





# Lesson 32: Who do you say that I Am?

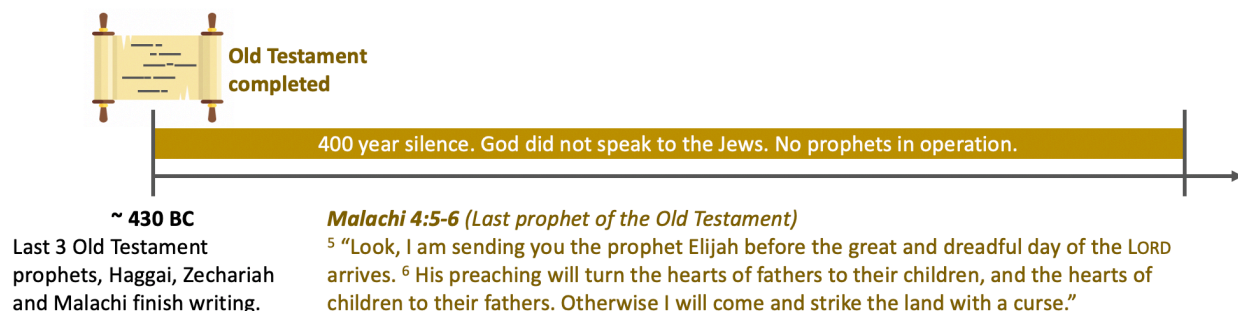
## Previously...

During the terrible time of the exile, God reassured the Jews that there was hope for their future. God gave them prophecies that told them what would happen in the time to come.

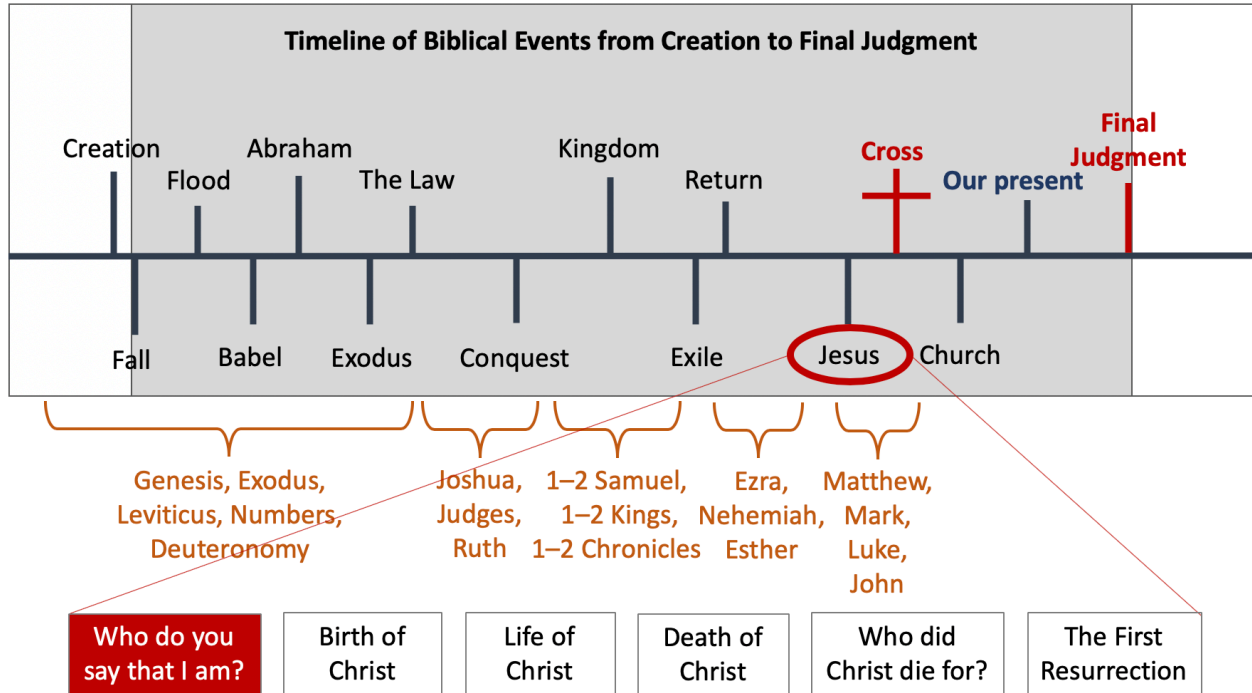
What were the Jews expecting at the end of the Old Testament period?			
			
A. About the Covenants	B. About the Messiah	C. About the Tribulation	D. About the Coming Kingdom
Jews were expecting to fully occupy the Promised Land, to have a Son of David on the throne in Jerusalem and as a nation, have a new heart to love Yahweh forever.	Jews were waiting for God to send the promised Saviour.	Jews were expecting a time of great Tribulation for their people before God rescues them.	Jews were eagerly waiting for all the amazing promises: world peace, Messiah and Prince David ruling from Jerusalem, Israel a superpower, great prosperity for all, no natural disasters and a renewed earth and nature.

Later on, when God led the Jews to return from exile, their hope began to grow. They expected that God would soon send the Messiah.

In the 400 years since the last prophets wrote, they had been waiting to see what God would do next.



How and when would God interrupt human history again? It would be with the coming of Messiah Jesus.



Jesus coming to earth was a very important time in world history. But what was the world like then?

## What was Happening in the World

During that time, the main political power was the Roman Empire with the emperor as the head.



The Romans controlled areas around the Mediterranean Sea, Europe, Africa and Asia.

Its capital Rome was the largest city in the world. When it was most powerful, the empire had 50 to 90 million people.

The Romans had a large army and it fought many wars to conquer the surrounding nations. However, at the time when Jesus came to earth, there was peace throughout the empire. This time period was called the Pax Romana or “The Roman Peace”.

## What was Happening with the Jews



### 1. The Jews had been severely disciplined and learnt many hard lessons

By this time in history, the Jews already had 2000 years of experience with Yahweh. Through God’s discipline during the exile, they had learnt many hard lessons:

- As a people, they were **hopelessly sinful**. Over and over again, they just could not keep God’s Law.



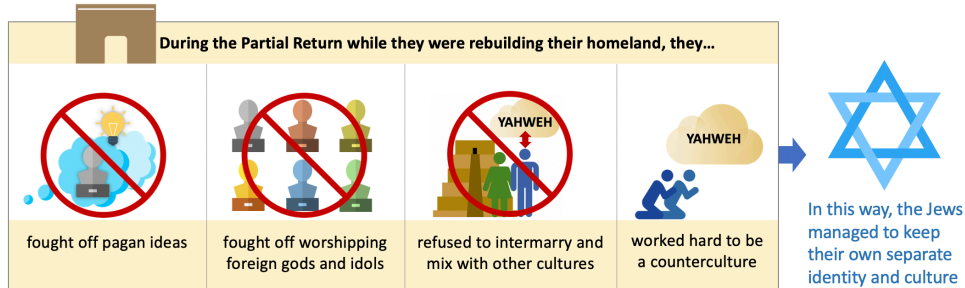
- There was **no other god except Yahweh**, the Creator-God of the universe. All other gods were false. Throughout the Old Testament, idol worship was a huge problem in the lives of the Israelites. However now, as a nation, they no longer worshipped idols.



