

PROPHECY, PROBABILITY & GOD

Introduction

How does one attempt to decide whether God exists, and if so, which religion/book is actually a revelation from Him?

Here we attempt a sketch of some of the evidence from fulfilled prophecy provided by the Bible as part of the case for the truth of biblical Christianity.

Light to the Gentiles: Isaiah 42:6; 49:6

Isa 42:6 (NIV) *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,*

Isa 49:6 (NIV) *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."*

What other Jewish person since Isaiah's time has founded a world religion?

Time of the Messiah: Daniel 9:25-26

Dan 9:25-26 (NIV) *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 will 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.*

Messiah to come after 69 "weeks" and to be "cut off."

Starting point is "command to build Jerusalem"; according to Nehemiah 2, this is 20th year of the Persian King Artaxerxes 1, to best modern knowledge is 445 BC.

Unit of measurement is "week," the 7-year sabbatical cycle. The week including 445 BC is fall 449 to fall 442.

Jewish counting convention is inclusive: unit including starting point is 1st unit, "after x units" means after xth unit has begun.

Thus after 7 + 62 weeks = AD 28-35.

Jesus "cut off" by religious trial and Roman execution about AD 30.

Contrast liberal interpretation, off by many years.

Israel's Future: Hosea 3:4-5

Hosea 3:4-5 (NIV) *For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. 5 Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.*

Six unusual sociological features to characterize Israel for "many days."

An acted parable in marriage of Hosea and Gomer to picture relation of God and Israel: after she abandons Hosea, he is to buy her back for many days but have no relations with her.

So Israel for many days to be without king/prince, sacrifice/sacred pillar, ephod/teraphim.

king/prince (government): Israel has had no king since 587 BC or AD 44; no "prince" from AD 70 to 1948.

sacrifice/sacred pillar (worship): Israel has had no sacrifice since AD 70, probably no pillar since c 500 BC.

ephod/teraphim (guidance): Israel has had no priesthood since AD 70, no teraphim since c 500 BC.

Twin Cities:

Something like use of controls in a scientific experiment; a number of "twin cities" that are very similar, yet have rather different prophecies made about them; could not switch them and have equally good prediction.

Memphis/Thebes: Ezekiel 30:13; 14-16

Ezek 30:13-16 (NIV) *This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis. No longer will there be a prince in Egypt, and I will spread fear throughout the land. 14 I will lay waste Upper Egypt, set fire to Zoan and inflict punishment on Thebes. 15 I will pour out my wrath on Pelusium, the stronghold of Egypt, and cut off the hordes of Thebes. 16 I will set fire to Egypt; Pelusium will writhe in agony. Thebes will be taken by storm; Memphis will be in constant distress.*

Two of Egypt's national capitals

destroy idols of Memphis vs cut off hordes of Thebes

Memphis used as quarry for Cairo vs Thebes reduced to small villages

Tyre/Sidon: Ezekiel 26:3-14; 28:22-23

Ezek 26:3-14 (NIV) *therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring many nations against you, like the sea casting up its waves. 4 They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers; I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock. 5 Out in the sea she will become a place to spread fishnets, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD. She will become plunder for the nations, 6 and her settlements on the*

mainland will be ravaged by the sword. Then they will know that I am the LORD. 7 For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: From the north I am going to bring against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, with horsemen and a great army. 8 He will ravage your settlements on the mainland with the sword; he will set up siege works against you, build a ramp up to your walls and raise his shields against you. 9 He will direct the blows of his battering rams against your walls and demolish your towers with his weapons. 10 His horses will be so many that they will cover you with dust. Your walls will tremble at the noise of the war horses, wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city whose walls have been broken through. 11 The hoofs of his horses will trample all your streets; he will kill your people with the sword, and your strong pillars will fall to the ground. 12 They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea. 13 I will put an end to your noisy songs, and the music of your harps will be heard no more. 14 I will make you a bare rock, and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt, for I the LORD have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD.

