

## Prophecy is Proof II: God is in the Details

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Does your Bible have a star beside every prophecy of Jesus in the Old Testament? Today we have a lot more resources on things like this than people use to. We have study Bibles, books, articles, videos, and websites that list these remarkable prophecies.

But here's the question: how do you *know* those verses *are* prophecies? How do you know the references you're using are correct? It's one thing for a preacher to say that there many prophecies in the Bible; it's another thing to prove it.

But let's ask a more fundamental question. What actually constitutes a prophecy? How do you know that a prediction was fulfilled in a later verse?

When an Old Testament verse *is* a prophecy, it doesn't say, "This is a prediction about the Messiah." Usually it doesn't even say, "This is a prophecy." If you're thinking that the New Testament identifies many Old Testament prophecies and tells us how they were fulfilled, you're right. But remember that the people who saw these prophecies fulfilled in Jesus didn't have the books of the New Testament yet. So, that means there was *something about the nature of the words* of the prophecies and their fulfilment that indicated they were God-inspired statements about the future. What did those honest Jews see—without a list like we have of "Prophecies Fulfilled in Jesus"?

To really understand prophecy, we have to look at how it was made and how it was fulfilled. In a previous discussion, we saw that there is often a long period of time between the making of a prophecy and the fulfillment of that prophecy. That time element makes the case for prophecy even stronger.

There is another element of genuine prophecy: *details*. For a prediction to count as proof, it must have enough details that correspond with the future event. That is what this discussion is about.

Prophecy has to be *sufficiently specific*. We're not talking about a horoscope that tells you that "things will get worse before they get better." Biblical prophecy is not like a fortune cookie that says you're about to hear from someone you haven't seen in a long time. It's not like someone "predicting" that the sun will rise tomorrow. The words of prophecy have marks that match a distinct event, person, or state of things in the future. So, let's take a closer look at some Old Testament examples to see this element of genuine prophecy.

Psalms 22 is one of the most striking cases of prophecy in the Bible. It begins with these familiar words:

1 My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?

*Why are You so far from helping Me,*

*And from the words of My groaning?* **David is crying out to God because of his troubles. He says one word that is the most difficult question of life – why? Jesus said these exact words as He hung on the cross: "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?'" (Matt. 27:46). We don't know how many, if any, of the Jews listening to him recognized these words from Psalm 22. And I'm not claiming that the mere fact that Jesus said these words proved that he was the Messiah. There is more to fulfilling prophecy than just quoting the Old Testament. However, the words that follow in Psalm 22 are unmistakable proof that this is a prediction of what happened to Jesus on the cross.**

2 O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear;

And in the night season, and am not silent.

3 But You *are* holy,

Enthroned in the praises of Israel.

4 Our fathers trusted in You;

They trusted, and You delivered them.

5 They cried to You, and were delivered;

They trusted in You, and were not ashamed.

6 But I *am* a worm, and no man;

A reproach of men, and despised by the people. **David is talking about himself, but remember that he is writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit used David's words about himself to point to One greater than David. The enemies of David oppressed and persecuted him; the enemies of Christ tortured Him and had Him crucified. As we will see, Isaiah also said that Jesus would be "despised and rejected by men" in Isaiah 53:3. Jesus was mocked, ridiculed, slandered, spit upon, scourged, beaten, and finally executed by crucifixion.**

7 All those who see Me ridicule Me;

They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, *saying*,

8 "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him;

Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" **Notice that this Psalm becomes more specific as it progresses. It begins with words that Jesus said, and now it foreshadows what his enemies said about Him. Here is what the Jewish leaders said while Jesus hung on the cross: "Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:41-43). Is it just a coincidence that the Jewish leaders said the exact words that David wrote a thousand years earlier? And, that Jesus said the very words in verse one?**

9 But You *are* He who took Me out of the womb;

You made Me trust *while* on My mother's breasts.

10 I was cast upon You from birth.

From My mother's womb

You *have been* My God.

11 Be not far from Me,

For trouble *is* near;

For *there is* none to help. **David felt completely alone at times. That was his feeling here, and it was the same human feeling Jesus experienced on the cross.**

12 Many bulls have surrounded Me;

Strong *bulls* of Bashan have encircled Me. **A bull is a powerful and stubborn animal. This is an image, a representation, of the powerful and hardened people surrounding Jesus at the cross.**

13 They gape at Me *with* their mouths,

*Like* a raging and roaring lion.

**Then David talks about the impact of this opposition. He describes his emotional turmoil with physical images.**

14 I am poured out like water,

And all My bones are out of joint;

My heart is like wax;  
It has melted within Me.

