

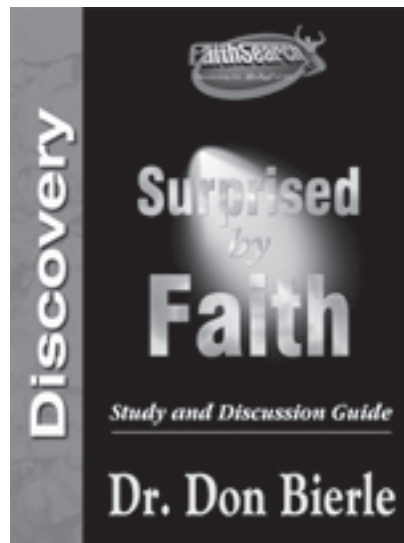
Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide

LEADER'S MANUAL

CHAPTER 5

Is Jesus Really God?

Discovering that He Often Said So!



- **Answer Key for the *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide***
- **Teaching Helps for the Teacher/Facilitator of the *FaithSearch Discovery Presentation***



Copyright ©2008, *FaithSearch* International. All rights reserved.

- 105 Peavey Road, Suite 200, Chaska, MN 55318 USA • Phone: +1.952.401.4501 • Fax +1.952.401.4504
- E-mail: info@faithsearch.org • Web: www.faithsearch.org

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL WITH EVIDENCE TO ALL PEOPLES EVERYWHERE

CHAPTER 5

Is Jesus Really God?

Discovering that He Often Said So!

Getting Focused

Materials

- *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide*, chapter 5
- *Surprised by Faith* text, chapter 3, pages 51-56
- PowerPoint® slides: through *Discovery #5* (slides 89-92)
Chapter review: slide 93

Key Points

1. Jesus claimed to be God.
The New Testament cites many occasions on which Jesus claimed to be God. Responses of those who heard Jesus firsthand reinforce the fact that His claims about Himself were extraordinary. People around Him were clearly astonished. Some even considered His claims blasphemous and determined that He should be put to death.
2. Jesus claimed to be able to do what only God can do.
The fact that Jesus believed Himself to be God is backed up by His claims that He could do things only God can do—such as forgive sins and raise the dead. In our day people would be prime candidates for psychiatric care if they said the kind of things Jesus said.

Glossary of Terms Used

Incarnation: the biblical teaching that God came to earth in recorded history in the form of the man Jesus Christ; Jesus had both the nature of God and the nature of man in one person

Messiah: equivalent to the title “Christ” or literally the “anointed one” who was prophesied in the Old Testament. According to the Old Testament, the Messiah would both die for the sins of the people and reign forever as King on David’s throne, that is, He would be both human and divine.

Blasphemy: to speak about God or sacred things with abuse or contempt; false witness concerning God; cursing or reviling God; irreverence (See Leviticus 24:16 for Judaism’s law on this.)

Answers to the numbered, objective questions are available at the end of each chapter.

Here's where we're headed



The purpose of this section is to guide the participant to make their own *Ah-ha!* Discovery number one.

Subjective questions on page 41
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 42
of the *Study Guide*

Making the DISCOVERY

Ah-ha! The DISCOVERY

#5 Eyewitnesses testified that Jesus claimed to be God!

Introduction

Which one of these can be used as evidence in a court of law: an eyewitness account or hearsay (rumor, based not on personal knowledge but on another's statements)? Why?

Hearsay (information gained secondhand or by being passed orally from generation to generation) is not allowed in a court of law because it cannot be confirmed by eyewitness testimony. Statements derived by hearsay cannot be cross-examined: the source is unavailable or dead. Furthermore, there is no personal recall quality. Therefore, hearsay information is not considered authoritative and is not allowed in a court of law.

In your own words, express how what you have learned about the New Testament records in chapters 3 and 4 is now relevant to testing the claim that Jesus is God. (Review page 24 in SBF.)

