

When Heaven Came Down

Who is Jesus? – Part I

John 1:1-3

Introduction

A few weeks ago, my six-year-old daughter came home from Sunday school with a sheet of paper. On one side, she had drawn an angel in the sky, and, on the other side, some questions had been written. From what I gathered, the teacher had written the questions my daughter had asked on the paper, as well as questions that had been raised by other children. Some of the questions were:

- How come God is called Jesus' Father?
- Why does Jesus need a Father?
- If God is invisible, how does He look?
- If God is invisible, how can Jesus see Him?

At the top of the page the teacher had written, "These are questions your child has asked about God. Take time to discuss and answer them."

Thanks a lot! Ten seconds into my discussion, I realized that all my words had sixteen syllables! I was explaining to my daughter the pre-existence of Christ, the subordination of the second person of the godhead, not by means of ineffectual divinity or essence; that is, ontologically, but in relationship to function; that is, economically, as the physical expression of the triune God.

Now, that will not be on the final exam, but does it bother you that there are questions you will never be able to answer or even fully understand? Everything I just rattled off is theological truth – it is what we believe, but do not fully understand.

One question, however, demands an answer, simply because everything related to our Christianity hinges upon it. It is a question that has been asked for over two thousand years. It is the question, "Just who is Jesus?"

"He was a good Jewish lad with a brilliant flair for shrewd moral teaching," writes A. N. Wilson, best selling British novelist, "but he would have been horrified to think of a 'church,' let alone people worshipping him as if he were 'divine'."

"He was not born of a virgin, since Mary had probably been violated," wrote Episcopal bishop John Shelby Spong. "Jesus himself was married; the wedding at Cana was probably his own wedding. The Gospels are to be read as the re-telling of stories without literal truth."

Barbara Thiering, who teaches the Dead Sea Scrolls at Sydney University, wrote in her recent book, "Jesus was part of the sect living at Qumran in Palestine; he was married and had three children; then he divorced and remarried. He did not die on the cross, but lived on and went with Paul on his missionary travels. It was with Paul in Philippi that Jesus met his second wife."

Adding to this thought is the international best seller of 1982, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, which speculates regarding Mary Magdalene as the wife of Jesus and the possibility that they had as many as six children. The authors are honest enough, however, to admit, "In order to reach such speculations, we realize, we are obliged to read between lines, fill in certain gaps, deal with omissions, with innuendoes, with references that are, at best, oblique."

On a different slant, Morton Smith, Professor of Ancient History at Columbia University, reveals Jesus as a magician who influenced his followers through the use of illusion and hypnosis.

Even more bizarre is the approach of John Allegro, a Semitic scholar, that Jesus was not a historical person at all, but something of a code name alluding to the use of a hallucinogenic drug made from the red-topped mushroom, *Amanita Muscaria*. The writers of the New Testament were allegedly members of an ancient fertility cult, who committed their secrets to writing in an elaborate cryptogram, the New Testament itself.

Oxford scholar, Geza Vermes, portrays Jesus in his new book, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew*, as a man stripped of divine attributes and innocent of the desire to found a church. He was simply a great Galilean rabbi.

These quotations are a few examples of attempts to answer the question, “Just who is Jesus?” The question remains, however, and it is not a new question. In fact:

- In Matthew, chapter 21, verse 10b, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, “. . . the city was stirred, saying, ‘Who is this?’”
- In Luke, chapter 8, verse 25b, the disciples asked each other, after Jesus stilled the storm, “Who then is this . . .?”
- In Luke, chapter 9, verse 9b, Herod asked, “. . . who is this man . . .?”
- In Luke, chapter 5, verse 21b, the scribes and Pharisees asked themselves, “Who is this man . . .?”

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the most important question you will ever answer. If He was only a man, then you can safely forget about Him. If He is God, as He claimed to be, you will one day stand before Him. You cannot afford to be wrong!

How does God answer that question in His Word to us?

He inspired an old man to write one of the last books of the Bible. He was last living apostle when he wrote his account. His brother James was already dead. Peter, the leading apostle to the Jews, had already been martyred by being hung upside-down on a cross. Paul, the church planting apostle to the Gentile world, had been executed in Rome by Nero. All of the apostles were gone, except for one – John, who lived in Ephesus at the time. May I invite your attention to the gospel by John.

