



Is Jesus God? (Part 2)

Lesson 3

Last week we began a study of the question that has been faced by the church for 2,000 years, what is Jesus relationship to God? Cults and false religions will often deny the full deity of Christ, and while most Christians believe that Jesus is God, few could articulate a biblical reason as to why. In these two lessons we are seeking to answer that very question.

Can you remember what we talked about last week? Where do we go in Scripture to show that Jesus is God?

Last week's outline:

I. Jesus is called God.

A. Places where Jesus is called God directly.

1. John 1:1 "the Word was God"
2. John 20:28 "my Lord and my God"
3. Romans 9:5 "...Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."
4. Hebrews 1:8 "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever..."

B. Places where Jesus is called God indirectly.

1. Philippians 2:6
2. Colossians 1:15
3. Hebrews 1:3

II. Jesus does things that only God does.

A. Jesus created (Colossians 1:16).

B. Jesus accepts worship (Matthew 28:17; Acts 13:2; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:13-14; 19:10; 22:8-9).

C. Jesus forgives sins (Luke 5:20-24).

D. Jesus masters Scripture (Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 44; 7:28-29).

This week we will be looking at two more ways in which we can see that Scripture teaches that Jesus is God: the things Jesus says about himself and the way the New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament about Jesus.

I. **Jesus said things that only God should say.**

Would you agree or disagree with the statement: Jesus never claimed to be God?

The answer to the above question depends on what you mean by “claimed.” If by that you mean “Jesus never uttered the statement ‘I am God,’” then you would be right. If you mean by that Jesus never thought of himself as God and never said things that pointed in that direction, you would be wrong. Three statements in particular show that Jesus thought of himself as much more than a wise teacher.

A. **“Ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:62; cf Daniel 7:13-14).**

Jesus frequently called himself the “Son of Man,” but what did he mean by this title? It’s possible that this is simply a reference to His humanity – he was the son of a man, i.e. a human. But there is an Old Testament passage that suggests that much more might lie behind this term, and in Mark 14 when Jesus is on trial he calls himself the Son of Man and points to this passage.

What indications do we have that this passage involves more than just a human?

Three things in particular suggest that this character is superhuman. When we look at the passage itself that Jesus alludes to, we note two more interesting points. First, all the nations and peoples of the world serve him. This Hebrew word (*palach*) is used ten times in the Old Testament, once in Ezra and nine times in Daniel. In every other occurrence, this word is used of serving deity.

Secondly, the Son of Man rides on the clouds. “Riding on the clouds” was something that in the time that the Old Testament was written pointed to deity. Ancient Canaanite texts describe Baal as making the clouds his chariot. The Old Testament clearly contradicts this teaching by claiming that it was, in fact, Yahweh who rode on the clouds (Exodus 14:20; 34:5; Numbers 10:34; Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 19:1). In Scripture, God rides on the clouds. In Daniel, the Son of Man rides on the clouds.

Finally, it’s interesting to note how the high priest responded to Jesus: “Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.” (Mark 14:63-64). Those who heard Jesus understood his claim went far beyond the claim to be a human. Now, the Son of Man in Daniel 7 comes to the Ancient of Days (God the Father), and so it’s difficult to know what exactly the religious leaders thought Jesus was claiming. Did they understand his claim as being to full deity? Or did they simply think that as a man

he was claiming to be some sort of superhuman creature? In either case, the seeds of the divinity of Christ are clearly present in Daniel 7, even if the trinity wasn't clearly understood until after Christ's coming. And for Jesus to claim to be the Son of Man meant at the very least that he saw himself as way more than just a nice, moral teacher.

B. "I and my Father are one." (John 10:22-39)

In this incident, Jesus and the Jews get into a heated discussion about whether or not he is the Messiah (the Christ). Christ confirms that he is but ends with the statement "I and my Father are one." This statement is so upsetting that the Jews begin to prepare to stone him! When Jesus asks why, he is told "...for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God."

This is actually the third time in the Gospel of John that the Jews have come tried to stone Jesus because they thought he was making in appropriate claims about himself (John 5:18; 8:58-59).

How does Jesus respond to them? If Jesus did not think he was God, would his answer have alleviated their concerns or stirred them up more?¹

C. "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:48-59, cf Exodus 3:13-14)

Probably the most shocking thing Jesus ever said in regards to his claims to deity is in John 8. Once again, Jesus is arguing with the Jews, and because of their unbelief things are not going well. He tells them that whoever follows him will not die. They counter that Abraham died. He states that Abraham rejoiced to see his day. They counter Abraham died a long time ago and Jesus is not even 50. The response of Jesus to this is crucially important.

"Before Abraham was, I am." To understand how explosive this statement is, we need to realize when Moses asked God who to tell the Israelites. God's response was "I am." Jesus goes out of his way in the Greek² to make sure that he mimics this statement by God, and the Jews know exactly what he is doing and seek to kill him. Not only is claiming to have preexisted, he is claiming to be the God of the Old Testament who revealed himself to Moses.

