

15. God’s Rescue Plan – Part 1

Previously...












Mankind had a poor track record throughout history.

- Adam and Eve rebelled against Yahweh by eating fruit from the tree He warned them against.
- People before the Flood rebelled against God and were very wicked toward each other.
- People soon after the Flood rebelled against God by building the Tower of Babel.
- Later, Egypt rebelled against God by worshipping their government and man-made idols.
- Then Canaan rebelled against God by being a violent, aggressive and murderous people.

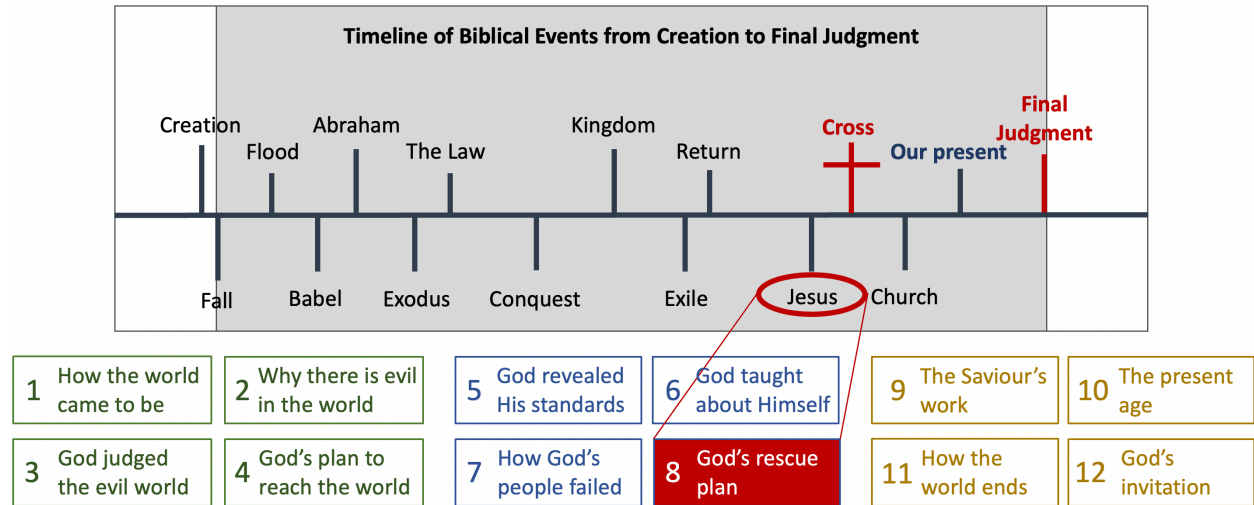
Even when God chose to work with Abraham’s descendants, they too, had a poor track record.

- The people rebelled against God, God’s law and Moses. They turned very wicked.
- Overall, the human kings were a rebellious lot who did not listen to God.

History proved that mankind had real problems with sin. People were simply not righteous. If mankind had to become righteous through their own effort in order to have eternal life, then everyone would fail. All would end up in the lake of fire.

Kingdom of Man Based on WORKS Man would save himself through his own ideas	Kingdom of God Based on GRACE God would save man	
People rejected God and His History and Truth	Election	
 Babel		God chose Abraham
 Egypt		God saved Israel
 Canaan		God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law ▪ National anthem ▪ Temple worship ▪ Feasts & festivals
		Conquest and Settlement in the Promised Land
		Kings in Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unified kingdom ▪ Divided kingdom
God’s restraining hand on the Pagan Kingdom of Man		Israel and Judah turned against God: Paganised—unbelievers
		Few believers
Rise of the Kingdom of Man	 Exile: Physical Kingdom of God Ended	

Yahweh knew the condition of mankind's heart very well. This was why, right from the beginning, God had planned a rescue programme for mankind which involved the offspring of the woman, the Saviour. But what were the details of the plan? We will look into that in this lesson.



GOD INTERVENED IN HISTORY WITH THE SAVIOUR

After mankind chose to trust Satan over Yahweh in the garden of Eden, Yahweh could have simply destroyed Satan and all mankind right there and then. Instead, in His mercy, God told Adam and Eve about His rescue plan.