John’s Disclaimer

Let us begin with John’s disclaimer, found in the last chapter, chapter 21, in verses 24 and 25. John is writing with a serious handicap, that of time and space.

This is the disciple who bears witness of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written.

John’s Desire

Well, why did John include the things he did write about? Turn back one chapter to chapter 20, verses 30 and 31.

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

John’s gospel may not be exhaustive or comprehensive, but it is adequate and conclusive. It does not answer all the questions, but it does answer the question, “Just who is Jesus Christ?”

Exposition

In chapter 1, John will use several different expressions or truths that describe Jesus Christ.

Truth #1 – Jesus Christ is divine and eternal

1. Truth number one is that Jesus Christ is divine and eternal.

Look at chapter 1, verses 1 and 2.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

Now, if you are wondering who the Word is, look ahead to verse 14.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This eternal, divine Word is none other than Jesus Christ.

The New World Translation of the Bible, published by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, translates this third affirmation, “and the word was a God”. They argue this, since the Greek text lacks a definite article before the word “God”.

Well, if their grammatical rule is to remain consistent in chapter 1, but does not, then they should translate verse 6, “There came a man sent from [a] God, whose name was John.” They should also translate verse 12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of [a] God . . .”.

The problem is that John, chapter 1, verse 1, is a stumbling block to that and any cult who denies the

full divinity of Jesus Christ. There must be a way around it.

I had a couple of ladies visit me some time ago, while I was outside working in the yard. When they walked up the driveway, I immediately knew who they were. They had their books and magazines, and pleasant smiles. They said, “We’d like to interest you in the Bible.”

I asked, “Which one?”

While they were thinking that one over, since that one had not come up in their classroom preparation, I said, “Ladies, you’re not going to get very far with me. You see, I believe the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh. John, chapter 1, verse 1, clearly spells it out.”

I admit, I was setting them up! They thought they had me here. The one lady, who was clearly the leader and trainer, said, “Well, sir, in the original language, John, chapter 1, verse 1, doesn’t say that.”

I said, “Really?! Would you wait a moment and let me go get my Greek New Testament, and would you read it to me?”

I was not being totally honest, as my Greek New Testament was in my office study and not in the house, but I had a sneaking suspicion they were not going to take up the challenge.

Now you might say, “I’m not a Greek scholar, so I can’t say that.”

Well, would you like to know the literal translation of John, chapter 1, verse 1? Get a pencil and be ready to write it into the margin of your Bible. Here it is,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, . . .

(Am I going to fast?),

. . . and the Word was God.

In verse 1, John leaves out the definite article to reinforce the doctrine of the trinity. There is more than one person making up the Godhead – God the Father and God the Son. They are not identical, as the heretic Sabellius argued in the third century. They are distinct persons, yet one in essence or attributes.

Verse one could be divided into three phrases:

- The first phrase, “In the beginning was the Word . . .”, declares Jesus to be eternally existent.

- The second phrase, “. . . and the Word was with God . . .” (face to face), describes Jesus as intimately close with the Godhead.
- The third phrase, “. . . and the Word was God.”, demands that Jesus be considered nothing less than equally divine.

Do I understand the Trinity? No. No more than I understand the sovereign election of the believer and the free will of humanity. Can I explain the Trinity? Not if my life depended on it!

Augustine, the brilliant early church father, was walking along the seashore one day. He observed a young boy who had dug a little hole near the water’s edge. The boy was furiously going back and forth, filling a small bucket from the sea, and pouring water into the hole. Augustine asked him, “Just what are you trying to do?”

The little boy responded, “I’m pouring the sea into this hole.”

To fully understand or explain the Trinity is to pour an ocean of infinite truth into a small finite mind!

