

Public Theology and Prophecy Data:  
Factual Evidence That Counts for the Biblical Worldview

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# Public Theology and Prophecy Data: Factual Evidence That Counts for the Biblical Worldview

[Abstract]

This is a companion paper to our article, “Public Theology and Scientific Method: Formulating Reasons That Count Across Worldviews,” that was published in 2002 in *Philosophia Christi* 4:45–88 (and that is also available from [www.ibri.org](http://www.ibri.org)). Here several prophecies are discussed that satisfy the criteria for admissible data specified in the *Philosophia Christi* article. Prophecies regarding Israel, its neighboring nations, and its Messiah are reviewed. Israel has for centuries satisfied six unusual sociological characteristics, as predicted in Hosea. The long-scattered Jews have returned to establish a state in the Middle East, as predicted by Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets. Predictions regarding the various ethnic groups around Israel are noted, and the fates of various twin cities – Babylon and Nineveh, Tyre and Sidon, Memphis and Thebes – are contrasted, each providing a sort of control on the other. Prophecies about the Messiah fit Jesus, the founder of the world’s largest religion of gentiles as predicted by Isaiah, who was cut off in the period 28–35 A.D., as predicted by Daniel. Subsequent outcomes have always proven these Bible prophecies to be true. The odds for all of these prophecies coming true just by luck or chance is only one in about  $10^{18}$ , and yet this brief paper examines only a small portion of the available data. So, fulfilled prophecy strongly supports the Bible prophets’ own claim of revelation from the true and living God who alone knows the end from the beginning.

[It] is worth noting that successful prophecy could be regarded as a form of miracle for which there could in principle be good evidence. If someone is reliably recorded as having prophesied at  $t_1$  an event at  $t_2$  which could not be predicted at  $t_1$  on any natural grounds, and the event occurs at  $t_2$ , then at any later time  $t_3$  we can assess the evidence for the claims both that the prophecy was made at  $t_1$  and that its accuracy cannot be explained either causally (for example, on the ground that it brought about its own fulfilment) or as accidental, and hence that it was probably miraculous.

— J.L. Mackie<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

This paper is a supplement to “Public Theology and Scientific Method: Formulating Reasons That Count Across Worldviews,” published in 2002 in *Philosophia Christi* 4:45–88. Here we provide a sample (somewhat larger than given in section 7 of that paper) of admissible prophecies, and give more detail regarding the interpretation, fulfillment, and documentation of these prophecies

As noted in the above paper, for prophetic data to be admissible as evidence that can count across worldviews, each prophecy must satisfy four criteria: (1) Clear Prediction, (2) Documented Outcome; (3) Proper Chronology, and (4) Evidential Weight. In addition, the dataset as a whole should satisfy another four criteria: (5) Testable Hypotheses, (6) Worldview Import, (7) Robust Conclusion, and (8) Manageable Effort. These criteria unpack as follows.

(1) Clear Prediction. The prophecy must be publicly available with a reliable text and evident interpretation. Its predictions must be so specific and detailed that a fulfillment, and also a failure, would be recognizable without any ambiguity.

(2) Documented Outcome. The prophecy must have had its outcome already by the present time, with that outcome well documented by publicly available facts. For instance, reliable and independent historical records count, as do the stones and relics found at archaeological sites and museums. Evident facts of world history also count. But unverifiable reports do not count, especially reports of miraculous events that are exceedingly improbable from atheist or other perspectives.

(3) Proper Chronology. Definite empirical evidence must be available presently and publicly to document that indeed the prophecy does predate its fulfillment. For the Old Testament, this criterion includes all outcomes dated after 150 B.C., the average date of copies of Bible books among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which is also about the time when the independently-circulated Greek translation, the Septuagint, was prepared in Alexandria, Egypt.

Likewise, for a collection of books such as is found in the Bible, the corpus or canon must have been settled before the considered outcomes began. Otherwise, knowledge of the outcomes could have influenced the selection process, canonizing

those books with fulfilled prophecies while discarding other books with embarrassing ones, thereby producing a spurious prophetic accuracy using the unfair advantage of hindsight.

(4) Evidential Weight. Predictions must be too specific and unusual to make their fulfillments likely merely by chance. For instance, a generic curse that a city will be destroyed has little evidential weight because most ancient Near-Eastern cities have been destroyed many times. Furthermore, there must be factual reasons for assigning particular odds of fulfillment by chance, such as 1:5 in one case or 1:100 in another. For instance, the antecedent odds for a city encountering some particular outcome can be assigned by determining the proportions of the various possible outcomes for a sizable and representative reference class of comparable cities. Sometimes simply counting the number of antecedently equally probable outcomes can provide a satisfactory assignment.

(5) Testable Hypotheses. Hypotheses are testable when they make different predictions about some observable outcome. The expectation of the Christian worldview for the Bible prophets is high accuracy. Consequently, any other worldview that expects a markedly lower accuracy has thereby rendered the Christian and that other worldview testable.

(6) Worldview Import. The different predictions, such as high or else low prophetic accuracy, must originate from causal explanations with significant worldview import. For instance, in a competition between Christianity and naturalism, the causal explanation for the prediction of high accuracy is that God alone knows the end from the beginning and has revealed the future to prophets, whereas the causal explanation for the low accuracy is that humans (and more generally any physical systems) have severely limited predictive powers, although occasional lucky guesses are expected.

(7) Robust Conclusion. The verdict on the Bible prophets' claims of predictive accuracy must emerge from major and settled features of the data, not from picky and disputable details. Different persons with different data subsets, different analyses and interpretations, and even vastly different expectations originating from diverse worldviews, should all reach virtually the same conclusion. Two properties that greatly favor robust investigations are that the inquiry's data produce an evidential weight rising exponentially with the amount of data and that the inquiry's analysis is disentangled from other information and worldview beliefs.

(8) Manageable Effort. The work needed to draw a definitive conclusion must be manageable. There are personal differences, of course, in interests and priorities. Ideally, those individuals with interest and leisure to pursue virtually all of the available data could obtain comprehensive materials, whereas those persons better served by a more manageable subset of the data could also obtain definitive results because its evidential weight is great. Otherwise, however significant a proposed inquiry might be, the required work might just be too much.

These eight criteria can be used to define first-tier and second-tier evidence. A prophecy dataset constitutes first-tier evidence if each prophecy meets the first four criteria for admissibility and also the dataset as a whole meets the remaining four criteria for relevance. But a given prophecy constitutes second-tier evidence if it fails somewhat to meet one of the criteria for admissibility. For instance, criterion 3 about proper chronology fails if no compelling empirical evidence proves that the prophecy predates its outcome. However, even if no copy of a prophecy older than its outcome has yet been found to provide this definitive evidence, there may still be several independent lines of circumstantial evidence that converge on an earlier traditional dating that predates the outcome, so there is a plausible or even probable case for meeting the chronology criterion. Likewise, the prophecy that a long-inhabited city will remain forever deserted after being destroyed is quite unusual since most such destructions are quickly and repeatedly followed by reconstructions, but it is impossible to observe a perpetual desolation with final certainty until the end of the age has already come.

Let us now look at our sample, organized under the categories of prophecies about Israel, about the surrounding nations, and about Israel's Messiah.

## 2. Prophecies about the Nation of Israel

Some of the most striking predictions in the Bible concern the future of Israel. These are not prophecies that the Jews would seek to fulfill, however, as they speak of exile and dispersion.

The early chapters of Hosea contain an acted parable predicting the sociological conditions that the Jews experienced during their dispersion from the second to the twentieth centuries A.D. Briefly, God commanded the prophet Hosea to marry Gomer, an unfaithful woman. They had several children, but then Gomer left Hosea for a less restrictive lifestyle. After Gomer was reduced to prostitution to support herself, God commanded Hosea to renew his marriage with Gomer, so that their relationship would picture God's continuing love toward Israel in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness to him.

A strange feature in this portrayal of God's relationship to Israel is a "many days" period of isolation before Hosea resumes a full marriage relation with Gomer. Just as Hosea keeps Gomer from conjugal relations with himself or any other man, so God will isolate Israel for "many days" from both their self-chosen kings and idolatrous practices, and from God-given kings and his established forms of worship. However, this quarantine will not last forever: Hosea looks forward to God's eventual reestablishment of full relations with Israel. A translation of the key passage (Hosea 3:4–5) follows.<sup>2</sup>

(4) For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king and without

prince and without sacrifice and without cult pillar and without ephod and teraphim. (5) Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to his goodness in the last days.

Note that the people will go “many days” without king, prince, sacrifice, cult pillars, ephod, or teraphim. While the meaning of these terms has some ambiguity (especially from an exegetical distance of over two thousand years), the general sense of the prediction follows.

*Without king and prince.* The people of Israel will cease to have a political leader. Given the reference in the next verse to “David their king,” this implies that a Davidic dynasty will not rule Israel. “Prince” is a general term for “official.” The sense seems to be that Israel will not be self-governing.

*Without sacrifice and cult pillar.* This refers to Israel’s worship and religion. In Hosea’s time, pillars were frequently associated with idolatrous pagan worship. “Sacrifice” may either refer to rites at the temple in Jerusalem or include idolatrous rites as well. The isolation predicted here pertains to Israel’s religion: it will have neither sacrifice nor idolatrous elements.

*Without ephod and teraphim.* The ephod is a special priestly garment, and the Septuagint takes the term in a symbolic sense, paraphrasing “ephod” as “priesthood.” Teraphim refers to household idols, which were used for divination in pagan circles and had no part in Mosaic worship. Although the term “ephod” could refer to both Mosaic and pagan priesthods, the sense of this prediction is that Israel will be without officiating priests and idolatry — even idols in the home.

The parallelism between these predictions and the past history of the Northern Kingdom is noteworthy. By the time of Hosea, the Northern Kingdom had abandoned the Lord in two areas: (1) Politically she had seceded from the Davidic monarchy.<sup>3</sup> (2) Religiously she had developed her own cult in order to be independent of the Jerusalem temple and had also incorporated Canaanite Baal worship. This understanding of the prophecy is strengthened by the parallelism in verse 5, where Hosea predicts that following the many days of isolation, “the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God [a religious restoration] and David their king [a political restoration].”

Another interpretive question in this text is the possible ambiguity in the party to whom this prophecy is directed: the term “sons of Israel” (v. 4) can apply to the entire Israelite population (politically divided into Judah and Israel at Hosea’s time) or to the Northern Kingdom in particular (which will be referred to hereafter as Ephraim). From the events related in the book of Hosea it is evident that the prophet’s primary ministry was to the Ephraim, although one cannot rule out the possibility here that he is including the Southern Kingdom of Judah. This ambiguity turns out to be unproblematic, as shall be shown momentarily.

