

# Prophecies of the Messiah

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn argues that the Bible contains genuine prophecies about a coming Messiah that were accurately fulfilled in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.*

## The Place of His Birth

Biblical prophecy is a fascinating subject. It not only includes predictions of events that are still in the future. It also includes predictions of events that were future at the time the prophecy was given, but which have now been fulfilled and are part of the past. This latter category includes all the prophecies about a coming Messiah that Christians believe were accurately fulfilled in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. If the Bible really does contain such prophecies, then we would seem to have evidence that's at least consistent with the divine inspiration of the Bible. One can see how an all-knowing God could accurately foretell the future, but it's not clear how a finite human being could do so. Thus, if there are accurately fulfilled prophecies in the Bible, then we have yet another reason to believe that the biblical worldview is true.



Let's begin with a prophecy about the Messiah's birthplace. "Messiah" is a Hebrew term that simply means "anointed one." When translated into Greek, the language of the New Testament, the term becomes "Christ." Christians believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Mark 14:61-62).

In Micah 5:2 we read, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though

you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” This prophecy was given in the eighth century B.C., more than seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus!

Notice, first, that it refers to a future ruler who will come from the town of Bethlehem. When King Herod, shortly after Jesus’ birth, asked the Jewish religious leaders where the Christ (or Messiah) was to be born, they told him that he was to be born in Bethlehem and cited this verse from Micah as support (Matt. 2:1-6). Both Matthew and Luke confirm that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1 and Luke 2:4-7). So He clearly meets this necessary qualification for being the promised Messiah.

But that’s not all. Micah also says that the origins of this ruler are “from of old, from ancient times.” How should we understand this? One commentator notes, “The terms ‘old’ . . . and ‘ancient times’ . . . may denote ‘great antiquity’ as well as ‘eternity’ in the strictest sense.”<sup>{1}</sup> Dr. Allen Ross states, “At the least this means that Messiah was pre-existent; at the most it means He is eternal.”<sup>{2}</sup> Micah’s prophecy thus suggests that the Messiah will be a supernatural, perhaps even divine, person. And this astonishing conclusion is precisely what Jesus claimed for Himself!<sup>{3}</sup>

## **The Time of His Appearing**

Let’s now consider a fascinating prophecy that, in the opinion of many scholars, tells us when the Messiah would make His appearance. It’s found in Daniel 9.

Daniel was one of the Jewish captives who had been brought to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. The prophecy in Daniel 9 was given in the sixth century B.C. While much can be said about

this passage, we must focus on a few important points.

To begin, verse 24 gives us the time parameters during which the prophecy will unfold. It reads, "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin," and so on. Although we can't go into all the details, the 'seventy 'sevens'" concern seventy distinct seven-year periods of time, or a total of 490 years.

Next, verse 25 tells us that from the issuing of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of the Messiah, there will be a total of sixty-nine "sevens," or 483 years. There are two views we must consider. The first holds that this decree was issued by the Persian ruler Artaxerxes to Ezra the priest in 457 B.C. [{4}](#) Adding 483 years to this date brings us to A.D. 27, the year many scholars believe Jesus began His public ministry! The second view holds that the reference is to a later decree of Artaxerxes, issued on March 5, 444 B.C. [{5}](#) Adding 483 years to this date takes us to A.D. 38. But according to this view, the years in question should be calculated according to a lunar calendar, consisting of twelve thirty-day months. [{6}](#) If each of the 483 years consists of only 360 days, then we arrive at March 30, 33 A.D. Dr. Allen Ross says "that is the Monday of the Passion week, the day of the Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem." [{7}](#) The views thus differ on the date of Jesus' death, but each can comfortably fit the evidence. [{8}](#)

Finally, verse 26 says that after the period of sixty-nine "sevens" the Messiah will be "cut off" and have nothing. According to one scholar, "The word translated 'cut off' is used of executing . . . a criminal." [{9}](#) All of this fits quite well with the crucifixion of Jesus. Indeed, the accuracy of this prophecy, written over five hundred years before Jesus' birth, bears eloquent testimony to the divine inspiration and truth of the Bible.

## The Nature of His Ministry

In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses told the Israelites, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” This verse promised a succession of prophets who would speak God’s words to the people. Ultimately, however, it refers to Jesus Christ. One commentator notes that the Messianic interpretation of this passage is mentioned not only in the New Testament, but also among the Essenes, Jews, Gnostics, and others.[{10}](#) Peter explicitly applied this passage to Jesus in one of his sermons (Acts 3:22-23).

But not only was the Messiah to be a great prophet, it was also foretold that he would be a priest and king as well. The prophet Zechariah was told to make a royal crown and symbolically set it on the head of Joshua, the high priest. The Lord then said, “Here is the man whose name is the Branch . . . he will . . . sit and rule on his throne. And . . . be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two” (Zechariah 6:12-13). “The title “Branch” is a messianic title.”[{11}](#) So the scene symbolizes the future Messiah, here referred to as “the Branch,” uniting the offices of king and priest in one person.

But why is it important that the Messiah be a priest? As a prophet he speaks God’s word to the people. As a king he rules from his throne. But why must he also be a priest? “Because priests dealt with sin,” says Michael Brown, a Christian scholar who is ethnically Jewish. “Priests bore the iniquities of the people on their shoulders.”[{12}](#) And this, of course, is precisely what Jesus did for us: “He . . . bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24).

Dr. Brown points to a tradition in the Talmud that says that on the Day of Atonement there were three signs that the animal sacrifices offered by the high priest had been accepted by God. According to this tradition, in the forty years prior to

the temple's destruction in A.D. 70, all three signs turned up negative every single time.[{13}](#) Dr. Brown comments, "Jesus probably was crucified in A.D. 30, and the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70."[{14}](#) So during this forty-year period God signaled that he no longer accepted these sacrifices. Why? Because final atonement had been made by Jesus![{15}](#)

## **The Significance of His Death**

Without any doubt, one of the most astonishing prophecies about the promised Messiah is found in Isaiah 52-53. The verses were written about seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus. They largely concern the death of the Lord's "Suffering Servant." According to many scholars, a careful comparison of this passage with the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus' suffering and death reveals too many similarities to be merely coincidental.

In some of the most-cited verses from this intriguing passage we read: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:5-6). Here we have a vivid depiction of substitutionary atonement. The Lord lays upon His servant "the iniquity of us all" and punishes him "for our transgressions." In other words, God's servant dies as a substitute in our place. This is precisely what Jesus claimed for himself, saying, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The parallels between Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" and Jesus are certainly impressive. But some scholars have suggested that Isaiah's "servant" is actually the nation of Israel and not the Messiah. Dr. Michael Brown dismisses this notion

however, insisting that 'nowhere in the . . . foundational, authoritative Jewish writings do we find the interpretation that this passage refers to the nation of Israel. References to the servant as a people actually end with Isaiah 48:20.'" {16} What's more, he says, "Many . . . Jewish interpreters . . . had no problem seeing this passage as referring to the Messiah . . . By the sixteenth century, Rabbi Moshe Alshech said, 'Our rabbis with one voice accept and affirm . . . that the prophet is speaking of the Messiah, and we shall . . . also adhere to the same view.'" {17}

For his part, Dr. Brown is so convinced that this passage prophetically depicts the suffering and death of Jesus that he feels "as if God would have to apologize to the human race and to the Jewish people for putting this passage into the scriptures" if Jesus is not the one in view! {18} Although this is a strong statement, it's not unjustified. For Isaiah 53 not only foretells the death of God's servant for the sins of the people, it also implies his resurrection!

## **The Mystery of His Resurrection**

In the opinion of many scholars, Isaiah 53 not only foretells the death of God's servant; it also implies his resurrection from the dead!

It's important to notice that Isaiah 53 makes it absolutely clear that the Messiah is put to death. It says that "he was cut off from the land of the living" (v. 8), and that 'he poured out his life unto death" (v. 12). On the other hand, however, it also says that 'he will see his offspring and prolong his days" (v. 10), and that after his suffering "he will see the light of life and be satisfied" (v. 11). So the text teaches both that the Messiah will die and that he will live again. And although the passage doesn't explicitly teach the Messiah's resurrection, it's certainly consistent with it. This is really staggering in light of the compelling

historical evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus! [{19}](#)

Let's now pause to consider what we've learned in this brief article. Micah 5:2 teaches that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. Also, by teaching the preexistence, or even eternality, of the Messiah, the prophecy suggests that he'll be a supernatural, possibly even divine, figure. In Daniel 9:24-27 we saw that the Messiah would appear to Israel sometime around A.D. 27 – 33, precisely the time of Jesus' public ministry! Deuteronomy and Zechariah teach that the Messiah would minister as prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet, Jesus spoke God's word to the people. As a priest, he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. And while he didn't reign as king during his first advent, he was called "the king of the Jews" (Matt. 27:11, 37). And Christians believe that he's in some sense reigning now from heaven and that he'll one day reign on earth as well (Luke 1:32-33). Finally, Isaiah 53 teaches that the Messiah would die for our sins—and then somehow live again. This is consistent with the New Testament's record of Jesus' substitutionary death and bodily resurrection.

Of course, we've not been able to consider all the prophecies. But hopefully enough has been said to conclude with Dr. Brown that if Jesus isn't the Messiah, "there will never be a Messiah. It's too late for anyone else. It's him or no one." [{20}](#) Well, you've now heard the evidence; the verdict is up to you.

## Notes

1. Thomas E. McComiskey, "Micah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 427.
2. Allen Ross, "Messianic Prophecies," at [www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=2764](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2764). Accessed on September 6, 2007.

3. See, for example, Matthew 11:27; John 8:58 and 10:30.
4. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 114. See also Ezra 7:11-26.
5. J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1985), 1362. See also Nehemiah 2:1-8.
6. See, for example, the discussion in Ross, "Messianic Prophecies," at [www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=2764](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2764). Accessed on September 6, 2007.
7. Ibid.
8. The first holds that He was crucified in A.D. 30, the second in A.D. 33.
9. Pentecost, "Daniel," 1364.
10. Earl S. Kalland, "Deuteronomy," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 122.
11. F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1985), 1558. See also Zechariah 3:8.
12. Michael Brown, interviewed in Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Advance Reader Copy) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 199.
13. See Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 39a.
14. Brown, interviewed in Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 201.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 213.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 212.
19. For a defense of this important claim, please see some of the excellent articles by William Lane Craig at [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org). For more scriptural support, please compare Peter's sermon in Acts 2:22-36 with Psalm 16:8-11.
20. Brown, interviewed in Strobel, *The Case for the Real*

Jesus, 203.

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# Truth You Can Sing About – Part 3

*Probe radio producer Steven Davis provides spiritual truth in five Christmas carols, backed by new music written and performed by his son Jon Clive Davis.*

## Coventry Carol

Songs about Jesus' birth have been close friends with Christmas for generations, but when's the last time you thought about the great truth found in these Christmas hymns and carols? In this article we're highlighting five Christmas songs, and first up is *Coventry Carol*.



**Herod the King in his raging charged he hath this day,  
His men of might in his own sight all children young to slay...**

Following a star, Magi arrive in Jerusalem, and ask Herod where they can find this new born King of the Jews. Herod rouses his biblical scholars to research this, and they find in Micah (5:2):

But as for you, Bethlehem . . . too little to be among the  
clans of Judah,  
from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.  
His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of  
eternity.

*This King* was a much bigger deal than Herod ever would be. Still, Herod chooses to inform the Magi, encouraging them to return and tell him where they found this King, so that he too could “Worship Him (Matthew 2:8).”