All I know is that the Trinity is three persons in one. Each has different functions, yet each are equally divine. The Trinity is not, $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$, but $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1!$ And, by the way, we live in a triune universe. Let me explain:

- The universe is triune – space, matter, and time.
- Space is triune – length, breadth, and height.
- Matter is triune – energy, motion, and phenomena.
- Time is triune – past, present, and future.
- Mankind is arguably triune – body, soul, and spirit.
- God is triune – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now, one of the most interesting verbs appears three times in verse 1. This is where the Greek opens a window of clarification. The verb “was,” in the Greek, is in the imperfect tense and expresses an ongoing state. You could expand your literal translation with your mental pencil by reading it in light of that tense,

In the beginning was [and is and always will be] the Word, and the Word was [and is and always will be] with God, and the Word was [and is and always will be] God.

So, truth number one is that Jesus Christ is divine and eternal.

Truth #2 – Jesus Christ is the Word, or explanation

2. There is a second truth that John introduces about Jesus Christ. It appears three times in verse 1 as well, and is the word “Word,” from the Greek word “logos”. It could be translated “reason” or “explanation”. If you insert that translation into the verse, you gain a fuller meaning, “In the beginning was the Explanation, and the Explanation was with God, and the Explanation was God.”

To the Greek mind, a logical word or explanation from God was ridiculous. Xenophanes said, “Guesswork reigns over all.”

Apuleius said that, men could catch a glimpse of God as a lightning flash lights up a dark night – one split second of illumination and then the dark.

Plato, several hundred years before Christ, said to his Greek comrades in philosophy, “Maybe one day, a logos – a reason or word – will come from God who will reveal the mysteries and make things plain.”

John selects, under inspiration, that same word, and says, in effect, “The Reason has come; the Explanation has just arrived in the flesh.”

And just what does the Word explain? He explains one of man’s most fundamental questions, “Where did we come from?”

Look at John, chapter 1, verse 3.

All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

Truth #3 – Jesus Christ is the creating agent of the Godhead

3. The third truth that John reveals is that Jesus Christ is the creating agent of the Godhead.

This is fascinating! Can you think of another book in the Bible that begins with the words, “In the beginning . . .?”

You probably think of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1, immediately.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

This verse tells us that everything was created by God. John, chapter 1, verse 3, tells us which person of the Trinity was the creative agent.

If you have trouble with Genesis, chapter 1, you will have trouble with John, chapter 1, and you will have even more trouble with Colossians, chapter 1, which informs us, in verses 16 and 17, that Christ created everything and even now, holds everything together.

One of the strongest arguments for the deity of Jesus Christ is the comparison of Genesis, chapter 1, with John, chapter 1.

Verse 3, of John chapter 1, begins with the word “all” from the Greek word “panta,” which refers to all things individually, or all things separately. It is a reference to the infinite detail of creation.

For example, the huge star Antares is so large that it could hold sixty four million suns of the size of ours. And yet, it is only one of billions of stars within our galaxy, the Milky Way – a galaxy that is one hundred thousand light years, from end to end, and is revolving at two hundred miles an hour. Jesus Christ created the gigantic stars, as well as every detail of our incredibly huge galaxy.

Yet, another example, is that in one tiny drop of water, there are so many millions of molecules that if each molecule were converted into one grain of sand, you would have enough to build a concrete highway from New York to San Francisco. The concrete highway would be one foot thick and one-half mile wide. Large or small, Jesus Christ created every detail of it all!

The July 19, 1993, cover story for *Newsweek* was subtitled, “A New Theory of Genesis”. The article covered the recent conference on the Origin of Life, where over four hundred researchers met. One new theory suggested the “frothy, filmy, iridescent bubbles of seawater served as life’s delivery room.”

My question is, “Where did the seawater and the iridescent bubbles come from?”

It is interesting that the author of the article went on to say, “bubble or comet, deep-sea vent or volcano, wherever the ingredients of life first evolved, combining them into something fully alive still seems madly improbable.”

Fred Hoyle, the British astronomer, once said “The event, suggested by such researchers, is about as

likely as assembling a Boeing 747 by sending a whirling tornado through a junkyard.”

For an organism to somehow, over millions of years, come up with the ability to reproduce itself, would be like putting a rooster in a hen house, all by himself, and hoping that after two or three million years, he would finally lay an egg.

I slipped into the back of my son’s elementary school assembly, one time when they were in the second grade. They, and all their classmates, were in the auditorium to hear a Ph.D. talk about their favorite subject – dinosaurs. I arrived late, so I sat in the back, unnoticed by my children or any of the teachers.

