



THE BEREHA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Presenting a Case for Belief in Jesus: An Overview (2)

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In [part one](#), we noted the current need to begin presentations of a case for Christ with a study of the historicity of the gospels before looking at the evidence for his deity in the gospels. We also observed that there are multiple topics to choose from in presenting the case. In the interest of streamlining it for the high school academic and church class settings where I have most often presented it, I have generally narrowed the focus to these four topic areas: [a] the New Testament writings can be trusted; [b] Jesus claimed to be divine; [c] Jesus’s works display the character of God; [d] Jesus was raised from the dead. We’ll introduce the second and third subjects here.

Claims for Deity

We begin with a clarification: we are not saying that the presence of claims for his deity proves that Jesus was divine; that is a circular argument. But the absence of a deity claim will adversely impact a case. It is reasonable to expect that a being who is divine would know he is. It is also sensible that his divine character could be evident enough for others to ascertain it.

In the New Testament, we have multiple cases in which either the writers or words of Jesus they include claim that he was in some sense divine. We know, too, as for example, in a letter of Pliny the Younger, that, shortly after the time of the New Testament, a feature of the Christian “gatherings was to ‘chant antiphonally a hymn to Christ as to a god’” (Pliny [the Younger], *Epistles* 10.96, in Hurtado 2005, 13; for elaboration on the claims, see Hurtado 1999 and 2005). Both the Synoptics and epistles include examples of deity claims, but John’s gospel elaborates them more. The claim text we will summarize here is John 10.22–33.

At a feast of Dedication, Jesus was approached by Jewish critics—John calls them “the Jews”¹—who challenged him, “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (v. 24). He replied, “The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me” (v. 25). He explained why they did not believe and then declared he would give eternal life and security to those who follow him. This implied that he had the right and power to do what only God could do (vv. 28–29; cf. Mark 2.1–12). He then said, “I and the Father are one” (v. 30). Exactly what he meant by that has been much discussed (cf. Carson 1991, 394–395), but what follows in verses 31–33 is telling.

The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.”

From their language it is evident that the Jews understood Jesus to be saying that, in some sense, he “was God” (John 1.1; cf. 8.48–59, esp. 58).

God’s Character on Display

The supernatural deeds performed by Jesus have always been an integral part of the case for his deity. John’s use of the words *signs* (σημείον, *sēmeion*) and *works* (ἔργον, *ergon*; in lieu of the Synoptic preference for δύναμις, *dynamis*) shows that those deeds were designed to do more than merely display power or produce wonder. When he transformed water to wine and walked on water in rough seas and a strong wind, Jesus demonstrated divine control over the natural elements (2.1–11; 6.16–21). When he healed people of various maladies or fed the crowds, he showed God’s concern for all (4.46–54; 5.1–15; 6.1–14; 9.1–7). He also demonstrated control over death (11.1–44). John and Luke are among the writers who note that his mighty works showed that God was attesting to him as the Son of God and the Christ (cf. Heb 2.3–4).

Now Jesus did many other *signs* in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20.30–31).

[Peter said,] “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with *mighty works* and *wonders* and *signs* that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it (Acts 2.22–24).

Peter’s focus on it in Acts 2.24–35 reminds us that the resurrection was also an essential part of the case for Jesus. We’ll review the evidence in part three.

Works Cited

- D. A. Carson. 1991. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
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- C. S. Keener. 2013. “John, Gospel of.” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. 2nd ed. ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, 419–436. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

¹ John 10.24 says it was “the Jews” who challenged Jesus. For a discussion of the various ways, both positive and negative in tone, John used that phrase, see Keener 2013, 424.

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The bulletin article (page link [here](#)), “Is It Really Possible?” - Can Christians really live faithfully in a depraved culture? (article link [here](#)).

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