

HOW SURE CAN WE BE THAT JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH OF ISRAEL?



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How sure can we be that Jesus Christ really was the Messiah of Israel? This is one of the most important questions we could ever ask. Christianity rests upon the claim that Jesus was not simply a religious teacher who appeared unexpectedly in the first century. He was the long-awaited Messiah anticipated throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. When He came, He fulfilled a prophetic script that had been written about His life centuries earlier, describing in advance key details of His identity, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection.

The remarkable thing is that we do not have to accept this claim through “blind faith.” The prophetic record gives us something objective that can actually be examined and tested by comparing what the Old Testament said beforehand with what the New Testament records taking place in the life of Jesus. Entire books have been written cataloging the Old Testament passages that point to the coming Messiah, including direct predictions as well as prophetic types, shadows, patterns, and correspondences. In this particular study, however, we are going to narrow our focus to a small sampling of especially specific prophetic details and examine their cumulative force using an exercise in probability.

This approach was popularized by mathematician and author Peter

W. Stoner in his book *Science Speaks*.¹ Chuck Missler later presented an adaptation of this exercise in *Cosmic Codes*.² We will follow the same basic approach by selecting several Old Testament Messianic prophecies, estimating the probability of an individual fulfilling each one, and then considering their cumulative effect when combined. In other words, this will be an exercise in **composite probabilities**. You will see what we mean as we begin.

Before doing that, however, we need to establish two important points. First, we need reasonable assurance that the Old Testament prophecies were actually written *before* Jesus fulfilled them. Second, we need to establish that there are good reasons to take the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life seriously as historical testimony. Without those two foundations, a critic could simply argue that the prophecies were written after the events or that the Gospel writers invented the fulfillments.

Were the Prophecies Written Before Christ?

The first objection is relatively easy to address. There is no serious historical question that the Hebrew Scriptures existed before the time of Jesus.

One important line of evidence comes from the **Septuagint**, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. According to the traditional account, around 285 BC, Ptolemy II Philadelphus commissioned approximately seventy-two Hebrew scholars to Alexandria to translate the Torah, the first five books of Moses, into Greek. The translation of the remaining Old Testament books followed, and by the second century BC the entire Old Testament Scriptures had been translated into Greek.³ This means that the prophetic books containing the Messianic prophecies we will be examining were already in existence and circulation well before the birth of Jesus Christ. This provides important independent evidence that these prophecies were already in existence centuries before the events they foretold took place.

Another important line of evidence comes from the discovery of

the **Dead Sea Scrolls** beginning in 1947. These ancient manuscripts include biblical scrolls and fragments representing every Old Testament book except Esther, with many dating to hundreds of years before the time of Christ.⁴ Most importantly for our purposes, this gives us actual manuscript evidence demonstrating that Old Testament prophetic texts existed before the events recorded in the New Testament.

The Great Isaiah Scroll, for example, contains the entire book of Isaiah and dates to approximately 125 BC.⁵ This is especially significant because Isaiah contains some of the most detailed Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, including the extraordinary description of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. We therefore possess an actual pre-Christian manuscript copy containing these prophecies, making it impossible to reasonably claim that Christians invented them after the events they describe had already taken place.

The same basic point applies to the Old Testament as a whole. The Messianic expectations we will be examining were not inventions created by Christians after the life of Jesus. They came out of the Jewish Scriptures that Christianity inherited.

Can We Trust the Gospel Accounts?

The second objection is that the Gospel writers may have deliberately shaped their accounts of Jesus in order to make Him appear to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. This objection deserves to be taken seriously. If we are going to use the recorded life of Jesus as evidence of prophetic fulfillment, we need good reason to believe that the Gospel writers were reporting actual events rather than simply inventing stories.

