

# Prophetic Evidence for Jesus as the Messiah

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July 19, 2004

The Jewish scriptures contain hundreds of references to the coming of a messiah (or messiahs). The pre-Christian concept of the messiah is not one well-defined person, but a range of possible outcomes. The chief expectation was that of a king or ruler who would be victorious and triumphant. The other less anticipated, although possibly more important outcome was a suffering and humiliated individual. In addition there is evidence for the messiah having prophetic and priestly qualities as well (Pinter 18-20). Very often these traits are found together prescribing the same person. It will be shown herein that Jesus of Nazareth as described in the New Testament is this messiah by his fulfilling not just one of these roles, but the roles of prophet, priest, king, and of having divine qualities. This claim is supported not only by the accuracy of fulfillment, but also the great number fulfilled (61 major prophecies [Tynedale 1207-1208]). Not all of them make reference to his messiahship. Rather they refer only to events that take place by his doing or or by his presence. This work focuses on textual evidence for his messiahship.

One of the earliest prophecies, or rather a set of prophecies, is that the messiah will descend from a line beginning with Abraham. God says to Abraham after he nearly sacrificed Isaac, “. . . and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” (Gen. 22:18 NIV). This blessing is the salvation brought by Jesus. The promise is continued in Abraham’s great grandson, Judah.

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,  
Until Shiloh comes,  
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”

(Gen. 49:10 NASB)

Here, Shiloh means “the peaceful one,” referring to the messiah (Easton “Shiloh”) and Judah is also the forefather of one of the twelve tribes of Israel by the same name. Judah has this double meaning in this context. The scepter is a symbol of authority that came from the idea that a ruler is a shepherd of his people (Easton “Sceptre”), that is, he leads them and they follow as sheep would a shepherd. Jesus demonstrates these leadership qualities in his life in Matt. 8:1, “When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.”

Many generations down Jesus’s genealogy, we find Jesse and David, son of Jesse. Isaiah 11:1 says, “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” The “fruit” here are the good deeds done by Jesus during his ministry.<sup>1</sup> Jesse has at least eight sons and it is David whom Jesus descends from as predicted in Jeremiah 23:5, “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will raise up to David [or *up from David’s line*] a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.’” Again, the messiah is predicted to be a king. This prophecy does not come true in the manner that most expect at Jesus’s time. Jesus does not become an earthly king, but rather the ruler of a heavenly kingdom. 2 Timothy 4:18 says, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

The gospels of Matthew and Luke contain full genealogies of Jesus from Abraham and Adam, respectively, and indeed confirm that Jesus is descended from Abraham’s line including David. There is a difference in the listings after

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<sup>1</sup>“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23a NIV)

David. The line in Matthew is from David's son, Solomon, ending with Mary's husband Joseph and the line in Luke is Mary's ascendants from David's son Nathan, ending with Joseph as son-in-law of Heli (GQM).

“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah...

... and Jesse the father of King David,

David was the father of Solomon,...

... Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”

(Matt. 1:1, 2, 6, 16 NIV)

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli,...

... the son of Nathan,

the son of David, the son of Jesse,...

... the son of Judah, the son of Jacob,

the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham,...

(Luke 3:23, 24a, 32a, 34a NIV)

A very well known and undisputed prophecy among the Jews was that the messiah would be born in Bethlehem. In the following passage, the town of Bethlehem is called “small among the clans of Judah” and is judged an unlikely place for the messiah to come from. The messianic indications are “ruler over

Israel”, which states his position of royalty, and “from days of eternity”, which expresses his divine status.

“But you Bethlehem [of] Ephrathah,<sup>2</sup>  
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 [or *from days of eternity*].” (Mic. 5:2 NIV)

Matthew’s gospel says Jesus was born in Bethlehem and was already believed by some to be the messiah. He is called a king because that is the most common expectation of his role from a prophetic point of view and as king was expected to liberate Israel from foreign control of the gentiles (Rome at this time).

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.’” (Matt. 2:1, 2 NIV)

One of the more controversial prophecies is the virgin birth of Jesus. Isaiah 7:14 says, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.” Here, the Hebrew word *almah* is translated as ‘virgin’, but can also be translated as ‘young (unmarried) maiden’. This opens the possibility for a non-virgin (illegitimate) birth, but such a birth would be meaningless (or non-miraculous)

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<sup>2</sup>Here, Ephrathah simply means the area of Bethlehem (Easton “Ephrathah”).

and not a sign of a messiah. The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament (ca. 250 B.C.) uses the term *parthenos*, which is unambiguous in its meaning of “virgin” (Lindsay 56). The prophecy is fulfilled in Matthew:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘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. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’ Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,’ which translated means, ‘GOD WITH US.’ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

(Matt. 1:18-25 NASB)

The names Jesus and Immanuel appear to contradict. Immanuel means ‘God is with us’, referring to his incarnation. Jesus means ‘YHWH is salvation’. Matthew believed these two interpretations to be the same in that you are saved if God is with you (CARM; Cramer).

Moses was the greatest of all the prophets of the Old Testament. He had the special privilege of receiving revelations from God through face-to-face conversation rather than through simple dreams or visions like the rest of the prophets before Christ (Lindsay 42). In Deuteronomy, God makes a promise to Moses that a prophet greater than him is yet to come.

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.’ The LORD said to me: ‘What they say is good. 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. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.’”

