

“This new book by Driscoll, one of the most promising young pastors I’ve met, and his theological partner Gerry Breshears, tell the old, old story in a contemporary, exciting, in-your-face manner. Though written to appeal to today’s younger seekers, nothing of classic Christian theology is omitted. Those of my generation may bridle at some aspects of the book—but it’s good if we do. This book is just what’s needed for us to understand how to reach the postmoderns and a great tool to help all of us connect with young seekers. This is both bold and uncompromising. I can highly recommend it.”

—CHUCK COLSON, founder, Prison Fellowship

“This book reveals Mark Driscoll as a highly powerful, colorful, down-to-earth catechist, targeting teens and twenty-somethings with the old, old story told in modern street-cred style. And Professor Breshears ballasts a sometimes lurid but consistently vivid presentation of basic truth about the Lord Jesus Christ.”

—J. I. PACKER, Board of Governor’s professor of theology, Regent College

“Mark and Gerry have packaged many of the deepest and sometimes hard-to-grasp theological truths about Jesus into an insightful (and at times, laugh-out-loud) book that brings the reader into close contact with the Jesus of both history and the Bible.”

—LARRY OSBORNE, author; pastor, North Coast Church, Vista, California

“Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears combine profound understanding of modern culture with weighty Christian doctrine that is faithful to the Bible, and it’s written in such an interesting style that it’s hard to put down. I strongly recommend it!”

—WAYNE GRUDEM, author, *Systematic Theology*; research professor of Bible and theology, Phoenix Seminary, Phoenix, Arizona

“*Vintage Jesus* offers a fresh, engaging, and insightful discussion of some of the oldest and most crucial truths about Jesus Christ that constitute the very core of the gospel itself. As I read, my heart leapt for joy for the wonder and brilliance of the truths being developed and also because Driscoll and Breshears uphold cherished realities that others in our day, sadly, despise and discard. If you think that you already know Jesus, think again. This book will open the eyes of many who have yet to see the radical nature of Jesus’ life and teaching. For the spread of the gospel and the advancement of the kingdom, I can only hope many will read this book and embrace Jesus as the true Lord, God, Savior, and King that he is.”

—BRUCE A. WARE, professor of Christian theology,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“In *Vintage Jesus*, Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears make biblical Christology accessible to readers of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those of the millennial generation, to which Driscoll also ministers effectively at Mars Hill Church in Seattle. The authors write with convictions, clarity, and humor, making effective use of cultural references and personal anecdotes to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of these timeless truths.”

—ELLIOT MILLER, editor-in-chief, *Christian Research Journal*

“This is a great book about Jesus—yesterday, today, and forever relevant. The answers provided are right on and meaningful to everyone.”

—ALLEN R. WEISS, president, Worldwide Operations Walt Disney Parks and Resorts; chairman, Vision 360

“For thousands of years the debate about Jesus Christ has raged on. In recent times, the fire from this debate has grown hotter than ever. But in *Vintage Jesus*, Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears tear down the walls of doubt about who Jesus was. They lay a foundation of understanding about what he did. And they provide direction for what it all means to us today. By covering everything from who Jesus said he was to what will happen when he returns, Mark and Gerry direct the reader on a journey to the truth about the most influential and transcendent person ever to walk the earth—Jesus Christ.”

—ED YOUNG, senior pastor, Fellowship Church;
author, *Outrageous, Contagious Joy*

“In a society where the Nicene Creed doesn’t hold as much water as a tall Americano, Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears take an unabashed stance on biblical theology that comes as a refreshing yet timeless hyssop in response to a Christian sociological breakdown of truths. *Vintage Jesus* is the blueprint to a firm foundation for all Protestants, both young and old.”

—BRANDON EBEL, president, Tooth & Nail Records

“Vintage Jesus is engaging, hilarious, thoughtful, and an accurate portrayal of the authentic Jesus. Thanks to Driscoll and Breshears for introducing a new generation to the one who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

—JOHN NEUFELD, senior pastor, Willingdon Church, Burnaby, B.C., Canada

“This is Driscoll’s best and most important work so far. If you’re hungry to know the Jesus of the Bible, *Vintage Jesus* can revolutionize your life. It speaks to today’s generation with a prophetic sense of urgency. Get to know Jesus, now. Worship him, now. Follow him, now. Become his, now.”

—CRAIG GROESCHEL, senior pastor, LifeChurch.tv

“Wow! This is a powerful book. It’s edgy, and, frankly, it made me uncomfortable at certain points . . . but for the right reasons. *Vintage Jesus* makes you realize that Jesus led an unvarnished life. Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears make sure that we understand that. We need light, not polish, over the story of Jesus, and that’s exactly what this well-written and provocative work provides. It may make you squirm, but the strong biblical orientation and the crisp historic perspectives give you a context for that squirming! Like I said . . . wow!”

—DAN WOLGEMUTH, president, Youth for Christ/USA, Inc.

“This book presents an honest view of Jesus without giving in to the pressure to soften him up. I had to grapple with the real vintage Jesus. This is a Savior worth fighting for.”

