

Evidence for Jesus

Lesson 1: What Jesus Said about Himself

Vocabulary:

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

Within the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, 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.

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" (4:46).

What does the term *Messiah* mean? What did the Old Testament say about the *Messiah*?

The term *Messiah*, *mashiach* [maw-SHEE-akh] in Hebrew or *Messias* [mes-SEE-as] 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.³ The Hebrew title *Messiah* is the same as the Greek term *Christos* [khris-TOS], or Christ.⁴ 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!"⁵ 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 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 ancient prophets teach that people who do not turn away from

³ "4899. mashiach," Brown-Driver-Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon, unabridged, electronic database (Biblesoft, 2006), <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4899.htm>; "3323. messias," Thayer's, <https://biblehub.com/greek/3323.htm>.

⁴ "5547. Christos," Thayer's, <https://biblehub.com/greek/5547.htm>.

⁵ "6005. Immanuel," Brown-Driver-Briggs, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6005.htm>.

a sinful life cannot be saved from this punishment and will be **eternally** separated from God. Isaiah speaks about God's anger over the sins 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. Even if they want to turn away from sin, they cannot without God's help (61). So, God looks for a **righteous** man, instead of his children, to receive this punishment, 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 people from punishment and eternal death if they are willing to turn away from sin. God then creates an eternal kingdom of saved children to bring him glory and honor (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 he 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 God also calls his arm his "servant," as well as "the Branch." Zechariah, who lived approximately 500 years *before* the birth of Christ, predicts that this special servant of God will 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?

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).⁶ 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 will put an end to these animal sacrifices and establish a new way for people to be **forgiven** for their sins. These sacrifices were only a symbol for what God would do 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?

⁶ 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>.

Isaiah describes exactly how the Messiah will put an end to the sacrificing of animals: The Anointed One will be punished and sacrificed for man's sins (53:5). A son born of a virgin, he will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace" (53:5). He will **cleanse** his children through his *own blood* (Zechariah 9:9-11). The prophets give clues to who this Messiah will be when he comes: He will come bringing righteousness, gentle and humble, "riding on a... **colt**, the foal of a donkey" (9:9). The deaf will hear, the crippled will walk, the mute will speak, and the blind will see (Isaiah 35:5-6; see Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 2:1-12). To **reveal** that the Messiah will be a spiritual King who could never die, God will raise his servant's body from the dead (Isaiah 53). Even though the world will continue in war and sin (Daniel 9:26, 12:10), the promise to the Messiah's true follows will be peace with God and others who follow him (Isaiah 11:6-9). All this was written over 500 years before Jesus was even born!

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, we see Jesus standing before the members of the Sanhedrin [san-HE-dren] court, the Jewish court of law. They are looking for evidence against Jesus to put him to death (27:59). 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*],⁷ 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." Perhaps Jesus knows that the high priest has made this statement before, and Jesus is **affirming** its truth. Yet something else may be happening in this conversation.

The Sanhedrin created many laws beyond those given to them by God. For example, anyone who used the term "God" plainly was a **blasphemer** deserving death.⁸ By the second to third century B.C.E., the Jewish Sanhedrin declared the term "God" too holy to be used. So, the Hebrew term for God [Yahweh or YHWH] was replaced with the term "Adonai" [ah-doh-NY], which means Lord.⁹ In other words, had Jesus used the term "Son of God" during his ministry, he would have been immediately arrested and put to death. For this reason, Jesus's reply, "You have said it yourself," allows Jesus to avoid blasphemy according to Sanhedrin law, while pointing out that the high priest himself has just committed blasphemy under his own laws. Even so, Jesus never condemns the high priest or any of his followers for referring to him as the Son of God, nor does he deny the title.¹⁰

While Jesus does avoid the term "God" before the Sanhedrin, he does not avoid stating clearly that he is the Messiah when he says, "But you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

What do you think Jesus means by "the right hand of the Power" and "coming on the clouds of heaven"?

⁷ "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>.

⁸ Sanhedrin 56a.

⁹ Kaufmann Kohler, "Adonai," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/840-adonai. For evidence that the law was changed, see Kaufmann Kohler and David Werner Amram, "Blasphemy," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3354-blasphemy (accessed Feb. 28, 2023).

