FORETOLD

The Prophecies of Jesus, Fulfilled and Still to Come, and the Odds Against Chance



Written centuries before He came, fulfilled in one Man, and still unfolding

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Foretold

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Andrew Dominguez

Foretold: The Prophecies of Jesus, Fulfilled and Still to Come, and the Odds Against Chance

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Before You Begin

> *And having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, He was explaining to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*
>
> Luke 24:27 (SLB)

On the afternoon Jesus rose from the dead, two of His followers were walking home to a village called Emmaus. They were sad and confused. They had hoped Jesus was the One who would redeem Israel, and now He was dead. Then a stranger fell in step beside them and asked what they were talking about. They did not know it was Jesus.

I translated the Steadfast Literal Bible, and that work trained me to look closely at what the text actually says. When you lay out what the Old Testament predicted centuries ahead next to what happened in the life of Jesus, the precision is hard to dismiss as coincidence. I wrote this book for honest skeptics and believers who want to look at the facts. God told us ahead of time so that when it happened, we would know.

What did the risen Lord do with those two discouraged men? He did not show them His hands right away. He did not do a miracle. He opened the Old Testament and walked them through it, from Moses through all the prophets, showing them the things written about Himself. Later that night their hearts were still burning from it.

That is what this book tries to do. It walks through the Old Testament the way Jesus did on that road, and it shows the things written about Him, hundreds of years before He was born.

What You Will Find in This Book

The Old Testament was finished about four hundred years before Jesus was born. Yet it describes Him in detail. It says what family He would come from, what town He would be born in, and roughly when He would appear. It says He would be rejected by His own people, betrayed by a friend for thirty pieces of silver, pierced, numbered with criminals, buried with the rich, and raised from the dead. It also says He will come again, this time in glory, to rule from David's throne.

I have tried to do four things in these pages.

1. Show the prophecies Jesus has already fulfilled, in the order of His life, from His family line to His ascension.
2. Show the prophecies still waiting to be fulfilled when He comes again, taught from a pre-tribulation view of His return.
3. Show the odds against any one man fulfilling all of them by chance, with charts, and show exactly where every number comes from.
4. Answer the honest objections people raise, fairly and plainly.

How the Book Is Laid Out

Part One: How Prophecy Works explains why God told us ahead of time, how we know these words were written long before Jesus came, how the New Testament uses the Old, and which popular "prophecies" I left out of this book and why.

Part Two: Fulfilled at His First Coming follows Jesus' life from beginning to end and shows the prophecies He fulfilled at each step. Three chapters take a closer look at the most remarkable passages: Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and the history outside the Bible that confirms the events.

Part Three: Still to Come looks at the prophecies about His return: the Rapture of the church, the seven years of Tribulation, His coming in glory, His thousand-year reign, and the new heavens and new earth.

Part Four: The Odds works through the math. It starts with the famous figures from Peter Stoner, then does a recount with much more generous numbers, then answers the hard questions skeptics ask.

At the back you will find a master chart of the prophecies, a chart of the prophecies still to come, a page showing how every number in Part Four was figured, a list of words to know, and an index of the Bible passages used.

Every chapter ends with **Study Questions** for personal reflection or a small group.

A Word About the Numbers

Many books say that Jesus fulfilled "over three hundred prophecies." Some say more. I have not tried to reach a big number. I have counted only passages that the New Testament itself applies to Jesus, plus the main passages Christians have long read as being about the Messiah, and I have marked which ones are direct predictions and which ones are patterns (I explain the difference in Chapter 3). The case does not need a padded list. A short list of strong ones is enough.

That means some passages you may have seen in other books are not here. A few have a debated meaning, such as Zechariah 13:6. Some are true of Jesus but are not predictions, such as Job 19:25. Some rest on hidden codes or guessed meanings of names, and some come from outside the Bible. Others were counted twice in longer lists. I did not want to leave them out without telling you, so Chapter 4 goes through each kind, with examples, and explains why it did not make the list.

In the same way, the odds in Part Four are estimates. Nobody can measure the exact chance that a man would be born in Bethlehem or betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. What we can do is make honest, careful estimates, show our work, and lean in the skeptic's favor. When you do that, the answer is still far beyond any reasonable chance. I want you to be able to hand this book to a doubting friend and have every number stand up.

A Few Notes Before We Start

Scripture quotations in this book come from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). Words set in bold italics inside a quotation are words added in English to make the sentence read clearly. When I don't quote a

passage, I give the reference so you can read it for yourself, and I hope you will. Don't take my word for anything in this book. Open your Bible and check it, the way the Bereans did in Acts 17:11.

I capitalize the pronouns that refer to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (He, Him, His, You, Your) as a sign of reverence. Inside a Scripture quotation, I leave the capitals exactly as the translation prints them. That is why you will sometimes see "he" or "him" in a prophecy that Christians apply to Jesus. Inside quotations from other writers, I leave their words exactly as they wrote them.

Dates for Old Testament books are given as approximate. Scholars debate many of them. Where I give a date, I use the traditional date and, where it matters, I also give the latest date that serious scholars hold, so you can see that the point holds either way.

Why This Matters

Prophecy is not a puzzle for clever people. God gave it so that ordinary people could know who Jesus is and trust Him. Jesus said so Himself the night before He died.

> *And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe.*
> (John 14:29)

That is my prayer for you as you read. Not that you would be impressed by the numbers, but that you would believe.

Part One: How Prophecy Works

Chapter 1: Why God Told Us Ahead of Time

> *Remember former things from long ago, for I **am** God, and **there is** no other God, and **there is** none like Me, declaring the end from **the** beginning, and from antiquity what has not been done, saying, "My counsel will stand, and all My desire I will do,"*
>
> Isaiah 46:9-10 (SLB)

Anyone can make a prediction. The weatherman does it every night. Your brother-in-law does it every football season. Most predictions are guesses, and most guesses miss.

The God of the Bible does something no one else can do. He tells the end from the beginning. He says what will happen hundreds of years before it happens, names names, and gives places and details. Then He does exactly what He said.

That is the point of Isaiah 46. God is speaking to people surrounded by idols. The idols could not speak, could not see, and could not save. So God gave a test that no idol could pass: I tell you what is coming, and then it comes. No other god can do that.

Prophecy Is God's Signature

Think about how you know a letter is really from someone. You look at the handwriting. You look at the signature. You look for things only that person would know.

Fulfilled prophecy is God's signature on the Bible and on His Son. Only the One who rules history can write history before it happens. When a prophecy written centuries ahead comes true in detail, it tells us two things at once. It tells us God is real, and it tells us the message came from Him.

God said this plainly through Isaiah more than once.

> *The former things, look, have come, and new things I am telling; before they spring up I will make you hear **them**.* (Isaiah 42:9)

> *The former things I declared from then, and they went out from My mouth, and I made them heard; suddenly I acted, and they came. Because I knew that you **are** stubborn, and your neck **is** a sinew of iron, and your forehead bronze, I declared **them** to you from then; before **it** came I made **it** heard to you, lest you should say, "My idol did them, and my carved image and my molten image commanded them."* (Isaiah 48:3-5)

Notice the reason God gives in that last passage. He told them ahead of time so they could not say, "My idol did it." Prophecy takes away our excuses. When God says it first and does it later, we cannot give the credit to luck, to fate, or to some other power.

The Test of a True Prophet

God did not ask Israel to believe every man who claimed to speak for Him. He gave them a test. A true prophet's words come true. Every time.

> *And if you say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?" when the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the word does not happen and does not come, that **is** the word which the LORD has not spoken; with presumption the prophet has spoken it; you shall not be afraid of him.'* (Deuteronomy 18:21-22)

That is a hard test. A weatherman who is right seventy percent of the time keeps his job. A prophet who was right seventy percent of the time was a false prophet. One miss was enough.

Keep that standard in mind as you read this book. We are going to look at dozens of prophecies about Jesus, written by many different men over about a thousand years. If the Bible's prophets were guessing, we would expect a lot of misses. Instead we find the details lining up, one after another, in one Man.

Moses Promised a Prophet Like Himself

In the same chapter where God gave the test of a true prophet, Moses gave one of the earliest promises about the Messiah. God would raise up a Prophet like Moses, from among the Israelites, and the people must listen to Him.

> *A prophet from your midst, from your brothers, like me, the LORD your God will raise up for you; to him you shall listen* (Deuteronomy 18:15)

> *A prophet I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers, like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And it shall be **that** the man who does not listen to My words which he speaks in My name, I Myself will require **it** of him.* (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

For centuries Israel waited for that Prophet. In John's Gospel, when the priests asked John the Baptist who he was, one of their questions was, "Are you the Prophet?" (John 1:21). They knew someone special was coming. After Jesus fed the five thousand, the crowd said, "This is truly the Prophet who is coming into the world" (John 6:14). And after Pentecost, Peter stood in the temple and told the crowd plainly that Jesus was the Prophet Moses had promised (Acts 3:22-26).

What made Jesus like Moses? Moses was rescued as a baby when a king killed the Hebrew boys, and so was Jesus. Moses spoke with God face to face, and Jesus came from the Father's side. Moses gave God's law on a mountain, and Jesus taught on a mountain. Moses led God's people out of slavery and stood between God and the people, and Jesus does the same in a far greater way. Moses was the go-between of the old covenant, and Jesus is the go-between of the new one. Deuteronomy ends by saying no prophet had risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10). Israel was still waiting. Jesus is the One they were waiting for.

Why So Many Details?

You might ask why God gave so many prophecies about the Messiah. One or two would have been enough to get people's attention.

I see at least three reasons.

First, details protect against fakes. If the only prophecy was "a great leader will come," a thousand men could claim it. Every added detail narrows the field. Born in Bethlehem. From the family of David. Before the second temple was destroyed. Rejected by His own people. Pierced. Buried with the rich. Each detail closes the door on more pretenders, until only one Man fits.

Second, details build faith over time. God's people did not get all the prophecies at once. They came a few at a time over many centuries, like puzzle pieces. Each generation could see a little more of the picture. When Jesus came, the pieces snapped together.

Third, details leave us without excuse. God is not asking for blind faith. He has given evidence. A person may still choose not to believe, but it will not be because God did not speak clearly.

Prophecy Points to a Person

Here is the most important thing to understand about Bible prophecy. It is not mainly about dates, charts, or world events. It is about a Person. The whole Old Testament is leaning forward, waiting for Him.

Jesus said that about Himself several times. After His resurrection He told His disciples that everything written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to be fulfilled. Those were the three sections of the Hebrew Bible. He was saying the whole Old Testament points to Him.

> *And He said to them, "These **are** the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things which are written concerning Me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled."* (Luke 24:44)

On another day He told the religious leaders that they studied the Scriptures hoping to find eternal life in them, and missed the fact that the Scriptures were talking about Him.

> *You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they that testify concerning Me; and you are not willing to come to Me so that you may have life.* (John 5:39-40)

The apostle Peter said the same thing about the prophets. They wrote about the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow, and they searched hard to understand what person and what time the Spirit was pointing to.

> *Concerning this salvation, **the** prophets who prophesied of the grace toward you sought out and searched out diligently, searching into what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating, as He testified beforehand the sufferings for Christ and the glories after these.* (1 Peter 1:10-11)

Notice those two words: sufferings and glories. The prophets saw both. They saw a Messiah who would suffer and die, and they saw a Messiah who would reign in glory. Many people in Jesus' day only wanted the glory. They wanted a king who would throw out the Romans. They did not see that the suffering had to come first. That is why we need both Part Two and Part Three of this book. Jesus came the first time to suffer. He is coming again to reign.

Prophecy Was Given to Be Checked

Some religions ask you to accept a holy book just because a holy man said it was holy. The Bible does something different. It makes claims about history that can be checked. It says this will happen, here, to this kind of person, in this order. Then it invites you to look.

The early Christians did exactly that. When Paul preached in a synagogue, he did not just tell stories about Jesus. He opened the Scriptures and reasoned from them.

> *And according to the custom of Paul, he went in to them, and for three Sabbaths he was reasoning with them from the Scriptures, opening and setting forth that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from* ***the*** *dead, and that this is the Christ, Jesus, whom I proclaim to you.* (Acts 17:2-3)

And when the people of Berea heard Paul, they did not just take his word for it. They went home and checked the Scriptures every day to see if what he said was true. Luke calls them noble-minded for doing it (Acts 17:11).

That is what I am asking you to do. Do not believe anything in this book because I said it. Look up the verses. Check the dates. Look at the math. God is not afraid of honest questions.

What Comes Next

Before we look at the prophecies themselves, we need to answer the first question every honest skeptic asks: how do we know these words were written before Jesus came? If someone wrote them after the fact, they prove nothing. That is the subject of the next chapter.

Study Questions

1. Read Isaiah 46:9-10. What does God say makes Him different from every idol?
2. Why do you think God set such a hard test for His prophets in Deuteronomy 18:21-22? What would happen to a prophet today under that test?
3. In what ways was Jesus a Prophet like Moses? Which comparison stands out to you most?
4. Peter says the Spirit testified beforehand “the sufferings for Christ and the glories after these.” Why do you think so many people in Jesus’ day missed the sufferings?
5. The Bereans checked Paul’s teaching against the Scriptures. How can you do that with what you read and hear today?

Chapter 2: Written Long Before He Came

> *And we have the prophetic word **as** more sure, to which you do well taking heed, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and **the** morning star rises in your hearts*
>
> 2 Peter 1:19 (SLB)

A prediction only counts if it was made before the event. If I tell you on Monday who won Sunday's game, I am not a prophet. I am a reporter.

So the first question any honest person should ask about the prophecies of Jesus is this: were they really written before He was born? If Christians wrote them, or changed them, after Jesus lived, then they prove nothing.

This is not a question we have to answer by faith alone. We have hard evidence, and much of it comes from people who were not Christians at all.

When the Old Testament Was Written

The Old Testament was written over a long stretch of time. The books of Moses are the oldest part. The Psalms of David come from around 1000 B.C. Isaiah, Micah, Hosea, and Amos wrote in the 700s B.C. Jeremiah and Ezekiel wrote around the time Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Daniel was in Babylon in the 500s B.C. Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi wrote after the Jews came home from exile, with Malachi writing around 430 B.C.

Scholars argue about some of those dates. Some date parts of Isaiah, Zechariah, and especially Daniel later than the traditional dates. Here is the important point: even the latest dates that mainstream scholars hold for these books are still well before Jesus was born. The most extreme common view puts Daniel in the 160s B.C. That is still more than a century and a half before Jesus. Nobody serious argues that Isaiah 53 or Micah 5 or Psalm 22 were written after Jesus lived.

We know that because of two pieces of evidence that are hard to argue with: the Greek translation of the Old Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Greek Translation: The Septuagint

After Alexander the Great conquered the Middle East in the 300s B.C., Greek became the common language of the whole region. Many Jews, especially in Egypt, grew up speaking Greek and could not read Hebrew well. So Jewish scholars translated their Scriptures into Greek. That translation is called the Septuagint, from the Latin word for seventy, because of an old story that seventy or seventy-two scholars did the work.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica says the Torah, the five books of Moses, was translated into Greek near the middle of the 3rd century B.C., and that the rest of the Old Testament was translated in the 2nd century

B.C. That means a Greek copy of the Hebrew prophets was being read in synagogues around the Mediterranean world well over a hundred years before Jesus was born.

Why does that matter? Because a translation is a witness to the text it was made from. If the Greek translation made by Jews before Jesus already contains the prophecies, then Christians did not invent them. And the Septuagint does contain them: Isaiah 53, Micah 5:2, Psalm 22, Zechariah 9 and 12, and all the rest. In fact, when the New Testament writers quote the Old Testament, they often quote the Septuagint, because it was the Bible their Greek-speaking readers already had in their hands.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

In the winter of 1946 to 1947, a Bedouin shepherd looking for a lost goat threw a rock into a cave near the Dead Sea and heard a jar break. Inside the cave were ancient scrolls. Over the next ten years, more than nine hundred scrolls and fragments were found in eleven caves near a place called Qumran.

Among them are copies or fragments of every book of the Old Testament except Esther. Before this discovery, the oldest complete Hebrew copies of the Old Testament we had were from around A.D. 1000. The Dead Sea Scrolls pushed our evidence back about a thousand years.

The most famous scroll is the Great Isaiah Scroll. It is about twenty-four feet long and holds the whole book of Isaiah. The Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where it is kept, dates it to about 125 B.C. and says its 54 columns contain all 66 chapters of the Hebrew book of Isaiah. That includes Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6-7, and Isaiah 53, the clearest picture of the suffering Messiah in the whole Old Testament, sitting in a jar more than a century before Jesus was born.

> *And He **was** pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our peace **was** on Him, and by His wound **there** was healing for us.* (Isaiah 53:5)

Think about what that means. A Jewish scribe copied those words around 125 B.C. He had no idea who Jesus of Nazareth would be. He was not a Christian. There were no Christians. Yet the words he copied describe a Servant of God who would be pierced for the sins of others, and they describe Jesus.

The Text Did Not Change

The Dead Sea Scrolls also answered another question: did the text change over time? Some people imagine the Bible was like a game of telephone, with the words drifting further from the original every time someone copied it.

When scholars compared the Great Isaiah Scroll with the Hebrew text used a thousand years later, they found the two almost the same. Most differences are small things like spelling. None of them changes a single prophecy about the Messiah. The Jewish scribes who copied Scripture were famous for their care. They counted letters. They treated the text as holy. The scrolls showed that the care was real.

Witnesses Who Were Not Christians

There is another strong piece of evidence that the prophecies are older than Jesus. The people who kept them and copied them were Jews who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah.

Think about that. If Christians had made up these prophecies or changed them to fit Jesus, the Jewish community would have been the first to say so. They had their own copies. They had every reason to point out a fake. Instead, Jews and Christians have used the same Hebrew text of Isaiah 53, Micah 5, and Psalm 22 for two thousand years. They disagree about who the passages describe. They do not disagree about what the passages say.

The Old Testament Was Closed Before Jesus

One more point. Jewish tradition holds that prophecy in Israel stopped after Malachi. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus, who was not a Christian, wrote that the Jews had a fixed set of holy books and that the exact line of prophets ended in the time of the Persian king Artaxerxes, around the 400s B.C. (Against Apion 1.8). After that, he said, things were written, but they were not given the same trust.

So by the time Jesus was born, the Old Testament was finished. The last of the prophets had spoken roughly four hundred years earlier. The prophecies were on record, translated into Greek, copied by Jewish scribes, read in synagogues every Sabbath, and stored in caves by the Dead Sea. No one could change them to fit Jesus. Jesus had to fit them.

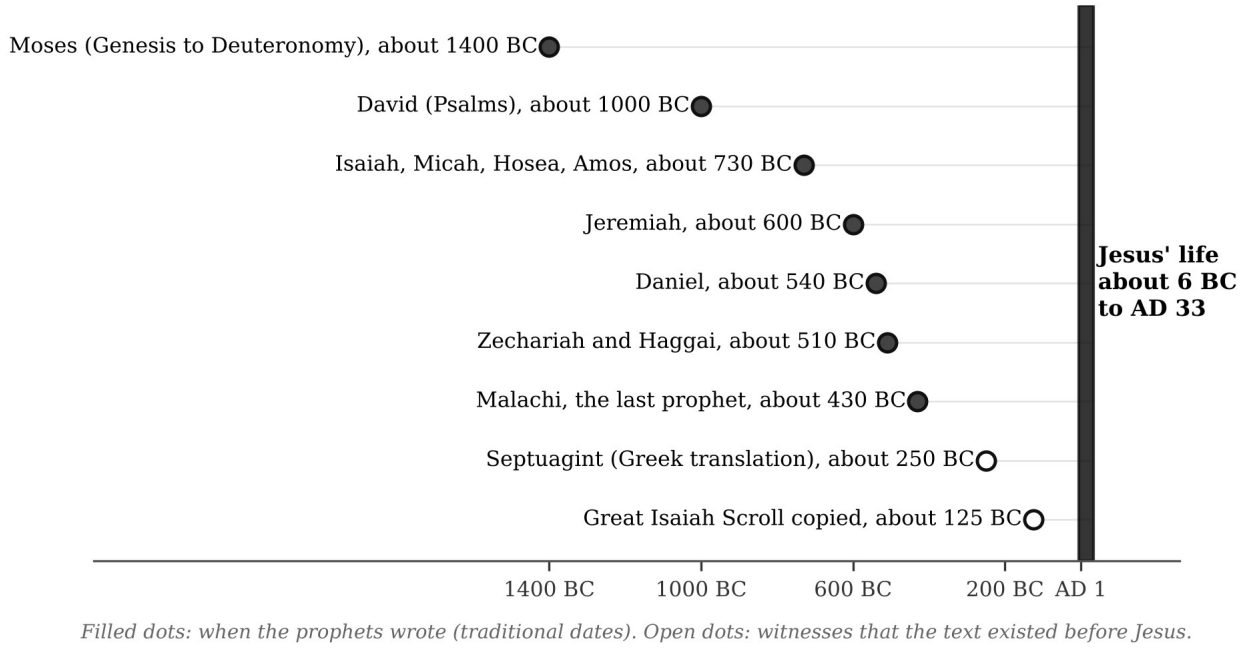


Figure 1. Written Long Before: When the Prophets Wrote, and When Jesus Came

What This Means for Us

Some Christians feel nervous when someone asks, “How do you know?” There is no need to be nervous. The evidence is on our side. We are not asking anyone to believe that the prophecies were written early just because we say so. We can point to the Greek translation made before Jesus, to the Dead Sea Scrolls dated before Jesus, and to the Jewish community that has kept the same text for two thousand years.

Peter said we have the prophetic word made more sure, and we do well to pay attention to it like a lamp shining in a dark place (2 Peter 1:19). A lamp in the dark is not a guess. It is something solid you can hold up and walk by.

Study Questions

1. Why is it important to show that the prophecies were written before Jesus was born? What would happen to the argument if they were not?
2. What is the Septuagint, and why does it help us date the prophecies?
3. The Great Isaiah Scroll is dated to about 125 B.C. Why is that date so important for Isaiah 53?
4. Why does it matter that the Jewish community, who did not accept Jesus as Messiah, kept and copied the same text?
5. Has someone ever asked you, “How do you know the Bible wasn’t changed?” How would you answer now?

Chapter 3: How to Read a Prophecy

> *Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.*
>
> Matthew 5:17 (SLB)

When the New Testament says a prophecy was "fulfilled," it does not always mean the same thing. If we miss that, we will get confused, and a skeptic will catch us in it. So before we go through the prophecies one by one, let's learn how to read them.

Three Kinds of Prophecy

I find it helpful to sort the prophecies about Jesus into three kinds. You will see these labels in the master chart in Appendix A.

Direct predictions. These are plain statements about the future. Micah 5:2 says a ruler of Israel would come out of Bethlehem. Zechariah 9:9 says Israel's King would come riding on a donkey. These are predictions in the simple sense. They say what will happen, and then it happens.

Patterns. The Bible's word for this is "type," from a Greek word meaning a mark or an impression. A pattern is a real person, event, or thing in the Old Testament that God shaped to point ahead to something greater. The Passover lamb is a pattern. It was a real lamb, killed in Egypt, whose blood saved Israel from death. It also pointed forward to Jesus, whom John the Baptist called the Lamb of God and whom Paul called our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jonah's three days in the fish is another pattern, and Jesus Himself said so (Matthew 12:40).

Prophecies with two horizons. Some prophecies had a near fulfillment in the prophet's own day and a fuller one in Christ. Isaiah 7:14 is a good example, and we will look at it closely in Chapter 6. Another is God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. It was partly fulfilled in Solomon, who built the temple. But it also promised a throne that would last forever, and no ordinary son of David could fulfill that.

What "Fulfilled" Means

The Greek word for "fulfill" means to fill something up, to bring it to its full measure. A direct prediction is fulfilled when the event happens. A pattern is fulfilled when the greater reality it pointed to arrives. A promise is fulfilled when God does what He said.

Here is the best example of why this matters. Matthew says that when Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod and later came back, it fulfilled Hosea 11:1.

> *and he was there until the death of Herod, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."* (Matthew 2:15)

Now read Hosea 11:1 in its own setting.

> *For Israel **was** a youth, and I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.* (Hosea 11:1)

In Hosea, "My son" is the nation of Israel, and the verse is looking back at the Exodus. Hosea was not making a prediction about a baby. Skeptics point to this and say Matthew pulled a verse out of context.

But Matthew knew exactly what Hosea meant. He was not misreading it. He was showing a pattern. Israel was God's son, called out of Egypt, tested in the wilderness, and Israel failed. Jesus is the true Son, who also came out of Egypt, was also tested in the wilderness, and did not fail. Read Matthew 2 through 4 and you will see Matthew walking through Israel's story with Jesus: out of Egypt, through the water (His baptism), into the wilderness for forty days, where He answered the devil three times with verses from Deuteronomy, the book of Israel's wilderness years. Jesus relived Israel's story and got it right. That is what Matthew means by "fulfilled."

So when you see a pattern fulfillment, do not treat it as a weak prediction. Treat it as what it is: a picture God painted in history that comes into full color in Jesus.

Prophecies Jesus Could Not Control

When we come to the odds in Part Four, another distinction will matter. Some prophecies were in Jesus' control as a man. He could choose to ride a donkey into Jerusalem. He could choose to stay silent before His accusers. A skeptic will say, "Of course He fulfilled those. He read the prophecies and acted them out."

That objection is fair as far as it goes, and we will answer it in Chapter 23. But notice how much it leaves out. No man can choose where he is born, or which family line he comes from, or when in history he lives. No man can arrange for a friend to betray him for exactly thirty pieces of silver, or for the money to be thrown down in the temple and then used to buy a potter's field. No man can make Roman soldiers gamble for his clothes, or keep them from breaking his legs, or make them pierce his side instead. No man can arrange his own burial in a rich man's tomb after he is dead. And no man can raise himself from the dead.

In Part Four, when I do my own conservative count, I will use only prophecies that were outside Jesus' control.

Gaps in Time

One more thing to watch for. Some prophecies jump across long stretches of time without warning, like a man looking at two mountain peaks from far away. From a distance they look close together. Only when you get closer do you see the valley between them.

Jesus showed us this Himself. In the synagogue at Nazareth, He stood up and read from Isaiah 61. But He stopped in the middle of a sentence.

> *"**The** Spirit of **the** Lord **is** upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to **the** poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken in heart, to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to **the** blind, to send away **the** oppressed in release, to proclaim **the** acceptable year of **the** Lord." And having rolled up the scroll, having given **it** back to the attendant, He sat down; and*

> *the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. Then He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears."* (Luke 4:18-21)

Isaiah's next words were "and a day of vengeance of our God" (Isaiah 61:2). Jesus did not read that line. Why? Because that part was not being fulfilled that day. He came the first time to proclaim the Lord's favorable year. The day of vengeance waits for His second coming. Two peaks, one sentence, and a valley of at least two thousand years between them.

We will see the same thing in Daniel 9, where the first sixty-nine of the seventy weeks lead up to the Messiah, and the seventieth week is still future. Holding this in mind will keep you from being confused when a prophecy seems to mix His first coming and His second.

Reading the Prophets Like the Apostles

The apostles did not invent this way of reading the Old Testament. They learned it from Jesus on the road to Emmaus and in the forty days after His resurrection (Luke 24:27, 45). They read the Old Testament as one story with one hero.

When we read the prophecies the way they did, we will see three things over and over:

- Real predictions that came true in plain, checkable detail.
- Real patterns in Israel's history that found their full meaning in Jesus.
- Real promises that are partly fulfilled now and will be completely fulfilled when He comes again.

With those tools in hand, we are ready to start at the very beginning, in the Garden of Eden.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between a direct prediction and a pattern? Give an example of each from this chapter.
2. Read Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:13-15. How would you explain to a skeptic what Matthew meant by "fulfilled"?
3. Why did Jesus stop reading Isaiah 61 in the middle of a sentence? What does that teach us about prophecy?
4. Which prophecies about Jesus could He not have arranged Himself? Why does that matter?
5. Jesus walked the two disciples through the whole Old Testament on the road to Emmaus. If you could hear one part of that conversation, which part would you choose, and why?

Chapter 4: The Prophecies I Left Out, and Why

> *Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures every day **to see** if these things might be so.*
>
> Acts 17:11 (SLB)

If you have read other books on this subject, you may notice that some passages you expected are not in this one. That is on purpose. Many popular lists say Jesus fulfilled "over three hundred prophecies." I would rather give you a shorter list that will hold up when a skeptic checks it than a longer list that falls apart at the first hard question. In this chapter I want to show you what I left out, and why.

The Four Tests I Used

Every passage in Appendix A and Appendix B had to pass four tests.

1. **The New Testament applies it to Jesus, or the passage plainly points to the Messiah in its own setting.** If neither the apostles nor the passage itself make the link, I did not make it either.
2. **It is a real prediction or a real pattern.** A general statement that happens to be true of Jesus is not the same thing as a prophecy about Him.
3. **It does not rest on a debated translation, a guessed meaning of a name, or a hidden code.** The prophets spoke in plain words that ordinary people could read.
4. **It is not counted twice.** One prophecy told in four Gospels is still one prophecy.

Here are the kinds of passages that did not pass, with an example of each.

Passages Whose Meaning Is Debated

Zechariah 13:6. This is the most famous one I left out, because Peter Stoner used it in his eight prophecies (Chapter 21).

> *And **one** will say to him, "What **are** these wounds between your hands?" And he will say, "**Those** which I was struck **with in** the house of those who love me."* (Zechariah 13:6)

Many Christians read the "wounds between your hands" as the nail wounds of Jesus. But read the verses just before it. Zechariah 13:2-5 is about false prophets in the day the LORD cleanses the land. They will be ashamed of their visions, and each one will deny that he was ever a prophet. Verse 6 seems to continue that picture: a man is asked about his wounds, which may be the cuts false prophets made on themselves (1 Kings 18:28), and he explains them away. Faithful Bible teachers disagree on this verse, and the New Testament never quotes it. So I kept Stoner's table exactly as he wrote it, with full credit, but I did not use this verse anywhere else, and I did not count it in my own recount.

Genesis 49:11. Jacob's blessing on Judah speaks of "binding his donkey to the vine." Some read this as a picture of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. It is a lovely thought, but the New Testament never links the two, and the verse reads most naturally as a picture of plenty in Judah's land, where vines are so

common that a man ties his donkey to one. I kept the verse before it, Genesis 49:10, because the scepter of Judah plainly points to a coming ruler.

Proverbs 30:4. Agur asks, "What is his name, and what is the name of his son? Surely you know!" Christians have often heard a hint of the Son of God in that question, and it is worth thinking about. But it is a question, not a prediction. It does not say anything will happen. So it is not on my list.

True of Jesus, but Not a Prediction

Job 19:25. "I know that my Redeemer lives." This is one of the great statements of faith in the Old Testament, and Christians rightly sing it about Jesus. But Job is speaking of his own hope in God. He is not predicting an event in the life of the Messiah, and the New Testament never quotes it that way. I believe Jesus is Job's Redeemer. I just do not count it as a fulfilled prophecy.

Psalm 91:11-12. The New Testament does quote this one in connection with Jesus. But look at who quotes it.

> *and says to Him, "If You are **the** Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it has been written, 'He will give orders to His angels concerning You, and on **their** hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'"* (Matthew 4:6)

It was the devil, tempting Jesus to throw Himself down from the temple. Psalm 91 is a promise of God's care for anyone who trusts Him. Satan twisted it into a dare. Jesus answered him with Deuteronomy 6:16. This is a good reminder that a verse quoted near Jesus' name is not always a prophecy about Him. We have to look at who is using it and how.

Counting the Same Thing Twice

Some long lists count each verse of Psalm 22 or Isaiah 53 as a separate prophecy, and some count the same event again for each Gospel that records it. I understand why. Those chapters really are full of detail. But it makes the total look larger than it is. In my lists, a single event counts once, even if several verses describe it or several Gospels record it. For example, the scattering of the disciples is one entry, though Matthew and Mark both tell it.

Hidden Meanings and Codes

The meanings of the names in Genesis 5. You may have seen a popular claim that the names from Adam to Noah, put together, spell out a message about the gospel. It is an appealing idea. But the meanings of several of those names are uncertain, and the "message" depends on picking one possible meaning for each name out of several. A prophecy that rests on guesses about word origins cannot carry weight with a skeptic, so I left it out.

Codes and hidden letter patterns. Some books claim to find secret messages in the Hebrew text by counting letters at fixed spacing. Whatever you think of that, it is not how the prophets spoke. Micah did not hide Bethlehem in a code. He named it. Every prophecy in this book was written in plain words that anyone could read and check.

The "gospel in the stars." Some teachers say the constellations were named to tell the story of Christ. The Bible does say the heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). But it never tells us what the constellations mean, and the case for this idea depends on meanings assigned to the star names long after the Bible was written. I left it out.

Predictions From Outside the Bible

People have pointed to sayings outside the Bible as predictions of Jesus: ancient oracles, Roman poems, and later writers such as Nostradamus. I have not used any of them. The prophets in this book claimed to speak for the LORD, and God gave Israel a test for anyone who made that claim.

> *when the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the word does not happen and does not come, that **is** the word which the LORD has not spoken; with presumption the prophet has spoken it; you shall not be afraid of him.'* (Deuteronomy 18:22)

The prophets of the Bible passed that test, and their words were copied and guarded for centuries before Jesus was born, as we saw in Chapter 2. Sayings from other sources do not have that kind of record, and many of them are so vague that they could fit almost anyone. They add nothing to the case.

Kept in the Book, but Left Out of the Odds

Two more groups are in this book, but I did not count them in the odds in Part Four.

Patterns. Passages like Hosea 11:1 ("Out of Egypt I called My Son") and the Passover lamb are real fulfillments, but of a different kind, as we saw in Chapter 3. They are marked "P" in Appendix A. Because a skeptic could say a pattern is only seen looking back, I did not count any of them in my recount.

Prophecies Jesus could have chosen to act out. Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey and staying silent before His accusers are true fulfillments, and they are in Part Two. But a man could choose to do those things on purpose, so I left them out of my recount in Chapter 22.

Why a Shorter List Is Stronger

Leaving these out does not weaken the case. It makes it stronger. When a skeptic finds one weak link in a long list, he often throws out the whole list. When every link has been tested, he has to deal with the evidence itself. After every passage in this chapter is set aside, we still have **91** prophecies fulfilled at His first coming and **30** still waiting for His return. That is more than enough.

The Bereans in this chapter's opening verse were praised because they checked what Paul said against the Scriptures. I want you to be able to do the same with this book.

Study Questions

1. Why might a shorter, carefully tested list of prophecies be more convincing than a list of three hundred?
2. Read Zechariah 13:2-6. Who do you think verse 6 is about? Why do you think the New Testament never quotes it?

3. Read Matthew 4:5-7. What does this teach about verses quoted near Jesus' name?

4. What is the difference between a prophecy and a true statement that happens to fit Jesus? Can you think of another example?

5. Read Deuteronomy 18:21-22. How does this test help us judge claims of prophecy today?

Part Two: Fulfilled at His First Coming

Chapter 5: The Promised Seed and the Royal Line

> *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law*
>
> Galatians 4:4 (SLB)

The first prophecy about the Messiah was spoken in the Garden of Eden, on the worst day in human history. Adam and Eve had just disobeyed God. Death had entered the world. And before God sent them out of the garden, He made a promise.

From that day on, the Old Testament narrows the search, one generation at a time. The Messiah would come from the human race, then from one family, then one nation, one tribe, one clan, and one household. By the time we reach the prophets, the field has been narrowed to one royal line out of all the families on earth.

In my lowest season, I had made choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. By every human measure, the damage looked permanent. God brought new life out of that ground. He held our marriage together, and on May 29, 2020, He gave me a new start free from alcohol. Isaiah 11:1 promised a shoot from the stump of Jesse. God specializes in bringing life where human hope has run out.

The Seed of the Woman

God spoke these words to the serpent, the devil, in front of Adam and Eve.

> *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you **on the** head, and you shall bruise him **on the** heel.* (Genesis 3:15)

Notice three things about this promise.

First, it speaks of the seed of the woman. In the Bible, family lines are almost always traced through the father. Here the promised One is called the woman's seed. Christians from the earliest centuries have seen in this a hint of the virgin birth, a Son with a human mother and no human father. Paul may have been thinking of it when he wrote that God sent His Son, "born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4).

Second, the promise speaks of one person, a "he," who would fight the serpent.

Third, it describes a battle with two wounds. The serpent would bruise His heel. He would bruise the serpent's head. A wound to the heel hurts, but you survive it. A wound to the head is fatal. At the cross, Satan struck Jesus, and Jesus died. But three days later He rose, and by His death He broke the devil's power.

> *Since therefore the children have shared in flesh and blood, He Himself also likewise partook of the same, so that through death He might render powerless the one who holds the power of death, that is, the devil* (Hebrews 2:14)

Christians have long called Genesis 3:15 the first gospel, the first good news in the Bible. Right at the moment sin entered the world, God promised a Rescuer.

The Family of Abraham

About two thousand years before Christ, God called a man named Abram out of the city of Ur and made him a promise. Through him, all the families of the earth would be blessed.

> *And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who disdains you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.* (Genesis 12:3)

After Abraham was willing to offer his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, God repeated the promise and tied it to Abraham's seed.

> *And all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed, because you have listened to My voice.* (Genesis 22:18)

The apostle Paul pointed out that the promise uses the word "seed" in the singular, pointing to one person.

> *Now to Abraham the promises were spoken, and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your seed," who is Christ.* (Galatians 3:16)

Matthew opens his Gospel by calling Jesus the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1). The blessing God promised to the whole world would come through one descendant of Abraham. Today, people from every continent worship the God of Abraham through Jesus Christ. The promise to a childless old man in the desert has come true on a scale no one in his day could have imagined.

Isaac, Not Ishmael

Abraham had more than one son. Ishmael was born first, to Hagar. Later he had six more sons by Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2). God said the promise would go through Isaac.

> *And God said to Abraham, "Let it not be bad in your eyes concerning the lad and concerning your maidservant. All that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice, for in Isaac seed will be called for you."* (Genesis 21:12)

Jacob, Not Esau

Isaac had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the firstborn, and by custom the promise should have gone through him. But God chose Jacob, and He repeated the promise to him.

> *And your seed shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out toward the west and toward the east and toward the north and toward the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the ground shall be blessed.* (Genesis 28:14)

In a vision recorded in Numbers 24, a pagan prophet named Balaam, hired to curse Israel, found that he could only bless them. He saw a star and a scepter coming from Jacob in the far future.

> *I see him, and not now; I observe him, and not near. A star will march forth from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel, and it will shatter the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of Seth.* (Numbers 24:17)

The Jewish people long read this as a prophecy of the Messiah. In fact, the leader of the Jewish revolt against Rome in A.D. 132 was given the name Bar Kokhba, "son of the star," because many believed he fulfilled this verse. He did not. Jesus did. He calls Himself the bright and morning star (Revelation 22:16).

The Tribe of Judah

Jacob had twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel. Near the end of his life, Jacob gathered them and spoke a blessing over each one. When he came to Judah, he said something he said to no other son.

> *The scepter will not depart from Judah, and the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him* ***will be*** *the obedience of peoples.* (Genesis 49:10)

The scepter is the symbol of a king. Judah would be the royal tribe, and the right to rule would not leave Judah until a person called Shiloh came, to whom the peoples would give their obedience. Jewish teachers in the centuries around Jesus read this verse as a reference to the Messiah. We will come back to this verse in Chapter 7, because it also tells us something about when He would come.

Jesus came from the tribe of Judah. The writer of Hebrews says it was evident (Hebrews 7:14), and in Revelation He is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

> *And one of the elders says to me, "Do not weep; look, the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome, to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."* (Revelation 5:5)

The House of Jesse and David

Judah was a large tribe. Isaiah narrowed it further, to the family of a man named Jesse from Bethlehem. Jesse's youngest son was David, the shepherd boy who became king.

> *And a shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.* (Isaiah 11:1)

Look at the picture Isaiah uses. A stump is what is left when a tree has been cut down. By the time Jesus was born, David's royal family had been cut down for about six hundred years. There had been no king from David's line since Babylon carried Zedekiah away in 586 B.C. The family tree looked dead. Joseph, a descendant of David, was a carpenter in a small town. Then a shoot came up from the stump.

God had made a covenant with David himself, about a thousand years before Christ.

> *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, and I will raise up your seed after you, who will come out from your inward parts, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me. When he commits iniquity, I will correct him with a rod of men and with strokes of the sons of mankind; and My steadfast love will not depart from*

> *him, as I removed **it** from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom will be established forever before you; your throne will be established forever.'* (2 Samuel 7:12-16)

Solomon, David's son, built the temple, and in that sense he fulfilled the first part of this promise. But Solomon died. His kingdom split after his death. About 350 years later Babylon ended David's line of kings. Yet God had said, three times in one passage, "forever." Either God failed, or the promise pointed to a Son of David who would never die.

The prophets understood it the second way. Jeremiah, writing as Jerusalem was about to fall, said God would raise up a righteous Branch for David, and His name would be "The LORD Our Righteousness."

> *Look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign **as** king, and He will act prudently, and He will do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell in security; and this **is** His name **by** which one will call Him: 'The LORD Our Righteousness.'* (Jeremiah 23:5-6)

The angel Gabriel told Mary that her Son would receive David's throne and reign forever.

> *He will be great and will be called Son of **the** Most High; and **the** Lord God will give Him the throne of David His father, and He will reign over the house of Jacob to the ages, and of His kingdom there will be no end.* (Luke 1:32-33)

Both Matthew and Luke give Jesus' family line back to David. Matthew traces it through Joseph, who was Jesus' legal father. Luke traces a different line through David's son Nathan. Many Bible teachers believe Luke's line is Mary's family, which would make Jesus a son of David by blood as well as by law. Either way, the New Testament writers all agree, and even Jesus' enemies never denied it. When blind men and crowds called Him "Son of David," the Pharisees objected to many things, but not to that.

The Curse on Jeconiah

There is a fascinating detail here that shows how carefully God worked. One of David's descendants, King Jeconiah (also called Coniah), was so wicked that God put a curse on his line. No descendant of his would sit on David's throne.

> *Thus says the LORD: "Write this man **down as** childless, a man **who** will not prosper in his days; for no man from his offspring will prosper, sitting on the throne of David and ruling again over Judah."* (Jeremiah 22:30)

Jeconiah is in Joseph's family line in Matthew 1:11-12. That means if Jesus had been Joseph's natural son, He could never have taken David's throne. Yet He needed to be Joseph's legal son to have the royal right. How could both be true? The virgin birth solved it. Jesus was Joseph's legal son and heir, with the royal right of David's line, but He was not Jeconiah's descendant by blood. Many Bible teachers have pointed this out. I find it one of the quiet wonders of Scripture. God had already closed one door, and then He opened the only way through it.

The Narrowing Funnel

Step back and look at what we have seen. The promised One would be:

1. A human being, the seed of a woman (Genesis 3:15).
2. A descendant of Abraham, out of all the nations (Genesis 12:3; 22:18).
3. A descendant of Isaac, not Ishmael or Abraham's other sons (Genesis 21:12).
4. A descendant of Jacob, not Esau (Genesis 28:14; Numbers 24:17).
5. From the tribe of Judah, out of twelve tribes (Genesis 49:10).
6. From the family of Jesse, out of all the families of Judah (Isaiah 11:1).
7. From the house of David, out of Jesse's eight sons (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Jeremiah 23:5).

Each step cuts the field down. By the end, out of every person who ever lived, only the descendants of one family qualify. Jesus came from that family.

I will be honest about one thing. A skeptic could say, "There were thousands of descendants of David in Jesus' day, so being one of them is not that remarkable." That is true. Family line alone does not prove anything. But it is the first filter. Anyone who fails it is out, no matter what else he does. And as we go, we will add filter after filter, each one cutting the field down further, until only one Man is left standing.

Study Questions

1. Read Genesis 3:15. What do you notice about who the promised One would be and what would happen to Him?
2. Why do you think God chose to work through one family line instead of announcing the Messiah all at once?
3. Read 2 Samuel 7:12-16 and count how many times God says "forever." How does Jesus fulfill a promise that Solomon could not?
4. Explain the Jeconiah problem in your own words. How does the virgin birth answer it?
5. Isaiah pictures David's family as a stump. Have you ever felt like a situation in your life was a dead stump? What does Isaiah 11:1 say to you?

Chapter 6: His Birth

> *And you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, **too** little to be among the clans of Judah, from you for Me **One** will go out to be ruler over Israel; and His goings out **are** from of old, from **the** days of antiquity.*
>
> Micah 5:2 (SLB)

Most people know the Christmas story. Fewer know how much of it was written down centuries before it happened. The mother, the town, the gifts, and even the grief that followed were all foretold.

Born of a Virgin

About 735 B.C., King Ahaz of Judah was terrified. Two kings to the north had joined forces to attack Jerusalem and replace him. God sent Isaiah to tell Ahaz not to be afraid, and even offered him a sign to prove it. Ahaz refused to ask for one. So Isaiah, speaking to the whole "house of David," said God would give a sign anyway.

> *Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Look, the virgin **is** pregnant and bearing a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.* (Isaiah 7:14)

This is one of the most debated verses in the Old Testament, so let's be careful and honest with it.

The Hebrew word Isaiah used is *almah*. It means a young woman of marriageable age. It is not the most technical Hebrew word for "virgin," and skeptics are right to point that out. But in every other place it appears in the Old Testament, it never clearly refers to a married woman, and in the culture of the time a young unmarried woman was assumed to be a virgin. More important, when Jewish scholars translated Isaiah into Greek about two hundred years before Jesus, they chose the Greek word *parthenos*, which plainly means "virgin." Those translators were not Christians. They read Isaiah 7:14 as speaking of a virgin long before Matthew did.

Some teachers believe the prophecy had a near fulfillment in Isaiah's own day, a child born as a sign to Ahaz, and a full fulfillment in Jesus. Others believe it pointed only to Jesus. Either way, Matthew tells us what the Holy Spirit meant by it.

> *And all this has come to pass so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Look, the virgin will have **a child** in **the** womb, and will bear a son, and they will call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."* (Matthew 1:22-23)

Notice the name: Immanuel, God with us. That is not a name you give to an ordinary baby. Two chapters later, Isaiah describes the same child again, and this time he leaves no doubt about who He is.

> *For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us; and the dominion is on His shoulder; and **one** has called His name Wonder, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of the dominion and of peace **there will be** no end, on the throne of*

> *David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness from now and until forever. The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this.* (Isaiah 9:6-7)

A child born. A son given. And His name is Mighty God and Father of Eternity. He sits on David's throne, and His kingdom never ends. Only one child in history fits that description: a true human baby who is also God Himself.

When the angel told Mary she would have a son, she asked the obvious question. How could that happen, since she had never been with a man? The angel answered that the Holy Spirit would come upon her.

> *Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I do not know a man?" And answering, the angel said to her, "**The** Holy Spirit will come upon you, and **the** power of **the** Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the holy **One** being born of you will be called Son of God."* (Luke 1:34-35)

I will say this plainly. The virgin birth is a miracle. No odds can be put on it, because it is not something that happens by chance. In Part Four, I will not count it in the math. But it matters deeply. It is how the eternal Son of God became a man without ceasing to be God, and how He came into the world without inheriting Adam's sin.

Born in Bethlehem

About the same time Isaiah was writing, a prophet named Micah from the small town of Moresheth named the very town where the Messiah would be born.

> *And you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, **too** little to be among the clans of Judah, from you for Me **One** will go out to be ruler over Israel; and His goings out **are** from of old, from **the** days of antiquity.* (Micah 5:2)

There were two towns called Bethlehem in Israel. One was in the territory of Zebulun, up north (Joshua 19:15). Micah specified Bethlehem Ephrathah, the small town in Judah where David was born. It was not a city of any importance. Micah himself says it was too small to count among the clans of Judah.

Notice also the last line. This ruler's "goings out are from of old, from the days of antiquity." The One born in Bethlehem would not begin in Bethlehem. He existed long before. A baby born in a small town, who had been going out since eternity past. That fits only Jesus, the eternal Son who took on flesh.

The Jewish leaders in Jesus' day knew this prophecy well. When the wise men came to Herod asking where the King of the Jews was born, Herod called the chief priests and scribes, and they answered without hesitation.

> *And having gathered together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he was inquiring of them where the Christ is born. And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it has been written through the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will go forth **One** leading, who will shepherd My people Israel.'"* (Matthew 2:4-6)

The common people knew it too. Later in Jesus' ministry, some in the crowd argued that He could not be the Messiah because they thought He came from Galilee, and the Christ had to come from Bethlehem (John 7:42). They had the prophecy right. They just did not know where Jesus had been born.

Here is what makes the Bethlehem prophecy so striking. Mary and Joseph did not live in Bethlehem. They lived in Nazareth, about seventy miles north. Mary was due to give birth any day. What brought them to Bethlehem at exactly the right moment? An order from the most powerful man in the world.

> *Now it came to pass in those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus for all the world to be registered. This registration first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. And all were going to be registered, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of* ***the*** *city of Nazareth, to Judea, to* ***the*** *city of David which is called Bethlehem, because of his being of* ***the*** *house and family of David* (Luke 2:1-4)

Caesar Augustus, sitting in Rome, never heard of Micah. He wanted a census for taxes. Yet God used his decree to move a carpenter and his pregnant wife to the exact town named seven hundred years earlier. Jesus did not arrange that. Neither did Mary or Joseph. That is one of the reasons Bethlehem is the first prophecy in Peter Stoner's list, and in mine, when we get to the odds.

Gifts From Kings of the Nations

The psalms and the prophets said the Messiah would receive gifts and worship from foreign kings and nations.

> *The kings of Tarshish and of* ***the*** *coastlands will render tribute; the kings of Sheba and Seba will bring near a gift. And let all kings bow down to him; all nations will serve him.* (Psalm 72:10-11)

> *A multitude of camels will cover you, young camels of Midian and Ephah; all of them will come from Sheba; they will carry gold and frankincense, and they will bring good news of the praises of the LORD.* (Isaiah 60:6)

When the wise men came from the east, they brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). Matthew does not say this fulfilled a prophecy, and the wise men were probably not kings in the way we picture them. So I treat this as a first taste of something bigger rather than a full fulfillment. Psalm 72 and Isaiah 60 look ahead to a day when all nations will honor the Messiah. The wise men, Gentiles from far away who came to worship the Jewish King, were the first of many.

The Star

Remember Balaam's prophecy from Chapter 5: "A star will march forth from Jacob" (Numbers 24:17). The wise men said they had seen His star in the east (Matthew 2:2). Matthew does not quote Numbers 24, and I do not want to claim more than the Bible says. But it is worth noticing that a star announced the birth of the One whom Balaam saw as a star rising out of Jacob.

Weeping in Ramah

The joy of Christmas had a dark side. When Herod realized the wise men had gone home without telling him where the child was, he sent soldiers to kill every boy in Bethlehem two years old and under. Matthew links this horror to a verse in Jeremiah.

> *Thus says the LORD: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping of bitterness; Rachel is weeping over her sons; she refuses to be comforted over her sons, because they are not.* (Jeremiah 31:15)

> *Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping **for** her children; and she was not willing to be comforted, because they are no more."* (Matthew 2:17-18)

In Jeremiah, Rachel, the mother of Israel, is pictured weeping as her children are carried into exile in Babylon. Ramah was the place where the captives were gathered before being marched away (Jeremiah 40:1). Rachel was buried near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19). So when the mothers of Bethlehem wept for their murdered sons, Matthew heard Rachel weeping again. This is a pattern fulfillment. The grief of the exile came back in the grief of Bethlehem.

But read the next verses in Jeremiah 31. Right after Rachel weeps, God tells her to stop crying, because her children will come back, and then He promises a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:16-17, 31-34). The baby who escaped Herod's soldiers would grow up to bring that new covenant in His own blood (Luke 22:20). Even in the darkest part of the Christmas story, God was keeping His promise.

Out of Egypt and Called a Nazarene

We looked at Hosea 11:1 in Chapter 3. Joseph took Mary and the baby to Egypt to escape Herod, and when Herod died, they came back. Matthew sees in this Jesus reliving the story of Israel, God's son called out of Egypt.

After they returned, the family settled in Nazareth, and Matthew adds one more note.

> *and having come, he dwelt in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, that "He will be called a Nazarene."* (Matthew 2:23)

No Old Testament verse says those exact words, and Matthew does not say "the prophet" but "the prophets," plural. He seems to be summing up a theme rather than quoting a line. There are two common explanations, and both may be true. First, the Hebrew word for the "branch" in Isaiah 11:1 is *netzer*, which sounds like Nazareth. Second, Nazareth was a small, looked-down-on town. When Nathanael heard where Jesus came from, he said, "Can any good thing be out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). The prophets said the Messiah would be despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3). Growing up in a town people sneered at was part of that.

The Son Who Is Called God

The child born in Bethlehem was no ordinary king. The letter to the Hebrews gathers several psalms to show who He is. Psalm 45, a royal wedding song, speaks to the King and calls Him God.

> *Your throne, God, **is** forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness **is** the scepter of Your kingdom.*
> (Psalm 45:6)

Hebrews 1:8-9 says these words are spoken "to the Son." In the same chapter, Hebrews applies Psalm 102:25-27 to Him as well: the One who laid the foundations of the earth, who stays the same while the heavens wear out like clothing (Hebrews 1:10-12). And Hebrews 10:5-7 hears the Son speaking in Psalm 40 as He comes into the world.

> *Therefore, coming into the world, He says, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You prepared for Me; in burnt offerings and **offerings** for sin You did not delight. Then I said, 'Look, I have come (in **the** scroll of **the** book it has been written of Me) to do Your will, O God.'"*
> (Hebrews 10:5-7)

The Old Testament did not only say where the Messiah would be born. It said who He would be: God Himself, the Creator, coming in a body prepared for Him to do the Father's will. Even His authority was pictured ahead of time. Isaiah 22:22 speaks of a faithful steward given "the key of the house of David," who opens and no one shuts. Jesus takes that picture for Himself in Revelation 3:7, as "the One who has the key of David."

What the Birth Prophecies Show

Put the pieces of His birth together. The Messiah would be:

- Born of a virgin, a child who is also Mighty God (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6).
- Born in Bethlehem of Judah, not the other Bethlehem, though His family lived far away (Micah 5:2).
- One whose origins go back to eternity (Micah 5:2).
- Honored by Gentiles who brought gifts (Psalm 72:10-11; Isaiah 60:6).
- Surrounded by grief as children were killed (Jeremiah 31:15).
- Called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1).

The birth of Jesus was not an accident of history. It was the opening move of a plan God had announced for centuries.

Study Questions

1. Read Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 9:6-7 together. What does the second passage add to our understanding of the child in the first?
2. Why is it significant that Jewish translators chose the Greek word for "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 two centuries before Jesus?
3. Micah 5:2 says the ruler's "goings out are from of old." What does this tell us about who the Messiah is?
4. How did God use Caesar Augustus to fulfill Micah's prophecy? What does that tell you about God's control over world events?

5. Even in Herod's cruelty, God was at work. Where have you seen God bring good out of something terrible?

Chapter 7: The Clock God Set

> *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law*
>
> Galatians 4:4 (SLB)

It is one thing to say where the Messiah would be born and what family He would come from. It is something else to say when He would come. Yet the Old Testament does that too. Three separate lines of prophecy point to the same window of time: after the Jews returned from Babylon, while the second temple was still standing, and before the city and the temple were destroyed. That window closed in A.D. 70. If the Messiah has not come by then, the prophecies failed. If He did come, He came in the first century.

Before the Scepter Departs

We met Genesis 49:10 in Chapter 5. Here it is again.

> *The scepter will not depart from Judah, and the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him* ***will be*** *the obedience of peoples.* (Genesis 49:10)

The scepter and the ruler's staff stand for the right to rule and to make law. Jacob said that right would stay with Judah until Shiloh came. "Shiloh" is a hard word to translate. Jewish teachers in ancient times, in the Aramaic paraphrases of the Bible called the Targums, took it as a reference to the Messiah. The point of the verse is that Judah would keep some kind of ruling authority until the Messiah arrived.

Judah's kings ended with the exile to Babylon, but the people of Judah kept a measure of self-rule. After the return from Babylon, they were governed by their own leaders under Persian, Greek, and then Roman rule, with their own council, the Sanhedrin, applying the law. That self-rule was steadily stripped away under the Romans in the first century, and after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Jewish nation lost its land and its government for nearly nineteen hundred years.

I want to be careful here. Historians argue about exactly when Judah's authority ended, and some popular books make claims about this verse that I could not confirm, so I have left them out. What we can say is this: Genesis 49:10 points to a Messiah who would come before Judah's ruling authority was gone. By any measure, that authority was gone by the end of the first century. Jesus came in time.

The Glory of the Second Temple

After the Jews came back from Babylon around 538 B.C., they started rebuilding the temple that Babylon had destroyed. The new temple was a poor copy of Solomon's. The old men who remembered the first temple wept when they saw the foundation of the second one (Ezra 3:12). So God sent the prophet Haggai with a promise.

> *Great will be the glory of this house, the latter more than the former, says the LORD of armies; and in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of armies.'* (Haggai 2:9)

How could this plain little temple have more glory than Solomon's, which was covered in gold? Herod the Great did enlarge and beautify it in Jesus' day, but no amount of stone and gold could make it greater than the temple where God's glory cloud had filled the house (1 Kings 8:10-11). The second temple's greater glory was this: God Himself, in the person of His Son, walked into it. Jesus was presented there as a baby (Luke 2:22-32), taught there as a boy (Luke 2:46), and taught and healed there as a man.

About a century after Haggai, Malachi gave a similar promise.

> *Look, I am sending My messenger, and he will clear a way before Me; and suddenly the Lord whom you are seeking will come to His temple, and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight; look, He is coming, says the LORD of armies.* (Malachi 3:1)

The Lord would come to His temple. That means the temple had to be standing when He came. The Romans destroyed the second temple in A.D. 70, and it has never been rebuilt. If the Messiah has not yet come, Haggai and Malachi made promises that can no longer be kept, at least not about the temple they were talking about. Jesus came to that temple.

Daniel's Seventy Weeks

The most precise time prophecy in the Bible is in Daniel 9. Daniel was an old man in Babylon. He had been reading Jeremiah and understood that the seventy years of exile were almost over (Daniel 9:2). He prayed, confessing his people's sins and asking God to restore Jerusalem. While he was still praying, the angel Gabriel came with an answer that reached far beyond the end of the exile.

> *Seventy sevens have been decreed on your people and on your holy city, to put an end to the transgression, and to complete sin, and to atone for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophet, and to anoint a holy of holies. And you shall know and gain insight: from the going forth of* ***the*** *word to restore and to build Jerusalem until an anointed one, a prince,* ***shall be*** *seven sevens and sixty-two sevens; it will again be built, plaza and moat, even in the distress of the times. And after the sixty-two sevens an anointed one will be cut off, and* ***there will be*** *nothing for him; and the people of a prince who is coming will destroy the city and the sanctuary; and its end* ***will be*** *with the flood, and until* ***the*** *end* ***there will be*** *war; desolations* ***are*** *determined. And he will make a covenant strong for the many* ***for*** *one seven; and* ***in*** *the middle of the seven he will cause sacrifice and grain offering to cease; and on a wing of abominations* ***will be*** *one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, and what has been decided will be poured out on the one who is desolate.*
> (Daniel 9:24-27)

Let me explain this one step at a time.

"Seventy sevens." The Hebrew says "seventy sevens." Older translations say "seventy weeks." A "seven" is a unit of seven, like a dozen is a unit of twelve. Daniel had just been thinking about years, the seventy years of exile, so most interpreters understand these as sevens of years. Seventy sevens is 490 years.

The starting point. The countdown starts "from the going forth of the word to restore and to build Jerusalem." Several decrees in the Persian period have been suggested. The one that fits best is the decree of the Persian king Artaxerxes in the twentieth year of his reign, giving Nehemiah permission to rebuild

the city and its walls (Nehemiah 2:1-8). Earlier decrees focused on the temple. This one was about the city.

Sixty-nine sevens to the Messiah. Gabriel splits the first part into seven sevens (49 years) and sixty-two sevens (434 years). That is 69 sevens, or 483 years, "until an anointed one, a prince." The Hebrew word for "anointed one" is *mashiach*, Messiah.

Then He is cut off. After the sixty-two sevens, the Anointed One would be "cut off, and there will be nothing for him." "Cut off" is the language of death, often death as a judgment. The Messiah would come and then be killed, apparently with nothing to show for it.

Then the city and temple are destroyed. After the Messiah is cut off, "the people of a prince who is coming will destroy the city and the sanctuary." That happened in A.D. 70, when the Roman army under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. Notice the order. The Messiah comes, then He is killed, then the city and temple are destroyed. Daniel's prophecy requires the Messiah to have come and died before A.D. 70.

Counting the Days

Can we count the 483 years exactly? Two well-known Bible scholars have tried. Their calculations differ in the details, and I want to show you both honestly.

Both use what is often called a prophetic year of 360 days. Ancient calendars commonly used 30-day months, and the book of Revelation counts the same period as 42 months and as 1,260 days (Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6; 13:5), which works out to 30 days a month and 360 days a year. Sixty-nine sevens of 360-day years is 69 times 7 times 360, or 173,880 days.

- **Sir Robert Anderson**, a British police official and Bible teacher, published his count in *The Coming Prince* in 1894. He dated Artaxerxes' decree to March 14, 445 B.C., and counted forward to the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem, which he dated to Sunday, April 6, A.D. 32. By his reckoning, the interval was 173,880 days to the day.
- **Harold Hoehner**, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, revised the count in *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* in 1977. Using newer research on Persian and Jewish calendars, he dated the decree to Nisan 1 (March 5), 444 B.C., and the triumphal entry to March 30, A.D. 33, with the crucifixion on Friday, April 3, A.D. 33. His count also comes to 173,880 days.

These two counts disagree about the starting year and the year of the cross. Other scholars have proposed still other starting points and methods. I am not asking you to stake your faith on any one calendar. But here is what is not in dispute: by any reasonable starting point in the Persian period, 483 years lands in the early first century A.D., and the city and temple fell in A.D. 70. Daniel put the Messiah's coming and death in exactly the window when Jesus came and died.



Figure 2. Daniel's Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:24-27)

The Seventieth Week

What about the last seven, the seventieth week? Gabriel describes it in verse 27. A coming prince "will make a covenant strong for the many for one seven," and in the middle of that seven he will stop the sacrifices and set up an abomination that makes desolate.

Notice that this prince is not the Messiah. He is the "prince who is coming" from the people who destroy the city, the Romans. Notice also that there is a gap. The Messiah is cut off after the sixty-ninth week, then the city is destroyed, and "until the end there will be war." Only then do we read about the seventieth week.

Jesus Himself put the abomination of desolation in the future, at the end of the age, right before His return (Matthew 24:15, 21, 29-30). So the seventieth week has not happened yet. Remember the two mountain peaks from Chapter 3. Sixty-nine weeks led to the first coming of Christ. Then the clock stopped. The seventieth week, the seven years of Tribulation, is still ahead, and it leads to His second coming. We will come back to it in Part Three.

Why the Timing Matters

Many Jewish teachers and families in the first century were expecting the Messiah. Luke tells us that Simeon and Anna were waiting for Him in the temple (Luke 2:25-38). The crowds asked John the Baptist if he was the Christ (Luke 3:15). Several men claimed to be deliverers in those years, and some led revolts against Rome. The Bible itself names a few (Acts 5:36-37; 21:38). They expected someone because the time was right.

The timing prophecies leave us with a hard question. If the Messiah had to come while the second temple stood, and before Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70, then either He came in the first century or the prophecies failed. The only Man in that window whose life fits the rest of the prophecies is Jesus of Nazareth.

Study Questions

1. Read Haggai 2:9 and Malachi 3:1. Why do these prophecies require the Messiah to come before A.D. 70?
2. Explain Daniel 9:24-27 in your own words. What are the four main events in order?
3. Why is it significant that the Messiah is “cut off” before the city and temple are destroyed?
4. Anderson and Hoehner count the days differently but reach the same conclusion. Why is it wise to rest on the main point rather than on one exact date?
5. Simeon and Anna were waiting for the Messiah. What does it look like for a Christian today to wait well for His return?

Chapter 8: The Messenger and the Ministry

> *The Spirit of the Lord GOD **is** on Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to **the** humble; He has sent Me to bind up the broken of heart, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to **those who are** bound, release*
>
> Isaiah 61:1 (SLB)

For about thirty years, Jesus lived quietly in Nazareth. Then, around A.D. 26 to 29, two things happened almost at once. A wild preacher appeared in the Judean desert, and Jesus came to be baptized by him. Both of those events were foretold.

When I walked into my first 12-step meeting on May 29, 2020, I was drunk, and my wife waited in the truck. I sat there weeping, listening to everyone, and I felt like a bruised reed ready to snap. I expected rejection. Instead I found a Savior who did not crush me, but restored me one day at a time. Isaiah 42:3 describes the Jesus I met in my brokenness.

A Voice in the Wilderness

Isaiah 40 opens the second half of Isaiah with comfort for God's people. Then it describes a voice calling out to prepare a road for God Himself.

> *A voice **is** calling, "In the wilderness clear the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert plain a highway for our God."* (Isaiah 40:3)

Kings in the ancient world sent workers ahead of them to fix the roads, fill the potholes, and straighten the curves before the royal procession came through. Isaiah says someone would prepare the road for the LORD, and he uses God's own name. The One coming after the messenger is God.

Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, picked up the same idea.

> *Look, I am sending My messenger, and he will clear a way before Me; and suddenly the Lord whom you are seeking will come to His temple, and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight; look, He is coming, says the LORD of armies.* (Malachi 3:1)

And then in the very last words of the Old Testament, Malachi named the messenger.

> *Look, I am sending to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And he will turn back the heart of fathers to sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land **with** a devoted destruction.* (Malachi 4:5-6)

Then the prophets went silent for about four hundred years.

When the silence broke, it broke with John the Baptist. Before John was born, the angel told his father Zechariah that John would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). John dressed like Elijah, in camel's hair with a leather belt (Matthew 3:4; 2 Kings 1:8). He preached in the wilderness. He called the whole nation to repent and get ready, because the King was coming.

> *And in those days comes John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." For this is the **one** who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "**The** voice of **one** crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of **the** Lord; make His paths straight.'"* (Matthew 3:1-3)

Jesus Himself said John was the messenger of Malachi 3:1 (Matthew 11:10), and that in a real sense Elijah had already come in John (Matthew 17:11-13). Jesus also said Elijah "indeed comes first, and will restore all things," which many teachers take to mean that Malachi 4:5 will have a further fulfillment before the great and terrible day of the LORD at His second coming. Either way, the forerunner came first, and the Messiah came right behind him.

This is the second prophecy in Peter Stoner's list. Many men in history have had someone who went ahead of them. But a prophet-like figure in the wilderness who calls the nation to prepare for the Lord, followed immediately by a Man who claims to be that Lord, is something else. No one but Jesus fits.

Anointed by the Spirit

The word Messiah, and its Greek form Christ, both mean "anointed one." In Israel, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil when they took office. Isaiah said the Messiah would be anointed with the Spirit of God Himself.

> *And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, **the** spirit of wisdom and understanding, **the** spirit of counsel and might, **the** spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.* (Isaiah 11:2)

> *Look, My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen one, **in whom** My soul is pleased; I have put My Spirit on Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out, and He will not lift up, and He will not make His voice heard in the street. A crushed reed He will not break, and a dim wick He will not extinguish; He will bring forth justice in truth.* (Isaiah 42:1-3)

At Jesus' baptism, the heavens opened, the Spirit came down on Him like a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven.

> *And having been baptized, Jesus immediately went up from the water; and look, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him. And look, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My Son, the beloved, in whom I was well pleased."* (Matthew 3:16-17)

Listen to the Father's words. "This is My Son" echoes Psalm 2:7, where God says to His anointed King, "You are My Son." "In whom I was well pleased" echoes Isaiah 42:1, about the Servant "in whom My soul is pleased." In one sentence, the Father pointed to two prophecies and said, "This is the One."

The Sermon in Nazareth

We looked at this scene in Chapter 3. Soon after His baptism, Jesus went back to Nazareth and stood up to read in the synagogue. He found Isaiah 61, read it, sat down, and said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). That is about as plain a claim as a man can make. He was saying, "I am the Anointed One Isaiah wrote about."

> *The Spirit of the Lord GOD **is** on Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to **the** humble; He has sent Me to bind up the broken of heart, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to **those who are** bound, release* (Isaiah 61:1)

A Light in Galilee

Most people in Judea looked down on Galilee. It was far from Jerusalem, and many Gentiles lived there. It was also the first part of Israel to be overrun by the Assyrians in the 700s B.C. Yet Isaiah said that the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, "Galilee of the nations," would see a great light.

> *For **there will be** no gloom for her who **was** in distress. As **at** the former time He treated with contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, so at the latter **time** He will make glorious the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walk in the darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, a light has shone on them.* (Isaiah 9:1-2)

Jesus did most of His public ministry in Galilee, based in the town of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, in the old tribal land of Zebulun and Naphtali. Matthew saw the connection.

> *And having left Nazareth, having come, He dwelt in Capernaum, which **is** by the sea, in **the** territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, **the** way of **the** sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those sitting in **the** region and shadow of death, light has dawned on them."* (Matthew 4:13-16)

The same Isaiah passage that describes this light in Galilee goes on, a few verses later, to describe the child who is Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6-7). The light that shone in Galilee was the Son of God Himself.

The Blind See and the Lame Walk

Isaiah described the day when God would come to save His people. Wonderful things would happen to human bodies.

> *Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like the deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy; for waters will burst forth in the wilderness, and torrents in the desert plain.* (Isaiah 35:5-6)

When John the Baptist was in prison, he began to have doubts. He sent messengers to ask Jesus, "Are You the One who is coming, or are we to look for another?" Jesus did not give a long speech. He pointed to Isaiah 35 and 61.

> *And answering, Jesus said to them, "Having gone, report to John what you have seen and heard: that **the** blind receive sight, **the** lame walk, lepers are cleansed, **the** deaf hear, **the** dead are raised, **the** poor have the gospel preached **to them**."* (Luke 7:22)

Jesus' miracles were not just acts of kindness. They were signs. Each one was a prophecy coming true in front of people's eyes. The blind in Jericho, the deaf man in the Decapolis, the lame man at the pool, and the widow's son at Nain were living proof that the One Isaiah described had come.

Even Jesus' enemies did not deny that He did these things. The Gospels record the Pharisees saying He cast out demons by the power of Satan (Matthew 12:24). You do not need to explain away miracles that never happened. The Jewish historian Josephus, who was not a Christian, also called Jesus "a doer of wonderful works," as we will see in Chapter 15. The miracles of Jesus are the subject of a whole other book, so I will not go through them here.

He Spoke in Parables

Psalm 78 begins with the psalmist saying he will teach in parables and tell things hidden from long ago.

> *I will open my mouth in a parable; I will pour forth riddles from of old* (Psalm 78:2)

Matthew says Jesus' habit of teaching in parables fulfilled this (Matthew 13:34-35). This is a pattern fulfillment. The psalmist told Israel's history as a lesson. Jesus, the greater Teacher, took up the same method and revealed things that had been hidden since the foundation of the world.

Gentle, Not Loud

Many people in Jesus' day wanted a Messiah with a sword and a war cry. Isaiah described someone very different. The Servant would not shout in the streets. He would be gentle with people who were barely hanging on, a bruised reed or a flickering wick.

> *so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Look, My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul has been well pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench, until He brings forth justice to victory. And in His name **the** Gentiles will hope."* (Matthew 12:17-21)

Matthew quotes this right after Jesus healed many people and told them not to make Him known (Matthew 12:15-16). Jesus did not run a publicity campaign. He did not seize power. He healed the hurting quietly, and He never once crushed a weak person. That too was prophesied.

A Light to the Nations

Isaiah also said the Servant's mission would reach beyond Israel to the whole world.

> *and He said, "It is too light for You to be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved ones of Israel; and I will give You for a light of **the** nations, to be My salvation to the end of the earth."* (Isaiah 49:6)

When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple, old Simeon took Him in his arms and quoted this very idea.

> *because my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before **the** face of all the peoples, a light for revelation of **the** Gentiles, and glory of Your people Israel.* (Luke 2:30-32)

In the first century, the God of Israel was worshiped only by Jews and a small number of Gentile converts. Today more than two billion people from nearly every nation on earth call themselves followers of Jesus. Whatever a person believes about Jesus, it is a plain fact of history that the light of Israel's God has gone to the ends of the earth through Him.

Zeal for His Father's House

Early in His ministry, Jesus walked into the temple courts, found merchants and money changers doing business there, made a whip out of cords, and drove them out. His disciples remembered a line from Psalm 69.

> *For the zeal of Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.* (Psalm 69:9)

> *And His disciples remembered that it is written, "The zeal of Your house has consumed Me."* (John 2:17)

Psalm 69 is a psalm of David about suffering for God's sake. We will see several more lines from it fulfilled at the cross. The zeal for God's house that burned in David burned even hotter in David's greater Son.

Study Questions

1. Isaiah 40:3 says the messenger would prepare the way for "the LORD" and "our God." What does that tell us about who came after John the Baptist?
2. At Jesus' baptism, the Father's words echoed Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. Why do you think the Father chose those words?
3. When John the Baptist doubted, Jesus answered with prophecy instead of a direct "yes." Why do you think He did that?
4. Isaiah 42:3 says the Servant will not break a bruised reed. Have you ever been a "bruised reed"? How has Jesus treated you?
5. Isaiah 49:6 promised the Servant would be a light to the nations. How does the spread of the gospel today fulfill that?

Chapter 9: Rejected by His Own

> *He came to His own **things**, and His own **people** did not receive Him.*
>
> John 1:11 (SLB)

If you were inventing a Messiah to impress people, you would not write it this way. You would have the whole nation welcome him. The religious leaders would bow down. His own family would be his first followers. Instead, the Old Testament says the opposite. The Messiah would be despised. The builders would reject the stone. His own brothers would treat Him like a stranger. People would see His miracles and still not believe.

This is one of the strongest reasons I trust these prophecies. Nobody makes up a story where the hero's own people turn on him unless that is what happened.

Despised and Rejected

Isaiah 53 is the subject of its own chapter later in this book, but one verse belongs here.

> *He **was** despised and rejected by men, a man of pains and acquainted with sickness; and like a hiding of **the** face from Him, He **was** despised, and we did not value Him.* (Isaiah 53:3)

Isaiah wrote that about seven hundred years before Jesus. Look at how the Gospels describe the response to Jesus. The people of His hometown were offended by Him and tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:28-29). The religious leaders called Him a glutton and a drunkard (Matthew 11:19), said He had a demon (John 8:48), and plotted to kill Him (John 11:53). At the end, a crowd chose a murderer named Barabbas over Him (Luke 23:18-19). He was despised and rejected by men.

The Stone the Builders Rejected

Psalm 118 is a song of victory that pilgrims sang on the way up to Jerusalem for the feasts. In the middle of it is a strange picture.

> *A stone **which** the builders rejected has become the head of **the** corner. From the LORD this has come; it **is** wonderful in our eyes.* (Psalm 118:22-23)

Builders in the ancient world chose stones carefully. Some they tossed aside as not good enough. The psalm says the very stone the builders threw away became the cornerstone, the most important stone in the whole building, the one that sets the line for every other stone.

Jesus quoted this psalm to the chief priests and elders in the temple during His last week, right after telling a parable about tenants who killed the owner's son (Matthew 21:33-42). They knew He was talking about them (Matthew 21:45). The builders were the leaders of Israel. The rejected stone was the Messiah. And God would make Him the cornerstone anyway.

> *Jesus says to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, '**The** stone which those building rejected, this has become **the** head of **the** corner; this was from **the** Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"* (Matthew 21:42)

Peter preached the same verse to the same council after the resurrection (Acts 4:10-11), and later wrote about it in his first letter, putting it next to two verses from Isaiah.

> *Therefore also it is contained in the Scripture: "Look, I lay in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, chosen, precious, and the one who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." To you therefore who believe **is** the preciousness; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected, this has become **the** head of **the** corner," and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; who stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which they also were appointed.* (1 Peter 2:6-8)

The two Isaiah verses Peter quotes are Isaiah 28:16, about a precious cornerstone laid in Zion, and Isaiah 8:14, about a stone that makes people stumble. Same stone, two results. To those who believe, He is precious. To those who refuse Him, He is the stone they trip over.

A Stranger to His Brothers

In Psalm 69, David describes being rejected even by his own family.

> *I have become estranged to my brothers, and a foreigner to the sons of my mother.* (Psalm 69:8)

Jesus had brothers. Mary and Joseph had other children after Him, and the Gospels name four brothers and mention sisters (Mark 6:3). During His ministry, His brothers did not believe in Him.

> *For not even His brothers were believing in Him.* (John 7:5)

At one point His family came to take Him home because they thought He had lost His mind (Mark 3:21). It was only after the resurrection that His brother James came to believe (1 Corinthians 15:7) and became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:19). Another brother, Jude, wrote the short letter near the end of the New Testament. Something changed them. They went from thinking their brother was out of His mind to worshiping Him as Lord. I think only seeing Him alive again could do that.

Hated Without a Cause

Twice in the Psalms, David complains of enemies who hated him without any reason (Psalm 35:19; 69:4). The night before He died, Jesus said those words were fulfilled in Him.

> *If I had not done among them the works which no other **one** has done, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father. But **this is** so that the word written in their law may be fulfilled, 'They hated Me without cause.'* (John 15:24-25)

Think about what Jesus did. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, raised the dead, and taught people to love God and their neighbor. Yet He was hated. When Pilate examined Him, Pilate said three times that he found no guilt in Him (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). Even the judge who sentenced Him admitted there was no cause.

They Saw and Did Not Believe

This may be the saddest prophecy of all. When God called Isaiah to be a prophet, He told him that many people would hear and not understand, see and not perceive.

> *And He said, "Go, and say to this people, 'Hear indeed, and do not understand; and see indeed, and do not know.' Make the heart of this people fat, and make its ears heavy, and smear over its eyes, lest it see with its eyes, and hear with its ears, and its heart understand, and it return, and* ***one*** *heal it."* (Isaiah 6:9-10)

John tells us that at the end of Jesus' public ministry, after all His signs, most of the people still did not believe, and this fulfilled Isaiah.

> *But though He had done so many signs before them, they were not believing in Him, so that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he said: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of* ***the*** *Lord been revealed?" Because of this they were not able to believe, because Isaiah said again: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they may not see with the eyes and understand with the heart, and turn, and I should heal them." Isaiah said these things when he saw His glory, and he spoke concerning Him.*
> (John 12:37-41)

Notice the last verse. John says Isaiah "saw His glory, and he spoke concerning Him." When Isaiah saw the LORD on His throne in the temple in Isaiah 6, John says he was seeing the glory of Jesus. That is one of the clearest statements in the New Testament that Jesus is the LORD of the Old Testament.

Why This Matters for the Odds

Earlier I said we would add filter after filter. Rejection is a strong one. Lots of leaders have followers. Very few would-be messiahs were rejected by the nation's leaders, scorned by their own hometown, disbelieved by their own brothers, and still turned out to be the cornerstone of a movement that changed the world.

It also answers a common objection. Some say the disciples wanted a Messiah so badly that they read the prophecies into Jesus' life. But the disciples did not expect a rejected Messiah. When Jesus told them He would suffer and die, Peter pulled Him aside and rebuked Him (Matthew 16:21-22). They did not understand these prophecies until after the resurrection (Luke 24:25-27; John 12:16). They did not invent a suffering Messiah. They resisted the idea until it happened in front of them.

Study Questions

1. Why is it significant that the Old Testament predicted the Messiah would be rejected? Would an invented story include this?
2. Read Psalm 118:22-23 and Matthew 21:42-45. Who are the "builders" and who is the "stone"?
3. Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him until after the resurrection. What do you think changed their minds?
4. John 12:41 says Isaiah saw Jesus' glory. Read Isaiah 6:1-5. What does that tell you about who Jesus is?

5. Jesus is precious to those who believe and a stumbling stone to those who do not. Which has He been to you?

Chapter 10: The Last Week: Entry, Betrayal, and Trial

> *But all this has come about so that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples, having forsaken Him, fled.*
>
> Matthew 26:56 (SLB)

The Gospels slow down when they reach the last week of Jesus' life. About a third of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and almost half of John, cover those few days. The prophecies slow down too. In one week, Jesus fulfilled more prophecies than in the thirty years before it.

When I am accused or misunderstood, my instinct is to pull out the records and defend myself. That is why Jesus' silence before His accusers in Matthew 27:12-14 stands out to me. He had an answer. He stayed quiet because He was willingly laying down His life. Nobody took His life from Him. He gave it.

The King on a Donkey

About five hundred years before Jesus, the prophet Zechariah told Jerusalem to rejoice, because her King was coming. Then he described the King's arrival in a way no one would expect.

> *Rejoice exceedingly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Look, your King comes to you; He **is** righteous and saved, lowly and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, a son of female donkeys.* (Zechariah 9:9)

Kings rode warhorses when they came to conquer. A donkey was the animal of peace, of ordinary people, and of a king coming humbly. Solomon rode his father's mule to his coronation (1 Kings 1:33-38). Zechariah said Israel's King would come lowly, riding a young donkey.

On the Sunday before His death, Jesus sent two disciples to a village to bring a donkey and her colt, and He rode into Jerusalem on the colt. The crowds spread their cloaks and palm branches on the road and shouted words from Psalm 118.

> *And all this has come to pass so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Look, your King comes to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey, even a colt, **the** foal of a beast of burden.'" And the disciples, having gone and having done just as Jesus commanded them, brought the donkey and the colt, and put their garments on them, and they set **Him** on them. And the very large crowd spread their own garments on the road; and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading **them** on the road. And the crowds, those going before and those following, were crying out, saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed **is** the **One** coming in **the** name of **the** Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"* (Matthew 21:4-9)

> *Please, LORD, save now! Please, LORD, give success now! Blessed **is** the one who comes in the name of the LORD; we bless you from the house of the LORD.* (Psalm 118:25-26)

"Hosanna" is a Hebrew word that means "save now" or "please save." The crowd was singing Psalm 118 and applying it to Jesus as the Son of David. When the religious leaders objected to children shouting the

same words in the temple, Jesus answered from Psalm 8:2 that God had prepared praise from the mouths of children (Matthew 21:15-16).

Now let me be honest. This is a prophecy Jesus chose to fulfill. He sent for the donkey. A skeptic will say, "He read Zechariah and acted it out." That is true, and Jesus meant it to be noticed. He was making a public claim to be the King Zechariah described. But a man can choose to ride a donkey. He cannot choose for the city to receive him as the Son of David, or for the leaders to reject him, or for him to be dead before the week is out. And Zechariah 9:10, the next verse, says this King will speak peace to the nations and rule to the ends of the earth. The first verse He fulfilled by choice. The rest He is fulfilling by power.

There is a quieter detail here. As Jesus came over the Mount of Olives and saw the city, He wept over it, because Jerusalem did not know "the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:41-44). He said its enemies would surround it and level it, not leaving one stone on another. Forty years later, in A.D. 70, the Romans did exactly that. Remember Daniel 9. The Messiah came, then He was cut off, then the city fell. Jesus held them accountable for knowing the time.

Betrayed by a Friend

In Psalm 41, David describes being betrayed by a close friend, someone who had eaten at his table.

> *Even the man of my peace, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has made **his** heel great against me.* (Psalm 41:9)

To share bread in that culture was a sign of trust and friendship. To betray someone you had eaten with was the lowest kind of treachery. At the Last Supper, Jesus quoted this verse about Judas.

> *I do not speak concerning all of you; I know whom I chose; but **it is** so that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'The **one** feeding on the bread with Me lifted up his heel against Me.'* (John 13:18)

Then He handed Judas a piece of bread He had dipped in the dish, and Judas went out into the night to betray Him (John 13:26-30). Judas had been one of the Twelve for about three years. He had heard every sermon and seen every miracle. He was trusted with the group's money (John 12:6). He was a friend who ate His bread.

Peter Stoner's fourth prophecy is a little different. He used Zechariah 13:6, about wounds received "in the house of those who love me." I explained in Chapter 4 why I do not use that verse in my own count. Psalm 41:9 is the verse Jesus Himself applied to Judas, and it is the stronger one.

Thirty Pieces of Silver

In Zechariah 11, the prophet acts out a picture of God as a shepherd of His people. The people reject him, and when he asks for his wages, they pay him an insulting amount.

> *And I said to them, "If **it is** good in your eyes, give **me** my wage; and if not, refrain." And they weighed out my wage, thirty **pieces of** silver. And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter, the magnificent price at which I was priced by them." And I took the thirty **pieces of** silver and threw it **into** the house of the LORD, to the potter.* (Zechariah 11:12-13)

Thirty shekels of silver was the price the Law of Moses set as payment when an ox gored a slave to death (Exodus 21:32). It was the price of a slave. Zechariah calls it, with heavy sarcasm, "the magnificent price at which I was priced by them." The people valued the LORD their Shepherd at the price of a dead slave.

Five hundred years later, Judas went to the chief priests and asked what they would give him to hand Jesus over.

> *Then one of the Twelve, the one called Judas Iscariot, having gone to the chief priests, said, "What are you willing to give me, and I will hand Him over to you?" And they set for him thirty silver* ***coins****.* (Matthew 26:14-15)

Not twenty. Not fifty. Thirty pieces of silver.

Thrown Into the Temple, Given to the Potter

Zechariah did not stop with the price. He said the money would be thrown into the house of the LORD, to the potter. Look at what happened to Judas's money.

> *Then Judas, the one who handed Him over, having seen that He was condemned, having regretted* ***it****, brought back the thirty silver* ***coins*** *to the chief priests and to the elders, saying, "I sinned, having handed over innocent blood." But they said, "What* ***is that*** *to us? You will see* ***to it****." And having thrown down the silver* ***coins*** *in the temple, he withdrew, and having gone away, he hanged himself. And the chief priests, having taken the silver* ***coins****, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is* ***the*** *price of blood." And having taken counsel, they bought with them the field of the potter for a burial place for the strangers. Therefore that field was called "Field of Blood" until this day.* (Matthew 27:3-8)

Every detail of Zechariah 11:13 is there. The silver was thrown down in the house of the LORD. It ended up going to the potter, used to buy a potter's field. And the people who did it were the chief priests, who had no idea they were fulfilling a prophecy. They were just trying to keep blood money out of the temple treasury.

Peter Stoner gave this one of his highest estimates, 1 in 100,000, and I understand why. Think of all the things that had to line up. The money had to be exactly thirty pieces of silver. The betrayer had to regret it and throw it back. He had to throw it in the temple. The priests had to refuse to put it in the treasury. They had to decide to buy a field with it. And the field had to be a potter's field. Judas did not plan any of that. Neither did the priests. Jesus was under arrest.

There is one puzzle here that I want to address honestly. Matthew says this fulfilled what was spoken "through Jeremiah the prophet" (Matthew 27:9). But the closest words are in Zechariah. Why does Matthew say Jeremiah? The most common answer is that Matthew is combining Zechariah 11 with passages from Jeremiah, who also visited a potter (Jeremiah 18:1-4), bought a potter's jar and preached in the Valley of Hinnom, the area where the potter's field was later located (Jeremiah 19:1-2), and bought a field with silver (Jeremiah 32:6-9). When writers in that day combined passages, it was a common practice to name the more well-known prophet. Matthew names Jeremiah because the field and the potter and the judgment on the valley come from Jeremiah, while the thirty pieces of silver come from Zechariah. That is the explanation I find most convincing.

Another Takes His Office

After Judas died, Peter stood up among the believers and said the Scriptures had spoken of this too. He quoted two psalms of David.

> *For it has been written in **the** book of Psalms, 'Let his homestead become desolate, and let there not be one dwelling in it,' and, 'May another take his office.'* (Acts 1:20)

The first line comes from Psalm 69:25 and the second from Psalm 109:8. Both psalms are prayers of a righteous man betrayed by those he had loved. Peter saw Judas in them, and the believers chose Matthias to take the place Judas had left (Acts 1:21-26).

The Shepherd Struck, the Sheep Scattered

Later in the same section of Zechariah, God calls for a sword to strike His Shepherd.

> *O sword, awake against My shepherd, and against the man **who is** My associate, declares the LORD of armies. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; and I will turn My hand against the little ones.* (Zechariah 13:7)

Notice who the Shepherd is. God calls Him "the man who is My associate," a word that means a close equal, a companion. On the night He was arrested, Jesus quoted this verse to His disciples.

> *Then Jesus says to them, "All of you will be caused to stumble in Me during this night; for it has been written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"* (Matthew 26:31)

A few hours later, when the soldiers came to arrest Him in Gethsemane, the disciples ran.

> *But all this has come about so that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples, having forsaken Him, fled.* (Matthew 26:56)

False Witnesses

David more than once complained of false witnesses rising up against him.

> *Do not give me over to the desire of my adversaries, for witnesses of falsehood have risen against me, and **one who** breathes out violence.* (Psalm 27:12)

> *Witnesses of violence rise up; what I do not know they ask me.* (Psalm 35:11)

At Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin that night, the council tried hard to find testimony that would justify a death sentence. Many false witnesses came forward, but their stories did not agree. Finally two of them twisted something He had said about the temple (Matthew 26:59-61; Mark 14:55-59).

Silent Before His Accusers

Isaiah described the Servant of the LORD going to His death without a word of protest, like a lamb.

> *He was oppressed, and He **was** afflicted, and He did not open His mouth; like the lamb **that** is brought to the slaughter, and like a ewe **that** before her shearers is mute, and He did not open His mouth.* (Isaiah 53:7)

Before the high priest, Jesus was silent until He was put under oath and asked directly if He was the Christ (Matthew 26:63-64). Before Pilate, while the chief priests accused Him, He said nothing.

> *And while He was being accused by the chief priests and the elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate says to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" And He did not answer him, not even to one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.* (Matthew 27:12-14)

Before Herod Antipas, who questioned Him at length hoping to see a miracle, Jesus answered nothing at all (Luke 23:8-9). Peter, who watched it all, later wrote that when He was reviled, He did not revile back, and when He suffered, He did not threaten (1 Peter 2:23).

This is another prophecy a skeptic might say was in Jesus' control. In one sense it was. But try it. Try staying silent while you are falsely accused of a crime that carries the death penalty, with the one man who can set you free asking you to defend yourself. Pilate was amazed. A guilty man argues. An innocent man protests. Only someone who had chosen to die stays quiet.

Struck and Spit Upon

In Isaiah 50, the Servant of the LORD speaks for Himself.

> *I gave My back to those who strike, and My cheeks to those who pluck **them** bare; I did not hide My face from humiliations and spitting.* (Isaiah 50:6)

And Micah, in the verse just before his prophecy of Bethlehem, said the judge of Israel would be struck on the cheek.

> *Now you will gash yourself, O daughter of troops; he has laid a siege against us; with the rod they will strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.* (Micah 5:1)

At the high priest's house, the guards and council members spit in Jesus' face, hit Him with their fists, and slapped Him (Matthew 26:67). Later, Pilate's soldiers flogged Him, pressed a crown of thorns on His head, struck Him on the head with a reed, and spit on Him (Mark 15:15-19; John 19:1-3). Isaiah 52:14 says His appearance would be disfigured beyond that of any man. Roman flogging, with whips weighted with bone and metal, could tear a man's back to the bone.

He gave His back to those who struck Him. He did not hide His face. He chose all of it.

The Rulers Gather Against Him

Psalm 2 opens with the nations raging and the kings of the earth taking their stand "against the LORD and against His Anointed" (Psalm 2:2). After Peter and John were released by the council, the believers prayed this psalm back to God and named the people who fulfilled it.

> *who through **the** mouth of Your servant David said, 'Why did **the** nations rage, and **the** peoples devise vain things? The kings of the earth took **their** stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.' For truly there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with **the** nations and **the** peoples of Israel* (Acts 4:25-27)

Herod, Pilate, the Roman soldiers, and the leaders of Israel all had a part in His trial and death. The same psalm that says the rulers would gather against Him also says God installed His King on Zion (Psalm 2:6). They meant to stop Him. They only fulfilled what God had said.

Study Questions

1. Read Zechariah 9:9-10. What kind of King did Zechariah describe? How is that different from what many expected?
2. Thirty pieces of silver was the price of a slave in Exodus 21:32. What does it say about how Jesus' enemies valued Him?
3. Make a list of every detail in Zechariah 11:12-13 and then find each one in Matthew 26:14-15 and 27:3-8. How many could Judas or the priests have arranged on purpose?
4. Why do you think Jesus stayed silent before His accusers? What does that tell you about His death?
5. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because it did not know the time of its visitation. Are there ways God is calling to you right now that you might be missing?

Chapter 11: The Cross

> *And He **was** pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our peace **was** on Him, and by His wound **there** was healing for us.*
>
> Isaiah 53:5 (SLB)

Jesus was crucified on a Friday morning outside the walls of Jerusalem, probably in A.D. 30 or 33. He hung on the cross about six hours. In those six hours, more prophecies were fulfilled than in any other six hours in history.

Two Old Testament passages carry most of the weight: Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. Each gets its own chapter after this one. Here I want to walk through the cross in order, the way the Gospel writers tell it, and stop at each prophecy along the way.

Pierced Hands and Feet

David wrote Psalm 22 about a thousand years before Jesus. In it, a man surrounded by enemies cries out in agony.

> *For dogs have surrounded me; a company of evildoers has encircled me; they pierced my hands and my feet.* (Psalm 22:16)

Here is what makes this line so remarkable. Crucifixion was not a Jewish form of execution. The Law of Moses called for stoning. Nailing a living man to a cross by his hands and feet was developed by other peoples centuries after David, and the Romans made it their standard punishment for slaves and rebels. When David wrote, no one in Israel was put to death by having his hands and feet pierced. Yet he described it.

I should tell you that the Hebrew text of this line is debated. Most later Hebrew manuscripts read a word that looks like "like a lion," which would make the line "like a lion, my hands and my feet." The Septuagint, translated by Jews before Jesus, reads "they pierced," and so do the oldest Hebrew evidence and the SLB. I will explain the debate fully in Chapter 14. For now, notice that the Jewish translators of the Septuagint, more than a century before Jesus, read this verse as "they pierced my hands and my feet."

After the resurrection, Jesus showed His disciples His hands and His feet (Luke 24:39), and invited doubting Thomas to put his finger in the marks of the nails (John 20:25-27). The nail wounds were the proof that it was really Him.

