

PUBLIC THEOLOGY AND PROPHECY DATA:
FACTUAL EVIDENCE THAT COUNTS
FOR THE BIBLICAL WORLD VIEW

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[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.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The key feature of prophecy which allows it to provide humans with evidence that God exists is that successful predictions, though hard to make, can be easy to check. The “hard to make” part reveals God’s involvement, while the “easy to check” part enables human discovery. Prophecy has content “which God alone can know at the time of the revelation,” since it is “not predictable from natural laws” accessible to human understanding, yet this content is the sort “which humans can certainly discover afterward.”²

As noted in our previous paper, for prophetic data to be admissible as evidence that can count across world views, 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

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¹ J. L. Mackie in Richard Swinburne, ed., *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1989) 90.

² Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 89.

another four criteria for the data to be relevant: (5) testable hypotheses; (6) world view 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 sufficiently specific and detailed that a fulfillment, and also a failure, would be recognizable without any ambiguity.

(2) Documented outcome. The outcome of the prophecy must be evident 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 atheistic or other perspectives.

(3) Proper chronology. Definite empirical evidence must be publicly available to document that the prophecy predates its fulfillment. For the OT, this criterion is satisfied by all outcomes dated after 150 BC, the average date of copies of Bible books among the Dead Sea Scrolls. This is also about the time the independently-circulated Greek translation, the Septuagint, was completed 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 sufficiently specific and unusual to make their fulfillments unlikely 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 world view for the Bible prophets is high accuracy. Consequently, any other world view that expects a markedly lower accuracy has thereby rendered the Christian and that other world view testable.

(6) World view import. These different predictions, such as high or else low prophetic accuracy, must originate from causal explanations with significant world view 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 re-

vealed 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 world views, 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 world view beliefs.

(8) Manageable effort. The work needed to draw a definitive conclusion should 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 also 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 yet be 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. A long-term continuing desolation could still count as second-tier evidence here.

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

II. 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.

1. *Hosea 3:4–5*. 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 AD. 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 and Israel is a "many days" period of isolation before Hosea resumes full marriage relations with Gomer. Just as Hosea keeps Gomer from conjugal relations with himself or anyone else, 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 (Hos 3:4–5) follows.³

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. 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 at an exegetical distance of over two thousand years), the general sense of the prediction is as 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 refer either to rites at the temple in Jerusalem or include idolatrous ones 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, but 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 priesthoods, 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 notable. By Hosea's time, the Northern Kingdom had

³ For a detailed exegesis and discussion of this prophecy, see John Bloom's chapter in *The Evidence of Prophecy* (ed. Robert C. Newman; Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1988) 67–82.

abandoned the Lord in two areas: (1) politically, she had seceded from the Davidic monarchy;⁴ (2) religiously, she had developed her own cult 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 regards the subjects of this prophecy: does the term “sons of Israel” (v. 4) refer to all Israelites (divided into Judah and Israel at Hosea’s time) or to the Northern Kingdom in particular (hereafter, Ephraim)? From the events in Hosea it is evident that the prophet’s primary ministry was to Ephraim, although one cannot rule out the possibility here that he also includes the Southern Kingdom, Judah. This ambiguity turns out to be no problem, as will be shown below.

After the time of Hosea, the state of Israel (Ephraim) soon withered and came to an end. In 733–732 BC, the Assyrian Tiglath-pileser III conquered Trans-Jordan and Galilee and “carried them captive to Assyria” (2 Kgs 15:29). Then in 721 BC, Sargon II conquered what remained. According to the Bible, Ephraim was resettled “in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (2 Kgs 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 Kgs 19:24). While there is no explicit documentation for 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).”⁵

Thus, by 515 BC, Ephraim had fragmented into three groups: (1) those exiled by Assyria to Halah, Habor, 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 the Assyrian conquest, 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.⁶ From this, some might conclude that Hosea’s prophecy was unfulfilled. Not so. The concept of the survival of a *remnant* is foundational to the prophetic literature, especially in passages of judgment. A particularly vivid example 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:

⁴ God considered Jeroboam’s actions to be rebellious because he did not obey the conditional promises of the prophecy (1 Kgs 11:38) but instead built shrines in Bethel and Dan (1 Kgs 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” (Hos 8:4).

⁵ H. L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 132.

⁶ H. Tadmor in H. H. Ben-Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976) 137–38.

“perhaps the Lord God of Hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph [Ephraim].”

Thus one need not grasp for fulfillment theories that identify “the ten lost tribes” with the American Indians (as the Mormons do) or modern Anglo-Americans (the British-Israel movement). The idea that God will include in future fulfillments those with the least bit of Israelite ancestry is unnecessary in light of his many assertions that only a remnant of Israel will survive.

Yet amazingly, this prophecy is fulfilled in those remnants of Israel that can still be traced: the Samaritans and the Jews.

a. *Fulfillment in the Samaritans.* The Samaritans today are a recognized remnant of Ephraim.⁷ 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.⁸

Though our knowledge of Samaritan history and religion is sketchy, such details as we have are here summarized.⁹ Regarding political history, the Samaritans apparently were not involved in the exile following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. 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 Neh 2:10–6:14, strife is recorded between Nehemiah and the Samaritan governor Sanballat. The Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim about 332 BC. The bitter hostility between Jews and Samaritans in NT times was the result of numerous hostile actions on both sides, culminating in John Hyrcanus, who subjugated the Samaritans and destroyed their temple in 129 BC.

