

FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE:
**WHO
IS
JESUS?**

BY DON ANDERSON



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Sake: Who Is
Jesus?**

**By
Don Anderson**

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Chapter 1

Who is Jesus?

Many people today believe all religions are essentially the same and worship the same God...that simply is not true.

The messages of numerous religious leaders throughout history proclaim their particular beliefs to their followers. Confucius, Jesus, Buddha, and Mohammed are several of the better-known religious leaders. In the past two hundred years others, such as Joseph Smith and Charles (Taze) Russell, have risen up for a season and then died. Most of these leaders met resistance of some sort, but none to the level that Jesus encountered. Jesus is the name that evokes a myriad of emotions and responses in people of all cultural and religious thinking. No other person has received such microscopic scrutiny. When Jesus was on earth, many

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devoted their lives to Him, while others wanted to kill Him. Some thought He was a great leader; others said He was a deceiver. Many were persuaded God sent Him to earth, yet others strongly felt that He worked through the power of Satan. So, who is Jesus? This is undoubtedly one of the most debated questions of all time.

Today, ask several people what they think of Jesus, and do not be surprised if no two responses are the same. Even now, Jesus' name still stirs up a wide array of responses. Some give Him the highest respect; others think He is a charlatan. Some people love him with their whole heart; others despise him. Many frequently swear by Him. By doing so, some are taking His name in vain and others are giving Him the highest praise. Over the years, Jesus has been the topic of both written and visual works. Numerous books, starting with the New Testament, contain both positive and negative opinions about Him. Movies portray His life and death, offering a wide spectrum of viewpoints.

Some cast Him in a favorable light; others express critical connotations. Television specials have explored and documented His life. Peter Jennings of ABC moderated a one-hour special program on Jesus' life in June 2000. Jennings interviewed an assortment of religious leaders, gathering information about who they believe Jesus was and why He came to earth. Jesus made several astounding claims that drew a sharp distinction between His own identity and that of others. As a result, although Jesus was a Jew, even among His countrymen there was a wide range of opinions and emotions about Him.

Worldwide there are many religions, and virtually all of them acknowledge Jesus. Only a few organized groups recognize most religious figures; however, most acknowledge that Jesus lived and had great influence. This alone demonstrates the importance of knowing as much about Him as possible. Although many religions recognize His existence, there is wide disagreement concerning who He is. Some

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claim Jesus was just a good man and a prophet, others say He was a created being of some sort, still others say He was the Son of God. Only one of these positions can be right. If one religious group believes Jesus is a good man and a prophet, they are directly at odds with those believing He is the Son of God, as well as with those believing He is a created being. If Jesus is the Son of God, He cannot be part of creation, for these viewpoints directly oppose each other. Clearly, the fundamental question is: Who is Jesus?

Many people today believe all religions are essentially the same and worship the same God. From the Biblical perspective, that simply is not true. In John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The Bible says Jesus is THE WAY, not a way. The Bible teaches He is the way to the Father. A proper understanding of His identity is required for a person to know the Father God. In addition to every major religion acknowledging Jesus, our Julian

calendar centers on His birth (A.D., B.C.). Secular merchants and media acknowledge Easter Sunday as the day commemorating Jesus' resurrection. Since Jesus impacts society in so many areas, understanding of His identity becomes a critical focus. For one seeking the truth, the beginning point of research should be gaining as complete an understanding of His identity as possible. This would include gaining all the information available about who He is. There are differing opinions on this, depending on the source of material. This book will focus on what the Bible says about Jesus.

Believing only one religion can be right seems arrogant and offensive to some individuals. In a zealous effort for achieving unity and peace, people often are willing for compromise. Unfortunately, compromising truth leads to error. It is not brash to believe you have the truth. The following sports example illustrates this point. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers won the Super Bowl in 2002. It is not brash for them to say they were the best

team in the National Football League for the 2002 season. This fact is in the record books. Knowing the truth about Jesus should bring pride and confidence in that belief. It is not necessary to put people down during a disagreement. Rather, lovingly explain the areas of controversy and let listeners check them out for themselves. One will never win others over by putting down their beliefs. My advice to Christians is to share the Jesus that you know. It is important to explain the distinctions between Christianity and other beliefs, focusing mainly on the claims of Christ.

Jesus is one of the most controversial figures in history. Many people today say He is the Son of God. This statement is Biblically correct. Unfortunately, many religious groups say Jesus is the Son of God, but their meaning is very different from that of evangelical Christianity. When questioning them, it becomes apparent they actually believe He was a created being of some sort. Therefore, in today's spiritual climate, stating Jesus is the Son of God is

incomplete. What then, is the best way to portray Jesus and clearly distinguish Christianity's core belief? To agree with the Bible's teachings about Jesus, *Christians must proclaim Him as God in the flesh.*

1 John 2:22-23 reads, "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?...Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either." This verse reinforces the fact that a wrong belief about Jesus' identity ultimately means one does not know the Father either. Denying the Son's deity is also denying the Father. What does the Word of God say about this issue? In John 4:25-26 we find the terms Christ and Messiah are synonymous. Jesus was telling the woman at the well that He was the Messiah. The Old Testament foretold the Messiah's deity. Isaiah 7:14 reads: "the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel." In Matthew 1:23 we learn the term Immanuel means God with us.

