

## Finding Truth in Religion: The role of Prophecy

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"How do you know that you are right?" A scientist expects to be asked a question like this; to answer it, a good researcher will give a presentation of his experimental data and a justification of his theoretical assumptions. Finally he will assert: "My conclusion fits all of the data that I have been able to obtain." Emotions, however, have no place in scientific endeavor. Many a scientist has felt absolutely convinced that his theory and experimental data made perfect sense, only to find that someone else's results blew his beautiful theory right out of the water.

Is such a "hard-nose" approach unrealistic? It is certainly obvious that in most areas of life one must act on the basis of the facts and not trust in our emotions. Driving a car is one situation which many people are familiar with: We stop at intersections when the lights are red, not because we feel like it, but because if we don't the odds are that we will be hit by another car or be stopped by another red light, this time accompanied by a siren.

The more important the decision is, the more important it is to look for facts to base the decision on. A doctor does not judge the drugs he prescribes on the basis of their color and flavor, but rather on the basis of their effectiveness and safety. When people set out to buy a house, they tend to ask if the place has termites, if the roof leaks, whether the basement floods out every spring, and how nice the neighborhood is. However, all Realtors know that some people are foolish and will select a particular house because they like its' color. Thus we find that in the real world, one of the wisest things that we can do is to ask ourselves, "how can I be sure that this is right?" In this way we will never be tricked by our emotions into doing something foolish.

Assuming that by 'religion' we mean any philosophy or system of belief that purports to tell us what will happen to us after we die, certainly it is important to ask this same question of the various religions, for what if our existence after we die is dependent upon decisions which we make while we are alive? But religion seems to be one area where, "How do you know that you're right?" is never asked; or if it is, the answer is: "Because I just know that its' true", or, "I prayed and asked God to show me if it was true, and he burned its' truth into my heart" To the thinking person, this only begs the question, for emotions deceive.

Another problem with religions is that they all differ and even conflict when they tell you what you must do in order to come through death in good shape. For example, Mormons will say that you must be baptized in one of their special ceremonies in order to 'make it', while Christians argue that you can only be saved by trusting in Christ's death on the cross to be a total and sole payment for your sins - baptism and the like are symbols, but not essentials. Who is right? In science, when people come up with differing theories, there is an immediate appeal to the physical, reproducible, experimental data to verify their claims; however, most religions appeal to emotional

(err, "spiritual") experiences in order to verify their claims.  
An example? In the flyleaf of the Book of Mormon, we find written:

"And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God . . . if these things be not true, and . . . he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost."

Even more interesting, Mormons and other groups promise that you can have the same experience as they have had. Of course, everybody knows that if you set up your experiment in exactly the same way as the previous person, you can usually duplicate their results. *Duplication proves consistency, but not truth.*

So, while feelings may be an adequate system of judgment for use in deciding what clothes we are going to wear when we get up in the morning, emotions certainly should have no place in our search for truth in religion. The questions to ask are: How do they know that they are right? Is their basis something testable, or am I called on to have "blind faith", or worse, am I told to trust in some emotional experience I have? Are these flimsy things the only assurance they can offer to prove to me that if I believe what they say, then I will be in good shape after I die?

Certainly the best test for various religions would be to believe in them, die, and come back again if it did not work and try another. However, we do not have any proof that people can do this (other than some peoples' experiences again), so it may be wise to start out with those religions which claim that a person has only one chance in this one life to make the right decision.

Of these, let's begin by looking at the one religion which claims to have the most severe consequences for not believing it when we die: Biblical Christianity. How are we to know that the claims of the Bible, as opposed to those religious books from any other culture, are to be taken as true? Does the Bible ask us to trust in our experience, like the others? Consider:

"Present your case," says the LORD. "Set forth your arguments," says Jacob's King. "Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so that we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear.

"Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come - yes, let him foretell what will come. Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."

