

## KNOWLEDGE

### Arguments/Criticisms Against Jesus

#### *Issues related to:*

##### ***His Person***

- Jesus never really existed
- Jesus was just a man
- The crucifixion and resurrection accounts are false

##### ***His Ministry***

- Jesus was/wasn't ...
- Jesus only/never said ...

#### **Resources:**

- McDowell, Josh, and Sean McDowell. **More Than a Carpenter**. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2009.
- Strobel, Lee. **The Case for Christ**. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- McDowell, Josh. **Evidence for Christianity**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2006.

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#### *The Gospel of John*

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

<sup>6</sup> *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

<sup>9</sup> *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people<sup>[c]</sup> did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

<sup>14</sup> *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace<sup>l</sup> <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

## Chapter 2: What's Makes Jesus So Different?

Q. Why can people talk about God and not get upset, and yet when Jesus is mentioned, things can get tense?

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*God is the "infinite and perfect spirit in whom all things have their source, support and end." – Augustus H. Strong*

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- This definition of God is adequate not only for Christians but also for all **theists**, including Muslims and Jews.
- Theism teaches that God is **personal** and that the universe was planned and created by him. God sustains and rules it in the **present**.
- What sets Christianity apart?
- Jesus Christ – a name and a title
  - The name Jesus is derived from Greek for the name *Jeshua*, which means "**the Lord saves**" or "Jehovah-Savior"
  - The title Christ is derived from the Greek term for Messiah (*Christos*) which means "**anointed one**"

Q. How does the New Testament present Jesus as God?

- The New Testament clearly presents Christ as **God**
- By the **names** applied to Christ
  - God
  - Savior
  - Messiah
  -
- By the **characteristics** attributed to Christ
  - **Self-existent** (John 1:2)
  - **Omnipresent** (Matthew 18:20)
  - **Omniscient** (Matthew 17:22-27)
  - **Omnipotent** (Matthew 8:26-27)
  - Possessing **eternal** life (1 John 5:11-12)
- By the **worship** He received
  - Most early followers were devout Jews who were **monotheistic**

- **Others** acknowledged He was God
  - Disciples, Stephen
  - Martha, Nathaniel
- Jesus himself **claimed** to be God
  - He claimed God as His **father** (John 5:16-18)
  - He equated His **work** with God's work (John 5:16-18)
  - He claimed to be **one** with God (John 10:30)
  - He **forgave** sins (Mark 2:5)
  - He claimed to be the Messiah and **Son of Man** (Mark 14:60-62)

**Q. For what crime was Jesus Christ on trial and why was his trial unique?**

- They regarded His claim as **blasphemy**
- They intended to enact the punishment of **stoning** (Leviticus 24:16)
- In most trials, the accused are tried for what they are alleged to have done. However, Jesus was tried for **who He claimed to be**.

## *Chapter 3: Lord, Liar or Lunatic?*

**Q. What would you say to a statement that says Jesus Christ was a great moral teacher and certainly a great leader, but nothing more?**

- Jesus claimed to be God
  - Either Jesus was **correct**, or he was not; if he was not, he was either **lying** or **crazy**
  - Aka "Lewis' Trilemma", "Mad, Bad or God"
- Was Jesus a liar?
  - If so, he **deliberately** deceived his followers
  - If so, he was a **hypocrite** because he taught honesty
  - If so, he was **evil** because he deceived his followers with a false hope of eternal life
  - If so, he was a **fool** because it led to his death
  - How could a 'great moral teacher' mislead others about His own **identity**?
  - How could a liar **prophecy** about so many things that came to be?
  - Why would a liar choose to claim to be the God of the **Jews**?
  - Someone who lived as Jesus lived, taught as Jesus taught, and died as Jesus died could not have been a liar.

- Was Jesus a lunatic?
  - His **behavior** doesn't indicate that he was delusional or out of touch with reality
  - His **teachings**, conversations and **interactions** don't cause us to question whether he was of sound mind
  - His **emotional** reactions don't lead us to question his stability
- Was Jesus Lord?
  - Some argue that the idea of Jesus' **deity** was introduced at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.
    - The New Testament documents were written within **decades** of Christ's death and resurrection and predate the council by more than 200 years
    - The NT authors, while writing from different perspectives and to different audiences, all share the **theme** that Jesus is God
    - Writings from early Christian fathers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries (before the council) also **agree** with the NT documents
    - There are **secular** writings from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century that corroborate the NT claims (even documenting that early Christians were persecuted for this belief)
  - What other evidence is there that Jesus is Lord?

**Q. What other alternatives do we have to Jesus being either a liar, lunatic or Lord?**

- According to some, there could be a fourth option – legend.
  - This criticism suggests that the "trilemma" is based on a false premise which assumes the **accuracy** of the Gospel accounts
  - Instead, the suggestion is that the claims made by Jesus were **invented** by early Christians seeking to glorify Jesus
- Other criticism suggests that Jesus' statements in the NT were ambiguous and therefore have been **misinterpreted** (not actually claims of divinity)
- Other criticism also suggests that the "trilemma" is not **logical** (false) because it insists there are only 3 options, when there could be more

**Q. Why would someone not be able to accept Jesus as Lord if they clearly believe he was neither a liar nor lunatic?**