After the time of Hosea, the nation of Israel (Ephraim) soon withered and came to an end. In 733–732 B.C., the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III conquered Trans-Jordan and Galilee and “carried them captive to Assyria” (2 Kings 15:29). About 721 B.C., the Assyrian king Sargon II conquered what remained of the Northern Kingdom. According to the Bible, Ephraim was resettled “in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (2 Kings 19:6). Sargon then “brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites” (2 Kings 19:24). While there are no explicit biblical or extra-biblical references to the fate of these deported Ephraimites, most modern scholars would agree with Ellison: “Sufficient of the Northern tribes joined Judah under the divided monarchy and doubtless at the return from exile to make the modern Jew representative of ‘all Israel’ (Romans 11:26).”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, by the time of the building of the second temple (515 B.C.), Ephraim had fragmented into three groups: (1) those exiled by Assyria to Babylon, Cuthah, and so on, known historically as “the ten lost tribes;” (2) those who remained in the land despite the exile, who apparently mixed with the imported gentiles to become the Samaritans; and (3) those who merged with Judah, having fled there during or after the fall of Samaria, or who joined the Judahites in exile. Each of these groups must be considered in turn as the fulfillment of Hosea’s prophecy is investigated.

“The ten lost tribes” apparently died out or assimilated into pagan races.<sup>5</sup> From the fact that the majority of the “sons of Israel” were killed or assimilated into the gentile world’s gene pool, some might conclude that Hosea’s prophecy was not fulfilled. But this is mistaken. The concept of the survival of a *remnant* is foundational to the prophetic literature, especially in passages of judgment. A particularly vivid example of this theme occurs in Ezekiel’s “hair” prophecy concerning Jerusalem (Ezekiel 5). That only a remnant of the “sons of Israel” would remain is suggested in Amos 5:15: “perhaps the Lord God of Hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.”

Thus one need not grasp for fulfillment theories that find “the ten lost tribes” in the American Indians (as the Mormons do) or in modern Anglo-Americans (with the British-Israel movement). The assumption that God traces genealogies and will include in future fulfillments all those with the remotest Israelite descent is not necessary in light of His many assertions that only a remnant of Israel will survive. But amazingly, this prophecy is fulfilled in those remnants of Israel that can still be traced: the Samaritans and the Jews.

The Samaritans today are a recognized remnant of Ephraim.<sup>6</sup> Kelso goes so far as to state:

Their history as recorded by Jewish sources describes Samaritans as descendants of the colonists whom the Assyrians planted in the Northern Kingdom, who intermarried with the Israelite population that the Assyrians had

left in the land. More likely they were the pure descendants of the Israelites left in the land, for Samaritan theology shows no sign of the influence of paganism among the colonists sent by the Assyrians. If there was intermarriage, the children became pure Israelites.<sup>7</sup>

Although knowledge of Samaritan history and religious practices is quite sketchy, such details as are readily available may be summarized.<sup>8</sup> Regarding their political history, the Samaritans apparently were not involved in the Judahite exile following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. One of the earliest references to them is found in Ezra 4:2, where their request to join with Zerubbabel and the returning exiles in rebuilding the temple is refused. In Nehemiah 2:10–6:14, strife is recorded between Nehemiah and the Samaritan governor Sanballat. A formal break occurred when the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim about 332 B.C. The bitter hostility seen in the New Testament between Jews and Samaritans was the result of numerous hostile actions on both sides, culminating in the actions of Maccabean ruler John Hyrcanus, who subjugated the Samaritans and destroyed their temple in 129 B.C.

Several features of later Samaritan history parallel those of the Jews. Both groups suffered deportation to Egypt about 300 B.C. by Ptolemy Soter. Both joined in revolt against Roman rule in 66 A.D., with disastrous results. Both were persecuted by the Roman emperor Hadrian in the second century. Both were dispersed throughout the Roman empire, as Samaritans and their synagogues are known to have existed in ancient Egypt, Rome, and other key regions.

Under the leadership of Baba Rabba in the fourth century A.D., the Samaritans flourished briefly in their homeland. However, animosity with Christian groups soon led to persecution, and in 529 the emperor Justinian outlawed the sect. Under Arab and Turkish rule the Samaritans continued to experience almost constant oppression.

References to the Samaritans continue during medieval times. By the early seventeenth century, Samaritans had begun to move back to Nablus, near ancient Samaria and Shechem, from Damascus and elsewhere. Persecutions continued, however, and at the beginning of the twentieth century, only 150 survived. Today in Israel, the sect numbers about 600, living in their own special neighborhoods on Mount Gerizim near Nablus, and in Holon near Tel Aviv.

The Samaritan religion has several interesting features. First, it is directed by a high priest, who originally traced his ancestry back to Aaron. However, this family line died out in 1623. Since then, the Samaritans have had what they call “Levite priests.” At least in modern times, the high priest also acts as political leader. Second, the Samaritans today celebrate the Passover by means of an annual sacrifice on Mount Gerizim. While many details of their history are not clear, the following points of corroboration with Hosea’s predictions may be noted.

(1) The Samaritans apparently have been without “king and prince,” particularly in



terms of homeland occupancy and leadership, from the persecutions in 529 A.D. to their return to the Nablus region in the seventeenth century. Their present situation, having returned to the land but being without Aaronic priesthood, may be viewed as an initial fulfillment of verse 5.

(2) While a fulfillment in which sacrifices are completely absent would be ideal, the Samaritans do retain a form of the annual Passover ceremony. However, throughout much of their history they experienced such severe persecution that they were unable to celebrate it.

(3) The Samaritans are clearly “without ephod and teraphim,” as they have lost the Aaronic priesthood and have turned from idolatry. Thus this phrase is fulfilled in the Samaritans, even taking a figurative understanding of “ephod.”

Hence, the Samaritans are apparently a tiny remnant of the “sons of Israel.” In their history they were dispersed from their homeland “for many days ... without king or prince.” They abandoned their idolatrous practices and so are “without pillar and teraphim.” They also abandoned worship in Jerusalem, so are “without (orthodox) sacrifice and (a literal) ephod.” They lost whatever link they may have had to the Aaronic priesthood in 1623, and so are “without (figurative) ephod.” Thus this remnant of Israel has fulfilled the predictions of Hosea 3:4 and is in the initial phase of fulfilling Hosea 3:5.

Most Bible commentators have applied Hosea’s predictions about “the sons of Israel” to the Jews as a whole, in recognition that many Ephraimites blended with Judah after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. And in fact the history of Judah follows what Hosea predicted.

After the Babylonian exile, Judah remained a vassal of Persia. At least for a time, its leadership was derived from the Davidic line, such as Zerubbabel. A degree of independence was achieved by the Maccabean revolt of the second century B.C., though this was under the leadership of a family of Levitical rather than Davidic descent. This independence was lost when the Romans entered the area in 63 B.C. Following the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D., most of the Jews were scattered throughout the Roman empire. After the Bar Kochba rebellion was put down in 135 A.D., the central hill region of Judea was essentially depopulated of Jews. Despite these devastations, however, a form of governance remained over the Jewish communities in the Near East, in which the leader was called the “exilarch.”<sup>9</sup>

But by the end of the eleventh century, the Jewish Diaspora was fragmented into local leadership due to the cultural and religious divisions that had developed internally and externally (such as, between the Christian West and the Islamic East). This fragmentation was not overcome on any large scale until the latter half of the nineteenth century, when a fresh plague of anti-Semitism arose, reaching its climax in the twentieth century persecutions by Stalin and Hitler. Specific tragedies like the Mortara affair (the kidnaping of a six-year-old from his Jewish parents in Bologna by

the Papal guard in 1858) also helped foster a spirit of unity for the sake of self-defense.<sup>10</sup>

Since 1881, but particularly after World War II, the return of the Jews to their homeland has been substantial. The formation of the independent state of Israel in 1948 marks the end of the period when the “sons of Israel” were without “king or prince,” since in Old Testament terminology the modern government is based on “princes.”

As regards Hosea’s prophecy, the religious aspects of Judah’s history may be stated briefly. Josiah desecrated the altars and pillars of both Northern and Southern Kingdoms in about 624 B.C. (2 Kings 23). The Babylonian exile itself “did generally succeed in purging” Judah from the worship of idols.<sup>11</sup> Thus from post-exilic times, Judah has been “without pillar and teraphim.” It is also apparent that the literal ephod of the high priest was lost or destroyed during the exile, as the Jews no longer had the Urim and Thummim at the time of Ezra (Ezra 2:63).

The loss of sacrifice and priesthood (taking a figurative ephod interpretation) occurred with the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. Milman suggests that the entire priesthood perished at this time.<sup>12</sup> The *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, on the other hand, believes “the priests merged with the rest of the nation” and notes that about 20 years after the destruction, the Sanhedrin at Jabneh [Jamnia] ruled that temple “sacrifices were ... replaceable by charity and repentance.”<sup>13</sup> In any case, by about 100 A.D., the Jews had lost their temple and the high-priestly family line and thus were “without sacrifice and ephod.” This situation has continued to the present day: rabbis and synagogues have replaced the priesthood and the temple with its sacrifices.

In summary, the prophecy of Hosea 3:4 has been fulfilled in the history of the surviving Jewish population as a whole, thereby including people from the Northern Kingdom who had moved to Judah. It has also been fulfilled in the history of the Samaritan sect, the survivors of the Northern Kingdom who were not exiled. This prophecy did not predict a vague dispersion of the “sons of Israel,” but it detailed *six specific cultural features* of which the Israelites would be deprived. These included Davidic kingship and lesser national rulers, (orthodox) sacrifice as well as idolatrous cult ritual (specifically pillars), the priestly ephod (either the priesthood itself or the specific garment) and idols. Although many aspects of the prediction were fulfilled much earlier, the absence of all these features has characterized those Jews who were not assimilated into the surrounding nations from at least the eleventh century A.D. This fact was recognized by many medieval Jewish scholars; for instance, David Kimchi noted: “These are the days of our present captivity, for we have neither king nor prince of Israel, but are under the rule of the nations, even under the rule of their kings and their princes.”<sup>14</sup>

Any discussion of the nation of Israel in prophecy is incomplete without the mention of the reestablishment of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948. Although one must be cautious in claiming fulfillment so close to the event, especially since the

region is still unstable, it is very likely that the new nation of Israel is the beginning of the fulfillment of Hosea 3:5. Another passage among the many that predict a return to the land after exile is Isaiah 11:10–12:

(10) In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. (11) In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. (12) He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.

This passage refers to a *second* return, the first generally taken as being the return of a remnant from Babylonian and Assyrian exile after Cyrus authorized the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple in 537 B.C. Although Nehemiah led another group back to Israel from Shushan in Persia (Nehemiah 1:1, 2:1–11) nearly a century later, they did not return from the broad geographic region that Isaiah mentions here.

