

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS – PART V

The identity of Jesus is the central question of all time. On it, hinges the salvation of all men and the fate of the world. But reason tells us He cannot just be a good teacher. Here's the claim in Christ's own words. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:18)

"BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"

Despite what the skeptics may claim, Jesus was not ambiguous about just who He claimed to be. Let's get right to the point and begin with his most direct assertions of divinity. Going back to Exodus God gives His own name as "I AM WHO I AM." (It is from the Hebrew pronunciation of this name that we get the word Yaweh, the Hebrew term for Lord.) This is the holy name of God. Isaiah 43:11 identifies that name with the Savior. **"I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior."** Now Jesus referred to himself in those very words on several occasions. In John 8:58 he is facing a crowd of unbelieving Jews. **"I tell you the truth,"** Jesus answered, **"before Abraham was born I am."** The crowd understood what he was saying. The use of that term angered them so much that they wanted to stone him. Later John tells us of Christ's use of the term when he is betrayed and the mob comes to seize him. **"I am he,"** he declares and the crowd is knocked to the ground by just the power inherent in that statement when expressed by the Son of God. Apparent in the meaning of the term, "I Am," is the notion of the eternal. That is the intended sense of the term. Again in John we find Christ's personal confirmation of his claim. **"And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had before the world began."** He is declaring not only his glory, but also the eternal nature of that glory.

Other assertions of his divinity were laid out in a series of statements in which he assumed the prerogatives of God as laid out in the ancient Scriptures. As far back as Genesis 2:7 it was declared that God was the giver of life. There it was written that it was the **"breath of the Lord"**, that made man a living being. We find in John 5:21 Jesus' clear assertion of this power when he states, **"...even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it."** Later he states that **"eternal life"** comes from him, and positively affirms **"I am the resurrection and the life."** (John 10:28 & 11:25) He also held that he could exercise the godly prerogative to forgive sins. He told a paralyzed man, **"Son, your sins are forgiven."** And to answer the objections of the rabbis and establish that prerogative he continued, **"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..."** He said to the paralytic, **"I tell you, get up, take up your mat and go home."** Even in his assertions of divine authority he was not unaware of the difficulty of belief and provided evidence of his authority.

Other examples abound. In Matthew he spoke of his coming judgement of the nations referred to by the prophet Joel. John 5:27 justifies that claim stating that he was given that **"authority to judge because he was the Son of Man."** Elsewhere in John's account we find that Jesus said, **"I am the good shepherd"**, and **"I am the light of the world"**, (John 10:11 & 8:12), both referring back to Old Testament passages. The claims of some critics that Jesus was just a great moral teacher but did not see himself as the Son of God are sheer nonsense. As we have seen above, the Gospels were written during the lifetimes of many witnesses to the events described in them. There was no chance for mythmaking. Jesus clearly felt he was, and claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God. No 'great moral teacher' could make such a claim if it were not so. Such a lie would automatically disqualify him as a 'great moral teacher'. Jesus said, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6) He is saying, all access to the Father must come through him. The aggregate significance of all these claims taken together is weighty indeed. He was the forgiver of sins, the giver of life, the judge of all the nations, the light of the world, existent for all eternity. If he were wrong about any of these things he would be either hopelessly deluded or a deliberate liar. In either case not the mettle of some great moral teacher. But he was no liar. He followed those convictions to death.

Looking at the evidence it can be confidently said that Jesus truly believed himself to be the Messiah, the Son of God. But what of those who knew him the best? Peter, when asked by Jesus, **“Who do you say I am?”** replied, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** (Matthew 16:15-16) No more straightforward answer could be forthcoming. Thomas, seeing him for the first time after his Resurrection called him **“My Lord and my God.”** (John 20:28) These were no mere words. Both of these apostles paid with their lives for holding to those beliefs. John’s testimony can be found throughout the Gospel he authored. Paul converted from one who’s overriding aim was the persecution of members of the new Christian sect to one who would eventually give his life for the faith. The author of Hebrews called Jesus the **“...radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”** (Hebrews 1:3) The Apostles who had lived with him side by side during his lifetime all worshipped him as God, eventually giving their lives for the cause. In Matthew 14:22-32, we have the story of Jesus walking on the water and calming the storm. At the conclusion of that account we are told of Jesus’ companions, **“Then those who were in the boat worshipped him saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”**

