

# Is Jesus God?

## What Books Should be in the Bible?

*The canon is a list of authoritative books more than it is an authoritative list of books. These documents didn't derive their authority from being selected; each one was authoritative before anyone gathered them together.*

— BRUCE METZGER of Princeton University

### MEMORY VERSE

*But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5).*

### TAKE A MINUTE TO LOOK BACK AT ALL YOU'VE LEARNED IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

- Truth exists.
- God exists.
- Miracles are possible and have happened.
- The New Testament is historically reliable.

If the New Testament documents are historically reliable, what do they say about Jesus? And which documents should be in the New Testament Canon? Those are the topics we'll discuss in this lesson.

### DID JESUS CLAIM TO BE GOD?

Many people today claim that "all paths lead to God," but what God are they talking about: Jesus, Allah, Krishna, a cult leader, or someone else? Which one is really God?

The stakes couldn't be higher. If Jesus is God, then whatever He teaches is true. If Jesus is not God, then He wasn't even a good man—He was a liar or a lunatic.

We have seen from our study that Jesus is the only person who met the predicted qualifications of the Messiah. The Messiah had to be God. But did Jesus really make that claim? We know that other New Testament writers stated that Jesus was God, but did Jesus claim that Himself?

**1. Read Mark chapter 14 and John Chapter 8.**

- **In Mark 14:61-64 how did Jesus claim to be God? Why did Caiaphas tear his robe?**
  
- **In John 8:56-59 how did Jesus claim to be God? Why did the Jews want to stone him?**

Jesus not only directly claimed to be God, but made several other statements that clearly implied He was God. For example, Jesus declared His deity within the parables. The characters in parables usually represent at least two persons: God and you! Sometimes there is a third character.

*“If Jesus didn’t claim to be God, then why did they kill him — for skipping around saying, ‘love your neighbor’?”*

**2. How did Jesus indirectly claim He was God in the parable of the lost son (Luke 15)? Who is God in the parable? Who represents the Pharisees? Who represents you?**

### **THE TRILEMMA: LORD, LIAR OR LUNATIC.**

Jesus' actions were those that could only be accomplished if He were God. Jesus would not have been a good "moral" teacher if He deceived people by claiming to be God. C.S. Lewis put it this way:

*"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. He did not intend to."*

***Mere Christianity***, pp. 55-56.

**3. C.S. Lewis claims that there are three possibilities regarding the identity of Jesus: Lord, Liar, Lunatic. Why are Liar and Lunatic implausible?**

## THE TRINITY: THREE PERSONS IN ONE ESSENCE

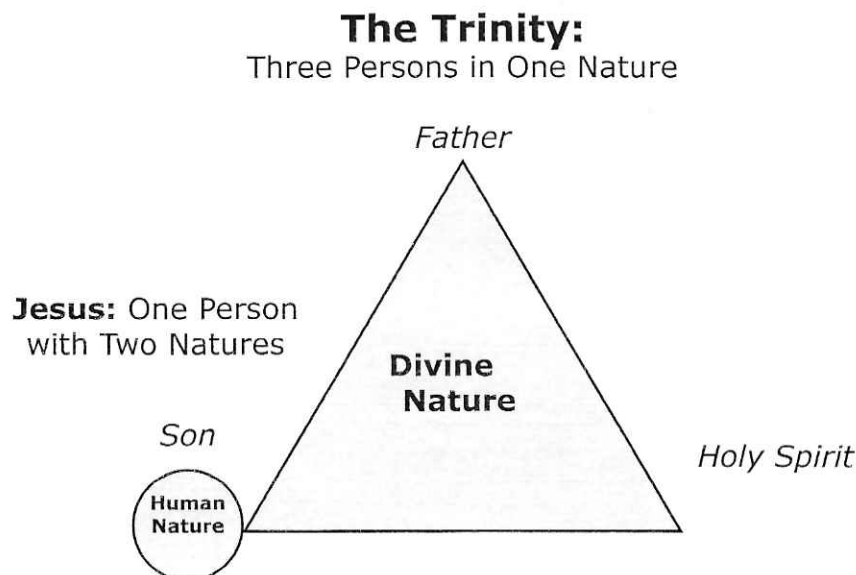
Some objections to the deity of Christ—such as how could Jesus be God if He didn't know when he would return—are answered by understanding the Trinity. The Trinity is three persons in one divine essence with one person (Jesus) having both a divine and human nature.

While there are no perfect illustrations of the Trinity, the following illustration using a triangle and circle may help. At one corner you have the Father, another you have the Son, and at the third corner you have the Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Godhead share the divine nature but they are distinct in terms of their personhood. It is not a contradiction to have three persons in one being. It is not three Gods but one God in three persons.

There is one God who is three persons. They all share in the divine nature but note that Jesus has another nature—a human nature (represented by the circle). He does not share the human nature with anyone. When Jesus came here, He did not cease being God. He added a human nature to His divine nature. In other words, Jesus in His human nature was born as a man just over 2,000 years ago, but He has existed for all eternity with the Father and the Holy Spirit in His divine nature. The human nature had a beginning; the divine nature did not. As Athanasius of Alexandria once declared, “the incarnation was not the subtraction of deity but the addition of humanity.”

Therefore, whenever you ask a question about Jesus, you really have to ask two questions. Did Jesus know when he was coming back? As man? No. As God? Yes. Did Jesus get tired? As man? Yes. As God? No.

The Trinity actually solves theological problems rather than creates them. For example, how could love exist in a strictly monotheistic being prior to creation? There was no one to love. But God being a Trinity has been a Being of love from all eternity. In the



Trinity, there is a Lover (the Father), a Loved One (the Son), and a Spirit of Love (the Holy Spirit).

