

Who Is Jesus Christ?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 4:16–30, 6:5, Eph. 1:3–5, Luke 9:18–27, 2 Pet. 1:16–18.*

Memory Text: “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said, ‘The Christ of God’ ” (*Luke 9:20, NKJV*).

Who is Jesus Christ? This question is not a philosophical or a sociological gimmick. It gets to the heart of who humans are and, even more important, what eternity will hold for them.

People can admire the works of Jesus, honor His words, extol His patience, advocate His nonviolence, acclaim His decisiveness, praise His selflessness, and stand speechless at the cruel end of His life. Many may even be ready to accept Jesus as a good man who tried to set things right—to infuse fairness where there was injustice, to offer healing where there was sickness, and to bring comfort where there was only misery.

Yes, Jesus could well earn the name of the best teacher, a revolutionary, a leader par excellence, and a psychologist who can probe into the depths of one's soul. He was all these and so much more.

None of these things, however, comes near to answering the all-important question that Jesus Himself raised: “ ‘Who do you say that I am?’ ” (*Luke 9:20, NKJV*).

It is a question that demands an answer, and on that answer the destiny of humanity hinges.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 18.

Reactions to Jesus

Read the Gospels; read the New Testament. All through these books incredible claims are made about not only what Jesus did but, even more important, about who Jesus was. (Of course, what Jesus did powerfully attested to who He was.) These claims—that He is God, that He is our Redeemer, that He alone is the way to eternal life—demand our attention because they are full of implications that have eternal consequences for every human being.

Read Luke 4:16–30. What caused the people to react as they did? See also John 3:19.

His hometown audience was thrilled at first to see Jesus, who, after performing many miracles and wonders, returned to Nazareth, and they “marveled at the gracious words” He spoke (*Luke 4:22, NKJV*). But their reaction to His rebuke showed what spirit truly animated them.

Read Luke 7:17–22. What was John’s question about Jesus, and why would he have asked it?

Even John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus and the one who announced Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” had doubts creeping into the depths of his soul. He wanted to know: “ ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ ” (*Luke 7:19, NKJV*).

Notice, too, that Jesus does not answer John’s question directly; instead, He points to acts that cry out in witness: “ ‘The lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them’ ” (*vs. 22, NKJV*). One could argue that Jesus didn’t need to answer John’s question directly; His deeds and actions gave ample testimony of who He was.

In a sense, the answer that Jesus gave might have caused John even a bit more consternation. After all, if Jesus has the power to do all these incredible things, why am I languishing here in jail? Who hasn’t, amid their own personal tragedies, wondered something similar: If God has all this power, why is this happening to me? Why is the cross, and all it represents and promises, our only answer?

Son of God

“Son of man” and “Son of God” are two names used in the Gospels to describe who Jesus is. The first indicates God incarnate; the second points to His divinity as the second Person of the Godhead. Together, the two phrases invite us to ponder the miracle of Jesus Christ: God who is both divine and human. It’s a hard concept to grasp, but that difficulty does not in any way take away from this amazing truth and the great hope that it offers us.

Read Luke 1:31, 32, 35; 2:11. What do these verses tell us about who Jesus really is?

In Luke 1:31, 32, the angel links the name “JESUS” with the “Son of the Highest” to whom the “Lord God will give” the throne of David (*NKJV*). Jesus is the Son of God. He is also the Christ, the Messiah, who shall restore David’s throne, not as an earthly deliverer but in the eschatological sense in that He will ultimately defeat Satan’s attempt to usurp the throne of God Himself. To the shepherds, the angel announced that the babe in the manger is the “Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (*Luke 2:11, NKJV*).

At the same time, the title “Son of God” not only affirms Christ’s position in the Godhead but also reveals the close and intimate relationship that Jesus had with God the Father while Jesus was on earth.

Yet, the relationship between the Father and the Son is not the same as the relationship that we have with God. While our relationship is a result of the work of Christ both as Creator and Redeemer, His relationship to the Father as the Son is as of one of three equal, eternal partners. Through His divinity Jesus maintained the closest possible ties to the Father.

“Jesus says, ‘My Father which is in heaven,’ as reminding His disciples that while by His humanity He is linked with them, a sharer in their trials, and sympathizing with them in their sufferings, by His divinity He is connected with the throne of the Infinite.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 442.

What does it mean to us that Jesus is, in the fullest sense, God? Though this truth is filled with many implications, one of the most amazing is that, though God, Jesus condescended to not only take upon Himself our humanity but to offer Himself as a sacrifice in that humanity for us. We are talking about *God* here! What wonderful hope does this truth have for us because of what it tells us about what God is really like?

