

How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus' Divine Nature---A Response to Bart D. Ehrman

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In his recent book *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher From Galilee* historian Bart Ehrman explores a claim that resides at the heart of the Christian faith- that Jesus of Nazareth was, and is, God. According to Ehrman, though, this is not what the earliest disciples believed, nor what Jesus claimed about himself.

The first response book to this latest challenge to Christianity from Ehrman, *How God Became Jesus* features the work of five internationally recognized biblical scholars. While subjecting his claims to critical scrutiny, they offer a better, historically informed account of why the Galilean preacher from Nazareth came to be hailed as "the Lord Jesus Christ." Namely, they contend, the exalted place of Jesus in belief and worship is clearly evident in the earliest Christian sources, shortly following his death, and was not simply the invention of the church centuries later.

Michael F. Bird

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Craig A. Evans is the John Bisagno Distinguished Professor of Christian Origins at Houston Baptist University, and author of several books, including *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (IVP Books, 2006).

Simon Gathercole is Senior Lecturer in New Testament at the University of Cambridge in Cambridge, UK, and author of several books, including *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Eerdmans, 2006).

Charles E. Hill (PhD, Cambridge) is John R. Richardson Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando and author of several books, including *Who Chose the Gospels?: Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy* (Oxford, 2010).

In 2014, well-known author of biblical exegesis, Bart D. Ehrman published *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*. In it, he posits that the concept of Jesus as God evolved over time. Five biblical scholars gather here to refute that theory. Although it's preferable to have read Ehrman's book before tackling this one, the authors do a relatively even-handed job of stating Ehrman's case before attempting to demolish it. The topics they discuss include divinization in the ancient world, the Christological claims of the synoptic Gospels, and burial practices at the time of Jesus' death (even those sympathetic to Ehrman's case would probably agree that his discussion of the empty tomb contains too much conjecture.) This book, while putting forth arguments well worth examining, is weakened by the fact it contains five voices, and dry, scholarly ones at that. Ehrman has mastered the art of writing in a style suitable for general audiences, making his book more accessible. Still, the two deserve consideration together, and the publisher of this volume has cleverly used a cover image in the same style and color as Ehrman's book, which may help lead interested readers in the right direction. --
Ilene Cooper

Other Books

The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith. The story of Jesus of Nazareth, as recounted in the New Testament, has always been understood by the church to be historically true. It is an account of the life, death, and resurrection of a real person, whose links with history are firmly signalled in the creeds of the early church, which affirm that Jesus 'suffered under Pontius Pilate'. Contemporary historical scholarship has, however, called into question the reliability of the church's version of this story, and thereby raised the question as to whether ordinary people can know its historical truth. This book argues that the historicity of the story still matters, and that its religious significance cannot be captured by the category of 'non-historical myth'. The commonly drawn distinction between the Christ of faith and Jesus of history cannot be maintained. The Christ who is the object of faith must be seen as historical; the Jesus who is reconstructed by historical scholarship is always shaped by commitments of faith. A reconsideration of the Enlightenment epistemologies that underlie much historical scholarship shows that historical knowledge of this story is still possible. Such knowledge can be inferential, based on historical evidence. A careful look at contemporary New Testament studies, and the philosophical and literary assumptions upon which it rests, shows that this scholarship should not undermine the confidence of lay people who believe that they can know that the church's story about Jesus is true.

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