

Lesson 33: Birth of Christ

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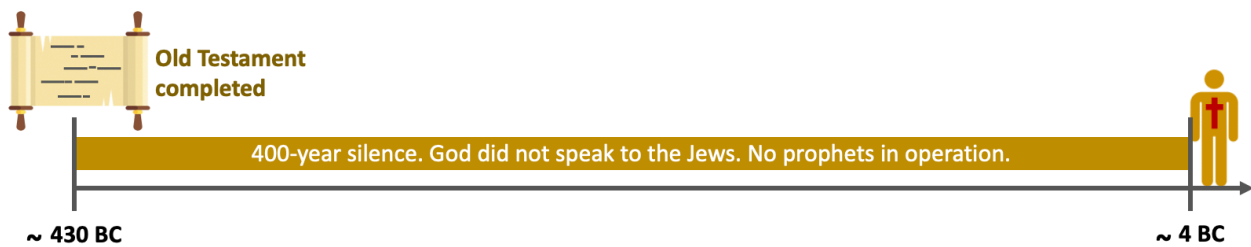
At the time when Jesus was born, Rome was the superpower of the world. Judea, where the Jews lived, was a province of Rome. They were no longer a free and independent people.



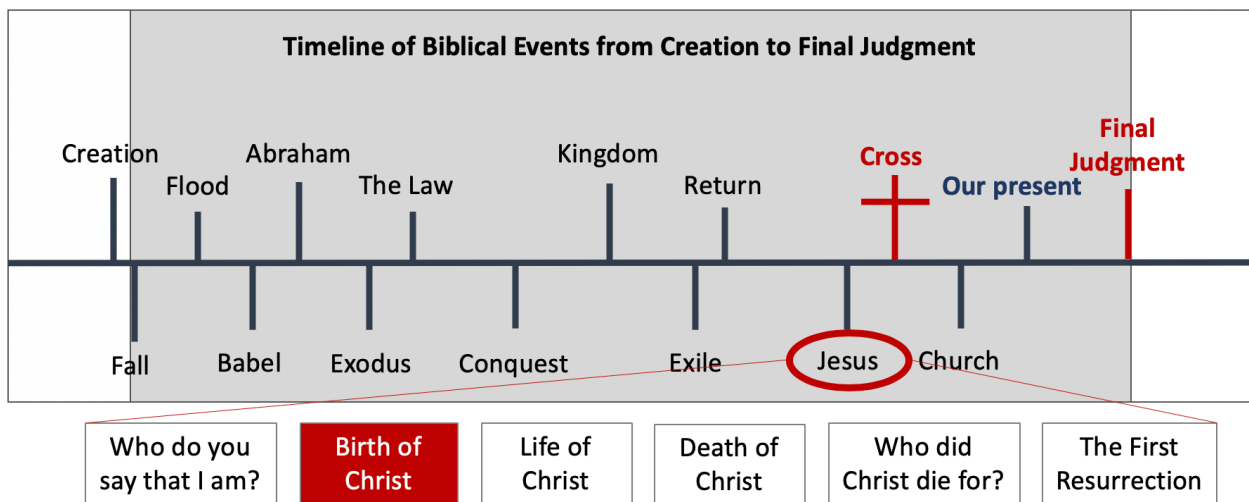
At this point in history, the Jews focused on Yahweh alone; they had stopped worshipping idols. However, they had turned legalistic. Instead of loving God with all their hearts, they were more concerned about how they appeared outwardly in their actions and deeds. And they were very protective of the relatively stable life and practices that they had created for themselves.



Nevertheless, they were still waiting for the promised Messiah.

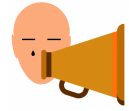


After four hundred years of silence from God, Yahweh spoke and acted audibly and visibly once more in the form of Jesus.



The Jews Were Expecting Two Things From God

God was not doing anything “new” with the birth of Jesus. He had prophesied about many of the things that would happen when the Messiah comes. From some of these prophecies, the Jews expected two things:



1. They expected God to physically reign as king over the earth.



2. They expected God to send a perfect human leader to reign.



But exactly where did they get these ideas from?



1. God will physically reign as king over the earth

Psalm 93:1

The LORD is king! He is robed in majesty.

Indeed, the LORD is robed in majesty and armed with strength.

The world stands firm
and cannot be shaken.

Psalm 97:1

The LORD is king!

Let the earth rejoice!
Let the farthest coastlands be glad.

Psalm 98:7–9

⁷ Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise!

Let the earth and all living things join in.

⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands in glee!

Let the hills sing out their songs of joy

⁹ before the LORD,

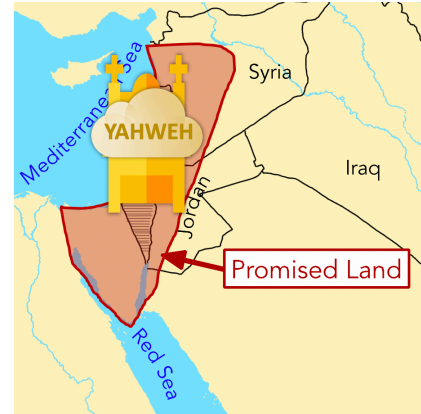
for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with justice,
and the nations with fairness.

Although Yahweh is the Creator-God who owns the whole earth, He is currently not ruling as the King of the visible Kingdom of God because the Kingdom of God is currently not in operation.

Because the Old Testament has many passages calling Yahweh King, the Jews fully expected Yahweh to usher in the physical Kingdom of God on earth and to physically rule the whole world from it.

But they also had another expectation.



2. God will send a perfect human leader to reign as king over the earth

Psalm 89:3–4, 35–37

³ The LORD said, “I have made a covenant with David, my chosen servant.

I have sworn this oath to him:

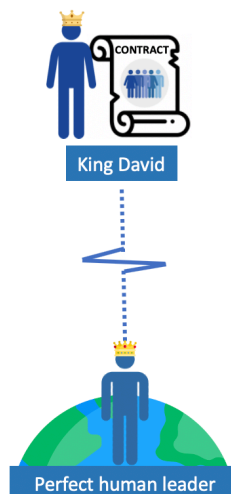
⁴ ‘I will establish your descendants as kings forever;
they will sit on your throne from now until eternity.”

³⁵ I have sworn an oath to David,
and in my holiness I cannot lie:

³⁶ His dynasty will go on forever;
his kingdom will endure as the sun.

³⁷ It will be as eternal as the moon,
my faithful witness in the sky!”

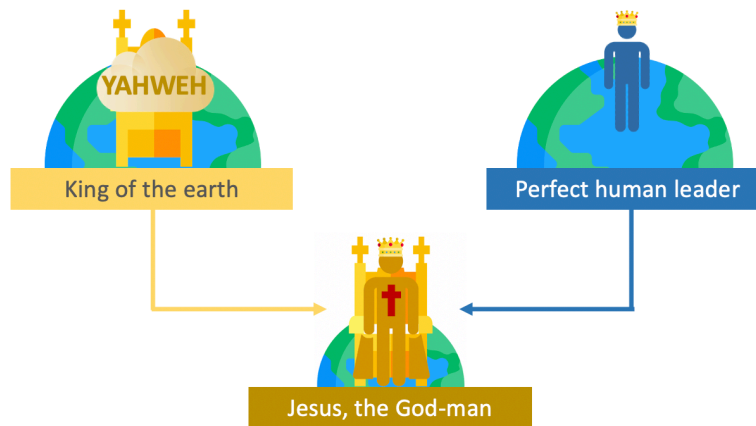
The Jews were also expecting that God would send an ideal human leader, a descendant of David, to reign over Israel forever. But this human leader must be perfect and righteous otherwise he would not be able to reign forever.



How would God achieve these two things? How would He:

1. physically reign as King Yahweh over the earth as well as
2. send a perfect human to reign?

Yahweh surprised the Jews by combining God the King and the ideal human leader into one person: Jesus, the God-man!



But how can God and man “combine”?

The word “incarnation” is often used to describe what happened with Jesus.

The Incarnation of Christ

This word, “incarnation” refers to Jesus, God the Son, becoming a human, but without losing any of His divine nature (or God nature). So, Jesus is fully God and fully man.







1. Jesus is fully God

The Bible tells us very clearly that Jesus is fully God. He has the same qualities as Yahweh, the Creator-God. How do we know this?

a. The Bible says that it was Jesus who created the world.

At the start of the Bible, Yahweh records how He created the heavens and the earth.

When the apostle John writes his Gospel, he also uses similar words to describe Creation. But he says that “the Word” was responsible for Creation. Compare the following two passages.

  Genesis 1:1–5	 John 1:1–5 
<p>¹ <u>In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.</u> ² The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.</p> <p>³ Then God said, “<u>Let there be light,</u>” and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.”</p> <p>And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.</p>	<p>¹ <u>In the beginning</u> the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and <u>the Word was God.</u></p> <p>² He existed in the beginning with God.</p> <p>³ God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.</p> <p>⁴ <u>The Word gave life to everything that was created,</u> and his life brought <u>light to everyone.</u></p> <p>⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.</p>
YAHWEH created	The WORD (Jesus) created

Genesis says that God created the world. John says that the “Word” created the world. One of Jesus’ names is “The Word”. So, the apostle John is saying that from eternity past, Jesus was with God the Father. And Jesus is God, with the same qualities as God the Father.

