

The divinity of Jesus

Was the man called Jesus really the only begotten Son of God? Was he God incarnate? If he was we would expect him to be a very *unusual* person. Unusual to the point of being unique! We would expect this, yea rational men would demand it. It is not surprising then that we start our discussion about Jesus with this question: Was Jesus unique?

Since this is a question of history, it must be emphasized (also see the Introduction on *the nature of proof*) that all history is accepted on the basis of probability, not certainty. In his introduction to "From Heaven or From Men?" Hugo McCord, on page vii, says "...but proofs in the field of history must always be appraised as only probable." He continues on page viii "In the field of history, where the only proofs are probable, nothing is beyond dispute. Any statement of a historian, no matter how well attested, may be doubted and rejected by *somebody*."

In this chapter, I will be quoting from the Bible, not as the inspired word of God that it is, but merely as an accurate history book. This is required because, I hope, many who read this book will not be believers and they will not accept the Bible as being inspired. So we will use it as a historically reliable source. There are many books which establish and sustain the historicity of The Bible (see the suggested additional reading at the end of the chapter).

For the purpose of establishing the Bible's historical accuracy I chose the words of an ex-Catholic, ex-Atheist, ex-socialist and Pulitzer Prize winner who received the Medal of Freedom from Gerald Ford in 1977. This historian died, as best as I can determine, as a skeptic who was friendly to religion. Will Durant (1885-1981) and his wife wrote the monumental and classic work "The Story of Civilization" in eleven volumes (it was for volume 10 of this work that he received the Pulitzer Prize). In Volume III, p.557, after a long paragraph claiming certain discrepancies in the Gospels he continues:

"All this granted, much remains. The contradictions are of minutiae, not substance; in essentials the synoptic gospels agree remarkably well, and form a consistent portrait of Christ. In the enthusiasm of its discoveries the Higher Criticism has applied to the New Testament tests of authenticity so severe that by them a hundred ancient worthies --e.g., Hammurabi, David, Socrates --would fade into legend. Despite the prejudices and theological preconceptions of the evangelists, they record many incidents that mere inventors would have concealed--the competition of the apostles for high places in the Kingdom, their flight after Jesus arrest, Peter's denial, the failure of Christ to work miracles in Galilee, the references of some auditors to his possible insanity, his early uncertainty as to his mission, his confessions of ignorance as to the future [only as to the time of the second coming. - *cb*], his moments of bitterness, his despairing cry on the cross; *no one reading these scenes can doubt the reality of the figure behind them.* That a few simple men should [or could- *cb*] in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, *would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels.* After two centuries of Higher Criticism the outlines of the life, character, and teaching of Christ, remain reasonably clear, and constitute the most fascinating feature in the history of Western man. [all emphasis added - *cb*]"

So please remember that all quotes from the Bible in this chapter should be considered quotes from a historically reliable source, which it is. The following characteristics of his person and life demonstrate the *uniqueness of Jesus*.

- 01) His Contemporaries believed that Jesus created the universe: John 1:3
- 02) His life followed 1800 years of prophecy in the Old Testament that "the messiah" would come. Jesus fulfilled all of these prophecies, e.g. The 61 listed in "Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Volume 1" by Josh McDowell, p. 144-166
- 03) His contemporaries claimed for him a virgin birth, Luke 1:26-37, Matthew 1:18-23.

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- 04) John the Baptist, a relative of Jesus (His Mother, Mary, and John's Mother Elizabeth, were related, but we know not how - Luke 1:36) was a prominent preacher when Jesus began his own ministry. John was so popular that many thought he was the messiah. But his purpose was to prepare the way for Jesus the Christ. Matthew 3; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 1:57-80; John 1:15-34, 3:22-36. John the "forerunner" of Jesus was predicted by Isa. 40:3, and Malachi 3:1.
- 05) His contemporaries worshipped him, from his birth! (14 scriptures, see appendix 2b) Buddha was not worshipped until c. 125 a.d. About 600 yrs. after his death. Mohammed, never.
- 06) He claimed to have had a previous life. John 8:58
- 07) He set the conditions for entrance into the kingdom of God. John 3:1-8
- 08) He forgave sin. Matt. 9:5-6, Mark 2:5, Luke 7:48
- 09) He claimed to be the *only* access to the Father "No one comes to the Father except *through me*" John 14:6
- 10) He claimed to have all authority in heaven and earth. Matthew 28:18
- 11) He refers to himself as "*the one and only son* of God" John 3:16, 10:36 (for 6 other scriptures, see appendix 2c.), and as the one who came from heaven, John 6:38,51;8:24,28,35-36.