Someone recently commented that many parents name their sons Immanuel, inferring it is

not significant that Jesus was given that term. Human parents naming a son Immanuel is quite different from God stating that Jesus was to be called Immanuel. God told the prophet Isaiah that Jesus was to be given this title. His messenger Isaiah foretold the Messiah's deity many years before His birth. Later on, Isaiah recorded another prophecy about the coming child (Messiah). Isaiah 9:6 states that the child would have many titles. The child's most important title is Mighty God. Think of that! The prophet, under God's direction, clearly enunciated that Jesus would be deity. That was a powerful statement!

The Old Testament contains other passages speaking of the deity of Jesus. Psalm 45:1-9 speaks of the coming King. This psalm is not talking about God the Father, because in verse two we learn that God blessed Him forever. God does not bless Himself. In verses six and seven, we read that the throne of the King is forever. These verses also refer to the King's deity by calling Him God. Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes

this passage and advises us that verses six and seven refer to the Son. This validates that the King in Psalm 45 refers to Jesus and His deity.

In Micah 5:2, we find another reference to the coming Messiah. This passage refers to Him as “The One to be Ruler in Israel.” Messiah was to come from the tribe of Judah and would be born in Bethlehem. The verse concludes by stating that His “goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” This statement refers to the eternal existence of the coming ruler. Only deity has eternal existence (Genesis 1:1, John 1:1). No created being of any sort can claim eternal existence; only the creator can! Many people believe the Old Testament does not mention Jesus. As already noted, references to Jesus exist in several passages. The prophets wrote that the Messiah (Jesus) was to be deity! Zechariah 12:8-10 provides insight on Jesus. Verse eight says that in the end-times the “Lord” will defend Jerusalem. He will destroy their enemies. Verse 10 gives a vivid description of the Lord. It states that the Jews

will "...look on Me whom they pierced." Since the Lord Jesus is the person they pierced, it would indicate that He is deity.

The Old Testament often refers to the deity of Messiah and Jesus, and this teaching prevails throughout the entire Bible. The New Testament contains many passages teaching and referring to Jesus and His divine claims. In John 5:18 the Jews understood that Jesus was claiming equality with the Father, which enraged them to the point of seeking to kill Him. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, was stating that He was equal with God the Father. The Jewish leaders just could not cope with His claims. In John 10:27-33 the Jews again observed that Jesus was claiming to be God. The Jews did not comprehend how a man could also be God. This claim by Jesus infuriated them to the point of wanting to stone Him. Looking back, I am amazed that the scribes and Pharisees could not figure out who He was. These religious leaders had studied all the prophecies about Messiah and His deity. When

they actually looked at Jesus in His bodily form, however, they did not believe He was truly deity conceived by the Holy Spirit.

John 8:58 records a conversation in which Jesus referred to Himself as I AM. God was talking to Moses at the burning bush when He referred to Himself as I AM (Exodus 3:14). God's annunciation of His identity was something Moses never forgot. In John, when Jesus referred to Himself in the same manner as God did when He spoke at the burning bush, the conclusion is evident. He was claiming to be God! The unbelieving Jews of that era understood this claim, for in John 8:59 they attempted to stone Him for what they thought was blasphemy. Their hardened hearts and lack of spiritual understanding kept them from the truth.

In the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to offer blood sacrifices as payment for sin. He instructed the people that only animals without blemish qualified as a sacrifice. All animal sacrifices looked ahead to Jesus'

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sacrifice. His offering, through death on the cross, ended all further need for restitution (Hebrews 10:12-14). Jesus was the sacrifice without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:19). In order to be a spotless sacrifice He had to live a sinless human life (2 Corinthians 5:21). There is only one way someone could live a perfect life – He would have to be deity. The Bible states that Jesus lived a sinless life. In Hebrews 4:15 we read that Jesus “was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.” Jesus is the only one that could have lived a sinless life. No other person in history has ever made the claim of living without committing any sin. This claim sets Him apart from all other religious leaders in history! Acts 20:28 states: “...church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” When Jesus gave His life on the cross, His death would not have significance if He were a mere mortal. If he were mortal, He would have only been a martyr dying for a good cause. Only God, Himself, could be the perfect sacrifice that was the required payment for the sin of

mankind. If God bought the church with His own blood, Jesus is the only One that could fulfill that statement and those previously quoted. Buying the church with His own blood as stated in Acts 20:28 verifies that Jesus was God.

