

Jesus' Divinity & the Message in Acts
(An appendix to my self-study course on Acts)
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God is a trinity: Father, Word, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Word that "became flesh" was divine as no other man is. But Jesus' pre-existence and divinity were not part of the evangelistic message recorded in the Book of Acts. That message was that Jesus is the Messiah, the One Anointed to rule. Messiah and Christ are two English versions of the same royal title with that meaning. Messiah represents the Aramaic form (Messias) of that title. Christ represents its Greek form (Cristos).

Jesus is divine. The Bible clearly affirms His divinity. He has the same nature as God His Father. He is the pre-existent Creator who came to earth. Here are some of the Bible's affirmations about Him:

- In Old Testament prophecies it attributes to Him divine names and descriptions (Isa. 7:14, "Immanuel"; Isa. 9:6, "Mighty God"; Micah 5:2, "His goings forth are from... the days of eternity").
- It records Jesus' claims about His unique relationship to His Father (Luke 10:22; John 5:17-18). He is the "only Son" (John 3:16).
- It affirms that all things were made by Him and for Him (John 1, Col. 1, Heb. 1).
- It calls Him both the "Word" and "God" (John 1:1; 20:28).
- It says that even before He "emptied Himself" in the Incarnation, "He existed in the form of God" (Phil. 2:6-7).
- It claims that "in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2:9).
- In the baptismal formula (in Matt. 28:19), it puts His name on the same level as those of the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- It accords Him, along with "Him who sits on the throne," the worship of "every created thing" (Rev. 5:13).

Jesus' divinity is certain. It is also essential. A merely human Jesus could never bring full salvation. But in spite of all this evidence and importance, *His divinity was not a theme* in the Book of Acts. According to that God-given record, it was apparently not taught to the unconverted (so, must have been saved for the converted). Here I will present evidence given in more detail in [Evangelistic Sermons in Acts](#).

Jesus is the Messiah—the One anointed to rule the world (see above). That is the main theme in most of the sermons in Acts, as well as in the first three Gospels. The words Acts reports are just as important as the works. Messiah began building His church both through deeds people saw and messages they heard. It provides *nearly eighty summaries—mostly short but some long—of gospel sermons*. Sermons for pagans were "pre-evangelism," about the Creator who has revealed Himself (Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31).¹ But sermons for those who knew the Scriptures, mostly Jews at first, preached the gospel that Jesus is the Messiah. They (a) gave the evidence for that fact, and (b) announced or implied what it will involve. (a) The evidence was mainly Jesus' mir-

¹ In four sermons (7:2-53; 22:1-22; 24:10-21; 26:1-29), the speaker "defended" himself and the same gospel preached in other sermons.

acles and His resurrection. (b) The implications include His authority (He is Lord) and His coming back to earth to set up His eternal kingdom and to rule. Using the powers He has demonstrated, He will oversee the “restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets” (Acts 3:21; cf. Matt. 19:28). That will include resurrecting His followers who died, so they can rule with Him.

Acts often gives short summaries of that apostolic message. The most common is “Jesus is the Messiah” (see 5:42; 9:22; 17:3; 18:5, 28, et al.). Take as example 5:42, climax to an episode in which the apostles

- were arrested by Jewish officials and put in jail (5:18)
- were released by an angel to go “tell the people the full message of this new life” (5:19-20)
- were arrested again, brought before the Sanhedrin (supreme Jewish council), and were warned, but even preached the gospel to them (5:25-32)
- were spared from being lynched but were flogged (5:33-40a)
- were released “rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (5:40b-41)
- kept on preaching as follows:

*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house,
they never stopped teaching and proclaiming
the good news that Jesus is the Christ [Messiah].
(Acts 5:42; NIV)*

The great sermons recorded in Acts 2 and Acts 10 both have that theme. By means of the first sermon the church was inaugurated for Jews; by the second, for Gentiles. The former cited more Scripture since its audience knew more Scripture, but both sermons basically meant the same. They did not include Jesus’ divinity or pre-existence, or the reasons for His death—but presented Him as the promised King. As main evidence they cited His miracles, His shameful death (as predicted), and His resurrection. They announced that as Messiah He has authority (is Lord, Judge). This clearly implied, as stated before, that He will return to earth to rule. Those who believed this message responded by being baptized in Jesus’ name. They received forgiveness for their sins and the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

Study those two great sermons with the help of my chart, reading also the NASB text that follows.