- Many Jews now understood that to be saved from their sin, **they needed Yahweh’s grace and help**. They couldn’t do it on their own.



During the time of the partial return, when the Jews were rebuilding their homeland, they had to fight off pagan ideas, foreign gods and becoming assimilated to other cultures (that is, fighting to prevent their culture from being swallowed up by others). As Yahweh had instructed, they worked hard to be a counterculture. They kept their identity and maintained a separation from the cultures around them.



However, they were no longer the free and mighty nation they were during King David’s and King Solomon’s time. They were now just Judea, one small province of the Roman Empire. And they were not free, but subjects of Rome.

Pagan Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man	
 Babel   Egypt   Canaan  God’s restraining hand on the Pagan Kingdom of Man	<b>Election</b>	
		God chose Abraham
		God saved Israel
		God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Law</li> <li>▪ National anthem</li> <li>▪ Temple worship</li> <li>▪ Feasts &amp; festivals</li> </ul>
		Conquest and Settlement in the Promised Land
		Kings in Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unified kingdom</li> <li>▪ Divided kingdom</li> </ul>
↓	↓	↓
Israel and Judah turned against God: Paganised—unbelievers	Few believers	
<b>Rise of the Kingdom of Man</b>	<b>Exile: Kingdom of God Ended</b>	
 Babylon Medo-Persia Greece Rome		Partial return: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Subjects of pagan nations</li> <li>▪ Kept their Jewish identity</li> </ul>



## 2. The Jews grew more legalistic

Because God had disciplined them so much in the Old Testament over idol worship, the Jews were no longer tempted to run after false gods. They now worshipped only Yahweh.

However, there was now a different problem: they had turned legalistic, meaning they obsessively followed what God's law said without caring about the purpose, intention or the heart of the law.

Why did they become legalistic?

They were so afraid of angering God that they thought of ways to protect themselves.

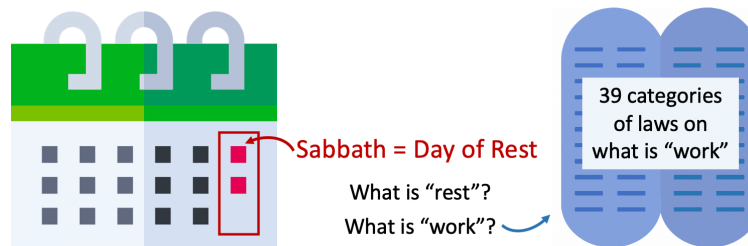
So the Jewish leaders began slowly adding man-made rules to the original 613 laws that God gave Moses. This was so that they would not even come close to breaking God's Law.

These additional rules started as explanations and clarifications of the Law. However, they ended up adding layers and layers of additional rules that the Jews had to follow.

From God's original set of 613 rules, the Jewish leaders added thousands!



For example, the Mosaic Law said that Saturday, the Sabbath, was to be a day of rest. But what was "rest"? To clarify, Jewish scholars created 39 separate categories to explain "what was work". They did this so that Jews would know what they were not allowed to do on that day. What's more, there were sub-categories within these 39 categories!



For example, there were Sabbath day rules for:

- how many steps a person could walk.
- how much "work" a person could do to prepare food without breaking the law.
- how many letters a person could write before it was counted as work.
- what they could or could not do with their animals on that day!

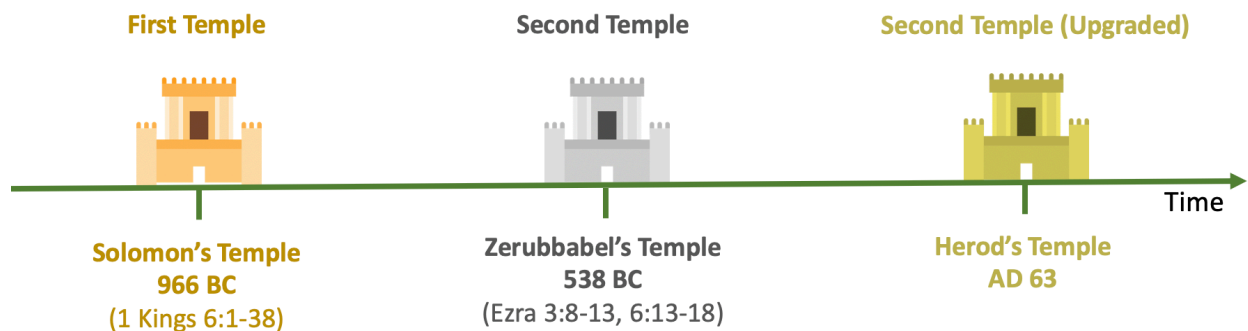
Life became complicated and difficult! The Jewish leaders had re-interpreted God's Law for themselves and added man-made rules!



### 3. The Jews became obsessed with the temple

For the Jews, the temple that they now had was of the greatest importance.

- The very first temple was built by Solomon. It was magnificent, but it had been destroyed at the time of the exile.
- Later, during the partial return, the governor of Judah, Zerubbabel, built a very simple temple to replace it.
- At the start of New Testament times, King Herod, who was appointed by Rome to rule Judea, upgraded Zerubbabel's temple to make it bigger and grander. It became known as Herod's temple. (Note: When Jesus talked about the temple in John 2:20, renovations had been going on for 46 years. It was finally completed in AD 63 only to be completely destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.)



The Jews became very possessive of this temple. They were very concerned with maintaining it and following all the rules for worship. In fact, they were more concerned with their outward acts of worship than with their heart attitude towards Yahweh. They ignored the fact that Yahweh did not actually live in the temple:

#### Acts 7:46–48

<sup>46</sup> “David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. <sup>47</sup> But it was Solomon who actually built it. <sup>48</sup> However, the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands.

God Himself had already said that He was more concerned with mankind's heart attitude towards Him rather than their outward actions.

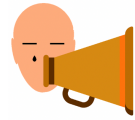
#### Isaiah 29:13

And so the LORD says, “These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote.

This was the background to what was happening in the world and with the Jews at the start of the New Testament times.

## When would Yahweh Send the Promised Saviour?

Even though the prophets in the Old Testament wrote about the Messiah, they didn't know when He was going to come. They tried very hard to figure it out, but couldn't. God had not told them. This is what Peter explained later.



### 1 Peter 1:10–12

<sup>10</sup> This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. <sup>11</sup> They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward. <sup>12</sup> They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.

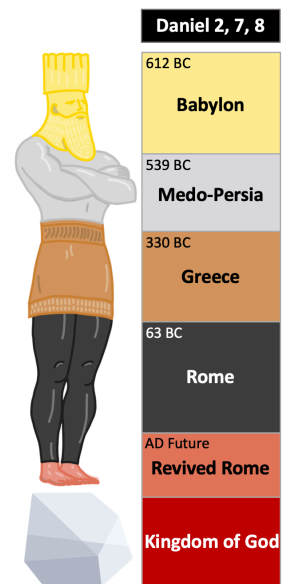
But while the Jews didn't know when the Messiah would come, they knew exactly what they were waiting for.

They were waiting for the Messiah to come in a glorious way to smash all the other world powers and restore the Kingdom of God (Daniel 2:17–45).

From eternity past, God had already planned for the Saviour to come and save man. But only at the right time.