15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd,

And My tongue clings to My jaws;

You have brought Me to the dust of death. **This is a vivid image of Jesus' crucifixion.**

**Crucifixion was one of the worst forms of death ever invented. It was death by pain. Our English word *excruciating* literally means out of or from crucifixion.**

16 For dogs have surrounded Me;

The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. **Again, Jesus was crucified in public view.**

**His enemies were happy to see Him suffer and be humiliated.**

They pierced My hands and My feet; **David used these words as a figure of his persecution by evil men. It is hard to see how anyone could read these words in the context and not see the connection to the nails that were driven into Jesus to keep Him on the cross.**

17 I can count all My bones.

They look *and* stare at Me.—**This is another reference to the public shame they put Jesus through. Then the details become even more specific in verse 18.**

18 They divide My garments among them,

And for My clothing they cast lots. **This is exactly what happened at the foot of the cross.**

**“Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet:**

**‘They divided My garments among them,**

**And for My clothing they cast lots’ (Matt. 27:35). This is what we mean by saying that Bible prophecies are specific. And the fascinating part is that this prophecy was written**

**1,000 years before Jesus was born! Who can believe these words accidentally or**

**coincidentally applied to Jesus? David describes the physical and emotional sufferings of crucifixion. He pictures the people who were there talking to Jesus as He was crucified. He gives the physical details of how his body was attached to the cross, and what was done with his coat. The details correspond perfectly to Jesus' crucifixion. David was not guessing about the Messiah. The Holy Spirit revealed this foreknowledge. *That* is biblical prophecy.**

Let's go next to another famous prophecy of Christ in the Old Testament. It's the section the Ethiopian eunuch was reading in Acts chapter 8 when Philip approached him: Isaiah 53. The section actually starts in Isaiah 52:13, so we'll begin there:

13 Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently;

He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. **It is true that God calls Israel His**

**“Servant” several times in this part of Isaiah. Many Jewish scholars insist that “My**

**Servant” in this verse is the nation of Israel. But because of what follows, especially in**

**chapter 53, it must refer to the One who was the ultimate reason that nation existed. That**

**purpose was to bring the Messiah into the world through the chosen nation to pay for the**

**sins of mankind and to establish His kingdom. He was truly the “Suffering Servant.” Jesus**

**was the culmination, the completion, the fulfillment of God's plan for the nation of Israel.**

**We'll also have a lesson on prophecy that explains and responds to the Jewish**

**interpretation of Isaiah 53. But at this point, I'm drawing attention to the level of details in this passage to show its evidential force in Christian apologetics.**

14 Just as many were astonished at you,

So His visage was marred more than any man,

And His form more than the sons of men; **The word “visage” is from the Hebrew word**

*mareh* which is often translated “appearance” or “countenance.” The word “marred” is from *mishchath* which means *disfigurement*. The word “form” in this verse is the word *to-ar*. It’s the same word used in chapter 53:2—“He has no *form* or comeliness.”

15 So shall He sprinkle many nations. To sprinkle the blood of a sacrifice was a symbol of an expiation for sins (we read about this in Hebrews 9). I Peter 1:2 mentions the “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus.” The Lord sprinkled many nations by sending the disciples into all the world to preach the gospel. In Matthew 28:19 He told them to make disciples of all the nations.

Kings shall shut their mouths at Him— Roman officials like Felix and Agrippa heard the gospel in the book of Acts, and though they didn’t convert to Christianity, they were taken back by what they heard.

For what had not been told them they shall see,

And what they had not heard they shall consider. Paul quoted this passage in Romans 15:21 when he talked about preaching the gospel to the Gentiles in places where it hadn’t been proclaimed. Now let’s go to what we call chapter 53 in our translations. There was no such division when Isaiah wrote this book.

53:1 Who has believed our report?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? It’s interesting that this is quoted in John 12. Notice John 12:37-38: “But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” Paul also quoted verse one in Romans 10:16. Both John and Paul applied these words to the stubbornness of the Jews in their day! They refused to accept the evidence of Jesus as the Messiah! They refused to believe the miracles Jesus did in their presence. They refused to see the prophecies of Jesus in their Scriptures. They rejected the gospel when it was preached to them. And today, 2000 years later, unbelieving Jews look at these remarkable prophecies in Isaiah 53 and argue that they have nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth! You may ask, what do Jews say about Isaiah 53? How do they deal with these prophecies? I know I keep saying this, but we’ll talk about that in a later lesson. As a matter of fact, that will be the topic of our next discussion on prophecy.

Verse 2 talks about his entrance into society and His place in it.

