Introduction

It comes as little surprise that the Bible’s inspired writers chose many metaphors and idioms to refer to Jesus Christ, the son of God and savior of mankind. In prophecy, on Earth and in glory, Jesus is the blessed redeemer and no turn of phrase or lofty comparison is too magnificent to fit his office. Jesus occupies many offices, in fact, and getting to know him better is dependent upon an interest in exploring each of them thoroughly.

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Lesson 1: Son of David

As God created mankind with freewill, he clearly understood that people would eventually use their autonomy in a self-destructive way, choosing to indulge some fleshly appetite through sin, putting themselves in spiritual peril.

As he expelled Adam and Eve from a Paradise they had cursed with evil, he spoke also to the serpent. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Her offspring would include a distant descendant through a royal lineage, the apparent son of one Joseph and Mary of Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem. This Jesus would be, in effect, the son of David—King David—and God’s messianic response to man’s sinful predicament. “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world” (First Peter 1:20). Jesus descends from Eve through David by blood through Mary and adoption through Joseph (Luke 3).

David was Israel’s greatest king and its throne became associated always with his name. Beleaguered people, looking for relief, came to think of the son of David as their redeemer and rescuer, and Jesus arrived to answer that call. His ascension to the throne differed from David’s, however, in that Jesus sought to be a spiritual conqueror and religious ruler. Notably, it is the sick, demon-possessed and poor who more readily acknowledge him as the son of David (Matthew 15:22, 20:30; Mark 10:47). They were willing to make him their Lord and submit to him as the son of David.

Such recognition was far from universal. In his own country, the response was tepid (Matthew 13:55) and the ruling class ordered him to silence his devoted followers. “But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were indignant” (Matthew 21:15) and sought to destroy him (Luke 19:47).

Jesus perplexed his enemies who sought to discredit him by casting doubt upon his claim to be the messiah and the son of David, but his superior understanding only exposed them (Mark 12:35-37).

Jesus posed a riddle regarding the prophecy found in the first verse of the one hundred tenth psalm: “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” How could David call his own descendent his lord? “And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions” (Matthew 22:46). The Pharisees acknowledged the messianic meaning of this passage, but could not explain it according to their limited, carnal understanding. Jesus knew that he preceded David in power and appearance, being his earthly son, but his eternal lord.
1. What do you think God meant in his curse of the serpent in Genesis 3:15 (see also Hebrews 2:14, First John 3:8, First Corinthians 15:24)?

2. When did God come up with the plan to redeem mankind (First Peter 1:17-21)? What does this indicate regarding free will?

3. What had God promised the house of David (Second Chronicles 6:16)? Which of them sat there during Christ’s ministry (Jeremiah 36:30)? Explain the void that the Jews must have felt.

4. Describe these circumstances where Jesus was called son of David:
   - Matthew 15:21-28:
   - Matthew 20:29-34:
   - Mark 10:46-52:
   - Matthew 21:1-11:

5. How did the leaders react (Matthew 12:22-24, 21:14-17)?

6. How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls his own descendent Lord (Matthew 22:41-46)?

7. When did Jesus assume the throne of David (Acts 2:29-33)?
Lesson 2: Branch

Wearing the title, “Branch” lacks much of the obvious allure of “King of the Jews” or even “Son of David,” but its deeper meaning is certainly no less significant.

Zechariah’s Old Testament prophecies contain a number of predictions about the future messiah, including his role as the Branch. Zechariah was a member of a prominent priestly family who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel in about 538 B.C. (Nehemiah 12:4). He prophesied to the remnant about their role in rebuilding Jerusalem and provided an assurance that God would grant their descendants even greater favor through the Messiah.

Zechariah was instructed by God to perform a mock coronation of the high priest’s son, Joshua. “And say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord”’” (6:12). Retrospect shows us that God had a richer temple and builder in mind than just this Joshua. “It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne” (6:13).

The significance of the term branch is in the metaphor of branching out from his place, “like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground” (Isaiah 53:2). Jesus had no form or comeliness that men should have sought him, nor was he born into earthly honor as the son of a carpenter. Jesus sprouted to grandeur because of his own inherent character and his glory continues to grow as the church expands soul-by-soul.

Isaiah likewise looks beyond Israel and its earthly remnant to the kingdom of God. “In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel” (4:2). Jeremiah added later, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (23:5; cf. 33:15).