The expression "the Son of God" is used 28 times in New Testament, all referring to Jesus.

At the crucifixion: Matthew 27:43 "*He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'*"

At his trial he answered the question "...are you the Christ, the Son of God?" in verse 64 (of Matthew 26) with this Greek expression: "συ ειπας," the meaning is given in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament v. 5, p. 185 as "Matthew 26:64 ... Contains an open Messianic confession on the part of Jesus." Maybe like our expression "You said it!" See also v. 5, p. 465 "Jesus gives a definite affirmation in answer to the High Priest's question."

Mark 14:61-62 Mark records the same situation and Jesus' answer is "***I Am!***" Since He said "I am the son of God." Jesus is either: The Lord, a Liar or a Lunatic.

- 12) He predicted his death and the manner of death, which he could not have controlled. Luke 24:7-8, John 3:14, 8:28, and 12:32. (see appendix 2d).
- 13) He predicted his resurrection. "In three days."-- then He DID IT!! (see "His Resurrection," p. 40 and appendix 2e)
- 14) He predicted His return. Matt. 26:64
- 15) He never traveled more than 50 miles from his birthplace, after his return from Egypt before his fourth birthday. Matt. 2:13-23
- 16) He taught for only three years. Buddha lived from c.563 to c.483 b.c., Buddhism founded in the sixth century b.c. Mohammed (570-632) a.d. -preached from 610 - 632)
- 17) He performed many mighty miracles, which were witnessed by hundreds, sometimes thousands: Healing those blind from birth, walking on water, raising the dead, etc.
- 18) He lived an unparalleled moral life. Both Buddha and Mohammed had many questionable experiences in their lives.

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What other man in history could claim these characteristics. Many of these characteristics individually would make Jesus unique, but taken together they are overwhelming evidence that indeed Jesus was a unique person amply qualified to be considered as the Son of God.

One of the things that makes Jesus unique is that he claimed to be the Son of God. Since he said this we must explain it somehow. There are only three possibilities: the statement is true, the statement is false and he knew it, the statement is false and he did not know it. This means he was either:

The Lord, a Liar, or a Lunatic

Let us examine the third possibility first, Was He a lunatic?

There is absolutely no psychological evidence on which to base such a claim. After 2000 years of history and many years of searching by unbelieving psychiatrists the result of their search is either capitulation or unfounded accusation. Consider the following points:

- 1) You can't be deluded in just this one area of life. It's who you are, a delusion of this magnitude affects everything you do and say. Thinking yourself to be God would effect every aspect of your life and there would be ample evidence of inconsistencies and neurotic behavior.
- 2) If he was deluded what caused him to be deluded? Did he do it himself, or did others help? If others helped, who and why? Especially "WHY?" What did he and his followers gain from this delusion? Their reward was poverty, pain, persecution, derision, rejection and death, even the death on the cross.
- 3) His whole life was consistent with the claim that "I am the one and only Son of God!" His daily habits, his teachings, his confidence and composure, his death and resurrection, are all perfectly compatible with his claim to deity.
- 4) If he was not the Son of God, how did he fool all those people for three years? Yes, most of them were of the average populace. But Luke was a doctor and Paul was of the highest level of the educated. Nicodemus (John 19:39) and Cornelius (Acts 10) are two other influential people who followed Jesus. Read about Paul's life, conversion and later teachings in Acts, chapters 8 -28.
- 5) How did Jesus convince John the Baptist? John was the first to say "He (Jesus) is the Messiah."
- 6) How could such a noble, moral and logically consistent religion have lasted over 2000 years with billions of followers if it had been based on a delusion?
- 7) Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 contain some of the teachings of Jesus which demonstrate his own strong yet loving, kind and appealing personality. These chapters describe a way of life governed by the highest ethics and permeated with a most inspiring picture of the brotherhood of mankind. Could these characteristics have been demonstrated by a lunatic?