But God knowing his heart, warns the Magi to return home another way. When Herod found out he was furious, and instructed his soldiers to kill all the baby boys two years old and younger. A second prophecy is fulfilled from Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.” (31:15)

It was this event which stirred the writing of the hauntingly beautiful *Coventry Carol*. Even though this is a dark and tragic theme, we need to know and to feel the entire context surrounding the birth of Christ.

One child born, and who knows how many dozens, if not hundreds, were slaughtered.

2000 years later, few would respond to Christ as Herod did; but to even do something as “harmless” as ignore Him, places you at eternal risk. So, how do you respond to the Christ?

## **In the Bleak Midwinter**

**Enough for Him, whom Cherubim worship night and day,  
a breastful of milk and a mangerful of hay;  
Enough for Him, whom Angels fall down before,  
the ox and ass and camel which adore.**

The third verse speaks to something we often forget, especially when it comes to applying it. The Christmas narratives from the Gospels, prophecies and subsequent teaching speak plainly and forcefully to the deity and humility of Christ. The Apostle Paul explains it well:

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as

something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. (Philippians 2: 6-8 NLT)

Jesus Christ gives us the greatest example of a life of humility, first by laying aside His "divine privileges," then humbled Himself further by dying for our sins on the cross. Going from the non-stop worship of the cherubim to mother's milk and a bed of hay was entirely within His character. As was the stark contrast between angels falling prostrate before Him to simple barnyard beasts adoring Him.

Perhaps God's greatest goal for your life and for mine is to make us like Jesus. Paul tells us in Romans: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." (Romans 8:29) So do you think humility would be part of that process for us? Of course.

The author of the song Christina Rossetti wraps up her verses with an application:

**Yet what I can I give Him, give my heart.**

Humility is what brings us to Christ. Will you give your heart to Him this Christmas?

## **God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen**

**God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,  
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day,  
To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of  
comfort and joy.**

Even though this is one of the oldest Christmas Carols still being sung today, it offers a unique blending of historic and contemporary perspectives.

The first and last verses are for us (the contemporary perspective), while the middle verses are about shepherds, angels, the Christ Child, and His mother Mary. Let's look at the verses which apply to you and me.

The first line tells us how we are to rest merry and are not to dismay. How can we do that? Because Christ was born to save. The angel said: "Do not be afraid" (Luke 2:10). In other words, don't be dismayed. And, "there has been born for you a Savior" (Luke 2:11), which allows us to rest merry. We learn more from Matthew 1:21, "He will save His people from their sins." So not just saved—but saved from our sins.

The next line talks about how "we were gone astray." Isaiah 53 shows us how far we've gone astray, listing the things Christ has done for us: bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; chastised for our peace, and His wounds healed us. And after all Christ has done for us, it says: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way." Despite this, the Lord "Laid on him the iniquity of us all."

What typically is the last verse, with the contemporary perspective, says:

**Now to the Lord sing praises, all you within this place.**

That's what you do when the Son of God has come into the world, to save you from your sins.

## **While Shepherds Watched**

**While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground,**

**An angel of the Lord came down, and glory shone around.**

**"Fear not," said he for mighty dread had seized their troubled mind**

**"Glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind."**

**Well, there's no doubt from the title it's all about the shepherd's perspective of what happened the night Christ was born.**

When you compare the lyrics of the carol with Luke 2, you discover that the shepherd's perspective in this song is extremely Biblical. Examine all the main points from the Gospel narrative, and you find them in the song: the cast, the location, angelic appearance, fear, angelic announcement, new location, signs, chorus, praise.

Now a word about the cast, and their perspective. *They were shepherds!* But wait, wasn't this the birth of the Son of God? King of kings and Lord of Lords? Why would God make such a stellar announcement to the working class? Two reasons:

The first reason is found in both Luke 2 and the first verse of the song. Here's Luke's account: "And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'" This good news was for ALL the people.

The second reason the shepherds were the recipients of such good news was pride. Had the message been brought to the elite, the royal, the upper class, do you think they would have shared such a great message with those of us less fortunate? Probably not. We wouldn't have access to their social circles. Why would they seek us out to share this good news? Pride would have cut the Good News off from the rest of the world.

God did not want this message to miss anyone. Christ came humbly, and his announcement came humbly. After all, *God so loved the **world**.*

## **0 Holy Night**

**0 holy night! The stars are brightly shining  
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth!**

Long lay the world in sin and error pining  
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

**Long lay the world in sin and error pining.** Although one rarely “pines” anymore, as I read this line, I feel the hopelessness and helplessness pressing in. In the seventh chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans, he said: “And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t . . . I am a slave to sin.” Yeah, that’s hopeless.

Speaking of slavery, the third verse declares: **Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother; and in His name all oppression shall cease.** In 1847, when the lyrics were written, slavery was rampant, especially in these United States. And a century and a half later, oppression still hasn’t ceased. Why?

Well, Paul said it in the previous passage: “I am a slave to sin.” We are *all* slaves to sin . . . until Christ breaks those chains.

The result of Christ breaking the chains of oppression is found in the choruses:

**Fall on your knees;**

and

**Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!**

Christ humbled Himself to embrace our human weaknesses, and humbled Himself even further, unto death on the cross. And our response is to fall on our knees in humility and praise. I wonder if humility has a place in breaking the chain of oppression. Seems to work for Jesus.

This program’s scripts were written by the producer of Probe Radio, Steven Davis. The music was composed and performed by

his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis. May your Christmas be filled with praise!

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# 5 Things You Need to Know About Jesus

*Tom Davis provides an overview of 5 extremely important aspects of Jesus' life: His birth, baptism, claims to deity, death and resurrection, and ascension.*

## The Birth of Jesus

Knowing about Jesus, who he was, what he did, and what he taught is essential for Christian discipleship. By studying Jesus, we know how we ought to live and what the redemption that he provides for us means. In this article we discuss five things you need to know about Jesus, starting with the meaning of the birth of Jesus.

The story of His birth is found in Matthew chapters 1 and 2, and in Luke chapters 1 and 2. Matthew gives us his understanding of what Jesus' birth meant in the angel Gabriel's proclamation to Joseph and in an Old Testament prophecy.



When the angel appeared to Joseph the angel told him that Jesus will “save his people from their sins.”<sup>{1}</sup> Jesus left heaven to come down to His people at His birth.

In order for His people to be saved from their sins Jesus must come to His people. The virgin birth of Jesus is directly

linked to His death and resurrection.

The first prophecy is, "See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel."[{2}](#) This prophecy comes from Isaiah 7:14. In Isaiah this prophecy is a promise to King Ahaz of Judah that God will defeat His enemies. Immanuel is an important name because it means "God with us." Matthew is telling us that through the virgin birth of Jesus God is with us, and is a sign that sin and death will be defeated.

In Luke, the praise of a man named Simeon and the proclamation of the heavenly host helps tell us what Jesus' birth means.

When Simeon saw Jesus in the temple he prayed, "For my eyes have seen your salvation. You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples—a light for revelation to the Gentile and glory to your people Israel."[{3}](#) Simeon tells us that Jesus will reveal God to all people. God's salvation is for all people, not only for the Jews.

When the heavenly hosts appeared to the shepherds out in the fields they proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!"[{4}](#) The proclamation of the angels tells us that the people Jesus favors, those who follow and trust Him, will have peace.

To recap, we see that the birth of Jesus is God coming down to be with us, and to save us from our sins. This salvation is not only for the Jews, but is for all people.

## **Jesus' Baptism**

Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention that when Jesus was baptized the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove.[{5}](#) A voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased."[{6}](#)

Jesus was sinless, so why does he receive baptism from John? Jesus told John it was to fulfill righteousness. Jesus is identifying with Israel, and all mankind, and fulfilling righteousness for our sake. Because Jesus identifies with us and our sins, His baptism is the beginning of His ministry of atonement that is accomplished at His crucifixion.[{7}](#)

All the gospels mention that the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. Have you ever wondered why in the form of a dove? In Genesis when God created the heavens and the earth the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. This signifies God's presence at creation. Some biblical scholars think that Noah sending the dove out from the ark signifies a kind of new creation after God destroyed the world with a flood. In the same way, the Spirit appearing in the form of a dove and descending on Jesus means that Jesus is the beginning of new creation.[{8}](#)

At Jesus' baptism the Father pronounced, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased."[{9}](#) What does this mean? Most Bible scholars think this statement references Psalm 2:7[{10}](#) and Isaiah 42:1.[{11}](#) Psalm 2 is a Psalm that was used at the coronation of a new king. Isaiah 42 is about God's suffering servant who will bring "justice to the nations." Biblical Scholar Craig Blomberg concludes, "Therefore it would appear that God is forthrightly declaring Jesus to be both kingly Messiah and suffering servant."[{12}](#)

Jesus' baptism means that Jesus identifies with us. Jesus is the beginning of new creation and begins His ministry of atonement for our sins. God's voice from heaven also declares that Jesus is the kingly Messiah and the suffering servant.

## **Jesus' Claims to Deity**

Jesus claimed to be God in several ways. He not only used words to make these claims, but His actions also made a claim

to deity.

Jesus' actions showed that he had authority over evil spirits by repeatedly casting out demons. Jesus commanded the weather. This is something mortal men do not do, but God and heavenly beings do. Jesus was a man, but this event shows that he was more than a man, he was God in human flesh.

But let's look specifically at how Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of Man during His trial by the Jewish authorities. The night before His trial Jesus was arrested and tried by the Jewish authorities. There were many who accused Jesus of various things. The problem was that the testimony of the witnesses who were accusing Jesus did not match. This led to the high priest asking, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus answered, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with clouds of heaven." The Jewish authorities then condemned him for blasphemy.[{13}](#) Why?

Jesus was condemned because he identified himself with the Son of Man in Daniel 7. In this chapter the Ancient of Days, God the Father, is sitting in judgment when the Son of Man comes with the "clouds of heaven" and approaches the Ancient of Days. The Son of Man is given dominion, glory, and a kingdom that will not be destroyed. The Son of Man is a human and divine figure who seems to sit in judgment alongside the Ancient of Days. When Jesus claims to be the Son of Man he is claiming to be a human and divine figure. Jesus is claiming that he will be vindicated and that the Jewish authorities will be condemned by God.[{14}](#)

Jesus claimed to be God by casting out demons, calming a storm, and by claiming to be the Son of Man in Daniel 7.

# Jesus' Death and Resurrection

Jesus' death and resurrection is the foundation of Christianity. The death and resurrection of Jesus is a climactic confrontation between God and Satan that involves forgiveness of sin, the abolition of death, and the defeat of evil.

The narratives of this event are found in all four gospels. However, the most important passage that helps us understand the meaning of the resurrection is not in one of the Gospels; it is in one of Paul's letters, 1 Corinthians 15.

In verse 3, Paul states that "Jesus died for our sins." In Hebrews 9 and 10, the author explains that in the Old Testament sacrificial system bulls, goats, and sheep had to be sacrificed every year to purify the people. However, Jesus only had to die once to cover the sins of all people. Therefore, the death of Jesus for our sins is superior to the sacrificial system and makes it obsolete.

Paul states, "For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."[{15}](#) We live life knowing that someday we will die. We live in the shadow of death's approach. Jesus confronts death on the cross, then returns from the grave three days later. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, death has been abolished. New Testament scholar Craig Keener states, "As death in every case is established in Adam, so life in all cases is established in Christ."[{16}](#)

In Colossians 2:15 Paul is addressing the implications of Jesus' resurrection. He writes, "He (Jesus) disarmed the rulers and the authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him." The rulers and authorities that Paul mentions are Satan and his demons.[{17}](#) Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan and his demons are defeated publicly. When Christians proclaim the resurrection, these rulers and authorities are humiliated publicly for everyone to

see.