Born into an agrarian economy of vineyards and orchards, Jesus could readily teach his disciples object lessons about his role as the Branch. To Zechariah, however, the main role of the Branch was always to rebuild the temple, a physical structure in the prophet’s day, but a very spiritual church in the Lord’s (First Peter 2:4-5).

Zechariah’s introduction of Joshua—“Behold the man”—is an eery harbinger of the word of Pontius Pilate at Christ’s condemnation. “So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Behold the man’” (John 19:5).
1. What is the significance of applying the term “Branch” to Jesus (First Kings 2:1-4; Jeremiah 22:24-30; cf. Matthew 13:31-32)?

2. What was to be the result of the Branch’s work (Zechariah 3:8-10; cf. Jeremiah 23:5-6; cf. Matthew 1:21)?

3. What was Zechariah trying to show with his mock coronation of Joshua (Zechariah 6:9-15)? What made it hard for a priest to become king?

4. It is easy to imagine the expectation of Israel regarding these prophecies. Surely, they anticipated a military deliverer and freedom from pagan occupation. And when Jesus came along, a temple was already under renovation. How is it that Jesus fulfills these prophecies in an unexpected way (John 2:18-22, First Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:18-20, Romans 6:16-18)?

5. Discuss the difficulty that would ensue if Christianity was dependent upon a physical temple in Jerusalem (John 4:19-24, Hebrews 10:24-25).

6. How does Christ depict himself to the apostles in John chapter 15?
“Son of man” is a phrase with deep Old Testament roots and was the Lord’s favorite designation for himself throughout the gospel accounts.

It appears in the psalms, in which the poet asks, “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him” (8:4; see also Hebrews 2:6). If Jesus borrowed the phrase from here, he surely meant to signify his status as the ideal human. The eightieth psalm, however, repeats the expression, but with more resonant messianic strains: “But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself” (17).

Prophets Ezekiel and Daniel wore it as a title long before Jesus walked the earth. Ezekiel’s long book identifies him as “son of man” no fewer than 90 times, seemingly indicating “the contrast between what Ezekiel is in himself and what God will make out of him, and to make his mission appear to him not as his own, but as the work of God, and thus to lift him up, whenever the flesh threatens to faint and fail” (Orr).

God addressed Daniel in the same way to encourage him in a moment of fear (8:17), but its usage a chapter earlier is even more remarkable. In the midst of a vision of future kingdoms, Daniel saw “in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom” (7:13-14).

The words become climactic at the Lord’s trial, when he tells the high priest, “from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). Jesus anticipated the establishment of his kingdom in a few days hence and the eventual fall of Judaism (see also Matthew 24:30).

This turn of phrase, “son of Man,” then, is perfectly expressive of two distinct realities–Jesus is at once both man and Messiah. While sharing flesh and blood with his creatures around him, Jesus was conscious of his future atoning work upon the cross, meek and humble enough not to thrust that role upon an unprepared population, but confident enough to allow them to deduce it on their own (Matthew 16:13).

This son of Man has special significance in three ways. First, Jesus, even while on Earth, had divine power and authority (Mark 2:10, 27). Second, the son of Man would suffer popular rejection and die at the hands of sinful men (Mark 8:31, 9:12, 31; 10:45, 14:41). Third, the glorified son of Man would return from the tomb and take the throne of David, rising in judgment against Jerusalem and later the earth (Mark 8:38, 13:26, 14:62).

Stephen makes a post-ascension reference to the son of Man, standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56), while John saw a vision of him in glory and waiting to administer temporal and final justice.

JESUS CHRIST
1. What use of the phrase “son of Man” did the writer of the Hebrew letter make (2:1-9)? What aspects of Psalm 80:17 are even more clearly messianic?

2. What use of the expression did God make in dealing with both Ezekiel and Daniel (8:17)?

3. What prophecy was being revealed when the expression appears again in Daniel 7:13-14 (see also Matthew 26:64, 24:30)?

4. Why would Jesus have preferred to call himself “son of Man” and not “son of God” (John 12:27-36, Mark 10:42-45)?

5. Although the term would seem to identify him with mankind, Jesus frequently used it to emphasize his supernatural authority. What power did the son of Man possess even on Earth (Mark 2:1-12, 2:23-28)?

6. What did Jesus know would happen to the son of Man (Mark 8:31, 9:12, 31; 10:45, 14:41)?

7. How is the son of man depicted for the church age (Acts 7:56, Revelation 1:13, 14:14)? What is his role (Mark 8:38, 13:26, 14:62)?
Lesson 4: Wonderful Counselor

The conditions in Israel were beyond bleak—“behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish … thrust into thick darkness” (Isaiah 8:22).

