

Evidence for Jesus

Lesson 2: What People in the Bible Said about Jesus

Vocabulary:

instead	according to	disciple	insane
to testify (testimony)	to cry out	business partner	to gather (gathering)
to convince	revelation	exactly	supreme court
finally	crown	to respond	expert
to know personally	robe	message	to arrest
public	to dip (adj. dipped)	to commit	to beat
business owner	tax collector	emperor	background
to preach (n. preaching)	earthquake	upside down	to baptize (baptized, baptism)
valuable	to react (reaction)	worthy	to stone
divine	to doubt (adj. doubting)	in fact	benefit
blessing	character	attention	to bow down

Discussion

How do we prove history about people and events? Historians cannot depend on science or laboratory experiments to prove historical facts. **Instead**, they examine written statements from witnesses, eyewitnesses, and other people who lived near or during that time in history. To study Jesus, we first examined what Jesus said about himself. Yet to prove Jesus's claims, we must study the **testimonies** of Jesus's witnesses and eyewitnesses. Did the people who walked with Jesus agree with what he said about himself? If yes, what **convinced** them? What else can we learn from their testimonies?

In the Bible, we can study statements by Matthew and John, as well as other eyewitnesses, including his followers Thomas, Peter, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, Jesus's brother James, and **finally** Paul, who first saw Jesus after Jesus had been raised from the dead. Later, we will examine statements from people outside of the Bible that confirm Jesus's testimony and the testimonies of his eyewitnesses.

John

John was one of Jesus's twelve closest followers, and Jesus's closest friend. John often called himself, "the one whom Jesus loved." He **personally knew** the Jewish high priest Caiaphas (John 18:15), which tells us that John either had a **public** role or came from a wealthy family. John was a fisherman and **business owner**, but after he met Jesus, he spent his life **preaching** and teaching about Jesus. In his old age, John was forced to work in a mine on the island of Patmos and later died around 100 C.E. in Ephesus (modern-day Turkey). John wrote about Jesus in the book of John, the book of Revelation, and possibly books I, II, and III John between 70 and 90 C.E.¹

Think about John's life. Why is his testimony about Jesus **valuable**?

¹ Smith, William, Dr., "Entry for 'John the Apostle,'" *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, by Charles Caldwell Ryrie (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 1924.

In his writings, John explains who Jesus is and why God sent Jesus to us:

¹ Before the world began, the Word was there. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was there with God in the beginning. ¹⁰ ...The world was made through him, but the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to the world that was his own. And his own people did not accept him. ¹² But some people did accept him. They believed in him, and he gave them the right to become children of God...¹⁴ The Word became a man and lived among us. We saw his **divine** greatness – the greatness that belongs to the only Son of the Father... ¹⁶ Yes, the Word was full of grace and truth, and from him we all received one **blessing** after another. ¹⁷ That is, the law was given to us through Moses,² but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. The only Son is the one who has shown us what God is like. He is himself God... (John 1:1-18, ERV)

In verses 1-2, where is the Word in the beginning? Who is the Word? What does this mean?

What does God do with His spoken Word in verses 10 and 14?

What name and title does God give His Word? (vs. 14, 17-18)

Why did God send His Word to us? (vs. 18)

According to John, what is the relationship between God, God's Word, and Jesus?

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, teaches us that God created all things through His spoken word. For example, in Genesis 1, God says, "Let there be light," (1:3) and light appears. In verse John 1:14, we learn that God gives His spoken Word a human body, a title, and a name. God calls His Word in human form His Son and gives Him the name Jesus. God sends Jesus to live among us to teach us the truth about God and about how to have a relationship with our heavenly Father.

When John first sees that Jesus has been risen from the dead, he **cries out**, "It is the Lord!" (John 21:7, NIV). In this phrase, the Greek word "Lord," *kurios*,³ is the term used only for God. In the book of **Revelation**, John writes about a spiritual vision that he experiences. He sees a man with **crowns** on his head, riding on a white horse, and describes him in this way:

He is dressed in a **robe dipped** in blood, and his name is the Word of God... On his robe and on his thigh, he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Revelation 19:13-16)

From these verses, what does John believe about Jesus, the Word of God?

We see that John believes that God sent His spoken Word to us in the form of Jesus. He believes that Jesus is the King above all Kings and the Lord above all Lords who came to die as a sacrifice for our sins.

² Moses was an ancient Jewish leader who gave the first laws of God to the Jewish people.

³ "2962. Kurios," *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, electronic database (BibleSoft, 2011), <https://biblehub.com/greek/2962.htm>.

Matthew

A Jewish **tax collector** for the Roman government, Matthew also became one of Jesus's twelve closest followers. Between 50-60 B.C.E., Matthew wrote about the life and teachings of Jesus in his book of Matthew.⁴

Think about Matthew's life. Why is his testimony about Jesus **valuable**?