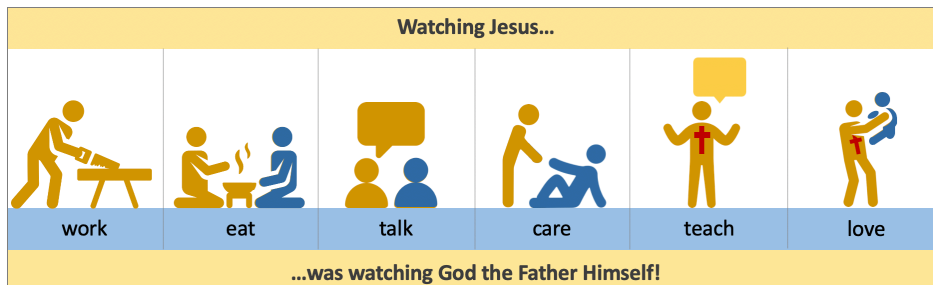
b. The Bible also tells us that Jesus, “The Word”, who is God Himself, came down to earth as a human.

John 1:14, 18

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.



Jesus left heaven and took on a human body. But Jesus did not just “look” like a human. He actually became fully human. He had flesh and bones. He breathed, He ate, He lived, and then later, He died and rose again.



c. During His time on earth, Jesus showed His “God qualities” or “God nature” for people to see.

Jesus said that looking at Him was the same as looking at God the Father!

John 14:6–11

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

From all these Scripture passages, we see that Jesus is 100% God.



2. Jesus is fully human

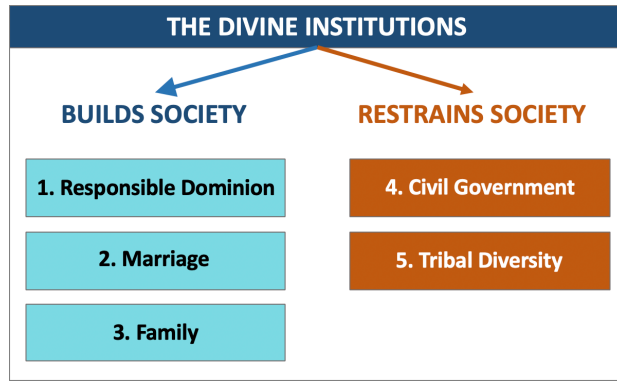
However, the Bible also says that Jesus is fully human. The apostle Paul said that Jesus came in a body just like ours but without sin. In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul called Jesus the second, or last Adam.

1 Corinthians 15:45–47

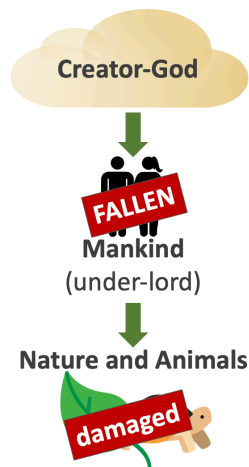
⁴⁵ The Scriptures tell us, “The first man, Adam, became a living person.” But the last Adam —that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit. ⁴⁶ What comes first is the natural body, then the spiritual body comes later. ⁴⁷ Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven.

Why did Paul call Jesus the “last Adam” and the “second man”, meaning “second Adam”?

Remember that God gave the first divine institution to man. It was responsible dominion. Adam represented God by being the under-lord. He was supposed to rule over all the earth wisely and successfully and in this way reflect God’s character.

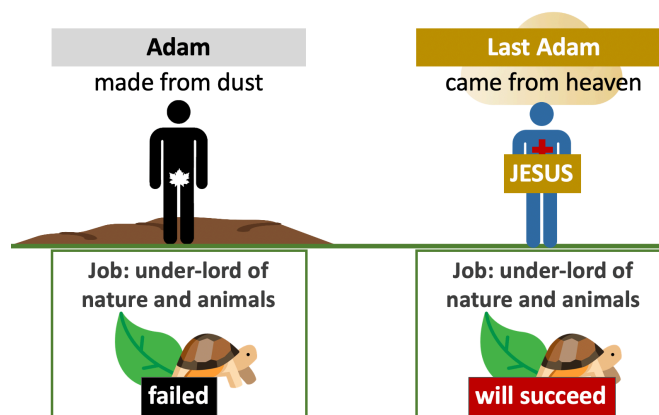


But instead, the first Adam rebelled against God and brought sin into the world. This was how the earth became cursed because of him.



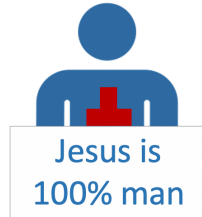
However, God will not let His plans be ruined. God still intends that man will rule nature and animals responsibly.

So what did He do? He sent a second Adam.



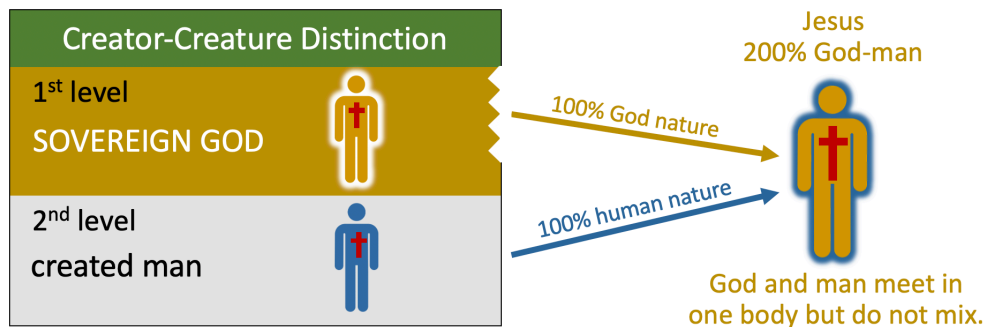
This second Adam (who is Jesus) will be a very successful under-lord. He will rule the world with righteousness. And there will be peace, prosperity and righteousness all over the earth.

This Jesus has to be and is indeed 100% man.



Jesus' two natures are together but not mixed

It is important to understand that when Jesus, who is God Himself, came to earth as a man, His "God nature" and his "human nature" live in the same body but do not mix together.



It is not like mixing apple and grape juice and getting "grapple juice".

No. Jesus is fully God and fully human together. His "God-ness", and his "human-ness" are in the same body but not mixed.

So we can say that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. He is the only 200% person! Jesus never destroyed the Creator-creature distinction.

How did Yahweh "combine" the two natures to get a 200% person?

➡ He did it through the virgin birth of Christ.

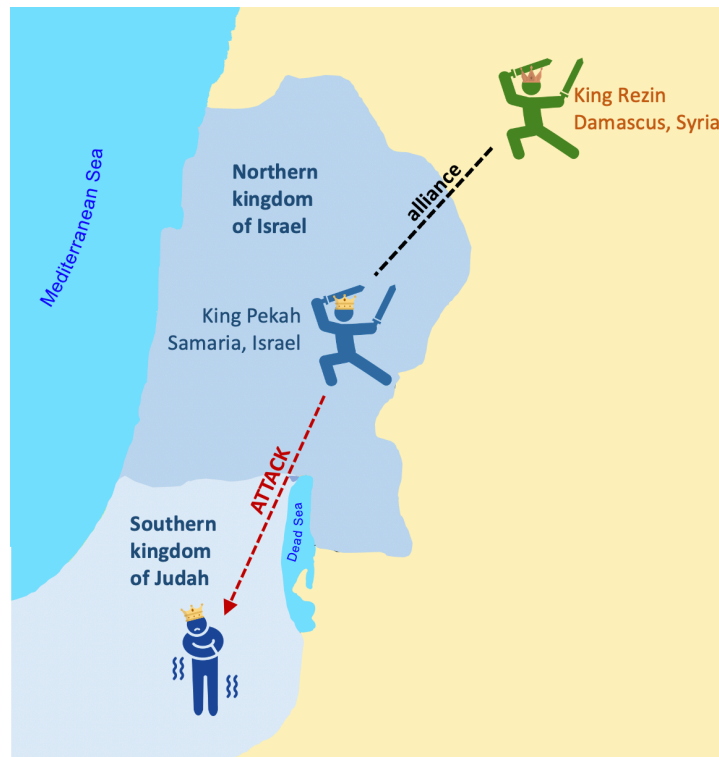
The Virgin Birth of Jesus

The way that Jesus came to be human was very special. One of the remarkable prophecies about Him coming to earth was that He would be born from a woman only. He would not have a biological human father.



This prophecy was given by the prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz. How did it happen?

1. King Ahaz was from the family of David. While he was ruling Judah, the southern kingdom, he was frightened when he learnt that the northern kingdom (Israel) had formed an alliance or partnership with Syria to attack Judah (Isaiah 7:1–2).



