

3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth

Paul Rutherford



Paul Rutherford suggests using three fulfilled biblical prophecies as an apologetic for biblical truth: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide surrounding His birth.

Pine scent inside my home, the quick defensive tightening of my skin as I walk outside into the cold brisk air, and then the reflexive opposite - the slow relaxation of my whole body as I stand in front of a fire warming myself.

These experiences during the holidays warm my heart.



As we look toward Christmas and hear the nativity story this season, I want to share with you one conversation starter I use to defend my faith.

Let me share it with you. It's rather simple. It's easy to remember because it comes entirely out of Matthew's second chapter. It's not long and involved either—just three points.

Skeptics ridicule the Bible for its many supposed "errors," "holes," and

“inconsistencies.” They conclude that it’s unreliable. Sharing this quick three-point apologetic can assure them that the Bible is reliable and can be trusted.

If the Bible makes three prophecies and then records the fulfillments of those prophecies, don’t you think that makes the book at least a little bit credible? That’s what you can do citing just the Christmas story from Matthew 2.

You might be tempted to dismiss this, saying it doesn’t matter. But here’s why the reliability of Scripture matters. IF Scripture can be trusted, AND what it is says is true, then some of the recorded teachings of Jesus could radically alter your life.

In Matthew 10:39 Jesus said, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Or Luke 14:27, “Whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.”

Does that mean the disciple of Jesus has to lose his life?! In a sense, yes.

How’s that for radical?! If the Bible is reliable, then that means your life is at stake. Literally. That’s not exaggeration: your physical life and your spiritual life. Both.

So there’s a lot at stake then, if what the Bible says is true. Let’s take a look, then, shall we?

Matthew’s account of the Christmas story records three distinct fulfillments of prophecy: Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide surrounding His birth. We’ll consider these one at a time.

Jesus Born in Bethlehem

Your life hangs in the balance of the Bible’s reliability. That’s why this discussion matters—whether or not the Bible is reliable. The Christmas story from Matthew 2 offers strong evidence that the Bible is true.

Today we get into the first of three instances in the Christmas story that point to the miraculous fulfillment of prophecy strictly surrounding Jesus' birth—namely the location of His birth, Bethlehem.

The gospel writer, Matthew, begins chapter two telling the story of the Magi—the fabled wise men from the East who came to worship the King of the Jews. They arrive in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital city, expecting to find the baby King. They are disappointed, but redirected to Bethlehem by King Herod's chief priests. Why? Because those priests had read the prophet Micah who foretold the Messiah, the coming King, would come out of Bethlehem.

In Matthew 2:6, the writer is quoting the prophet Micah 5:2.

You may have known Jesus was born in Bethlehem. That's a pretty widely known fact, which is also why it's a great place to start this conversation to make a case for the Bible's reliability. It might sound like this.

"You know Jesus was born in Bethlehem, right?" you could begin. "Well, did you know that was prophesied hundreds of years prior?" Don't worry about trying to remember the citation. Just focus on it being fulfilled prophecy. You can always look up the reference later if you want to. If you want extra credit, go for the prophet's name, Micah.

Some skeptics may grant that Jesus indeed fulfilled prophecy, but that he did so intentionally. That is, skeptics basically charge Jesus with reading the Hebrew prophets, and then deliberately fulfilling as many as he possibly could in order to win favor, influence, and gain a following.

However, this is difficult to achieve when you haven't been born yet! How could he possibly have deliberately fulfilled anything when he wasn't deliberating anything at all? He wasn't conscious, and didn't even exist yet in the flesh.

So no, Jesus could not have fulfilled this prophecy by Himself in order to deceive

and manipulate. What are the chances Jesus' birthplace would fulfill prophecy? Not likely!

Jesus' Flight to Egypt

The second fulfillment of prophecy recorded in Matthew 2 (the Christmas story), is Jesus' flight to Egypt. Practically overnight Jesus' father, Joseph, moves his family out of the country—out of Israel and into Egypt. Here's the text. Matthew 2:14-15.

“So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

International travel back then was not what it is today. Modern conveniences ease travel today and increase comfort, yet it still remains difficult for us. Joseph and Mary, however, risked their very lives in order to relocate internationally. This effort was not undertaken lightly. Joseph was, after all, under orders from an angel.

Question: what do you think are the chances an ancient near-eastern middle-class laborer would embark upon world travel with only a moment's notice? He risked the life of his fiancée. He risked the life of his (adoptive) child, not to mention his own. This kind of journey was highly unusual. So it seems unlikely this scenario would have played out under other circumstances—that it was mere coincidence to fulfill prophecy.