But it was not just the apostles that bore witness to his divinity. Many of those who saw him preach or felt his healing touch also paid him homage. It would have been anathema for any Jew steeped in the Shema to have worshipped any but the One True God. Yet many saw Jesus as a member of that godhead and did give him worship. (Significant too, is the fact that unlike his disciples, Jesus accepted it.) It began very early on. The second chapter of Matthew records the successful search of the Magi to find the Christ and worship him. Later we are told a leper came and knelt before him to beg for healing. (Matthew 8:2) A newly healed blind man worshipped him also. (John 9:38) There are many other examples in the Gospel accounts. Perhaps the most compelling, however, is recorded by Matthew. (Matthew 28:16-17) Speaking of the eleven remaining disciples, those same who had lived the better part of three years with him, witnessing all he had done, Matthew writes: **“When they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted”** That last little note brings an extra ring of truth to the passage. Of course we can understand the human sense of uncertainty that must have crept in. This after all was the Jesus that they had taken their meals with, at whose side they had traveled the Judean countryside. Yet in the end we know that all these overcame their doubts and gave the most perfect form of worship, the work of their hands and the sacrifice of their lives.¹

The pattern is beginning to become clear. The ancient Scriptures pointed to the appearance of the Messiah somewhere during the first part of the 1st century. Jesus specifically fit the identity of that Messiah as laid out in the Old Testament. He pointedly claimed that office and was accepted as such by those who knew him best. They saw his very life as a testimony of his holiness. Peter described him as a **“lamb without blemish”**, and quoting Isaiah 53:9 wrote of him, **“He committed no sin, and no deceit was in his mouth.”** (1 Peter 1:19 & 2:22) John wrote of his purity in his first epistle. (1John 3:3) Jesus himself challenged his enemies on this very point. **“Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?”** (John 8:46) His question was met only with silence. Even at the trial that eventually condemned him only false and contradictory witnesses could be found. This sinless-ness, this perfected moral character is one of the keystones to the validity of His claims. This is not the pattern of saintly men throughout the ages. The Buddha, Mohammed, Gandhi, Isaiah, the great church saints and others were all overwhelmingly aware of their moral failings once compared with the perfection of the All-Mighty. Yet neither Jesus nor his enemies could ever find fault in his actions. A fitting apostrophe was put on this fact by a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council named Nicodemus. Speaking for more than just himself he told Jesus, **“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”** (John 3:2)^{2 3}

CRAZIER THAN YOU MAY REALIZE

Russian President Dimitry Medvedev said it. “Further aggression against Russian citizens will have a crushing response.” It sounded like something that should have come from the lips of Hitler some Nazi spokesman as they prepared to ‘protect’ the Germans living in the Sudetenland in the run-up to World War II. The Russians and the Georgians it seems have both signed a cease fire agreement that returns their forces to “pre-conflict positions”; - however with “additional security arrangements” that at least tacitly allows the Moscow to interpret things their own way and remain in Georgia.

At this writing, the Russian Army was still in control of the towns of Gori and Senako in Georgian territory and had moved SS-21 missile launchers in, capable of striking Tbilisi with nuclear warheads.⁴ Earlier, Russia's Foreign Minister had made it plain: Georgia could "forget about" recovering the provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazi.⁵ Moscow is doing more than just flexing its muscles. It is drawing a red line around its sphere of interest and daring the West to violate it. The Russians were clearly not surprised by the Georgian move to recover their breakaway provinces. Within hours the Russians had invaded that overmatched democratic nation with overwhelming force. You just don't have that kind of an army hanging around the border, ready to roll, - unless you're looking to use it...soon! Since then they've managed to bomb pipelines and destroy bridges and other infrastructure to 'punish' the Georgians for their impudence. Their moves have frightened the other emerging democracies in the region, driving them into the arms of the West.