Biblical Affirmation of Jesus' Deity

The Gospels note several incidents reaffirming Jesus' deity. In Mark 2:5-7 Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic He was about to heal. The scribes reasoned in their hearts that He was blaspheming, because only God can forgive sins. They were partly right—forgiving sins is one of the prerogatives belonging only to God. Human beings forgive others in order to restore a strained or broken relationship. A simple mortal cannot restore another person's standing before God. Jesus was exercising divine authority in forgiving the man's sin or He was blaspheming.

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Jesus exhibited power over nature. In Luke 8:22-24 we read that Jesus got into a boat with His disciples. When they encountered a windstorm so fierce that waves of water began to fill the boat, the disciples woke Jesus because they were terrified. In verse 24, Jesus spoke the word, the wind ceased, and the lake became calm immediately. This incident contributed to the disciples' initial understanding that Jesus was more than a mere mortal.

Matthew 14:22-33 relates the account of Jesus walking on water. Perhaps you have heard the statement: "If you think you are perfect, try walking on water." Walking on water demonstrated Jesus had power over nature – an attribute exclusive to God! Some might argue that Peter's walking on the water proved humans have abilities and powers that Jesus displayed. Careful reading of the passage reveals that Peter asked Jesus to command him to come to Him on the water. Peter was able to walk on the water only at Jesus' direction. If Peter had been able to walk on the water with

his own ability, he would not have started sinking moments later when he took his eyes off Jesus and started focusing on the stormy waves. Additionally, he would have been able to regain his position on the waves and resume walking if he had the power within himself. It was not Peter's power that enabled this feat; he was depending entirely on Jesus' supernatural attribute!

Exodus 34:14 instructs God's people not to worship anyone but the Lord God. He is a jealous God and worshipping anyone or anything else is idolatry. In John 9:6-38 we find the story of a man blind from birth. Jesus restored his sight by putting clay on his eyes and directing him to go wash it off. In verses 35-38, the man whose sight was restored came back, wanting to know who Jesus was. When Jesus told him He was the Son of God, the man believed and worshipped Him. According to this account, Jesus received and approved of the man worshipping Him. No one knew the Scriptures better than Jesus did. The last

command of the Bible is found in Revelations 22:9 where we are told to “Worship God.” Jesus’ response to the blind man leaves two possible conclusions: Either *He was a lunatic of epic proportion*, or, *He was God in the flesh!*

Finally, in John 2:18-22 Jesus made a prophetic statement that I believe was the most astounding prediction of all time! He prophesied that His body would be destroyed (crucified) but that in three days He would raise Himself from the dead! Think about it. Jesus stated He would rise from death by His own power. Undoubtedly, this was the most awesome display of power the world has ever witnessed. In today’s world, an atomic bomb would be the biggest display of power ever known. Bombs are illustrations of the power to destroy; Jesus’ display of power was to save lives! Jesus’ statement was so amazing even the chief priests and Pharisees could not forget it. After Jesus’ crucifixion, they went to Pilate asking for a secure watch on His tomb, because they remembered His prophecy in Matthew

27:63 that stated, "...Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.'" One of the best Scriptures for defending the deity of Christ is John 2:18. Jesus' claim of raising Himself from the dead does not contradict other passages where the Bible tells us God raised Him from the dead. Rather, these verses are in harmony with each other. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all participated in the resurrection of Jesus, and yet, any one of the three could have done it alone. The statement in John 2:18-22 and other Scriptures stating God raised Jesus from the dead are true with each standing on its own merit.

There is another example of this seeming contradiction. In Genesis 1:1 the Bible tells us God created the heavens and the earth. In John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16, the Bible says all things were made through Jesus. This may seem to be contradictory at first reading, but these verses are compatible in the same manner as those discussed above. Thus, the Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit participated equally in creation and in Jesus' resurrection.

In John 10:17-18, Jesus spoke to the Pharisees about this issue. In verse 17, He stated that "I lay down my life that I may take it again." In verse 18, He explained further by saying, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Jesus was telling them that no one could take His life; He would lay it down. He also reminded them that He had power to take it again (raise Himself), just like He stated in the John 2:18-22 passage.