2. Yahweh sent Isaiah to reassure Ahaz that He would make the alliance fall apart.

Isaiah 7:3–9

³ Then the LORD said to Isaiah, “Take your son Shear-jashub and go out to meet King Ahaz. You will find him at the end of the aqueduct that feeds water into the upper pool, near the road leading to the field where cloth is washed. ⁴ Tell him to stop worrying. Tell him he doesn’t need to fear the fierce anger of those two burned-out embers, King Rezin of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah. ⁵ Yes, the kings of Syria and Israel are plotting against him, saying, ⁶ ‘We will attack Judah and capture it for ourselves. Then we will install the son of Tabeel as Judah’s king.’ ⁷ But this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“This invasion will never happen;
it will never take place;

⁸ for Syria is no stronger than its capital, Damascus,
 and Damascus is no stronger than its king, Rezin.
 As for Israel, within sixty-five years
 it will be crushed and completely destroyed.
⁹ Israel is no stronger than its capital, Samaria,
 and Samaria is no stronger than its king, Pekah son of Remaliah.
 Unless your faith is firm,
 I cannot make you stand firm.”

Yahweh told Isaiah to take his young son with him to meet King Ahaz. (The son’s name Shear-jashub means “a remnant will return”, which was another prophetic hint.) God’s message to the king was to stop worrying about the alliance. Why? Because God would never allow anyone to destroy the family of David because of the Davidic Covenant. But King Ahaz didn’t trust Yahweh and was already thinking of asking Assyria for help (2 Kings 16:5, 7–9)!



3. Because Yahweh knew that King Ahaz didn’t really trust Him, God instructed Ahaz to choose a confirming sign. When God fulfilled it, Ahaz would be able to rest in God’s assurance and trust Him for the promised outcome.

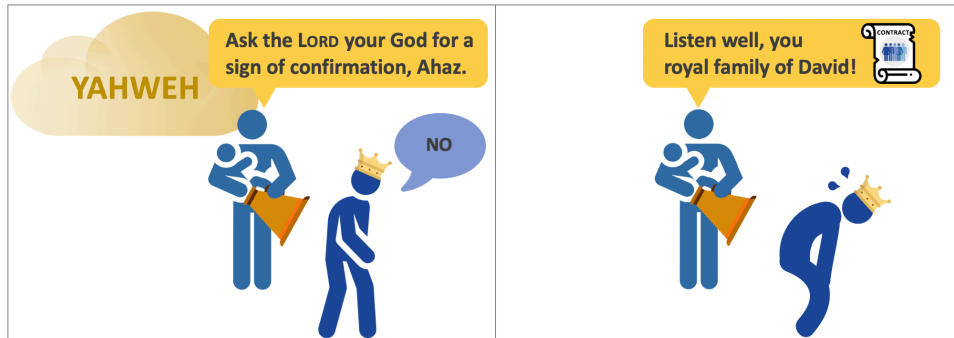
Isaiah 7:10–16

¹⁰ Later, the LORD sent this message to King Ahaz: ¹¹ “Ask the LORD your God for a sign of confirmation, Ahaz. Make it as difficult as you want—as high as heaven or as deep as the place of the dead.”

¹² But the king refused. “No,” he said, “I will not test the LORD like that.”

¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Listen well, you royal family of David! Isn’t it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you exhaust the patience of my God as well?”

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’). ¹⁵ By the time this child is old enough to choose what is right and reject what is wrong, he will be eating yogurt and honey. ¹⁶ For before the child is that old, the lands of the two kings you fear so much will both be deserted.



Notice how God spoke to the entire family line of David: “You royal family of David!” He was reminding Ahaz of the Davidic Covenant. But Ahaz disobeyed God by refusing to choose a sign, so Yahweh chose His own sign. In fact, He chose two:

FAR FUTURE FULFILMENT	NEAR FUTURE FULFILMENT
<p>¹⁴ All right then, the LORD himself will give you the sign. Look! <u>The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel</u> (which means ‘God is with us’).</p>	<p>¹⁵ By the time this child is old enough to choose what is right and reject what is wrong, he will be eating yogurt and honey. ¹⁶ For <u>before the child is that old</u>, the lands of the two kings you fear so much will both be deserted.</p> <p>(This is saying that before the boy is old enough to know right from wrong, both Israel and Syria will be emptied.)</p>
<p>The Hebrew word for “you” in this verse is kem, which is a plural form.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">God was addressing the entire family line of David.</p>	<p>The Hebrew word for “you” in this verse is ‘attâ, which is a singular form.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Now God was addressing just King Ahaz.</p>

Near future fulfilment: a sign for Ahaz

Yahweh had asked Isaiah to bring his son to meet the king. Why? Because God was using the little boy as the sign of the near future fulfilment of His prophecy. Isaiah himself said this about his family.

Isaiah 8:18

I and the children the LORD has given me serve as signs and warnings to Israel from the LORD of Heaven’s Armies who dwells in his Temple on Mount Zion.

Yahweh was saying to King Ahaz that before Shear-jashub was old enough to know right from wrong, the alliance between Israel and Syria would collapse.



And indeed, in 732 BC, just a few years after Isaiah’s prophecy, Assyria did conquer both Syria and Israel, destroying their alliance. The threat to Judah (and to the family of David) was gone for the moment. God saved David’s family because of His covenant with him.

So “the boy” in this part of the prophecy was referring to Isaiah’s son, a sign that both King Ahaz and Isaiah could clearly observe. For the sign to make sense for Ahaz, it had to be something he could see.

But there was also a far future fulfilment.



Far future fulfilment: for all the family of David (and the world)

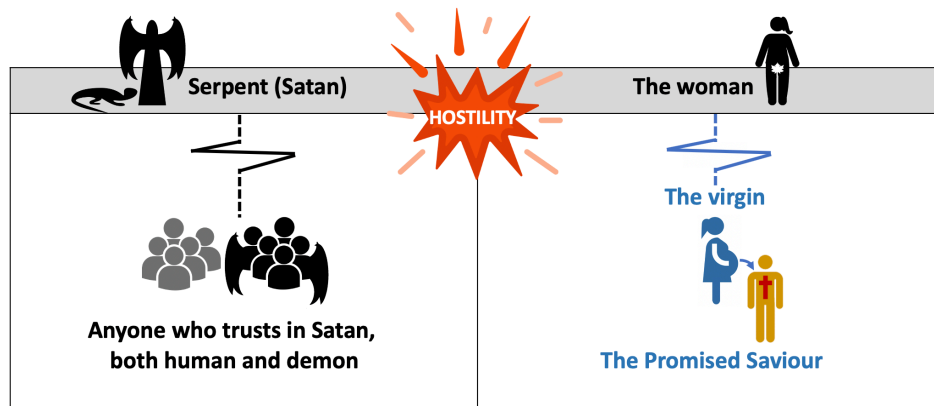
Speaking to the whole family of David, Isaiah prophesied that “the virgin” would bear a son who would be called “Immanuel”. This far future prophecy was very specific. It referred to “**the** virgin”, a specific woman, rather than “**a** virgin”. Who was she?



We need to go back to the first reference of a specific virgin. She is found in the first promise God gave to mankind about the coming Saviour. God had said He would be the “offspring of the woman” and would crush Satan.

Genesis 3:15

And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.”



From very early on, the Jews understood that the Saviour would be the son of a virgin and have no human father. This special woman came to be known as “the virgin”.

Now through Isaiah, God gave another detail about the virgin’s Son. One of His titles or names would be “Immanuel” which means “God is with us”. This means He would be God Himself.

God confirmed this far future understanding of Isaiah’s prophecy when an angel appeared to Joseph (who was from the family of David) and explained why he should take Mary as his wife. God was telling Joseph that Mary was “the virgin” who would give birth to the Messiah!

Matthew 1:20–23

²⁰ As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

²³ “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means ‘God is with us.’”




Even in the Old Testament, Yahweh had already prepared His people to understand that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. But why did Jesus have to be born in such a special way?

Why did Messiah need to have a virgin birth?

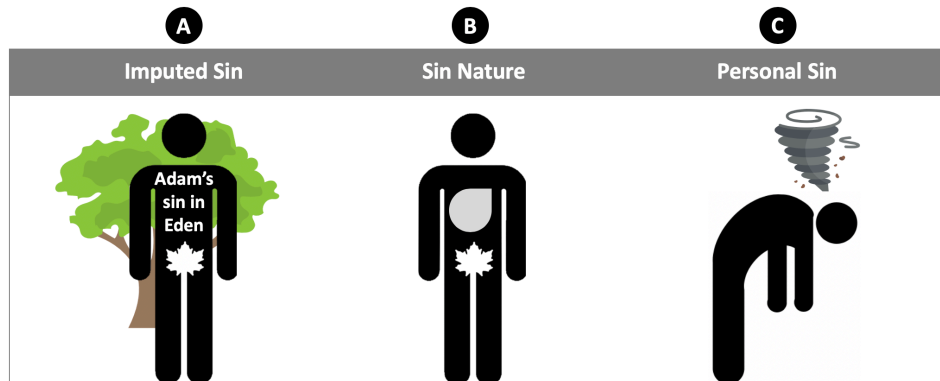
Was it just because of the prophecy? No, it was more than that. There are two reasons:

1. Because He is God, Jesus had to be sinless even in His human body

Jesus needed to remain sinless even though He had a human body. Why? This was because He is the Holy God who cannot and will not be mixed with sin.

