

Session 4



ANALYZING JESUS

As far as I was concerned, the case was closed. There was enough proof for me to rest easy with the conclusion that the divinity of Jesus was nothing more than the fanciful invention of superstitious people.... Frankly, I had wanted to believe that the deification of Jesus was the result of legendary development in which well-meaning but misguided people slowly turned a wise sage into the mythological Son of God. That seemed safe and reassuring; after all, a roving apocalyptic preacher from the first century could make no demands on me. But while I went into my investigation thinking that this legendary explanation was intuitively obvious, I emerged convinced it was totally without basis.

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*

READ THIS!

If possible, read the following content in preparation for your group meeting. Otherwise, read it as follow-up.

The Case for Christ, chapter 9: The Profile Evidence

The Case for Christ, chapter 10: The Fingerprint Evidence

WATCH THIS!

DVD Teaching Segment #1

For every DVD clip, space is provided to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

DISCUSS THIS!

1. Define “miracle.” What is the difference between a miracle and a magic trick? Are real miracles possible?

“It is, therefore, at least millions to one, that the reporter of a miracle tells a lie.”

Thomas Paine

2. Craig Evans points out that Jesus' contemporaries—that is, people who liked him, people who were indifferent, and people who opposed him—all acknowledged that Jesus did extraordinary things. What about you? Do you think Jesus really performed miracles such as commanding nature, healing the sick, and raising the dead? Elaborate.

“Jesus’ biggest distinctive is how he did miracles on his own authority. He is the one who says, ‘If I, by the finger of God, cast out demons, then the kingdom of God is among you’—he’s referring to himself. He says, ‘I have been anointed to set the captives free.’ He does give God the Father credit for what he does, but you never find him asking God the Father to do it—he does it in the power of God the Father. And for that there is just no parallel.”

Gregory Boyd, PhD



Think About This!

Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name.

John 2:23 NIV

The Jews gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me.”

John 10:24–25 NIV

But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”

Matthew 12:24

3. During the time Jesus was performing miracles, people who believed in him were convinced he was filled with the Spirit of God, while those who opposed him were convinced he was of the devil. What do you think was the power source behind his miraculous acts? Elaborate. What are some factors that would delineate between a “good” power source and an “evil” power source?



Think About This!

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...” Then he said to the paralytic, “Get up, take your mat and go home.”

Matthew 9:4-6 NIV

4. What do you think was the significance or ultimate purpose of Jesus’ miracles?

*For in Christ all the fullness of
the Deity lives in bodily form.*

Colossians 2:9



Think About This!

“When David sinned by committing adultery and arranging the death of the woman’s husband, he ultimately says to God in Psalm 51, ‘Against you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight.’ He recognized that although he had wronged people, in the end he had sinned against the God who made him in his image, and God needed to forgive him. So along comes Jesus and says to sinners, ‘I forgive you.’ The Jews immediately recognize the blasphemy of this. They react by saying, ‘Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ To my mind, that is one of the most striking things Jesus did.”

New Testament scholar Donald A. Carson

5. In the DVD clip Mark Strauss suggests that the most astonishing thing Jesus did was claim to be able to forgive sins. Why is this claim so remarkable? Do you really believe Jesus has the power to forgive sins? Describe what it would feel like for you personally if you could have your slate wiped clean and every wrong you’ve ever done completely forgiven.
6. Strauss further explains that Jesus’ miracles confirmed that he in fact did have the power and authority to forgive sins. Do you agree or disagree with Strauss’s logic? Explain.

Optional Discussion Questions

- Did you have the opportunity to read the corresponding chapters from *The Case for Christ*? What impacted you most? Least? What questions or issues did this topic raise for you?
- The New Testament records at least forty separate miracles performed by Jesus. List as many of them as you can. Which one is the most outrageous? Which is the easiest to believe?
- Read the following passages recorded in Jesus' biographies. What did Jesus appear to believe about himself and his identity?

"I and the Father are one." Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

John 10:30–33 NIV

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." 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'?"

John 14:6–9

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered.

Matthew 26:62–66 NIV

- Which of the following attributes of Jesus would you consider to be strong evidence for his divinity?
 - He claimed to forgive sins. (Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:17–26; 7:36–50)

- He accepted worship. (Matthew 14:33; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38)
 - He exorcized demons. (Matthew 8:28–34; Mark 1:34, 39; 9:14–29)
 - He demonstrated control over the elements. (Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; John 2:1–11)
 - He healed the sick. (Matthew 4:23; 8:1–13; 9:1–8, 18–34; Mark 1:34; Luke 8:40–48; John 9:1–7)
 - He had authority over life and death. (Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:49–56; John 11:1–44)
 - He was said to be without sin. (1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5)
- Read the following Scripture texts and quotations. Which, if any, convinces you that Jesus was the Son of Man—God in human flesh?

Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” They all condemned him as worthy of death.