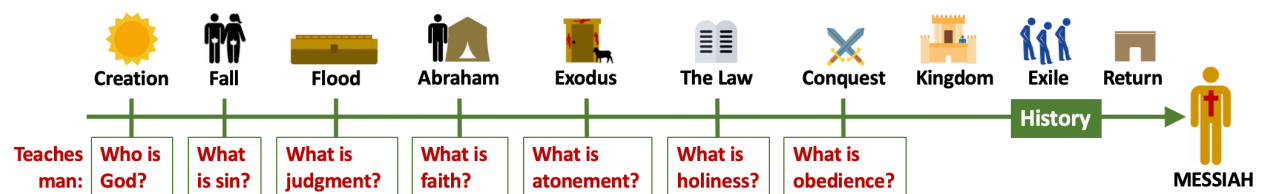
### Galatians 4:4–5

<sup>4</sup> But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. <sup>5</sup> God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.

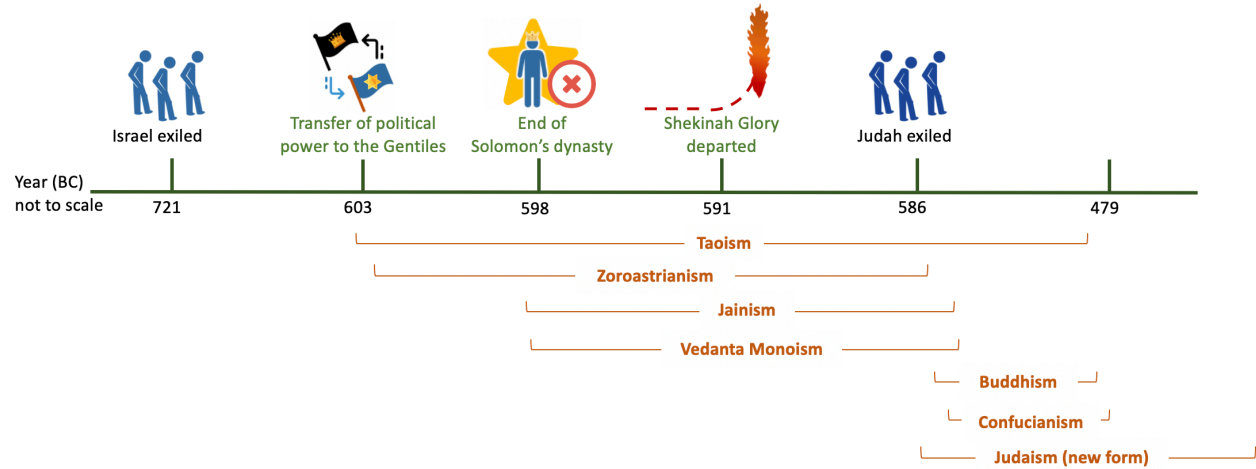


But why this particular timing? Why not earlier?

Yahweh's timing on when to send the Messiah was very intentional. He had used the events in history to teach mankind about what sin is, what faith is, what atonement is and more. Yahweh sent the Messiah only after He had taught the people all this background.






Interestingly, God did not send the Messiah immediately after the exile and before the 400 years of “silence”. Why not? It may be that God deliberately wanted the world to experience the consequences of the rise of seven new religions.



And perhaps He wanted them to also experience the consequences of the rise of Greek philosophy.

### Sources of Truth

<p><b>1. YAHWEH</b></p> <p><b>God's Revelation in Scripture:</b> Content-filled message given in human language so man can understand.</p> 	<p><b>2. Man</b></p> <p>Human reason because man's mind is able to discover truth without any external help (that is, without any god).</p> 	<p><b>3. Man</b></p> <p>Man's personal experience and feelings are the ultimate source of truth. This includes scientific study.</p> 
--	---	--

In these 400 years, mankind would have realised that these new religions and Greek thinking shared similar characteristics to earlier versions of paganism—that mankind rather than God was the ultimate authority. Mankind could save themselves through their own ideas and works. Perhaps by only sending the Messiah after these 400 years, people would be better able to see the difference between what the pagan world stood for and what God was offering through His Messiah.

Another interesting observation was that during these 400 years, the Greeks and the Romans built excellent roads linking many areas in the empire. We will see later on that these very roads were very important in helping the gospel go out into all the world. Again, perhaps God in His wisdom wanted all these things to be in place before sending His Messiah.

In any case, God had a very specific timing and reason for the Messiah to come at the time that He did.



## Yahweh Sent a Prophet to Announce the Arrival of the Messiah

Yahweh was very orderly and consistent in the way He did things. In the Old Testament, one of the jobs of the prophet was to announce who God had chosen to be the king. For example, the prophet Samuel announced that Saul was to be the king. Later, Samuel also announced that the next king would be David.

God continued this same practice and pattern in the New Testament. He sent the prophet John the Baptist to announce whom God had chosen as the Messiah.



### John 1:29–34

<sup>29</sup> The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” <sup>30</sup> He is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.’ <sup>31</sup> I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel.”

<sup>32</sup> Then John testified, “I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. <sup>33</sup> I didn’t know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’” <sup>34</sup> I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.”

John the Baptist himself didn’t know that Jesus was the Saviour at first, but God had told him to prepare the way for the Messiah by baptizing people with water. And then God told him how he would recognise the Messiah: the Holy Spirit would rest on Him.

## Looking at Jesus was Looking at God Himself

Jesus physically coming to earth and living among people was the clearest revelation of the Creator-God that man had ever seen. There was no better way for mankind to know and understand who Yahweh was than to see Jesus.

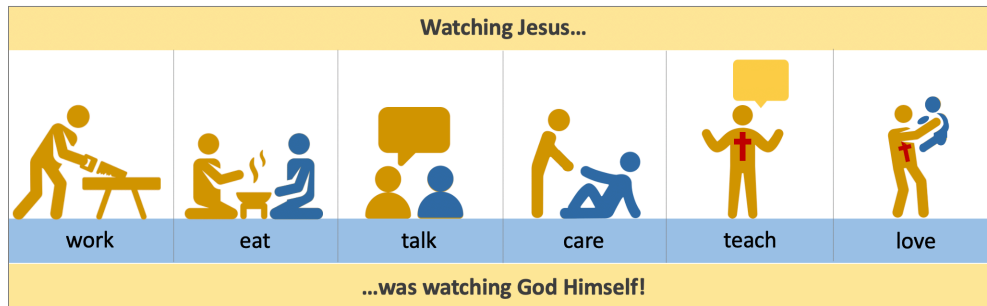
### John 14:9

Jesus replied, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?”



### Watching Jesus was watching God Himself!

- Watching Him live, eat, work, and talk with others was the same as watching the Creator-God do all these things.
- Seeing how Jesus loved, cared for others, taught and lived by God’s Law was watching a live example of how God intended all mankind to be.

