

IS JESUS GOD?

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It is important in hearts not only that Jesus is the Messiah but that Jesus is God along with His Father and the Holy Spirit. Apologist Ralph Muncaster decided that in order to convince himself that Jesus was God, he would need not only proof of the fact that Jesus was a great prophet but proof that Jesus “could prophesy and fulfil His own prophecy with the accuracy of God Himself”¹ Of all the prophecies that Jesus made concerning Himself Muncaster found the most startling to be the those that predicted Jesus would be betrayed and crucified yet on the third day rise from the dead. An example of this type of prophecy is Matthew 20: 17-19

“Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again”

Jesus made numerous other prophecies concerning the events of his trial, crucifixion and resurrection; included amongst them are the following prophecies

- 1) In Matt 12:40 “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”
- 2) In Matthew 16:21 Jesus informed his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, at Jerusalem He would suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes. Then He would be killed and raised on the third day. A similar account is found in Mark 9: 30-31, as well as Mark 10:32-34 and Luke 18:31-34.
- 3) In Matthew 17: 22-23 while in Galilee Jesus prophesied that He would be betrayed into the hands of men, be killed and on the third day raised up.
- 4) Witnesses testified that Jesus said “He was able to destroy the temple of God and build it in three days.” (Matthew 26:61, Matthew 27:40; Matthew 27:63; Mark 14:58; Mark 15:29-30).
- 5) The Saviour taught His followers that He must suffer, be rejected, be killed and on the third day rise again. (Mark 8: 31; Luke 9:21-22).
- 6) When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus he explained “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should

¹ Muncaster page 191

not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:14-16). On another occasion Jesus taught “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself.” This He said, signifying by what death He would die. (John 12:32-34)

Concerning these prophecies Muncaster comments “If there was ever an unusual and amazing prophecy, it would be one with the specific details of the prophesiers death, and far more that He would rise from the dead in three days.”². And as if to leave no doubt that Jesus clearly understood and prophesied the events of His suffering, rejection, betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection the Gospel records the accounts of prophecies of this type no fewer than 18 times. In addition Jesus prophesied that

- 1) He would be betrayed by one of his disciples (Matthew 26:21; Mark 14:18; Luke 22: 21-22)
- 2) His disciples would stumble because of Him and be scattered (Matthew 26: 31-32; Mark 14:26-27).
- 3) Peter in particular would deny Jesus three times (Matthew 26: 33-34; Mark 14: 30) In the Luke account (Luke 22:31-34) Jesus attributes Peter’s denial to the fact that Satan desired to sift Peter like wheat, but Jesus sees beyond Peter’s fall and commands Peter after he has returned to Jesus to strengthen his brethren.
- 4) In fact Jesus saw that all the disciples would return to Jesus and instructs them to meet Him in Galilee after His resurrection (Mark 14:28).

The closing chapters of each of the Gospels narrate how the events of Jesus betrayal, trial, crucifixion and resurrection perfectly fulfilled these prophecies. It is one thing to prophesy of one’s own soon coming death when one is nearing the end of a natural life, it is quiet another to foretell of the circumstances of that death in such remarkable detail. When we consider the prophecies that Jesus made concerning Himself as well as the Messianic prophecies found in the Old Testament one could argue that Jesus could have planned to fulfil some of the predictions by controlling the circumstances. However there are dozens of other prophecies that could only be fulfilled as others acted completely independently of Him. As a human it was completely impossible for Jesus to decide who his ancestors would be, the same could be said of his birthplace, means of execution, and the reaction of people after His execution. The only explanation of how the prophecies concerning Jesus could be fulfilled to such a remarkable degree is the presence of a supernatural agency. Furthermore only God can prophesy that He would die and then be raised to life again and then fulfil that prophesy.

It has to be asked did the Jews of the first century accept Jesus as God? The Book of Acts reveals that at the time of Jesus ascension 120 followers gathered in the upper room to await the fulfilment of the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. This occurred on the day of Pentecost about 50 days after the Resurrection. On the day of Pentecost Acts 2: 41 records that a further 3000 men were added to the believers, part of the reason why so

² Muncaster page 191

many were converted on that day was that Peter filled with the Holy Spirit made use of the Old Testament Scriptures to proclaim the deity of Christ.