The first bit of geopolitical fallout occurred when on the heels of the Russian military action, Poland decided to increase military ties with the US and sign up for an American missile interceptor base. Almost immediately a Russian General threatened nuclear attack against the Poles saying that the Polish-American deal "cannot go unpunished".⁶ Warsaw perceives a very real threat. Polish President Tusk, commenting on the arrangements said: "... it is no good when assistance comes to dead people. Poland wants to be in alliances where assistance comes in the very first hours of - knock on wood - any possible conflict".⁷ Echoing the fatalism of Julius Caesar, the Prime Minister added, "We have crossed the Rubicon".⁸ And Poland is not the only country that's afraid of the Russians. First, Ukraine warned Moscow that it was ready to cancel Russia's lease on their naval base in Sebastopol if ships from that base took part in the Georgian hostilities. Following that they announced they were turning over access to its missile warning systems to both the US and Europe.⁹ Ukraine has chosen sides, and it's likely to get the Russian bear mad. Former Ukrainian President Eduard Shevardnadze fears his country may be the bear's next victim. "We still don't know who's next. Ukraine most likely."^{10 11} Moscow sees this as a Western attempt to surround Russia with NATO members and client states. *All of this is flirting with the unthinkable - a nuclear conflict with Russia.*

For now, the Russians do not seem in a mood to ease tensions by backing off. First, they announced that they would likely be rearming their Baltic Fleet with nuclear warheads, threatening the Poles who share access to that same waterway.¹² At the same time they let slip that they were considering placing nukes in the Mediterranean as well as in Syria.¹³ Finally, indicating just how far they may be willing to push this game, Hugo Chavez, the anti-American leader of Venezuela let it be known that the Russians had expressed interest in sending a fleet to the Caribbean, and that they would be welcomed there.¹⁴ That, of course, would be a direct threat and provocation of the US. Russia's new found aggressiveness is directly related to America's commitment in the Middle East. The troop is succeeding in Iraq, meaning that American forces can soon come out to assume other roles. Still, as long as US forces are involved there, Russia has a better opportunity to re-draw the strategic map in the region. The US had been steadily making allies of former Soviet client states such as Poland and Ukraine and Georgia. Moscow is desperate that that not happen. This is opportunity, and they will not let it pass. To that end, until they get what they want in the region, Russia will continue playing Iran against America. Even though Moscow itself fears Iranian nukes; -It fears Western encirclement even more.¹⁵

The fact that Russia is willing to play this game at all tells me that we are dealing with something darker and more sinister than we can imagine. Despite intentions, we are not talking about just a localized conflict. Any miscalculation could result in a war that could threaten the very survival of mankind. Rational man could not easily raise the stakes on so risky a game. But we do not deal here with mankind alone. There is a spirit at work behind the material forces that we can see. We can neither comprehend nor contend with it, without the help of God Himself. Ephesians 6:12 puts it thus: **"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."**

PROBLEMS IN PAKISTAN

On August 18, 2008, President Pervez Musharraf resigned office as the President of Pakistan. He had been a long time friend of the US in the War on Terror, but increasingly less effective since the assassination of one-time-rival Benazir Bhutto in December of 2007 and the ensuing election of the radical Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister. Seeing the writing on the wall, the US finally signaled it was time for him to go, - and go he did. His personal fate remains somewhat in the air, having resigned in the wake of looming impeachment charges. With radical Islamic power growing in this nuclear power of over 160 million souls, one concern was the immediate disposition of its' atomic arsenal of as many as 100 warheads. For the time being these seem safe, but other problems loom on the horizon. Right now it is difficult to know just who is in charge in the country. There is the forming coalition government, the military, the radicals and the not quite controllable intelligence services, the ISI, - that the CIA believes was involved in supporting terror in India as well as specifically the July bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.^{16 17 18}

All of this plays a part in the American war effort in Afghanistan. Tribal militants straddling the two countries use the mountainous border region as a base of operations against Afghanistan's new government and the US and allied forces in country, escaping back across the border to relative safety. Though a troop surge was the ticket in Iraq, its effectiveness in Afghanistan is limited because the problem *IS* Pakistan.¹⁹ Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters have been operating from there with impunity, having the tacit or active support of the local tribal leaders. That Taliban insurgency, - in the words of the NY Times, - "threatens to destabilize Pakistan itself". Some elements of American intelligence believe that Pakistan's ISI may even be aiding operations against Afghanistan.²⁰ All of this together, in turn brings the specter of fully modern nation, replete with a sophisticated nuclear arsenal, - operating under the auspices of a radical Islamist regime. Scary indeed! However in recent the Pakistan's armed forces have been operating with energy against the rebel elements in the tribal controlled areas. A major offensive launched this last week saw massive firepower employed by government forces against al-Qaeda strongholds. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled the area of the fighting.²¹ Mixed signals indeed! However, how any of this will play out is still anybody's guess. Yet this remains a key battleground in the terror war. The loss of Pakistan to radical control would seriously damage the American presence in the region and perhaps make the Afghan War one that we cannot win.

