

The Witness of Prophecy

One of God's attributes is that he stands apart from time. Time is a creation of God, and we know from the theory of relativity that time is subject to certain laws. Laws that God has put in place.

Because God stands apart from time, he is able to declare the future. False prophets use their intuition or demonic help, resulting in predictions that can be completely wide of the mark. Alternatively, they can give a vague prophecy which can easily be interpreted as being fulfilled in one way or another. A fortune teller famously declared in 2003 that the then Labour opposition leader, Simon Crean, would be the next prime minister of Australia. When the election day came, Simon Crean wasn't even in the race. God however, is always correct, he declared to the people of Israel, "Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone." (2 Kings 19:25).

God, through the prophet Isaiah challenges those who follow after worthless idols. "Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear." (Isaiah 41:22-23).

Again, God says through the prophet Isaiah, "See, the former things [prophecy] have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." (Isaiah 42:9). The prophet Isaiah was highly respected by the people of Israel because he was used of God on many occasions to declare what would come to pass. The above passages would have turned Isaiah into a 'laughing stock' if they were not true.

One of the most dramatic prophecies announced through the prophet Isaiah is the destruction and desolation of Babylon. God declared through the prophet, "Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged." (Isaiah 13:19-22).

The ancient ruins of Babylon are located in Iraq, ninety kilometres (56 miles) south of Bagdad. Some readers may recall that when Saddam Hussein was in power in Iraq, he attempted to restore the ancient city. He did not succeed in his plans, and he had no hope of succeeding because God has declared Babylon "... will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations..." God's judgment upon the city remains forever.

It can not be sensibly claimed that Isaiah simply looked at Babylon's situation, noticed a deterioration in its economic well-being, then crafted a statement to fit in with what he observed, because Isaiah lived before Babylon had reached its zenith in power and glory.

The period of Isaiah's prophetic ministry went from 740

to at least 701 BC. Babylon reached its height in power under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar around 100 years after the completion of Isaiah's ministry.

It was in 605 BC that Nebuchadnezzar triumphed over the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in Syria. This conquest established his kingdom as the most powerful in the Middle East.

Of the two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon, it could be easy to imagine Babylon lasting forever because of the strength of its fortifications and powerful army. It was also blessed with a good water supply. In its day, it was the largest city in the known world covering more than 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres). In comparison, it could be easy to imagine Jerusalem being destroyed, never to rise again because of its weak situation. Jerusalem was destroyed, but God brought about its restoration. Against all normal expectations, it is Babylon that is destroyed and remains desolate.

The destruction of Babylon

The downfall of Babylon had its beginnings in 539 BC. "Cyrus, who had taken over Media, Persia, and Elam, entered Babylon on 16 October 539 BC, following its capture by his general Gobryas. The course of the river Euphrates had been diverted at Opis to enable the invaders to penetrate the defences along the dried-up river-bed. Belshazzar and later Nabonidus were killed (Dan. 5:30)." ¹

Regarding the death of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, God foretold by rather dramatic means, (a hand writing on the wall next to the king) and by the mouth of the prophet Daniel, that he would face the judgment of God. The execution of the judgment came on the very night of its pronouncement.

King Belshazzar was terrified when he saw the hand writing on the wall, so he called for someone to interpret the writing. When Daniel was brought to the king, Daniel said to him.

"... You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honour the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. 'This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN.

'This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.' Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.'" (Daniel 5:23-31).

Greek rule

It was during the period of Greek rule that Babylon rapidly declined. Alexander the Great (Greek, 356-323 BC) conquered Babylon with the defeat of Persia. After Alexander's untimely death in Babylon (possibly poisoned), the empire was divided into three major kingdoms; Ptolemaic

Egypt, Seleucid and Macedon. ²

The Greek Seleucid rulers built Seleucia on the Tigris river early in the third century BC and moved most of the population from Babylon to the new city. Also, Babylon was plundered for the construction of the new city. Babylon was completely deserted by the end of the second century AD. The Euphrates river which flowed through the city changed its course and sand blew in from the desert and covered the old river bed. Finally, wild animals roamed through the ruins, just as predicted by Isaiah.