From that time forth the number of Jesus' followers grew rapidly, Muncaster estimates that by the time Peter and John appeared before the Sanhedrin the number of disciples could easily have represented 20% of Jerusalem entire population³. The Jewish authorities could not tolerate such phenomenal growth and the persecution of the church was soon underway.

The men who wrote the New Testament were so convinced that Jesus was not only the Messiah but also God Himself that they were willing to be martyred for proclaiming this message. Furthermore if the New Testament was a fraud their contemporaries could easily have brought forth evidence to repute their message. There is no historical evidence to suggest that this ever happened. One of the most striking passages concerning Jesus deity in the Gospels is John 1:1-14. This passage is one of my favourite passages from Scripture; it contains a remarkable declaration that Jesus is God who came to earth to reveal the Father and to bring fallen sinners into relationship with Him and His Father. Other evidence that Jesus is God can be found in the Gospels in the fact that

1. Peter worshiped Jesus (Luke 5: 8) and on another occasion declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16: 16). Thus Peter affirmed that Jesus was the Messiah, Peter was declaring that Jesus was the Son of God—deity in human flesh⁴
2. Thomas declared Jesus to be “My Lord and My God” (John 20: 28)
3. Jesus drew Peter, James and John aside and allowed them to witness His transfiguration (Matthew 17). The transfiguration was a visible demonstration of the full glory of the deity of Jesus.
4. Even while in the womb John the Baptist recognized the deity of Jesus and leapt in Elizabeth's womb. Elizabeth responded by called the yet unborn baby “My Lord” (Luke 1:41-43).
5. Simeon, who was a devout Jewish prophet (Luke 2:25-35) and Anna, a Jewish prophetess (Luke 2:36-38) both believed that Jesus was God come to bring salvation to the people.
6. Eventually even James and Jude, possibly both half brothers of Jesus believed that Jesus was God and wrote the epistles that bear their names.
7. While Jesus was on the cross a Roman Centurion and other bystanders believed that Jesus was the Son of God (Matthew 27: 51-54).

³ Muncaster page 192

⁴ *Believers study Bible* 1997, c1995. C1995 by Foundation for Reformation. (electronic ed.) (Mt 16:16) Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

8. Furthermore the early disciples testified to the fact that Jesus was who He claimed to be by being willing to die as Martyrs rather than deny what they knew to be the truth. Consider the following observation that Muncaster makes

“The apostles who knew Jesus closely, and all who would definitely know whether Jesus actually lived, died, and rose from the dead all willingly faced horrible persecution and death to tell the gospel message. Historical tradition tells us that one by one, all the apostles except John were executed over a period of years –simply for spreading a historical message, the gospel. Records of tradition tell us that

- Peter was crucified upside down.
- James the half brother of Jesus was stoned (he did not believe until after the resurrection)
- Matthew was killed by the sword.
- James son of Alphaeus was crucified.
- James son of Zebedee was killed by the sword.
- Thaddaeus was killed by being shot with arrows.
- Bartholomew was crucified.
- Andrew was crucified.
- Philip was crucified.
- Simon the Zealot was crucified.
- Thomas was killed with the spear.
- Paul was beheaded (he also did not believe until after the resurrection).”⁵

It is hardly conceivable that all of these men would die for something they either knew to be a lie or even had any suspicion might not be the whole truth. “Men will sometimes die for what they believe to be true but never for what they know to be false. A man becomes extremely honest and truthful under the threat of death.⁶ Also consider that these men did not die in one place at one time, they therefore had ample time to consider their pending fate and yet wilfully and deliberately choose not to deny the one who they knew as their Lord, God and Master. Not only did these early followers of Jesus face persecution and execution, but the generations of believers that followed also choose to pay the same price. This fact is remarkable in itself but it is even more astonishing when one takes into

⁵ Muncaster page 203

⁶Geisler, N. L. (1976) *Christian apologetics*. Includes index. (Page 315) Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

consideration that in those early centuries when martyrdom was a common fate of many who followed Christ the church grew so rapidly. Indeed there have been countless Christian Martyrs down through the ages even on down to our time all willing have given their lives proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah.

