

*We Would See Jesus: The Son of God*

## **“The Word Became Flesh”**

*Eric Lyons*

Many outlandish accusations and assertions have been made through the centuries. Some have claimed that Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime never murdered millions of Jews (see Harwood). Others have concluded that one way a man can rid himself of the AIDS virus is to have sexual relations with a virgin (see Govender). Enemies of America have accused the U.S. of being uncaring and insensitive to the suffering that takes place around the world when, in truth, few if any countries on the planet do as much to help the distressed following various catastrophes than America. [Although the U.S. certainly has lost its way in regard to promoting certain Biblical and Christian values (e.g., the value of an unborn child’s life, heterosexual marriages, etc.), America is consistently at the forefront of helping the afflicted.] Unfortunately, more lies have been told (and believed!) about God and Christianity than perhaps anything or anyone else on Earth. This, of course, is not surprising since “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30) and “the father” of lies (John 8:44)—Satan—wants nothing more than to deceive people regarding the one true religion. [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

One lie that Satan has attempted to sell for centuries, and one which he continues to promote among the masses, is that God (the Word) never became flesh—that Jesus was not the Son of God. “Jehovah’s Witnesses” frequently distribute literature espousing that Christ’s

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divine nature is a trumped-up teaching of men, rather than an actual doctrine of God (see "What Does..." 12-16). Likely, however, the accusation that Jesus was only a man was never made more popular in modern times than with the publication of Dan Brown's 2003 novel, *The Da Vinci Code*. Within three years of its release, a reported 60 million copies of the book had been printed in several different languages. Millions of readers were misled by this alleged "fact-based" novel (MacEwen), which casts suspicion and purports several lies about the deity and nature of Christ, the foundation of Christianity (Matt. 16:16-18). According to Sir Leigh Teabing, one of the story's main characters, until the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325,

Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal.... Jesus' establishment as "the Son of God" was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea.... By officially endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, **Constantine** turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable. (Brown 233, italics in orig., emp. added)

**Constantine** upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries after Jesus' death.... **Constantine** commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's *human* traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. (234, italics in orig., emp. added)

No doubt, millions of readers have examined these words and pondered over their truthfulness. Was Jesus merely a "mortal prophet," or was He "the Son of God"? Was He considered only a man before Constantine's alleged transformation of Him at the Council of Nicaea in A.D.

325, or was He shown by Himself, the inspired writers and the early disciples to be God incarnate? Was Jesus merely a man in the flesh, or was He “the Word” that “became flesh” (John 1:1, 14)?

### THE TESTIMONY OF ISAIAH

Approximately 700 years before “the Word became flesh” (and 1,000 years before the time of Constantine), the prophet Isaiah foretold about many things concerning the Christ. Hebrew scholar Risto Santala wrote: “The Messianic nature of the book of Isaiah is so clear that the oldest Jewish sources, the Targum, Midrash and Talmud, speak of the Messiah in connection with 62 separate verses” (164-165), including Isaiah 9:6. “For unto us,” Isaiah foretold, “a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, **Mighty God, Everlasting Father**, Prince of Peace” (9:6, emp. added). The Messiah, Isaiah wrote, would be not only the “Prince of Peace,” and the “Wonderful Counselor” (NASB), but also “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father.” [NOTE: “The Targum elucidates this verse, saying: ‘His name has been from ancient times...’ and, regarding the ‘Everlasting Father’ part, that ‘the Messiah has been for ever’” (Santala 196), or that He is “the Father of eternity” (Jamieson).] What’s more, Isaiah also prophesied of the virgin birth of the Messiah, and that His name would be “Immanuel” (7:14), which means “**God** with us” (Matt. 1:23, emp. added). Why would Isaiah call the Messiah “Mighty God,” “Everlasting Father” and “Immanuel,” if He was not God?

Interestingly, more than 100 years before Jesus allegedly was “made God” at the Council of Nicaea, the non-inspired “church father” Irenaeus quoted from Isaiah

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9:6 and applied the divine names to Christ, Who "is Himself in His own right...God."