Peter Stoner's eighth prophecy was this one. His class put the chance of any man being crucified at 1 in 10,000, based on studying how often men were executed this way. I will use a much more generous number in my own count.

Numbered With Criminals

Isaiah said the Servant would be counted among transgressors.

> *Therefore I will apportion to Him **a share** among the many, and with mighty **ones** He will apportion plunder, because He poured out His soul to death, and with transgressors He was numbered; and He Himself bore the sin of many, and for the transgressors He will intercede.* (Isaiah 53:12)

The night before, Jesus told His disciples that this verse was about to be fulfilled in Him (Luke 22:37). The next morning He was crucified between two robbers, one on His right and one on His left (Matthew 27:38). The sinless Son of God died as if He were one of them.

Mocked and Taunted

David described the people around the sufferer mocking him and shaking their heads.

> *All who see me mock at me; they open **wide** with **the** lip; they shake **the** head: "Roll **it** to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, for He delights in him."* (Psalm 22:7-8)

Now listen to the crowd at the cross.

> *And those passing by were blaspheming Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build **it** in three days, save Yourself! If You are **the** Son of God, come down from the cross!" And likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, were saying, "He saved others; Himself He is not able to save. If He is **the** King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe Him. He has trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He wants Him; for He said, 'I am **the** Son of God.'"* (Matthew 27:39-43)

The chief priests did not know they were quoting Psalm 22. They meant to mock Him. Instead, their own words became one more piece of evidence. "He has trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now" is almost the exact taunt David put in the mouths of the enemies a thousand years before. Psalm 109:25 adds that they would shake their heads, and Matthew records them "wagging their heads."

Gambling for His Clothes

Psalm 22 continues with a detail that seems almost too small to mention.

> *They divide my garments among themselves, and for my clothing they cast a lot.* (Psalm 22:18)

Notice the two parts. The garments are divided. The clothing is gambled for. Those are two different actions. John, who was standing at the cross, tells us exactly how both happened.

> *Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was seamless, woven from the top throughout the whole. Therefore they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but let us cast lots for it **to see** whose it will be," so that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says, "They divided My garments among themselves, and for My clothing they cast a lot." Therefore the soldiers indeed did these things.* (John 19:23-24)

It was customary for the soldiers who carried out an execution to take the victim's clothes. Four soldiers divided His outer garments into four parts. But the tunic was woven in one piece without a seam, so

instead of tearing it, they threw dice for it. Both halves of David's line were fulfilled by four Roman soldiers who had never heard of David.

Praying for His Enemies

Isaiah 53:12 ends with a line that is easy to miss: "for the transgressors He will intercede." To intercede is to pray on someone's behalf.

While the soldiers were dividing His clothes, Jesus prayed.

> *And Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And dividing His garments, they cast a lot.* (Luke 23:34)

Darkness at Noon

Amos spoke of a day of judgment when God would make the sun go down at noon.

> *And it will be in that day," declares the Lord GOD, "and I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in a day of light.* (Amos 8:9)

From noon until three in the afternoon, while Jesus hung on the cross, darkness covered the land (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45). I treat this as a pattern rather than a direct prediction. Amos was speaking of judgment on Israel in his own day. But it is a fitting picture. At the cross, the judgment of God against sin fell on His Son, and the sky went dark at midday.

Forsaken

At about three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in Aramaic the first line of Psalm 22.

> *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" That is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matthew 27:46)

In Jesus' day, the Psalms were not numbered. People referred to a psalm by its first line. When Jesus cried out "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He was not only expressing His own anguish, though He truly was forsaken as He bore our sin. He was also pointing everyone who knew the Scriptures to the whole psalm. It was as if He said, "Read Psalm 22. It is happening right now."

Thirsty, and Given Vinegar

In Psalm 69, David described his enemies giving him poison and vinegar.

> *And they put poison in my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.* (Psalm 69:21)

On the way to the cross, the soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with gall, a bitter drink. He tasted it and refused it (Matthew 27:34). Near the end, He said, "I am thirsty," and they lifted a sponge soaked in sour wine to His mouth.

> *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things have now been finished, so that the Scripture might be accomplished, says, "I am thirsty." Therefore a vessel full of sour wine was set* ***there****; and they,*

> *having filled a sponge with sour wine and having put **it** around hyssop, brought **it** to His mouth. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It has been finished." And having bowed **His** head, He delivered up the spirit.* (John 19:28-30)

Notice what John says. Jesus knew that all things had been finished, and He spoke "so that the Scripture might be accomplished." Then He said, "It has been finished." The Greek word was used on receipts in that day to mean "paid in full."

Into Your Hands

Psalm 31 is a prayer of trust in God in the middle of deadly danger.

> *Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, LORD, God of truth.* (Psalm 31:5)

With His last breath, Jesus prayed these words.

> *And having called out with a loud voice, Jesus said, "Father, into Your hands I will commit My spirit." And having said these things, He expired.* (Luke 23:46)

No one took His life from Him. He laid it down Himself (John 10:18).

Friends Standing Far Off

In Psalm 38, David says his loved ones and friends stood at a distance in his suffering (Psalm 38:11). Luke tells us that all of Jesus' acquaintances, and the women who had followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching (Luke 23:49). Only John and a few women came close enough to hear Him speak (John 19:25-27).

Not One Bone Broken

This next prophecy is one of the most remarkable, because it involves a chain of events that no one at the cross controlled.

The next day was the Sabbath, and a special one during Passover. The Jewish leaders did not want bodies hanging on crosses over the Sabbath, because the Law said a body must not remain on a tree overnight (Deuteronomy 21:23). So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the three crucified men broken. Breaking a crucified man's legs made it impossible for him to push up to breathe, and he would die quickly. Here is what happened.

> *Therefore the Jews, since it was **the** Preparation, so that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for the day of that Sabbath was a great **one**), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and **that** they might be taken away. Therefore the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with Him. But having come to Jesus, when they saw Him already dead, they did not break His legs; but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And the **one** who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and that one knows that he says true **things**, so that you may believe. For these things took place so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "A bone of His will not be broken."* (John 19:31-36)

The soldiers broke the legs of both robbers. When they came to Jesus, He was already dead. So they did not break His legs. One of them stabbed a spear into His side instead.

John says this fulfilled the Scripture, "A bone of His will not be broken." Which Scripture? Two of them, at least. The Law said not one bone of the Passover lamb could be broken.

> *In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not bring out any of the flesh from the house outside; and you shall not break a bone of it.* (Exodus 12:46)

And David wrote that God protects the righteous man.

> *He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.* (Psalm 34:20)

Jesus died at Passover as the true Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). The soldiers had orders to break His legs. They had already broken the legs of the men on either side of Him. Jesus did not control whether He died before they reached Him. He did not control whether a soldier decided to use his spear instead. Yet the pattern of the Passover lamb held, down to the bones.

They Will Look on Him Whom They Pierced

The spear thrust that kept the soldiers from breaking His legs fulfilled another prophecy at the same moment.

> *And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications; and they will look to Me,* ***to Him*** *whom they have pierced; and they will mourn over Him like a mourning over the only* ***son****, and* ***they will*** *show bitterness over Him as* ***one*** *shows bitterness over the firstborn.* (Zechariah 12:10)

> *And again another Scripture says, "They will look on* ***Him*** *whom they pierced."* (John 19:37)

Look closely at Zechariah 12:10. God is speaking: "they will look to Me." Then, in the same sentence, "to Him whom they have pierced." The One who is pierced is God Himself, and He is also a Person they mourn for like an only son. Christians see in this verse both the deity of Christ and His death.

Zechariah 12:10 has two horizons. The piercing happened at the cross. The looking and mourning, when the whole house of David turns to Him in grief and repentance, is still future. John quotes it again at the beginning of Revelation, about His second coming.

> *Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, and those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail because of Him. Yes, amen.* (Revelation 1:7)

We will come back to this in Part Three.

Lifted Up

One more pattern deserves a place here. When poisonous snakes were killing the Israelites in the wilderness, God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone bitten who looked at it would live (Numbers 21:8-9). Jesus told Nicodemus this was a picture of Himself.

> *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:14-15)

The cure for death was lifted up on a pole, and whoever looked to it in faith lived. Two thousand years later, the cure is still the same.

The Lamb God Provides

Two more patterns from the Law point to the cross. The first comes from Abraham. When God told him to offer Isaac on Mount Moriah, Isaac asked where the lamb was. Abraham answered with words that reach much further than he knew.

> *And Abraham said, "God will see to the lamb for Himself for a burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went together.* (Genesis 22:8)

God stopped Abraham's hand and provided a ram in Isaac's place (Genesis 22:13-14). Two thousand years later, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Look, the Lamb of God." Paul says God "did not spare His own Son" (Romans 8:32), the very thing He did not require of Abraham.

The second pattern is the curse of the tree. The Law said that a man put to death and hanged on a tree was under God's curse, and his body had to come down before night (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Paul says that is exactly what Jesus took on Himself for us.

> *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it has been written, "Cursed **is** everyone who hangs on a tree"—* (Galatians 3:13)

Jesus did not die just any death. He died the one death the Law called cursed, so that He could carry the curse that we deserved.

Study Questions

1. Make a list of every prophecy in this chapter that was fulfilled by Jesus' enemies, not by Jesus. What does that list tell you?
2. Read Psalm 22:18 and John 19:23-24. Why is it significant that both halves of the verse were fulfilled?
3. Why do you think Jesus quoted the first line of Psalm 22 from the cross?
4. The soldiers had orders to break His legs, but they did not. What chain of events had to happen for Exodus 12:46 and Psalm 34:20 to be fulfilled?
5. Jesus said, "It has been finished." What was finished? What does that mean for you?

Chapter 12: The Grave, the Empty Tomb, and the Throne

> *For I delivered to you among **the** first **things** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (SLB)

If the story ended at the cross, the prophecies would be fascinating but sad. A good man died the way the prophets said. That would prove God knew the future. It would not prove that Jesus is the Savior.

But the prophets did not stop at the cross. They said the Messiah would be buried in a rich man's grave, that His body would not decay, that He would see light and prolong His days after His death, that He would go up to heaven and sit at God's right hand, and that He would pour out God's Spirit. Paul summed up the gospel in four lines: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and He appeared to many witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). "According to the Scriptures" means the Old Testament said so first.

With a Rich Man in His Death

Isaiah 53 has a puzzling verse about the Servant's grave.

> *And **one** assigned His grave with wicked **men**, and with a rich **man** in His deaths, although He had done no violence, and no deceit **was** in His mouth.* (Isaiah 53:9)

Someone "assigned His grave with wicked men." That fits a crucified man. The Romans usually left crucified bodies on the cross or threw them into a common grave for criminals. That was the plan for Jesus. He was executed with two robbers. Of course His grave would be with the wicked.

But Isaiah goes on: "and with a rich man in His deaths." How could both be true? The Gospels answer it.

> *Now evening having come, a rich man from Arimathea came, named Joseph, who himself also had become a disciple to Jesus. This **man**, having gone to Pilate, asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given up. And Joseph, having taken the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his new tomb, which he had cut in the rock; and having rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, he went away.* (Matthew 27:57-60)

Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man and a member of the very council that condemned Jesus (Luke 23:50-51). He had been a secret disciple. On the afternoon Jesus died, Joseph risked his reputation, went to Pilate, and asked for the body. Pilate gave it to him. Joseph and Nicodemus, another council member, wrapped the body in linen with about seventy-five pounds of spices (John 19:39) and laid it in Joseph's own new tomb, cut out of rock, where no one had ever been buried.

Think about how many things had to go right. A rich man had to step forward. He had to be a member of the council that hated Jesus, yet secretly love Him. Pilate had to agree to release the body of a man

executed for treason. The tomb had to be ready and close by, because the Sabbath was only hours away. Jesus could not arrange any of this. He was dead.

His Body Would Not Decay

David wrote Psalm 16 as a song of trust. Near the end, he says something that goes beyond anything that happened to him.

> *For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; You will not give Your godly one to see the pit.* (Psalm 16:10)

On the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection, Peter stood up in Jerusalem and explained this psalm to a crowd of thousands.

> *For David says concerning Him, 'I was foreseeing the Lord before me continually, because He is at my right **hand**, that I may not be shaken. Because of this my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced, and moreover my flesh also will dwell in hope; because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor will You give Your Holy One to see decay. You have made known to me paths of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence.' Men, brothers, it is permitted to speak with boldness to you concerning the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is among us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn to him with an oath that out of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit upon his throne, having foreseen **this**, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left to Hades, nor did His flesh see decay. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we all are witnesses.* (Acts 2:25-32)

Peter's argument is simple. David died. He was buried. His tomb is right here in Jerusalem, and his body decayed in it. So David could not have been talking about himself. He was a prophet, and he was speaking about the Messiah, his descendant, whose body would not see decay. And Peter adds: we are witnesses. We saw Him alive.

Paul made the same argument from the same psalm in a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, connecting it with Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 55:3 (Acts 13:32-37).

He Will See Light and Prolong His Days

Isaiah 53 is about the death of the Servant. He is "cut off from the land of the living" (Isaiah 53:8) and assigned a grave (Isaiah 53:9). Then, in the very next verses, the dead Servant is alive.

> *And the LORD was pleased to crush Him; He made **Him** sick. If His soul makes a guilt offering, He will see offspring, He will prolong days, and the pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. From the labor of His soul He will see; He will be satisfied. By His knowledge the Righteous One, My servant, will justify the many, and their iniquities He Himself will bear.* (Isaiah 53:10-11)

He makes His life a guilt offering, and then "He will see offspring, He will prolong days." After His death, He sees and is satisfied, and He justifies many. How does a man who has died and been buried prolong

His days and see His offspring? Only by rising from the dead. Isaiah does not use the word “resurrection,” but he describes it.

And at the very start of the passage, Isaiah tells us how it will end.

> *Look, My servant will act wisely; He will be high and lifted up, and exalted exceedingly.* (Isaiah 52:13)

The Third Day

Jesus predicted not only that He would rise, but when. He said again and again that He would be killed and raised on the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19). He pointed to the sign of Jonah.

> *But He, answering, said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; and a sign will not be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For just as Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.”* (Matthew 12:39-40)

This is a pattern. Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and spent three days and three nights inside it before being thrown up alive on the shore (Jonah 1:17; 2:10). Jesus said His time in the grave would be the same kind of sign.

Some people get stuck on the phrase “three days and three nights,” because Jesus was buried on Friday and rose on Sunday morning. But in Jewish counting, any part of a day counted as a day, and “a day and a night” was a common way to say one day. Friday afternoon, all of Saturday, and early Sunday morning are three days by that count. That is why the same Gospels can say “on the third day” and “after three days” for the same event.

Jesus said the Scriptures foretold the third day (Luke 24:46), and Paul said He was raised on the third day “according to the Scriptures.” Which Scriptures? The Jonah sign is one. Hosea 6:2 may be another, where Israel says God will raise them up on the third day. Some teachers also point to Isaac, who was as good as dead for three days on the journey to Mount Moriah before God gave him back to Abraham (Genesis 22:4; Hebrews 11:19). These are patterns, not plain predictions, and I do not count them in the odds.

The Law gives one more picture of the third day. At the feast of Firstfruits, the priest waved the first sheaf of the harvest before the LORD “on the next day after the Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:10-11). Jesus rose on the day after the Sabbath, and Paul calls Him “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). The first sheaf promised the whole harvest. His resurrection promises ours.

The Resurrection Itself

I want to say something about the resurrection, even though it is a miracle and cannot be put into the odds.

Every prophecy in this book would be interesting history if Jesus stayed dead. The resurrection is what makes the prophecies matter. It is God’s own stamp on Jesus’ claims. Paul says Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4).

And the evidence for it is strong. The tomb was empty, and even Jesus' enemies did not deny it; they claimed the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:11-15). More than five hundred people saw Him alive, many of whom were still living when Paul wrote and could be asked (1 Corinthians 15:6). His disciples went from hiding in fear to preaching in public, and most of them suffered for it. His brother James, who did not believe in Him during His ministry, became a leader of the church after the risen Jesus appeared to him (1 Corinthians 15:7). The church began in Jerusalem, the one city where anyone could have walked to the tomb and checked.

Isaiah said He would see light after His suffering. He did.

Psalm 22, which begins with "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" ends in praise. "I will recount Your name to my brothers; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You" (Psalm 22:22). Hebrews 2:11-12 hears the risen Jesus saying these words, calling His people His brothers. The psalm of the cross ends in the joy of the resurrection.

He Went Up on High

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus led His disciples out to the Mount of Olives, blessed them, and was taken up into heaven while they watched (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9).

Psalm 68 is a victory song about God going up to His holy mountain after defeating His enemies, leading captives, and receiving gifts.

> *You have gone up to the height; You have taken captive captivity; You have received gifts among mankind, and even **among the** rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell **there**.* (Psalm 68:18)

Paul applies this psalm to Christ's ascension. He went up in victory over sin, death, and the devil, and He gave gifts to His people, the gifts of the Spirit and of leaders for His church.

> *Therefore it says, "Having ascended on high, He took captivity captive, and He gave gifts to men."* (Ephesians 4:8)

Seated at the Right Hand

Psalm 110 is the Old Testament passage most often quoted in the New Testament. It begins with a conversation in heaven.

> *The LORD declares to my Lord, "Sit at My right **hand** until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."* (Psalm 110:1)

Who is David's "Lord"? A king in Israel had no human lord above him. Jesus asked the Pharisees this very question during His last week. If the Messiah is David's son, how can David call Him "my Lord" (Matthew 22:41-46)? No one could answer Him. The only answer is that the Messiah is more than David's son. He is David's Lord.

Peter preached this psalm at Pentecost. David did not go up to heaven, Peter said, but Jesus did, and God has made Him both Lord and Christ.

> *Therefore, having been exalted by the right **hand** of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right **hand**, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."' Therefore let all **the** house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.* (Acts 2:33-36)

The same psalm says the Lord would be a priest forever, not from Aaron's family, but in the order of Melchizedek.

> *The LORD has sworn, and He will not relent: "You **are** a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."* (Psalm 110:4)

The letter to the Hebrews spends three chapters on this verse (Hebrews 5-7). Jesus could not be a priest under the Law, because He came from Judah, not Levi (Hebrews 7:14). But He is a priest of a higher kind, a King and Priest together like Melchizedek, who lives forever to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:24-25).

The Spirit Poured Out

Peter began his Pentecost sermon with a prophecy from Joel.

> *And it will be afterward **that** I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions. And also on the **male** servants and on the female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit.* (Joel 2:28-29)

Fifty days after the resurrection and ten days after the ascension, the Holy Spirit came on the disciples in Jerusalem with a sound like wind and tongues like fire, and they spoke in other languages. Peter said, "This is that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16), and then explained that the risen, ascended Jesus had poured out the Spirit from the Father's right hand (Acts 2:33). The coming of the Spirit was itself proof that Jesus had reached the throne.

Joel's prophecy also has two horizons. Joel goes on to speak of wonders in the sky, the sun turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD (Joel 2:30-31). Those signs belong to the end of the age. Pentecost was the beginning of the fulfillment, not the end of it.

Where We Are Now

Step back and see where the prophecies have brought us. Born in Bethlehem. Descended from David. Anointed by the Spirit. Rejected by His own. Betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. Pierced. Buried with the rich. Raised the third day. Ascended. Seated at the right hand of God, "until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

That last word, "until," is where we are today. Jesus is seated, waiting. His enemies are not yet under His feet. There is more to come. Part Three is about that "until." But first, we need to look more closely at the two most remarkable prophecies of all.

Study Questions

1. Read Isaiah 53:9 and Matthew 27:57-60. How was Jesus' grave both "with wicked men" and "with a rich man"?
2. Explain Peter's argument from Psalm 16 in Acts 2:29-32. Why could David not have been talking about himself?
3. Isaiah 53 describes the Servant's death and then His prolonged days. Why is that so striking?
4. Jesus asked how David could call his own son "Lord" (Matthew 22:41-46). What is the answer?
5. Psalm 110:1 says "until." What does it mean for your daily life that Jesus is seated at God's right hand right now?

Chapter 13: Isaiah 53 Up Close

> *All of us like the sheep have gone astray; each to his own way we have turned; and the LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us.*
>
> Isaiah 53:6 (SLB)

In Acts 8, an official from the court of the queen of Ethiopia was riding home in his chariot after worshiping in Jerusalem. He was reading Isaiah out loud. God sent Philip to run alongside the chariot, and Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. The man said, "For how could I be able, unless someone guides me?" and invited Philip up. The passage he was reading was Isaiah 53.

> *Now the passage of the Scripture which he was reading was this: "As a sheep He was led to slaughter, and as a lamb before the one shearing it **is** silent, so He does not open His mouth. In His humiliation His judgment was taken away; and who will describe His generation? For His life is taken away from the earth." And answering Philip, the eunuch said, "I beg you, concerning whom does the prophet say this? Concerning himself, or concerning some other **man**?" And Philip, having opened his mouth and having begun from this Scripture, preached Jesus **as** the gospel to him.* (Acts 8:32-35)

That is still the question: about whom does the prophet say this? About himself, or about someone else? In this chapter we will read the whole passage, from Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12, and answer that question.

When I translated Isaiah 53 for the SLB, I could not keep it at arm's length. It was my rebellion and my bad choices that put Him on that cross. That strips away spiritual pride and leaves only gratitude. Put your own name in Isaiah 53 and prophecy stops being a history lesson and becomes a rescue.

The Shape of the Passage

The passage has five stanzas of three verses each. It begins and ends with the Servant lifted up, and in the middle is His suffering and death. It is written as if the prophet were looking back on something already finished, even though it was written about seven hundred years ahead. Hebrew prophets often spoke of the future as if it had already happened, because God's word was so certain.

Stanza One: The Servant Exalted (52:13-15)

> *Look, My servant will act wisely; He will be high and lifted up, and exalted exceedingly. Just as many were appalled at You (so His appearance **was** a disfigurement beyond **that of** a man, and His form beyond the sons of mankind), so He will sprinkle many nations; kings will shut their mouth because of Him; for what had not been recounted to them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand.* (Isaiah 52:13-15)

It begins with the end. The Servant will be high and lifted up. Then it goes back to tell how He got there. Many were appalled at Him, because He was disfigured beyond that of any man. Yet He will "sprinkle many nations." In the Law, priests sprinkled blood and water to cleanse people (Leviticus 16:14-15; Numbers 19:18). This Servant would act as a priest, cleansing not just Israel but the nations.

Kings will shut their mouths at Him. Rulers who are used to giving speeches will be left speechless at what God has done through Him.

Stanza Two: The Servant Rejected (53:1-3)

> *Who has believed our report? And the arm of the LORD, to whom has it been revealed? And He grew up like the sapling before Him, and like the root from dry ground;* ***there was*** *no form to Him and no splendor, that we should look at Him, and no appearance, that we should desire Him.* (Isaiah 53:1-2)

> *He* ***was*** *despised and rejected by men, a man of pains and acquainted with sickness; and like a hiding of* ***the*** *face from Him, He* ***was*** *despised, and we did not value Him.* (Isaiah 53:3)

The speaker changes to "we." The people who should have recognized the Servant are speaking, confessing that they did not believe. He grew up like a sapling from dry ground, a small shoot coming up from a dead stump, like Isaiah 11:1. There was nothing in His appearance to make people want Him. He was despised, rejected, a man of pains, and they turned their faces away.

John quotes 53:1 about the people who saw Jesus' miracles and did not believe (John 12:38), and Paul quotes it about those who heard the gospel and did not obey (Romans 10:16).

Stanza Three: The Servant Suffering for Others (53:4-6)

This is the heart of the passage.

> *Surely our sicknesses He Himself bore, and our pains, He carried them; and we, we considered Him stricken, struck by God, and afflicted.* (Isaiah 53:4)

> *And He* ***was*** *pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our peace* ***was*** *on Him, and by His wound* ***there*** *was healing for us.* (Isaiah 53:5)

> *All of us like the sheep have gone astray; each to his own way we have turned; and the LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us.* (Isaiah 53:6)

Count the words "our," "us," and "we." Our sicknesses. Our pains. Our transgressions. Our iniquities. Our peace. All of us have gone astray. The iniquity of all of us. The Servant is suffering, but not for His own sins. He is suffering in our place.

The people watching thought God was punishing Him for something He did, "struck by God." They were half right. God was striking Him. But not for His sins. For ours. "The LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us."

This is what Bible teachers call substitution. Someone takes another's place. It is the meaning of every sacrifice in the Old Testament. The lamb died so the sinner could live. Here, a Person is the sacrifice.

Peter, who had once tried to talk Jesus out of going to the cross, later wrote about it using these very verses.

> *who Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that, having died to sins, we might live to righteousness; by whose wound you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* (1 Peter 2:24-25)

Stanza Four: The Servant Silent and Slain (53:7-9)

> *He was oppressed, and He **was** afflicted, and He did not open His mouth; like the lamb **that** is brought to the slaughter, and like a ewe **that** before her shearers is mute, and He did not open His mouth.* (Isaiah 53:7)

> *From oppression and from judgment He was taken away; and His generation, who will consider **it**? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of My people a wound **was** His.* (Isaiah 53:8)

> *And **one** assigned His grave with wicked **men**, and with a rich **man** in His deaths, although He had done no violence, and no deceit **was** in His mouth.* (Isaiah 53:9)

We saw these verses fulfilled in Chapters 10 through 12. He was silent before His accusers. He was led like a lamb to slaughter. He was taken away by an unjust trial. He was cut off from the land of the living. He was assigned a grave with the wicked and ended up with a rich man in His death.

Notice two more details. First, verse 8 says it was "for the transgression of My people a wound was His." God calls Israel "My people," and the Servant is wounded for them. That makes it hard to say the Servant is Israel, a point we will come back to. Second, verse 9 says He had done no violence and there was no deceit in His mouth. The Servant is innocent. Peter quotes that line about Jesus, too (1 Peter 2:22).

Stanza Five: The Servant Satisfied (53:10-12)

> *And the LORD was pleased to crush Him; He made **Him** sick. If His soul makes a guilt offering, He will see offspring, He will prolong days, and the pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. From the labor of His soul He will see; He will be satisfied. By His knowledge the Righteous One, My servant, will justify the many, and their iniquities He Himself will bear.* (Isaiah 53:10-11)

> *Therefore I will apportion to Him **a share** among the many, and with mighty **ones** He will apportion plunder, because He poured out His soul to death, and with transgressors He was numbered; and He Himself bore the sin of many, and for the transgressors He will intercede.* (Isaiah 53:12)

Here is the most surprising sentence in the passage: "the LORD was pleased to crush Him." How could God be pleased to crush His Servant? Not because He enjoyed His suffering, but because of what it would accomplish. The Servant makes His life a guilt offering, a sacrifice that pays for sin. And through it, many are made righteous.

Then the dead Servant lives. He sees offspring. He prolongs days. He is satisfied. He divides the spoils of victory. He poured out His soul to death and bore the sin of many, and now He intercedes for transgressors. That is death and resurrection, described seven centuries before the empty tomb.

Who Is the Servant?

Now back to the Ethiopian's question. Who is Isaiah talking about?

Not Isaiah himself. The Servant is innocent, has no deceit in His mouth, and dies for the sins of the people. Isaiah confessed that he was a man of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5). He also says "we" have gone astray, putting himself among the guilty. And there is no record that Isaiah died for anyone's sins.

What about Israel? This is the main view in Jewish teaching today, and it deserves a fair hearing. In other places, Isaiah does call the nation of Israel God's servant (Isaiah 41:8; 44:1). In Isaiah 49:3, the Servant is even called "Israel." The great Jewish teacher Rashi, in the eleventh century, taught that Isaiah 53 describes the suffering of the Jewish people at the hands of the nations. The early Christian writer Origen, around A.D. 248, recorded that a Jewish teacher he debated already read the passage this way (Against Celsus 1.55). Many Jewish readers today sincerely hold this view, and the long history of suffering the Jewish people have endured makes it understandable.

But there are strong reasons, inside the text itself, to read it differently.

1. The Servant is innocent. Isaiah describes Israel as sinful again and again, including in this same part of the book. "We have all become like the unclean, and all our righteous deeds like a garment of menstruation" (Isaiah 64:6). The Servant of Isaiah 53 "had done no violence, and no deceit was in His mouth."
2. The Servant suffers for "My people." In 53:8 He is wounded for the transgression of God's people. If the Servant is Israel, who is "My people"?
3. The Servant is distinct from Israel in Isaiah 49. Even in the chapter where He is called "Israel," the Servant has a mission to bring Jacob back to God and to gather Israel (Isaiah 49:5-6). He is the true Israel, the one faithful Israelite who does what the nation could not, which is exactly how Matthew read Hosea 11:1 in Chapter 3.
4. The Servant suffers willingly and silently. Israel's suffering in history was not chosen, and Israel did not suffer in silence. The prophets record her cries and complaints.
5. The Servant's suffering takes away the sins of others. The suffering of the Jewish people has been real and terrible, but it has never been offered as a payment for the sins of the Gentile nations.

It is also worth knowing that the Israel view was not the only Jewish view. An ancient Aramaic paraphrase of Isaiah, the Targum attributed to Jonathan ben Uzziel, reads Isaiah 52:13 as "my servant the Messiah," though it explains the suffering in other ways. Some later rabbis also read parts of the passage as being about the Messiah. So the idea that Isaiah 53 speaks of the Messiah is not a Christian invention. Christians simply took it all the way.

So who is it? The Servant is an individual. He is innocent. He is rejected by His own people. He is silent before His accusers. He is killed, though He did no wrong, as a sacrifice for the sins of others. He is buried with the rich. Then He lives again, is exalted, and makes many righteous. Only one Person in history fits.

Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, he told the Ethiopian the good news about Jesus. The man believed and was baptized that same day (Acts 8:35-38).

Isaiah 53 in Your Own Words

Before you move on, I want to suggest something. Read Isaiah 53:4-6 again, and every time you see “our,” “us,” or “we,” put your own name in its place. Surely my sicknesses He Himself bore. He was pierced for my transgressions. The LORD has caused to fall on Him my iniquity. That is what this passage is meant to be. Not just a proof. A personal word from God about what His Son did for you.

Study Questions

1. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12 aloud in one sitting. What stands out to you most?
2. Count the words “our,” “us,” and “we” in 53:4-6. What does that tell you about why the Servant suffered?
3. What does it mean that “the LORD was pleased to crush Him”? How can that be good news?
4. Many Jewish readers believe the Servant is the nation of Israel. What are the strongest reasons from the text itself for reading Him as an individual?
5. Try putting your own name in Isaiah 53:5-6. How does it change the way you read it?

Chapter 14: Psalm 22 Up Close

> *My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? **You are** far from my salvation, **from** the words of my roaring.*
>
> Psalm 22:1 (SLB)

Isaiah 53 tells us what the Messiah's death would mean. Psalm 22 tells us what it would feel like. Isaiah 53 is written by an onlooker: "we considered Him stricken." Psalm 22 is written from the inside, in the first person, by the one hanging there. It is as if David stood on the hill outside Jerusalem a thousand years early and wrote down what the Man on the middle cross was thinking.

Who Wrote It, and When

The heading of the psalm says it is "a psalm of David." David reigned as king roughly 1010 to 970 B.C. Even if someone doubts the heading, Psalm 22 was part of the Hebrew Psalms long before Jesus and was translated into Greek in the Septuagint, as we saw in Chapter 2. Fragments of the psalm are also among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

David suffered a great deal in his life. He was hunted by Saul, betrayed by his son Absalom, and cursed by his enemies. But nothing we know about David's life matches what this psalm describes: a man surrounded by a mocking crowd, stripped, his bones out of joint, his hands and feet pierced, dying of thirst, his clothes gambled for, and then, suddenly, rescued and praising God before a great assembly while the ends of the earth turn to the LORD. David was writing as a prophet (Acts 2:30), about something beyond himself.

