

"The Three Most Important Questions!"

Hearing the name of "Jesus" often arouses several different feelings and responses:

- 1) One of disbelief or even anger, as one would hear of a mythical person or event that has been pushed on others. It may make an entertaining story though.
- 2) One of interest or curiosity as if hearing the name of a real historical person whose history and biography have been manipulated to fit a certain story, narrative or ideology (world-view).
- 3) One of gladness and joy as if hearing the name of a good friend, loved one or a very admired person with whom one would like to meet.

I will present what I believe are possibly the three most important questions one could ask. They pertain to the person of Jesus; questions that many of us eventually ask at some point in our lives. All verses are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

The Three Questions:

I) Does (did) Jesus really exist?

- 1) The Bible as evidence: The Bible is often doubted as an historical book because it is a book of religion and faith.
 - a) However, when one looks into the reliability of the Bible as history, we find that the oldest available copies are very close to the original ones. The Bible stands up well when compared to other ancient writings, such as:
 - i. Homer's Iliad (only 643 copies) with the oldest copy written 500 years after the original writing.
 - ii. Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars (only 10 copies) with the oldest copy written 1000 years after the original writing.
 - iii. Pliny's History (only 7 copies) with the oldest copy 750 years from the original writing.
 - iv. Thucydides' History (only 8 copies) with the oldest copy 1,300 years from the original writing.
 - v. Herodotus' History (only 8 copies) with the oldest copy 1,300 years after the original writing.
 - vi. This compares with, for example, portions of the New Testament (with over 24,000 ancient copies) with the oldest ones only 25 years from the original writings. There are many good studies on the accuracy and reliability of the Bible for those who are interested.
 - b) The Bible has stood the test of time while many have attempted to completely destroy it.
 - i. In 64 A.D., Emperor Nero tried to wipe out the Bible and anyone who professed Christ. He blamed Christians for burning Rome which he likely did himself. Many considered him mad, and he ultimately committed suicide.
 - ii. In 200 A.D., the Jews were persecuted under Antiochus Epiphanies and the Pentateuch (Books of Moses) was torn up and burned. "...anyone found possessing the book of the covenant was condemned to death by the decree of the King."
 - iii. In A.D. 303, the Roman Emperor Diocletian issued an edict to destroy Christians and their Bible. What followed was brutal.
 - iv. In 1700, the French humanist, Voltaire proclaimed, "one hundred years from now the world will hear no more of the Bible." Fifty years after his death, Bibles were printed by

the Geneva Bible Society in the very house where he lived, and on his own printing press!

- v. In 1866, Pope Pius IX said: "Socialism, Communism, clandestine societies, Bible societies... pests of this sort must be destroyed by all means."
- vi. During the 19th century, the government of Korea outlawed the Bible and tried to keep it out of the land.
- vii. The former Soviet Union tried to outlaw the Bible and now the Word is flourishing there.

- c) Numerous attempts have been, and are being made to demonstrate inaccuracies and discrepancies of the Bible.
 - i. The Bible stands up to the "external" test that shows writings, history and archaeology, external to the Bible, have not yet been found to disprove anything in the Bible.
 - ii. The Bible stands up to the "internal" test that shows there is nothing within the Bible that contradicts itself. Some make claims of "apparent" contradictions. However, further study shows that these are not contradictions at all.
 - iii. The Bible stands up to the "bibliographic" test that shows the accuracy of the Bible has been maintained and transmitted down through history as it has been copied and translated to the present time. Some have calculated that perhaps there is a small degree of grammatical or "scribal" errors when comparing the oldest writings of the Bible with the later discoveries. But, these have had no affect on the meaning or teachings of the Bible.

2) What about evidence outside of the Bible (the following are some examples)?