(Deu. 18:15-19 NIV)

The prophet spoken of here would be quite literally be the voice of God on earth, certainly greater than Moses who only was spoken to, not through. Jesus fulfills this prophecy as a prophet in John.

“But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”

(John 5:45-47 NIV)

Here Jesus is claiming to be the prophet pointed to by Moses in Deuteronomy.

This raising of a prophet is also in response to the request by the people at Horeb to live. They desire a prophet so that they may seek advice and live wisely rather than suffer by their ignorance.

The Jews expected the messiah to be a great king who would liberate Israel by force. However, liberation came in the form of eternal life, or liberation from death due to sin, granting the wish of the people at Horeb (although it is debated as to whether Jews from before Christ could receive salvation). This promise is found in the gospel of John and emphasizes Jesus's priestly ability to forgive sin.

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.”

(John 5:39-40 NASB)

In the New Testament, having eternal life is equated with having one's sin removed completely and permanently.

Arguably the most important set of prophecies, those regarding the messiah's suffering and death, come from the book of Isaiah. The relevant sections are 42:1-9; 49:1-12; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12, collectively known as the four cameos of Isaiah. The first describes the servanthood of one. The second declares the salvation that is to be brought to all people on earth through the LORD's servant. The third describes the humiliation of one, the reward for bearing it, and the punishment for distrust of the LORD. The fourth begins with the exaltation of the servant in the 52<sup>nd</sup> chapter (the servant is enthroned) and the suffering and humiliation of the servant in the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter. The messianism portrayed in Isaiah points to a servant of a divine nature



rather than a simply human king. Due to the length of these passages, they are not included in full below in the argument.

The first question is who the text refers to. There are two major interpretations: Jesus and nation of Israel as a whole. The most common theme is suffering and both have suffered greatly, the nation of Israel over its millenia of existence as a people both in ancient times and in the common era and Jesus during his last hours before the crucifixion.

The argument in favour of Israel as a nation has very little weight behind it. In each cameo in Isaiah, the servant is always referred to in the singular, “he”, “him”, “I”, “Me”, “My chosen *one*”. 49:5 says, “And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him”. This clearly differentiates Israel from the servant. 53:5 states that the servant suffered innocently, “But He was pierced through for *our* transgressions, He was crushed for *our* iniquities;”. Israel has always been punished for its own wrongdoing<sup>3</sup> (Reymond 121).

After eliminating the option of Israel, it becomes quite clear that the servant in Isaiah fits the account of Jesus in the New Testament. Isaiah 53 is most clear in its predictions of not only the reasoning behind Jesus’s death, but also specific events. Here are some examples:

#### PROPHECY

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.” (Is. 53:7 NASB)

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<sup>3</sup>Is. 1:4, “Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption!” (NIV).

FULFILLMENT

“And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. Then Pilate said to Him, ‘Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?’ And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.” (Matt. 27:12-14 NASB)

PROPHECY

I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. (Is. 50:6 NASB)

FULFILLMENT

“They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him.” (Mark 15:19 NASB)

PROPHECY

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. (Is. 53:5,6 NASB)

FULFILLMENT

... and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (1 Pet. 2:24-25 NASB)

Finally, to reinforce the evidence that the messiah is of the heavenly realm, the book of Psalms contains clear and undisputed references to the messiah, or ‘Anointed One’ (Easton “Messiah”). In Psalm 2, the nations of the world are warned against dishonouring the Son. That is, the Son of God. He has been raised to a position of great authority over all the earth. This combines the messiah’s heavenly and royal statuses.

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. . .

. . . I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:

He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.’ Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth.

(Psalm 2:1-2, 7-10 NIV)

The Sonship of the messiah is repeatedly reinforced in the New Testament more so than any other trait in Jesus. Although Jesus is often reluctant to admit this to the people around him, it is made quite clear in all the gospels and most notably in Matthew 3:17, “And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”

Further evidence for the divinity of the messiah is found in Psalm 16. Here, God promises that he will never die and will remain at God’s right hand.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor

will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

(Psalm 16:9-11 NIV)

This promise is reflected in the resurrection of Jesus. In the passage from John below, Jesus has already risen and is first discovered by Mary Magdelene.

At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. . . . . Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher). Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, “I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” ’” (John 20:14b, 16-17 NASB)

The tomb that Jesus’s body was a cave with an enormous rock rolled in front of it, too large for any one, two, or three men to move on their own. It was also guarded by Roman soldiers. On the Sunday morning following the crucifixion, the tomb was discovered by the disciples to contain nothing except the burial shroud of Jesus and the rock had been rolled back. By this time the soldiers had already discovered this and were on their way back to the city of Jerusalem to warn the chief priests. They claimed that the body had been stolen by the disciples for fear of punishment for allowing the tomb to be opened. This claim is highly unlikely. A rock of that size could not be moved without the notice of the guards.

Following this event, Jesus was seen by hundreds of people and spent a significant amount of time teaching his disciples about all that had happened.

“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord” (John 20:19b-20 NIV).

It was shown that the messiah of the Hebrew people is quite clearly Jesus of Nazareth as the New Testament portrays him. The Jewish scriptures speak of a messiah (or messiahs) that has the possibility of being a prophet who receives revelation from God, a priest who has the ability to forgive sin, a heavenly servant who suffers, and a king who is exalted. Jesus fills each of these convincingly. These are only the most notable prophecies in the Old Testament that come to fruition in the New Testament. There are many more that Jesus of Nazareth fulfills (Tyndale 1207-108).

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