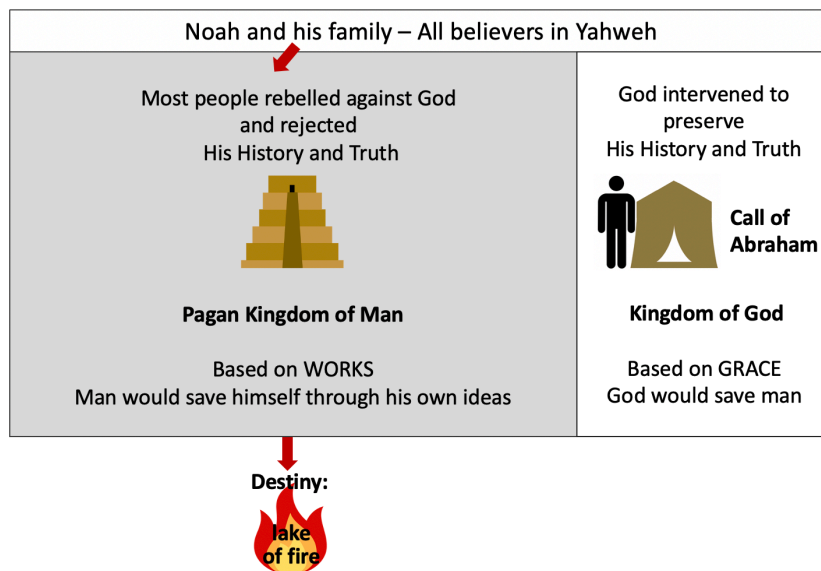


## Jesus Introduced Himself to the Jews First

When Jesus arrived on earth, He didn't show Himself to the whole world, but only to the Jews. Why? It was because of the covenant, or the contract, that God had made with Abraham.

After creation, Yahweh communicated directly with all mankind. However, they chose to ignore Him. So God interrupted history and called Abraham out of the evil pagan culture he was in. He chose Abraham and his descendants to be the ones who would preserve His history and truth and then take it to the rest of the world.

### How Civilisation became Paganised and How God Intervened



**Genesis 12:2–3** (Covenant with Abraham)

<sup>2</sup> I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."



From that time on, God started to give new information or revelation about Himself, His plan for world history and salvation directly to the Jewish people first.

**Romans 3:1–2**

<sup>1</sup> Then what's the advantage of being a Jew? Is there any value in the ceremony of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Yes, there are great benefits! First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God.

**Amos 3:7**

Indeed, the Sovereign LORD never does anything until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets.

God meant for the nation of Israel to be His representatives to the whole world. The nation was supposed to be the mediator, or go-between for God and the world.

**Exodus 19:5–6**

<sup>5</sup> Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. <sup>6</sup> And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.<sup>7</sup> This is the message you must give to the people of Israel."

So when Jesus came, He also went to the Jews first. God was going to finish revealing Himself to the world through the Jews.

**Romans 1:16**

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.

Yahweh's plan was for the Jews to then take His truth to the world.

This was one way that God had planned for Abraham and his family to be a blessing to the whole world.

**Matthew 28:18–20**

<sup>18</sup> Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Did the Jews obey Messiah Jesus and do what He told them to? Unfortunately, no.

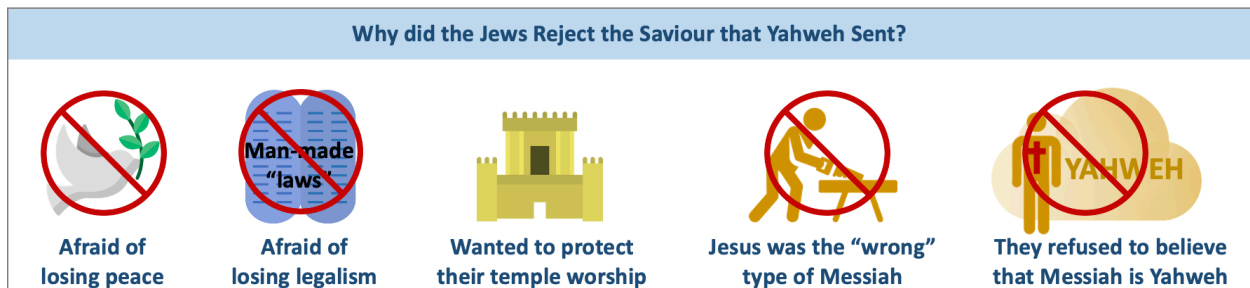
**The Jews Rejected Jesus**

How did the Jews respond to the Messiah they were waiting for? Shockingly, most of them rejected Jesus.

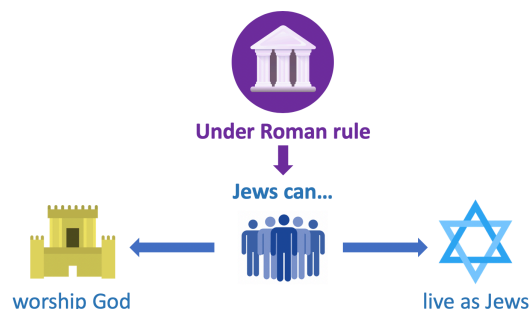
**John 1:10–11**

<sup>10</sup> He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.

Why did this happen? After waiting in anticipation for so many hundreds of years, why did the Jewish people not accept the Saviour that Yahweh sent? There were five reasons.

**1. Afraid of losing peace**

The Jewish leaders were afraid that they would lose their political security. Under the Romans, they had quite a lot of independence and freedom. They could worship God and live their lives. As long as they did not rebel against the empire, they were safe.



When Jesus came, He declared that He was not only the promised Messiah, but that He was God Himself, the ultimate authority over all creation. Jesus told the Jews to submit to Him, just as they submitted to Yahweh.



The Jewish leaders panicked. If the Romans heard what Jesus said, it would mean the end of their safe little world.

Jesus was a political threat!

### John 11:47–48

<sup>47</sup> Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. “What are we going to do?” they asked each other. “This man certainly performs many miraculous signs.

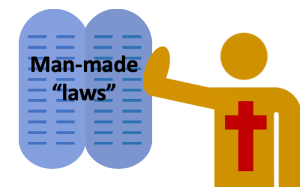
<sup>48</sup> If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation.”



## 2. Afraid of losing legalism

The Jewish leaders were very self-righteous and they taught people that they had to live by all the additional rules and traditions they themselves had added to God’s Law.

But when Jesus came, He said people did not become righteous by following the Law. He criticised the Pharisees, scolding them for treating the law as a list of dos and don’ts instead of focusing on their heart attitude towards God.



Jesus was a threat to their man-made religious “laws”!

But they did not pause to reflect on their actions, or repent. Instead, they looked for ways to accuse Jesus of wrong-doing.

### Matthew 15:1–14

<sup>1</sup> Some Pharisees and teachers of religious law now arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. They asked him, <sup>2</sup> “Why do your disciples disobey our age-old tradition? For they ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat.” <sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, “And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God?” <sup>4</sup> For instance, God says, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and ‘Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.’ <sup>5</sup> But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, ‘Sorry, I can’t help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.’”

<sup>6</sup> In this way, you say they don't need to honor their parents. And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition. <sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote,

<sup>8</sup> 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

<sup>9</sup> Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.'"

<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. "Listen," he said, "and try to understand. <sup>11</sup> It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth."

<sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you realize you offended the Pharisees by what you just said?"

<sup>13</sup> Jesus replied, "Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted, <sup>14</sup> so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch."

Pharisees focused on	Jesus focused on
 <p>The Pharisees' religious authority comes from "our age-old tradition" (verse 2).</p>	 <p>Jesus rejects the authority of their traditions. True authority comes from God's Word alone (verse 3).</p>

With each encounter they had with Jesus, the Jewish leaders grew more and more angry, so finally, they plotted to get rid of Jesus.