Creator-Creature Distinction	
1 st level	JESUS 
INFINITELY HOLY & RIGHTEOUS	
2 nd level	created man

However, the problem with mankind was that after the Fall, sin was part of all humans. In fact, all humans have three types of sin. But Jesus cannot have any of these three types.



A. Imputed Sin

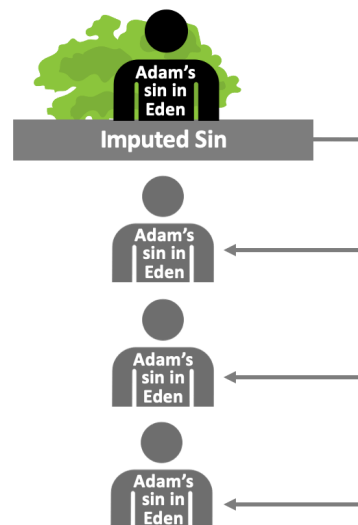
Ever since Adam rebelled against God in the garden of Eden, he passed on “imputed sin” to all his descendants.

Romans 5:12

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

Adam’s first sin (or crime) is passed directly to all humans. This means that each one of us is also guilty of that same sin that he committed in Eden and we will die because of it.

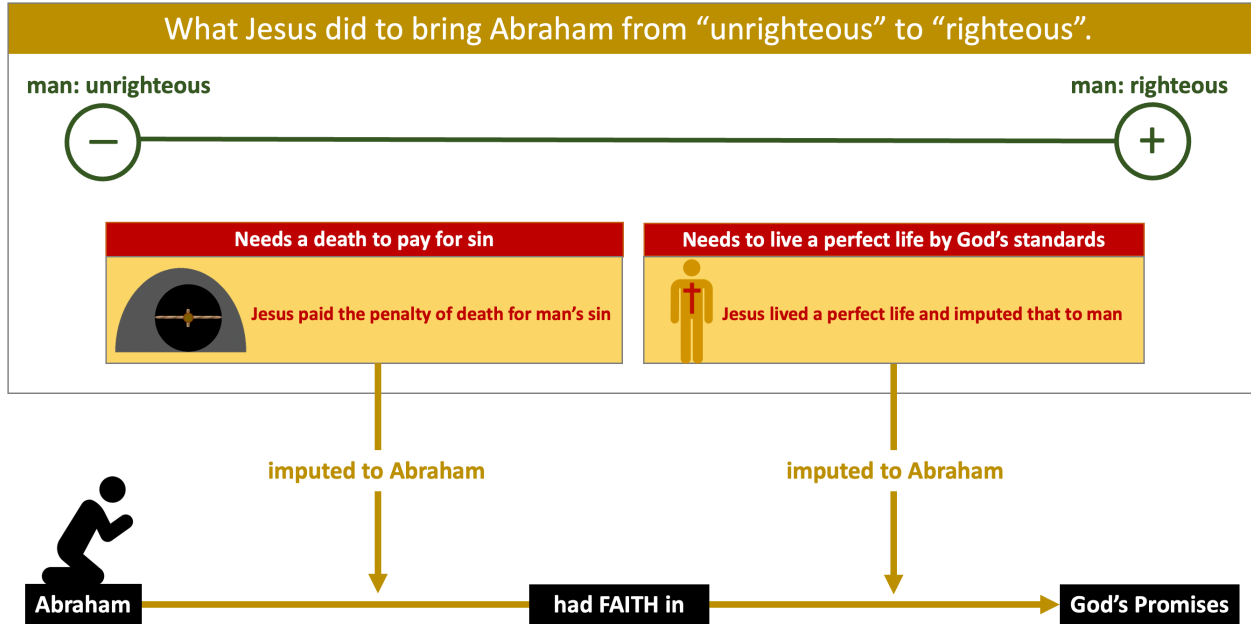
In fact, when a baby is born, the baby already begins to die. All humans carry this death sentence with them not because of something they individually did but because Adam represented them before God. What Adam did, he did on behalf of all mankind. God considered all the human race to be in Adam as we will see shortly.



Adam's sin in Eden is imputed directly into all descendants

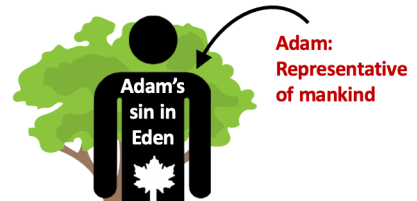
How did Adam pass on his sin (and death) to all people on earth? The Bible explains this passing down of sin as **imputed sin**.

Have we seen this idea of “imputing” before? Yes, we have. In the Old Testament, we see that when Abraham had faith in God, God “imputed” or “credited” or “deposited” righteousness to Abraham.



In the same way, when Adam sinned, his sinful action is now credited, or imputed, to all his descendants.

Adam, as mankind’s representative, committed a sin and that sin is applied to all mankind.



We see this same idea of a “representative” working today as well. In any international sports event, each country will send their team to compete.

Let’s say Switzerland’s swimmers won their race. People can congratulate any Swiss and say “Congratulations, you won the race!” Not every Swiss swam in the race, only the team representing Switzerland. But when their representatives won, their victory was credited or imputed to every Swiss citizen.



Another example: if Italy's representative soccer team lost a match, people can say to any Italian, "Oh, sorry you lost the match." It was not because that Italian actually played in the soccer match, but when the Italian team who represented all Italians lost, they credited their loss to every Italian citizen.

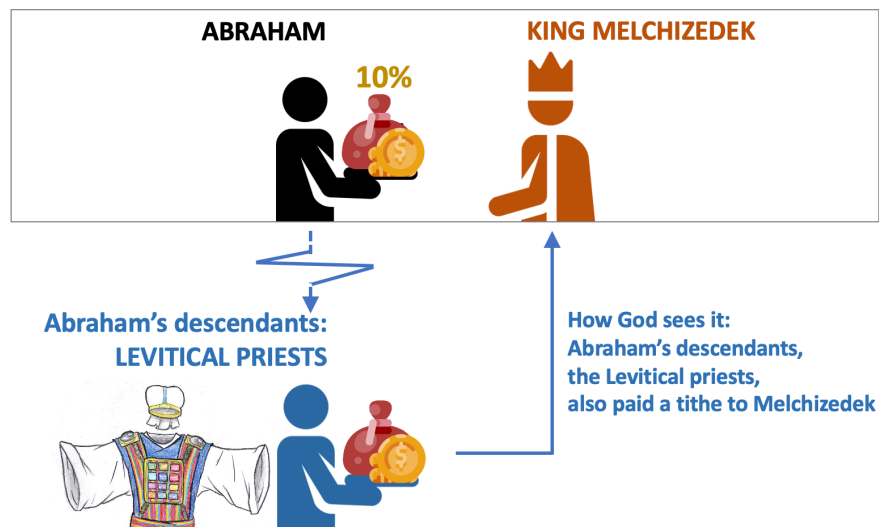


The Bible also uses this idea of "representative" and "imputing".

For example, the Bible said that when Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek, what he did was credited or imputed to every single future Levitical priest as well. This was true even though all the future priests were not even born yet!

Hebrews 7:4, 9–10

⁴ Consider then how great this Melchizedek was. Even Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel, recognized this by giving him a tenth of what he had taken in battle. ⁹ In addition, we might even say that these Levites... paid a tithe to Melchizedek when their ancestor Abraham paid a tithe to him. ¹⁰ For although Levi wasn't born yet, the seed from which he came was in Abraham's body when Melchizedek collected the tithe from him.



So in the same way, Adam's first sin, the rebellion in the garden, was credited, or imputed, or placed, or deposited into all his descendants. So even if we were able to live a perfect life (which is impossible), we still carry in us this initial sin from Adam our ancestor.

Some people get really upset when they understand this. They feel God is unfair to impute to them a sin that they did not commit.

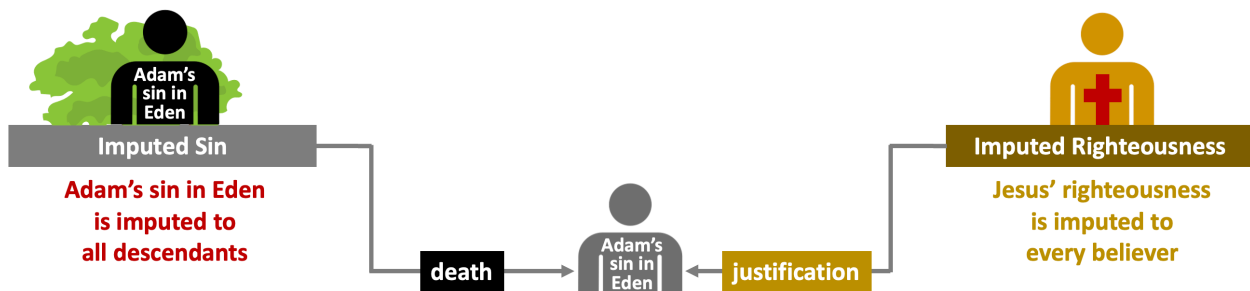
However, the good news is that for all who trust Jesus for salvation, He also does something similar. Jesus also does imputing for all believers.

When Jesus saves, He also imputes

Romans 5:15–16

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

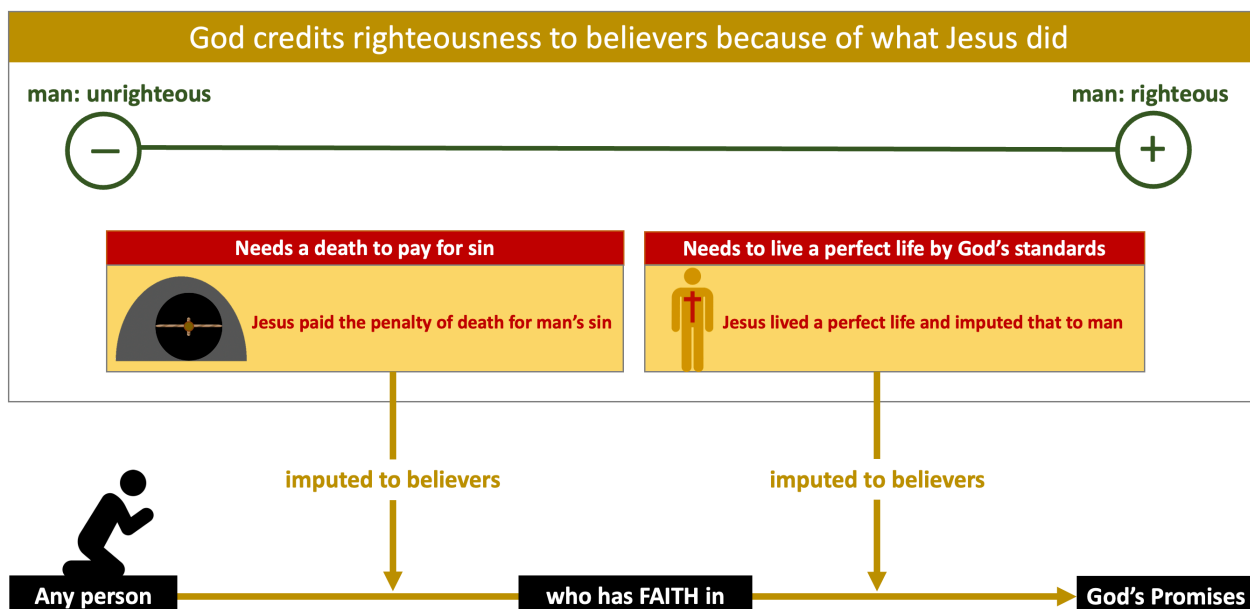
¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.



Previously, we all belonged to Adam and therefore had his sin. But all believers now belong to Jesus and have His righteousness.

1 Corinthians 15:21–22

²¹ So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. ²² Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.



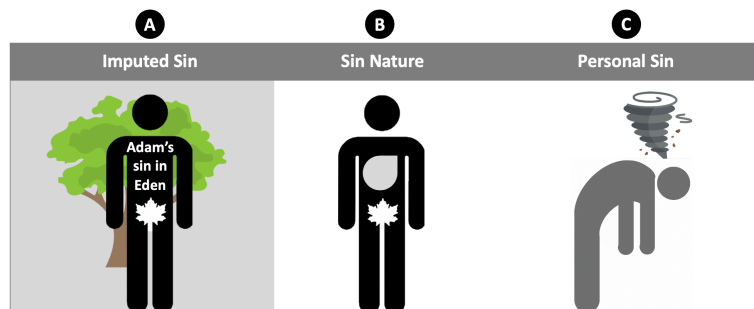
Interestingly, the way God solved mankind's sin problem helps us understand what the problem was to begin with:

- **The solution:** Jesus' solution was to credit or impute His righteous life to all believers.
- **The problem:** This helps us understand how Adam had credited or imputed his sin to all his descendants' lives.

As believers, we have therefore no reason to be upset with God for being “unfair” and imputing Adam's sin to us.

Instead, let's be thankful that in God's grace, He allowed Jesus to impute His righteous life to us, saving us from eternal death!

That is the first type of sin. Here are the other two.



B. Sin Nature

As Adam's descendants, we also inherited his corrupted sin nature. Something in Adam's body was spoilt and this “spoilt” nature has been handed down from father to child, father to child. The sin nature is not genetic but spiritual. However, we can picture it like a father's genes being passed down to the children. Every human being from the moment they begin to exist inherits this sin nature.

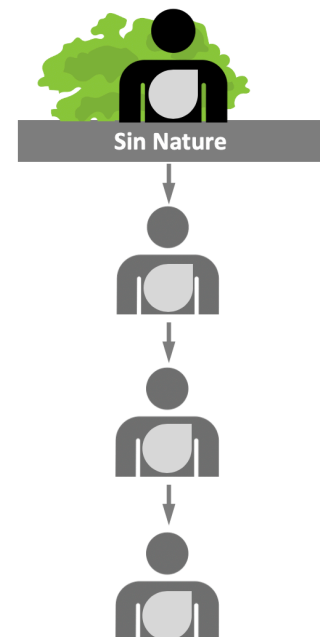
Psalm 51:5

For I was born a sinner—
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.

It is this sin nature that makes us want to sin and rebel against God. In a way, this sin nature is like a magnet, attracting us towards sin. The Bible often calls this “living in the flesh” or the sinful nature.

Galatians 5:17

The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.



Adam's corrupted sin nature is passed on to all descendants, like genes.

C. Personal Sin

The third type of sin is what we commit ourselves.

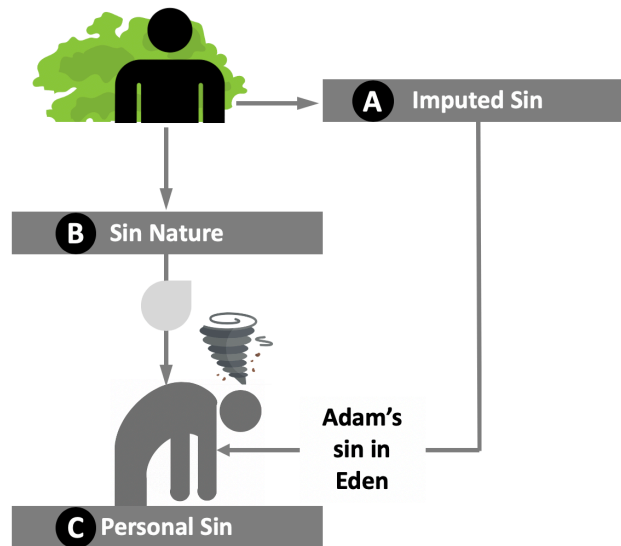
Because we are all born with the sin nature that we inherited from Adam, it makes it so easy for us to sin.

It is this sin nature that causes us to make poor choices, hurt others, act selfishly and rebel against God. Whatever sin we ourselves commit for whatever reason is called personal sin.



If all humans have these three types of sins, when Jesus was born as a human, how did He avoid getting:

- Adam's imputed sin and
- Adam's sin nature?



Answer: The virgin birth solved this problem.



The Holy Spirit caused the virgin birth

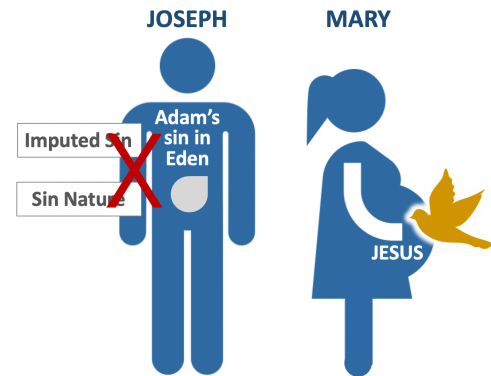
God the Holy Spirit placed Jesus into a virgin and He grew like a normal baby in the woman's womb. In this way, Jesus did not have a biological human father. The Bible records what happened:

Luke 1:26–35

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.” ³⁵ The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.”



While God didn’t provide all the details, the Bible simply states that God the Holy Spirit performed a physical and spiritual miracle in Mary that made Jesus her physical son. And this virgin birth prevented Jesus from getting Adam’s imputed sin and sin nature.

Romans 8:3a (NIV)

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

Jesus was born with a physical human body just like ours, but His body had absolutely no sin.

Without Adam’s imputed sin and sin nature, Jesus could live righteously and He did not commit any personal sin. This was how Jesus was free from all three types of sin.



So the first reason why Messiah needed to have a virgin birth is because Jesus is God and He will not mix with sin. The human body He took on had to be sinless.

The second reason that Jesus needed a virgin birth was because He came to be the Saviour of mankind. In order to die for man, He needed to have a sinless body.

2. For Jesus to be the Saviour, He had to be sinless

If Jesus had sin in Him, He would not have been able to be mankind’s Saviour. He would have His own sin to pay for. But because Jesus had absolutely no sin in Him, He could be the Messiah, the sufficient sacrifice. As Saviour, Jesus willingly took on mankind’s sin penalty (eternal death) by dying on the cross.