Muncaster contrasts the early martyrs of the Christian faith with those who have been martyrs of other religion and concludes

“The Christian martyrs deaths were all because of a single historical event that either happened or didn’t happen. They had to believe in something historical or their martyrdom was empty. All other martyrs...died for some philosophical belief- a belief that would get some eternal paradise or a belief in a metaphysical cause. But in the case of the Christians, if there had been no crucifixion and resurrection verifying the prophecies that Jesus was God, there would be no reason for martyrdom. There would be no Christianity in the form we know today.”⁷

Before we can accept that Jesus is God, we have to address the doctrine of the Trinity. While it is true that the term “the Trinity “ is not directly found in the Bible, never the less the truth contained in the concept is implied throughout the Scriptures. “The Old Testament hints at a plurality within the Godhead, while the New Testament directly affirms the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁸ It should be observed that the Bible consistently declares that there is only one God, and none beside him. (Deut 4:35; 6:4; Isa.43: 10; 44:6; 45:5, 1 Tim 2:5; Mark 10:18; 12: 29). However if we examine the Bible closely we find that throughout its pages a plurality of persons within the one Godhead is disclosed. For instance Genesis 1:1 is the very first time the word “God” is used in the Bible it as a translation of the Hebrew plural word “Elohim”. In the Old Testament “Elohim” is in fact the most frequently word used for God. When God decides to create mankind (Gen.1: 24) the thought is expressed in these words “let us make man in our image”, it is important to note that plural pronouns are used. When the Lord God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden the statement “Behold, the man has become like one of us” is used (Gen.3: 22). Another passage in the Bible where God speaks in the plural is Genesis 11: 7 on this occasion God confuses the languages of the world. In passages such as Genesis 2: 24 and Deuteronomy 6: 4 the Bible uses the Hebrew word “echad” to express the thought of “compound unity –not a simple unity.”⁹ in the Godhead. Furthermore Paul Enns writes

“In Psalm 110:1 David recognized a distinction of persons between “LORD” and “my Lord”. David implies that Messiah is One greater than an ordinary human king because he refers to Messiah with an ascription of deity, “my Lord”. In the prophecy concerning Christ in Isaiah 7:14 the Lord makes it clear that the One born of a virgin will also be Immanuel “God with us”. It is an attestation to Messiahs’

⁷ Muncaster page 205

⁸ Mcgrath The NIV Thematic Reference Bible page 1404.

⁹ Torrey page 18

deity. Two additional passages previously mentioned that imply the Trinity are Isaiah 48:16 and 61:1. In both of these passages all three persons of the Godhead are mentioned and seen as distinct from one another.”¹⁰

While the Old Testament hints at the Trinity, it is the pages of the New Testament that the doctrine of the Trinity is developed much more fully Paul Enns observes “Ultimately to demonstrate that the Scriptures teach the trinity, two things must be affirmed, that there is only one true God, and that all three persons are called God ...The *Father* is called God (1 Cor.8: 6); the *Son* is called God (Heb 1.8-10; the *Holy Spirit* is called God (Acts 5: 3-4); God is one God (Deut 6:4). Combining these four statements affirms the Trinity.”¹¹

The New Testament contains ample evidence to prove that within the Godhead there are three persons who are in a close intimate united and equal relationship.

“In the act of making disciples Jesus commanded that the apostles were to baptize the new disciples “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (Matt 28:18). It seems clear that the equality as well as the unity of the three persons is intended. In Mary’s conception the Trinity is involved: the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, the power of God overshadowed her, and the resultant offspring was called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). All three are also seen as distinct at the baptism of Jesus (a denial of modalism; cf. Luke 3:21-22). In John 14:16 the unity of the three is again mentioned: the Son asks the Father who sends the Spirit to indwell believers forever. The unity of the three is clear. In Romans 8:9-11 all three are mentioned as indwelling the believer. The benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 surely is a strong affirmation of both the equality and unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf. also 1 Cor.2: 4-8; Rev 1:4-5).”¹²

The doctrine of the Trinity is a truth that is revealed in the pages of the Bible, that man left to his own human reasoning could not have been derived. Again it must be stressed that the term “trinity” does not appear in the Bible, but early church coined the term as they sought to find words that expressed the doctrine as it is revealed in the pages of Scripture. Myer Pearlman has observed

