

# Where did Jesus say I am God, worship me?



**Big picture:** The fact that Jesus is God is one of the clearest truths of the New Testament with many verses attesting to the fact that Jesus is not only 100% human but also 100% divine. One question Muslims like to ask Christians, however, is “where did Jesus say I am God, worship me?” Responding is not as easy as you may think, so how do we answer this question?

## 1. A carefully worded question designed to trip up Christians

At first glance this should not be a hard question to answer, with verses like [John 1:1](#) clearly declaring Jesus to be God. However, on deeper inspection, answering it is not straightforward. The problem is that while the New Testament (and Old) in many places affirms who Jesus is, and presents him as one we should worship, Jesus doesn't actually use those specific words anywhere in the Gospels. It is therefore a question that needs careful navigation as we seek to answer it.



The question is a favourite of Muslim dawah teams and the fact that the exact phrase is not used by Jesus is a key argument for Muslims against the deity of Christ<sup>1</sup>. The question was made popular by popular Muslim evangelists like Zakir Naik<sup>2</sup> and Ahmet Deedat<sup>3</sup> and has since permeated the Muslim world<sup>4</sup>.

Ultimately, it is key to understand that if a Muslim friend asks this question, using those exact words, you can be 99% sure that they are asking the question to confuse you, trip you up and win the argument rather than to truly understand how as Christians we understand who Christ is. In dialogue, having the Christian admit that Jesus doesn't say that he is God and that we should worship him, puts the Muslim on the front foot.

## 2. The question assumes the false premise that identity is reliant on revealing identity

At the same time, it is important to understand the false premise of the argument. Just because someone doesn't use specific words, or words we might expect them to use in order to disclose their identity, that doesn't actually change the fact of who they are. If, for example, the Queen arrived at an event, the fact that she really is the Queen doesn't rely on her disclosing her identity using a specific set of words. If law enforcement arrives at a property to make inquiries, whether or not they show an ID card, proving their identity doesn't change who they are. In the same way, the assumption that Jesus is required to use a specific set of words to confirm who he is, is again a false assumption, especially if our expectation of how Jesus might reveal his identity might not be the way he might choose to do it. The context in which someone introduces themselves can change. To use the Queen again as an example: if the Queen was announcing her identity in her Christmas speech, she might say, “I am the Queen”. However, if making a phone call to a member of her family, she probably wouldn't use her title, but rather her name, or just mummy. When Jesus announces his identity in the Gospels, it is important to understand the religious and political context in which he is found.

## 3. Similar carefully worded questions show the weakness of the approach

In these contexts, as those asking the question are not looking to a detailed answer, quickfire questions to turn the tables are often the best approach. You can ask your friend, “I'd be happy to show you where Jesus said, ‘I am God, worship me’, if you can show me where he said in the Bible ‘I'm only a prophet, don't worship me’ in those exact words<sup>5</sup>”. This question exposes the false assumption that Jesus' identity is reliant on a certain set of words. Similarly, a question like “show me from the Bible or Quran, where did Jesus say, ‘I am the virgin-born son of Mary?’” can be helpful. Muslims believe that Jesus was indeed born of a virgin<sup>6</sup>, however, those exact words don't appear on the lips

of Jesus in the Bible or the Quran.

Another good example from the Quran is the fact that Jesus is said to be the Messiah multiple times<sup>7</sup>. Mary states the fact, Allah states the fact, the Jews state the fact, yet Jesus himself nowhere claims himself to be the Messiah in Quran. If Muslims therefore claim that Jesus nowhere saying, "I am God, worship me" in the Bible disqualifies him from being God, their understanding of their own scriptures is deeply flawed.

#### **4. The claim to be God using the title "God" may have been misunderstood by the Jews**

When we do have an opportunity to address whether Jesus claims to be God, we need to understand a little bit about the religious context in which Jesus is found, and specifically how God has disclosed his own identity in the Old Testament. This will help us analyse Jesus' words and determine if he really did claim to be God.

Our English translations of the Bible use the word "God" many times<sup>8</sup> and, in the Old Testament the Hebrew word translated as God is Elohim<sup>9</sup>. The vast majority of times elohim is a title used of the true and living God<sup>10</sup>. However, it is not the only way the word is used.