Romans 8:3

The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

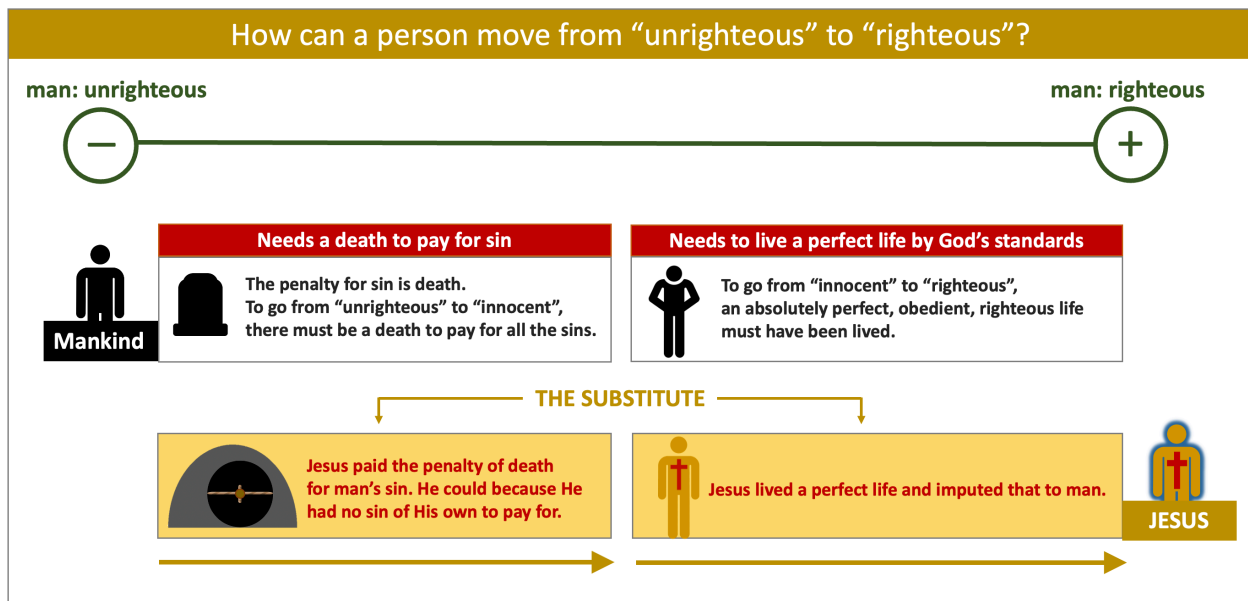
Hebrews 10:5

That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God,
 “You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings.

But you have given me a body to offer.

1 Peter 1:18–20

¹⁸ For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. ¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. ²⁰ God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake.



If Jesus had not been born through a virgin birth, He could not have been the Saviour. Rather, if Jesus had been born of a human father and mother, He would have been a sinner at birth, just like the rest of us. And then He would need a saviour of His own! This is why the virgin birth is so important.

Did the Bible make mistakes in recording the genealogy of Jesus?

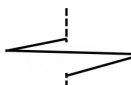
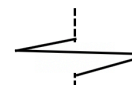
Because God made a covenant with David stating that one of his descendants would be on the throne of Israel, the Messiah must come from David's family.



To prove this, the gospel writers Matthew and Luke take the time to show that Jesus, on His human side, was truly a descendent of King David.

But when we compare the genealogies of Jesus that are recorded in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke, we can see immediately that they are different!

(Luke recorded the genealogy in reverse order but to make it easier to compare both Matthew and Luke, we flipped the order to match Matthew's.)

Matthew 1:5-7, 16	Luke 3:23, 31-32
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah). Solomon was the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam was the father of Abijah. Abijah was the father of Asa. <p style="text-align: center;">  [Skipping over several generations] </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obed was the father of Jesse. David was the son of Jesse. Nathan was the son of David. Mattatha was the son of Nathan. Menna was the son of Mattatha. Melea was the son of Menna. Eliakim was the son of Melea. <p style="text-align: center;">  [Skipping over several generations] </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joseph was the son of Heli. Jesus was known as the son of Joseph.

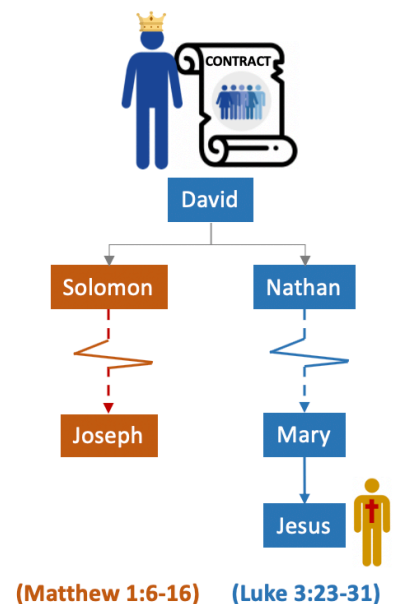
In Matthew's list, David's son is **Solomon**, who became king after his father died.

But in Luke's list, David's son is recorded as **Nathan** (another son of Bathsheba. See 1 Chronicles 3:5).

After that, both family lines are different until we get to Joseph, the husband of Mary.

In Matthew's list, **Jacob** is Joseph's father. But in Luke's list, **Heli** is Joseph's father. How can this be? Exactly who is Joseph's father?

Bible scholars say the difference is because Luke was actually using Mary's family line, not Joseph's. Mary is also from the family of David, but her family line goes back to Nathan.



How do they know this? Because of the Greek word “ho” (written as “ὁ” and pronounced as “ha”) which means “the”. This is Mary’s genealogy in the book of Luke with the Greek text.

Using Mary’s Genealogy: Luke 3:23–24

23 · Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age,
 kai lesous autos archo eimi hosi triakonta etos

being **the son** (as was supposed) of Joseph, **the son** of Heli,
 eimi **huios** hos nomizo Ioseph **ho** Eli

24 **the son** of Matthat, **the son** of Levi, **the son** of Melchi, **the son** of Jannai,
ho Maththat **ho** Leui **ho** Melchi **ho** Iannai

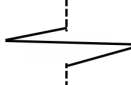

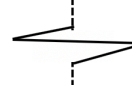

the son of Joseph, 25 **the son** of Mattathias, **the son** of Amos, **the son** of...
ho Ioseph **ho** Mattathias **ho** Amos **ho**

Missing Greek word “ho” (with arrow pointing to the first 'ho' in the text)

In the Jewish tradition, people would trace a family line through the man and not the woman. So even if they were tracing the woman’s family line, they would not use her name. They would use her husband’s name instead.

Then how would we know if a genealogy was actually tracing the woman’s line? We know when the Bible does not say “**the** son”. If the Bible is tracing the woman’s line, it will skip the word “the” (In Greek, “the” is “ho”) and just say “son”. In Luke’s genealogy, Jesus is listed as “being son” of Joseph instead of “**the** son” of Joseph. That missing Greek word “ho” (“the”) is important. It tells us this is Mary’s line, not Joseph’s.

This means that in the Gospel of Luke, Heli was actually Mary’s father. Joseph was Heli’s son-in-law, not son. But because Jewish tradition does not trace the woman’s line, Luke records Joseph as Heli’s son.

Matthew 1:5–7, 16	Luke 3:23, 31–32
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesse was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. <p> Joseph’s father</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> David was the son of Jesse. Nathan was the son of David.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joseph was the son of Heli. Jesus was known as the son of Joseph. <p> Mary’s father (Joseph’s father-in-law)</p>

Even though tracing a family through the woman's line was not common, there were other examples of this in the Bible (see Ezra 2:61; Nehemiah 7:63).

So the difference between the genealogies in Luke and Matthew is:

- Luke shows Mary's genealogy from Jesus to Nathan and David.
- Matthew shows Joseph's genealogy from Jesus to Solomon, the royal line of David.

But why show this? It is because of the curse that Yahweh placed on one of David's royal descendants, King Jehoiachin (also spelt Jeconiah). This king had made Yahweh so angry that He cursed him.

Jeremiah 22:30

This is what the LORD says:

'Let the record show that this man Jehoiachin was childless.

He is a failure,
for none of his children will succeed him on the throne of David to rule over Judah.'

With this curse, none of Jehoiachin's descendants could take the throne of David! And reading the Gospel of Matthew, we can see Jehoiachin's descendant was none other than Joseph, Mary's husband.

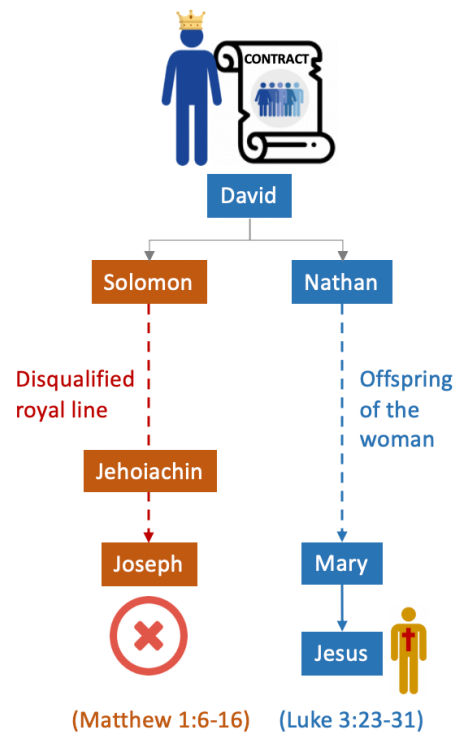
So even though Joseph is from the royal line of David, he was disqualified to take the throne and his son would also be disqualified.

