

# CHRISTMAS AND THE PROPHETS

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Matthew 1:18-23

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INTRO.

-- The history behind a book, movie or event is its "backstory." If you want to fully understand and appreciate the Christmas story - its importance, meaning, and purpose - you need to know its backstory.

-- During this Christmas season we're going to look at the amazing history of Christmas - the extraordinary backstory of the birth of Jesus. We start today with the part of the backstory mentioned by Matthew in his account of Jesus' birth.

Matthew 1:18-23

## I. The Backstory in the Prophets (vv. 22-23)

### A. The Christmas Story Doesn't Start with Mary & Joseph

-- Matthew tells us here that the Christmas story doesn't start with Mary and Joseph. The events about to take place in Joseph's and Mary's lives are actually fulfillments of prophecies made hundreds of years earlier by the OT prophets.

### B. Specific Prophecies of Jesus' Birth

-- Centuries before Joseph and Mary lived, the OT prophets made highly specific prophecies about the details of Jesus' birth.

#### 1. His Nation

##### a. The Prophecy

-- One of the first prophecies of the Messiah was recorded more than a thousand years earlier in Genesis 12.

**Genesis 12:1-3** Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **<sup>2</sup>** And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **<sup>3</sup>** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

##### b. The Fulfillment

Thousands of years later, in a sermon to Jews outside the Jerusalem Temple, Peter announced that God had fulfilled this prophecy.

**Acts 3:25-26** You are the children of those prophets, and you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors. For God said to Abraham, 'Through your descendants all the families on earth will be blessed.'**<sup>26</sup>** When God raised up his servant, Jesus, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways."

#### 2. His Tribe

-- The OT not only prophesies that the Messiah will be born in the Jewish nation but also foretells that He will be born into the tribe of Judah.

a. The Prophecy

**Genesis 49:10 (NLT)** The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor.

b. The Fulfillment

-- The fulfillment of this prophecy is confirmed in Jesus' genealogy in the Gospel of Luke.

**Luke 3:23, 33-34a** Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli &hellip; **<sup>2</sup>**the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, **<sup>34</sup>**the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham&hellip;.

3. His Clan (Family)

-- The prophecies get even more specific. Isaiah, writing 700 years before the birth of Jesus, made many prophecies about the Messiah. One of those prophecies identified the clan (the specific family) within the tribe of Judah in which the Messiah would be born. Isaiah predicted that Jesus would be born to descendants of Jesse (ther father of the great King David).

a. The Prophecy

**Isaiah 11:1-2a, 10** There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. **<sup>2</sup>**And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him &hellip; **<sup>10</sup>**In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples - of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

b. The Fulfillment

-- Hundreds of years later, Luke recorded the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

**Luke 2:4-5** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, **<sup>5</sup>** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

4. His Mother

-- One of the most notable prophecies in Isaiah has to do with the mother of the Messiah and the miracle of the virgin birth.

a. The Prophecy

-- **Isaiah 7:14a** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son&hellip;.

b. The Fulfillment

-- The fulfillment of this prophecy is confirmed by Matthew.

**Matthew 1:20, 22-23a** But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **<sup>21</sup>**She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." **<sup>22</sup>**All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: **<sup>23</sup>**"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son

5. His Name / Title

a. The Prophecy

-- That same verse in Isaiah 7 goes on to prophesy a title that indicates the nature of the promised Messiah.

**Isaiah 7:14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

b. The Fulfillment

-- And once again Matthew confirmed the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

**Matthew 1:21-23** She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he

will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup>"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

## 6. His Birthplace

### a. The Prophecy

-- Even Jesus' birthplace is prophesied hundreds of years in advance. Micah, a contemporary with Isaiah, predicted Jesus' birthplace more than 600 years beforehand.

**Micah 5:2** But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

### b. The Fulfillment

-- And Luke records the fulfillment exactly as Micah had foretold.

**Luke 2:4-7** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup>And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

## II. The Prophecy Quoted by Matthew (Isaiah 7:14)

-- So, we've had an overview of the OT prophecies concerning the promised Savior. Let's take a closer look at one of those prophecies, the one quoted by Matthew. In verse 23 of the first chapter, Matthew quotes one of Isaiah's best-known prophecies.

