

The Prophets: Preparation and Expectation

Selected Scriptures

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In 1998, an anonymous donor gave a marketing agency \$150,000 to create an advertising campaign called “God Speaks.” His desire was to reach people who had drifted away from their faith.

The campaign created such a positive response that the Outdoor Advertising Association of America picked it as its public-service campaign for the year and began running ads on 10,000 billboards in two hundred cities nationwide. Here are some of the spiritual sayings they used.

“Wherever you go, there I am.”

“That Love thy neighbor thing, I meant that.”

“Keep using my name in vain, I’ll make rush hour longer.”

“Don’t make me come down there.”

Aren’t you glad we serve a God who speaks? While these sayings are catchy and are designed to get people to think, God *has come down* here when He sent His Son Jesus at Christmas.

We’re beginning a new December series called, “The Cast of Christmas.” Our focus today will be on how the Old Testament, from Moses to Malachi, is filled with exhortations to expect the coming of Christ.

This is captured in [Isaiah 64:1](#): ***“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down.”*** The prophet was longing for the Lord to somehow come down into his world to make sense out of all the nonsense, to bring peace to all the problems, to dispel the darkness, and to extricate evil. Isaiah was hungry to have the Holy One enter his whacked-out world in an extraordinary manner. Brothers and sisters, aren’t you glad the Lord *has come down*?

This sense of holy anticipation and longing for the Lord to come is found in one of the Christmas carols we just sang: “O Come, O Come, Immanuel.”

*O come O come Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here*

Until the Son of God appear

Our main idea is this: *The prophets foretold the coming of Christ with pinpoint precision.* Christmas is rooted in the Old Testament because God had been planning our salvation for a long time. Today, our approach is to simply allow the Word of God to speak. I'll make comments to help clarify but for the most part, we'll be hearing directly from God.

Genesis 3:15 contains the first hint of the gospel in the Bible. These words were spoken by God to the serpent right after Adam and Eve fell into sin: ***“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”*** The rest of the Bible shows the battle between the offspring of Satan and the offspring of Eve, which culminated in the ultimate victory of Jesus when He crushed the head of Satan through His atoning death and glorious resurrection.

From the moment of the first sin onward, the entire Old Testament prepares and points us to the great moment when Jesus saved us from the curse of sin. The Old Testament literally has hundreds of prophecies which have been fulfilled by the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Scores more will be fulfilled when He returns (we'll focus on some of these during the sermon on Sunday, December 26).

I've selected 10 Old Testament passages which speak of the birth of Jesus. After listing each one, we'll consider the corresponding New Testament fulfillment. Then, we'll soak in several Scriptures from the Old Testament which deal with the death of Christ, and end by celebrating communion.

Prophecies about the Birth of Jesus

1. Jesus is the offspring of Abraham. Genesis 12:3, 7: ***“I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed...To your offspring I will give this land.”***

Listen to Galatians 3:16: ***“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring, who is Christ.”*** Matthew 1:1 opens with these words: ***“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”***

2. Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah. Genesis 49:10: *“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”* A scepter was the privilege of a ruler, and a staff was the symbol of a shepherd.

According to Matthew 1:3, the genealogy of Jesus is traced through Judah. Let’s fast forward to the last book of the Bible where we see how the lineage of the Lord runs through the tribe of Judah. Ponder Revelation 5:5: *“Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that He can open the scroll and its seven seals.”*

3. Jesus is a prophet like Moses. Listen to what God says to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18: *“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”* Moses was told another prophet will come who will say what God wants said and do what God wants done.

Consider how Jesus is not just similar to Moses, but far superior according to Hebrews 3:3-6: *“For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses— as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son.”*

4. Jesus will rule on the throne of David forever. 2 Samuel 7:16: *“And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”* This prophetic prediction doesn’t refer to David’s son Solomon because his kingdom was anything but forever. At the end of his life, the kingdom was split in two and permanently divided. The Lord Jesus comes from the line of David and His kingdom is eternal.

Listen to what the angel said to Mary in Luke 1:31-33: *“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*

5. Kings will bring tribute to Him. Psalms 72:10-11: *“May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts! May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!”*

While we're not certain the wise men were actual kings, they represent how the nations will fall down in worship to the Word made flesh.

Worship with the wise men as we hear Matthew 2:11: ***“And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.”***

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6. The Virgin will give birth to Immanuel. Written 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah 7:14 predicted, ***“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”*** Notice it is the ***“Lord himself”*** who will give this sign. I'm reminded of what Abraham said in Genesis 22:8: ***“God will provide for himself the lamb.”***

The name *Immanuel* means, *“The strong God with us.”* From the point of this miraculous birth on, God Himself would be present among His people. This stunning fulfillment is found in Matthew 1:22-23: ***“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ – which means, ‘God with us.’”***

7. Jesus will bring gladness to Galilee. Isaiah 9:1: ***“But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”*** Zebulun and Naphtali are tribes in the north of Israel, making up the land of Galilee. For many years, the people in this region knew only grief because of the onslaught of enemies unleashed by the Almighty. Because they lived closest to the bad guys, they were the first ones attacked. Isaiah tells of a time in the future when gloom will be replaced with gladness in Galilee.

