

## What the Bible Teaches About Jesus Christ

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Christianity involves more than a belief in God. The Christian faith owes its life and its unique character to the Person of Jesus Christ. What a person believes concerning Him is of eternal importance.

The names given our Lord are significant. “Jesus” means “Saviour” and is His human name. “Christ” means “Messiah” and speaks of His work. “Lord” is His divine name and signifies that He was God as well as man. There are other names (such as “Alpha and Omega”) which were assigned to Jesus.

### 1. THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Many facts point to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is fully God. Many other facts lead to the conclusion that He was perfect man. We will note first what the Bible says about His deity.

*His Preexistence.* Strange as it may seem, the Bible declares that Jesus lived before He was born! John the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan River, and when he spoke to the multitudes, he said, “After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me” (John 1:30). Yet Jesus was born *after* John the Baptist. Elizabeth was an expectant mother six months before Jesus was conceived, and thus John the Baptist was born about one-half year before Jesus.

Jesus himself says “**before Abraham was, I am**” (John 8:58). Jesus not only claimed to have existed *before* Abraham, but He also claims for himself the name “Yahweh” – and thus He claims to be God (Exodus 3:14-15). The prayer of Jesus in John 17:5 also confirms His preexistence. Jesus lived with God the Father before the world was created.

*Evidences of Deity.* Many deny the deity of Christ, or at least cast a veil over His deity, and say that He was only a man – a good, holy, exemplary man but only a man. The denial is not new. The Ebionites, Arians, and Socinians all regarded Jesus as merely a man. Today, Unitarians and theological liberals and many of the cult groups deny the full deity of Jesus Christ.

(1) *His own claim* – Jesus himself claimed equality with God when He said that He and the Father are one (**John 10:30**). Those who heard Him understood what He had said for they accused Him of blasphemy. Also, Jesus received and accepted *worship* as God (**John 20:28**). If Jesus were not God, He would have rebuked those who worshipped Him even as the apostles did in **Acts 14:15**.

(2) *His supernatural works* -Jesus is said to have done certain things which only God can do. **Mark 2:7** describes His power to forgive sins. **John 5:25** says He will raise the dead. **Colossians 1:17** declares that He participated in the work of creation. All these activities are works which only God can do. The supernatural works of Jesus are clear evidences of His deity.

(3) *His divine characteristics* – Jesus possessed the attributes which only God can have. His *omnipotence* is set forth in the statement found in **Matthew 28:18**. Furthermore, Jesus has power over sickness, nature, and death (**Matthew 8:16; Matthew 8:23-27; John 11:43-44**). The *omniscience* of Jesus is described in Paul's words in **Col. 2:2-3**. Passages such as **Mark 2:8** and **John 1:48-49** confirm that Jesus knows everything. His *omnipresence* is disclosed in passages like **Matthew 18:20** and **Matthew 28:20**. Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always."

In the Scriptures *the name* of Jesus is coupled with the names of the other members of the Trinity in the baptismal formula. We are to baptize in the name of the Father, *and of the Son*, and of the Holy Spirit. This identification with the Father and with the Holy Spirit sets Jesus apart as a divine person of the Godhead.

The doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ is exceedingly important. Our salvation is dependent upon Jesus' being God. After Jesus disclosed His deity in the eighth chapter of John, He said, "For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (**John 8:24**).

## 2. THE HUMANITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Jesus was not only fully God, but also fully man, except that He was without sin. We cannot explain the mystery of how Christ's two natures were united in one Person. The biblical writers recognized His perfect manhood and His full deity. He had to be human as well as divine if He was to be the Mediator between God and man.

*His Incarnation.* The "incarnation" was *the way* in which Christ who is God took on humanity. The word "incarnation" means "in flesh." The *method* of incarnation was the virgin birth. **Matthew 1:16** clearly indicates that the conception of Jesus was connected exclusively with Mary and not with Joseph. Matthew lists more than forty names in the ancestry of Jesus, and says the one "begat" the other, but when he comes to Jesus he simply says Joseph was "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus" (**Matthew 1:16**). The pronoun "of whom" is feminine singular. Jesus was born of *a* woman – not as in normal human generation – of a man and a woman.

