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**NYT-bestselling Author Bart Ehrman Tackles Christianity's Biggest Question:
*HOW JESUS BECAME GOD***

Master explainer of Christian history Bart Ehrman tackles the question of how a Jewish preacher from a rural backwater, executed for crimes against the state, came to be viewed as God. His latest book, *HOW JESUS BECAME GOD* (HarperOne, Hardcover: March 2014) is the sweeping story of a belief that took root in ancient times and changed the course of history.

The claim at the heart of the Christian faith is that Jesus is God. But this is not what the original disciples believed during Jesus's lifetime, and it's not what Jesus claimed about himself. According to Ehrman, it was only when some followers had visions of Jesus alive after his death that anyone came to think of him as God.

Belief in the resurrection changed everything. Otherwise, early Christians "would not have thought that Jesus was different from any other unfortunate prophet who ended up on the wrong side of the law and was executed for his troubles," Ehrman writes. The disciples' belief was directed away from his apocalyptic message to faith in Jesus himself, creating a new religion.

A historian of early Christianity at the University of North Carolina and author of bestsellers such as *Misquoting Jesus* and *God's Problem*, Ehrman has been researching and writing this book, arguably the most important of his career, for eight years. Some of his provocative conclusions include:

- Jesus was not originally considered to be God at all. He eventually became divine for his followers in some sense, before he came to be thought of as equal with God.
- Jesus did not understand himself as God, nor did he describe himself as God.
- An apocalyptic prophet, Jesus proclaimed the end of the current evil age. "He believed and taught that he was the future king of the coming kingdom of God, the Messiah of God yet to be revealed," Ehrman says. "It was the message that got him crucified."
- Jesus probably did not have a decent burial, and therefore the empty tomb stories are unlikely. The Romans usually left the bodies of executed criminals to the elements and scavenging animals, or threw them into a common grave.

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In this far-reaching work, Ehrman explores ancient Greek, Roman and Jewish beliefs about divine humans. He presents the historical view of what we can and cannot know about the resurrection, and compares competing Christologies: Christ as exalted to heaven versus Christ as pre-existent God who came to Earth. He reviews post-New Testament era beliefs and paradoxes inherent in the orthodox Christian belief enshrined in the Nicene Creed: e.g., How can Christ be God and God the Father be God if there is only one God?

“As an agnostic, I now think of Jesus as a true religious genius with brilliant insights. But he was also very much a man of his time and his time was an age of full-throated apocalyptic fervor,” Ehrman says. “Christ may not be the historical Jesus. But he is the Christ of orthodox Christian doctrine, the object of faith and veneration over the centuries, and he is still the God revered and worshiped by Christians throughout our world today.”

BART EHRMAN is one of the most renowned and controversial Bible scholars in the world today. A master explainer of Christian history, texts, and traditions, his work continues to drive debate among supporters and detractors alike. Ehrman is the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He lives in Durham, NC.

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