

Arguments for and from Fulfilled Biblical Prophecies

This session will explore arguments for and from fulfilled biblical prophecy. First, we will examine criteria for assessing predictive prophecy. We will then assess 1) Old Testament City Prophecies (e.g. prophecies about Jerusalem and Tyre) and 2) the New Testament record of fulfilled Old Testament messianic prophecies in light of the biblical and extra-biblical evidence. We will conclude by asking what the case for fulfilled biblical prophecy can contribute to a 'ramified natural theology' (i.e. a natural theology that takes into account 'Christian evidences').

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I. The Bible on Prophecy

- A. **Isaiah 41:23**: 'Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are [divine].'
- B. **Jeremiah 28:9**: 'the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true.'
- C. **Deuteronomy 18:20-22**: "'a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.'" You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken.'
- D. Used as apologetic in the NT (especially in the writings of Luke), e.g. by Jesus (Luke 24:27), by Peter (Acts 2:22-36) & by Paul (Acts 17:2-4)

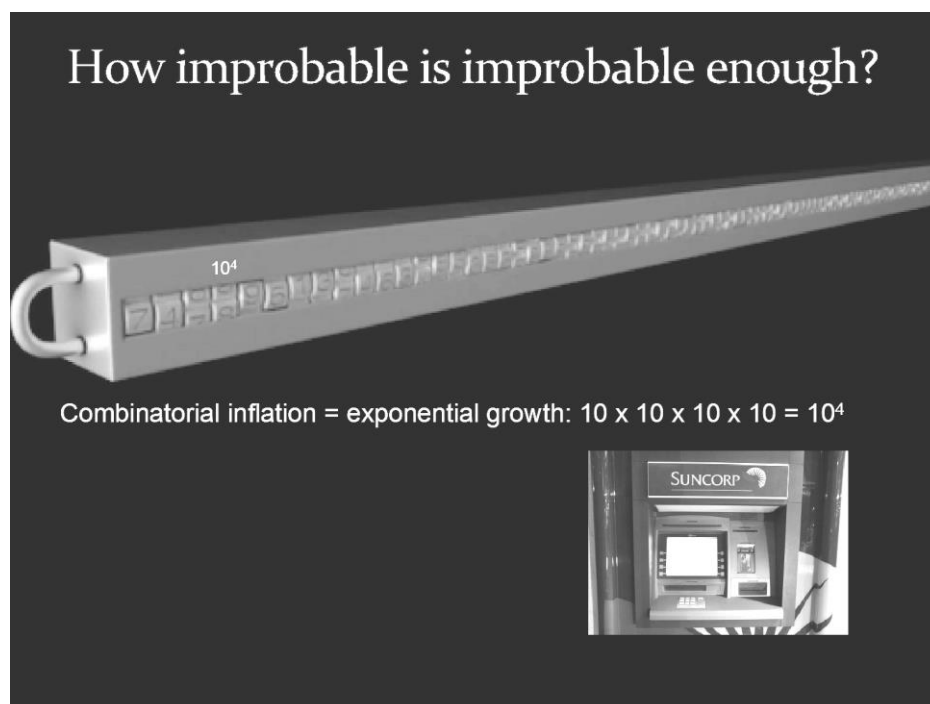
II. Jesus & the Temple

- A. **Ian Wilson**: 'it is a straight fact of history that Herod's seemingly so-permanent Temple, which Jesus had predicted would be destroyed within a generation of his time (Matthew 24:1-3; Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7), did indeed suffer this very fate.' - *The Bible Is History* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), p. 238.
- B. **Karl Popper**: 'Confirmations should count only if they are the result of *risky predictions...*' – *Conjectures and Refutations* (1963)
- C. The *specificity* of the predictions: within a generation/no stone on another/stones thrown down/flight most urgent after desecration of temple

D. At odds of 1 in 10 each = *unlikeliness* of **1 in 10⁴** (1 in 10,000)

III. Criteria

- A. **William Lane Craig:** ‘for a design inference... in addition to high improbability there also needs to be conformity to an independently given pattern... Thus, for example, in a poker game any deal of cards is equally and highly improbable, but if you find that every time a certain player deals he gets all four aces, you can bet this is not the result of chance but of design.’
- B. **William A. Dembski:** ‘A seemingly improbable event can become quite probable when placed within the appropriate reference class of probabilistic resources. On the other hand, it may remain improbable even after all the relevant probabilistic resources have been factored in. If it remains improbable (and therefore complex) and if the event is also specified, then it exhibits specified complexity.’ – ‘The Chance of the Gaps’
- C. **If there’s a close correspondence between the most plausible reading of one or more specific prophetic predictions and a sufficiently improbable event or series of events then the best explanation for this match is design.**
- D. In such a case, *if* the prediction/s were a) **written some time before the event** and b) **the event couldn’t be or wasn’t humanly manipulated to fit the prediction, then** the best explanation of the match will appeal to the supernatural resources of the religious context of the prophecy/prophecies.



