And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this'"* (The Gospel According To Mark 2:5, 7-12). The authority and power of God was demonstrated by Jesus repeatedly, and such we would expect of the Son of God.

Third, He lived a perfect life; He was sinless. His apostles, Peter and John, both testified to this. Peter wrote, *"since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth, and while being reviled He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats. . ."* (The First Letter of Peter 2:21-23). John wrote, *"You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin"* (The First Letter of John 3:5). Both of these men lived day in and day out for three years with Jesus, so they were not dependent on the opinions of others. Jesus challenged His accusers, *"Which one of you convicts Me of sin?"* (The Gospel According to John 8:46). God, the Father, spoke audibly to Jesus from heaven in the hearing of many witnesses. On the first occasion He said, *"You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased"* (The Gospel According to Luke 3:22). No one else has ever lived a perfect life, only Jesus. The Bible elsewhere declares, *"all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,"* and in another place Scripture declares, *"there are none righteous, not even one. . . There is none who does good, there is not even one"* (The Letter to the Romans 3:23, 10, 12). The only exception is Jesus. Such we would expect from the Son of the living God.

Fourth, the supreme evidence that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God was His resurrection. His resurrection had been foretold in the Old Testament (Psalms 16:10;

22:22) and foretold by Jesus Himself (The Gospel According to Matthew 16:21; 17:22, 23; 20:18, 19). He said He would go to Jerusalem, and He did. There, He said that the Jewish and Gentile authorities would condemn him on false charges, and He was. He said, He would be mocked, scourged, brutally crucified, and buried, and He was. He said, on the third day following His crucifixion He would be raised from the dead, and He was.

Jesus' Apostle, Paul, recorded a list of those who had witnessed Jesus' death and His resurrection. *"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also."* (The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 15:3-8). Many of these were martyred because they would not recant their personal testimony of the fact that Jesus had died, had been buried, and then rose from the dead. Jesus' resurrection was the supreme fact and witnessed evidence that He was the Christ and the Son of the living God.

Fifth, there are a host of ancient secular historians who make mention and verify that a man named Jesus lived, preached, did miracles, and who was reported to have been resurrected from the dead. Some of these historians noted that His followers were so confident of the identity of Jesus that they were willing to die, rather than to say, Jesus is not God who became a man. Among these ancient writers we could cite Tacitus, the Roman historian, Suetonis, Pliny the younger, Epictetus, Lucian, Aristides, Galenus, Lampridius, DioCassius, and Josephus. This is only a partial list.

F. F. Bruce, past Rylands professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, says: *"Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth,' but they do not do so on the grounds of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories."*

Who is Jesus? There are many opinions, but when we look at who Jesus said He was, when we listen to His friends and disciples, and when we look at the verifiable evidences He gives us, it becomes pretty clear.

Why Is It Important to Know Who Jesus Is?

If Jesus is the Son of God, then there is a God.

If Jesus is the Son of God, then He has communicated with mankind.

If Jesus is the Son God, then according to Jesus there is only one way to God.

Jesus said, *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through Me"* (The Gospel According to John 14:6).

- If Jesus is the Son of God, then all the other so-called gods are not gods.
- If Jesus is the Son of God, then God truly did say, *“This is My beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”* (The Gospel According to Matthew 17:5), and we should listen!
- If Jesus is the Son of God, then sin is real and every one of us has broken the Law of God, is a sinner, and we are deserving of God's punishment and His wrath.
- If Jesus is the Son of God, then His death on the cross is the only substitute payment God will receive for my sin, or I must face the wrath and inescapable eternal punishment of God myself.
- If Jesus is the Son of God, then He will return, He will establish His Kingdom, and He will bring judgment upon all who have rejected Him and salvation for all who have accepted Him.
- If Jesus is the Son of God, then God does not have only bad news, but He has a *“Gospel”* (*Good News*) for you and for me. In Jesus, the Christ, I can know God’s love, mercy, become a partaker of eternal life, and know God as my loving heavenly Father.
- If Jesus is the Son of God, then God has called me to believe in the claims of Jesus, to learn from Him, to follow Him, and to obey Him!

What are the possibilities of who Jesus is?

The famous C. S. Lewis, distinguished past professor at Cambridge University, once an agnostic, reduced the options of the identity of Jesus down to this:

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

Then Lewis adds: You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Jesus asked His disciples, *“Who do you say that I am?”*

Today or someday you will have to answer that question. Who is Jesus?