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# Did Jesus Claim To Be God?

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The question if Jesus HIMSELF ever claimed to be God, or the Son of God, comes up all the time. Many people ask if Jesus actually claimed he was God. Some people of other religions like to state that Jesus never proclaimed himself to be God so they can point out similarities between religions, or because they want to undermine the foundational truth of the New Testament. If they are at least a little educated about the Bible they might say that many others made such claims ABOUT him, but Jesus himself never made those claims. Those who say this are usually ignorant of early Jewish culture and their religious traditions. Of course, some of them are just selling something without really wanting to know the truth.

To answer this question adequately, we must first understand a very important aspect of Jewish culture at the time Jesus walked the earth. This cultural aspect related to the requirement of testimony to establish fact.

The Jewish tradition of establishing statements as FACT through the use of witnesses began back with the Law as revealed to Moses, and is presented in Numbers 36 and Deuteronomy 16. In those Scripture passages, it took the testimonies of at least two witnesses, and sometimes three, to establish the FACTS of a murder. No one could be convicted of murder without AT LEAST two witnesses, and in some circumstances three witnesses. Over the next thousand years, this principle began to be applied to any claim of a serious nature. Two witnesses established the FACT, and three witnesses made it irrefutable. And a man was not allowed to testify on his own behalf – he was considered a false witness. The Jews, at the time of Jesus, knew all of this. All lived by this, some died by this. And Jesus used this practice to clearly and effectively declare that he was the Son of God.

However, Jesus seldom made that claim about himself directly.

Jesus allowed others to proclaim he was the Son of God. Jesus allowed others to proclaim he was the Lamb of God come to take away the sins of the world. Jesus allowed others to proclaim he was the Messiah. Yet seldom did Jesus make these direct claims himself. He allowed the testimonies of others to "convict" him of his Deity. This process of allowing others to establish his claims spoke more powerfully TO THE JEWS than any

claims he could have made for himself. And this process worked for him. It worked so well that the people worshiped him and they followed him. And it worked so well that the Jewish religious leaders hated him and tried to kill him.

Make no mistake about this. Jesus established VERY CLEARLY his claim to Deity many times in many ways, only he used an approach that was clear to those people of his time; they understood old Jewish traditions. Two thousand years later, in modern Western thinking, Christ's teaching methods are not as clear to us. It would be like a young man who grew up in New York City listening to someone using old farming techniques in an analogy to make something clear. It simply would not be clear to that modern city dweller. But Jesus certainly communicated it clearly to those Jews of his time.

HE DID IT SO CLEARLY AND SO WELL THAT HE WAS CRUCIFIED FOR IT!

Jesus uttered a long monologue to clarify this process of others testifying to his Deity, as recorded in John's Gospel. Some of that discourse follows:

*If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. [John 5:31-40, NIV]*

In this monologue, Jesus says there are four - not two or three, but FOUR - witnesses of Jesus and his teachings: John the Baptist, the demonstrations of power Jesus performed, the Father himself, and the Scriptures.

Jesus claimed that there were four powerful and important witnesses that give testimony of his claims and his teachings. He presented those four witnesses as if they were clear enough and powerful enough to convict him in a court of law of being God.

Are there any witnesses against these claims that can stand up against those four witnesses?

No? Well, let's see if there is any more evidence that Jesus was God.

The first evidence I offer is the Scripture itself. Each of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) were written and in circulation within 60 years of the death of Jesus: Mark as early as 45 A.D. and John as late as 92 A.D. This means that all four Gospels were in circulation while eye-witnesses of Jesus and his ministry were still alive. Yet, no one throughout history has been able to produce any evidence at all of any eye-witness claiming the Gospel accounts are untrue. No one! NO EVIDENCE!

Historians see this as the most powerful evidence of accuracy that any writer could want.

Let me give you an example. Suppose someone were to write a very negative newspaper article about the mayor in your town or city. That same day you can expect the mayor and his people to have a rebuttal released. And the day after that you can expect people in your area to write letters to the editor of that newspaper expressing either agreement or disagreement with the views and claims expressed in the article.

There are many, many people who have at least some firsthand knowledge of the fact in that story, and many of them would speak up.

The fact that we have no personal letters or official documents from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century expressing any disagreement with the Gospel accounts is strong evidence for their accuracy. In fact, the best-known historian of that time, Flavius Josephus, a Jewish man that wrote tons of documents recording facts and situations regarding the Jewish nation and the Roman government actually wrote some comments backing up the Gospel accounts.