Isaiah 41:21-24, 44:7-8

It appears then, that the God of the Bible is calling for a test. That test is to "Declare to us the things to come, so that we may know that you are gods." From the sounds of this, it does not appear that the God of the Bible is asking us to trust in him on the basis of some kind of blind faith or emotional experience. The logical thing to do then, is to reverse this challenge and ask, if the God of the Bible can predict the future Himself? And are there any other religions which make a similar claim and then back it?"

#### DEFINITION:

Before proceeding, we should define what we mean by "predict the future". Therefore we ask: "What are reasonable criteria that we would want to see met before we would admit that someone actually predicted the future?"

1. The prediction must be clear enough to recognize that it has occurred.

By this we mean that it cannot be vague or have double-talk in it so that no matter what happens, it would be "fulfilled."

2. The prediction must be known to have been made before it is fulfilled.

Otherwise, how could it be called a prediction?

3. A prediction should not be influenced by the predictor himself, or by his zealous band of followers.

Thus statements like, "I'm going to the grocery store tomorrow," cannot be considered as true predictions.

4. A prediction must be more than a good guess.

Either the fulfillment should be sufficiently remote so that it could not be a good guess (i.e., predicting the next president versus predicting who will be president a hundred years from now); or sufficiently detailed so that it could not have been guessed (the next president being a Republican versus him winning by 2,300,540 votes over the opponent).

To clarify our terminology, we will call any prediction that meets all of the above requirements a "prophecy".

Obviously, prophecies are extremely difficult to make: ask any weatherman. It seems that more often than not, one will be listening to the radio and find them predicting a fine sunny afternoon while it is actually raining outside. Football announcers are also particularly good at "putting their foot in their mouth" when they try to guess which team will win.

#### ASSORTED HOAXES:

From time to time in history, various religious groups have claimed to have a special ability to predict the future; however with some study, one finds that their "prophecies" fail the above criteria.

1. The ancient Greeks are famous for their vague prophecy: One of the most tragic cases concerns Cresus, King of Lydia, who went to the Oracle of Delphi to inquire about his planned attack on Cyrus, King of Persia. The 'prophetess' there informed him, "If you march out and attack Cyrus, a great empire will be destroyed." Naturally, Cresus was greatly encouraged, and went out to attack Cyrus, and indeed a great empire was destroyed - Cresus'

2. The Mormons claim to have some fantastic fulfilled prophecies as well. In the flyleaf of the Book of Mormon we read:

"America's history foretold 2500 years ago - 1st Nephi, Chapter 15, page 22.  
A - Columbus, Verse 12  
B - Fate of the Indians, Verse 14  
C - The Puritans, Verse 16  
D - The Revolutionary War, Verses 17 - 19  
E - The Bible, Verses 23 - 29."

These would truly be incredible prophecies but for one problem: the earliest date for any known tangible manuscript of the Book of Mormon is 1823. Thus the claim to be 2500 years old is only that - a claim, which may be accepted on blind faith.

Are there any other Mormon prophecies? Yes, but many of them have not come true. One most recent example has to do with the acceptance of Black people into the Mormon priesthood. Brigham Young, one of the founders of Mormonism, taught that blacks "never can hold the Priesthood or share in it until all the other descendants of Adam [whites] have received the promises and enjoyed the blessings of the Priesthood. . . . Until the last ones of the residue of Adam's children [whites] are brought up to that favorable position, the children of Cain [blacks] cannot receive the first ordinances of the Priesthood." (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 7, pp. 290-291). However, on June 9th, 1978 the Mormon church issued a new revelation that blacks would now be allowed to hold the priesthood. Such an adjustment of an "inspired" prophetic utterance given by one of their great prophets, as commendable as the final result may be, still establishes him as a false prophet. [For more examples and information contact the Utah Lighthouse Ministry, Box 1884, Salt Lake City, Utah 84110.]

