

## Comparison of the Biblical Unitarian and Arian Doctrines

### **Introduction**

The *vast majority* of Christian churches teach that Jesus, himself, is actually Almighty God – by virtue of the fact that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. Basically, the Trinity teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are **all equally** God; but there is still only one God – not three gods.

However, a small minority of Christian churches have “Unitarian” beliefs. In essence, the Unitarian belief holds that **only** our Heavenly Father is Almighty God. That belief also holds that Jesus is the son of God – but **not** God, Himself.

There are several different doctrines which have Unitarian beliefs. The two most well-known Unitarian doctrines are usually referred to as the “Biblical Unitarian” doctrine, and the “Arian” doctrine. Both of those doctrines agree that only our Heavenly Father is Almighty God – but they differ on some **other** important points.

Of course, it is always necessary to **verify** any theological doctrine, with the actual text of Scripture. In other words, it is necessary to determine if a doctrine’s beliefs match what is actually written in the Bible.

So, this article first provides an overall description of those two doctrines. Then, the article compares the two doctrines’ beliefs against Scripture; to try to determine which of the doctrines is closer to the truth. Finally, the article goes into detail about two rather “difficult” theological questions to resolve.

### **Description of the Two Doctrines**

The following is an *extremely* brief overview, of some of the main beliefs of the Biblical Unitarian and Arian doctrines. These items should help to clarify some of the *differences* between those two doctrines.

#### Overview of the Biblical Unitarian doctrine:

- Jesus was **always** part of God’s plan. In other words, God always had Jesus “in mind” – even before He created the universe.
- However, Jesus did not **personally** exist, until God caused Mary to conceive.

- In other words, Jesus' personal existence did **not** begin, until his mother conceived him – just like every other person's existence does **not** begin, until our mothers conceive us.

- When God resurrected Jesus, He gave Jesus a “**spiritual**” body - as opposed to a “**natural**” (or “mortal”) body. As a result, Jesus is now a man who has a **spiritual body**. Spiritual bodies are immortal – so Jesus will *never* die again.

- In a similar way, when Jesus returns to the earth, he will resurrect his followers – and give them spiritual bodies. So, in the next age, Christians will become **people** who have **spiritual bodies** – just like Jesus is a **man** who has a **spiritual body** now.

- As a result, Jesus is the “firstfruits from the dead”, and the “beginning of the new creation” – because he is the first person who was resurrected with a **spiritual body**.

#### Overview of the Arian doctrine:

- Jesus is the very **first** being that God created. In other words, God created Jesus, before He created anything else – i.e., even before the *universe* existed.

- As a result, Jesus **originally** existed as a spirit being – i.e., as a being in heaven – rather than as a physical being on earth.

- After God created Jesus, then Jesus – himself – actually **created the universe**. In other words, God did not actually create the universe – instead, **Jesus** actually created it, under God's direction. In essence, Jesus was God's “agent” in creating the universe.

- The way that God caused Jesus to be born on the earth is that He “transformed” Jesus into a **human embryo** – and then He “implanted” Jesus into Mary's womb.

- So, with this doctrine, Mary did not actually “conceive”, per se – because by definition, conception refers to a woman's **egg** being **fertilized**. In other words, in this doctrine, Mary was actually a “surrogate mother” – i.e., a woman who has a **pre-existing** embryo implanted into her uterus, for someone else.

- When God resurrected Jesus, he caused Jesus to become a **spirit being** again. So, Jesus is not a **man** *at all* any longer; instead, he is a **spirit being** once again – just like he was *before* God transformed him into an embryo in Mary’s womb.

- For the most part, followers of Jesus will never become spirit beings like Jesus. Instead, Christians will remain human beings, even in the next age. So, Christians will live forever on the earth, as **human** beings; while Jesus lives forever in heaven – as a **spirit** being.