2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,

And as a root out of dry ground. Jesus was like a tender, fragile plant. His life was in danger from the start because of Herod. That’s why his parents took him to Egypt for a while. A root in dry ground doesn’t seem to have much of a chance. You don’t expect much to come from a root in an environment like that. Jesus came from dry ground, so to speak. He grew up in Nazareth of Galilee. People in Jerusalem looked down on Galileans. The chief priests and Pharisees scoffed at Nicodemus and said, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee” (John 7:52). To make things worse, He grew up in Nazareth. Nathanael—whom Jesus said was a sincere man—expressed the common sentiment of the time: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). These were Jesus’ roots. And, He didn’t come from a noble family. His father was a carpenter, His parents appear to have been poor, and the Jews accused Him of being the illegitimate child of Mary. His place in the world seemed more like a tender plant than a mighty oak.

He has no form or comeliness; The word *form* is from the same word we saw him chapter 52:14—*to-ar*. It means something that you gaze at.

The word “comeliness” (*hadar*) means majesty or splendor.

And when we see Him,

*There is* no beauty that we should desire Him. This description is not what people thought or said *about* Jesus. It is about what they saw, or, in this case, what they didn’t see. They didn’t see anything special or impressive about His appearance. These three words—form, comeliness, and beauty—include any kind of royalty or nobility in how he dressed or acted or talked or anything beautiful about Him. There was nothing about His physical features, His attire, or mannerisms that would make you think He was an earthly king. This fits perfectly with the humble life of Jesus.

3 He is despised and rejected by men, This was definitely the case in Jesus’ life. The Jews called Him Beelzebub (Matt. 10:25). They hated Him without a cause (John 15:25). Here’s how John describes this tragedy: “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:10-11).

A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Jesus wept at Lazarus’ tomb (John 11:35). He cried as He approached the city of Jerusalem because of what would happen when the Romans attacked less than 40 years later (Luke 19:41). He wept with “vehement cries” in the garden of Gethsemane the night before He was crucified (Heb. 5:7).

And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Sadly, this was even true of His apostles. The night Jesus was arrested, they all fled from Him (John 16:32).

4 Surely He has borne our griefs

And carried our sorrows; These griefs and sorrows included physical sufferings that Jesus healed. Matthew by inspiration quoted this verse: “When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses’” (Matt. 8:16-17).

Yet we esteemed Him stricken,

Smitten by God, and afflicted. In spite of the good things He did for the people, they eventually considered Him “smitten of God”—that is, they thought God punished Him in the end!

5 But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,

*He was* bruised for our iniquities;

The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,

And by His stripes we are healed. This is the most succinct verse in the Old Testament regarding the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus. He was wounded, bruised, chastised, and given stripes *for our sins*. Why? Because God is a just God. When we sin, we deserve to be punished (Rom. 6:23). Since we cannot pay this debt by ourselves, we must have grace from God. The cross of Christ is the epitome of that grace. Atheists, deists, Muslims, and unbelieving Jews stumble at this concept to this day. Paul wrote that Jesus “died for our sins according to the Scriptures” in I Corinthians 15:3. He was referring to Isaiah 53:5 and perhaps other prophecies. Peter also alluded to Isaiah 53 when he wrote that Jesus “bore our sins in His own body on the tree...by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray...” (I Pet. 2:24-25), which is what the next verse in Isaiah 53 says.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray;

We have turned, every one, to his own way;

And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. **The iniquity of “us all” refers to the sins of all mankind. Jesus was the sacrificial lamb who “takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2). He died for our sins, not His, because He had no sin. He was the perfect sinless sacrifice. Now stop and consider what we’ve read so far. How can you explain these points? What Isaiah wrote is not just *similar* to what happened to Jesus. It is identical.**

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,

Yet He opened not His mouth;

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,

And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,

So He opened not His mouth. **This is the section of Isaiah that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading in Acts chapter 8. The Jews made all kinds of false accusations against him, but He held His peace. Pilate could not understand this. He asked Jesus, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?’ But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly” (Matt. 27:13-14). Herod also “questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing” (Luke 22:9). How could anyone read this seemingly incidental point in Isaiah and not be in awe of this prophecy?**

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, Jesus was arrested and tried by the Jews. **After He was declared guilty by the Jewish council, He was handed over as a prisoner to the Roman governor Pilate (Luke 22:54-23:1).**

And who will declare His generation?

For He was cut off from the land of the living; **He was executed, not for any crime He committed, which Pontus Pilate admitted, but He was slain for “the transgressions of My people”--**

For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

9 And they made His grave with the wicked—**He was crucified with two thieves, as we’ll see in just a moment.**

But with the rich at His death, **Here is another detail that might seem small, and yet God shows His foreknowledge even in these seemingly incidental aspects. How? Matthew 27 records, “Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed” (Matt. 27:57-60). How could Isaiah write these details in Jesus’ life 700 years before He was born? There is only one answer: the God who knows the future revealed it to him.**

Because He had done no violence,

Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth. **Here again we’re reminded of what Peter wrote about Jesus in I Peter 2:22: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth. “**

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him;

He has put *Him* to grief.