—MATT LINDLAND, 2000 Olympic silver medalist in wrestling;
top-ranked middleweight mixed martial arts fighter

VINTAGE
JESUS

TIMELESS ANSWERS *to* TIMELY QUESTIONS

**MARK DRISCOLL
& GERRY BRESHEARS**

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PREFACE

Resurgence Literature (Re:Lit) is a ministry of Resurgence (www.theresurgence.com). There you will find a growing repository of free theological resources, including audio and video downloads of the sermons on which this series is based, along with information on forthcoming conferences we host. The elders of Mars Hill Church (www.marshillchurch.org) have generously agreed to fund Resurgence along with the Acts 29 Church Planting Network (www.acts29network.org) so that our culture can be filled with a resurgence of timeless Christian truth that is expressed and embodied in timely cultural ways.

This book is a collaborative project between friends. As a young pastor, I desired to be as competent a Bible preacher as possible. This led to a close friendship with my professor Dr. Gerry Breshears, whose biblical insights have been invaluable to my understanding of the person and work of Jesus as revealed in Scripture. In the chapters of this book you will hear my voice since I crafted the words onto pages, but many of the concepts were shaped and formed by my good friend. I sent the manuscript to him for his insights and suggestions, and he also wrote the answers to common questions found at the end of each chapter. The many footnotes are provided by my incredibly helpful researcher, deacon Crystal Griffin. Our hope is that this book will be readable, practical, and biblical so that everyone from seminary professors and pastors to non-Christians would benefit from our work.

We also hope that this book will lead to many profitable discussions between you and your friends so that your friendships can grow around the person and work of Jesus as ours has through the discussions that led to this book. In addition, we intentionally introduce a number of

Christian doctrines in this book and thereby raise numerous questions about related theological issues (such as Scripture, the cross, the character of God, heaven and hell, and the church). Our friends at Crossway have kindly agreed to publish this book as the first in a series called *Vintage Jesus* that will build on the themes and doctrines introduced in this book.

CHAPTER ONE

IS JESUS THE ONLY GOD?

“You, being a man, make yourself God.”

J E S U S ' E N E M I E S (J O H N 1 0 : 3 3)



Jesus Christ. No one is more loved and hated than Jesus Christ.

The name *Jesus* is derived from the Old Testament name *Joshua*, which means, “Yahweh God is salvation.” The title *Christ* means one chosen and anointed by God to be the Messiah who delivers God’s people.

Roughly two thousand years ago, Jesus was born in a dump, rural, hick town, not unlike those today where guys change their own oil, think pro wrestling is real, find women who chew tobacco sexy, and eat a lot of Hot Pockets with their uncle-daddy. Jesus’ mom was a poor, unwed teenage girl who was mocked for claiming she conceived via the Holy Spirit. Most people thought she concocted a crazy story to cover the “fact” she was knocking boots with some guy in the backseat of a car at the prom. Jesus was adopted by a simple carpenter named Joseph and spent the first thirty years of his life in obscurity, swinging a hammer with his dad.

Around the age of thirty, Jesus began a public ministry that included preaching, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and befriending social misfits such as perverts, drunks, and thieves. Jesus’ ministry spanned only three short years before he was put to death for declaring himself

to be God. He died by shameful crucifixion like tens of thousands of people before and after him.

At first glance, Jesus' résumé is rather simple. He never traveled more than a few hundred miles from his home. He never held a political office, never wrote a book, never married, never had sex, never attended college, never visited a big city, and never won a poker tournament. He died both homeless and poor.

Nonetheless, Jesus is the most famous person in all of human history. More songs have been sung to him, artwork created of him, and books written about him than anyone who has ever lived. In fact, Jesus looms so large over human history that we actually measure time by him; our calendar is divided into the years before and after his birth, noted as B.C. ("before Christ") and A.D. (*anno Domini*, meaning "in the year of the Lord"), respectively.

No army, nation, or person has changed human history to the degree that Jesus, the homeless man, has. Some two thousand years after he walked the earth, Jesus remains as hot as ever. In fact, as Paul promised in 2 Corinthians 11:3–4, the opinions about Jesus are countless in seemingly every area of culture.

JESUS OF POP CULTURE

On television, Jesus often appears on the long-running animation hits *The Simpsons* and *South Park*. Jesus also appears in the comedic sketches of vulgar comic Carlos Mencia's hit show *Mind of Mencia*, which explores everything from what it would have been like for Jesus to be married to his involvement in a royal religious wrestling rumble with the founders of other major world religions. Dog the Bounty Hunter, the famous Christian bail bondsman, prays to Jesus on almost every episode of his hit television show, gathering his wife in her clear heels and the rest of their chain-smoking, mace-shooting, criminal-pursuing, mullet-wearing posse to ask Jesus to bless each manhunt.

In the world of fashion, Jesus appears on numerous T-shirts, including the popular "Jesus is my homeboy" shirt, worn by everyone from Madonna to Ashton Kutcher, Ben Affleck, Brad Pitt, and Pamela Anderson.

Roughly one hundred films have been made about Jesus, including top-grossing movies like *The Passion of the Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code*, along with the bizarre Canadian kungfu/horror/musical/comedy *Jesus*

Christ Vampire Hunter (which pairs Jesus with Mexican wrestling hero El Santos to battle an army of vampires that can walk in the daylight). In the film *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*, comedian Will Ferrell (as Ricky Bobby) prays to an “8-pound, 6-ounce, newborn infant Jesus” in “golden, fleece diapers.”