In the face of the total absence of any evidence of a psychological disorder and considering all the details of his life, we must conclude that *only a neurotic could find neurosis in the life of Christ.*

Was He Liar?

If he was a liar then he died for something he *knew* was untrue! No one dies for a lie, ... if he knows it's a lie. Many people in history have died for a lie, but they did not know it was a lie. All the Nazis who died in WWII, in effect, died for a lie. But they did not know it was a lie. When faced with death a liar usually finds a conscience and decides to tell the truth. Such a person would not accept death, especially the death on a cross for something he knew was a lie.

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If he was a liar, how did he fool all those apostles and friends who lived with him 3 years? For it was not just one lie (that he was the Son of God), it would have been many lies. Almost everything he said was a lie if he did not have the authority to teach what he taught and forgive sins as he did. His righteousness would be self-righteousness, his piety would be but a hoax, his confidence arrogance, his wisdom a sham, his miracles but tricks, and his kindness a pretense. Can anyone who knows anything about the life of Jesus accept these conclusions? If not, then you cannot believe he was a liar.

If he was a liar, he was the worse kind of liar, causing many to lose their lives. Jesus told people that he was the Son of God and convinced them to follow him. Many who followed him lost their homes, their position in society and even their lives because they believed him. His lie was not of the placid, inconsequential kind. It changed lives, minds, speech and actions of all who truly believed him.

There were consequences for believing this lie, dire consequences, and nothing but a false, empty and temporary hope can be offered as a benefit for telling these lies. If He was a liar, he was not just a liar, he was a mean, sadistic, hateful person. If he was a liar, then he was a completely evil person. If he was a liar and not the Son of God then all his teaching about the judgment and the afterlife cannot be relied on.

If you cannot accept these conclusions about Jesus then you cannot believe he was a liar.

If he was neither lunatic nor liar, Then He was indeed The Lord!!

Every person MUST choose one of these three options. Why not choose the one with the best evidence??

His Resurrection

If we can prove the resurrection of Jesus, then He was the Son of God. In order to prove this we must establish that the tomb was empty and then consider the possibilities for explaining this vacancy. Remember Jesus predicted his resurrection! John 2:19-22

Was the tomb empty? The historically accurate documents of the New Testament say "yes!" What did his enemies, the Jews, say? And what about history?

The Jewish chief priests knew the importance of the resurrection prediction! Matthew records in chapter 27, starting at verse 62, these words *“62 The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63 “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 64 So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.” 65 “Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.”*

The *“the chief priests and the Pharisees”* knew what an empty tomb would do for Jesus’ creditability, and their own. They did not want that tomb to be empty. They did not just put “one of their own” (who could, maybe have been bought) to guard the tomb. *The chief priests and the Pharisees* went to Pilate, asking for official help.

Breaking a government seal was a very serious offense, so they sealed the tomb with an official seal and posted 4 or 8 soldiers (the number is not specified, but the normal number for guard duty was a group of 4 or 8) thinking that would be sufficient to prevent any specious resurrection.

The event which was to be the very cornerstone of the new religion happened in the very early morning hours of the Sunday after the crucifixion. The tomb was found empty, Matthew 28:11-15. Please notice that the chief priests and the Jewish elders did NOT deny that the tomb was empty. They only tried to explain why it was vacant.

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The historical evidence is overwhelming that the tomb was really empty. The only alternative is historically untenable. There were too many people who had both the power (authority), desire and the opportunity to verify the condition of the tomb. The task of verification would be too simple to ignore. They must have done so, because the enemies of Christ had much to lose if, indeed the grave site proved to be without a body.

The resurrection was preached *immediately* in the very city where it would be easiest to deny, but no one denied that the tomb was empty. The tomb was empty and it was all too easy to prove it empty, just go and look for yourself.