- a) Josephus, a Jewish Priest of the first century, who many later considered a despicable traitor, mentioned Jesus, "who is called Messiah," in reference to the brother of James in his writings.
- b) Tacitus (full name - Publius Cornelius Tacitus) was a Roman historian who lived from around AD 56 to around AD 120. To Tacitus, Jesus was not the Son of God. Tacitus wrote a book called "Annals" in around AD 116. In one part of the book, Tacitus reports on the six-day Great Fire of Rome that burned much of the city in AD 64 during Emperor Nero's reign. Emperor Nero (Roman emperor from AD 54 to AD 68) had decided to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in AD 64. Tacitus reports that Christians derived their name from an historical person named Cristus (from the Latin Christ). This Cristus is said to have suffered the extreme penalty (obviously referring to the Roman method of execution known as crucifixion).
- c) Pliny the Younger - Another important source for the validity of Jesus being worshipped as God, and the existence of the early Christians, can be found in the letters from Pliny the Younger (real name - Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus) to Emperor Trajan. For Pliny the Younger, Jesus and His followers were extremely odd.
- d) The Babylonian Talmud is a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings, and there are some key references to Jesus in it.
- e) In a passage written somewhere between AD 73 and AD 200, Mara Bar- Serapion, who was a stoic philosopher from the Roman province of Syria, made remarks about the Jews executing their wise king and the consequences that followed.
- f) Lucian of Samosata was a second century Greek satirist. In one of his works, he wrote of the early Christians who worshipped a man who was very distinguished and was crucified and that he taught that "all men are brothers from the moment of their conversion."
- g) The calendar! At the writing of this paper, this is the year 2022 AD ("Anno Domini" which is Latin for "the year of our Lord"). Our calendar is based on the birth of Jesus Christ. B.C. Stands for "Before Christ." The Anno Domino dating system was formulated in 525 by

Dionysius Exiguus of Scythia Minor to identify the years in his Easter table. The dating system was not really used until the 9th century. One small problem was that in the process of determining the date of Jesus' birth, there was an error pinpointing the exact year of His birth and was off between 4-6 years. Jesus was likely born between 6-4 BC and not AD 1 by this dating system. This does not diminish the fact that Jesus was used to divide history and placing Him as the turning point in history adding further support for His existence. Some people have tried to change our dating system to reduce Jesus' significance by substituting BC (Before Christ) with BCE (Before Common Era) and substituting AD (Anno Domini) with CE (Common Era) to avoid the "religious" implications of the dating system. One may change the notations but it does not diminish the fact that it is still a timeline based on Jesus!

II) Is Jesus the Messiah (Savior of the world)?

- 1) The Bible teaches about the Messiah.
 - a) The Old Testament teaches there will be a coming Messiah (some verses cited).
 - i) The first indication of God's response to the fall when Adam and Eve sinned is mentioned in Genesis 3:15 though the term Messiah or Savior is not used. God's plan is very much implied.
 - ii) There are 31 uses of the word "Savior" in the Old Testament.
 - iii) Psalm 22 is a very detailed description of the suffering Savior who was to die for the world. It was penned by King David about 1,000 years prior to Christ's actual crucifixion.
 - iv) Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12 is another very detailed description of the pain and suffering (and purpose behind it) of the One who would "...take up our infirmities and carried our sorrows..." as our Savior. This was written about 700 years prior to Christ's actual suffering and death on the cross.
 - b) The New Testament teaches about the Messiah (some verses cited).
 - i) The people of Samaria, after Jesus revealed Himself to the woman at the well, announced "we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." (John 4:42)
 - ii) Luke 2:11 announces, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."
 - iii) Peter and the other apostles announce in Acts 5:30-32, speaking to the Jews persecuting them, "The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given those who obey him."
 - iv) Philippians 3:20 states, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ..."
 - v) Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:9-10 that God "...saved us and called us to a holy life... given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,...revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."
 - vi) 1 John 4:14 states, "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world."
- 2) The very claims of Jesus:
 - a) In Matthew 16:15-17, Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was. Peter answered "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus responded that this was revealed to him by 'My Father in heaven.'