Son of Man

Although Jesus was fully conscious that He was both the Son of man and the Son of God (*Luke 22:67–70*), “Son of Man” was our Savior’s favorite way of self-designation. The other instances in which the title appears are in Daniel 7:13, in Stephen’s speech (*Acts 7:56*), and in Revelation 1:13 and 14:14. The title appears more than 80 times in the Gospels and 25 in Luke. Luke’s usage shows the author’s deep interest in the humanity of Jesus as the universal Man who was sent by God to proclaim the good news of salvation.

“The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man; He gave proof of His humility in becoming a man. Yet He was God in the flesh.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244.

The use of “Son of man” in Luke provides various insights into the nature, mission, and destiny of the Incarnate Jesus.

First, the title identifies Him as a human (*Luke 7:34*), with no worldly address or security (*Luke 9:58*).

Second, Luke uses the title to assert Christ’s divine nature and status: for the “‘Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (*Luke 6:5, NKJV*). Therefore, He is also the Creator, with the power to forgive sins (*Luke 5:24*).

Third, to accomplish this redemptive mission ordained by the Godhead before the foundations of the world (*Eph. 1:3–5*), the Son of man came to seek and save the lost (*Luke 9:56, 19:10*). But redemption itself cannot be completed until “ ‘the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected . . . and be killed, and be raised the third day’ ” (*Luke 9:22, NKJV*). This self-awareness of the Son of man about the path He had to tread, and the price He had to pay for the Redemption of humankind from sin, reveals not only the divine origin of the plan of Redemption but also Christ’s submission in His humanity to that plan.

Fourth, note how complete a picture of the suffering Messiah that Luke portrays in the following passages: His foreknowledge of the Cross (*Luke 18:31–33*); His betrayal (*Luke 9:44*); His death as a fulfillment of prophecy (*Luke 22:22*); His Crucifixion and Resurrection (*Luke 24:7; compare with Luke 11:30*); and His role as the Mediator before the Father (*Luke 12:8*).

Fifth, Luke sees the Son of man in last-day terms as the One who returns to earth to reward His saints and to wrap up the great controversy (*Luke 9:26; 12:4; 17:24, 26, 30; 21:36; 22:69*).

In short, the title “Son of man” incorporates the multifaceted aspect not only of who Christ was but of what He came to do and what He has accomplished and will accomplish for us in the plan of salvation.

“The Christ of God”

Read Luke 9:18–27. Why would Jesus have asked the disciples a question whose answer He already knew? What lesson was He seeking to teach them not only about Himself but about what it means to follow Him?

“Who do you say that I am?” (Luke 9:20, NKJV). The question that Jesus asked 2,000 years ago still haunts history. People have given many different answers. A great teacher. A profound ethicist. An embodiment of truth. An edifice of self-sacrifice. A fearless prophet. A social reformer. A great model of everything a human being should be. But no answer short of the confession that the original question drew from the lips of Peter will do.

After revealing His authority over nature (Luke 8:22–25), His power over demons (vs. 26–35), His might over diseases (Luke 5:12–15, 8:43–48), His ability to feed the 5,000 out of almost nothing (Luke 9:13–17), His power over death itself (Luke 8:51–56)—Jesus confronts His disciples with, really, two questions: first, what others thought of Him; next, what the disciples themselves thought. He didn’t ask in order to learn something that He didn’t already know. Rather, He asked in order to help them to understand that who He was would, in fact, demand from them a commitment that would cost everything.

“Our knowledge of Jesus must never be at second hand. We might know every verdict ever passed on Jesus; we might know every Christology that human minds have ever thought out; we might be able to give a competent summary of the teaching about Jesus of every great thinker and theologian—and still not be Christians. Christianity never consists in *knowing about* Jesus; it always consists in *knowing Jesus*. Jesus Christ demands a personal verdict. He did not ask only Peter, he asks every one of us: ‘You—what do *you* think of me?’ ”—William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2009), vol. 2, p. 161.

Our response to the question Jesus asked cannot be anything short of Peter’s confession: Jesus is “the Christ of God” (Luke 9:20, NKJV). “Christ” means the Anointed One, the Messiah, whose mission is not that of a political liberator but the Savior who will free humanity from the grip of Satan and sin and inaugurate the kingdom of righteousness.

It’s not enough simply knowing who Jesus is. Rather, we need to know Him for ourselves. If, then, you claim to know Jesus, what, in fact, do you know about Him? That is, what has your own personal knowledge of Jesus taught you about Him and about what He is like?

The Transfiguration

Read all three Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration (*Luke 9:27–36, Matt. 17:1–9, Mark 9:2–8*). (Read also Peter’s firsthand account of the incident, and note the truth the apostle establishes from his eyewitness experience; see 2 Peter 1:16–18.) What additional information does Luke provide, and why is it important?