The promise

Yahweh hinted to Adam and Eve that He would send a Saviour (the offspring, or “seed” of the woman) to crush Satan. This was what Yahweh said to the serpent in the garden.

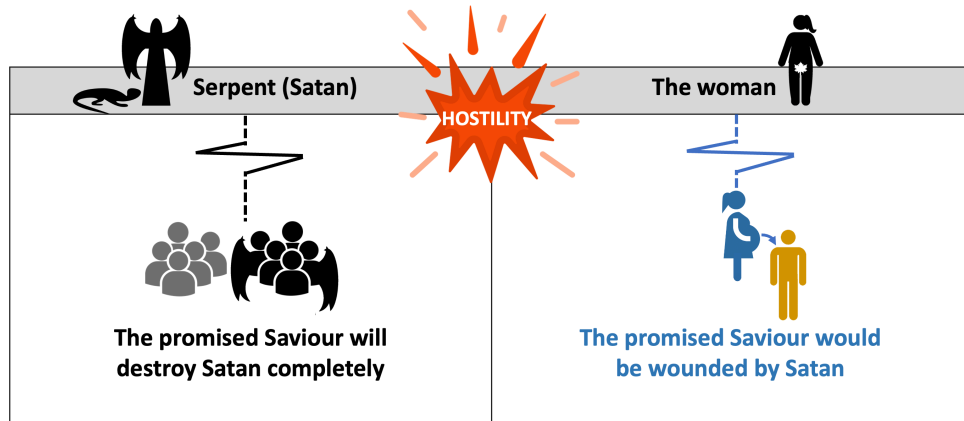
Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)

And I will put enmity
 Between you and the woman,
 And between your seed and her Seed;
 He shall bruise your head,
 And you shall bruise His heel.”

The phrase “the seed of the woman” was very unusual. “Seed” or “sperm” is from the man. So what did “seed of the woman” mean?

Yahweh was saying that the rescuer would be born from the woman alone. There would be no human father.

Yahweh said that this “seed of the woman” would destroy Satan (“He shall bruise your head”), but the rescuer would also be hurt by Satan (“you shall bruise His heel”).



After this initial declaration, Yahweh also gave more descriptions about the Saviour. The Old Testament prophets recorded all this information in God's Word. One prophet, Isaiah, wrote:

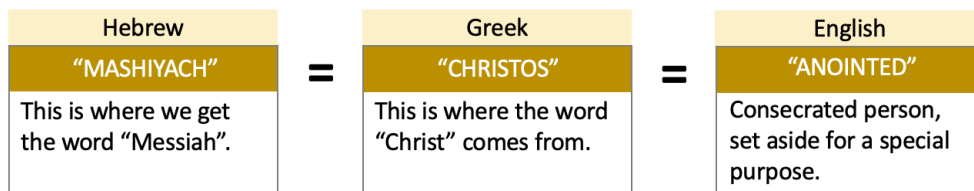
Isaiah 7:14b

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').



Isaiah recorded that this woman whom Yahweh spoke about in Eden would be a virgin. And her son, the Saviour, would come into the world by being born as a baby. Isaiah also recorded that one of this baby's titles would be "Immanuel".

Other prophets also referred to this Saviour as "mashiyach" (in Hebrew), meaning the "anointed one" (in English). Translated into Greek, this would be "Christos". So this rescuer has several important titles and names.

















While Yahweh gave quite a lot of detail to the prophets about what the Saviour would do and what His life would be like, He never told the prophets when this promised Saviour would arrive.

The arrival

Finally, approximately 4,000 years after Yahweh created the world, He sent His promised Saviour.

What was happening in the world at that time?

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	Election	
		God chose Abraham
		God saved Israel
		God built Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Law ▪ National anthem ▪ Temple worship ▪ Feasts & festivals
		Conquest and Settlement in the Promised Land
Rise of the Kingdom of Man		Kings in Israel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unified kingdom ▪ Divided kingdom
 Babylon Medo-Persia Greece Rome	 Israel and Judah turned against God: Paganised—unbelievers	 Few believers
	 Exile: Kingdom of God Ended	
		Partial return: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Subjects of pagan nations ▪ Kept their Jewish identity
		The Promised Saviour

During the time of the exile, there had been a change in power from the Babylonian to the Medo-Persian kingdom.

