

A King Is Coming

The Old Testament contains more than 300 passages that refer to the first coming of the Messiah. Of these 300 prophecies, 48 of them are very specific descriptions concerning His life, His death, and His resurrection. These include the place of His birth, the place in which He would minister, His flight to Egypt as a child, His virgin birth, His betrayal for an exact price, the use of that money to buy a potter's field, His flogging and beatings, the crucifixion alongside thieves, the wine vinegar He would be offered on the cross, and even the gambling for that occurred for His clothing.

“But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled” Luke quotes the Apostle as saying in Acts 3:18 [RSV].

To claim that you are God is one thing, but to convince other people that you are indeed what you say you are is quite another. So how did Jesus' closest followers come to be so convinced of His claims that they would lay down their very lives for that belief? How could they be so certain of Who Jesus is that not a single one of His followers ever recanted their testimony of seeing a risen Savior, even while undergoing the harshest of torture and persecution? They were able to be so certain because Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies about Himself.

These predictions were made by different Jewish prophets who lived in widely separated communities over a period of 1,000 years. They were fulfilled more than 500 years after they were recorded.

Many Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah were fulfilled in precise detail by Jesus of Nazareth. Neither the Jews nor the disciples of Jesus understood at the time that Jesus was fulfilling the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, even though at times He told them this was the case (Luke 18:31; Matthew 26:56). They were looking for a far different Messiah than the One so many prophecies actually described.

Some people have said that these predictions were added into the Scriptures after they happened. This is historically impossible because archeology has given us extant copies of Scripture (such as the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran) dated before the time of Christ. In addition, the entire Old Testament was translated into Greek around 250 BC, and this translation became known as the Septuagint. Also, the prophecies were such an integral part of the Jewish culture that references to them were everywhere. The Jewish people were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the promised Messiah Who would redeem them from the tyranny of oppression under hostile cultures. They knew He would be a from the line of David, that He would be born in Bethlehem, that another prophet would precede Him with a message of repentance and to ***“make straight in the***

desert a highway” (Isaiah 40:3 [RSV]) for Him, and that He would save His people from their sins.

Did you know that the Bible actually predicted the exact year the Messiah would appear? An amazing prophecy in Daniel 9:25 [RSV] gives the specific year the Messiah would arrive on the scene. ***“Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an Anointed One, a Prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.”*** The angel Gabriel revealed this information to Daniel approximately 580 years before its fulfillment. Let's examine this remarkable prophecy and how it was fulfilled.

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The word translated “weeks” here literally means “sevens.” While it could mean seven-day weeks, that is evidently not the case here. Daniel had been specifically praying earlier in the chapter about a prophetic period of 70 years. In this answer to his prayer, he is told of a period of 70 sevens, clearly meaning 70 sevens of years in this context. In other words, 70 seven-year periods.

Adding 7 plus 62 (69) of these seven-year periods – that is, a total of 483 years – from a decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem gives the year the Messiah would appear on the scene.

After Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in 586 BC, the Babylonian Empire was succeeded by the Medo-Persian Empire. This empire's kings issued several such decrees that were recorded in the Bible (by Cyrus in 538 BC, found in Ezra 1:1-2, and by Darius in 520 BC, described in Ezra 6:8).

But the one that was issued by Artaxerxes Longimanus in 457 BC in Ezra 7:11-26 points us specifically to Christ's ministry. Counting 483 years from the 457 BC date of this decree brings us to AD 27, keeping in mind that because there is no year “0” we have to add one year to the calculation.

AD 27 was a significant year, for it was in this year that Jesus was baptized and He began His public ministry.

The Jews of Christ's day were certainly familiar with Daniel's prophecy. And regardless of which decree one might choose as the starting point of the 483 years, the time for the Messiah to appear had elapsed during Jesus' day. Messianic fervor was rampant with the realization that the fulfillment of this prophecy was near at hand. This can be seen in the following passages from the

Gospel of John: “He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ).” (John 1:41 [RSV]) “The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (He Who is called Christ); when He comes, He will show us all things.’” (John 4:25 [RSV]) If the Messiah was to come, He would have to arrive on the scene just when Jesus did – in the exact year!

