

Study Guide #8: Did Jesus Really Claim to be God?

Introduction

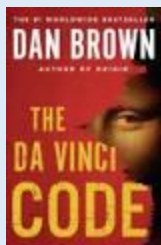
In Explorer I, Study Guide #6, we showed that the New Testament that we have today is essentially the same one that was written by its original authors. Then in Explorer I, Study Guide #7, we demonstrated by the standards used by historians that the New Testament contains reliable history. In order to answer the question about Jesus being God, we must first discover whether Jesus Himself ever made the claim to be God. If He did, then we need to evaluate such a claim to determine if it's reasonable or not. In this Study Guide, we examine the issue of what Jesus claimed about Himself.

Question #1: Don't Muslims teach that Jesus never claimed to be God, but that later Christian writers changed the New Testament documents to add that teaching?

Answer: Yes, they do make that claim. Islam reveres Jesus as the greatest prophet after Muhammed. Review Explorer I, Study Guide #6 for the fact that the dates for the New Testament documents show that there was not a sufficient amount of time for fictional, legendary material to have entered those books. Critics are free to say and write anything they want to, of course. But that doesn't make them correct.

Question #2: Didn't Dan Brown, who wrote *The DaVinci Code*, show that Emperor Constantine influenced a church council to ban certain books from the New Testament in order to create a new version of Christianity that then began to falsely teach that Jesus was God?

Answer: The Roman Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. By then certain Christians known as Gnostics were teaching that Jesus could not have been God. Gnosticism was begun by pagan Greek thinkers who, being influenced by Plato (d. 347 B.C.), taught that matter was inherently inferior and even evil in contrast to the perfect world of the spirit. That's the reason that Gnostic Christians



insisted that God would never have stooped to take on a material body. In his book, Brown asserted that the Gnostic version of Christianity was at least as old as traditional Christianity, and that Constantine influenced the council of bishops that year to suppress the Gnostic version. *First*, although elements of Christian Gnosticism arose during the time of the Christian apostles, it didn't develop into a full-blown version of Christianity until at least the middle of the 2nd century A.D. *Second*, the historical evidence is that Constantine did not play a major role in the discussions or decisions of the council. *Third*, it's a known fact that the books of the New Testament were almost fully settled in that same century, and none of the accepted books taught a Gnostic version of Christianity at all. Moreover, there is no evidence that the books of the

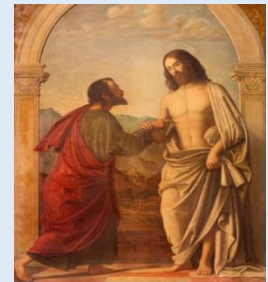
Bible were ever discussed at the Council of Nicea. Therefore, Dan Brown's book is nothing more than a work of fiction whose major thesis isn't based on accurate history.

Question #3: Did Jesus ever accept the title of *God*?

Answer: Yes, He did. Please note the following passage from the gospel of John:

Then He [Jesus] said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed. (John 20:27-29, NKJV)

Some have said that Thomas was using God's name in vain, such as when a person today exclaims, "OMG!" But the *context* of Thomas' words doesn't support that conclusion. Furthermore, Thomas was a devout Jew whose later actions showed that he really believed that Jesus was God. Therefore, the fact that Jesus didn't rebuke Thomas for his statement shows that Jesus also believed He was God.



Thomas touching Jesus' Wounds

Question #4: Did Jesus accept the title of *Son of God*? If so, does that prove that Jesus claimed to be God?

Answer: Yes, Jesus did accept the title "Son of God." Please note the following passage from the gospel of John:

Simon Peter answered and said to Him [Jesus], 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' (John 1:49-50, NKJV)

Question #5: Are there other titles that suggest Jesus thought of Himself as God?