Several features of later Samaritan history parallel those of the Jews. Both groups suffered deportation to Egypt about 300 BC by Ptolemy Soter. Both revolted against Roman rule in AD 66, with disastrous results. Both were persecuted by Hadrian in the second century. Both were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, as Samaritans and their synagogues are known in ancient Egypt, Rome, and other key regions.

Under the leadership of Baba Rabba in the fourth century AD, the Samaritans flourished briefly in their homeland. But animosity with Christians led to persecution, and in 529 the emperor Justinian outlawed the sect.

⁷ *EncJud*, “Samaritans,” by Benyamin Tsedaka.

⁸ *ZPEB*, “Samaritans,” by J. L. Kelso.

⁹ The following summary is paraphrased and condensed from articles on the Samaritans in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1970) by Theodore H. Gaster, *EncJud*, and *ZPEB* (noted above). An interesting website with both recent history and pictures is www.the-samaritans.com.

During Arab and Turkish rule the Samaritans experienced almost constant oppression.

In the seventeenth century, Samaritans began moving back to Nablus and Shechem. Persecution 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 at one time 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 is also the 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 unclear, the following points corroborating with Hosea's predictions may be noted.

(1) The Samaritans have been without "king and prince," particularly in terms of homeland occupancy and leadership, from the persecutions in AD 529 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 with sacrifices completely absent would be ideal, the Samaritans do retain a sacrificial 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. This phrase is fulfilled for the Samaritans in both the literal and figurative understanding of "ephod."

The Samaritans are a tiny remnant of the "sons of Israel." They have been 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 Hos 3:4 and appears to be in the initial phase of fulfilling Hos 3:5.

b. *Fulfillment in the Jews.* Most Bible commentators have applied Hosea's predictions about "the sons of Israel" to the Jews as a whole, recognizing 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. For a time, its leadership included descendants in the Davidic line, such as Zerubbabel. A degree of independence was achieved by the Maccabean revolt in the second century BC, though this was under the leadership of a Levitical rather than Davidic family. This independence was lost after about a century when

the Romans entered the area in 63 BC. Following the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, most Jews were scattered throughout the Roman empire. After the Bar Kochba rebellion was put down in AD 135, the central hill region of Judea was essentially depopulated of Jews. Despite these devastations, however, a form of central governance remained over Jewish communities in the Near East, centered in a leader called the "exilarch."¹⁰

By the end of the eleventh century, this international leadership disappeared as the Jewish Diaspora was fragmented by cultural and religious divisions both internal and external. This division lasted until the late nineteenth century, when a fresh plague of anti-Semitism arose, which fostered a spirit of unity for the sake of self-defense.¹¹

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 OT terminology the modern government is based on "princes."

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 BC (2 Kings 23). The Babylonian exile itself "did generally succeed in purging" Judah from the worship of idols.¹² 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 even as early as the time of Ezra (Ezra 2:63).

The loss of sacrifice and priesthood (figurative ephod interpretation) occurred with the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Milman suggests that the entire priesthood perished at this time.¹³ 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."¹⁴ In any case, by AD 100, 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 Hos 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

¹⁰ Ben-Sasson, *History of the Jewish People* 303–13, 332–34.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 811, 849.

¹² J. B. Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 111.

¹³ H. H. Milman, *The History of the Jews* (5th ed.; London: John Murray, 1883) 2.414.

¹⁴ *EncJud*, "History," by Michael Avi-Yonah.

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 of these aspects were fulfilled much earlier, the absence of all these features has characterized those Jews who were not assimilated from at least the eleventh century AD. This was recognized by 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."¹⁵

2. *Isaiah 11:10–12*. Any discussion of Israel in prophecy is incomplete without mentioning the revival of the Jewish state in 1948. Although caution is needed in claiming fulfillment for such recent events, especially in view of the region's instability, it seems likely that the new nation of Israel is the beginning of the fulfillment of Hos 3:5. Another passage (among many) that predicts a return to the land after exile is Isa 11:10–12:

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. 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. 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.

Our passage refers to a *second* return, the first return generally being understood as that of a remnant from Babylonian exile in 537 BC. Though Nehemiah led another group back from Shushan (Neh 1:1, 2:1–11) nearly a century later, neither return fits the broad geographic region 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 BC), there were Jews in all the provinces of the Persian empire from India to Ethiopia (Esth 8:9). The conquests of Alexander (334–323 BC) encouraged their spread westward, and by the first century AD, Jews were found all over the Roman empire (Acts 2:8–11). Thus a return of Jews "from the four quarters of the earth" could not very well have taken place before the Christian era.

