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DID JESUS CLAIM TO BE GOD?¹

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"I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!" (Rev. 1:17–18).²

When Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples the mother of all questions, "*Who do you say I am?*" (Matt. 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). Mormons answer this question by saying that Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer; Jehovah's Witnesses answer by saying that Jesus is the archangel Michael; New Agers say Jesus is an avatar or enlightened messenger. Jesus, however, answered by claiming that He was God.

First, Jesus claimed to be the unique Son of God. As a result, the Jewish leaders tried to kill Him because in "calling God his own Father, [Jesus was] making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). In John 8:58 Jesus went so far as to use the very words by which God revealed Himself to Moses from the burning bush (Exod. 3:14). To the Jews this was the epitome of blasphemy, for they knew that in doing so Jesus was clearly claiming to be God. On yet another occasion, Jesus explicitly told the Jews: "'I and the Father are one.' Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God'" (John 10:30–33).

Furthermore, Jesus made an unmistakable claim to deity before the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin. Caiaphas the high priest asked Him: "'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' 'I am,' said Jesus. 'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (Mark 14:61–62). A biblically illiterate person might well have missed the import of Jesus' words. Caiaphas and the council, however, did not. They knew that in saying he was "*the Son of Man*" who would come "*on the clouds of heaven*" he was making an overt reference to the Son of Man in Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 7:13–14). In doing so, He was not only claiming to be the preexistent Sovereign of the universe but prophesying that He would vindicate His claim by judging the very court that was now condemning Him. Moreover, by combining Daniel's prophecy with David's proclamation in Psalm 110, Jesus was claiming that He would sit upon the throne of Israel's God and share God's very glory. To students of the Old Testament this was the height of "blasphemy," thus "they all condemned him as worthy of death" (Mark 14:64–65).

Finally, Jesus claimed to possess the very attributes of God. For example, He claimed *omniscience* by telling Peter, "This very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times" (Matt. 26:34); declared *omnipotence* by not only resurrecting Lazarus (John 11:43) but by raising Himself from the dead (John 2:19); and professed *omnipresence* by promising that He would be with His disciples "to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Not only so, but Jesus said to the paralytic in Luke 5:20, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." In doing so, He claimed a prerogative reserved for God alone. In addition, when Thomas worshiped Jesus saying "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28), Jesus responded with commendation rather than condemnation.

For further study, see Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996).

— Hank Hanegraaff

NOTES

1. Adapted from Hank Hanegraaff, *The Bible Answer Book* (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2004).
2. All Bible quotations are from the New International Version.