Contrast this to the God of Islam—Allah—who is only one person. As a strict monotheistic being, Allah would have no way to be in a loving relationship prior to creation. Since we know the universe had a beginning, Allah could not have been a loving being from all eternity. (Muslims don't even believe Allah loves anyway. They believe He is arbitrary—whatever He does is good.) Christians believe that God IS good. It is His nature. He is the standard and foundation of good.

Skeptics sometimes complain that the Trinity is too complicated; it needs to be simpler. But who says that truth must always be simple? As C.S. Lewis pointed out, "If Christianity was something we were making up, of course we would make it easier. But it is not. We cannot compete in simplicity with people who are inventing religions. How could we? We are dealing with fact. Of course, anyone can be simple if He has no facts to bother about." *Mere Christianity*, p. 145.

## WHAT DID JESUS TEACH ABOUT THE BIBLE?

Jesus taught that the Old Testament was the Word of God, and he promised the New Testament. His confirmation of the Old Testament does not apply to any other writings in the world. Jesus didn't just say the Old Testament was the Word of God, He lived it—He fulfilled the law completely for us and offers His life in place of ours.

**4. Frank listed seven ways in which Jesus taught that the Old Testament was the Word of God. List as many as you can remember:**

**5. Jesus affirmed as true many of the most disputed passages of the Old Testament (Adam and Eve, Noah, Jonah, Daniel, etc.). What is the apologetic significance of this?**

**6. Jesus certainly affirmed the Old Testament. Where did He promise the New Testament?**

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## **WHAT BOOKS SHOULD BE IN THE CANON?**

As we mentioned earlier in our discussion of Bart Ehrman, Dr. Bruce Metzger was the top manuscript expert of the Twentieth Century. His point in the quote above is that no human being **determined** what should be in the Bible; human beings **discovered** what God had already determined should be in the Bible. In other words, we discovered the books God had inspired.

How did the early believers discover what writings should be considered part of the New Testament canon? Here are the basic criteria they used to discover which writing was inspired:

- Was it written by a prophet of God?
- Was the writer confirmed by acts of God or someone who was confirmed as an eyewitness (e.g. Paul confirmed Luke)?
- Was it accepted by the people of God?

**7. Popular novels and the media like to cast doubt on the New Testament Canon by asking why other books were not included in the New Testament (such as the Gospels of Peter, Thomas and Judas). Why were these documents never included?**

**8. Skeptics like to claim that the resurrection of Christ was not an actual historical event but was instead copied from pagan resurrection myths. Why is this not plausible?**

### **ARE DIVERGENT DETAILS REALLY A PROBLEM?**

Some critics claim that the New Testament documents can't be trusted because they don't agree on all the details of, say, the resurrection (was there one angel at the tomb or two?). There are very good books that give sound answers to what appear to be contradictions or divergent details in the Bible (e.g. *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties*, by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe). But divergent details are actually evidence of independent eyewitness testimony.

Any judge who hears word-for-word identical testimony from two eyewitnesses would immediately conclude that the witnesses colluded to iron out their details. The nature of eyewitness testimony is that eyewitnesses agree on the major issues but may disagree or emphasize different minor details. For example, some survivors of the Titanic say that the ship went down whole while others say it broke in two before it sank. They disagree over that detail, but they all agree on the central fact— that the Titanic sank! Likewise, the New Testament writers include divergent details about the resurrection account (who got there first, how many angels were there, etc.), but they all agree on the central fact that there was a resurrection! This is clearly not an invented story. The writers certainly didn't get together to iron out the minor details.

But what do divergent details say about inerrancy? Proving the inerrancy of the Bible is beyond the scope of this study. While we believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, one does not need to show that the Bible is inerrant in every detail to show that the resurrection of Christ actually occurred and the essential doctrines of the Christian faith are true. You do not need all the witnesses to agree on how the Titanic sank to be sure that it actually did sink.

**9. Go to the blog section at [www.crossexamined.org](http://www.crossexamined.org) and search for the article titled "Gospel Contradictions? Why They Don't Exist. A Little Experiment to Teach Skeptics about NT Accuracy." Explain how the article shows that divergent details do not invalidate the fact that there really was a plane crash.**

**10. In light of the evidence, who has to have more faith – the Christian or the non-Christian? Why? (Or should we ask, "Do you have enough faith to be an atheist?") Explain your answer.**

## **YOU WILL NEVER KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT GOD!**

This study is only a part of your preparation as a Christian apologist. Since God is an infinite being, we will never completely comprehend Him, His creation, and purposes. God is the only perpetual novelty. You will never become bored with God because there will always be more to explore and learn.

## **TOOLBOX**

- Get *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties*, by Norman Geisler and Tom Howe.
- Are we sure we have the entire Bible? Could there be lost books? Go to STR.org and search for the "Solid Ground" edition titled, *No Lost Books* (January/February 2011). You may need to register to read it.
- Jesus had confrontations with the Pharisees that proved He was not a spineless, meek, little wimp (as some in our culture believe) who wouldn't judge the error of anyone else. Notice that the Pharisees were the religious and political leaders of Israel. Yes, Jesus got involved in politics! In fact, politics not only affects



people we are called to love, but even our ability to preach the Gospel! So the Christian, like all good citizens, ought to be involved in politics. (For more, see *Jesus Was Involved in Politics* by Neil Mammen, *Politics According to the Bible* by Wayne Grudem, *Legislating Morality* by Norman Geisler and Frank Turek, and *Correct, Not Politically Correct* by Frank Turek).

- Go to YouTube and view the five-minute video "Did Jesus Claim to be God?" by Lee Strobel.
- There are thousands of books and websites where you can get the answers you need. Start at [www.CrossExamined.org](http://www.CrossExamined.org). If you want to go further, you can click on the links and resources page. It will launch you into virtually a limitless universe of answers!