Cf., Matthew 1:23, quoting Isaiah 7:14

### A. The Prophecy

-- The seventh chapter of Isaiah took place about 600 years before the birth of Jesus, when a man named Ahaz was King of Judah. Although he was a descendant of David, Ahaz was a wicked king who led Judah into terrible paganism and filled the nation with idols.

When two neighboring kings conspired to invade Judah, King Ahaz considered turning to the dreaded Assyrians for assistance. The Lord sent Isaiah to Ahaz to assure the king that an alliance with the pagan empire of Assyria was unnecessary, that the Lord would deliver Judah from its enemies and would preserve the line of David. To persuade King Ahaz to trust the Lord in this matter, Isaiah offered to give the king a sign, to perform a sign that the king himself would choose. But Ahaz refused to request a sign; so, Isaiah gave the king a confirming sign.

**Isaiah 7:14-16 (NLT)** All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us'). <sup>15</sup>By the time this child is old enough to choose what is right and reject what is wrong, he will be eating yogurt and honey. <sup>16</sup>For before the child is that old, the lands of the two kings you fear so much will both be deserted.

### B. The Double Fulfillment

-- An interesting aspect of this prophetic sign is that it would have a double fulfillment, one in the near future and another in the distant future.

#### 1. The Near-Future Fulfillment

-- Isaiah's prophesied sign would be fulfilled first in the near future. A young woman who was unmarried at the time that Isaiah made the prophecy would marry and have a son, and while that son was still a young child, the two kings threatening Judah would be destroyed.

#### 2. The Distant-Future Fulfillment

-- But when Matthew quoted this prophecy, he indicated that it was also a sign of a more distant, more astounding, and more important event - an event in which a young woman while still a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son who would be Immanuel, God with Us, the Messiah, the One who would be the deliverer not just for the people of Judah but for the whole world.

### III. The Implications of the Fulfilled Christmas Prophecies

-- The fulfilled prophecies like Isaiah 7:14 and the others we have seen this morning reveal at least two marvelous truths about God.

#### A. God's Providential Power

1. Fulfilled prophecies point us to the sovereign God whose providential power directs the affairs of history to accomplish His plans and fulfill His purposes.

a. Take, for example, the prophecy of Jesus' birthplace in Micah 5:2, a prophecy made 600 years before Jesus was born.

**Micah 5:2** But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.

b. Bethlehem was an obscure village outside of Jerusalem, not the kind of a place where you would expect anything important to happen. Yet that's exactly where God chose for Jesus to be born.

But as little as one week before Jesus' birth Mary and Joseph were still in Nazareth, some 80 miles from Bethlehem - in a time when that journey had to be made on foot and took about 4 days. But God was in control and providentially directing the events. God had already moved the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus to order a census that required Joseph to register in the city of his ancestors, which just "happened" to be Bethlehem. So, in the final days of Mary's pregnancy, Mary and Joseph made the unlikely journey and arrived in Bethlehem just as Mary went into labor and gave birth to Jesus, exactly as the prophet Micah had said centuries earlier.

2. In a book called *Science Speaks* the author, Peter Stoner, applies the science of probability to just 8 of the prophecies about Christ and determines that the chance of any one man fulfilling all eight prophecies is one in 10 to the 17<sup>th</sup> power (that's 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000 or one hundredth quadrillion). To illustrate how nearly impossible that is, he says it would be like covering the entire state of Texas with silver dollars, two feet deep, and randomly marking just one of those coins and mixing it in the pile somewhere. Then you would be blindfolded and put in the middle of the state and told to find that coin on your first try. Your chance of finding that coin on just one try would be the same as all 8 prophecies being fulfilled by one person. But there aren't just 8 prophecies that Jesus fulfilled - there are more than 300! The fulfillment of those prophecies is a breathtaking sign of the sovereign, providential power of God at work in the story of Jesus.

#### B. God's Wonderful Love

-- But even more importantly, the fulfilled prophecies are signs of God's wonderful love for us, because the prophecies are about the fulfillment of God's eternal plan to provide for our salvation by sending His Son who would save us by taking the judgment for our sins upon Himself in His death on the Cross.

Cf., Matthew 1:21

### CONCLUSION

Fulfilled prophecies are a fascinating part of the backstory of Christmas, but they are just a part. In the weeks ahead, we will look at other equally important parts of the amazing history of Christmas.