

## Chapter Four

### WAS JESUS GOD?

At one time or another we have all asked ourselves: Who is God? Having been raised in a Christian society I had been told that Jesus was God. I wasn't certain. Was Jesus God?

Who *was* Jesus?

In trying to answer this question we will be drawing on many sources of information, a few of which most Christians have not explored.

Again, our goal with this book is simply to try to come closer to God. To do that we must internalize Christ's teaching to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength" (Mark 12:30 & Luke 10:27).

Back to our question: Was Jesus God? The answer may come as a shock to many Christians, as it did to me. Jesus never said he was God. Actually, he said over and over, and in many ways, that he was not God.

Jesus was a practicing Jew, and such a concept is now, and would have been then, totally against the law of Moses (Mosaic law).

#### JESUS FOLLOWED MOSAIC LAW

The next few quotes from the Bible show us that Jesus was a devout and learned Jew, a rabbi:

*Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and his reputation spread throughout the region. He was teaching in their synagogues, and all were loud in his praise. He came to Nazareth where he had been reared, and entering the synagogue on the sabbath as he was in the habit of doing, he stood up to do the reading.*

**[Luke 4:14-16]**

The worship of God was always focal in his life, even as a child. The second chapter of Luke tells us a very touching story of Jesus as a precociously wise child of twelve, sitting for days among the scholars. His family had accidentally left him in Jerusalem after their annual visit for the Passover. Nearly frantic, they searched for him:

*On the third day they came upon him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All who heard him were amazed at his intelligence and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him: "Son, why have you done this to us? You see that your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow." He said to them: "Why did you search for me? Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?"*

**[Luke 2:46-49]**

As he grew, "*Jesus...progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men*" (Luke 2:52). After he had matured, his opinion was sought, though perhaps not always respectfully, by traditional Jews. An example of this is John's narration of the adulterous woman brought to Jesus for judgment.

Though they addressed him as "*Teacher*," they tried to trap him into saying something which they could use against him. As he straightened up from where he had been writing on the ground, he issued his famous judgement: "*Let him without sin cast the first stone.*" Though they had come to trap him, the scribes and Pharisees could not argue and drifted away, leaving the woman without harming her. Even those who were hostile to his teachings respected him.

## OTHER SCRIPTURAL SOURCES

While religious scholars of most faiths would agree that Jesus was a wonderful model for humanity, the scriptures of almost all the major religions predate Christ, and therefore give us no new information about him. The one exception to this is the Quran, the scripture of Islam.

Unfortunately, what the world recognizes as the religion of Islam is really the cultural tradition of the Muslim world. Most Muslims have not studied the Quran, and they do not really follow it. Comparing what they do in the name of Islam with the teachings of the Quran is like comparing the Spanish Inquisition with the teachings of the Bible. The practice is almost in total opposition to the scripture.

The basic message of the Quran and the Bible are the same. If we look at just the Quran itself, and leave the culture and tradition behind, we find a great deal of valuable information about Jesus and what he taught.

According to the Quran, not only was Jesus a young scholar, but he was a prophet from birth, delivering divine revelations, even shortly after birth :

*She came with him to her family, carrying him. They said, "O Mary, you have committed something gross. O descendant of Aaron, your father was not a bad man, nor was your mother unchaste." She pointed to him. They said, "How can we talk with*

*an infant in the crib?” (The infant spoke and) said, “I am a servant of God. He has given me the scripture, and made me a prophet. He made me blessed wherever I go, and enjoined me to observe the contact prayers (Salat) and the obligatory charity (Zakat) for as long as I live. I am to obey my mother; He did not make me a disobedient rebel. And peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I get resurrected.” Such was Jesus, the son of Mary. This is the truth of this matter, about which they have a lot of doubt.*

**[Quran 19:27-34]**

We see from this and the following quote that Jesus taught even as a newborn infant.