The death and resurrection of Jesus cleanses us of our sins, pays the penalty for our sins, abolishes death, and defeats Satan and the forces of evil.

## **Jesus' Ascension**

Jesus' return to heaven is described in Acts 1:9-11. After His resurrection Jesus spent forty days with His disciples. After forty days the disciples watched Jesus ascend into heaven in a cloud. But what does this mean?

In John chapter 16 Jesus told His disciples that he will be leaving them. Jesus said, "It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you." [{18}](#) The Counselor that Jesus referred to is the Holy Spirit. Jesus' promise to the disciples is fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus told His disciples "When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth." [{19}](#) When Jesus ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to us. The Holy Spirit does not only counsel us; he guides us to truth and intercedes for us.

Jesus' ascension has other implications as well. Paul tells us, "Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for us." [{20}](#) There are two things to pay attention to in this verse. First, Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is on His throne, which means he is ruling now. Second, Jesus also prays for us. There are many other things that could be mentioned in a discussion of things we need to know about Jesus. One example is Jesus' temptation in the desert. When Adam and Eve were tempted in the Garden of Eden, they failed to resist Satan's temptation. Jesus succeeded in resisting Satan.

When we consider Jesus' birth, baptism, claims to deity, temptation, casting out evil spirits, death, resurrection, and ascension, we have an image of a God that became man. God rescues us from our sin and from the evil powers and principalities that are active in this world. Jesus will return and make all things new with the new creation and new Jerusalem in Revelation 20 and 21. The first Christians saw all of this. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright sums things up this way, "The first Christians saw the message and accomplishment of Jesus as the long-awaited arrival of God's kingdom, the final dealing-with sin that would undo the powers of darkness and break through to the 'age to come.'" [\[21\]](#)

## Notes

1. Matthew 1:21
2. Matthew 1:23
3. Luke 2:30-32
4. Luke 2:14
5. Jesus' baptism is found in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, and is alluded to in John 1:29-34.
6. Mark 1:11 CSB
7. Keener, Craig S., *Matthew* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1997), 85.
8. Evens, Craig A., *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew-Luke*, (Colorado Springs, Victor, 2003) 78.
9. Mark 1:11 CSB
10. I will declare the Lord's decree. He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. – Psalm 2:7 (CSB)
11. This is my servant; I strengthen him, this is my chosen one; I delight in him. I have put my Spirit on him; he will bring justice to the nations. – Isaiah 42:1 (CSB)
12. Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville, Broadman & Holman Press, 1997), 222.
13. Matt. 26:62-65; Mark 14:60-6
14. Quarles, Charles L. "Lord or Legend: Jesus as the Messianic Son of Man," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 62, No. 1 (2019) 103-124. Heiser, Michael S. *The*

*Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham Press), 249-151.

15. 1 Corinthians 15:22 CSB

16. Keener, Craig S., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IVP Academic 2014) 494.

Gilbrant, Thoralf Ed. *The Complete Biblical Library: The New Testament Study Bible Romans-Corinthians* (Springfield, World Library Press 1986) 465.

17. *Ibid.*, 574.

18. John 17:7 CSB

19. John 16:3 CSB

20. Romans 8:34 CSB

21. Wright, N. T. *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (San Francisco, HarperOne, 2016), 280.

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# Body and Soul in the New Testament

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn draws on John Cooper's book *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting* to provide an overview of what the New Testament teaches about the body-soul connection.*

## The Teaching of Jesus

What does the New Testament teach about the nature and destiny of human beings? In a [previous article](#), I discussed what the Old Testament has to say about these issues, giving special attention to the human body and soul. In this article, we'll consider what the New Testament has to say.

About 400 years separate the end of the Old Testament from the beginning of the New. During this so-called “intertestamental” period, Jewish biblical scholars, like the Pharisees, continued to teach and write about what God had revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. According to John Cooper, the Pharisees taught that when a person dies, the soul leaves the body to continue its existence “in an intermediate state, already enjoying or lamenting the anticipated consequences of God’s judgment.”[{1}](#) Interestingly, both Jesus and the Apostle Paul also seem to have held this view.[{2}](#)



Consider, for example, some of the last words spoken by Jesus just prior to His death on the cross. You may remember that Jesus was crucified between two criminals. While one of these men railed against Jesus, the other (aware of his guilt), asked Jesus to “remember” him when He came into His kingdom (Luke 23:39-42). Jesus responded by promising *this* man that he would join Him “in Paradise” that very day (v. 43). Paradise, in the Jewish thinking of the time, was understood to be a pleasant and refreshing place where the souls of the righteous continue their existence between the death and resurrection of the body.[{3}](#)

The body, in other words, may die, but the soul, or person, continues to exist apart from their body. Although this criminal had only hours left to live, his elementary confession of faith in Jesus resulted in Jesus promising him that they would be together in Paradise that very day! This ought to encourage all of us who have put our hope in Christ for salvation. Our bodies may wear out and die. But when they do, we shall go to be with Christ, awaiting the resurrection of our bodies while enjoying the presence of the Lord!

But what about the other criminal, the one who mocked and insulted Jesus? Although we’re not told what happened to him, we know from elsewhere in Scripture that the souls of the unrepentant also continue to exist after the death of the

body. In the next section we'll take a closer look at the fate of the righteous and unrighteous dead.

## The Rich Man and Lazarus

What happens to us when we die? Do we continue to exist in some sense? Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus appears to offer some answers to these questions (see Luke 16:19-31). The story concerns a rich man, who lacks for nothing, and a poor beggar, named Lazarus, who is laid at the rich man's gate (v. 20). The story implies that the rich man could have helped Lazarus, but never did so.

Eventually, both men died. Lazarus is said to be "carried by the angels to Abraham's side" (v. 22). Essentially, he is depicted as being with the Jewish patriarch Abraham in Paradise. Paradise, you'll remember, was considered a place of rest and refreshment for the righteous dead. By contrast, the rich man, his body having been buried, finds himself in "torment" in Hades (vv. 22-23). Seeing both Abraham and Lazarus at a great distance, he pleads with them for help. Abraham, however, tells him that this just isn't possible (vv. 24-31).

What might this story teach us about the nature and destiny of human beings? Though we should perhaps be careful about reading the story too literally, it seems to teach that we will each continue to exist (in some sense) even *after* the death of our body. Moreover, this existence will be experienced as either joyful or sorrowful, depending on our relationship with God. Although the story seems to depict the rich man and Lazarus as if they still have bodies of some sort, John Cooper offers several reasons for believing that the story is using figurative language to describe a time in which these men exist apart from their bodies.<sup>{4}</sup> This would be the period between the death and resurrection of the body. What are some of the reasons that Cooper offers for this view?

First, at the time Jesus tells this story, He regarded the resurrection as a still future event (see Luke 20:34-36). It is thus unlikely that the story here concerns some sort of literal bodily existence. Second, the story locates the rich man in “Hades”—and this term appears only to be used of the intermediate state, between the death and resurrection of the body.[{5}](#) The story thus appears to depict the rich man and Lazarus as consciously existing persons between the death and resurrection of their bodies. And if this is so, then we are *more* than just our bodies (as we’ll see more fully in the next section).

## Paul’s Heavenly Vision

Do you view yourself as *more* than just your body? Might you also have a soul? We’ve previously considered evidence for the human soul in the teachings of Jesus. In this section, we’ll consider further evidence from the writings of the Apostle Paul. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul recounts an extraordinary experience which he had fourteen years earlier (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, 7). He describes being “caught up . . . into paradise” and hearing “things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (vv. 2-4).

For our purposes, the most important element of this experience concerns a peculiar detail mentioned twice by the apostle. According to Paul, he was unsure whether he had this experience while “in the body or out of the body” (vv. 2-3). That is, Paul was unsure whether he had been “caught up into Paradise” (v. 3) in his body, or out of it. But why is this important? Because it shows that Paul regarded the “out of body” option as a genuine possibility.[{6}](#)

You see, many scholars have argued that Paul did not believe in any sort of conscious existence apart from the body. The great New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce claimed that Paul “could not conceive” of a situation in which he might exist

and have experiences apart from his body.<sup>{7}</sup> Now you might be thinking, “Well wait just a minute. Didn’t you say that Paul was unsure whether this experience had occurred while in the body or out of it? Maybe he remained in his body and the experience was just a *vision* of Paradise, occurring while he was in some sort of trance-like state on earth.”<sup>{8}</sup>

Yes, you’re right. That *is* possible (although it doesn’t seem consistent with what Paul actually says).<sup>{9}</sup> And here’s the thing: the very fact that Paul was unsure whether this experience occurred while he was in (or out of) his body, tells us that he regarded the “out of body” explanation as a genuine possibility. And if this is so, then contrary to what some scholars have said, Paul most certainly *could* conceive of conscious existence apart from his body. Indeed, he thought he may have had just such an experience himself.

But we can take this argument further. For as we’ll see in the next section, Paul (like the Pharisees and Jesus), seemed to think that we’ll continue to exist and have experiences between the death and resurrection of our bodies.

## **Our Heavenly Dwelling**

When I was a child, our family would occasionally go camping. Although we usually went in a camper, with air-conditioning and beds, I’ve also spent a few nights camping out in a tent. Most of us have probably had such an experience (though whether we enjoyed it or not is another matter). A tent is basically a portable structure that provides a temporary place to stay while we’re away from our permanent home.

In 2 Corinthians 5 the Apostle Paul has a fascinating discussion that touches on some of these issues (see vv. 1-10). The discussion is challenging, but if we consider it step by step, I think we can get a handle on what the apostle is saying. He begins, “For we know that if the tent that is

our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (v. 1).

When Paul writes of "the tent that is our earthly home," he is referring to our physical bodies here and now. If our body is "destroyed," and we die physically, "we have," says Paul, "a building from God . . . eternal in the heavens" awaiting us. According to John Cooper, this "building" can plausibly refer to one of two things.<sup>{10}</sup> It *might* refer to our future resurrection body. However, it may also refer simply to "being 'with Christ'." If the second option is meant, then Paul is speaking about going to be "with Christ" at the time of death, in which we are (as he later puts it), "at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8; see also Philippians 1:23).

Paul characterizes our present "earthly" state as one of groaning, "longing to put on our heavenly dwelling" that "we may not be found naked" (1 Corinthians 5:2-3). Although these verses are difficult to interpret, it is probable that "nakedness" refers to temporarily existing without a body when we die. If so, then Paul is saying that when we die, we go immediately to be "with Christ." There we are "at home with the Lord," awaiting that day in which we will "put on our heavenly dwelling" (v. 2). This likely refers to our resurrection body. At the time of the resurrection, our souls will be united with a glorious new body, so that we might eternally enjoy life with Christ and fellow believers in the new heaven and new earth. We will consider these issues more fully in the next section.

## **The Resurrection of the Body**

The Bible envisions a future time in which all who have died will be raised from the dead into some sort of physical, bodily existence. The New Testament writers refer to this as "the resurrection of the dead" and it will include both believers and unbelievers. Hence Jesus, referring to His own

unique role in executing divine judgment, claims that “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29). Although evidence elsewhere in the New Testament suggests that different groups of people may be raised at different times, the key point here is that this event has not yet taken place. It’s still in the future.