Even Saddam Hussein who was able to corruptly channel money into building several palaces in Iraq could not rebuild Babylon. Hussein was not the only ruler who planned to rebuild Babylon. Alexander the Great who conquered the city in 330 BC wanted to rebuild it, but died before he could bring those plans to fruition.

The desolation of Babylon was so complete that for a time, all knowledge of its exact location was lost. Who would have thought back in the sixth century BC that Babylon, the largest and most powerful city on earth could ever become lost? At one point in time, the ziggurat towers at Aqaraqat west of Baghdad were considered to be the ruins of ancient Babylon. Another possibility for a time were the ruins at Borsippa eleven kilometres (7 miles) SSW of Baghdad; both locations were wrong. The big moment of discovery came in 1616 AD when Pietro della Valle correctly identified the ruins of Babylon.³ The ruins of Babylon are situated at 32°35' N x 44°26' E. Baghdad by comparison is at 33°20' N x 44°24' E.

The two cities

We should note some of the major differences between the two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon. Babylon, at the height of its power and glory was a large well fortified city. It was encircled by a double system of defences each comprising two walls. The largest of the walls reached to a height of ninety one metres (300 ft) with its towers reaching to a height of one hundred and twenty-eight metres (420 ft).⁴ It also had an army that no other army in the world could match. It also reached great heights of wickedness.

The people of Jerusalem also became wicked in that they neglected the one true God and went after the gods of the nations about them. God can not tolerate wickedness so he punished the people of both cities, but in different ways.

I suspect it is because Babylon tends to represent all that is worldly and carnal in the affairs of men that God determined to bring about its destruction forever. Jerusalem on the other hand is a place which God has chosen as a witness to his name. He said, "But now I have chosen Jerusalem for my Name to be there, and I have chosen David to rule my people Israel." (2 Chronicles 6:6.) See also 1 Kings 8:13. It is in Jerusalem that those who were faithful to the Lord offered their sacrifices (2 Chronicles 11:16). It is in Jerusalem that the baptism of the Holy Spirit first comes upon the Church (Acts 1:4, 2:14-21). It is Jerusalem which first receives the gospel message (Acts 2:41, 5:28). Finally, a new Jerusalem will descend from heaven in which God will dwell together with men (Revelation 3:12, 21:2, 10).

God dealt with his people's idolatry by driving them into exile and by bringing about the temporary destruction of Jerusalem. God's punishment worked. To this day, the Jews as a whole have not gone back to the worship of idols.

God's punishment of Judah is consistent with the way he has punished in the past. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God and ate of the forbidden fruit, they were expelled from paradise and given a comparatively barren land to live in. When all of mankind became wicked, God separated man from the earth with water so that they all drowned except for one righteous man; Noah and his family. After the earth was washed with water, Noah and his family repopulated the earth.

God's dealings with the people of Samaria are also instructive to us. After the death of King Solomon, the people hoped his son Rehoboam would be a less demanding king. When he informed the people he intended to be more strict and demanding, ten of the twelve tribes broke away from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin at the southern end of the country. The region of the ten tribes came to be known as Samaria. The Samaritans neglected the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and worshipped false gods. God sent prophets to the people to warn them of punishment if they did not return to him. The warnings were ignored. The Assyrians conquered Samaria in 722 BC under the rule of Sargon II. A large number of the people were taken into captivity and other conquered peoples were brought into the land so that they became a mixed and much weakened nation.

Judah also fell into idolatry. They failed to take adequate note of the fact that their brothers to the north were taken from their land when they rebelled against God and followed the gods of the nations about them.

God commanded the prophet Jeremiah to speak with the people of Jerusalem. Jeremiah reports, "'The word of the LORD came to me again: 'What do you see?' 'I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north,' I answered. The LORD said to me, 'From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms,' declares the LORD. 'Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem; they will come against all her surrounding walls and against all the towns of Judah. I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshipping what their hands have made.'" (Jeremiah 1:13-16).