*(On the Day of Resurrection) God will say, “O Jesus, son of Mary, remember My blessings upon you and your mother. I supported you with the Holy Spirit; you thus spoke to the people from the crib, as well as an adult...”*

**[Quran 5:110]**

In the above verse, it is useful to understand the Quranic definition of the Holy Spirit as the angel who brings divine revelation from God, the angel Gabriel. The Quran teaches that Gabriel brought the revelation from God to Jesus, who then delivered it to the people, and this process began even while Jesus was an infant.

This Quranic concept of revelation from God is fully supported by the first two verses in the biblical Book of Revelation:

*This is the revelation God gave to Jesus Christ, that he might show his servants what must happen very soon. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who in reporting all he saw bears witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

**[Revelation 1:1-2]**

## BASIC TEACHINGS

As a rabbi, what did Jesus teach? Throughout the New Testament, Jesus exhorted us to worship God alone and keep the Mosaic commandments. The first and best known commandment in both the Old Testament and the New Testament advocates total and absolute devotion to God alone:

*The Lord our God is Lord **alone!** Therefore, you shall adore the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*

**[Deuteronomy 6:4-5]**

**[Mark 12:29-30]**

Jesus especially stressed this First Commandment:

*The scribe said to him: “Excellent, Teacher! You are right in saying, ‘He is the One, there is no other than He.’ Yes, ‘to love him with all our heart, with all our thoughts and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves’ is worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice.” Jesus approved the insight of his answer and told him, “You are not far from the reign of God.”*

**[Mark 12:32-34]**

## THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

Again, Jesus’ straightforward injunctions to follow the commandments in general, and the First Commandment in particular, are throughout the New Testament. Significantly, he described the First Commandment as “The Great Commandment” (Mark 12:29). The statement of this injunction is very strong:

*I, the Lord, am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have any other gods beside me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God....*

**[Deuteronomy 5:6-9]**

For Jesus, this commandment meant more than just an injunction against physically worshipping idols. Often people use phrases like ‘he worships the ground she walks on,’ or ‘he’s my idol.’ These phrases show the subtle idol worship that pervades our daily lives. Jesus taught the absolute devotion to God alone:

*On one occasion a lawyer stood up to pose him this problem: “Teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?” Jesus answered him: “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” He replied: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said: “You have answered correctly. Do this and you shall live.”*

**[Luke 10:25-28]**

If you do love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your mind—literally with your whole being—there is not room for *anything* else. That is the definition of devotion.

Jesus taught that this devotion to God must be more than lip service:

*“Yet an hour is coming, and is already here, when authentic worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth. Indeed, it is just such worshipers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.”*

**[John 4:23-24]**

We see that Jesus stressed pure worship of the Father, in spirit and truth. It is not possible that Jesus could have so strongly taught total devotion to God, and then advocated his own worship.

## EARLY CHRISTIAN JEWS

It is also very clear that the early Christians still considered themselves to be Jews, and thus subject to the Mosaic laws revealed in the Torah. Dr. George M. Lamsa, in his book *NEW TESTAMENT ORIGIN* (Aramaic Bible Society, Inc., p. 9), makes a point of the Jewish origins of Christianity, and his quote from Matthew stresses Jesus' adherence to Mosaic law:

*...Christians for some time continued to worship in the Jewish temple and in the synagogues, to observe Jewish customs and traditions, and to keep the Mosaic law and the Sabbath. For nearly two centuries the bishops of Jerusalem were Semites. In other words, the followers of Jesus were loyal to the teachings of the prophets as expounded by their Master, who had told them that he had not come to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them. Jesus said: Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whoso shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-19).*

Evidently Jesus left no doubt in the mind of his disciples in regard to his loyalty to the commandments and the teachings of the prophets.

ON HIS OWN IDENTITY Jesus' statements throughout the Bible suggest that any idea of exalting him to divinity was unthinkable. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus denounces in the strongest terms those who exalt him by calling him 'Lord':

*“None of those who cry out, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of God but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. When the day comes, many will plead with me, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not exorcised demons by its power? Did we not do many miracles in your name as well?’ Then I will declare to them solemnly, ‘I never knew you. Out of my sight, you evil doers!’ ”*

**[Matthew 7:21-23]**

Jesus would not even accept the praise of a man who called him good:

*“Good teacher, what must I do to share in everlasting life?”  
Jesus answered: “Why do you call me good? No one is good but  
God alone.”*

**[Mark 10:17-18]**

If Jesus would not even allow himself to be called good, he certainly would not claim divine qualities.

