

Study Guide #12: Is Jesus the Messiah?

Introduction

The word “Messiah” comes from a Hebrew word meaning “anointed” and is used in the Hebrew Scriptures (Christian Old Testament) in a variety of ways. But *the* Messiah is used to signify one person who would become a king of Judah in the line of King David, who would restore David’s dynasty, defeat Judah’s enemies, and bring great glory to the nation and justice to the entire *world*. Christians also believe that he would be a prophet with a spiritual mission of dying as the Divine-Human Substitute for people’s sins and then be resurrected to everlasting glory. Christians believe that Jesus is that Messiah. [NOTE: The word “Christ” is actually a title rather than a person’s name; it’s the equivalent of the Hebrew word for “Messiah.”]

Question #1: How many prophecies of the Messiah are there in the Old Testament?

Answer: That’s impossible to answer definitively because many of them do not actually use the word for “Messiah.” It’s a matter of attempting to decide which prophecies are Messianic on the basis of the context of a passage. The estimated range of passages that speak of the Messiah ranges from as few as about 30 to more than 300. [NOTE: Even Jewish scholars don’t agree on exactly which prophecies are Messianic.]

Question #2: How do we know the Messiah would be a descendant of Judah, Abraham’s great grandson?

Answer: The first text to identify the Messiah as a descendant of Judah is Genesis 49:10, which declares that “**The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes...**” (NKJV). The word “**Shiloh**” comes from a Hebrew word meaning “He whose it is” or “that which belongs to him.” Of course, a scepter is a symbol that belongs to a king. Shiloh seems to be the most important Jewish king (Jews are descendants of Judah) whose kingship really belongs to him. For this reason, the Jewish Talmud considers this to be a Messianic prophecy. [NOTE: The Jewish Talmud is a written collection of ancient Jewish religious/legal traditions, second in importance only to the Scriptures for Jews.]



King David

Question #3: What passages tell us that the Messiah would specifically be a descendant of King David?

Answer: Isaiah 11:1-10 speaks of a male descendant of Jesse (David's father) who **"shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked"** (v. 4, NKJV). Then it describes supernatural conditions in His kingdom, which is the entire earth (vv. 6-9). Such a king must also be a Divine-human king. As a special Davidic king, he is viewed as the Messiah. Amos 9:11-12 refers to the *restoration* of the **"tabernacle of David"** (NKJV). Since David didn't build the tabernacle or sanctuary, this language is

understood by both Jewish and Christian scholars to refer to David's dynasty. If David's dynasty needs to be restored, it means that his dynasty would be interrupted first.

Question #4: You said that Isaiah 11 suggests that the Messiah would be divine as well as human. Are there any other Messianic prophecies that teach this?

Answer: Yes. Perhaps the clearest example is Jeremiah 23:5-6, which refers to a Davidic king who will save Judah at some future time: **"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, 'That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His day Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS'** (NKJV)." The Jewish Targum on Isaiah identifies Isaiah 9:6-7 as a Messianic prophecy. That text clearly calls Him **"Mighty God"** and **"Everlasting Father."** Some have argued that the writer borrowed from the Egyptian practice of calling their rulers gods without actually meaning that the Messiah is God. But the Hebrew Scriptures are just too plain to be misunderstood.

Question #5: Is there a prophecy telling us *where* the Messiah would be born?

Answer: Yes. Micah 5:2 talks about a **"Ruler in Israel"** who will come out of Bethlehem, the city of David. The word for **"Ruler"** in Biblical times denoted a king. This king would reunite the **"remnant...of Israel"** (v. 3) and **"shall be great To the ends of the earth"** (v. 4, NKJV). Thus, this is no ordinary king. Moreover, verse 2 also says His **"goings forth are from old, From everlasting"** (NKJV). Therefore, the Messiah would also be a divine Being as well as human.



Bethlehem

Question #6: *When* would the Messiah be born?

Answer: The exact year of the Messiah's *birth* is not prophesied in Scripture. However, the 70 Weeks prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27 does tell us when the Messiah would *appear*. Without detailing this prophecy, it's clear that he would appear 483 years after a decree allowing the Jews to **"restore and build Jerusalem"** (v. 25, NKJV) after the Babylonian Captivity. There were 4 decrees issued by 3 different Persian kings involving the Jews doing something in Jerusalem: (a) Cyrus in 538/537 B.C.; (b) Darius in 520/519 B.C.; (c) Artaxerxes I in 458/457 B.C.; and (d) Artaxerxes I in 445/444 B.C. The 483 years is derived from the

69 weeks (v. 25) by assuming that “weeks of years” is meant ($69 \times 7 = 483$) since a period of 70 literal weeks is far too short for everything in the prophecy to be fulfilled (see Daniel 9:24).

[NOTES:

- When the starting date is greater than 483 years, the time is still in B.C. But when the starting date is less than 483 years, the time is in A.D.
- Also, when moving from B.C. to A.D., one must add 1 because there was no year zero (0).
- Conservative scholars don’t agree on which date to choose; but it varies between 458/457 B.C. to 445/444 B.C. We examine this prophecy in greater detail in Explorer III, Study Guide #4, where we identify the specific year when the Messiah was prophesied to appear.
- Since “Messiah” means “anointed,” we should *not* look for the *birth* year of the Messiah, but the year of his *anointing*—which in Jesus’ case was when He was baptized—see Luke 3:21-23; Acts 10:38.]

This gives a conservative range between A.D. 26 to A.D. 40 for the Messiah to appear (i.e., to be “anointed”). Indeed, the Jewish people were looking for the Messiah during the time of Jesus, whose approximate dates match the prophecy.

Question #7: How do we know the Messiah would also be a prophet?

Answer: Deuteronomy 18:15-18 says that God would raise up a prophet like Moses. In other words, this would be no ordinary prophet since Moses was a *special* leader in Israel. This prophet’s ministry is described in Isaiah 61:1-7 as one who will be “anointed” (v. 1). He also **“will bring forth justice to the Gentiles”** (v. 1) and **“justice to the earth”** (v. 4), and will Himself be a **“covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison house”** (vv. 6-7, NKJV). Such a specially anointed prophet must be the Messiah.

Question #8: How do we know the Messiah would also be a priest?

Answer: Read Psalm 110. There are 2 “lords” in this psalm. David isn’t one of them because the 2nd



Abraham and Melchizedek

“Lord” is called **“my Lord”** by God Himself (v. 1). Note that this 2nd Lord **“is at Your [God’s] right hand”** (v. 5), meaning that He is equal to God. Therefore, this 2nd Lord is also God Himself. He is referred to as a king (**“Rule”** in v. 2) and a **“priest forever”** (v. 4). This is no ordinary priest-king; He must be the Messiah. Note that His priesthood is not Levitical in nature, but He is after the order of Melchizedek. The latter was the priest-king of Salem (later called Jerusalem), to whom

Abraham paid tithes, according to Genesis 14:18-20.

Question #9: When and how will the Messiah function as a priest?

Answer: A clue to that question's answer is found in Isaiah 53, which speaks of the Messiah as both the sacrificial lamb (vv. 5-7, 10-11) and one who will make **"intercession for the transgressors"** (v. 12, NKJV). He is a priest who especially mediates or intercedes on the sinner's behalf before God. Since this intercession must occur only after the Messiah has become the sin offering, and He's not a Levitical priest, the sanctuary in which He will serve as priest must be the heavenly sanctuary after His (implied) resurrection.

Question #10: Please explain more about the prophecy of Isaiah 53.

Answer: Isaiah 53 is the last of 4 Messiah/Servant Songs (poems) in Isaiah: (1) 42:1-9; (2) 49:1-13; (3) 50:4-11; and (4) 52:13-53:12. This is clearly the Messiah because (a) **"He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles"** and **"in the earth"** (42:1, 4); (b) He will be a **"light to the Gentiles," "be My salvation to the ends of the earth"** (49:6); (c) will **"restore the earth"** (49:8), and (d) is called God's **"Servant"** who **"was not rebellious"** when the rest of Israel was.