By demonstrating that the New Testament records concerning Jesus are eyewitness testimony rather than hearsay, we can confidently use them as a source of reliable evidence to test the claim that Jesus is God. In fact, the New Testament contains the most reliable records of antiquity, both the integrity of the text and historical confirmation of people, places and events. As a result, in this chapter we can discover what the eyewitnesses heard Jesus say through their records. In the next chapter we can discover what the eyewitnesses saw Jesus do.

How does this truth make it easier for you to defend Jesus' claim to be God than it would be for others who may have claimed deity in the past?

The truth that the first century eyewitness records of the New Testament meet the legal requirements for evidence gives the Christian a decided edge to defend Jesus' claim to be God over others who may make similar claims. Anyone can make an extravagant claim, for example, to be deity. But can they back up that claim with objective evidence? What reasons can be presented to make the claim credible? No other claim for God (by individuals or religions) except Christianity, has eyewitness observations of their god preserved in reliable historical records. Jesus Christ is not myth or legend as could be alleged for other gods which lack this evidence. That Jesus Christ is God is reasonable because of the evidence we have of His life. The historical confirmation of the New Testament records will be considered in chapter 6.

Read John 4:25-26 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. In His conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria, who did Jesus tell her that He was?

Jesus told her that He was the Messiah whom she anticipated was coming.

As He talked to them [disciples on the road to Emmaus], who does Jesus identify from Old Testament prophecy would need to suffer and rise again from the dead (verses 26 and 46)?

He said that the Christ (Messiah) would need to suffer and rise again from the dead.

To whom did Jesus apply these prophecies? (verse 27)

Jesus applied them to Himself.

Who, then is Jesus claiming to be?

He is claiming to be the Messiah (Christ) who would suffer and rise again from the dead.

Read Mark 14:61-62 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. When asked by the high priest Caiaphas if He was the Christ (Messiah) what did Jesus answer?

Jesus said that He was ("I am.")

It is clear from the biblical record that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. What evidence links Jesus' life with the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament?

See the essay on pages 42-43 in the *Study Guide* for the evidence from fulfilled prophecy. There are also the direct statements recorded in the nativity passages which link Jesus with the Messiah. For example, Gabriel stated to Mary that her Son would reign over the throne of David and of the house of Jacob (Luke 1:32-33). The angels announced to the shepherds that the child born in Bethlehem was a Savior who was Christ or Messiah (Luke 2:11). The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon in the temple at Jerusalem that this child Jesus was the Lord's Christ (Luke 2:25-32). The wise men, the chief priests and scribes all understood the "King of the Jews," who was prophesied in the Old Testament to be born in Bethlehem, was the Christ or Messiah (Matthew 2:1-6).

Read endnote number four on page 137 of SBF. Why is it reasonable to conclude that Jesus' claim to be the Messiah was also a claim to be Divine?

Jesus demonstrated His familiarity with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah when He identified Himself with the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 61:1-2 (recorded in Luke 4:18-19). This means He also knew that the "glory" of Galilee and the "great light" they would see was none other than the child who would be born there (Isaiah 9:1-2, 6). And this child would bear the names "Mighty God" and "Eternal Father" (v. 6). During Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, they asked whether He was the Christ (Messiah). He not only acknowledged that to be true, but He went beyond and quoted a prophetic passage from Daniel regarding the "Son of Man" (Luke 22:66-69). The Sanhedrin understood this to be

Subjective question on page 42
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 43
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective questions on page 44
of the *Study Guide*

a claim to be God as indicated in their question, "Are you the Son of God, then?" Jesus replied, "Yes, I am." Clearly, Jesus connected His claim to be the Messiah with His claim to be Divine.

▶ What are two possible meanings of "One" that *do not fit* either the grammar or the context of the verse?

One possible meaning is that by "one" Jesus meant that He and the Father were the same person. But the Greek grammar would be incorrect if this was His intended meaning. In that case, "one" would have to be in the masculine gender. Instead it is in the neuter gender. Another meaning is that Jesus was saying He was "in agreement" or "in unity" with the Father. The context negates this view. The Jews were going to stone Him to death—an action totally unjustified if they thought Jesus meant "unity."

▶ What is the meaning of Jesus' claim to be "One" that *does fit* the grammar and context?