In fact, only a minority of Jews returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. Most stayed where they were, and gradually continued to spread throughout the known world. By the time of Esther and Xerxes (486–465 B.C.), there were Jews in all the provinces of the Persian empire from India to Ethiopia (Esther 8:9). The conquests of Alexander (334–323 B.C.) encouraged their spread westward from Palestine, and by the first century A.D., Jews were found all over the Roman empire (Acts 2:8–11). Thus a return of Jews “from the ends of the earth” could not have taken place before the Christian era. Incidentally, there are various approaches for interpreting predictions that speak in terms applying to the culture of the time of a prophet’s writing. In this case, the context is geographical, so it seems natural to think of Isaiah’s prediction in terms of the places where these people groups were located when Isaiah made his prediction.

Until 70 A.D., the Jews continued to live in their own land as a national entity, though subject to the dominant empires, whether Persian, Greek, or Roman. Finally, however, the Jews rebelled against Rome, and the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish state in two wars, 66–73 and 132–135 A.D. From that time until recently, there has been only a small struggling Jewish population in Palestine.<sup>15</sup>

Under later Roman, Byzantine, Muslim, Crusader, Marmeluke, and Turkish rule, conditions were hardly favorable for forming a Jewish state in Palestine. Over the centuries, some Jews did return (most notably those fleeing the greater terrors of the Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492), but there certainly was no large regathering of Jews from the lands of their dispersion as Isaiah envisioned. During the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of a Jewish state began to grow in the minds of some pious rabbis in eastern Europe and, independently, in the thoughts of several Englishmen. European Jews began to send financial aid to the relatively backward Jewish communities of the Middle East, though without notable effect. As

late as 1882, only 24,000 of the 450,000 inhabitants of Palestine were Jewish.

When severe persecution broke out in Russia, hundreds of thousands of Jews fled that land, most to other places in Europe. A few idealists among the refugees, joined by others from Rumania and Poland, came to Palestine and founded communities. Although the communities were not very successful, the number of Jews in Palestine rose, and by 1914 it had more than tripled to 85,000.

During World War I, the Turks dealt severely with the Jews in Palestine, with the result that their number dwindled to 56,000 by the end of the war. Yet in 1919, in return for Jewish help in World War I, the British government (in the Balfour Declaration) pledged its support to establish a national home in Palestine for the Jewish people. In 1920, Britain assumed control over Palestine as a mandate from the League of Nations. However, the Arab majority in Palestine had no desire for it to become a Jewish state, and British military administrators there tended to favor Arab interests. As a result, the Balfour Declaration was almost ignored. Even so, there was renewed Jewish immigration to Palestine, and many new communities were established.

During the thirties and early forties, the shadow of Nazi Anti-Semitism spread over Europe, leading to increased Jewish immigration to Palestine. But this was matched by growing Arab opposition to Jewish settlement. In the midst of increasingly violent Arab-Jewish hostilities were the British, under fire both figuratively and literally from both sides. To keep the peace in Palestine while fighting World War II in Europe, the British sought to stop Jewish immigration in spite of the plight of east European Jews fleeing Hitler's holocaust. The Jews, in their desperation, turned to illegal immigration.

When the war ended, Britain refused to continue its mandate to administer Palestine. The United Nations, which had replaced the defunct League of Nations, partitioned Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state, in spite of strong Arab objections. When the British withdrew and the partition was put into effect, the surrounding Arab nations immediately invaded the new Jewish state. Almost miraculously, the Jews turned back the Arab armies, and Israel became a free nation in 1948.

The subsequent Arab-Israeli wars of 1956, 1967, 1973, and the Lebanese invasion of 1984–1985 are fairly common knowledge. The immediate future of Israel is uncertain, but there is now a Jewish state in Palestine for the first time since 135 A.D., nearly two thousand years ago, and it has now lasted over fifty years.

In addition to the reestablishment of the nation of Israel, it is noteworthy that the Jewish population in many of the regions that Isaiah mentions has immigrated to Israel. The ancient countries of Lower Egypt (Mizraim), Upper Egypt (Pathros) and Cush are included in the modern nations of Egypt and Sudan, perhaps also Ethiopia. In 1947, Egypt's Jewish population was 66,000. By 1967, it had dropped dramatically

to 2500.<sup>16</sup> In fact, by 1970, only four Jewish families still lived in Egypt; 35,000 Jews of Egyptian origin lived in Israel, and 47,000 in France, Great Britain, the United States, and Argentina. Since the founding of Israel in 1948, anti-Jewish sentiment in Egypt has been strong, with riots and confiscation of property leading many Jews to leave. The resurgence of Islam in the Sudan and of famine in Ethiopia is causing Jewish departure from these lands also. Perhaps the most famous recent example of the return of Jews to Israel from this region was the 1991 airlift of an imperiled Jewish population in Ethiopia. This small group of about 15,000 Jews had been living in an isolated community in Ethiopia with no connection whatsoever to the rest of the Jewish world for thousands of years. Despite this, all Israelis, because of the fundamental belief that Israel is a safe haven for Jews in need, supported the monumental effort to rescue them.<sup>17</sup>

Assyria and Babylon are largely the modern country of Iraq. The Jewish population of Iraq has likewise declined drastically, from 150,000 in 1947 to 2500 in 1967. Between 1948 and 1950, in reaction to official harassment and confiscation at home, about 123,000 Iraqi Jews settled in Israel.

Hamath and part of ancient Assyria are now in modern Syria. Persecution of Jews under the influence of Arab nationalism has been especially strong in Syria since 1947, and has resulted in a drop in the Jewish population from 15,000 to 3,000 as of 1968. This emigration was particularly substantial in view of efforts by the Syrian government to discourage it by freezing the bank accounts and confiscating the property of departing Jews.

Ancient Elam, later called Persia, is Iran today. As of 1968, fewer Iranian Jews had migrated to Israel than from other Middle Eastern countries. In 1948, Iranian Jews numbered 95,000. By 1968, this had fallen to 60,000, with 55,276 Jews migrating to Israel from Iran between 1950 and 1968. This relatively low number was doubtless due to a more favorable climate for Jews in the Shah's regime. Since the Shah was overthrown by radical Shiite Muslims under Ayatollah Khomeini, however, the migration has increased. As of the end of 1983, there were only about 27,000 Jews still in Iran.

From the foregoing information, it appears that most of the Jews living in the specific nations mentioned in Isaiah 11:11 have left these countries, and most of these have gone to Israel. The immediate cause of the migration is primarily persecution, but the prophecy does not say how God would regather Israel. Jews from all over the world ("the four quarters of the earth," verse 12) have also moved to Israel, although large numbers still remain in the more industrialized nations.

The Hosea and Isaiah passages are not isolated predictions regarding the reestablishment of a nation of Israel in Palestine (see Ezekiel 36:24–31, Zechariah 12:10–13:1, 13:8–9, 14:21, and Revelation 11:1–13). Although one needs to be cautious in judging whether or not particular contemporary events are their fulfillment, the fact that the state of Israel has survived now for over 50 years seems significant.

On the other hand, most of these return passages contain elements that have not (yet) occurred. For instance, most modern Israelis have no interest in “seeking the Lord their God and David their king”. However, if one reads these prophecies as lists of unfolding events, the first item is generally a return to the land, so apparently the next steps are yet future.

Aside from the critique that what was predicted has not yet fully occurred, the other critical response might be that the prophecy was fulfilled by a zealous band of followers, in other words, that the Jewish people were seeking to make it happen. However, for anyone familiar with the Russian and Nazi atrocities that drove the Jews to return to Palestine, it is an insult to call their regathering “voluntary.” Although there are certainly some Jews who have returned in order to fulfill this prophecy, they are the minority. Immigration rates to Israel are directly proportional to the level of persecution the Jews felt in their former countries.

Incidentally, there are many additional Old Testament prophecies made regarding the persecutions and terrors that the Jews would face in their dispersion. Kellogg<sup>18</sup> and Urquhart<sup>19</sup> detail both the predictions and the atrocities the Jewish people faced from the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. through the end of the nineteenth century (the time they were writing), and there has also been the holocaust in the twentieth century. While some cases of persecution were undoubtedly rationalized as efforts to fulfill these biblical curses on the Jews, their nearly global occurrence over two millennia in a variety of religious and political circumstances speaks of motivations other than that of extremist groups out to make the predictions come true.

Finally, what is the antecedent improbability of these prophecies? And accordingly, what is the evidential import of their all coming true?

For a nation to be “without king or prince” *eventually* is likely, although its particular fulfillment in a dispersal of Jews so global that the isolated communities had no unifying leader seems unusual. Given that the kings of conquered nations were either killed or retained as royal puppets, it seems fair to say that this prediction has the odds of a coin toss, about 1:2. However, for this nation to be left “without sacrifice or cult pillar, without ephod or teraphim” in a state of religious limbo is far less likely. In particular, the total loss (or disappearance) of the high-priestly line with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. left Israel without ephod and the proper personnel to perform acceptable sacrifices, aside from the issue of the loss of the temple itself. Given the dispersal of Jews through the Roman empire by this time, the fact that this critical family line had no members living outside of Jerusalem — or any who were able to flee Jerusalem’s destruction — and thus was completely lost is striking, especially given the universal recognition of the importance of the Aaronic priesthood to the nation of Israel (estimated odds, 1:20). Moreover, that Israel would completely abandon idolatry (“without pillar or teraphim”) is also surprising, given Israel’s proclivity to it in the past and the popularity of this form of worship in the Near East until Islamic times (estimated odds, 1:10). Incidentally, since a people group that perishes will automatically also lose its priestly leaders, this induces a negative

association between national survival and priestly extinction, so this departure from strict independence makes the evidential weight of the present correct predictions even greater than that given here by the more conservative procedure of just multiplying individual odds together.

What are the probabilities that a people group will be globally dispersed, yet retain its identity for centuries independently of a homeland, survive almost continual persecution and harassment, and then return to reestablish their nation? Few of the peoples from Old Testament times survive today as distinct ethnic groups: The people of Moab, Edom, Nabatea, Philistia, and Assyria have all disappeared, having blended with successive migrations of Arabs and others into the area. Coptic (pre-Islamic) Egyptians and Samaritans survive, but they stayed within or close to their homelands. Given the upheavals in the Near East, only about a tenth of these people groups have maintained their ancient ethnic identity in the region over the centuries. The Jews, who were dispersed globally, faced much lower odds of retaining their identity outside their homeland for over two thousand years.