“The early church was confronted with two facts, that God is one, and that the Father is God, The Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And these two great facts concerning God constitute the doctrine of the Trinity. God the Father was a reality to them; the Son was a reality to them; and so was the Holy Spirit. And the only conclusion that could be reached from these facts was that in the Godhead there was a real but

¹⁰ Enns page 201-202

¹¹ Enns page 201-202

¹² Enns page 201-202

mysterious distinction of personality, which distinction became manifest in the Divine work for man's redemption.”¹³

As an accountant I like to think of the early Church deciding to use the term “Trinity” in order to reconcile the Biblical fact that there is only one God (Deut 6:4, Isa.43: 10-11; 44:8) with the Biblical fact that the Father is God (1 Cor.8: 6), Jesus is God (Heb.1: 8-10) and the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4).¹⁴ G.L.Bray expresses this thought when he states “The doctrine develop in the early church because it was the only way in which the NT witness to Jesus and the to the Holy Spirit could be adequately accounted for.”¹⁵ Concerning the development of the Doctrine of the Trinity R L Saucy has noted

“The doctrine of the Trinity flows from the self-revelation of God in biblical salvation history. As the One God successively reveals himself in his saving action in the Son and the Holy Spirit, each is recognized as God himself in personal manifestation. It is thus in the fullness of New Testament revelation that the doctrine of the Trinity is seen most clearly. God is one (Gal .3:20; James 2: 19) but the Son (John 1:1; 14:9; Col.2: 9) and the Spirit (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor.3: 16) are also fully God. Yet they are distinct from the Father and each other. The Father sends the Son and the Spirit (John 15:26; Gal 4:4). This unified equality and yet distinctness is seen in the triadic references to the three persons. Christian baptism is in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt 28: 19). Likewise all three are joined in the Pauline benediction in a different order suggesting the total equality of persons (2 Cor.13: 14; cf. Eph 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2).”¹⁶

Throughout church history there has been a tendency to misstate the doctrine of the Trinity. There have been three prominent ways in which the doctrine of the trinity has been misstated. 1) Tri-theism that there are three gods in close association with one another. 2) Sabellianism or Modalism which while speaking of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit understands each as “a mode of existence or manifestations of one God”¹⁷ and thus undermines the unique personality of each member of the Godhead 3) Arianism teaches that only God the Father is God, Jesus is less than God since he was begotten by the Father. However Jesus was begotten of the Father in the sense not of origination but declaration, Jesus was declared by the Father to be the Son.

Henry Morris and Henry M Morris III point out

“The doctrine of the Trinity, rather than being unnatural and self-contradictory, is deeply implanted in the very nature of reality and in

¹³ Myer Pearlman page 74

¹⁴ The NIV Thematic Reference Bible provides Biblical references for exploring more fully the unity, distinctions, relationships and equality that exists in the Godhead. Pages 1404-1405.

¹⁵ G L Bray page 691

¹⁶ R L Saucy page 502

¹⁷ Enns page 199

man's awareness of God. Man has always felt and known in his heart that God was "out there" everywhere, that He was somehow the invisible source of all things. But this deep consciousness of God as eternal and omnipresent Father, he has corrupted into pantheism and then eventually into naturalism.

Similarly, man has always recognized that somehow God must and does reveal himself in human dimensions, so that man can see and discern the nature and purpose of his Creator. But this glorious truth of God as Son and Word, man has distorted into idolatry, seeking continually to erect some kind of model of God to his own specifications, either from material substance or metaphysical reasoning.

Finally, man has always desired to know God experientially, and thus sensed that God indwells His creation, manifesting himself in actual vital union with man in particular. This is the reality of God, the Holy Spirit, but once again man has corrupted this glorious truth into mysticism and fanaticism and even demonism.

Man has thus always sense, and could have understood had he desired, that God is Father, Son and Spirit, but instead he has corrupted the true God into pantheistic naturalism, polytheistic paganism and demonistic spiritism...(Rom 1:21; Eccles. 7:29).

The doctrine of the triune God is thus not only revealed in Scripture but is intrinsic in the very nature of things as they are."¹⁸

¹⁸ Morris and Morris III page 115-116