JESUS - WAS (IS) THE MESSIAH?

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PROPHECIES FULFILLED

Christ asked the most crucial question in the history of mankind: *"Who do you say that I am?"* (Matt 16:15). This is truly the question, and it is personally directed to us. Our eternity is hinged upon how we answer this pivotal question, provided that our life reflects our belief.

Was He really the Messiah? Was He a mere good moral teacher? Was He just a Prophet? Let's examine together the evidence before us.

But, before we delve into the core of the argument, let's define what we mean by "Messiah." The Greek and Coptic translation of this word is "Khristos." This is Jesus' title; many have made this title into Jesus' surname. Jesus Christ means Jesus the Christ (Messiah). When we say we are Christians, we are saying that we are followers of the Messiah.

Messiah is a Hebrew word signifying "one who has been anointed." The kings of Israel were anointed with oil in the name of God. Because it was customary to anoint kings, the phrase "The LORD's anointed" became a synonym for "king."

The term "Messiah" was later used to designate a "future king," an expected royal leader from the line of David who would restore the kingdom to Israel. That the Messiah is supposed to be a king is a well-known fact by anyone who has studied the Bible in depth. Consider these verses:

> *"Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross,"* (Mark 15:32).
>
> *"We have found the Messiah…you are the king of Israel,"* (John 1:41, 49).

So now we come to the crucial question: What is the historical evidence for the messiahship of Jesus? It is one thing to claim to be the Messiah and quite another to have the credentials to support that claim. However, Christ did both. He offered three unique and miraculous facts as evidence of His claim: (1) the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies, (2) a uniquely sinless life, and (3) His resurrection from the dead. All of these are historically provable and unique to the person of Jesus.

The Fulfillment of Messianic Prophecies

There were numerous prophecies in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah. To name a few, the following prophecies claimed that Jesus would be:

- Born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Matt. 1:21)
- Of the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3 and 22:18; Matt. 1:1 and Gal. 3:16).
- Of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Luke 3:23, 33 and Heb. 7:14).
- A descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12; Matt. 1:1).
- Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:1 and Luke 2:4–7).
- Anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11:2; Matt. 3:16–17).
- Heralded by a messenger (Isa. 40:3 and Mal. 3:1; Matt. 3:1–2).
- A worker of miracles (Isa. 35:5–6; Matt. 9:35
- Cleansing the temple (Mal. 3:1; Matt. 21:12).
- Rejected by Jews (Ps. 118:22; 1 Peter 2:7).
- Dying a humiliating death (Ps. 22 and Isa. 53; Matt. 27:31).
- Standing silence before his accusers (Isa. 53:7; Matt. 27:12–19).
- Mocked by those who crucified Him (Ps. 22:7–8; Matt. 27:31).
- Having His hands and feet pierced (Ps. 22:16; Luke 23:33).
- Crucified with thieves (Isa. 53:12; Mark 15:27–28).
- Praying for his persecutors (Isa. 53:12; Luke 23:34).
- Pierced in his side (Zech. 12:10; John 19:34).
- Buried in a rich man's tomb (Isa. 53:9; Matt. 27:57–60).
- Mocked by the casting of lots for his garments (Ps. 22:18; John 19:23–24).
- Raised from the dead (Ps. 2:7 and 16:10; Acts 2:31 and Mark 16:6).
- Ascending into heaven (Ps. 68:18; Acts 1:9).
- Sitting at the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 1:3).

These Old Testament prophecies about Christ were made hundred of years in advance. What is truly amazing about these Old Testament prophecies is that there is no way they could be made by "intelligent guesses" or by reading the "trend of the times."

Some skeptics argue that there is a natural explanation for what only seemed to be supernatural prophecies here. One explanation is that the prophecies were accidentally fulfilled by Jesus. He happened to be in the right place at the right time. But what are we to say about the prophecies involving miracles? He just happened to make the blind man see? He just happened to resurrect from the dead? These hardly seem to be chance events. If a God is in control of the universe, then chance is ruled out. Further, it is unlikely that these events would have converged in the life of one man.

Dr. Peter S. Ruckman, a mathematician, claims the odds of fulfilling only 60 of the prophecies, by the only person who claimed to be the Son of God, and who died on a "tree" in Calvary, and who rose from the dead on the third day, are astronomical! The odds are not just one in one trillion but one out of ten to 895^{th} power. That is a one over a one followed by 895 zeroes! The evidence clearly points to Jesus as the divinely appointed fulfillment of the messianic prophecies.

Jesus' Sinless Life as Evidence for His Messiahship

The very course of Christ's life demonstrates His claim as the Messiah. Some of Jesus' enemies brought false accusations against Him, but the verdict of Pilate at His trial has been the verdict of history: *"I find no fault in this Man"* (Luke 23:4). A soldier at the cross agreed, saying, *"Certainly this Man was a righteous Man"* (Luke 23:47), and the thief on the cross next to Jesus said, *"This Man has done nothing wrong"* (Luke 23:41).