Until AD 70, the Jews continued to live in their own land as a nation state, though subject to the dominant empires, Persian, Greek, then Roman. Finally, they rebelled, and the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish state in two wars, 66–73 and 132–135. From that time until recently, there has been only a small struggling Jewish population in Palestine.¹⁶

¹⁵ David Kimchi, quoted without citation in E. Henderson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (1858; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 17–18.

¹⁶ This and the following sections summarize Efraim Orni and Elisha Efrat, *Geography of Israel* (3rd rev. ed.; Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1973) 214–51.

Under later rule—by Roman, Byzantine, Muslim, Crusader, Mameluke, and Turk—no Jewish state was permitted in Palestine. Occasionally some Jews did return (especially those fleeing the greater terrors of the Inquisition and the expulsion from Spain in 1492), but there was no such regathering of Jews from the lands of their dispersion as Isaiah envisioned. But finally, during the nineteenth century, the idea of a Jewish state began to grow in the minds of some pious rabbis in eastern Europe and, independently, among several Englishmen. European Jews began to send aid to the impoverished Jewish communities of the Middle East, but without much 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 them, joined by others from Rumania and Poland, came to Palestine and founded communities. Although these 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 Jews in Palestine, and their number dwindled to 56,000. Yet in return for Jewish help in World War I, the British government (in the Balfour Declaration) had pledged its support to establish a national home in Palestine for the Jewish people. When Britain assumed control of the area in 1920 as a mandate from the League of Nations, the Arab majority there had no desire for a Jewish state and British military administrators tended to favor Arab interests. As a result, the Balfour Declaration was almost ignored, though it spurred renewed Jewish immigration to Palestine, and many new communities were established.

During the thirties and early forties, Nazi Anti-Semitism spread across Europe, leading still more Jews to come to Palestine. This immigration was matched by growing opposition from the Arabs. As the hostilities became increasingly violent, the British came under fire from both sides. To keep the peace in Palestine while fighting World War II in Europe, the British sought to stop Jewish immigration despite the plight of east European Jews fleeing Hitler's holocaust. The Jews, in desperation, turned to illegal immigration.

When the war ended, Britain refused to continue its mandate over Palestine. The United Nations, having 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 effected, 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. While the immediate future of Israel is uncertain, there is now a Jewish state in Palestine for the first time since AD 135, nearly two thousand years ago, and to date it has lasted over fifty years.

Not only has the nation of Israel been revived, but the Jewish population in the regions Isaiah explicitly names has in particular 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 2500.¹⁷ In fact, by 1970, only four Jewish families still lived in Egypt; at that time, 35,000 Jews of Egyptian origin lived in Israel, and 47,000 in France, Great Britain, the United States, and Argentina. The resurgence of Islam in the Sudan and famine in Ethiopia is causing Jewish departure from these lands also. Perhaps the most famous recent example was the 1991 airlift of an imperiled Jewish population in Ethiopia. This small group of some 15,000 Jews was an isolated community in Ethiopia unconnected to the rest of the Jewish world for thousands of years. Yet the rescue was widely supported in Israel because of the fundamental belief that Israel should be a safe haven for Jews in need.¹⁸

The ancient 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 in Iraq, 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 had resulted in a drop in the Jewish population from 15,000 to 3,000 as of 1968. This emigration was particularly substantial despite 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, the number having fallen from 95,000 in 1948 to 60,000 in 1968, with 55,276 Jews migrating to Israel from Iran between 1950 and 1968. This smaller migration was doubtless due to the more favorable climate for Jews in the Shah's regime. But since the Shah was overthrown by radical Shiites, the flow has increased. At the end of 1983, there were only about 27,000 Jews still in Iran.

From the foregoing, it is clear that most Jews in the nations specifically mentioned in Isa 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," v. 12) have also moved to Israel, although many still remain in the industrialized nations.

3. *Other passages.* The Hosea and Isaiah passages are not the only predictions regarding the reestablishment of Israel in Palestine (see also Ezek 36:24–31; Zech 12:10–13:1; 13:8–9; 14:21; and Rev 11:1–13). Though caution is desirable in judging whether contemporary events fulfill ancient prophecies, the fact that the state of Israel has now survived for 55 years

¹⁷ For citations and further details on the statistics given here, see Eugenie Johnston, "The Return of the Jews," in Newman, *Evidence of Prophecy* 83–97.

¹⁸ See <http://www4.district125.k12.il.us/faculty/bswislow/immig.html>.

seems significant. There are, however, elements in most of these return passages that have not yet occurred. For instance, most modern Israelis have little interest in “seeking the Lord their God and David their king.” But if one reads these prophecies as a series of unfolding events, the first item is generally a return to the land, so it is not unreasonable to suppose the next steps are yet future.

Aside from the objection that what was predicted has not yet fully occurred, another criticism might be that the prophecy was fulfilled by a zealous band of followers—that the Jewish people were seeking to make it happen. But anyone familiar with the Russian and Nazi atrocities that drove Jews back to Palestine realizes that their regathering was hardly voluntary. Although there are certainly some Jews who have returned in order to fulfill this prophecy, they are the minority. Immigration rates to Israel have been directly proportional to the level of persecution the Jews felt in their former countries.