There are several reasons to take their testimony seriously. For one thing, the Gospel writers repeatedly include information that does not make themselves or the earliest followers of Jesus look particularly impressive. The disciples are portrayed as confused and slow to understand what Jesus was teaching (Mark 9:32; Luke 18:34). Peter is strongly rebuked by Jesus (Mark 8:33), later denies that he even

knows Him (Matthew 26:69-75), and the disciples flee when Jesus is arrested (Matthew 26:56). Thomas initially refuses to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead (John 20:24-29), and even after the resurrection Matthew records that some still doubted (Matthew 28:17). These are unusual details to invent if the writers were simply fabricating heroic stories about themselves and the founders of their movement.⁶

The Gospels also preserve difficult and potentially embarrassing details concerning Jesus Himself. His own brothers initially did not believe in Him (John 7:5). Some accused Him of being a deceiver (John 7:12), demon possessed (Mark 3:22), or insane (John 10:20). Many of His followers eventually abandoned Him (John 6:66). Most striking of all, the central event of the Gospel story is of course His public execution by crucifixion, a humiliating form of death that carried the stigma of being under a curse (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13).

We should also consider what the apostles themselves stood to gain by proclaiming their testimony about Jesus. Their message brought them intense opposition, persecution, imprisonment, torture, and, according to early Christian testimony, martyrdom in every case except John. The New Testament itself records the execution of James the brother of John (Acts 12:2), while early Christian sources preserve the martyrdom traditions of the remaining apostles.⁷ Although the surviving documentation is stronger for some individuals than for others, the overall historical tradition is clear: all of the apostles except John ultimately died for their testimony concerning Jesus.

This does not mean that dying for a belief automatically proves that belief is true. The important distinction is that the apostles were not *later* followers dying for something they had simply been taught. They were the men claiming to have personally seen, heard, and experienced the events they proclaimed. If they had knowingly fabricated those events, they would have known it. Their willingness to suffer and die rather than deny their testimony provides powerful evidence that they sincerely believed what they proclaimed was true.

This becomes especially significant when we consider Jewish

expectations concerning the Messiah. Many Jews of that time were anticipating a triumphant king who would deliver Israel from her enemies and restore the kingdom. If the Gospel writers were inventing a Messiah simply to persuade their Jewish audience, a rejected and crucified Messiah would have been a very strange story to create. Yet rather than hiding or minimizing the crucifixion, they made it central to their message.⁸

Another key point is that many of the prophetic circumstances associated with Jesus were completely outside of His control from an ordinary human standpoint. He could not choose the place of His own birth (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1). He could not control the exact amount Judas would accept to betray Him (Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:14-15), what the priests would later do with that money (Zechariah 11:13; Matthew 27:3-10), how the Roman soldiers would treat Him during His execution (Psalm 22:16-18; John 19:23-24), or the tomb in which His body would be buried (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60).

This becomes increasingly important as the prophetic details begin to accumulate. A critic might reasonably point out that Jesus could knowingly arrange to “fulfill” certain prophecies, such as entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation cannot account for the many circumstances that depended upon the actions of other people or were completely outside His ordinary human control.

The question, therefore, is not whether someone could deliberately imitate one or two Messianic expectations. The question is whether one historical individual could satisfy a large collection of specific prophetic details, many written centuries beforehand and many involving circumstances beyond His control. That is the question we are going to explore.

Our Approach

In the next chapter, we will examine eight Old Testament Messianic prophecies and the corresponding fulfillment events recorded in the life of Jesus. We will then assign deliberately conservative probability

estimates to each one and consider what happens when those probabilities are viewed cumulatively.

It is important to understand what we are trying to accomplish. We are not claiming that these probability figures can be assigned a precise value. Each one necessarily involves an estimate, and throughout this study we will intentionally use very conservative numbers for these estimates. The point of the exercise is to show the cumulative force of multiple specific prophetic fulfillments. Even when the individual estimates are kept deliberately modest, the combined probabilities quickly become enormous.

And remember, we will begin with only eight prophecies. The Old Testament contains many more passages that Christians have historically understood as pointing to the Messiah.

So, how sure can we be that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel? Let's begin examining the evidence.

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1. Peter W. Stoner, *Science Speaks*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1963.
 2. Chuck Missler, *Cosmic Codes: Hidden Messages from the Edge of Eternity*, Coeur d'Alene, ID: Koinonia House, 1999, pp. 219-230.
 3. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, article "Septuagint," May 12, 2020, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Septuagint> - Retrieved 8/9/21)
 4. John Salvo, *Dead Sea Scrolls: Their History and Myths Revealed*, New York: Metro Books, 2013, pp. 59 and 82.
 5. Adolfo D. Roitman, "The Great Isaiah Scroll," *The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls*, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. (<https://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah> - Retrieved 08/23/26)
 6. Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004, Ch. 11.
 7. Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, updated and expanded version, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017, p. 208.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

CHAPTER 2

EIGHT PROPHETIC PROBABILITIES

Messianism in the Old Testament is the anticipation of the prophesied coming leader who will save, liberate, and redeem Israel. One scholar, J. Barton Payne, found as many as 574 verses in the Old Testament that somehow point to, describe, or reference the coming Messiah. Alfred Edersheim found 456 Old Testament verses prophetically referring to the Messiah or His times. **Conservatively, Jesus fulfilled at least three hundred of these prophecies in His earthly ministry, according to theologians who have catalogued them.**¹

For the sake of this example, we have selected only eight of the three hundred. The New Testament gospels, the historical records of the life of Jesus, record specific fulfillments to these prophecies as attested to by numerous witnesses. We will examine each of these eight, and if legitimate, we will then mathematically apply them to an exercise in calculating composite probabilities.

By analyzing the circumstances surrounding each one, you can come up with an estimated probability of each one taking place by assigning an approximated numerical value to its probability. The chance that a single person could fulfill all eight is an exercise in what

is termed composite probabilities. Bear in mind, all of the following probability estimates are extremely conservative!

#1 – Born in Bethlehem

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

-Micah 5:2

This passage is a clear prophecy concerning the coming Messiah. Micah foretells that a future ruler of Israel would come forth from the otherwise insignificant town of Bethlehem Ephratah, while also making the remarkable statement that His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” The verses that follow continue describing this coming ruler as the one who would “stand and feed in the strength of the Lord,” whose greatness would extend “unto the ends of the earth,” and who would bring peace (Micah 5:4-5). The context therefore concerns far more than the birth of an ordinary Jewish ruler.

That this passage was understood as messianic is confirmed directly in the New Testament. When the Magi arrived in Judea asking where the newly born “King of the Jews” could be found, Herod gathered the chief priests and scribes and asked them “where Christ should be born.” They answered, “In Bethlehem of Judaea,” and cited this prophecy from Micah (Matthew 2:1-6). Matthew and Luke then independently record that Jesus was, in fact, born in Bethlehem.

What then can we say is the likelihood that anyone – from the time of Micah until the present – has been born in Bethlehem? Would you agree that an *extremely* conservative estimate would be one in 100,000? Missler writes:

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The best estimate which we might make would be to estimate the average population of Bethlehem, from the time of Micah to the present day, and to divide it by the average population of Earth during the same period. The population of Bethlehem has averaged less than 10,000, and assuming that the population of Earth has averaged about two billion, a reasonable estimate could be expressed as 2,000,000,000/10,000 or about one in 200,000 having been born in Bethlehem. To be really conservative, let us cut that in half, and adopt an assumption of less than one in 100,000 for our analysis.²

Probability: 1:100,000

#2 – Death by Crucifixion

For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.

-Psalm 22:16

The passage refers to the distinctive death of crucifixion, which involved the piercing of the hands and feet. Psalm 22 as a whole contains some of the most remarkable messianic prophecy in the entire Bible – specifically concerning the Messiah's future suffering and death. The New Testament repeatedly connects this Psalm with Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus Himself quoted its opening words from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Other details from the Psalm are likewise reflected throughout the crucifixion accounts. The chapter is so vivid that it reads almost as though the suffering Messiah Himself were describing the scene while hanging on the cross – yet it was written centuries beforehand.

What makes this even more incredible is that the official form of execution in Israel, according to the Mosaic Law, was stoning, not crucifixion. So if you were predicting how some future person would die in ancient Israel, you would naturally expect stoning. Crucifixion, by contrast, apparently had not even developed into a recognized

method of execution when Psalm 22 was written and certainly was not practiced in Israel.³ Of course, all four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), agree that Jesus was crucified, which fulfilled this prophecy.

So then, what is the ratio of Jewish men, taken at random, to have died by crucifixion? We will assign an extremely conservative estimate of one in 10,000.