Luke begins the narrative with a detail that Matthew and Mark do not mention: Jesus took Peter, John, and James up the mountain *to pray*. Jesus set His eyes and mind toward Jerusalem and predicted the path of suffering that lay before Him. Jesus wanted to be certain that what He was doing was what God wanted Him to do. At such moments, prayer is the only way of finding certainty and assurance. The process of prayer instantly poured out divine glory on the person of Jesus: “His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening” (*Luke 9:29, NKJV*).

The transfigured Jesus was in conversation with Moses and Elijah about “His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (*vs. 31, NKJV*). The word *decease* can be understood in two ways: His upcoming death in Jerusalem, although the Greek used here, *exodus*, is not often used for death; hence, “decease” can also mean the great “exodus” Jesus was about to accomplish in Jerusalem, the mighty redemptive exodus that would bring about deliverance from sin.

The conference of the three concluded with a voice of approval from heaven: “ ‘This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!’ ” (*vs. 35, NKJV*). The Transfiguration anoints Jesus with glory, assures His Sonship once again, and announces that Redemption will cost the Son’s life. Therefore, the heavenly command to the disciples: listen to Him. Without obedience and exclusive loyalty to Him, there is no discipleship.

Ellen G. White wrote that these men, meaning Moses and Elijah, who had been “chosen above every angel around the throne, had come to commune with Jesus concerning the scenes of His suffering, and to comfort Him with the assurance of the sympathy of heaven. The hope of the world, the salvation of every human being, was the burden of their interview.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 425. Thus, even Jesus Himself, who had comforted so many others, sought solace and comfort for Himself. What should that tell us about how even the strongest spiritually among us, even our leaders, teachers, and guides, can at times need solace, encouragement, and help from others? In fact, whom do you know right now who could use solace, comfort, and encouragement?

Further Study: “Avoid every question in relation to the humanity of Christ which is liable to be misunderstood. Truth lies close to the track of presumption. In treating upon the humanity of Christ, you need to guard strenuously every assertion, lest your words be taken to mean more than they imply, and thus you lose or dim the clear perceptions of His humanity as combined with divinity. His birth was a miracle of God. . . . Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to corruption. He was tempted in all points like as man is tempted, yet He is called ‘that holy thing.’ It is a mystery that is left unexplained to mortals that Christ could be tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin. The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain, a mystery.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1128, 1129.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read the Ellen G. White statement above about the human nature of Christ. We must face the fact that Jesus’ human nature, as with His divine nature, is a great truth that for now we will never fully fathom. As she wrote: “The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain, a mystery.” Why, then, must we be very careful about making harsh judgments on those who don’t necessarily understand this “mystery” the same way that we do?
- 2 Think about what happened on the mount of transfiguration. This amazing event in salvation history was about to happen, and what were the chosen disciples who came with Him on the mountain doing at first? Sleeping! In what ways could this be a metaphor for ourselves, as individual believers, or for us as a church who live right before another great event in salvation history, the second coming of Jesus?
- 3 Read some of the things that Jesus had said about Himself. Why, then, is the idea that Jesus was merely a great man, a great prophet, or a great spiritual leader logically flawed? Why must we either accept that He is what He said He is or that He was a lunatic and someone who was greatly deceived about Himself? Why is there no other option for us in regard to the identity of Jesus?

The “Under-the-Ground” Bible

A PASTOR, CHINA

During the time of China’s Cultural Revolution, it was very dangerous to own a Bible. Someone we knew, however, was able to obtain one. Since it was such a rare and precious book, he wanted to share it with as many people as possible, so he carefully took the Bible apart and gave one or two books of the Bible to various Seventh-day Adventist families.

Our family received the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, and we read them again and again, treasuring every word. As I child, I enjoyed the many exciting stories contained in those two books! My older brother could write, so he copied the books by hand to share with others.

A few years later, another Adventist found a very small Bible that had been put into a plastic bag and buried in the ground. Because of poor eyesight, the man wasn’t able to read the small print, so he gave the Bible to me when I was 18. I was so excited! Here was a complete Bible that I was holding in my hands for the very first time!

This “under-the-ground” Bible became very precious to me, and I read it from the first chapter to the last more than ten times. I spent a lot of time with it, marking important passages, and writing down some of my thoughts.

I remembered my great-grandmother telling me about Noah when I was very young, but here I was at 18, reading about the Flood for the first time.

As I read the Bible, I started to understand what this book is about. I learned more about Jesus and His teachings. I discovered the truth in the Bible that can help us to have better lives. The more I read, the more interested I became.

When I was 20, I visited an area where most people knew nothing about the Bible. I was invited to speak to groups in various homes. I showed them my little Bible and shared what I had learned from it. As word spread, I was invited to speak in many other homes as well.

While sharing, I noticed that the young people—those in their mid-teens—were especially interested.

They were so eager to learn that I wrote out 1,000 Bible texts and gave them to the young people, who memorized the texts. I found this was an excellent way for them to learn the Bible!