Jerusalem had good fortifications, so it thought it was secure. However, judgment came upon the city just as predicted. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came against Jerusalem and King Jehoiachin had to surrender to him in 597 BC. King Nebuchadnezzar's appointee was Zedekiah, but after eleven years rule, this king rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar. The judgment for the rebellion was severe. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed; the city wall was broken down and the people were taken captive to Babylon. Only the poor were left to look after the land. The year of this great disaster was 586 BC. We see here again, the people loose their land because of sin. After the people become repentant, and at God's appointed time, the people are

released from captivity and they return to the land.

Regarding God's appointed time, Jeremiah the prophet informed the people their period of punishment would last seventy years (Jeremiah 25:10-11). Daniel took encouragement from the prediction (Daniel 9:2). That prediction was fulfilled. "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: 'This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you - may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.'" (Ezra 1:1-3). The leaders and/or family heads of those who returned are listed in chapter two of Ezra.

God is teaching us by these judgments that righteousness and security of land go hand-in-hand. A permanent security in a perfect land requires a perfect righteousness. Only the perfect life of Jesus Christ can link mankind with God who is holy and perfect in every way, and with heaven - the perfect land.

Prophecy

1. Place of birth

Prophesied by Micah approx. 700 years before Christ.
"But you, **Bethlehem** Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:2).

2. Will Be A Prophet Like Moses

Deuteronomy 18:18 (1250 B.C.)
"I will raise up for them a **prophet** like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him."

3. Triumphant Entry Into Jerusalem

Zechariah 9:9 (525 B.C.)
"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a **donkey**, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

4. Betrayed by A Friend

Psalm 41:9 (1,000 B.C.)
"Even my **close friend**, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

5. Silent When Accused

Isaiah 53:7 (700 B.C.)
"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is **silent**, so he did not open his mouth."

Jesus is the Way

Jesus said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me." (John 14:6). This is a strong statement, since many others have risen, proclaiming to be God, or from God; so how can we know that Jesus is the only way to God? The real question is, which person does God himself bear witness to? Is it to Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed or some other? When we examine the views of the above men, we find that they are self-proclaimed leaders who have gathered a following around themselves. With Jesus, however, we find that God proclaimed his coming and some of the details of his life hundreds of years beforehand through the prophets. Some of those prophecies are as follows:

Fulfilment

Matthew 2:1

"After Jesus was born in **Bethlehem** in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem" (See also Matt. 2:5).

2. John 6:14

"After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, 'Surely this is the **Prophet** who is to come into the world.'"

3. John 12:13-14

"They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!' Jesus found a young **donkey** and sat upon it, as it is written,"

4. Mark 14:10

"Then Judas Iscariot, **one of the Twelve**, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them."

5. Matthew 26:62-63

"Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, 'Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?' But **Jesus remained silent**. The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God:

6. **Smitten and Spat Upon**

Isaiah 50:6

"I offered my back to those who **beat** me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from **mocking and spitting.**" (Also Ps.129:3).

7. **Crucified with Sinners**

"... he poured out his life unto death, and was **numbered with the transgressors.** For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isaiah 53:12).

8. **Hands and Feet Pierced**

Psalm 22:16

"Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have **pierced my hands and my feet.**"

A prophecy of the crucifixion at a time when the normal method of execution in Israel was stoning (Lev. 20:1-23).

9. **Given Vinegar to Drink**

Psalm 69:21

"They ... gave me **vinegar** for my thirst."

10. **Cast Lots for His Garments**

Psalm 22:18

"They divide my garments among them and **cast lots** for my clothing."

11. **Not A Bone Was Broken**

Psalm 34:20

"he **protects all his bones,** not one of them will be broken."

12. **Buried with the Rich**

Isaiah 53:9

"He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and **with the rich** in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth."

13. **His Resurrection**

Psalm 16:10

"because you will **not abandon me to the grave,** nor will you let your Holy One see decay."