3. It should be noted that there are some people today who appear to give accurate prophecies, the most famous example being Jeanne Dixon, who predicted Kennedy's assassination. However, when one studies the various predictions she has made over the years, one finds that many of them have not come true at all. Does this mean that Jeanne is a 40% prophet, or that we can trust what she says 40% of the time?

At this point, the God of the Bible makes an important comment:

"But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him." Deuteronomy 18:20-22

It appears then, that the God of the Bible demands perfection from those who claim to be his prophets: If anyone who claimed to be a prophet ever made a mistake in one of his predictions, he was to be killed. Certainly this additional test narrows down the field of contestants quite a bit: we do not need to be afraid of, nor should we trust in, any prophet who has clearly made mistakes.

4. Are there any other religions which claim to give prophecy? The Koran is one of many popular religious books which does not try:

Q? "Why has no sign been given to him (Mohammed) by his Lord?"

Ans: "Signs are in the hands of Allah; my mission is only to give plain warning. Is it not enough for them that we have revealed to you this book for their instruction?"

The Koran, Sura 29 ("The Spider") 50/49

Perhaps it should be noted that a prophecy of a last Judgment is given; however, by that time it might be too late to change teams. So, it looks like the god of the Koran does not want his authority challenged by any evidence which can be tested today. Now that we have a general idea of what to look for, we should investigate the Biblical prophecies themselves.

#### PROPHECIES FROM THE BIBLE.

From reading in the Old Testament, we find that all the writers of the Old Testament books were regarded as true prophets. Of course, we cannot check the predictions which proved this claim to their ancient audiences, because we have no proof today that their "short-range" predictions occurred before the event took place. However, we can ask if they made any "long-range" predictions: ones which were obviously fulfilled some time after the prophecy was given, say, after the time of Christ.

After finding that prophecies in the Koran and Book of Mormon are rare or non-existent, it might seem strange to assert that there are so many long-range prophecies in the Bible that this section would turn into a book if we covered them all. However, you might regard it as rather inconclusive evidence if all of them could be covered in one short paper. Hence, we will consider some examples: The Bible and the history books are open to all.

## 1. MEMPHIS.

This was the great capital city of ancient Egypt, and was also a center for Egypt's many religious cults. Yet we find the God of the Bible declaring through Ezekiel:

"I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis."

Ezekiel 30:13

Was this fulfilled? At around the time of Christ, Strabo (the Greek historian) found the city "large and populous, next to Alexandria in size." He then proceeded to describe the many gods, temples, and statues which accompanied this religious center. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* makes the dry comment that zealous Christians during the 3rd century defaced and destroyed some of the idols in Memphis. This is noble, but not what one could call a fulfillment of prophecy.

However, in the 10th century the scene changed: Mohammed and his followers swept through the Middle East, conquering city after city, and converting people from idolatry to Islam by the threat of the sword. Once his empire had expanded, Mohammed decided that the people should build a new capital city - one where no pagan gods had ever been worshiped. A site was selected (where Cairo is today) which just happened to be ten miles from Memphis. So this new city was started, the population of Memphis drifted to Cairo, and the stones of Memphis became an excellent nearby quarry to use for building the new capital city.

At the turn of the century, the famous archaeologist F. Petrie had some difficulty in finding the site of ancient Memphis, for the area today is forested and there is no rubble above ground. Excavation of the area gave a poor yield of statues: Petrie found one small sphinx about the size of a man, and one large statue of king Ramses II which was broken into 3 pieces (these have since been moved to museums).

Thus the idols and images of Memphis have been destroyed and used to build the city of Cairo. Notice how literally this prophecy came true; it certainly would not be true no matter what happened (i.e., a prophecy that Memphis would be conquered could surely be fulfilled sometime). Perhaps it could be argued that many ancient cities have been destroyed.

However, most of their ruins have not been quarried to the point that nothing is left of them today. As a control, let us consider the prophecy concerning another Egyptian religious center.

