

Christianity and Hot Button Issues

Biblical and Cultural Challenges Christians Must Face

#6 – WASN'T JESUS JUST A MAN?

The Historical and Biblical Question

- 1) When Did Christians first conceive of Jesus as God? Historical Question
- 2) Does the New Testament teach that Jesus was God? Biblical Question.

The Historical Facts

First century Judaism was strictly and staunchly monotheistic and unitarian. In Jewish monotheism, God alone is (1) Creator, (2) Ruler of all things, and (3) the object of worship.

Christianity came in and understood Jesus as identifying himself with the one true God of the OT. Since the identity of Jesus with Yahweh occurs in all of the NT books, this belief predates the writing of those books. The NT writers saw no tension with this supposed conflict.

Nomina Sacra (Sacred Name)

Most manuscript copies of the NT dating early in the 2nd century on (50 yrs after NT written) contain contracted abbreviations (first and last letter) of 4 common words: GOD, LORD, JESUS, and CHRIST with a line drawn over both letters. This indicates Christians regarded Christ as God.



The Biblical Facts

Some Key Passages on the Deity of Christ:

- 1) **John 1:1-5.** John is clearly alluding to Gen. 1:1. “The Word was God” is a predicate nominative which means that the verb “was” is an equating verb. Thus, “the Word” is equated to “God.” See also Heb. 1:1-4.
- 2) **1 Corinthians 8:6** is a reformulation of the *Shema* in Deut. 6:4. Note similarity to Rom. 11:36. “Yet for us there is but **one God**, the Father, **from** whom are **all things** and we *exist for* Him; and **one Lord**, Jesus Christ, **by** whom are **all things**, and we *exist through* Him. The Father is the efficient cause (*from*) of the creation, Jesus is the instrumental cause (*by*). The Father is the goal (*for*) of creation, Jesus is the instrumental agent (*through*) for that goal. See also Col. 1:15-20; 2:9-10 and Eph. 1:8b-14 (note the “all things” phrasing in these passages).
- 3) **Philippians 2:6-11.** “Form” = outward manifestation of inward essence. Note verse 10 quotes Isa. 45:23 which is a clear reference to Yahweh that is now attributed to Jesus.

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- 4) **Mark 2:1-12; 14:61-63.** Note that Jesus draws from Dan. 7:13-14 for “Son of Man” title 79 times. He uses “Son of God” title only 5 times. See Isa. 43:25 for God’s prerogative to forgive.

- 5) **John 12:38-41.** Jesus quotes from both Isaiah 6 (in vs. 40) and 53 (in vs. 38). Jesus is identified with the subject of Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6. Also note the phrase “high and lifted up” in Isa. 6:1 (referring to Yahweh) and Isa. 52:13 (referring to the messianic Servant).

- 6) **The “I AM” sayings:** John 4:26; 6:20, 35, 48; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8. Normally, the Greek first person “be” verb *eimi* means “I am.” Adding *ego* (“I”) to *eimi* is emphatic and not normal. Jesus is drawing from Exodus 3:14 and the giving of the sacred name of God—*Yahweh*.

- 7) The titles “**Alpha and Omega**”/ “**First and Last**”/ “**Beginning and End**” in Revelation: (1) Rev. 1:8 (God/ Jesus); (2) Rev. 1:17 (Jesus); (3) Rev. 21:6 (God); (4) Rev. 22:13 (Jesus). These draw from Isa. 44:6; 48:12 (*Yahweh*).

Why We Need a Savior Who is Both Fully God and Fully Man (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 1:15)

1) We need a man to suffer the pains of the curse (Heb. 2:9)	But God to overcome its power (Heb. 2:10)
2) We need a man as an acceptable atoning sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:9)	But God to ensure it was unblemished, free of the curse of sin (Heb. 2:17; 1 Pet. 1:18-19)
3) We need a man to suffer and bear our punishment for sin (Isa. 53:3-5)	But God to endure the full weight of it and crush it to pieces (Matt. 26:39; Heb. 12:2)
4) We need a man to represent us and be tested with obedience (Matt. 5:17) as Adam was	But God to facilitate impeccable adherence to the moral demands of the divine will (Rom. 5:18-19)
5) We need a man to be tempted as we are (Heb. 2:18)	But God , who is free of sin, to overcome all temptation (Heb. 4:15)
6) We need a man to die a brutal death of retribution (Isa. 53:4-9)	But God to destroy death by the Son’s dying and rising again (1 Cor. 15:20-26)
7) We need a man to become like us—to assume our flesh and blood (John 1:14)	But God to make us like himself by uniting us to his Son (Rom. 6:1-11)

Resources on Deity of Christ:

Book: John MacArthur, *The Deity of Christ*

Book: Robert M. Bowman Jr. & J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus into His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ*