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WHO IS JESUS? A DEEPER LOOK

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Each time we pick up a book, we enter into a new realm. Every detail the author includes broadens our understanding and experience of that world. The Bible is no different. It, too, opens up realms of possibilities and transforms our understanding of the world.

The Christian [Bible](#), a sixty-six-book unit of Scripture, includes a span of diverse writings. It begins with records of ancient history and the mystery of the world's origins. Then it threads its way through poetry, letters, prophecy, history, and law. Finally the Bible concludes with apocalyptic literature filled with imagery of future times and [the end of the world](#).

However, as we dive in, we must not lose the forest for the trees. Even while we observe the details of the Bible, we must remember that all these parts—indeed, every one of the sixty-six books—hang together on one theme.

Writer Sally Lloyd-Jones once explained, “There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them. It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle—the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.”¹

THE BIBLE TELLS THE STORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

The Bible tells the story of the relationship between God and man. As with any relationship, this one has not been easy. Like the relationship between parents and their children, man's relationship with God has gone through peaks and valleys.

But this Father never gave up on his children. The primary way he chose to [display his consistent, persistent love](#) is through the person and work of Jesus Christ—the person for whom [Christianity](#) was named and the reason it even exists.²

Setting the Scene

In many stories, the hero is not apparent at first. The author, working to build suspense and paint a clear picture of the need for rescue, may keep the hero in the wings until the moment when his entrance has the greatest effect.

¹ Sally Lloyd-Jones, “The Story and the Song,” in *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2007), 17.

² *The Holy Bible*, New International Version © 2011, John 3:16–17. “For God so loved the world that he gave his

one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Songwriter David Wilcox puts it this way:

Look, if someone wrote a play just to glorify
What's stronger than hate, would they not arrange the stage
To look as if the hero came too late? He's almost in defeat
It's looking like the Evil side will win, so [we're] on the edge of every seat,
from the moment that the whole thing begins.³

But the Apostle John assures us that the hero of the Christian story was here before the first lights shone on the world stage. Jesus was here in the very beginning.⁴

The Apostle Paul explains, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”⁵

Jesus said of himself, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End,”⁶ a claim that had, up to that point, been made by God alone.⁷

Though never mentioned by name in the Old Testament, the person of Jesus may be felt in the “negative space”—he is [the unspoken end to which all of the Old Testament points](#). Jesus may be felt in the area around and between each of us. As in a work of art, the negative space draws us in, showing us that there is something more as we witness the unfolding story in which our hero's love will ultimately save the day.

As David Wilcox continues,

It is love that mixed the mortar
And it's love who stacked these stones
And it's love who made the stage here
Although it looks like we're alone
In this scene set in shadows
Like the night is here to stay
There is evil cast around us
But it's love that wrote this play.⁸

**JESUS IS THE UNSPOKEN END
TO WHICH ALL OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT POINTS.**

In the Beginning

All started out well in the Garden of Eden. Beauty abounded. Relationships between God and humans, Adam and Eve, and humans and creation commenced and flourished. The first strains of life's melody, as in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, were peaceful. But just as in Stravinsky's ballet, dissonance rapidly ensued.⁹

³ David Wilcox, “Show the Way,” *Big Horizon*, A & M Records, 1994.

⁴ *The Holy Bible*, John 1:1–3. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

⁵ *Ibid.*, Colossians 1:16–17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Revelation 22:13.

⁷ See *The Holy Bible*, Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; and 48:12. Also see Jesus' parallel claims in Revelation 1:8,17; 2:8; 3:14; and 21:6.

⁸ Wilcox, “Show the Way.”

⁹ Igor Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*, 1913.

Humankind, like rebellious teens ready to escape their parents, disdained God's household rules. They chose to believe a lie rather than trusting in the goodness of their Father.

**HUMANKIND FELL UNDER
AN ALL-CONSUMING CURSE
INCURRED BY THEIR REJECTION
OF GOD.**

This seemingly small act of disobedience broke not only the relationship between God and humans, but also every other relationship that existed or ever will exist. Humankind fell under an all-consuming curse incurred by their rejection of God.¹⁰

It took [just one sin to bring the curse](#); what hero could break it?

Old Testament Heroes

Many men and women in ancient times set the stage for the hero. Among these were Moses, the judges, the kings (including David and Solomon), and many other now-famous individuals—such as Boaz (great-grandfather of King David) and Esther (the Jewish wife of King Xerxes of Persia).

Moses, by God's power, brought the nation of Israel out of slavery, taught them the ways of obedience, and tried to lead them back to the Father.¹¹ Boaz acted as a redeemer in his relationship to Ruth, through a seemingly small act of generosity and love that played into the bigger story in a huge way.¹²

**GOD WOULD RESTORE
HUMANITY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH
THEIR CREATOR, REDEEMING THE
WORLD AND BRINGING LIGHT
AND LIFE TO ALL.**

But one look at the historical record shows that these men and women—despite their great accomplishments—were anything but perfect. Moses threw temper tantrums.¹³ David committed adultery and murder. Esther, through her husband's power, decreed the slaughter of over 75,000 people as an act of vengeance on her enemies.¹⁴

None of these were chosen for the lead role in this story. They each played only a supporting role, pointing forward to the Hero who was yet to come.

Throughout the biblical stories a single theme is subtly—and sometimes not so subtly—woven. God would send [a messiah to save people from the curse of sin and death](#). He would restore humanity's relationship with their creator, redeeming the world and bringing light and life to all.¹⁵

The Ultimate Hero Foretold

Have you ever waited for someone you've never met or even seen before? Have you ever tried to find a new location in an area with which you just weren't familiar?

¹⁰ See *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 3:14–24.

¹¹ For more on Moses, who is generally accepted as the author of the first five books of the Old Testament, read Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

¹² See *The Holy Bible*, Ruth 1–4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Exodus 32:19 and Numbers 20:11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Esther 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, John 1:4.

**ISRAEL KNEW TO LOOK
FOR A COMING HOPE, THE
FULFILLMENT OF ALL OF GOD'S
PROMISES IN THE ONE WHOM
THEY CALLED MESSIAH.**

Maybe you had certain expectations built up in your mind about what he or she would look like. Maybe you took a wrong turn somewhere and got lost. Regardless of the situation, it is much easier to find someone if you know what they look like; it is much easier to get somewhere when someone shows you the way.

Interwoven through the accounts of the imperfect heroes of Israel's history are clues to the Messiah. He would be the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;¹⁶ of the tribe of Judah;¹⁷ and ultimately from the line of David,¹⁸ "a man after [God's] own heart."¹⁹

As well as being named the "Seed" (offspring), we notice symbols of kingship and authority in these passages. They mention words like "anointing," "kingdom," "throne," and "scepter." They repeat the promise that this Mighty Hero will reign for all eternity.²⁰

Israel knew to look for a coming hope, the fulfillment of all of God's promises in the one whom they called Messiah²¹ (or Christ,²² from the Greek). Who and what this Messiah would be remained a matter of mystery.²³

So they waited.

Long-Awaited Arrival

A long period of silence occurs between the writings of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament.²⁴ But suddenly, in the first century, things change. From the first chapter of Matthew's gospel, we see that "Jesus the Messiah" has entered the picture.²⁵ What had been hidden is now wondrously revealed—and a people lulled into the numbness of waiting are understandably surprised.

The New Testament authors tell us of the circumstances surrounding **Christ's birth** and childhood, echoing the prophetic writings of the Old Testament:²⁶ a baby, born of a virgin, in a manger, to parents (virgin mother, Mary, and surrogate father, Joseph) from the lineage of King David.²⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., Genesis 12:3; 17:19; 21:12; 22:18; and Numbers 24:17.

¹⁷ Ibid., Genesis 49:10 and Micah 5:2.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2 Samuel 7:12–13 and Isaiah 9:7.

¹⁹ *The Holy Bible*, Acts 13:22.

²⁰ See *The Holy Bible*, Psalm 45:6–7 and Daniel 2:44.

²¹ "Messiah" means "anointed one." See Tracey R. Rich, "Mashiach: The Messiah" *Judaism 101*, <http://jewfaq.org/mashiach.htm>.

²² Michael S. Houdmann, "What does *Christ* mean?" *GotQuestions*, <http://www.gotquestions.org/what-does-Christ-mean.html>.

²³ For further reading on the Messiah mystery, see Glenn Miller "Good question...why should we believe Jesus was the Messiah, if He didn't fulfill all the prophecies

when He was here?" November 14, 2000, <http://christianthinktank.com/falsechrist.html>.

²⁴ Four hundred years passed between the writing of the last minor prophet and the first of the gospels.

²⁵ *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 1:18.