When compared to non-biblical prophecy, this one seems awfully specific. It names the country out of which he is called—Egypt—not something vague like “foreign country.” No. The prophet Hosea mentions Egypt specifically in chapter 11:1. Further it mentions the gender of the child—a male child, a son.

The specificity of the prophecy and the unlikely nature of the event occurring on its own both point to divine orchestration. This was no accident. The fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus' birth make the Bible seem a lot more reliable.

Your life is in the balance of the Bible's reliability. The teachings recorded in this book can save your life. The bigger question is, will you believe them? Do you want to be saved? Do you believe Jesus is Lord and accept His sacrifice on the cross to save you from sin? (If so, please email me at paul@probe.org.) I want to hear from you.

Jesus, Genocide Survivor

Three fulfilled prophecies recorded by Matthew chapter two—in the Christmas story—underscore the reliability of this controversial ancient text. The Christmas story is evidence that the Bible is true.

Today we consider the third prophecy Jesus' birth story fulfills: namely, that there would be a genocide killing babies. Here's the text from Matthew 2:16-18.

“Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.’”

The gospel writer, Matthew, is quoting a prophecy of Jeremiah. To decode this passage, first keep in mind that Rachel, Jacob's wife, was mother to Israel's twelve tribes, and here she is a kind of symbolic mother for all of Israel. The second point to note is that Ramah is located in Bethlehem.

With that in mind, the prophecy foretells of Israel's mothers crying in Bethlehem,

mourning the loss of their children. The author draws our attention to the amazing accuracy of this prophecy. Not only does he get right the who and the what—the moms and their weeping because of the lost babies, but he also correctly prophesies the small village! Incredible.

What are the chances Jesus would fulfill this prophecy this specifically? And as we discussed before, if Jesus were no more than a charlatan attempting to self-fulfill these prophecies, how could a man orchestrate something as large-scale as the death of all the baby boys in a village? Plus the Bible records that was Herod's idea. And remember, Herod didn't want Jesus around. Herod was attempting to eliminate potential competition for his throne.

The genocide ordered by the Jewish king, an event that is part of the Christmas story of Jesus' birth, fulfills prophecy. In so doing it shows the Bible is reliable. That's a big deal because the Bible records the story of a very important man—one whom you need to know: Jesus.

Conclusion

We've been discussing how the Christmas story indicates the Bible is true. We've done that by considering three instances recorded in Matthew 2 that fulfill Old Testament prophecy.

First, the prophet Micah prophesied the coming Ruler would come out of Bethlehem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Matthew 2:1 records that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Second, the prophet Hosea prophesied that the Messiah would be called out of Egypt. Jesus' father Joseph moved infant Jesus to Egypt to flee the coming baby genocide. When it was safe, Joseph was instructed in a dream to return. So Jesus was called out of Egypt. (Matthew 2:14)

Then thirdly, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied all the mothers in Bethlehem

would mourn the loss of their children. Matthew 2:16 records that after King Herod learns the news of Jesus' birth, he orders all infant boys in Bethlehem killed.

What are the chances of one man fulfilling ALL of those prophecies? Not likely! If you want more, read Josh McDowell's book *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. He records 61 prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. In it he quotes professor Peter Stoner who calculated the probability of Jesus fulfilling just eight prophecies. He illustrates the likelihood this way. Cover the state of Texas in two feet of silver dollars. Mark just one silver dollar. Now choose one silver dollar at random from anywhere in the state. The chances of picking up the marked silver dollar on the first try are the same as Jesus fulfilling just eight Old Testament prophecies. Not happening!

We have good evidence that what the Bible records is accurate. It will stand up to criticism that Jesus attempted to fulfill prophecy on his own, to position himself as a teacher with authority, influence, or to gain a following. But the fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy we discussed cannot be intentionally self-fulfilled. They either occurred before He was born, or were entirely out of His control.

Do you now believe in Jesus because you listened to this? Email me. I'd love to hear from you (paul@probe.org). Are you already His disciple? God has a unique purpose for your life, only you can fulfill. You are his ambassador. Share the good news. Your life is not the only one at stake. Your neighbor's is too. Have you shared with him or her yet? Take your next step of faithfulness today, whatever that is. I am praying you do.

You now have a great conversation starter to help you get there. The Christmas story is tremendous evidence for biblical truth.