That a globally-dispersed group would return to their native land and resettle it after two thousand years is unique in history. This is not a situation like the Balkans or the former Soviet Union where an amalgam of hostile people groups has fragmented after a century of enforced political domination; but a global dispersion of small, relatively isolated communities in foreign lands that nonetheless preserved their identity for thousands of years. Perhaps the closest analogy would be if the Amish or Mennonite communities returned to their homelands and formed a new nation, although these groups have only a 500-year history. The odds of Israel regathering, being unique in history, may be estimated conservatively at 1:1,000.

The cumulative odds for getting all of these predictions regarding the nation of Israel correct is 1:400,000. Many unlikely events were predicted with detail and accuracy.

### *3. Prophecies about Surrounding Nations*

The prophets of Israel also made predictions concerning peoples beyond their borders. Of course, many of these had already come to pass before the time threshold of about 150 B.C. when there is independent evidence that the prophecies had already been written. But a number were fulfilled after that threshold.

Any student of the Old Testament is well aware of the deep animosity between ancient Israel and her neighbors, the Philistines, Edom, and Ammon. The prophets of Israel predicted that those nations would be destroyed, or conquered and assimilated by Israel. Of course, one expects that a prophet would forecast the destruction of his nation's enemies, but nevertheless it is noteworthy that none of these peoples exist today. Ammon was destroyed by Nabatean Arabs from the east, as predicted in Ezekiel 21:31–32, 25:4–7 and 10b. The Edomites were driven by Arabs out of their homeland into the Negev of Judah, where in about 120 B.C. they

were conquered and incorporated into Israel by John Hyrcanus (Ezekiel 25:12–14, Obadiah 18–21, Malachi 1:4–5). The Philistines were weakened by the Babylonian and Greek invasions of their lands, and their cities were taken over by the Maccabees in 148–146 B.C. (Amos 1:8, Obadiah 19, Zephaniah 2:4–7).<sup>20</sup>

Many scholars see the prediction in Isaiah 19:23–25, “The Egyptians will worship [the Lord] with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be a third with Egypt and Assyria,” as fulfilled during the Byzantine period, when Christianity swept Egypt and Assyria and Egypt became a leading Christian country from the third to seventh centuries.<sup>21</sup> Most other prophecies regarding Egypt were less favorable. Ezekiel and Isaiah pronounced curses on the nation, her people, and the Nile river with its irrigation canals. They foresaw Egypt’s cultural collapse to “the basest of nations” (Ezekiel 30:12–14, Isaiah 19:5–7). However, they also predicted the survival of the Egyptian race, known today as Coptics (most Egyptians today are ethnic Arabs). Although Egypt was eclipsed as an international power by New Testament times, it still was the breadbasket of the Roman Empire and was renowned for its craftsmen. It did not hit bottom as predicted until it fell under Arab domination starting in the seventh century.<sup>22</sup>

Predictions about the destruction of enemies are almost expected from prophets. So, is there a way to analyze these fulfillments to show whether they were more than lucky guesses, or merely that the inevitable happened? When scientists conduct experiments, they use controls. That is, they attempt to verify their results by comparing them to a standard or to a parallel experiment in which some critical elements are *not* changed. When testing new drugs, for example, researchers select a group of subjects that are as identical to each other as practical and then give the drug to one half of the group while the other half receives a placebo. Effective drugs are those which give a statistically significant benefit when compared with the placebo.

Is it possible to use controls or standards when studying prophecy? This appears to be feasible when dealing with ancient cities. Cities that were similar at the time the prophecies were made can be paired. For instance, cities might be paired that were within the same nation or geographical region, or likewise were of the same size and relative importance. The only significant difference between the pair is that the predicted fate of one city differs substantially from the other. Since merely switching city names would result in a decidedly different prediction, such “twin city” pairs provide an excellent test of the predictive accuracy of Biblical prophets.

Unfortunately, many of the Biblical prophecies regarding ancient cities involve predictions that were fulfilled before the present constraint of 150 B.C. — such as Alexander the Great’s extremely unusual destruction of Old Tyre by throwing its rubble into the sea, leaving the site a “bare rock” (Ezekiel 26). However, the control concept allows comparisons of the prophetic descriptions with the modern sites. Accuracy in the details increases the significance of what might otherwise appear at first to be obvious predictions.



For example, Babylon and Nineveh were the capital cities respectively of two great Mesopotamian empires that dominated the ancient Near East during the era of the prophets in Israel. Downtown Babylon in its prime covered over 1,000 acres and was the largest city in the world, with an estimated population of over 1,000,000 people.<sup>23</sup> Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, was nearly as large at its zenith. Moreover, due to their excellent locations, both cities had existed for thousands of years prior to becoming the capitals of their respective empires. Yet because of their pride, power, and ruthless military practices, no other foreign cities are discussed and condemned in such detail in the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

Regarding Babylon, Isaiah (13:20–22) predicts that “she will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations,” and Jeremiah (51:26) says that no rock or stone from her ever will be reused for building materials. While it was striking for these prophets to predict around 750–550 B.C. (by traditional datings) that a city of Babylon’s age and stature would be permanently abandoned, by the time of the public confirmation date of 150 B.C., Babylon is in decline and most of the population has moved about 20 miles to the new city of Seleucia. About the time of Christ, Strabo visited this city that had been the cultural and political center of the world for centuries<sup>25</sup> and found Babylon so deserted that he remarked jokingly, “the great city is a great desert.”<sup>26</sup> Archaeological remains show that a group of priests occupied the site until about 100 A.D.<sup>27</sup>

As Isaiah predicted, the site has now been deserted for two nearly thousand years. The *Iraq tour guide* web site notes: “Today, Babylon lies completely in ruins. A large and splendidly carved stone lion is all that remains of its former glories.”<sup>28</sup> Those who visit the site are amazed that Isaiah’s picture of the ruins of Babylon is so accurate.<sup>29</sup> Historical and archaeological records indicate that there have been no significant settlements at Babylon since about the time of Christ. The Euphrates River, which used to flow through the heart of the city, has eroded away the ruins that may have been on its western bank. Moreover, the river has changed its main course since ancient times, leaving a swampy area in its place.<sup>30</sup> For superstitious reasons, Arabs do not live in the ruins, which have become the home of desert animals.<sup>31</sup> The soil among the ruins is so poor that it does not provide enough grass for sheep.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, as Jeremiah predicted, natives who work the site for building materials only take bricks; they burn the stones they find for lime.<sup>33</sup> In 1958 (ten years before Saddam Hussein had any power in governing Iraq) the Iraq Department of Antiquities began restoration of the Emakh temple, part of the Ishtar Gate, the Processional Way, and the palace complex. A half-size model of the complete Ishtar Gate at the entrance to the site was also constructed. These serve as an open-air museum and tourist attraction, and have fueled wild speculation in some circles that Hussein will completely rebuild Babylon for use as the capital of his future world empire.<sup>34</sup>

As a control, consider Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, the other major ancient Near Eastern empire that plagued Israel. The prophet Zephaniah (2:13–15) portrays its future state as “utterly desolate and as dry as the desert. Flocks and herds will lie down there, creatures of every kind.” Although Nineveh itself was destroyed before

150 B.C., the prophecy is still confirmable because Nineveh has remained desolate since that time. When Layard worked the site around 1850, only a small village shared the mound with wild animals.<sup>35</sup> Today the ruins of Nineveh, which are across the river from Mosul, Iraq, include on-site museums and some parts are threatened by suburban growth. Strikingly, the largest mound of the site bears the old Arabic name Kuyunjiq, which means “many sheep.”<sup>36</sup> Irrigation and rainfall are generally plentiful enough that the plains around the mound are cultivated,<sup>37</sup> and the ruins in this area are grazed during the rainy season.<sup>38</sup>

Note the contrast between the prophecies made against these two former world capitals: One will be desolate forever, unoccupied and not even useable for grazing. The other will be desolate for an unspecified time and will be grazed. Had the city names been reversed, the pictures of desolation would not be accurate.

The predictions made against Tyre and Sidon, the two “sister cities” of the Phoenicians, form another natural pair for controlled study. As commercial centers, these cities can be thought of as the Hong Kong and Singapore of the ancient Near East.<sup>39</sup> Sidon was built on the coast, while the ports and main temple of Tyre were situated on an island one-half mile off the coast, making them impervious to attack. Nevertheless, Tyre was highly dependent on the mainland for its resources (water, food, wood) and land trade routes.<sup>40</sup> Speaking to this proud Phoenician city, the prophet Ezekiel (26:3–14) predicts that waves of enemies will attack Tyre. The prediction that is accessible in the admissible time frame warns: “I will make you a bare rock, and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt.”

Although Alexander the Great’s famous siege against Tyre resulted in the debris of the old city being thrown into the sea, as Ezekiel predicted, it is clear from historical records that Alexander had Tyre rebuilt. It remained an important trading and manufacturing center that was fought over by Alexander’s immediate successors, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids.<sup>41</sup>

Even by New Testament times, the prophecy of Ezekiel was not fulfilled: Tyre was still a thriving commercial center by the time the Old Testament had been distributed throughout the Roman Empire by Jewish and Christian communities alike. Recent excavations at Tyre show how large the city was in Roman times. A hippodrome with a seating capacity for 20,000 people and a large necropolis (cemetery) were discovered on the mainland in the 1970’s.

Tyre served as a major trading and manufacturing center throughout the Byzantine and Muslim periods. During the Crusades, Tyre remained strong and well-fortified, surviving a siege by Saladin in 1187–1188. Finally, in 1291, the Mamelukes from Egypt took Tyre, massacred the citizens or sold them into slavery, and destroyed the city as part of their scorched-earth policy to thwart any attempt by the Crusaders to return.<sup>42</sup> The region then suffered under inter-sect Muslim rivalry, a major earthquake, and plague. Several travelogues written during this period remark that the site was essentially abandoned. In the 1960’s settlement at Tyre was encouraged by regional

authorities, which grew into a small fishing village. Tyre finally became a place for the spreading of fishnets. Thus from about 1290 until 1930, the site of Tyre unquestionably matched Ezekiel's picture of desolation. Aerial photographs of Tyre taken in the 1930's show a bare isthmus and a tiny fishing village located where the majestic "Queen of the Seas" had once stood.<sup>43</sup>

Critics gloss over this 650-year fulfillment period and note that for the past 50 years the Lebanese Department of Antiquities conducted excavations at Tyre, uncovering and reconstructing a Crusader cathedral, and Roman-era arch, hippodrome, and necropolis. More importantly, the population of Tyre and the rest of southern Lebanon has grown dramatically over the past 30 years due to the influx of Palestinian refugees. The Lebanese government has provided a new water supply and is attempting to develop the excellent beaches and Roman ruins in the area as a resort and tourist attraction.<sup>44</sup> This recent growth argues against Ezekiel's prediction that the city will never be rebuilt beyond a small fishing village. However, the civil war and proximity to Israel make the region unstable today. Indeed, the city was shelled as recently as 1996. Remembering that Ezekiel spoke against a Tyre that was a world-trade center and naval empire, the fact that the site now has museums and resorts in addition to its fishing village hardly constitutes regaining her former title "Queen of the Seas."

