

The Prophecies Concerning Jesus

M. W. Bassford, 8-22-10

In our last Sunday morning lesson, we looked at some reasons why we should believe that there is a God, that there is some supernatural force responsible for our existence. A lot of Christians make the leap from “supernatural force” to “God of the Bible” without even blinking, but although that might seem appealing, we can’t logically go that far that fast. How do we know that our Creator is the God of the Bible? Why should we be assured that He isn’t Allah, or Brahma, or Olodumare, or some Being with no interest in us who hasn’t revealed Himself?

Of course, the Bible doesn’t overlook this question. In fact, we see God present His method for proving His existence and establishing His identity in Isaiah 46:9-10. The logic here is simple. No one and nothing in the natural world can predict the future. God, though, declares that He can, and if He predicts the future in the Bible and His predictions actually happen, then He is truly God and the Bible is truly His word. The validity of this claim is so obvious that a number of religious scholars have spent a great deal of time attempting to disprove the prophetic accuracy of the Bible. For instance, they claim that the second half of Isaiah was written hundreds of years after the first half, and their only reason for claiming that is that the second half of the book clearly describes events that took place long after Isaiah’s death. In fact, anytime they can plausibly date a prophecy after the actions it predicts, that’s exactly what they’ll do.

However, there’s one area of prophecy where they can’t make that argument: the Old Testament prophecies about our Lord. No one disputes that the Old Testament was complete long before the birth of Jesus. Neither Jesus nor His followers could have altered those texts to follow the pattern of His life. Thus, if the Old Testament correctly predicts what Jesus and His contemporaries would do, the Bible must be the word of God. These internal evidences in Scripture are some of the most important to our faith. Let’s look, then, at the prophecies concerning Jesus.

His Birth

This study most naturally begins with the prophecies about the birth of Jesus. Before I go on, let me note that we’re going to be moving extremely quickly here. My normal sermons have about eight or nine Scriptures in them; this one has 52. Unless you want to be here till mid-afternoon, this doesn’t give us much time for analysis.

First, the Scripture prophesied that Jesus would be born of a virgin. Let’s look together at Isaiah 7:14. This prophecy was fulfilled in Matthew 1:18. It tells us that Mary was pregnant with Jesus even though she had never come together with her husband or any other man. Second, the Scripture foretold that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. This is apparent from Micah 5:2. In fact, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as described in Luke 2:4, 6. Third, the Scripture predicted that at some point, Jesus would be summoned out of Egypt, according to Hosea 11:1. This was made possible because Jesus’ earthly father Joseph fled with his family to Egypt in Matthew 2:13-14. Finally, it was prophesied that children would be slaughtered in the time of Jesus in Jeremiah 31:15. This happened because of the brutality of King Herod in his quest to destroy the Messiah. This story appears in Matthew 2:16.

His Ministry

This same pattern of prophecy and fulfillment is apparent throughout the years of the ministry of Jesus. To begin with, it was foretold that even before Jesus began His ministry, He would be preceded by a messenger. We find one of these prophecies in Isaiah 40:3-5. This prophecy was fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist, according to Matthew 3:1-2. Likewise, the Scripture predicted that Jesus would carry out His work in the area of Galilee. We find this prediction in Isaiah 9:1-2. This took place when, in fact, Jesus began His ministry in Galilee in Matthew 4:12-13. During this ministry, Isaiah also promised that Jesus would be gracious to the people. This is apparent from His description in Isaiah 42:2-3. Of course, this was the way that Jesus behaved Himself, as we see from Scriptures like Matthew 12:15-16.

The content of Jesus’ message was going to be that He would proclaim the good news, as foretold by Isaiah 61:1-2. No less authority than Jesus declared that He fulfilled this prophecy in Luke 4:20-21. However, Jesus’ teaching would not be immediately clear to everyone, as the psalmist promised in Psalm 78:2. As we look at the Scripture, we see that Jesus truly did teach in parables. This quite clear, among other places, from Matthew 13:34. Finally, the word also foretold that despite His message and His miracles, Jesus would be rejected by His people. This is found in the oft-cited text of Isaiah 6:9-10. However, that’s exactly what the people did, according to John 12:37.