The messianic prophecy that follows, about seven hundred years away from fulfillment, however, changed the nation’s mood to hope. Even the contempt upon Zebulun and Naphtali would be lifted when glory would come out of Galilee (Isaiah 9:1). In a prophetic speech that would be aptly quoted by the Lord Jesus at the onset of his ministry, Isaiah traces a portrait of the savior. “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (9:2).

In the bleakest of moments, God was proceeding with his plan to send his people salvation and a king. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor,” among other appellations (9:6).

Wonderful Counselor.

Sometimes those words are separated by commas but the context makes their combination a more likely translation. Wonderful Counselor.

More than simply a trusted adviser, Jesus Christ is a wise planner whose cognizance exceeds every human expectation. The psalms warn against other guidance: “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful” (1:1). As surely as King Rehoboam brought disaster on the kingdom by heeding the advice of naive counselors, so we can only secure reliable guidance by accepting the words of a Wonderful Counselor.

While we do not expect this counsel to come in dreams and visions, it is still very true that Christ speaks to his brethren today in preserved revelation—the Bible—and by participating in answered prayers as our advocate with his father (see First John 2:1). Less wonderful counsel can be had in self-help books, daytime talk shows and well-meaning friends, but nothing can be compared to “Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3). Christ incarnate and now glorified is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (First Corinthians 1:24).

The wisdom of Christ is so far superior to ours that sometimes it appears to be slow and even self-defeating. Haste and caprice are often recommended by worldly wisdom, especially where the Lord directs sober reflection (James 3:13-18). Sometimes the Lord advises a circuitous route and long labor where it seems that shortcuts would be harmless (Exodus 13:17-18).

Christ, our Wonderful Counselor, can be trusted to know best when what seems like a shortcut is really a detour to disaster. If we read from his teachings, we will hear his voice, and if speak to him in prayer, we will prepare ourselves to accept his counsel, no matter what it is.
1. What was the reputation of Zebulun and Naphtali (Isaiah 8:22-9:2)? When did things get better (Isaiah 9:2, Matthew 4:13-17)? How do others share with them (Second Corinthians 4:1-6)?

2. From where do people today get their wisdom? How does it tend to differ from godly wisdom (James 3:13-18)? Why did Rehoboam’s advisors fail him (see First Kings 12:1-16)?

3. Why is the counsel of Christ sometimes difficult to accept (Romans 11:33-36; see also Psalm 16:1-7, Second Peter 3:8)?

4. Isaiah even allows that God’s work sometimes seems “strange” and “alien” (28:21). To the early disciples, the cross seemed a strange coronation procedure. What should all this prepare us for (Matthew 7:13-14)?

5. What was the Lord’s counsel to the worldly Laodicean saints (Revelation 3:14-22)?

6. What are the benefits and perils of human counsel (Proverbs 24:5-6, 27:17)?

7. What happens when men quit listening to Wonderful Counsel altogether (Proverbs 1:20-32, Second Thessalonians 2:11-12)?
Lesson 5: Immanuel Mighty God

Isaiah had much to say about the coming Messiah, even though his arrival would wait for seven centuries.

Isaiah acted as a conduit for prophecy to King Ahaz who wearied God with his unfaithfulness. The prophet looked not only to minor events in his own time, but into the distant future when “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (7:14). The Hebrew word maiden (‘almah) was translated in the Septuagint as parthenos, a specific word for virgin because the original tongue carried that implication—a young woman, unmarried and sexually chaste. The events that preceded the birth of a boy named Jesus perfectly parallel this ancient prediction when Joseph’s fiancée, Mary, conceived of the Holy Spirit and bore a son she called Immanuel, “(which means God with us)” (Matthew 1:23).

The messiah then was not merely a talented general, a Hebrew Alexander or resurrected Samson. Matthew confirmed that Jesus was only the adopted son of Joseph, but was truly the son of God—God in the flesh.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6).

The prophesied prince would in fact be part of the only true Godhood. His existence precedes his Bethlehem nativity and survives his execution. His knowledge is omniscient and his might is omnipotent. “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9, NKJV). It is for this reason that he received worship and adoration where his apostles could not (Acts 10:25-26). Jesus was sinless and perfect (First Peter 1:19).

