

God's Story, Our Story

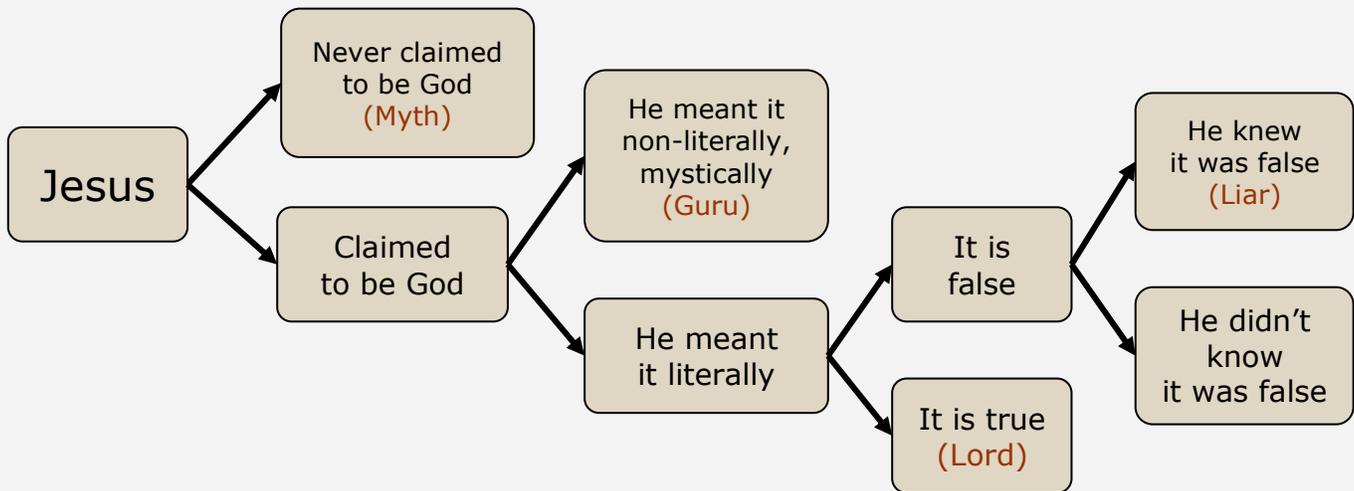
Lesson 25: Jesus – A Critical Examination Of His Person and of His Life



1. Did Jesus really exist? Evidence for the historical life of Jesus:
 - a. 27 New Testament books
 - b. Writings of the Church Fathers (hundreds of sources)
 - c. Secular sources:
 1. Flavius Josephus (Jewish historian, born A.D. 37)
 2. Cornelius Tacitus (Roman historian, born A.D. 52-54)
 3. Pliny the Younger (Governor of Bithynia, A.D. 112)
 4. Seutonius (Roman historian, A.D. 120)

The Test of Jesus' Identity

1. Was Jesus *only* a good man, or remarkable moral teacher?
 - a. This is nonsense, for Jesus seems to have claimed that he was God (Jn 11:25-26, Jn 14:6; see lesson 25)