Ezek 28:22-23 (NIV) and say: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I am against you, O Sidon, and I will gain glory within you. They will know that I am the LORD, when I inflict punishment on her and show myself holy within her. 23 I will send a plague upon her and make blood flow in her streets. The slain will fall within her, with the sword against her on every side. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

Two major Phoenician city-state seaports
Throw Tyre's rubble into sea, spread nets, never rebuilt
vs war & disaster for Sidon w/o statements re/ abandonment
Tyre abandoned today vs Sidon still a major port

Babylon/Nineveh: Isa 13:20-22, Jer 51:26; Zeph 2:13-15

Isa 13:20-22 (NIV) She[Babylon] will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. 21 But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. 22 Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged.

Jer 51:26 (NIV) "No rock will be taken from you[Babylon] for a cornerstone, nor any stone for a foundation, for you will be desolate forever," declares the LORD.

Zeph 2:13 (NIV) He will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, leaving Nineveh utterly desolate and dry as the desert. 14 Flocks and herds will lie down there, creatures of every kind. The desert owl and the screech owl will roost on her columns. Their calls will echo through the windows, rubble will be in the doorways, the beams of cedar will be exposed. 15 This is the carefree city [Nineveh] that lived in safety. She said to herself, "I am, and there is none besides me." What a ruin she has become, a lair for wild beasts! All who pass by her scoff and shake their fists.

Capital cities of two major empires in 1st millennium BC

Babylon to be deserted, no Arabs, no shepherds, wild animals dwell there vs desolate, place of sheep grazing.

B avoided by Arabs, soil too poor for grass, natives take brick but burn stone for lime.

Nineveh long abandoned (tho now in suburbs of Mosul), name of largest mound

Quyuniq means "many sheep."

Capernaum/Nazareth: Matthew 11:20-24; see also Luke 4:14-30

Matt 11:20 (NIV) Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. {[23] Greek Hades}If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Capernaum cursed with destruction for not repenting at Jesus' miracles; no such against Nazareth, even though they tried to kill Jesus.

Today C abandoned, recently discovered & excavated; N a prosperous city, much larger than in Jesus' time.

Probabilities:

Here we attempt to calculate probability of these things happening by accident; numbers need not be pressed, as there are many more fulfilled prophecies of this sort (see bibliog.; Stoner makes such calculations); compound probability = product of partial probabilities multiplied together.

Light to Gentiles: How many major world religions? 4 or 5. Antecedent chance that Jew would be founder of one of these, given Jews have own religion? Try fraction of Jews in world population, c 1/100; $p = 5(.01) = 5 \times 10^{-2}$

Time of Messiah: Chance this founder cut off in 1st half 1st cen AD? Lives then, 1/50; cut off, 1/10; $p = 2 \times 10^{-3}$

Israel's Future: Given Israel's survival (which itself is a fulfillment of other prophecies), many days w/o king, 1/2; w/o prince, 1/10; w/o sacrifice, 1/10; w/o ephod, 1/10; w/o pillar, 1/2; w/o teraphim, 1/2; $p = 1/8000 = 1.5 \times 10^{-4}$

Twin Cities: Memphis/Thebes: images cease, 1/10; depopulated, 1/2; total: 1/20; Tyre/Sidon: many nations, 1/5; scrape debris, 1/5; throw in water, 1/10; never rebuilt, 1/10; total: 1/2500; Babylon/Nineveh: never inhabited, 1/10, no Arab, 1/5; no shepherds,

1/2; no stone, 1/10; destruction, 1/2; total: 1/2000; Capernaum/Nazareth: destruction, 1/2; not, 1/2; total: 1/4; $p = 2.5 \times 10^{-9}$

Total probability of good guess: 3×10^{-17}

Conclusions:

Fulfilled prophecy is strong evidence that not all religions/worldviews are equal.

In fact, a series of prophecies about the end of the age and the second coming of Jesus appear even now to be in the process of being fulfilled, though this is still difficult to be sure of as yet: return of Israel to its land, strong pressures for world government, threat of ecological disaster, famine, epidemics.

What will you do about it?

- (1) Ignore evidence and do what you want, hoping that if there is a God you'll be OK anyway?
- (2) Pick out a religion you like, hoping God will believe that you really were sincerely looking for the truth?
- (3) Go where the evidence points, even if it means admitting that you've been ignoring God and rebelling against Him?

The good news if you're willing to pick (3):

God is willing to forgive (and still do what is right & just) because He has paid for our sins and provided the righteousness we lacked in the life and death of the God-man Jesus Christ; we just need to come to God in prayer and ask that He forgive us and change us.

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