As a control, note the predictions made against Tyre's sister city, Sidon, located about 20 miles up the coast. Ezekiel prophesies (28:22–23) that Sidon will face war, plague, and famine, but he says nothing more specific about its fate. This prediction, what the critic would call a generic curse formula, qualifies as a nice placebo to compare with the specified fate of Tyre. Ezekiel (or any other Old Testament prophet) never says that Sidon will face desolation or be reduced to a small fishing village. If the history of Sidon is tracked beyond New Testament times, she was destroyed on several occasions, but never abandoned like Tyre was. Surviving records indicate that over the centuries Sidon remained an important harbor town serving Damascus. Clearly, if Ezekiel or a later editor had simply switched the names of these sister cities in the predictions, neither would have been fulfilled.

Memphis and Thebes form another pair of twin cities to analyze. The two most important cities in ancient Egypt, they functioned as the capitals and religious centers of the Lower and Upper Kingdoms, sharing prominence over the centuries. Both cities hosted enormous numbers of temples.<sup>45</sup> Thus it is not surprising that the prophet Ezekiel (30:13) quotes God as saying, "I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis." This prediction was not yet fulfilled around the time of Christ, when Strabo found the city "large and populous, next to Alexandria in size" and gave a description of the many gods, temples, and statues that occupied this religious center.<sup>46</sup> Although some zealous Christians during the third century defaced and destroyed some of the idols in Memphis,<sup>47</sup> their actions do not constitute a satisfactory fulfillment because it is not clear that their motivations were independent of the prediction, and in any case many idols still remained.

However, in the seventh century the scene changed. The followers of Muhammad

swept through the Middle East, conquering city after city and converting people from idolatry to Islam by the threat of the sword. Following the conquest of Egypt, the caliph 'Omar restricted the army from making Alexandria the Muslim capital because water [the Nile] would come between the caliph and the army. With his further restriction that they could not own property or take root in Egypt, the army chose to settle at the encampment from which they had besieged the fortress protecting Memphis. This army headquarters, called Fustat, grew over the centuries into the city of Cairo.<sup>48</sup> As this new city grew, the population of Memphis drifted to Cairo, and the stone work of Memphis became a convenient quarry for expanding the new capital city because it happened to be only fifteen miles away.

By the late 1800's, this quarrying was so complete that the only significant artifact of Memphis above ground was a single colossal statue of Ramses II.<sup>49</sup> From 1908–1913 the famous archaeologist Flinders Petrie excavated the site with great difficulty as the “ground was nearly all cultivated, and the search must be always below water level.”<sup>50</sup> It is striking that any remains that Petrie left exposed soon disappeared due to weathering and the continued quarrying efforts of nearby villagers. Today the colossal statue of Ramses II remains one of the few objects at Memphis visible above ground.<sup>51</sup>

Thus the idols and images of Memphis were destroyed and used to build the new city of Cairo. Notice how exactly this prophecy came true. It certainly is not the sort of thing that would have happened anyway. True, virtually all ancient cities have been attacked and ravaged at least once by now, and many sites have been abandoned, but rarely have their ruins been quarried to the point that nothing visible is left of them today. In contrast, consider the prophecy concerning another Egyptian religious center.

Thebes, the largest city in southern Egypt, was another world-famous center for Egyptian religions. In the same context as the above prophecy concerning Memphis, Ezekiel (30:14–16) quotes God saying, “I will ... inflict punishment on Thebes. I will ... cut off the hordes of Thebes. Thebes will be taken by storm.” Thebes was repeatedly attacked. Although Nebuchadnezzar and Cambyses both captured and burned Thebes, the city recovered a good measure of its former strength. In 92 B.C. Thebes withstood a three-year siege before Ptolemy Lathyrus (the grandfather of Cleopatra) sacked and burned the city in anger. While Thebes recovered again, it was finally destroyed by Cornelius Gallus during the reign of Augustus for having joined in an insurrection against the tax gatherers. From this time on, Thebes has been reduced to a small collection of villages.<sup>52</sup>

Thebes has never regained its stature as a city, and today about nine small villages dot the area (the two most notable being Karnak and Luxor). Certainly the hordes of Thebes have been “cut off,” yet the area is still populated (in contrast with prophecies against other cities like Petra or Babylon, of which it was predicted that no one would live in them any more). Moreover, the ruins of Thebes still stand as Griffith notes, “Thebes still offers the greatest assemblage of monumental ruins in the

world.”<sup>53</sup> Most of the temples and statues (aside from the pyramids) that are associated with ancient Egyptian culture are located at this religious center.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, how unlikely are all of these predictions about nations surrounding Israel to be fulfilled were their source merely human? Can they be explained by chance?

The survival of various ethnic groups in this region has already been discussed, but note again that the groups predicted to perish (Ammonites, Philistines, and Edomites) did, whereas those predicted to survive (native Egyptians [Coptics] and Jews) did. The odds of calling all five of these outcomes right by chance are like the odds of calling five coin flips right, which is one in  $2^5$ , or about 1:30. Actually, since a larger fraction of these ancient Near-Eastern people groups have perished than have survived, a more careful calculation would result in considerably smaller odds for getting it right by luck. But for the sake of simplicity and to be conservative, odds of 1:30 are estimated here.

Moreover, the antecedent probability of Israel fulfilling the predictions about conquering the Edomites and Philistines is quite low. Even though both of these enemies were weakened by outside forces (Arabs and Babylonians, respectively), the chance that the Maccabean revolt not only succeeded against the powerful Seleucid and Ptolemaic regimes but permitted Israel to expand its control into the critical Egyptian trade route along the Philistine plains is remarkable. Indeed, many Jews consider it miraculous. Odds of 1:10 for the success of each of these two predictions are conservative.

That a major city will eventually be destroyed is an easy guess; that the site will remain desolate for an extended period of time is less likely. The sites of cities and villages in the ancient Near East were determined by their ability to provide (a) water, (b) a defensible position, (c) fertile land in the area, and commonly (d) access to trade routes. This combination of features is unusual enough that most favorable sites were repeatedly rebuilt by the local population following their destruction, as was the case with Sidon, Jerusalem, Damascus, and many other sites. That Babylon was and is abandoned can be attributed to the loss of its water supply when the Euphrates shifted its course. That Nineveh and Tyre were abandoned for hundreds of years is probably due to the depopulation of the region and political instability.

The significance of these abandonments is strengthened when we realize that these cities were not small villages but were major cities, even capitals of world empires — the ancient equivalents of Rome, London, and New York City. They had been occupied for thousands of years prior to their condemnation, attesting to the first-rate quality of their sites. That someone would predict the long-term abandonment of any of these major cities seems risky, given their favorable sites and past occupation histories. Since less than a fourth of the reference population of ancient major cities ever experienced such a fate, the chances of being right are estimated conservatively as 1:4 for each of these long-abandoned cities, Babylon, Nineveh, and Tyre. These odds seem especially conservative when the opposite

fates of their three controls are taken into account.

The soil quality of the rubble and how building materials are reused varies throughout the ancient Near East. The critic might argue that a prophet could hazard a good guess if he knows the geology of the city he was condemning, but this is not as easy as it might seem. Whether old stone is burned for fertilizer or reused for building material depends on the availability of new materials, which depends on the ease and cost of their transportation and manufacture, which in turn depends on the region's political stability and economic prosperity. Rather than pursue such complex probabilities, a simple logic is used. Since it is not uncommon to reuse the stones from destroyed cities in the ancient Near East, it was risky for Jeremiah to predict otherwise for Babylon. Given that the bricks from Babylon were reused, but the stones were not, it seems conservative to assign odds of 1:4 for this prediction.

Regarding Memphis and Thebes, their outcomes differ strikingly. The idols are gone from Memphis, whereas they still stand in Thebes. Given their geographic proximity, it is rather likely that the idols at these two locations would either both be destroyed or else both be preserved, given that the same national policy or foreign conqueror would be likely to affect both cities. Accordingly, predicting this discrepancy between these nearby cities is risky, so the odds for this outcome are estimated at 1:5. Moreover, Memphis was never attacked and ravaged as severely as Thebes, and the people of Memphis were not wiped out but rather simply moved to Cairo. Such a population movement is unusual — apparently the only other documented case in ancient times being the movement of people from Babylon to the new city of Seleucia, and Thebes is noteworthy because this favorably-situated capital city never regained its formerly sizable population. The odds on guessing the contrasting fates of these two populations may be estimated at 1:10. Note how each city's prediction is in effect a control for the other city. If Ezekiel had merely reversed the city names in his prophecies, both would have been wrong.

The cumulative odds for all of these predictions about surrounding nations being correct is about 1:38,000,000. There is much detail in these prophecies that makes accurate fulfillment quite remarkable.

#### 4. Prophecies About the Coming Messiah

One of the most impressive sections of prophecy in the Old Testament is found in the book of Isaiah, chapters 40 through 56. It is often called the "Servant" section because of its many references to a figure whom God calls "my servant" or the like. This Servant is frequently identified with the nation Israel (Isaiah 41:8, 44:1 and 21, 45:4, 48:20, 49:3), but elsewhere he is just as clearly distinguished from Israel (Isaiah 42:6, 49:5–8, 50:5, 53:8, not to mention numerous characteristics that do not fit the nation as a whole). Probably the best explanation for this peculiarity is that suggested by MacRae: from the viewpoint of responsibility, Israel as a whole was called by God to do a particular work, but as regards accomplishment of the work, it will be done by an individual Israelite.<sup>55</sup>

It has sometimes been suggested that the Servant is a personification of Israel — particularly its righteous remnant or an ideal Israel. But the lack of any contextual hints of personification, together with very specific details, rather argue that a particular individual is in view.<sup>56</sup>

Besides scattered references to the Servant throughout Isaiah 40–56, there are several extended passages in which his character and labors are detailed. These are Isaiah 42:1–7, 49:1–12, 50:4–11, and 52:13–53:12. Numerous features in these passages point to the Servant being fulfilled in Jesus as he is described for us historically and theologically in the New Testament. But to counter claims that the New Testament was explicitly written to fit these predictions, most of the fulfillments examined here happened long after New Testament times and were such that the New Testament writers could not possibly have engineered these outcomes. Isaiah 42:6–7 says that:

(6) I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the gentiles, (7) to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

The Servant is to be a light to the gentiles. This theme is picked up and developed further in Isaiah 49, where verses 5–7 predict that:

(5) And now the LORD says — He who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring back Jacob to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength — (6) He says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept, I will also make you a light for the gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” (7) This is what the LORD says — the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel — to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: “Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

Here the Servant’s being a light to the gentiles is explained as “bring[ing] my salvation to the ends of the earth,” suggesting that the phrases in Isaiah 42:7 about opening blind eyes and freeing captives are either eschatological (referring to events at the end of the age) or are spiritual (rescuing people from spiritual blindness and from captivity to sin). But in any case the Servant’s work is to have a powerful effect. Though “despised and abhorred by the nation,” even rulers of the gentiles will bow down to him.

