

60. Darkness over the Land

PROPHECY

"And it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord GOD, "That I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight."
—Amos 8:9

Because the Jews reckoned twelve hours from sunrise to sunset, it would make the sixth hour near noon and the ninth hour about three o'clock.

61. Buried in a Rich Man's Tomb

PROPHECY

"And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death."
—Isaiah 53:9

4A. CONFIRMATION OF JESUS AS THE MESSIAH, THROUGH FULFILLED PROPHECIES**1B. Objection: Fulfilled Prophecy in Jesus Was Deliberately Engineered by Him**

In *The Passover Plot*, radical New Testament scholar H. J. Schonfield proposes that Jesus was an innocent messianic pretender who connived to "fulfill" prophecy in order to substantiate His claims. (Schonfield, H.J., 35–38)

First of all, this was contrary to Jesus' honest character as noted above. It assumes He was one of the greatest deceivers of all time. It presupposes that He was not even a good person, to say nothing of the perfect man the Gospels affirm Him to be. There are several lines of evidence that combine to demonstrate that this is a completely implausible thesis.

Second, there is no way Jesus could have

FULFILLMENT

"Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land."
—Matthew 27:45

FULFILLMENT

"There came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph. . . and [he] asked for the body of Jesus. . . . When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb."
—Matthew 27:57–60

controlled many events necessary for the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. For example, He had no control over where He would be born (Mic. 5:2), how He would be born of a virgin (Is. 7:14), when He would die (Dan. 9:25), what tribe (Gen. 49:10) and lineage He would be from (2 Sam. 7:12), or other facts about His life that have corresponded to prophecy.

Third, there is no way short of being supernatural that Jesus could have manipulated the events and people in His life to respond in exactly the way necessary for it to appear that He was fulfilling all these prophecies, including John's heralding Him (Matt. 3), His accuser's reactions (Matt. 27:12), how the soldiers cast lots for His garments (John 19:23, 24), and how they would pierce His side with a spear (John 19:34).

Indeed even Schonfield admits that the plot failed when the Romans actually pierced Christ. The fact is that anyone with

all this power would have to be divine—the very thing the Passover hypothesis attempts to avoid. In short, it takes a bigger miracle to believe the *Passover Plot* than to accept these prophecies as supernatural. (Geisler, BECA, 585)

Answer: The above objection might seem plausible until we realize that many of the prophecies concerning the Messiah were totally beyond the human control of Jesus:

1. Place of birth (Mic. 5:2)
2. Time of birth (Dan. 9:25; Gen. 49:10)
3. Manner of birth (Is. 7:14)
4. Betrayal
5. Manner of death (Ps. 22:16)
6. People's reactions (mocking, spitting, staring, etc.)
7. Piercing
8. Burial

2B. Objection: Fulfilled Prophecy in Jesus Was Coincidental—an Accident

"Why, you could find some of these prophecies fulfilled in the deaths of Kennedy, King, Nasser, and other great figures," replies the critic.

Answer: Yes, one could possibly find one or two prophecies fulfilled in the lives of other men, but not all sixty-one major prophecies! In fact, for years, if you could have found someone other than Jesus, living or dead, who fulfilled half of the predictions concerning Messiah, as listed in *Messiah in Both Testaments* by Fred John Meldau, the Christian Victory Publishing Company of Denver offered to give you a one-thousand-dollar reward. There are a lot of men in the universities who could have used this extra cash!

H. Harold Hartzler, of the American Scientific Affiliation, Goshen College, in the foreword of Peter Stoner's book writes: "The manuscript for *Science Speaks* has been carefully reviewed by a committee of the American Scientific Affiliation members and by

the Executive Council of the same group and has been found, in general, to be dependable and accurate in regard to the scientific material presented. The mathematical analysis included is based upon principles of probability which are thoroughly sound and Professor Stoner has applied these principles in a proper and convincing way." (Hartzler, "F," as cited in Stoner, SS)

The following probabilities are taken from Stoner in *Science Speaks* to show that coincidence is ruled out by the science of probability. Stoner says that by using the modern science of probability in reference to eight prophecies (1.—No. 10; 2.—No. 22; 3.—No. 27; 4.—Nos. 33 & 44; 5.—No. 34; 6.—Nos. 35 & 36; 7.—No. 39; 8.—Nos. 44 & 45 [crucified]),

We find that the chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10^{17} [(10 to the 17th power). That would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (17 zeros after the one). In order to help us comprehend this staggering probability, Stoner illustrates it by supposing that] we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote them according to their own wisdom.

Now these prophecies were either given by inspiration of God or the prophets just wrote them as they thought they should be. In such a case the prophets had just one chance in 10^{17} of having them come true in any man, but they all came true in Christ. This means that the fulfillment of these eight prophecies alone

proves that God inspired the writing of those prophecies to a definiteness which lacks only one chance in 10^{17} of being absolute. (Stoner, SS, 100-107)

Stoner considers forty-eight prophecies and reports,

We find the chance that any one man fulfilled all 48 prophecies to be 1 in 10^{157} . This is really a large number and it represents an extremely small chance. Let us try to visualize it. The silver dollar, which we have been using, is entirely too large. We must select a smaller object. The electron is about as small an object as we know of. It is so small that it will take 2.5 times 10^{15} of them laid side by side to make a line, single file, one inch long. If we were going to count the electrons in this line one inch long, and counted 250 each minute, and if we counted day and night, it would take us 19,000,000 years to count just the one-inch line of electrons. If we had a cubic inch of these electrons and we tried to count them it would take us, counting steadily 250 each minute, 19,000,000 times 19,000,000 times 19,000,000 years or 6.9×10^{21} years.

With this introduction, let us go back to our chance of 1 in 10^{157} . Let us suppose that

The highly reputed "predictions" of Nostradamus were not that amazing at all. Contrary to popular belief, he never predicted either the place or the year of a great California earthquake. Most of his "famous" predictions, such as the rise of Hitler, were vague. As other psychics, he was frequently wrong, a false prophet by biblical standards.

—GEISLER, BECA, 615

we are taking this number of electrons, marking one, and thoroughly stirring it into the whole mass, then blindfolding a man and letting him try to find the right one. What chance has he of finding the right one? What

kind of a pile will this number of electrons make? They make an inconceivably large volume. (Stoner, SS, 109, 110)

Such is the chance of any individual fulfilling forty-eight prophecies.

3B. Objection: Psychics Have Made Predictions Like the Bible's

Contemporary critics of biblical prophecy nominate psychic predictions for equality with Scripture. There is another quantum leap between every psychic and the unerring prophets of Scripture (see *Miracle and Magic*). Indeed, one test of a prophet was whether they ever uttered predictions that did not come to pass (Deut. 18:22). Those whose prophecies failed were stoned (18:20)—a practice that no doubt gave pause to any who were not absolutely sure their messages were from God. Amid hundreds of prophecies, biblical prophets are not known to have made a single error. A study of prophecies made by psychics in 1975 and observed until 1981 showed that of the seventy-two predictions, only six were fulfilled in any way. Two of these were vague and two others were hardly surprising—the United States and Russia would remain leading powers and there would be no world wars. *The People's Almanac* (1976) did a study of the predictions of twenty-five top psychics. The results: Of the total seventy-two predictions, sixty-six (92 percent) were totally wrong. (Kole, MM, 69) An accuracy rate around 8 percent could easily be explained by chance and general knowledge of circumstances. In 1993 the psychics missed every major unexpected news story, including Michael Jordan's retirement, the Midwest flooding, and the Israel-PLO peace treaty. Among their false prophecies were the prediction that the Queen of England would become a nun, and that Kathy Lee Gifford