In addition, Isaiah 9:2 describes how the birth of Christ will bring brightness to a dark world: ***“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.”***

Let's be moved by how Matthew 4:15-16 marks the ministry of Jesus being grounded in Galilee, a direct fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah predicted: ***“The***

land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” Jesus, the light of the world, took the Gospel beyond the borders of Israel into Gentile areas.

8. Mothers will weep for their children. Written some 600 years before Christ was born, Jeremiah 31:15 makes this prediction: *“Thus says the LORD: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.’”* This was a time of exceeding anguish and widespread weeping, especially by mothers for their children.

Ramah was located about five miles north of Jerusalem. Historically, it was the holding place for Jewish captives before they were deported to Babylon, much like Terezin was for prisoners before they were sent to Auschwitz.

Rachel was known as the mother of the nation who died while giving birth to Benjamin. While she was buried in Bethlehem, in profound poetic imagery, her tears are figuratively spilling into the soil again as mothers are weeping and crying inconsolably.

Imagine the despair described in Matthew 2:16-17: *“Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah.”*

Some of you are grieving the loss of a child or grandchild. I can’t even imagine the pain you are experiencing. Others of you are lamenting the loss of your spouse or parent, family member or friend. I pray you find comfort in Psalm 34:18: *“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”*

It’s horrific the Babylonians slaughtered so many children. Several centuries later, Herod’s hatred led to the butchering of babies in and around Bethlehem. In A.D. 70, up to a million people were killed, including infants and children, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. And, 1900 years from then, Hitler exterminated six million Jews in the Holocaust, many of whom were children.

Are you aware that Rachel is still weeping today? If you lean in, you can hear her loud lamentation for the 63 million babies which have been aborted in our country since 1973. The Supreme Court heard oral arguments Wednesday which hopefully will lead to the reversal of Roe v. Wade when their decision is handed down in June or July.

It was very moving to hear the opening argument made by the Solicitor General of Mississippi. Albert Mohler believes these are *“some of the most important words ever spoken before the Supreme Court of the United States...these words speak the truth, and these words made history.”*

After Chief Justice Roberts introduced the case, he called on General Stewart. This is how he began:

“Mr. Chief Justice, and may it please the Court, Roe v. Wade and Planned Parenthood v. Casey haunt our country. They have no basis in the constitution. They have no home in our history or traditions. They’ve damaged the democratic process. They poison the law. They’ve choked off compromise. For 50 years, they’ve kept this court at the center of a political battle that it can never resolve. And 50 years on, they stand alone. Nowhere else does this court recognize a right to end a human life.”

In essence, he stated the obvious: *Because the preborn are people, they must be protected.*

9. The place of Jesus’ birth must be Bethlehem. The prophet Micah recorded an astonishing predictive prophecy 700 years before the birth of Jesus. Micah 5:2: *“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”* The phrase translated *“from of old”* is used elsewhere to describe the eternity of God and *“from ancient days”* literally means, *“From the days of eternity.”*

This is remarkable to me. An almost forgotten prophet named Micah was moved by the Holy Spirit to record a predictive prophecy which stated the Messiah had to be birthed in Bethlehem. 700 years go by until one day God explodes into human history by sending His Son to be carried in the womb of a maiden named Mary. Then, God moves in the heart of a pagan Roman emperor, who lived 1500 miles from Israel, to declare a census had to be taken of the entire world, commanding people to travel back to their family’s hometown to be counted. Since Joseph was

from the family of David, he was required to register in the little town of Bethlehem, the birthplace of David.

Notice, how precisely God orchestrated everything that first Christmas. Mary was close to her delivery date, so Joseph decided to bring her along on the 80-mile journey. Technically, he could have gone by himself. When they finally arrived, Mary was ready to give birth and Jesus was born in the precise place foretold by Micah.

Luke 2:3-7 fills in the details: *“And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”*

Listen to how John 7:42 captures it: *“Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?”*

10. The Son was to come out of Egypt. Hosea 11:1: *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”* If you know your Old Testament, you’ll recognize the significance of Egypt. On the one hand, Egypt represents slavery and stress. On the other, it signifies safety and security.

Matthew 2:13-15 shows how God moved Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Egypt so this prophecy could be fulfilled: *“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”*

The prophets foretold the coming of Christ with pinpoint precision.

I hope you are experiencing a sense of awe and wonder as we’ve been walking through the Word. Hopefully, your confidence in the truthfulness of the Bible and the supremacy of the Savior is leading you to worship. Christmas didn’t happen in

a vacuum but was a fulfillment of the anticipation seen throughout the Old Testament.