¹⁰ See also Matthew 16:16.

The term “right hand” in ancient Jewish times referred to a place in the highest authority of government.¹¹ The term “the Power” is again a term that Jesus uses to avoid Sanhedrin blasphemy, but is used in place of “God.” With this statement, 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 when he will sit at God’s right hand as ruler. The Greek term for “Man” [Gk: *anthrōpos*] means that Jesus will have authority over all “man,” “mankind,” or “human race”¹² and will one day return on a cloud as a divine being. To understand this image, we must return to the Old Testament and its description of the future Messiah. When Jesus uses this image, he is describing the same picture that Daniel used in 500 B.C.E. to describe the Messiah who was to come.

In Daniel 7:13-14, the prophet Daniel sees a **vision** of someone like a “son of man” coming on the clouds of heaven. For “man,” Daniel uses the Hebrew term *enosh* [en-AWSH], or human being.¹³ In Daniel’s vision, God gives this son of man, or human being, 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), or place of highest authority. As a Jewish leader, David only believed in one true God, yet 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 states that what the high priest says is truth according to Jewish scripture. He will have the same authority that God has over all men, *including* the high priest, and he will return as God the Messiah and Savior of those who believe in him. For these claims, the high priest tears his robe in anger, a sign that he has witnessed blasphemy.¹⁴ Jesus has claimed to be divine, to have the same authority as God, and to be the Messiah, “Almighty God and Everlasting Father.” The priest **condemns** Jesus to death and sends him 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?

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**. We see Jesus in his human nature when he prays, sometimes all night, and cries out to God for strength (Luke 6:2, 22:44). The title Son of Man also shows Jesus’s **humility**. He is not like the high priest, bringing honor to himself, but Jesus humbles himself as a servant and washes his followers’ feet (John 7:1-17). 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 and give a sign that he is the Messiah mentioned in the Zechariah, Jesus enters the center of Israel, Jerusalem, riding on a weak, young donkey or colt (21:1-11).¹⁵

What do we learn from Jesus’s relationship with God and with others from this title “Son of Man”?

One with the Father

In John, 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).

¹¹ “1188.dexios,” Thayer’s, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1188.htm>.

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

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

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Kohler and Amram, “Blasphemy.”

¹⁵ 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 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*,¹⁶ meaning one in *spirit*. The meaning, in this case, is actually 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). So, did Jesus ever say he was one in number with the Father?

In John 8, the Jewish people become angry when Jesus says that whoever obeys his teaching will never see death (John 8:51-53). They question Jesus by saying, “⁵³ ‘Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?’” Jesus replies, “⁵⁶ ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad... ⁵⁸ Very truly I tell you... before Abraham was born, I am!’ The Jewish people pick up stones to throw at Jesus, but he slips away.”

Jesus was born c. 6 B.C.E. Abraham was born c. 2000 B.C.E. What do you think Jesus is saying when he says, “Before Abraham was born, I am!”? Why do you think the Jews wanted to kill Jesus for this statement?

If translated into Greek, the term “I am” in this passage means, “I exist” and suggests that Jesus also existed at a time when Abraham did not.¹⁷ In the Old Testament, “I AM” was also the name that God gave for himself when speaking to Moses (Exodus 3:14). While Jesus does not use Hebrew to declare who he is to the Jews, he ensures his meaning by declaring that he existed *before* Abraham was born! In this way, Jesus is making himself equal to the eternal God. To the Jews, this is a crime worthy of death. And yet, this is exactly what the prophet Isaiah declared that the Messiah would be: “Mighty God, Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6).

The Way to the Father

So far, we have seen Jesus 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, the servant of all mankind, and eternal God. In 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

¹⁶ “1520. heis,” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, electronic database (BibleSoft, 2011), <https://biblehub.com/greek/1520.htm>.

¹⁷ “1510. eimi, Thayer’s,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/1510.htm>.

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 clearly 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, healing the sick and raising 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).

What is Jesus claiming when he says, “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,”¹⁸ 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 is again 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 is crucified and dies, he is buried. Three days later, no one can find his body, yet he appears to his followers. When Jesus appears to them, raised from the dead, he says 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 (1 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. In a notebook, write 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.”

¹⁸ “3485. naos,” Thayer’s, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1485.htm>; James Strong, Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.