There are even Jesus wrestling federations, such as Wrestling for Jesus, Ultimate Christian Wrestling, and The Christian Wrestling Foundation, with wrestlers named Zion and Satan and sponsors like auto parts stores and a tattoo parlor dedicated to redneck outreach. Jesus even appears on a 110-foot, 750-pound hot-air balloon, a monster truck, and innumerable tattoos. In the world of poker, Phil Gordon said, “Even Jesus wouldn’t bet all of his chips on a Jack-three!”¹

Musically, everyone from rapper Kanye West to rockers The Killers, punk rockers Green Day, American Idol country-crooner Carrie Underwood, and the world’s top band, U2, are singing about Jesus. The Beatles’ frontman John Lennon even once said, “We’re more popular than Jesus now.”

Even homosexuals have their own spin on Jesus. The homepage for the pro-gay Metropolitan Community Churches is www.Jesus.com. The portrayal of Jesus as a gay man also appears in the book *Jesus Acted Up* by Robert Goss and in the play *Corpus Christi* by Terrence McNally.

In the world of sports, it seems every time someone scores a touchdown, hits a shot at the buzzer, throws a no-hitter, or knocks someone out, they thank their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, also affectionately referred to as “my Coach” and “The Big Guy Upstairs.” Gigi Becali, owner of the Romanian soccer club Steaua, reportedly even commissioned a copy of da Vinci’s *Last Supper* portrait, with himself as Jesus Christ.² It also seems that Jesus is a real baseball fan—there are twelve major league and sixty-two minor league baseball players with the name “Jesus” somewhere in their name.

Jesus is now even on the radio hosting a call-in show. The bald-headed, tattooed, thirty-seven-year-old Neil Saavedra pretends to be Jesus Christ on his Sunday morning *The Jesus Christ Show*.³ The hit program is an exploration of what it would be like if Jesus lived in Los Angeles and hosted his own call-in advice show.

JESUS OF THE CULTS

It is fascinating how some people will boldly claim that all religions essentially teach the same thing. However, when it comes to Jesus, the cults and world religions in no way teach the same thing.

Liberal “Christians” and some of their Emergent offspring say Jesus was merely a good man, but they are not clear about his being the God-man. Jehovah’s Witnesses say that Jesus was merely Michael the archangel, a created being that became a man.⁴ Mormonism teaches that Jesus was not God but only a man who became one of many gods; it furthermore teaches that he was a polygamist and a half-brother of Lucifer. Unitarian Universalism teaches that Jesus was not God but rather essentially an incarnation of Mister Rogers, a great man to be respected solely for his teaching, love, justice, and healing. New Age guru Deepak Chopra told Larry King, “I see Christ as a state of consciousness we can all aspire to.”⁵ According to Scientology, Jesus is an “implant” forced upon a Thetan about a million years ago. I would explain that position more thoroughly but I have never smoked weed or done any drugs; subsequently, I apparently lack the imagination to understand a religion started by a science fiction writer that has unleashed Tom Cruise on the world as Billy Graham’s evil *doppelgänger*. There is even a Canadian nudist-arsonist cult that thinks that the word “Jesus” in the Bible is a code word for hallucinogenic mushrooms that are to be eaten before getting naked and lighting things on fire.

JESUS OF THE OCCULT

Freemasonry, or the Masons, includes fourteen United States presidents, eighteen vice presidents, and five Supreme Court chief justices. Masonic lodge meetings include the reading of Scripture, but intentionally omit the name “Jesus.”⁶ Levi Dowling said Jesus underwent seven degrees of initiation (an occultic ceremony) in Egypt with the seventh degree making him the Christ.⁷ Edgar Cayce said Jesus only became the Christ in his thirtieth incarnation after shedding his bad karma.⁸

JESUS OF THE RELIGIONS

Bahá’ís say that Jesus was a manifestation of God and a prophet but inferior to Muhammad and Bahá’u’lláh. Buddhism teaches that

Jesus was not God but rather an enlightened man like the Buddha. Hinduism, with its many views of Jesus, does not consider him to be the only God, but most likely a wise man or incarnation of God much like Krishna. Islam teaches that Jesus was merely a man and a prophet who is inferior to Muhammad. Speaking at an event hosted by the Muslim Student Association at the University of North Texas, Council on American-Islamic Relations vice president Eric Meek told students, “If Jesus were here, he’d be a Muslim.”⁹ The Dalai Lama said, “[Jesus] was either a fully enlightened being, or a *bodhisvatta* [a being who aids others to enlightenment] of a very high spiritual realization.”¹⁰ Indian Hindu leader Mahatma Gandhi said, “I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Muhammad or Zoroaster.”¹¹

JESUS OF THE FAMOUS AND INFAMOUS

The famous and infamous also have much to say about Jesus, including:

- ⊙ President Thomas Jefferson: “Jesus did not mean to impose himself on mankind as the son of God . . .”
- ⊙ Prince Philip: “[Jesus] might be described as an underprivileged, working-class victim of political and religious persecution.”
- ⊙ Fidel Castro: “I never saw a contradiction between the ideas that sustain me and the ideas of that symbol, of that extraordinary figure [Jesus Christ].”
- ⊙ Mikhail Gorbachev: “Jesus was the first socialist, the first to seek a better life for mankind.”
- ⊙ Malcolm X told *Playboy*: “Christ wasn’t white. Christ was black. The poor, brainwashed Negro has been made to believe Christ was white to maneuver him into worshiping white men. . . . A white Jesus. A white Virgin. White angels. White everything. But a black Devil, of course.”
- ⊙ Martin Luther King Jr.: “Jesus Christ was an extremist for love, truth and goodness.”
- ⊙ Rollo May (American existential psychologist): “Christ is the therapist for all humanity.”
- ⊙ Lakota Native American tribe: Jesus is “the buffalo calf of God.”