Paul says much the same thing in several of his letters. To cite just one example, he tells the Philippians that “we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20-21). Elsewhere Paul tells us that our resurrection bodies will be “imperishable,” “powerful,” and glorious (1 Corinthians 15:42-43). It’s incredibly exciting to contemplate the fact that the Lord intends to give his people marvelous new bodies, patterned after his own resurrection body, so that we might enjoy eternal life with him forever. When that day dawns, our joy will truly be complete!

So how might we attempt to summarize our discussion in this article? First, both Jesus and Paul seem to have taught that human beings are (in some sense) composed of both a body and a soul. John Cooper describes the relationship of soul and body as one of “functional holism.” Our body and soul *function* as a thoroughly integrated *whole* during our present earthly lives. But when our body dies, our soul continues to exist, awaiting the resurrection of our body at some future time.[\[11\]](#)

On that day, our soul will be united with our resurrection body, either to enjoy eternal life with Jesus, or face eternal judgment in hell. This, it seems to me, is what the New Testament has to say about the nature and destiny of humanity. In Christ we are offered a sure and steadfast hope for both our soul—and our body!

## Notes

1. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), Kindle Loc. 1208.
2. J. P. Moreland, *The Soul: How We Know It's Real and Why It Matters* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 55, Kindle.
3. This becomes a bit complicated. John Cooper points out that Jewish thinking about the afterlife continued its development during the intertestamental period. While some Rabbis conceived of "Paradise" as a special place for the righteous dead within Sheol, others began to think of Paradise as outside Sheol altogether. Regardless of such differences, however, Cooper reminds us that "Paradise" was understood as the place "where the blessed dwell with the Lord" (see Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1175-1200).
4. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1605; see also Loc. 1592-1607.
5. Again, see Cooper's discussion in *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1592-1607.
6. Cooper makes this point emphatically in *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1880-86.
7. F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 313; cited in John Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1840.
8. This possibility is also mentioned in *Cooper, Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1871.
9. Again, see Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1872.
10. See Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1837.
11. See Cooper's discussion in *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 699-712.

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# The Value of Suffering: A Christian Perspective

*Sue Bohlin looks at suffering from a Christian perspective. Applying a biblical worldview to this difficult subject results in a distinctly different approach to suffering than our natural inclination of blame and self pity.*

*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*



*There is no such thing as pointless pain in the life of the child of God. How this has encouraged and strengthened me in the valleys of suffering and pain! In this essay I'll be discussing the value of suffering, an unhappy non-negotiable of life in a fallen world.*

## Suffering Prepares Us to Be the Bride of Christ

Among the many reasons God allows us to suffer, this is my personal favorite: it prepares us to be the radiant bride of Christ. The Lord Jesus has a big job to do, changing His ragamuffin church into a glorious bride worthy of the Lamb. Ephesians 5:26-27 tells us He is making us holy by washing us with the Word—presenting us to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. Suffering develops holiness in unholy people. But *getting there* is painful in the Lord's "laundry room." When you use bleach to get rid of stains, it's a harsh process. Getting rid of wrinkles is even more painful: ironing means a combination of heat plus pressure. Ouch! No wonder suffering hurts!



But developing holiness in us is a worthwhile, extremely important goal for the Holy One who is our divine Bridegroom. We learn in Hebrews 12:10 that we are enabled to share in His holiness through the discipline of enduring hardship. More ouch! Fortunately, the same book assures us that discipline is a sign of God's love (Heb. 12:6). Oswald Chambers reminds us that "God has one destined end for mankind—holiness. His one aim is the production of saints." [{1}](#)

It's also important for all wives, but most especially the future wife of the Son of God, to have a submissive heart. Suffering makes us more determined to obey God; it teaches us to be submissive. The psalmist learned this lesson as he wrote in Psalm 119:67: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees."

The Lord Jesus has His work cut out for Him in purifying us for Himself (Titus 2:14). Let's face it, left to ourselves we are a dirty, messy, fleshly people, and we desperately need to be made pure. As hurtful as it is, suffering can purify us if we submit to the One who has a loving plan for the pain.

Jesus wants not just a *pure* bride, but a mature one as well—and suffering produces growth and maturity in us. James 1:2-4 reminds us that trials produce perseverance, which makes us mature and complete. And Romans 5:3-4 tells us that we can actually rejoice in our sufferings, because, again, they produce perseverance, which produces character, which produces hope. The Lord is creating for Himself a bride with sterling character, but it's not much fun getting there. I like something else Oswald Chambers wrote: "Sorrow burns up a great amount of shallowness." [{2}](#)

We usually don't have much trouble understanding that our Divine Bridegroom loves us; but we can easily forget how much He longs for us to love Him back. Suffering scoops us out, making our hearts bigger so that we can hold more love for

Him. It's all part of a well-planned courtship. He does know what He's doing . . . we just need to trust Him.

## **Suffering Allows Us to Minister Comfort to Others Who Suffer**

One of the most rewarding reasons that suffering has value is experienced by those who can say with conviction, "I know how you feel. I've been in your shoes." Suffering prepares us to minister comfort to others who suffer.

Feeling isolated is one of the hardest parts of suffering. It can feel like you're all alone in your pain, and that makes it so much worse. The comfort of those who have known that same pain is inexpressible. It feels like a warm blanket being draped around your soul. But in order for someone to say those powerful words—"I know just how you feel because I've been there"—that person had to walk through the same difficult valley first.

Ray and I lost our first baby when she was born too prematurely to survive. It was the most horrible suffering we've ever known. But losing Becky has enabled me to weep with those who weep with the comforting tears of one who has experienced that deep and awful loss. It's a wound that—by God's grace—has never fully healed so that I can truly empathize with others out of the very real pain I still feel. Talking about my loss puts me in touch with the unhealed part of the grief and loss that will always hurt until I see my daughter again in heaven. One of the most incredibly comforting things we can ever experience is someone else's tears for us. So when I say to a mother or father who has also lost a child, "I hurt with you, because I've lost a precious one too," my tears bring warmth and comfort in a way that someone who has never known that pain cannot offer.

One of the most powerful words of comfort I received when we were grieving our baby's loss was from a friend who said,

“Your pain may not be about just you. It may well be about other people, preparing you to minister comfort and hope to someone in your future who will need what you can give them because of what you’re going through right now. And if you are faithful to cling to God now, I promise He will use you greatly to comfort others later.” That perspective was like a sweet balm to my soul, because it showed me that my suffering was not pointless.

There’s another aspect of bringing comfort to those in pain. Those who have suffered tend not to judge others experiencing similar suffering. Not being judged is a great comfort to those who hurt. When you’re in pain, your world narrows down to mere survival, and it’s easy for others to judge you for not “following the rules” that should only apply to those whose lives aren’t being swallowed by the pain monster.

Suffering often develops compassion and mercy in us. Those who suffer tend to have tender hearts toward others who are in pain. We can comfort others with the comfort that we have received from God (2 Cor. 1:4) because we have experienced the reality of the Holy Spirit being there for us, walking alongside us in our pain. Then we can turn around and walk alongside others in their pain, showing the compassion that our own suffering has produced in us.

## **Suffering Develops Humble Dependence on God**

Marine Corps recruiter Randy Norfleet survived the Oklahoma City bombing despite losing 40 percent of his blood and needing 250 stitches to close his wounds. He never lost consciousness in the ambulance because he was too busy praying prayers of thanksgiving for his survival. When doctors said he would probably lose the sight in his right eye, Mr. Norfleet said, “Losing an eye is a small thing. Whatever brings you closer to God is a blessing. Through all this I’ve been

brought closer to God. I've become more dependent on Him and less on myself." {3}

Suffering is excellent at teaching us humble dependence on God, the only appropriate response to our Creator. Ever since the fall of Adam, we keep forgetting that God created us to depend on Him and not on ourselves. We keep wanting to go our own way, pretending that we are God. Suffering is powerfully able to get us back on track.

Sometimes we hurt so much we can't pray. We are forced to depend on the intercession of the Holy Spirit and the saints, needing them to go before the throne of God on our behalf. Instead of seeing that inability to pray as a personal failure, we can rejoice that our perception of being totally needy corresponds to the truth that we really are that needy. 2 Corinthians 1:9 tells us that hardships and sufferings happen "so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."

Suffering brings a "one day at a time-ness" to our survival. We get to the point of saying, "Lord, I can only make it through today if You help me . . . if You take me through today . . . or the next hour . . . or the next few minutes." One of my dearest friends shared with me the prayer from a heart burning with emotional pain: "Papa, I know I can make it through the next fifteen minutes if You hold me and walk me through it." Suffering has taught my friend the lesson of total, humble dependence on God.

As painful as it is, suffering strips away the distractions of life. It forces us to face the fact that we are powerless to change other people and most situations. The fear that accompanies suffering drives us to the Father like a little kid burying his face in his daddy's leg. Recognizing our own powerlessness is actually the key to experience real power because we have to acknowledge our dependence on God before His power can flow from His heart into our lives.

The disciples experienced two different storms out on the lake. The Lord's purpose in both storms was to train them to stop relying on their physical eyes and use their spiritual eyes. He wanted them to grow in trust and dependence on the Father. He allows us to experience storms in our lives for the same purpose: to learn to depend on God.

I love this paraphrase of Romans 8:28: "The Lord may not have planned that this should overtake me, but He has most certainly permitted it. Therefore, though it were an attack of an enemy, by the time it reaches me, it has the Lord's permission, and therefore all is well. He will make it work together with all life's experiences for good."

## **Suffering Displays God's Strength Through Our Weakness**

*God never wastes suffering, not a scrap of it. He redeems all of it for His glory and our blessing.* The classic Scripture for the concept that suffering displays God's strength through our weakness is found in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, where we learn that God's grace is sufficient for us, for His power is perfected in weakness. Paul said he delighted in weaknesses, hardships, and difficulties "for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Our culture disdains weakness, but our frailty is a sign of God's workmanship in us. It gets us closer to what we were created to be—completely dependent on God. Several years ago I realized that instead of despising the fact that polio had left me with a body that was weakened and compromised, susceptible to pain and fatigue, I could choose to rejoice in it. My weakness made me more like a fragile, easily broken window than a solid brick wall. But just as sunlight pours through a window but is blocked by a wall, I discovered that other people could see God's strength and beauty in me because of the window-like nature of my weakness! Consider how the

Lord Jesus was the exact representation of the glory of the Father—I mean, He was all window and no walls! He was completely dependent on the Father, choosing to become weak so that God's strength could shine through Him. And He was the strongest person the world has ever seen. Not His own strength; He displayed the Father's strength because of that very weakness.

The reason His strength can shine through us is because we know God better through suffering. One wise man I heard said, "I got theology in seminary, but I learned reality through trials. I got facts in Sunday School, but I learned faith through trusting God in difficult circumstances. I got truth from studying, but I got to know the Savior through suffering."

Sometimes our suffering isn't a consequence of our actions or even someone else's. God is teaching other beings about Himself and His loved ones—us—as He did with Job. The point of Job's trials was to enable heavenly beings to see God glorified in Job. Sometimes He trusts us with great pain in order to make a point, whether the intended audience is believers, unbelievers, or the spirit realm. Quadriplegic Joni Eareckson Tada, no stranger to great suffering, writes, "Whether a godly attitude shines from a brain-injured college student or from a lonely man relegated to a back bedroom, the response of patience and perseverance counts. God points to the peaceful attitude of suffering people to teach others about Himself. He not only teaches those we rub shoulders with every day, but He instructs the countless millions of angels and demons. The hosts in heaven stand amazed when they observe God sustain hurting people with His peace." [\[4\]](#)

I once heard Charles Stanley say that nothing attracts the unbeliever like a saint suffering successfully. Joni Tada said, "You were made for one purpose, and that is to make God real to those around you." [\[5\]](#) The reality of God's power, His love, and His character are made very, very real to a watching

world when we trust Him in our pain.