Perhaps some of the difficulty that humans have is that we do not really recognize the qualities of God. When we say that He is omnipotent and omniscient, we do not fully realize what that means—that God can do *anything* and that He knows *everything*, including our innermost secrets, and those we are not even aware of yet. Unless we do realize the full meaning of these qualities, it is possible to think of Jesus as having had them. But the next section shows clearly that he did not.

## ONLY GOD HAS DIVINE QUALITIES

Matthew 24:36, quoted below, demonstrates that Jesus was not omniscient:

(In relation to the end of the world Jesus said to them:)

*“As for the exact day or hour, no one knows it, neither the  
angels in heaven nor the son, but the Father only.”*

**[Matthew 24:36]**

One divine quality is the ability to assign the souls their positions in the Hereafter. Jesus tells us that only God can do this. When he speaks to the mother of his disciples James and John, she asks him to promise that her sons will be on either side of him in the Hereafter:

*“...But sitting at my right hand or my left is not mine to give.  
That is for those to whom it has been reserved by my Father.”*

**[Matthew 20:23]**

Surely, when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane he demonstrated that he was neither omnipotent nor omniscient:

*“Father, if it is your will, take this cup from me; yet not my will  
but yours be done.”*

**[Luke 22:42]**

Jesus made it clear in many, many ways that he was not God, that God is greater. Nowhere is this more definitely stated than when he spoke to his disciples about his imminent departure:

*If you truly loved me you would rejoice to have me go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.*

**[John 14:28]**

## JESUS' PRAYER

As demonstrated above, and throughout the Gospels, Jesus prayed to God. This certainly argues against his being God. God would not pray to Himself.

Like Luke 22:42, the Gospel of Matthew reports that a very human Jesus became distressed in Gethsemane and turned to God for solace:

*He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer. "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. Still, let it be as you would have it, not as I"*

**[Matthew 26:39]**

There were times when Jesus felt the need to pray with special urgency. Luke reports that, on one occasion, Jesus prayed very hard:

*In his anguish, Jesus prayed with all the greater intensity, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

**[Luke 22:44]**

Jesus also prayed to God that the people might believe in him as God's messenger. This specifically defines the role of Jesus as deliverer of God's message:

*...Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know that you always hear me but I have said this for the sake of the crowd, that they may believe that you sent me."*

**[John 11:41-42]**

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence that Jesus was not God is in the way that he taught the disciples to pray:

*One day he was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us the wrong we have done as we forgive those who wrong us. Subject us not to the trial but deliver us from the evil one.' "*

**[Luke 11:1-4]**

[Matthew 6:9-13]

Note that Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, our Creator, not to himself. In fact, he did not mention himself in any way, nor did he indicate that we should pray in his name. His instructions were very specific—we are to pray to God alone.

This would not be the case if Jesus himself were God.

## REPORTED DYING WORDS

Even in the narration of his death, in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, there is an incident that contradicts the concept of Jesus' divinity. According to these two references, Jesus was put on the cross and left to die, then:

*At that time Jesus cried in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachtani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

[Matthew 27:46] & [Mark 15:34]

It is not logical that God would ever say: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This utterance was recorded in both Gospels in Jesus' mother tongue, Hebrew/Aramaic, to emphasize the accuracy of transmission. Thus, according to this Christian narration, Jesus could not have been God.

## RECENT SCHOLARLY DEVELOPMENTS

There has long been a great deal of debate among Christian theologians and scholars regarding the divinity of Jesus. This debate has intensified in recent years, and there seems to be an increasingly open concern over the truth of this doctrine. For example, the authors of *THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE* (The Westminster Press, 1977, p. ix) concluded, as already quoted, that:

"Jesus was (as he is presented in Acts 2:21) 'a man approved by God' for a special role within the divine purpose, and...the later conception of him as God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living a human life, is a mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance for us."