JESUS OF THE DEMONS

One of the more curious aspects of Jesus' earthly ministry is that people were often unable and/or unwilling to see him as God. Jesus used the word "dull" to refer to such people who were as discerning as the guys who drive for miles with their turn signal on. The exception to this rule, shockingly enough, was the demons. While many people said Jesus was demon-possessed and raving mad, the demons were more likely to get it right.¹²

The Gospel of Mark, the shortest gospel, gets right to the point. Jesus stirs up a ruckus when he comes to town. He calls, and tough men follow him. He teaches, and people are astonished. But it's the demons who know: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God."¹³

In Mark 1:33–34 we read, "The whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him." In Luke 4:33–34 we read, "And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, 'Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.'" Again in Luke 4:40–41 we read, "Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ."

Interestingly enough, the demons have some of the highest Christology in the gospels, though they themselves do not love Jesus or receive the gift of salvation from him. The demons even have a higher Christology than most present-day cults and world religions, which is, to say the least, tragic.

JESUS OF JESUS

Who exactly is Jesus? Is he a good man or God, the half-brother of Lucifer or a prophet, liar or truth-teller, therapist or communist, stand-up comic or just my uber-fly, holy homeboy? So much has been said about Jesus that it only seems appropriate to let Jesus speak for himself.

Therefore, we will examine ten ways by which Jesus flatly said he is the only God.

1) JESUS SAID HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN.

On very rare occasions people will claim that they have been taken into heaven through something like a near-death experience (NDE). Examples include Betty Eadie's non-Christian book on the subject, *Embraced by the Light*, which was a bestseller some years back, along with the movie *Flatliners*.

Celebrities who have reported NDEs include Jayne Seymour, Peter Sellers, Elizabeth Taylor, Sharon Stone, Larry Hagman, Gary Busey, Tony Bennett, Burt Reynolds, Chevy Chase, George Lucas, and William Petersen. Ozzy Osborne also claimed to see “a white light shining through the darkness, but no ****ing angels, no one blowing trumpets and no man in a white beard.”¹⁴

Dr. Melvin Morse wrote an entire book on NDEs called *Transformed by the Light*. Perhaps the most bizarre story in the book was about a forty-five-year-old Midwestern teacher who died and went to heaven to see the King—Elvis, not Jesus. Apparently so many people have had an NDE that resulted in their seeing Elvis instead of Jesus ruling over heaven that Raymond Moody has actually written a book about them called *Elvis After Life*.

The Muslim “prophet” Muhammad also claimed that on one occasion he was taken from earth to heaven. The Dome of the Rock standing on the site of the original Jewish temple in Jerusalem memorializing that alleged event is considered the third holiest Muslim monument in the world. It is said that from that place Muhammad ascended through the seven heavens on a strange heavenly beast called a Buraq into the presence of Allah, escorted by the angel Gabriel. There, he was reportedly met by various biblical figures such as Adam and Abraham along with many angels and even Moses with whom he chatted. It is said that during his visit to heaven Muhammad was ordered by Allah to have Muslims pray five times a day.

However, unlike a near-death experience or the purported heavenly glimpse of Muhammad, Jesus made an even more audacious claim. Jesus did not merely claim to have peeked into heaven to see King Elvis or Allah. Instead, Jesus boldly claimed to be God who lived in heaven

but came down from his eternal home to visit the earth as a man: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”¹⁵ His audacious claim got him into trouble with those who heard him: “So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, “I have come down from heaven?”’ . . . When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” . . . After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”¹⁶

His claim to be God incarnate has never been made by the founder of any other world religion. The closest anyone has come is the assertion by some Hindus that the Buddha is an avatar of Vishnu. But the Buddha himself never made such a claim. Conversely, Jesus clearly stated that he is God. God alone calls heaven his eternal home, and God alone could descend from heaven as opposed to ascending up to heaven.

Finally, the statement that he came down from heaven also indicates Jesus’ eternity; he existed before his birth as a man, which is the repeated teaching of the New Testament.¹⁷ Jesus also appears upon occasion in the Old Testament in christophanies, which are pre-incarnate cameos. For example, he wrestles with Jacob,¹⁸ is worshiped by Joshua as the Lord of the army of heaven,¹⁹ speaks to Isaiah in the temple,²⁰ and is the fourth man in the fiery furnace with Daniel and his friends.²¹

2) JESUS SAID HE WAS MORE THAN JUST A GOOD MAN.