The speaker gave the standard forty million year old story, showed how the dinosaurs hatched, talked about what they ate, showed pictures of fossils, etc. Then he asked for questions.

The kids were full of questions, one of which was, “How did dinosaurs become extinct?”

He replied, “Well, one of the newest theories that is gaining wider and wider acceptance, is that some great catastrophe hit planet earth, destroying the dinosaurs, as well as many other animals.”

I thought to myself, “That sounds familiar. The story of Noah and the ark might just be that catastrophe.”

All of a sudden, I noticed one of my sons raising his hand. He said, “I know what it was – it was the flood.”

He has always been a gifted child!

The speaker said, “Well, that’s a possibility.”

Man resists the revelation that Jesus Christ is the Creator. The bottom line for sinful man is – if Jesus Christ is the Creator:

- He must be God – for only an infinite Creator could design the worlds and the living creatures. In a recent article from a journal I subscribe to, *Neusner*, a Jewish rabbi says, “If I could have an audience with Jesus, I would want to ask Him one question, ‘Who do you think you are, God?’”
- The rest of the Bible must be telling the truth about Him, as well. Maybe He did die for my sins, as, for example, I John, chapter 2, verse 2, says. Maybe He is coming back for His own, as I Thessalonians, chapter 4, verses 14 through 17 tells us.

- He must have the right to reign over my life. If He created me, He must know everything about me.

Application

Let me apply this several ways.

When a child asks, “What does God look like?” you can simply answer, “Look at Jesus Christ.”

1. First, when a child asks, “What does God look like?” you can simply answer, “Look at Jesus Christ.”

God the Father and God the Spirit are invisible. When you, one day, see God in all His glory, you will be looking at none other than the glorified magnificence of the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15).

When a scientist, or any intelligentsia, asks, “What did God say?” you can simply answer, “Listen to Jesus Christ.”

2. Secondly, when a scientist, or any intelligentsia, asks, “What did God say?” you can simply answer, “Listen to Jesus Christ.”

John Baillie, of Edinburgh University, Scotland, was lecturing at an American university, some time ago. An attorney, who was the legal representative for that university, stood and said, “You speak of trusting God, of praying to Him, and doing His will, but it’s all so one-sided. We speak to God, we bow down before Him and lift up our hearts to Him, but He never speaks to us; He makes no sign.”

I think of the author of Hebrews, who wrote, in chapter 1, verses 1 and 2,

God, after He spoke long ago . . . in the prophets . . . in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, . . .

Listen to Jesus! The gospel of John is the words and works of God in the flesh.

When a philosopher or skeptic asks, “What did God do?” you can simply answer, “Let Jesus Christ show you.”

3. When a philosopher or skeptic asks, “What did God do?” you can simply answer, “Let Jesus Christ show you.”

You must be willing to look, however. Jesus declared Himself to be the Creator of all things, and that is quite a declaration. Either Jesus Christ was a deluded rabbi or He was deity!

John wrote of seven of Jesus' miracles that undeniably revealed Him as God! And, John wraps up his gospel by saying, in chapter 20, verse 31,

but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

When the troubled or hopeless ask, “What does life mean?” you can simply answer, “Let Jesus Christ lead the way.”

4. When the troubled, discouraged, hopeless, or unfulfilled ask, “What does life mean? What is it really for?” you can simply answer, “Let Jesus Christ lead the way.”

Because Jesus Christ is who He is – He can do what He said; He can fulfill every promise He ever made; He can accomplish everything He ever said He would do.

Now, imagine driving down the highway and seeing a sign that warns, “Slow – Dangerous Curve Ahead”. Immediately, you are confronted with making a choice. One, you can observe the warning and slow down. Two, you can ignore the warning and maintain your current rate of speed. Or, three, you can defy the warning and speed up. Whatever your response, however, you will never change the truth of the sign.

Well, here is the sign,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus Christ, Himself, said, in John, chapter 14, verse 6,

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

And, just as with the traffic sign, you are confronted with making a choice with this sign. You can observe and believe. You can observe and ignore. Or, you can observe and defy. Your response will not change the truth of the sign – it shall always remain the truth.