Here is what Matthew wrote about Jesus after his death on a cross:

¹ The day after the Sabbath day was the first day of the week. That day at dawn Mary Magdalene and the other woman named Mary went to look at the tomb. ² Suddenly an angel of the Lord came from the sky, and there was a huge **earthquake**. The angel went to the tomb and rolled the stone away from the entrance. Then he sat on top of the stone. ...⁵ The angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, the one who was killed on the cross. ⁶ But he is not here. He has risen from death, as he said he would. Come and see the place where his body was. ⁷ And go quickly and tell his followers, "Jesus has risen from death. He is going into Galilee and will be there before you. You will see him there." (28, ERV)

According to Matthew, what happens to Jesus after he dies? How did others know that what Matthew claimed was true?

⁸ So the women left the tomb quickly...They ran to tell his followers what happened. ⁹ Suddenly, Jesus was there in front of them. He said, "Hello!" The women went to him and, holding on to his feet, worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go tell my followers to go to Galilee. They will see me there." (28)

How do the women **react** to Jesus? What do they believe about Jesus? How do you know?

¹⁶ The eleven followers⁵ went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. ¹⁷ On the mountain the followers saw Jesus. They worshiped him. But some of the followers did not believe that it was really Jesus. ¹⁸ So he came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. ¹⁹ So go and make followers of all people in the world." (28)

Matthew and the other followers go to see Jesus. What does Matthew believe about Jesus? How do you know?

The followers who see Jesus worship him. How does Jesus react to their worship? Why is this important?

⁴ Ibid, Ryrie. (1455)

⁵ Judas Iscariot, one of the first twelve followers of Jesus, left Jesus and handed Jesus over to the Jewish authorities to be crucified, leaving eleven followers.

Thomas

Thomas was born in Antioch (located in modern Turkey) and was also one of first twelve followers of Jesus. Thomas is often called “**Doubting** Thomas” because when he heard that Jesus had been raised from the dead, he doubted. When Thomas saw Jesus raised from the dead, however, he believed. During his life, Thomas may have preached in Parthia, or Persia, and possibly farther east. He is believed to have died for his faith in Edessa (also located in modern Turkey).⁶

Examine Thomas’s life, **character**, and death. Why is Thomas’s testimony about Jesus valuable?

John describes Thomas’s reaction to Jesus when Thomas sees Jesus raised from the dead:

²⁴ Now Thomas...one of the Twelve, was not with the **disciples** when Jesus came. ²⁵ So, the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” ²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:24-29, NIV)

Describe Thomas’s character.

Even though Thomas has doubts, how does Jesus react to his doubts?

What does Thomas believe about Jesus after he sees Jesus? How do you know?

What promise does Jesus give people who believe in him without seeing him?

Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael

Peter was also one of the first twelve followers of Jesus. Peter was a fisherman and **business partner** with John’s family. Peter was nearly thirty to forty years old when he met Jesus. Peter began following Jesus because Jesus’s cousin, John the Baptist, was telling the town that Jesus is the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:21). When Andrew, Peter’s brother, heard this about Jesus, he went immediately to his brother Peter and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (1:41). The next day, Jesus asked a peasant, or poor farmer, named Philip to follow him. Philip turned and told the Jewish man Nathanael, also known as Bartholomew, “We have found the one that Moses and the Prophets wrote about. He is Jesus...” (1:45, CEV). Philip and Nathanael went to find Jesus. When they found him, Jesus by his miraculous power told Nathanael **exactly** where Nathanael was when Philip found him. Nathanael **responds**, “You are the Son of God and the King of Israel” (1:49).

⁶ Smith, William, Dr., “Entry for ‘Thomas,’” *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*, <<http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/smiths-bible-dictionary/thomas.html>> (17 May 2010).

Before Jesus predicts his own death, he asks his followers who people say the Son of Man is. They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets” (Matthew 16:14, NIV). In other words, the Jewish people thought that the Son of Man described in the Old Testament was just a messenger or a prophet. But Jesus looks directly at Peter and asks him, “Who do you say I am?” Peter answers, “You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God” (16:16). In reply, Jesus says, “Blessed are you...for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (16:17). We see here that Jesus doesn’t correct Peter or bless those that say he is a prophet. Rather, he confirms Peter’s understanding of who he is and explains that this truth is something **revealed** to people by God. For this reason, Jesus often taught in **parables** and revealed himself through his miracles, his power, his teachings, and his ability to forgive sins.

Why do you think Jesus revealed who he was in these ways rather than speaking directly to people about who he is? (Hint: Jeremiah 29:11-13)

After Jesus died, the women who discovered that Jesus’s tomb was empty, ran and told the other disciples what had happened. When Peter heard that Jesus had risen from the dead, he and John were the first disciples to run to the tomb to see the news for themselves. Jesus appeared to his followers for forty days after being raised from the dead, and all of them together started the first church of Christ followers (Acts 1:1-14, 2:1, 43-47).

What did Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael believe about Jesus? How do you know?