No one was closer to Jesus while on Earth than his friend John, who spoke significantly of his divine identity, calling Jesus “the Word of life” manifested before mankind (First John 1:1-3; cf. First Timothy 3:16). John founded his gospel upon the fact that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). John portrays Jesus as Creator (John 1:2-3), teacher (John 1:4-5) and savior (John 1:14).

It is the apostle Paul, however, who explains how God the son ended up in the body of a Jewish carpenter. Despite his deity, Jesus lived to look out for the interests of his people. Jesus, “being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:6-7, NKJV).

There is but one God—one Godhood, or essence of deity in the universe—and Jesus, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is a part of that divine entity. He is no mere angel or ambitious prophet, but is the son of God, God in the flesh, “our great God and savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13, NKJV).
1. What are the implications of the names Immanuel and Jesus (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-23)?

2. How did Jesus display the special attributes of deity as follows?
   - Omniscience:
   - Omnipotence:
   - Omnipresence:
   - Mercy:

3. How did the following people worship Jesus?
   - Wise men (Matthew 2:1-11):
   - Leper (Matthew 8:2):
   - Ruler (Matthew 9:18):
   - Mariners (Matthew 14:25-33):
   - Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28):
   - Thomas (John 20:26-28):

4. What was John’s description of the identity of Jesus (First John 1:1-3, John 1:1-3, 14; see also Romans 8:3)?

5. What should we learn from his willingness to leave heaven and suffer indignity upon Earth (Philippians 2:5-9, Hebrews 5:8-9, John 13:1-20)?

6. What roles of his are described in Colossians 1:15-18?
Lesson 6: Everlasting Father

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, even Prince of Peace. But Everlasting Father?

Each appears as a description of Jesus Christ in Isaiah’s eighth century B.C. prophecy. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given … and his name shall be called … Everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6).

It is an expression that is usually reserved for the “first person of the Godhead,” and not one applied either to the Son or the Spirit. Here, however, it is used in a much more metaphorical sense of a benevolent protector. People have historically looked to good kings and leaders as father figures, at least in terms of security and provision. Likewise, this passage serves to align Jesus with Jehovah much more tightly.

Christ’s sonship to Jehovah is sometimes a complicated and controversial subject. It certainly was in the first century, for in the ministry of Christ, the Lord spent more time defining his relationship to Jehovah than claiming plainly to be the Messiah. Naturally, the two claims are identical, but the Lord’s choice of words is still compelling. He claimed sonship to Jehovah as evidence of his messianic identity (see Psalm 2:7-9).

The apostle John records several of these conversations. In his tenth chapter, the Jews pick up stones to throw at Jesus because he dared to say of God, “I and the Father are one” (30). They recognized that such a claim made him more than just a son, but divine as well. “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God” (33). Jesus did not demur, but challenged his persecutors to consider his mighty works as evidence that, “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (38).

As the end drew near, Jesus took time to explore this relationship further with his apostles, explaining especially to Thomas and Philip that he was a perfect representation of the divine in the flesh. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9; see also First John 4:7-12).

When pressed by his enemies, Jesus never backed away from his claim to be eternal with the Father, even adopting the appellation, “I AM,” so closely identified with his meeting with Moses at the burning bush (John 8:58). “This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him ... he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

As he neared the cross, Jesus prayed that his followers might enjoy the kind of unity that defined his relationship to Jehovah. “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

That anonymous writer would mine the prophecies to show the Godhood of Jesus Christ (1:5-12), the marvel of deity in three persons. Jesus is the only begotten son of God and yet also the Father of Eternity.
1. “Everlasting Father” implies an eternal nature and an authoritative role. What does the Hebrew writer report in the interest of both claims (1:5-12)?

2. What role is ascribed to Jesus in Colossians 1:15-17 (see also Genesis 1:26)?

3. Perhaps rather than confusing the persons of the Godhood, Isaiah’s meaning is that Jesus is the architect of eternal life for his followers. What does Jesus use to accomplish that goal (John 10:22-39, John 12:44-50)?

4. John tells us that Jesus was the only begotten son of God (John 3:16-18), but other inspired writers develop this concept even further. While Jesus appeared to be begotten of Joseph and Mary, the begetting does not refer either to creation or origin. To what do these men make it refer?
   - Hebrews 1:5-7:
   - First John 4:7-12:
   - Acts 13:26-41 and Hebrews 5:5-8:

5. What does his sonship suggest about Christ’s inferiority to his Father (John 5:17-20, Hebrews 1:8-9, Romans 8:3, Hebrews 10:5-7, Mark 1:11)?