- b) In Mark 14:61-62, after Jesus was arrested, was asked “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” He answered, “I am,.”
 - c) When Jesus met the woman at the well (John 4:25-26), she said “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming...” Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.”
 - d) Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
- 3) Evidence of Jesus’ resurrection give support that He is who He claimed to be; the Son of God and Messiah:
- a) The empty tomb. The Jewish leaders and teachers of the law (Sanhedrin) could not produce Jesus’ body and even paid the Roman guards to claim that His body was taken by the disciples while they were asleep (Matthew 28:11-15).
 - b) The women who followed Jesus were the first eyewitnesses of His resurrection. Women were second class citizens at that time but the gospel writers, being men, still reported that it was the women who first saw Jesus after His resurrection.
 - c) Jesus’ Apostles’ new found courage! They became bold preachers after Jesus’ resurrection and His subsequent appearance to them. Before that, they were cowards who fled the scene when Jesus was arrested (Matthew 26:56).
 - d) The Bible records that there were more than 500 eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus Christ at the same time (1 Corinthians 15:6).
 - e) The Apostle Paul’s conversion when the risen Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19).
 - f) Most of the original Apostles (tradition teaches all but Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, and the Apostle John) were martyred for their faith in Jesus. One may dare to die for what one believes to be true, but who would die for something they **know** is a lie?
- 4) Some claim that Jesus was a good person and teacher but was not the Messiah or God’s Son. This really is NOT and option based on the things Jesus said about Himself and what He came to do.

After all, Jesus claimed to be:

- a) God’s Son (Matthew 26:63-64, 27:43; Luke 22:70; John 10:36)
- b) The Messiah/Savior (John 4:25-26)
- c) Equal with God (John 1:1; John 10:30; John 14:9; Colossians 1:15, 2:9; Hebrews 1:3)

The only three options to believe about Jesus are (Taken from “More Than A Carpenter” by Josh McDowell):

- 1) **Liar** - He was not telling the truth about Himself based on His obvious claims. The problem with this is that the accounts of His life are filled with acts of kindness, goodness and sacrifice. His life did not display the behavior of an evil person or that of a liar. He spoke the truth to the dismay of the Jewish leaders and teachers.
- 2) **Lunatic** - He was a crazy person and really believed these things about Himself. The problem with this is that the account of His life was that of a very sane person not displaying behaviors of one who is out of touch with reality. The Bible is replete with accounts of His teaching filled with wisdom and clarity and was described often as one who ‘teaches with authority.’
- 3) **Lord** - This leaves us with the only valid and logical choice that He was, and is the Lord and Savior of the world. This is supported by His claims, His teachings and His acts of kindness, sacrifices, miracles and prophecies.

III) Is Jesus your Lord and Savior?

1) What is salvation?

A brief summary of the plan of salvation:

- a) We were created by God and made in His image. (Genesis 1:27)
- b) We were given a free will to obey, or to disobey God as did Adam and Eve. (Genesis 3:6-7)
- c) We are Adam and Eve's offspring, and have all sinned (Romans 3:23)
- d) We are sinful at birth (Psalm 51:5)
- e) We therefore all deserve death (Romans 6:23) because God is not only a loving God (1 John 4:16), but IS Love (1 John 4:18). He is also a perfect and holy God. (Psalm 99:9).
- f) We are filled with varying degrees of pride and self-centeredness and try to earn, or work our way back to God. God's "law" was given to us, not to bring salvation but to reveal sin (Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:24).
- g) It is by grace we are saved, not by our works (Ephesians 2:8-9) but by faith and belief in Jesus (John 3:16).
- h) Knowing about Jesus and believing that He exists does not bring salvation. Even the demons "believe" that He is real but they refuse to surrender to Him. (James 2:19)
- i) The Bible teaches that we should repent (to change one's mind) of our sins (Matthew 4:17; 2 Corinthians 7:10).
- j) It then involves believing in Him and making Him our "Lord", surrendering to His rule in our lives (Romans 10:9-10).
- k) There is no other way to the Father but by Jesus (John 14:6). Not by our good deeds alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).