During Persian rule, God caused the Medo-Persian government to allow some Jews to return to the Promised Land. However, they returned as subjects of the Medo-Persian kingdom. The Promised Land was now a small province called Judea.

After the Medo-Persian kingdom, the Greek Empire took over as the superpower. This was followed by the Roman Empire. It was under Roman rule that the promised Saviour arrived.

The birth

Yahweh had planned that the promised Saviour, the seed of the woman, would arrive as a newborn baby through “the virgin”. But how did this happen? This is what the Bible records.

Matthew 1:18–23

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.

¹⁹ Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.



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.’”

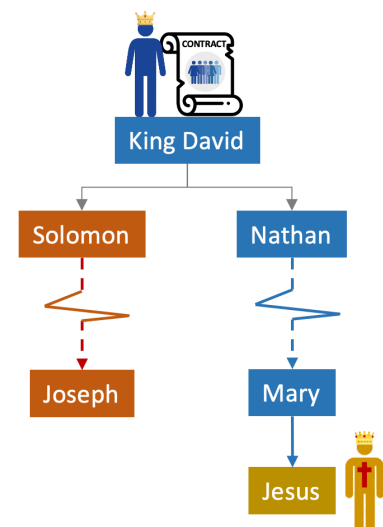
The angel told Joseph that God Himself (the “Holy Spirit”) caused Mary to conceive. In fact, he confirmed that Mary was actually “the virgin” that Isaiah had prophesied about. Her conception was not natural—no human man was involved. It was a miracle that Yahweh did. Yahweh did indeed cause the Saviour to be born from the woman alone as He had said in the garden of Eden.

Moreover, the angel said that Mary’s baby boy was the promised Saviour who would save people from their sins. So Yahweh was telling Joseph to go ahead with his marriage to Mary. God had planned for Joseph to be baby Jesus’ earthly adoptive father.

Interestingly, the angel called Joseph “son of David” (verse 20). Why did he do that? Earlier, we learnt that Yahweh had made a contract with King David that the promised Saviour would come from his line.

This promised Saviour would be the future political and spiritual king and also the one who would die as the substitute for mankind.

Yahweh wanted people to know that Joseph was a descendant of King David. This meant that Jesus’ adoptive father was a “son of David”. But more importantly, Mary was also a descendant of King David. This meant that Jesus was truly a descendant of David. God kept His promise to King David that the promised Saviour would be his descendant.



Who exactly is this promised Saviour?

Was Jesus a man that Yahweh created just like He had created Adam and Eve? No. All mankind on earth are descended from Adam and Eve. God personally created no one else aside from them.

The Bible says that Jesus is God himself. Yahweh makes this clear through Jesus' names and titles. Isaiah recorded that one of Jesus' titles is "Immanuel", meaning "God is with us".

Isaiah 7:14b

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').

Isaiah also called the Saviour by titles that cannot refer to any human being. Names like "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father" can only refer to a divine being.

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.

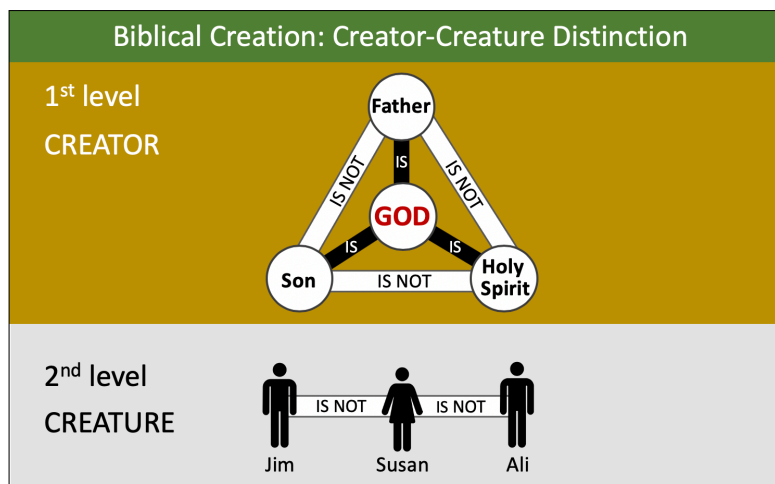


- Mighty God
- Everlasting Father
- Immanuel

But if Jesus was God, how could He come to earth as a baby? Would that even be possible? Then who would be running the universe?