With the two possible meanings above disqualified, the true meaning shines forth: Jesus was claiming to be God, a position supported both by the Greek grammar and by the context.

Subjective question on page 44
of the *Study Guide*

▶ Compare Luke 4:8 with John 9:38, Matthew 14:33 and 28:17 in your Bible or in the margin of this page. In what way do these passages indirectly support the contention that Jesus claimed to be God?

Jesus responded to the devil's temptation to worship him (the devil) with an unswerving commitment to Scripture which commanded the worship of God alone. But during His own ministry He received and never protested worship directed to Him by others. By this acceptance He was communicating that He was worthy to receive that which was reserved for God alone, an indirect claim to be God. See the paragraph on this subject on page 62 of SBF.

Subjective question on page 44
of the *Study Guide*

▶ Is Jesus "God" or the "Son of God"?

See the essay on this subject which follows this question on pages 44-45 in the *Study Guide*. The key here is that by being the "Son" does not make Jesus a lesser or later deity than the Father. They share all Divine attributes and are co-eternal. To be the "Son of God" is equivalent in Christian theology to being "God." There is no biological relationship (as there would be between my son and me). Of course, this will make no sense to someone who is determined to resist the concept of God as a trinity. But that is exactly the way God revealed Himself to us in the Old and New Testament Scripture and in sacred history.

Subjective question on page 45
of the *Study Guide*

▶ If Jesus truly made the two claims above, then it is abundantly clear they are stupendous in nature. Imagine yourself making similar claims to your family and friends. Describe how you think they would respond: smile and encourage you, or become concerned and even suggest counseling?

The responses to this question will be personal. In a sense, the question is a rhetorical one—it does not even need to be answered because it is so obvious. To hear someone who is only human say they have power over death and are not from this world is enough to generate incredulity, suspicion and even humor or fear. If you seriously persisted in making such claims for yourself, your family and friends certainly would become concerned about your sanity.

The degree of reaction of the hearer can often be an indicator of the nature of the claim being made. Read the passages below in your Bible or in the margin of this page, and write down the reactions of those who heard what Jesus said.

John 5:17-18 The Jewish leadership was so incensed by Jesus' statement that they felt justified in seeking His death. The only basis in the law for this would be blasphemy, that is, Jesus' claim to be equal with God. That must be what they understood Jesus to be saying.

John 8:58-59 Likewise, their reaction in John 8:59 was to stone Him to death because He claimed the name of God for Himself, that is, "I AM." Again, they spoke the same language and shared the same culture—they should know what He said and meant.

Mark 14:60-64 The Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death, not for anything He did, but for who He claimed to be (which they considered blasphemy).

Would you consider these reactions to be extreme?

Yes. The choice of punishment by death is extreme by anyone's standard.

Subjective question on page 45 of the *Study Guide*

Do you think these reactions are indicative of and consistent with the contention that Jesus was claiming to be God?

Yes. The reactions of Jesus' own contemporaries reinforce the position that He really was claiming to be God. The Jews were bound to enforce capital punishment only as the Law allows. And it allows the punishment of death only for extreme crimes, which includes extreme expressions of blasphemy of the name of God. Therefore, their attempt to kill Jesus would be consistent with their perceiving His claim to be a human claim to be God. Furthermore, the text of Scripture makes it clear that is why they did it (for example, John 10:33).

Subjective question on page 46 of the *Study Guide*

Do you agree that Jesus' statements are not what you expect a person who is merely a human being to say?

It is hard to imagine anyone taking this course not agreeing. If someone does, it would indicate to me that they are very aware that if they agree here, the next step is to acknowledge that Jesus must not be just another human being. He must be Divine. They will disagree here to avoid acknowledging this, and retain their unbelief position.

What would it take for you to convince your family and friends that you were God?

