

## 4 **Jesus**

Man—

God—

Myth?

“Jesus Christ is to me the outstanding personality of all time, all history, both as Son of God and as Son of Man. Everything he ever said or did has value for us today and that is something you can say of no other man, dead or alive. There is no easy middle ground to stroll upon. You either accept Jesus or reject him.

Sholem Asch (1880-1957)

—Jewish author

That is a big statement— “You either accept Jesus or reject Him.” Yet, I suppose it is true because we either accept that He lived, that He walked this earth or we believe He was a myth—just another story passed down through the ages. We either accept Him for who He says He is or we reject His claims that He is the Son of God.

This is a huge dilemma for many people because believing a man’s claims that He is God takes an enormous leap of faith. We may be able to see the benefit of having a spiritual faith, we may see the value of the Bible and we may even feel the difference prayer can make to our lives, but believing in a man who says He is God? That’s another ball game!

Or is it?

But before we get too much into the discussion, what are your thoughts on Jesus?

## Questions

*What do I know about Jesus?*

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*Do I believe in the claims that He existed?*

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“Of course the doubt as to whether Jesus really existed is unfounded and not worth refutation. No sane person can doubt that Jesus stands as founder behind the historical movement whose first distinct stage is represented by the Palestinian community.”

Professor Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976)—  
*Jesus and the Word*

Did Jesus really exist or is He just a myth that has survived the ages? There are many scholars and experts, both atheist and Christian, who wholeheartedly believe that Jesus definitely existed.

“Today, nearly all historians, whether Christians or not, accept that Jesus existed and that the gospels contain plenty of valuable evidence which has to be weighed and assessed critically. There is general agreement that, with the possible exception of Paul, we know far more about Jesus of Nazareth than about any first or second century Jewish or pagan religious teacher.”

Professor Graham Stanton, Cambridge University,  
*The Gospels and Jesus*

“That a few simple men should 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 Gospel. 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 of the history of Western man.”

Will Durant, (1885-1981)—  
Scholar/writer/philosopher/historian,  
Caesar and Christ (the third volume  
of his Story of Civilisation)

“I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very centre of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.”

H.G. Wells (1866-1946)  
—British author

Those are some heavyweight statements. Atheist and Christian experts alike agree that Jesus Christ of Nazareth existed! But why should we believe them? What makes their opinion so worthy and valuable?

why  
should  
we  
believe?

Amateurs often disregard the crucial importance of field-familiarity, i.e. that one must have a long and deep acquaintance with a particular time and culture in order to make reliable judgments about the probable and improbable, the expected and unexpected, and all the other background assumptions necessary to understanding the significance of any particular fact or claim—in short, one must be cognizant not merely of the literary context of a statement, but its entire socio-historical context as well. And that is no easy thing to achieve.

Richard Carrier, (b.1969)

— co-founder of the Secular Web

Most experts agree that Jesus existed—but what of His claims to be God?

## Questions

*What do I believe about Jesus' divinity—do I believe He is God?*

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*Who do I think He is?*

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Here is where things get a bit dicey. Jesus is a man who is documented to have made claims that belong only to divinity. According to numerous sources, Jesus uttered statements that would make sense only if He was indeed God. In fact, it does not take too deep a reading of the Bible to see that Jesus, and those who followed Him, made some outrageous claims regarding who He was.

what  
of his  
claims to  
be God?

Was it just a case of megalomania, a case of inflated ego, self-importance? Maybe it was a desire for power or the need for constant recognition from others. Why do we have to believe that Jesus is God? Why does He have to be more than just a great moral teacher?

Well, He said that he was the Son of God—how can we accept the teachings of a person who claimed to be God if we do not think He is? Have a look at a couple of His statements:

***They all shouted,  
Then you claim you  
are the Son of God?  
And He replied, You  
are right in saying  
that I am.***

Luke 22:70

***Jesus told her, “I am the  
resurrection and the life. Those  
who believe in Me, even though  
they die like everyone else, will  
live again. They are given eternal  
life for believing in Me and will  
never perish. Do you believe this,  
Martha?”***

John 11:25

Let's be reasonable. Who is going to say this other than a lunatic, a liar, or someone who is what He claims to be—and who can do what He claims He can do? Moreover, why would we want to believe the teachings of a man whom we think is a liar, or a lunatic?

Here is what British author, C.S. Lewis says about Jesus' just being a great moral teacher:

“I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I am ready to accept Jesus as the 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 a 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 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.