#### **Matthew 12:14**

Then the Pharisees called a meeting to plot how to kill Jesus.

#### **Matthew 26:3–4**

<sup>3</sup> At that same time the leading priests and elders were meeting at the residence of Caiaphas, the high priest, <sup>4</sup> plotting how to capture Jesus secretly and kill him.



### **3. Wanted to protect their temple worship**

The temple was the focus of the Jews' spiritual life. They had started to treat the temple almost as importantly as the worship of God Himself. So, for these Jews, to attack the temple was to attack God Himself. This attitude and behaviour was very wrong. God never intended for them to "worship" the temple like that.

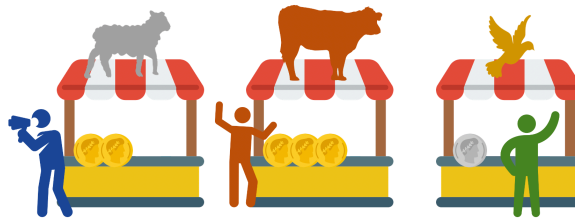
When Jesus came, He tried to explain that God Himself was greater than the temple. And in fact, God Himself was now with them because He was God.

### Matthew 12:3–6

<sup>3</sup> Jesus said to them, “Haven’t you read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? <sup>4</sup> He went into the house of God, and he and his companions broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests are allowed to eat. <sup>5</sup> And haven’t you read in the law of Moses that the priests on duty in the Temple may work on the Sabbath? <sup>6</sup> I tell you, there is one here who is even greater than the Temple!”



Another time, Jesus went to the temple and stopped the merchants from buying and selling animals for the Passover, because they were turning the temple from a place of worship to a chaotic marketplace.



### John 2:18–20

<sup>18</sup> But the Jewish leaders demanded, “What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it.” <sup>19</sup> “All right,” Jesus replied. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” <sup>20</sup> “What!” they exclaimed. “It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?”

What Jesus said and did challenged the religious leaders’ attitude towards the temple and how they thought they should “worship” God. This made them very angry.

Jesus was a big threat to their religious practices and traditions!



## 4. Jesus was the “wrong” type of Messiah

Jesus was not the glorious King the Jews were expecting. They were expecting a powerful political Saviour to come and overthrow the Romans, re-start the Kingdom of God and rule forever from David’s throne in Jerusalem.

The Jews were expecting the Son of David to...		
		
Overthrow the Romans	Free the Jews	Become the political ruler

On Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the people got so excited because they thought that Jesus was finally going to crush the Romans completely and free them from Roman rule.

### Matthew 21:8–11

<sup>8</sup> Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

“Praise God for the Son of David!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Praise God in highest heaven!”

<sup>10</sup> The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. “Who is this?” they asked.

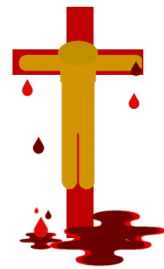
<sup>11</sup> And the crowds replied, “It’s Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”



But this was not what Jesus had come to do. Even though Jesus announced He was the Messiah, He didn’t talk about overthrowing the Romans. Instead, He talked about how He would be killed by the religious leaders.

### Matthew 16:21–22

<sup>21</sup> From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. <sup>22</sup> But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. “Heaven forbid, Lord,” he said. “This will never happen to you!”



Even the disciples who trusted Him, like Peter, had a hard time understanding all this. It didn’t fit the image or expectation he had for the conquering Saviour. And Peter was not the only one.

Even though John the Baptist had introduced Jesus as the Messiah, later, he too, wondered if he had been right.

### Matthew 11:2–3

<sup>2</sup> John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, <sup>3</sup> “Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?”



Jesus really didn’t meet any of the Jews’ expectations of what the Messiah would be like!





## 5. They refused to believe that the Messiah is Yahweh

The Jews came up with their own thinking that Messiah could not be Yahweh. This was not what Scriptures taught at all. In fact, if they had read the Old Testament carefully, they would have seen that God said the total opposite: Messiah was Yahweh.

### Isaiah 9:6

For a child is born to us,  
a son is given to us.  
The government will rest on his shoulders.  
And he will be called:  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.



- Mighty God
- Everlasting Father
- Immanuel

### Isaiah 7:14

All right then, the LORD himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').

Who had the right to use the titles “Mighty God”, “Everlasting Father” or “Immanuel”? No human could. These names applied only to Yahweh, the Creator-God of the universe. It was clear that the prophet Isaiah was saying that Messiah was God Himself. However, the Jews chose to misunderstand or ignore these passages.

Because of this, when Jesus came claiming to be Yahweh, the Jews became very angry.

Once, they were discussing with Jesus what it meant to be Abraham’s children. And Jesus told them that Abraham was happy whenever he thought about the day the Saviour would come.

### John 8:56–59

<sup>56</sup> Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad.” <sup>57</sup> The people said, “You aren’t even fifty years old. How can you say you have seen Abraham?” <sup>58</sup> Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!” <sup>59</sup> At that point they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple.



When Jesus used the phrase “I AM”, the Jews recognised it immediately. “I AM” was Yahweh, the Creator-God’s personal name (Exodus 3:14)!



According to the Law, it was a crime to claim to be God. This was considered blasphemy and the punishment was death by stoning.

Because they had already made up their own minds that there was no way the Messiah could be Yahweh, they tried to stone Jesus for His “crime”.

The Jews rejected Jesus, the Messiah they were waiting for. Was it because God failed to tell them who the Messiah would be? No. Their rejection actually revealed what was in their hearts towards God: this was not the kind of God or Messiah that they wanted!

Jesus didn't fit into their own ideas of what a Saviour should be.

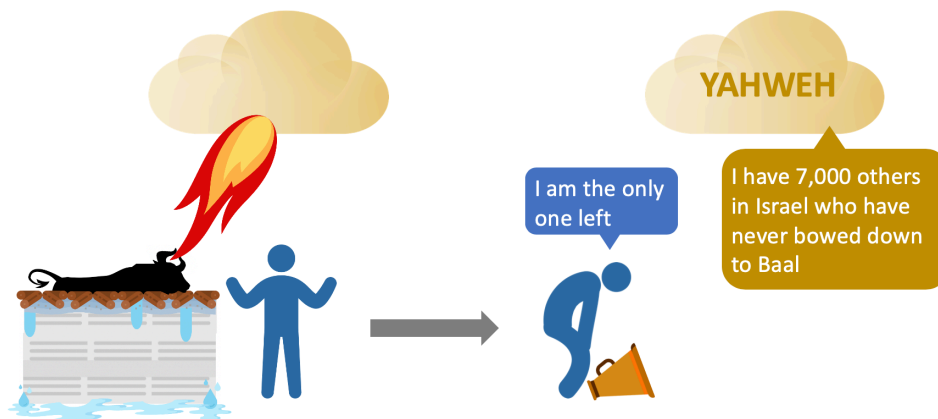
That's why they rejected Him.

## Some Jews Believed

However, not every single Jew rejected Jesus. There were those who did believe He was the Messiah and Yahweh Himself.

This was similar to Elijah's time. In the Old Testament, after the prophet Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, he was discouraged and complained to Yahweh that he was the only prophet of God left in Israel (1 Kings 19:10).

Yahweh responded by telling him that he was not the only believer. Aside from Elijah, God had kept 7,000 faithful people for Himself (1 Kings 19:18).