7. What did Jesus explain to Thomas and Philip (John 14:1-11; see also John 1:14-18)? What is the implication for us today (John 17:17-23, First John 4:7-12)?
Lesson 7: Prince of Peace

Did he come to bring peace on Earth or not?

Isaiah prophesied, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called ... Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore” (9:6-7).

Peace surely is a theme of the gospel, which begins with an angelic announcement of peace on earth and goodwill toward men (Luke 2:14). Jesus wished peace on those who approached him with questions and problems, and even sought to avoid unnecessary conflicts with his enemies (see Matthew 17:27). Confrontation, however, was often unavoidable and the Lord never backed away from error or surrendered to hypocrisy.

Before long, the one who came to bring peace is heard to say, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). He went on to explain how making peace with God can sometimes create animosity among men when believers and unbelievers clash over their convictions (see John 16:33). As he entered Jerusalem for the last time, his followers cried out, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest” (Luke 19:38)! When he refused the Pharisees’ demand that he silence his disciples, the animosity only intensified. The things that make for peace were hidden from their uncooperative, disinterested, prejudiced eyes (Luke 19:42).

Jesus, “Lord of all,” did bring peace to the Earth in a brand not known since Eden (Acts 10:36). A covenant of mercy came with him and was sealed upon the cross, bringing every penitent prodigal back home to the Father (Ephesians 2:14). That peace, however, is not universally appreciated. Some not only reject its terms, but choose to persecute those who accept them.

The purpose of the Prince of Peace falls prey to a fundamental misunderstanding. People imagine that he was to recreate a utopian earth, free of warfare, disease and sin. Instead, his peace is to call believers out of carnality and to give them accord with God and one another. “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Romans 5:1, 14:19).

Peace is one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit that this Prince can deliver when we allow his spirit to infuse ours (see Galatians 5:22-24). Righteousness does not guarantee peace among men, but it does destroy enmity with God and bring solace to the soul. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.
1. What government is upon the shoulders of our Prince of Peace (John 18:36-37, First Timothy 6:15, Colossians 1:13, Matthew 16:18-19)?

2. To whom did the heavenly host promise peace (Luke 2:8-14)? How does one come into this company (Luke 15:11-24, Acts 10:34-35)?

3. What kind of peace is it (Ephesians 2:14-17)? Choose one.
   - a. freedom from troubles
   - b. no conflicts
   - c. restored fellowship with God
   - d. the end of national warfare

4. Jesus completely disavowed the utopian mission often ascribed to him by Premillennialism. What sort of division did he foresee resulting from his ministry (Matthew 10:34-39)? What solace did he offer (Luke 18:28-30)?

5. How do the following passages describe the Prince’s peace?
   - Acts 10:36:
   - Philippians 4:7:
   - Colossians 1:20:

6. How does Jesus lend peace to the individual believer’s spirit (Philippians 4:6-9, Colossians 3:15, Galatians 5:22-24)?

7. What practical things can we do to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9, James 3:18, Hebrews 12:14, First Peter 3:11, Second Corinthians 13:11)?

8. Who was the original King of Peace (Hebrews 7:1-3)?
Lesson 8: The Prophet

Many people today complain that God does not speak directly enough to them—that if he approached mankind, or at least them, in a more personal way, they would be certain of his existence and more likely to obey him.

Just as many are unfamiliar with an episode in Israel’s history in which that kind of proximity was briefly attempted. At Mount Horeb, also called Mount Sinai, God prepared to give Israel its law while the skies thundered and lightning disturbed the heavens. “Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die’” (Exodus 20:18-19).

Later, Moses would recall this event when promising a succession of prophets, which the Jews expected to culminate in a messianic messenger. “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly” (Deuteronomy 18:15-16).

A prophet is not just a predictor of future events, but is more properly one who tells forth God’s will, even concerning the present or explaining the past. Where the heathen listen to sorcerers and stargazers, God expected his people to wait for the prophets to relay his message to them.

Prophets came and went throughout the Old Testament, but the last 400 years before the coming of Jesus were rather silent (Deuteronomy 18:18, Jeremiah 1:7-9). By the time John came on the scene, Israel, by then under the thumb of the Romans, was ready to anoint him. The Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him if he was the Christ or Elijah. “‘What then … Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No’” (John 1:21).

