

Table of Contents:

1. Divine Humans in Ancient Greece and Rome
 2. Divine Humans in Ancient Judaism
 3. Did Jesus Think He Was God?
 4. The Resurrection of Jesus: What We Cannot Know
 5. The Resurrection of Jesus: What We Can Know
 6. The Beginning of Christology: Christ as Exalted to Heaven
 7. Jesus as God on Earth: Early Incarnation Christologies
 8. After the New Testament: Christological Dead Ends of the Second and Third Centuries
 9. Ortho-Paradoxes on the Road to Nicea
- EPILOGUE: Jesus as God: The Aftermath

Excerpt from the Intro:

As a historian I am no longer obsessed with the theological question of how God became a man, but with the historical question of how a man became God. The traditional answer to this question, of course, is that Jesus in fact was God, and so of course he taught that he was God and was always believed to be God. But a long stream of historians since the late eighteenth century have maintained that this is not the correct understanding of the historical Jesus, and they have marshaled many and compelling arguments in support of their position. If they are right, we are left with the puzzle: How did it happen? Why did Jesus's early followers start considering him to be God?

In this book I have tried to approach this question in a way that will be useful not only for secular historians of religion like me, but also for believers like my friend who continue to think that Jesus is, in fact, God. As a result, I do not take a stand on the theological question of Jesus's divine status. I am instead interested in the historical development that led to the affirmation that he is God. This historical development certainly transpired in one way or another, and what people personally believe about Christ should not, in theory, affect the conclusions they draw historically.

The idea that Jesus is God is not an invention of modern times, of course. As I will show in my discussion, it was the view of the very earliest Christians soon after Jesus's death. One of our driving questions throughout this study will always be what these Christians meant by saying "Jesus is God." As we will see, different Christians meant different things by it. Moreover, to understand this claim in any sense at all will require us to know what people in the ancient world generally meant when they thought that a particular human was a god—or that a god had become a human. This claim was not unique to Christians. Even though Jesus may be the only miracle-working Son of God that we know about in our world, numerous people in antiquity, among both pagans and Jews, were thought to have been both human and divine.

It is important already at this stage to stress a fundamental, historical point about how we imagine the "divine realm." By divine realm, I mean that "world" that is inhabited by superhuman, divine beings—God, or the gods, or other superhuman forces. For most people today, divinity is a black-and-white issue. A being is either God or not God. God is "up there" in the heavenly realm, and we are "down here" in this realm. And there is an unbridgeable chasm between these two realms. With this kind of assumption firmly entrenched in our thinking, it is very hard to imagine how a person could be both God and human at once.

Moreover, when put in these black-and-white terms, it is relatively easy to say, as I used to say before doing the research for this book, that the early Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in which Jesus never makes explicit divine claims about himself—portray Jesus as a human but not as God, whereas the Gospel of John—in which Jesus does make such divine claims—does indeed portray him as God.