And the Jewish readers of Matthew would understand that Joseph and his son were both not qualified for David's throne!

But after revealing this problem, Matthew immediately describes God's solution: the virgin birth of Jesus. He clearly states that Jesus is not Joseph's biological son. He is Joseph's son in name only. Jesus was born of Mary alone.

Matthew 1:16, 18

¹⁶ Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah. ¹⁸ This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.



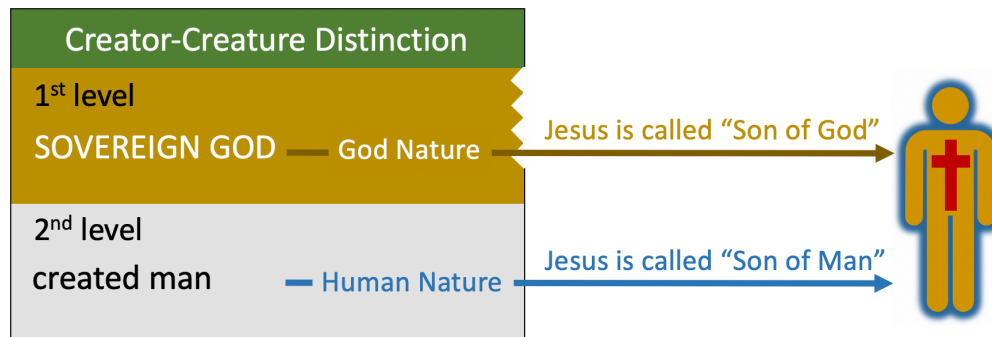
Matthew shows Yahweh's solution to the disqualification in Solomon's line. Through a virgin birth, the Messiah would be free from the corruption of David's line!

And through Luke's Gospel, we learn that Mary is descended from Nathan, another son of David. Nathan was not disqualified! Jesus then, is truly a qualified son of David!

With the virgin birth, Yahweh didn't have to go through the disqualified line of Jehoiachin. We can only marvel at how God works through people and history to ensure that His plan of salvation and kingdom restoration is fulfilled. God is never thwarted in what He plans to do!

Jesus: Son of God and Son of Man

Jesus is known as "Son of God" and "Son of Man". But what exactly do these names mean?



1. Son of God

In the Old Testament, we see the mention of the "Son of God" several times. In this passage below, the writer of Proverbs asks four questions about who it is that can do a particular thing. The answers are always: it is the Creator-God who can do the things mentioned. Then the writer asks, "What is his name?"

Proverbs 30:1–4

- 1 I am weary, O God;
I am weary and worn out, O God.
- 2 I am too stupid to be human,
and I lack common sense.
- 3 I have not mastered human wisdom,
nor do I know the Holy One.
- 4 Who but God goes up to heaven and comes back down?
Who holds the wind in his fists?
Who wraps up the oceans in his cloak?
Who has created the whole wide world?
What is his name—and his son's name?
Tell me if you know!

When the writer of Proverbs asks “What is his name?”, he also goes on to ask the most surprising question: “What is his son’s name?”

The Creator-God revealed His own name to Moses as Yahweh (Exodus 3:14–15). But this passage talks of His Son! Immediately, the Jews would realise that Yahweh has a Son! There is a Son of God! But throughout the Old Testament, God did not reveal this Son’s name.

What is His name?



What is His Son’s name?



Yahweh provides another clue that He has a Son when He asks the prophet Isaiah to record this prophecy:

Isaiah 9:6–7

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.

⁷ His government and its peace
will never end.

He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.

The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven’s Armies
will make this happen!



- Mighty God
- Everlasting Father
- Immanuel

There it was, stated plainly, that the Messiah would come as a Son. He would be a descendant of David, and He would also be “Mighty God”!

When Jesus came to earth, He had to challenge the Jewish leaders who refused to acknowledge that the Messiah was not just a son of David, but also God Himself. So He challenged them by quoting from Psalm 110. In this psalm, Yahweh and David are talking to each other.

Matthew 22:41–46

⁴¹ Then, surrounded by the Pharisees, Jesus asked them a question: ⁴² “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They replied, “He is the son of David.”

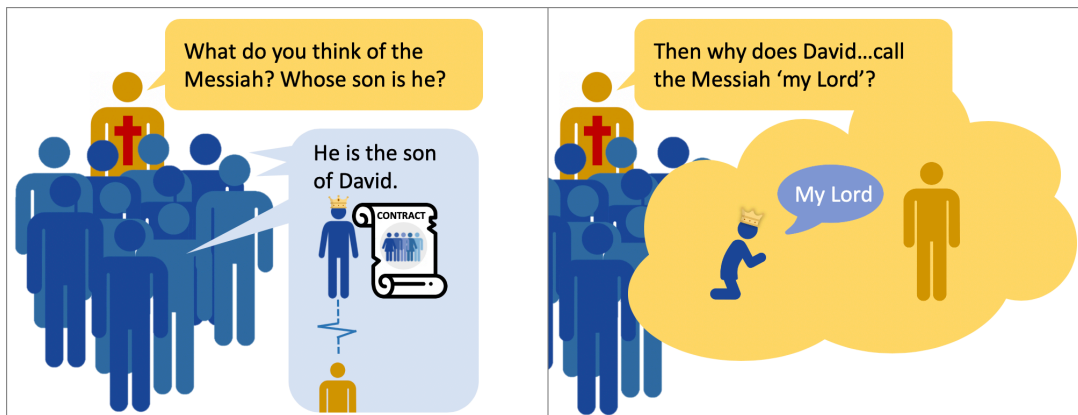
⁴³ Jesus responded, “Then why does David, speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit, call the Messiah ‘my Lord’? For David said,

44 ‘The LORD said to my Lord,
 Sit in the place of honor at my right hand
 until I humble your enemies beneath your feet.’

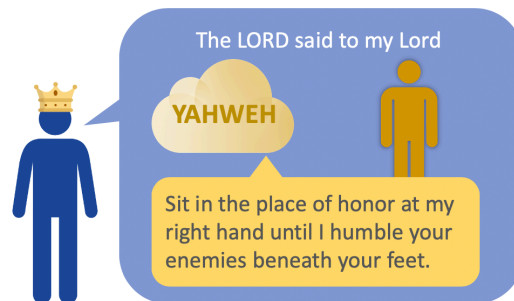
45 Since David called the Messiah ‘my Lord,’ how can the Messiah be his son?”

46 No one could answer him. And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

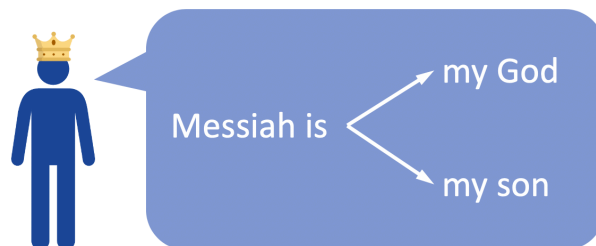
Jesus’ question forced the Pharisees to think about what David was actually saying.



- David called the Messiah “my Lord”. This was a title reserved for God.
- So, what David was saying in verse 44 is: “Yahweh said to my God”!

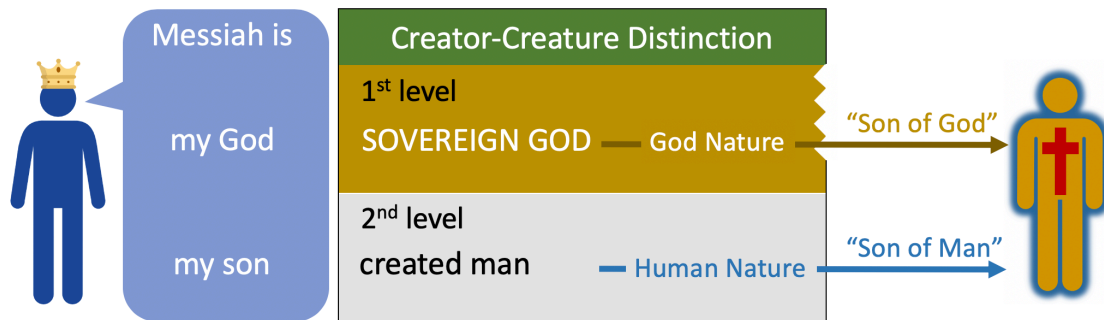


- David was calling the Messiah, who was going to be a son of David, “my God”.



And so Jesus was asking, “How can the Messiah both be God and be a son of David?”

Jesus was telling the Pharisees that He is both a son of David and also God! He is the Son of God, that is, God in human form!



The Pharisees clearly understood what Jesus was saying but they refused to believe. So they kept quiet.

(See how Psalm 110 is used again and again to explain that Jesus is the Son of God: Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44; Acts 2:34–36; Hebrews 1:13, 10:12–13.)

So we see that Jesus used the title “Son of God” to explain that He is Yahweh, who had come to earth in human flesh. However Jesus is also known by another title.

