

Evidence for Jesus

Lesson 1: What Jesus Said about Himself

Vocabulary:

history (historical, historian)	to examine	everlasting	to cleanse
legal	to match	to punish (punishment)	high priest
to prove (proof)	term	justice	to interpret
fact	spirit (spiritual, spiritually)	sin (sinful)	to accuse (accusation)
event	representation (to represent)	eternally (eternal)	to condemn
laboratory	Messiah	righteous	vision
evidence	to anoint (v./adj. anointed)	Savior	to crucify
to claim (n. claim)	Holy Spirit	ancestry	temptation
witness (eyewitness)	virgin	to sacrifice	humility
document	miracle	to deserve	donkey
prophecy (prophet)	counselor	to forgive (forgiven, forgiveness)	temple

Discussion

The Bible tells us who Jesus is, what he taught, what people said about him, and what Jesus said about himself. Maybe you have already read about Jesus, heard about him in school, or seen a movie about his life. Share what you already know about Jesus.

What do you already know about Jesus? What do you believe about him?

Even though we might know what the Bible says about Jesus, how do we know if the Bible is true? Historians often use the **legal-historical method** to prove facts about people and events in history.¹ Since no one can prove in a laboratory that a person lived or an event happened, historical evidence for such facts is found in personal statements or claims about people and events, as well as witnesses and eyewitnesses. If the person lived or the event occurred before a person's death or the death of the witnesses, then historians can also use written statements and documents as evidence.²

Tell us something about one of your grandparents or great grandparents who is no longer alive. How would you prove that your statement is true?

How you prove your statements about your grandparents or great grandparents are some of the same ways that historians must prove statements made about Jesus in the Bible. What your grandparents said about themselves, what others said about them, along with any pictures, writings, or documents, can be used as evidence to prove that what you say about your grandparents is true.

¹ The term "prove" means "to demonstrate the truth or existence of (something) by evidence or argument." In other words, the definition of the term may refer to conclusions that are deducted from evidence presented. In legal terms, the word can mean to test the validity of a claim. This is the closest definition to the references used in this paper. See Oxford English Dictionary.

² McDowell, Josh, *More Than a Carpenter*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, Carol Stream, 2005.

To prove what the Bible says about Jesus, we too must look at Jesus's claims about himself in the Bible, as well as other people's claims about Jesus. We can also use the Old Testament, the New Testament, and other documents as proof. Even though the Old Testament was written before Jesus was born, the Old Testament contains many **prophecies** about Jesus that we can **examine** as evidence. During the time that Jesus lived, these prophecies caused many Jewish people to follow Jesus. The Old Testament also helps us to understand the titles that Jesus gives himself.

We find the teachings and words that Jesus spoke in the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Within these books, we find the claims that Jesus made about himself. Jesus's followers, as well as people today, have also made many claims about Jesus, but these statements must **match** what Jesus said about himself. Since Matthew and John were two of the closest followers and eyewitnesses of Jesus, we will examine what Jesus said about himself in these two books.

One with the Father

In the book of John, we read that Jesus says this about himself to the Jewish people:

"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also" (John 8:19, NIV)... I and the Father are one. (10:30).

What does Jesus mean when he says, "If you knew me, you would know my Father also," and "I and the Father are one"?

The term **one** in the second verse comes from the Greek word *heis*,³ meaning one in **spirit**. The meaning, in this case, is not the same as one in number. Jesus is saying that he is **spiritually** one with the Father in heaven. Therefore, if we study Jesus's life, actions, and teachings, then we will know and understand who God is, how he thinks, how he acts, and how he wants us to live. In this way, Jesus is the exact **representation** or copy of God, but in human form (Hebrews 1:3).

Messiah

A woman from Samaria, just north of Israel, says to Jesus, "I know the **Messiah**...is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us" (John 4:25). In reply, Jesus says, "I, the one speaking to you, I am he" (4:26).

What does the term *Messiah* mean?

What did the Old Testament say about the *Messiah*?

The term *Messiah*, *mashiach* in Hebrew or *chriό* in Greek, is a title for a person who is **anointed**. An anointed person has been chosen by God to lead others or to receive special skills. When a king or priest was anointed in the Old Testament, oil was placed over his head to represent the **Holy Spirit** and to show that the Holy Spirit was giving this person a special title.⁴ The Hebrew title *Messiah* is the same as

³ "1520. heis," Thayer's Greek Lexicon, electronic database (Biblesoft, 2011), <https://biblehub.com/greek/1520.htm>.