And those Gospel accounts record that Jesus stated his deity so clearly that he was killed for those claims

The second evidence I offer is IN Scripture. Many times Jesus made statements that the Jews in attendance knew to be claims of Deity by Jesus. How do we know they believed that Jesus was claiming to be God? Because they wanted to stone him for blasphemy!

Make no mistake, the Jews of Christ's time believed Jesus claimed to be God, and he claimed it several times! Let's look at some examples.

The ministry of John the Baptist went far beyond getting people wet. John was asked by priests and by Pharisees and by Levites (all different "offices" of spiritual authority at the time of Jesus) who he was and why he was preaching this stuff. John replied that he was there to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. He specifically claimed, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

This claim was taken from chapter forty of the Book of Isaiah, a passage that all Jews knew related to the Messiah. The full passage from Isaiah was:

*A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rough ground shall become level, and the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." [Isaiah 40:3-5, NIV]*

From this passage, Jewish religious leaders taught that Isaiah prophesied that someone will someday come, sent by God, to prepare the way for God to visit mankind. His role will be to prepare the hearts of the people to receive him. This passage was taken by the Pharisees and the rabbis to mean two things. First, the Messiah will someday come to the Jews. And second, the Messiah was a representative of God who would speak for God. Some of the rabbis and Pharisees believed that the Messiah would be God himself come to earth because the phrase used by Isaiah, and which we translate into English as LORD, usually using all caps, is the same phrase Moses used to refer to the God who gave the Law. The Hebrew wording meant *Yahweh our Elohim*, and was directly related to the "I AM" name of God which God himself used with Moses.

Isaiah claimed that someday a man would be sent by *Yahweh our Elohim* to prepare the hearts of the Jews to receive *Yahweh our Elohim* when he comes to earth to take away our sins. And John claimed to be that man sent by God to prepare the hearts of the Jews for the coming Messiah. It is this same man, this same voice, that Isaiah goes on to say in that same chapter:

*You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. [Isaiah 40:9-10, NIV]*

So John says in front of witnesses, *"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! This is the One I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"*

Make no mistake about it. When John claimed that he was the man in the chapter forty of Isaiah, EVERYONE who heard him KNEW John was claiming to be preparing the way for the Messiah. And many KNEW this was the coming of the God above all Gods.

And make no mistake about it. When John claimed Jesus was the Lamb who would take away the sins of the world, EVERYONE who heard him KNEW John was claiming Jesus was the Messiah, and many believed the Messiah was God himself come to earth. And to underline what he meant, John went on to say:

*I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.* [John 1:34, NIV]

As further proof that the people around John knew what John meant, when he said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God*" [John 1:36, KJV] two of John's disciples left John and became disciples of Jesus.

Another place where someone made a direct and powerful claim of the Deity of Jesus occurs just a few verses later in the same chapter of John's Gospel.

Jesus was recruiting some new disciples; Philip was one of them. Philip went to his best bud, Nathaniel, and brought him to Jesus. After their initial meeting, Nathaniel said, "*Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.*" [John 1:49, NIV]

Did Jesus deny it? Did Jesus admit it?

Not at all. Instead, Jesus responded in a peculiar manner.

*Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." He then added, "I tell all of you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."* [John 1:50-51, NIV]

First, Jesus acted as if the claim was true, a move that only a stupid man would make in front of several disciples who would have many, many opportunities to prove the claim wrong; or a move that only an insane man would allow to stand without challenge because it could lead to Christ's stoning and death. Clearly, if this claim were not true, Jesus would have to be stupid or insane to allow it to stand unchallenged.

Second, Jesus added to the claim by Nathaniel with an equally outlandish claim of his own: The Son of Man. Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man some 80 times in the four Gospel accounts. And each time Jesus referred to the Son of Man, he added to the meaning and the role of the Son of Man in a collective description, clearly making references to the Messiah and at times to the Son of God. Add all those references up and the composite picture is definitely that of God coming to the earth as a man, and very definitely Jesus claiming to be that man.

For clarification of this, we need only move along two chapters in this same Gospel account. Here Jesus is dealing with Nicodemus, a Pharisee that secretly believed in Jesus and, because of this, came to Jesus after dark one night. In their conversation, Jesus again referred to himself as the Son of Man, making sure that this expert in the Law and the Prophets would understand the next comment.

*If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven." [John 3:12-13, KJV]*

Jesus just claimed that the Son of Man came down from heaven, and somehow is still in heaven. The Son of Man cannot do this unless the Son of Man is God!

And Jesus went on and spoke of what the Son of Man must experience.

AND NOTICE THIS: Jesus said he was the Son of Man. Then Jesus said the Son of Man must be "lifted up" and die...