Even though most of the nation had rejected Yahweh, there was a remnant, a small faithful group, who believed.

God's People in the Old Testament	
Israel and Judah turned against Yahweh: Became Paganised—unbelievers	Few believers (remnant)

Jesus also had a small group who believed in Him, but He had to teach them about Himself before they would finally understand who He really was.

God's People in the New Testament	
Most Jews rejected Jesus	Few Jewish believers

## Jesus' disciples believed after He forced them to think about who He was

One day, after teaching a great crowd, Jesus miraculously fed all of them (Mark 8:1–8). There were 4,000 men there. Counting also the women and children, the number was even bigger. This was the second time that Jesus had fed a large crowd. He had fed 5,000 earlier (Matthew 14:13–21).

This was an astonishing miracle. Here was the Messiah taking bread and fish and breaking them over and over to produce enough food to feed so many people. He was showing that He was Yahweh, the Creator-God.



After the meal, Jesus and His disciples crossed the lake and there, a group of Pharisees met Him. They got into a discussion with Him, demanding a miraculous sign. Jesus refused, returned to the boat with His disciples, and sailed away.

On the boat, the disciples realised they had forgotten to bring bread. How they argued showed they didn't understand that Jesus was Messiah and Yahweh. So He forced them to think.

### Mark 8:16–21

<sup>16</sup> At this they began to argue with each other because they hadn't brought any bread.

<sup>17</sup> Jesus knew what they were saying, so he said, "Why are you arguing about having no bread? Don't you know or understand even yet? Are your hearts too hard to take it in?

<sup>18</sup> 'You have eyes—can't you see? You have ears—can't you hear?' Don't you remember anything at all? <sup>19</sup> When I fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread, how many baskets of leftovers did you pick up afterward?"

"Twelve," they said.

<sup>20</sup> "And when I fed the 4,000 with seven loaves, how many large baskets of leftovers did you pick up?"

"Seven," they said.

<sup>21</sup> "Don't you understand yet?" he asked them.

This was a very important moment. Note how Jesus used the legal language of the Old Testament prophets to lay a charge on His disciples (“can’t you see...”; “can’t you hear...”).

Jesus was forcing them to stop and think carefully about who He was. They had seen Him perform this food miracle twice. He could give them all an unlimited supply of food. Based on this, Jesus was saying, “Don’t you know who I am by now?” Jesus wanted them to decide who He was and identify Him. If they failed to recognise who He was, they could not be His disciples!

Think...  
...don’t you understand?



Can’t you see?



Can’t you hear?

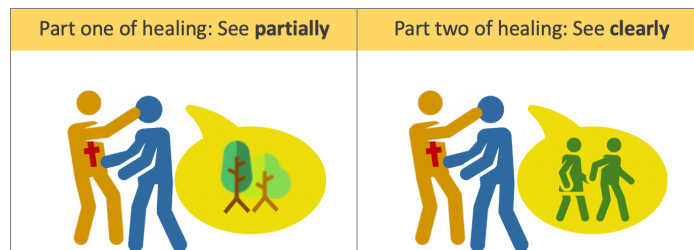
But they still did not quite understand. In fact, Jesus illustrated their lack of understanding through the way He healed a blind man right after that.

**Mark 8:22–25**

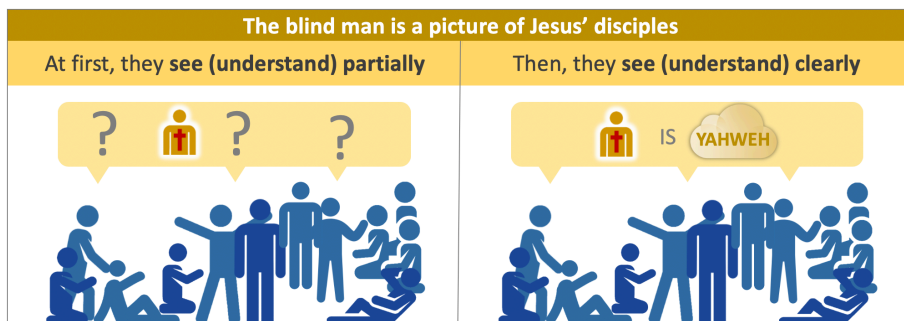
<sup>22</sup> When they arrived at Bethsaida, some people brought a blind man to Jesus, and they begged him to touch the man and heal him. <sup>23</sup> Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Then, spitting on the man’s eyes, he laid his hands on him and asked, “Can you see anything now?”

<sup>24</sup> The man looked around. “Yes,” he said, “I see people, but I can’t see them very clearly. They look like trees walking around.”

<sup>25</sup> Then Jesus placed his hands on the man’s eyes again, and his eyes were opened. His sight was completely restored, and he could see everything clearly.



Why did Jesus do this two-step miracle? Why not heal in one step? “Seeing” was a picture of having understanding. Jesus was probably showing His disciples that even though they were with Him, they did not yet fully understand, or “see” who He really was. They were like the blind man at the first stage of healing. He was hinting that they could ask for His help to make them truly see and understand.



Not long after that miracle, Jesus gathered the disciples and asked them directly.

**Mark 8:27–29**

<sup>27</sup> Jesus and his disciples left Galilee and went up to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

<sup>28</sup> “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets.”

<sup>29</sup> Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

Peter replied, “You are the Messiah.”

Finally they understood! Peter, speaking on behalf of the other disciples, declared that Jesus was the Messiah! They finally saw Jesus clearly!

Not only did they finally understand, all of them except for one, believed (John 6:64)!

But the disciples were not the only ones who believed. There were others.

## Other Jews also believed

### 1. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

Some Jews believed in Jesus after they saw the miracles He did.



**John 12:17–19**

<sup>17</sup> Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and they were telling others about it. <sup>18</sup> That was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign. <sup>19</sup> Then the Pharisees said to each other, “There’s nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him!”

### 2. When Peter the apostle preached his first public sermon.

After Jesus died, rose again and went back to heaven, even more people believed.

**Acts 2:38–41**

<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God.” <sup>40</sup> Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!” <sup>41</sup> Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.



### 3. When Peter and John appeared before the Sanhedrin.

Even when Jesus' disciples were punished for telling other Jews about Him, people came to believe!

#### Acts 4:1–4

<sup>1</sup> While Peter and John were speaking to the people, they were confronted by the priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and some of the Sadducees. <sup>2</sup> These leaders were very disturbed that Peter and John were teaching the people that through Jesus there is a resurrection of the dead. <sup>3</sup> They arrested them and, since it was already evening, put them in jail until morning. <sup>4</sup> But many of the people who heard their message believed it, so the number of men who believed now totaled about 5,000.



### 4. When the apostles performed miracles and preached about Jesus.

#### Acts 5:12–14

<sup>12</sup> The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>13</sup> But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them. <sup>14</sup> Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women.



### 5. Even Jesus' own brothers who did not believe in Him before, now believed.

Jesus had four brothers who were the sons of Joseph and Mary, His earthly parents. They were James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Matthew 13:55). When Jesus was first going around teaching, even His own brothers didn't believe in Him.

#### John 7:2–5

<sup>2</sup> But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, <sup>3</sup> and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles!" <sup>4</sup> You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!" <sup>5</sup> For even his brothers didn't believe in him.

However, after Jesus' death and resurrection, they too, became believers.

