

Is Jesus Truly The Messiah?

The Greek word for Messiah is christos, or Christ, the term that has been firmly affixed to Jesus' name throughout history. "To call Jesus the Christ, therefore, is to make a theological claim—that he is the Messiah long expected by the Jews," said Stephen Prothero, chair of the religion department at Boston University.¹

1) Jesus Claimed to Be Messiah

Jesus revealed to his disciples that He was the Messiah, and showed them by looking at the Scriptures. Luke 24:26-27; Luke 24:44-48;

Jesus made it clear to those seeking that He was the Messiah. Ex: John 4:25-26

Jesus, "having made these unambiguous claims, if he then fails to match the prophetic portrait, Jesus would be an imposter worthy of rejection and disdain—a false prophet who should be rejected by Jews and Gentiles alike. Obviously, these matters are critical to all spiritual seekers, regardless of their religious background. Nothing less than the classrooms to scholarly books—and to the sweltering subways of New York City, where dueling ads clashed over whether Jesus should be embraced by Jews searching for their Messiah."²

2) The Perspective of the Jews Versus the Perspective of the Christian

One conviction that unites many Jewish and Christian scholars is that the Tanakh, known by Christians as the Old Testament, does foretell the coming of the **Messiah**.

Since the Old Testament/Tanakh doesn't explicitly label verses as being messianic, scholars must pore over the context of various passages to determine which ones deal with the coming of the Messiah. In his Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy, J. Barton Payne digs out 127 personal messianic predictions in 3,348 verses of the Old Testament. In addition, there are 456 Old Testament passages cited in some 558 rabbinic writings that refer to the Messiah and the messianic times.³

The big controversy is whether Jesus of Nazareth is the one who fulfilled the ancient prophecies and therefore fits the fingerprint of this much-anticipated Messiah, a word that means "anointed one."

¹ Lee Strobel, The Case For The Real Jesus, 193

² Ibid., 196

³ Ibid., 196

A) The Perspective of the Jews

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan said, “Belief in the coming of the Messiah has always been a fundamental part of Judaism. Thus, for example, [Jewish philosopher] Maimonides counts the belief in the Messiah as one of the thirteen cardinal principles of Judaism. It is a concept that is repeated again and again throughout the length and breadth of Jewish literature.”⁴

Rabbi Joshua Waxman was once asked, “Couldn’t you be Jewish and believe in Jesus? The answer is no.”⁵

Why Not?

The Jews had one major objection to the Christian Messiah, and that was the fact that he had been unsuccessful. Judaism had always taught that the Messiah would redeem Israel in a political sense, and Jesus had failed to accomplish this. Instead, he had been scourged and humiliated like a common rebel, and finally crucified along with two ordinary thieves. How could the career of Jesus be reconciled with the glorious picture of the Messiah as taught by the Prophets of Israel? The early Christians faced this dilemma, and, in justifying Jesus as the Messiah, radically altered the entire concept.⁶

Amy-Jill Levine, a Jewish expert in Jesus and the New Testament at Vanderbilt Divinity School and author of *The Misunderstood Jew*, said there’s no “messianic checklist” that establishes Jesus as the one who was foretold. “The Messiah is someone who establishes justice throughout the world, and I look out my window and I know that hasn’t happened,” The Messiah is someone who conquers death, conquers disease. And I know that hasn’t happened. One might even say, for example, the death of the Messiah—his torture, his crucifixion—is predicted in the Old Testament. Well, in fact, it’s not.”⁷

B) Christian Perspective

Jesus is the promised Messiah, as He Fulfilled Old Testament Messianic Prophecies

The disciples and first witnesses of Jesus were repeatedly amazed by the number of ways Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy related to the coming Messiah:

- The Messiah Will Appear After the Jews Return to Israel (Jeremiah 23:3-6)
- (2) The Messiah Would Be Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)
- (3) The Messiah Would Be Preceded By a Messenger (Isaiah 40:3)
- (4) The Messiah Would Enter Jerusalem While Riding on a Donkey (Zech 9:9)
- (5) The Messiah Would Suffer and Be Rejected (Isaiah 53:3)
- (6) The Messiah Would Be Betrayed for 30 Pieces of Silver (Zech 11:12-13)
- (7) The Messiah Would Be Silent Before His Accusers (Isaiah 53:7)
- (8) The Messiah Would Be Wounded, Whipped and Crucified (Isaiah 53:5)

⁴ Ibid., 191-192

⁵ Ibid., 191

⁶ Ibid., 199

⁷ Ibid., 199-200

3) Bridging the Gap

MICHAEL L. BROWN, PH.D.