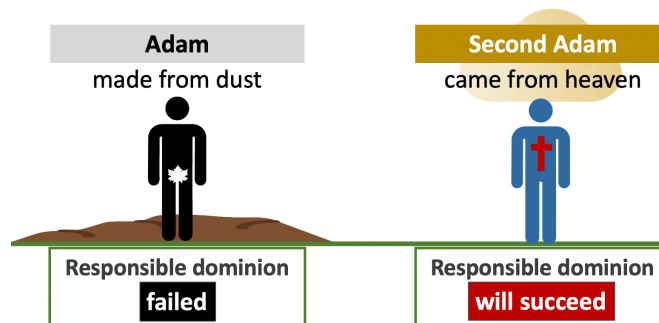


Human Nature

2. Son of Man

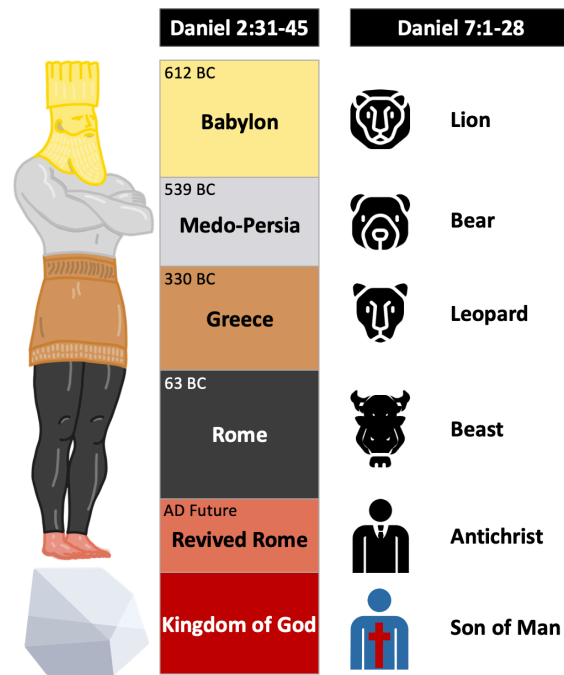
Although Jesus acknowledged that He is the Son of God, His most-used title for Himself is the “Son of Man”.

This name shows that He is human and it reminds people that He is the second Adam (“Adam” in Hebrew is the word for “man”).



But it is more than that. When the Jews heard the title “Son of Man” they would think of the prophecy recorded by Daniel.

In this vision, Daniel first saw four terrible beasts coming to rule over the earth (Daniel 7:1–11). These beasts represent the same kingdoms as the ones from Nebuchadnezzar’s statue.



These terrible beasts represent evil kingdoms of man that tried to rule the world but failed because responsible dominion was not given to evil mankind but to righteous man.

(It is interesting to note that the evil kingdoms are represented by beasts. God gave responsible dominion to man, not to beasts!)

God’s solution was to send a perfectly righteous man, a second Adam, to take over and have responsible dominion.

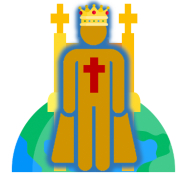
Daniel 7:13–14

¹³ “I 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.
¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

God had never given up on His plan for man to have responsible dominion. So since the first Adam had failed, God would send a second Adam, one who is sinless and righteous. This is the Messiah in human flesh.

As the “Son of Man”, He approaches Yahweh (the Ancient of Days) to receive an everlasting kingdom that will rule the world in peace, righteousness and prosperity.

So in using the title “Son of Man” on Himself, Jesus was indicating that He was the perfectly righteous second Adam. And as the perfect man, He will take back control and rule over all the earth. He will be the righteous under-lord that Adam failed to be. The Son of Man will restore God’s proper order for the world!



The “Son of Man” and the “Son of God” are two titles that work together to tell us what God’s righteous global leader will be like. As a man, Jesus is completely sinless and righteous. As God, He is eternal. This means He is fully qualified to be the perfect under-lord of all creation. **Jesus alone** is the only hope that mankind has of attaining the perfect world, or utopia, that various sinful human rulers have attempted but failed to create. Even the four kingdoms of man that Daniel saw and that have occurred in history could not bring about the utopia that mankind has longed for. It is impossible for mankind, after having rebelled and fallen, to fulfil the role that God designed for them. But with Jesus, the faultless God-man, an everlasting and perfect world can be achieved.

The Incarnation of Christ is the Clearest Revelation of God

Jesus becoming human and coming to earth is Yahweh’s clearest revelation of Himself. As the Creator-God, He is spirit.

John 4:24

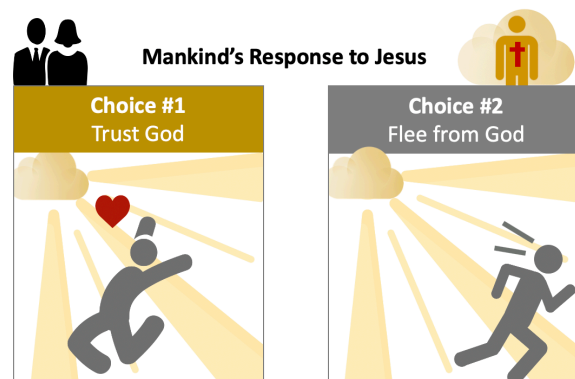
For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”

But when Jesus came as a human, people could see God, interact with Him, touch Him, and hear Him teach. It took the revelation of God to a whole new level.

When Jesus came, He was spiritual light shining into the hearts of men and women everywhere.

What was mankind’s response?

- There were those who became convinced of their sinfulness and their need for a Saviour and so they trusted in what Jesus would do for them.
- For many others, the light that Jesus shone on them made them flee because it exposed their sinfulness and they did not want to change their minds about their condition. So they fled from Jesus or they opposed Him.



John 3:18–21

¹⁸ “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son.

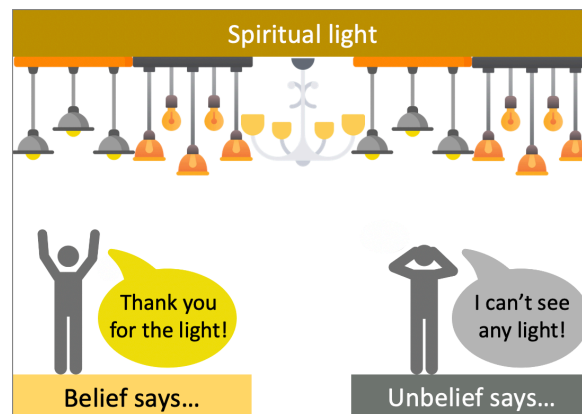
¹⁹ And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.

²⁰ All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed.

²¹ But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”

This is God’s explanation of unbelief. Imagine walking into a dark room full of people and then turning on the light.

- There will be some in the room who will say, “I can’t see any light!”
- Our response to them would not be: “Oh, the light must be broken.” Instead, our response would be: “You are acting blind! The light is everywhere!”



In other words, God’s revelation through Jesus is very clear. It’s not that people can’t understand who Jesus is. But in their sinfulness, they choose to ignore God’s revelation. The light of Jesus makes them run from God. They suffer from a spiritual blindness caused by their sin nature.

Romans 1:18–19

¹⁸ But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. ¹⁹ They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them.

Since Creation, God has been showing people who He is through nature. And He directed the Jews to accurately record His history and truth so people everywhere could get a clear understanding of Him. And God Himself came to earth in human flesh so people could see, hear, touch and interact with the Creator-God of the universe in a personal, intimate way.

God reveals Himself through



Nature



Scripture



Messiah Jesus

But often, when we share the good news about God’s salvation with other people, they come up with all kinds of objections:

- Jesus was not a real, historical man.
- Jesus was a good teacher, but he’s not God.
- Jesus didn’t really come back to life. That’s just a myth.
- The Bible is full of errors. How can you trust it?
- There’s no evidence of God anywhere!
- Science proves that the Bible is wrong!
- And on and on.



We all have people like this in our lives. What should we do?

1. First, we thank God that He has helped us trust Him for salvation.
2. Then we pray that the all-powerful and all-loving God of the universe will also help our unbelieving family and friends to stop being proud and stubborn.
3. We love them as best as God shows us how and when the Holy Spirit prompts us, we share with them God’s truth as revealed in Scripture.
4. And we keep praying that God will help them drop their hands and open their eyes to see and believe in the Saviour He provided for them.



Discussion Questions

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

1. Describe in your own words what God achieved by taking on human flesh through a virgin birth. What would happen if He had not come as a man?
2. Consider the complexity of God’s salvation work. He could save man in any way He wants but He chose to work through sinful mankind with covenants and promises. Why do you think He worked this way?
3. How should we study the Bible so that we can understand so-called “conflicting” or “contradictory” passages? Do we need to change our Bible study habits so we can learn God’s Word better? (Think of the careful approach used in this lesson.)



Pre-reading for next lesson: Matthew 4:1–11, 12:1–13; Luke 4:16–30, 7:36–50; John 4:1–29, 12:1–8, 9:1–16

Endnote

Page 23: Greek Bible text is presented in an English Reverse Interlinear format. Taken from: *Greek-English Interlinear ESV New Testament: Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece (NA28) and English Standard Version (ESV)*. Crossway, 2019. E-Book.