## 2. THEBES.

Thebes was the great capital city of southern Egypt, and was another famous center for the Egyptian cults. In the same context as the above prophecy concerning Memphis,

the God of the Bible says:

"I will . . . inflict punishment on Thebes. I will . . . cut off the hordes of Thebes. Thebes will be taken by storm." Ezekiel 30:14-16

From history we find that God certainly did execute judgments on Thebes: Nebuchadnezzar and Cambyses both captured Thebes and burned it. Ptolemy Lathyrus (the grandfather of Cleopatra) attacked it in 92 BC, and after a three year siege, he sacked and burned the city in his anger. Thebes never again regained its stature as a city. When Strabo visited the city in 25 BC, he noted that this huge city had been reduced to several small villages. Today the area has nine small villages. Certainly the hordes of Thebes have been cut off (Hebrew colloquialism for "killed"), yet the area is still sparsely populated (this contrasts prophecies against other cities like Petra, where it was predicted that no one would live in them any more). However, the wreckage of Thebes still stands: the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was a long article on Thebes and shows many color photographs of the temples, idols, and statues of this ancient religious center. Note that if Ezekiel had made a mistake and had reversed the names of these cities, both prophecies would be wrong. The idols are gone from Memphis; they still stand in Thebes. Memphis was never attacked and ravaged as severely as Thebes was. The people of Memphis were not finally killed; they moved to Cairo.

So we have seen two cases of prediction clearly made before the events occurred. The predictions were brief, but not so vague that they could be applied to any ancient city. No zealous band of followers assisted the fulfillment of these prophecies (the Moslems do not acknowledge Ezekiel). It appears then, that these are genuine prophecies which were given by the God of the Bible to substantiate his claims.

### 3. TYRE.

"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring many nations against you, like the sea casting up its waves. They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers, I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock. Out in the sea she will become a place to spread fishnets, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD. She will become plunder for the nations, and her settlements on the mainland will be ravaged by the sword. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

"For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: From the north I am going to bring against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, with horsemen and a great army. He will ravage your settlements on the mainland with the sword; he will set up siege works against you, build a ramp up your walls and raise his shields against you. He will direct the blows of his battering rams against your walls and demolish your towers with his weapons. His horses will be so many that

they will cover you with dust. Your walls will tremble at the noise of the war horses, wagons, and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city whose walls have been broken through. The hoofs of his horses will trample all your streets; he will kill your people with the sword, and your strong pillars will fall to the ground.

"They (note the change from "he") will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber, and rubble into the sea. I will put an end to your noisy songs, and the music of your harps will be heard no more. I will make you a bare rock, and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt, for I the LORD have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD." Ezekiel 26:3-14

This prophecy concerning the destruction and fate of Tyre is one of the most startling of all Biblical predictions against ancient cities. In the time of Ezekiel, Tyre was the greatest maritime city on the coast of the Mediterranean. Geographically, it was situated on the coast, with an excellent natural harbor that was protected by an island a half mile off shore. The main city was on the mainland, but apparently some 'suburbs' were built on the island. Nebuchadnezzar took the mainland city in 573 BC after a 13 year siege. However, most of the people moved their wealth out to the island, and since Nebuchadnezzar did not have a navy, he abandoned any further attacks on Tyre. In 332 BC Alexander the Great came and attacked Tyre on his way to Persia. Since Nebuchadnezzar's time, Tyre had remained on the island, and had not rebuilt appreciably on the mainland. Having no navy to aid him, Alexander used a "brute force" approach and built a land bridge 200 feet wide out to the island. This was no easy task, and took the labor forces from the many nations he had already conquered. For building material, Alexander used the walls and buildings from the old mainland city; so much material was needed that the workers had to scrape the area bare. Alexander finally succeeded in capturing Tyre, but the city on the island was quickly rebuilt; at the time of Christ, Tyre was still a major port city.

During the crusades, Tyre was heavily fought over, but finally the Moslems recaptured it in 1291 and completely destroyed the city. The site remained desolate for hundreds of years, and in the late 1700's a small fishing village was started on the island. Today this village has about 12,000 people in it; but it does not occupy the ancient site of Tyre. These fishermen use the large flat, bare areas as a place for spreading their nets out to dry.