Probability: 1:10,000

#3 – Hailed As a King While Riding a Donkey

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem:
behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation;
lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

-Zechariah 9:9

This is one of Zechariah's clearest prophecies concerning Israel's coming messianic King. The passage calls upon Jerusalem to rejoice because "thy King cometh unto thee," describing Him as righteous, bringing salvation, and yet coming in humility. The following verse expands the picture even further, declaring that He would bring peace to the nations and that "his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:10). This is therefore not simply a prediction concerning an ordinary ruler entering Jerusalem. It describes Israel's promised King whose reign and authority would ultimately extend throughout the earth.

Zechariah then gives an extraordinarily specific detail concerning how this King would present Himself to Jerusalem: He would come "lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all record that Jesus entered Jerusalem in precisely this manner while the crowds publicly hailed Him as King. Matthew and John specifically identify the event as the fulfillment of this prophecy (Matthew 21:4-9; John 12:14-16).

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What then can we say is the probability that any man who has entered Jerusalem as a King has done so while riding on a donkey – from the time this prophecy was given up until the present? While we have no record of anyone but Christ doing so, let's allow for the possibility of there being unrecorded instances of this happening. We will assign an estimate of one in one hundred – again, an extremely conservative estimate.

Probability: 1:100

#4 – Betrayed for Thirty Pieces of Silver

And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.

-Zechariah 11:12

A few chapters after describing Israel's coming King, Zechariah presents another important messianic picture – this time involving Israel's rejected shepherd. In Zechariah 11, the prophet symbolically takes the role of a shepherd sent to care for the flock, but the relationship ends in rejection. The shepherd then asks the people to determine what his service was worth, and they weigh out exactly thirty pieces of silver. The Lord responds with deliberate contempt: "a goodly price that I was prised at of them" (Zechariah 11:13). The amount therefore does not appear as an isolated numerical detail. It is connected with Israel's rejection and contemptuous valuation of the shepherd God had placed before them.

This becomes unmistakably significant in the betrayal of Jesus. Judas went to the chief priests and asked, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?" Matthew 26:15 then records, "And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver." Jesus, Israel's true shepherd and Messiah, was rejected by His own people and valued at precisely the same amount described by Zechariah centuries earlier. This was not simply a random similarity involving the number thirty.

The amount appears within the same larger prophetic pattern: Israel rejects its shepherd, the shepherd is contemptuously valued, and the price assigned to him is thirty pieces of silver.

So what are the odds that any particular person who claimed to be Israel's Messiah would also be rejected and betrayed for exactly thirty pieces of silver? To remain extremely conservative, let us assign this probability a value of only one in 1,000.

Probability: 1:1,000

#5 – Transaction Took Place in the Temple/Silver to the Potter

And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.

-Zechariah 11:13

As we saw in the previous prophecy, Zechariah 11 portrays Israel's rejection of its shepherd. The shepherd is insultingly valued at thirty pieces of silver, and the Lord identifies that insulting valuation with Himself: "a goodly price that I was prised at of them." The prophecy then becomes even more specific. The thirty pieces of silver connected with the rejection of Israel's shepherd are taken into "the house of the Lord" and ultimately associated with "the potter." In other words, this is not an unrelated prediction about money. It is the continuation of the same rejected-shepherd prophecy that finds its remarkable fulfillment in the rejection and betrayal of Israel's Messiah.

Within this single prophecy, there is an extraordinary amount of specificity and detail. We are given the exact **amount** involved – thirty pieces of silver – the exact **location** connected with the money – the house of the Lord, or the Temple – and the remarkable detail that the silver would ultimately be associated with a **potter**.

Matthew 27 records precisely this sequence following the betrayal of Jesus. After realizing what he had done, Judas attempted to return

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the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. When they refused to take responsibility for the money, Judas “cast down the pieces of silver in the temple” and departed to hang himself.

The priests then faced another problem. Because the money was considered “the price of blood,” they determined that it could not lawfully be placed into the Temple treasury. Instead, “they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in.” Thus the thirty pieces of silver paid in connection with the rejection of Israel’s Messiah were thrown into the Temple and then used to purchase property belonging to a potter.

Notice how remarkably the details converge. The prophecy does not simply mention silver. It describes thirty pieces of silver connected with the rejection of Israel’s shepherd, the money being brought into the house of the Lord, and that same money becoming associated with a potter. In the betrayal and death of Jesus, all of these unusual details come together in a single historical event.

We now need to estimate the probability of all of this occurring by chance. One man in how many, since this prophecy was given, has:

- been paid off to betray a close friend
- immediately become remorseful
- tried to renege on the deal and return the money
- gotten turned down by the other party
- threw the money down on the floor of the Temple
- the coins end up in the hands of a potter

With so many independent and highly unusual details converging in one event, we could reasonably assign a very large number here. Yet to remain extremely conservative, we will estimate the probability at only one in 100,000.

Probability: 1:100,000

#6 – Wounded In His Hands In the House of His Friends

And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands?
Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house
of my friends.

-Zechariah 13:6

Zechariah continues to supply remarkable details that converge upon the coming Messiah. Here again, the surrounding context is especially important. In the previous chapter, Zechariah speaks of the One who would be “pierced” and afterward mourned by Israel (Zechariah 12:10). Then, immediately after the reference to these wounds in Zechariah 13:6, the very next verse introduces the “smitten shepherd” – a prophecy Jesus explicitly applied to Himself on the night of His arrest (Matthew 26:31). Thus, within this larger messianic section, Zechariah presents a pierced figure, wounds, and the smiting of God’s Shepherd in close succession.

This makes the reference to wounds in the hands especially significant when compared with the resurrected Christ. After His crucifixion, Thomas refused to believe that Jesus had risen unless he could personally see the wounds in His hands:

Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger
into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not
believe.

-John 20:25

Eight days later, Jesus appeared again and specifically showed Thomas those wounds (John 20:26-27). The correspondence is therefore difficult to overlook. Zechariah speaks of wounds in the hands in the immediate context of the smitten Shepherd, while the New Testament records that the Shepherd Himself was crucified and afterward bore those very wounds in His hands. Missler writes:

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Now, when we go back and review the provocative glimpse given us by Zechariah, we realize that it wasn't the nails that are the wounds being referred to, but Thomas' unbelief. Ouch!⁴

Jesus' true wound was the unbelief of one of His closest friends and followers, as Thomas stuck his fingers into Jesus' freshly crucified hands.

So then, how many men since this prophecy have been wounded in both hands in the house of their friends while also fitting the larger description of Zechariah's pierced and smitten Shepherd? We will assign an extremely conservative estimate of one in 1,000.

Probability: 1:1,000

#7 – Made No Defense Though Innocent

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth:
he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her
shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

-Isaiah 53:7

This prophecy comes from Isaiah 53, one of the clearest and most remarkable messianic passages in the Old Testament. Beginning in Isaiah 52:13 and continuing through chapter 53, Isaiah describes the coming Servant of the Lord who would be rejected by His people, suffer despite His innocence, bear the sins of others, be put to death, and afterward be exalted. He is described as being "wounded for our transgressions," having "the iniquity of us all" laid upon Him, and being "cut off out of the land of the living" for the transgression of God's people. The passage is not simply describing the suffering of an ordinary righteous man. It presents a unique Servant whose suffering and death would have a substitutionary purpose in God's plan of redemption.

Within this larger messianic prophecy, Isaiah gives the remarkable

detail that although this Servant would be unjustly oppressed and led to His death, He would not defend Himself: “he opened not his mouth.” When reading the New Testament, we find that this precisely profiled Jesus’ experience as He was arrested and put through six illegal overnight trials before the Jewish and Roman authorities.⁵

After falsely accusing Jesus through the testimony of a number of false witnesses – who, despite their efforts, could not even get their stories to agree – His accusers subjected Him to tremendous physical and emotional abuse. Yet Jesus repeatedly refused to defend Himself against the charges. The entire ordeal ultimately ended with Pontius Pilate sentencing Jesus to execution despite repeatedly declaring that he found no fault in Him.

Let’s assign an estimate. Since this prophecy was given, one man in how many – while on trial for his life, and although innocent – would make no defense for himself? We will assign an extremely conservative estimate of one in 1,000.

Note: Many wonder why Jesus made no defense. He couldn’t! He was in *our* shoes! His mission was to be our substitute, and we *are* guilty!