...[T]his is **Christ, the Son of the living God**. For I have shown from the Scriptures, that no one of the sons of Adam is as to everything, and absolutely, called God, or named Lord. But that **He is Himself in His own right**, beyond all men who ever lived, **God**, and **Lord**, and **King Eternal**, and **the Incarnate Word**, proclaimed by **all the prophets, the apostles, and by the Spirit Himself**, may be seen by all who have attained to even a small portion of the truth. Now, **the Scriptures would not have testified these things of Him, if, like others, He had been a mere man**. But that He had, beyond all others, in Himself that pre-eminent birth which is from the Most High Father, and also experienced that pre-eminent generation which is from the Virgin, the divine Scriptures do in both respects testify of Him: ...that **He is the holy Lord**, the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Beautiful in appearance, and **the Mighty God**, coming on the clouds as the Judge of all men;—**all these things did the Scriptures prophesy of Him**.  
(Book III, Chapter 19, emp. added)

Isaiah not only referred explicitly to Jesus as "Mighty God" in 9:6, he also alluded to the Messiah's divine nature in a prophecy about John the Baptizer in 40:3. "The voice of one that crieth, prepare ye in the wilderness **the way of Jehovah**; make level in the desert a highway for our **God**" (ASV, emp. added; cf. Mal. 3:1). According to the New Testament, this "preparer" (or forerunner) was John the Baptizer (John 1:23). He prepared the way for **Jesus**, as all four gospel accounts bear witness (Matt. 3:1-17; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-23; John 1:15-34). Notice that Isaiah wrote that John would prepare "the way of

**Jehovah;...our God**" (40:3, emp. added). Thus, Isaiah claimed that the Messiah is God.

Truly, long before the Christian age, even long before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah provided inspired testimony of the nature of Christ. He is Jehovah, Mighty God, Immanuel ("God with us"), Everlasting Father, "the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (Rev. 1:8; cf. Isa. 44:6).

### THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES

When Jesus came to Earth in human form in the first century, He repeatedly referred to His divine nature. The fact that He claimed to be the Messiah (Mark 14:61-62) is proof enough, since according to the Old Testament, the Messiah would be called "Mighty God." Jesus also maintained that He was "One" with the Father (John 10:30). His enemies rightly concluded from this statement that though Jesus was a man, He was also claiming to be divine (John 10:33; cf. John 5:17-18). Jesus said that "all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (John 5:23). Jesus accepted worship time and again (Matt. 14:33; John 9:38; Luke 24:52), which is due only to God (Matt. 4:10) — **not mere human beings** (Acts 12:23; 14:8-18; cf. Heb. 1:6). Furthermore, Jesus indirectly asserted His Godhood by claiming that **the** church was **His** church (Matt. 16:18); He built it, bought it ("with His own blood" — Acts 20:28), and will one day come back for it (Matt. 25; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). Since elsewhere the church is called the church of God (1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32-33; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13), Christians reasonably conclude that to say the church is Christ's is to say the church is God's, because Christ **is** God (cf. Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 12:27). Truly, Jesus came from heaven (John 3:13; 6:33, 38, 41) and ascended

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back into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father (Matt. 26:64; cf. Psa. 110:1). Jesus was, is, and will forever be, deity (Heb. 13:8).

What did Jesus' followers reveal about His nature? In the very first verse of the gospel of John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20) testified: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**" (emp. added; cf. 1:14, 17). Two verses later the reader learns that "[a]ll things came into being by Him [the Word], and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3, NASB). Still in the first chapter of John, the apostle testified that John the Baptizer was the one whom Isaiah foretold would "prepare...the way of Jehovah" (Isa. 40:3; John 1:23). For Whom did John the Baptizer come to prepare the way? Isaiah called Him "Jehovah." The apostle John, as well as John the Baptizer, referred to Jehovah as "Jesus" (John 1:17), "the Christ" (3:28), "the Word" (1:1), "the Light" (1:17), "the Lamb" (1:29), "the Truth" (5:33), etc. Peter called Jesus, "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), while Paul preached "Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). After Jesus rose from the dead, the apostle Thomas called Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Jesus responded: "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (vs. 29). Notice that Jesus did not deny His deity; rather He acknowledged Thomas' faith and commended future believers. Believers in what? In that which Thomas had just confessed — that Jesus is Lord and God.