Even if it were found that the earlier parts of this prophecy were forged (and there is no data which would support this claim), the fact that the city was not desolated until 1291, that it was never rebuilt after this, and that fishermen today use the site as a place to dry their nets shows that the prediction could not have been guessed.

Well, so what? Most of those ancient cities are wrecks today. This is not so: Sidon, 20 miles up the coast from Tyre, is still a major port city in Lebanon. When we look in the



Bible for any prophecies regarding this city, we find:

"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'I am against you, O Sidon, and I will gain glory within you. They will know that I am the LORD, when I inflict punishment on her and show myself holy within her. I will send a plague upon her and make blood flow in her streets. The slain will fall within her, with the sword against her on every side. Then they will know that I am the LORD.'" Ezekiel 28:22-23

There are no comments here that Sidon will be destroyed and never rebuilt. We see that if the names of these two cities, only twenty miles apart, were reversed in the prophecies, we would have to admit that they had failed. But note that there is no double-talk or vagueness in these Biblical prophecies: what was predicted has simply happened.

#### 4. BABYLON.

"Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged."

"No rock will be taken from you for a cornerstone, nor any stone for a foundation, for you will be desolate forever,' declares the LORD."  
Isaiah 13:20-22; Jeremiah 51:26

Here again we find prophecies that have come true to the letter. At the time of Alexander the Great, Babylon was still a great city; but after a long series of political struggles and battles for control after his death, the Seleucids decided that it would be easier to build a new city than to restore Babylon. By the time of Christ, Strabo could only comment, "the great city has become a desert."

Today the site of Babylon is one of desolation. The nearest civilization is found in Al Hillah, six miles away. For fear of various superstitions, Arabs do not live in the ruins, and so they have become the home of many desert animals. The soil in the area is so poor that it does not provide enough grass for sheep. Most amazingly, natives who vandalize the site for building materials only take bricks; they burn the stones which they find for lime. Even non-Christian archaeologists who visit the site are amazed that Isaiah's picture of the ruins of Babylon are so accurate (cf. H. M. F. Saggs, in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, edited by Winton Thomas, p. 41).

Yet we find that Isaiah himself said:

"O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago. You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the stronghold of the foreigners to be a city no more . . ." Isaiah 25:1-2

So, from a brief investigation of some the prophecies regarding some ancient cities, we have found material far different from that in the Koran or the Book of Mormon: we found pictures and descriptions of the ruins which agree with what we see today, and further, most of these cities have met their destruction after the time of Christ. Cities which were predicted to be destroyed and never rebuilt, have been destroyed and never rebuilt; cities which were not predicted to become a desolation have remained as important cities today.

But does all of the prophecy in the Bible concern ancient cities? Certainly there are more interesting subjects to prophesy about. Let's look now at prophecies with regard to the God of the Bible's chosen people: the nation of Israel.

## 5. ISRAEL.

When Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt into the promised land, the God of the Bible gave the Israelites a series of laws and promised to greatly bless them if they obeyed Him. However, if the Israelites were to disobey Him, then the LORD promised: "You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods - gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, 'If only it were evening' and in the evening, 'If only if were morning' - because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see. The LORD will send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you. Deuteronomy 28:63-68

While the general history of the Jews since the final capture of Jerusalem has been one of almost constant persecution as the God of the Bible predicted, it is tragically noteworthy that this last promise, that the Jews would be shipped back to Egypt, was literally fulfilled in 70 AD. After Titus took the city, every survivor over 17 years of age was shipped to Egypt to be sold into slavery and to work in the mines there. This influx of Hebrew slaves thoroughly saturated the Egyptian slave market.

