

Apologetic Response:

There are four major responses that will be given by nonbelievers to the question, "What do you think about Jesus?"

1. "He was a good man. I admire Him a lot, but Jesus was not God."
2. "He was a great teacher, but Jesus did not rise from the dead."
3. "Jesus never did the miracles recorded in the Bible."
4. "The real Jesus was nothing like the Jesus described in the Bible. The church changed the Bible at one of the church councils."
5. "There is no evidence that Jesus ever existed. Jesus is a myth like Santa Claus and the Easter bunny."

We need to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have. But we are to do this with gentleness and respect (see 1 Pet. 3:15).

- Unbelievers have reasonable questions that deserve good answers.
- Fortunately, there are excellent answers to these questions. Most unbelievers have never heard reasoned Christian answers to their questions.
- 1 Peter 3:15 commands us to be ready to give unbelievers answers when they ask.

Four Common Responses to the Question:

1. "He was a good man. I admire Him a lot, but Jesus was not God."

Jesus claimed to be one with God in John 10:30. If Jesus was not who He said He was, He was either a liar or crazy. However, the testimonies of those who knew Jesus best revealed a person that was neither a liar nor crazy. Jesus' close friend and disciple, Peter, said, "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22, NIV).

In addition, all of Jesus' disciples scattered and abandoned Him when He was arrested to be crucified (see Matt. 26:56). It was not until after the resurrection, when they saw that He had the power of God to overcome the grave, that the disciples were committed to serving Him even if it meant that they would die. With the exception of John, all of Jesus' disciples were executed because of their testimony. Even John suffered for his faith in Jesus. It is inconceivable that these men, who were so quick to flee and desert Him, would die for Christ if they had not seen the power and authority of God in the resurrection.

2. "He was a great teacher, but Jesus did not rise from the dead."

The resurrection of Jesus is unique. No other religion in the world claims anything similar to it. The resurrection of Jesus has more historical evidence confirming it than any other miracle in ancient history.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to over five hundred of His followers on multiple occasions. Jesus talked and ate with them. They not only saw Jesus, but also touched Him.

After Jesus' death, His followers were frightened and discouraged. They hid in fear of the authorities. After Jesus rose from the dead, they experienced a radical change in both attitude and behavior. They were transformed from being timid, discouraged, and frightened men into bold, optimistic, and fearless apostles of Jesus. It is inconceivable that they would have lied about the resurrection of Jesus when their testimony not only cost them greatly, but they had nothing to gain personally.

3. "Jesus never did the miracles recorded in the Bible."

The Jewish Talmud accuses Jesus of practicing sorcery (*The Babylonian Talmud*, Sanhedrin, 43a). There are indirect references in the Gospels to this charge against Jesus by his enemies in Luke 11:15 and John 8:48. It is significant that Jesus' enemies never denied that He performed miracles. Rather, they claimed that He did His miracles through evil means. If Jesus' contemporaries affirmed that Jesus was a miracle worker, then the evidence for His miracles must have been overwhelming!

4. "The real Jesus was nothing like the Jesus described in the Bible. The church

changed the Bible at one of the church councils."

This is another popular myth that is refuted by empirical evidence. The first church council did not meet until A.D. 325. However, there are several biblical manuscripts that are older than the fourth century. It is extremely difficult to conceive how the church could have changed the Bible when we have manuscripts that were written before the fourth century that show no evidence of tampering!

The manuscript evidence for the Bible is many times greater than any other ancient writing. For example, take Caesar's first century account of the Gallic Wars. Without his writings, historians would have no record of these wars. However, Caesar's original writings are no longer in existence. Only 10 complete copies of them remain, and they were written in A.D. 900—950. Even so, these documents are taught as historical fact.

The Bible, on the other hand, has more than 14,000 Old Testament manuscripts—many of which date back as far as 400 B.C. And there are over 5,300 manuscripts of the New Testament, with nearly 800 of them written before 1000 A.D. It is indeed puzzling how their historical reliability could be questioned. And there is no empirical evidence that the early church changed the biblical description of Jesus.

5. "There is no evidence that Jesus ever existed. Jesus is a myth like Santa Claus and the Easter bunny."

It is a popular myth that the only ancient references referring to Jesus are found in the Bible. The truth is that many ancient and secular sources refer to Jesus. For example, the Roman historian Tacitus referred to Jesus at least three times. Suetonius, who was on the staff of Emperor Hadrian in the early second century, wrote about Jesus. There are allusions to Christ in the writings of such ancient authors as Thallus, Philo, Pliny the Younger, Galen, Celsus, Mara Bar Serapion, and Lucian. Also, the Jewish historian Josephus, as well as the Jewish Talmud, mention Jesus.