Over the years I have had the privilege of talking about Jesus to literally thousands of non-Christians in conversations, e-mail correspondence, and radio interviews. Virtually no one I have ever spoken to thought Jesus was God or even a bad person. Instead, most everyone spouted the very common statements that “Jesus was a good man,” “Jesus did a lot of nice things for people,” and “Jesus never thought he was God but other people made that up about him.” Perhaps lesbian Jewish actress Sandra Bernhard’s sentiment, “I’m sure that Jesus was an incredible person,” best sums up the majority mood.

Thich Nhat Hanh, author of *Living Buddha, Living Christ* and considered by many to be the most respected interpreter of Buddhism to the western world, after the Dalai Lama, said of Jesus, “Of course Christ is

unique. But who is not unique? Socrates, Muhammad, the Buddha, you, and I are all unique.”²²

Apparently the idea that Jesus was merely a good guy but not God is nothing new. Mark 10:17–18 says, “And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.’” This man likely thought he was honoring Jesus by calling him a “good teacher.” However, Jesus replied that since everyone is a sinner, there is no such thing as a good person—God is the only good person. In saying this, Jesus was revealing to the man that he was not merely a good person, but in fact God. Even Jesus’ enemies were equally clear that Jesus refused to be considered merely a good man. They wanted to kill Jesus because he was “making himself equal with God.”²³

This fact of Jesus’ uniqueness as more than just a good spiritual man is incredibly important. Perhaps the legendary Billy Graham said it best: “Jesus was not just another great religious teacher, nor was he only another in a long line of individuals seeking after spiritual truth. He was, instead, truth itself. He was God incarnate.”²⁴

3) JESUS SAID HE IS THE SON OF MAN.

When picking a title for himself, Jesus was apparently most fond of “Son of Man.” He spoke of himself by this term roughly eighty total times among all four gospels. He lifted the title from the prophet Daniel, who penned it some six hundred years before Jesus’ birth. In Daniel’s vision, the Son of Man comes to the Ancient of Days, the Lord himself. But he comes from the clouds, from heaven, not from the earth. This indicates that he isn’t a human. He is given messianic dominion and authority, something no angel can obtain. Only a divine person can receive this. Daniel is speaking of the same person as David speaks of in Psalm 110. The Old Testament sees this divine person sitting alongside the Lord as an equal. This second person of the Trinity was promised to receive the messianic mission to redeem the world, to trounce every enemy, and to rescue the trapped people. As God, he is exalted over all peoples, nations, cultures, and religions to be worshiped as the eternal King. Jesus is the one who claimed he would be the Son of Man coming with the clouds as God.²⁵

4) JESUS PERFORMED MIRACLES.

Jesus was a great leader and teacher, but his ministry also included the miraculous—one line of evidence that he was in fact God and more than just another spiritually enlightened person. The acceptance of Jesus' miracles was perhaps most opposed during the modern era when scientific rationalism gave way to naturalism, whereby miracles were deemed philosophically impossible. Subsequently, cults that sprang up during modernity sought to ignore or deny Jesus' miracles. For example, the Unitarian Universalist book *A Chosen Faith* says, "Most of us would agree that the important thing about Jesus is not his supposed miraculous birth or the claim that he was resurrected from death, but rather how he *lived*. The power of his love, the penetrating simplicity of his teachings, and the force of his example of service on behalf of the disenfranchised and downtrodden are what is crucial."²⁶

However, Jesus is emphatic that he did perform miracles and that they helped to prove his claims that he is God. In John 10:36b–39 Jesus said, "Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands."

There is ample evidence throughout the New Testament that Jesus performed many miracles. Nearly forty specific miracles are mentioned. In Mark's short Gospel alone, roughly one-third of the verses deal with miracles. Furthermore, even those who opposed Jesus acknowledged that he did perform miracles that needed to be accounted for.²⁷

Opponents of Jesus outside of Scripture also testify to his miracles. The Jewish Talmud charged that Jesus "practiced magic."²⁸ Celsus, a strong opponent of Christianity, later repeated that claim.²⁹ The noted Jewish historian Josephus also reported that Jesus was "a doer of wonderful works."³⁰

While some of the miracles Jesus performed are done by other humans, including driving out demons, healing diseases, and even raising someone from the dead,³¹ other miracles are without human precedent. For example, the Gospel writers tell of the disciples, men who

were seasoned fishermen, terrified by a raging storm and begging Jesus to rescue them. He rebuked the storm with one powerful command and there was immediately quiet calm. Creation obeyed the command of Jesus. Regarding the disciples, Mark 4:41 says, “They were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’” They knew their Bibles well. It is God who stills or raises storms with a word. Only God treats storms like this.³²

Throughout his life, Jesus performed a great number of miracles; each demonstrated his rule over the physical world. In performing these miracles, we are told that his purpose was to prove he is God so that we would trust in him and receive salvation from him.³³ In this way, the miracles that Jesus performed were in fact signs pointing to his divinity.

5) JESUS SAID HE IS GOD.

Jesus clearly, emphatically, and repeatedly said he is God. If his statements were untrue, it would have been a blasphemous violation of the first commandment. The belief that Jesus is God is not something that Christians made up, but rather something that Christians believe because it was taught by Jesus himself. Many cults wrongly deny that Jesus is God or ever claimed to be God. For example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses Watchtower Society says, “Jesus never claimed to be God.”³⁴ Bahá’ís say that Jesus was a manifestation of God and a prophet but inferior to Muhammad and Bahá’u’lláh. Buddhism teaches that Jesus is not God but was rather an enlightened man like the Buddha. Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy flatly states, “Jesus Christ is not God.”