Probability: 1:1,000

#8 – Died With the Wicked, Grave With the Rich

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death;
because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

-Isaiah 53:9

As we established in the previous prophecy, Isaiah 53 describes the suffering and death of the coming messianic Servant who would be rejected despite His innocence and give His life for the sins of others. Isaiah now adds another remarkably specific detail concerning what would happen to this Servant at His death: although He would die among the wicked, He would somehow be buried with the rich.

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According to the Gospels, Jesus fulfilled this precisely. He was crucified between two criminals, identifying Him in death with “the wicked.” Yet after His death, His body was claimed by Joseph of Arimathea, whom Matthew specifically identifies as “a rich man.” Joseph then placed Jesus’ body “in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock” (Matthew 27:57-60).

The correspondence is especially remarkable because these are two very different circumstances brought together in the death of one man. Jesus was executed under the disgraceful circumstances of a condemned criminal and surrounded by criminals, yet instead of receiving the kind of burial normally associated with such an execution, He was placed in the personal tomb of a wealthy man. Isaiah had placed these seemingly contrasting details together centuries beforehand.

So then, one in how many men since this prophecy was given have both died under condemnation among the wicked and then been buried in the private grave of a rich man? While there could certainly be other examples, the combination is unusual enough that we will assign the extremely conservative probability of only one in 1,000.

Probability: 1:1,000

Before going on, let’s further clarify what we mean by these probability estimates. A helpful way of doing this is to try to visualize what we mean by using a physical example.

“1:100” - A suitable example would be taking 100 silver dollars, marking one, and putting them all into a bucket, mixed. You would then reach into the bucket blindfolded and your chances of randomly selecting the marked coin would be 1 in 100 chances.

We hope this makes sense, as it will be crucial to understand as we go forward.

1. "How many prophecies did Jesus fulfill?" *GotQuestions.org*. (<https://www.gotquestions.org/prophecies-of-Jesus.html> - Retrieved 10/11/20)
2. Missler, pp. 220-221.
3. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, article "Capital Punishment, Crucifixion," Sept. 8, 2022, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/crucifixion-capital-punishment> - Retrieved 5/10/21)
4. Missler, p. 223.
5. John W. Lawrence, *The Six Trials of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1977.

CHAPTER 3

THE PROBABILITY OF ONE MAN FULFILLING ALL EIGHT PROPHECIES

Now that we've determined individual probability estimates for each of the eight prophecies we've selected, our next task is to determine a probability estimate that one person could fulfill them all! To do this, we need to combine these eight separate estimates into a composite probability.

In mathematics, to determine composite (or compound) probabilities (the chance of *all* of the events occurring), you calculate the **product** of each individual probability. In other words, you simply multiply the probabilities.¹

(e.g. $1:1,000 \times 1:1,000 = 1:1,000,000$)

So, let's now apply that to our current exercise. In order to calculate the **composite probability of all eight Messianic prophecies being fulfilled by a single person, you would take the product of the 8 assigned probability estimates.**

Consider the following chart:

Eight Prophetic Probabilities (out of over 300 OT prophecies, all fulfilled by Christ)	
Prophecies:	Probabilities:
1. Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)	1:100,000
2. Death by Crucifixion (Psalm 22:16)	1:10,000
3. Hailed as a King Riding a Donkey (Zechariah 9:9)	1:100
4. Betrayed for 30 Pieces of Silver (Zechariah 11:12)	1:1,000
5. Transaction Took Place in the Temple / Silver to the Potter (Zech. 11:13)	1:100,000
6. Wounded in His Hands in the House of His Friends (Zechariah 13:6)	1:1,000
7. Made No Defense Though Innocent (Isaiah 53:7)	1:1,000
8. Died With the Wicked, Grave With the Rich (Isaiah 53:9)	1:1,000
The probability that one man would fulfill all eight → $10^5 \times 10^4 \times 10^2 \times 10^3 \times 10^5 \times 10^3 \times 10^3 \times 10^3 = 10^{28}$ / 8.8×10^{10} (the estimated number of people who have lived between the time these prophecies were given, until now) = 1 chance in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (10¹⁷)	

$$\text{or: } 10^5 \times 10^4 \times 10^2 \times 10^3 \times 10^5 \times 10^3 \times 10^3 \times 10^3 = 10^{28}$$