## Comparison of the Doctrines with Scripture

As shown above, the Biblical Unitarian and Arian doctrines have very *specific* beliefs, about Jesus’ origins, and about his current existence. From what I can see, many of the Arian beliefs appear to be contradicted by Scripture. For example, consider the following beliefs of the Arian doctrine – along with the information that Scripture provides about those beliefs:

**Item 1:** According to the Arian doctrine, Jesus, himself, actually created the universe (under God’s direction). However, Scripture *explicitly* states that God created the universe **all by Himself** - i.e., no one assisted Him. For example, consider this passage:

### Isaiah 44:24 (ESV):

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer,  
who formed you from the womb:  
“I am the Lord, who made all things,  
who alone stretched out the heavens,  
who spread out the earth by myself

As a result, the belief that *Jesus* created the universe does not appear to be supported by Scripture.

**Item 2:** According to the Arian doctrine, God “transformed” Jesus into a human embryo, and then “implanted” Jesus into Mary’s womb. So, in that doctrine, Jesus is not a genetic descendant of Mary – because that pregnancy does not involve one of Mary’s eggs being fertilized.

However, Scripture *explicitly* states that Jesus is a **literal, genetic** descendant of King David. That, in turn, means that one of Mary's eggs must have been fertilized – i.e., she must have conceived. For example, consider these passages:

**2 Samuel 7:12 (ESV)** (God speaking to King David):

<sup>12</sup>When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

**Luke 1:30-31 (ESV):**

<sup>30</sup>And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

As a result, the belief that Jesus was "transformed" into a human embryo, and then "implanted" into Mary, does not appear to be supported by Scripture.

**Item 3:** According to the Arian doctrine, Jesus is not a man at all any longer – instead, Jesus is now a **spirit being**. In essence, the belief is that when God resurrected Jesus, Jesus became a spirit being again – just like he was before God transformed him into a human embryo.

However, the apostles repeatedly refer to Jesus as a **man** – even **after** he was resurrected, and even **after** he ascended into heaven. For example, consider these passages – both of which were written **after** Jesus had been resurrected:

**1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV):**

<sup>5</sup>For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus

**Acts 17:31 (ESV):**

<sup>30</sup>The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup>because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

As a result, the belief that Jesus is no longer a man does not appear to be supported by Scripture.

**Item 4:** According to the Arian doctrine, Jesus was originally created as a spirit being, in heaven. So, in that doctrine, Jesus lived with God, in heaven, for an *extremely* long time (probably millions of years), **before** God sent him to the earth.

As a result, with the Arian doctrine, Jesus had personally experienced God – i.e., he had “seen” God, and “seen” heaven, before he was born on the earth. That, in turn, means that during Jesus’ time on the earth, he *already* knew – from **firsthand experience** – that God exists, and that God loves us – because he had **lived** with God, in heaven, for *eons* – before being born on the earth.

The above belief is very “problematic”, though, because Scripture *explicitly* states that Jesus was tempted in the **same way** as we are. For example, consider this passage:

**Hebrews 4:15 (ESV):**

<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Now, let’s think about this issue for a minute. According to the Arian doctrine, while Jesus was on the earth, he already knew, for a **fact**, that God exists – because he had already lived with God in heaven. However, we do **not** know that God exists – because we have never lived with God in heaven. (We *believe* that God exists – but we do not **know** that He exists – because we have not personally lived with God in heaven.)

As a result, with the Arian doctrine, Jesus had an enormous advantage over us, when it comes to resisting temptation. Basically, in the Arian doctrine, Jesus already knew that God exists – because he had already spent millions of years living with God, in heaven. That, in turn, would have **greatly assisted** Jesus in resisting sin – because he personally knew God already. However, we have never lived with God in heaven – so we do **not** have that advantage, when we need to resist temptation.

Of course, as mentioned above, Jesus was tempted in exactly the same way as we are. Also, as mentioned, having **previous experience** of living with God, in heaven, is an enormous advantage when resisting temptation. So, since we do not have that advantage, that indicates that Jesus also does not have that advantage. In other words, the above passage indicates that Jesus did **not** live in heaven with God, prior to being born on the earth.

As a result, the belief that Jesus lived with God in heaven, before being born on the earth, does not appear to be supported by Scripture.

