

Christmas: Prophecy

This Christmas, if you were to share it's true meaning with a non-believer, where would you start? -- Prophecy would be my suggestion.

Astounding Time-Table

Prophecy begins from our perspective as a plan in the mind of God that He purposes to bring about. Then in time He lets us know what He is going to do before He does it. Then incrementally the stages, the preludes, and like the table of contents in a book, He lets us in on what is coming. Then like road-signs announcing coming sights, cities and places of interest prophecy alerts us that each fulfillment is near, until the full day when all is fulfilled. An example of this is found in Daniel 9, where God, Himself, sets up a prophetic time-line.

Seventy-weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place ... from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and the coming of Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.... (Daniel 9:24-25)

In this text God is date-setting. (Someone forgot to tell Him not to do this).

Seventy weeks decreed until the end of all things listed (vs. 24).

Seven weeks and sixty-two weeks...(equals 69 weeks of years)

Sixty-nine weeks (483 years)– then a time gap (the Church Age)
 – followed by one *bad* week (The Tribulation).
 -Which equals 70 weeks of years (490 years)

Time-table begins from the time of Nehemiah:

In 445 B. C. Artaxerxes issued a decree to rebuild Jerusalem that had been destroyed at the time of the exile by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. Nehemiah records the rebuilding of the walls and gates of the city of Jerusalem. The prophetic time-table has begun.

John Lennox, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford writes,
 “...His new decree, permitting the rebuilding of Jerusalem, was issued in the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (i.e. March 444 BC). It was a historic moment. God’s plans for Jerusalem took a major leap forward: the city would be rebuilt, and the seventy weeks began to run.... Hence, on the first approximation, $490 - 7 = 483$ years from that decree would bring us to what we call the first half of the first century AD. In fact it brings us to the 30s AD, which is remarkable since Daniel says that at that time an anointed one shall be cut off (Dan. 9:26). Surely this was fulfilled when Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be the anointed one (Messiah) of God, was “cut off” by being crucified in Jerusalem – in or around AD 30.”¹

The Scripture records that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem the angel declared,

“...and you shall call His name Jesus,
 for it is He who will save His people from their sins.”
 (Matt. 1:21).

(Jesus comes from [Heb.] Joshua meaning ‘Jehovah saves’)

When Jesus was crucified, He became the sacrifice that atoned for sin, thus fulfilling His work of redemption, and the prophecy concerning atonement for sin.
 ...to make atonement for iniquity

Fulfilled Prophecies:

Some of the prophecies relating to the birth of Jesus Christ,

Prophecy	Predicted	Fulfilled
• Seed of a woman	Gen. 3:15	Gal. 4:4
• Descendant of Abraham	Gen. 12:3	Matt. 1:1
• Descendant of Isaac	Gen. 17:19	Matt. 1:1

¹ John C. Lennox, *Against the Flow*, (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2015), Pp. 297-298.

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| • Descendant of Jacob | Num. 24:17 | Matt. 1:2 |
| • Born to the tribe of Judah | Gen. 49:10 | Luke 3:33 |
| • Be a descendant of David | 2 Sam. 7:12 | Matt. 1:1 |
| • Born in Bethlehem | Micah 5:2 | Luke 2:4,5,7 |
| • Born of a virgin | Isaiah 7:14 | Matt. 1:18 |
| • Slaughter of children | Jer. 31:15 | Matt. 2:16-18 |
| • Flight to Egypt | Hos. 11:1 | Luke 3:3-6 |
| • Preceded by a forerunner | Mal. 3:1 | Luke 7:24,27 |

Many more prophecies could be listed concerning Christ's birth, as well as his life and ministry. Joseph and Mary, the earthly parents of Jesus lived in Nazareth and because of a decree from Caesar Augustus were forced to return to their birth city, which was Bethlehem, to register for taxes. Nothing was in their control, but just as the prophet Micah wrote about and as was confirmed by Matthew also.

