

Reasons to Believe Your Bible - Prophetic Reasons

Sign Title: Prophetic Reasons to Believe Your Bible

January 23, 2011

If you are new, I would like to welcome you in the name of Christ. My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. This morning, we continue our teaching series entitled *Reasons to Believe Your Bible*. In this series, we are discovering solid reasons to trust the Bible is what it claims to be,... the word of God. This morning, we are looking at *prophetic* reasons to trust this book.

As you pass through the check out line at Wal-Mart, you can't help but read them... they are called the tabloids... the *National Enquirer*, the *Sun* and the *Globe*, just to name a few. They are newspapers that feature bold and ominous predictions about the future from famous psychics. These papers don't focus on reporting the news after it happens but they attempt to report the news before it happens.

Sometimes it looks like they get things right. For example, the front page of many tabloids claimed that the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York was predicted by the famous 16th century psychic Nostradamus. Is that true? Did Nostradamus see this tragedy coming centuries before it occurred?

I have always wondered, "How accurate are the tabloids?" I did a little research to find out. A study of psychics and their prophecies from 1975 to 1981 revealed the major psychics made 72 predictions, but only six were fulfilled. Two of those six were vague and another two were not surprising. Such as... 1) "the United States and Russia will remain world leaders" and 2) "there wouldn't be a world war." That isn't impressive to me.

The *People's Almanac*, in 1976, did a study of 25 top psychics; of their predictions, 92% were wrong. An accuracy rate of 8% does not give psychics a strong vote of confidence in anybody's book. In fact, in 1993, psychics missed every major new story, including Michael Jordan's retirement.

As for the Nostradamus prediction about the collapse of the twin towers, according to www.snopes.com, an urban legend information web site, the famous Nostradamus prediction the tabloids referred to wasn't written by him. It was written by a student named Neil Marshall in an essay for a class in college. The subject of the essay was how vague prophecies, such as Nostradamus', could be reinterpreted to apply to most anything. His sample prophecy was copied down and applied to the September 11th, tragedy. When it comes to the psychics, Nostradamus, and other predictors of the future, one thing is clear, their predictions usually aren't true, and they are often vague.

When it comes to the Bible, we find it also gives prophecies, but they are very different. Rather than vague prophecies, they are very specific, and the acceptable margin of error is not 92% but zero. Since the Bible's prophets are speaking for God, they must be right 100% of the time. In fact, claiming to speak a prophecy in God's name but not getting it right was a fast way to fit yourself with a pine overcoat.

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, **that same prophet shall die.**' And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?'— **when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken;**... Deuteronomy 18:20–22 (ESV)

This morning, we are taking a few minutes to look at prophecies in the Bible. First, we will look at some Old Testament prophecies then, we will look at the most prophesied event in the Bible, the birth, life and death of Jesus Christ.

Old Testament Prophecies

The Bible tells us God not only knows the future, but he orders and determines it. He knows the future of individuals and nations with complete accuracy. For instance, can a psychic predict who will be president 150 years from now? Not only that, but could a psychic also predict what would be the most important foreign policy decision of his career? There is not a psychic alive who would try to predict that, but in the Bible, those are the kind of predictions we find. Let me show you.

Cyrus - King of Persia

This first prediction is found in Isaiah 44, but before we look at the text, let me give you some background. Isaiah wrote from 700-680 B.C. At that time, Babylon couldn't hold its own on the world scene and it was just beginning to develop. Isaiah predicted this upstart nation would eventually surround Jerusalem and take the Jews captive. Approximately 100 years later, in 586 B.C., this is exactly what happened.

Not only did Isaiah predict that Babylon would conquer Jerusalem, but he went on to say that Babylon would be conquered by the Persians. Remember, when this prediction was made; Persia was a tiny nation barely in existence. Isaiah predicted she would become a world power and would conquer Babylon.

Isaiah even added that the king of Persia would allow the Jews exiled to Babylon a chance to return to Jerusalem. Everything happened just as Isaiah said.

Now comes something even more astonishing. Isaiah, who is speaking for God, actually gives the name of the king who would rule the Persian Empire and let the Jews return to Jerusalem! No wonder Isaiah repeatedly begins his prophecy with the phrase, “thus saith the Lord.” These are things only God could know!

who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited,’ and of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins’; who says to the deep, ‘Be dry; I will dry up your rivers’; *who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose’; saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’*” Isaiah 44:26–28 (ESV)

Cyrus is mentioned as the man who will let the Jews return to their land and rebuild Jerusalem. Isaiah names him and predicts this foreign policy decision over one hundred years before Cyrus is born! There is more!