Some key Scriptures illustrate how Jesus clearly said he is God and his hearers clearly understood his unparalleled claim. Mark 14:61–64 reports, “He remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’ And the high priest tore his garments and said, ‘What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?’” John 8:58–59 reports that Jesus said, “‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they

picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”

Jesus claimed eternity in saying that he existed before Abraham, who lived roughly two thousand years prior. Furthermore, in naming himself “I am,” Jesus was declaring himself to be the same God who revealed himself by the title “I am” some fourteen hundred years prior when he spoke to Moses through the burning bush. As a result, those who heard Jesus rightly understood him as declaring himself to be the eternal God who saved Abraham and called Moses. Consequently, they called him a blasphemer for being a man who claimed to be God and sought to impose the death penalty on him for it.

In John 10:30–33 Jesus also said, “I and the Father are one.” Then, “The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?’ The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.’”

On this point, New York’s Judge Gaynor once said of Jesus’ trial at the end of his earthly life, “It is plain from each of the gospel narratives, that the alleged crime for which Jesus was tried and convicted was blasphemy.”³⁵

Throughout the history of the world, numerous people have claimed to speak for God. Yet there is a surprisingly short list of people who have actually claimed to be God. For example, such religious leaders as Buddha, Krishna, Muhammad, and Gandhi did not claim to be God. In fact, they assured their followers that they were not God. Jesus, in contrast, clearly and repeatedly said he is God. This is simply an astonishing claim that people kept seeking to kill Jesus for saying, because it would clearly be blasphemy if untrue. After all, could you even imagine someone walking up to you at a party wearing a nametag that simply said “God”? Nonetheless, Jesus repeatedly said he is God. He was not killed for his nice deeds or pithy parables, but for claiming to be God.

Today this claim is as controversial as ever. For example, while I was preaching the sermon on which this chapter is based, a man attending one of our evening services pulled out a machete and tried to get onto the stage, apparently to run me through for saying that Jesus alone is

God. He was screaming that Jesus is not God, until tackled and taken away from the premises by the police.

6) JESUS CONFIRMED TO OTHERS HE IS GOD.

Not only did Jesus repeatedly declare that he is God, but he also reiterated this fact when others doubted or opposed that claim. For example, Matthew 26:63–65 says: “But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, ‘I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, ‘He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy.’”

As Matthew describes, religious leaders sought to condemn Jesus publicly for committing blasphemy (declaring himself to be God). The penalty for blasphemy was death; if Jesus were not convinced that he was God, then we would expect him to clarify the misunderstanding about himself in an effort to avoid a bloody death. Maybe he was just dyslexic and was only confessing he owned a “dog.” But it was no mistake—Jesus declared he is God.

The fact that Jesus did not recant when challenged proves that everyone who has believed that Jesus claimed to be God has not misunderstood his words but has actually understood them clearly. Lastly, the Scriptures testify to additional occasions in which the religious leaders in Jesus’ day recognized his claim to be God, for which Jesus never did apologize or recant.³⁶

7) JESUS SAID HE WAS SINLESS.

Sin is both omission and commission. Sins of omission are when we fail to do something good, and sins of commission are when we do something wrong. Sin includes our thoughts, motives, words, and deeds, which are all seen objectively by our all-knowing God.

In the history of the world, no one has claimed with any credibility that they are without sin, because to do so is to declare that one’s words, actions, thoughts, and motivations are continually perfect and pure. As the old adage goes, no one is perfect. To see if anyone has ever claimed to be sinless, I actually did a Google search for “sinless,” only to find that

there is a strip club by the same name. That pretty much sums up my point that the world is filled with sin.

Even those religious leaders who are widely commended as the most devout and morally upright (e.g., Mohammad, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Billy Graham) have admitted that they are indeed sinners. As we read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, we often see him calling others to repent. We also see Jesus being tempted to sin.³⁷ Nevertheless, nowhere does Jesus sin or repent of any personal sin, because he was without sin. Jesus' enemies sought to bring up false charges of sin against Jesus, but their lies never agreed with one another and were found to be groundless.³⁸

Tragically, some people do not believe that Jesus is sinless and therefore morally superior to everyone else. Fully 41 percent of adults believe that Jesus sinned when he was on the earth. Additionally, 43 percent of Hispanics, 43 percent of whites, and 32 percent of blacks agree with the statement "when He lived on earth, Jesus Christ was human and committed sins, like other people."³⁹ Even 40 percent of teenagers who claim to be born again and 52 percent of teenagers who attend a Protestant church likewise wrongly believe that Jesus committed sins like other people while on the earth.⁴⁰

However, Jesus declared that he was not only morally superior to everyone who has ever lived, but in fact sinless. He further challenged anyone to prove him wrong: "Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?"⁴¹

The perfect, sinless life of Jesus makes him admittedly more holy and worthy of our devotion than anyone who has ever lived and helps to prove that he was and is God because God alone is without sin. This claim is unparalleled in history and is repeated by Jesus' disciples throughout the New Testament, most of whom suffered and died without recanting. Those who testify to the sinlessness of Jesus are those who knew him most intimately, such as his friends Peter⁴² and John,⁴³ his brother James,⁴⁴ and even his former enemy Paul.⁴⁵ Additionally, even Judas who betrayed Jesus admitted that Jesus was without sin,⁴⁶ along with the ruler Pilate who oversaw the murder of Jesus,⁴⁷ a soldier who participated in the murder of Jesus,⁴⁸ and the guilty sinner who was crucified at Jesus' side.⁴⁹

8) JESUS FORGAVE SIN.

