

WHO IS JESUS?

Christianity is all Christ Jesus. All of those who want to be Christians hang their faith on Jesus. Did he live? Who was he? How did he live? Why did he die? Did he rise from the dead? Do his teachings still matter? Many have different ideas of what Jesus was like and who he is. The next three studies will explore many of these questions.



I. JESUS IN HISTORY.

Luke 2:1-7; 3:1-2 (read these texts)

These verses identify Jesus and John the Baptist in historical settings. Of what value is there in Luke (the writer) noting these historical details?



Jesus is placed in an actual historical setting along with Roman officials like Herod, Pontius Pilate and Caesar. Mythological or fairy tale characters do not have actual historical settings (Cinderella; “once upon a time in a far away land...”)

Matthew and Luke include the genealogies of Jesus to show that Jesus was in the right family of the predicted Messiah or Christ (both words mean the same). Mythological characters do not have a family tree!

We have the writings of at least ten extra-biblical sources (sources outside the Bible) from the time period of Jesus and the early disciples that testify to the existence of Jesus, to his death by crucifixion by Pilate’s orders, and to the activities of early Christians. Some of these sources include Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman historian; Suetonius, another Roman historian; Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor (modern Turkey); and others.¹

Josephus is another example of the ten sources. He was a Jewish historian who was born just a few years after Jesus died. In AD 66 he obtained a Galilean military command and soon after deserted to the Romans. He predicted that the invading commander, Vespasian, would one day become emperor. Vespasian became emperor and Josephus was free to write *The Antiquities of the Jews* in AD 93.



Josephus has a statement of interest to our study. It is a testimony about Jesus identifying him as a wise man, the Messiah and that Pilate condemned him to be crucified. Josephus even goes as far as saying about Jesus, “he appeared to them alive again the third day.” The following is the quote in question.

¹ Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Volume 1: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1972, 1979), 81-87.

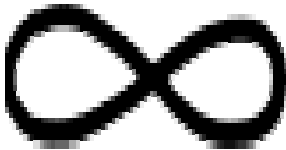
Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.²

Josephus is not an inspired writer nor did he ever convert to Christianity, but his writings confirm the New Testament account of many key facts. There is debatable criticism to Josephus' reference to Jesus' resurrection but there is no credible objection to the facts that Jesus did exist, Jesus was crucified, and Pilate was the one who had Jesus crucified. These are facts of history attested to by both Scripture and historians.

Observation: Jesus really did exist.

II. HOW LONG HAS JESUS EXISTED?

Read John 1:1-18 (Maybe break the reading into sections John 1:1-5, 6-13, 14-18)



Note: John 1:1-2, 14

What are descriptions of the "Word" in these passages? (*The Word is God, the Word is from the beginning, the Word became flesh or became a man, other answers addressed in this study are that the Word is the creator and the revealer of the Father*)

Why can we know that Jesus is the one described as the Word? (The Gospel of John makes this clear as the story unfolds, but his becoming flesh is our clue here.)

How long has the Word existed?

Why might John be interested in noting that Jesus, God becoming flesh, is an eternal being and did not just come into existence at his birth?

Observation: Jesus has always existed, even before he took the form of a man, even before the creation of all things. Jesus is eternal.

III. IS JESUS THE CREATOR GOD?

Note: John 1:1-3, 14

Who is the Word described as being in verse 2? (God)

What role does the Word have toward creation?

As creator, what authority does the Word have over its creation?

Observation: Jesus is God, our creator and has the authority granted to the one who creates.



² Flavius Josephus, *The Judean Antiquities*, Book 18, Whiston Chapter 3, Whiston Section 3; available from <http://pace.cns.yorku.ca/York/york/showText?book=18&chapter=3&textChunk=whistonSection&chunkId=3&text=anti&version=&direction=&tab=&layout=english>; Internet accessed 15 Jan. 2007.

IV. DID THE WORD, JESUS, BECOME A MAN?

Note: John 1:4-5, 14, 18

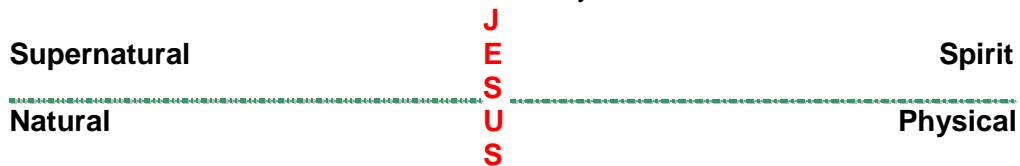
The Word, became man, verse 14. Why would God become a man?
How are the characteristics of God easier to see through God becoming flesh in Jesus?

In the Word is life and that life is the light for all people, verse 4. What kind of life is found in Jesus?

How is Jesus the light of men?

From verse 18, why did He become a man? (To show us the Father. Jesus came to show us what God is like. When you look at Jesus; loving, serving and saving, then you see the nature and love of God.)

In verse 14 John points out that *God became flesh and lived on the earth like us!* Jesus has come from another "realm". Notice the two-story universe illustration below:



The supernatural has entered into the natural realm in a dramatic way in the person of Jesus Christ to provide a way for people to be brought into fellowship with God (II Corinthians 5:19, Jesus reconciles us to God).

Observation: Jesus, God, became a man to give life and bring light to a dark existence. He also showed us what God is like. Jesus the Son revealed the nature and attitude of the Father.

V. JESUS IS THE PERFECT EXAMPLE FOR US TO FOLLOW

Luke 2:51-52

What four areas did Jesus grow in according to this verse? (*mentally, physically, spiritually and socially*)

Why are all these areas important? (*well balanced people will grow in all these areas*)

Consider: We look at someone with a handsome or beautiful appearance and think they have it all, but they may have no meaning or purpose beyond looking good. Jesus had a full life that included relationships with His Father and people. He lived among people showing them how to have a joyful life and a fulfilling relationship with God. Jesus was a man of steel (kicking the money changers out of the temple; John 2:15-16), and a man of velvet (holding little children; Matthew 18:2-6). Jesus is the ideal role model for women and men. His character of integrity and His life of purpose are ideal. He shows all of us how to have a life of *balance, meaning and purpose!*

Observation: Jesus set an example for us to have true life.

VI. THOUGHTS TO THIS POINT

In the material we have considered about Jesus to this point what has been helpful to you as you seek a relationship with God? Why that concept?