The Apostle Paul told Festus that Jesus "would be the first to rise from the dead" in Acts 26:23. We know this statement is not referring to numerical order. Several people were raised from the dead in Old Testament accounts. Jesus raised several people from the dead during His earthly ministry. By this we know Paul's statement had a deeper meaning. In I Corinthians 15:20-21 we read that "Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For

since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead.” Here we see Jesus is the first fruit. At the resurrection He did something significant that had never been done before. Jesus, the God Man, introduced the resurrection, starting with His own! He was the first, and only, person to raise Himself. He established the resurrection factor for all believers. In John 11:25 Jesus told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life.” In John 5:21-26 Jesus expounded even further on this subject. In verse 21 He stated, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.” Here, Jesus told us that just as the Father has power to raise the dead, He also has the same power. Jesus can give life to anyone He wishes. There are no exception clauses in Jesus’ statement in verse 21 or anywhere else. Power to raise “whoever He wills” means Jesus was able to raise Himself from the dead. In John 5:26 Jesus stated that “as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself.” Jesus

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had the same power over life and death, including His earthly life, as the Father does. Since Jesus lived on this earth as God, He obviously had the power to raise Himself from the dead.

Jesus told Philip in John 14:9, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father...” Philip most certainly had a hard time grasping the meaning of those words. It was difficult for all the disciples to comprehend that God could take on human form. Once again, the statement has only one logical conclusion. If Jesus was just a man or a created being, He could not have made that statement to Philip. It was another precise declaration of His deity. Jesus was God in the form of man on earth. He came to reveal Himself to humanity and to pay the required price for our sins. Anyone seeing Jesus while He was alive was seeing God. Some might argue that no one could see God and live. This statement is true in the sense that no one could see the full Shekinah glory of God and survive. A human being could not stand in the full

presence of God's holiness and live. We must remember that Jesus was in a human body. Taking on human form required the partial hiding of His full glory. Veiling of His glory was another privilege that Jesus gave up during His earthly life (Philippians 2:7-8).

In Paul's epistles, we find the deity of Christ mentioned repeatedly. Paul often uses the terms Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus, or Jesus Christ our Lord in his writings. In these passages, the Greek word for Lord is *kurios*, meaning "supreme in authority." The many references to the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament present another Biblical claim that there is no authority above Him. If someone is truly supreme in authority, there cannot be another higher than that person. It does not mean Jesus is over God; rather, that they are equal (John 5:18). Romans 10:9 tells us if we want to be saved, we must confess the Lord Jesus and acknowledge that He is supreme. Apart from believing in the deity of Christ, there is no salvation.

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An encounter with zealous missionaries in the 1970s motivated me to always be prepared for defending the Gospel of Christ. One Saturday morning, two members of a cult knocked on my door. I was a very young and enthusiastic Christian, ready for an opportunity to share my faith. I opened the door and invited them in. The men began telling me about Jesus, presenting Him much differently than what I knew and believed Him to be. Although I knew they were wrong in their presentation of Him, I lacked the knowledge to refute their doctrine.

Thirty years have passed since that morning, yet too many Christians today have the same problem I had then. I pray the Lord uses this little book to help readers in two vital areas: First, to equip believers for defending the deity of Jesus effectively and second, to help seekers find the truth about Him. Any person wanting to share the Gospel must offer a strong defense of the deity of Christ.

Experts now estimate there are over 1,100 recognized cults and they all stumble at the

deity of Christ. I have read many definitions of a cult. Most are wordy, complex and difficult to understand. All cults have particular nuances and are unique in some way. Many cults contain perversions and brainwashing purposely meant to draw people into deception from which it is difficult to break away. I have studied the main cults in depth and have a basic knowledge of most new ones. Since all share one common factor, defining them is easier than many think. This common distinction is the core of the Christian faith. My definition is simply this: *A cult is any religious organization that denies the deity of Christ.*

Most cults believe and teach that Jesus is a created being of some sort. Each has a little different twist, but generally, they share that conclusion. One of the most common passages used to teach this is Colossians 1:15-16. Verse 15 states that Jesus is the firstborn over all creation. The cults use this statement to teach that He is the highest creation of God. The term firstborn actually refers to a position of priority;

that Jesus is the chief over creation. Verse 16 gives clearer understanding. It states, "For by Him (meaning Jesus) all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth." If Jesus is a created being, that statement cannot be true. If Jesus is a created being, then all things were not created through Him! The passage actually contradicts the cults' own teaching when interpreted for what it says. One must beware taking a verse out of context and twisting it into a false teaching.

The Bible tells us plainly that if we do not abide in the doctrine of Christ, we do not have God. We must have the correct understanding of who Jesus is, for if we do not, we do not know God! Since denying the deity of Christ is the central, common thread of all cults, distinguishing true believers from the false is uncomplicated. Although it can be determined easily, do not think it lacks importance. To the contrary, it is vitally necessary for me to know what my church believes. If I am uncertain, I need to ask for clarification. Should my spirit

raise a red flag regarding the issue, I must investigate for myself. If I learn the leaders of my church do not believe that Jesus is God in the flesh, I have the responsibility to get out of it as quickly as I can! It is imperative to make the belief that Jesus is deity, God in the flesh, my number one criteria for selecting a church fellowship.