

LESSON THREE

WHAT DID GOD DO ABOUT THE PROBLEM?

We have seen in the Bible that God, the Creator, made human beings and wants to fellowship with them. But they deliberately chose to reject and disobey God, and by doing so were cut off from direct contact with God, the source of life. Man is therefore responsible for the death he brought on himself, but God promised a solution, saying it would be given through a descendant of the woman.

God must have been deeply hurt when the people he had made turned against him and caused estrangement and death for the whole human race. And love for them would cause him to search for ways to reestablish contact and communicate with them, and to rescue and restore them. In this lesson we will begin to see what God's solution to the problem is, and also how he communicated with us.

John 1 I - JESUS CHRIST, "THE WORD" --

To begin with, think a moment about "words." How would you define "word"? What is the purpose or function of words?

With that in mind, consider the following part of the Bible which talks about a certain "Word."

John 1:1-4, 10-11

1. What facts do verses 1-4 give about this special "Word"?
2. According to verses 10-11, what was the response of people to this person when he came into the world?

John 1:14-18

3.
 - a. In what form did the Word come into the world, according to the beginning of verse 14?
 - b. After becoming a man, whom did Jesus Christ, "the Word," make known (v.18)?
 - c. How is this role related to the fact that he is called "the Word"?

The Gospel of John uses this explanation about the Word as the introduction to writing about Jesus Christ. Calling him the Word, this is saying that Jesus Christ is God, the Creator, and that he became a man and "made known" (communicated) God to us. Calling him Christ (which means Messiah) is a claim that he is the promised "offspring of the woman" who is to conquer Satan and solve the enormous problem of sin and its disastrous effects.

These are astonishing claims to make. It is a matter of historical record that Jesus was born as a human being about 2000 years ago, that he lived about 33 years and was put to death on a Roman cross. But is there any evidence that he was more than an ordinary human being? In this lesson we will examine the Bible record of what he was like, what he said about himself, and some of what he did to substantiate what he said. Let's see what brought John to the conclusion that Jesus was God, the Creator, become a man to reveal God to us.

II - WHAT JESUS CLAIMED ABOUT HIMSELF

John 8:56-59 *As you read this passage remember that Abraham lived about 2000 B.C., long before Jesus said these things.*

1. a. In verse 58, as Jesus compares himself to Abraham, who does he say lived first?
b. What, then, is Jesus claiming about himself?
2. How did the Jews react to that claim of Jesus?

In the Old Testament one of the names by which God identifies himself is the "I AM." Jesus is using that name for himself in this sentence (v.58). The Jews were shocked and outraged at what seemed to them blasphemy, the Biblical penalty for which was death by stoning.

John 10:30-38

3. What do the Jews understand Jesus to be claiming?
4. According to Jesus, what do his "works" (i.e. miracles) reveal about himself? (v.37-38)

John 14:6-11 *In this section Jesus is talking with his disciples, who wanted to understand what he said, rather than the people who were opposing him.*

5. What did Jesus claim about himself in verse 6?
6. What does Jesus say in these verses about the relationship between the Father (i.e. God) and himself)?

These words of Jesus mean he claims to be the God of Genesis 1. Who beside Jesus ever claimed that? Neither Mohammed nor Buddha nor any other person ever has. But Jesus Christ clearly did.

III - HOW JESUS PROVIDED EVIDENCE FOR HIS CLAIMS

I Peter 2:22 *Peter was one of Jesus' disciples and knew him well from being with him for over three years.*

1. What does Peter say about Jesus here?
2. Why is this unusual?

Mark 1:30-34, 40-42

3. In these verses, over what kinds of things did Jesus demonstrate power?

These are just examples from the many accounts in the four gospels where Jesus showed that he had power over diseases and demons.

Mark 4:35-41

4.
 - a. When were the disciples most frightened?
 - b. What were the surrounding conditions when they were "terrified"? (v. 41)
 - c. Why do you think they would suddenly fear Jesus so much?
5.
 - a. What method did Jesus use to calm the storm?
 - b. What method did God use when he created the universe? Compare Genesis 1:3,6,9,etc.

Since God created the universe by "speaking," it is not surprising that Jesus, who is claiming to be God, could influence and control nature by speaking. Many of Jesus' miracles were done in this way.