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to *Cyrus*, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: “I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, *that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.*” Isaiah 45:1–3 (ESV)

Lets review the facts. Everyone agrees the founder of the Persian empire, Cyrus, ruled over the Persians from 559-530 B.C. and that during his reign, he conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.. Historians tell us he issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland in March of 538 B.C., just after his capture of Babylon.

Keep in mind the time Isaiah wrote was 700-680 B.C.. Even the junior high students can figure this one out. God spoke through Isaiah to name Cyrus and predict one of his most significant foreign policy decisions 100 years before Cyrus was born and 150 years before he became king of the land.

God also predicted, through the prophet Jeremiah, how long the Jews would be in exile in Babylon before he would raise up Cyrus to destroy Babylon and return the Jews to their land.

This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste. Jeremiah 25:11–12 (ESV)

The Jews of that day watched Isaiah's and Jeremiah's prophecies about Cyrus and Babylon unfold with amazing accuracy when Cyrus conquered Babylon and decreed the Jews could return to their land.

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Ezra 1:1–2 (ESV)

Why did God give these detailed prophecies? He wants us to know that no matter what hits us, no matter how devastating life becomes; he is in complete control, not just of our lives, but of the nations. He wants us to understand the scope of his sovereign authority and be comforted by it.

Tyre - A City Wiped Clean

To understand this story, you need to know a little about the city of Tyre. It was actually two cities. There was an island city, that was located 1/2 mile into

the ocean, and there was a coastal city which was over 20 miles long. Both of them were densely populated, resembling New York or Los Angeles today. Let's look at what God said about these cities through his prophet, Ezekiel in 587 B.C.

and her daughters on the mainland shall be killed by the sword... "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, and with horsemen and a host of many soldiers. He will kill with the sword your daughters on the mainland...Your stones and timber and soil they will cast into the midst of the waters... I will make you a bare rock. You shall be a place for the spreading of nets. You shall never be rebuilt, for I am the Lord; I have spoken, declares the Lord God. Ezekiel 26:6–14 (ESV)

Three years after Ezekiel's prophecy, Nebuchadnezzar attacked the coastal city. It took him 13 years to finally break through the massive fortifications. When he entered it, the city was sparsely populated because most in the coastal city escaped by boat to the Island city of Tyre.

Nebuchadnezzar slaughtered the remaining coastal inhabitants and destroyed the buildings to insure it couldn't be re-inhabited. For the next 240 years the coastal city of Tyre lay in ruin while the Island city prospered. God's prophecy appeared to have partially come true. The prophecy was only partially complete.

therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. They shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers, and I will scrape her soil from her and make her a bare rock. She shall be in the midst of the sea a place for the spreading of nets, for I have spoken, declares the Lord God. And she shall become plunder for the nations, Ezekiel 26:3–5 (ESV)

In 333 B.C., after conquering the Persians, Alexander the Great was on his way to Egypt and was forced to deal with the island city of Tyre. It would be unwise for him to leave such a formidable opponent with access to his rear flank.

Alexander attacked the city but realized his soldiers couldn't get close enough without being hit by rocks thrown from the city walls. He hit upon an idea to build a 200 foot wide, 1/2 mile long road from the mainland to the island. For material, he used the rubble of the coastal city, scraping the 20 mile long city clean as he pushed it into the sea, just like Ezekiel prophesied.

Alexander needed more than a road to conquer the city, he also needed ships. He pulled together parts of the navies of each of the nations he conquered. He took ships from Sidon, Byblos, Rhodes, Lycia and Cyprus, 220 warships in total. Now, three years after his first assault, with a road from the mainland to the island, and a vastly superior navy, he reengaged the island city and conquered it. Just as Ezekiel prophesied, many nations were brought against Tyre to destroy the city.

To insure the city's final destruction, Alexander crucified the remaining 2,000 men on the island and sold the 30,000 women and children into slavery. He then scraped the island clean, throwing the remains of the vast island city into the ocean, just as Ezekiel prophesied. Today there is a small village in Tyre, but the city of Tyre, the economic powerhouse of the ancient world, is just as Alexander the Great left it. Both cities are nothing more than bare rocks with a rubble causeway connecting them. They are a place that fishermen spread their nets. Only God could predict that massive city would literally be scraped clean into the sea.

Prophecies about Christ

The most predicted event in the entire Bible is the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. Let's look at some of these prophecies.

Born in Bethlehem

When the wise men asked Herod where the Christ was to be born, Herod went to the scribes. In Matthew 2:6, we see they *immediately* knew the answer because it was prophesied in the Old Testament.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2 (ESV)

Virgin Birth

That Jesus would be born of a virgin was prophesied in the Old Testament and we find it fulfilled in the New.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary... "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,... And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Luke 1:26–34 (ESV)

His Forerunner

The Bible predicts John the Baptist would pave the way for Jesus.