Overall, from all of the above information, it certainly appears to me that the Biblical Unitarian doctrine matches Scripture **more closely** than the Arian doctrine does.

Also note: the following documents contain much more information about the Arian doctrine. In particular, those documents address many of the common “proof texts” for the Arian beliefs:

[Was Jesus the "Agent" of Creation?](#)

[Natural Bodies vs. Spiritual Bodies](#)

[The Idiom of Prolepsis](#)

[Primogeniture in Scripture](#)

[Let US Make Man, in OUR Image](#)

## Two “Difficult” Questions

As shown above, in many *specific* areas, the beliefs of the Arian doctrine do not appear to be supported by Scripture. In those same areas, the beliefs of the Biblical Unitarian doctrine are supported by Scripture – and as a result, from what I can see, the Biblical Unitarian doctrine is definitely closer to the truth.

However, there are two specific questions that arise, with the Biblical Unitarian doctrine. Those two questions are as follows:

- If Jesus is a man just like we are, then how can it be that Jesus is in **heaven** currently? After all, Scripture states that human beings will not go to heaven **at all** – not even *after* we have spiritual bodies. Instead, people will live on the **earth** forever. So if Jesus is a man, how can it be that he is in heaven now?

- If Jesus is a human being just like we are, then how is it possible that Jesus did not commit **any** sins? In other words, since every **other** human being has committed sins, then how did Jesus avoid committing sins, if he is a human being just like us?

Both of those two questions are non-issues in the Arian doctrine – because in that doctrine, Jesus is actually a **spirit being** – not a human being. In other words, in the Arian doctrine, Jesus is in heaven now because he is a spirit being – and he was able to avoid sin because he is a spirit being. So, those two questions do not come up at all, with the Arian doctrine.

However, in the Biblical Unitarian doctrine, the above two questions are rather “difficult” to resolve – i.e., there are not any *obvious* answers to those questions, with the Biblical Unitarian doctrine.

The sections below go into detail about those two questions – as well as describing how those questions can be answered, with the Biblical Unitarian doctrine.

**First question:** If Jesus is a man just like we are, then how can it be that Jesus is in **heaven** currently?

At first glance, the fact that Jesus is in heaven now seems to be “incompatible” with the Biblical Unitarian doctrine. Basically, if Jesus is a human being just like we are, then it seems rather “strange” that Jesus can be in heaven currently – when **every other** human being will never be in heaven.

Of course, heaven is the “realm of God” – i.e., it is the place where God resides. So, the fact that Jesus in heaven now means that he has “personal access to God”, so to speak. As a result, this overall question can be stated this way: “If Jesus is a man just like we are, then how can it be that Jesus has personal access to God – when no other person has that access?”

So, let’s examine Scripture, to determine if there are any **other** cases in which just one person has “personal access to God”. If there are other such cases, then it will not seem so “strange” that Jesus has that access.

First, consider the example of Moses. As stated in the Old Testament, Moses was the **only** person who was permitted to speak with God “face to face” – no other prophet could do so. For example:

**Exodus 33:9,11 (ESV):**

<sup>9</sup>When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. <sup>11</sup>Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

**Numbers 12:6-8 (ESV):**

<sup>6</sup> And he [God] said, “Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. <sup>7</sup> Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. <sup>8</sup> With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD.

**Deuteronomy 31:10-11 (ESV):**

<sup>10</sup> And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, <sup>11</sup> none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land,

So, Moses was a man just like us – **and** Moses was the only prophet who was able to speak to God “face to face”. In other words, this is an example of **one** man having the ability to be in the “presence of God” – when no other person was able to do so!

There is one other item to note on this subject. Moses himself tells us that God will eventually raise up a prophet **like him** – and that God will put His words in that prophet’s mouth:

**Deuteronomy 18:15-18 (ESV):**

<sup>15</sup> “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— <sup>16</sup> just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ <sup>17</sup> And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. <sup>18</sup> I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

Acts chapter 3 verifies that this “prophet like Moses” is **Jesus**. As a result, it stands to reason that Jesus – like Moses – would have “personal access” to God – even when no other person had that access!