⁴ "4899. mashiach," Brown-Driver-Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon, unabridged, electronic database (Biblesoft, 2006), <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4899.htm>; "5548. chriό," Thayer's, <https://biblehub.com/greek/5548.htm>.

the Greek term *Christos*, or Christ.⁵ This is why Jesus is called Jesus *Christ*, meaning Jesus the Messiah or the Anointed One.

In order to understand this concept of “Messiah” in the New Testament, we must go back 700 years before Jesus was born to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who gave predictions about this future Messiah. Isaiah says that this Anointed One will be born as a human baby, the son of a virgin, not through a man, but through a miracle done by the Holy Spirit. He will be called *Immanuel* (Isaiah 7:14), which in Hebrew means “with us is God!”⁶ This special child will be given these titles: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace” (9:6).

According to these definitions and verses, who is the Messiah?

What miraculous sign will God give to us to recognize the Messiah?

In his writings, Isaiah gives the Messiah another name: “arm of the Lord” (53:1, 59:1,16), a part of God’s being. Isaiah then describes God’s plan to send His “arm” to save His children from spiritual death and punishment for their sins (56:15-17, 20-21; 60-62). Because of God’s justice, every sin of every person on earth must be punished. Isaiah and the other Old Testament prophets teach that people who do not turn away from a sinful life cannot be saved from this punishment and will be eternally separated from God. Isaiah speaks about God’s anger over the sin of his people and how hard this punishment will be. Yet God does not want to punish his children or be separated from them. He loves his children and knows that they are weak. Yet, even if they want to turn away from sin, they cannot without their heavenly Father’s help (61). Isaiah says that God looks for a righteous man to receive this punishment, instead of his children, a man who can also help his children turn away from their sin (59:16-21). But God can find no human able or willing to do this.

What problem is God facing with the children he created? What solution is he seeking?

Isaiah tells us that God can find no righteous human being to take the place of his children and receive their punishment. So, he uses his “own arm,” a part of himself, to save his children from punishment and eternal death if they are willing to turn away from sin. From the people this Messiah saves, God then creates an eternal kingdom of children to bring him glory (9:6-7, 23:4). For this reason, the prophet Jeremiah (c. 600 B.C.E.) calls the Messiah, “The Lord Our Righteous Savior” (Jeremiah 23:6) and prophesies that this Lord and Savior will be born through the ancestry of King David (23:5), the King of Israel in c. 1000 B.C.E. In the writings of prophet Zechariah (c. 520 B.C.E.), we learn that in the Old Testament God also calls his arm his “servant” and “the Branch.” Zechariah, who lived approximately 500 years before the birth of Christ, predicated that this special servant of God would remove the sins of the people in a single day (Zechariah 3:8-9, 12).

According to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, what are the differences and similarities between the terms *Messiah* and *God*?

What additional signs does God give to us to recognize the Messiah?

⁵ “5547. Christos,” Thayer, <https://biblehub.com/greek/5547.htm>.

⁶ “6005. Immanuel,” Brown-Driver-Briggs, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6005.htm>.

The Jewish prophet Daniel, who served under Cyrus the Great in Persia (590-529 B.C.E.), also speaks about the future Anointed One or Messiah in his book Daniel. He says that this Messiah will come during the middle of the week, be put to death, and put an end to the **sacrificing** of animals to God (Daniel 9:25-27).⁷ Since the time of Moses, who wrote the spiritual Laws for God's people to follow, the Jews were required to sacrifice animals for their sins. God did this to show the people that their sins caused spiritual death and must be punished. God did not want his children to receive the full punishment for their sins, so he showed his love for his children by sacrificing animals instead of his own children when they sinned. In this way, even though God's children felt the pain of losing their best animals, they could also see God's grace and mercy, as someone else received the punishment that they themselves **deserved**. Over 500 years before the birth of Jesus, Daniel prophesies that God would put an end to animal sacrifices and establish a new way for people to be **forgiven** for their sins. Yet God used these early sacrifices to prepare his people for what he would do centuries later through the Messiah.

What was the purpose of God's old plan of sacrificing animals? What was God's new plan?

Through God's plan for his children, what do we learn about God as a Father?