Other Christian scholars have questioned not only the claims that Jesus is God, but even that he publicly proclaimed himself to be the Messiah. On October 17, 1987, the Associated Press released the following news release:

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) - A group of biblical scholars known as the Jesus Seminar has decided that Jesus did not publicly proclaim himself the messiah.

The scholars say the belief that he did, held by many Christian denominations, was added to biblical texts by early church officials.

The group is meeting at Luther Northwestern Seminary in St. Paul this weekend as part of a five-year effort to reach a consensus on which sayings attributed to Jesus are historically accurate and which were added by others.

Individual scholarly efforts to determine the historical nature of the Gospels, and of Jesus himself, are not new. What is unusual about this group is its effort to reach voting consensus, after study and debate.

The group includes about 125 Roman Catholic, Protestant and non-Christian scholars.

Seminar leaders admit the findings are not to be taken as truth, but rather as a scholarly “theory of uncertainty.” One example of the biblical phrases that the group claims are not authentic is in John 11:25, where Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will...never die.”

In concluding that Jesus did not make such messianic claims, the group cites non-canonical and highly controversial sources such as the Gospel of Thomas and the hypothetical “Q document.”

(ARIZONA DAILY STAR, October 18, 1987)

Significantly, the Jesus Seminar leaders have admitted that their scholarly findings “are not to be taken as truth, but rather as a scholarly *theory of uncertainty*.” In other words, even the leading scholars are still uncertain. One of the most important outcomes of the 1987 meeting of the Jesus Seminar the biblical statements in John 11:25-26 are “not authentic.” This is relevant to this chapter, since many Christians have stretched the interpretation of these particular verses to mean that Jesus is God:

*Jesus told her: “I am the resurrection and the life: Whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die.”*

**[John 11:25-26]**

## THE OPPOSING VIEW:

### EXAMINATION OF VERSES

We have seen that there is significant scriptural evidence that Jesus was not God. On the other hand, there are numerous other verses understood by many Christians to mean that he was divine. The rest of this chapter examines those verses.

It is appropriate at this time to quote from Michael Goulder, Staff Tutor in Theology, Birmingham University. Goulder states in *THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE* (Ibid., p. 48):

...In my early ministry I was still a trembling believer in Chalcedonian orthodoxy-Jesus was God the Son, of one substance with the Father, who came down from heaven. Trembling beliefs do not alter themselves: they are reinforced daily by the repetition of the liturgy. When I look back, I think that the firmest plank on which my creed rested was the familiar passage in John 1, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” This was not alone, for there were

similar statements in Col. 1 and Phil. 2, and hints of the same in many of the Pauline letters, and in Hebrews. Where had St. John got the doctrine from? Not from Jesus.

In these lines we see some of the Biblical references understood by many people to mean that Jesus is God. We also see in the same lines that Goulder found those roundabout statements do not bestow divinity upon Jesus.

Since Michael Goulder, at least for a period in his life, was a typical Christian, let us look at the biblical references that led him to believe that Jesus was God:

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory: the glory of an only Son coming from the Father filled with enduring love.*

**[John 1:14]**

This verse makes a clear distinction between the Word and the Father. In no way does it argue for the divinity of Jesus. The Word comes from God, and thus reflects the glory of the Creator, much as our creations reflect our skills and talents. But the Word cannot logically be considered divine anymore than our handiwork is human.

The first verse of John is more misleading in this regard:

*In the beginning was the Word; The Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God.*

**[John 1:1]**

An objective reading of this verse raises the question: "If the 'Word' was 'in God's presence,' how could it be God?" When something is in your presence, it has to be, by definition, separate from you.

The logical understanding is that the 'Word' emanates from God, or **represents God**. When we obey the Word of God, we obey God.