Now, consider a second example – the example of the high priest. Scripture tells us that **only** the high priest could enter the innermost part of the temple – the area called the “Holy of Holies”. In other words, no other person had that access. The book of Hebrews refers to that fact – in the passage below, the “inner room” refers to the Holy of Holies:



**Hebrews 9:6-7 (NIV):**

<sup>6</sup>When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. <sup>7</sup>But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

Another item to note is that the Temple (and the Tabernacle before it) was the “dwelling place of God”. In other words, the Temple was the one, specific place on the earth, which served as a “home” for God’s Holy Spirit. For example, consider these passages:

**Exodus 25:1-2,8-9 (ESV):**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>“Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.

<sup>8</sup>And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. <sup>9</sup> Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

**1 Chronicles 22:17-19 (ESV):**

<sup>17</sup> David also commanded all the leaders of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying, <sup>18</sup>“Is not the LORD your God with you? And has he not given you peace on every side? For he has delivered the inhabitants of the land into my hand, and the land is subdued before the LORD and his people. <sup>19</sup> Now set your mind and heart to seek the LORD your God. Arise and build the sanctuary of the LORD God, so that the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the holy vessels of God may be brought into a house built for the name of the LORD.”

As a result, entering the Temple was a way of **approaching God** – because God’s *presence* was in the Temple. Also note that God’s presence was most strongly felt in the “Holy of Holies” area, because the Ark of the Covenant was in that area – and Scripture states that God’s Holy Spirit resided on the cover of the Ark.

So, God’s presence was in the Holy of Holies area of the Temple – and only the high priest was permitted to enter that area. In other words, **no other person** had such “personal access” to God.

The above information, about the Temple and the high priest, is connected to **Jesus** as well. First, Scripture states that the Temple on the earth was a “replica”, or “copy” of the Temple in heaven:

**Hebrews 8:5 (ESV):**

<sup>5</sup>They [the priests] serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”

In addition, Scripture states that Jesus became our high priest:

**Hebrews 5:7-10 (ESV):**

<sup>7</sup>During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. <sup>8</sup>Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered <sup>9</sup>and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him <sup>10</sup>and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

As a result, Jesus now serves as our high priest, in the Temple in heaven:

**Hebrews 8:1-2 (ESV):**

Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, <sup>2</sup>and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

So, since Jesus is our high priest, it stands to reason that Jesus is the **only** person who can enter the Temple in heaven – just like the high priests in the Old Testament were the **only** people who could enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple on the earth.

Both of the above examples – of Moses, and of the high priest – demonstrate cases in which “personal access to God” was **restricted** to specific people – i.e., **no one else** had such access. As a result, it is quite understandable that **only** Jesus has that type of access now – *especially* since Scripture states that Jesus is the “successor” to both Moses and the high priest!

**Second question:** If Jesus is a man just like we are, then how can it be that Jesus **never** sinned?

Now, let's consider the second question – namely, how is it possible that Jesus **never** committed any sins – when Scripture tells us that every other human being **has** sinned? To put it another way, since Jesus was able to avoid committing any sins, then why has no one else been able to avoid committing any sins?

At first glance, the Biblical Unitarian doctrine seems to be “incompatible” with the fact that Jesus never committed any sins. In other words, the fact that Jesus did not commit any sins **seems** to imply that Jesus must not be a man just like us. However, as mentioned earlier in this article, Hebrews 4:15 explicitly states that Jesus was tempted in exactly the same way as **we** are. That, in turn, demonstrates that Jesus **must** be a man, just like us – because otherwise, he would *not* have been tempted the same way as we are.

On another note, some groups claim that it is **impossible** for humans to obey God. Basically, the belief is that our bodies are “completely corrupt” – and that as a result, all human beings will **always** end up sinning – no matter how hard we try to follow God. That doctrine is often referred to as “total depravity”.

Of course, if the “total depravity” doctrine is correct, then Jesus could **not** have been a man – because in that case he would not have been able to avoid sin. However, the total depravity doctrine is not supported by Scripture. First of all, if that doctrine is correct, then God could never punish anyone for sin – because in that case, people would not have the **ability** to obey God. In other words, if it is not possible for people to obey God, then God's justice could never hold anyone *accountable* for disobeying Him.