A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Isaiah 40:3 (ESV)

...the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance

for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’ Luke 3:2–4 (ESV)

Betrayed for 30 Pieces of Silver

Christ’s betrayal for thirty pieces of silver was prophesied.

Then I said to them, “If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter” — the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter. Zechariah 11:12–13 (ESV)

What do we find at the end of Christ’s life with Judas’ betrayal?

and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. Matthew 26:15 (ESV)

And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. Matthew 27:5 (ESV)

So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers. Matthew 27:7 (ESV)

His silence at his trial

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)

And Pilate again asked him, “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.” But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed. Mark 15:4–5 (ESV)

The piercing of his hands and feet

For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— Psalm 22:16 (ESV)

And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him,... Luke 23:33 (ESV)

The division of his clothes

they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. Psalm 22:18 (ESV)

And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. Matthew 27:35 (ESV)

Some other things prophesied about Christ in the Old Testament fulfilled by his life in the New Testament are:

- He was of the house of David.
- The wise men would present him gifts.
- Herod would kill the children of Bethlehem.
- His ministry would begin in Galilee.
- He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey.

Bible scholars have identified over 300 Old Testament prophecies about Christ in the Old Testament that were fulfilled by Christ's life in the New Testament. Remember, all these prophecies were written *at least* 400 years before Christ's birth.

What is the probability this happened by chance?

You might think there are a lot of people who could fulfill these prophecies. You are partially right. There are many people who could fulfill perhaps two or three of these prophecies. There were many born in Bethlehem. Some of them were accused of crimes and could have appeared before Pilate and remained silent in the face of their accusers. The problem is the statistical probability of someone fulfilling *all 300 prophecies*.

In the book Science Speaks, Peter Stoner graphically explains what the probabilities look like. The chance of one person fulfilling 8 of the prophecies is 1 in 10^{17} (That is a 1 with 17 zeros after it.) He illustrates it this way. If we were to take 10^{17} silver dollars, they would cover the entire state of Texas 2 feet deep.

Now mark one of these silver dollars with an “X” and mix the whole lot. Blindfold a man. Tell him he can go as far as he wishes, but he only has one chance to pick the right silver dollar. Those are the same odds of someone fulfilling just eight of the prophecies about Christ by chance. Remember, there are over 300.

Maybe you think Jesus intentionally painted himself into the Messiah prophecies by studying the Scriptures and trying to carefully fulfill the Messianic description. The problem with that thinking is the majority of the prophecies about Jesus involve things Jesus had absolutely no control over, like where he would be born, how he would die, what family line he would be born into, John’s heralding of his coming, his accusers reactions to him, what soldiers would do with his clothing after he died, the amount of money he would be betrayed for, that they would pierce his side with a spear, that they would decide not to break his legs while on the cross - a commonly done practice, that he would be laid in a rich man’s tomb. Those are just ten things he had absolutely no control over.

Believing Jesus arranged his life to fit what the Old Testament description of the Messiah takes a greater leap of faith than believing in the resurrection.

Let’s try a final analogy. Instead of using silver dollars over Texas, we need something much smaller. Let’s try one of the smallest particles known to man, an electron. If you counted 250 electrons a minute, it would only take 19 million years to count enough of them to create a line one inch long. To count enough to fill a square inch you would need 19 million x 19 million x 19 million years. I can’t do the math but how big of an area do you think we would need to cover with electrons to represent the odds of 1 person by chance fulfilling all 300

specific prophecies about Christ? The math whizzes can check me on this but I believe it is the odds of pulling the one specific electron out of a pool of them bigger than the state of Texas. Statistically, the possibility of anyone fulfilling all 300 prophecies about Jesus by chance, is called absolute zero.

If your mind is open to honestly consider this stuff, you can see God spoke many things in the Bible prophetically to help alleviate the doubts we often face about the truth of this book.

Conclusion

The next time you are in the check out line at Wal-Mart, and you see the tabloids with their predictions, you and I know the truth. They almost never come true. But we have in our hands a completely different book. A book where God invites us to test its predictions because he guarantees they will not fail.

The flawless fulfillment of God's word in the past will mean the flawless fulfillment of God's Word in the future.

The Bible says the same Christ, whose first coming was prophesied, will come again, separate the believers from the unbelievers, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. It is only our faith in Jesus Christ that will make the difference in that day.

You and I know that is true. It is... inevitable. It is Bible prophecy.

Benediction

God, thank you for giving us your Word. Thank you for giving specific and detailed prophecy in this book. Prophecy we have seen come true in history. Just as your words came true in the past, we know they will also come true in the future. Amen



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