Many years ago, Peter Stoner, a professor of mathematics, conducted a study to calculate how likely it would be for Jesus to have fulfilled just eight prophecies. He concluded it would be 1 in 10 to the 17th power. That's one in one hundred quadrillion!

Lee Strobel, a former atheist, and author of *A Case for Christ*, has shared this helpful illustration:

“I imagined the entire world being covered with white tile that was one-and-a-half inches square – every bit of dry land on the planet – with the bottom of just one tile painted red. Then I pictured a person being allowed to wander for a lifetime around all seven continents. He would be permitted to bend down only one time and pick up one piece of tile. What are the odds it would be the one tile whose reverse side was painted red? The odds would be the same as just eight of the Old Testament prophecies coming true in any one person throughout history!”

Even though not everyone who was alive at the time connected the dots, Jesus purposely and specifically fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies with pinpoint precision! Listen to what He said to two disciples out on a walk Easter evening as recorded in Luke 24:44: ***“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”***

We've only touched on a portion of the prophecies related to the birth of Jesus. Now, let's transition and consider some passages dealing with the details surrounding the death of Jesus.

Prophecies about the Death of Jesus

Written 600 years before Christ, Psalm 22:1 says: ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?”*** Matthew 27:46: ***“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”***

Psalm 22:16-18: ***“They have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”*** Jesus was pierced, none of His bones were broken, and the soldiers gambled for His clothes as seen in Matthew 27:35: ***“And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.”***

Consider Psalm 41:9: ***“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.”*** Listen to what happened in Matthew 26:47-48: ***“While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.’”***

Psalm 69:21: ***“They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.”*** Matthew 27:34: ***“They offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.”***

Zechariah 11:12-13: ***“And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the LORD said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter.”***

Matthew 27:3-4 says: ***“Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ They said, ‘What is that to us? See to it yourself.’”***

Zechariah 13:7: ***“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”*** Mark 14:50: ***“And they all left him and fled.”***

Close your eyes as I read from Isaiah 53. As you listen, contemplate how these words were fulfilled with pinpoint precision by Jesus when He died in your place on the cross.

“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the

chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

To get a sense of the longing expectation of God’s people, consider how it must have been for them to experience 400 years of silence between the end of Malachi and the beginning of Matthew.

One day Jesus told the disciples how privileged they were to see how prophecy was playing out in front of them. Check out [Matthew 13:16-17](#): ***“But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”***

The prophets foretold the coming of Christ with pinpoint precision.

You have now seen and heard. What will you do with what you now know to be true?

The Christmas season is not all about sentimentality. At its core, it’s the celebration of fulfilled promises. It’s about God who promised men and women long ago He would send a rescuer and redeemer to save them from their sins and give them hope.

Paul Tripp says, *“The birth of the Messiah is concrete evidence that God keeps His promises.”*

Some of our grandsons have been learning about Christmas through a book called, *The Promise: The Amazing Story of our Long-Awaited Savior*. Here are a few quotes.

*Maybe a really good man can save us,
a really good man like Noah,
whom God saved from the flood so that he and his family
could once again fill the earth with people.
But Noah emerged from the ark
and almost immediately sinned against God.
We see that not even a really good man
like Noah can save us.*

*Maybe a great man of faith can save us,
a great man of faith like Abraham,
the father of the nation of Israel.
But Abraham feared other men and lied about Sarah,
calling her his sister and not his wife.
We see that not even a faith-filled man like Abraham can save us.*

*Maybe a great prophet can save us, a great prophet like Moses,
who led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt.
But Moses lacked faith, striking the rock twice, and disobeyed God.
We see that not even a great prophet like Moses can save us.*

*But God gave mankind a promise.
And what a great promise it was!
The promise of salvation!*

*In this child, the promise came.
He was the one who would crush the head of the serpent,
deliver mankind from their sin, grant them his righteousness,
work in them his holiness, give them his life.*

We began with a billboard which imagined God saying, *“Don’t make me come down there.”* Actually, because of His love, God longed to come down to save sinners. It was all part of His eternal plan, and He has kept His promise.

Here are a few other promises from the *God Speaks* campaign:

“Life is short. Eternity isn’t.”

“You think it’s hot here?”

“We need to talk.”

“I’ve been here all along.”

At its core, communion is a time to remember God’s fulfilled promises.

Luke 22:19-20 records what Jesus said at the Last Supper: ***“And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”***

The Bible calls us to examine ourselves before taking communion. Let’s do that now.

We practice open communion here. You don’t need to be a member of Edgewood to participate, but you do need to be born again.

Directions for Opening Cup

1. Hold the cup with one hand and with the other find the clear tab and pull gently to open to take the bread.
2. Continue to hold the cup and now find the foil tab and pull carefully to open the juice cup. Be careful while pulling – you don’t have to pull it completely off.