One of Jesus' defenses to the Jews He used against His accusers was to appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures themselves, which identified Him as the One to come. **“You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to Me,”** He told them in John 5:39 [RSV].

After Jesus was resurrected, He began to help His disciples understand the Scriptures, and the disciples were inspired to declare that Jesus was indeed the prophesied Messiah. The proof they offered was the very Scriptures they had not previously understood. So let us take a few moments now to consider some of these passages and see how they were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

8. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” 16. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many; but, referring to One, “And to your Offspring,” Which is Christ. (Galatians 3:8; Galatians 3:16 [RSV]).

In Galatians 3:8 and 3:16, Paul explains that the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3; Genesis 18:18; and Genesis 22:18, was, in actuality, a reference to the coming Messiah. This promise was later repeated to Abraham's son, Isaac in Genesis 26:4 and then later passed on through Abraham's grandson, Jacob in Genesis 28:14.

Several hundred years later the future Messiah was prophesied to come through Jesse, the father of King David, of the tribe of Judah, one of Jacob's 12 sons. **“There shall come forth a Shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots”** (Isaiah 11:1 [RSV]). David was the son of Jesse from whom the line would come that would produce Jesus of Nazareth some 30 generations later. Through the Prophet Jeremiah, God foretold that He would **“raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as King and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land”** (Jeremiah 23:5 [RSV]).

In this amazing progression of prophecies, beginning some 1,500 years before the Messiah would come, we are told in precise terms what the human lineage of Christ would be. Jesus fulfilled these promises, as the Apostle Matthew shows us in recording the descent of Jesus through the line of King David. The number

of people who potentially could have fulfilled the Messianic prophecies narrows greatly when limited to this family.

The prophecies discussed so far strongly point to Jesus, but some might argue they are not conclusive. Other people could have qualified if you use only these three as the criteria. But these are only the beginning.

The Jews of Jesus' day also knew that the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem (Matthew 2:3-6). This was plainly understood from Micah 5:2 [RSV]: ***“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me One Who is to be ruler in Israel, Whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.”*** There were two Bethlehems, one in the region of Ephrathah in Judea and the other located in the north, in the region of the tribe of Zebulun. But Micah's prophecy was precise. He wrote this sometime around 700 BC. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Ephrathah. Jesus was born in this Bethlehem in Judea (Matthew 2:1). Although He was to be born in this Bethlehem, Micah also makes it quite clear that the Messiah's origins were eternal, dating from ***“ancient days.”*** The Hebrew word used here, ***“olam,”*** actually refers to a time older than the Flood of Noah, and is associated with creation. Of this the Apostle John writes, ***2. He was in the beginning with God; 3. all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.*** (John 1:2-3 [RSV])

The very first prophecy ever spoke came from the mouth of God Himself, Who stated in Genesis 3:15 [RSV], ***“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.”***

This prophecy goes hand in hand with a remarkable prophecy found in Isaiah 7:14 [RSV], called “the Immanuel prophecy,” which foretells the unique birth of Jesus by a virgin: ***“Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”***

Isaiah was a contemporary of Micah, and wrote around the same time as Micah. Moses wrote Genesis around 1400 BC, so these two messages are consistent despite a 700-year time gap. Both indicate that the Messiah's birth would be from a woman with no human male involvement. In Genesis 3:15 the word ***“seed”*** is the Hebrew noun ***“zera”*** and is used in a singular sense. Note that the passage refers to the seed of a woman, not a man, indicating a virgin birth was to occur.

Before Jesus was born, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that his betrothed, Mary, was expecting a child – conceived not by man, but by the Spirit of God. The angel referred to this prophecy from Isaiah (Matthew 1:18-23; compare Luke 1:26-35). Because of this warning given to him by the angel, Joseph was able to take Mary as his wife.

The story of Mary's virginity was so well known during the ministry of Christ that the Babylonian Talmud scornfully referred to Jesus as "the bastard child of the adulteress." The Jewish leaders refused to accept that Jesus was actually born of a virgin, in spite of what their own Scriptures taught.

Zechariah predicted that Jesus would enter Jerusalem triumphantly riding on a donkey, and declared a King. ***"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey"*** (Zechariah 9:9 [NKJV]).

On April 6, AD 32, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey while crowds of disciples waved palm branches and declared Him "King of the Jews." Some people correctly point out that Jesus arranged this, and use that as an argument that it cannot be used as a legitimate prophecy. While the objection is well taken, it does not invalidate the prophecy. How many other people in Jewish history have been declared King while riding the foal of a donkey? How many other times did the people shout out, ***"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"*** (Matthew 21:9 [RSV])

It was also prophesied that the Messiah would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Zechariah 11:12 [NKJV] says, ***"Then I said to them, 'If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.' So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver."***

Here we have a very precise figure of 30 pieces of silver paid for the betrayal of the Messiah. The Gospels record that Judas Iscariot was paid exactly 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus, and that he cast the pieces away: ***"And throwing down the pieces of silver in the Temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself"*** (Matthew 27:5 [RSV]).

We are also given the very precise prophecy that the betrayal money would be used to buy a potter's field. ***"And the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter' that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter"*** (Zechariah 11:13 [NKJV]).

Matthew 27:6-7 [NKJV] says, ***6. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood." 7. And they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.***

Matthew records that after Judas threw the money on the Temple floor in a moment of guilt, the chief priests were unable to put the funds back into the

treasury because it was blood money. So they used it to buy a potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.

David prophesied how the Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced, and Zechariah adds that the coming Messiah's side would also be pierced as well: **16. Yea, dogs are round about Me; a company of evildoers encircle Me; they have pierced My hands and feet – 17. I can count all My bones – they stare and gloat over Me** (Psalm 22:16-17 [RSV]). **“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on Him Whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over Him, as one weeps over a first-born”** (Zechariah 12:10 [RSV]).

Both prophecies were written hundreds of years before crucifixion was invented. It was an idea borrowed by the Romans from the Babylonians around 200 BC. Archeological evidence has confirmed that they would place the victim on a wooden cross, nailing each hand to the crossbeam and driving a nail into the side of each foot, just below the ankle bone. Death would usually take many hours – even days – ultimately the result not of the wounds, but of suffocation when the victim could no longer push himself up to let out his breath. Often the legs were broken to speed up the process. Because Jesus died so suddenly (at the exact time of the afternoon sacrifice in the Temple), a Roman soldier also slid a spear into his heart to make sure he was dead. A mixture of blood and water poured out, indicating that he had pierced the pericardium (John 19:34).

We are also told how the Messiah would be given vinegar to drink in Psalm 69:21 [RSV]: **“They gave Me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink.”**

This was written more than 900 years before Christ, yet it describes the scene at the cross where the soldiers soaked a sponge into a jar of wine vinegar, stuck it onto the tip of a long hyssop stalk and lifted it to Jesus' lips (John 19:29).

Those who crucified the Messiah would also cast lots for His clothing: **“they divide My garments among them, and for My raiment they cast lots”** (Psalm 22:18 [RSV]).

The Bible indicates that the Roman soldiers divided Jesus' clothing and cast lots to see what each would get (Luke 23:34).

There are many other prophecies about the Messiah, including His burial in the tomb of a rich man, the complete line of ancestors, His resurrection, and even His ascension into Heaven. And Jesus fulfilled every last one of them! We can trust that He is truly the Son of God, and that we can find salvation in Him!

Have you given your life into His hands?