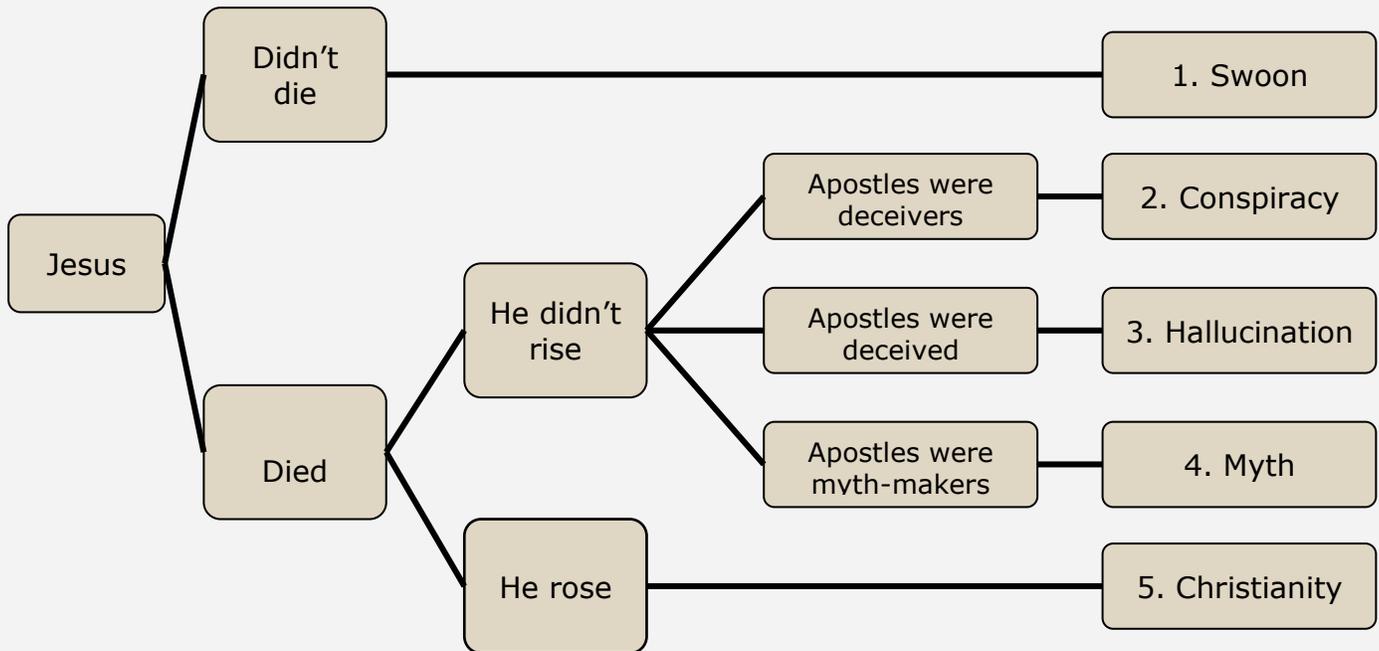
2. Perhaps Jesus never claimed to be God. Perhaps this is a **myth** that his disciples fabricated long after he died? Can we rely on the NT's account of the life of Jesus?
 - a. The bibliographical test: how reliable are the copies of the NT? (number of manuscripts; time interval between the original and extant copy)
 - i. Over 20,000 copies of New Testaments manuscripts in existence today, including 5,664 Greek manuscripts
 - ii. Some 36,000 quotations of the New Testament in the writings of the Church Fathers, enough to reconstitute almost the entire NT.

- iii. Several NT manuscripts from the first centuries are in existence today.
- b. The internal evidence test: whether the written record is credible.
 - i. The benefit of the doubt should be given to the document's author.
 - ii. The NT authors wrote as eyewitnesses or from first-hand information. (Lk 1:1-3, Jn 19:35, Ac 2:22, 2 Pet 1:16, 1 Jn 1:3)
 - iii. The NT accounts of Christ were being circulated within the lifetimes of those alive at the time of his life.
 - iv. No first century documents contest the New Testament texts.
- c. The external evidence test: whether other historical material confirms or denies the internal testimony of the documents.
 - i. The writings of the apostolic fathers confirm the authenticity of the NT text.
 - ii. The evidence of archeology confirms the NT record.
- d. The New Testament documents are too reliable and credible for us to dismiss the Gospel accounts as "myths."
- 3. Perhaps Jesus claimed that He was God – but in the Eastern sense that we are all "gods." Jesus was therefore a kind of **guru**.
 - a. Jesus was a Jew. The Jewish concept of God (transcendent, personal, moral) is completely different from the Eastern concept of God (pantheistic, impersonal, amoral).
 - b. Jesus could not have claimed to be a "god" in the Eastern sense. He claimed to be Jewish God - the transcendent Creator of the world.
- 4. Perhaps Jesus made claims to divinity but knew that he was not God: he was a **liar**.
 - a. By lying and deceiving his followers, he was a hypocrite, teaching others to be honest while living a lie. He was also a fool, since this lie led to his crucifixion.
 - b. This portrait of Jesus doesn't match his life, selfless character and high ethical teachings.
- 5. Perhaps Jesus thought that he was God, but he was mistaken. He was sincere, but wrong – a **lunatic**.
 - a. This does not fit with the man who uttered some of the most profound sayings ever recorded.
- 6. The last possibility: Jesus is **Lord and God**.

The Test of the Resurrection: Myth or historical reality?