Answer: Yes. The following is just one example of Jesus claiming that He was the "Son of Man": **"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be"** (Matthew 24:37, NKJV). The immediate context throughout Matthew 24 shows that Jesus was talking about Himself as the **"Son of Man."** In fact, this title was Jesus' favorite designation for Himself, having used it more than 80 times in the gospels. This title originated in Daniel 7, where the Son of Man is taken into a courtroom judgment scene and then given an everlasting kingdom. The Son of Man was a Messianic title among the Jews. If His *kingdom* is everlasting, then *He* must be everlasting as well. Thus, Jesus was saying that He is God.

Question #6: When Jesus is recorded as having called Himself “I AM,” what did He mean?

Answer: You are referring to Jesus’ statement in John 8:58, which reads: **“Jesus said to them [group of Jews], ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’ Then they took up stones to throw at Him”** (NKJV). The reference to **“I AM”** means that Jesus claimed to be the God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3:14: **“And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’”** (NKJV). Note that Jesus’ statement here in John 8:58 was in answer to the question by His critics to the effect that He couldn’t have seen Abraham because the latter had lived so long ago (John 8:56-57). Therefore, when Jesus replied that **“before Abraham was, I AM,”** His critics knew that Jesus was claiming to be God. Indeed, that’s the reason they took up stones to kill Him, although Jesus escaped (John 8:59).

Question #7: When Jesus claimed to forgive sins, wasn’t He simply exercising His right as a priest?

Answer: No. *First*, none of the Jewish priests ever claimed the authority to forgive someone’s sins. As we will see, the Jews regarded such a claim as the sin of blasphemy because only God can forgive sins. *Second*, the Jewish priests were descendants of Levi, and Jesus was part of the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:2-3, 17). So Jesus never claimed to be a priest in Judea. Christians believe that Jesus is our High Priest, but that His priestly ministry is in the sanctuary in *heaven*, not on earth (Hebrews 4:14-15; 5:5-11; 6:20; 7:11-9:28).

Please note how the Jewish critics of Jesus reacted negatively to Jesus when He claimed the right to forgive someone of his sins:



Jesus and the Paralytic

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you.’ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ (Mark 2:5-7, NKJV)

Then He [Jesus] said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” (Luke 7:48-49, NKJV)

Please note that Jesus never argued with His critics over their definition of blasphemy. Therefore, His forgiving people of their sins was one way He declared that He was indeed God, which—if He was/is God—would not be blasphemy.

Question #8: Did Jesus say anything else that indicated He thought Himself to be God?

Answer: Yes. Jesus claimed equality with God by certain other statements He made. For example, in John 14:9, Jesus declared emphatically, **“He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”** Then in John 10:30, Jesus plainly said, **“I and My Father are one”** (NKJV).

Question #9: Did Jesus say or do anything else to suggest that He thought He was God?

Answer: Yes. Jesus approved of people worshiping Him. Matthew 14:33 declares, **“Then those were in the boat came and worshiped Him [Jesus], saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God’”** (NKJV). And note another example in the gospel of Matthew when certain people worshiped Jesus:



Jesus worshiped in the Boat

And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, ‘Rejoice!’ So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.’ (Matthew 28:9-10, NKJV)

Note that Jesus didn’t rebuke them for worshiping Him. This is particularly noteworthy because the apostle John later started to worship an angel, but he was told not to do that:

Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God. (Revelation 22:8-9, NKJV)

Question #10: What must we conclude from the evidence concerning whether Jesus thought that He was God?

Answer: We have reviewed the testimony of the Christian gospels, about which we have previously shown to accurately represent the original documents (Explorer I, Study Guide #6) and to be reliable history of the events in Jesus’ life (Explorer I, Study Guide #7). There can be no reasonable doubt about the fact that Jesus definitely claimed to be God in a variety of ways—at least 7 of which we examined in this Study Guide. Now that doesn’t prove that Jesus is God, of course. We begin to answer that question in our next Study Guide, and we give the definitive answer in Explorer I, Study Guide #11.