When You make His soul an offering for sin, **A great commentary on this verse in Isaiah is the book of Hebrews because it shows that Jesus is the true offering for sin. Animal sacrifices could not take away sin and were only foreshadows and types of the perfect sacrifice of Christ.**

He shall see *His* seed, **This seed refers to spiritual descendants, Christians. “His” is in italics which means it is not in the Hebrew; but even if the word His is meant, the seed would still go back to the promise to Abraham. That is the point of Galatians 3:16-29. Paul said in verse 27 if you’ve been baptized into Christ, then you have put on Christ. And if you belong to Christ-- he says in verse 29--“You are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**

He shall prolong *His* days, **That is, He will continue His work on earth through the Holy Spirit He sent especially upon the apostles (John 14-16 and the book of Acts explain this).**

And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

11 He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied.

By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,

For He shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,

And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, **Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection is pictured as a triumphing army over its foes. In Colossians 2 Paul used this image when He said that through His death on the cross Jesus removed the law of Moses, and, “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:15).**

Because He poured out His soul unto death,

And He was numbered with the transgressors, **This happened just as Isaiah said. “With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with the transgressors” (Mark 15:27-28). Was Isaiah guessing? Did this happen by chance? The weight of this evidence is too heavy for a skeptic to bear!**

And He bore the sin of many,

And made intercession for the transgressors. **This part of the prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus’ famous words, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).**

**This section is one of many prophecies of Jesus in the book of Isaiah. It is no wonder that Isaiah is sometimes called the “Gospel Prophet.” And, it’s no exaggeration to say that Isaiah and other prophets wrote the biography of Jesus hundreds of years before he was born.**

Now let's notice briefly a few more prophecies that have the kind of details we're discussing:

- The prophet **Micah** preached to the people of Judah during the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. He was a contemporary of Isaiah. He addressed the same problems in the nation: idolatry, corruption, and immorality. And, like Isaiah, he looks by inspiration into the future. In fact, he delivered the same prophecy about the Messiah and the church that Isaiah wrote about.

He wrote in chapter four, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Micah 4:1-3).

This is a prophecy of spiritual peace, not physical peace. It is a prophecy of a spiritual kingdom, the church, not a political empire. But there is one well-known prophecy in this book that is even more specific: Micah 5:2—“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”

In this book, the prophet pronounces God’s judgment on His people in Judah but also on Samaria which was the capitol of Israel. Micah, writing in the mid 700s B.C., says that the Lord will use the Assyrians to punish Israel and the Babylonians to punish Judah. The Assyrians attacked the Northern tribes in Israel in 721 B.C. and the Babylonians attacked the Southern tribes in 605 B.C. and took thousands of Jews to Babylon. So those warnings were prophecies also.

But the Jews were his chosen people who would bring the Savior into the world. So the prophet also talks about God's mercy. He says that God would deliver His people from their enemies. For instance, he says that the Jews in Babylonian captivity would be like a woman who is about to give birth to a child. The Jews were in Babylon for 70 years, but they would return to their land and be fruitful once more (Micah 4:10 and Micah 5:3). The Holy Spirit inspired Micah to write about something that was 200 years in the future!

But in Micah 5:2, he looks even further into the future. This is one of the most specifically detailed one-verse prophecies in the Old Testament. Let’s consider what he says.

*First*, this ruler would come out of Bethlehem. This Bethlehem is in *Judah*—it was “among the thousands of *Judah*” Why is this important? Because there was another Bethlehem in the Old Testament, but it was in *Zebulun* (Josh. 19:15—the context is the tribe of Zebulun).

*Second*, Bethlehem was a small, humble town. This fits perfectly with what Isaiah said about the Messiah in Isaiah 53—that He would have a humble beginning, like a root out of dry ground, and that He would not be surrounded by show and celebration like an earthly king.

*Third*, this is a prophecy of a future *Ruler* in Israel. Some ancient commentators said Zerubbabel was this Ruler. More recent expositors claim it was Hezekiah. But these guesses are wrong. This ruler in Israel was to be One “whose goings forth are from of old,” that is, from old or ancient times. If Micah had stopped here, there might have been a question about how this Ruler was connected to the past. But he says the coming Ruler in Israel has been “from everlasting,” literally, from *days of eternity (mi-me olam)*. No human king has proceeded from *eternity*. This can only mean One who had no beginning because He is eternal. That must be Jesus!

*Fourth*, this is a prophecy of an *individual person*, not a prediction about the Jewish nation. Even the Jewish leaders in the first century understood this. When king Herod asked where the Christ would be born, the chief priests and the scribes quickly responded, “In Bethlehem of Judea” and then quoted Micah 5:2! This amazingly pointed prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus: “Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child” (Luke 2:4-5).