Bio: Michael grew up in a Jewish family. He was not interested in spiritual things, and so he joined a band and began living the ways of the world. One day two of his band members began going to church, and so he went to the church to try to save them from Christianity. However, God used that church experience, as he eventually made a profession of faith and began to live for Jesus. Although his father appreciated how his son's new faith in Jesus changed his lifestyle for the good, he was still bothered that his son was now a Christian. As a result, he had their Rabbi come to try to dissuade him from being a Christian. Every attempt that the Rabbi made, he could not cause Michael to change his ways. However, the Rabbi did raise some serious questions and challenged him on his lack of knowledge towards the Hebrew language. These challenges turned into motivation, as he pursued years of education. He received a masters degree as well as a doctorate in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures from New York University. His education allowed him to develop into one of America's best-known defenders of Jesus the Messiah. Brown has taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Fuller Theological Seminary, Regent University, and in twenty-five countries. He has authored eighteen books.

Michael, How Would You Respond?

1) *The Messiah was only for God's Chosen People (The Jews)*

"The Jews are God's chosen people," he said, "but it's important to understand that when God chose Abraham and his descendants, there was a divine purpose. It was not just to have a separated people who would be loyal to him: it was so that through Israel the entire world would be blessed and come to know the one true God. We need to keep that in mind as we proceed."⁸

2) *Jesus did not fulfill the credentials of the Messiah*

a) *Specific promises given to the tribe of Judah and to David*

Genesis 49:10 says, "The scepter will not depart from Judah".

Isaiah 11:1 says, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." The term "Branch", is commonly used to refer to the Messiah. It's said there would be a lasting kingship through David. Jeremiah 23:5 says, that he will raise up from David's line, "a righteous Branch. A King who will reign wisely."⁹

⁸ Ibid., 199.

⁹ Ibid., 201

b) *Messiah as Servant of the Lord*

Isaiah refers to the Messiah as servant of the Lord. A number of these verses are also recognized as referring to the Messiah in some ancient Jewish traditions.

Isaiah 42:4 says “he will not falter until he brings justice to the earth. Michael explained that Isaiah 49 says “the servant has the mission of regathering the tribes of Israel to bring them, back to God. The servant feels as if he failed in his mission, but God says not only will he ultimately regather Israel, but he adds in Isaiah 49:6, ‘I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.’”¹⁰

Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12- Michael explained that “these verses say the Messiah will be highly exalted but first will suffer terribly. He will actually be disfigured in his suffering... **and the narrative says the people of Israel didn’t get it.** They thought he was suffering for his own sins and wickedness; they didn’t realize he was bearing their sins, suffering on their behalf, and by his wounds there was healing for them. Then it speaks of his death and his continued life after that.”¹¹

c) *The destruction of the Temple fulfilled the Messiah had come*

2 Chronicles 7:19-22- “God says if Israel’s sin reaches a certain level, he’ll destroy the temple, exile the people, and leave them in a state of judgment.” By looking at the Scriptures, we can see that this happened.

Daniel 9- the prophet Daniel prayed for mercy, and God gave him a revelation that the temple would be rebuilt. And before “this new temple is destroyed, Daniel is told, several things are going to take place, including the bringing of everlasting atonement—the final dealing with sin.” (Daniel 9:24)

The second temple that was built in Jerusalem after the exile was nothing like the first. The first one was not only a “stunning physical structure”, “but it had the glory of God there. When sacrifices were offered, fire came down and consumed them. The second temple didn’t have the presence of God or the divine fire. Yet Haggai said the glory of the second temple would be greater than the glory of the first temple. God would fill the second temple with his glory.” (Haggai 2:6-9)¹²

The word glory: It can mean “great wealth” or “abundance”. However, when God says that He will fill the temple with glory, that can only apply to his presence.

¹⁰ Ibid., 201

¹¹ Ibid., 201-202

¹² Ibid., 201-203

Malachi says, “the Lord will come to his temple purifying some of his people and bringing judgment on others.” (Malachi 3:1-5) “Malachi uses a Hebrew term that always refers to God himself: the Lord- he will come to the temple.”¹³

“Keep in mind the second temple was destroyed in AD 70. Atonement for sin had to be made and the divine visitation had to take place before the second temple was destroyed. There are even rabbinic traditions that put the Messiah’s coming around two thousand years ago—right when Jesus came. In fact, Rashi, the foremost Jewish commentator on the Tanakh, put the date at more than 1,750 years ago, but that was based on the most famous chronological error in the rabbinic literature. When the error is corrected, we find ourselves in the middle of the first century, within one generation of the time of Jesus!