John was a resurrection of Elijah’s ideals and purpose, however—the “voice of one crying in the wilderness,” preparing the Messiah’s path, “before the great and awesome day of the Lord” (Isaiah 40:3-5, Luke 3:4, Malachi 4:5). When his ministry crossed paths with that of his cousin, Jesus, John pronounced, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

It is upon the day that the Lord fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes that someone announced, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14). Jesus had become God’s ultimate messenger to the world—the message itself (Matthew 17:1-5, 22:46; Hebrews 1:1-4).

Jesus, of course, suffered the fate of many prophets, dying a martyr’s death, but also an atoning one (Matthew 23:29-39). Both Peter and Stephen identify Jesus with the Prophet whom Moses predicted would crown the line of messengers (Acts 3:22-24, 7:37).
1. Why did God announce himself to Israel with such a dramatic display (Exodus 19:16-19, 20:18-21)? When had they seen something similar (Exodus 9:23-26)? How did they respond this time?

2. Moses reminded them later of this event in his second telling of the law prior to his departure. What did Moses further promise (Deuteronomy 18:15-22)? How did Jeremiah, for one, match this (Jeremiah 1:7, 9)?

3. Describe Israel’s conditions by the time John came along.

4. What did John claim to be (John 1:19-28; Isaiah 40:3-5, Malachi 4:5-6)?

5. How did Jesus characterize John’s work (John 5:30-47)?

6. What event provides the backdrop for an independent announcement that Jesus is the Prophet (John 6:1-14)? What is ironic about this (6:41-66)?

Lesson 9: King of the Jews

“So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews’” (John 19:16-19).

On a place reserved for the charge levied against the condemned man, Pilate inscribed the very truth he dismissed and conspired with the Jews to conceal (see John 18:33-40). Both Pilate and the Hebrew leadership had reason to fear the turmoil that Jesus appeared to be fomenting. Pilate could be recalled to Rome if things got out of control and the Sanhedrin could lose its last shred of autonomy and influence over Hebrew affairs. Politics made for strange bedfellows—even the high priest Caiaphas can be heard to prophesy, “it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” (John 11:50).

While the Jews yearned to become an independent kingdom again, Jesus showed no signs of being the revolutionary character to lead them. He preached about peace and seemed more concerned with forgiving sins than amassing an arsenal. After feeding the multitudes and being declared The Prophet, he perceived that the people “were about to come and take him by force to make him king … Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself” (John 6:15).

Jesus had no interest in becoming an earthly king, in spite of the shortsighted will of the common people (John 12:13). His mission was greater—to become ruler of God’s universal kingdom, comprised of penitent Jews and Gentiles. The Sanhedrin only wanted autonomy along the Jordan.

Pilate resisted the call to execute Jesus, who was formally accused of fomenting a revolt against Caesar. “From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, ‘If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar … He said to the Jews, ‘Behold your king! … Shall I crucify your king?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’ So he delivered him to be crucified” (John 19:12, 14-16).

“Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” was executed, but the crown of thorns did not destroy his ascent to Israel’s throne. Rather, it sealed it and even allowed him to expand his realm to include the lost of every nation (Acts 10:34-35). God raised him up to sit on David’s throne as King of kings and Lord of lords (First Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14, 19:16; First Corinthians 15:20-28).

Christ’s kingdom is of heaven and numbers citizens throughout the world and even across time (Colossians 1:13, Philippians 3:20). He is the only head of the church, a deserving and benevolent king.
1. If the Jews in the first century wanted independence and a king so badly, why did they reject Jesus (John 11:45-57, Acts 5:33-40)?

2. Why was Nathanael ready to anoint Jesus (John 1:43-51)? Why was the multitude ready (John 6:1-15)? Why was the crowd ready (John 12:12-16)?

3. Why didn’t Jesus let them take him by force and make him king (Luke 4:5-8, 24:25-27; Romans 6:17-19)? Even after his auspicious entrance into Jerusalem, what did he foresee concerning his coronation (John 12:27-36)?

4. How did Jesus try to explain how his royal claim was different from what both Pilate and the Jews were expecting (John 18:33-38)? What kind of kingdom did he intend to rule (Matthew 16:13-19, Acts 10:34-35, Romans 2:28-29, 14:17)? What kind of king is he (First Timothy 6:15)?

5. Describe the pressure the Jews put on Pilate to kill Jesus (John 19:4-16).

6. What kind of crown did Jesus wear at his coronation (John 19:1-3)? What objection did the chief priests make to the inscription (18-22)?
Lesson 10: High Priest

A letter was written to the first century Jewish Christians who contemplated recanting their faith in Jesus to return to Judaism and escape persecution.