Throughout the course of the Bible, we find predictions that if the Israelites disobey God, they will be scattered, but if they return to obedience, they will be regathered to form a nation again. That this happened several times in their history is evident from reading the Old Testament. However, there is one unusual prophecy about a return of

the Jews to their homeland found in Hosea 3:4-5:

"For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

Here we find predicted that the Jews will continue for some time:

a) Without any official or recognized ruler.

Even during the Babylonian captivity, the Jews still had a king, although he served in the Babylonian court.

b) Without any sacrifice or ephod (a priestly garment).

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the official genealogies were lost, and the priests were killed by the Romans. The remaining Jews could not reliably trace their family lines back to Aaron, and thus the priestly line could not be reestablished. With no high priest to offer sacrifices, and with Jerusalem and the temple destroyed, the Jews developed a non-sacrificial, non-priestly Jewish religion. Note that they did not as a people turn to idolatry, but only modified their old religion. Thus the Jews have been both without ephod and idol.

c) Afterward the Israelites would return.

There is no statement here that first the Jews would seek the LORD their God, and then return, as always happened before. It appears that the Jews will return, and then later come trembling to the LORD in the last days.

Some people argue that the Jews have always been eager to return to their homeland; certainly with the persecution they have endured over the centuries one cannot blame them. Yet at the turn of this century, we find that most Jews had no interest in hacking a country out of their homeland, which had over the centuries become a desert. John Urquhart, in his classic book, *The Wonders of Prophecy*, notes that Rabbinowitz went to Palestine in 1882 to check the feasibility of this idea, but had to abandon the idea due to the poverty of the soil and the oppression of the Turkish government.

However, when Hitler came to power in Europe and tried to eradicate the Jews, they decided that it would be better to go and form a separate nation where they could at least fight together. Thus after World War II the Jews who survived the gas chambers fled to Palestine, and in 1948 Israel once again became a nation.

Another prophecy concerning this apparently final return of the Jews is given in Isaiah 11:11-14:

"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 corners of the earth. Ephraim's jealousy will vanish, and Judah's enemies will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, nor Judah hostile toward Ephraim. They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west; together they will plunder the people to the east. They will lay hands on Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will be subject to them."

Today in Israel we find no hostility between the various family lines, as there was in ancient Israel: what counts is that you are a son of Abraham; further distinctions are not important.

In closing it is interesting to note a prophecy concerning the ancient city of Ashkelon:

"Gaza will be abandoned and Ashkelon left in ruins. The land by the sea, where the Kerethites dwell, will be a place for the shepherd and sheep pens. It will belong to the remnant of the house of Judah; there they will find pasture. In the evening they will lie down in the houses of Ashkelon."  
Zephaniah 2:4,6-7

Ashkelon was a major port city on the Mediterranean until it was destroyed by Sultan Bibars in 1270 AD. To prevent the further use of the natural harbor, they filled it with stones. The surrounding lands then became a sheep herding area, as predicted. However, after the Israelites returned in 1948, they have cleared the harbor and rebuilt the city, as was also predicted.

**BUT WHAT ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT?  
ARE THERE ANY PROPHECIES IN IT?**

It is worth noting that Jesus also gave a prophecy about the return of the Jews in the last days in Luke 21:24: The Jews "will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." [In 1967 the Jews finally got control of Jerusalem; it took almost 1900 years. But full control will not happen until the Moslem mosque is removed from the temple site. We see this prophecy is in the process of being fulfilled.]

A couple of startling prophecies occur which specifically warn about future apostate "Christian" groups. Consider this one:

"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain

from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth." 1 Timothy 4:1-3

Is there any group in Christendom today who has forbidden marriage to at least a part of their members (if it forbid marriage to all, it would quickly die out), and who has forbidden its' members to eat certain foods on Fridays and during Lent (if it forbid eating certain foods all of the time, the chances are that it would die out very quickly)? Thus we find here an example of prophecy which has clearly been fulfilled today.

Another example is the woman in Revelation chapters 17-18, who is said to have a golden cup in her hand, and to have her headquarters in the city of seven hills. This prophecy is too extensive to reproduce here, but is certainly worth reading thoughtfully.