This resurrection, the very cornerstone of Christianity, was immediately preached all over the Roman empire, starting at Jerusalem:

In Jerusalem - Acts 2:24, Acts 4:10, **then**

In Athens: -Acts 17:31

In Rome: - Romans 1:4

In Corinth: - 1 Corinthians. 15:12

In Philippi - Philippians 3:10

To All Saints - 1 Peter 1:3

- Yet the enemies of Jesus (The Jews) never denied it! - Matt. 8:11-15
- The resurrection took place in the very seat of Judaism (Jerusalem) where it could be easily verified.
- This teaching began immediately after the event, again easily verifiable. Although we don't know where the tomb was **they did!!!**
- The body (or remains) was never produced!!!
- Jesus was seen after He was raised? Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 24:13-53, Mark 16:14-18, John 20:10-21:23, I Cor. 15:3-8
- Throughout the first centuries of Christianity the vacancy of the tomb was never doubted!!!

The only reasonable conclusion is that the tomb was indeed empty. Therefore:

What happened to the Body?? There are only four possibilities:

1) Jesus was not really dead, and He recovered while in the tomb!! This is obviously unreasonable to the point of being ridiculous for the following reasons:

1) The Romans were not good at everything but they did know how to kill people!! Crucifixion was a very common means of execution, meaning that they had a great deal of practice. He was examined by soldiers to determine if in fact he was dead. The centurion (an officer over 100 men) reported to the governor that Jesus was dead. If a centurion misrepresented this fact to a government official he would reap dire consequences. See the account in Mark 15:42-47.

2) Even a casual understanding of the process of crucifixion (have you seen the movie, "The Passion"?) would imply the inability to recover without immediate medical treatment. The absence of food and water strengthens this implication. In the three days that Jesus was in the tomb, if not already dead He would have become weaker **not stronger**.

3) If He recovered, how did He have the strength to get out of the burial cloth which had been wrapped around his body "in accordance with the Jewish burial customs," John 19:38-40? If you think this would be easy, try this experiment: Lie down diagonally on a bed sheet. Roll yourself in it and have someone put just one strip of duct tape around it. Then try to get out by yourself. Now a healthy person might possibly escape, but then try it after a crucifixion experience and after three days without food or water!

4) How could he have moved the stone from the INSIDE? The stone was "big" (Matthew 27:60), "very large" (Mark 16:4) and at least five women thought they couldn't move it by themselves (Mark 16:3). These women were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome (Mark 16:1), Joanna and "others" (Luke 24:10). Since

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“others” is plural and included Salome, there had to be at least one more that those named. Therefore there must have been at least five women present. Remember that the stone was larger than the mouth of the tomb. When looking at it from the inside there would be no “hand-holds,” no place to grab it in order to roll it aside. Most stones were rolled downhill to put it in place, meaning to remove it, it must be rolled uphill, requiring even more strength for removing it than for putting it in place.

5) What would the soldiers guarding the tomb have done? If a soldier on guard duty allowed his charge to escape, he was punished by death. When Peter escaped his Guards in Acts 12, his guards were executed (Acts 12: 19). The likelihood of the total passivity of the guards under these circumstances is totally untenable.

6) To the detriment of the reasoning process it has become fashionable and, sadly, acceptable in some circles to replace evidential reasoning with pure speculation. We, however, feel a necessity to fight this trend and require evidence to support any conclusion. Therefore we ask those who think that Jesus recovered in the tomb to produce any evidence that could possibly support such a claim.

We can only conclude that He was indeed dead before His body was put into the tomb. So, who removed the body from the grave?

II) *Some disinterested, neutral persons removed the body!* On the surface this seems to be very unreasonable. If a person was, by definition, neutral or uninterested why bother to do it?

The usual reasons of money, power, fame or even humor (just for the thrill of it) were nonexistent because they never produced the body or even claimed to have it in order to get the desired results. Why would several men plot together to break the law, face punishment, bribe the guards (which, even if possible, would require a lot of money because the guards would face execution for “losing” the body they were charged to protect) and then, what is most unreasonable, not tell anyone about it. Every law enforcement officer knows how many criminals are caught because they “just couldn’t keep it to themselves.” This most human trait is totally absent if this explanation of the empty tomb is to be accepted.

And again I ask, What evidence is there that could possibly establish such a claim? We, therefore, conclude that a disinterested person did not take the body.