- Zechariah 11:12-13—“Then I said to them, ‘If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.’ So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter.”

Zechariah is a book of symbols and figures. In the context, he is using the image of a shepherd. The people had refused God as their shepherd, and he gave them a worthless shepherd



or ruler instead. Their rejection of God thus pointed to the future. It foreshadowed the Jews' rejection of Jesus. Notice again the details. The price was 30 pieces of silver—not 20 or 40 pieces, not pieces of gold or bronze. That is exactly what the Jewish leaders paid Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus: “Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?’ And they counted out to him **thirty pieces of silver**” (Matt. 26:14-15). That amount was the price of a slave who had been gored to death by an ox (Exod. 21:32). This was how little they valued His life, which was again a fulfillment of the prophecies about His lowly condition on earth.

And, what happened to those thirty pieces of silver? Notice Matthew 27: “Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ And they said, ‘What is that to us? You see to it!’ Then he **threw down** the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood.’ And they consulted together and bought with them **the potter's field**, to bury strangers in” (Matt. 27:3-7).

How can we explain this amazing agreement between Zechariah and Matthew? Judas Iscariot didn't stage his own suicide to fulfill prophecy. The chief priests certainly wouldn't use something they read in the prophets to glorify Jesus. Matthew didn't comb through the Old Testament looking for a way to make a man from Nazareth appear to be the Messiah.

Finally, the image of a shepherd in Zechariah 11 is not accidental or coincidental. Jesus is “the good shepherd” (John 10:11), the “Shepherd and Bishop” of our souls (I Pet. 2:25), the “Chief Shepherd” who will someday appear (I Pet. 5:4). The only explanation is that these details were given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

These are only some of the examples in the Scriptures. My purpose is not to survey all the predictions made in the Old Testament. The goal is to establish the fact that biblical prophecies contain the necessary element of *sufficient detail*. There are many other examples. For instance,

- Over 200 years before the event, Isaiah prophesied of the release of the Jews from Babylonian captivity, and even mentioned by name the future king who would issue the decree. His name is given in **Isaiah 44:28-45:1**—Cyrus the King of Persia. This was fulfilled in Ezra 1.
- We have already seen in the previous lesson that **Daniel chapter 8** is an incredible prophecy of the fall of the Persian empire and the rise of the Greek nation under Alexander the Great down to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. We could add **Daniel 9:24-27**, which is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem hundreds of years later in 70 A. D. Jesus confirmed this in Matthew 24:15. Josephus was an eyewitness who recorded that calamity in his book *Wars of the Jews, or, The History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*.
- The Old Testament prophesied of one who would be the forerunner of the Messiah. **Isaiah 40:3** said that he would be like a voice crying in the desert; **Malachi 4:5-6** said that he would be like the prophet Elijah and would call the people to reform their lives. John the Baptist did just that (Matt. 3:1-12; Matt. 11:7-14).

These examples demonstrate the evidence of OT prophecies. These predictions are pointed, not vague. They are definite and specific. To see the weight of this evidence, compare the prophecies we've looked at to some so-called prophecies in history.

Michael Nostradamus lived in France from 1503-1566. He served as physician to several kings and was an avid astronomer. According to some, he made predictions about well-known people and events. Here are some of these so-called prophecies:

- *“From the depths of the West of Europe, A young child will be born of poor people, He who by his tongue will seduce a great troop; His fame will increase towards the realm of the East.”* This is an alleged prediction of Adolf Hitler. Another of his predictions say, *“Beasts ferocious with hunger will cross the rivers, The greater part of the battlefield will be against Hister. Into a cage of iron will the great one be drawn, When the child of Germany observes nothing.”* Had the word *Hister* not appeared in Nostradamus’ writings, it is debatable whether this prediction would ever have been applied to him rather than to someone else. As to wars in Europe--Germany included--one doesn’t have to be a prophet to say that there have been battles throughout that part of the world—in any age, regardless of who is in power. This so-called prophecy is too general to be a legitimate prophecy; and, it’s not specific enough to be a prediction of Hitler. “Hister” may be similar to “Hitler,” but mere *similarity in spelling* is not enough.
- *“The great man will be struck down in the day by a thunderbolt. An evil deed, foretold by the bearer of a petition. According to the prediction, another falls at night time. Conflict at Reims, London, and pestilence in Tuscany.”* This is supposed to be a prediction of the assassination of John and Robert Kennedy. Did you see anything in these words that would make you think of the Kennedy brothers?
- *“In the year of the new century and nine months. From the sky will come a great King of Terror. The sky will burn at forty-five degrees. Fire approaches the great new city.”* This is supposed to be a prophecy of 9/11. Another prediction of Nostradamus talks about a calamity regarding twin brothers, which is supposedly a reference to the Twin Towers in New York. These predictions are both vague and ambiguous. They could mean just about anything at any point in history since the death of Nostradamus in 1566.