Has there ever been any Israelite who fits these words? Not even Albert Einstein fits, though he has received widespread honor for his scientific discoveries and has been the most respected Jew of recent centuries.

But what about Jesus? He is the only Jewish person — and one who claimed to be the Messiah at that — who has started a world religion of gentiles. Before the first century A.D., only the Jews and a few Greek philosophers were believers in one God. Only a small percentage of the world's population were even aware of the Hebrew Scriptures. Most worshiped a whole committee of gods, who set rather poor examples for their followers. The resulting level of morality was understandably quite low. But today those who believe in one God include not only the Jews (14.2 million), but also the predominantly gentile Christians (1.4 billion). The Muslims (723 million) might also be included, as the rise of Islam was at least an indirect result of Christianity. Thus about one-half the world's population now claims allegiance to the God of Abraham, most of these as a result of the work of Jesus.<sup>57</sup>

Even neglecting Islam and most Jews, about one-third of the world's people accept Jesus as the Messiah. They are found on every continent and in nearly every country: both in the more developed nations (790 million) and less developed (643 million); in the Western nations (547 million), the Third World (532 million), and even in Communist countries (254 million).<sup>58</sup> Truly Jesus of Nazareth has become a light to the gentiles as news of him has spread throughout the world.

Another striking prophecy points to the specific time of the coming of the Messiah. This is the prophecy of Daniel's seventy "weeks" found in Daniel chapter 9. According to the narrative at that point, the prophet Daniel has recently come to understand from the Scriptures that "the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years." Apparently Daniel realizes that the time must be about up, so he begins to pray to God, confessing his sins and those of his people, asking God to restore the city for the sake of his Name. While he is praying, the angel Gabriel is sent to him with the following message (Daniel 9:24-27):

(24) Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. (25) Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. (26) After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. (27) He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

There has been considerable dispute over the meaning of this passage, especially since the rise of theological liberalism, which claims that the book of Daniel was written in the Maccabean period (c 165 B.C.) instead of the sixth century



B.C. in which the narrative is set. Three items in particular are of interest here. (1) Is the passage speaking of one Anointed One or two? (2) What is the unit of time measurement used here? (3) What is the starting point for the time span pictured here?

Modern translations fall into two classes regarding how to construe the syntax of verses 25 and 26. The King James Version and a number of more conservative translations<sup>59</sup> agree with the quotation above, in which it appears that the prophecy expects one Anointed One (or Messiah) to come and be cut off at the end of 7+62 'sevens.' The Revised Standard Version and a number of more liberal translations<sup>60</sup> instead read the text as saying there will be two Anointed Ones, one coming at the end of seven 'sevens,' the other after a further sixty-two 'sevens':

(25) Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks, it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. (26) And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing.

This latter translation follows the old Masoretic punctuation of the Hebrew Bible, where a division in the sense is made between the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks.<sup>61</sup> It does explain the peculiar combination of 7 and 62 instead of their sum 69. Nevertheless, the Masoretic punctuation may not date back before the ninth or tenth century A.D.,<sup>62</sup> and the parallelism of the passage favors the former translation. In the Hebrew, the phrase rendered "restore and rebuild" consists of the same pair of verbs as are translated "built again" later in the verse. Likewise the word "Messiah/Anointed One" is repeated. This parallelism may be sketched as follows:

From the going forth of the word to *build again* Jerusalem  
To *Messiah* the Prince shall be 7 weeks and 62 weeks.  
Plaza and moat shall be *built again* ...  
And after 62 weeks *Messiah* shall be cut off.

This parallelism suggests that the passage is structured as a summary statement consisting of two lines in which two events and two time periods are mentioned, followed by several lines in which the details of each event are spelled out in turn. Thus there is one Messiah or anointed one, whose cutting off occurs after 69 weeks from the starting point. Perhaps the first seven weeks, if one may hazard a guess, involve the rebuilding of the city.<sup>63</sup>

The usual procedure in interpreting this passage is to assume that the prophecy intends by the word 'seven' or 'week' a period of seven years, and then to proceed to make the calculation using units of years. With the most likely starting point (the one suggested below), this has the anointed one cut off about 39 A.D. Since most scholarship dates Jesus's crucifixion in the range 29–33 A.D., theological conservatives have usually opted for an earlier starting point or else suggested that

the years are actually 'prophetic years' of only 360 days. But none of this is necessary.

The unit of measurement used here in Daniel is the 'week' or 'seven,' not the year. The context, and possibly the unusual plural used for this word here, suggests that the author intends us to understand the seven-year sabbatical land use cycle rather than the seven-day week.<sup>64</sup> The Biblical commands regarding this sabbatical cycle are given in Exodus 23:10–11 and Leviticus 25:3–7 and 18–22. The Exodus passage reads: "For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused."

It is interesting that the context in Daniel 9 seems to point to this usage as well. Daniel has been concerned about the desolation of Jerusalem and the fact that the Israelites are scattered from their land. He has just learned "from books" that this desolation will last seventy years. The prophecy of Jeremiah supplies the time element for this scattering and desolation (Jeremiah 25:11–12, 29:10), but it appears that Leviticus 26:32–35 supplies the rationale. If Israel did not keep the sabbatical-year regulation, then God would expel them from the land until the land could "enjoy its sabbaths."<sup>65</sup>

Various suggestions have been made for the starting point of these seventy 'sevens': (1) God's word at the fall of Jerusalem (586 B.C.; Jeremiah 25:11–12, 29:10); (2) Cyrus's word in allowing the captives to return to Jerusalem (537 B.C.; 2 Chronicles 36:23, Ezra 1:2); (3) Artaxerxes's commission to Ezra (458 B.C.; Ezra 4:11–12 and 23); and (4) Artaxerxes's commission to Nehemiah (445 B.C.; Nehemiah 2:1–6).<sup>66</sup> Of these four, only the last actually issued in the rebuilding of the city wall. In thus making Jerusalem fortified again, it became in ancient parlance once more a city and no longer a village. Thus the fourth alternative is followed here, and Nehemiah 2:1 dates Artaxerxes's sending Nehemiah to Jerusalem to the twentieth year of Artaxerxes 1, namely 445 B.C.<sup>67</sup> So this is the starting point.

The next step is to make the calculation forward from 445 B.C. But unlike many other commentators, here the actual sabbatical cycles are used as units of measurement rather than just adding 7(69 years to the starting point, since this follows the actual usage in Daniel. Recent work by Ben Zion Wacholder has reviewed all the ancient data for the location of the sabbatical cycles in antiquity, and he finds the modern cycle in error by one year.<sup>68</sup> Here Wacholder's numbers are used rather than the traditional cycles, but this will turn out to make no difference in the results.

The calculation is simple. The starting point, 445 B.C., falls in the seven-year sabbatical cycle 449–442 B.C., of which the last year, from September 443 to September 442, is the seventh or sabbatical year. Using the usual Jewish inclusive method of counting, 449–442 is the first 'seven' of Daniel's prophecy. The second is 442–435 B.C., and so on, down to the transition from B.C. to A.D., where one needs to remember that 1 B.C. is immediately followed by 1 A.D., with no zero in between (so the 64<sup>th</sup> cycle is 8–1 B.C. and the 65<sup>th</sup> is 1 B.C. to 7 A.D.). The 69<sup>th</sup> cycle following

Artaxerxes's commission is 28–35 A.D., just the time that Jesus of Nazareth was “cut off” in Palestine while claiming to be God’s Messiah!

Some may be concerned that Daniel says “*after* the sixty-two ‘sevens’ Messiah will be cut off,” whereas by the above calculation the crucifixion occurs *on* the 62<sup>nd</sup> ‘seven’ (the 69<sup>th</sup>, counting the first 7). But this, too, is a conventional Jewish idiom, in which “after” means “after the beginning of.” Notice that Jesus’s resurrection is alternatively spoken of as occurring “*after* three days” (Matthew 27:63, Mark 8:31) and also “*on* the third day” (Matthew 20:19, Mark 9:31).

Anyway, if the traditional scheme for the location of the sabbatical cycles is followed instead of Wacholder’s calculations, the 69<sup>th</sup> cycle shifts by only one year, to 27–34 A.D., which still fits equally well. Likewise an error by a year or two on either end — for Artaxerxes’s 20<sup>th</sup> year or the date of the crucifixion — would not change the result. The prediction fits Jesus even allowing for the largest possible uncertainties in chronology.

How unusual are these predictions? Some estimates of the odds for these predictions are given here.

The light to the nations prophecy, in the course of over 2,000 years since it was made, has been fulfilled in a rather spectacular manner. The largest religion in the world today was founded by a Jew, who has turned multitudes of pagan gentiles into worshipers of the God of Abraham. How does one calculate the probability of something like this happening? A reasonable assumption is that the founder of the world’s largest religion must belong to some people group. Then what fraction of the world’s population, at the time the prediction was made, or the time it was fulfilled, were Jews? The current fraction of Jews in the world is 0.3%. In spite of the holocaust, the fraction of Jews living today is probably higher than in antiquity, since the Jews have participated in the huge population expansion of first world countries during the previous several centuries whereas many other ethnic groups did not. Anyway, staying with 0.3%, the antecedent odds of this prophecy coming true for the world’s largest religion are 1:300. But more conservatively, if we assume “light to the gentiles” would be fulfilled by any of the major world religions, say 5 of them, then the odds would fall to 1:60.

What fraction of famous Jews would be “despised and abhorred by the nation” (Isaiah 49:7)? Not a very large fraction normally. Like any ethnic group, Jews tend to take pride in those who have done well in the larger society. Of course, Jesus is viewed as a religious innovator, and the fraction of Jewish religious innovators who are abhorred by the Jews is doubtless larger than in non-religious cases. Yet one of the standard *objections* against the Messiahship of Jesus is his rejection by the Jews! So something unusual is going on here, and odds of 1:10 seem fair. Hence, the total odds of the light to the nations prophecy are 1:600.

