

How Was Christ's First Coming Foretold?

Matthew 1:18-23

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Prologue:

Before we read today's text, let me draw your attention to what comes before verse 18. The New Testament begins with the following words, "The historical record of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). Ours is a historical faith. Our boast is that God is at work in history. That, quite frankly, is the world's only hope.

Now notice that beginning with Abraham, Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy through the centuries right down to Joseph, his adopted, legal father. His prologue ends like this: "So all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations; and from David until the exile to Babylon, 14 generations; and from the exile to Babylon *until the Messiah*, 14 generations" (Matt. 1:17).

By listing all these names Matthew is saying, "Everything that happened in the Old Testament was aimed at one goal, bringing forth Jesus of Nazareth as God's long-promised Messiah (anointed one), the Saviour of the world. As important as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, King Solomon or anyone else in the list might have been, their primary purpose was to carry forward the Messianic line until Jesus could be born. In other words, according to Matthew the Old Testament is not so much Jewish history as it is Jesus' pre-history.

Why would Matthew need to make this point? Because when he wrote his gospel, the entire power structure of the world was dedicated to denying it. The Jewish High Priest, the Sanhedrin Court, almost all the rabbis and scribes had declared, "Jesus of Nazareth is not the Messiah! Crucify Him." The Roman government, represented by Pontius Pilate, agreed, and Jesus was crucified.

Even today it seems that a large contingent of so-called Christian scholarship is dedicated to proving that Jesus was not prophesied in the Old Testament, or at least not nearly so well prophesied as our forefathers were led to believe. To quote Shakespeare, "A pox on [those peoples'] houses. If you are a Christian you believe the New Testament, and if you believe the New Testament then you must believe that the coming of Jesus the Messiah, not just a Messiah, but Jesus the Messiah, is prophesied on almost every page of the Old Testament.

Today's text

Matthew 1:18 The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. 19 So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

20 But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a

dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”

22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name Him Immanuel, which is translated “God is with us.”

One little side road

In a moment we will focus our attention on verses 22-23. But before we get there, take a moment to look at verse 18 and notice how it begins, “The birth of Jesus Christ.” What’s interesting is, Matthew doesn’t say “birth.” In the original language he says “genesis,” the beginning. As one commentator puts it, “the evangelist is about to describe, not the genesis of the heaven and the earth, but the [earthly] genesis of Him who made the heaven and the earth, and who will yet make a new heaven and a new earth” (Morison).

This is amazing. In one word (genesis instead of birth) Matthew speaks to the same theme John presented with greater detail in . . .

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. 4 Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. 5 That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it.

There it is. John gives us more detail in his prologue, but Matthew captures all of it by referring to Jesus’ conception in Mary’s womb as a genesis, a new creation. You would not believe how many unbelieving scholars have tried to send Matthew to war against John, but if you are truly ready to see, these two men agree on everything that matters.

What the prophets said

Look with me again at Matt. 1:22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name Him Immanuel, which is translated “God is with us.”

We’ll focus on the virgin birth next week, but today let’s pay close attention to the announcement of prophecy fulfilled. As you read through Matthew you will find that again and again he links Jesus (what He said, what He did, and what was done to Him) to hints, allegations and direct prophecies in the Old Testament. Let me give you a partial listing.

Biblical prophecies of Christ’s first coming

Prophecy	Prophecy Given	Prophecy Fulfilled
The Messiah would be the seed of the woman	Genesis 3:15	Matt. 1:20; Gal. 4:4

He would be born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matt. 1:18,24,25
He would be the Son of God	Psalms 2:7	Matt. 3:17
He would be of the Seed of Abraham	Genesis 22:18	Matt. 1:1; Gal. 3:16
He would be a descendant of Isaac	Genesis 21:12	Luke 3:23,24
He would be a descendant of Jacob	Numbers 24:17	Luke 3:23,34
He would be of the tribe of Judah	Genesis 49:10 (also Micah 5:2)	Luke 3:23,33
He would be of the family line of Jesse	Isaiah 11:1	Luke 3:23,32 (also Matt. 1:6)
He would be of the house of David	Jeremiah 23:5	Luke 3:23,31
He would be born at Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matt. 2:1; Luke 2:1ff
He would be presented with Gifts	Ps. 72:10	Matt. 2:1, 11
Herod would kill infants to try to kill Jesus	Jeremiah 31:10	Matt. 2:16

This is not an exhaustive list of the Biblical prophecies concerning Jesus' birth and first coming, nevertheless there are a couple of things that need to be noted.