The Cry of the Forsaken (22:1-5)

> *My God, I call out by day, and You do not answer; and by night, and **there is** no silence for me. And You **are** holy, sitting **on** the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted; they trusted, and You delivered them. To You they cried out and escaped; in You they trusted and were not ashamed. And I **am** a worm and not a man, a reproach of mankind and despised by **the** people.*
> (Psalm 22:2-6)

The psalm opens with the cry Jesus spoke from the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). He calls out by day and by night, and God does not answer. It was noon when the darkness fell, and three o'clock when Jesus cried out.

Notice what the sufferer does not say. He does not say God is unfair. He says God is holy. Our fathers trusted You and You delivered them. Even in the deepest darkness, he holds on to who God is. The forsakenness is real, but so is his trust.

A Worm, Not a Man (22:6-8)

He calls himself "a worm and not a man, a reproach of mankind and despised by the people." Then he describes the crowd.

> *All who see me mock at me; they open **wide** with **the** lip; they shake **the** head: "Roll **it** to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, for He delights in him."* (Psalm 22:7-8)

We saw in Chapter 11 how the chief priests at the cross said almost exactly these words (Matthew 27:43). Think about that. The leaders of Israel, men who knew the Psalms by heart, stood at the foot of the cross and quoted the enemies in Psalm 22 without realizing it.

Surrounded (22:9-15)

> *For You **are the One** who drew me out from **the** belly, who made me trust on the breasts of my mother. On You I was cast from **the** womb; from the belly of my mother You **have been** my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble **is** near, for there is no helper. Many bulls have surrounded me; mighty ones of Bashan have encircled me. They have opened their mouth against me, a lion tearing and roaring.* (Psalm 22:9-13)

He remembers that God has been his God since his mother's womb. He is surrounded by enemies he pictures as strong bulls from Bashan and a roaring lion. Then he describes what is happening to his body.

> *Like water I have been poured out, and all my bones have come apart; my heart has become like wax; it has melted in the midst of my inward parts. My strength has dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue is made to cling to my jaws; and to the dust of death You set me.* (Psalm 22:14-15)

Compare this with what we know about crucifixion. The victim hung by his arms, and his weight pulled his joints apart: "all my bones have come apart." He lost a great deal of fluid from the flogging and the hours in the sun: "like water I have been poured out." His heart was under terrible strain: "my heart has become like wax." He was desperately thirsty: "my tongue is made to cling to my jaws." Jesus said, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28). And at the end, death: "to the dust of death You set me."

Pierced, Stared At, and Stripped (22:16-18)

> *For dogs have surrounded me; a company of evildoers has encircled me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I count all my bones; they look, they gaze at me. They divide my garments among themselves, and for my clothing they cast a lot.* (Psalm 22:16-18)

Dogs in the ancient world were not pets. They were wild scavengers, and Jews sometimes used the word for Gentiles. Roman soldiers surrounded Jesus. A company of evildoers, the crowd and the leaders, encircled Him. They pierced His hands and His feet.

"I count all my bones." A crucified man was stripped and stretched out, and his bones showed through his skin. "They look, they gaze at me." Crucifixion was public on purpose. People stood and stared (Luke 23:35). "They divide my garments among themselves, and for my clothing they cast a lot." We saw in Chapter 11 how four Roman soldiers fulfilled both halves of that line.

The Debate Over "Pierced"

I promised in Chapter 11 to explain the debate about verse 16. Here it is, as fairly as I can put it.

The standard Hebrew text used today, called the Masoretic Text, was copied by careful Jewish scribes in the centuries after Christ. In most copies, the key word in verse 16 is *ka'ari*, which means "like a lion." Read that way, the line says, "like a lion, my hands and my feet." Most Jewish translations today follow that reading, often adding a verb to make sense of it, such as "like a lion they are at my hands and my feet."

Christian translations, including the SLB, read "they pierced." Here is why:

- **The Septuagint.** The Jewish translators who put the Psalms into Greek before Jesus read a verb here meaning "they dug" or "they pierced." They were not Christians and had no reason to favor a Christian reading.
- **A Dead Sea Scrolls era manuscript.** A scroll fragment of the Psalms found at Nahal Hever, near the Dead Sea, dated to the late first or early second century A.D., has a slightly different spelling, *ka'aru*. That form is a verb, not "like a lion." Scholars debate exactly what verb it is, but it supports a verb in this spot.
- **Other early translations.** The ancient Syriac translation also reads "they pierced."
- **The grammar.** "Like a lion my hands and my feet" has no verb. The sentence does not work well in Hebrew without one, which is why translations that follow it have to add one.

The difference between "like a lion" and "they pierced" in Hebrew is one small stroke of a letter. I believe the evidence favors "pierced." But even if someone disagrees, Psalm 22 still describes a man mocked by a crowd, his bones out of joint, dying of thirst, with his clothes divided by lot, who is then rescued and praised by the nations. And Zechariah 12:10 says plainly, without any textual debate, that God's people "will look to Me, to Him whom they have pierced." The case does not rest on one word.

The Sudden Turn (22:19-21)

> *And You, LORD, do not be far off; my strength, hurry to my help! Rescue my soul from **the** sword, my only one from the hand of a dog. Save me from the mouth of a lion; and from the horns of wild oxen You have answered me.* (Psalm 22:19-21)

Read the last line carefully: "from the horns of wild oxen You have answered me." In the middle of the sentence, the sufferer goes from asking to having been answered. In Hebrew, the psalm turns at this point from prayer to praise. Something has happened. God has answered.

Praise in the Assembly (22:22-26)

> *I will recount Your name to my brothers; in the midst of **the** assembly I will praise You. You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All **you** seed of Jacob, glorify Him, and be afraid of Him, all **you** seed of Israel. For He has not despised and He has not detested the affliction of the afflicted, and He has not hidden His face from him; and when he cried for help to Him, He heard.* (Psalm 22:22-24)

The man who was dying is now standing among his brothers, praising God. The writer of Hebrews quotes verse 22 as the words of the risen Jesus Himself.

> *For both the One who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified **are** all of one; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will declare Your name to My brothers; in **the** midst of **the** assembly I will sing praise to You."* (Hebrews 2:11-12)

The morning He was raised, Jesus told Mary Magdalene, "go to My brothers" (John 20:17). For the first time in John's Gospel, He calls His disciples "brothers." The forsaken One of the first half of the psalm is the risen One of the second half, gathering His brothers and leading them in praise.

And verse 24 answers the opening cry. "Why have You forsaken me?" God "has not hidden His face from him; and when he cried for help to Him, He heard." The forsakenness was real, but it was not the end.

The Ends of the Earth (22:27-31)

> *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before You. For the kingship **belongs** to the LORD, and He **is** ruling over the nations. All the fat ones of **the** earth have eaten and have bowed down; before Him will bow all who go down **to the** dust, and **he who** has not kept his soul alive. A seed will serve Him; it will be recounted of the Lord to the generation. They will come and declare His righteousness to a people **yet** to be born, that He has done **it**.* (Psalm 22:27-31)

The psalm ends far beyond anything that ever happened to David. All the ends of the earth will turn to the LORD. All the families of the nations will bow down. People not yet born will hear about it. And they will declare "that He has done it."

How could the suffering of one man lead the whole world to turn to God? It makes no sense for David. It makes perfect sense for Jesus. Out of His death and resurrection came a message that has gone to every continent and been passed down to generation after generation, people "yet to be born," including you and me.

Many Bible teachers have noticed that the last words, "He has done it," are close in meaning to Jesus' last words from the cross, "It has been finished" (John 19:30). I do not want to press that too hard. The words are not the same in Hebrew and Greek. But the idea is the same. The work is done.

What Psalm 22 Tells Us

When Jesus cried out the first line of Psalm 22, He was pointing the people to the whole psalm. Read all of it and you find:

- Forsaken by God, crying out by day and night (verses 1-2).
- Despised and mocked, with heads shaking and the taunt "let Him deliver him" (verses 6-8).
- Surrounded by enemies (verses 12-13, 16).
- Bones out of joint, poured out like water, heart failing (verse 14).
- Terrible thirst (verse 15).
- Hands and feet pierced (verse 16).
- Stared at and stripped (verse 17).
- Garments divided and clothing gambled for (verse 18).
- Rescued and answered by God (verses 21, 24).

- Praising God among His brothers (verse 22).
- The ends of the earth turning to the LORD (verse 27).
- The news passed to generations not yet born (verses 30-31).

A thousand years before the cross, God gave David the words. A thousand years later, His Son spoke them.

Study Questions

1. Read all of Psalm 22 aloud. Where do you see the psalm turn from suffering to praise?
2. Compare Psalm 22:14-18 with the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion. Which details match?
3. What are the main reasons for reading verse 16 as “they pierced”? Why does the case not depend on that one word?
4. Hebrews 2:12 puts Psalm 22:22 in Jesus’ mouth. What does it mean to you that Jesus calls believers His “brothers”?
5. Psalm 22:31 says the news will reach “a people yet to be born.” How did this message reach you?

Chapter 15: Witnesses Outside the Bible

> *For the king knows about these things, to whom also I speak with boldness; for I am not persuaded that any of these things escapes his notice, not one; for this has not been done in a corner.*
>
> Acts 26:26 (SLB)

A skeptic might say, "You keep showing me the Old Testament and then the New Testament. Of course the New Testament says Jesus fulfilled the prophecies. Christians wrote it." That is a fair point. So in this chapter, I want to step outside the Bible and call witnesses who were not Christians. Some were Jewish. Some were Roman. A few of them hated Christians. None of them had any reason to help our case.

They cannot tell us everything. Ancient historians did not write much about a carpenter from a small province. But they confirm the main facts on which the prophecies rest: that Jesus lived, that He was called the Christ, that He was executed under Pontius Pilate, and that His followers worshiped Him as God soon afterward.

Josephus, the Jewish Historian

Flavius Josephus was born in Jerusalem in A.D. 37 or 38, just a few years after the crucifixion. He came from a priestly family, fought against Rome in the Jewish revolt, was captured, and later became a historian under the Roman emperors. Around A.D. 93 he finished a long history of his people called the *Antiquities of the Jews*. He was not a Christian.

Josephus mentions Jesus twice. The shorter mention comes in his account of the death of James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, around A.D. 62. Josephus tells how the high priest Ananus took advantage of a gap between Roman governors.

> "...he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned." (Josephus, Antiquities 20.9.1, William Whiston translation)

Almost all scholars accept this passage as genuine. It is a passing remark, and it is not the kind of thing a Christian would have invented, since it calls Jesus only the one "who was called Christ." Josephus expected his readers to know who that was.

The longer passage comes earlier, in Book 18, in his account of Pontius Pilate. Here it is as William Whiston translated it in 1737.

> "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as

> the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day." (Josephus, Antiquities 18.3.3, William Whiston translation)

I need to be honest about this passage, because a skeptic will be. Most scholars today believe a Christian copyist added some lines to it in the centuries after Josephus. A Jewish writer who did not become a Christian would not likely say "He was the Christ," or "if it be lawful to call him a man," or that He "appeared to them alive again the third day as the divine prophets had foretold." Those are the very lines that would help this book the most, and I am not going to lean on them.

But most scholars also believe that Josephus did write a passage about Jesus here, and that once you take out the likely additions, a solid core is left. In that core, Josephus says that Jesus was a wise man who did surprising works, that He taught and drew followers from both Jews and Gentiles, that Pilate condemned Him to the cross at the urging of the Jewish leaders, that His followers did not abandon Him, and that the Christians named after Him were still around in Josephus' day. That core matches the Gospels.

Tacitus, the Roman Historian

Cornelius Tacitus was a Roman senator and one of the greatest historians of the ancient world. Around A.D. 116 he wrote the *Annals*, a history of Rome. In it he describes the great fire of Rome in A.D. 64, which many Romans blamed on the emperor Nero. To shift the blame, Nero accused the Christians and had many of them tortured and killed. Tacitus did not like Christians. He calls their faith a "superstition." But he explains to his readers who these people were.

> "Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus." (Tacitus, Annals 15.44, as translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb)

"The extreme penalty" was the Roman way of describing execution, and for a non-citizen from the provinces it usually meant crucifixion. In one sentence, a hostile Roman historian confirms the name Christ, the time (the reign of Tiberius, A.D. 14 to 37), the place (Judea, where Pilate governed from A.D. 26 to 36), and the execution under Pilate. Tacitus goes on to say that the "superstition" was checked for a moment but broke out again, not only in Judea but in Rome itself.

Pliny the Younger, the Roman Governor

Pliny the Younger was the Roman governor of Bithynia, in what is now northern Turkey. Around A.D. 112, he wrote to the emperor Trajan asking how to handle Christians who were brought before him. He had been executing those who would not give up their faith, but he was not sure how far to go. In his letter he describes what the Christians told him about their worship.

> "...they met on a stated day before it was light, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up..." (Pliny the Younger, Letters 10.96, William Melmoth translation revised by F. C. T. Bosanquet)

This is important for prophecy. Isaiah 9:6 called the coming child "Mighty God." Within about eighty years of the crucifixion, a Roman governor with no sympathy for Christians reported that ordinary believers in a province far from Judea were praying to Christ "as to a divinity." The early Christians did not slowly turn Jesus into a god over centuries. They worshiped Him from the start.

The Talmud

The Babylonian Talmud is a large collection of Jewish teaching put together over several centuries after Christ. One passage (Sanhedrin 43a) says that a man called Yeshu was hanged on the eve of Passover for practicing sorcery and leading Israel astray. "Hanged" was a common way of describing crucifixion, as in Galatians 3:13.

I want to be careful with this one. The Talmud was written down long after Jesus, and scholars disagree about whether this passage is a genuine memory of Jesus of Nazareth or a later polemic. But if it does refer to Him, notice two things. It agrees that He was executed at Passover, as the Gospels say (John 19:14). And it explains His miracles as sorcery, which is the same charge His enemies made in the Gospels (Matthew 12:24). It does not deny that He did remarkable things. It gives them a different source.

Witnesses to the Old Testament Itself

We saw in Chapter 2 that witnesses outside the church also show the prophecies were written before Jesus.

- **The Septuagint**, the Jewish Greek translation of the Old Testament, made in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.
- **The Great Isaiah Scroll**, dated by the Israel Museum to about 125 B.C., containing all 66 chapters of Isaiah, including chapter 53.
- **The Dead Sea Scrolls** as a whole, with copies of every Old Testament book except Esther, many from before the time of Christ.
- **Josephus** again, who wrote that the Jewish Scriptures were complete by the time of the Persian king Artaxerxes, and that in all the ages since, "no one has been so bold as either to add any thing to them, to take any thing from them, or to make any change in them" (Against Apion 1.8, Whiston translation).

What These Witnesses Prove, and What They Don't

These outside sources do not prove that Jesus fulfilled every prophecy in this book. Roman historians did not record what town He was born in or how many pieces of silver Judas received. For details like those, the Gospels are our sources, and they are good ones, written within the lifetime of eyewitnesses.

What the outside witnesses do is confirm the frame. Jesus was a real man in Judea in the first century, in the window Daniel's prophecy requires. He was called the Christ, the Messiah. He did things people called wonders. He was executed under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius. His followers did not abandon Him, and within a few decades they were worshiping Him as God across the Roman world. And the Old Testament they said He fulfilled was already written, translated, and copied before He was born.

Paul told King Agrippa that these things had “not been done in a corner” (Acts 26:26). They happened in public, in history, where friends and enemies alike could see them.

Study Questions

1. Why is it important to have witnesses from outside the Bible? What can they show that the Bible alone cannot show to a skeptic?
2. Why is it wise to be honest about the parts of Josephus’ longer passage that scholars think were added? How does that make our case stronger, not weaker?
3. What facts about Jesus does Tacitus confirm in one sentence?
4. Pliny says Christians prayed to Christ “as to a divinity” around A.D. 112. Why does that matter for the claim that Jesus is God?
5. Paul said these things had “not been done in a corner.” How would you use that idea in a conversation with a friend who doubts?

Part Three: Still to Come

Chapter 16: The Promise of His Return

> *And as they were looking intently into heaven as He was going, then look, two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, "Galilean men, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you watched Him going into heaven."*
>
> Acts 1:10-11 (SLB)

Everything we have looked at so far is history. It has already happened, and we can check it. Now we turn to prophecies that have not happened yet. Some people find that harder to accept. But think about it this way. The same God who said where the Messiah would be born, what He would be sold for, and how He would die has also said He will come again. If God kept every promise about the first coming down to the bones and the dice, we have good reason to trust Him about the second.

The New Testament speaks of the return of Christ again and again, in almost every book. Jesus promised it. Angels announced it. Every apostle who wrote a letter taught it. It is not a side issue. It is the hope the whole Bible leans toward.

This part of the book gives an overview of the prophecies of His return, in order. For a fuller look at the book of Revelation, verse by verse, see my *Revelation Bible Study: A Verse-by-Verse Study*. It includes a timeline of the end times, a chart of the judgments, and a section that sets Daniel and Revelation side by side. For Daniel's seventy weeks, see also my *Daniel Bible Study*. Both are free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com.

I hold a pre-tribulation Rapture and a dispensational premillennial view. Leading Bible studies, I have been in rooms with sincere believers who see the timeline differently. What we share is the core truth: Jesus is coming back bodily and visibly. Keeping our eyes on the Person who is returning lets us talk about timelines with grace.

Jesus Promised to Come Back

The night before He died, Jesus told His disciples He was leaving. They were troubled. So He gave them a promise.

> *Let your heart not be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In the house of My Father are many dwelling places; but if not, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you also may be.* (John 14:1-3)

Notice the words. "I am coming again." "And will receive you to Myself." "Where I am, you also may be." That is not a vague idea that His spirit will live on in our hearts. It is a promise that the same Jesus will come and gather His people to be with Him.

Forty days after His resurrection, as the disciples watched Him go up into heaven, two angels stood beside them and said He would come back the same way (Acts 1:11). He left bodily, visibly, from the Mount of

Olives. He will return bodily and visibly. And, as we will see in Chapter 18, the prophet Zechariah says His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives when He does (Zechariah 14:4).

Two Stages of One Return

When you read everything the Bible says about Jesus' return, you notice that the passages describe two different scenes.

In one, Jesus comes for His people. He comes in the air. Believers, living and dead, are caught up to meet Him. It happens in an instant, without warning. The emphasis is comfort: "encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

In the other, Jesus comes with His people. He comes to the earth. His feet stand on the Mount of Olives. Every eye sees Him. He comes as a warrior to judge the nations and set up His kingdom. It follows clear signs: the abomination of desolation, great tribulation, the sun and moon darkened (Matthew 24:15-30). The emphasis is judgment and victory.

I believe, along with many Bible teachers, that these are two stages of His return, separated by the seven-year Tribulation that we will look at in Chapter 17. The first stage is usually called the Rapture, from the Latin word used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 for "caught away." The second is His glorious appearing, usually called the Second Coming. This view is called the pre-tribulation view, because the Rapture comes before the Tribulation. It is the view I have taught in my studies of Daniel and Revelation, and it is the view this book follows.

I want to be fair. Faithful Christians who love the Bible hold other views. Some believe the church will be caught up in the middle of the Tribulation, some at the end of it, and some read these prophecies in a less literal way. All of them agree on the most important truth: Jesus is coming again, bodily, to raise the dead, judge the world, and make all things new. Whatever your view of the timing, you can believe that.

The Rapture of the Church

Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians only a few months after starting the church there. Some of the believers had died, and the others were worried. Would their loved ones miss the Lord's return? Paul answered with the clearest passage on the Rapture in the Bible.

> *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve, just as also the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. For this we say to you in **the** word of **the** Lord, that we who are living, who remain until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15)
>
> *because the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with **the** voice of an archangel and with **the** trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are living, who remain, will be caught away together with them in **the** clouds to meet the Lord in **the** air; and so we will always be with **the** Lord.* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Here is what will happen, in order:

1. The Lord Himself will come down from heaven.
2. There will be a shout of command, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God.
3. Believers who have died will be raised first.
4. Believers who are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds.
5. They will meet the Lord in the air.
6. They will always be with the Lord.

Paul told the Corinthians the same thing and added that it will happen in an instant.

> *Look, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in an instant, in **the** blink of an eye, at the last trumpet; for **the** trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.* (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

In the blink of an eye, every believer who has died will be raised with a new body that will never die, and every believer who is alive will be changed into the same kind of body. The Bible calls this a mystery, which in the New Testament means something God kept hidden in earlier times and has now revealed. The Old Testament prophets spoke of the resurrection of the dead (Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 26:19), but the catching up of living believers to meet the Lord in the air was first made known through the apostles.

Why Before the Tribulation?

There is no single verse that says, "The Rapture will happen seven years before the Second Coming." The pre-tribulation view comes from putting several passages together. Here are the main reasons I hold it.

The church is promised rescue from the coming wrath. Paul says Jesus "is delivering us from the wrath that is coming" (1 Thessalonians 1:10), and that "God did not appoint us for wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). The Tribulation is described again and again as a time of God's wrath poured out on the earth (Revelation 6:16-17; 15:1).

Jesus promised to keep His church from the hour of testing. To the faithful church in Philadelphia, He said:

> *Because you kept the word of My endurance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole inhabited world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*
> (Revelation 3:10)

He does not say He will keep them through the hour, but from it. And the hour is coming on "the whole inhabited world."

The coming for the church can happen at any moment. The New Testament tells believers to watch and wait for Christ Himself, not for the Antichrist or for signs (Titus 2:13; Philippians 3:20). But the Second Coming follows clear signs, including the abomination of desolation at the midpoint of the Tribulation, which happens three and a half years before Jesus appears. If the Rapture and the Second Coming were the same event, Jesus' words that no one knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36) would

no longer fit once the abomination had happened. Two stages solve this. The Rapture can happen any day. The Second Coming follows the signs.

The church disappears from the earth in Revelation 4-18. The word “church” appears nineteen times in Revelation 1 through 3. It does not appear again on earth until the end of the book (Revelation 22:16). During the long description of the Tribulation in chapters 6 through 18, the church is never mentioned on earth.

Something is holding back the man of lawlessness. Paul told the Thessalonians that the “man of sin” will not be revealed until the one who restrains him is taken out of the way (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8). Many pre-tribulation teachers believe the restrainer is the Holy Spirit working through the church, and that He will be removed, in this special restraining role, when the church is caught up.

Daniel’s seventieth week is about Israel. Gabriel told Daniel that the seventy weeks were decreed “on your people and on your holy city” (Daniel 9:24). The first sixty-nine weeks ended at the Messiah. The church age, in which Jews and Gentiles are one body in Christ, was a mystery not revealed to the prophets (Ephesians 3:4-6). The seventieth week picks up God’s program with Israel again. Many believe the church is removed before that week begins.

Those are the main reasons. I hold them with conviction, but I hold them humbly. The timing of the Rapture is not a test of anyone’s salvation.

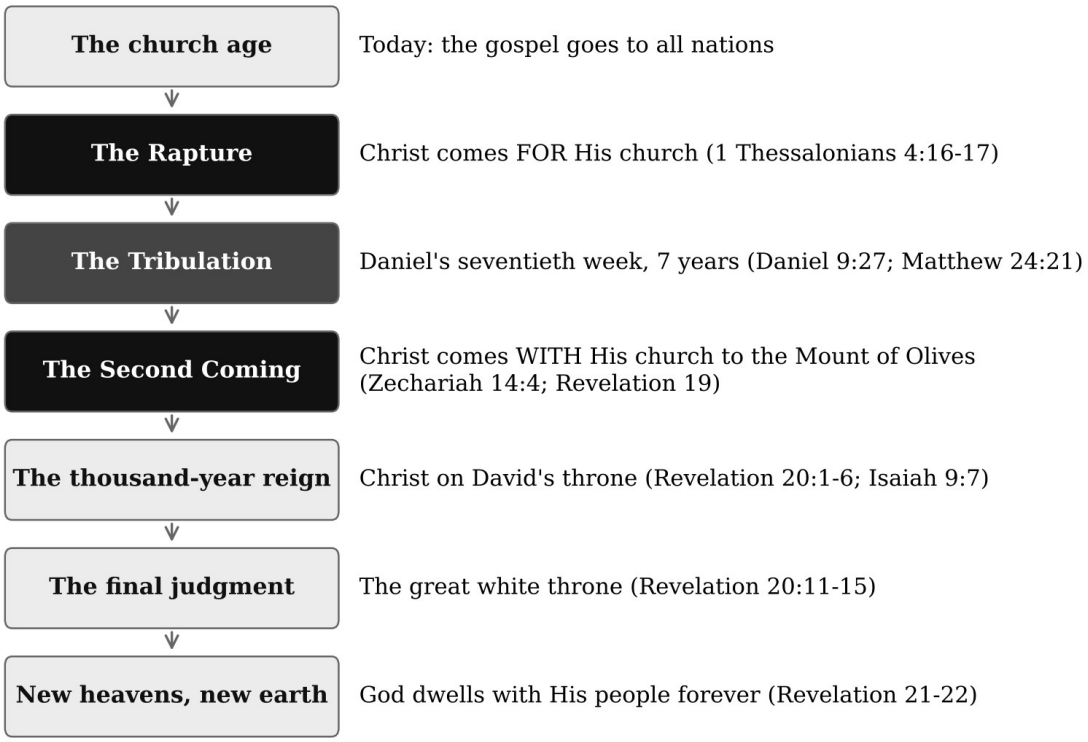


Figure 3. The Order of Coming Events in the Pre-Tribulation View

What the Rapture Will Be Like for the World

Jesus said His coming would be like the days of Noah and the days of Lot.

> *And just as the days of Noah **were**, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For just as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and took all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.* (Matthew 24:37-39)

People were eating and drinking, marrying, buying, selling, planting, and building. Ordinary life was going on. Then, suddenly, judgment came. Many teachers apply this to the beginning of the Day of the Lord. One day the world will wake up to find millions of people gone. And then the hardest seven years in human history will begin.

The Blessed Hope

For a believer, the Rapture is not something to fear. Paul called the return of Christ "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). It means seeing Jesus face to face. It means being reunited with every believer who has died. It means new bodies that never get sick, never age, and never die.

> *For our citizenship exists in **the** heavens, from which also we eagerly await a Savior, **the** Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humiliation, so that it may become conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working of His being able even to subject all things to Himself.* (Philippians 3:20-21)

> *Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He is revealed, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.* (1 John 3:2-3)

Notice John's last line. Everyone who has this hope purifies himself. The return of Christ is not just something to argue about. It changes how we live today. If He could come today, how would you want Him to find you?

The last prayer in the Bible is a prayer for His return.

> *The One who testifies these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Yes, come, Lord Jesus!* (Revelation 22:20)

Study Questions

1. Read John 14:1-3 and Acts 1:10-11. What do these passages promise about how Jesus will return?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. What will happen, in order? Why did Paul tell them to "encourage one another" with this?
3. What are the main reasons for the pre-tribulation view? Which one do you find strongest?
4. Why do you think Christians who hold different views of the timing can still agree on the most important truths about His return?

5. 1 John 3:3 says hope in Christ's return purifies us. What is one thing you would change if you knew Jesus was coming back this week?

Chapter 17: The Seventieth Week

> *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not happened from **the** beginning of **the** world until now, nor by any means will happen. And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved; but because of the elect those days will be shortened.*
>
> Matthew 24:21-22 (SLB)

In Chapter 7 we saw that Daniel's seventy weeks were split. Sixty-nine weeks of years led to the coming of the Messiah, and then He was cut off. The city and temple were destroyed in A.D. 70. But the seventieth week has not yet come. The clock stopped, and it will start again.

This chapter is about that last week, the seven years the Bible teachers usually call the Tribulation. I will keep it focused on what the Bible says about Jesus in those years, because this is a book about the prophecies of Jesus, not a full study of the end times. My studies of Daniel and Revelation go into more detail.

The Week Begins With a Covenant

Daniel 9:27 tells us how the seventieth week begins: "he will make a covenant strong for the many for one seven." The "he" is the "prince who is coming" of verse 26, a ruler who rises from the people who destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Roman people. Most pre-tribulation teachers believe this is the coming world ruler the New Testament calls the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3) and the beast (Revelation 13), who is often called the Antichrist.

He will make a firm agreement with "the many," apparently with Israel, for seven years. That agreement will start the clock again.

The Middle of the Week

Halfway through the seven years, the prince will break his word.

> *And he will make a covenant strong for the many **for** one seven; and **in** the middle of the seven he will cause sacrifice and grain offering to cease; and on a wing of abominations **will be** one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, and what has been decided will be poured out on the one who is desolate.* (Daniel 9:27)

He will stop the sacrifices and set up "an abomination" that makes desolate. For sacrifices to be stopped, they must have started again, which means there will be some kind of temple or place of worship in Jerusalem in those days. Paul says this man will sit in the temple of God and declare himself to be God.

> *Let no one deceive you in any way; because **it will not come** unless the apostasy comes first and the man of sin is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits down in the temple of God as God, displaying himself that he is God.* (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4)

Jesus pointed His disciples to Daniel's prophecy when they asked Him about the end of the age.

> *Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in **the** holy place (let the **one** reading understand), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains* (Matthew 24:15-16)

Notice that Jesus placed the abomination of desolation in the future, more than five hundred years after Daniel. Some teachers point to an earlier event, when the Greek king Antiochus IV Epiphanes set up an altar to Zeus in the temple in 167 B.C., as a preview. Jesus spoke after that and still said, "when you see" it. And He tied it directly to His own return, which has not happened yet.

Three and a Half Years

The Bible measures the second half of the week several ways: "a time and times and half a time" (Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 12:14), forty-two months (Revelation 11:2; 13:5), and 1,260 days (Revelation 11:3; 12:6). All three are the same: three and a half years. This is also where the 360-day prophetic year in Chapter 7 comes from, since 1,260 days divided by 42 months is 30 days a month.

> *And he will speak words against the Most High, and he will wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and he will intend to change seasons and law; and they will be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time.* (Daniel 7:25)

> *And it was given to it to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority was given to it over every tribe and tongue and nation. And all who dwell on the earth will worship it, whose names have not been written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from **the** foundation of **the** world.* (Revelation 13:7-8)

This ruler will make war on the saints, people who come to faith during those years, and he will rule over every tribe and nation. The whole world will worship him, except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

A Time of Trouble Like No Other

Daniel, Jeremiah, and Jesus all described this time as worse than any before it.

> *And at that time Michael will arise, the great prince who stands over the sons of your people; and there will be a time of distress such as has not been since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people will escape, everyone who is found written in the scroll.* (Daniel 12:1)

> *Alas! For that day **is** great, so that **there is** none like it; and it **is** a time of distress for Jacob, and from it he will be saved.* (Jeremiah 30:7)

Jeremiah calls it "a time of distress for Jacob." It is Israel's darkest hour. But both Daniel and Jeremiah end on hope. "Your people will escape." "From it he will be saved."

The book of Revelation describes the judgments of those years in three series of seven: seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls (Revelation 6-16). War, famine, disease, earthquakes, and signs in the sky come one after another. The people of the earth know where it is coming from.

> *and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from **the** face of the One sitting on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"* (Revelation 6:16-17)

Notice who is pouring out these judgments. It is "the wrath of the Lamb." The Lamb who was slain is also the Judge.

Jesus in the Tribulation

This is a book about the prophecies of Jesus, so here is what the Bible says He will be doing during those seven years.

He will open the scroll. In Revelation 5, no one in heaven or on earth is worthy to open the sealed scroll of God's judgment, until the Lamb, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, takes it (Revelation 5:5-7). Every judgment in the Tribulation flows from His hand.