How about Daniel’s seventy weeks prophecy? What is the chance that the prophet

will accidentally hit Jesus at a distance of hundreds of years? The size of his “gun sight” is seven years. The size of the prophetic span given is 490 years, resulting in odds of 1:70. But there is no antecedent reason why the prophet need limit himself to 490 years in the sweep of his prophecy. If instead one took the length of Jewish history up to the time of fulfilment, that would be about 1500 years (from Moses), or else 2,000 years (from Abraham), resulting in odds of 1:200 or 1:300. If one took the length of Jewish history to date, the odds are about 1:500 to 1:600. As a middling estimate, 1:200 suffices.

Compare this with the liberal alternative that says some pseudo-Daniel was “predicting” the Maccabean persecution after the fact using one of the starting points mentioned above. Taking the target to be 190 B.C. and the seventy weeks to be 490 years, the starting point would be 660 B.C., which misses alternative (1) by 70 years, (2) by 120, (3) by 190, and (4) by 215 years! This just does not work.

There are other impressive Messianic prophecies. The prediction of the suffering servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 comes to mind. See the detailed discussions in Aston and MacRae.<sup>69</sup> Aston finds the following features in this passage. (1) The suffering servant is portrayed in detailed features as a real person. (2) He is an innocent sufferer. (3) He is a voluntary sufferer. (4) He is an obedient, humble and silent sufferer. (5) His suffering springs from love for sinners, including his executioners, who act in ignorance. (6) His suffering is foreordained by God in love, and fulfills the divine intention and purpose. (7) His suffering is vicarious or substitutionary. (8) His suffering is redemptive and spiritual in nature. (9) His suffering ends in death. (10) His death gives way to resurrection. (11) His atoning work leads the straying people to confession and repentance. (12) His redemptive work inaugurates a victorious life of kingly glory. Obviously, many of these features refer to phenomena that cannot be independently verified in human history, being either worldview dependent or still future. But what is clear is that they are central to the New Testament portrayal of Jesus, the one Messianic claimant who has founded a world religion of gentiles and who was cut off in just the period designated by Daniel! What are the chances that all these things could plausibly be applied to an individual who also shows up at the right time and does the right things? Who could specify even one other candidate in the first century A.D., or even in any century? Surely the odds for this are far smaller than one in a thousand. And they raise an interesting question no often dealt with in liberal theological circles, that the major features of Christian theology are predicted hundreds of years in advance!

Then there is the suffering person depicted in Psalm 22, whose cry to God for help is reported by two of the Gospel writers to have been shouted by Jesus from the cross. This person (1) feels abandoned by God and yet (2) trusts him completely. (3) He is despised and mocked by the people who surround him. (4) They pierce his hands and feet; (5) they cast lots for his clothing; (6) and they subject him to some situation in which he is weak, terribly thirsty, and his bones are out of joint. (7) Although he is “laid in the dust of death,” God somehow rescues him. (8) The effects of these events will go down through the future generations and to the ends of the

earth, (9) so that all the families of the nations will turn to the Lord and bow down to him. Though some of these features are regularly dismissed from being real fulfillments by assuming that the Gospel writers ransacked this passage for details to use in describing Jesus's death, it remains a fact that this passage strikingly fits death by crucifixion, an experience that Jesus certainly endured. What fraction of people since this Psalm was written have died by a death consistent with these details? One in a thousand? One in a million?

The cumulative odds of all of these prophecies about the coming Messiah being fulfilled are 1:120,000, counting only those with clear empirical verification. Giving the Gospel writers even modest credence as reliable eye-witness historians would increase these odds enormously, as detailed in the preceding two paragraphs.

To summarize the preceding three sections, the cumulative odds for the empirically verified fulfillments that have been surveyed here concerning Israel, surrounding nations, and the Messiah are about 1:10<sup>18</sup>. While the odds for any particular prophecy's fulfillment may be set somewhat higher or lower by different individuals, it seems quite implausible that any fair assessment would change the cumulative odds substantially (say, outside the range of 1:10<sup>10</sup> to 1:10<sup>30</sup>). The cumulative evidence is staggering and it counts across worldviews.

## 5. Conclusions

The most valuable data for public theology satisfy three criteria. They carry great evidential weight, they count across diverse worldviews, and they have substantial theological import. On these three counts, fulfilled prophecy from the Bible is particularly valuable data.

First, the amount of data is large and its evidential weight increases exponentially. The Bible has numerous predictive passages, constituting 27% of its text. After applying the above eight criteria for admissibility and relevance, first-tier evidence comprises about 3.5% of this material (as detailed in Section 7 of the companion paper). The probability of several prophecies with essentially independent outcomes all coming true equals their individual probabilities multiplied together, so the weight of the evidence grows exponentially with its amount. There is space in this paper to examine only a small fraction of the available data. But even this very limited exploration delivers impressive results. The combined odds for the prophecies examined here regarding Israel are 1:400,000, for other nations 1:38,000,000, and for the Messiah 1:120,000, yielding total odds of about 1:10<sup>18</sup>. As Blaise Pascal remarked about fulfilled Bible prophecy, "And what crowns it all is that it was foretold, so that no one could say it was the effect of chance. Anyone with only a week to live will not find it in his interest to believe that all this is just a matter of chance."<sup>70</sup>

Second, the evidence of fulfilled Bible prophecy counts across worldviews because the data are empirical and public and the interpretation of the data has a light interpretive burden and no problematic or unexamined presuppositions. The action is in the parchments and stones, not the presuppositions and opinions.

Third, unlike other lines of evidence and argumentation for theism offered by natural theology, this evidence has enormous theological import. It shows that Yahweh is the true and living God who alone knows the end from the beginning. And the very content of Bible prophecies directly supports virtually the entirety of Christian theology, starting with the person and work of Christ.

“[The] fact of predictive prophecy brings, first of all, glory to God; for each prediction testifies to its Author’s wisdom and sovereignty over the future. As Isaiah spoke forth to the Israelites of his day, ‘Who hath declared it from the beginning, that we may say, He is right?’ (41:26). Predictions point up His powers, as contrasted with those of any conceivable rivals; as the Lord went on to speak through His prophet, ‘Before it came to pass I showed it [to] thee, lest thou shouldst say, Mine idol hath done them’ (48:5).”<sup>71</sup>

Prophecies concerning Israel and the nations show that God is concerned about all of humanity, although He has a special relationship with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They show that his method of dealing with humanity is not to prevent all evil from happening, but to allow the consequences of such behavior to work themselves out, the meanwhile not leaving himself without testimony in bringing judgment on nations that set themselves up to act with arrogance and cruelty against others. And they show that Israel will initially reject its Messiah but in (as yet unfulfilled) predictions that they will eventually turn to him at the time of his return. Those prophecies concerning the Messiah indicate the time of his being “cut off,” the theological significance of his death as a substitutionary sacrifice to provide forgiveness for sinners, and that He will be restored to life and become a light to the gentiles.<sup>72</sup>

Among all of the other kinds of evidence for theism offered by natural theology as well as Christian apologetics and philosophy, fulfilled Bible prophecy is unique in satisfying all three of the above criteria. Therefore, fulfilled Bible prophecy is the centerpiece of what Christian philosophers and theologians could offer to public theology. This topic merits more extensive development than is possible in the limited space of this paper.

Being a kind of miracle, fulfilled prophecy has important ramifications for the wider discussion of miracles. As remarked earlier, miracles provide especially conspicuous evidence for theism. It may be that Hume’s influential philosophical arguments against the credibility of reported miracles are finally falling on hard times. But in any case, whether interest in reported miracles revives or not, there are great advantages to enlarging the case for miracles (and hence for theism too) to include not only reported miracles but also testable miracles — and more pointedly still, testable miracles possessing enormous theological import. After the testable miracles of fulfilled Bible prophecy have supported the case for theism, the evidential requirements for reported miracles become more feasible.

One of philosophy's most significant questions, which more generally is also one of life's big questions, is: Does God exist, and if so, just which God is this? To answer this question, specifically within a public forum that obtains answers that are disentangled from worldview presuppositions and hence count across worldviews, the data on fulfilled prophecy from the Bible are richly informative.<sup>73</sup>

## NOTES



- 1 J.L. Mackie in Richard Swinburne, editor, *Miracles*, (New York, New York: Macmillan, 1989), 90.
- 2 For a detailed exegesis and discussion this prophecy, see John Bloom's chapter in *The Evidence of Prophecy*, edited by Robert C. Newman (Hatfield, Pennsylvania: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1988), 67–82.
- 3 God considered Jeroboam's actions to be rebellious because he did not obey the conditional promises of the prophecy (1 Kings 11:38) but instead built shrines in Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:26–33, 14:7–16). By the time of Hosea, the Northern Kingdom's kingship had been corrupted to the point that God said, "They have set up kings, but not by Me; they have appointed princes, but I did not know it" (Hosea 8:4).
- 4 H. L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956), 132.
- 5 H. Tadmor in H. H. Ben-Sasson, editor, *A History of the Jewish People* (London, England: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 137–138.
- 6 *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971), s.v. "Samaritans," by Benyamin Tsedaka.
- 7 *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Samaritans," by J. L. Kelso.
- 8 The following summary is paraphrased and condensed from articles on the Samaritans in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1970) by Theodore H. Gaster, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, and *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia* (noted above). An interesting website with both recent history and pictures is [www.the-samaritans.com](http://www.the-samaritans.com).
- 9 Ben-Sasson (1976:303–313, 332–334).
- 10 Ben-Sasson (1976:811, 849).
- 11 Payne (1973:111).
- 12 H. H. Milman, *The History of the Jews*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (London, England: John Murray, 1883), 2:414.
- 13 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "History," by Michael Avi-Yonah.
- 14 David Kimchi, quoted without citation in E. Henderson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (1858; reprinted Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1980), 19–18.
- 15 This and the following sections summarize Efraim Orni and Elisha Efrat, *Geography of Israel*, 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition (Jerusalem, Israel: Israel Universities Press,

1973) 214–251.

16 For citations and further details on the statistics given here, see “The Return of the Jews,” by Eugenie Johnston in Robert C. Newman, editor, *The Evidence of Prophecy*, (Hatfield, Pennsylvania: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1988), 83–97.

17 See <http://www4.district125.k12.il.us/faculty/bswislow/immig.html>.

18 Samuel H. Kellogg (1839–1899), “The Dispersion and Oppression of the Jews,” in Newman (1988:55–66).

19 John Urquhart, *The Wonders of Prophecy*, (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Christian Publishers, n.d. [1895]).

20 For a recent presentation of the historical details on the disappearance of these nations, see Kenny Barfield, *The Prophet Motive: Examining the Reliability of the Biblical Prophets*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Gospel Advocate, 1995). Urquhart (1895) is the classic treatment of these nations.