His Last Week

The pace of fulfilled prophecies really begins to pick up when we begin to examine the last week of Jesus’ life, which He spent in the area of Jerusalem. First, the Scripture predicted that Jesus would enter the city riding on a donkey like the kings of old. This is found in Zechariah 9:9. That’s exactly what happened, according to Matthew 21:6-7. While

Jesus was in Jerusalem, the Scripture foretold that He would become outraged by the abuses carried out at the temple, according to Psalm 69:9. Of course, Jesus behaved in exactly that way, as depicted in John 2:13-15.

It was during this week that Jesus would be betrayed by one of His close associates, as foreshadowed by Psalm 41:9. Jesus Himself points to the impending fulfillment of this prophecy in Mark 14:18. This associate would sell Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver, which we see prefigured in Zechariah 11:12. That is, of course, the price that Judas asked in exchange for betraying Jesus in Matthew 26:14-15. The same passage from Zechariah also predicted what would happen to the money, in Zechariah 11:13. Amazingly, this too took place, in Matthew 27:5-7. Finally, once the betrayal was set in motion, the Scripture foretold that Jesus' disciples would scatter from Him. This was found in Zechariah 13:7. Sadly, even though they didn't realize it at the time, the disciples fulfilled even this prophecy in Matthew 26:56.

His Trial

We see still more detailed prophecies fulfilled during the trial of Jesus. This process begins with the prediction of an oppressive, unfair trial in Isaiah 53:8. Jesus trial was precisely that unfair, according to Mark 14:55-56. Despite, or perhaps because of, this unfairness, the Scripture foretold that Jesus would remain silent before His accusers. We see this in Isaiah 53:7. Once again, this took place, in Matthew 26:62-63. As part of this trial process, Isaiah also foresaw that Jesus would be scourged, which he describes in Isaiah 53:5. They flogged Jesus too, as Mark 15:15 reveals. Finally, Isaiah predicted that Jesus, in addition to these physical torments, would also suffer the mental torment of being mocked. We find this prediction in Isaiah 50:6. Naturally, Jesus was treated in this shameful way in Mark 15:18-19.

His Crucifixion

This drumbeat of prophecy reaches its climax during the crucifixion of Jesus. First, the Scripture predicted that Jesus would be given gall and sour wine to drink before His crucifixion, in Psalm 69:21. As with all the others, this was fulfilled, in Matthew 27:33-34. Second, the prophets said that Jesus would have His hands and feet pierced. We see this plainly in Psalm 22:16. This occurred when Jesus was nailed to the cross in John 19:18. Also at this time, Jesus was to be numbered with the transgressors, which was the message of Isaiah 53:12. We learn the identity of these transgressors in Luke 23:32-33. Immediately after this took place, Jesus' enemies were to gamble for his garments, which we see prophesied in Psalm 22:18. The Roman soldiers fulfilled this prophecy in Mark 15:24. The Scripture also promised that the enemies of Jesus would insult Him, in Psalm 22:7-8. The chief priests and elders of the Jews, who really should have known better, carried this prophecy out to the letter in Matthew 27:41-43. Finally, after Jesus died, His body was to be entrusted to a rich man, as predicted by Isaiah 53:9. Joseph of Arimathea asks for the body in Matthew 27:57, 59-60.

Conclusion

We see the Bible's explanation of all of this in Acts 13:29. All kinds of actors, from Jesus Himself to His bitterest enemies, spent His days on earth fulfilling prophecy after prophecy. There just aren't any good naturalistic explanations for this. It's impossible that this pattern of prophecy could be the work of a conspiracy. Men like the Pharisees wouldn't have spat on Jesus if He were on fire, much less helped Him establish that He was the Messiah. Nor is it possible that the record of the gospels could be a hoax. As Paul remarks in Acts 26, none of these things were done in a corner. Everyone knew what had happened during the life and death of Jesus, and the gospel writers would not have been able to get away with a heavily fictionalized account. In the final analysis, the only plausible explanation for this prophetic outpouring is that God is real, the Bible is His word, and Jesus is His Son.