Another example is the Quran of the Islamic religion. Muslim scholars try to defend the Quran by saying that it contains prophecies. Here are some alleged cases:

- *The Quran will not perish; it will last forever.* In Sura 15:9, the Quran says, “We have without doubt sent down the message; and we will assuredly guard it (from corruption).” A footnote on this verse in the English translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali reads, “The purity of the text of the Quran through 14 centuries is a foretaste of the eternal care with which Allah’s Truth is guarded through all ages. All corruption, inventions, and accretions pass away, but Allah’s pure and holy truth will never eclipse, even though the whole world mocked at it and was bent on destroying it.” A similar verse says, “To thee we sent the Scripture in Truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety” (Sura 5:48).

Here are some problems with this so-called prophecy. First of all, *there were different editions of the Quran* after Muhammed died. Muslim leaders collated these versions and established a single text of the Quran after they burned all the variant copies. The claim that there has always been a uniform text of the Quran, even in the original Arabic, is not true.

Second—and this is very important—Islam contradicts itself on this point. This is because the Quran admits that God gave Scripture before the Quran. It calls these writings “the Book”—the Bible, especially the law of Moses. That is why you’ll read about “the people of the Book” in the Quran. Those people are Jews and Christians. Also, as we just saw, Sura 5:48 talks about “the scripture that came before” the Quran. So if the Quran admits that the Bible came

from God, that it is Scripture, then why don't Muslims accept it? The answer is this: Muslims say that the Old Testament and New Testament were inspired of God but the Jews and Christians changed these writings. They tell us that the Bible we have now is corrupt, unlike the Quran which is the same. Therefore, any verse in the Bible has to be interpreted *in the light of the Quran*. But here is a problem for Muslims. The Quran plainly says that no one can alter the word of God. Sura 6:115 says, "None can change His words." Sura 10:64 says, "No change can there be in the words of Allah." If the Quran admits that the Bible came from God, and the Word of God cannot be changed, then how could the Bible have been corrupted? This is a clear contradiction, and the so-called prophecies of the Quran being imperishable are meaningless.

- *No one will ever be able to produce a book that equals the Quran.* Sura 17:88 reads, "If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Quran, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support."

I would say first of all that we hope nobody ever does write a book like this one. The Quran has caused enough misery as it is. This was commonly admitted 150-200 years ago. For instance, William Gladstone, Prime Minister of Great Britain, once held up a copy of the Quran in the House of Commons and said, "So long as there is this book, there will be no peace in the world." President John Quincy Adams said, "The precept of the Quran is perpetual war against all who deny that Muhammed is the prophet of God." But, of course, Muslims see the Quran through a different set of lenses. To them, the Quran is a miracle. Its style, eloquence, its beauty, its power—Muslims argue—could only have come from divine inspiration. Obviously, this claim is totally subjective and, frankly, just a lot of air. Anyone who has read the Quran knows how empty this claim is. It is not historical. It is not logical. It is certainly not beautiful. And, it is definitely not prophetic.

- *A future state of peace and prosperity for Muslims.* This supposed prophecy comes from Sura 24:55—"Allah has promised to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that he will of a surety, grant them in the land inheritance of power, as he granted it to those before them; that he will establish in authority their religion, the one which he has chosen for them; and that he will change (their state), after the fear in which they lived, to one of security and peace, and they will worship me alone, and not associate aught with me." Muslim scholars say this was fulfilled at the Battle of the Ditch in Medina when Muslims were attacked by forces outnumbering them 10 to 1; Muslims obtained victory in that battle and enjoyed great peace from their enemies afterward. But it is simply impossible to connect Sura 24:55 to this or any other specific event.

Muslims have to be desperate to think these passages in the Quran are prophecies. There's nothing specific enough in them to connect these verses to a definite event in the future.

The contrast is clear. The predictions of Nostradamus, the Quran and other prognosticators cannot compare to the foreknowledge of God displayed in biblical prophecies. In fact, what predictions in any other book can come remotely close to the prophecies in the Bible?

We can know the Bible is the inspired word of God because of the evidence of prophecy. These prophecies are *proof* of inspiration, not a mere *probability* of inspiration.

Sometimes books and sermons on Christian evidences miss the mark on this point. A common argument is this: "there's only one chance in" so many trillions that these prophecies could have happened by chance. They put 1 over something like 78 to the 132<sup>nd</sup> power and say the odds are astronomically in favor of the Bible. We must ask, is that what apologetics is about—a matter of odds?