After doing the arithmetic, the composite probability that a single person would fulfill all eight prophecies turns out to be an enormous number: $1:10^{28}$ (that is, 1:10 with twenty-eight zeroes after it, or 1:100,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000). Missler writes:

This answers the question of one man in how many men could have fulfilled these eight prophecies. But what we really want to know is, what is the chance that any **particular** man might have lived from the day of these prophecies down to the present time and have fulfilled **all** of these specific prophecies? To estimate this we must divide our 10^{28} by the total population of the people who have lived since the time of these prophecies.²

The estimate of the total number of people who have lived during this time period is thought to be approximately 88 billion (or 8.8×10^{10}).

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10^{10}).³ To simplify this calculation, we will round up to 10^{11} . The chance of one actual person in history fulfilling all eight prophecies is 10^{28} divided by 10^{11} , which equals 10^{17} or 1:1,000,000,000,000,000,000 – still an astronomically huge number.

In order to appreciate just how huge of a number 10^{17} is, we must come up with an imaginative way to visualize it. Here's one way. If we took the entire state of Texas and filled it completely with 10^{17} silver dollars, the depth of silver dollars on the ground would equal two feet anywhere you walk.⁴ If you then mark one of the silver dollars at random and bury it anywhere in that two-foot "ocean" of silver dollars, the chances of a blindfolded person being dropped anywhere in the entire state and successfully picking up that same silver dollar would be one chance in 10^{17} .

I hope you'd agree that it would be completely irrational to imagine this could happen by chance. This is the same likelihood that one man fulfilled all eight of the prophecies we examined.

1. Missler, pp. 225-226.

2. Ibid., p. 226.

3. Ibid., p. 226.

4. Ibid., p. 227.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROBABILITY OF ONE MAN FULFILLING SIXTEEN PROPHECIES

Now let's say we want to expand our exercise to include sixteen of the available three hundred prophecies instead of just eight. To simplify our analysis, let's assume that the likelihoods of the eight we are adding are essentially the same as the first eight. Using those same conservative assumptions and applying the same arithmetic, the probability of one man fulfilling all sixteen prophecies comes to approximately $1:10^{45}$!

$$(10^{28} \times 10^{28}/10^{11} = 10^{45})$$

Well how big of a number is this? Let's come up with another imaginary model to help us appreciate the largeness of the number 10^{45} .

Again, we will use silver dollars as an example, but this time Texas isn't big enough to accommodate 10^{45} – in fact, the entire United States isn't big enough. Instead, to represent 10^{45} silver dollars, we'll need to make a ball of silver dollars with a diameter sixty times the distance from Earth to the sun!¹

We now need to mark one of the silver dollars at random, and then mix them up so as to give every silver dollar an equal chance of being

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selected. We will then commission a blindfolded astronaut, launch him into this ball of silver dollars, and have him select one at random. The chance that he successfully picks the marked silver dollar is the same chance that the Messiah had in fulfilling each of the sixteen prophecies.

But again, we have only utilized sixteen of over three hundred prophecies we can pick from. Let's try this exercise once more. This time, we will explore three times as many, a total of forty-eight prophecies.

1. Ibid., p. 228.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROBABILITY OF ONE MAN FULFILLING FORTY-EIGHT PROPHECIES

We will now increase our calculation to include forty-eight Messianic prophecies. As before, we will assume that none of these additional prophecies are any more specific than the original eight. In other words, we will assume that the likelihoods are the same as the first eight. If you apply the same arithmetic, the chance of one man fulfilling all forty-eight prophecies comes to $1:10^{157}$!

$$(10^{28} \times 10^{28} \times 10^{28} \times 10^{28} \times 10^{28} / 10^{11} = 10^{157})$$

Our problem now simply becomes comprehending the magnitude of the numbers we're working with. 10^{157} is such a large number that silver dollars will no longer work for this example. Instead, we need to use something unimaginably smaller: atoms.