Mark 14:61–64 NIV

“So look at what Jesus is doing by applying the term ‘Son of Man’ to himself. This is someone who approaches God himself in his heavenly throne room and is given universal authority and dominion. That makes ‘Son of Man’ a title of great exaltation, not of mere humanity.”

Craig Blomberg, PhD

“‘Son of Man’ is often thought to indicate the humanity of Jesus, just as the reflex expression ‘Son of God’ indicates his divinity. In fact, just the opposite is true. The Son of Man was a divine figure in the Old Testament book of Daniel who would come at the end of the world to judge mankind and rule forever. Thus, the claim to be the Son of Man would be in effect a claim to divinity.”

Philosopher and New Testament scholar William Lane Craig

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13–14

WATCH THIS!***DVD Teaching Segment #2***

[Jesus] said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Luke 24:44

DISCUSS THIS!

7. Where did the idea of a Messiah come from (see “Fast Fact” box below)? How and why did the Jews expect to receive a Messiah? To what degree are you looking for a Messiah in your own life?

**Fast Fact**

Messiah, in Hebrew, means “the promised and expected deliverer.” When the term is used in the Old Testament, it specifically pertains to the Jewish people. The Greek word for “Messiah” is “Christ.” In the New Testament the Christ is revealed to be the anointed one and the deliverer who has come for all who would receive him.



Think About This!

“The premise behind fingerprint evidence is simple: each individual has unique ridges on his or her fingers. When a print found on an object matches the pattern of ridges on a person’s finger, investigators can conclude with scientific certainty that this specific individual has touched that object.... There is another kind of evidence that’s analogous to fingerprints and establishes to an astounding degree of certainty that Jesus is indeed the Messiah of Israel and the world. In the Jewish Scriptures, which Christians call the Old Testament, there are several dozen major prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, who would be sent by God to redeem his people. In effect, these predictions formed a figurative fingerprint that only the Anointed One would be able to match. This way, the Israelites could rule out any impostors and validate the credentials of the authentic Messiah. The Greek word for “Messiah” is Christ. But was Jesus really the Christ? Did he miraculously fulfill these predictions that were written hundreds of years before he was born? And how do we know he was the only individual throughout history who fit the prophetic fingerprint?” [See the following chart of messianic prophecies.]

Lee Strobel

Fulfilled Prophecy	Old Testament Reference	Approximate Years Written before Jesus
He would be born of a virgin.	Isaiah 7:14	700
He would be born in Bethlehem.	Micah 5:2	700
He would be mocked and scorned, whipped, and killed by the piercing of his hands and feet. His bones would be out of joint; his garments would be divided by the casting of lots (dice).	Psalms 22	300-1,000
The time of his birth was predicted.	Daniel 9:24-26	600
He would come from the seed of a woman.	Genesis 3:15	1,400
He would be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.	Genesis 12:3; 17:19	700-1,400
	Numbers 24:17	
	Isaiah 9:7	
He would come from the tribe of Judah.	Genesis 49:10	1,400
He would heal the deaf and blind.	Isaiah 29:18	700

He would be rejected by his own people, the Jews.	Isaiah 53:3	700
He would teach with parables.	Psalms 78:2	300-1,000
Kings and rulers would plot to kill him.	Psalms 2:2	300-1,000
He would be betrayed by a close friend.	Psalms 41:9	300-1,000
He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver.	Zechariah 11:12	500
His disciples would be scattered.	Zechariah 13:7	500
His bones would remain unbroken.	Psalms 34:20	300-1,000
He would be buried in a rich man's grave.	Isaiah 53:9	700
He would be resurrected on the third day.	Psalms 16:10	300-1,000
	Hosea 6:2	

8. What's your overall reaction or response to the detailed list of the messianic prophecies found in the Bible? What questions or issues does this subject matter raise in your mind?

"The Old Testament paints a portrait of God by using such titles and descriptions as Alpha and Omega, Lord, Savior, King, Judge, Light, Rock, Redeemer, Shepherd, Creator, giver of life, forgiver of sin, and speaker with divine authority. It's fascinating to note that in the New Testament each and every one is applied to Jesus. Jesus said it all in John 14:7: 'If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.' Loose translation: 'When you look at the sketch of God from the Old Testament, you will see a likeness of me.'"



Think About This!

Consider the following words from the Jewish prophet Isaiah, written approximately seven hundred years before Jesus lived:

He was despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.... Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:3-9, 12

9. Some skeptics claim that Jesus “engineered” the fulfillment of all these prophecies. Which of the prophecies listed in the chart on pages 62–63 have some possibility of being engineered? Which would be least plausible in becoming self-fulfilling prophecies? To what extent do you think it is possible that Jesus somehow intentionally orchestrated the events of his life in order that he might fulfill each of the predictions made about the Messiah?



Think About This!