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”

(Micah 5:2).

Statistical probabilities of one of these prophecies being fulfilled would be at 50/50. Of two prophecies being fulfilled the probabilities would be at 25/75 or one in three. Just eight of these is an inconceivable number ratio: $1/10^{100}$ With at least 44 prophecies on the birth of Christ and hundreds more on the life and ministry of Christ; as well as nearly 800 specific prophecies on the Second Coming and Kingdom of Christ, no numbers could account for these other than God in prophecy showing men what He is about to do before it happens so they could learn to trust in the Word of God.

Amazing Fulfillments: The Virgin Birth

In a very real sense the most difficult of the prophetic miracles is the conception of Jesus in the womb of a virgin. Defying the laws of nature its fulfillment demands a miraculous intervention of God.

The God who created nature and its laws is Himself not bound by them. Being eternal, all-powerful and all knowing God can do as He pleases. We can't break a single law of gravity, energy or matter, but He can - because He is the Lord of all creation.

Luke captures the pathos of the moment Mary learns she is with child,

Luke 1:26-38

Mary's key response: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

This shows not unbelief or rejection of the message but a logical question, since it was understood a virgin could not become pregnant.

The same angel came to Joseph, and spoke to him in a dream,
 "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife
 for the child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit"
 (Matt. 1:20).

Then the angel quoted from Isaiah's prophecy, showing that it was being fulfilled in Mary's being the mother of Jesus Christ.

Matthew's gospel referred to Isaiah's prophecy,
 "...Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call
 His name Immanuel. (which translated means, God with us)."
 (Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:23).

After this Joseph went ahead and took Mary as His wife,
 but obeyed completely with her circumstances,

"but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son;
 and he called His name Jesus." (Matt. 1:25)

Another Amazing Prophecy: The Star

When we consider the star, which led the wise men to Jesus, we are faced with yet another miracle – a wondering star, announcing the birth of a king.

The wise men were a cast of wise men specializing in astronomy, astrology and natural science. The most educated scientists of their day left everything to follow a star based on this verse:

“...A star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel...” (Numbers 24:17).

No doubt with the encouragement of this and other Scriptures they set out on their great quest to find the new-born King. After a short encounter with Herod the wise men once again saw the star.

“And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And they came into the house and saw the child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh...” (Matt. 2:9-11).

What is interesting about the star is that it seemed to coincide with the angelic appearance to the shepherds.

And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. And the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be fore all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you; you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” (Luke 2:8-14).

The significance of the angelic appearance that lit up the sky, filling it with the angelic host and glory, could be one and the same star that guided the wise men.

MacArthur writes,

What was the star? No one knows, and Scripture doesn't say, but the biblical phenomenon that most closely resembles it is the Shekinah glory, the visual expression of God's glory, which in the time of Moses led Israel to the Promised Land, appearing as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

THIS WAS THE FIRST NEW WORD FROM GOD IN FOUR HUNDRED YEARS.

From Malachi to Christ's birth, we have "the silent years"

The glory had departed because Israel wanted only God's blessings and not the God who blessed. They practiced their idolatry to such a degree that God removed His glory. Now the glory of God returned as God Himself became a Man.

Summary: The miracles of the first Christmas all seem to be rooted in prophecies that were wondrously fulfilled, showing that God is the Sovereign Ruler over all.

Understanding Prophecy as it relates to Christmas brings us to several conclusions:

1. Realization: Miracles are an important part of this natural world.

When did we stop believing in miracles?

2 Peter 3:4 – End-time accusation:

"Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

2. Realization: There are an overwhelming volume of end-time prophecies dealing with Christ's Second Coming, compared to the amazing fulfilled prophecies announcing His first.

"Wise men still seek Him," do we?

3. Realization: Prophecies are for our encouragement. Historical fulfillments provide strong evidence for an effective witness to the lost, waiting to be found.

"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Rom. 15:4)