An Explanation of Apostolic Procedure. Sermons to pagans must first establish the truth of God and creation. But after that, why does the saving message in Acts focus on Jesus’ kingship rather than His divinity? Because His kingship is the proper foundation of Christian faith. It correctly relates the hearer to God’s Word and its promises. Messiah is the One victorious over death and given all authority to fulfill those Scriptures. If we substitute other truth for that foundation—even Jesus’ divinity—we complicate our connection to God’s Word. Probably for that reason Jesus’ divinity was/is not part of the original message. However, it is an overwhelming conclusion that every believer will quickly learn.

Inaugural Sermons in Acts 2 & Acts 10 (Peter preached the gospel to God-fearing Jews & Gentiles.)		
Context & Message	Acts 2 (Jewish Pentecost)	Acts 10 (Gentile "Pentecost")
The occasion	2:14-21, 33 Peter explained to the Jewish crowd that the Holy Spirit from God/Jesus made them speak in tongues.	10:1-24 The Lord led Cornelius to send for Peter and led Peter to go preach to Gentiles, who had gathered to listen.
God's grace was spreading.	2:39 for them and "all who are far off"	10:35 "in every nation"
The main theme: Jesus is the Messiah (the One anointed to rule):		
a. His miracles attested His relationship to God	2:22 "miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him"	10:38 "God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit."
b. The Jews crucified Him.	2:23 as God planned	10:39b
c. God raised Him from the dead, as witnesses saw.	2:24-32 (includes e and f below)	10:40-41
d. God exalted Him to His right hand.	2:33-35 as anticipated in Psalm 110	implied by His being raised and appointed future Judge (c and g)
e. He will (return to) rule from David's throne.	2:30-32a as foreseen by David, implied in Psalm 16	implied by "Judge of the living and the dead" (g)
f. God chose people to bear witness to these things.	2:32b	10:39a, 41, 42a
g. Jesus has become Lord (Master) and Messiah.	2:36 "God has made Him both Lord and Messiah."	10:42 "appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead"
h. God offers forgiveness through faith in Jesus.	2:38	10:43
Many hearers repented & were baptised.	2:37-41 "added about 3000"	10:47-48
Those converted were given the Holy Spirit.	2:38b	10:44-46 As at Pentecost, the evidence was tongues-speaking.

Acts 2:14-41 NASB

¹⁴ But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. ¹⁵ For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; ¹⁶ but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says,
‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
And your young men shall see visions,
And your old men shall dream dreams;

¹⁸ Even on My bondslaves, both men and women,
I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit
And they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ ‘And I will grant wonders in the sky above
And signs on the earth below,
Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.

²⁰ ‘The sun will be turned into darkness
And the moon into blood,
Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.

²¹ ‘And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

²² “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— ²³ this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. ²⁴ But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. ²⁵ For David says of Him,

‘I saw the Lord always in my presence;
For He is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken.

²⁶ ‘Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted;
Moreover my flesh also will live in hope;

²⁷ Because You will not abandon my soul to Hades,
Nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

²⁸ ‘You have made known to me the ways of life;
You will make me full of gladness with Your presence.’

²⁹ “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat *one* of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. ³² This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ³³ Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. ³⁴ For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:

'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,
³⁵ Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'"

³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

³⁷ Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" ⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Acts 10:24, 34-48, NASB

²⁴ On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

³⁴ Opening his mouth, Peter said:

"I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. ³⁶ The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)—³⁷ you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. ³⁸ *You know of* Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. ³⁹ We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. ⁴⁰ God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. ⁴² And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. ⁴⁵ All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷ "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?" ⁴⁸ And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.