He will save many. Revelation 7 describes 144,000 from the tribes of Israel sealed by God, and then a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, who come out of the great tribulation having washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:4, 9, 14). Even in the darkest days in history, Jesus will be saving people.

He will bring Israel to repentance. Zechariah says two thirds will perish in the land, and the third will be refined like silver and tested like gold (Zechariah 13:8-9). At the end, they will call on the LORD's name, and He will say, "It is My people," and they will say, "The LORD is my God." Paul says that a partial hardening has come on Israel until the full number of Gentiles comes in, and then "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25-27).

He will shorten those days. Jesus said that if those days were not cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect they will be cut short (Matthew 24:22). God's mercy sets a limit even on His wrath.

Signs Before His Appearing

Jesus said that immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sky itself will announce His coming.

> *And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a trumpet of great sound, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from **the** ends of **the** heavens to their ends.* (Matthew 24:29-31)

This is the moment the whole Tribulation leads to. Joel spoke of the sun turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD (Joel 2:31). Peter quoted it at Pentecost (Acts 2:20). Its final fulfillment comes here.

Why Tell Us This?

Some people avoid the prophecies of the Tribulation because they are frightening. I understand that. But God did not give them to scare us. He gave them for at least three reasons.

First, so that no one would be fooled. Jesus warned that false christs and false prophets would come and deceive many (Matthew 24:24). The world will be offered a counterfeit savior. The prophecies show what the real one looks like.

Second, so that anyone left behind after the Rapture would know what is happening and turn to Christ. Many will. The great multitude of Revelation 7 proves it.

Third, so that we would take sin and judgment seriously. The God who loved the world enough to send His Son is also holy. The cross shows both His love and His judgment against sin. Those who refuse the cross will face the judgment themselves.

For the believer, though, the last word is hope. Paul wrote, “God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Study Questions

1. How does Daniel 9:27 describe the beginning and middle of the seventieth week?
2. Jesus spoke of the abomination of desolation as still future (Matthew 24:15). Why does that matter?
3. Daniel 12:1 and Jeremiah 30:7 both describe terrible distress, but both end on hope. What is the hope?
4. What will Jesus be doing during the Tribulation? Which of those things encourages you most?
5. Why do you think God told us about the Tribulation ahead of time?

Chapter 18: He Comes in Glory

> *Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, and those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail because of Him. Yes, amen.*
>
> Revelation 1:7 (SLB)

The first time Jesus came, almost no one noticed. A few shepherds, some wise men from the east, and two old people in the temple. He was born in a stable, laid in a feeding trough, and raised in a town people laughed at.

The second time, the whole world will see Him.

The Son of Man on the Clouds

About 550 B.C., Daniel had a vision of four beasts coming up out of the sea, picturing four world empires. Then he saw the throne of God, the Ancient of Days, and someone else approaching it.

> *I was seeing in the visions of the night, and look, with the clouds of the heavens **one** like a son of man was coming; and He reached the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, and all the peoples, nations, and languages will serve Him. His dominion **is** an everlasting dominion, which will not pass away, and His kingdom **one** which will not be destroyed.* (Daniel 7:13-14)

This One is "like a son of man." He looks human. But He comes with the clouds of heaven, which in the Old Testament is how God Himself travels (Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 19:1). And He is given a kingdom that will never end, and all peoples serve Him. In Daniel, a human figure who rides the clouds like God and receives the worship of the nations.

"Son of Man" was Jesus' favorite name for Himself. He used it about eighty times in the Gospels. At His trial, when the high priest put Him under oath and asked if He was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus answered by quoting Daniel 7.

> *Jesus says to him, "You have said **it**. Nevertheless I say to you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at **the** right **hand** of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."*
> (Matthew 26:64)

The high priest tore his robes and said Jesus had spoken blasphemy (Matthew 26:65). He understood exactly what Jesus was claiming. Jesus was saying, "I am the One in Daniel's vision. The next time you see Me, I will be coming on the clouds."

Every Eye Will See Him

At the start of Revelation, John put two prophecies together, Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10.

> *Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, and those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail because of Him. Yes, amen.* (Revelation 1:7)

Jesus said the same: “they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). His return will not be secret. It will not happen in some desert where only a few can see it. Jesus warned against believing anyone who said that (Matthew 24:26-27). It will be like lightning that lights up the whole sky from east to west.

His Feet on the Mount of Olives

The prophet Zechariah described the last battle in detail. All the nations gather against Jerusalem. The city is about to fall. Then the LORD Himself comes.

> *And I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem for the battle, and the city will be captured, and the houses will be plundered, and the women will be ravished; and half of the city will go out into the exile, and the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. And the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as **on** the day of His fighting, on a day of battle. And His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives, which **is** before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split from its middle toward the east and toward the west **into** a very great valley; and half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward the south.* (Zechariah 14:2-4)

Remember where Jesus left. He ascended from the Mount of Olives, and the angels said He would come back the same way (Acts 1:11-12). Zechariah, five hundred years earlier, said the LORD’s feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, on the east side of Jerusalem, and the mountain will split in two.

Notice again who is coming. Zechariah says it is “the LORD,” using God’s own name. Yet His feet stand on a mountain. The God of Israel has feet. The One who comes is both God and man.

> *And the LORD will be King over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one, and His name one.* (Zechariah 14:9)

The Rider on the White Horse

John saw the same event in a vision near the end of Revelation.

> *And I saw heaven opened, and look, a white horse, and the One sitting on it **is** called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. And His eyes **are** like a flame of fire, and on His head **are** many diadems, having a name written which no one knows except He Himself, and clothed with a garment dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven were following Him on white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure. And out of His mouth goes forth a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike the nations; and He Himself will shepherd them with a rod of iron; and He Himself treads the press of the wine of the fury and of the wrath of God the Almighty. And He has on the robe and on His thigh a name written: “King of kings and Lord of lords.”* (Revelation 19:11-16)

Every title in this passage belongs to Jesus. He is Faithful and True (Revelation 3:14). He is the Word of God (John 1:1, 14). He rules the nations with a rod of iron, as Psalm 2:9 said the Messiah would. He treads the winepress of God’s wrath, as Isaiah 63:1-3 pictured. And His name is King of kings and Lord of lords.

His robe is dipped in blood. Some teachers see His own blood from the cross. Others, comparing Isaiah 63, see the blood of His enemies. Either way, the Lamb who was slain comes back as the Lion who conquers.

The armies of heaven follow Him, dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Earlier in the same chapter, the fine linen is "the righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:8). These are believers, raised and changed at the Rapture, coming back with Him. Jude quotes an old prophecy of Enoch about this very scene.

> *And Enoch, the seventh from Adam, also prophesied about these, saying, "Look, **the** Lord came with His holy myriads, to execute judgment against all, and to convict all the ungodly among them concerning all their works of ungodliness which they have done in an ungodly way, and concerning all the harsh **things** which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."* (Jude 1:14-15)

The End of the Beast

The world ruler of the Tribulation will gather the armies of the earth to fight against Jesus. It will not be a long battle.

> *And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with the One sitting on the horse and with His army. And the beast was captured, and with this **one** the false prophet who did the signs before it, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worship its image. The two were thrown living into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.* (Revelation 19:19-20)

Paul says the Lord Jesus will destroy the lawless one "with the breath of His mouth" (2 Thessalonians 2:8). One word from Him is enough. The battle that the world calls Armageddon, from the place where the armies gather (Revelation 16:16), ends the moment He appears.

Israel Looks on Him Whom They Pierced

At His second coming, Zechariah 12:10 will be fulfilled in full. We saw in Chapter 11 that the piercing happened at the cross. The looking and mourning happen here.

> *And it will be on that day **that** I will seek to destroy all the nations that are coming against Jerusalem.* (Zechariah 12:9)

> *And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications; and they will look to Me, **to Him** whom they have pierced; and they will mourn over Him like a mourning over the only **son**, and **they will** show bitterness over Him as **one** shows bitterness over the firstborn.* (Zechariah 12:10)

The very people who were surrounded and about to be destroyed will look up and see their Deliverer, and they will see the wounds. They will mourn as for an only son. And in that moment, Paul says, "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). The next chapter of Zechariah begins, "On that day there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity" (Zechariah 13:1).

I find this one of the most moving prophecies in the Bible. For two thousand years, many of the Jewish people have rejected Jesus as the Messiah. On that day, they will recognize Him. And they will recognize Him by the marks of the nails.

The Stone That Fills the Earth

Long before Daniel saw the Son of Man, he interpreted a dream for King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The king had seen a giant statue with a head of gold, chest of silver, belly of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay, picturing a series of world empires. Then a stone came.

> *You were seeing until a stone was cut out, which **was** not by hands, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and shattered them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were shattered as one, and they became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, and no place was found for them. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled all the earth.* (Daniel 2:34-35)

> *And in the days of those kings the God of the heavens will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and the kingdom will not be left to another people; it will shatter and put an end to all these kingdoms, and it will stand forever* (Daniel 2:44)

A stone "not by hands," meaning not made by humans, strikes the statue on its feet and shatters the whole thing. Then the stone grows into a mountain that fills the earth. When Jesus returns, every human kingdom will end, and His kingdom will fill the whole earth. The rejected stone of Psalm 118 becomes the mountain of Daniel 2.

Then the seventh trumpet in Revelation will sound, and heaven will announce it.

> *And the seventh angel sounded, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of the world have become **those** of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign to the ages of the ages."* (Revelation 11:15)

Study Questions

1. Read Daniel 7:13-14. What details show that the "son of man" is more than a man?
2. Why did the high priest call Jesus' answer in Matthew 26:64 blasphemy? What was Jesus claiming?
3. Compare Acts 1:9-12 with Zechariah 14:4. What do you notice?
4. Read Revelation 19:11-16 and list every name or title given to the Rider. What does each one tell you about Jesus?
5. Zechariah 12:10 says Israel will recognize Him by His wounds. What do the wounds of Jesus mean to you?

Chapter 19: The King on David's Throne

> *Of the increase of the dominion and of peace* ***there will be*** *no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness from now and until forever. The zeal of the LORD of armies will do this.*
>
> Isaiah 9:7 (SLB)

In Chapter 5, we saw God promise David a Son who would sit on his throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). We saw the angel tell Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32). Jesus has not yet sat on David's throne in Jerusalem. He is seated now at the Father's right hand in heaven, "until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet" (Psalm 110:1). When He returns, the "until" will be over.

A Thousand Years

After John saw the Rider on the white horse defeat the beast, he saw something else.

> *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut him in, and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years were completed; and after these things he must be released for a little time. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them; and the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and who did not worship the beast nor its image, and did not receive the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one having a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death does not have authority, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him a thousand years.* (Revelation 20:1-6)

Five times in these six verses, and once more in verse 7, John says "a thousand years." Satan is bound and thrown into the abyss so he cannot deceive the nations. Those who were faithful to Christ, including believers martyred in the Tribulation, are raised and reign with Him. This is called the first resurrection. The rest of the dead are not raised until after the thousand years.

Christians have understood these thousand years in different ways. Some see them as a picture of Christ's present reign from heaven. Others see them as a golden age the church will bring about before He returns. I read them, along with many Bible teachers through history, as a literal reign of Christ on earth after His return, often called the Millennium, from the Latin word for a thousand years. This fits the order of events in Revelation 19 and 20, and it fits the many Old Testament promises of a King who would rule the nations from Jerusalem in peace and justice, promises that have never yet been fulfilled.

What the Prophets Saw

The Old Testament prophets described a coming age that does not match today's world and does not match eternity either. In it, there is still death, but people live very long lives. There are still nations, but they all come to Jerusalem to learn God's ways. There is still the possibility of sin, but the King rules with perfect justice. This is the kingdom the prophets saw.

The King rules from Zion. In Psalm 2, God answers the rebellion of the nations by installing His King on Mount Zion and giving Him the nations as His inheritance.

> *"And I, I have installed My King on Zion, the mountain of My holiness." I will recount concerning the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You **are** My Son; I, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will make nations Your inheritance, and the ends of **the** earth Your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron; like a vessel of a potter You will smash them."* (Psalm 2:6-9)

The nations come to learn. Isaiah and Micah, who lived at the same time, both recorded this prophecy.

> *And it will be at the end of the days that the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established at the top of the mountains, and it will be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us from His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion **the** law will go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations and will decide for many peoples, and they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and they will not learn war again.* (Isaiah 2:2-4)

Notice how it ends. Swords beaten into plowshares. Nations no longer learning war. That has never happened. The United Nations has a sculpture based on this verse outside its headquarters in New York, but war goes on. Only the King of kings can bring this about. Micah adds that everyone will sit under his own vine and fig tree, with no one to make them afraid (Micah 4:4).

He judges with perfect justice. Isaiah 11, which began with the shoot from the stump of Jesse, describes how He will rule.

> *And His delight **will be** in the fear of the LORD; and He will not judge by the sight of His eyes, and He will not decide by the hearing of His ears; and He will judge the poor with righteousness, and decide with uprightness for the humble of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will put the wicked to death. And righteousness will be the waistband of His hips, and faithfulness the waistband of His loins.* (Isaiah 11:3-5)

He will not judge by appearances or by rumor. He will defend the poor and the humble. Think of every injustice you have ever seen in a courtroom, a government, or a workplace. The coming King will not get it wrong once.

Creation itself is healed.

> *And the wolf will sojourn with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling **will be** together; and a small boy will lead them. And the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion, like the ox, will eat straw. And the nursing child will play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned **child** will put out his hand over the nest of the viper. They will not do evil and they will not destroy in all the mountain of My holiness; for the earth will be full **of** the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.* (Isaiah 11:6-9)

The curse that came on the ground in Genesis 3 will be lifted in large part. The wolf and the lamb, the lion and the ox, the child and the snake. And the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Long life returns. Isaiah says a person who dies at a hundred will be thought of as a youth (Isaiah 65:20). That verse shows the kingdom is not yet eternity, because death is still possible. But it is a world much closer to Eden.

The nations worship the King. Zechariah says the survivors of the nations that came against Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of armies, and to keep the Feast of Booths (Zechariah 14:16).

The Son of David on David's Throne

The prophets were clear that this King would be from David's line, and some even call Him David.

> *'Look, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'and I will carry out the good word which I have spoken to the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause to sprout for David a Branch of righteousness, and He will do justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell in security; and this **is what** one will call her: "The LORD Our Righteousness."'* (Jeremiah 33:14-16)

> *And My servant David **will be** king over them, and there shall be one shepherd for all of them; and they shall walk in My judgments, and keep My statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell on the land which I gave to My servant, to Jacob, in which your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell on it, they and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant **will be** prince for them forever.* (Ezekiel 37:24-25)

Ezekiel wrote about four hundred years after David died. He was not saying David would come back from the dead to be king. He was using David's name for the great Son of David, the Messiah, the true Shepherd-King.

Amos promised that God would rebuild "the booth of David that is falling" (Amos 9:11). At the first church council in Jerusalem, James quoted that very passage and said the coming of Gentiles into the church agreed with it (Acts 15:15-17). The Gentiles are coming in now, as Amos said they would. But the rebuilding of David's house points ahead to the full restoration when the King returns.

Jesus Himself told His disciples about this time.

> *And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on **the** throne of His glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* (Matthew 19:28)

"The regeneration" means the renewal of all things. The Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, and the twelve apostles will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus spoke of a real kingdom, with real thrones, and a real Israel.

Why a Thousand Years?

Some people ask why God would have a thousand-year kingdom on this earth before the eternal state. Why not go straight to the new heavens and new earth?

I think part of the answer is that God keeps His word, and He keeps it in the place where He gave it. He promised Abraham a land. He promised David a throne in Jerusalem. He promised the prophets that the nations would beat their swords into plowshares on this earth. The Millennium is God keeping those promises in history, in the same world where they were made.

Another part of the answer is in what happens at the end of the thousand years. Satan is released for a short time, and even after a thousand years of perfect government, peace, and justice, with the King visible in Jerusalem, many still rebel (Revelation 20:7-9). That will prove once and for all that the problem with the human heart was never our surroundings. People do not sin because of poverty, bad government, or a hard life. The human heart needs to be made new. Only the gospel can do that.

The Promises Kept

When the King reigns on David's throne, these promises will be fulfilled:

- The throne of David established forever (2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:7; Luke 1:32-33).
- The King installed on Zion and given the nations (Psalm 2:6-8).
- The nations streaming to Jerusalem to learn God's ways (Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2).
- Swords beaten into plowshares and war ended (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3).
- The Branch reigning in righteousness, with Judah saved and Jerusalem secure (Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:14-16).
- Creation renewed and the earth full of the knowledge of the LORD (Isaiah 11:6-9).
- The apostles on twelve thrones judging Israel (Matthew 19:28).
- Satan bound for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2-3).

The first coming kept every promise God made about the suffering of the Messiah. The second coming will keep every promise He made about His glory.

Study Questions

1. Read 2 Samuel 7:16 and Luke 1:32-33. How has Jesus fulfilled this promise already, and how will He fulfill it in the future?
2. Read Isaiah 2:2-4. Why has the world never been able to beat its swords into plowshares?
3. Isaiah 11:3-5 says the King will not judge by appearances. What injustice would you most like to see Him set right?

4. Why do you think God will allow a final rebellion after the thousand years? What does it teach us about the human heart?
5. How does knowing that Jesus will one day rule the earth in perfect justice affect the way you live and vote and work today?

Chapter 20: Judgment and All Things New

> *And the One sitting on the throne said, "Look, I make all things new." And He says to me, "Write, because these words are true and faithful."*
>
> Revelation 21:5 (SLB)

The Bible begins with a garden, a man and a woman, and God walking with them. It ends with a city, a great multitude from every nation, and God dwelling with them. Between those two scenes is the whole story of sin and salvation. At the center of the story is Jesus. And at the very end, the prophecies about Him reach their final fulfillment.

God was patient with me through every season I drifted. That keeps me from writing anyone off as too far gone. Every day He waits to return is another day of mercy for someone we love to turn and come home (2 Peter 3:9).

Every Knee Will Bow

About seven hundred years before Christ, God spoke through Isaiah with an oath.

> *Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I **am** God, and **there is** none else. By Myself I have sworn; righteousness has gone out from My mouth, a word, and it will not return, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear.* (Isaiah 45:22-23)

God says, "I am God, and there is none else," and then, "to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear." Paul took those words, which God spoke about Himself, and applied them to Jesus.

> *Therefore God also highly exalted Him and granted to Him a name, the **one** above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of **those** in heaven and **those** on earth and **those** under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ **is** Lord, to **the** glory of God **the** Father.* (Philippians 2:9-11)

Notice what this means. The bowing that Isaiah said belongs to the LORD alone, Paul says belongs to Jesus. One day every person who has ever lived, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, will bow before Jesus and say that He is Lord. For some it will be the joy of worship. For others it will be the admission of something they refused to believe. But every knee will bow.

The Judge of All

The Old Testament says God is the Judge of all the earth (Genesis 18:25; Psalm 96:13). Jesus said the Father has handed all judgment to the Son.

> *For the Father does not judge anyone, but has given all the judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father. The one who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.* (John 5:22-23)

> *Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth, those who have done the good **things** to a resurrection of life, and those who have practiced the wicked **things** to a resurrection of judgment.* (John 5:28-29)

Daniel had said the same about the resurrection, more than five hundred years earlier.

> *And many of those who sleep in the ground of dust will awake, these to everlasting life, and these to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence.* (Daniel 12:2)

Paul told the philosophers in Athens that God has fixed a day when He will judge the world by a Man He has appointed, and that He has given proof of it by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:31). The resurrection is not only proof that Jesus is the Savior. It is notice that He will be the Judge.

The Great White Throne

At the end of the thousand years, after Satan's last rebellion is crushed, John saw the final judgment.

> *And I saw a great white throne and the One sitting on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged out of the things written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged, each one according to their works. And Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And if anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.* (Revelation 20:11-15)

This is a sober passage, and I will not soften it. The dead, great and small, stand before the throne. The books are opened, and they are judged by what they have done. Anyone whose name is not in the book of life is thrown into the lake of fire.

But notice there are two kinds of books. The books of works record what each person has done. If we are judged by those books alone, every one of us will be condemned, because "all sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The other book is the book of life, also called the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:27). The only hope at that throne is to have your name written in the Lamb's book. And the only way to get it there is through the Lamb who was slain.

The Last Enemy

Paul describes the end this way.

> *then the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He brings to nothing all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all the enemies under His feet. **The** last enemy is brought to nothing: death. For He put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says that all things have been put in subjection, **it is** evident that the **One** who put all things in subjection to Him **is** excepted. And when all things have been put in subjection to Him, then the Son Himself also will be put in subjection to the **One** who put all things in subjection to Him, so that God may be all things in all.* (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)

“The last enemy is brought to nothing: death.” Isaiah had prophesied that God would swallow up death forever and wipe away tears from all faces (Isaiah 25:8). Paul quoted it in the same chapter: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). Revelation shows it happening. Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). Death itself dies.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Isaiah heard God say He would create something completely new.

> *For look, I am creating new heavens and a new earth; and the former **things** will not be remembered, and they will not come up on **the** heart.* (Isaiah 65:17)

Peter wrote that this is still God’s promise.

> *But according to His promise we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.* (2 Peter 3:13)

And John saw it.

> *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no longer. And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of heaven, saying, “Look, the tabernacle of God **is** with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them, their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer, nor mourning nor crying nor pain will be any longer, because the first things passed away.” And the One sitting on the throne said, “Look, I make all things new.” And He says to me, “Write, because these words are true and faithful.”* (Revelation 21:1-5)

Read the promises one at a time. God will dwell with His people. He will wipe away every tear. There will be no more death, no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain. The first things have passed away. “Look, I make all things new.”

The One on the throne is the One who was rejected, betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, pierced, and buried with the rich. The Lamb is at the center of it all.

> *And **there** will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His slaves will serve Him. And they will see His face, and His name **will be** on their foreheads. And night will not be there, and they have no need of a lamp and of light of the sun, because **the** Lord God illuminates them; and they will reign to the ages of the ages.* (Revelation 22:3-5)

“They will see His face.” That is the final fulfillment of every prophecy. Not a doctrine. Not a chart. A face. The people of God will see Jesus face to face and live with Him forever.

Why the Lord Waits

If all this is coming, why hasn’t it come yet? People asked that question even in Peter’s day. Peter’s answer is one of the most loving verses in the Bible.

> *The Lord is not slow concerning the promise, as some consider slowness, but is patient toward us, not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance.* (2 Peter 3:9)

God is not slow. He is patient. Every day He waits is another day for someone to turn to Him. That may be you.

The Whole Picture

We have now traced the prophecies of Jesus from Genesis to Revelation. Before we turn to the odds, look at the shape of what we have seen.

- In the garden, a Seed of the woman was promised to crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15).
- Over two thousand years, God narrowed the line to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, and David.
- The prophets named His town, described His birth, and set the time of His coming.
- They foretold His forerunner, His ministry, His miracles, and His rejection.
- They described His betrayal, His price, His silence, His wounds, His death among criminals, and His burial with the rich.
- They promised His resurrection, His ascension, and His seat at God's right hand.
- They promise His return for His church, His coming in glory, His reign on David's throne, His final judgment, and a new creation where God dwells with His people.

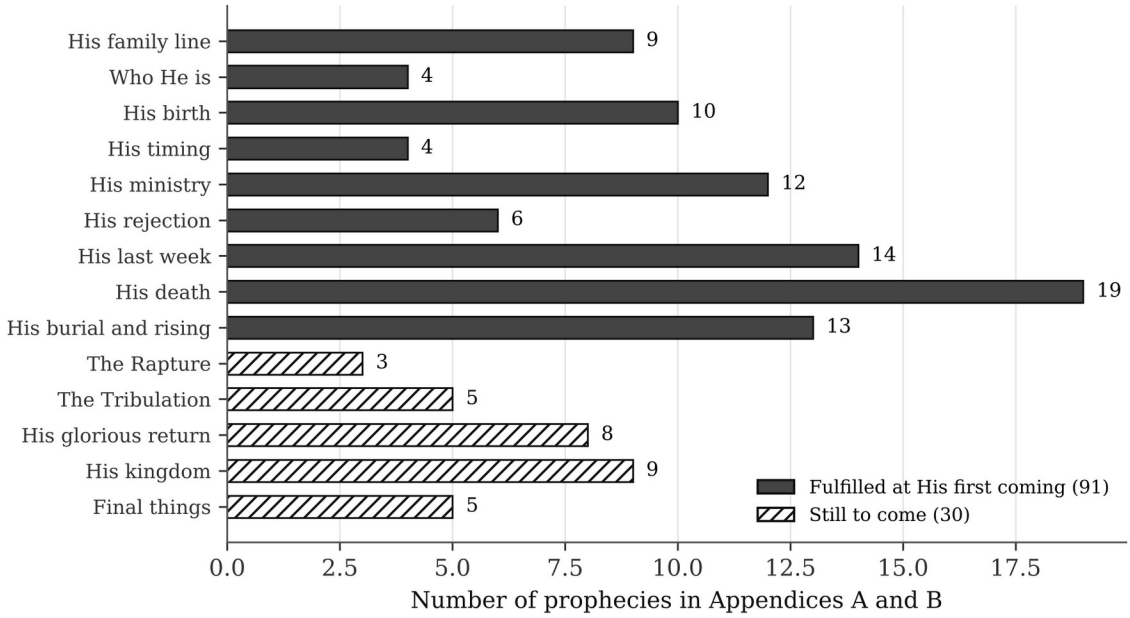


Figure 4. Prophecies in This Book: Fulfilled and Still to Come

The first coming happened just as the prophets said. Every single detail. The second coming is still ahead. Given God's record, I would not bet against Him.

Study Questions

1. Isaiah 45:23 says every knee will bow to the LORD. Philippians 2:10-11 applies it to Jesus. What does that tell you about who Jesus is?

2. What is the difference between the books of works and the book of life in Revelation 20:12? Which one gives you hope?

3. Read Revelation 21:1-5. Which promise means the most to you right now, and why?

4. Peter says God is patient, not slow. Who in your life are you praying will turn to Him while there is still time?

5. Look back over the list at the end of this chapter. What part of the story of prophecy has surprised you most so far?

Part Four: The Odds

Chapter 21: One Man, Eight Prophecies

For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote concerning Me.

John 5:46 (SLB)

Suppose you were told that a man would be born in a certain village, that someone would announce him in the desert, that he would ride into the capital on a young donkey, that he would be betrayed by a friend, that the price would be thirty pieces of silver, that the money would be thrown into a temple and given to a potter, that he would stay silent while on trial for his life, and that he would be executed by having his hands and feet pierced. What are the chances that all of that would come true of one man by accident?

That is the question a science teacher named Peter Stoner asked his college students in the middle of the last century. His answer has been quoted in many books and sermons since. In this chapter, I want to show you exactly what he did, give him full credit, and explain plainly what his numbers mean and what they do not mean.

Who Was Peter Stoner?

Peter W. Stoner chaired the mathematics and astronomy departments at Pasadena City College in California and later led the science division at Westmont College. His small book *Science Speaks* went through several editions, including a 1963 Moody Press paperback. Chapter 3, “The Christ of Prophecy,” is the one everyone quotes. The text of the book is kept online by the Stoner family.

Stoner explains how he got his numbers. The Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship at Pasadena City College sponsored a class in Christian evidences. He gave the students a prophecy and asked them to estimate the chance that it would come true of any man by accident. They discussed each one until, in his words, “the students agreed unanimously on a definite estimate as being both reasonable and conservative.” Then he combined those estimates with ones given to him later by about twelve other classes, more than six hundred students in all. He writes, “I have carefully weighed the estimates and have changed some to make them more conservative.”

I want you to notice that. Stoner’s numbers are estimates. They were made by thoughtful people, but they were not measured in a laboratory. When someone quotes them as if they were exact facts, he is claiming more than Stoner did.

Stoner’s Eight Prophecies

Here are the eight prophecies Stoner chose and the chance he used for each. “1 in 1,000” means that, by his estimate, only one man in a thousand would fulfill that prophecy by accident.

#	Prophecy	Scripture	Stoner's estimate	Short reason he gives
1	Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	1 in 280,000	Bethlehem's share of the world's population over the centuries
2	Preceded by a messenger	Malachi 3:1	1 in 1,000	Very few men have had a forerunner prepare the way for them
3	Enters Jerusalem as a king riding on a donkey	Zechariah 9:9	1 in 100	No other ruler of Jerusalem is known to have entered this way
4	Betrayed by a friend, with wounds in His hands	Zechariah 13:6	1 in 1,000	Betrayal by a friend is rare, and with wounds to the hands rarer still
5	Sold for thirty pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12	1 in 1,000	The exact price makes it unlikely
6	The money thrown into the house of the LORD and given to the potter	Zechariah 11:13	1 in 100,000	The students knew of no other case combining these details
7	Silent before His accusers, though innocent	Isaiah 53:7	1 in 1,000	An innocent man on trial for his life almost always defends himself
8	Hands and feet pierced (crucified)	Psalm 22:16	1 in 10,000	Based on the students' study of how often men were executed this way

Several of these were cut down from what the students first proposed. For the donkey, the class estimated 1 in 10,000, but Stoner used 1 in 100. For the thirty pieces of silver and for the silent trial, the students said 1 in 10,000, and he used 1 in 1,000. He leaned toward the skeptic on purpose.

Checking Stoner's Reasons

Stoner gave short reasons, and I wanted to see whether the facts back them up. Six of his eight prophecies are also in my recount, and I give the evidence for each one in the next chapter, under "The Evidence Behind Each Estimate." Here are the other two, plus the one I set aside.

The donkey, 1 in 100. Kings did ride donkeys and mules in Israel. When David made Solomon king, he had him ride "on the mule of King David" (1 Kings 1:38). So the picture was a royal one. But Zechariah 9:9 is more specific: Jerusalem's King comes to the city, humble, on a donkey's colt, while the people greet Him as King. Stoner's students set this at 1 in 10,000, and he cut it to 1 in 100. Since a man could choose to do this, I left it out of my recount.

Silent before His accusers, 1 in 1,000. Jesus' silence was striking enough that Pilate "marveled greatly" (Matthew 27:14). An innocent man on trial for his life nearly always speaks up for himself. Stoner's students said 1 in 10,000, and he used 1 in 1,000. This too was in Jesus' control, so it is not in my recount.

Wounds in the house of friends, 1 in 1,000. This is Zechariah 13:6. As I explained in Chapter 4, its meaning is debated, so I report Stoner's figure but do not lean on it.