Again, this is more of a rhetorical question. Probably none of us can imagine even trying this. But if we did try, we would likely use one of two approaches. Either we would attempt to persuade by adopting an aesthete's sacrificial lifestyle suggesting we are different and more "spiritual" than others; or we would use deception and magic in order to fool people into thinking we can do supernatural feats. Our family and friends would likely either laugh or cry. They would assume we were either joking or had lost our mind! Indeed,

**Subjective question on page 46
of the Study Guide**

Author's Comment

Proceeding through this chapter and the next will reveal any individuals in your group who may not be Christians or who are resisting the Lordship of Christ for some reason. They will find

**Subjective questions on page 47
of the Study Guide**

it difficult to accept that Jesus clearly claimed to be God and backed it up with His life and ministry. Why? If they do accept this, their life commitments and values must change in order to be consistent with this truth. The usual response I have heard from people in this position is to once again question the veracity of the New Testament text which contains these claims and ac-

**Subjective questions on page 47
of the Study Guide**

tions of Jesus. It's the only way "out" they can see. When this happens, you can refer them back to chapters 3 and 4 where you demonstrated the evidence that these records are of eyewitness quality and historically reliable. Ask them, "What evidential basis do you have for questioning them?" Since they have none, they will fall

**Subjective questions on page 47
of the Study Guide**

back on public opinion, the authority of a professor they once had who denied the truth of Christianity and the Bible, a special they once saw on television, etc. In extreme cases they will even deny the evidence itself, choosing ignorance over enlightenment. Therefore, if you have people in your group who are not believers, you should be praying for them every day that the Holy Spirit will soften their heart and open their eyes and will to the truth.

if much of what Jesus said were to come out of our mouths, we would be considered as prime candidates to be locked up or given psychological treatment. Albert Schweitzer was so overwhelmed by the extraordinary statements of Jesus that he addressed his M.D. dissertation at Strasbourg in France to how Jesus could make such claims and still be considered sane.

What insight does this give you into Jesus' own situation?

No one would attempt to do it the way Jesus did—with powerful acts in the lives of people with thousands of eyewitnesses present (and no props, curtains, etc. of any kind)! Of course, as an encore, you would need to resurrect yourself from the dead! As a result, those who knew Him best—his own family—became believers (Acts 1:14) and his brother James became the head of the Jerusalem church proclaiming Jesus as resurrected Lord and dying a martyr's death as a result (1 Corinthians 15:7; Acts 15:13). It is hard to imagine anything more persuasive of the genuine nature of Jesus' life and ministry than these results.

When was God ever pierced (crucified)?

We know of no such situation.

If Jesus is God, how would that help explain this passage?

Long before the practice of crucifixion by the Romans, the prophet Zechariah recorded God as speaking about His own crucifixion. The only way this can make sense is if it is a prophecy spoken by the second person of the trinity concerning His crucifixion during His future incarnation to earth. This is indirect evidence that Jesus is indeed God.

When did God die?

We know of no such situation.

If Jesus is God, how would that help explain this passage?

There is no question in anyone's mind that it is Jehovah God who is speaking in the first chapter of Revelation. The only way His statement about being dead and alive forevermore makes any sense is if it is Jesus who is talking and He is making reference to His death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection. Again, this is indirect evidence that Jesus is God.

When was God put in the grave?

We know of no such situation.

If Jesus is God, how would that help explain this passage?

Again, God is speaking about His death and the fact that His body would not undergo decay. This only makes sense if the second person of the trinity (Jesus) is speaking and making reference to His future death and resurrection after three days.

Application and Reflection

Do you agree that the question of whether Jesus actually was God is the most significant issue of Christianity's validity? Why or why not?

There is a very important reason why this is true. From the perspective of our thesis in this study, it is critical because Jesus is our historical contact with an otherwise invisible, intangible and illusive God (review SBF, pp. 16-18, 21-23). Because of Jesus' incarnation, Christianity's claim for God's existence becomes testable using historical evidence. If Jesus is God (as confirmed by his claims and acts in history) then the truth about the Christian claim for God's existence is certain. This confidence based on reliable historical evidence validates Christianity, and separates it from the unsupported allegations of the gods claimed by other religions.

Were Jesus' exclusive claims to be God as presented in this chapter convincing to you?