1. To get 12 predictions right is an absolute miracle. But to compound that miracle, some of these prophecies were uttered thousands of years before they came true. Even Micah's statement that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem was 700 years old when it proved true. Fulfilled prophecy is one of the strongest proofs that the Bible is a divine book.
2. These prophecies are specific, made by Someone who had to be able to (1) know exactly what would happen hundreds or thousands of years in the future, and (2) speak with the utter assurance that no contingency would arise to falsify what He had said.

Think of how many ways things could have gone wrong. What if David had lost his fight with Goliath? The whole Messianic project would have been over. What if Caesar Augustus decided not to register everyone in their home town? Jesus would have been born in Nazareth, not in Bethlehem and the prophecy of Micah would have been stricken from the Old Testament. What if Joseph decided he wanted nothing to do with pregnant Mary even after the angel instructed him? Jesus would have lost His legal claim to the throne of David.

But of course, none of that happened, because the same God who inspired the prophets also reigns as sovereign over the affairs of men. He prophecies and He prevails. He is never surprised. Nothing ever happens that does not further His purposes, short-term and long. Bottom line? Fulfilled prophecy is the strongest proof that "there is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew

them how we will” (Hamlet, Wm. Shakespeare). Fulfilled prophecy is as strong as any proof we have that there is a God and that He is sovereign over the affairs of men.

In fact, this is God’s very boast!

Isaiah 44:6 This is what the Lord says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies: “I am the First and the Last; there is no other God. 7 Who is like me? Let him step forward and prove to you his power. Let him do as I have done since ancient times when I established a people and explained its future. 8 Do not tremble; do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim my purposes for you long ago? You are my witnesses—is there any other God? No! There is no other Rock—not one!” (NLT)

Christ’s First Coming was Foretold as God with us

Look with me at one more idea from today’s text.

Matt. 1:22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet (Isaiah 7:14): 23 See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name Him Immanuel, which is [Hebrew for] “God is with us.”

The funny thing is, the Jews read that line in Isaiah—“God is with us”—for 700 years and misunderstood it every time. To them it meant the same thing you mean after surviving a car wreck with no injuries and you say, “God was with me.” Or you prayed for help before tackling a difficult assignment, and after its successful completion you say, “God was with me.” That’s how the Jews interpreted that prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. They wanted God to be with them as the unseen power who gave them victory over their enemies, who sent rain to water their crops, who blessed their wives with successful childbirth, and who enabled them to make good business deals and grow rich.

But God had so much more in mind than that, as the Jews would have seen if only they had studied Isaiah with the right heart.

1. In the Messiah God is with us in person. (Isaiah 7:14) The point of Christmas!
2. In the Messiah God is with us as Lord and King. (Isaiah 9:6)
3. In the Messiah God is with us as the Righteous Judge. (Isaiah 11:2-5)
4. In the Messiah God is with us as our champion to destroy death for all the peoples of the world. (Isaiah 25:7-8)
5. In the Messiah God is with us as our sin-bearer and Saviour. (Isaiah 53:5-6) The point of Easter!

Isaiah 53:4 Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! 5 But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. 6 All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all. (NLT)

6. In the Messiah God is with us as our husband. (Isaiah 54:5-10)
7. In the Messiah God is with us to bring us to our eternal home. (Isaiah 65:17-25)

Conclusion: All these things are summed up in that simple phrase “God with us!” Everything we’ve seen today was part of the foretelling of the coming of Messiah Jesus. It’s what the world is really all about! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ while you can!