14. **His Ascension**

Psalm 68:18

"When you **ascended on high,** you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious - that you, O Lord God, might dwell there."

The above is a small sample of the more than sixty major prophecies which point to Christ. Many of the prophecies involve events which are outside of the control of an ordinary man. No man can control where he will be born or into which tribe he will be born.

Jesus certainly did not organise a crowd to give him

Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

6. Mark 14:65

"Then some began to **spit** at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, 'Prophecy!' And the guards took him and **beat** him."

7. Matthew 27:38

"**Two robbers** were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left."

8. Acts 2:23

"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by **nailing** him to the cross."

See also John 20:25, 27, Col. 2:24.

9. John 19:29

"A jar of wine **vinegar** was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips."

10. Mark 15:24

"And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they **cast lots** to see what each would get."

11. John 19:32-33

"The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man ... But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they **did not break his legs.**"

12. Matthew 27:57

"As evening approached, there came a **rich man** from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus." (See 27:58-60).

13. Matthew 28:5-6

"The angel said to the women ... 'He is not here; **he has risen,** just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.'"

14. Luke 24:50-51

"When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was **taken up into heaven.**" See also Acts 1:9.

praise when he rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, that would be very hollow praise. No ordinary man could or would arrange to be crucified when the normal method of execution used by the Jews was stoning - a far less cruel method of execution. Nor could he arrange to have two robbers crucified with him, then have his own bones preserved while

the legs of the two robbers are broken. Nor arrange to have the soldiers cast lots for his clothing. As for the prophecy relating to where the Christ would be born, it was not an obscure prophecy. The chief priests and teachers of the law, when questioned by Herod, were able to tell him exactly where the Christ was to be born; they said, “‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written:’” (Matt. 2:5).

The Science of Probability

From the science of probability, we know that the possibility of just eight prophecies being fulfilled in any one man is one in 100,000,000,000,000,000.⁵ If this number of Australian dollars (the dollar is 2.5 cm. or 1 inch in diameter), were placed edge to edge in one continuous long chain. The chain would be long enough to be wrapped around the equator of the earth more than 62 million times. Mark one of the coins and then get a blind man to walk around the earth over the heap of coins. At any time he can stoop down and pick up just one coin. I think you will agree he has virtually no hope of picking up the correct coin.

The Apostle Paul

The Old Testament so clearly bears witness to Jesus Christ, that the apostle Paul was able to use the Old Testament Scriptures to show even the hard-hearted Jews that Jesus is the Christ. “For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.” (Acts 18:28).

The Jews who were the guardians of the Old Testament knew that it was reliable. They reluctantly had to accept the evidence (the O.T. Scriptures) which the apostle Paul put forward to them. If there was any hint in the minds of the Jews that the O.T. could be unreliable, then they would have used the argument of unreliability to make the apostle Paul’s evidence worthless.

God keeps himself mostly hidden from mankind. He is only found by those who truly seek after him (Matthew 7:7). God reveals himself fully in the person of Jesus Christ. “He is the image of the invisible God...” (Colossians 1:15).

End Notes

1. Babylon, D J Wiseman, “*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*”, General Editor, Merrill C. Tenney, Ph. D., Zondervan, Michigan US, 1975, Vol. 1, p. 440.
2. Alexander The Great, Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, Standard Ed., 2005.
3. Babylonia, D J Wiseman, “*The New Bible Dictionary*”, Organizing Editor, J D Douglass, Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1962, p. 123.
4. Babylon, OT, D J Wiseman, “*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*”, Vol. 1, p. 442.
5. Peter Stoner and Robert Newman, “*Science Speaks*”, Moody Press, Chicago, 1976, pp. 106-112.

Recommended Reading

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|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Josh McDowell | “More Than A Carpenter” |
| Lee Strobel | “The Case For Christ” |
| Josh McDowell | “Christianity A Ready Defence” |
| Josh McDowell | “Evidence that Demands a Verdict” |
| R.W. Stott | “Basic Christianity” |
| Frank Morrison | “Who Moved the Stone?” |
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