

HIS NAME IS WONDERFUL

STUDY THREE

The Meaning of Messiah

Selected Scriptures

When we acknowledge Jesus as Messiah, we claim Him to be the Anointed One. There will not be another. He is the redeemer who has come to fulfill God's promises.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

GEORGE Frederic Handel was drowning in debt. He developed several plans that he hoped would allow him to use his musical talents to make some money. Yet plan after plan failed, and people grew more and more critical of Handel's work. He knew that if these circumstances persisted, he would never pay back what he owed, and he would find himself in prison.

Then, one summer day in 1741, a dear friend commissioned Handel to compose an oratorio on the life of Jesus Christ using only phrases from Scripture. Handel readily accepted and proceeded to compose more than 250 manuscript pages of music in a mere twenty-four days—a task that normally would take a composer over a year.

Handel titled his composition, *The Messiah*. His masterpiece—particularly the climactic “Hallelujah Chorus”—has moved hearts in worship for centuries. No Christmas season could be complete without this soaring overture to Christ's glory. Each intensifying refrain fills the heart with praise to Jesus, the modest carpenter, Israel's promised deliverer, the savior of the world . . . the long-awaited Messiah.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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1

The Meaning of Messiah

Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Through faith in Jesus the Messiah, believers have unique access to God through prayer. For this reason, Jesus said, “Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (*John 14:14*). As you prepare to search the Scriptures, reflect on the words of *Hebrews 4:14–16* below. Then offer your own prayer to the Father in the name of Jesus.

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As the creator of the universe, Scripture calls God *El-Elyon*—a Hebrew expression meaning “God Most High.” As Most High, God chose to rule His creation through human vice-regents whom He designated to carry out His plan. For the nation of Israel, God delegated His rule through four main offices: judge, king, priest, and prophet (*Deuteronomy 16:18–18:21*).

Custom dictated that those selected for these offices would receive an anointing with oil. The Hebrew verb meaning “to anoint” is *mashach*, and this verb’s noun counterpart is *mashiach*, meaning “anointed one.” In English, this term is “messiah,” and in Greek, it is *christos* (or “Christ”).

Such anointings authorized individuals and set them apart for God’s service. When God chose an anointed one, He offered divine enablement. God commissioned a “messiah” as an agent through whom He carried out His perfect plan.

As time passed, wicked “messiahs” placed themselves in these sacred roles, and they profaned the honor of their anointing. They abused their power, harmed others for their own gain, and led Israel deeper and deeper into the darkness of wickedness as the light of faithfulness faded away.

Yet a faithful remnant in Israel awaited someone greater. A greater judge, who would deal with sin for good. A greater king, who would establish an eternal kingdom. A greater priest, who would draw sinful people back to God. A greater prophet, who would be the very Word of God.

The true Messiah.



The Meaning of Messiah

Selected Scriptures

Observation: Recognizing the Messiah

Observation is the bedrock upon which Christians build an accurate understanding of Scripture and life-changing application.¹ Turn to the following passages, and witness those who had some of the earliest encounters with Israel's promised Messiah.

John the Baptizer's Testimony—John 1:19–34

John the Baptizer was a prophet with a special responsibility. According to [John 1:19–20](#), who did the Jewish leaders wonder John the Baptizer might truly be? What was John's response? According to [1:23](#), what role did John say he had instead?

When John saw Jesus in [1:29–34](#), what did he say?

As John witnessed these things, he recognized this moment as Jesus' anointing—though, not a typical human anointing with oil. No, Jesus received a *divine* anointing with the Holy Spirit. In that moment, John knew that this Messiah would look far different than all of Israel's previous messiahs.



The Meaning of Messiah

Selected Scriptures

Jesus' Declaration—Luke 4:16–21

Jesus wanted the Jews to understand His mission at the outset of His ministry. So He walked into His hometown synagogue, grabbed the scroll of Isaiah, stood in front of the assembly, and started reading aloud. In your own words, summarize what Jesus read in [Luke 4:16–19](#).

After Jesus spoke, every eye in that synagogue locked onto Him. The people likely thought, *What was that all about?* According to [4:20–21](#), how did Jesus respond to their silent stares? What did He imply by this statement?

Peter's Confession—Matthew 16:13–18

The meaning of Jesus' teaching often eluded the disciples, but the truth of His identity became clearer to His friends as they spent more time with Him. Jesus chose to address the topic of His identity by asking them a set of parallel questions.



The Meaning of Messiah


Selected Scriptures

Read *Matthew 16:13–16*, and fill in the chart below.

Scripture Reference	Jesus' Question	Disciples' Response
<i>Matthew 16:13–14</i>		
<i>Matthew 16:15–16</i>		

What did Jesus say in *16:17–18* in response to Peter's confession?

John the Baptizer recognized Jesus as the Messiah even before Jesus began His ministry. Throughout His ministry, Jesus declared His messiahship in His words and His deeds. After following Jesus for years, Peter made the powerful confession, “You are the Messiah” (*Matthew 16:16*). Even so, despite all the evidence, many still rejected Jesus as Israel’s promised Messiah. The next section considers the reasons.

 **Interpretation: Rejecting and Accepting Jesus as Messiah**

During Jesus’ lifetime, Rome ruled the land of Judea, and a corrupt priesthood who was sympathetic to Rome ran the temple. Bound by the chains of political and spiritual oppression, the people of Israel clung to a mixed bag of hopes about how the promised Messiah would deliver them.

Some expected a pious prophet or priest to launch a spiritual revival that would draw Israel back to God. Others expected a mighty judge or a warrior king to lead a political revolution that would bring justice to the evil Roman oppressors. Some even expected two messiahs!

The Meaning of Messiah

Selected Scriptures

Very few, however, expected their Messiah to be both priest *and* judge, both prophet *and* king. In light of this context, why did so many Jews reject Jesus as Messiah? How did their flawed expectations differ from who Jesus truly was?

In what ways did Jesus defy expectation and perfectly fulfill these four God-ordained roles?

Christians have believed for years that many predictions of Jesus the Messiah are woven through the fabric of the Old Testament. The references are far more numerous than you would ever expect, which enhances our faith. That is the beauty of Scripture.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Messiah Then, Now, and Forever

In seasons of need, each person tends to cling to his or her own mixed bag of hopes about how God might offer deliverance. People look for all kinds of “saviors” to fix their problems. However, when we call Jesus our “Messiah,” three realities occur:

1. We claim Him to be *the* Anointed One.
2. We declare our search for all other so-called “messiahs” has ended.
3. We announce that He alone provides us with all we need for lasting satisfaction.



The Meaning of Messiah

Selected Scriptures

As *the* Anointed One, Jesus is the true judge, king, priest, and prophet. Which of these four offices stands out to you? How can seeing Jesus in this way practically affect your daily walk with Him and meet your need today?

Just as many Jews rejected Jesus during His life, many people still reject Him today. In what ways do those around you try to squeeze Jesus into the box of how they expect a “messiah” should look? How does their expectation differ from the way Scripture portrays Him?

Jesus Christ isn't just a name! Rather, Jesus is *the* Christ, the promised Anointed One whom God sent to shine His light into a world darkened by sin, guilt, shame, fear, and death. The light of life is calling to all today. Run to Him, and rest in the warmth of the presence of the true Messiah.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for sending the long-awaited Messiah. Thank You for giving us a better judge, a better king, a better priest, and a better prophet than any who came before Him. Help me live each day finding satisfaction in the truth that Jesus is my deliverer, my savior, my Messiah. In His mighty name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