The theme of that anonymous missive is that everything about Christ and the New Testament is infinitely better than the Law of Moses and the old, defunct covenant. Jesus himself is described superior, and surely worthy of any sacrifice that a disciple might make. The Lord is described in terms that relate to an Old Testament mind, but which portray him as the fulfillment of all those mere types and shadows.

“Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house” (Hebrews 3:1-2). “Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places” (Hebrews 8:2).


Not exactly the words that disciples are accustomed to applying to Jesus and yet to first century readers, they meant everything, especially in establishing his superior claim to each office and the messianic role as well.

An apostle is literally a messenger—“one who is sent” in the Greek tongue. Moses was chosen of and sent by God as the apostle of the old covenant, but Christ claims a higher role as the son who was sent (see Matthew 21:33-46). A human body was prepared to house his eternal spirit so that Christ could be sent with good news to mankind.

Jesus was the bane of the high priests in his day, especially Annas and Caiaphas, who saw to his arrest and torture. Although they were acting to protect their own power, within a few decades all of Jerusalem was sacked and the office of earthly high priest was abolished. Jesus had already superseded it anyway when he arose from the tomb and became the only advocate with the father that any believer would need—“a great high priest who has passed through the heavens … holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 4:14, 7:26).

Minister is such a plain word that we are reluctant to give the title to Jesus. A minister, however, is just a servant, and Jesus never shrank from service to God and man. “Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). He is no minister of sin, but of righteousness (Galatians 2:17).

Christ’s superiority to Moses becomes motivation for enduring hardship and persecution that one might suffer with Jesus and obtain the promises.

2. How was Christ made an apostle (Hebrews 2:14-3:1, 10:5-10; John 6:29, 8:42, 17:3; Acts 3:26)?

3. Why can the son of God sympathize with our weaknesses (Romans 8:1-3, Hebrews 4:14-16)? What does this do for us (First Corinthians 10:12-13, First Peter 2:18-23)?

4. How can Jesus be high priest if the Law says nothing of a Jew in that role (Hebrews 7:11-14, 5:1-10)?

5. What offering did Jesus bring (Hebrews 9:11-14)?

6. What ministry, or service, does Christ provide (Hebrews 8:1-6, 7:23-25; First John 2:1-2)? What makes it better than what the earthly priests did?

7. How is it that Jesus suffered “outside the camp” just as the bodies of the animals were burned outside the city (Hebrews 13:10-14, Matthew 21:33-46)? How might this apply today (Second Corinthians 6:11-18)?
Lesson 11: Chief Shepherd

The Old Testament prophets were highly and rightly critical of Israel’s shepherds—not the lonely men out in the wild with the flocks, but the spiritual leaders back home who were derelict in their duties.

Isaiah complained about blind, ignorant watchmen and “shepherds who have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all” (56:11). Where these men were supposed to be looking out for the nation’s religious welfare, they instead were only concerned with their own (see Jeremiah 23:1-4).

Jesus met with a similar condition when he entered Jerusalem many centuries later. He found the scribes and Pharisees sitting in Moses’s seat as interpreters and enforcers of the law, but that they were hypocritical and self-serving. While expert at analyzing the tithing of seeds and stems, they were bewildered by such elemental requirements as justice and mercy and faithfulness. The scribes and Pharisees had become more consumed with party orthodoxy than God’s will, “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (see Matthew 15:7-9, 23:1-4, 23-24).

There surely was anguish in his voice when Jesus recognized that the people who came to hear him preach “were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

Jesus set out to be their shepherd.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep … I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:10-15).

Where Isaiah and Jeremiah had exposed such wicked shepherds centuries before, other prophets had also predicted the coming of a worthy shepherd. “And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace” (Micah 5:4-5; see also Ezekiel 37:24).

Our Lord’s gentle approach to the soft-hearted seeker and ferocious defense against doctrinal wolves recommended him as the good shepherd who would “gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom” (Isaiah 40:11). Peter recalled the cross and commented, “you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (First Peter 2:25).

The apostle himself would eventually serve as a bishop in some unidentified local congregation, from which he would write to encourage other shepherds: “And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (First Peter 5:4, cf. Hebrews 13:20).
1. What is the responsibility of a literal shepherd? How does this compare to spiritual shepherds?

2. What was wrong with Israel’s shepherds (Isaiah 56:9-12, Jeremiah 23:1-4, Ezekiel 34:1-10)? What did God plan to do for his sheep (Micah 5:2-4)?