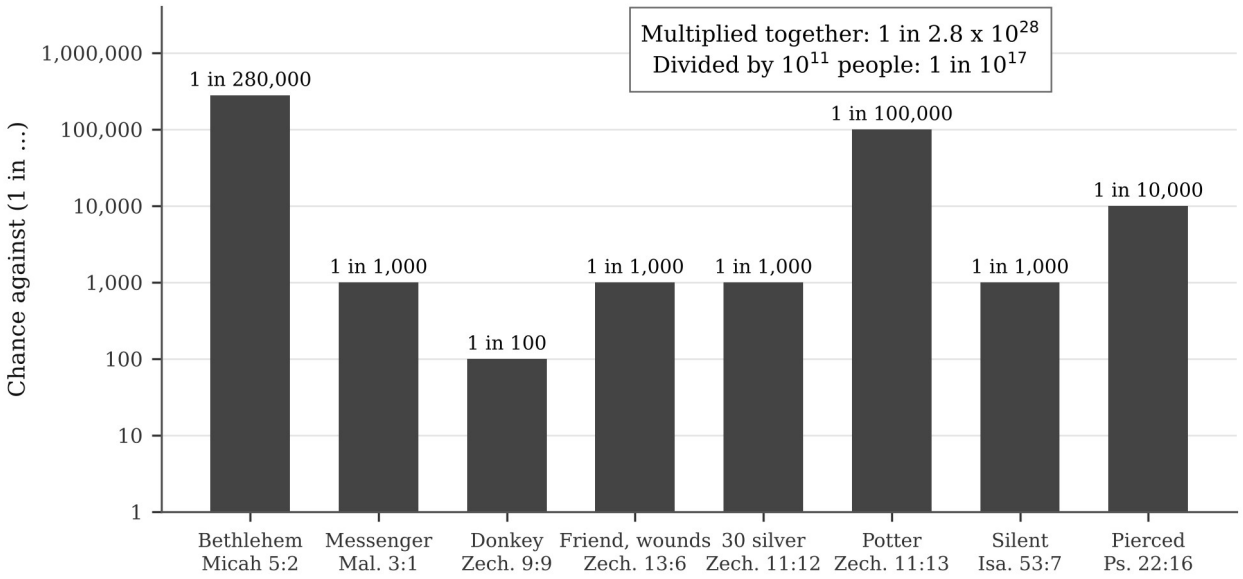


Figure 5. Peter Stoner's Eight Prophecies and His Estimates

Multiplying the Chances

When two things have to happen together and one does not affect the other, you multiply their chances. If the chance of flipping heads is 1 in 2, the chance of flipping heads twice in a row is 1 in 2 times 2, or 1 in 4. Three times in a row is 1 in 8.

Stoner multiplied his eight estimates together. The result was 1 in 2.8 times 10 to the 28th power. That means 28 followed by 27 zeros: 1 in 28,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000. He rounded it to 1 in 10 to the 28th power.

That is the chance that one particular man would fulfill all eight by accident. But a skeptic could say, "Lots of men have lived. Maybe one of them was bound to fit." So Stoner did one more step. He estimated that about 88 billion people had lived since the time of the prophecies, and rounded that up to 10 to the 11th power, or 100 billion. Dividing gave him his famous figure.

> "...the chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10^{17}." (Peter W. Stoner, Science Speaks, chapter 3)

In plain numbers, that is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. One hundred million billion.

An editor's note added to the online edition says the 88 billion figure may be too large by a factor of ten, which would make the answer 1 in 10 to the 18th instead. Either way, the change makes the odds against chance even longer, not shorter.

The Silver Dollars

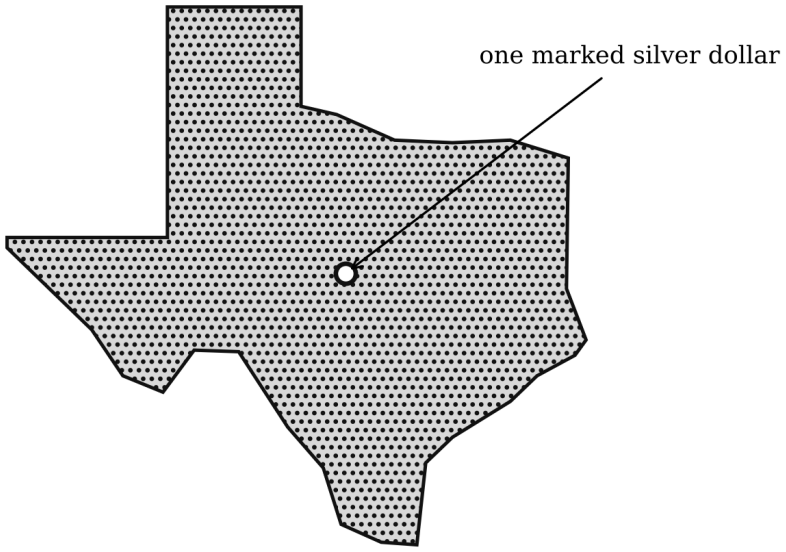
A number like 10 to the 17th power is too big to picture. So Stoner gave an illustration that has become famous.

> "Suppose that we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep." (Stoner, Science Speaks, chapter 3)

Then, he says, mark one of those silver dollars, stir the whole pile all over the state, and blindfold a man. Tell him he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of picking the marked one?

Stoner's point is that the blindfolded man has the same chance of picking the marked coin on his first try as the prophets had of writing these eight prophecies by their own wisdom and having them all come true in one man.

I checked his picture with modern measurements. Texas covers about 268,600 square miles. An old silver dollar is about 1.5 inches across and a little under a tenth of an inch thick. Packed tightly, 10 to the 17th power of them would cover Texas about one and a half feet deep. Stoner's "two feet" is in the right range for coins poured loosely. The picture holds.



10^{17} silver dollars, covering all of Texas
about one and a half to two feet deep

The chance of picking the marked coin on the first try = 1 in 10^{17}

Figure 6. Stoner's Silver Dollar Picture of 1 in 10^{17}

What This Number Means

I want to be careful about what Stoner's number proves.

It does **not** prove that the estimates are exact. Someone could argue with every one of them, and in Chapter 23 we will look at the arguments.

It does **not** prove, on its own, that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. For that we need the historical evidence that He did, which is what Part Two was about.

What it **does** show is this. When you take prophecies written centuries in advance, each one fairly unlikely, and require all of them to come true in one person, the chances shrink so fast that chance stops being a reasonable explanation. Even if every one of Stoner's estimates were off by a lot, the conclusion would hold. We will test that in the next chapter by cutting his numbers down hard.

Putting It Into Percentages

Some people find percentages easier to grasp than odds. Here is the same figure both ways.

Odds	As a percentage	How to say it
1 in 2	50%	A coin flip
1 in 100	1%	One in a hundred
1 in 1 million	0.0001%	One in a million
1 in 292 million	0.00000034%	About the chance of one Powerball ticket winning the jackpot
1 in 10^{17} (Stoner, 8 prophecies)	0.000 000 000 000 001%	Fourteen zeros after the decimal point before the 1
1 in 10^{28} (Stoner, 8 prophecies, one man)	0.000 000 000 000 000 000 000 01%	Twenty-five zeros after the decimal point before the 1

The Powerball figure is the official chance of one ticket matching all five numbers and the Powerball, 1 in 292,201,338. Stoner's eight prophecies are about 340 million times less likely than that.

Study Questions

1. Who was Peter Stoner, and how did he get his estimates? Why is it important to know that they are estimates?
2. Look at the table of Stoner's eight prophecies. Which estimate seems most reasonable to you? Which seems hardest to estimate?
3. Explain in your own words why we multiply chances together when all of them must come true.
4. Why did Stoner divide by the number of people who have lived? Does that make the argument stronger or weaker?
5. Stoner's silver dollar picture has been repeated for decades. Why do you think a picture helps people understand a big number?

Chapter 22: Raising the Stakes, and a Conservative Recount

> *And He said to them, "O foolish **ones** and slow in heart to believe in all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary **for** the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"*
>
> Luke 24:25-26 (SLB)

Stoner did not stop at eight prophecies. And I do not want to stop at Stoner. In this chapter, I will show you what happens when he added more prophecies. Then I will do what a careful skeptic would want: throw out the prophecies Jesus could have arranged, cut every estimate down to a much more generous number, and run the math again.

In project work, if you want a forecast to hold up under scrutiny, you strip out padding and use conservative assumptions. That is why I wanted to test Peter Stoner's prophecy numbers with a stricter recount. When the math still points overwhelmingly to design after you tighten every assumption, the case gets stronger, not weaker.

Sixteen Prophecies

Stoner next took eight more prophecies and assumed, for simplicity, that their combined chance was about the same as the first eight. Multiplying the two sets together, he wrote:

> "The chance that one man would fulfill all sixteen is 1 x 10^{28} x 10^{17} or 1 in 10^{45}." (Stoner, Science Speaks, chapter 3)

To picture that many silver dollars, Stoner said Texas is far too small. If you made them into a solid ball, it would have its center at the earth and reach, in his words, "more than 30 times as far as from the earth to the sun."

Forty-Eight Prophecies

Then Stoner went to forty-eight prophecies. For the added ones, he deliberately used a smaller number than his first set, to stay conservative, and arrived at this:

> "...the chance that any one man fulfilled all forty-eight prophecies to be 1 in 10^{157}." (Stoner, Science Speaks, chapter 3)

That number is 1 followed by 157 zeros. To picture it, Stoner turned from silver dollars to electrons, which are among the smallest things we know of. He wrote that it would take 2.5 times 10 to the 15th power of them laid side by side to make a line one inch long, and that counting just that one-inch line at 250 a minute would take about 19 million years. He then imagined a ball of electrons six billion light-years in radius and said that 10 to the 157th power of electrons would fill that ball many times over, about 6 times 10 to the 28th power times.

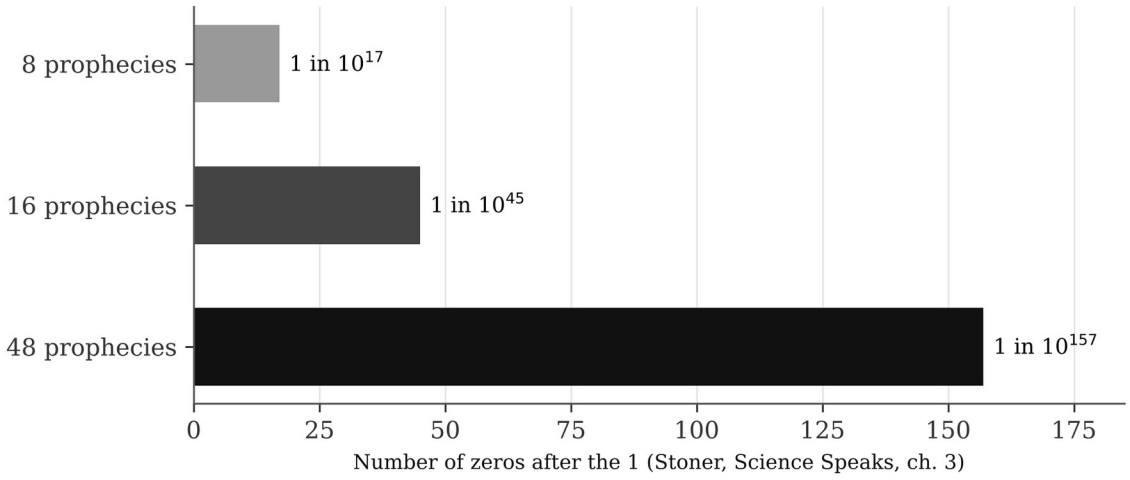


Figure 7. Stoner's Results for 8, 16, and 48 Prophecies

Why I Want to Do a Recount

Stoner's numbers are famous, and his point is sound. But a careful skeptic could raise four fair questions about them.

1. **Some of his prophecies were in Jesus' control.** A man can choose to ride a donkey and choose to stay silent.
2. **One of his prophecies is debatable.** Zechariah 13:6, about wounds received "in the house of those who love me," comes in a passage about false prophets being exposed. Many Bible teachers, including some who believe in the inspiration of the Bible, do not think it is about the Messiah. The New Testament never quotes it.
3. **Some of his estimates are very high.** For example, Bethlehem at 1 in 280,000 treats the whole world's population as the pool. A skeptic would say the real question is how many Jewish men of that time were born in Bethlehem.
4. **He divided by everyone who ever lived.** But most people who ever lived were never candidates for being Israel's Messiah. The fairer pool is the men who claimed to be, or were hailed as, the Messiah.

I think those are fair questions. So I am going to answer them by doing my own count, using rules that lean toward the skeptic at every step.

My Rules for the Recount

- **Only prophecies outside Jesus' control.** No donkey ride, no silence, nothing He could have chosen to act out.
- **Only prophecies the New Testament itself says He fulfilled, or that are fulfilled in plain detail in the Gospel record.** No Zechariah 13:6.
- **Generous numbers.** Where Stoner gave a figure, mine is far more generous, by 100 to 2,800 times.
- **Dependent events counted that way.** If one event makes another more likely, I estimate the second one as if the first had already happened. For example, once a man has been crucified, the chance that soldiers gamble for his clothes is much higher. So I estimate it as 1 in 2, not as a separate rare event.

- **A generous pool.** Instead of dividing by everyone who ever lived, I compare the result to a pool of 1,000 men who have claimed to be or been hailed as the Messiah throughout history. That is far more than history actually records. Even a broad modern list of people who claimed to be a messiah or were hailed as one, across many religions and every century, names far fewer than a thousand people.
- **No miracles in the math.** The virgin birth and the resurrection are not chance events, so they are not counted at all. Chance cannot produce them at any odds.

The Twelve Prophecies in the Recount

#	Prophecy	Scripture	Stoner's figure	My generous figure	Why I chose it
1	Born in Bethlehem of Judah	Micah 5:2	1 in 280,000	1 in 100	Bethlehem was one small village among hundreds of towns in the land
2	Preceded by a forerunner who calls the nation to prepare for the Lord	Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3	1 in 1,000	1 in 10	Several prophet-like figures appeared in that era
3	Appears and dies while the second temple stands, before Jerusalem falls	Daniel 9:26; Malachi 3:1	not used	1 in 5	Compared to all would-be messiahs in history, a fifth lived in that window, very generous
4	Betrayed by a close friend who ate with Him	Psalm 41:9	not used	1 in 10	Betrayal by an inner-circle friend is uncommon
5	For exactly thirty pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12	1 in 1,000	1 in 10	Even given a paid betrayal, the price could be almost anything
6	The money thrown down in the temple and used to buy a potter's field	Zechariah 11:13	1 in 100,000	1 in 100	Several separate choices by Judas and the priests had to line up
7	Executed by crucifixion, hands and feet pierced	Psalm 22:16	1 in 10,000	1 in 10	Rome crucified many rebels, so I am generous
8	Executed alongside criminals	Isaiah 53:12	not used	1 in 2	Given crucifixion; Rome often crucified several men at once
9	His clothes divided and gambled for	Psalm 22:18	not used	1 in 2	Given crucifixion; soldiers commonly took the clothes
10	No bone broken, though the men beside Him had their legs broken	Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20	not used	1 in 2	Given crucifixion; leg breaking was common when bodies had to come down quickly
11	His side pierced instead	Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34	not used	1 in 5	Given the above; a spear thrust was one of several things a soldier might do
12	Buried in a rich man's tomb	Isaiah 53:9	not used	1 in 10	Given crucifixion; executed criminals were not normally given honorable burial

The Evidence Behind Each Estimate

A number in a table is only as good as the reason behind it. Here is the evidence I used for each of the twelve, so you can judge it for yourself. Where I quote Josephus, I use the William Whiston translation, which is free to read online.

1. Born in Bethlehem: 1 in 100. Micah himself called Bethlehem "too little to be among the clans of Judah" (Micah 5:2). The book of Joshua lists the towns of Judah's territory by groups and gives a count for each group, and those counts add up to 112 cities, each with its villages (Joshua 15:21-62). Galilee in the north was crowded too. Josephus, who commanded the Jewish forces there in A.D. 66 and 67, wrote, "you know there are two hundred and forty cities and villages in Galilee" (Josephus, Life 45). So the land held well over three hundred towns and villages. Bethlehem was a small one. The New Testament scholar R. T. France, citing other estimates, put its population in Jesus' day at around 1,000 people (France, "Herod and the Children of Bethlehem," Novum Testamentum 21, 1979). Choosing 1 in 100 treats Bethlehem as if it held several times its fair share of the nation's births.

2. A forerunner: 1 in 10. The first century had several prophet-like leaders. Josephus describes John the Baptist and his baptism (Antiquities 18.5.2), a man named Theudas who claimed to be a prophet (Antiquities 20.5.1), and "an Egyptian false prophet" who gathered a crowd on the Mount of Olives (Jewish War 2.13.5; see Acts 21:38). Notice what all of them did, except John: they pointed to themselves. A herald who announces someone greater and then steps aside, as John did (John 3:30), is rare. I still gave it 1 in 10.

3. In Daniel's window: 1 in 5. Daniel 9:26 says the Anointed One would be cut off before the city and the sanctuary were destroyed. Rome destroyed the temple in A.D. 70, as Josephus describes in book 6 of his Jewish War. Most of the famous claimants came later: Simon bar Kosiba in A.D. 132, Sabbatai Zevi in 1665, and many more since. Saying that one in five of all claimants lived in that narrow window before A.D. 70 is very generous.

4. Betrayed by a close friend who ate with Him: 1 in 10. I checked how the other first-century claimants were stopped. Theudas was captured by Roman cavalry, who "took Theudas alive, and cut off his head" (Josephus, Antiquities 20.5.1). The Egyptian's followers were attacked by the governor Felix, and "the Egyptian ran away" (Jewish War 2.13.5). Judas the Galilean "perished" and his followers were scattered (Acts 5:37). In none of the accounts I read was the leader handed over by one of his own inner circle who shared his table. Ten to one is a generous guess for something I could not find happening to anyone else.

5. For exactly thirty pieces of silver: 1 in 10. Once a betrayal is paid for, the price could be almost anything: ten coins or a hundred, silver or gold, money or a favor. Zechariah named thirty pieces of silver, which the Law of Moses set as the price paid for a slave gored by an ox (Exodus 21:32). Matthew records that the priests "set for him thirty silver coins" (Matthew 26:15). Hitting the exact amount and the exact metal by chance is far less likely than 1 in 10.

6. The money thrown in the temple and used for a potter's field: 1 in 100. Three separate things had to happen. Judas had to give the money back, and throw it down in the temple. The priests had to

refuse to put it in the treasury. And they had to spend it on a potter's field, which was then called the Field of Blood (Matthew 27:3-10; Acts 1:18-19). If each step were as likely as 1 in 5, the three together would be 1 in 125. I rounded down to 1 in 100.

7. Executed by crucifixion: 1 in 10. The Law of Moses did not crucify. Its method for a blasphemer was stoning (Leviticus 24:16). That is how Stephen was killed (Acts 7:58), and crowds tried to stone Jesus more than once (John 8:59; 10:31). When David wrote Psalm 22, crucifixion was not a practice of Israel's law. Josephus does record that, about nine hundred years after David, the Jewish king Alexander Jannaeus had about eight hundred of his enemies crucified in Jerusalem (Antiquities 13.14.2). Under Rome, though, crucifixion became common. Josephus says the Roman governor Varus crucified two thousand men after one revolt (Antiquities 17.10.10), and that during the siege of A.D. 70 the Romans caught five hundred Jews a day, or more, and crucified them (Jewish War 5.11.1). That is why I was generous. A would-be messiah who angered Rome might well be crucified. But of the other claimants named above, one was beheaded, one ran away, and one simply perished. Ten to one is fair.

8. With criminals: 1 in 2. Once a man is crucified, being crucified alongside others was common, as the numbers above show. Mark records that "with Him they crucify two robbers" (Mark 15:27). I counted it as nearly a coin flip.

9. Clothes divided and gambled for: 1 in 2. The condemned were stripped before crucifixion, and the soldiers kept what they took. But Psalm 22:18 names two separate actions, dividing the garments and casting lots for the clothing. John records both: the soldiers made four parts of the garments, and then cast lots for the tunic woven in one piece rather than tear it (John 19:23-24). I still counted it as 1 in 2.

10. No bone broken, though the men beside Him had their legs broken: 1 in 2. The Law said a hanged man's body must not stay on the tree overnight (Deuteronomy 21:22-23), and Josephus confirms that the Jews "took down those that were condemned and crucified, and buried them before the going down of the sun" (Jewish War 4.5.2). Breaking the legs hastened death so the bodies could come down. That is exactly what the soldiers did to the two men beside Jesus (John 19:31-32). On the eve of a great Sabbath at Passover, breaking His legs too was the expected thing. 1 in 2 is generous.

11. His side pierced instead: 1 in 5. The soldiers could have broken His legs anyway, or simply left Him. Instead "one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear" (John 19:34). That fulfilled Zechariah 12:10 and, at the same time, left His bones unbroken. I gave it 1 in 5.

12. Buried in a rich man's tomb: 1 in 10. Under Roman law, the bodies of executed people were buried only when someone asked for them and permission was given (Roman legal texts quoted by the scholar Craig A. Evans, 2005). Jesus' disciples had run away. The man who asked Pilate for the body was Joseph of Arimathea, "a rich man" (Matthew 27:57) and "a prominent council member" (Mark 15:43). In 1968, builders in Jerusalem uncovered a Jewish tomb holding the bones of a crucified man named Jehohanan, with an iron nail still driven through his heel bone. So a crucified man could be given a proper burial, and I did not make this estimate any harder than 1 in 10. But a criminal's grave given by a rich man, exactly as Isaiah 53:9 describes, is not what anyone would have predicted.

Sources for this section. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, *The Jewish War*, and *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, translated by William Whiston, Project Gutenberg editions 2848, 2850, and 2846, read November 10, 2026. Bethlehem population, R. T. France, and the Jehohanan find: Wikipedia articles "Massacre of the Innocents," "Jehohanan," and "Crucifixion," read November 10, 2026. Roman burial law: Wikipedia article "Burial of Jesus," citing Craig A. Evans (2005), read November 10, 2026. Scripture counts and quotations: the Steadfast Literal Bible.

Running the Numbers

Multiply the twelve generous figures together:

100 x 10 x 5 x 10 x 10 x 100 x 10 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 5 x 10 = 200,000,000,000

That is a chance of **1 in 200 billion** that one particular man would fulfill these twelve prophecies by accident. As a percentage, it is 0.0000000005 percent.

Now compare that to the pool. Suppose, very generously, that 1,000 men in all of history had been in a position to fulfill these prophecies, as claimants to be the Messiah. The chance that any one of them would fit all twelve by accident is 1,000 divided by 200 billion, or **1 in 200 million**.

To picture 1 in 200 million: it is about the same as flipping a coin and getting heads twenty-seven or twenty-eight times in a row. Try it sometime. Most people never get past seven or eight.

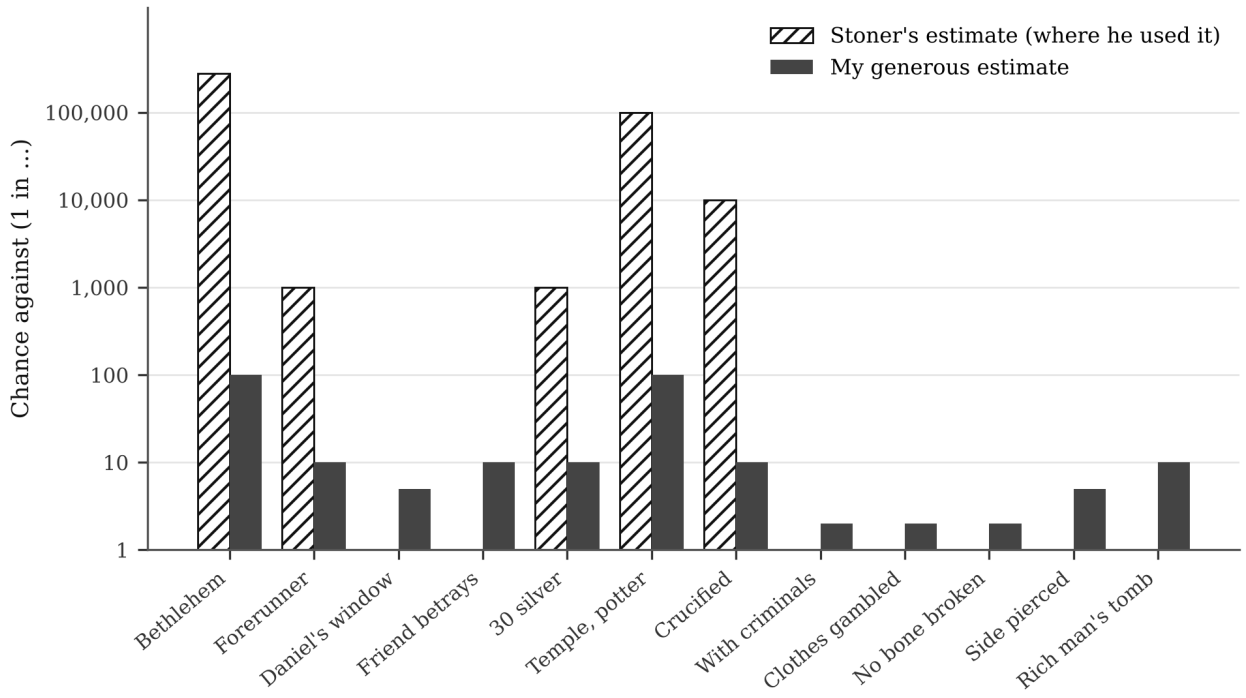


Figure 8. Stoner's Estimates Compared With My Generous Recount

What the Recount Shows

Look at what we have done. We threw out every prophecy that Jesus could have arranged. We threw out the one prophecy whose meaning is debated. We cut Stoner's estimates by 100, 1,000, even 2,800 times.

We counted dependent events generously. We used a pool of claimants far larger than history records. We left out the virgin birth and the resurrection entirely.

And the answer is still about 1 in 200 million.

Now remember that these twelve are only a fraction of the prophecies in this book. I did not count His family line from Abraham to David. I did not count the ministry in Galilee, the rejection by His own brothers, the zeal for the temple, the false witnesses, the mockers quoting Psalm 22, the darkness, the vinegar, the Spirit poured out, or the light to the nations. Add even a few of those at generous odds of 1 in 2 or 1 in 10 each, and the number grows by thousands or millions more.

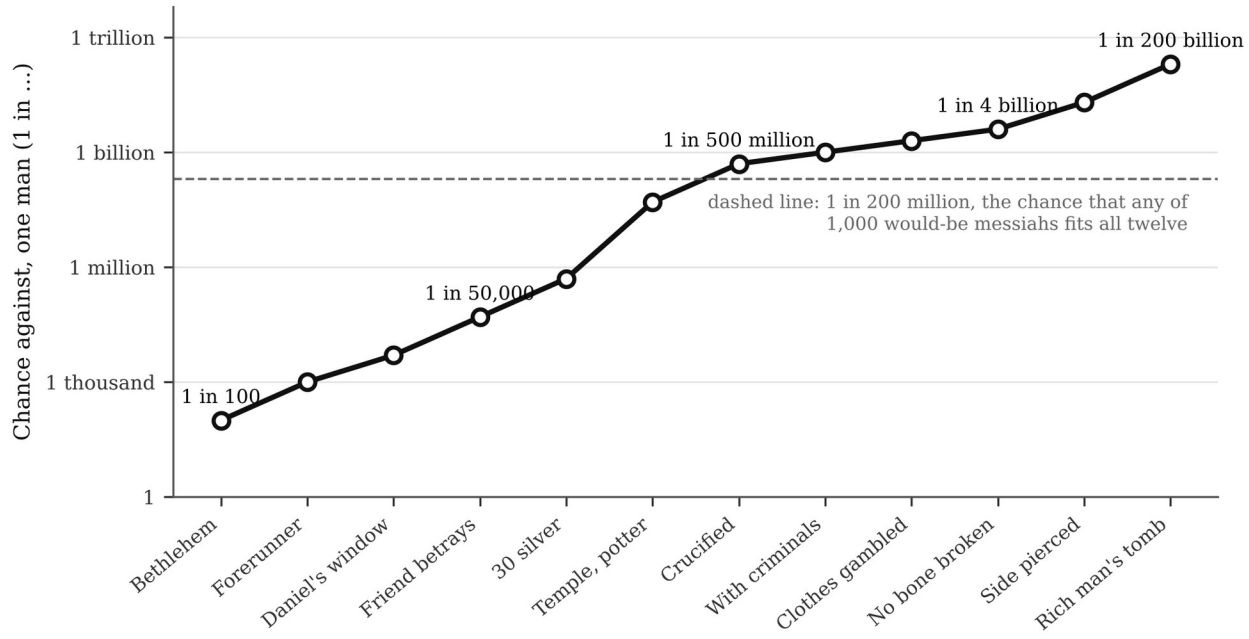


Figure 9. How the Odds Shrink as Each Prophecy Is Added (Generous Recount)

I also want to be honest about the limits of what I have done. Every number in my table is still an estimate. You may think some of my figures are too generous or not generous enough. Good. Write in your own numbers and multiply them out. Appendix C shows the arithmetic step by step so you can. Here is what I think you will find: unless you set almost every estimate to 1 in 1 or 1 in 2, which would mean saying these events were nearly certain to happen to anyone, the answer always comes out far beyond reasonable chance.

Not Impossible, but Not Chance

Some books say it is mathematically impossible for one person to fulfill all these prophecies. I understand why they say it, but I do not use that word. In mathematics, a chance of 1 in 200 million, or even 1 in 10 to the 157th power, is not zero. It is just so small that no reasonable person would bet on it.

Here is how I would put it to a skeptic. “You do not have to accept any of Stoner’s numbers. Use your own. Throw out anything Jesus could have arranged. You will still be left with a chance so small that you

would never accept it as an explanation in any other part of life. If a man won the lottery twelve weeks in a row, you would not call it luck. You would assume someone had arranged it. With Jesus, Someone did."

Jesus Himself said it to the two men on the road to Emmaus. "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26). It was not luck. It was necessary, because God had said it.

Study Questions

1. Why does Stoner's argument grow so quickly when he adds more prophecies?
2. Which of the four fair questions about Stoner's numbers do you think is strongest? How does the recount answer it?
3. Look at my table of twelve prophecies. Do you think any of my generous figures are too generous, or not generous enough? Try your own numbers.
4. Why does the recount leave out the virgin birth and the resurrection? Does that make the case weaker or stronger?
5. The chapter says "Not impossible, but not chance." How would you explain the difference to a friend?

Chapter 23: Honest Objections, Honest Answers

> *but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and **be** ready always for a defense to everyone who asks you an account concerning the hope in you, with gentleness and fear*
>
> 1 Peter 3:15 (SLB)

I have tried to be fair all through this book. In this chapter I want to be fair in a special way. I want to take the strongest objections that thoughtful skeptics and sincere Jewish readers raise about the prophecies of Jesus and answer them plainly. If the case is true, it can stand up to hard questions. Peter told us to be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks, "with gentleness and fear." That is the spirit I want here.

"Jesus read the prophecies and acted them out."

This is the most common objection, and it is partly right. Jesus did choose to fulfill some prophecies. He sent for the donkey. He chose silence before Pilate. He quoted Psalm 22 from the cross. He was not a passive victim. He knew the Scriptures, and He walked into them on purpose.

But look at how much this objection cannot explain.

- No one chooses where he is born or which family he is born into.
- No one chooses to live in the exact window of history that Daniel 9 requires.
- No one can make a forerunner appear in the desert to announce him.
- No one can set the price of his own betrayal, or make the betrayer throw the money into the temple, or make the priests buy a potter's field with it.
- No one can make Roman soldiers gamble for his clothes, or skip his legs while breaking the legs of the men beside him, or pierce his side instead.
- No one can arrange his own burial in a rich man's tomb after he is dead.
- And no one can raise himself from the dead.

That is why, in my recount in Chapter 22, I used only prophecies outside His control. The answer was still about 1 in 200 million. The prophecies He chose to fulfill do not weaken the case. They show that He knew who He was.

"The Gospel writers made up the details to fit the prophecies."

This is a more serious objection. If the Gospel writers invented events to match the Old Testament, then the match proves nothing. How do we answer it?

The Gospels were written while eyewitnesses were still alive. Most scholars date Mark to the 60s or early 70s A.D., and Matthew and Luke within a few decades after that. Paul's list of resurrection witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15, which most scholars date to about A.D. 55, is a creed he says he had received earlier, and he notes that most of the more than five hundred witnesses were still alive (1 Corinthians 15:6). Luke

says he carefully investigated everything from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4). Inventing public events in Jerusalem, while people who were there could deny them, would have been foolish.

