

Session 4: Jesus

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.

Is there any question that Jesus existed?

There shouldn't be, but...

Bertrand Russell: "Historically, it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him." Russell is a philosopher, but not much of a historian.

Jesus Christ was a real man. If we only had to rely on the Biblical accounts, they have proven to be historically reliable, but historians outside of the Bible record that he lived and died:

Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55-120): "But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.

Some even tried to explain the supernatural events that surrounded his life. Thallus, a first century historian, tried to explain the darkness that fell at Christ's crucifixion:

"Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun—unreasonably, as it seems to me (unreasonably, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died.)" (Quoted by Julius Africanus, a Christian historian.)

Here is an incomplete table of the references we have to Jesus' life outside of the Bible:

Secular References and Jewish References		Christian References
Cornelius Tacitus	Macrobius	Clement of Rome
Lucian of Samosata	Trajan	Ignatius
Suetonius	Hadrian	Quadratus
Pliny the Younger	Antoninus Pius	The Epistle of Barnabas
Thallus	Marcus Aurelius	Aristides
Phlegon	Juvenal	Justin Martyr
Mara Bar-Serapion	Seneca	Hegesippus
Babylonian Talmud	Hierocles	
Josephus		

What do modern historians have to say about whether Christ actually lived?

F.F. Bruce: "Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth', but they do not do so on the ground 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."

Otto Betz: "No serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus."

Lord, Liar or Lunatic?

It is not difficult to prove that Jesus Christ actually lived. The question becomes "Who was he?" Most telling about His nature is what he said about himself:

Mark 14:61b-64

61b Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"
 62 "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

John 14:6-7

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and the only way to heaven. The gospel accounts are historically accurate documents; they began to circulate so soon after Jesus' death that eyewitnesses would have easily been able to refute the words of Jesus in them.

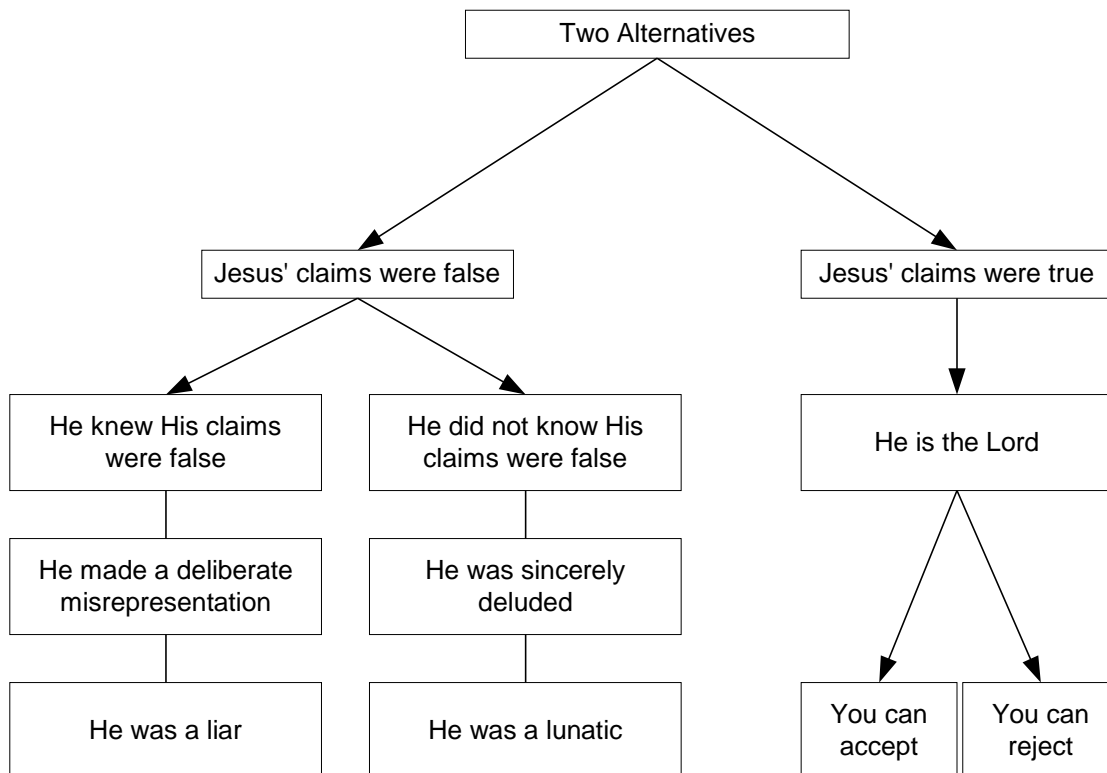
Jesus asked Peter in Matthew 16:15, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” We must all answer that question at some time during our lives.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, makes the following assertion:

"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 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. 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 patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

Jesus claimed to be God. Either his claims were false, or they were true.