This calls for a personal response and may vary within the group. At this point, you should help them distinguish between Jesus' claims to be God (the subject of this chapter) and the proof that His claims are true (the subject of chapter 6). Hopefully, everyone will realize from the biblical examples given that Jesus did, in fact, claim to be God.

If not, why not? What evidence would be convincing to you?

If someone indicates they are not convinced, ask them to explain why. Either they are going to question the truthfulness of the New Testament records (on which our understanding of the claims of Jesus is based) or they have not understood the logic of the examples used. In the first case, they should reexamine the evidence of chapters 3 and 4. In the second case, take them back to the individual claims of Jesus (summary on page 56 of SBF) and have them explain why the conclusion we gave is not valid for them. As you deal with people like this, realize that there are two primary reasons for unbelief: *ignorance* of the truth or an *unwillingness to accept* the truth (chapter 7 will explain this fully). Through the use of Discovery you are removing ignorance as a basis for unbelief. This exposes the "will" as the real basis for any remaining unbelief. This will become clear to everyone in your class in chapter 7. At this point do not confront them about their unwillingness to believe. Rather, follow the instructions given by Peter (1 Peter 3:15) to respond to them with gentleness and reverence. You have the Holy Spirit to help, so be patient.

Subjective questions on page 48 of the Study Guide

Author's Comment

Some Christian people object to the use of logic and historical evidence to demonstrate the truth of God. They state that they do not need all this evidence and reason complicating their faith. They maintain that theirs is a simple faith based on the inner testimony of assurance by the Holy Spirit. My response is that certainly the testimony of the Holy Spirit within is a valid claim (see Romans 8:16 and John 14:26) but we ought to be concerned with our effectiveness in communicating the truth of the Gospel message of Jesus to those who do not possess the indwelling Holy Spirit. As long as the people to whom we share our faith do not have any questions or objections, we may be okay in expressing only the "what" of the Gospel. What if the honest skeptic or adherent of another religion says they do not believe in the truth of the Bible, or that they do not believe Jesus is God incarnate? To answer their objections we must be prepared to tell them why it is true. Tradition and clerical authority are not adequate, for these exist—with different conclusions—in other religions as well. Only the historical evidence for Jesus, as recounted in **FaithSearch** Discovery, can validate Christian faith to be truth compared to the lack of this validity in other religions. Unfortunately, those who deny the need for or use of "why" explanations often walk away from a person with honest objections, concluding that they have a hardened heart and are unwilling to accept the truth. Thus, such opportunities are lost because of a lack of appropriate preparation.

Bible confirmation on page 48
of the *Study Guide*

Author's Comment

Chapters 5 and 6 go together as a unit in the same way that chapters 3 and 4 go together. Using the field trip illustration, we have just finished listening to what Jesus claimed for Himself (through the ears of the eyewitnesses as recorded in the New Testament). Now in chapter 6 we will use the eyewitnesses' eyes to see what it was that convinced them that Jesus' claims were true. If what we are going to see Jesus do has been recorded and transmitted to us accurately (as has been previously demonstrated) then it is overwhelming evidence that His claims to be God are true. The danger for some Christians is that familiarity with the miraculous events in Jesus' life may have "calloused" them against experiencing anew their incredible nature (such as raising Lazarus from the dead after four days in John 11). Be in prayer that everyone in your group will be sensitive to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit as you continue with Discovery.

Confirming the Discovery

Read the references below in a Bible, or as provided here in the margin. Write below how the main teaching of each relates to or confirms the discovery made in this chapter.

The summary which follows in the *Study Guide* text below the verse listings is the author's view of the main teaching of these passages. Refer to that for the answers to this section. The references of John 9:38 and Matthew 28:16-17 should be compared to Jesus' statement in Luke 4:8.

Looking Ahead

Additional Reading

- Jon Buell and O. Quentin Hyder, *Jesus: God, Ghost or Guru?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Probe, 1978), Chapters 1-2. (This book is out of print, but is available in some libraries.)
- Douglas Groothuis, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), Chapter 13.
- Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1980), Chapter 1.
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1998), Chapters 7-8.