Isaiah describes exactly how the Messiah would put an end to the sacrificing of animals: The Anointed One will be punished and sacrificed for man's sins (53:5), and God's own *blood* will **cleanse** his people. As the perfect Father in love with his children, God would sacrifice a part of himself, the arm of the Lord made into a man and brought into this world through a virgin. God calls this man his only Son, a son he sacrifices so that all his earthly children would have the chance to be with their Father in heaven forever (Zechariah 9:9-11). To prove to the world that the Messiah would also be a heavenly King who could never die, God would then raise his servant's body from the dead (Isaiah 53). Even though the world would continue in war and sin (Daniel 9:26, 12:10), the promise to those who follow the Messiah would be peace with God and peace among his true followers (Isaiah 11:6-9). All this was written over 500 years before Jesus was even born!

Why was the Messiah a better sacrifice for God's children than animals?

How did God prove to his children that his Son is more than just a man?

Son of God, Son of Man

In Matthew 26, when the Jewish **high priest** says to Jesus, "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of the God" (26:63b, NET), Jesus responds, "You have said it yourself. But I tell you, from now on, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (26:64). The exact translation of "You have said it yourself" [Gk: *sy eipas*], is "You have said" that I am the Christ, the Son of God, or "You commanded" that I am the Christ, the Son of God. The statement can also be **interpreted** simply as, "You have said it yourself."⁸ In one way, Jesus could be agreeing with the high priest's

⁷ The end of temple sacrifices references both Antiochus who violated the Jewish Temple in 167 C.E. and the end that Jesus brings to the temple sacrifices through the sacrificing of his body on the cross. See Benson Commentary and Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary for Daniel 9:27, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/daniel/9-27.htm>.

⁸ "Matthew 26:64," Biblehub, <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/matthew/26-64.htm>; "2036," Thayers, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2036.htm>. See also "Strong's #2036," *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), Derivative 2015 by Allan Loder, <https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/greek/2036.html>.

accusation, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Yet he also knows that the high priest denies this truth. So, to be clear about who he is, Jesus adds this statement about himself: “*But you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.*” Jesus is now raising his own authority to something far above the high priest’s accusation: Jesus is not just a Son of God or Son of Man. He will be given equal authority with God. While God already called Jesus “the arm of the Lord,” the term “right hand” and the authority that it represents will be discussed in a minute.

Yet, if Jesus is trying to raise the level of his authority, why does he change the title that the high priest gives him, Son of God, to something that seems lower, Son of Man? To understand this comparison, we must first understand the title, Son of Man. The Greek word for “man” in this title is *anthrōpos*, which can also mean “man,” as well as “mankind” or “the human race,” both male and female.⁹ In other words, Jesus states that what the high priest says is truth according to Jewish custom, but Jesus as the Son of Man will have the same authority God has over all men, *including* the high priest. At this remark, the high priest tears his robe in anger, accuses Jesus of insulting God, and condemns Jesus to death.

Why do you think the high priest gets angry at Jesus’s statement when the Bible has already predicted the coming of a Messiah?

Jesus says that the Son of Man will sit at the right hand of the Power and come on the clouds of heaven. What do you think Jesus means by this?

To fully understand the image that Jesus is creating when he says that he is the Son of Man, *anthrōpos*, or son of all mankind, who will sit at the right hand of God and come back to earth on the clouds of heaven, we need to return to the Old Testament and its description of the future Messiah. The term “right hand” in ancient Jewish times referred to a place in the highest authority of government.¹⁰ While this term can be used in a physical government, here Jesus is referring to a spiritual government. When Jesus uses this image, he is describing the same picture that Daniel used in 500 B.C.E. to describe the future Messiah.

In Daniel 7:13-14, the prophet sees a vision of someone like a “son of man” coming on the clouds of heaven. For the term “son of man,” Daniel uses the Hebrew term *enosh*, or human being.¹¹ In Daniel’s vision, God gives this son of man full authority over all nations and an eternal kingdom where people speaking every language worship this son as God. In 1000 B.C.E., King David also says about the Messiah: “The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand...” (Psalm 110:1a). Since David as a Jewish leader only believed in one true God, he understood that someday, the Messiah, his Lord, the arm of the Lord, a part of God’s being and Savior of the world, would sit at God’s right hand to rule over mankind. In other words, Jesus is claiming to be this Messiah, the ruling arm of the Lord and God himself who rules over all mankind. For these claims, the high priest sends Jesus away to be crucified (Mark 14:63-64).

Jesus shows his authority over all men and equal power to God by using the title “Son of Man,” but what are some other reasons why he might have used this title for himself?

⁹ “444. anthrōpos,” Thayer’s, <https://biblehub.com/greek/444.htm>.