While many of the resources in our world are spent on dealing with the effects of sin (e.g., war, illness, death, depression, crime, poverty), there is still no way for people to have their sins forgiven. At best, some religions try to teach their adherents what they can do to work hard at paying God back through such things as good works and reincarnation; they still lack any concept of forgiveness.

In light of this, Jesus' claims to forgive sin are simply astonishing. Speaking to a sinful but repentant woman in Luke 7:48 it is reported, "And [Jesus] said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'" Luke 5:20–21 also says, "And when [Jesus] saw their faith, he said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.' And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'"

Can you even imagine someone saying that he is God and has the authority to forgive your sin? Sin is the human problem. All sin is ultimately committed against God.⁵⁰ Subsequently, God alone has the power to forgive the sins of sinners.⁵¹ Jesus could only forgive sin because he was and is God. In making this claim, Jesus is inviting us to confess our sins to him so that we may be forgiven through his substitutionary death and bodily resurrection. If he were not God, our sin simply could not be forgiven by him.

9) JESUS TAUGHT PEOPLE TO PRAY TO HIM AS GOD.

Prayer is how we mere mortals talk to God. But Jesus Christ actually told us to pray to him, and he did so repeatedly.⁵² By doing so, Jesus was clearly stating that he is God. As a result of his teaching, both men like Stephen⁵³ and women like the Canaanite⁵⁴ did pray to Jesus as God. In Acts 7:59, we read that at the moment of his painful death by stoning, the early church deacon Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Many people throughout history and a few billion worshipers of Jesus on the earth today have, like Stephen, cried out to Jesus in prayer at their moments of most desperate need. If Jesus is not God who does not live forever and is not all-knowing or powerful enough to answer our prayers, then he is nothing more than a cruel sadist for asking us to pray to him in faith.

10) JESUS SAID HE IS THE ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN.

Not only did Jesus declare that he came down from heaven, but he also taught that he alone is the only way for anyone else to enter into heaven. While there are many religious and spiritual teachers who claim that they can point you to the path to heaven, they do not claim to be that path themselves. Jesus, in contrast, promised that he was the way to eternal life in heaven, saying in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus’ words further prove that he was and is God. Because heaven belongs to God, it is God alone who determines who is granted access to it and who will live with him forever there. Some will protest that other religions provide additional paths to heaven, but Jesus debunked those myths by declaring that he alone is the sole, narrow path to eternal life and that all other paths are merely paths to eternal death in hell.⁵⁵ Sadly, in our day there are even pastors and Christian leaders who lack the courage to simply say what Jesus said and declare him to be the only way to heaven. For example, one female bishop for the Episcopalian church was asked by *Time* magazine, “Is belief in Jesus the only way to get to heaven?” Sadly, instead of using the opportunity to let Jesus speak for himself, she instead contradicted Jesus, saying, “We who practice the Christian tradition understand him as our vehicle to the divine. But for us to assume that God could not act in other ways is, I think, to put God in an awfully small box.”⁵⁶

The question remains to be answered, how should we respond to the incredible person, work, and claims of Jesus? We are left with only three possible responses: Jesus was a lunatic, Jesus was a liar, or Jesus is Lord. British author C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) wisely said:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.⁵⁷

Liar?

Indeed, if untrue, Jesus' claims to be God would make him an evil cult leader much like David Koresh, who had a lengthy, televised standoff in 1993 with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) and the FBI. Upwards of eighty-five of his followers died in their Waco compound, including approximately twenty-five children. Only nine members of the cult survived. Koresh proclaimed himself the "Son of God" and said he and not Jesus was the Lamb of Revelation.⁵⁸ Koresh was quoted as once saying, "Do you know who I am? God in the flesh . . . stand in awe and know that I am God."⁵⁹ Simply, if Jesus is not God but claimed to be God and deceived others into dying for that claim, he is nothing more than a lying, demonized cult leader.

Lunatic?

While it is difficult to find anyone who claims to be God, I was able to find one guy on MySpace.com whose mom apparently told him he can become anything he wants if he just puts his mind to it and works hard. So he is hoping to become God at some point. But, it does not seem his quest for godhood will be achieved as he only has a few friends linked to his page. Why? Because he's nuttier than a Snickers bar, and if Jesus said he is God when in fact he were not, he would be a nut job, too.

Lord?

Jesus is not a liar or a lunatic, but rather God our Lord. Therefore, the appropriate response to Jesus is turning from sin to worship him alone as God. According to the first two commandments,⁶⁰ there is only one God, and that God alone is to be worshiped. The one God to be worshiped is Jesus.