This understanding is confirmed by the fact that throughout the Gospels, Jesus emphasizes that he did not speak on his own, that God told him what to say. This clearly indicates that Jesus delivered the Word of God, not that he was God. Here is an illustration from John:

*Jesus proclaimed aloud: "Whoever puts faith in me believes not so much in me as in him who sent me; and whoever looks on me is seeing him who sent me. I have come into the world as its light, to keep anyone who believes in me from remaining in the dark. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I am not the one to condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save it. Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words already has his judge, namely, the word I have spoken- it is that which will condemn him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own; no, the Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to speak. Since I know that his commandment*

*means eternal life, whatever I say is spoken just as he instructed me.”*

**[John 12:44-50]**

A distinction is made here among the Word of God, Jesus and God. Perhaps that distinction can be expressed this way: Jesus brought to the world God’s Word, and thus, whoever puts faith in that Word, puts faith in God. This distinction is reinforced by the following quotes, again from the Gospel of John:

*I cannot do anything of myself. I judge as I hear, and my judgment is honest because I am not seeking my own will but the will of him who sent me.*

**[John 5:30]**

*“My doctrine is not my own; it comes from him who sent me. Any man who chooses to do his will will know about this doctrine- namely, whether it comes from God or is simply spoken on my own. Whoever speaks on his own is bent on self-glorification. The man who seeks glory for him who sent him is truthful; there is no dishonesty in his heart.”*

**[John 7:16-18]**

In John 8:40, Jesus describes himself as “*a man who has told you the truth which I have heard from God.*”; Thus again we see that Jesus delivered the Word of God.

A significant understanding, and one whose relevance cannot be ignored here, occurs in the Quran. The Quran calls Jesus a ‘Word’ from God. Among Quranic scholars, the prevalent understanding of this description of Jesus is that Jesus was created inside Mary’s womb as the result of a ‘word’ from God, the word ‘Be.’ Jesus was then formed inside Mary’s womb, without the need of a human father:

*The angels said, “O Mary, God sends to you good news: a word from Him to be called the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary. He will be prominent in this world and, in the Hereafter, he will be among those close to God.”*

**[Quran 3:45]**

*The creation of Jesus, as far as God is concerned, is the same as the creation of Adam; God created him from clay then said to him, “Be,” and he was.*

**[Quran 3:59]**

## COL. 1-PAUL'S TEACHING

Much of what we recognize today as the basic teachings of Christianity came to us through Paul. Remember that though Paul was the major missionary to the gentiles in the years immediately following the crucifixion, he never met Jesus. All of his understanding of Jesus and what he taught came secondhand and through the visions which he had.

Most of Paul's own teachings come to us through letters which he wrote to various Christian communities. His Epistle to the Colossians is an example. It was partly from this letter that Michael Goulder originally derived the idea of Jesus' divinity:

*He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creatures. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, principalities or powers; all were created through him, and for him. He is before all else that is. In him everything continues in being.*

**[Col.1:15-17]**

This obviously is Paul's teaching, not that of the man who said, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (Mark 10:18).

In this passage, Paul was using an old Biblical formula to describe Jesus. Wisdom personified was similarly described in Solomon's Proverbs:

*"The Lord begot me, the firstborn of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago; From of old I was poured forth, at the first, before the earth."*

**[Proverbs 8:22-23]**

*"Happy the man who obeys me, and happy those who keep my ways, happy the man watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts; for he who finds me finds life, and wins favor from the Lord; but he who misses me harms himself; all who hate me love death."*

**[Proverbs 8:33-36]**

When we look carefully at Colossians 1:15-17 and Proverbs 8:22-23 and 8:33-36, we realize that we cannot draw the conclusion that Jesus and Wisdom personified are both God. Rather, both instruct us in the means of reaching God, and thus are God's agents, not God. To paraphrase the authors of *THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE*, these descriptions are a mythological or poetic way of expressing the significance of Jesus and Wisdom for us.

The opening statements of Colossians make a clear distinction between God and Jesus:

*Paul, an apostle of **Christ** Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the holy ones at Colossae, faithful brothers in Christ. May **God our Father** give you grace and peace.*

[Col. 1:1-2]

## PHILIPPIANS 2

Another biblical statement mentioned by Golder and used by many to convey divinity upon Jesus is in Philippians 2. This is one of the epistles of uncertain origin. Many scholars do not accept it as being written by Paul at all. A comparison of the King James version and the broader based *NEW AMERICAN BIBLE*, reveals a dramatic difference in the meanings given this statement. Here is the King James version:

*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*

[Phil. 2:5-7]

Upon reading these straightforward verses, who can blame a believer in the scripture for believing that God was incarnated into a human being? Here we see that Jesus was “*in the form of God,*” that he “*thought it not robbery to be equal with God,*” and that “*he took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*” No wonder this rendering is frequently quoted with confidence by those who believe in the divinity of Jesus.