Enemies did not deny the main facts. Jewish leaders who opposed the church did not say Jesus was never crucified, or never buried, or that the tomb was not empty. Their story was that the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:11-15), which admits the tomb was empty. As we saw in Chapter 15, Tacitus, Josephus, and later Jewish sources all agree that Jesus was executed. Even the Talmud's hostile passage agrees on the timing, at Passover.

The Gospels include details that do not help them. If you were making up a story to fit prophecy, you would not have the disciples run away, Peter deny Jesus three times, the first witnesses of the resurrection be women (whose testimony carried little weight in that culture), or Jesus cry out "Why have You forsaken Me?" These details are in the Gospels because they happened.

The writers suffered for what they wrote. People make things up to gain money, power, or comfort. The apostles gained beatings, prison, and for most of them, according to early church tradition, death. People will die for something they believe is true. It is very hard to believe they would die for something they knew they had invented.

Many fulfillments are not even pointed out. John is the only Gospel writer who mentions that Jesus' legs were not broken and that His side was pierced, and he says he saw it himself (John 19:35). Matthew does not mention Psalm 22:16 at all. If the writers were inventing events to fit prophecies, you would expect them to make more of the match, not leave it unsaid.

"These passages are not about the Messiah at all."

This is the objection sincere Jewish readers most often raise, and it deserves respect. For example, many Jewish teachers read Isaiah 53 as being about the nation of Israel, Psalm 22 as being about David, and Zechariah 12:10 in other ways.

I covered Isaiah 53 in Chapter 13 and Psalm 22 in Chapter 14. Here I want to add three points.

First, some of these passages were read as being about the Messiah by Jewish teachers before and outside of Christianity. The chief priests in Herod's day knew Micah 5:2 told where the Messiah would be born (Matthew 2:4-6). The Targum read Isaiah 52:13 as being about the Messiah. Balaam's star in Numbers 24:17 was applied to the Messiah so strongly that a revolutionary was called "son of the star." So the Christian reading did not invent the idea that these passages point to the Messiah.

Second, many of these passages describe things that never happened to their original writer or subject. David's body decayed, so Psalm 16:10 could not be about him alone, as Peter pointed out (Acts 2:29-31). David was never pierced. The nation of Israel is never sinless. Something in each passage reaches beyond its first setting.

Third, I would ask a friend who holds this view to read the passages for himself, without any book in his hand, and ask the same question the Ethiopian asked: "Concerning whom does the prophet say this?" (Acts 8:34). I trust the text to make its own case.

“The Messiah was supposed to bring peace and rebuild the temple. Jesus didn’t.”

This is another honest Jewish objection. Many Jewish teachers say that the Messiah, when He comes, will gather the Jewish people back to the land, rebuild the temple, and bring peace to the world. Jesus did not do those things, so He cannot be the Messiah.

The answer is that the Old Testament itself describes two kinds of work for the Messiah: suffering and reigning, sufferings and glories (1 Peter 1:11). The same Bible that says He would reign in peace (Isaiah 9:7; 11:1-9) also says He would be despised, pierced, and cut off (Isaiah 53; Psalm 22; Daniel 9:26). Both are true. The first coming fulfilled the suffering. The second coming will fulfill the reign. Remember Jesus stopping in the middle of Isaiah 61:2 in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-21). Part Three of this book is about the promises Jesus has not fulfilled yet, because He has not yet returned. When He does, He will do every one of them.

“Matthew took verses out of context.”

We looked at this in Chapter 3 with Hosea 11:1. When Matthew says Jesus “fulfilled” a verse like Hosea 11:1 or Jeremiah 31:15, he is not claiming that Hosea or Jeremiah were predicting an event in Jesus’ life. He is showing that Jesus relived Israel’s story and brought it to its full meaning. Matthew’s Jewish readers understood that way of reading. It is not a mistake. It is a different kind of fulfillment, and I have marked those as patterns in Appendix A. Notice, too, that I did not count any pattern prophecies in the odds.

“Stoner’s estimates are made up.”

They are estimates, not measurements. Stoner said so himself. That is exactly why I did a recount in Chapter 22 with much more generous numbers and showed every step in Appendix C. I invite anyone to put in his own estimates. The important thing to see is that the conclusion is not fragile. You can cut every estimate by a factor of ten, a hundred, or a thousand, and the answer is still far beyond chance.

Some critics also say the prophecies are not independent, that one leads to the next. That is a fair point for some of them, such as the details of a crucifixion. That is why my recount estimated those details as if the crucifixion had already happened. For many others, such as birthplace and the price of the betrayal, there is no connection at all.

“Other people have fulfilled prophecies too.”

History has seen many men who claimed to be the Messiah or were hailed as one. Acts mentions Theudas and Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:36-37). Simon bar Kosiba led a revolt against Rome in A.D. 132, and the respected rabbi Akiva hailed him as the Messiah and called him Bar Kokhba, son of the star. He was killed in A.D. 135, and his revolt ended in disaster. In 1665 a man named Sabbatai Zevi was proclaimed the Messiah and drew followers across the Jewish world, until he was arrested by the Ottoman sultan and converted to Islam under threat of death the next year.

None of them was born in Bethlehem of David’s line in Daniel’s window, preceded by a forerunner, betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, crucified, buried in a rich man’s tomb, and raised from the dead. None

of them left a movement that brought the God of Israel to the nations. The fact that men have tried to fit the prophecies, and failed, shows how hard it is to do.

"Psalm 22:16 doesn't really say 'pierced.'"

I covered this fully in Chapter 14. In short, the Septuagint made by Jews before Christ reads "pierced" or "dug," a first or early second century Hebrew scroll supports a verb, the reading "like a lion" leaves the sentence without a verb, and Zechariah 12:10 says "pierced" without any textual question. The case does not rest on that one word.

"Why should I believe prophecies that haven't happened yet?"

Because of the track record. If a friend had kept every promise he ever made to you, down to the smallest detail, for thirty years, you would trust him about the next one. God kept every promise He made about the first coming, from the town to the tomb. The prophecies of His return are made by the same God, in the same Bible, often in the same chapters. Zechariah 12:10 has a fulfilled half and a future half in one sentence. Isaiah 9:6 has a child born and a son given, and Isaiah 9:7 has a throne that never ends. The first half came true. I believe the second half will too.

One More Thing

At the end of the day, prophecy can bring a person to the edge of faith, but it cannot make anyone believe. Jesus told a story about a rich man in torment who begged Abraham to send someone back from the dead to warn his brothers. Abraham answered, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

Evidence matters. God gave it on purpose. But faith is also a matter of the heart and the will. If you are a skeptic reading this, I am not asking you to turn off your mind. I am asking you to follow the evidence where it leads, and to be honest with yourself about what you find there.

Study Questions

1. Which objection in this chapter have you heard most often? How would you answer it now?
2. Why do details like the disciples running away and women being the first witnesses suggest that the Gospels are not invented?
3. How do the "sufferings" and "glories" of the Messiah answer the objection that Jesus did not bring world peace?
4. Why does the failure of other would-be messiahs actually strengthen the case for Jesus?
5. Read Luke 16:31. Why do you think some people still do not believe even with strong evidence?

A Closing Word: What Will You Do With Him?

> *but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*
>
> John 20:31 (SLB)

We have walked a long road together, from the garden in Genesis to the city in Revelation. We have seen a Seed promised to Eve, a scepter promised to Judah, a throne promised to David, a town named by Micah, a price named by Zechariah, a death described by David and Isaiah, and a time set by Daniel. We have seen every one of those promises come true in one Man, Jesus of Nazareth. And we have seen promises still waiting, written by the same prophets, guaranteed by the same God.

We have also done the math. Even with the most generous numbers I could find, the chance that one man would fulfill these prophecies by accident is so small that no reasonable person would accept it as an explanation for anything else in life.

So now the question is not about prophecy. It is about you.

Prophecy Was Given So That You Would Believe

John told us why he wrote his Gospel. He wrote "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). Jesus said He told His disciples things before they happened, "so that when it happens you may believe" (John 14:29). Prophecy is not a puzzle. It is an invitation.

The prophecies tell us who Jesus is. He is the Seed who crushed the serpent. He is the Son of David who will reign forever. He is the child who is Mighty God. He is the Servant who was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. He is the Lamb whose bones were not broken. He is the risen Lord seated at the right hand of God. And He is the King who is coming again.

The prophecies also tell us why He came. Isaiah said it plainly.

> *All of us like the sheep have gone astray; each to his own way we have turned; and the LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us.* (Isaiah 53:6)

We have all gone our own way. That is what the Bible calls sin. It is not just the big things. It is every time we put ourselves in God's place and decide that our way is better than His. And sin separates us from a holy God. But God laid our iniquity on Jesus. He took the punishment we deserved, so that we could be forgiven and made right with God.

What God Asks of You

God does not ask you to earn this. You cannot. He asks you to receive it. The Bible says it this way.

> *that if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of **the** dead, you will be saved; for with **the** heart it is believed for righteousness, and with **the** mouth it is confessed for salvation.* (Romans 10:9-10)

> *But as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God, to those who believe in His name* (John 1:12)

To believe in Jesus means to trust Him. It means you stop trusting your own goodness to make you right with God, and you trust what Jesus did on the cross. It means you turn from your sin, which the Bible calls repentance, and turn to Him as your Savior and Lord.

If you have never done that, you can do it right now, wherever you are. There are no magic words. God looks at the heart. But if it helps, you can pray something like this:

> *Lord Jesus, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, the One the prophets wrote about. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins and that God raised You from the dead. I know I have gone my own way, and I am sorry. I turn from my sin and I trust You alone to save me. Please forgive me and make me Yours. Help me to follow You from this day on. Thank You for keeping every promise. Amen.*

If you prayed that and meant it, the Bible says you have "passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). Tell another believer. Find a church that teaches the Bible and believes that Jesus is fully God and fully man. Ask about being baptized. Start reading the Bible, beginning with the Gospel of John. And keep watching for His return.

For Those Who Already Believe

If you already know Jesus, I hope this book has strengthened your faith. I hope you will read these prophecies again when doubts come, and remember that your faith is not a leap in the dark. It rests on a God who has kept His word, in public, in history, for thousands of years.

I also hope you will use what you have learned. Somebody you know needs to hear it. Philip started with one passage in Isaiah 53 and told an Ethiopian official the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:35). You can do the same.

And I hope you will live as someone who is waiting. "Yes, I am coming quickly," Jesus said. The right answer is still the last prayer in the Bible.

> *The One who testifies these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Yes, come, Lord Jesus!* (Revelation 22:20)

Appendix A: Master Chart of Fulfilled Prophecies

This chart lists the 91 prophecies covered in Part Two, in the order of Jesus' life. "Kind" tells whether the prophecy is a direct prediction, a pattern (type), or both, as explained in Chapter 3. Only direct predictions outside Jesus' control were used in the recount in Chapter 22.

His family line

#	Prophecy	Old Testament	Fulfilled	Kind
1	Seed of a woman who crushes the serpent	Genesis 3:15	Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 2:14	Direct
2	Descendant of Abraham, blessing all nations	Genesis 12:3; 22:18	Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16	Direct
3	Descendant of Isaac, not Ishmael	Genesis 21:12	Luke 3:34; Romans 9:7	Direct
4	Descendant of Jacob, not Esau	Genesis 28:14; Numbers 24:17	Luke 3:34	Direct
5	From the tribe of Judah	Genesis 49:10	Hebrews 7:14; Revelation 5:5	Direct
6	From the family of Jesse	Isaiah 11:1, 10	Luke 3:32; Romans 15:12	Direct
7	From the house of David, heir to his throne	2 Samuel 7:12-16; Jeremiah 23:5	Luke 1:32-33; Romans 1:3	Both
8	Not a blood descendant of Jeconiah	Jeremiah 22:30	Matthew 1:11-12, 16; Luke 3:23	Direct
9	A prophet like Moses	Deuteronomy 18:15, 18	John 6:14; Acts 3:22-26	Direct

Who He is

#	Prophecy	Old Testament	Fulfilled	Kind
10	His throne lasts forever, and He is called God	Psalm 45:6-7	Hebrews 1:8-9	Direct
11	The Creator who stays the same forever	Psalm 102:25-27	Hebrews 1:10-12	Direct
12	Comes to do God's will in a body prepared for Him	Psalm 40:6-8	Hebrews 10:5-10	Direct
13	Holds the key of David	Isaiah 22:22	Revelation 3:7	Pattern

His birth

#	Prophecy	Old Testament	Fulfilled	Kind
14	Born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:34-35	Both
15	Called Immanuel, God with us	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23	Direct
16	A child who is Mighty God	Isaiah 9:6	John 1:1, 14; Titus 2:13	Direct
17	Born in Bethlehem of Judah	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1-6; Luke 2:4-7	Direct
18	Existing from eternity	Micah 5:2	John 1:1-2; 8:58	Direct
19	A star out of Jacob	Numbers 24:17	Matthew 2:2; Revelation 22:16	Both
20	Gifts from the nations	Psalm 72:10-11; Isaiah 60:6	Matthew 2:1, 11	Both
21	Weeping for the children	Jeremiah 31:15	Matthew 2:16-18	Pattern
22	Called out of Egypt	Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:14-15	Pattern
23	Called a Nazarene (the Branch)	Isaiah 11:1; 53:3	Matthew 2:23	Pattern

His timing

#	Prophecy	Old Testament	Fulfilled	Kind
24	Before the scepter departs from Judah	Genesis 49:10	Luke 2:1-7	Direct
25	Comes to the second temple and fills it with glory	Haggai 2:7-9; Malachi 3:1	Luke 2:27-32; John 2:13-22	Direct
26	Comes 483 years after the decree, then is cut off	Daniel 9:25-26	Luke 19:41-44; Galatians 4:4	Direct
27	Cut off before the city and temple are destroyed	Daniel 9:26	Matthew 24:2; Luke 19:43-44	Direct

His ministry

#	Prophecy	Old Testament	Fulfilled	Kind
28	Preceded by a messenger in the wilderness	Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1	Matthew 3:1-3; 11:10	Direct
29	The messenger comes in the spirit of Elijah	Malachi 4:5-6	Luke 1:17; Matthew 17:11-13	Both
30	Anointed by the Holy Spirit	Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1	Matthew 3:16-17; Luke 4:18-21	Direct
31	Declared God's Son	Psalm 2:7	Matthew 3:17; Acts 13:33	Direct
32	Ministry in Galilee	Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:12-16	Direct
33	Proclaims good news and liberty	Isaiah 61:1-2	Luke 4:16-21	Direct
34	Heals the blind, deaf, lame, and mute	Isaiah 35:5-6	Matthew 11:4-5; Luke 7:22	Direct
35	Teaches in parables	Psalm 78:2	Matthew 13:34-35	Pattern
36	Gentle servant, not loud	Isaiah 42:1-3	Matthew 12:15-21	Direct
37	Brings the new covenant	Jeremiah 31:31-34	Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6-13	Direct
38	A light to the Gentiles	Isaiah 42:6; 49:6	Luke 2:30-32; Acts 13:47	Direct
39	Zeal for God's house	Psalm 69:9	John 2:13-17	Pattern

His rejection

#	Prophecy	Old Testament	Fulfilled	Kind
40	Despised and rejected	Isaiah 53:3	Luke 23:18-23; John 1:11	Direct
41	The stone the builders rejected	Psalm 118:22-23	Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:10-11	Direct
42	A stone of stumbling	Isaiah 8:14; 28:16	Romans 9:32-33; 1 Peter 2:6-8	Direct
43	A stranger to His own brothers	Psalm 69:8	John 7:5; Mark 3:21	Pattern
44	Hated without a cause	Psalm 35:19; 69:4	John 15:24-25	Pattern
45	Seen but not believed	Isaiah 6:9-10; 53:1	John 12:37-41	Direct

His last week

#	Prophecy	Old Testament	Fulfilled	Kind
46	Enters Jerusalem on a donkey as King	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:1-9; John 12:12-16	Direct
47	Hailed with Hosanna, blessed in the LORD's name	Psalm 118:25-26	Matthew 21:9	Direct
48	Praise from children	Psalm 8:2	Matthew 21:15-16	Pattern
49	Rulers gather against the LORD's Anointed	Psalm 2:1-2	Acts 4:25-28	Direct
50	Betrayed by a friend who ate His bread	Psalm 41:9	John 13:18, 21-27	Both
51	Sold for thirty pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 26:14-15	Direct

#	Prophecy	Old Testament	Fulfilled	Kind
52	The money thrown into the temple	Zechariah 11:13	Matthew 27:3-5	Direct
53	The money given for the potter's field	Zechariah 11:13; Jeremiah 19:1-11; 32:6-9	Matthew 27:6-10	Direct
54	The betrayer's office given to another	Psalm 109:8; 69:25	Acts 1:16-20	Direct
55	The shepherd struck, the sheep scattered	Zechariah 13:7	Matthew 26:31, 56	Direct
56	Accused by false witnesses	Psalm 27:12; 35:11	Matthew 26:59-61	Pattern
57	Silent before His accusers	Isaiah 53:7	Matthew 26:63; 27:12-14	Direct
58	Struck and spit upon	Isaiah 50:6; Micah 5:1	Matthew 26:67; Mark 15:19	Direct
59	Disfigured by suffering	Isaiah 52:14	John 19:1-3	Direct

His death

#	Prophecy	Old Testament	Fulfilled	Kind
60	Hands and feet pierced	Psalm 22:16	John 20:25-27; Luke 24:39	Direct
61	Numbered with transgressors	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38; Luke 22:37	Direct
62	Prays for those who kill Him	Isaiah 53:12	Luke 23:34	Direct
63	Mocked with heads shaking: let God deliver Him	Psalm 22:7-8; 109:25	Matthew 27:39-43	Direct
64	Stared at and stripped	Psalm 22:17	Luke 23:35	Direct
65	Garments divided and lots cast for His clothing	Psalm 22:18	John 19:23-24	Direct
66	Darkness at noon	Amos 8:9	Matthew 27:45	Pattern
67	Cries out: My God, why have You forsaken Me?	Psalm 22:1	Matthew 27:46	Direct
68	Thirsty, given vinegar	Psalm 22:15; 69:21	John 19:28-29; Matthew 27:34	Direct
69	Commits His spirit to God	Psalm 31:5	Luke 23:46	Pattern
70	Friends stand far off	Psalm 38:11	Luke 23:49	Pattern
71	Bones out of joint, heart poured out	Psalm 22:14	John 19:34	Direct
72	Not one bone broken	Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20	John 19:33, 36	Both
73	His side pierced	Zechariah 12:10	John 19:34, 37	Direct
74	Dies as a sacrifice for the sins of others	Isaiah 53:4-6, 8, 10-12	1 Peter 2:24; 1 Corinthians 15:3	Direct
75	The Passover Lamb	Exodus 12:3-13	John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7	Pattern
76	Lifted up like the bronze serpent	Numbers 21:8-9	John 3:14-15	Pattern
77	God provides the lamb	Genesis 22:8, 13-14	John 1:29; Romans 8:32	Pattern
78	Hanged on a tree, bearing the curse	Deuteronomy 21:22-23	Galatians 3:13	Pattern

His burial and rising

#	Prophecy	Old Testament	Fulfilled	Kind
79	Grave with the wicked and with a rich man	Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60	Direct
80	Body does not see decay	Psalm 16:10	Acts 2:25-32; 13:35-37	Direct
81	Prolongs His days after death	Isaiah 53:10-11	Luke 24:1-7; Romans 4:25	Direct
82	Raised on the third day	Hosea 6:2	1 Corinthians 15:4	Pattern
83	The firstfruits from the dead	Leviticus 23:10-11	1 Corinthians 15:20-23	Pattern
84	Praises God among His brothers	Psalm 22:22	Hebrews 2:11-12	Direct
85	Three days, the sign of Jonah	Jonah 1:17	Matthew 12:39-40; 1 Corinthians 15:4	Pattern
86	Exalted and lifted up	Isaiah 52:13	Philippians 2:9; Acts 2:33	Direct
87	Ascends on high, gives gifts	Psalm 68:18	Ephesians 4:8-10; Acts 1:9	Direct
88	Seated at God's right hand	Psalm 110:1	Acts 2:33-36; Hebrews 1:3	Direct
89	A priest forever like Melchizedek	Psalm 110:4	Hebrews 5:5-6; 7:17	Direct
90	Pours out the Spirit	Joel 2:28-29	Acts 2:16-18, 33	Both
91	The nations turn to the LORD	Psalm 22:27; Isaiah 49:6	Acts 13:47-48; Romans 15:9-12	Both

Appendix B: Prophecies Still to Come

This chart lists the 30 prophecies about Jesus covered in Part Three that are still waiting to be fulfilled, in the order of events in the pre-tribulation view taught in this book.

The Rapture

#	Prophecy	Scripture
1	Comes again to receive His people to Himself	John 14:1-3
2	The dead in Christ rise, the living are caught up	1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53
3	Keeps His church from the hour of testing	Revelation 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9

The Tribulation

#	Prophecy	Scripture
4	The seventieth week begins with a covenant	Daniel 9:27
5	The abomination of desolation	Daniel 9:27; 12:11; Matthew 24:15
6	A time of distress like no other	Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:7; Matthew 24:21
7	The Lamb opens the scroll of judgment	Revelation 5:5-7; 6:1
8	A great multitude saved out of every nation	Revelation 7:9-14

His glorious return

#	Prophecy	Scripture
9	Comes on the clouds with power and glory	Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30; 26:64
10	Every eye will see Him	Zechariah 12:10; Revelation 1:7
11	His feet stand on the Mount of Olives	Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:11
12	Comes with His holy ones	Zechariah 14:5; Jude 1:14; Revelation 19:14
13	Defeats the nations gathered against Jerusalem	Zechariah 12:9; 14:3; Revelation 19:19-21
14	Destroys the lawless one by the breath of His mouth	Isaiah 11:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:8
15	Israel looks on Him whom they pierced and mourns	Zechariah 12:10-13:1
16	All Israel will be saved	Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 11:25-27

His kingdom

#	Prophecy	Scripture
17	Satan bound for a thousand years	Revelation 20:1-3
18	Reigns on David's throne	2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:7; Luke 1:32-33
19	Installed as King on Zion over the nations	Psalm 2:6-9; Zechariah 14:9
20	The nations come to learn His ways	Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2; Zechariah 14:16
21	Swords into plowshares, war ended	Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3
22	Judges with perfect justice	Isaiah 11:3-5; Jeremiah 23:5-6
23	Creation renewed, wolf with lamb	Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:20-25
24	The apostles judge the twelve tribes	Matthew 19:28
25	The stone becomes a mountain filling the earth	Daniel 2:34-35, 44

Final things

#	Prophecy	Scripture
26	Every knee bows and every tongue confesses	Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:10-11
27	Raises the dead and judges all	Daniel 12:2; John 5:22-29; Revelation 20:11-15
28	Death swallowed up forever	Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:26, 54
29	New heavens and a new earth	Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1
30	God dwells with His people; they see His face	Ezekiel 37:27; Revelation 21:3; 22:4

Appendix C: How the Numbers Were Figured

This appendix shows the arithmetic behind every number in Part Four, so you can check it and try your own estimates. The facts and sources behind each estimate in my recount are in Chapter 22, under "The Evidence Behind Each Estimate."

How to Combine Chances

When several separate things must all happen, the chance that all of them happen is found by multiplying their chances. If something has a chance of 1 in 10 and something else has a chance of 1 in 5, the chance of both is 1 in 10 x 5, or 1 in 50.

When one thing makes another more likely, the second chance is estimated as if the first had already happened. This is called a conditional chance. In my recount, the details of the crucifixion (clothes gambled for, legs not broken, side pierced, rich man's tomb, executed with criminals) are all estimated this way.

To turn "1 in N" into a percentage, divide 100 by N. For example, 1 in 200 is 100 / 200 = 0.5 percent.

Stoner's Eight Prophecies

Prophecy	Stoner's estimate	As a power of ten
Micah 5:2	1 in 280,000	2.8×10^5
Malachi 3:1	1 in 1,000	10^3
Zechariah 9:9	1 in 100	10^2
Zechariah 13:6	1 in 1,000	10^3
Zechariah 11:12	1 in 1,000	10^3
Zechariah 11:13	1 in 100,000	10^5
Isaiah 53:7	1 in 1,000	10^3
Psalm 22:16	1 in 10,000	10^4
All eight together	**1 in 2.8×10^{28}**	Add the powers: 5+3+2+3+3+5+3+4 = 28

Stoner then divided by the number of people he estimated had lived since the prophecies were written, about 88 billion, which he rounded to 10^{11}. 10^{28} divided by 10^{11} is 10^{17}. For sixteen prophecies he multiplied 10^{28} by 10^{17} to get 10^{45}. For forty-eight he reported 1 in 10^{157}.

Source: Peter W. Stoner, *Science Speaks*, chapter 3, "The Christ of Prophecy," read online at sciencespeaks.dstoner.net on November 10, 2026.

The Silver Dollar Check

Texas covers about 268,600 square miles, or about 696 billion square meters. A silver dollar is about 38 millimeters across and 2.4 millimeters thick, so each coin takes up about 2.7 millionths of a cubic meter.

10^{17} coins take up about 270 billion cubic meters. Spread over Texas, that is about 0.39 meters, or about 1.3 feet, packed with no gaps. Round coins cannot pack with no gaps, so the real depth would be about 1.4 feet or more, and more still if poured loosely. Stoner's figure of two feet is in the right range.

My Conservative Recount

Step	Prophecy	Generous chance	Running total
1	Born in Bethlehem	1 in 100	1 in 100
2	A forerunner	1 in 10	1 in 1,000
3	In Daniel's window, before A.D. 70	1 in 5	1 in 5,000
4	Betrayed by a close friend	1 in 10	1 in 50,000
5	For thirty pieces of silver	1 in 10	1 in 500,000
6	Money thrown in the temple, potter's field	1 in 100	1 in 50 million
7	Crucified	1 in 10	1 in 500 million
8	With criminals	1 in 2	1 in 1 billion
9	Clothes gambled for	1 in 2	1 in 2 billion
10	No bones broken	1 in 2	1 in 4 billion
11	Side pierced	1 in 5	1 in 20 billion
12	Rich man's tomb	1 in 10	1 in 200 billion

For one man: 1 in 200,000,000,000, which is 0.0000000005 percent.

For any of 1,000 would-be messiahs: 1,000 / 200,000,000,000 = 1 in 200,000,000, which is 0.0000005 percent.

Coin flip comparison: 2 multiplied by itself 27 times is about 134 million, and 28 times is about 268 million. So 1 in 200 million is between 27 and 28 heads in a row.

Lottery comparison: the official chance of one Powerball ticket winning the jackpot is 1 in 292,201,338.

Try Your Own Numbers

Make a copy of the recount table and write your own estimate beside each prophecy. Multiply them together. Then divide the result by however many would-be messiahs you think history has had. If your answer is still smaller than about 1 in 1,000, you have to ask whether chance is really the best explanation.

Appendix D: Words to Know

Abomination of desolation. An idol or blasphemous act set up in God's holy place that makes it desolate. Daniel and Jesus place it in the middle of the seventieth week (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15).

Anointed One. The meaning of both "Messiah" (Hebrew) and "Christ" (Greek). Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil; the Messiah is anointed with the Holy Spirit.

Antichrist. The common name for the coming world ruler of the Tribulation, called the man of sin and the beast in the New Testament.

Conditional chance. The chance of something happening once something else has already happened.

Dead Sea Scrolls. About nine hundred ancient scrolls and fragments found in caves near Qumran from 1947 on, many copied before the time of Christ.

Direct prediction. A plain statement about the future that comes true as stated.

Forerunner. A messenger sent ahead to prepare the way. John the Baptist was the Messiah's forerunner.

Great Isaiah Scroll. A complete scroll of Isaiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, dated to about 125 B.C.

Messiah. The promised King and Savior of Israel and the world; Jesus Christ.

Millennium. The thousand-year reign of Christ on earth after His return (Revelation 20:1-6).

Pattern (type). A real person, event, or thing in the Old Testament that God shaped to point ahead to Christ, such as the Passover lamb.

Pre-tribulation view. The belief that Christ will take His church to Himself in the Rapture before the seven-year Tribulation begins.

Prophetic year. A year of 360 days, used in counting Daniel's seventy weeks and the time periods of Revelation.

Rapture. The catching up of believers, living and dead, to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Second Coming. Jesus' visible return to the earth in glory at the end of the Tribulation.

Septuagint. The Greek translation of the Old Testament made by Jewish scholars in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.

Seventy sevens (seventy weeks). Daniel's prophecy of 490 years decreed for Israel and Jerusalem (Daniel 9:24-27).

Son of Man. The heavenly figure of Daniel 7:13-14, and Jesus' favorite name for Himself.

Targum. An ancient Aramaic paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible, read in synagogues.

Tribulation. The seven years of Daniel's seventieth week, a time of distress and judgment before Christ returns.

Appendix E: Scripture Index

This index lists the Bible passages quoted or cited in this book. The numbers after each passage are chapter numbers. “Intro” is Before You Begin, and “Back” is the closing word and the appendices.

- **Genesis:** 3:15 (5, 20, Back); 12:3 (5, Back); 18:25 (20); 21:12 (5, Back); 22:4 (12); 22:8 (11, Back); 22:13-14 (11, Back); 22:18 (5, Back); 25:1-2 (5); 28:14 (5, Back); 35:19 (6); 49:10 (4, 5, 7, Back); 49:11 (4)
- **Exodus:** 12:3-13 (Back); 12:46 (11, 22, Back); 21:32 (10, 22)
- **Leviticus:** 16:14-15 (13); 23:10-11 (12, Back); 24:16 (22)
- **Numbers:** 19:18 (13); 21:8-9 (11, Back); 24:17 (5, 6, 23, Back)
- **Deuteronomy:** 6:16 (4); 18:15 (1, Back); 18:18 (Back); 18:18-19 (1); 18:21-22 (1, 4); 18:22 (4); 21:22-23 (11, 22, Back); 21:23 (11); 34:10 (1)
- **Joshua:** 15:21-62 (22); 19:15 (6)
- **2 Samuel:** 7:12-16 (5, 19, Back); 7:16 (19, Back)
- **1 Kings:** 1:33-38 (10); 1:38 (21); 8:10-11 (7); 18:28 (4)
- **2 Kings:** 1:8 (8)
- **Ezra:** 3:12 (7)
- **Nehemiah:** 2:1-8 (7)
- **Job:** 19:25 (Intro, 4)
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About This Book

Foretold walks through the prophecies of Jesus Christ from Genesis to Revelation, the way Jesus Himself did with two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Part One explains why God told us ahead of time, how we know the prophecies were written long before Jesus was born, from the Septuagint to the Dead Sea Scrolls, how the New Testament reads the Old, and which popular "prophecies" were left out and why.

Part Two follows Jesus' life in order and shows the prophecies He fulfilled at His first coming: His family line, His birth in Bethlehem, the timing set by Daniel, His forerunner and ministry, His rejection, His betrayal for thirty pieces of silver, His death, His burial with the rich, His resurrection, and His ascension. Close-up chapters cover Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and the witnesses outside the Bible, including Josephus, Tacitus, and Pliny.

Part Three looks at the prophecies still to come, taught from a pre-tribulation view: the Rapture of the church, the seventieth week of Daniel, His return in glory to the Mount of Olives, His reign on David's throne, the final judgment, and the new heavens and new earth.

Part Four works through the odds. It presents Peter Stoner's famous estimates with full credit, then does a conservative recount using only prophecies outside Jesus' control and far more generous numbers, with the historical evidence behind every estimate, charts, and every step of the math shown. It closes with honest answers to the hardest objections.

Every chapter ends with study questions. At the back are a master chart of the prophecies, a chart of those still to come, the arithmetic behind every number, a list of words to know, and a Scripture index.

All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible, which is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.