The importance of the virgin birth of Jesus lies in the fact that when a child is born by natural processes, his nature is tainted with sin, transmitted from parent to child – but in the case of Jesus, the Holy Spirit transmitted seed, and Jesus had no sin (**2 Corinthians 5:21**).

*Evidences of Humanity.* The full and perfect humanity of Jesus was manifested in a number of ways. **Philippians 2:6-8** says that Jesus "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." The idea of taking on humanity with its limitations was humbling, but it did not involve His giving up any divine attributes. When Jesus became man He did not subtract deity but He added humanity.

*(1) He had a human body, soul, and spirit* – The conception of Jesus was supernatural, but His birth was natural. He possessed a human *body* which grew normally (**Luke 2:40**). Near the time of His crucifixion Jesus said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful" (**Matthew 26:38**). And while He was on the Cross He said, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" (**Luke 23:46**). Jesus possessed body, soul, and spirit.

*(2) He had typical human characteristics* – Jesus became hungry (**Matthew 4:2**) and thirsty (**John 19: 28**). He experienced love and compassion (**Matthew 9:36**). He wept (**John 11:35**). His body required sleep (**Matthew 8:24**). His mind possessed wisdom (**Luke 2:52**). His spirit learned obedience (**Hebrews 5:8**) Jesus was tested but did not sin (**Hebrews 4:15**).

(3) *He possessed human names* – Jesus called himself “the Son of man” eighty times and thus identified himself with us as sons of men. Jesus was called “the son of David” (**Mark 10:47**), and “a man” in **1 Timothy 2:5**. The one Mediator between God and man is “the man” Jesus.

The humanity of Jesus Christ was as real and as genuine as was His deity. Both must be accepted and neither should be emphasized at the expense of the other. Our Lord’s perfect divine nature was so united with His perfect human nature that a single divine-human Personality developed. Without becoming less than God, Jesus Christ took upon himself complete human nature.

A proper knowledge of Christ’s Person is crucial in understanding His work. If Christ was God and only God, He could not have moved freely among men, and experienced their trials and sufferings. If Christ was man and only man, He could not have paid the price to buy us back from sin. Our wonderful Saviour is a God-man.

### 3. THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

Great men of this world are valued for their lives, but Jesus is known above all for His death. Almost half of the Gospel according to John is devoted to the week of His death. The death of Jesus is central to the Christian faith. This is underscored by Paul’s determination at Corinth “not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified” (**1 Corinthians 2:2**).

*Prophecies about His death.* The shedding of blood on Israel’s altars was a symbol of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (**Hebrews 9:12; John 1: 29**). The Passover Lamb in Egypt was a type of Christ (**Exodus 12:5-7; 1 Corinthians 5:7**). The bronze serpent in the wilderness pictured Christ lifted up on the Cross (**Numbers 21:9; John 3:14-15**). The events surrounding the Cross are clearly foreshadowed in **Isaiah 53** – numbered with transgressors, wounded for our transgressions – and in **Psalms 22** – the mocking crowd, the intense thirst, the piercing of the hands and feet.

*The accomplishment of His death.* Christ’s death was substitutionary. This means that Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners. The New Testament used three Greek prepositions when speaking of Christ’s death:

“*peri*” – for us (used in **Matthew 26:28**)

“*anti*” – in place of us (used in **Matthew 20:28**)

“*huper*” – in behalf of us (used in **2 Corinthians 5:21**) The prepositions are used in many other passages of Scripture such as **Titus 2:14, Galatians 2:20, and Hebrews 9:28**. Jesus died for us, in place of us, and in behalf of us. Jesus had no sins of His own, but He died for the sins of others, taking the punishment they deserved.

*False concepts about His death.* The *martyr theory* says that Christ’s death was similar in kind to that of John Huss or Polycarp or the early Anabaptists. Just as martyrs gave up their lives as a sacrifice for a principle, so, they say, Christ died for the principle of truth. The *moral example theory* states that the example of Christ’s suffering ought to soften human hearts and help a person to reform his own condition. The *governmental theory* says that God punished Christ because He wanted to make Christ’s suffering an example to show men how He hates sin. These views of Christ’s death have some elements of truth, but each omits the basic concept of *substitutionary sacrifice as payment for sin*. It was *my* sins that put Jesus on the Cross. He becomes *my* Substitute.