One way elohim is used is to describe other gods who are not the true and living God. In Exodus 12:12, for example, in anticipation of the first Passover, God is about to send a final plague on Egypt. He declares that he will "strike down every firstborn of both people and animals"<sup>11</sup> with the purpose of bringing "judgment on all the gods of Egypt". The word for gods here is again 'elohim'.

After they had been brought out of Egypt Moses is called to spend time with God on the mountain where he is to receive the 10 commandments and the Law<sup>12</sup>. While gone, God's people grow impatient and with Aaron make a golden calf saying, "Come, make us gods who will go before us." Again, the word for 'gods' here is again elohim, the same word used for God himself. Interestingly, later in the chapter, Moses also refers to the golden calf itself as elohim<sup>13</sup>.

Another use of the word elohim is in Psalms 82. The context of the Psalm is that the rulers of God's people, charged with upholding God's law and values, have failed to do so, specifically failing to "defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed" and "rescue the weak and the needy; deliver[ing] them from the hand of the wicked" (Psalms 82:3-4). In this context the rulers are addressed as "gods" (literally 'elohim' – see Psalms 82:1). The use of elohim here does not attribute a divine nature to the leaders of God's people but rather the fact that on God's behalf, they are set apart as vicegerents<sup>14</sup> to rule on God's behalf with God's authority with God's word. Jesus confirms this in John 10:34-35 confirming that the 'gods' of Psalms 82 are those "to whom the word of God came"<sup>15</sup>.

For the Jewish people, therefore, someone claiming to be God using the word Elohim or the title 'God' arguably could hold various meanings. It could be a claim to be a rival god to the true and living God, or just someone with the responsibility and authority to teach God's word, or indeed the true and living God himself.

#### **5. The claim to be God would have been seen as a political statement against Rome**

Another consideration in Jesus claiming to be God is the political context in which Jesus lived. With the Jewish people living in Roman occupation, claiming to be God, would be seen as a direct political statement against the Roman Authorities. Caesar Augustus reigned from 27 BC to AD 14 when Jesus would have been a teenager. His uncle Julius Caesar was instrumental in his coming to power after he named Augustus as his adopted son and heir in his will. After Julius' death, Julius Caesar was later declared to be a 'deity' by the senate in Rome and became known as 'Divus Julius', 'divus' denoting a human who had attained the status of divinity<sup>16</sup>. This led to Augustus adopting the title "Divi Filius" which means literally, 'son of god' and establishing the Roman imperial cult<sup>17</sup>. The influence of the cult would become a civil religion and a test of loyalty for those living in the Roman Empire<sup>18</sup>. Any claims to deity, even in Jesus' day, would have huge political implications. The Jewish leaders looking for an opportunity to have Jesus executed would have seized on this opportunity to have him effectively commit treason against Rome<sup>19</sup> and so Jesus,

wanting his death timed specifically with the Passover, chose a way of expressing his divinity in a way that was clear to the Jewish leaders, yet didn't provide them unnecessary leverage for them to have him killed.

## 6. Jesus reveals his identity using God's name

In the Old Testament, there are ways that God introduces himself in a way that leaves no ambiguity. In the Exodus account, God appears to Moses in the burning bush and calls him to go back to Egypt to deliver his people from slavery. When Moses asks who he should say sent him, God could have said, "Tell them God sent you." However, Moses wanting no room left for doubt that the people would know exactly who had sent him, asks God's name:

Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" Then what shall I tell them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you."' ([Exodus 3:13-13](#))

The Hebrew word for "I AM" is the first-person form of the verb "to be". "THE LORD" (in Hebrew: Yahweh or YHWH) is used in subsequent verses as God's proper name is the third-person form of "to be", lit. "HE IS"<sup>20</sup>. Yahweh carries the idea that God is self-sufficient in his being and existence and [Exodus 3:15](#) states that it is "my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation"<sup>21</sup>. It is used in Scripture to refer to God many more times than Eloh<sup>22</sup> and is only ever used of God.