¹⁰ “1188.dexios,” Thayer’s, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1188.htm>.

¹¹ “582.enosh,” Brown-Driver-Briggs, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/582.htm>.

As a man, Jesus also uses this title to show that the Messiah is a physical being, fully human and able to feel emotional and physical pain, weakness, and even **temptation**. For this reason, we see Jesus praying, sometimes all night, and crying out to God for strength (Luke 6:2, 22:44). The title Son of Man also shows Jesus's **humility**. He came to the earth as a servant and slave to all mankind, giving all glory to God and making himself nothing. Jesus was not like the high priest, to bring glory to himself. He used humble terms to describe who he was as a man and servant of God. In Matthew, Jesus says this about himself: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life..." (Matthew 20:28, NIV). To further show his humility, Jesus enters the center of Israel, Jerusalem, riding on a weak, young **donkey** (21:1-11). Since Zechariah had prophesied that the Messiah would announce himself as a King by humbly riding on a young **donkey**,¹² Jesus again is showing himself to be the Messiah that was described throughout the Old Testament.

What do we learn from Jesus's relationship with God and with others?

The Way to the Father

So far, we have seen Jesus's claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the ruling arm of the Lord, who is a part of God and equal in authority to God, the Savior, and the servant of all mankind. In the book of John, Jesus makes this claim about himself: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (16:6).

Based on who Jesus claims to be, why is Jesus the only way to God?

Many people today say that there are many ways to heaven or to God. Does Jesus agree? How do you know?

Jesus claims to be the only way to heaven and the only one sent by God to save our sins. Jesus does not say that he is *a* way to heaven but *the* way to heaven. After he makes this statement, he says this: "If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (16:7, 9). In John 8, Jesus tells his followers that he is one in spirit with his Father in heaven, but here, he speaks even more clearly about who he is.

Who is Jesus claiming to be in John 16:7 and 9?

Based on John 16:7 and 9, Jesus is not only claiming to be one in spirit with God; he is now one in number with God. Yet, even if Jesus claims that he is the Father God in human form, how can he prove this to the world? To prove that he is the Messiah sent by God, Jesus performs many miracles, heals the sick, and raises people from the dead. Most importantly, he makes this statement about himself: "Destroy this **temple**, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19).

¹² The word "King" in Zechariah 9:9 is not used for any king but only for a king who comes through the ancestry of King David. The Messiah was such a king. David and his successors were seen riding on donkeys, which appears to symbolize the Messiah to come. See Zechariah 9:9 under "4428. malek," Brown-Driver-Briggs, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4428.htm>.

What is Jesus claiming in his statement, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days"?

The Jewish people think that Jesus is referring to their temple in Jerusalem, but Jesus is referring to his own body. The Greek word for "temple," *naos*, can mean "temple," but Jesus does not use the general word for "temple." Instead, he uses the specific area inside the temple "where God lives,"¹³ his body. In this way, Jesus is saying that he will raise his own body to life three days after his death, something only God can do. Since Jesus is claiming to have this power, he again is claiming to be God in human form. No man, prophet, or religious leader has ever claimed this power or been able to raise himself from the dead.

After Jesus was crucified and died, he was buried. Three days later, his body could not be found, yet he appeared to his followers. When he appeared to them, raised from the dead, he said this about himself: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18), an authority given to God alone. The Bible says that Jesus appeared to more than 500 people after his death (I Corinthians 15:6), proving himself to have authority and power over the grave.

To prove that Jesus did perform miracles, appeared to people after his death, and claimed to be God, then we must have witnesses. Matthew and John are two eyewitnesses of Jesus's death. Were there other witnesses and eyewitnesses? Did these witnesses agree with Jesus's claims? Did they worship Jesus as God while he was still alive? How did Jesus react to this worship? Are there any witnesses of these things outside of the Bible? Read the handout "What People in the Bible Said about Jesus" to find out.

This Week:

Write in your journal:

1. Look back at your answers in this lesson. Is there anything new that you learned about Jesus? Write down what you learned and how it made you feel.
2. If you want to read more about Jesus and what he said about himself, begin reading one of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. These books contain the life and teachings of Jesus. After each chapter, write in a notebook what you learn from Jesus.
3. If you want to learn more about what others have said about Jesus, attend the next class, "What People in the Bible Said about Jesus."

¹³ "3485. *naos*," Thayer's, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1485.htm>; James Strong, Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.