

Jesus: His Claims Biblically Examined

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Introduction

Over the years, the subject of the real nature and identity of Jesus has come into sharp focus, with many claiming that the real Jesus has been enshrouded in mystery or at best lost to history (Schweitzer 1910; Strobel 1998). Others have claimed that the Jesus presented in the gospel narratives is a fake, insane or confused fellow with wild claims (McDowell & Larson 1990). Still others claim that the gospel narratives portray different people rather than the same person. What is one to believe about this issue? In this short write up, we investigate this matter and squarely answer it from the scriptures. This paper assumes that the scriptures are a correct narrative given the abundant verifiable external evidences (over 24,500 complete or part complete manuscripts). Let us approach this enquiry with an objective mind, allowing the scriptures to speak and tell their story.

What Jesus Claimed

Many things and words have been written about the person and nature of Christ. While some completely reject the gospel record as being authentic, others completely doubt whether Jesus existed at all. If he existed as claimed, is the picture depicted in the Christian gospel narratives correct, factual and true or a mere man made fabrications, with others claiming the *Da Vinci Code* plot is true and sound (Brown 2003). But what did Jesus himself claim about himself? Why do people doubt his claims? In this discourse, we do not attempt to prove whether the Jesus in the Christian Gospel narrative is real, true or false, rather, our task is to declare what is written in the scriptures. Firstly, Jesus claimed to be the son of God. By this claim, he ascribed divinity to himself. Secondly, Jesus claimed to be the son of man. By this claim, he asserted that he was fully man while he walked the earth. Thirdly, Jesus claimed to be pre-existent, the creator of the world and one with the father. In other words, Jesus claimed to be eternal and everlasting. Fourthly, Jesus claimed to be the saviour of mankind, atoning for the world's sins. Fifthly, Jesus claimed to be the prophet that was foretold in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 28:18). Sixthly, Jesus Claimed to be the prophet, Priest and King.

In short, Jesus made many claims amounting to his being the pre-existent perfect lamb of God that was slain before the foundation of the world, who, in the fullness of time, came seek ad to save the lost. These are radical and deep claims which mortals find difficult to take in.

The Biblical Evidence

The Bible has abundant evidence to reveal and support the claims of Jesus Christ. We highlight some of these with supporting Biblical evidence at length:

1. Divine (John 1:1; 19:30)
2. Saviour of the world (John 3:16)
3. Son of Man (Mark 2:28)
4. Son of God (John 8:9; John 3:16)
5. Creator (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16)
6. Eternal (John 17:24)
7. Second person of the Trinity (John 10:30)
8. Pre-existent (John 17:5)
9. The long awaited prophet (John 1:15;21)

From this abundant evidence, Jesus' claims are to be examined and accepted for what they are from a Christian Biblical perspective. Jesus is no ordinary man.

Objections Raised

Some people object to the fact of the divinity of Christ. Arius was one of the earliest proponents of heretical views claiming that Jesus was not of the same essence with the father but was of similar essence. Arius also claimed that Jesus was a creation of God and thus could not be God himself. As a result, this bishop marshalled a following within the early fourth century Church but was only checked by the determined Athanasius who championed the Trinitarian doctrine and thus saved the Church from heresy. Arius however, still has a following even today who blatantly reject the truth of Scripture. Among these are the present day Jehovah's witnesses, The Way International and a whole host of Unitarian churches.

What Others have Said or Written about Jesus being Divine

Many Christian writers have undertaken to establish and defend the true identity, nature and person of Jesus Christ. Right down from the first century, the Church has espoused and treasured the deity of Jesus Christ, except for a few epochs when some rejected these stubborn facts. Often, those that reject the divinity of Christ are those that reject the record of scripture and its inspiration. There is a fair share of those that reject the humanity of Christ as well claiming that he only appeared to be a human when in fact he was not. The Christological Trinitarian controversy that raged in the early centuries, in many senses is still with us. We need people with the Spirit of Athanasius to rise to the occasion once again. Among those that God has raised have been Zacharias Ravi, Josh McDowell, John Montgomery, FF Bruce and a whole host of others that have devoted their lives to research and demonstrate that Jesus is for a fact divine. For instance, McDowell has written extensively from different perspectives to prove that Jesus is God. One perspective is to argue from internal scripture evidence, having demonstrated that the scriptures are trust worthy and accurate, therefore giving an objective picture of who Jesus was, as well as, his claims to divinity. If we agree that the gospel record is authentic, then we can safely accept his claims to divinity. His claims were not irrational, wild, out of lunacy, a complex or a strong desire to be noticed. No, these were words from the King of Kings that walked the earth in time with a view to redeem the elect. Ravi, on the other hand demonstrates clearly in his book '*Jesus among other Gods*' that although many deities exist and claim to be the way to God, only Jesus is the true way to the father because of his nature, mission and claims. Hailing from a non-Christian, monistic, syncretic background, Ravi proves that Jesus is unique and worth believing in. Strobel (1988), has compiled a great work composed of contributions from leading theological minds. This makes the case for Jesus, his person and existence. This certainly a great read.