Incidentally, many additional OT prophecies picture the persecution and terror the Jews would face in their dispersion. Kellogg and Urquhart detail both prediction and fulfillment from AD 70 through the end of the nineteenth century when they were writing;¹⁹ since then we have seen the Holocaust in the twentieth century. While some cases of persecution were doubtless 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.

4. *Probabilities.* 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 AD 70 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. We estimate the odds at 1:10 just for the loss of the priestly family line, and will not attempt

¹⁹ Samuel H. Kellogg (1839–1899), “The Dispersion and Oppression of the Jews,” in Newman, *Evidence of Prophecy* 55–66; John Urquhart, *The Wonders of Prophecy* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publishers, n.d. [1895]).

estimates for the other cultic changes. 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 in 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 OT times survive today as distinct ethnic groups: The people of Moab, Edom, Nabatea, Philistia, and Assyria have all disappeared, blending 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 re-settle it after two thousand years is apparently unique in history. This is not like the situation in the Balkans or the former Soviet Union where an amalgam of hostile people groups has fragmented after a century of subjection. Rather, we have 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 European homelands and formed a new nation, though these 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 are 1:200,000. Such numerous and specific prophecies would greatly risk falsification if their source were mere human prediction rather than genuine God-given revelation.

III. PROPHECIES ABOUT SURROUNDING NATIONS

The prophets of Israel also made predictions concerning peoples beyond their borders, especially their neighbors and conquerors. Many of these were fulfilled before our time threshold (about 150 BC) when there is independent evidence that the prophecies had already been written. But a number have been fulfilled since and hence can meet the criteria for admissibility.

1. *Various people groups.* Any student of the OT is aware of the deep animosity between ancient Israel and her neighbors, the Philistines, Edom, and Ammon. The prophets of Israel predicted these nations would be

destroyed, or conquered and assimilated by Israel. Of course, one expects a prophet would forecast destruction for his nation's enemies. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that none of these peoples exist today. Ammon was destroyed by Nabatean Arabs from the east, as predicted in Ezek 21:31–32, 25:4–7 and 10b. The Edomites were driven out of their homeland by Arabs into the Negev of Judah, where about 120 BC they were conquered and incorporated into Israel by John Hyrcanus (Ezek 25:12–14; Obadiah 18–21; Mal 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 BC (Amos 1:8; Obadiah 19; Zeph 2:4–7).²⁰

Many scholars see the prediction in Isa 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.²¹ 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” (Ezek 30:12–14; Isa 19:5–7). However, they also predicted the survival of the Egyptian race, known today as Coptics (most Egyptians today are ethnic Arabs). Though Egypt was no longer an international power by NT times, it was still the breadbasket of the Roman Empire and renowned for its craftsmen. It did not hit bottom as predicted until after it fell under Arab domination in the seventh century.²²

Since destruction of enemies is an expected prophecy, is there any way to analyze the fulfillments to show whether they are more than lucky guesses or inevitable events? Perhaps we can use a technique common in modern research. When scientists conduct experiments, they often 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 show a statistically significant benefit compared with the placebo.

2. *Twin cities.* Is it possible to use controls when studying prophecy? Yes, we can do this for prophecies about ancient cities. For instance, two cities might be paired because they were in the same nation or geographical region, or were of similar size and importance. The only significant difference between the pair is that the predicted fate of one city differs substantially from that of the other. Since merely switching city names would result

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, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1995). Urquhart, *Wonders of Prophecy*, is the classic treatment of these nations.

²¹ Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* 304.

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

in a decidedly different prediction, such “twin city” pairs provide an excellent test of the predictive accuracy of biblical prophets. Though a number of biblical prophecies for ancient cities include predictions fulfilled before our time constraint of 150 BC—such as Alexander the Great’s most unusual destruction of Old Tyre by throwing its rubble into the sea and leaving the site a “bare rock” (Ezekiel 26)—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 merely generic curses.

a. *Babylon and Nineveh.* For example, Babylon and Nineveh were each capital cities of great Mesopotamian empires that dominated the ancient Near East during the time 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 over a million.²³ 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 capitals of their empires. Yet because of their pride, power, and ruthless warfare, no other foreign cities are discussed and condemned in such detail in the Bible.²⁴

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 risky for these prophets to predict around 750–550 BC (the traditional dates) that a city of Babylon’s age and stature would be permanently abandoned, by the time of the public confirmation date of 150 BC, Babylon was in decline and most of the population had moved 20 miles to the new city of Seleucia. At the time of Christ, Strabo visited this city that had been the cultural and political center of the world for centuries²⁵ and found Babylon so deserted that he remarked jokingly, “the great city is a great desert.”²⁶ Archaeological remains show that a group of priests occupied the site until about AD 100.²⁷

The site has now been deserted for two nearly thousand years, as Isaiah predicted. 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.”²⁸ Those who visit the site are amazed that Isaiah’s picture of the ruins of Babylon is so accurate.²⁹ Historical and archaeological

²³ Robert Koldewey, *The Excavations of Babylon* (London: 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* (rev. ed.; London: Thames and Hudson, 1986) 142.