- If his claims were false and he knew them to be false, he was a liar.
- If his claims were false and he did not know they were false, he was a lunatic.
- If his claims were true, then he is Lord—and we have a decision to make. You may either accept Jesus as Lord—or you may reject it.



Point 1: Jesus was sinless

- We have no evidence in Scripture that Jesus sinned. None of the gospel accounts indicate that he committed any sin.

- Jesus believed Himself to be sinless:

John 8:46

46 “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?”

“Jesus could encourage such a public examination because he was without sin.”

– Josh McDowell

John 8:29

29 “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.”

“Jesus apparently lived in unbroken communion with God.” – Josh McDowell

- Jesus’ friends believed Him to be sinless:

1 Peter 1:19

19 “but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

1 Peter 2:22

22 “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

1 John 3:5

5 “But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.”

- Jesus’ enemies believed Him to be sinless:

Luke 23:41

“We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” – Testimony of one of the thieves killed with Christ

Luke 23:47

“Certainly this man was innocent” – The Roman centurion at Christ’s execution

Mark 14:55-59

55 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any.

56 Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

57 Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him:

58 “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.’”

59 Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

The Koran—the holy book of Muslims—even testifies to Jesus’ sinlessness:

Mary 19. (The angel) said: "I am only a Messenger from your Lord, (to announce) to you the gift of a righteous son." ("righteous" can be translated as "without sin.")

The fact that Jesus was born of a virgin is important—Jesus was not born into sin, as we are. Because he was not born into sin, and committed no sin throughout his life, he was able to bear the weight of our sins.

Point 2: Jesus was fully man and fully God

Jesus retained His deity when He became a man. He was not half-man, half-God, rather he was fully man and fully God.

Jesus experienced all of the temptations, joy, sorrows, and pains of a human. He cried, bled, and died. But in doing so, He also retained His full God-ship. He forgave sins, performed miracles, and spoke with the authority of God himself.

Jesus, the man, was lesser than God—but as Jesus, Son of God, he was God’s equal.

Point 3: Jesus was crucified as a substitute for us in payment of our sins

Because Jesus was sinless, he could pay the price for our sins.

Romans 6:23

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Herschel Hobbs describes Jesus sacrifice this way:

"In his perfect life, Jesus justified God in his demand for righteousness in man. He demonstrated that one can live in a flesh and blood body in a corrupt world, be tempted in all points, yet not sin. Having proved God just, in his death on the cross he paid the price for sin and thus became the justifier before God of all who believe in him as Savior."

Christ’s death was for all men—no future Savior or sacrifice is necessary.

Hebrews 9:26-28

26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Though Christ died for all men, it is necessary to confess Him before men and believe that God raised him from the dead. God's gift is universal, but only to those who repent of their sins and accept Jesus as Lord.

Romans 10:9

9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

In His crucifixion, Jesus performed his duty as high priest. In the Jewish tradition, the high priest was the only one who could enter the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. When Christ was crucified, the veil of the Holy of Holies was torn in two. Roy Edgemon makes this point about Christ's priesthood:

"In times past, a sinful man representing sinful people would bring a sacrifice of a lamb and put it on the altar of God in the presence of God. But sin was always present. Never had a perfect priest existed who could bring a perfect sin offering; but Jesus is the Great High Priest, one who is without sin, one who is perfect in every way. Therefore, the barriers no longer exist. Due to the sacrifice of Jesus and His priestly ministry, every man, woman, and child, on earth can come directly into the presence of God. There is no longer a physical holy of holies, no Day of Atonement, no blood sacrifices. None of that is required any longer because of Jesus, our perfect Sacrifice and perfect High Priest. Now we can come directly into the presence of God."

Point 4: Jesus was literally raised from the dead

Paul makes it very clear that we must believe in a literal resurrection in order to have faith in Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:12-15 (The Message)

Now, let me ask you something profound yet troubling. If you became believers because you trusted the proclamation that Christ is alive, risen from the dead, how can you let people say that there is no such thing as a resurrection? If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it—if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ—sheer fabrications, if there's no resurrection.

William Lane Craig makes this statement:

"Without the belief in the resurrection, the Christian faith could not have come into being. The disciples would have remained crushed and defeated men. Even had they continued to remember Jesus as their beloved teacher, his crucifixion would have forever silenced any hopes of his being the Messiah. The cross would have remained the sad and shameful end of his career. The origin of Christianity therefore hinges on the belief of the early disciples that God had raised Jesus from the dead."

Was Jesus dead?