Even more importantly, Scripture clearly indicates that people **have** the ability to obey God. First, consider the following passage:

**Genesis 4:6-7 (NET):**

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why is your expression downcast? <sup>7</sup> Is it not true that if you do what is right, you will be fine? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must subdue it.”

In the above passage, God tells Cain that he must “subdue” sin – i.e., he must resist the temptation to sin; and obey God instead. Of course, Cain did *not* subdue sin in that case; but the point is that Cain had the ability to resist sin – that is, he had the ability to obey God.

Now, consider another passage. In the passage below, Moses is discussing the commandments that God has given to the Israelites:

**Deuteronomy 30:11-14,19-20 (ESV):**

<sup>11</sup> “For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. <sup>12</sup> It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ <sup>13</sup> Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’<sup>14</sup> But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.”

<sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

In the passage, Moses **explicitly** states that the commandments of God are not too difficult follow – and he also explicitly states that people **can** obey them. He then goes on to exhort the people to **choose** to obey God. So, it is clear that people **are** able to follow God, and to avoid sin.

From the above information, it is clear that Jesus was a human being, **exactly** the same as we are. It is also clear that **all** human beings have the ability to obey God – and to avoid sin.

Of course, that still begs the question – given the above information, why is it that Jesus was able to avoid sin, but no other person has been able to?

From what I can see in Scripture, it appears that Jesus is the only person who has ever **truly** followed God with his whole heart. In other words, Jesus is the only person who has *ever lived*, who has **totally** and **completely** surrendered his will to God’s will – such that he conducted himself exactly as God commanded him to.

To put it another way, every person has the potential to follow God perfectly, as Jesus did. However, **no one else** – no one other than Jesus – has ever been *willing* to follow God with “100% obedience”.

(Remember – even “hating your neighbor in your heart” is sinful behavior...)

There are a number of passages in Scripture which refer to Jesus' "wholehearted" commitment to obeying God. For example:

**Luke 22:41-42 (ESV):**

<sup>41</sup> And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

**John 5:30 (ESV):**

<sup>30</sup> "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me."

**John 8:28-29 (ESV):**

<sup>28</sup> So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. <sup>29</sup> And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

**Philippians 2:8-9 (ESV):**

<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name

**Hebrews 10:7 (ESV):**

<sup>7</sup> Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'

**Hebrews 5:7-10 (ESV):**

<sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

The above passages make it clear that Jesus faced **enormous** temptations – but he was willing to *completely* submit his will to God’s will. That, in turn, allowed him to overcome all of his temptations – and avoid sin.

It is certainly reasonable to conclude that no other person has ever **completely** submitted their will to God as Jesus did – and that, in turn, would explain why every other person has committed sins.

## **Conclusion**

The Biblical Unitarian and Arian doctrines agree on many points – most notably, that only our Heavenly Father is Almighty God. There are a number of differences between those two doctrines as well, however; primarily regarding the identity and nature of Jesus.

From what I can see, Scripture appears to support the Biblical Unitarian doctrine much more closely than the Arian doctrine. In other words, in the areas where the two doctrines *differ*, Scripture supports the Biblical Unitarian belief, over the Arian belief.

However, there are two specific “questions” which arise, about the overall Biblical Unitarian doctrine. Those two questions are as follows:

- If Jesus is a human being just like us, then how can it be that Jesus in heaven – when every other human being will never go to heaven?
  
- If Jesus is a human being just like us, then how can it be that Jesus was able to avoid sin – when every other human being has not been able to avoid sin?

Those two questions are not issues with the Arian doctrine – because in that doctrine, Jesus is actually a **spirit being** (as opposed to a human being). So, for those two specific questions, it is easier to support the Arian doctrine.

In the previous section, I provided my understanding of how those questions can be answered, with the Biblical Unitarian doctrine about the nature of Jesus.

I hope that this article was useful to you!