III) *His enemies stole the body!* This is the most unreasonable, historically untenable position of the four considered. The enemies did all they could to *prevent* the disappearance of the body. They knew before the resurrection that if there was no body it would fulfill his prediction that he would be raised again. If they had the body they would have simply produced it in order to discredit Christianity. There is absolutely no creditable record or even theory to explain this possible action on the part of His enemies.

This hypothesis is so historically and logically untenable, I need not even ask what evidence is there that would even hint at this possibility.

IV) *His friends stole the body.* If you deny the resurrection this is the alternative that seems, on the surface, to be the most plausible. But there are numerous problems to consider. How many of Jesus’ friends would have been part of the plot? In any such endeavor the fewer participants the better, lest the secret get out. But we would need enough to move the stone, deal with the guards, physically move and hide the body. And this only covers the *number* of people that would have to be involved.

What *type* of people would be necessary for this type of clandestine operation? Which of the apostles, or other friends, demonstrated the kind of moxie required, first to plot, and then to accomplish the task? There is no way that *all* of His friends could have been “in on it.” There are simply too many followers to have kept the secret all those years and carried it with them to their graves. But if *only a few* of his friends did it, then they would be deceiving the rest, and by this deception leading those friends to severe persecution and death. And not one of them repented or showed any remorse, never mentioning a word of their secret to anyone. These are only a few of the unanswerable questions.

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Also consider these points:

- His friends followed His teachings; “do not lie, obey the Law, do good to those who persecute you,” etc. Why would they break the law by stealing the body, and then lie to all their friends, thereby violating all the teachings of Jesus ... whom they loved?
- They didn’t understand His prediction (see John 20:9) of the resurrection! Some doubted when they heard about the empty tomb, some even doubted when they saw him. Matthew 28:17, Mark 16:11, 13-14, Luke 24:11-12. This is hardly compatible with the theory that his followers stole the body.
- His friends were all defeated and scattered. They left Jerusalem and went fishing! John 21:1-3
- How did they deal with the guards? The usual number of soldiers for such a detail was four or eight. The penalty for allowing Jesus’ body to vanish from the grave was death!! Remember Acts 12:19 when Peter miraculously escaped from prison the guards were ordered to be killed (also see Acts 16:27). So they couldn’t have bribed them!!! They would have had to kill them, but the guards lived! (Matthew 28:11-15)
- Why did the disciples (Matthew 28:8) and the apostles (Luke 24:9-10) **doubt**? If they had stolen the body they would be making every effort to get everyone to accept the resurrection as fact, not doubting it.
- None of His friends were “brought in for questioning.” If they were really suspected, they would have been arrested and questioned. They were not.
- **What is the evidence that His friends stole the body??**

There is an axiom in philosophy which says that when seeking the cause for an effect, the simplest cause is preferred. *The simplest explanation of these events is that the supernatural event of the resurrection actually happened.*

The resurrection changed the course of history and the lives of his believers. Before the resurrection the believers were disheartened, discouraged and dispersed. After the resurrection they were united, courageous, revitalized and eager to serve and even die for the cause! Could this change have been caused and maintained until death, by a hoax?

Summary:

Jesus’ life, his character and his teachings make him a man so unusual as to be unique among all men. His actions and his speech were exactly what you would expect from a superhuman, supernatural son of God. The only rational and consistent explanation of his uniqueness, his claim to be the Son of God and his resurrection is that He truly was/is the son of God and as such we must believe in him and obey His commands and yes, even his *suggestions* (if indeed there are such things).

For further reading:

- * “Who moved the Stone?” By Frank Morrison
- * “The Historical Jesus,” by Gary R. Habermas
- * “Why I am a Christian” by Norman Geisler and Paul Hoffman
- * “The Case for Christ” by Lee Strobel
- “From Heaven or From Man,” by Hugo McCord
- “The Story of Civilization: Part III (Ceasar and Christ)” by Will Durant
- “Evidence that Demands a Verdict. Volume 1” by Josh McDowell,
- “Bible vs. Modernism” by Charles Roberson,
- “The Gospel Facts Sustained by the testimony of Unbelieving Jews and Pagans” by Alexander Campbell,
- “The Stones Cry Out” by Randell Price
- “Seven Questions in Dispute” by William Jennings Bryan
- “Protestant Christian Evidences” by Bernard Ramm

* *most important, a must read for every Christian!*