John 11:17-27,38-48, 53

6. What did Jesus claim about himself in verse 25?
7. What evidence did he give to support that claim?
8.
 - a. By what method did he raise Lazarus from the dead?
 - b. In his prayer, what did Jesus say this miracle would reveal to the people who were watching?
 - c. What were the different reactions of the Jews (v.45-53)?

The Jewish leaders admitted (v.47) -- indeed could not refute the fact -- that Jesus was doing miracles, which is a clear indication that they really happened. The leaders, however, decided to murder Jesus rather than face up to the implications of those miracles. We need to consider if we are being like the Jewish leaders, determined not to believe regardless of the evidence, or like the disciples, who asked, "Who then is this?" and were looking and listening receptively.

Mark 8:31, 9:31,10:33-34

9.
 - a. What does Jesus predict will happen to himself?
 - b. How will he die?
 - c. What does he say will happen afterward?
10. If what he has predicted does NOT happen, can we trust the other statements he made?

IV - THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

With so much hatred obviously building up against him, it was not necessarily supernatural for Jesus to predict his murder. But resurrection? Preposterous, if he was an ordinary man. If he could both predict and accomplish that, no one can lightly dismiss anything else he said, including his claim to deity. In fact, the credibility of Christianity itself depends on whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. Let's examine some of the evidence for the resurrection.

Matthew 27:57-66 *As you read these verses, notice what was done with Jesus' body after his death.*

1. What was done with Jesus' body after he died? (v.58- 60)
2. What were the priests and Pharisees afraid would happen?
3. What was done to prevent the disciples from stealing the body?

The seal had the authority of the Roman Empire behind it. Breaking it could mean the death penalty. The guard was soldiers who could be given a death penalty if they failed their responsibility.

Matthew 28:1-15 *As you read, find what each group of people said or thought happened to Jesus' body.*

4. Did any of the people mentioned in these verses believe that the body was still in the tomb?
5. The angel, the women, the guards, and the Jewish leaders all recognized that the body was gone from the tomb. How did their explanations of it differ?
6. Would you have believed the story the guards told? (How much can you see when you are sleeping?)

Mark 16:9-14 *Read this, noticing the reactions of the disciples to news of Jesus' resurrection.*

7. a. Even though Jesus had told his disciples many times about his coming death and resurrection, they do not appear to have been expecting it. Before Jesus appeared to the disciples, who told them he had arisen?
b. How did those people (Mary, the two who were walking) know he was risen?
8. How did the disciples react to those reports?
9. Why do you think they didn't believe until Jesus himself appeared to them?

It is obvious that the disciples were not eagerly awaiting the resurrection and that they were not ready to grasp at the slightest excuse for believing it. Nor did they show any indication that they might invent such a story. If people that stubbornly skeptical later become convinced of Jesus' resurrection, they must have seen conclusive proof.

John 20:1-9

As you read this incident, imagine the thoughts and feelings of Mary and the two disciples. John calls himself "the other disciple."

10. a. What did Peter and John find in the tomb?
b. What possible explanations can you think of for the burial cloths being there without the body?
11. John saw this and "believed" (v.8). What do you think he believed? (v.9 is an explanation of why he had not believed earlier.)

John 20:19-20

12. a. Why would Jesus show the disciples his hands and side?
b. What would they prove?

John 20:24-31

13. What did Thomas say were his conditions for believing?
14. When Jesus appeared he spoke immediately to Thomas and referred to those conditions. How could Jesus have gotten the information about them when he was not there? (Psalm 139:1-6)
15. What did Thomas believe? (v.28)
16. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Why would John have a special reason to record this? (see v.8)
17. According to v.30-31, why did John write this gospel?

V - SUMMARY

Many people say they can't believe Jesus' miracles really happened, especially his resurrection. But the central problem is not, "Are miracles possible?" but "Who is Jesus Christ?" If he is the God who created everything, he would not only have power to do supernatural things, he would do so in order to make his claims believable.

*The Bible says this resurrected Jesus Christ is the living God, that he is the one who created us, has put his hand on us and wants to lead us. **Revelation 3:20** says this in another way. If you want to open yourself up toward him, as it suggests, to invite him into your life so he can teach you further the truth about himself, tell him that as you take a short time for prayer. You can also tell him honestly about any doubts or questions you have.*

Before the final lesson next time read at least one account of the crucifixion from the gospels. (Matthew 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23 or John 18-19)