When Chuck Missler presented this illustration in *Cosmic Codes*, he used an estimate of approximately 10^{66} atoms in the universe.¹ Scientific estimates have increased considerably since then. Modern estimates place the number of atoms in the observable universe on the order of 10^{80} particles.²

But even that enormous figure of 10^{80} atoms is nowhere close to the 10^{157} number we are trying to visualize. So now imagine not just

one observable universe, but **10^{80} observable universes – one entire universe for every atom in our own observable universe.** If each of those universes also contained 10^{80} atoms, the total would be approximately 10^{160} atoms.

$$10^{80} \times 10^{80} = 10^{160}$$

That is actually larger than the 10^{157} figure we are trying to visualize, but only by a factor of 1,000. So imagine taking 10^{157} atoms from this incomprehensible collection, marking just one of them, and then mixing them all together. The chance of randomly selecting that single marked atom would be one in 10^{157} .

As you can see, we have reached a number that is far beyond human comprehension. And remember, we have only dealt with forty-eight of the hundreds of specific Messianic prophecies!

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1. Ibid.
 2. Evelyn Lamb, “Big Numbers Are Big,” Apr. 1, 2013, *Scientific American*. (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/blog/roots-of-unity/big-numbers-are-big/> - Retrieved 08/23/26)

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Interestingly, the French mathematician Émile Borel developed a principle concerning extremely small probabilities. He argued that once a probability becomes sufficiently small, it can be regarded as negligible, or practically impossible, on the scale being considered. For events on a cosmic scale, Borel placed that threshold at approximately one chance in 10^{50} .¹ In other words, probabilities below this level become so extraordinarily small that treating them as realistic possibilities becomes mathematically absurd for practical purposes.

Our figure of one chance in 10^{157} is not just *below* Borel's threshold, but *enormously beyond* it. In fact, it represents a probability 10^{107} times smaller than the one-in- 10^{50} level Borel regarded as negligible on a cosmic scale. That gives us some perspective on just how extreme the number we have arrived at really is.

So what is the point of all of this? As we have seen, the Old Testament contains hundreds of Messianic prophecies that were written before the time of Christ. The New Testament then provides multiple eyewitness accounts documenting their fulfillment in the life of Jesus. In this study, we examined only a small sampling of those prophecies and intentionally used very conservative probability estimates. Yet even under those conservative assumptions, the numbers quickly

became almost impossible to comprehend. This leaves us with two important conclusions:

1. To attribute Jesus Christ's fulfillment of this collection of specific Messianic prophecies to coincidence or chance requires accepting a probability that does not just approach mathematical absurdity, but exceeds it by an almost incomprehensible margin.
2. The cumulative prophetic evidence provides overwhelming reason to identify Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel. Our probability exercise gives us a quantitative way to appreciate just how extraordinary that evidence really is.

Jesus did not simply appear in history and happen to resemble a few vague predictions. He fulfilled a prophetic script that had been written about Him centuries earlier. His birthplace, the circumstances surrounding His ministry, His betrayal, His suffering, His death, and other specific details had been prophetically anticipated long before He was born. Many of these circumstances were completely outside of His control from an ordinary human standpoint.

That is what makes the evidence so powerful. The prophecies existed beforehand, the events were later recorded as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and the cumulative correspondence becomes increasingly impossible to reasonably attribute to coincidence or chance. While the probability calculations in this study are not intended to assign an absolutely precise mathematical value to every event in ancient history, they do profoundly demonstrate the staggering cumulative force of the evidence when even conservative estimates are applied.

So, as we conclude, we need to recognize that the fact that Jesus Christ is the Messianic fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy can be established with overwhelming certainty. This recognition provides powerful evidence for the supernatural origin of the Bible, meaning that its ultimate source is not from man, but from beyond our space-time. The magnitude of the probability we have examined is so enormous that, as we have seen, even the universe itself can barely provide

us with a way to illustrate it! And to reject the identity, ministry, and destiny of Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel, along with everything He accomplished in His First Coming, is to reject a fact established, perhaps more absolutely than any other fact in the universe.

Thus, based on the evidence we have examined, you can actually be more certain that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of Israel than you are of your own name!

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1. Rupert Taylor, "Borel's Law of Probability," Mar. 11, 2024, *Owlcation.com*. (<https://owlcation.com/stem/Borels-Law-of-Probability> - Retrieved 10/15/24)

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