THE TEMPLE & THE MOSQUE

It's just a pamphlet, - but an interesting one at that. The publication entitled Tisha B'Av, was put out by a Jewish religious organization dedicated to the building of a Third Temple on the site where the al-Aqsa Mosque now stands atop the Temple Mount, in Jerusalem. What a photo in the pamphlet did was 'clean up' the image of the Temple Mount by eliminating the Mosque located at the Dome of the Rock and any other Islamic imagery from the picture. A Jewish leader of the Maayanei Heyeshua movement responsible explained; - "Jews throughout the world hope for a day in which the al-Aqsa Mosque will actually be obliterated from the Temple Mount and not just by means of Photoshop software". Of course, the Muslim Arabs are all in a tizzy over this development.²² But the really interesting part is not in the desire of Jews to build the Temple or even the reaction to those desires. It's in the fact that it seems all part of a plan long in place by the forces that would bring the Antichrist to power.

It has long been an acknowledged aim of the Free Masonic movement to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem for the installation of their New Age Christ, - a counterfeit of the Returning Jesus. Here are some quotes from Peter Lemesurier's *Armageddon Script*, which in the early 80's revealed much of the plan to pull this off. "If the Messiah is to appear, then he must be produced...[and this] is just as much a function of humanity as of Divinity". Then describing this "Messiah's" processional to assume his office, Lemesurier tells us "...he must be duly enthroned and anointed with oil (in token of Psalm 45:6-7) amid the rubble of the dome of the Rock".²³ For what it's worth!

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- ¹ Norman Geisler & Peter Bocchino, *Unshakeable Foundations*, Bethany House, Minneapolis, 2001, pg 287-288
 - ² Paul E Little, *Know Why You Believe*, Chariot Victor, 1999, pg 36
 - ³ Norman Geisler & Peter Bocchino, *Unshakeable Foundations*, Bethany House, Minneapolis, 2001, pg 303-304
 - ⁴ Medvedev, DEBKAFfile, August, 18, 2008
 - ⁵ Russia; Georgia Can 'Forget' Regaining Provinces, *Newmax*, August 14, 2008
 - ⁶ Infuriated Moscow issues threat..., *MSNBC*, August 15, 2008
 - ⁷ Hal Lindsey, Russia's message to the West, *World Net Daily*, August 15, 2008
 - ⁸ US, Poland sign missile shield deal, *Reuters*, August 14, 2008
 - ⁹ Damien McElroy, Ukraine offers satellite defence co-operation with Europe and US, *UK Telegraph*, August 18, 2008
 - ¹⁰ Russia to Go After Ukraine Next, *Bloomberg*, August 13, 2008
 - ¹¹ Henry Meyer, Russia May Focus on Pro-U.S. Ukraine After Georgia, *Bloomberg*, August 13, 2008
 - ¹² Russia may arm Baltic fleet with nukes, *Jerusalem Post*, August 17, 2008
 - ¹³ Russia considers nuclear missiles for Syria, *Mediterranean, Baltic, DEBKAFfile*, August 17, 2008
 - ¹⁴ Daniel Cancel, Russia Looking to Send a Navy Fleet to Caribbean, Chavez Says, *Bloomberg*, August 17, 2008
 - ¹⁵ George Friedman, *The Real World Order*, *Stratfor Intelligence*, August 18, 2008
 - ¹⁶ Jane Perlez, In Musharraf's Wake..., *New York Times*, August 19, 2008
 - ¹⁷ Jayshree Bajoria, Challenges After Musharraf, *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 18, 2008
 - ¹⁸ Frederik Balfour, With Musharraf gone, what's next for Pakistan?, *Business Week*, August 18, 2008
 - ¹⁹ Jayshree Bajoria, Challenges After Musharraf, *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 18, 2008
 - ²⁰ Jane Perlez, In Musharraf's Wake..., *New York Times*, August 19, 2008
 - ²¹ 300,000 flee as jihadis attacked, *The Australian*, August 18, 2008
 - ²² Kobi Nahshoni, Dome of the Rock 'erased' from Temple Mount, *YNet News*, August 15, 2008
 - ²³ Peter Lemesurier, *The Armageddon Script*, 1981, pg 233-235