Yahweh intentionally recorded in the Old Testament something about Himself that is not easy to understand. Yahweh explained that even though He is one God, He is made up of three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

This is not easy at all for us to understand because God did not create human beings like that. But we must remember that the Creator-God of the universe is on a totally different level from His creation. And this is exactly how Yahweh describes Himself.



In the Old Testament, Yahweh made it clear that there is a divine “Son of God”.

Proverbs 30:4

Who but God goes up to heaven and comes back down?

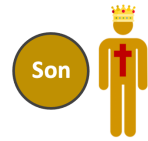
Who holds the wind in his fists?

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!



And even at the very beginning of the Bible, we see that there is the Holy Spirit or “Spirit of God”.

Genesis 1:1–2

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 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.



This is why, right from creation, when Yahweh was creating mankind, He used the words: “Let us”. Who is this “us”? It is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All three were involved in the creation.

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

Other passages in the Bible make it clear that there are three Persons that make up the one Creator-God. In the following passage, the prophet Isaiah recorded what God the Son (Jesus) said.




Isaiah 60:22–61:1

²² The smallest family will become a thousand people, and the tiniest group will become a mighty nation. At the right time, I, the LORD, will make it happen.”

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.

Yahweh wants us to know that the three Persons of God make up one God.

-  Sovereign LORD (Yahweh): **God the Father**
-  Yahweh's Spirit: **God the Holy Spirit**
-  The Speaker: **God the Son** (Note how the Son also calls Himself “Yahweh”: “I, the LORD”)

Even though there are three Persons, there is just one God. The Bible makes it clear that there are not three Gods.

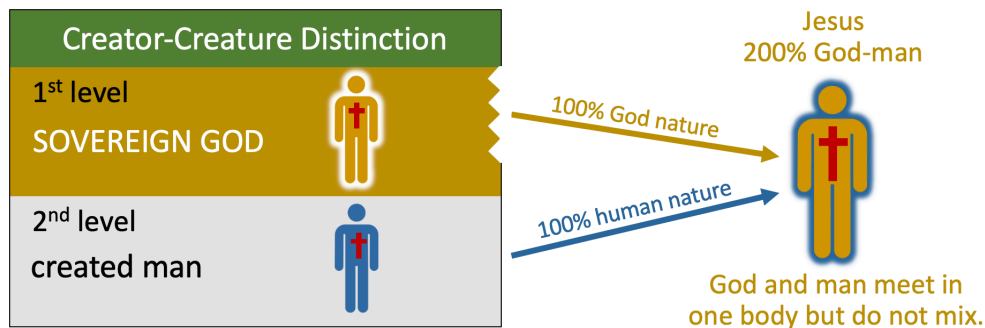
However, each of the three Persons has different roles. This is seen throughout the Bible, and even in the promised Saviour's arrival:

- God the Father sent ...
- ... the Holy Spirit to place ...
- ... the Son, Jesus, in Mary's womb.



Jesus is fully God and fully man

There is something else supernatural about Yahweh that is not easy to understand, but is true. When God the Son, Jesus, came to earth as a man, His “God nature” and His “human nature” lived in the same body but did 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” were in the same body but not mixed.

So Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. He is the only 200% person. Jesus never violated the Creator-creature distinction.

Why did God the Father send God the Son to earth? Why was a virgin birth necessary? We will explore these questions and more in a later lesson. But for now, we will take a look at Jesus' life.

THE LIFE OF THE PROMISED SAVIOUR

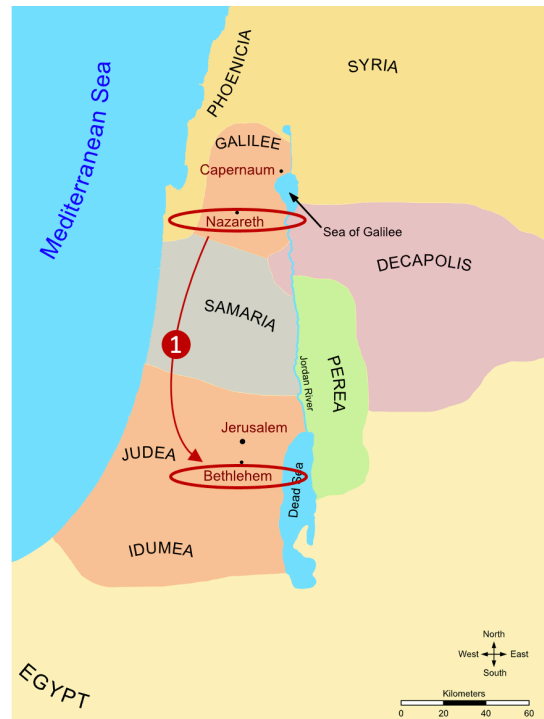
Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, a little town in Galilee.