However, when we study the original material, a totally different picture emerges. Let us look at the same verses, translated directly from the oldest available texts by the translators of the *NEW AMERICAN BIBLE*, rather than revised from earlier translations, as is the case in the King James version:

*Your attitude must be that of Christ: Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate.*

[Phil. 2:5-7]

Contrary to the King James’ assertion that Jesus’ equality with God was acceptable to Jesus, the *NEW AMERICAN BIBLE* translation conveys the exact opposite; Jesus deemed it unthinkable. The same problem is observed in the King James translation that Jesus “*made himself of no reputation*” and “*was made in the likeness of men.*” This is vastly different from Jesus “*being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate.*”

Ironically, only two verses later, a clear distinction *is* made between God the Supreme Being, and Jesus as one who was exalted by God. Obviously, God would have no need to exalt Himself. Jesus the man was exalted by God. The complete biblical context clearly negates the idea that Jesus was God.

## 1 TIMOTHY 3:16

Another of the major verses used to support the concept that Jesus is divine is Verse 3:16 of 1 Timothy. However, there is now a developing conviction that this particular verse was an innovation written to conform to the principles of the Nicene Conference. Many scholars question the authenticity of all of 1 Timothy, pointing to strong evidence that Paul wrote only three epistles: Romans, Corinthians and Galatians.

In any case, examination of two different translations of 1 Timothy 3:16 shows how easily the translator's understanding of a verse can overshadow the original wording. The verse in the King James version reads as follows:

*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

**[1 Timothy 3:16]**

*King James version*

Now let us look at this verse in the *NEW AMERICAN BIBLE*, which you will remember is a much more recent translation, able to use a wider range of documents than were available at the time of the King James translation. This translation clearly refers to Jesus, but does not say he is God:

*Wonderful, indeed, is the mystery of our faith, as we say in professing it: "He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit; Seen by the angels; preached among the Gentiles, Believed in throughout the world, taken up into glory."*

**[1 Timothy 3:16]**

*New American Bible*

## WORD OF GOD

It seems that the representation of God by His word, as explained earlier, has contributed to occasional confusion. Nevertheless, the idea that the 'Word' of God represents God is common to the three scriptures: the Torah, the New Testament and the Quran:

*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen, and I will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him. If any man will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it.*

**[Deut. 18:18-19]**

This idea that Jesus did not speak on his own is repeated throughout the Gospels, as quoted earlier. See, for example, John 7:16-18 and 12:44-50.

In the Quran, the same principle is set forth:

*Whoever obeys the messenger is obeying God.*

**[Quran 4:80]**

Deuteronomy 18:15, and 18-19 (quoted above) indicate that the messenger of God does not speak on his own. Thus, the message delivered by God's messenger and contained in the scripture, stands for the messenger, and represents God ("If any man will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it" [Deut. 18:19]).

In his book, the translated title of which is *THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS SECTARIANISM* (The Message Publishers, 1985, p. 23), Dr. Ahmed Mansour, Professor of Islamic History at the famous Azhar University in Cairo, states:

...since the messenger, be he Moses, Jesus or Muhammad, is dead, the commandment 'to obey the messenger' must be referring to the message itself.

He also notes that the scriptures consistently order us to "obey the messenger," and not to obey Moses, or Jesus, or Muhammad by name.

This same idea has been expressed by other scholars on the basis of the Quran 11:1-2 and 65:10-11, where the scripture is specifically called "*the messenger*."

