

Who Do People Say I Am?

Jesus Uncanny Resemblance to The Prophets.

Luke 9:7-9: *Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed, because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. But Herod said, "I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?"*

Matthew 16:13-14: *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

Luke 9:18-19: *Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."*

Who else finds this odd... Jesus asks the disciples the question "Who do people say I am?", and their reply is:

- 1) A prophet whom they all knew, and who had just been beheaded
- 2) A fiery prophet who was swept to heaven in a whirlwind 900 years earlier
- 3) A weeping prophet who warned of coming captivity 600 years prior
- 4) Some other prophet of long ago who had come back to life

So, if a polling organization had existed and questioned a cross-section of Israel on who Jesus was, the general consensus would not be that he was a good teacher, or a carpenter from Galilee, or the Messiah, but definitely a dead prophet risen from the grave. They just couldn't agree on which one!

I know we all prefer the second part of this passage, where Peter answers Jesus question correctly. But for now let's dig into the disciples answer to Jesus' first question, and look at the prophets mentioned individually to see why Herod and the masses were confused.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

This conclusion is the weirdest, but the first mentioned in all the accounts. Anyone who had seen and heard Jesus while John was still alive would rule this theory out. As key a figure as John was, very little is written of what he actually did. Outside of John's birth, Jesus' Baptism, and John's imprisonment and execution, what do we know about this man? We do know who he was always compared to. Even Jesus said "if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come."

ELIJAH

If Jesus were a prophet from long ago come back to earth, Elijah would be the obvious choice. He never died, being caught up to heaven, plus there were scriptures prophesying his return. But maybe they also thought Jesus might be Elijah because of his similar abilities to work miracles:

1 Kings 17:17-24: Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?” “Give me your son,” Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord, “O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?” Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the Lord, “O Lord my God, let this boy’s life return to him!” The Lord heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive!” Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.”

Mark 5:35-43: While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher any more?” Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

JEREMIAH

To quote David Wilkerson:

“When you think of Jeremiah, think of a teardrop...his life was characterized by sorrow and loneliness. Born a priest; chosen to be a prophet before he was born; called to prophetic office while very young. Forbidden to marry because of the terrible times during which he lived. He never made a convert. He was rejected, hated, beaten, put in stocks, imprisoned. His message broke his own heart. He wanted to resign his commission as prophet, but God would not let him.”

Jeremiah 7:9-11: “Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, “We are safe” – safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become *a den of robbers?*”

Jeremiah 19:14-15, 20:1-2: Jeremiah then returned from Topheth, where the Lord had sent him to prophesy, and stood in the court of the Lord’s temple and said to all the people, “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Listen! I am going to bring on this city and the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words.’ When the priest Pashhur son of Immer, the chief officer in the temple of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the Lord’s temple.

Luke 19:41-47: As he (Jesus) approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.” Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. “It is written,” he said to them, “ ‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘*a den of robbers.*’ ”

ANOTHER PROPHET: ELISHA

When it comes to Elisha, I don’t even know where to start. So I compiled what I call “The Elisha List”...

Elisha was preceded, blessed and endorsed by Elijah at the Jordan River
Jesus was preceded, baptized and endorsed by John the Baptist at the Jordan River
Elisha’s authority was immediately tested by the youths at Bethel
Jesus’ authority was immediately tested by satan in the wilderness
Elisha’s first public miracle was turning toxic water into clean water
Jesus’ first public miracle was turning clean water into wine
Elisha lived with and mentored the school of the prophets
Jesus lived with and mentored the disciples
Elisha fed 100 by multiplying loaves of bread, and had leftovers
Jesus fed 5000 by multiplying loaves and fishes, and had leftovers
Elisha healed a leper and raised a person from the dead
Jesus healed many lepers and raised several people from the dead
Elisha interacted with and healed gentiles
Jesus interacted with and healed gentiles, sinners and tax collectors
Elisha was often shown hospitality by the Shunamite woman, and raised her son from the dead
Jesus was often shown hospitality by Mary and Martha, and raised their brother from the dead
Elisha had the power to bring a dead man back to life even after he himself had died
Jesus by dying conquered death, and has the power to bring everyone back to life

In my opinion, if the masses during Jesus’ time had been reading the scriptures, they would have thought Jesus must be Elisha. Where Elijah was volatile and drew lots of attention to himself, Elisha quietly did twice as many miracles, sometimes sending his assistant Gehazi to do his work. Doing my own study on Elisha was the inspiration for this teaching.

ANOTHER PROPHET: JONAH

I know what you are thinking. Jonah? Wasn’t he that reluctant, rebellious, self-righteous prophet with the really bad attitude? Yes he was. Would anyone in Jesus time mistake him for Jonah? Nope they wouldn’t. Let’s look to him anyway, as I’m beginning to suspect every prophet in the Old Testament was a “Type of Christ”, even the really flawed ones like Jonah.

Picture the following scene as if it were in movie, like one of those epic period Bible films of the early 60s... A boat is at sea, tossed about by a mighty waves. All aboard are fearful that the boat might be broken up...

JONAH 1:4-7: Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.”

Mark 4:36-41: Leaving the crowd behind, they took him (Jesus) along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

We all know that what happens next is very different. But can’t you sense God wanting us to notice this?

As for true character, Jonah surrendered his life willingly to save the others on the ship. Like Christ, he also was obedient to preach a message of repentance and salvation to Gentiles. To defend Jonah’s reluctance, know that the Assyrians were brutal. They amputated limbs, skinned people, and sealed them alive into walls. However, it was Jesus, not Jonah, who experienced a violent death at the hands of His audience. And it was Jonah’s message that brought a citywide revival.

Interestingly, Jesus referenced, quoted, and taught about many of the Old Testament prophets. But he only compared himself to one, and that was Jonah...

Matthew 12:38-41: Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.” He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.”

This message is intended more as an eye-opener than a life-changing message. But if there is a challenge in it, it’s this: Maybe the reason Jesus and the Old Testament prophets lives were similar is because *that’s what it looks like to follow and obey God*. Is it possible we might all be called to heal, preach the Gospel with signs and wonders, cast out spirits, or be watchmen and warn people of what is to come?

I believe that God was causing similar situations to occur to demonstrate that Jesus was more than a just a prophet. In every comparable event, what Jesus did was superior... “and now one greater than Jonah, greater than John the Baptist, greater than Elijah, greater than Jeremiah, greater than Elisha, is here.”