Lessons learnt

Many lessons can be adduced from different sources apart from the gospel narratives or holy scripture. Being closely bound to the historical context, the Christian faith can be proved from archaeological findings, ancient manuscripts, scientific scrutiny and a whole host of other methods that are objective and willing to establish the truth. Although we strongly believe that scripture alone is presuppositionally sufficient to establish our case, we imitate the early Christians in proving our case using many Infallible proofs where possible and in sync with scripture. It is our conviction too that, the Christian should not be afraid to face the facts. In this paper, we present some lessons learnt from the diverse reading materials referred to in our research. We do so in point form for brevity's sake:

1. Jesus is indeed God because he claimed divinity, was called or viewed as such by others. Moreover, he did not protest when they so addressed him.
2. Jesus possesses all the exclusive names, titles and nature of God.
3. The name *Christ* refers to the anointed one that was expected from the Old Testament prophecies to redeem God's people.
4. In this paper, we assume that the scriptures are the actual word of God and thus reliable (I Thessalonians 2:13ff).
5. Certain Greek and Hebrew renderings and words used in the scriptures about Jesus are attributed to God alone. For example, the title "Lord" is *Adonai* in Hebrew and *Kurios* in Greek. Both these are attributed to Jesus. The other is "I AM" found in exodus 3 and refers to God or "*ego eimi*" that is attributed to Jesus as well.
6. As stated elsewhere, we all commence our discussions from a given presupposition, whether scientist, religious or not.
7. In some parts of scripture, Jesus is referred to as "God and saviour" to denote his divinity. In other places, he is called "Mighty God"¹, "Everlasting father," "Prince of Peace," "Emmanuel," etc. All these point to God alone. (Isaiah 9)
8. In some scriptures such as in Revelation 7:10-12, Jesus is said to sit on the throne that God alone does sit on. This is proof positive that God is Trinitarian in nature and essence.
9. Many people who have initially set out to discredit the Christian faith have ended up getting convinced and converted by the fact of Christianity. John McDowell is one of such people who are now strong advocates for the truth of Christianity.
10. Christianity is a relationship with a person, Jesus Christ not mere allegiance to facts, rituals or blind obedience to an impersonal deity.
11. Only God can fully reveal himself as he truly is. All others cannot although once he reveals himself in regeneration; someone can have an appreciation of him as well as experience the love that comes out of divine placental blessings.
12. God has indeed revealed himself and this fact can be verified through different means including scriptural assertions found in the pages of scripture. In addition, the Bible claims to be the very word of God and thus reveals who He is. Therefore, every claim must be tested against the touch stone of scripture and the person of Jesus.

¹ Or 'El Gibbor' in Hebrew

13. The scriptures (i.e. Holy Bible) are so well attested by historical records and over 24,600 full or partial manuscripts. This by far outweighs the next best historical works by Homer (Odyssey) with a paltry 634 manuscripts! The Bible can thus be relied upon, because of their veracity. The 1947 Dead Sea scroll finds add a further dimension to the strong evidence of the Bible's claims. In short, the bible has immense supporting evidence, short only of eleven verses from the church and apostolic father's writings alone!

14. In the incarnation, Jesus humbled himself and stepped into time to be our saviour. He thus revealed the father and worthy of our worship.

15. Though some scriptures apparently appear to support the idea that Jesus is not divine on face value, this can be proved otherwise when considered in the wider context of scripture. For instance, Jesus has all the attributes and titles ascribed to God alone.

16. God has general and moral attributes that distinguish him from all other purported deities. God is also Trinitarian in nature and a panorama of scriptures teach these truths. Some of these scriptures include the following: John 1:1; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 1:1-3; Romans 15:16,30; 2Thessalonians 2:13-14 etc

17. When dealing with the mystery of the Trinity, care must be taken not to veer into unwarranted extremes such as Sabelianism, Arianism, Socinianism or any heretical or erroneous positions. The Trinity doctrine needs to be deductively derived from the scriptures and remain in that framework.

18. The Lord Jesus was incarnated so that we might be saved, bring about a bridge between a thrice holy God and a sinful people etc.

19. Jesus has always been, he was never created either in time or eternity.

20. One of the evidences of Jesus' divinity was how the Jews violently reacted when Jesus claimed to be divine (ego eimi). Hostile reactions are strong evidence to a given case.

21. The name "I AM" found in Exodus 3:14 and "*Jehovah*" in Genesis are not strictly the same but both etymologically derived from the name "*to be*" meaning that both are aspects of who God is exactly.

22. The Greek word "*theos*" is the equivalent of "*Elohim*" in the Hebrew text, although strictly speaking "*theos*" may be generic, derived from Hellenistic language for Greek mythology. Like '*Logos*,' '*theos*' is adapted to communicate the essence and nature of Paul's Unknown God of Acts 17.

23. John 1:1 is one of the clearest passages in the entire scriptural campus that proves that Jesus is divine.

Conclusion

From the evidence thus far adduced from scripture and basic reasoning, we can safely conclude that Jesus is indeed who he claimed to be-God. His claims to and acceptance of exclusive divine titles prove that He was for a fact, the eternal God. Opposing claims fail to face up to the facts at hand.

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