## **Suffering Gets Us Ready for Heaven**

Pain is inevitable because we live in a fallen world. 1 Thessalonians 3:3 reminds us that we are “destined for trials.” We don’t have a choice whether we will suffer—our choice is to go through it by ourselves or with God.

Suffering teaches us the difference between the important and the transient. It prepares us for heaven by teaching us how unfulfilling life on earth is and helping us develop an eternal perspective. Suffering makes us homesick for heaven.

Deep suffering of the soul is also a taste of hell. After many sleepless nights wracked by various kinds of pain, my friend Jan now knows what she was saved from. Many Christians only know they’re saved without grasping what it is Christ has delivered them from. Jan’s suffering has given her an appreciation of the reality of heaven, and she’s been changed forever.

I have an appreciation of heaven gained from a different experience. As my body weakens from the lifelong impact of polio, to be honest, I have a deep frustration with it that makes me grateful for the perfect, beautiful, completely working resurrection body waiting for me on the other side. My husband once told me that heaven is more real to me than anyone he knows. Suffering has done that for me. Paul explained what happens in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

*“Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

One of the effects of suffering is to loosen our grasp on this life, because we shouldn't be thinking that life in a fallen world is as wonderful as we sometimes think it is. Pastor Dick Bacon once said, "If this life were easy, we'd just love it too much. If God didn't make it painful, we'd never let go of it." Suffering reminds us that we live in an abnormal world. Suffering is abnormal—our souls protest, "This isn't right!" We need to be reminded that we are living in the post-fall "Phase 2." The perfect Phase 1 of God's beautiful, suffering-free creation was ruined when Adam and Eve fell. So often, people wonder what kind of cruel God would deliberately make a world so full of pain and suffering. They've lost track of history. The world God originally made isn't the one we experience. Suffering can make us long for the new heaven and the new earth where God will set all things right again.

Sometimes suffering literally prepares us for heaven. Cheryl's in-laws, both beset by lingering illnesses, couldn't understand why they couldn't just die and get it over with. But after three long years of holding on, during a visit from Cheryl's pastor, the wife trusted Christ on her deathbed and the husband received assurance of his salvation. A week later the wife died, followed in six months by her husband. They had continued to suffer because of God's mercy and patience, who did not let them go before they were ready for heaven.

Suffering dispels the cloaking mists of inconsequential distractions of this life and puts things in their proper perspective. My friend Pete buried his wife a few years ago after a battle with Lou Gehrig's disease. One morning I learned that his car had died on the way to church, and I said something about what a bummer it was. Pete just shrugged and said, "This is nothing." That's what suffering will do for us. Trials are light and momentary afflictions . . . but God redeems them all.

## **Notes**

1. Oswald Chambers, *Our Utmost for His Highest*, September 1.

2. Chambers, June 25.
3. *National and International Religion Report*, Vol. 9:10, May 1, 1995, 1
4. Joni Eareckson Tada, *When Is It Right to Die?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 122.
5. Tada, 118.

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## **Heresy: Nothing New Under the Sun**

*Kerby Anderson provides an overview of some ancient Christian heresies that are still being embraced today: legalism, gnosticism, mysticism, and marcionism.*

In this article we address ancient heresies that still exist in only a slightly different form today. Jesus warned us in Matthew 13:24-25 that the “kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.” But then there is a twist in the story.

“But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.”

Later Jesus explained the parable. The wheat is the “people of the kingdom.” The tares are the “people of the evil one.” The illustration would make sense to people living in the first century. There was even a Roman law against sowing tares in another person’s field. Some have called it a “primitive form of



bioterrorism.”

Jesus is teaching that both true Christians and false Christians will live together. They both may even go to church and seem like Christians. But the false Christians believe and spread heresy within the church and into society.

Paul also warned about false teaching and heresy. In what might have been his last epistle, he warned Timothy that: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” (2 Timothy 4:3)

Peter also gave a warning that these false teachers will come from inside the church. “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.” (2 Peter 2:1)

Notice that these heresies and false teachers will arise from among you. They will secretly introduce these heresies. And they will use greed and sensuality to seduce Christians. Jude (1:4) also adds that these false teachers “have crept in unnoticed” and “turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

In this article we look at heresies in the past that can be found in a slightly altered form today. Just as believers in the first century were warned about false teachers and destructive heresies, so we need to warn each other today about these heresies in the 21st century.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 reminds us that there is “nothing new under

the sun.” As we will see below, that is true of these ancient heresies.

## **Legalism**

Legalism is an ancient heresy going all the way back to the first century. Paul in his letter to the Colossians (2:16-17) said, “Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath-day things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” He warned them about those in their midst who were taking them captive through the subtle lies of legalism.

You might notice that what is listed in these verses are not instructions on purity or righteousness. Rather they are specific Old Testament practices that were given to Israel before the coming of Christ. The Passover is a foreshadowing of Christ’s sacrifice as the Lamb of God. While the deliverance of Israel is significant, consider how much more significant is Christ’s death which provides us with deliverance from the slavery of sin and separation from God. The previous feasts and festivals are no longer necessary now that we have Christ in our lives.

Jesus addressed legalism among the Pharisees and scribes. They established all sorts of rules and regulations that were binding on all Jews. Starting with the law, they set out to compile the various oral traditions and even began to develop interpretations of these laws. In the end, they even had interpretations of the interpretations that were collected in numerous volumes.

By the time of Christ, the Pharisees and the scribes were actually following the traditions of men rather than the law of God. Jesus pointedly asked them, “Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (Matthew 15:3) Jesus also condemned the Pharisees by saying, “You also

outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:28). Jesus therefore accused them, on numerous occasions, of being hypocrites.

Legalism is our attempt to produce righteousness apart from God. We are challenged to follow additional rules and regulations that we believe will merit favor before God. But in the end, these unbiblical rules bind us and drain the joy from our lives.

When we give people an ever expanding “to-do list” that is uncoupled from God’s power, we wear people down and ultimately drive people away from the gospel. Paul warned Timothy that in the last days there would be people “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5). He counsels him to avoid such people.

## **Gnosticism**

Gnosticism is an ancient heresy that surfaced in the last century, partially because of the discovery of the Gnostic Gospels. The Gnostics were prevalent in the first few centuries after the time of Christ. The word *gnosis* means “knowledge.” The focus was on hidden knowledge that contradicted biblical revelation.

For example, the Gnostics denied the existence of sin. Instead, they proposed that the world was corrupted by the demiurge who created it and rules over it. If they believed in sin, they would say that the only sin is ignorance.

The Gnostics taught that Jesus came not to save the world but to impart special knowledge that would lead us to what they called a “divine pleroma.” If you were fortunately to find this knowledge, then you would achieve salvation.

In the first centuries, the Gnostics presented themselves as Christians and worked to popularize their ideas among the growing church of believers. They also produced their own

texts (Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Judas).

Iraenaues was a church father who wrote a critique of Gnosticism in AD 180. He explained that the Gnostics used the Bible alongside their own texts to demonstrate their “perverse interpretations” and “deceitful expositions.” They also reinterpreted parables and allegories from the Old Testament in a fraudulent manner.

Nevertheless, Gnosticism appealed to many Christians in the first centuries because it had many elements that were very similar to Christianity. They believed in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They quoted from the Bible. They practiced some of the sacraments.

Many of these same heretical ideas appeal to Christians today. Leaders of progressive Christianity argue that they have a more mature view of God and the Bible. These leaders believe they have special knowledge that allows them to set aside the standard interpretations of biblical passages. One evangelical pastor said: “The church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from 2,000 years ago as their best defense.”[\[1\]](#)

The Gnostics and modern heretics claim sources of knowledge outside the Bible. They say we know so much more now than the early Christians. C.S. Lewis refers to this as “chronological snobbery.” They assume they know better than any believer in the past.

Today, we have people claiming to know what the Bible really means and invite you to join them as they impart their “special knowledge” to you. More than ever we should be alert to such leaders who will ultimately lead us away from the true Gospel.

# Mysticism

Mysticism is another ancient heresy that we still see today. When Paul wrote to the Colossians (2:18-19), he warned them about false teachers who would attempt to seduce them into mystical ideas: "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God."

The word mysticism comes from the Greek word (*mystes*) for the mystery religions that existed at the time Paul was writing to these Christians. He is describing someone who is "taking his stand on visions he has seen." In other words, this is a person who has had some vision and is mixing that vision with the revelation of Scripture.

At the time Paul was writing to a church that was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Many were young Christians and may have brought their pagan ideas into the church. This would include the idea that you receive spiritual revelations by entering into an ecstatic state. These Christians also lived in a culture where many claimed they were receiving visions from the gods. If these young Christians did not have discernment, they might actually believe that someone who has these visions was spiritually superior to them.

Mysticism has been a major area of cultural captivity both in church history and even in our present day. We see in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, that believers were confused about speaking in tongues and other spiritual manifestations. Some of the believers were essentially "babes in Christ" who could not handle the solid food of God's word. He reminded them that when they were pagans, they had been led astray (1 Corinthians 12:1-3). Because of their previous exposure to

paganism, they were vulnerable to false doctrine.

Throughout church history, certain churches and denominations have brought mystical rituals and practices into their worship experience. They may take the form of chants, icons, or prescribed practices not found in Scripture but part of a tradition that borrows heavily from mystical ideas. And many of these practices are found today not only in North American churches but in churches in other parts of the world.

Mysticism is quite prevalent outside of the church and can have a strong cultural influence on Christians. Many of the books on the best-seller lists over the last few decades dealing with spirituality are not books that promote biblical Christianity but rather books that promote an Eastern philosophy of religion or the New Age Movement.

## **Marcionism**

Marcionism was taught by a theologian named Marcion in the second century. Although some of his ideas parallel Gnosticism, he made a distinction between the God of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. He taught that the benevolent God of the gospels who sent Jesus was inconsistent with the mean, vindictive, malevolent God of the Old Testament. Hence, he concluded they were two different deities.

He also considered himself a follower of Paul, who he preached was the only true apostle of Jesus Christ. In fact, he even created his own "Scriptures" that included ten of Paul's epistles and the Gospel of Marcion (which was a shorter version and highly edited version of the Gospel of Luke). He emphasized Paul because he felt he freed Christianity from the Jewish Scriptures.

He also rejected most of the orthodox teachings of Christianity. For example, he rejected the ideas of God's

wrath and rejected the ideas of hell and judgment. Those ideas, according to him, were tied to the God of the Old Testament, whom he called the Demiurge. That God was merely a jealous tribal deity of the Jews and represented a legalistic view of justice.

A similar idea exists even today. For example, one evangelical theologian said this: "The Bible is an ancient book and we shouldn't be surprised to see it act like one. So seeing God portrayed as a violent, tribal warrior is not how God is but how he was understood to be by the ancient Israelites community with god in their time and place." [\[2\]](#)

We might add that an increasing number of pastors and Christians no longer want to talk about God's wrath and refuse to teach what the Bible does say about hell and judgment. Books and articles are being written denying the existence of hell. Instead, they teach universal salvation for all.

Jesus talked more about hell than he talked about heaven. In Luke 16 he describes it as a great chasm that does not allow people to cross to the other side. In Matthew 25 he predicts a future in which people will be separated into two groups. One will enter heaven. The others will be banished to "eternal fire."