IV. Saving Jerusalem from Sennacherib

A. Isaiah & 2 Kings report prophecies that *are the result of divine intervention*:

1. Sennacherib wouldn't attack Jerusalem (1 in 100) ✓
2. Sennacherib wouldn't take Jerusalem (1 in 10) ✓
3. Sennacherib would go back to Nineveh without having taken Jerusalem and wouldn't return to finish the job (1 in 100) ✓
4. Odds of **1 in 10⁵** (call these the Prime OT Jerusalem Prophecies)

B. Secondary prophecies (made before the event but reported after):

1. Sennacherib would be murdered (by sword) (1 in 10) ✓
2. Sennacherib would be murdered *in his own country* (1 in 10) ✓
3. Odds of **1 in 10²**

V. Destroying Tyre

A. Short-term prophecies:

1. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia will attack Tyre ✓
2. Nebuchadnezzar will 1st attack coastal towns ✓

B. Long-term prophecies:

1. Multiple nations will attack Tyre ✓
2. Their attacks will be successive ✓
3. Tyre will be leveled ✓
4. The rubble of Tyre will be put into the sea ✓
5. Tyre will become a place where fishermen can dry their nets ✓
6. The inhabitants will never re-build Tyre ✓

C. Total Odds: **1 in 10⁸**

VI. Messianic Prophecies

A. 'Some prophets told how kind God would be to you, and they searched hard to find out more about the way you would be saved. The Spirit of Christ was in them and was telling them how Christ would suffer and would then be given great honour. So they searched to find out exactly who Christ would be and when this would happen.' (1 Peter 1:10-11 CEV)

- B. Setting aside any events that are inherently miraculous (e.g. healings) James Dietz lists 25 OT prophecies fulfilled in Jesus. Assigning a *very* conservative 1 in 4 chance to each event, he calculates a **1 in 10¹⁵** probability of chance fulfillment: ‘If there are prophecies in the list... that a reader finds objectionable [e.g. Hosea 11:1 – escape to Egypt], other prophecies can be used to make up the 25.’

- Individual odds of 1 in 10 for each of 25 fulfilled messianic prophecies = **1 in 10²⁵**
- Long Term Tyre Prophecies = **1 in 10⁶**
- Prime OT Jerusalem Prophecies = **1 in 10⁵**
- Jesus' NT Jerusalem Prophecies = **1 in 10⁴**
- Remaining OT city prophecies = **1 in 10⁴**

Running Total

- 1 in 10²⁵**
- 1 in 10³¹**
- 1 in 10³⁶**
- 1 in 10⁴⁰**
- 1 in 10⁴⁴**

- And if we swapped out this Messianic Prophecy calculation for the one in *Understanding Jesus* we'd be past **1 in 10⁵¹**

- C. David Phillips, the senior climatologist with Environment Canada, estimated that the total number of snowflakes that have fallen on Earth over the course of time is c. **10³⁴**.

- D. **Thomas V. Morris:** ‘A [fulfilled] series of prophecies made by different people at different times and culminating in a single fulfilment by the life of so remarkable a person as Jesus cries out for an explanation of a quite extraordinary sort... the most reasonable explanation is that God was involved in the prophecy and fulfilment, thereby giving us an extra ground for accepting Jesus as the culmination of divine revelation.’ – *Making Sense Of It All*, p. 166.