*The benefits of Christ’s death.* God’s provision for the salvation of sinful man lies in the death of His Son. Christ’s death brings redemption (paying the price), propitiation (turning away wrath), reconciliation (getting together by removing enmity), justification (declaring righteous), and cleansing (removing the stain). Each of these benefits of Christ’s death will be considered in more detail when we study the doctrine of salvation in a later **WITNESS** article.

Christ’s death at Calvary is the central theme of the Scriptures (**Luke 24:25-27,46**). The death of the Saviour will be the grand theme of heaven, where a new song of worship is addressed to Him: “**Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood**” (**Revelation 5:9**).

#### 4. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Christianity is the only religion which bases its claim for acceptance upon the resurrection of its founder. The implications of the resurrection are enormous. We should seek to understand them as fully as possible and rejoice in these truths.

*The fact of the resurrection.* We are faced with the fact of the empty tomb. To say that the body of Jesus was stolen by enemies is useless, for *if enemies had stolen* the body, all they would have had to do, was to produce it as evidence that Jesus was still dead. *If a wild beast had devoured* the body, the grave wrappings would have been left in disarray (**John 20:6-7**). *If the disciples had taken* the body away, they would then have

died as martyrs (most *did* die as martyrs) for something which they knew to be a lie. People will sometimes die for what they mistakenly think is true, but they do not die for what they know is false. The only alternative then which explains the resurrection is that Jesus arose miraculously as He had predicted.

*The nature of the resurrection.* Jesus Christ arose *bodily* from the dead. The resurrection does not mean simply that His memory lives on, nor was it a resurrection of spirit. It was *the body* that was placed into the grave, and it was *the body* that was resurrected.

After his resurrection, Jesus had bodily characteristics which the disciples saw (**Luke 24:39; John 20:27**). The resurrection body of Jesus was identified with the same body which had been crucified and buried, and yet it was different in that it was not subject to normal limitations. After His resurrection, Jesus passed through closed doors (**John 20:19**), and it is stated that His body would not ever die again (**Romans 6:9**).

*The significance of the resurrection.* There are a number of significant results of the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

(1) *The resurrection proved the validity of Christ's claims.* Jesus said that He would not only be killed but that He would rise again, and that it would occur on the third day (**Matthew 17:23**). Not just any person can make a claim like that. We have good reason thus to accept *a#* that Jesus said as being valid and true.

(2) *The resurrection confirms the forgiveness of our sins.* Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we know that we are not trusting a myth, but that we are forgiven through the work of a living and active Christ (**1 Corinthians 15:17**).

(3) *His resurrection is a guarantee of our own resurrection.* Jesus said, "Because I live ye shall live also" (**John 14:19**). We know with assurance that the grave is not our end and that we will be raised as He was (**2 Corinthians 4:14**).

(4) *Resurrection faith provides power for service to Christ.* We do not believe in a dead Christ, but in the Christ of the empty tomb. The *living* Christ is an incentive for obedient service. **Ephesians 1:18-19** speaks of God's exceedingly great "power toward us who believe . . . which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ may be denied but it cannot be successfully refuted. Jesus showed himself alive by many infallible proofs (**Acts 1:3**). The resurrection is linked with Christ's deity (**Romans 1:3-4**); it is connected with regeneration (**1 Peter 1:3**); it is

related to prayer and victory (**Hebrews 7:25**). Jesus Christ is not a historical character who once walked the dusty roads of Palestine; instead, He is a living Person who right now presides over the affairs of earth.

The proof of God's power in the Old Testament was the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and especially the opening of the Red Sea. The resurrection and the ascension of Christ described in the New Testament is an even greater demonstration of God's power. Men can deny and ignore Jesus Christ in this life, but they must someday acknowledge His position and authority (**Philippians 2:9-11**). It is much better to trust Him now as Saviour, and then to forever enjoy His blessings.

### SELF-CHECK TEST

1. Give a brief meaning for the names "Jesus" and "Christ" and "Lord."
2. Name three evidences of Christ's deity.
3. Name three evidences of Christ's humanity.
4. Name the three Greek prepositions that speak of "substitution. "
5. List five benefits of Christ's death and give the brief description of the meaning for each word.