- 1 Some time before 4 BC, Caesar Augustus (the Roman Emperor) ordered a census. Along with everyone else, Joseph and Mary returned to their hometown of Bethlehem in Judea to register themselves.

While they were in Bethlehem, Jesus was born. About 700 years earlier, Yahweh had told the prophet Micah to record that the promised Saviour would be born in Bethlehem.

Micah 5:2

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
are only a small village among all the
people of Judah.
Yet a ruler of Israel,
whose origins are in the distant past,
will come from you on my behalf.



In the Bible, we see that God told His prophets to record many prophecies that were later fulfilled to the exact detail, sometimes hundreds of years later. In fact, when the Bible was written, about 27% of it was predictive, and currently, about half of these prophecies have already been precisely fulfilled.

Why did Yahweh do this? He wanted mankind to know that He really is the sovereign God of all. He says that the true test of what makes a person “God” is the ability to tell the future and also control it so it turns out exactly as predicted. And Yahweh says He can do all that.

Isaiah 46:9–10

- ⁹ Remember the things I have done in the past.
For I alone am God!
I am God, and there is none like me.
- ¹⁰ Only I can tell you the future
before it even happens.
Everything I plan will come to pass,
for I do whatever I wish.

The reason the Bible contains many prophecies about the promised Saviour is because Yahweh wants people to know exactly who this Saviour is. In fact, while on earth, the Saviour Himself also gave prophecies about the future. This was so that people would believe that He was in fact, the one who had been chosen as the rescuer, the Messiah, the Christ. This was what He said.

John 13:19

I tell you this beforehand, so that when it happens you will believe that I am the Messiah.

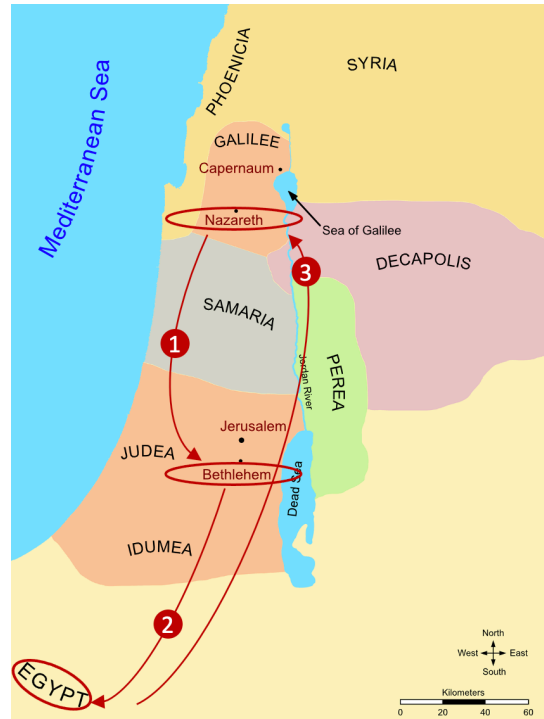
After Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph remained in Bethlehem for a while. There, this little family were visited by wise men from the east. (Wise men were a very learned group of the priestly class of people whom rulers normally turned to for advice.) Relying on ancient prophecies, the wise men had come to look for Jesus and to worship Him. However, when Herod, the local ruler over the Jews heard about this, he felt threatened. He commanded that all baby boys be killed because he did not know who, nor exactly where, Jesus was.

The Bible tells us that since the garden of Eden, when Satan tricked Adam and Eve into rebelling against Yahweh, he has never stopped going against God's good plans. Satan hates mankind and he especially hates God. Realising that God the Son had come to earth as a baby was the perfect opportunity for Satan to kill Him. So the Bible says that Satan worked through Herod to try to destroy Jesus.