One of the theories used to refute the resurrection is that Christ never actually died—he merely appeared to be dead. When he was placed in the tomb, he awoke and escaped. This is known as the “swoon theory” (to swoon means to faint). Here are some facts that refute that theory:

- In the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his execution, Jesus’ stress was so great that he sweat drops of blood:

Luke 22:44

44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

This is a documented medical condition called hematidrosis. It is caused when the capillaries in the sweat glands break down. A side effect of this condition is that it causes the skin to become very fragile. Christ’s skin was particularly fragile when the Romans beat him.

- Hebrew law limited the number of lashes that could be administered to a criminal, but Roman law did not. Christ was punished under Roman law. The whip with which Christ was beaten contained shards of bone and metal, which would tear off the flesh. Christ was most likely beaten by the Roman soldiers, who would have been even more merciless in their punishment than the “scourgers” normally employed by the Romans. Bishop Eusebius, a historian of the third century, commented about the typical Roman scourging: “The sufferer’s veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.”
- Jesus was most likely in hypovolemic shock when he was forced to carry his own cross to the hill at Golgotha. Hypovolemic shock is the condition resulting from losing a large amount of blood. Four things result: 1) The heart races to pump blood that isn’t there, 2) the blood pressure drops, 3) the kidneys stop producing urine, and 4) the person becomes very thirsty as the body craves fluids to replace the lost blood. This condition is evident when Christ collapses and Simon is forced to carry his cross. On the cross, Christ says, “I thirst”.

“Jesus was already in serious to critical condition even before the nails were driven through his hands and feet.”—Dr. Alexander Metherell, M.D. as quoted by Lee Strobel in The Case for Christ

- On the cross, Christ's agony only increased. The Romans used five to seven inch nails for crucifixions. Two of these nails went through Christ's wrists—although the language in Scripture refers to “the hand”, the wrist was considered part of the hand in those days. The nails through the wrists would have pierced the largest nerve that runs through the arm to the hand. This nerve is similar to the one we refer to as the “funny bone”. In Christ's case, the effect was this: “Picture taking a pair of pliers and squeezing and crushing that nerve. That effect would be similar to what Jesus experienced.”
- After the nails were driven and the cross raised, Christ underwent his final agony: “...his arms would have immediately been stretched, probably about six inches in length, and both shoulders would have become dislocated.” Dr. Metherell suggests that the final cause of death would have been asphyxiation. “Crucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation.”

The cardiac arrest brought on by the asphyxiation caused a condition called “pericardial effusion”, which is a collection of fluid around the heart and lungs. This is the medical explanation for the “blood and water” flowing from Christ's side when he was pierced by the Roman soldier's sword:

John 19:34

34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

Very little evidence exists to support the theory that Christ didn't actually die. In fact, the overwhelming evidence is that he did die a literal, physical death.

The Theft Theory

Another theory posed by skeptics is that the body of Christ was stolen from the tomb. One suggestion is that the disciples stole the body. Unfortunately, they did not have the power to remove him—after all, soldiers guarded the tomb night and day. The Jews maintained that the guards had fallen asleep; however, this doesn't explain the testimony of the guards that the disciples had performed the theft—if they were asleep, how did they know? Most scholars believe that the guards were paid by the Sanhedrin to testify that the disciples stole the body.

Another argument against the disciples' theft is this: history records that only one of the disciples died a natural death—the others were killed in various persecutions. Would the whole lot of them have given their lives for something they knew to be a lie?

What about Christ's enemies? They likely did not steal the body either; after all, what better proof of the death of Christ than to produce the body? The Jews and Romans would have loved to parade the body of Christ through the streets of Jerusalem; unfortunately for them, they could not. Christ's body was nowhere to be found.

Eyewitness Evidence

One final point to raise: 1 Corinthians 15 records the people to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection:

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,

8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

As Paul points out, most of the five hundred eyewitnesses were still alive—surely, someone would have come forward to refute the account if it were false.

Point 5: Jesus will return to judge the world

Several references in the gospels and Revelation prophecy the return of Christ to judge the world:

Matthew 25:31-34

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.

32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Acts 1:10-11

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Words You Need to Know

asphyxiation	to kill or make unconscious by inadequate oxygen, presence of noxious agents, or other obstruction to normal breathing. Christ's death on the cross was caused by asphyxiation.
atonement	the reconciliation of God and man through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.
axiomatic	taken for granted, self-evident
glorified	to make glorious by bestowing honor, praise, or admiration—to elevate to celestial glory
incarnation	the embodiment of Christ in earthly form—the union of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ
mediator	one that mediates between parties at variance
postulate	to assume or claim as true, existent, or necessary
scourge	to whip--to inflict pain or punishment
swoon theory	a theory used to refute the resurrection of Christ. It states that Christ did not actually die, but instead he “swooned” (fainted).

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