We live in a world where heresy, false teaching, and a false gospel are proliferating. That is why we need to develop biblical discernment. Paul said he was amazed that some of the early Christians adopted "a different gospel" which he said was a distorted gospel of Christ. He added, "If we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-8).

These ancient heresies are being preached today. We need to return to the essential gospel and sound biblical teaching.

**Notes**

1. “Rob Bell Suggests Bible Not Relevant to Today’s Culture | CBN News,” [www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2015/February/Rob-Bell-Suggests-Bible-Not-Relevant-to-Todays-Culture](http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2015/February/Rob-Bell-Suggests-Bible-Not-Relevant-to-Todays-Culture) accessed 2/5/2023.

2. Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (NY: Harper One, 2014).

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## Friendship with Jesus

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn draws on a work by Dr. Gail R. O’Day, “Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John,”<sup>{1}</sup> to explore the perspective of Jesus Christ as a Friend.*

### What a Friend We Have in Jesus<sup>{2}</sup>

In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis offers four analogies of God’s love for humanity.<sup>{3}</sup> These include the love of an artist for a great work of art, the love of a human being for an animal, the love of a father for his son, and the love of a man for a woman. Interestingly, he does not consider the analogy of friendship, or love between friends. In one sense it’s surprising, for Lewis would later write quite perceptively about friendship in his book, *The Four Loves*.

Of course, at this time in his career, Lewis may not have even thought about the love of friendship in the context of discussing analogies of God’s love for humanity. After all, on the surface, the Bible appears to say little about friendship between God and human beings. But saying little is not the same as saying nothing, and the Bible does speak about the possibility of



enjoying friendship with God. In fact, the Gospel of John offers a great illustration of this in the life and teaching of Jesus, whom Christians regard as God the Son incarnate. John presents Jesus as a true friend, one who is willing to speak the truth to those He loves and to lay down His life for their benefit.

Consider Jesus' words to his disciples in John 15: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (vv. 12-15).

In this brief passage, Jesus surfaces several important elements of friendship which would have been readily recognized by people in the ancient world. We'll carefully consider each of these elements in this article. For now, however, the key point to notice is that Jesus explicitly refers to His disciples as "friends." Moreover, He also holds out to them the possibility of deepening their friendship with both Him, and one another.

In what follows, we'll unpack many of these ideas further. First, however, we must get a better understanding of how friendship was viewed in the ancient world.

## **Friendship in the Ancient World**

Of course, John's discussion of friendship in his gospel does not occur in a cultural or historical vacuum. Indeed, he seems to have been aware of other such discussions and even enters into a dialogue (of sorts) with some of them. So how was friendship understood in the ancient world?

The most important discussion of friendship in antiquity is

probably that found in Aristotle's *Ethics*. As one philosopher observes, "Aristotle's treatise on friendship is comprehensive and confident, as well as undeniably profound." {4} Aristotle views friendship as something like the glue of a community, binding people together in relations of benevolence and love. Such relations are indispensable for the community's health and well-being. {5}

Aristotle describes friendship as "*reciprocated goodwill*" and claims that the highest form of friendship occurs between "good people similar in virtue." The primary virtue of real friends is "loving" one another. And such love is expressed in practical actions, for the virtuous person "labours for his friends" and is even willing to "die for them" if necessary.

Finally, the ancients also viewed "frank speech" and "openness" as essential elements of friendship. According to Plutarch, "Frankness of speech . . . is the language of friendship . . . and . . . lack of frankness is unfriendly and ignoble." {6} The language of friendship thus involves something like "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Friendship should allow, and even encourage, frank speech. And yet, such speech should always be characterized by love and a genuine desire for the friend's best interest.

Putting this all together, we can see how Jesus' remarks about friendship correlate with the ancient ideals expressed in the writings of men like Aristotle and Plutarch. Just as Aristotle viewed friendship as the glue of a community, so also Jesus seems to envision the formation of a community of friends, who are bound together in love by their shared allegiance to Him. As biblical scholar Dr. Gail O'Day observes, "The language of friendship provided language for talking about the construction of a community of like-minded people informed by a particular set of teachings." {7}

Below, we'll consider how Jesus both models and encourages the ancient ideals of friendship in His life and teaching.

## The Language of Friendship

One of the ways in which John shows Jesus demonstrating friendship is through his frank and honest speech. We've seen that in the ancient world, open and honest speech was regarded as one of the hallmarks of friendship. And there are several occasions in which such speech is attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John (e.g., 7:26; 10:24-30; 11:14; 16:25-33; 18:19-20).[{8}](#)

Of course, this doesn't mean that everything Jesus had to say was easy to understand. It wasn't, and even his disciples often misunderstood Him. Nor does it mean that Jesus never taught truths about God by using parables or figurative language. Indeed, He often did. What it does mean, however, is that throughout his Gospel, John repeatedly portrays Jesus as speaking and teaching the truth about God openly and honestly to all who care to listen.

For example, Jesus is described as "speaking openly" while teaching the people in the temple at the Feast of Booths (John 7:14, 26). Moreover, after His arrest, when Jesus is being questioned by the High Priest, He frankly declares to those present, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret" (John 18:20). Dr. Gail O'Day observes that Jesus here claims that His entire public ministry has "been characterized by freedom of speech throughout its duration." She writes, "Jesus has not held anything back in His self-revelation but has spoken with the freedom that marks a true friend."[{9}](#)

Finally, we must not forget what Jesus says to His disciples in John 15: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (v. 15). Here Jesus explicitly refers to His disciples as "friends," claiming that He has "made known" to

them everything that He has heard from the Father. Not only does Jesus call His disciples “friends,” He also speaks to them in the language of friendship, openly and honestly revealing to them the heart and mind of the Father.

Judged by the criterion of “frank and honest speech,” Jesus thus reveals Himself to be a true friend to His disciples. And as we’ll see next, He is willing to do much more than this, for Jesus is willing to lay down His life for the benefit of others.

## **The Ultimate Demonstration of Friendship**

In John 15 Jesus declares, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (v. 13). Earlier we saw that Aristotle, in his writings on friendship, maintained that the true friend, actuated by genuine goodness, would even be willing to “die” (if necessary) for the sake of a friend.<sup>{10}</sup> Of course, as any reader of the Gospels knows, Jesus soon does this very thing, thus demonstrating the greatest possible love according to the ancient ideals of friendship. As Dr. O’Day observes, “Jesus did what the philosophers only talked about—He lay down his life for His friends.”<sup>{11}</sup>

This event is foreshadowed by Jesus in His claim to be the Good Shepherd in John 10. “I am the good shepherd,” He says. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (v. 11). This claim is one of the seven “I Am” statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John, and it likely involves an implicit claim to deity, for as Edwin Blum has noted, “In the Old Testament, God is called the Shepherd of His people (Psalm 23:1; 80:1-2; Ecclesiastes 12:11; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10).”<sup>{12}</sup> One thinks of the way in which David begins Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (v. 1). The Lord Jesus, as the Good Shepherd of His people, is willing to lay down His life for their benefit (John 10:11).

But Jesus goes further than this, for as Paul tells us, Jesus not only gave His life for His “friends,” but even for His “enemies.” “For while we were still weak,” writes Paul, “at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). “While we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8), and even “enemies,” “we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10). If dying for one’s friends epitomizes the ancient ideal of friendship, dying for one’s enemies far transcends this ideal. It demonstrates the sacrificial love of God for all humanity. While we were spiritually dead, mired in sin and rebellion (Ephesians 2:1-3), God “sent his Son to be the savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

Aristotle referred to friendship as “reciprocated goodwill.” Jesus demonstrated the greatest possible love and “goodwill” of God by giving His life for the sins of the world (John 1:29). He commands His disciples to reciprocate His goodwill by loving “one another” as He has loved us (John 15:12, 14). By following His command, a community of friends is formed, bound together in love for one another and a shared commitment to Jesus.

## **A Community of Friends**

Jesus calls His disciples “friends” and commands them to “love one another” as He has loved them (John 15:12). Jesus wants His followers to regard themselves not only as *His* friends, but as friends of one another as well. He intends for them to be a community of friends, bound together in their love for one another because of their shared devotion to Him. The sort of love to which Jesus calls them is a costly love, for He desires that His people’s love for one another be an imitation of the love that He has already demonstrated toward them. And what sort of love is this? It’s the kind of love that is willing to give one’s life for the benefit of others, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13).

Now this, I think we can all agree, is a very high calling. Indeed, if we're honest, I think that we must all admit that, humanly speaking, it is frankly impossible. If some degree of discomfort does not grip our hearts in considering this commandment, then we probably aren't considering it in all due seriousness. Very few of us will probably ever reach the level of truly loving other believers just as Jesus has loved us, and if any of us do reach it, we probably won't be able to consistently maintain such love in our daily practice. But Jesus commands us to do it, and we must at least begin trying to do so. But how?

Dr. Gail O'Day, I think, strikes the right tone when she comments: "The disciples begin with the explicit appellation, 'friend,' and the challenge for them is to enact and embody friendship as Jesus has done. The disciples know how Jesus has been a friend, and they are called to see what kind of friends they can become. Jesus' friendship is the model of friendship for the disciples, and it makes any subsequent acts of friendship by them possible because the disciples themselves are already the recipients of Jesus' acts of friendship."[\[13\]](#)

We must remember that Jesus is our friend, that He loves us and provides all that we need to live a holy and God-honoring life. Indeed, He has sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower His people for just this purpose. As we trust in Jesus, giving ourselves to Him (and one another) in genuine love and friendship, we will find that we are increasingly obeying His commands and bearing fruit that brings Him glory. So let's commit ourselves to friendship with Jesus, and to those who compose His body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:24).

## Notes

1. Much of the content of this article is indebted to the prior work of Gail R. O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John," *Interpretation*, 58(2):144-157.

2. The title for this day is indebted to the song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." The words to this song were originally penned by Joseph Scriven in the 19th century; they were set to music by Charles Converse in 1868. For a brief history of Scriven and the hymn, please see Terry, L. (2004, July-August). Joseph Scriven's: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus": What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! *Today's Christian*, 42(4), 16.

3. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1962), 42-48.

4. Michael Pakaluk (Ed.), *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991), 28.

5. I am drawing from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett Publishing, 1985), 1155a23-27.

6. Plutarch, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, 61; cited in Gail O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John," *Interpretation* 58(2):147.

7. O'Day, 147.

8. See the discussion in O'Day, 152-57.

9. O'Day, 156.

10. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett Publishing, 1985).

11. O'Day, 150.

12. Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1989), 310.

13. O'Day, 152.

# Is Jesus the Only Way? – Part 2

*Paul Rutherford explains how reason, Christ's resurrection, and the Bible all testify that Jesus is the only way to heaven.*



I can't drive around town seven days straight without passing at least one car with a bumper sticker that reads, "Coexist" on the back. You know the one. It spells the word using symbols associated with the world's faiths, ancient and modern.



The popularly held mantra is that "all religions are equally valid ways to heaven." This is what's called pluralism. So is there room in this brave new world for the words of an ancient and historically respected faith?

Jesus once said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) That sounds offensive and inflammatory today. I will remind you that Jesus said it, not me.

Even more important is the truth question. It is perhaps even more offensive! Are Jesus' words true?

I fully acknowledge even the question itself may strike you as antiquated, out of date. Perhaps I sound to you like an eccentric, soured-up, fuddy-duddy. I may be. But if the words of Jesus are true, then far more than your offended sense of style is at stake here. Far, far more.