But the real test is what those who were closest to Jesus said of His character. His disciples had lived and worked with Him for several years. Peter called Christ *"a lamb without blemish and without spot,"* (1 Peter 1:19) and added, *"Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth,"* (1 Peter 2:22). St. John the Beloved called Him, *"Jesus Christ the righteous,"* (1 John 2:1). St. Paul expressed unanimous belief of the early church that Christ *"knew no sin,"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). He later said that He was tempted as we are *"yet without sin,"* (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus Himself once challenged His accusers, *"Which of you convicts Me of sin?"* (John 8:46), but no one was able to find Him guilty of anything.

This being the case, the impeccable character of Christ gives a double testimony to the truth of His claim. It provides supporting evidence as He suggested, but it also assures us that He was not lying when He said that He was God.

Jesus' Resurrection as Evidence for His Messiahship

There is a third miracle of God confirming Christ's claim as the Messiah: it is His resurrection from the dead. This is truly the greatest of all miracles. The fact that both the Old Testament and Jesus predicted that He would rise from the dead makes the miracle that much stronger.

First, there are passages, such as Psalms 2 and 16, that are cited by the New Testament as applying to the resurrection of Christ (Acts2:27 and Heb 1:5). St. Paul used these passages, without doubt, in the Jewish synagogues as he "*went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ,'*" (Acts 17:2,3).

Second, the resurrection of Christ is taught by logical deduction from two Old Testament teachings: (1) the Messiah will come and *die* (Isa 53; Ps 22) and (2) the Messiah will have an enduring *reign* from Jerusalem (Isa 9:6; Dan 2:44; Zech 13:1). The only way the Messiah can fulfill these two prophecies is by a resurrection from the dead.

On the top of these Old Testament prophecies of Christ's resurrection are those He made on several occasions Himself. According to our teacher St. John, Jesus prophesied about His resurrection from His earliest ministry, saying, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,*" (John 2:19). In Matthew 12:40, He said, "*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*" After Peter's confession, Jesus "*began to teach His disciples that the Son of Man must suffer many things… and be killed, and after three days rise,*" (Mark 8:31). Jesus repeated this same prophecy again on the way to Jerusalem and the cross (Mark 14:59; Matt 27:63). Further, Jesus said He would raise Himself from the dead when He said, "*No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again,*" (John 10:18).

Now in view of the prophecies of the resurrection, the event is given special confirming significance. Philosopher of science Karl Popper argued that, whenever a "risky prediction" is fulfilled, it counts as confirmation of the theory that predicted it. If so, then the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction of His own resurrection is confirmation of His claim to be God. For what could be riskier than predicting your own resurrection? If a person will not accept these lines of evidence as support to Christ's truth claim, then he or she will not accept anything as evidence.

Liar, Lunatic, Or Lord

Thus, we are left with the now famous "tri-lemma" proposed by the English apologist, C. S. Lewis, who concluded his own research into the messiahship of Jesus.

The argument in simplest form states:

1. Jesus was either God or a bad man.
2. But Jesus was not a bad man.
3. Therefore Jesus was (is) God.

Few would challenge the second premise, but if the first is added, the conclusion necessarily follows.

Someone who claims to be God, and is not, is not a good man but a bad man. Merely a "good man" is one thing Jesus could not possibly be. By claiming to be God, He eliminated that possibility. For a liar is not a good man, and one who lies about his essential identity is a liar, and a mere man who claims to be God lies about his essential identity.

C.S. Lewis cogently says:

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 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. He did not intend to.

It is attractive and comfortable to say that Jesus was neither a bad man nor God, but a good man. To say he was a bad man offends Christians, and to say he was God offends non-Christians. To say neither offends no one. Therefore non-Christians want to say neither. *But that position offends logic.*

Either Jesus believed His own claim to be God or He did not. If He did, He was a lunatic. If He did not, He was a liar. Unless, of course, He was (is) God.

Why could He not be either a liar or a lunatic? Because of His character. There are two things everyone admits about Jesus' character: He was wise and He was good. A lunatic is the opposite of wise, and a liar is the opposite of good.

Why, then, are many not compelled?

Not for rational reasons. No reason has ever been brought forth against Christianity that has not been refuted. The reluctance is usually moral. To admit that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, is to admit His absolute authority over my life.

Can a drug addict think clearly and objectively about moral truth when it comes to drugs? We are all addicts to something — to sin, that is.

That is the very disease that Jesus came to cure. Of course the cancer is going to fear the surgeon. That is exactly what you would expect. That is not a reason to disbelieve the surgeon's claim to be the healer. In fact it is just the opposite. The sad truth that haunts many is *"that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God"* (John 3:19-21). It is not the *absence* of evidence that bewilders the skeptics and non-believers; rather, it is their *suppression* of the evidence.

May the Lord of lords reign on our needy hearts and in them may He become our King, our sovereign Ruler, and most of all, *our Messiah*.

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