*"...that whosoever believeth in him (the Son of Man) should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." [John 3:15-16, KJV]*

PLEASE NOTE THAT JESUS SAID THIS TWICE: "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jesus said it once concerning the Son of Man. And then Jesus immediately repeated it concerning the Son of God.

There can be no question that Jesus taught that the Son of Man and the Son of God are one and the same person. And there can be no doubt that Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man. Eighty times!

Another time Jesus referred to himself as Deity was the first time he visited the Temple as an adult. Outside in the courts surrounding the Temple, he found all sorts of businesses making a profit from the sacrifices required in the Law. He set about driving them out of the Temple area, saying, *"Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"* [John 2:16, NIV]

Please notice that Jesus did not use the traditional Jewish phrase "our Father," but instead used the personal phrase "my Father." Jesus later used the same phrase "my Father" and the Pharisees responded with claims of BLASPHEMY!

The next time that Jesus made these claims was when he spoke with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well outside of Sychar in Samaria. After an exchange on some peripheral issues, Jesus said some things about the woman that really made an impact on her. The woman's response was, *"I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us."* [John 4:25, NIV]. By this response, she showed that she shared in the Jewish beliefs about the Messiah.

*Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." [John 4:26, NIV]*

There can be no question but that Jesus called himself the Jewish Messiah. Anyone who denies this is terribly ignorant or is lying to you.

To follow up with that claim, Jesus stayed in town for two more days and taught the Samaritans much concerning his being the Messiah, the Son of God who comes to earth to die for our sins. The result of Jesus teaching these things is found in the words of the Samaritan people themselves:

*They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." [John 4:42, NIV]*

After two solid days of teaching, these people could not have concluded that Jesus was the Savior of the world unless Jesus CLAIMED to be the Savior of the world!

A few days later, Jesus made it to Nazareth. On the Sabbath, Jesus stood up to read from the Scriptures. He chose to read another section from the Prophet Isaiah. This particular section was also well-known to all Jews to be a prophecy about the coming Messiah. For hundreds of years the rabbis and the scribes and all other Jewish authorities had taught this passage to be a Messianic prophecy.

According to custom and procedure, Jesus stood to read from the Scriptures. Following the reading of Scripture, custom and tradition required the man offer some teaching or commentary on what was read. Instead, Jesus rolled up the scroll and handed it back to the Scribe, indicating he was finished, and sat down without a word. After a dramatic silence, Jesus simply said, *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* [Luke 4:21, NIV]

This was no teaching. This was an announcement!

A very powerful example of Jesus claiming to be God was recorded in Matthew, Mark, AND Luke. The fact that this was recorded in all three Gospel accounts showed that those authors thought this was important, too.

Jesus was in Capernaum, with Peter at his mother in-law's house. The crowd gathered, as usual, to hear Jesus teach. They gathered around in such a throng that there was no way any more people could crowd in. Christ's teaching was interrupted by some men tearing a hole in the roof. (In the stunned silence caused by the demolition work, I can just hear Peter saying, *"Oh man! Her mom is going to KILL me for this!"* But for some reason not one of the three Gospel writers decided to include this particular comment by Peter.)

As soon as the men cleared a hole large enough, they lowered a bed with a paralyzed man to the floor in front of Jesus.

As one would expect, Jesus was very impressed with both their efforts and their faith. So Jesus forgave the sins of the paralyzed man.

The lazy person would leave this alone and keep on reading. But the scribes and the Pharisees who were there DID NOT leave this alone! They were quite disturbed at what Jesus said. Let me explain why they were upset.

Every Jew at that time lived according to the traditional Jewish teaching, quite common among many different religions throughout human history, that God blesses righteous men by improving their health and their wealth, and God curses UNrighteous men by attacking their health and their wealth. According to Jewish beliefs, this man was paralyzed simply because there was sin in his life and he was cursed by God. This belief is underscored in the account where Jesus healed the man born blind, and Christ's disciples asked, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?*" [John 9:2, NIV]

Since sin was supposedly the cause of this man's paralysis, Jesus went directly to the heart of the matter and forgave his sins, supposedly removing God's curse on this man. Every Jew in that crowd, except maybe the Pharisees, expected the man to experience physical healing immediately or in the near future as a result of receiving forgiveness. But Jesus had an ulterior motive for doing things this way: Jesus wanted to get the religious leaders really stirred up.

And it worked! The scribes and Pharisees plotted among themselves NOT about the possible healing on the Sabbath, but because Jesus claimed to forgive the man of his sins. In their words, they accurately claimed no one can forgive sins but God, and they accused him of blasphemy.

