



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
**Volume 17 Number 42**  
**November 9, 2022**

**What They Say about Jesus - Part 1**

By Tal Davis

Jesus Christ. Everyone knows about Jesus Christ. Right? It is true that Jesus is probably one of the most famous figures in all of human history. Probably more books have been written about Him than any other person in history – along with dozens of movies and TV programs. For Christianity Jesus is the heart and soul of our faith. He is our Lord and Savior who came to save us from our sins. Without Jesus, Christianity would not exist. In contrast, if you took Buddha out of Buddhism, Muhammad out of Islam, or even Moses out of Judaism, those religions would not change. But if you took Jesus out of Christianity it would cease to be.

Given the fact that most people in the world have at least heard of Jesus, the fact is that most of them have no idea what He did or what He taught. Many people assume they know based on what they have heard, but few can accurately relate what He actually said, claimed about Himself, or what He accomplished. Actually, the only reliable information about Jesus can only be found in the pages of the New Testament, particularly in the four gospels.

A bigger problem is that most other world religions and Christian cults have distorted views of who Jesus was and what He taught. Christians need to understand what the beliefs of historic Christianity are concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. They should also be able to discern the false concepts about Him of non-Christian and pseudo-Christian belief systems. For that reason, in this two part article, we will do a survey of what the larger world religions and

counterfeit Christians groups teach their people about Jesus Christ.

First, we will review the Historic Christian perspective on who Jesus was and what He did for mankind. The New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ was a genuine, historical figure, a fact that most historians (but not all) agree on. As Christians, we assert that He was more than just a man who lived two thousand years ago in Palestine. We believe, based on New Testament evidence, that He was the unique incarnation of God in human form. Thus, Jesus was fully deity and claimed equality with God (see John 1:1,14, 5:17-18, 23, 8:56-59, 10:30-33; Colossians 1:15-20, 2:9). We maintain that He preexisted His earthly life as God the Son, the Second Person of the Eternal Infinite Trinity, with the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 1:1-14; Matthew 28:19).

As far as His earthly existence is concerned, Jesus was born on earth as a man by the miraculous conception and His virgin birth to Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus lived a sinless life and performed numerous miraculous acts that are reported in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But His ministry had even greater purposes. He was crucified on the cross to die and make atonement for the sins of the world. We also assert that Jesus confirmed His claims to deity by rising again bodily from the dead. He appeared physically to more than 500 of His disciples (see Luke 24:36-43; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead were the means for the forgiveness and atonement for our sins.

So, in a nutshell, that is what Historic Christianity has believed and taught about Jesus Christ since the First Century AD.

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Those theological facts have been affirmed historically by every major Christian denomination, including Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals. It is against those doctrinal absolutes that we must judge the teachings of any and all other religious groups. If any world religious movement, or any sect claiming to be Christian, denies or deviates from any of the historic doctrinal tenets of who Jesus was and what He did, it must be rejected as incompatible with genuine Christian teaching. In part one of this article, and in the next installment, we will analyze the beliefs about Jesus of some of the largest world religions and pseudo-Christian movements. We will seek to determine if and how they distort the truth about Jesus Christ. We will begin with the faith from which early Christianity sprang.

### Judaism

Jesus Christ was Jewish. He was born to a Jewish mother, Mary, and raised by a Jewish father, Joseph. So He was steeped in the beliefs and teachings of the Old Testament. One of those beliefs was that God (the One True God Yahweh) was going to send a specially anointed savior (Messiah) to restore the nation of Israel and judge the nations who rejected Him.

When Jesus came, He claimed to be that Messiah, but not in the way they were expecting. His was to be a Kingdom not of this world, but one that encompassed people's hearts, including non-Jews. So when Jesus failed to destroy the Romans and establish a new Israel, most Jewish people, especially those in places of religious authority, rejected Him and called for His death. Many first century Jews did, however, embrace Him as their Lord and Messiah. In fact, nearly all of the earliest Christ followers were Jewish.

However, when the majority of Jewish people did not believe in Him, the Jesus Movement moved beyond its Jewish confines to welcome non-Jews (Gentiles) who received Him as their Lord and Savior (read the Book of Acts). In time, Christianity spread the throughout the world with millions accepting Jesus as Lord. Sadly, most Jewish people (but certainly not all) have strongly resisted the efforts of Christian missionaries and evangelists to get them to accept Jesus as their Messiah.

So what then is the current view that Jewish people have of who Jesus was and what He did? To begin with, most Jews affirm that Jesus Christ was an actual historical figure who lived and taught in the First Century AD in what was then the Roman provinces of Judea and Galilee. They believe, though, that He was not the Messiah (Christ), and was not raised from the dead. Some Jews acknowledge that Jesus was perhaps a great rabbi (teacher), reformer, or even a prophet who may have actually done miracles. Nonetheless, they do not regard Jesus as divine or the promised Messiah.

The fact that most Jews do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah presents something of a dilemma for many Christians. They ask, "Does that mean all Jews are lost?" Some theologians try to resolve the issue by asserting what is sometimes called the "Two Covenant Theory." That position maintains that Jews are still covered under the Abrahamic Covenant and thus do not need to become Christians to be saved. The problem with that view is that there is no hint in the New Testament that salvation is obtained any differently for Jews or Gentiles. Salvation is only by grace through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 14:6).

That being said, as we indicated, there are a growing number of Jewish people in America and in modern Israel

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who do indeed accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. Many of them accept the doctrines of historic Christianity, but choose to remain faithful to their Jewish cultural and religious traditions. They are sometimes referred to as Messianic Jews or Jews for Jesus, and may congregate to

gether in Messianic synagogues.

In the next installment we will examine how other of the world religions, and pseudo-Christian movements, understand who Jesus was and how He fits into their belief systems (if at all).

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