

## Who is Jesus, and did He really rise from the dead?

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Course web site: [www.covingtoninnovations.com/tough](http://www.covingtoninnovations.com/tough) (may move to church web site later)

## Was Jesus God?

### What was the purpose of Jesus' ministry?

(a) To tell people how to live better lives?

No; although Jesus had a lot to say about practical morality, his teachings weren't original. They closely matched the morality that people already believed in.

(b) To atone for our sins?

Yes; far from being a tragic failure, Christ's death on the cross was the most important thing he did for us.

If Jesus was not really the Son of God, then our sins are not forgiven and Christianity falls apart.

### What did Jesus claim to be?

(a) "The Christ, the son of the living God" (Mt 16:15) (uttered by Peter, not contradicted by Jesus)

(b) "I and the Father are one... I am the Son of God"

(and immediately the Jews wanted to stone him for blasphemy) (Jn 10:30,37)

(c) "Your sins are forgiven... The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mk 2:5,10)

Important point. How could a human being – even a saintly one – forgive sins against others or against God?

(d) "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming from the clouds of Heaven" (Mk 14:62)

### What was Jesus, really?

**(a) Liar?** Was Jesus deliberately exaggerating his claims in order to make his teachings sound more authoritative?

-- Lots of religious quacks have done this in modern times.

-- But we can see through them. We can tell they are self-serving.

-- If Jesus' goal had been fame and fortune, he would have stopped preaching as soon as it became obvious that he was headed for the cross.

**(b) Lunatic?** Was Jesus sincere, but sincerely mistaken, when he thought he was God?

-- He didn't talk like a lunatic or even a confused person. His moral teachings are deep, penetrating, and shrewd.

-- He certainly managed to convince a lot of other people that he was God.

**(c) Legend?** Were Jesus' claims of divinity all added to his teachings later by his followers?

-- In the 19th Century this was a popular position. Archeological evidence available then seemed to indicate that the Gospel of John (which contains the strongest claims that Jesus is God) was written much later than the other Gospels. So it looked as though the claims to divinity were a later addition.

-- Much current thinking dates all four gospels earlier than 70 A.D. (None of them points out that the destruction of the Temple, which Jesus predicted, actually took place in that year.) And the Epistles of Paul are even earlier.

-- Even in the 19th C. the argument was circular. "Jesus only claims to be God in the passages that were written last." "How do you know they were written last?" "Because they say Jesus claims to be God."

### **(d) Lord**

The simplest and most convincing explanation is that Jesus actually was who he claimed to be. If the personality of Jesus is compelling, then so are his credentials.

## **Did Jesus really rise from the dead?**

*Discovering that there is good historical evidence for the Resurrection was a turning point in my own faith.*

Facts to be explained:

- (1) The New Testament records the resurrection of Jesus, and all early Christians believed it.
- (2) No one ever found and exhibited the dead body of Jesus, though the Romans and Jews both could have gained a lot by doing so. (Or even by exhibiting some other dead body and claiming it was Jesus!)

Point of method:

If you assume at the outset that something cannot possibly have happened, you will never know whether it actually did happen. ("It's impossible because it's against the laws of nature...")

Complete proof of a past event is never available. However, the historical evidence that Jesus actually rose from the dead is much stronger than most people realize.

### **If Jesus didn't rise, then what did happen?**

#### **(1) Was the Resurrection faked by the early Christians?**

- (a) The Resurrection was widely accepted at least by 65 A.D., which is early enough that counter-evidence, if any, could still have been found.
- (b) Many early Christians were willing to die for their faith. They would have been unlikely to do this if they had suspected that Christianity was a fraud.
- (c) The body of Jesus was under guard at the time it disappeared. Anyone wanting to fake a resurrection would have had to overpower a Roman soldier.

#### **(2) Was the Resurrection a hallucination or delusion?**

- (a) The New Testament indicates that Jesus' disciples were not expecting a resurrection and were puzzled when it happened. One of them (Thomas) was frankly skeptical.
- (b) The Romans or Jews could have silenced the resurrection story immediately by displaying the dead body of Jesus. Why didn't they?

#### **(3) Was Jesus merely unconscious, not dead, when put in the tomb?**

- (a) He was pronounced dead by experienced executioners and had been stabbed in the side.
- (b) Upon reviving, how would he get past the Roman guard? Or even unwrap his own embalming cloths?

#### **(4) Was it a coincidence of several unrelated events?**

- (a) Theories of this type will always be unanswerable. Maybe the guard went to sleep, and one early Christian stole the body to fake a resurrection, and the other Christians didn't find out about it, and they all had hallucinations.
- (b) If you allow a sufficiently far-fetched theory, you can explain away anything. But far-fetched theories such as this raise at least as many difficulties as the theory that the Resurrection actually took place.

**The historical evidence for the Resurrection, more than anything else, convinced me that the claims of Jesus are not just "taken on faith" – they stand up well to critical examination.**