¹ There is much debate about what exactly Jesus means by his quotation of the startling phrase "Ye are gods.". The two main views on this are (1) Jesus is talking about judges, whose function is viewed as being ultimately a divine task (see Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary on John) or (2) Jesus is talking about angelic creatures that in the OT are sometimes referred to as "gods" (Hebrew *Elohim*, i.e. spiritual beings, see Piper <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/did-jesus-say-we-are-gods>). In either case, Jesus is not backing down from his claims, and the result is that the people attempt to arrest him.

² In Greek, the subject doesn't need to be stated because it is included in the verb (you can just say "am" instead of saying "I am"). When the subject is included, there is normally a reason for it, often it is a point of emphasis.

The actions and statements of Jesus, both from this lesson and the previous, are not the words of some great wise teacher. They are either the words of a crazy person, a charlatan, or someone much more than just an enlightened human. C. S. Lewis made this point very articulately in *Mere Christianity* where he wrote:

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 patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

II. Jesus' followers apply OT passages about God to Jesus.

This finally category is probably the strongest when arguing for Jesus' divinity. In the New Testament there are numerous places where the writers of the New Testament quote passages from the Old Testament that are talking about God, but they apply them to Jesus.

To fully understand how important this, we need to do a brief refresher on the word "LORD" in the Old Testament. When you see LORD in all capital letters, what that is signaling is that in the Hebrew the word being translated is YHWH (pronounced either Yahweh or Jehovah). This is the personal name for God that Jews came to hold so highly they would not say it, and so when they translated the Old Testament into Greek, they translated the word Yahweh with the Greek word *kurios* which means "lord." When Christian translators have translated the Old Testament, they followed this pattern of translating YHWH as LORD rather than as Yahweh or Jehovah.

All of this is important because in a number of passages the writer of the New Testament quotes an Old Testament passage that relates to God, specifically Yahweh ("LORD"), and then says that it was really talking about Jesus. We might miss this, because we hear that John is preparing the way for the Lord (Matthew 3:3), and think to ourselves, "Right, the Lord Jesus." But as we look at the passage Matthew is quoting (Isaiah 40:3) we realize that "the way of the Lord" is actually "the way of the LORD." John was preparing the way for Yahweh! As we look through several of these it will become very clear that the writers of the New Testament viewed Jesus as being Yahweh.

For these, it might be helpful to have the group look up each reference and explain to you how this citation/allusion would argue for the divinity of Christ.

A. Isaiah 40:3 applied to John the Baptist in Matthew 3:3.

We have just touched on this example, but the way of the LORD in Isaiah 40:3 is the way of God, as the second half of the verse makes very clear. John's job was to prepare the way for Jesus, which means that if the Old Testament said his job was to prepare the way for God, then Jesus is God!

B. Isaiah 6:13 applied to Jesus in John 12:37-42.

Another clear example of this is John 12. Here, John quotes from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, and then throws in the statement "These things said Esaias[Isaiah], when he saw his glory, and spake of him" (12:41). When did the prophet Isaiah say these things? Both of the previous citations come from Isaiah 6, where Isaiah sees the LORD (Yahweh) high and lifted, and his train filled the temple.

A careful study of John 12 will show that the "he" here is definitely referring to Christ (see verse 42). This means that John is just casually throwing out there that when Isaiah saw the Lord in the temple, he was seeing Jesus!

C. Isaiah 45:23 applied to Jesus in Philippians 2:10.

This passage is almost a direct quote of Isaiah 45:23, and again the fact that all are to confess "Jesus is Lord" is very important in light of the background of the word Lord that we have covered earlier.

D. Psalm 102:25-27 applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1:10-12.

While describing why Jesus is better than the angels, the author of Hebrews cites Psalm 102, a passage very clearly referring to God, and applies it to Jesus.

E. Joel 2:32 applied to Jesus in Romans 10:13.

Once again, Paul's well-known statement from Romans 10:13 is actually a direct quote from the Old Testament, but in the Old Testament the LORD is Yahweh.

Other arguments could be made for the deity of Christ beyond what we have studied here. For example, (1) the fact that the NT consistently calls Jesus "Lord" is important since in the Old Testament "Lord" is consistently used for God in the Greek translation (see above) and (2) Jesus shares unique divine attributes such as omniscience (John 2:25), omnipotence (Matthew 8:26-27; 14:19; John 2:1-11), and eternity (John 8:57-58).³

³ See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* pages 543-554 for more discussion of some of these arguments.

The New Testament is clear: Jesus is God. Although false teachers will protest, it actually does come out and call him God on several occasions, most notably John 1:1 and 20:28. The actions of Jesus and the statements of Jesus show that he viewed himself to be God, and the New Testament writers assume the deity of Christ in the way they quote the Old Testament in relation to him. God became man and dwelt among us, and we beheld the glory of God. What a marvelous, perplexing, humbling, glorious truth!

In what ways should the divinity of Christ affect our thinking about him?