So listen up. And take note because this crazy sounding first-century Jewish rabbi made some crazy-big statements about the nature of man, the nature of reality, and how to live the good life, here, now, and forever. Does that at least sound appealing to you? If even just for the sake of a little controversy?

Explore with me the words of this rabbi. In this article we'll think through three reasons you should agree with him. And maybe you'll even find eternal life in the process. If you're a long-time listener to Probe radio, or a regular listener, this may sound familiar. I have [another](#) program exploring the position that Jesus is the only way to God. This one is part two. In this one I give you three reasons Jesus is in fact the only way to heaven. In the previous program, I defended Jesus' statement against three lines of criticism. So in the next sections I'll explain how reason, the resurrection, and the Word all testify that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

## **Jesus the Only Way Because of Reason**

Western culture today is more pluralistic and secular than ever before. This means at least in one small part, that people believe multiple religions lead to heaven. Western culture has been moving this way for some decades. Now it has reached mainstream. Pop culture increasingly accepts this. It is therefore so much more important to consider this exclusive claim Jesus made. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." (John 14:6)

This is an increasingly unpopular teaching. Before I defend it, allow me to clarify. It was made by the Lord Jesus himself. I didn't make it up. I am merely defending it.

So today I want to talk about how it is reasonable to believe this statement—why it is that you should yourself believe Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Today's reason is logic itself. I will base this conclusion on two points: first, that the belief in one God is more logically defensible than believing in multiple creator gods; and second, that the belief in Jesus Christ as God is more reasonable than claims to deity made by others.

The first point is that believing in one creator God is more reasonable than believing in multiple. The god Aristotle believed in (the unmoved mover) was eternally simple. That is, at the root of all things is ultimately one thing—one cause, one source, one origin to which all other things owe their existence.<sup>[1]</sup> This position beautifully avoids the difficulty of what philosophers call *reductio ad absurdum*—or the problem of infinite regression—or the problem of which came first, the chicken or the egg? The search for the first, original, or ultimate source, does not continue on and on forever. It cannot.

The second point is that Jesus is the most reasonable candidate for divinity. I respect the Buddha. But he never claimed to be God. Neither did Mohammad. Jesus was very clear. He claimed to be God.

Consider His teachings. They have not been surpassed in excellence in the two millennia that have passed since He walked the earth. Consider His actions. History's best biographies about the man Jesus, record Him loving His enemies, healing the sick, and showing compassion to outcasts. Jesus' life exemplified extraordinary moral rectitude.

I conclude, therefore, that it is more reasonable to believe Jesus is the only way to God given that it is more reasonable to believe in only one creator God, and given that Jesus has the best case for divinity among man's founders of faith.

**Jesus the Only Way Because of the**

# Resurrection

We have a saying in American culture that nothing is certain but death and taxes. So if the taxman doesn't come to call, the grim reaper will eventually. Death finds each of us, so we must face our own mortality.

By the best historical accounts Jesus also died and was buried, just like so many of His human brothers before Him.[{2}](#) But Jesus, on the other hand, experienced something unique, declaring Him God above all others.

I speak, of course, of resurrection.[{3}](#) Jesus Christ is the only person ever to have raised up Himself from the dead of his own volition, and by His own power.

This one point may be the most compelling of the three I offer this week. It is perhaps the most intuitive case for Jesus being the only way to Heaven. If Jesus really died and raised Himself from the dead, then His power exceeds those of any other man before Him, or after, for that matter. Surely He must be God.

No other religious figure can make that claim. In a class by Himself, Jesus reigns over all the founders of world religions. Muhammad's burial site is a common tourist destination in Saudi Arabia for contemporary pilgrims. Buddha's cremation site is in northern India. No such site exists today in contemporary Israel for Jesus. His body has no confirmed remains.

The tomb is empty. That much is clear. Records indicate He definitely died and was buried. The empty tomb demands an explanation. Resurrection makes the most sense. Jesus is the only way because He is the only one who has died and raised himself up to new life.

We have several excellent articles at our website devoted to just this topic.[{4}](#) Go check them out for more detail. Jesus

is who He said he is, "The way, the truth, and the life."  
(John 14:6) So the question is, do you want some? Believe in  
Jesus today by faith.

## **Jesus the Only Way Because the Word Declares It**

Western culture today increasingly accepts the belief that  
multiple religions are equally valid and they are all ways to  
eternal life. I propose to you today another reason to believe  
something

diametrically opposed to this—namely that the Jesus Christ  
revealed in the Bible, is the only way to eternal life. As the  
gospel writer John quoted Him, He is, the way, the truth, and  
the life (14:6). No one comes to the Father except through  
Him.

This third and final line of reasoning that Jesus is the only  
way to eternal life, springs from the Bible—from the very word  
of God itself.

You may not accept the Bible as God's word. That's ok. Just  
hear me out. Let me explain how this line of reasoning at  
least makes sense. Then after you've heard it, you can judge  
for yourself if it's true or not.

So first, the Bible claims to be God's word (2 Timothy 3:16).  
If we therefore assume the very commonly held conception that  
God is good and perfect, then that includes the words He  
speaks as well. So if He speaks good words, then those words  
must be true. They must accurately describe reality.

The Bible also makes this claim. Jesus in a famous prayer to  
the Father asks him to sanctify His disciples with the truth  
before stating, "Your word is truth." (John 17:17) It's a  
profound statement.

So if God's word is true, and God says in His word that Jesus

is, in fact, the only way to God—that none can come to Him except by Jesus, then that means it's true. See how simple that is?

But this statement is also made in another part of the Bible, Acts 4:12. Peter and John have been arrested and are being examined by the Jewish leaders. Peter declares Jesus to them and explains, "There is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved."

I fully admit this line of reasoning rests on you acknowledging the authority of the Bible—in which case you may not have needed to be convinced in the first place. But if you had not already been convinced of the truth of God's word, I am very sincerely relying on the power of the Spirit at work in you to believe this truth. (Isaiah 55:11)

## **Conclusion**

In this article we considered the truth of a controversial claim. It might be one of the most hotly contested claims in religion today—that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.

This is not popular these days in America, Europe, anywhere in the English speaking West, or the non-English speaking West. To hear responses to criticisms against the claim, check out [part one](#) of this two part series.

Jesus was Himself no stranger to controversy. He died a criminal's death at the hands of His enemies. He was killed and buried. The Jewish and Roman leaders were smugly satisfied they'd dispatched this unquiet voice.

But when Jesus' enemies attempt to end his earthly ministry, they unknowingly ushered in a spiritually unending ministry of atonement and reconciliation. By his death Jesus paid the price of sin—death—satisfying the just wrath of God. Jesus made peace with God on your behalf. Believe in Him by faith today and you can have peace

with God. Would you like to have peace with him? Tell Him right now. Use your voice or pray silently. But tell Him. Go ahead.

The only thing required of you to receive eternal life is to believe Jesus is Lord. One of Jesus' most famous sayings is, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Confess this belief with your mouth that Jesus Christ is God and believe in your heart that God has raised up his Son from the dead. And you can be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Jesus is the only way to God because there is no other way to get to God but by Jesus. Mankind is imperfect. You are dead in your transgressions and sins. The only way to satisfy God's holy wrath is to give Him what is due: death. Jesus died that death for you. He's the only one who could ever have paid your debt. And He did.

Human reason leads us to this beautiful conclusion that Jesus is the only way. God has declared it himself clearly in his divinely inspired book—the Bible. His resurrection seals it.

If you believed this for the first time today you are now heir to an eternal throne. Pick up a Bible and read Jesus' life story in the book of John. Tell a friend who's a Christian. Make plans to join them at their church Sunday. Keep praying and reading the Bible. You can discover the wonderful adventure of life in Jesus Christ, the only way to God.

## Notes

1. Metaphysics, Lambda.
2. Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19
3. Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20
4. [Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction? – A Clear Christian Perspective;](#)

[What Difference Does the Resurrection Make?;](#)

[The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?](#)

[– A Real Historical Event;](#)

[The Answer Is the Resurrection](#)

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## **Satan Loses—Every Single Time**

Someone commented on one of our articles about Satan. They said that many people, both believers and non-believers, feel that Satan holds the upper hand in life over Christ. Many reasons exist that could lead one to believe the devil has the world in his hands. Nothing could be further from the truth. What humanity witnesses on a day-to-day basis as Satan winning, I'll provide some additional proclamations that would challenge the notion. I wouldn't say he's winning by any means. He's not even losing.

In fact, Satan lost. When? First, he lost when he rebelled against the Living God. That's the first "L." The second huge loss took place through Jesus Christ, when He died on the cross at Calvary. Jesus snatched the keys of death and Hades from Satan. With that, people now have a way to access God's peace and intimacy through the risen Savior. Then why does it seem like the devil has the upper hand in life? It *seems* that way because (1) he knows he has little time left (Revelation 12:12) in influencing this side of eternity, and (2) the devil remains consistent on his path of destruction (John 10:10; Job 1:7, 2:2).

Some may ask, "Why doesn't God do something about what's happening in the world?" He did. First, let's remember that Jesus Christ reigns as Lord over all things. Second, after His

death and resurrection, Jesus sent the world His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, or God the Spirit, the third Person of the Triune Godhead, holds a distinct function on earth. So today, Jesus lives *among* us through the Holy Spirit, but only through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior does His Spirit live *in* us. The Living God sometimes chooses to work *through* people, sometimes *alongside* people, and other times outside of the influence of people.

For example, a Christian, having the Holy Spirit living *in* them, can demonstrate God's love and forgive the same way Jesus did. The Lord can then empower or work *upon* this same Christian (because teaching and preaching are spiritual gifts) to preach a sermon on love and forgiveness. The Holy Spirit, through the Christian, then *convinces* listeners (by working *upon* the heart) to come to faith in Christ by allowing Him *in* their hearts to believe. Yet, the Lord, in His omnipotence, works self-sufficiently to wake the Christian and the listeners up, who depend on God to see the new day. Only then can the Christian love and forgive like Jesus, preach the Gospel, and the listeners hear the message to consider eternal life.

With that said, God provided enough to the world to ensure the world looks the way it should, despite the existence of Satan and His influence in the world. The Lord God gave us Himself. In the book of Genesis, the Lord told Cain to do and live right, while exposing a tactic of sin. God told Cain that sin "crouches" at his door (Genesis 4:7). Sin doesn't display itself as a loud and formidable opponent. Comparable to 1 Peter 5:8, sin, like Satan, takes a clandestine approach to trap and devour the lives of people. It desired to control Cain's life, but God commissioned Cain to master and control sin's advances. The Bible also tells us to resist and flee from sin (1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Timothy 2:22, James 4:7). Today, sin holds an attractive appeal to the eye of those mastered by sin. Rejecting Jesus Christ and the Bible also

holds significant popularity. Society encourages sin. The media aims to normalize it. People make excuses for it. The world embraces it.

Sin seems and *feels* good until it leaves you empty, left to address the dire consequences or irreparable damage, ones that can take years to repair if even possible. But that does not matter to those who have handed their calling from God to take dominion on the earth over to Satan. What Jesus rejected in the wilderness, the world has freely accepted. Those in submission to the flesh and its desires can only crave the wrath placed on the flesh after the Fall in Eden—to surely die and return to the dust (Genesis 2:17, Genesis 3:19).

So, when we see a world that seems like Satan is winning—he's not. The world continues and aims to find value in digging itself into the same hellhole that Satan and his demons put themselves in and will not get out of. Satan isn't winning. For every prince answers to a king—and Satan still answers to the King of kings. Yet, despite Jesus giving us everything we need to master sin and overcome Satan, the world, unfortunately, has decided that it's best that they, not Christ, surrender and bow to this defeated foe. Remember, Satan always broadcasts a counterfeit reality. Jesus Christ has the victory now and forevermore.