²⁶ Strabo, *Geography* 16.1.5.

²⁷ Oates, *Babylon* 142–43.

²⁸ See http://www.arab.net/iraq/tour/iq_babylon.html.

²⁹ Koldewey, *Excavations* 314; André Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958) 148–49; H. M. F. Saggis, “Babylon,” in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study* (ed. D. Winton Thomas; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) 41. Oates, *Babylon* 144 notes,

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.³⁰ For superstitious reasons, Arabs do not live in the ruins, which have become the home of desert animals.³¹ The soil among the ruins is so poor that it does not provide enough grass for sheep.³² Interestingly, as Jeremiah predicted, natives who work the site for building materials only take bricks; they burn the stones they find for lime.³³ 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.³⁴

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 BC, 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.³⁵ Today the ruins of Nineveh, which are across the river

“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.”

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

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

³² Koldewey, *Excavations* 108; Mignan, *Travels* 234–35. Note that there are shepherds in the plains surrounding the ruins in Layard, *Discoveries* 484.

³³ Observation of Mr. Rassam, quoted without reference in Urquhart, *Wonders* 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: Egypt Exploration Society, 1985) 14.

³⁴ Charles H. Dyer and Angela Elwell Hunt, *The Rise of Babylon* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1991).

³⁵ The village of Nebi Yunus has been on the site for some centuries. For the reference to animals, see Layard, *Discoveries* 661–62.

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.”³⁶ Irrigation and rainfall are generally plentiful enough that the plains around the mound are cultivated,³⁷ and the ruins in this area are grazed during the rainy season.³⁸

Note the contrast between the prophecies made against these two former world capitals: One will be desolate forever, unoccupied, not even useful for grazing. The other will be desolate for an unspecified time but will be grazed. Had the city names been reversed, neither picture of desolation would be accurate.

b. *Tyre and Sidon.* The predictions against Tyre and Sidon, two “sister cities” of the Phoenicians, form another natural pair for controlled study. As commercial centers, these cities were the Hong Kong and Singapore of the ancient Near East.³⁹ Sidon was on the Mediterranean coast, while Tyre had its ports and main temple on an island one-half mile offshore, making them difficult to attack. Nevertheless, Tyre was highly dependent on the mainland for resources (water, food, wood) and overland trade routes.⁴⁰ 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 our limited time frame warns: “I will make you a bare rock, and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt.”

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

Even by NT times, the particular prophecy of Ezekiel we are following was not fulfilled: Tyre was still a thriving commercial center at a time when the OT 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 cemetery were discovered on the mainland in the 1970s.

Tyre continued as a major trading and manufacturing center through the Byzantine and Muslim periods. During the Crusades, it remained strong and well fortified, surviving a siege by Saladin in 1187–1188. Finally, in 1291, the Mamelukes of Egypt destroyed Tyre, massacring and enslaving the citizens, as part of their scorched-earth policy to thwart future invasion by the

³⁶ ZPEB, “Nineveh,” D. J. Wiseman. Compare Layard, *Discoveries* 76 who translates it as “little sheep” after the name of an abandoned village on the mound.

³⁷ Layard, *Discoveries* 77.

³⁸ Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains* (2 vols.; New York: George P. Putnam, 1849) 1.28–29.

³⁹ Patricia M. Bikai, “Phoenician Tyre,” in Martha Sharp Joukowsky, ed., *The Heritage of Tyre: Essays on the History, Archaeology, and Preservation of Tyre* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1992) 46.

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

⁴¹ Bikai, “Phoenician Tyre” 61.

Crusaders.⁴² The region thereafter suffered from inter-sect Muslim rivalry, a major earthquake, and plague. Several travelogues from this period remark that the site was essentially abandoned.

In the 1760s regional authorities encouraged settlement at Tyre, and this 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 1930s show a bare isthmus and a tiny fishing village located where the majestic "Queen of the Seas" had once stood.⁴³

Critics tend to gloss over this 650-year fulfillment period, noting 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.⁴⁴ This recent growth is set 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 a few museums and resorts in addition to its fishing village hardly constitutes regaining her former title "Queen of the Seas."

As a control, consider the predictions against Tyre's sister city, Sidon, located some 20 miles up the coast. Ezekiel predicts (28:22–23) that Sidon will face war, plague, and famine, but he says nothing more specific about its long-term 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 OT prophet) never says that Sidon will face desolation or be reduced to a small fishing village. If the history of Sidon is tracked beyond NT 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.

c. Memphis and Thebes. Memphis and Thebes form another pair of twin cities we can 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 featured enormous numbers of temples.⁴⁵ Thus it is not surprising (though perhaps rather

⁴² Ibid. 78. Maurice H. Chehab, *Tyre: History, Topography, Excavations* (Beirut, Lebanon: Editions Librairies Antoine, 1974) 25.

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

⁴⁴ Chehab, *Tyre* 26.

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

risky) that 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 by 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.⁴⁶ Although zealous Christians in the third century attacked some of these idols,⁴⁷ their actions are not a satisfactory fulfillment since 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 would not permit his army to make Alexandria the Muslim capital because the water of the Nile would come between the caliph and his army. With a 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.⁴⁸ As the new city grew, the population of Memphis drifted to Cairo, and the stonework of Memphis became a convenient quarry, being only fifteen miles away.