In the book of Acts, Peter preached the first **message** about Jesus to Jews from every nation, asking them to follow Jesus. Three thousand people **committed** their lives to Jesus that day. Peter spent the rest of his life helping Christians to follow Jesus and helping non-believers to become Christians. According to early Christian writers, Peter was later crucified for his faith by Nero, **emperor** of Rome, near 67 B.C.E. Early Christian writer, Origen, wrote that Peter asked to be crucified **upside down** because he did not feel **worthy** to be crucified in the same way as Jesus.⁷

Consider the life and death of Peter. Why is his testimony valuable?

If John, Thomas, and Peter had never seen the risen Jesus, how could this have changed how they lived their lives and how they chose to die?

James (Jesus's brother)

A few members of Jesus’s family followed Jesus during his lifetime, including Jesus’s cousin John the Baptist and his brother Jude, also called Thaddaeus. However, some of Jesus’s other brothers, including James, did not believe. **In fact**, during Jesus’s life, his brothers accused him of doing miracles for public **attention** (John 7:3-5). They thought that Jesus was **insane** when they saw how many people were **gathering** around him when he was teaching (Mark 3:20-21). After Jesus died and appeared to James, James finally

⁷ Smith, William, Dr., “Entry for ‘Peter,’” *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*, <<http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/smiths-bible-dictionary/peter.html>> (6 May 2010).

believed that his brother to be the Messiah (I Corinthians 15:7). From this miraculous experience, James became an apostle, or public messenger, of Jesus, a leader among the churches, and the main leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13, 21:18, Galatians 1:19). He also taught the churches through his book, James, found in the Bible. According to historian Eusebius, James was put to death in 62 C.E. by the Jewish **supreme court** called the Sanhedrin.⁸

What convinced James that Jesus was the Messiah? Why is this important?

What happened in James's life that helps us to trust his testimony?

Paul (also called Saul)

Before Paul became a follower of Jesus, he was a Pharisee, or a leader and teacher among the Jewish people. Paul was an **expert** teacher of Jewish Law under Rabbi Gamaliel and a member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34, 22:3). For these reasons, Paul knew the Jewish prophecies about the Messiah. However, Paul did not believe in Jesus. In fact, Paul's job was to **arrest, beat,** and kill Jesus's followers (Acts 8:1-3, Philippians 3:5-6).

Why is Paul's educational and religious **background** important to his testimony about Jesus?

On his way to the city of Damascus to murder Christians, Jesus appeared to Paul in a bright light, leaving him blind. Yet, the Lord sent a Christian to Paul to heal him miraculously through the name of Jesus. At that moment, Paul became a believer and was **baptized**, a symbol that he had committed his life to be Jesus's follower. During Paul's life, he was sent to prison, flogged (whipped with sharp objects), **stoned** with rocks, and beaten many times for his faith; yet he spent the rest of his life teaching and preaching about Jesus from Europe to Asia.⁹

What happened in Paul's life that helps us to trust his testimony?

Paul wrote at least ten of the New Testament books, and possibly more. Here are some descriptions of Jesus that Paul wrote:

³ Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures say; ⁴ ...he was buried and was raised to life on the third day, as the Scriptures say; ⁵ and...he appeared to Peter and then to the twelve apostles. ⁶ After that Christ appeared to more than 500 other believers at the same time. Most of them are still living today, but some have died. ⁷ Then he appeared to James and later to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, he appeared to me.... (I Corinthians, ERV)

⁶ ...[Jesus] was like God in every way, be he did not think that his being equal with God was something to use for his own **benefit**. ⁷ Instead, he gave up everything, even his place with God. He accepted the role of a servant, appearing in human form. During his life as a man, ⁸ he humbled

⁸ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), s.v. "James, St."

⁹ Ibid, McDowell; Kaplan, Rabbi Aryeh, *The Jewish Court System: Qualification for a Jewish Judge and the Operation of the Sanhedrin*, an excerpt from the *Handbook of Jewish Thought*, Asih.com, July 21, 2004, <http://www.aish.com/jl/m/pm/48936377.html>. See also Acts 22:3-21, Acts 5:34, and II Corinthians 11:23-27.

himself by being fully obedient to God, even when that caused his death – death on a cross. ⁹ So, God raised him up to the most important place and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. ¹⁰ God did this so that every person will **bow down** and honor the name of Jesus. Everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth will bow. ¹¹ They will all confess, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” and this will bring glory to the Father. (Philippians 2)

What did Paul believe about Jesus?

Which of Jesus’s followers impacted you the most and why: John, Matthew, Thomas, Peter, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, James, or Paul?

This Week:

Write in your journal:

1. If you want to read more about Jesus and what he said about himself, continue reading one of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. After each chapter, write down in a notebook what you learn from Jesus.
2. Think about ways in your life that you can begin to follow Jesus’s teachings. Pray to the Lord to help you know where you can grow and follow what Jesus taught.
3. If you want to learn more about what others have said about Jesus, begin the handout, “What Others Outside of the Bible Said about Jesus.”