It is interesting then that Jesus, when confronted by the Jewish leaders in [John 8:58](#) and forced to make a declaration of his identity, could have said, "I am God". But arguably not wanting any claim to be God left ambiguous, he chose to reveal his identity in a way that left no doubt as to who he was claiming to be, and so stated, "before Abraham was, I AM" ([John 8:58](#)). We know that religious leaders understood that Jesus was making a direct reference to the "I AM" of Exodus by their immediate response to attempt to stone Jesus to death for blasphemy.

Jesus' self-reference to the "I AM" of [Exodus 3](#) can also be seen in the other "I AM" statements of John's Gospel<sup>23</sup>, and in the synoptic Gospels too<sup>24</sup>.

## 7. Worship of Jesus is often spontaneous and documented positively in the Gospels and never rebutted by Jesus

In terms of worship, in the Gospels when someone understands who Jesus is, the response is often spontaneous worship. We see this in Matthew's Gospel with its strong theme of worship. Jesus is worshiped by the Magi who visit him at his birth ([Matthew 2:11](#)), the disciples in the boat after watching Jesus walk on the water respond in worship ([Matthew 14:33](#)) and Jesus is worshipped in [Matthew 28:17](#) as he appears to his disciples after his resurrection ([Matthew 28:17](#)). In John's Gospel too, Jesus is worshipped by the blind man ([John 9:38](#)) and by Thomas meeting the risen Christ ([John 20:28](#)). In none of these examples did Jesus rebuff their worshipful response as we see elsewhere in Scripture when others are worshipped mistakenly<sup>25</sup>.

We see therefore that Jesus did claim to be God, but just not in the way our Muslims expect. He did it in the clearest way possible, in a way his own people would understand, navigating the complicated political context, by using God's name. Those who recognise him as he is will always respond rightly in worship.

## References

1. <sup>1</sup> E.g. <https://justdawah.org/resources/biblical-studies/the-real-jesus>
2. <sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coHussEd8Fo>
3. <sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeQ9Ks3qRgs> - this video is actually a Christian response to the question by David wood which contains some great responses which we will list here.
4. <sup>4</sup> This is probably a question that will come up without fail at least once when reaching out to Muslims on any given day.
5. <sup>5</sup> From <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeQ9Ks3qRgs>

6. 6 Quran 19.17-21
7. 7 For example: Quran 3.45, Quran 4.157, Quran 4.171-5:172, Quran 5.17, Quran 5.72, Quran 5.75, Quran 9.30-31.
8. 8 3995 times in total, 2678 times in the Old Testament: [https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?-quicksearch=god&version=NIVUK](https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?quicksearch=god&version=NIVUK)
9. 9 Elohim, Eloah (the single form) or El - see <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/430.htm>
10. 10 Genesis 1:1 is a key example.
11. 11 Exodus 12:12
12. 12 Exodus 19:3
13. 13 <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/exodus/32-31.htm>
14. 14 <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/vicegerent>
15. 15 Other uses of Elohim in this way are Exodus 21:6, Exodus 22:8 and Exodus 22:28.
16. 16 <https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-2132>
17. 17 [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/classics/intranets/students/modules/aug/syllabus/imp\\_cult.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/classics/intranets/students/modules/aug/syllabus/imp_cult.pdf)
18. 18 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-11rLwSUHM>
19. 19 This would eventually be a key factor in Jesus' arrest and trial leading to his crucifixion.
20. 20 See <http://www.ubs-translations.org/tbt/1988/04/TBT198804.html?seq=14> and <http://www.ubs-translations.org/tbt/1988/04/TBT198804.html?seq=15>
21. 21 The Quran or Hadith literature makes no reference to God's name being Yahweh.
22. 22 6824 according to <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3068.htm> vs just under 4000 for Elohim.
23. 23 "I AM the bread of life" John 6:35, "I am the light of the world" John 8:12, "I am the gate" John 10:7, "I am the good shepherd" John 10:11, "I am the resurrection and the life" John 11:25, "I am the way and the truth and the life" John 14:6, "I am the true vine" John 15:1.
24. 24 E.g. Matthew 14:27 in the context of walking on the water - this chapter is full of Exodus references - or Mark 14:62 where Jesus not only uses the I AM name for himself, but applies the Daniel 7 divine figure to himself.
25. 25 E.g. The angel in Revelation 22:8-9 or Paul and his companions in Acts 14:11-15.