By the late 1800s, this quarrying was so complete that the only significant artifact visible at Memphis was a colossal statue of Ramses II.⁴⁹ From 1908 to 1913 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."⁵⁰ It is noteworthy that any remains Petrie left exposed soon disappeared, due either to weathering or continued quarrying by nearby villagers. Today the colossal statue of Ramses II remains one of the few objects at Memphis visible above ground.⁵¹

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

⁴⁶ Strabo, *Geography* 19.1.31–32.

⁴⁷ Barbara G. Mertz, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., "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* 5; Petrie's other reports cited below; and Rudolf Anthes, *Mit Rahineh 1955* [Philadelphia: 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: School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1910) 39.

⁴⁸ Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Story of Cairo* (London: J. M. Dent, 1902) 39–42; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., "History of Egypt," by Donald P. Little.

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

⁵⁰ W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Seventy Years in Archaeology* (New York: Henry Holt, 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. Gardner, *Tarkhan III and Memphis V* (London: School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1913) 32; and *Memphis III* 38–40.

is not the sort of thing that would have happened anyway—it is a risky prediction. Yes, virtually all ancient cities have been attacked and ravaged by now, and many sites have been abandoned. But rarely have their ruins been quarried to the point that nothing visible is left today. By contrast, consider the prophecy concerning another Egyptian religious center.

Thebes, the largest city in southern Egypt, was also a world-famous center for Egyptian religion. In the same context as the prophecy against Memphis, Ezekiel (30:14–16) quotes God as saying, “I will . . . inflict punishment on Thebes. I will . . . cut off the hordes of Thebes. Thebes will be taken by storm.” And indeed, Thebes was repeatedly attacked. Yet though Nebuchadnezzar and Cambyses both captured and burned Thebes, the city recovered a good measure of its former strength. In 92 BC Thebes withstood a three-year siege, after which Ptolemy Lathyrus (the grandfather of Cleopatra) sacked and burned the city. Thebes recovered again, but it was finally destroyed by Cornelius Gallus during the reign of Augustus for having joined a tax rebellion. From then on, Thebes was merely a small collection of villages.⁵²

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.”⁵³ Aside from the pyramids, most temples and statues associated with ancient Egypt are located at this religious center.⁵⁴ If we reverse the names of Memphis and Thebes in these prophecies, they were not fulfilled.

3. *Probabilities.* How likely would all these predictions about Israel’s neighbors be, were their source merely human? Can they be explained by chance?

The survival of various ethnic groups in this region has already been discussed. 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 2⁵, 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. But for the sake of simplicity and to be conservative, we estimate odds of 1:30 here.

In addition, the antecedent probability of Israel fulfilling predictions about conquering the Edomites and Philistines is quite low. Though both these enemies were weakened by outside forces, the chance that the Maccabean revolt would not only succeed against the powerful Seleucid and Ptolemaic

⁵² Francis Llewellyn Griffith, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., “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: Stein and Day, 1965).

regimes but also permit 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 is a much more risky prediction. 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 to political instability.

The unlikelihood of these abandonments is increased when we realize that these cities were not small villages but major cities, even capitals of world empires—the ancient equivalents of Rome, London, and New York City. Each had been occupied for thousands of years prior to the prophecies against them, 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 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 here. 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 of 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 for surrounding nations being correct are about 1:38,000,000. There is much detail in these prophecies that makes accurate fulfillment quite remarkable.

IV. PROPHECIES ABOUT THE COMING MESSIAH

One of the most impressive sections of prophecy in the OT is in 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 (Isa 41:8, 44:1 and 21, 45:4, 48:20, 49:3), but elsewhere he is just as clearly distinguished from Israel (Isa 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: Israel as a whole was called by God to do a particular work, but it will actually be accomplished by an individual Israelite.⁵⁵

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

1. *Light to the Gentiles.* 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 Isa 42:1–7, 49:1–12, 50:4–11, and 52:13–53:12. Numerous features here point to the Servant being fulfilled in Jesus as he is described for us historically and theologically in the NT. But to counter claims that the NT was explicitly written to fit these predictions, most of the fulfillments examined here happened long after NT times and were such that the NT writers could not possibly have engineered the outcomes. Isa 42:6–7 says:

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

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

⁵⁶ Frederick A. Aston, "The Work of the Messiah" in Newman, *Evidence of Prophecy* 121–24.

for the gentiles, 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:

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—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.” 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 Isa 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.

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 AD, only the Jews and a few Greek philosophers were believers in one God. Only a small fraction of the world’s population was 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 of the world’s population now claims allegiance to the God of Abraham, most of these as a result of the work of Jesus.⁵⁷

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).⁵⁸ Truly Jesus of Nazareth has become a light to the Gentiles as news of him has spread throughout the world.