What divine visitation did take place if not for Yeshua? When else did God visit the second temple in a personal way? Who else atoned for sin? How else was the glory of the second temple greater than the first? Either the Messiah came two thousand years ago or the prophets were wrong and we can discard the Bible. But they weren’t wrong. Yeshua is the Messiah—or nobody is.”¹⁴

Something Interesting...

“...there’s a rabbinic tradition preserved in the Talmud that says on the Day of Atonement there were three different signs that the animal sacrifices the high priest offered had been accepted by God and atonement given to the people would be ashamed and mourn, because God had not accepted their sacrifice. “Then it says that during the last forty years before the second temple was destroyed, all three signs were negative each and every time. Think about that: Jesus probably was crucified in AD 30, and the temple was destroyed in AD 70. So from the time of his death to the time of the destruction of the temple— a period of forty years —God signaled that he no longer accepted the sacrifices and offerings of the Jewish people. Why?” His answer was emphatic: “Because final atonement had been made through Yeshua, just as he had prophesied.”¹⁵

3) *The prophecies don’t foretell that the Messiah would be divine*

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan said, “In no place do the Prophets say that he will be anything more than a remarkable leader and teacher. The Jewish Messiah is truly human origin. He is born of ordinary parents, and is of flesh and blood like all mortals,”¹⁶

Michael response: “Bear in mind, however, that the Jews were staunch monotheists, and it would have been totally misunderstood if the claim of the Messiah’s divinity had been too explicit.... The Davidic king was described as being highly exalted and the one who will someday rule and reign. Several parallel descriptions are used of both God and this exalted king: people will praise God, and people will praise the king; people will

¹³ Ibid., 203

¹⁴ Ibid., 203

¹⁵ Ibid., 205

¹⁶ Ibid., 208

serve God, and the people will serve the king; people will bow down before God, and people will bow down to the king.”¹⁷

Psalm 110:1 says- “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand.’”

Sitting at the right hand: That’s a position of great exaltation

Michael explains Daniel 7: The Son of Man figure in Daniel 7 “is highly exalted; he comes before the throne of God, is worshiped, is given sovereign power and authority, and his kingdom is eternal. Being worshiped, having sovereignty, being eternal—sounds a lot like divine characteristics to me. And of course, Jesus’ favorite self-description was the Son of Man, and he applied Daniel 7 directly to himself.”¹⁸

Psalm 45- “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever.” Michael explains: “God is anointing this king, yet the king himself is called *Elohim*, a Hebrew name for God. That’s very significant. We know that sometimes Elohim can be a reference to earth judges and angels, but to call an individual Elohim in this context is really stretching things.”¹⁹

Isaiah 52:13- says the servant will be ‘raised’ and ‘lifted up’. In Isaiah, those words only occur in reference to the Lord. And even more directly in Isaiah 9:6-7, as the king is given various names; including: ‘Mighty God’ and ‘Everlasting Father’.

Did the people of that day anticipate a divine Messiah?

“It wasn’t really until Yeshua came and they looked back at the Hebrew scriptures and said, ‘Oh, that explains it!’ In hindsight, it becomes much clearer.”²⁰

The Verdict

DID JESUS—AND JESUS ALONE—MATCH THE IDENTITY OF THE MESSIAH? Hundreds of years before Jesus would redeem God’s people. In effect, dozens of these Old Testament prophecies created a fingerprint that only the true Messiah could fit. This gave Israel a way to rule out imposters and validate the credentials of the authentic Messiah. Against astronomical odds—by one estimate, one chance in a trillion, trillion—Jesus, and only Jesus throughout history, matched this prophetic fingerprint. This confirms Jesus’ identity to an incredible degree of certainty.²¹

¹⁷ Ibid., 208

¹⁸ Ibid., 209

¹⁹ Ibid., 209

²⁰ Ibid., 209

²¹ Ibid., 279

Deployment

At Elliott Heights Baptist Church, we believe that God humbled himself and became a man and dwelt among us; He was fully man, but also fully God at the same time. (Philippians 2:8-11)

However, when we share the gospel, we will meet people who will struggle with Jesus being God.

How would you respond to someone who told you that Jesus plagiarised from other mythological gods? That person begins to show some interesting parallels with the pre-Christian God Mithras:

Mithras was born of a virgin in a cave on December 25, was considered a great traveling teacher, had twelve disciples, promised his followers immortality, sacrificed himself for world peace, was buried in a tomb and rose again three days later, instituted a Eucharist or “Lord’s Supper,” and was considered the Logos, redeemer, Messiah, and “the way, the truth, and the life.”

This person then concludes, “How can you believe in Jesus when he borrowed from other religions?”

How would you respond to that person? What would you say?