#### CONCLUSIONS:

Imagine that you lived in Babylon during the time of Nebuchadnezzar; Babylon is a thriving metropolis of over a million people, and you are a well-to-do merchant, supervising the caravans which are bringing spices from India to Egypt. You go to the temple of Marduk every week, and have ten good servants, a couple of beautiful wives, and several kids who are all going to school; one son is even training to serve in Nebuchadnezzar's court. Marduk has certainly been good to you.

But one of your best servants is from Judah, some little spot which old Nebuchadnezzar wiped off the map several years again. He keeps politely refusing to go to temple with you, and every time he gets an opportunity he tries to tell you about the fantastic God of Israel, who brought his people out from Egypt through the Red Sea, who shattered the walls of Jericho, who sent incredible prophets like Elijah . . . . But every time you just laugh back at him, and say, "How can you cling to your God like that? Our Marduk has conquered and scattered you Why should I bother with the history of your little country, when you lost and especially when you say he's the only God?"

And yet - all of those people are dust now. The people of Babylon, of Memphis, of Thebes, of Tyre - all of the things that they worked for - their goals, their gods, are dust now too. And yet - the God of Israel's prophecies have come true. We can see what happened to ancient cities who chose to ignore the God of the Bible, and to the Jewish people who disobeyed him. And in another hundred years our own bodies will be dust, and we will have had to face that final test of "How do you know that you are right?" - death.

What is the purpose of all of this prophecy? Is it to satisfy our curiosity, to amuse us for one afternoon, or does the God of the Bible want to prove a point: that indeed he is the one God who can faithfully control the future. Perhaps the God of the Bible gives evidence like these prophecies so that we can be sure that he really exists, and so that we can trust him. Could it be that the God of Israel wants us to come through death on his team? Could it be that he wants us to be able to trust in more than the usual "religious" experiences? Consider the testimony of one of the New Testament writers:

"We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place . . . ." 2 Peter 1:16-19

Peter does not claim that after he had this religious experience, he just knew in his heart that Christianity was true; what clinches it for him is that the things which Jesus did, and what people did to him, were all prophesied hundreds of years before he came. Further, for us who were not eyewitnesses, Peter recommends that we consider not our emotional experience, but the data - the prophecies. What is the advantage of prophecy over eyewitness experience? Plenty: the data is objective, and written. If we worry that we misinterpreted something, we can go back and check again. The evidence of prophecy and history does not change with our mood; we can trust this type of data as much as we can trust that the sun will rise tomorrow.

"BUT - this just isn't enough!" One cannot condense all of the Biblical prophecies and all the world's history into one short paper. For more examples, see: *The Wonders of Prophecy*, by John Urquhart. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Vol. 1 and 2, by Josh McDowell. John W. Montgomery, ed. *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question*. Probe Books/ Word Publishing, 1991; Robert C. Newman ed. *The Evidence of Prophecy*, (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1994).

"BUT - this just isn't enough I won't believe in Jesus unless someone came back from the dead and stood right here in front of me, and warned me about hell." Yes, it's possible for God to do that, but the question is not: "Do we have all of the data that we want?" but rather, "Do we have enough reliable data to make a reasonable decision?" In science this happens all the time; no one ever seems to get all of the data that they want in a scientific endeavor, for more questions and new areas of research are continually opening up. Yet enough data always seems to be gathered to enable the researcher to make an intelligent decision as to what to do next. Are we going to turn the tables and demand more absolute data from God than we use in the important decisions which we make everyday?

In Luke 16:29-31 Jesus tells us that the evidence contained in Moses and the Prophets is sufficient. Maybe it is not as exciting and glamorous as we want, but glamour is as bad a guide to truth as emotion. Is there a reasonable basis to conclude that the God of the Bible exists and he should be heeded? Certainly in comparison to the rest of the gods of this world, that answer is simply "Yes."