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

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

2. *Coming of the Messiah.* Another striking prophecy points to the specific time of the coming of the Messiah. This is the prophecy of the seventy “weeks” found in Daniel chapter 9. According to the narrative at that point, the prophet Daniel had recently come to understand from the Scriptures that “the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.” Apparently Daniel realized that the time must be about up, so he began 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 was praying, the angel Gabriel was sent to him with the following message (Dan 9:24–27):

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. 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. 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. 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 BC) instead of the sixth century BC 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 translations⁵⁹ 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 translations⁶⁰ 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”:

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. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing.

⁵⁹ Including the NIV, NASB, LB, Berkeley Version, Amplified Bible, and the Jerusalem Bible.

⁶⁰ Including the Jewish Publication Society’s version, the NEB, the Smith-Goodspeed and Moffatt translations, and the NAB.

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.⁶¹ It does explain the peculiar combination of 7 and 62 instead of their sum 69. Nevertheless, the Masoretic punctuation may not be older than the ninth or tenth century AD,⁶² 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 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. In this case, 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.⁶³

The usual procedure in interpreting this passage has been 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 AD 39. Since most scholarship dates Jesus’ crucifixion in the range AD 29–33, 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.⁶⁴ The biblical commands regarding this sabbatical cycle are given in Exod 23:10–11 and Lev 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.”

The context in Daniel 9 seems to favor 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

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

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

⁶³ As suggested in the Berkeley Version. The Smith-Goodspeed and the NEB imply such an interpretation by translating verse 25b: “for sixty-two weeks it shall *stay* rebuilt / *remain* restored,” but these translations of the verb *šub* 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.

desolation will last seventy years. The prophecy of Jeremiah supplies the time element for this scattering and desolation (Jer 25:11–12, 29:10), but it appears that Lev 26:32–35 supplies the rationale. If Israel would not keep the sabbath-year regulation, God would expel them until the land could “enjoy its sabbaths.”⁶⁵

Various suggestions have been made for the starting point of these seventy “sevens”: (1) God’s word at the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC, Jer 25:11–12, 29:10); (2) Cyrus’s word in allowing the captives to return to Jerusalem (537 BC, 2 Chr 36:23; Ezra 1:2); (3) Artaxerxes’s commission to Ezra (458 BC, Ezra 4:11–12 and 23); and (4) Artaxerxes’s commission to Nehemiah (445 BC, Neh 2:1–6).⁶⁶ Of these four, only the last actually led to rebuilding of the city wall. By 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 Neh 2:1 dates Artaxerxes’s sending Nehemiah to Jerusalem to the twentieth year of Artaxerxes 1, namely 445 BC.⁶⁷ So this is the starting point.

The next step is to make the calculation forward from 445 BC. But unlike many other commentators, here the actual sabbatical cycles are used as units of measurement rather than just adding 7x69 years to the starting point, since this follows the actual usage in Daniel. Ben Zion Wacholder has recently 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.⁶⁸ 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 BC, falls in the seven-year sabbatical cycle 449–442 BC, of which the last year, 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 BC, and so on, down to the transition from BC to AD, where one needs to remember that 1 BC is immediately followed by AD 1, with no zero year in between (so the 64th cycle is 8–1 BC and the 65th is 1 BC to AD 7). The 69th cycle following Artaxerxes’s commission is thus AD 28–35, 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 62nd “seven” (the 69th, counting the first 7). But this, too, is just a conventional Jewish idiom, in which “*after*” means “*after the beginning of.*” Notice that Jesus’ resurrection is alternatively spoken of as occurring “*after* three days” (Matt 27:63; Mark 8:31) and also “*on the third day*” (Matt 20:19; Mark 9:31).

⁶⁵ The author of 2 Chr 36:21 explicitly applies this reasoning to explain the length of the Babylonian captivity.

⁶⁶ Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* 383–86.

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

⁶⁸ Ben Zion Wacholder, “The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles During the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period,” *HUCA* 44 (1973) 153–96. A complete table from 519 BC to AD 441 is given on pages 185–96.

In any case, if the traditional scheme for the location of the sabbatical cycles is followed instead of Wacholder's, the 69th cycle shifts by only one year, to AD 27–34, which still fits equally well. Likewise an error by a year or two on either end—for Artaxerxes's 20th 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.

3. *Probabilities.* How unusual are these predictions? Some estimates of the odds for these fulfillments 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? The founder of the world's largest religion must belong to some people group. 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 have 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" (Isa 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 fulfillment, 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.

4. *Other messianic prophecies.* There are other impressive messianic prophecies. The prediction of the suffering servant in Isa 52:13–53:12 comes

to mind.⁶⁹ 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 world view-dependent or still future. But what is clear is that they are central to the NT 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 AD, or even in any century? Surely the odds for this are far smaller than one in a thousand. And they raise an interesting question not often dealt within 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 future generations and to the ends of the earth, so that (9) 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' 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 even such details? One in a thousand? One in a million? We opt for the first of these as a conservative estimate.