²⁶ For a list of forty-four Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah fulfilled in Jesus, and the New Testament reference for where these prophecies were fulfilled, please see Mary Fairchild, "Prophecies Jesus Fulfilled: 44 Prophecies of the Messiah Fulfilled in Jesus Christ," *About Christianity*, <http://christianity.about.com/od/biblefactsandlists/a/Prophecies-Jesus.htm>.

²⁷ See the genealogies of Christ found in Matthew 1 and Luke 3.

The first time the name Jesus appears is Matthew 1, in the report of a dream in which an angel speaks to Joseph. He is encouraged not to be afraid of what is unfolding in his life, and to give the baby boy the name Jesus:

FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS OF HIS MINISTRY, IT WAS CLEAR THAT JESUS WAS EXTRAORDINARY.

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

This baby would be named Jesus. This baby would be called Immanuel.

What could this mean? Matthew intended for his readers to be thinking, *Could this baby be the long-awaited hero, fully man and fully God?*

From the earliest days of his ministry, it was clear that Jesus was extraordinary. While some might believe he was merely a prophet or a good moral teacher, the Bible teaches otherwise.

Three gospel writers record that when Jesus was baptized, “a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”²⁹

John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, freely admitted that he was *not* the Christ³⁰ and humbly pointed to the One who came after him.³¹ Jesus did the opposite, laying claim to the titles Son of Man (the Anointed One of the line of King David) and Son of God—identifying himself as Messiah and Savior. The gospels are unanimous in this.

Jesus’ Own Claims

Many agree that Jesus was a good man and even a great teacher but hesitate to credit him with anything more than that.

Theologian and author C. S. Lewis summed up the issue with this outlook nicely:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.³²

²⁸ *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 1:20–23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; and Luke 3:22. Mark and Luke depict the voice as addressing Jesus himself: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

³⁰ See *The Holy Bible*, John 1:20 and 3:28.

³¹ *Ibid.*, John 3:25–36.

³² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 52.

So who did Jesus say he was? No words have a more profound and polarizing effect than the words of Jesus himself.

Over the course of his life, Jesus made many radical claims about himself. As recorded in the Gospel of Luke, he bookended his public ministry on earth by clearly teaching that it was he to whom the Old Testament messianic prophecies pointed.³³ He stated many times that he was not there on his own authority but on that of God, whom he called “Father” (making him the Son of God).³⁴

**JESUS STATED MANY TIMES
THAT HE WAS NOT THERE ON
HIS OWN AUTHORITY BUT ON
THAT OF GOD.**

Most radical of all was the language he chose, aligning himself in nature with God, claiming to be “one with the Father,” and mirroring God’s use of the personal “I AM.”³⁵

Not only did he identify himself with God through these statements, he used the “I am” phraseology³⁶ to say some amazing things:

- “I am the bread of life.”³⁷
- “I am the light of the world.”³⁸
- “I am the gate for the sheep.”³⁹
- “I am the good shepherd.”⁴⁰
- “I am the true vine.”⁴¹
- “I am the resurrection and the life.”⁴²

Each of these uniquely chosen metaphors may be summed up with John 14:6: “I am the way [the gate, the door], the truth [the light, the shepherd], and the life [the bread, the vine].”

Jesus is saying, “Look, people: here I am! I have come to save the day! I’m the Chosen One you’ve been waiting for, the Hero, the Rescuer—everything you need!” He was essentially reaching out his hand and exclaiming—to borrow the catchphrase from the iconic film *The Terminator*—“Come with me if you want to live!”⁴³

³³ See *The Holy Bible*, Luke 4:16–21, in which Jesus reads Scripture from Isaiah before stating, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”
Ibid., Luke 24:27: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

³⁴ Ibid., John 2:16; 3:16–18; 5:17; and 5:19–47.

³⁵ Ibid., Exodus 3:14.

See also John Piper, “I Am Who I Am,” September 16, 1984. *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/i-am-who-i-am>.

See also Cory Baugher, “The Meaning of Yahweh,” *Knowing the Bible*, January 12, 2007, <https://www.knowingthebible.net/the-meaning-of-yahweh>.

knowingthebible.net/the-meaning-of-yahweh.

³⁶ Henry Morris, PhD, “The ‘I Am’s’ of Christ,” *Institute for Creation Research*, April 2003, <http://www.icr.org/article/i-ams-christ/>.

³⁷ *The Holy Bible*, John 6:35.

³⁸ Ibid., John 8:12.

³⁹ Ibid., John 10:7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., John 10:11.