In Scripture we see that Jesus is worshiped as the only God by the blind man,⁶¹ the previously demonized man,⁶² Thomas the doubter,⁶³ his best friend John,⁶⁴ all of the disciples,⁶⁵ a group of women,⁶⁶ the mother of James and John,⁶⁷ angels,⁶⁸ entire churches,⁶⁹ his own mother,⁷⁰ his own brothers,⁷¹ little children,⁷² and his former enemies like Paul.⁷³

Having surveyed both what is said about Jesus by others and by Jesus himself, his own question to us is a fitting conclusion to this chapter: "Who do you say that I am?"⁷⁴

ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT JESUS' DIVINITY

DOES THE BIBLE CLEARLY SAY THAT JESUS IS GOD?

Yes, the Bible repeatedly and clearly declares that Jesus is God.⁷⁵

Another way that the Bible speaks of Jesus as God is by applying to Jesus, in the New Testament, titles that are used of God in the Old Testament. Examples include:

- ⊙ First and Last⁷⁶
- ⊙ Light⁷⁷
- ⊙ Rock⁷⁸
- ⊙ Husband or Bridegroom⁷⁹
- ⊙ Shepherd⁸⁰
- ⊙ Redeemer⁸¹
- ⊙ Savior⁸²
- ⊙ Lord of Glory⁸³

ISN'T JESUS REALLY AN ANGEL?

The Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus was not the creator God, but rather Michael the created archangel who became a man.⁸⁴ Speaking of Jesus, however, John 1:1 teaches that in the beginning (a reference to Genesis 1:1 when all created things were created), the Word was already in continuing existence. He was in face-to-face, personal relation with God when space-time, mass-energy, and the laws of nature were created. John 1:3 then tells us that the Word created all things. Paul says the same thing in Colossians 1:16–17. Throughout the Bible, it is clear that God is the one who creates. Passages like Isaiah 44:24 and Job 9:8 are very specific that it is only God who creates. So if the Word creates, as John says, he has to be God. He can't be anything less without violating foundational teachings of Scripture.

In the final phrase of John 1:1, it says "the Word was God." Now, a

predicate nominative (noun + “linking verb” + noun) means the two nouns share characteristics. For example, when someone says, “The guy is a stud,” it means he has studly characteristics. Likewise, when Scripture says “the Word was God,” it means that the Word shares the same characteristics of God himself. Jehovah’s Witnesses wrongly translate that phrase as “the Word was a god.” But if this were correct, the Word would be one of several gods, something no Jew would ever say. Further, the Jehovah’s Witnesses themselves do not believe that either. Simply, Jesus Christ the Word is God the Creator, not a created angel.

SINCE THE BIBLE SAYS GOD CANNOT DIE, YET JESUS DIED, DOES THAT NOT PROVE THAT JESUS CANNOT BE GOD?

It’s true that God is immortal, which is simply a way of saying that he cannot die. Verses like 1 Timothy 1:17 say this plainly. It’s equally clear that Jesus really died. That does not mean his existence ended. Rather it means his body and spirit were separated, just as ours are upon our death.

On this point, Philippians 2:6 says that before Jesus entered human history as a man, Christ had equality with God in every possible way. But he didn’t think that was something to hang on to. Instead he emptied himself of that equality in humility to come “in the likeness of men.”⁸⁵ Hebrews 2:17 says the same thing: “He had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

In conclusion, to identify with us and substitute himself for us, Jesus Christ humbled himself by becoming a human being to die like us so that we could have our sins forgiven. In this, Jesus remained God. Rather than refuting Jesus’ divinity, his death reveals to us the love of God.

HOW COULD JESUS SAY “THE FATHER IS GREATER THAN I” (JOHN 14:28) IF HE IS IN FACT GOD?

Jesus absolutely did say that God the Father was greater than him. There will be no dodging what the Bible says by appealing to “textual corruption” or “later addition.” Various critics of the Bible may do such

a thing, but as followers of Jesus we must believe what God has spoken to us through his Word.

In saying this, Jesus was reminding the disciples that he was about to return to the Father from whom he had come.⁸⁶ In heaven, before his humble entrance into history as a human being, he enjoyed full glory and equality with the Father. But he humbled himself and gave up that equal status and position. So in his incarnate state, Jesus' status and position were under the Father.⁸⁷ This is all that was meant by Jesus' statement that the Father is greater than he.

ISN'T THE DEITY OF CHRIST AN IDEA THE CHURCH CREATED LATER?

Dan Brown and *The Da Vinci Code* have successfully repeated this tired idea. According to Brown, Constantine created the divine Jesus to cement his hold on power. But even a quick look at the Bible shows the deity of Jesus was the teaching from the earliest days of Christianity.

Everyone agrees that the book of Romans is authentically Pauline and was written around A.D. 60, two and a half centuries before Constantine. In Romans 9:5, Paul speaks of "the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen." Even earlier in 1 Corinthians 8:6, another unquestionably authentic Pauline book, Paul puts the Father and the Lord Jesus into a parallelism that clearly affirms the deity of Jesus.

There are many biblical references to the deity of Jesus. But there are also many references in the writings of the early church fathers. These lines of evidence are deftly defended by reliable scholars for those wanting to investigate these facts more thoroughly.⁸⁸ You can say that the fact of Jesus' deity is wrong, perhaps, but no person with even a passing knowledge of the early evidence can say that it was not affirmed from the beginning.

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