Christians sometimes use science to make the same kind of mathematical argument. They say, for instance, that there's only one chance in, let's say, 132 billion trillion that the universe could happen without a cause, specifically, the intelligent design of the Creator.

These arguments sound impressive. But they are not sound. Here are some questions to think about if you use this reasoning:

1. Do you know this?
2. How did you arrive at these numbers? Why not 2 chances in trillions of trillions? 10? 20?
3. Do you realize that this argument IMPLIES that it is possible that God does not exist and that the Bible is a lie? If there is even one chance that God does not exist, do you realize that you are IMPLYING that killing a little baby may possibly be no different morally than killing an ant or a worm?
4. You may say, "But the odds are so greatly in favor of God and the Bible that it's highly improbable God does not exist and the Bible is not His word." But how do you know it's highly improbable? If you can't be sure, you can't really know.
5. What if you apply this argument to itself? What are the odds that this very argument is false?

When you say there is one chance in no matter how many zeros you put at the end of a number of possibilities, you are still implying that Christianity could be an absolute lie. We can talk about statistical likelihood all day. But who decides those numbers? How did those scientists arrive at them? By observing events in the physical world? How can that apply to something science cannot observe—the origin of the universe? That's why it's important to remember that creation science, which is different from apologetics, cannot decide the question of origins. It can help us see the development of the world, but not its beginning. The question of origins is a logical and philosophical problem that is settled by divine revelation.

This kind of argument is well-intentioned, but it is not valid. It's actually agnostic in its implications. It's not as pronounced, but it's similar to the argument known as Pascal's Wager. Using mathematical formulas to determine the probability of Christianity – even if we say the probability is astronomically high in its favor – still puts God and the Bible in the realm of the unprovable. The bottom line is that this weakens the case for Christianity instead of strengthening it.

Someone might object to the case for prophecy in the Bible because the predictions aren't specific enough. A person might say, "But why wasn't God more specific when He predicted the future? Wouldn't that have removed all doubt about them?" In other words, the objector is saying that, if these are really prophecies, they should have more specific details to make it absolutely clear to everyone. That way there would be no room for unbelief.

But that is like saying that God ought to show Himself more directly in the world, that He should give more definite proof that He exists, so that we can know for sure. Years ago, a famous scientist said that if there is a God, then he could've done something like place a giant orbiting cross in the sky, or write the Ten Commandments on the moon.

But even spectacles like these wouldn't guarantee that everyone would believe. People have free will. They can choose to disbelieve in God, even if they were to see a miracle. Many people in Bible times did. The Israelites saw the Sea part and crossed through it, and yet it was no time until they rebelled against God. When Jesus cast out demons, the stubborn Jews said He did it by the power of the devil (Matt. 12:24). The rich man in hades argued that if someone went back from the grave to warn his brothers, they would repent. But Abraham corrected him. He said, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). And here is what the Bible says about many who witnessed the

amazing miracles of Christ: “But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe Him” (John 12:37). No amount of proof will convince a hardened soul. The point is that God gives enough evidence of Himself so that we can know He exists, but He doesn’t overwhelm us by manifesting His being and power.

Now think of what would have happened if God had written these prophecies in this way. What if God, for instance, had given a prophecy like this to Micah: “The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem of Judah in the days of the census decreed by the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus. His mother will be Mary the wife of Joseph who is of the lineage of David. The Christ child will be laid in a manger because there will be no room in the inn. And they shall name Him Jesus.”

In the first place, if a person was determined not to believe the Bible, would a prophecy even that specific convince him?

Secondly, biblical prophecies revealed the future, but God didn't give so much information that men could manipulate it for selfish purposes. Imagine what would have occurred if the prophet Micah had written a prophecy that specific. Rome may have never risen to power because its enemies might have heard about this prophecy and crushed the Roman culture while it was small and weak. Or, political opponents of Augustus might have assassinated him when he announced the census. Or, a king like Herod could have sent soldiers to kill Jesus and Mary before he was born. Herod obviously thought that baby Jesus would grow up to be a rival king. That’s why he was so interested in finding out where the Christ would be born in Matthew 2. It’s also why he flew into a fit of rage and slaughtered all the male children up to two years of age.

If power-hungry kings were that paranoid and violent about keeping their position, think of what they would have done if they had been in possession of this kind of foreknowledge! And, think about what the Jews who despised being subject to Romans or anyone else would have done! If the prophecies of their Old Testament had been that explicit about the future, would they have been able to outsmart the Romans and avoid the strong arm of Roman rule—if that even existed? And, *would the crucifixion of Christ have ever happened?*

So, prophecies must not contain *too many* details for the purpose that God had in giving them. But they also must not contain *too few* details. They must not be general and vague. So there is a special balance in the degree of details we find in these prophecies. If they failed to have enough specifics, then we couldn’t know they are really prophecies. But if they have too many details of the future, then men would be able to manipulate the future for selfish interests.