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)—British writer

## Question

*Which of Jesus' teachings impresses me the most?*

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One of the hardest things to comprehend about the Jesus story is not just that He was God, but that He was God and man at the same time! How do we believe that a supernatural being can make Himself into a human baby and be deposited in a woman's body without conception? I know, it's a tough one to get our heads around! So how do we understand it?

Look, if you believe that the universe was created, and designed, as opposed to being just a product of pure chance, then it was obviously a pretty unique and powerful force, or being, which indeed created and designed the universe, right? After all, the universe is a pretty awesome place. Now, whatever power created the universe, it's hardly unreasonable to think that this power, if it wanted, could have "shrunk down" and taken on a human form. Certainly, the God who created the universe could have come down and taken upon Himself humanity, couldn't He? Compared to making a few hundred billion galaxies, that should have been simple.

“...we can no  
more reject  
Jesus'  
existence than  
we can reject  
the existence of  
a mass of  
pagan  
personages  
whose reality as  
historical figures  
is never  
questioned.”

Professor Michael Grant  
(1914-2004)—Atheist  
historian, *Jesus:  
An Historian's Review  
of the Gospels*

All this, in essence, is about what we believe Jesus Christ was: the Creator of all things, the Creator of the universe, who had left wherever He was in the cosmos to become a human being. That human is known to the world as Jesus Christ, the Jewish carpenter from the city of Nazareth; the rabbi who lived in the small nation of Judea at the time of Roman dominion in the first century A.D.

Jesus of Nazareth never commanded any army, any navy, any nation. He didn't hold any public office; He didn't hold any political position, He wasn't a member of parliament or even a local town councillor. He didn't, during His life, have a particularly huge following—and those who followed Him for the most part were the dregs of society, uneducated folks with little power or authority, and even less money or stature. With few exceptions, during His life the elite of His own nation not only didn't follow Him but fervently opposed Him. He was, at best, a minor figure in a small nation with a fairly insignificant role in a major world empire. He had no wealth, no private army, no contacts in the government who could have helped Him in any great way. He never travelled very far after He began His ministry. He wrote no books, nor left any kind of written legacy. We have absolutely nothing of whatever He might have written down. His public ministry lasted only three and a half years, and from all outward appearances was a massive

“ In his own lifetime Jesus made no impact on history. This is something that I cannot but regard as a special dispensation on God's part, and, I like to think, yet another example of the ironical humour which informs so many of his purposes. To me, it seems highly appropriate that the most important figure in all history should thus escape the notice of memoirists, diarists, commentators, all the tribe of chroniclers who even then existed.

Malcolm Muggeridge (1903-1990)

—British journalist

failure. Many of the leaders of His own nation rejected Him along with some of the people. He was arrested (His closest followers fleeing at the arrest); He was tried and convicted in a kangaroo court, then tortured, beaten, and finally crucified along with common criminals.

In short, everything about this man spelled failure. He should have vanished into history along with untold thousands and thousands of others who, with even a lot more worldly things going for them than Jesus, made all sorts of claims for themselves and tried to start religious and/or political movements that all came to nothing. In short, under normal circumstances, no one should have ever heard the name Jesus of Nazareth.

So, what has happened over the last two thousand years? Was Jesus a liar or a lunatic whose story has just happened to stick around? Or did God Himself, as a man, come down to this world, amid its chaos, and give it something to hope for?

## Question

*How would following Jesus' teachings change my experience of the world?*

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**Paul Erdos, a famous mathematician, was a rather bizarre character who never married, he lived out of his suitcase for two decades and has been considered by many to be the greatest mathematician of the 20th century. As we said, he was very eccentric, and among his peculiar traits was that he was always talking about SF. What was the SF? It was short for the Supreme Fascist, his name for God!**

**Why would he call God that? Well, there are those who believe that they can prove the existence of other dimensions through mathematics, and some believe that if there was a God, He could be existing in these other dimensions. Erdos**

Even if it makes sense that God became a man, and that man was Jesus Christ, why would He do it? Why would the Creator of the universe come down and take on human flesh, only in the end to be hung on a cross and die in that flesh? And maybe even more relevant, what does it mean for me? What message does this Jesus have for me? What does this Jesus, even if He is God, mean for my life?

And what about us, today? Maybe we have some indistinct faith in something out there, as did Paul Erdos? Maybe we aren't content with the idea that most of us have been taught in school, that we are here through pure chance alone, that some cosmic explosion billions of years ago hurled fiery gases through the cosmos and given enough time, and, *abra cadabra*, once the gases cooled and condensed, everyone from Euripides to Einstein appeared?