4. Describe the Lord’s contrast between a good shepherd and a hireling (John 10:1-15). How would he prove his love for the sheep (see also Psalm 23)?


6. If Jesus is the chief shepherd, who are his minions (First Peter 5:1-4; see also Acts 20:17-28, Ephesians 4:11)? What is their pastoral duty to the sheep (Hebrews 13:7, 17, First Thessalonians 5:12-13)

7. What obligations belong to the sheep (First Peter 2:21-25)?
Lesson 12: Alpha and Omega

The enduring image of Jesus Christ is usually a Christmas baby in the manger or a doomed man upon an Easter cross. The images are artificial, sterile and usually temporary in their effect. The baby is harmless, but Jesus proved to be very dangerous to the false teachers, hypocrites and impenitents in Jerusalem. The bruises, injuries and blood rarely make much of an appearance in depictions of the prisoner on the cross.

Such images are of dubious value and authority, often devolving into objects of superstition or idolatry. Perhaps the enduring image of Jesus should be the one found in the final book of the New Testament.

Under the influence of inspiration, the apostle John offered his readers a peak into their near future as they dealt with terrific persecution and hardship. Once again, the reader is reminded of the divinity of Jesus Christ, especially as he is identified with the Alpha and the Omega.

At first, John is summoned by the Lord God, who called himself the Alpha and the Omega, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). Much later in the Revelation, however, the Son of Man was also given this distinction (22:13).

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, a plain message to believers of the era that their God is both creator and judge, and that he is from everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 90:2).

In Revelation, Jesus is neither infant nor prisoner; rather, he is a warrior and conqueror (19:11-21). As John found himself in the spirit on the Lord’s day, he heard a voice that told him to begin writing.

“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last’” (Revelation 1:12-17).

The Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. The son of God shares that distinction with his father and offers to us an image of strength and power as we face our own challenges in life.

“But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life” (Jude 20-21).
1. What might be the danger of the two enduring images of Jesus Christ?

2. What is meant by the expression, Alpha and Omega?

3. How did Jesus respond to the Jews’ ridicule of the idea that he knew Abraham (John 8:48-59)? What does that imply (Philippians 2:5-7)?

4. Understand that Revelation is written in symbolic language and that only some of the images are explicitly explained in the book. Reading Revelation 1:12-20, what is the identity of the seven golden lampstands? What does the presence of the son of Man represent?

5. Describe his appearance.
   - Hair:
   - Eyes:
   - Feet:
   - Voice:
   - Face:

6. How would you characterize his appearance overall?

7. What task remains for the Son of Man as the Bible closes (Revelation 20:7-15, 22:12-21)?
Lesson 13: Review

1. 6. How is it David, in the Spirit, calls his own descendant Lord (Matthew 22:41-46)? When did Jesus assume the throne of David (Acts 2:29-33)?

2. What is the significance of applying the term “Branch” to Jesus (First Kings 2:1-4; Jeremiah 22:24-30; cf. Matthew 13:31-32)?

3. Why would Jesus have preferred to call himself “son of Man” and not “son of God” (John 12:27-36, Mark 10:42-45)?

4. Why is the counsel of Christ sometimes difficult to accept (Romans 11:33-36; see also Psalm 16:1-7, Second Peter 3:8)?

5. What are the implications of the names Immanuel and Jesus (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-23)?

6. What did Jesus explain to Thomas and Philip (John 14:1-11; see also John 1:14-18)? What is the implication for us today (John 17:17-23, First John 4:7-12)?
7. How does Jesus become the prince of peace to the individual believer’s spirit (Philippians 4:6-9, Colossians 3:15, Galatians 5:22-24)?

8. What event provides the backdrop for an independent announcement that Jesus is the Prophet (John 6:1-14)? What is ironic about this (6:41-66)? What fate did the Prophet share with so many others (Matthew 16:13-16, 23:29-39)? Why didn’t that fate destroy his messianic claim (Acts 3:17-26)?

9. Why didn’t Jesus let them take him by force and make him king (Luke 4:5-8, 24:25-27; Romans 6:17-19)? Even after his auspicious entrance into Jerusalem, what did he foresee concerning his coronation (John 12:27-36)?

10. What ministry, or service, does Christ provide (Hebrews 8:1-6, 7:23-25; First John 2:1-2)? What makes it better than what the earthly priests did?


12. How would you characterize the Revelation’s portrait of Jesus? What task remains for the Son of Man as the Bible closes (Revelation 20:7-15, 22:12-21)?
**ENDNOTES**