5. *Discussion.* The cumulative odds of all of these prophecies about the coming Messiah being fulfilled are 1:120,000, counting only the first two prophecies as being first-tier evidence, as we did in our *Philosophia Christi* paper. Taking the selected predictions in Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 as first-

⁶⁹ See the detailed discussions in Aston and MacRae: Aston, "Work of Messiah" 119–27; MacRae, *Gospel of Isaiah* 129–50.

tier also, each of these provides an additional 1:1000, with cumulative odds of 1:120 billion. Giving the Gospel writers even modest credence as reliable eye-witness historians would serve to increase the odds enormously beyond this.

To summarize the preceding three sections, the cumulative odds for the empirically verified fulfillments that have been surveyed here concerning Israel, her neighbors, and the Messiah are about 1:10¹⁸ (ignoring Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22), or about 1:10²⁴ including them. 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 1:10¹⁰ to 1:10³⁰). The cumulative evidence is staggering and it counts across world views.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This paper's topic is located in a broader context currently receiving tremendous interest and attention. This broader issue is whether science, or empirical data more generally, can speak to world view issues. Most pointedly, can science join philosophy and theology in being among the disciplines that can speak forcefully to the question regarding God's existence? Does science get a vote? Precisely this question about the domain and reach of scientific and empirical inquiries is foremost in many of the best-selling books on science.⁷⁰ Accordingly, it is important to recognize that this paper's focused question, "Do the data support the Bible's claim of miraculously accurate prophecies given by God?" is a species of the broader question, "Can empirical data support world view conclusions such as whether God exists?"

Furthermore, the pursuit of empirical data having world view import is naturally extended from scientific inquiry as such to historical inquiry, as in the present study. The essential matters are that the evidence be empirical and public, so as to be admissible, and that the evidence bear differentially on the credibilities of competing world view hypotheses, so as to be relevant. But whether empirical evidence resides in the domain of science or history is inconsequential, since this merely reflects conventions about how human knowledge is packaged into various disciplines. Elsewhere we have argued that "Bible prophecy is a particularly valuable test of Christian theism and competing world views because it carries great evidential weight, counts across diverse world views, and conveys substantial theological content" and that "this combination of strengths is rare."⁷¹ Likewise Earman claims that some religious beliefs can achieve the same evidence-driven objectivity and

⁷⁰ E.g. John Horgan, *Rational Mysticism: Dispatches from the Border Between Science and Spirituality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003). See also the book review in the 29 November 2002 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* B7-B9.

⁷¹ Hugh G. Gauch, Jr., John A. Bloom and Robert C. Newman, "Public Theology and Scientific Method: Formulating Reasons That Count Across Worldviews," *Philosophia Christi* 4 (2002) 87.

consensus as can scientific and everyday beliefs, and that to think otherwise is to have a defective epistemology that sadly lacks responsiveness to reality.⁷²

The most valuable data for public theology satisfy three criteria. They carry great evidential weight, they count across diverse world views, 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 our paper in *Philosophia Christi*). 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 1:200,000, for other nations 1:38,000,000, and for the Messiah 1:120,000 (or 1:120 billion) yielding total odds of about 1:10¹⁸ (or 10²⁴). 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.”⁷³

Second, the evidence of fulfilled Bible prophecy counts across world views 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).⁷⁴

⁷² John Earman, *Hume’s Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 72, 4.

⁷³ A. J. Krailsheimer, ed., *Pascal’s Pensées* (New York: Penguin, 1995) 100; also see pp. 99–105.

⁷⁴ Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* 13. Several additional insights may be gleaned from Payne. He puts prophecy in perspective as being one of three kinds of revelation. “Israel possessed

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, 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.⁷⁵

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.

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” (p. 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” (p. 14). “[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” (p. 13). “Some, if not most [prophecies], were aids to moral living. Both the promises of divine blessing and the threats of impending judgment constituted urgent motivations to ethical conduct” (p. 14). Fulfilled prophecies authenticated real prophets (Jer 28:9, Ezek 33:33), and failed prophecies exposed false prophets (Deut 18:22). Bible prophecy is instructive, not only for the prophets’ contemporaries, but also for all generations (2 Pet 3:11, Rev 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” (p. 15).

⁷⁵ Additional messianic prophecies not examined here point to the Messiah’s pre-existence and deity (Mic 5:2; Isa 9:6–7; John 1:1–3; Col 1:15–17; Heb 1:1–4), his (still future) second coming (Zech 12:10; 14:3–5; Dan 7:13–14; Matt 24:3–44; Acts 1:10–11; 1 Thess 4:13–18; 2 Thess 2:1–12; Rev 19:11–21), his prime role in the judgment of humanity (Isa 9:7; 11:1–5; 42:3–4; 49:1–7; 50:7–11; Dan 7:13–14, 18, 26–27; Matt 25:31–46; John 5:19–27; Rev 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 (Isa 50:10–11; 66:1–24; Dan 12:1–4; Matt 25:34–36; John 5:28–29; Rev 20:12–15; 22:14–15).

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 the most significant questions of philosophy and theology, which more generally is also one of life's big questions, is: Does God exist, and if so, just what God is this? To answer this question, specifically within a public forum that obtains answers that are disentangled from world view presuppositions and hence count across world views, the data on fulfilled prophecy from the Bible are richly informative.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ 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.