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Did the Old Testament Accurately Predict Jesus as the Messiah?

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Did the Old Testament Accurately Predict Jesus as the Messiah?

Reading the Old Testament, it becomes clear that *Someone is coming*. Bible scholar Ray Stedman says that “*Someone*” is God’s promised Messiah:

*From the very beginning of the Old Testament, there is a sense of hope and expectation, like the sound of approaching footsteps: Someone is coming!... That hope increases...as prophet after prophet declares yet another tantalizing hint: Someone is coming!*¹

Prophecies Regarding the Coming of the Messiah

Hundreds of ancient prophecies speak of a Messiah (Christ) who would one day bring peace to Israel and the world.² About 740 years before Christ, God said through Isaiah that the Messiah would be born as a child. Yet in the same passage the prophet tells us that he is to be called “Mighty God.”

*To us a child is born,
to us a son is given....
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*³

The waiting Jews must have wondered what Isaiah meant by the words, “Mighty God.” Several other Old Testament clues revealed other details about who the Messiah would be, and how he could be recognized. Let’s look at just a few. The Messiah would be:

- Born of a virgin⁴
- From the lineage of David⁵
- Born in Bethlehem⁶
- Rejected by his own people⁷
- Betrayed by a friend⁸

- Sold for 30 pieces of silver⁹
- Silent before his accusers¹⁰
- Pierced in his hands and feet¹¹
- Crucified with thieves¹²
- Buried in a rich man's tomb¹³
- Raised from the dead¹⁴

When Jesus began his ministry, his miraculous deeds led many to believe that he was the Messiah. But it was his fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies that convinced his followers. In fact, 61 details about the Messiah in nearly 200 Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

Although Jesus performed powerful miracles and taught us how to love one another, he said his primary mission was to save us from our sins.¹⁵ His intense suffering and painful death on the cross for us was foretold in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. Here are portions of that remarkable prophecy:

*He was hated and rejected by people....
 But he took our suffering on him
 and felt our pain for us.
 We saw his suffering
 and thought God was punishing him.
 But he was wounded for the wrong we did;
 he was crushed for the evil we did.
 The punishment, which made us well, was given to him,
 and we are healed because of his wounds.
 We all have wandered away like sheep;
 each of us has gone his own way.
 But the Lord has put on him the punishment
 for all the evil we have done.
 He was beaten down and punished,
 but he didn't say a word.
 He was like a lamb being led to be killed.
 He was quiet, as a sheep is quiet while its wool is being cut;
 he never opened his mouth....
 He died without children to continue his family.*

*He was put to death;
he was punished for the sins of my people.
He was buried with wicked men,
and he died with the rich.
He had done nothing wrong,
and he had never lied.
But it was the Lord who decided
to crush him and make him suffer...
He willingly gave his life
and was treated like a criminal.
But he carried away the sins of many people
and asked forgiveness for those who sinned.¹⁶*

Isaiah's words in this prophecy were so literally fulfilled by Jesus that some skeptics thought it was rewritten by Christians after his death. They argued that, since the earliest copy of Isaiah (the Masoretic Aleppo Codex) dates to AD 935,¹⁷ alteration of Isaiah's prophecy might have been possible.

However, in 1947, a copy of Isaiah was discovered near the Dead Sea, dating from 125 years *before the birth of Christ*. And what stunned scholars and skeptics alike is that Isaiah's words in the Dead Sea Scroll are virtually identical with the words of Isaiah from the Masoretic Codex in our Bibles.¹⁸

With such compelling evidence for Jesus' fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, one would expect most Jews to embrace him as their Messiah. So, how do Jews interpret Isaiah 53?

Prior to Christ, many rabbis understood the passage as saying that the Messiah would suffer and die for Israel.¹⁹ Yet Jews were also expecting the Messiah to destroy the enemies of God, bring worldwide peace, usher in the resurrection of the dead, and set up his kingdom in Jerusalem.

Then in the 11th century, the influential Rabbi Rashi argued that the passage referred to the nation of Israel, a view held by most Jews today.²⁰

However, Rashi's interpretation is problematic. For example, Isaiah says the suffering servant dies for Israel's sins. How could Israel die for Israel? Also, the prophet Zechariah makes it clear that when the Messiah returns to Jerusalem in the

last days, he will bear the marks suffered while on Earth.

They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died.²¹

The Jews rejected Jesus because they wanted a conquering Messiah, not a Savior. However, the primary reason they wanted him dead was because he made claims that only God himself could make.²² Zechariah tells us their eyes will be opened when Jesus returns to Jerusalem. They will recognize him as their Messiah by the wounds he received on the cross.²³

What do these fulfilled prophecies tell us about the truthfulness of the Bible? And what are the odds that Jesus could have fulfilled all 200? Professor of mathematics Peter Stoner illustrates the long odds for Jesus to have fulfilled just eight prophecies:

- First, blanket an area the size of Texas with silver dollars two feet high.
- Second, specially mark one of those dollars and randomly bury it.
- Third, ask a blindfolded person to select that exact dollar on one try.

Stoner calculates the odds against the blindfolded person picking that one dollar to be comparable to Jesus fulfilling just eight prophecies. In mathematical terms, that would be 10^{17} (one in 100 quadrillion).

So, if Jesus fulfilled all these prophecies written hundreds of years before his birth in Bethlehem, what does that tell us about the authorship of the Bible? Many scholars believe fulfilled prophecy proves that its author is God.

Endnotes