*(This is) a scripture whose verses have been perfectly designed then elucidated. It comes from the most wise, the most knowledgeable. Proclaiming: "You shall not worship except God. I come to you from Him, as a preacher and a bearer of good news."*

**[Quran 11:1-2]**

*...God has sent down to you the scripture, a messenger reciting for you God's profound revelations....*

**[Quran 65:10-11]**

## JOHN 14

This principle of representing God by His Word is clearly demonstrated in John 14:6-11. It appears that the problem of the deification of Jesus arose from the same kind of misunderstanding of this passage as we witnessed earlier with John 1:1, Colossians 1:15-17 and Philippians 2:5-7.

*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father also. 'From this point on you know him.... Whoever*

*has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not spoken of myself; it is the Father who lives in me accomplishing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works I do."*

**[John 14:6-11]**

John 14:20 sheds more light on the idea of God being represented by His words, and shows that "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me" does not mean that Jesus is the same as God:

*"On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."*

**[John 14:20]**

Obviously, Jesus' disciples do not become Jesus, nor are they made divine when Jesus tells them: "I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you." Similarly, Jesus' statement that "To hate me is to hate my Father" (John 15:23) does not mean that Jesus and God are one and the same. Rather it indicates a hatred of the Father's teachings that Jesus delivered.

Thus far it is clear that the references from the New Testament we have examined, which are understood by many to confer divinity upon Jesus, are indirect and misleading. Meanwhile, the direct expression: "Jesus is God" is never found.

## ISAIAH 9

Interestingly, it is in the Old Testament where we find the most critical verse for searching Christians—Isaiah 9:6. The translation of this particular verse is the most misleading of all. In the King James version, it reads:

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of peace.*

**[Isaiah 9:6]**

*King James version*

Let's look at this same verse as translated by the Jewish Publication Society of America in its *THE HOLY SCRIPTURES: According To The Masoretic Text* (Philadelphia, 1917):

*For a child is born unto us, a son is given unto us; And the government is upon his shoulder; and his name is called Pele-joez-el-gibbor-Abi-ad-sar-shalom; (That is: Wonderful in*

*council is God the Mighty, the Everlasting Father, the Ruler of peace.)*

**[Isaiah 9:5]**

*Torah*

To be named “*Wonderful in council is God the Mighty, the Everlasting Father, the Ruler of peace*” is not to be God, but to be named with a name which glorifies God. The names “John,” meaning “God is good,” and “Joshua,” meaning “God is salvation,” are similar.

Note that the original Hebrew is used to ensure and emphasize the accuracy of transmittal. Also note that the verse number is five, rather than the number six of the King James translation.

The verse number five is also retained in the *NEW AMERICAN BIBLE* translation, along with a much more accurate rendition of the Hebrew/Aramaic of the original:

*For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him wonder-counselor, God-hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.*

**[Isaiah 9:5]**

*New American Bible*

Though this translation is not as straightforward as the Jewish rendering of the same verse, the difference between this translation and the King James version is doctrine-shaking. The difference between the phrases “*the mighty God*,” and “*God-hero*” is obvious and profound. There are people today who can be considered God-heros, doing great work in the cause of God.

## REVELATION 1:8

Going back to the New Testament, we see a similar pattern of misunderstanding and mistranslation in another verse often quoted to show that Jesus was God. First, the King James version:

*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, Which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*

**[Revelation 1:8]**

Second, THE *NEW AMERICAN BIBLE* version:

*The Lord God says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty!”*

**[Revelation 1:8]**

Note that the King James version omits the critical first line: “*The Lord God says...*” The omission gives the impression that it is Jesus who is speaking, rather than God. This impression is strengthened by the fact that “*I am the Alpha and the Omega*” is repeated some verses later within the context of a mysterious and totally ambiguous story. Here the source of these words is not identified as Jesus, but as “*One like a Son of Man.*”

Whether leaving out the crucial first line was intentional or not in the King James version, there is no doubt that its absence creates a false reading of the verse.