You think there might be a God; maybe you have experienced some things in your life that you just can't write off as mere coincidence, that in their own way powerfully imply something beyond the mundane? Or maybe you've had moments and experiences, in which you sensed God—the reality of something greater than yourself—yet you didn't know what it was or how to relate to this greater reality.

was one of the men who believed this. And here's the point: Erdos' mathematics might have been able to give him some hints that there was a God, but he had a totally skewed view of what this God was like. He knew enough maths to know that there was a likelihood of this God being there, but maths alone wasn't going to give him enough information to let him know the character of this God, and so for him, based on such limited knowledge, God was the Supreme Fascist.

You're convinced that there's something more to life than just the flesh you pamper and primp; you sense there's got to be more to your existence than getting up, going to work, buying things, and then getting up and going to work to buy more things, on and on until you die.

## Question

*When have I felt that there just has to be something more to life?*

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But what does all of this have to do with Jesus? Well, He is the greatest revelation we can have of God, because Jesus *is* God. And as God, and as our Creator, He alone can answer all our needs because He is the one who first created them.

The ancients had gods of wood, gods of stone and even gods 'out there' with whom they communicated. They prayed to them, they sacrificed to them; they lived their lives in fear of them, desperately wanting to please them so their lives would be better.

But we are spiritual beings; we have a spiritual side, a side that sex, money, fame, and things of this life can't satisfy. Only God can. And Jesus, God, came down to our level, came down to where we are, in order to point us to Himself, in order to show us that He wasn't made of stone and wood, but that this God we sense is real. After all, we are humans, and what better way to communicate with humans than to become one yourself!

Years ago a well known Nobel-prize winning scientist, Steven Weinberg, made the famous statement, “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless.” And though he later admitted his statement was a bit rash, it’s not hard to see his point; that is, if you believe we’re here only by chance with no God who has any final purpose for us.

Jesus’ presence on earth did more than save us, He showed us that God was more than just “out there,” He showed us that God connects with our hearts. He showed us that the gap in our lives which we can’t seem to fill is the presence of God in our hearts. Jesus gave us a model of how we could be, how we were meant to be, before our bad choices took control of us. Jesus is the connection between God and man—He is the Divine essence of humanity.

And in a way, by being here, Jesus was saying this to us: You sense there’s more to life than the 9-5 routine; you sense there’s more to life than sex, and food, and money. You sense something missing. You sense there is a God but don’t know about Him. Well, I am that God, and I have come to show you Him.

Jesus is God’s way of saying to each one of us that He cares about our lives, and how we live, so much that He became literally one of us, a part of us, part of our lives, part of how we live. Jesus is God’s way of saying to each of us that we don’t have to live without an understanding of who we are, or why we are here, or what life is all about. Jesus is God’s way of showing us, in a sense, who we are, why we are here, and how best to live our lives. Jesus is God showing us that there is, indeed, more to life than just a bunch of things that in the end don’t satisfy.

***So the Word  
became  
human and  
lived here on  
earth among  
us. He was  
full of  
unfailing  
love and  
faithfulness.  
And we have  
seen His glory,  
the glory of  
the only Son  
of the Father.***

John 1:14

Again, here is where Jesus of Nazareth comes in. Jesus is God's way of saying to each of us that no matter how big the universe is in comparison to us, we still matter to the God who created it all. He's God's way of saying to us that however small we are in comparison to the galaxies out there, we're not small in God's eyes. On the contrary, we're important enough so that God Himself would come down in human flesh and dwell with us.

That is talking about Jesus, about God, who came to us full of grace and truth.

Imagine you're in the hospital and one day the Prime Minister came into your hospital room, not only to visit you but to take care of you? He came and truly took the time to minister to your needs, to talk with you, to change your bandage, to wash your body, to adjust your medications. And suppose you were sure it wasn't some publicity stunt, something to help him win an election, but that you could see he did it because he really cared about you? That would be pretty incredible, would it not? It would say to you and the world just how important you are. After all, with this whole country to run yet he came and spent time with you, ministering to you.

Well, however weak that analogy, that's what we have in Jesus. The Creator of the whole universe came down and stepped into our world as a human being in order to tell us that we matter, that each one of us matters. When we understand just who Jesus is and what He did, we understand that He came for each one of us individually. This was the whole point.