21 Payne (1973:304).

22 Barfield (1995) and Urquhart (1895) have extensive discussions of Egypt that need not be repeated here.

23 Robert Koldewey, *The Excavations of Babylon*, translated by Agnes S. Johns (London, England: Macmillan, 1914), 5.

24 Nineveh is the principal topic of the prophetic books Jonah and Nahum, and is mentioned in Zephaniah. Babylon is repeatedly condemned in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and elsewhere.

25 Joan Oates, *Babylon*, (London, England: Thames and Hudson, revised edition, 1986), 142.

26 Strabo, *Geography*, 16. 1. 5.

27 Oates (1986:142–143).

28 See [http://www.arab.net/iraq/tour/iq\\_babylon.html](http://www.arab.net/iraq/tour/iq_babylon.html) (accessed 4 August 2000).

29 Koldewey (1914:314); Andre' Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament* (New York, New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 148–149; H. M. F. Saggs, “Babylon,” in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, edited by D. Winton Thomas, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1967), 41. Oates (1986:143–144) notes, “Today, despite the restoration of its major buildings, its desolation remains complete; once

the centre of the world it now serves as a moving reminder of the impermanence of life and, along its once busy river, a quiet picnickers' haven."

<sup>30</sup> Austen H. Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, (London, England: John Murray, 1853), 484 and 493.

<sup>31</sup> Claudius James Rich, *Memoir on the Ruins of Babylon*, (London, England: Richard and Arthur Taylor, 1815), 27; Robert Mignan, *Travels in Chaldea*, (London, England: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1829), 201; Layard (1853:484).

<sup>32</sup> Koldewey (1914:108); Mignan (1829:234–235). Note that there are shepherds in the plains surrounding the ruins in Layard (1853:484).

<sup>33</sup> Observation of Mr. Rassam, quoted without reference in Urquhart (1895:144). Unfortunately, one cannot tell which of the Rassam brothers, Christian or Hormuzd, is being cited. However, both were involved with Layard in his archaeological campaigns in Mesopotamia and are credible observers. It should be noted that lower Mesopotamia is a flood plain and has no natural stones. Rock was imported and the most abundant building material is brick made from local clay. This situation contrasts with Israel, where both rock and clay are easily available. In Mesopotamia the bricks are often reused in new native construction, while in Memphis, Egypt, the opposite situation occurs: old bricks are used for fertilizer while the stones are reused in new construction. See D. G. Jeffreys, *The Survey of Memphis I Part One: The Archaeological Report*, (London, England: The Egypt Exploration Society, 1985), 14.

<sup>34</sup> Charles H. Dyer and Angela Elwell Hunt, *The Rise of Babylon*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> The village of Nebi Yunus has been on the site for some centuries. For the reference to animals, see Layard (1853:661–662).

<sup>36</sup> Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia, s.v. "Nineveh," by D. J. Wiseman. Compare Layard (1853:76) who translates it as "little sheep" after the name of an abandoned village on the mound.

<sup>37</sup> Layard (1853:77).

<sup>38</sup> Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*, 2 volumes (New York, New York: George P. Putnam, 1849), 1:28–29.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia M. Bikai, "Phoenician Tyre," in Martha Sharp Joukowsky, editor, *The Heritage of Tyre: Essays on the History, Archaeology, and Preservation of Tyre*, (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1992), 46.

40 Maria Eugenia Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West*, translated by Mary Turton (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 31.

41

Bikai (1992:61).

42 Bikai (1992:78). Maurice H. Chehab, *Tyre: History, Topography, Excavations*, translated by Leila Badre (Beirut, Lebanon: Editions Librairies Antoine, 1974), 25.

43 The photographs from A. Poidebard, *Un Grand Port Disparu Tyr*, (Paris, France: Paul Geuthner, ca. 1936) are available at <http://almashriq.hiof.no/general/900/930/933/tyr-poidebard/tyr.html>.

44 Chehab (1974:26).

45 W. M. Flinders Petrie cites ancient references to at least nineteen temples in *Memphis I*, (London, England: School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1909), 2.

46 Strabo, *Geography*, 19. 1. 31–32.

47 Barbara G. Mertz, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition, s.v. “Memphis.” Her statement, “zealots of that faith defaced and destroyed the remaining pagan temples,” should not be taken too strongly. Flinders Petrie and other investigators have recovered intact idols from several of the major temples of Memphis (*Memphis I*, p. 5; Petrie’s other reports cited below; and Rudolf Anthes, *Mit Rahineh 1955* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1959), 4). However, the total amount of surviving remains from Memphis is surprisingly small given the original size of the ancient city. Petrie notes regarding the Temple of Ptah area, “The site has been so much exhausted for building stone in the Arab ages, that it is not likely that a complete turning over of the whole ground would repay the work.” W. M. Flinders Petrie, Ernest Mackay, and Gerald Wainwright, *Meydum and Memphis (III)*, (London, England: School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1910), 39.

48 Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Story of Cairo*, (London, England: J. M. Dent, 1902), 39–42; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition, s.v. “History of Egypt,” by Donald P. Little.

49 Amelia B. Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, (London, England: G. Routledge and Sons, 1891; reprinted, Los Angeles, California: J. P. Thacher, 1983), 65–67.

50 W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Seventy Years in Archaeology*, (New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), 224.

51 Mertz, “Memphis.” Note that any significant statuary recovered by Petrie was

removed to museums, in effect clearing the site. See W. M. Flinders Petrie, G. A. Wainwright, and A. H. Gardiner, *Tarkhan III and Memphis V*, (London, England: School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1913), 32; and *Memphis III*, 38–40.

52 Francis Llewellyn Griffith, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, s.v. “Thebes.”

53

Griffith, “Thebes.”

54 For excellent illustrations of the ruins at Thebes, see Charles F. Nims, *Thebes of the Pharaohs: A Pattern for Every City*, (New York, New York: Stein and Day, 1965).

55 Allan A. MacRae, *The Gospel of Isaiah*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody, 1977; reprinted, Hatfield, Pennsylvania: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 61–62.

56 Frederick A. Aston, “The Work of the Messiah,” in *The Evidence of Prophecy*, edited by Robert C. Newman, (Hatfield, Pennsylvania: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1998), 121–124.

57 Statistics from David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1982), 4 and 6.

58 Barrett (1982:4, 6).

59 Including the New International Version, New American Standard Bible, Living Bible, Berkeley Version, Amplified Bible, and the Jerusalem Bible.

60 Including the Jewish Publication Society’s version, the New English Bible, the Smith-Goodspeed and Moffatt translations, and the New American Bible.

61 For example, see K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia* editio minor, (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 1984), 1404.

62 Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 19.

63 As suggested in the Berkeley Version. The Smith-Goodspeed and the New English Bible imply such an interpretation by translating verse 25b: “for sixty-two weeks it shall *stay* rebuilt / *remain* restored,” but these translations of the verb *shub* find no warrant in the lexicons and merely show the problem of adopting the Masoretic punctuation.

64 The Book of Jubilees gives evidence of such use of ‘seven’ in Hebrew literature.

65 The author of 2 Chronicles 36:21 explicitly applies this reasoning to explain the

length of the Babylonian captivity.

66 Payne (1973:383–386).

67 Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964), section 336.

68 Ben Zion Wacholder, “The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles During the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973), 153–196. A complete table from 519 B.C. to 441 A.D. is given on pages 185–196.

69 Aston (1988:119–127); MacRae (1992:129–150).

70 A.J. Krailsheimer, editor, *Pascal Pensées*, (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 100; also see pages 99–105.

71 Payne (1973:13). Several additional insights may be gleaned from Payne.

Payne puts prophecy in perspective as being one of three kinds of revelation. “Israel possessed three basic classes of human media for revelations from God, each with its own particular function. As expressed in Jeremiah 18:18, ‘The law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word [or vision, Ezek 7:26] from the prophet.’ That is, while the wise, Israel’s compilers of proverbial wisdom, were inspired to communicate principles for the direction of life, and while the Levitical priests, informed by Yahweh’s law book, were equipped for the restoration of those who had fallen short of the divine standards, it was the prophet who occupied that central position of revealing God’s will, His specific ‘word’ for men, reproving their sin against His ‘counsel’ and guiding them repentantly to seek His ‘law’ from the priest” (Payne 1973:1).

“Some of the prophecies were aids to faith: Jesus said, ‘Now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it comes to pass, you may believe’ (John 14:29); and David forecast his victory over Goliath ‘that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel’ (I Sam 19:46; cf. v. 47) — its truth was proclaimed by his prophecy as well as by his deed that followed. ... [Likewise, when] Joshua spoke out in faith and foretold the miracle of the cutting off of the waters of the Jordan (Josh 3:13), he assured his people, ‘Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you’ (v. 10); and to this end the prediction itself contributed, just as did the subsequent miracle” (Payne 1973:14, 13). “Some, if not most [prophecies], were aids to moral living. Both the promises of divine blessings and the threats of impending judgment constituted urgent motivations to ethical conduct” (Payne 1973:14). Fulfilled prophecies authenticated real prophets (Jeremiah 28:9, Ezekiel 33:33), and failed prophecies exposed false prophets (Deuteronomy 18:22).

Bible prophecy is instructive, not only for the prophets’ contemporaries, but also for all generations (2 Peter 3:11, Revelation 1:3). Indeed, “Far from fading away with the passage of time, the value of the Bible’s predictions ... grows ever greater as their accomplishments [fulfillments] unfold” (Payne 1973:15).

<sup>72</sup> Additional Messianic prophecies not examined here point to the Messiah's pre-existence and deity (Micah 5:2, Isaiah 9:6–7, John 1:1–3, Colossians 1:15–17, Hebrews 1:1–4), his (still future) second coming (Zechariah 12:10, 14:3–5, Daniel 7:13–14, Matthew 24:3–44, Acts 1:10–11, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12, Revelation 19:11–21), his prime role in the judgment of humanity (Isaiah 9:7, 11:1–5, 42:3–4, 49:1–7, 50:7–11, Daniel 7:13–14, 18, 26–27, Matthew 25:31–46, John 5:19–27, Revelation 20:11–15, 22:12–16), and the two drastically different eternal destinies for those who have fled to God for refuge and those who have chosen to continue a lifestyle of rebellion against him (Isaiah 50:10–11, 66:1–24, Daniel 12:1–4, Matthew 25:34–36, John 5:28–29, Revelation 20:12–15, 22:14–15).

<sup>73</sup> We appreciate helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper from J.P. Moreland, Frederic C. Putnam, Robert Vannoy, and Martin Wells. The authors dedicate this paper to John Bloom's wife, Claudia, and son, David.