The key to the amount of details in these prophecies is the free will of man. God framed these prophecies in language that allows honest, diligent souls to discover their meaning while insincere people pass over them and fail to see their intent. This is the same difference we see in how people react to the evidence for God in the creation. There is enough proof to leave every man without excuse (Rom. 1:20); but that evidence is not so powerful that a man would be forced to acknowledge Him.

This is also why Jesus spoke in parables. When His disciples asked Him why He taught in parables, He basically said it was to reveal the truth to the honest and conceal the truth from those that would misuse it (Matt. 13:10-13). This is why prophecies are neither too specific nor too general in the way they are worded.

Consider the parable in Matthew 21 about the landowner and the vinedressers. Jesus said in verse 33, "Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit.

35 And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another.

36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them.

37 Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.'

39 So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.”

This parable is an illustration of the point we are making; that is, prophecy is neither too specific nor too general. And yet, prophecy has enough details to enable us to connect it to the future event. Here is what I mean.

Who is the landowner in verse 33? Who or what does the vineyard represent? And who are the vinedressers? The landowner is God. The vineyard is the Hebrew nation. The vinedressers are the leaders of that nation—in the OT, especially kings, princes and elders of the people.

What about the servants of the landowner in verses 34-36? They are the prophets. Amos 3:7 calls these men “His servants the prophets.” The Jewish leaders had prophets of God beaten and killed. That’s what verse 35 and 36 mean. We know this because of OT history. I Kings 18:13 says Jezebel “slew the prophets of the Lord.” Jesus later said that Jerusalem killed the prophets and stoned the ones who were sent to it (Matt. 23:37).

And what about the son of the landowner in verses 37-39? That must be Jesus the Son of God. In the verses that follow Jesus tells these Jewish leaders what will happen to their city. It will be destroyed. And we know when and how that happened. It occurred in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

What does all this have to do with prophecy? How do you know that the landowner in this parable is God? How do you know the vineyard is the Hebrew nation? How do you know that the vinedressers are the leaders of the nation? How do you know that the servants are the prophets in the Old Testament? And how do you know that the son is Jesus?

You know because this description fits the history of the Old Testament. The details correspond too closely to the facts to be anything else. Jesus didn’t have to tell you that God is the landowner. He didn’t tell you that the vinedressers were men like king Ahab in the OT. He didn’t say the servants were prophets of God in the book of I Kings. He didn’t even identify Himself specifically as the son in the parable. And yet you are able to connect these descriptions to the people and events of the past.

My point is simply this. If we can know that a passage refers to definite persons and events in *the past* even though it does not specifically mention them, then in the same way we can know that a prophecy refers to persons and events in the future even though it doesn’t specifically name the persons or give every detail of an event.

This parable gives us enough information to connect it to the past when it describes God, Israel, the leaders of Israel, the prophets, Jesus and His death at the hands of those leaders. And it does so without giving their names or explicitly mentioning everything that occurred.

In the same way, OT prophecies give enough information to connect them *to the future*. Isaiah said that the Messiah would be despised and rejected by men. That He would bear the sins of us all. That He would be silent before His accusers prior to His execution. That He would make His grave with the wicked and with the rich at His death. That He would be numbered with

the transgressors and make intercession for the transgressors. Isaiah didn't have to say this would happen while Tiberius was Emperor or while Pontius Pilate was governor.

The points of identification are clear enough. They are just as clear as the parable we just looked at if not clearer. There are other passages in the Bible that speak of the past, and we have no trouble seeing the connection. We should be able to see the connection of passages about the future.

There's one more thing that is very important to remember about prophecies. Some prophecies are more clear than others. For instance, when you read Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22, it should be clear that you're reading a prophecy of Jesus. But there are other times when you read a passage in the Old Testament, and you think, "That sounds like a prophecy of Jesus, but I'm not sure."

You'll always have questions like this. But isn't that true of Bible study in general? We'll never know the meaning of every passage. The same thing is true of verses that appear to be prophecies. That's why some lists of prophecies of Jesus are longer than others. Some say there are over 300 Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament; others say the number is less than one hundred. But regardless of different opinions about this, the bottom line is that *there are sufficient predictions in the Bible to prove that they came from God.*

Prophecies in the Old Testament are like stars in the sky. Some give a faint glimmer and you can barely tell they are stars. Others give more light, but you still have to look closely to see them. Then there are stars that are so bright you can't miss them. There are different shades of clarity. But taken as a whole, these stars show the handiwork of God. In the same way, prophecies and, to a lesser degree, types and foreshadows in the Old Testament, were luminaries of things to come. Some shine brighter than others. But taken together, they show the foreknowledge of God in breathtaking constellations of divine revelation.