“For a few of the prophecies, yes, that’s certainly conceivable that Jesus could have intentionally fulfilled them, as some claim. But there are many others for which this just wouldn’t have been possible. For instance, how would he control the fact that the Sanhedrin offered Judas thirty pieces of silver to betray him? How could he arrange for his ancestry, or to be born when and where he was, or his method of execution, or that soldiers gambled for his clothing, or that his legs remained unbroken on the cross? How would he arrange to perform miracles in front of skeptics? How would he arrange for his resurrection? When you interpret Daniel 9:24–26, it foretells that the Messiah would appear a certain length of time after King Artaxerxes issued a decree for the Jewish people to go from Persia to rebuild the walls in Jerusalem. That puts the anticipated appearance of the Messiah at the exact moment in history when Jesus showed up. Certainly that’s nothing he could have prearranged.”

Prophecy scholar Louis Lapidès

10. How does the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies by Jesus—and Jesus alone—relate to his identity, namely his divinity?

“[In Isaiah 53] it’s almost as if God said, ‘I want to make it so absolutely clear Yeshua [Jesus] is the Messiah that it’s undeniable. I almost feel as if God would have to apologize to the human race and to the Jewish people for putting this passage into the Scriptures when it so clearly points to Yeshua if he didn’t really mean that.’”

Prophecy scholar Michael L. Brown

12. How convinced are you that Jesus—and Jesus alone—fulfills the Old Testament prophecies for the Messiah? What are the implications for all of humanity if Jesus really was God in the flesh? What are the implications for *your* life if Jesus really was God in the flesh? What is a difficult or troublesome aspect of this truth for your life today?

Optional Discussion Questions

- What would prevent you from accepting the following challenge from Jewish believer in Jesus, Louis Lapidès? What would motivate or inspire you to wholeheartedly accept his challenge?

Here's my challenge to skeptics: don't accept my word for it, but don't accept your rabbi's either. Spend the time to research it yourself. Today nobody can say, "There's no information." There are plenty of books out there to help you. And one more thing: sincerely ask God to show you whether or not Jesus is the Messiah. That's what I did—and without any coaching it became clear to me who fit the fingerprint of the Messiah.

- Consider Psalm 22:1, 6–8, 16–18 (NIV) below, written hundreds of years before Jesus lived. What conclusions could you draw about the character or sanity of Jesus if he intentionally deceived people into believing he fulfilled these predictions of the Messiah if he in fact knew he was not really the Messiah?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?... scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him."... Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

- To what extent has the information presented and discussed in this session influenced your opinion of the identity of Jesus Christ? What aspect of Jesus' divinity is troublesome or difficult for you to accept? Why? How convinced are you that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the One sent by God to be the Savior of Israel and the world? Explain.
- Is there anything in your life that would make it difficult for you to become a Christian? What anxieties do you have about believing that Jesus is the Messiah or Christ? How would your friends and family members react? Do you see any costs that you might incur if you were to become a Christian? How might those costs compare with the benefits?

WATCH THIS!

DVD Wrap-up/Lee's Perspective

"The Jews are God's chosen people, but it's important to understand that when God chose Abraham and his descendants, there was a divine purpose. It was not just to have a separated people who would be loyal to him: it was so that through Israel the entire world would be blessed and come to know the one true God."

Michael L. Brown

BETWEEN SESSIONS

Personal Reflection

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.

"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Luke 7:36–50 NIV

- Do you believe in God? Do you believe Jesus is the Son of Man, the Messiah, the promised deliverer? Think about your own sins and shortfalls. Think about the most shameful things you have ever done. Remember the lies, the cheating, the stealing, the lusting . . . what about the selfish times, and putting things or people before God?
- When Jesus walked this earth, he claimed to be able to forgive even the worst sins of all those who repented and had faith in him. In his death he paid the price for the sins of all humankind—including yours. Think about your sin and then consider the sins of all of humanity throughout

history. Can a mere human being actually forgive everything you have ever done wrong, much less take the punishment for the sins of all humankind? This is what Jesus claimed to do. What do you make of Jesus' claims? If Jesus is divine and has the authority to forgive sin, what does this mean for you personally? How miraculous would it be for you to have your lifetime's accumulation of mistakes and failures completely forgiven and forever forgotten?

- Consider the woman in the account from Luke 7. Do you think she was any more or less sinful than you have been? How did she respond to Jesus? Contrast the Pharisee's attitude toward her with Jesus' attitude toward her. Jesus tells us that she loved much because she had been forgiven much. What do you think led her to worship and love Jesus as she did? Is there anything that could lead you to love him with such abandon?
- The Bible teaches that if we confess, repent (turn away from our sin), and ask for forgiveness, we will be totally forgiven and received into the family of God. Have you ever considered asking for God's forgiveness? Have you ever considered casting all of your sins upon Jesus, who has offered to take them from you and absolve you of all wrongdoing? You can ask this of Christ anywhere at any time with a simple, heartfelt prayer. When you turn to him in genuine faith, he promises that absolutely nothing will keep him from coming to you. He himself said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28–29).