So, absolutely unperturbed, Jesus responded with the following:

*Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk"? But that you may know that the Son of man has the authority on earth to forgive sins... He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"* [Mark 2:8-12, NIV]

Make no mistake about this. Jesus showed that their traditions closely connected sin and sickness in such a way that one directly caused the other. And Jesus claimed that, because of their close connection, there was no real difference between healing a man

and forgiving his sins. So, to make things VERY clear to everyone there, Jesus did BOTH: he healed the man AND he forgave his sins.

And the Pharisees correctly claimed that only God could forgive sins. This meant that when Jesus claimed to have authority to forgive sins, the Pharisees believed Jesus was claiming to be God and was guilty of blasphemy. The people, on the other hand, believed Jesus was guilty of being God!

There can be no mistake about this. Everyone in that place, including the Pharisees, KNEW Jesus was claiming to be God!

Even more clear is another passage in John's Gospel. It needs no commentary.

*So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. [John 5:16-18, NIV]*

Jesus was taking the position that God was busy 24/7, answering prayers and doing his stuff, so Jesus claimed HE should be busy 24/7 doing what God, his Father, wanted him to do. It was no big deal to Jesus, but it was a VERY BIG DEAL to the scribes and the Pharisees!

Jesus took this to its logical extreme a few weeks later; AGAIN on the Sabbath. Jesus and his disciples were taking a shortcut from somewhere to somewhere by walking through someone's farm. The men were hungry, so they took some lunch to go. When the Pharisees saw Jesus and his disciples (and COUNT on it that they would definitely be seen - these guys were watching Jesus!) picking grain and eating it as they walked, they were upset greatly: harvesting anything, even picking fruit or picking flowers, on the Sabbath violated the rules and traditions the rabbis and Pharisees had stacked on top of the Law from Moses. And Jesus showed he didn't really care by going straight to the heart of the matter.

*Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. [Mark 2:27-28, NIV]*

In the event you conclude that Jesus was a rebel with a cause, a rabble-rouser dedicated to making life miserable for the Pharisees, you just might be right. There is no doubt that Jesus did things in a way that really set off the Jewish leaders.

Further evidence that Jesus was teaching that he was the Son of God was the response he got from his family. They clearly believed that Jesus was claiming his Deity, and they were not happy!

*When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." [Mark 3:21, NIV]*

In another passage from John's Gospel, Jesus is speaking with some people who were there when he fed 5,000 men the day before. It was the next day and these men seemed to want another free lunch. Jesus kept trying to entice them into following him, and the men kept trying to entice Jesus into providing another free meal.

*Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and fishes and had your fill." [John 6:26, NIV]*

So Jesus finally bridged into an issue that pretty much killed the possibility of a free lunch for these men. For about 10 verses, Jesus teaches on his ability to forgive sins and take people with him into eternity. The last few of those verses follow:

*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day." [John 6:38-40, NIV]*

Make no mistake about it. These men knew Jesus was claiming to have come from heaven, that God was HIS FATHER, and that eternal life came through believing in him. It was clear to the men listening that Jesus was teaching about his Deity, and they left without their free lunch.

Perhaps one more passage can be brought to the attention of the serious learner. Again, it is in John's Gospel. Jesus is in Jerusalem again, and teaching in the Temple again, and the scribes and Pharisees are confronting him AGAIN! There was a series of comments passed back and forth about Abraham, and then Jesus delivered a real doozie!

*Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I*

*know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."*

*"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"*

*"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. [John 8:54-59, NIV]*

Again, Jesus used the phrase "my Father" and, if that was not enough, went further to make some comments on Abraham. First, he claimed to be older than Abraham, and second, he used the name of God that God himself used with Moses and the Jews considered to be unpronounceable: "I am."

The fact that Jesus claimed to be God was so clear that the Pharisees picked up stones to stone him to death on the spot.

Perhaps the final proof that Jesus claimed he was God came from the lips of the Jewish leaders themselves. Pilate had taken the position that "I find no fault in him." The Jews wanted Jesus killed and Pilate didn't understand why.

*But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him." The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." [John 19:6-7, NIV]*

The Jewish religious leaders worked hard and long to have Jesus killed. When Pilate asked why, the Jews themselves tell us why.

**BECAUSE HE CLAIMED TO BE THE SON OF GOD!**

Anyone who states that Jesus didn't claim to be God has not read the Gospel accounts, or else they are intentionally denying the truth that they have read.

Anyone who states that Jesus didn't claim to be God is just plain wrong!

This demands the answer to the most important question you will ever face. Author and historian C.S. Lewis said it quite eloquently:

"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 the 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... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God." [Lewis, C.S., [Mere Christianity](#), London: Collins, 1952, p54-56 ]

C.S. Lewis stated that Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord of the Universe. So which is it?

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