The spiritual mission of the Messiah is outlined in this last and longest Messiah Song (52:13-53:12) [All quotes are from the NKJV]:

- He would be **"despised and rejected by men"** and a **"Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"** (53:3).
- He will be **"cut off"** [executed] **"For the transgressions of My people"** (53:8).
- In His suffering, He will be like a sacrificial **"lamb"** without protesting (53:7).
- He will have **"borne our griefs And carried our sorrows,"** be **"wounded for our transgressions"** (Not His), **"bruised for our iniquities"** (Not His), **"by His stripes we are healed,"** and **"the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"** (53:4-6, all NKJV).
- The Lord will cause Him to become an **"offering for sin."** Yet **"He shall prolong His days"** (53:10). [NOTE: That is, He will be resurrected after becoming a sin offering.]
- He will **"justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities"** (53:11).
- Because **"He bore the sin of many,"** He will **"make intercession for the transgressors"** (53:12). [NOTE: Again, resurrection is implied.]



Jesus on the Cross

Question #11: Did Jesus fulfill all of the Messianic prophecies explained here?

Answer: Yes. See the outline of those fulfillments below:

- Jesus was born from the tribe of Judah—Genesis 49:10; Matthew 1:2-17
- Jesus was a male descendant of King David—Isaiah 11:1-10; Amos 9:11-12; Matthew 1:6-17
- Jesus was born in Bethlehem—Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-7
- Jesus was believed to be both a human and a divine Being by His followers—Psalm 2; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Micah 5:2; and the entire New Testament’s testimony
- Jesus was eventually and generally “**despised and rejected by men**”—Isaiah 53:3; Matthew 26:3-5, 47-27:50; Mark 14:1-2, 43-15:37; Luke 22:1-6, 47-23:46; John 18:1-19:30
- Jesus went to His execution without protest—Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 26:50-56; Mark 14:43-50; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:1-11
- Jesus was “**cut off**” (executed as a criminal)—Isaiah 53:8; Matthew 27:31-50; Mark 15:15-37; Luke 23:26-47; John 19:16-30
- Jesus’ followers claimed He was resurrected from the dead—Implied in Isaiah 53:10, 12; Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-18; Luke 24:1-48; John 20:1-21:14

Question #12: What are the odds that someone other than Jesus could have been the Messiah?

Answer: Dr. Peter Stoner, a mathematician and scientist, calculated the odds in the 1950s. He wrote the book entitled *Science Speaks* about his calculations in 1958. He based his odds on only 8 Messianic prophecies for his analysis. Admittedly, some of his numbers are just guestimates because their very nature doesn’t allow anyone to know exactly what the probability is. But no one who studied his research logic doubts that he was very conservative in the numbers he chose. Also, other mathematicians confirmed that he used the law of probability in an accurate way. His analysis concluded that the odds of any one man accidentally fulfilling just 8 Messianic prophecies was 1 in 10^{17} , which is the number 1 with 17 zeros. Large numbers like that are difficult to comprehend, so Dr. Stoner illustrated his conclusion in the following way:

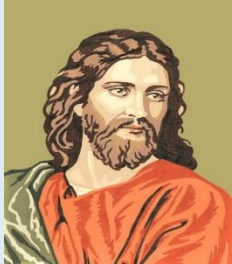
Suppose that we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing those eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote using their own wisdom.¹

Stoner’s conservative analysis shows that the prophets who wrote those 8 Messianic prophecies were supernaturally inspired to a degree of 1 chance in 10^{17} of absolute certainty. That is amazing!

¹ Peter Stoner, *Science Speaks*, https://www.yearofourlord.org/1_bible_divinity_of_christ/ScienceSpeaks.pdf.

Question #13: If Jesus really was the Messiah, why did the Jewish nation as a whole reject Him?

Answer: There are at least 2 principal reasons for this. *First*, the Jewish people were firmly convicted that God is an absolute monotheistic Being—1 God is 1 Person. Undoubtedly, this was based on their history of frequent periods of polytheistic idolatry during Biblical times. It seems they learned their lesson after the Babylonian Captivity so well that they ignored evidence of more than one Person within the Godhead in their own Scriptures. The result was that they simply could not accept any notion that the Messiah could be both human *and* divine. *Second*, their long history of being dominated by foreign powers led them to focus exclusively on those Messianic prophecies that speak about a king who would defeat their enemies, ignoring the other Messianic prophecies portraying the spiritual mission of the Messiah. [NOTE: When they rejected His *spiritual* mission, Jesus could not fulfill the *political/military* mission—at least not in their day and in the exact same way. This has significance for how Christians interpret the role of Israel in the end-time prophecies.]



Jesus