“Every person is Christ for me, and since there is only one Jesus, that person is the one person in the world at that moment.”

Mother Teresa  
(1910-1997)

## Question

*What questions do I have about who Jesus is?*

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The best thing about Jesus is that we are acceptable to Him, just as we are. Yes, our lives will change as we get to know him, but we are important to Him right now—just as we are—not that He wants us to stay the same, Jesus is about changing lives; He can help us work through things that at times seem unworkable. He can make us into new people, He can heal us, He can change us, and He can give us a new life.

Jesus' life on earth means that, through knowing Him personally, we can find answers to the moral questions that we have been struggling with. Jesus lived his life as an example for us, as a model and a guide on how we should live. He rose above the rules to highlight principles, and He lived out these principles in His own life. Jesus' life means that we have hope for a better future, both now and for eternity.

## Questions

*What do the principles of Jesus' life offer me?*

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*How would living a life by these principles be different from the life I am living now?*

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## My Answers

*What do I know about Jesus?*

I know that He is an amazing person who lived by the most wonderful principles.  
I also believe that He is God.

**Your Answer**

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*Do I believe in the claims that He existed?*

**Yes I do. I believe he changed history!**

**Your Answer**

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*What do I believe about Jesus' divinity—  
do I believe He is God?*

Yes, I believe Jesus is who He said He was. Sometimes it's hard to believe it, but I still keep making the decision to believe!

**Your Answer**

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*Who do I think He is?*

I think Jesus is an wonderful person, a caring friend, an incredible mentor and a compassionate, kind-hearted God.

**Your Answer**

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*Which of Jesus' teachings impresses me  
the most?*

His teachings about love are inspiring, but what I love the most is the way Jesus showed people how valuable they are. If only I could have that gift!

**Your Answer**

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my answers

*How would following Jesus' teachings change my experience of the world?*

I do try to see people differently, to see them in context with their experience, pain, beliefs and concerns. That has helped me a lot, because it enables me to be a whole lot less judgmental and a whole lot more understanding. Although I'm certainly not perfect!

**Your Answer**

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*When have I felt that there has to be something more to life?*

When I am sitting in traffic on the way to work. When I go to the gym because I need something to do. When I stand in the middle of a crowd and don't want to be there.

**Your Answer**

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my answers

*What questions do I have about who Jesus is?*

I want to know what made Him cry, what made Him laugh? What makes His life so relevant to mine?

**Your Answer**

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*What do the principles of Jesus' life offer me?*

His principles offer me a cheat sheet to life. They are my map when I am lost, and my ocean rescue helicopter when I am way out of my depth!

**Your Answer**

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*How would living a life by these principles be different from the life I am living now?*

Well, I am trying to live these, but am still struggling with some of them. It's a journey, so I suppose if I could introduce all of Jesus' principles into my life—I would see a big difference!

**Your Answer**

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my answers

## **Further Resources**

### **At Jesus' Feet: The Gospel According to Mary Magdalene**

*Doug Batchelor*

Review & Herald Publishing

Copyright: 2001

### **Discover Jesus**

*Mark Finley*

Pacific Press Publishing Association

### **Falling in Love With Jesus**

*Barbara Folkenberg with Eileen E. Lantry*

Review & Herald Publishing

Copyright: 2001

### **The Four Faces of Jesus**

*Robert K. McIver*

Pacific Press Publishing Association

Copyright: 1999

### **How Jesus Treated People**

*Morris L. Venden*

Pacific Press Publishing Association

### **Jesus Face To Face**

*Mark Finley and Steven Mosley*

Pacific Press Publishing Association

**Just Like Jesus**

*Max Lucado*

W Publishing Group

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**The Case for Christ: A Journalist's  
Personal Investigation of the  
Evidence for Jesus**

*Lee Strobel*

Zondervan Publishing House

Copyright 1998

**The Jesus I Never Knew**

*Philip Yancey*

Zondervan Publishing House

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**Jesus—Who He Is And Why He  
Matters**

*Alister McGrath*

Inter-Varsity Press

Copyright 1994

**Jesus—The Man Who Changed  
History**

*Meryl Doney*

Lion Hudson Plc

Copyright 1997

### Jesus Who Is He?

*Tim Lahaye*  
Multnomah  
Copyright 1997

### Jesus: Who Did He Think He Was?

*H J Richards*  
Kevin Mayhew  
Copyright 2000

### Who Is Jesus?

*Leander E Keck*  
Fortress Press  
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