## THE TESTIMONY OF EARLY NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

But were the New Testament's statements that allude to Jesus' divinity "embellished" in the time of Constantine in order to **make** Christ "godlike" (Brown 234)? Did Jesus "become" God centuries after the church was established? The truth is, numerous copies of the various New Testament documents and quotations from those documents by early Christian writers exist that **predate** the time of Constantine by 100-200 years. Constantine did not write or "embellish" John 1:1 ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**," emp. added; cf. 1:14). Copies of this passage (found in manuscripts designated p<sup>66</sup> and p<sup>75</sup>) go back to the late second and early third centuries—100 to 150 years **before** Constantine and the Council of Nicaea. Jesus' claim, "I and My Father are One" (John 10:30), and the Jews' recognition that Jesus made Himself, not just a man, but "God" (John 10:33; cf. 5:18) also predate Constantine by more than a century (cf. manuscripts designated p<sup>45</sup>, p<sup>66</sup> and p<sup>75</sup>). What's more, a copy of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, in which he affirms "Christ Jesus, Who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God" (2:5-6), existed long before Constantine's supposed embellishment of the nature of Jesus (p<sup>46</sup>).

In *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, edited by Philip Comfort and David Barrett, more than 60 of the earliest Greek New Testament manuscripts are transcribed (including those mentioned above). Many photographs of these early manuscripts (the originals of which are housed in museums throughout the world) are also contained in the book. Interestingly, in the

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introduction to this massive 700-page volume, Comfort and Barrett state: "All of the manuscripts [contained in the book—EL] are dated from the early second century to the beginning of the fourth (A.D. 100-300)" (17). In fact, "[s]everal of the most significant papyri date from the middle of the second century" and thus "provide the earliest direct witness to the New Testament autographs" (18). Comfort and Barrett even concede that "it is possible that some of the manuscripts thought to be of the early second century are actually manuscripts of the late first" (23). New Testament manuscripts with descriptions of Jesus' deity from the middle second century and possibly the late first century? But *The Da Vinci Code* alleges that Constantine purposefully manipulated the Scriptures in the **fourth century** (A.D. 325) in order to make Jesus sound divine when really He was not? The facts speak for themselves. The story that Satan has sold to millions upon millions of people is a lie. We have ample proof that neither Constantine nor anyone else in the fourth century changed the New Testament documents by elevating Jesus' status from man to God. Jesus always has been, and always will be, God.

### **THE TESTIMONY OF EARLY CHRISTIANS AND THEIR ENEMIES**

Writings from early Christians (all of which predate A.D. 325 by well over a century) also exist that reveal much about the early church's view of Jesus. Ignatius, who died in the early second century and is thought to have been a companion of the apostle John, referred to Jesus Christ as "our God" several times in his letters to the Christians in Ephesus (chapter 7; chapter 8) and Rome (Introduction; Chapter 3). Polycarp, who was a contemporary of Ignatius and died around A.D. 150, wrote



a letter to the church at Philippi in which he called Jesus “the Son of God, and our everlasting High Priest” (chapter 12). Another “church father” from the second century, Justin Martyr, wrote that Jesus, “being the first-begotten Word of God, is even God” (chapter 63). Irenaeus also provides us with valuable insight into what Christians (living more than a century **before** the time of Constantine) thought about Jesus. In approximately A.D. 200, he wrote: “[T]his is **Christ, the Son of the living God....** He is Himself in His own right, beyond all men who ever lived, **God**, and **Lord**, and **King Eternal**, and **the Incarnate Word**, proclaimed by all the prophets, the apostles, and by the Spirit Himself” (book III, chapter 19, emp. added).

Even certain second-century enemies of Christ give testimony to the fact that Christians viewed Jesus as divine long before A.D. 325. In a letter that Pliny the Younger (Roman governor in the Asia Minor province of Bithynia around A.D. 115) wrote to the Emperor Trajan, he stated: “They [the Christians – EL] were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn **to Christ, as to a god**, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds...” (10:96). Another individual who opposed Christianity was the Greek rhetorician and satirist, Lucian. He wrote:

The **Christians**, you know, **worship a man to this day**—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their

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original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and **worship the crucified sage**, and live after his laws. (11-13, emp. added)

Thus, aside from the non-hostile witnesses that testify of Jesus being God, even Jesus' enemies, who lived both in the first century (e.g., Pharisees; John 5:18; John 10:33) and second century (i.e., Pliny the Younger and Lucian), recognized that both Jesus and His followers believed that He was God and thus worthy of worship.

### **CONCLUSION**

In truth, Jesus was viewed as divine by His followers **long** before the Council of Nicaea convened in A.D. 325. The leaders who gathered at that council nearly 300 years after the death of Christ did take a vote regarding the nature of Christ. But, that vote did not settle the matter regarding His deity. The nature of Christ was settled hundreds of years earlier when Isaiah, Jesus and the first century apostles and prophets, who were guided "into all truth" by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), taught that Jesus was indeed God, "the Word" Who "became flesh" (John 1:14).

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