1. The Resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith: "*If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.*" (1 Cor 15:14)
2. The resurrection is not:
 - a. A ghost: the resurrected Jesus had a real body.
 - b. A resuscitation (like Lazarus): Jesus' resurrection is permanent.
 - c. Reincarnation into another body.
 - d. Enlightenment or Nirvana, where the individual is absorbed into the One. The risen Jesus is a distinct individual.
 - e. Assumption into heaven. Jesus came back to earth.
 - f. A vision. The risen Christ was seen in public; he was touched; he ate.
 - g. A myth or legend (only symbolically true). The resurrection really happened.

3. The facts: Jesus was wrapped in a linen cloth, with about 100 pounds of aromatic spices applied to the wrappings about the body. The body was placed in a solid rock tomb. An extremely large stone (ca. 2 tons) was rolled against the entrance of the tomb. A Roman guard was stationed to guard the tomb.
4. Women arrive at the tomb on Sunday morning and find it empty. Angels tell the women that Jesus is risen. Jesus appears to many people (more than 500 disciples at one time (1 Cor 15:5-8).



5. **The swoon theory:** Perhaps Jesus didn't die on the cross but only fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. Everyone thought him dead, but later he was resuscitated and the disciples thought it to be a resurrection.
6. Problems with the swoon theory:
 - a. Jesus could not have survived the crucifixion.
 - b. The fact that the Roman soldier did not break Jesus' legs means that he was already dead.
 - c. Blood and water came out of Jesus' pierced heart, a sign that his lungs had collapsed.
 - d. The body was encased in winding sheets and entombed.
 - e. How could a half-dead, weak and ill staggering man, in need of medical treatment, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave?
 - f. How did he move the stone and get by the Roman guard?
 - g. The disciples could not have stolen the body because of the guard.
7. **The conspiracy theory:** Perhaps the apostles conspired to deceive the world into believing the most successful lie in history, that Christ was resurrected.
8. Problems with the conspiracy theory:

- a. No early Christians ever admitted that the resurrection was a conspiracy.
- b. A group of fishermen came up with the most creative, enduring, life-changing story ever told?
- c. The disciples' simple and honest character argues strongly against such a conspiracy on the part of *all* of them, with no dissenters.
- d. They were transformed from fear to faith, despair to confidence, confusion to certitude, cowardice to boldness, and all willingly died for their "conspiracy."
- e. No possible motive for such a lie; they were hated, persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, exiled, crucified, boiled, roasted, beheaded and fed to the lions.
- f. The Jews and Romans would have produced the corpse.
- g. The disciples could not have proclaimed the resurrection in Jerusalem - with all its eyewitnesses - if it had been a lie.

9. **The hallucination theory:** Perhaps the apostles were deceived by a hallucination and imagined that they saw the risen Christ.

10. Problems with the hallucination theory:

- a. There were too many witnesses. Hallucinations are private, individual, subjective. Christ appeared to many disciples, and to 500 people at once.
- b. Hallucinations usually last a few seconds or minutes. This one lasted for 40 days, repeatedly.
- c. Hallucinations do not eat. The resurrected Christ did (Lk 24:42-43, Jn 21:1-14).
- d. The disciples touched him (Mt 28:9, Lk 24:39, Jn 20:27).
- e. They spoke with him, and he spoke back.
- f. If the apostles hallucinated, the corpse would have still been in the tomb. Why did the Jews or Romans not stop the rumors and produce the body?
- g. A hallucination could not explain the empty tomb, the rolled-away stone, or the inability to produce the corpse.

11. **The myth theory:** Perhaps the apostles created a myth, not meaning that the resurrection be taken literally.

12. Problems with the myth theory:

- a. The style of the gospels is radically different from the style of all the myths.
- b. There was not enough time for a myth to develop (not even one generation after the actual events).
- c. The first witnesses of the resurrection were women, who had low social status and no legal right to serve as witnesses.
- d. The New Testament itself repudiates the mythic interpretation (2 Pet 1:16).
- e. The gospels were written by the disciples, not later myth-makers, and the gospels we have today are essentially the same as the originals.

13. The last possibility: The birth and rise of Christianity can only be explained by the resurrection of Christ (cf. Acts 2:32-36). He is risen indeed!