VII. Conclusions

- A. The Bible contains accurate knowledge about various historical events

- B. There's evidence (varying in strength) that these events were predicted by specific prophecies made before the fact
- C. The best evidence concerns messianic prophecies fulfilled in Jesus
- D. The match between these specific prophecies and events is sufficiently unlikely to justify a design inference
- E. The best explanation is revelation from the Biblical God (foreknowledge/power/intelligence/moral concern)

Recommended Resources

Peter S. Williams, Biblical Prophecy YouTube Playlist

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWgq_Hba52LXvmcUHR4T01oa

Paul Barnett, *Messiah: Jesus – the evidence of history* (IVP, 2009)

<https://beliefmap.org/prophecy-fulfilled/tyre/>

John A. Bloom, 'Is Fulfilled Prophecy of Value for Scholarly Apologetics?'

www.bethinking.org/is-christianity-true/is-fulfilled-prophecy-of-value-for-scholarly-apologetics

Larry Brandt, 'Messianic Prophecies – First Things First' www.bethinking.org/is-the-bible-reliable/messianic-prophecies-first-things-first

Kyle Butt, 'Tyre in Prophecy'

www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=13&article=1790

William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Wipf & Stock, 2000)

Craig Davis, *Dating the Old Testament* (RJ Communications, 2007)

James Deitz, 'Christianity for the Technically Inclined: Risk Assessment, Probability, and Prophecy' in *Tough-Minded Christianity: Honoring the Legacy of John Warwick Montgomery* (William A. Dembski & Thomas Schirrmacher ed.'s: B&H Academic, 2008)

Hugh G. Gauch, Jr., 'Best Practice for Prophecy Arguments', *Philosophia Christi*, Volume 16, Number 2 (2014)

Norman L. Geisler, 'Miraculous Bible Prophecy Fulfillments' (*Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*) <https://philosophical11.wordpress.com/2012/09/12/miraculous-bible-prophecy-fulfillments/#more-151>

Walter C. Keiser, 'The Promise to David in Psalm 16 and its Application in Acts 2:25-33 and 13:32-37' www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/23/23-3/23-3-pp219-229_JETS.pdf

- John Lennox, *Against the Flow: The Inspiration Of Daniel In An Age Of Relativism* (Monarch, 2015)
- Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel* (Apollos, 2002)
- Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (Thomas Nelson, 1999)
- J.P Moreland, 'The Historicity of the New Testament' www.bethinking.org/is-the-bible-reliable/the-historicity-of-the-new-testament
- Robert C. Newman, 'Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the Old Testament Sabbath-Year Cycle' <http://apollos.ws/argument-from-prophecy/Daniel's%20Seventy%20Weeks%20and%20the%20Old%20Testament%20Sabbath-Year%20Cycle.pdf>
- 'Fulfilled Prophecy as Miracle' in *In Defence of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case For God's Action In History* (R. Douglas Geivett & Gary R. Habermas ed.s': Apollos, 1997)
- ed., *The Evidence of Prophecy* (IBRI, 2001)
- , John A. Bloom, and Hugh G. Gauch, Jr., 'PUBLIC THEOLOGY AND PROPHECY DATA: FACTUAL EVIDENCE THAT COUNTS FOR THE BIBLICAL WORLD VIEW' *JETS* 46/1 (March 2003) 79–110, www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/46/46-1/46-1-pp079-110_JETS.pdf
- Robert L. Reymond, *Faith's Reasons For Believing* (Mentor, 2008)
- William Paley, *Evidences of Christianity* (Bibiobazaar)
- Bernard Ramm, 'The Evidence of Prophecy and Miracle' http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/rev-henry/16_evidence_ramm.pdf
- Robert H. Stein, *Jesus, The Temple And The Coming Son Of Man: A Commentary on Mark 13* (IVP Academic, 2014)
- Richard Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Oxford, 2008)
- J. Warner Wallace, 'Fulfilled Prophecy' <http://coldcasechristianity.com/tag/fulfilled-prophecy/>
- Peter S. Williams, 'The Design Inference – A Critical Review', *Philosophia Christi*, Vol.9, No.2, 2007, www.bethinking.org/does-evolution-disprove-creation/the-design-inference-a-critical-review
- *Understanding Jesus: Five Ways to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Paternoster, 2011)
- 'Luke 2:22-40: The Presentation at the Temple' <http://podcast.peterswilliams.com/e/luke-222-40-the-presentation-at-the-temple/?token=6d568dc904a6dc7bccf880c4d5136ddd>
- 'Old Testament Prophecy: History and the Fate of Jerusalem in the Eight Century BC' <http://podcast.peterswilliams.com/e/old-testament-prophecy-history-and-the-fate-of-jerusalem-in-the-eighth-century-bc/?token=12a433fd528e3d673ada6130d3696b40>