- 2 The all-knowing Yahweh warned Joseph about this murderous plot and told him to hide his family in Egypt.

So Joseph brought his family to Egypt and hid there until the death of Herod.



- 3 After that, Jesus' family moved back to Nazareth, where He grew up. The Bible does not record much of Jesus' early life. However, at the age of about 30, Jesus started His public ministry.



The announcement by the “king-making” prophet

Yahweh is very orderly and consistent in the way He does things. In the Old Testament, one of the jobs of a prophet was to announce whom God had chosen to be the king.

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

Old Testament	New Testament
<p>Anointing prophet</p>  <p>Yahweh's chosen king</p>	<p>Anointing prophet: John the Baptist</p> <p>Yahweh's chosen Messiah: Jesus</p> 

How did this happen?

At first, John himself did not know who the promised Saviour was. But Yahweh told him how to recognise the Messiah:

- First, He told John to preach to all the Jews that they must repent from their rebellious ways and turn their hearts towards Yahweh. That was how the people were to prepare for the soon-to-return kingdom of God on earth that they had lost at the exile.
- Then John was to “baptise” or immerse in water, those who agreed with this message of repentance and repented of their sins (this was how John came to be known as John “the baptist”).
- Yahweh told John that as he went about baptising people, this was how he would recognise God’s promised Saviour: as John immersed the Saviour in the water, the Holy Spirit would descend like a dove upon Him.



And this is exactly what happened the day John baptised Jesus.



Jesus had come to John and asked to be baptised because He agreed with the message that sinners must repent and look forward to the returning kingdom of God. (Note that Jesus Himself had no sin but He was agreeing with John’s message.)

And when John baptised Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus. This was Yahweh’s stated sign to identify the Messiah.

The day after Jesus’ baptism, the prophet John announced to everyone that Jesus was the Messiah, the “Lamb of God”.

John 1:29–34

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” ³⁰ 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.’ ³¹ I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel.”

³² Then John testified, “I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. ³³ 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.’” ³⁴ I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.”

This was how the prophet, John the Baptist, came to announce God's chosen Saviour. Interestingly, John called Jesus the "Lamb of God". Why did he do that and what did it mean?

When Yahweh saved Israel out of slavery in Egypt, the tenth plague was the death of the firstborn of every household. But Yahweh told the people that if they killed a lamb and put its blood on the doorframes of their houses, He would accept the death of the lamb as a substitute for the firstborns. In this way, the lamb died in place of the firstborn, and the firstborn would be saved from death.



God's Judgment:

Death in every house



EITHER...

the firstborn dies

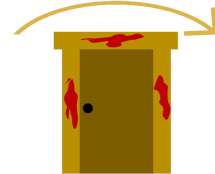


OR...

a substitute dies



God will pass over



No death of firstborn because of the blood of the lamb

When John the Baptist called Jesus, "the Lamb of God", John was announcing very clearly that Jesus was the real permanent "lamb" that God had chosen to save mankind from their sin problem.

After John's announcement, Jesus started His public ministry and He also claimed to be the promised Saviour.

Jesus is the promised Saviour

This was how Jesus introduced Himself to the Jews. It happened at the synagogue, the Jewish place of worship.

Luke 4:14–21

¹⁴ Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. ¹⁵ He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶ When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. ¹⁷ The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,

¹⁹ and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."



²⁰ He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. ²¹ Then he began to speak to them. “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”

Isaiah had prophesied that the promised Saviour would bring good news of rescue and salvation to the poor, blind and oppressed, and in fact, all mankind, who were bound for eternal death.

When Jesus read from this part of the Scripture, He announced that it was fulfilled that day. He was announcing that He was the promised Saviour.

What happened next?

John the Baptist announced that Jesus was the promised Saviour by calling Him the Lamb of God. Jesus identified Himself as the promised Saviour when He read the Isaiah prophecy aloud in the synagogue. But how would the average Israelite or Jew know that Jesus is the Saviour, the one whom Yahweh had promised after the Fall? In the next lesson, we will see that Jesus proved His identity as God through signs and miracles that only God can do.



Bible reading for review

Matthew 1–3; John 1:1–34