## JOHN 8:58

There is one last verse we should examine. It also is misunderstood by many who believe that it shows Jesus was divine:

*Jesus answered them: “I solemnly declare it: before Abraham came to be, I AM.”*

**[John 8:58]**

Extracting divinity for Jesus from this verse is stretching it far beyond its context. First of all, a complete reading of the entire passage leaves a very different impression:

*Jesus answered: “If I glorify myself, that glory comes to nothing. He who gives me glory is the Father, the very one you claim for your God, even though you do not know him. But I know him. Were I to say I do not know him, I would be no better than you—a liar! Yes, I know him well, and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he might see my day. He saw it and was glad.” At this the Jews objected: “You are not yet fifty! How can you have seen Abraham?” Jesus answered them: “I solemnly declare it: before Abraham came to be, I AM.”*

**[John 8:54-58]**

A very clear distinction is made in this passage between Jesus and God. Also, the idea of Jesus’ pre-existence is not at all unique in the Bible and does not prove his divinity. For example, we see the pre-existence of Jeremiah in the Old Testament:

*The word of the Lord came to me thus: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.*

**[Jer. 1:4-5]**

Personified Wisdom’s pre-existence, in the same manner as Jesus, is reported in Proverbs:

*“The Lord begot me, the firstborn of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago; From of old I was poured forth, at the first, before the earth. When there were no depths I was brought*

*forth, when there were no fountains or springs of water; Before the mountains were settled into place, before the hills, I was brought forth; While as yet the earth and the fields were not made, nor the first clods of the world.”*

**[Proverbs 8:22-26]**

As an interesting note, Jesus, Solomon and Jeremiah are recognized in the Quran as prophets and messengers of God. Furthermore, the Quran states that God made a special covenant with all His messengers before the creation of the heaven and the earth (Quran 3:81).

In fact, according to the Quran, the entire human race predated the heaven and the earth:

*Recall that your Lord gathered all the descendants of Adam (before creation), and had them bear witness for themselves, saying: “Am I not your only Lord?” They all said, “Yes indeed, we thus bear witness.”*

**[Quran 7:172]**

## EXAMINATION OF THE TITLE ‘LORD’

Finally, we need to look at the title ‘Lord’ as used to refer to Jesus. This word has sometimes been chosen as the translation instead of ‘Master’ or ‘Rabbi.’ In English it has a much more elevated meaning and, when referring to Jesus, it is understood by many readers to imply his divinity. Jesus’ own understanding of this title is illustrated in the following verses from Matthew. Note that the Jews were expecting the Messiah (literally ‘the anointed one’) to come from the family of David:

*In turn Jesus put a question to the assembled Pharisees, “What is your opinion about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” “David’s,” they answered He said to them, “Then how is it that David under the Spirit’s influence calls him ‘lord,’ as he does: ‘The Lord said to my lord, Sit at my right hand, until I humble your enemies beneath your feet’?”*

**[Matthew 22:41-44]**

*New American Bible*

Here we see a clear distinction between the Lord God who supports His Messiah, humbling his enemies and keeping him in His protection (at His right hand), and that same Messiah as a ‘lord’ or master/rabbi.

The irony of the above scriptural quote has been masked by the translation rendered as ‘lord’, which might also be translated as ‘father’. The latter translation then becomes:

*... "Whose son is he?" "David's," they answered. He said to them, "Then how is it that David...calls him 'father,' as he does: 'The Father said to my father...'"*

**[Matthew 22:42-44]**

*Modified New American Bible*

In the Middle East, the traditional title for the father, the head of the household or the leader is 'rabb' or 'lord.' This is true in Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic. It does not necessarily imply divinity.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus followed the Mosaic law and did not claim divinity. According to the Bible, He was not omniscient nor omnipotent.

We have examined a large number of scriptural references which are often used to support the divinity of Jesus. As we have seen, there are factors in all of them which negate that conclusion, or make it very questionable. Given the fact that nowhere in the Bible do we see a direct identification of Jesus as God, and that Jesus strongly upheld all the commandments and emphasized the First Commandment, we can only conclude that the doctrine of Jesus' divinity has no foundation in the scripture nor in the life and teachings of Jesus. This concept is an innovation in Christian doctrine.

This may be a painful and radical conclusion for many. Painful because it is new and runs contrary to what we have always been taught. Radical only if we are not familiar with the historical development of the doctrine of Christ's divinity.