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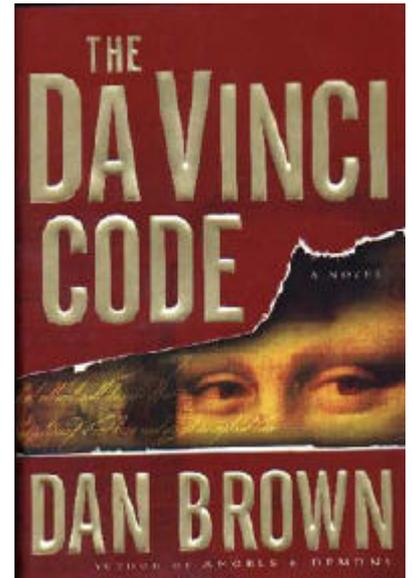
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## **What Happened at Nicaea**

*The identity of Jesus of Nazareth is central to the beliefs of Christianity. Christianity does not call a person to join a philosophy, or a set of practices. Sure, there are philosophical ideas and practices that are consistent with*

*Christianity. However, the central part of the Christian faith is a call to be in a relationship with Christ Jesus. Christian apologist Michael Ramsden once remarked, "Without Christ the Christian is left with the letters I A N and Ian cannot help you." While this is simplistic, saying it does convey the importance of Jesus to the Christian religion. This is exactly the question that many bishops were called to answer in the city of Nicaea in A.D. 325.*

Some skeptics claim that no one claimed that Jesus was not seen as divine until the council of Nicaea. In 2003 this view was popularized in Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code* and in the movie that followed. In this novel Brown uses a fictional story to make factual claims about the origin of Christianity and the person of Jesus. While investigating a murder, several of Brown's characters make some disturbing discoveries. One character states, "Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...A great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless." [\[1\]](#) Another character says that "Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus' death." [\[2\]](#) While most of Brown's claims have been disregarded, the claim that the divinity of Jesus was something invented is still floating around. So it is still important to understand what happened at the Council of Nicaea.



One interpretation of the Council of Nicaea is that it was a "local dispute...eventually judged by the ecumenical councils." [\[3\]](#) The result is that the issue of this local dispute was influenced by cultural issues that was then imposed on all Christians by an ecumenical council. An examination of the facts reveals that this interpretation is the result of imposing philosophical presuppositions onto the historical narrative instead of looking at the facts.

Before the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine was praying when he saw a cross in the heavens with the inscription, "CONQUER BY THIS." Constantine had that sign painted on the shields of all his soldiers before the battle. Constantine won the battle and became co-emperor of the Roman Empire with Licinius. From that point Constantine worked to promote the Christian religion in the Roman Empire.

In 318 Arius, a presbyter (priest or elder) in Alexandria, began to teach that Christ was a divine being that was created by the Father. Christ then created the world. This view made Christ "a kind of divine hero: greater than an ordinary human being, but of a lower rank than the eternal God." {4} The Bishop of Alexandria disagreed with this view. The conflict led to a council meeting in Alexandria where Arius was excommunicated. Arius, who had the support of Eusebius, the Bishop of Nicomedia, spread his teachings through the empire. Several more meetings were held, but the controversy continued.

Constantine believed that it was his duty to promote unity in the Christian religion for the sake of the empire. Constantine wrote "My design then was, first, to bring diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity ...and, second, to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world, then suffering under the power of grievous disease." {5} Constantine called the council of Nicaea to "adjudicate the meaning of Jesus' divinity" {6} so that there could be cultural unity in the empire. The controversy may have started as a local dispute between a bishop and a presbyter, but it spread through the empire and caused enough division to get the attention of the empire. This was not just a local dispute any more, and involved more than just cultural influence. Theological questions that defined the very nature of Christianity were at the heart of the controversy.

Arius' argument had a logical component, and a component based

on Scripture. The logical argument, or “logic of monotheism,”<sup>{7}</sup> focused on the Father’s unity. Arius reasoned that if God was perfect, transcendent, and changeless, and the sustainer of all things, then everything and everyone is separate from God. If everyone is separate from God, then Jesus is separate from God. Jesus has a special role in creation and redemption but cannot be God because there is only one God. This means that Jesus is a created being. Because Jesus was created, he is subject to change. Therefore, Jesus was not God.

To popularize his argument, Arius wrote easily memorized, catchy songs set to familiar tunes, which allowed his teachings to spread across the empire. One song had the lyrics:

And by adoption had God made the Son  
Into an advancement of himself.  
Yet the Son’s substance is  
Removed from the substance of the Father:  
The Son is not equal to the Father,  
Nor does he share the same substance.<sup>{8}</sup>

Arius also used Scripture as part of his argument. Arius identified wisdom with Christ. He cited Proverbs 8:22 which says, “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.” Jesus states that “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). Luke states that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). This indicates that Jesus changed, something God cannot do. Paul writes that Jesus is “the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). Paul also states that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn among all creation” (Colossians 1:15). Arius argued that these verses meant that Jesus was the first created being. John writes, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Paul writes to Timothy about God, “who alone has immortality, who dwells in

unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:16). Arius taught that these verses taught that God was totally set apart from creation, which includes the Son.

Arius' opponents thought that he was "reading meaning into innocent passages."[{9}](#) To show this, these bishops looked to the Scripture to find their own proof texts. Paul writes of Jesus "though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6). This verse identifies the Son with the Father. John opens his Gospel with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Jesus was not only *with* God, he *was* God. The author of Hebrews writes that Jesus "is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by his word and his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus is identified as the exact imprint of the Father and the sustainer of the universe. Paul calls Jesus the "Lord of Glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). The author of Hebrews states that "Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus does not change and neither does the Father.

The opponents of Arius countered his argument that Proverbs 8 showed that wisdom was created by pointing to verse 30, "Then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily in his delight, rejoicing before him always." They argued that this verse showed that wisdom was always with God.

The orthodox bishops also responded with an argument called the "logic of salvation."[{10}](#) The argument is that if Christ is not truly God, then Jesus cannot save mankind from sin. If Jesus is less than God, and is subject to sin, then his sacrifice is insufficient to redeem mankind of their sin. Paul taught this when he wrote, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ cannot make us the righteousness of God if he is not of the same substance

as the Father.

In his novel Brown portrays the outcome of the Council of Nicaea as coming down to a close vote. The vote was 300 to 2. In any election this would have been called a landslide. The council instated what later became the Nicene Creed. Its statement is as follows:

We believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
begotten from the Father before all ages,  
God from God,  
Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made;

of the same essence as the Father.  
Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven;  
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,  
and was made human.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered and was buried.

The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.

He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again with glory  
to judge the living and the dead.

His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life.

He proceeds from the Father and the Son,

and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.

He spoke through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,  
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

Constantine did not decide that Jesus should be made a God, nor did he participate in the vote. The deity of Jesus was not what was at issue at this council either. The issue before the council was the nature of Jesus' relation to the Father.

The Council of Nicaea may have decided against Arius' view, but the controversy was not over yet. The Arians were exiled after the council. Eusebius of Caesarea was recalled after writing a theology that made Constantine the "earthly image of the *Logos*." [\[11\]](#) Arius was recalled from exile after giving a statement of faith that Constantine did not understand, but died unexpectedly the day before taking communion with the faithful.

Athanasius took the office of bishop of Alexandria after Alexander, the previous bishop, died. Athanasius was Alexander's advisor at the time of the council in 325. Athanasius did not welcome the Arians back into the Church, putting him in conflict with Constantine. The Arians tried to dispose of Athanasius at Tyre in 335. Athanasius was accused of abusing clergy that disagreed with him and of cutting off food to Constantinople by instigating a dock strike. Constantine banished Athanasius to Trier in Gaul.

When Constantine died, Athanasius and Marcellus, who taught that the Father and the Son were of a similar substance, were allowed to return from exile. The Eastern Empire was ruled by Constantius, and the West by Constans. The Nicene Creed was still the official doctrine, but the Arians outnumbered the orthodox Christians. To advance their cause the Arians convinced Constantius to banish Athanasius and Marcellus

again. In 340 Bishop Julius recalled Athanasius and Marcellus. Marcellus' teachings were declared orthodox. However, in 341 there was a council at Antioch that rejected the teachings of Arius and Marcellus. Athanasius was not allowed a hearing at the council. The creed that was affirmed by this council excluded Arianism and condemned Marcellus. Constans and Constantius decided to call a council in Sardica. This council ended in schism between the eastern and western parts of the Empire. Athanasius abandoned Marcellus and was allowed to return to Alexandria.

In 350 Constantius gained control over the western Empire. He allowed the Arians power in the Church. Bishops were forced to turn on Athanasius. In 356 Athanasius was banished again. A creed was published in 357 that banished the philosophical language that was used in Nicaea. Basil, Marcellian's successor, taught that the Son was of the same substance as the Father; this development was encouraging to Athanasius.

When Emperor Justine ascended to power, he permitted all exiles to return. A council was held in 362 in Alexandria where the Nicene Creed was affirmed. Another council was held in 381 in Constantinople where a modified version of the Nicaea Creed was affirmed and all bishops were assured that the three persons of the Trinity were not three Gods. Three persons formed the one Triune God. It took 66 years of conflict after the Council of Nicaea for the Church to reach a conclusion about the issue.

There were four main affirmations that resulted from the Council of Nicaea. First, Christ was "very God of very God."[{12}](#) Jesus is God in the same sense that the Father is God. Second, Christ is "of one substance with the Father."[{13}](#) On this point the distinction was one Greek letter. Arianism taught that Jesus was of a similar substance (*homoiousios*) with the Father. Athanasius and the orthodox Christians believed that Jesus was of the same substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. It can be said that the whole dispute was

over one letter. Third, Jesus was “begotten, not made.”<sup>{14}</sup> Fourth, Jesus “became human for us men, and for our salvation.”<sup>{15}</sup> Without the work of Jesus there is no salvation of mankind.

Athanasius spent most of his life defending the truth of Christian doctrine. He was exiled five times. He placed himself on the line to fight the good fight. Athanasius deserves to be remembered as one of the greatest theologians and defenders of the truth. Even when his name is forgotten, the fruit of his work will remain.

There are many misconceptions about the Council of Nicaea in the larger culture. Constantine did not decide to declare Jesus divine. He called a council to attempt to resolve a dispute among Christians. From Constantine’s point of view, the stability of the Empire stood on the stability of the Christian religion. The Christians did not decide to declare that Jesus was divine at this council. This was a belief that was already held by the majority of Christians. The primary question that was being discussed transcended cultural boundaries. If Christ is fully God, then this transcends all cultural boundaries. If Christ is fully God, then all of mankind will be united once again to worship their king.

## Notes

1. Quoted by Hank Hanegraaff and Paul L. Maier, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact of Fiction?* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishing 2004), 15.
2. Ibid. 32.
3. Virginia Burrus and Rebecca Lyman, “Shifting the Focus of History,” in *A People’s History of Christianity Vol. 2: Late Ancient Christianity*, Ed. Virginia Burrus, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 18.
4. Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 100.
5. Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000), 51.

6. Ibid. 48.
7. Ibid. 54.
8. Ibid. 53.
9. Ibid. 54.
10. Ibid. 55.
11. Tim Dowley, Ed. *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 169.
12. Noll, 57.
13. Ibid. 58.
14. Ibid. 58.
15. Ibid. 58.

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