#### Acts 1:14

They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.



## Some Gentiles Believed Too

During His earthly ministry, Jesus went only to the Jews. This was because of the promises God made in the Abrahamic Covenant. The plan was for the Jews to then take the good news to the rest of the world.

But news about Jesus spread and some Gentile people also came to believe in Him.

God's People in the New Testament		
Most Jews rejected Jesus	Few Jewish believers	Gentile believers

### Matthew 15:21–28

<sup>21</sup> Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> A Gentile woman who lived there came to him, pleading, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely.”

<sup>23</sup> But Jesus gave her no reply, not even a word. Then his disciples urged him to send her away. “Tell her to go away,” they said. “She is bothering us with all her begging.”

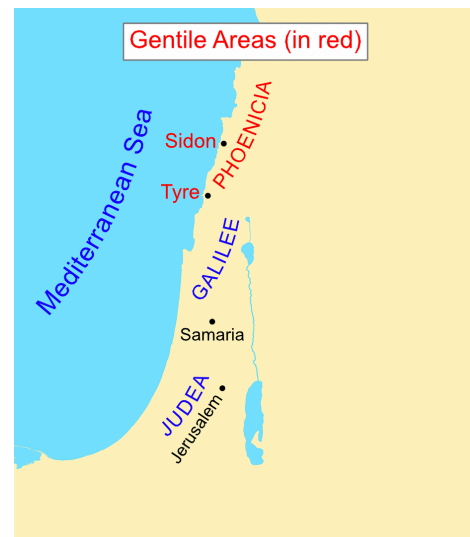
<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to the woman, “I was sent only to help God’s lost sheep—the people of Israel.”

<sup>25</sup> But she came and worshiped him, pleading again, “Lord, help me!”

<sup>26</sup> Jesus responded, “It isn’t right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs.”

<sup>27</sup> She replied, “That’s true, Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their masters’ table.”

<sup>28</sup> “Dear woman,” Jesus said to her, “your faith is great. Your request is granted.” And her daughter was instantly healed.



Note: God had told the Jews that they were supposed to be a counterculture and not get culturally mixed with the pagan culture. So the Jews had isolated themselves from non-Jewish people. That was why the disciples wanted Jesus to send the Gentile woman away. Also, at that time, the Jews often referred to Gentiles as “dogs”.

In this incident, Jesus saw that this Gentile woman understood that He was the Messiah (She called him “Son of David”). And she bravely hinted that even Gentiles should be allowed access to God: “Even dogs (Gentiles) are allowed to eat the scraps.”



Jesus praised her for her faith, and healed her daughter. Jesus granted her request even though she was a Gentile!

What Jesus did was a sign that God intended for the Gentiles to also benefit from what the Messiah would do. We will see how God does this in later lessons.



## What is Our Reaction to Jesus?

Most Jews rejected Jesus because He didn't fit their idea of what the Messiah should be like. Other Jews and some Gentiles joyfully accepted Jesus as Messiah and Yahweh.

In our own lives, who is Jesus to us? Who do we say that He is?



- What kind of God will we worship?



- Are we expecting Yahweh to fit our expectations of what we think God should be like?
- Are we looking for a God whom we can fully understand in our own minds?
- Do we want to worship a small god whom we can control?
- Are we looking for a God who will allow us to decide what is right and what is wrong?



When we meet the God of the Bible, do we resent His authority?

 <b>YAHWEH</b>	
<b>WHO AM I?</b> I am a creature who is responsible to my Creator.	<b>WHO AM I?</b> I am my own person, not accountable to anyone. I am alone in this sea of chaos.
<b>WHAT IS TRUTH? HOW DO I KNOW?</b> I look to my Creator, a person, for the truth. He is the source of all truth.	<b>WHAT IS TRUTH? HOW DO I KNOW?</b> Truth is whatever I make it. I generate my own law.
<b>WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?</b> God defines what I do. God gives the rules. He gives my life meaning.	<b>WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?</b> I generate my own ethics. I do what is right in my own eyes.

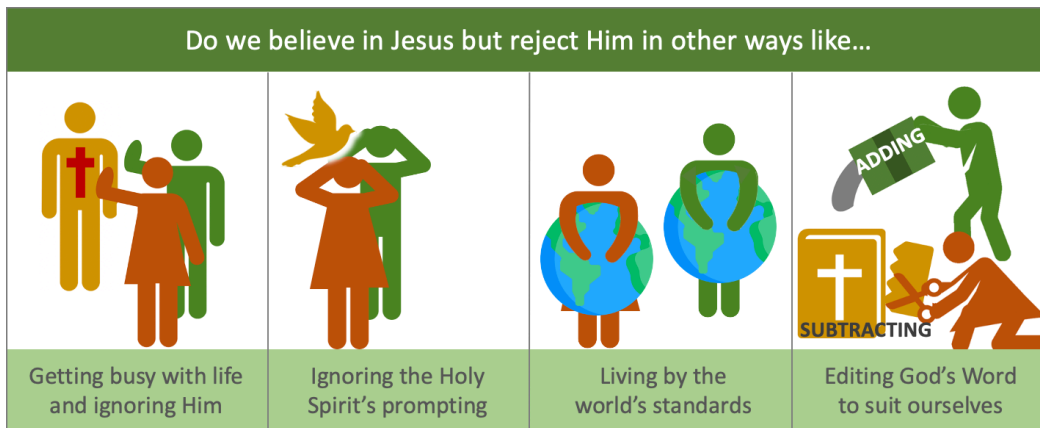
- Do we get embarrassed and angry when He shows us our sinfulness?
- Does it hurt our pride when He tells us that we desperately need a Saviour?
- Would we rather measure our lives by our own standards of righteousness?
- And do we prefer to judge others rather than have God judge us according to His perfect standard?
- In other words, do we prefer making ourselves the final authority of our lives (and the lives of others)?

Like the first-century Jews who rejected Jesus, perhaps we don't want the true God because:

- We don't want to feel guilty before a holy God. (We want to feel self-righteous.)
- We don't want to believe that we are helpless and need Him. (We are proud.)
- We don't want God to change us. (We are happy the way we are.)
- We are worried that God will require too much of us. (We don't want to be burdened.)
- We don't want to give up our lifestyles. (We enjoy our sin!)

Or we believe in Jesus but reject Him in other ways by:

- Getting busy with our lives and ignoring Him.
- Shaking off the Holy Spirit's work in trying to influence us.
- Living by the world's standards rather than seeking God.
- Twisting, adding or subtracting from God's Word to suit ourselves.



We need to ask ourselves:

Do we accept Messiah Jesus, Yahweh, as the true God of the Bible?



Who is He to us?

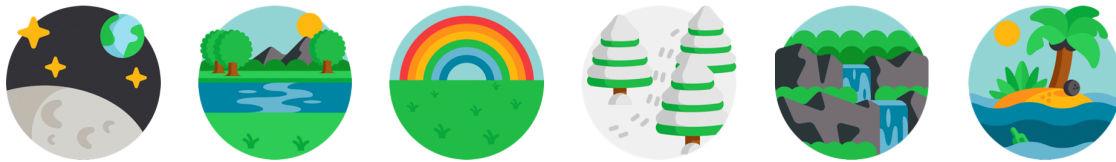
## Is it true that people do not have any natural knowledge of God and are therefore ignorant about Him?