What does God save us FROM?

- a. The PENALTY of sin: (spiritual death - Ephesians 2:1-3; eternal death - 1 Corinthians 15:42-55) in addition to God's wrath as taught in Revelation 6,8,9,16 and elsewhere)
- b. The POWER of sin: (2 Peter 2:19; Romans 8:5-11)
- c. The PRESENCE of sin: (not presently, but soon to come - Revelation 21:3-5)

What does God save us FOR?

- a. A restored relationship with Him: (Romans 5:8-11; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14)
- b. All of God's amazing blessings (His peace, protection, purpose, power, promises and provisions)
- c. To do God's work in His power, not ours: (Ephesians 2:8-10; 2 Timothy 1:7)

What is our part (how do we "accept" God's free gift)?:

- a. Repent of our sins - (Matthew 4:17)
- b. Believe in Jesus - (John 3:16)
- c. Receive Him as Lord and Savior - (John 1:12; Romans 10:9-10)

Surrender to Christ involves "death to self" (surrender to His rule over our lives):

- a. John 12:24-26: Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it cannot grow and bear fruit!
- b. Phil. 3:7-11: All we have and all we are is like rubbish compared to knowing Christ.
- c. Gal. 2:20: Our old self is "crucified" with Christ. He now lives in us when we surrender our lives to Him!
- d. Phil. 2:3-8: We give up our selfish ambition and look to the interest of others when we give our lives to Jesus.
- e. Col. 2:20-23: We die to the principles and rules of this world that give the appearance of goodness but really lack value.

2) What are the things that only faith in Jesus Christ can provide? (in addition to unconditional love, hope, joy, acceptance and all the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23):

a. Peace

- i. Philippians 4:6-7
- ii. John 14:27
- iii. Isaiah 26:3
- iv. John 16:33

b. Purpose (and true meaning)

- i. Romans 8:28
- ii. Philippians 2:14
- iii. Romans 12:1-2
- iv. Ephesians 2:10

c. Power

- i. 2 Corinthians 4:7-10
- ii. 2 Timothy 1:7
- iii. Philippians 3:7-11
- iv. Acts 1:8

d. Protection

- i) 2 Thessalonians 3:3
- ii) Psalm 40:11
- iii) Psalm 116:6
- iv) John 17:15

e. Provisions

- i. 1 Timothy 6:17
- ii. Acts 14:17
- iii. 1 Corinthians 10:13
- iv. Psalm 111:5,9

f. Passion (our heart's desires)

- i. Psalm 37:4
- ii. 2 Timothy 2:22-24
- iii. 1 Chronicles 29:18
- iv. 2 Thessalonians 3:5

g. Promises (future and hope)

- i. John 14:1-3, 13-14
- ii. Jeremiah 29:11
- iii. 2 Chronicles 7:14
- iv. Ezekiel 36:26-27

h. Propitiation (satisfy God's holiness)

- i. Romans 3:25
- ii. Hebrews 2:17
- iii. 1 John 2:2
- iv. 1 John 4:10

3) What are the things of this world in which many of us indulge as cheap substitutes for that which only Jesus can provide?

- a. Money and material possessions
- b. Positions of power, personal glory and fame
- c. Drugs / alcohol
- d. Sex (adultery, fornication, pornography)
- e. Food / gluttony

- f. Entertainment
- g. Risk taking activities
- h. People pleasing, seeking praise and glory from others
- i. Controlling others
- j. Violent behavior, hurting and using others

Final thoughts:

◆ *God's Gift and invitation are offered to **all** men.*

◆ *God loves **YOU** and wants a relationship with **YOU**!*

◆ *God gave us a choice. He is a Perfect Gentleman and will never force His love upon you and me.*

◆ *The door to the human heart can only be opened from the inside. (Revelation 3:20)*

◆ *A time will come when our chance to choose will end; and then we will get our wish.*

◆ *God does not keep us from heaven and from an eternal relationship with Him. We do.*

What will you choose?