⁴¹ Ibid., John 15:1.

⁴² Ibid., John 11:25.

⁴³ *The Terminator*, directed by James Cameron (1984; Los Angeles: Orion Pictures).

To put it in Jesus' own words, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."⁴⁴

They Could Not Understand

Yet the gospels say that many religious leaders opposed Jesus. He was even sentenced to death. Why?

RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL LEADERS EXPECTED THE MESSIAH TO BE A MAN, AN EARTHLY HERO, A KING.

John 5:18 says, "For this reason [some religious and political leaders] tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

These leaders could not get their minds around what they were seeing and hearing. They expected the **Messiah to be a man, an earthly hero, a king**. This humble (albeit eloquent) carpenter—who was healing people on the day of rest⁴⁵ and claiming to know details about the kingdom of heaven⁴⁶—was something else entirely. Their preconceptions left no room for Jesus' words and actions.

He had to be stopped. He had to be silenced. But as you will see if you read the disciples' accounts, even this was all a part of the Author's plan.⁴⁷

A Hero Who Dies and Lives Again

A few stories have explored the idea of a hero who comes back to life, but often such resurrection stories require a major suspension of disbelief (or a hilarious comedic setting) for one to accept the idea.⁴⁸ Yet no other story of resurrection has had the impact on history—nor has been as thoroughly documented⁴⁹—as the victory over death of the one who said of himself, "I am the resurrection."⁵⁰

The New Testament gospels tell the story of Jesus from four perspectives, but all reach a climax in his **crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection**. The gospel stories acknowledge how difficult it was even for Jesus' original followers to believe in a resurrected Jesus.

Several women who visited Jesus' empty tomb were so afraid that they told no one what they had seen.⁵¹ Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, admitted he wouldn't believe unless he could touch the risen Jesus.⁵² When Peter and John—two other members of Jesus' inner circle of followers—heard the news of Jesus' resurrection, they ran to his tomb. John, it seems, believed the news without hesitation, but Peter—even though he observed the empty tomb firsthand—still struggled to believe until he saw Jesus face-to-face.⁵³

⁴⁴ *The Holy Bible*, John 11:25–26.

⁴⁵ See *The Holy Bible*, Mark 3:1–6.

⁴⁶ See the parables told throughout the book of Matthew.

⁴⁷ See *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 16:21; 20:17–19; 26:1–2; Mark 8:31; 10:32–34; Luke 9:22–24; 18:31–34; and John 2:19.

⁴⁸ For example, Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*; Harry Potter in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*; Westley in *The Princess Bride*; Neo in

The Matrix.

⁴⁹ Josh McDowell, "Evidence for the Resurrection," *Josh McDowell Ministry*, 1992, available at <http://www.bible.ca/d-resurrection-evidence-Josh-McDowell.htm>.

⁵⁰ *The Holy Bible*, John 11:25.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Mark 16:8.

⁵² *Ibid.*, John 20:24–28.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, John 20:1–9.

Yet it is precisely the resurrection of Jesus that the gospels and New Testament call us to embrace with faith. “Jesus is alive!” they declare, and “for those who believe in him, Jesus offers eternal life.”

The emphasis on and importance of Jesus’ resurrection is well stated by the early Christian convert and apostle Paul of Tarsus. Paul concluded that “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”⁵⁴ “But,” he goes on to say, “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”⁵⁵

**NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS
BEAR WITNESS TOGETHER
THAT THE HERO HAS COME,
DIED, WAS RESURRECTED, AND
WILL ONE DAY COME AGAIN TO
CLAIM HIS KINGDOM.**

This is the good news of Jesus Christ. One man brought the curse of sin and death; the living God-man Jesus has broken it.

So That You May Have Life

Paul’s conclusion is the consensus of all the New Testament writers who bear witness together that the Hero has come, died, was resurrected (victorious over death), and will one day come again to claim his kingdom. Indeed, their very reason for writing their experiences, risking their lives, and dying for their cause is so “that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”⁵⁶

The claims made by the men and women of the Bible challenge the mind and the heart. The details included here are many, but they are merely a glimpse of a vast story—the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ. In the end, it is you who must look through the clues, weigh the evidence, and consider: Who is this Jesus?

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1 Corinthians 15:14.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1 Corinthians 15:20–22.

⁵⁶ Ibid., John 20:31.

⁵⁷ Photo Credit: [Robert Nyman](#) | [Unsplash](#)