Some believers have the idea that unbelievers don't know anything about Yahweh at all. Even when we look among our friends, we might believe that they have absolutely no information about the Creator-God. In fact, many believers struggle with this question: "What about people who have never heard about God?"

We would expect the Bible to give us an answer to this question. Interestingly however, Scripture doesn't talk about people who have no information about God. This is not God's perspective at all! Instead, Yahweh who knows the hearts of all people, says that everyone has knowledge of Him but many have consciously decided to suppress it.

### Romans 1:18–20

<sup>18</sup> But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. <sup>19</sup> They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. <sup>20</sup> For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.



**Through His work of creation, God made it obvious to mankind that He exists.**

The Bible says that Yahweh has left enough signs in the world to help us recognise that there is a Creator-God. However, people suppress God's truth on purpose to avoid thinking about Him. But if they actually stop to think, it can lead them to look for more information about Him.

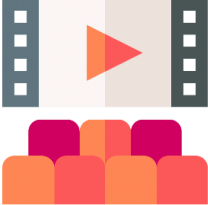
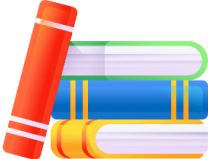

Many of us know people who believe there is no God and no Creator. To us, they may not look like they are suppressing truth because they genuinely believe that. Yet, the Bible insists that they are suppressing truth.

How?

They very easily believe that when they see a piece of work, there is a creator behind it.

Yet, when they look at all of creation, they insist there is no Creator.

**How mankind suppresses truth**

<p><b>Movies</b></p>  <p><b>I believe</b> there must be a producer, director, actors, etc.</p>	<p><b>Novels</b></p>  <p><b>I believe</b> there must be a writer, editor, proofreader, illustrator, etc.</p>	<p><b>World</b></p>  <p><b>I don't believe</b> anyone created this.</p>
---	---	--

The Bible calls this suppressing the truth. They have tricked themselves into believing what they want.

**Romans 1:21**

Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused.

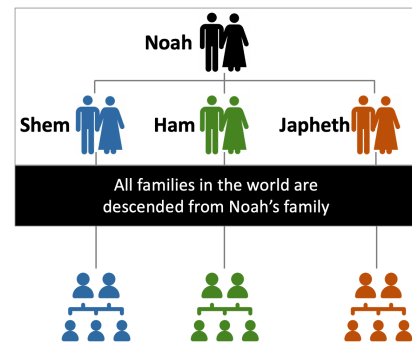
The Bible is saying that once people start suppressing the truth, they become foolish and they confuse themselves.

Think back to when Yahweh elected Abraham. God said He would communicate directly with him and his descendants, the nation of Israel. The Jews had the special job of recording God's history and truth and then they had to take it to the world. But before God worked directly with Israel, how did He communicate with mankind?



He spoke to all mankind. Starting with Adam and Eve, God gave public revelation about Himself globally. After the Flood, Noah and his family had with them the information of Genesis 1–10. This information was passed on to everyone. Noah and his family lived a long time and were around to share God's history with many generations of people. This information we can call "Noah's Bible".

Then God scattered the people at Babel. As they went all over the earth, each people group carried God's truth with them. Over time, they twisted, suppressed and forgot the truth they had. Interestingly, when missionaries work with remote tribes, they learn about tribal "stories and myths" that often sound a lot like the biblical events of Genesis 1–11. Why is that? It's the corruption of God's truth as it is handed down from generation to generation. Many tribes speak of a Creator-God, a global flood, of mankind being perfect once, then falling into sin and more. These are all fragments of Noah's Bible! In fact, even the ancient Chinese characters that we looked at in lesson 7 suggest that people all over the world had God's truth but they have corrupted it over time.



Not only that, there is another aspect of how God's truth is available all over the world. Though the world we live in is fallen, God says He made sure there is ample evidence of Himself in it.

Once, the apostle Paul was with a group of Gentiles in a town called Lystra (now in present-day Turkey). Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Paul had healed a crippled man and when the crowds saw what he had done, they began to shout that Paul and Barnabas were gods. This was Paul's reply.

#### **Acts 14:15–17**

<sup>15</sup> "Friends, why are you doing this? We are merely human beings—just like you! We have come to bring you the Good News that you should turn from these worthless things and turn to the living God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. <sup>16</sup> In the past he permitted all the nations to go their own ways, <sup>17</sup> but he never left them without evidence of himself and his goodness. For instance, he sends you rain and good crops and gives you food and joyful hearts."



**Evidence of God and His goodness**

Paul says that God left the people alone but He did not leave them without any information about Himself.

When we study nature and how the world works, we are looking at God's complex design work. It should lead us to think about the designer—Yahweh!

Also, God created people such that they can think, reason and then understand what is going on. Through reasoning, God says that they would be able to realise there is a Creator-God in charge of the universe. For example, when Paul was talking about Yahweh with a group of philosophers in Athens, he quoted from two pagan writers, Epimenides and Aratus, to show that even pagans can realise there is a Creator-God. Acts 17:28 is a blend of two quotes from these two pagan philosophers.

**Acts 17:24–31**

<sup>24</sup> “He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, <sup>25</sup> and human hands can’t serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need.

<sup>26</sup> From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

<sup>27</sup> “His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

<sup>29</sup> And since this is true, we shouldn’t think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone.

<sup>30</sup> “God overlooked people’s ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. <sup>31</sup> For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.”

Paul knew that the Greeks in Athens believed that people are “children” of a greater being. Using this little bit of truth they had, Paul said that they should therefore not think of “God” as a man-made idol. He was trying to point them to the true God, Yahweh.

Paul told them that in the past, God waited patiently for them to believe in Him because He was working with and preparing the Jews. But now, as the Jews (like Paul himself) took the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world, God expected people everywhere to respond to His truth by repenting and turning to Him in belief (verse 30).

Ultimately, we understand from the Bible that God does not agree that mankind has no knowledge of Him. Because all mankind is made in the image of God, every human being has some knowledge and understanding of their Creator, Yahweh.

God has provided mankind with enough proof or evidence of Himself to convince anyone willing to believe there is a Creator-God. Yet, He has not overwhelmed mankind with so much evidence that every person has no choice but to believe.

Instead, He has revealed Himself in a way that allows the unwilling to reject Him. In other words, the amount of evidence that God provides for mankind gives everyone the genuine choice to seek Him or reject Him.

**Isaiah 45:15**

Truly, O God of Israel, our Savior,  
you work in mysterious ways.

God expects people to look around their environment, to stop and think and to come to the right conclusion that there is a Creator-God. Then they are supposed to find out more about Him. And when the message of Jesus' death and resurrection is shared with them, God expects them to come to Him in faith.

People are not supposed to suppress His truth, ignore it or refuse to use their minds to reason and think.



## Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. How do we know if the image or understanding of God that we are building in our minds is an accurate picture of what God is really like? How can we be sure?
2. Thinking of the people you are trying to reach with the gospel, what misconceptions do they have about Jesus and God? How would you help them gain a proper picture of who Jesus is?
3. How would you answer Jesus' question: "Who do you say that I am?" Is your answer just the "textbook" answer or an answer from your heart? As a believer, are there areas of your life that you have kept away from the influence of Jesus?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Matthew 1:1–2:12; Luke 1–3; John 1:1–18