



Lesson 8 | The Messiah in the Early Prophets | 1/27/2021

It has been estimated that there are some 2500 prophecies in the Bible. It is also estimated that there are 333 prophecies that are fulfilled in the Messiah. It should be obvious that the fulfillment of all 333 in one Man would be literally impossible based on chance alone. However, what are the odds against even a smaller number being fulfilled by chance.

But what does it mean to fulfill the Scriptures? This is not as simple as it may sound. Often, the New Testament writers say that Jesus has fulfilled the Scriptures when something in his life is literally predicted by the prophets. For instance, the idea that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Other times, fulfillment is not about prediction but pattern. In his role as Israel's Messiah, Jesus fulfills the Scriptures when he relives Israel's story through his own life—when he suffers their pains, endures their hardships, and lives a life of perfect obedience to God's law. And our purpose in this class is to remember what all those nuances are and to see how they make Jesus more meaningful to us.

In his pre-resurrection ministry, Jesus said, "You [Jewish people] diligently study the Scriptures [i.e. Old Testament]... These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). But even more famously, Jesus rebuked Cleopas, and that other unnamed disciple, as they walked along the road to Emmaus, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the [Old Testament] Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27). Even King David predicted the resurrection of Jesus back in 1000 B.C. as he, too, saw what was ahead, namely, that Jesus would not be "abandon[ed] ... to the grave, nor [would he] let his Holy One see decay" (Ps 16:8-11; Acts 2:30-31). Therefore, it is not unexpected that we, too, should find the events about Jesus' life and ministry (even beyond His role and Messiahship) present in the events and the predictions found in the Old Testament.

What is meant by "Early prophets" are those that come before the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. Also included in these are the bulk of the "non-writing" prophets (i.e. there is no book attributed to their authorship) like Ahijah (1Kings 14:1-18); Jehu (1Kings 16:1-12).

While there are many references in the writings of David (a prophet) in the Psalms, these are not included in this class because of their inclusion in earlier lessons. We have already considered Samuel's famous prophecy that Messiah would be king like David (2Samuel 7).

The ministry of the non-writing prophets reached the highest expressions around the time of the demise of Solomon and the subsequent division of the kingdom. Tensions centred around the definition of the true Israel and the true worship of the Lord.

Let's consider Elijah. The relationship between Elijah and Jesus is seen in both the Old and New Testament. In Malachi 4:5-6, Elijah is predicted as the one who will come before "the great and terrible day of the LORD." When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" they replied, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:13-14). There are some interesting comparisons between Elijah and Jesus that give insight into the progression of God's work in the Old and New Testaments. The following are just a few; you can easily search out many more in the Scriptures.

1. In their preaching: Elijah rebuked Israel (including her leaders) for pagan idolatry, especially the worship of Baal and urged them to turn from idolatry to follow the God of Israel (1 Kings 18:21). Jesus rebuked religious leaders for misleading the people and for having an outward righteousness while their hearts were far from God (Matthew 23:1-39); identification of himself as the Good Shepherd Who lays down his life for His sheep, the giver of eternal life (John 10:1-42).



2. In their miracles: Elijah prophesied rain would cease for years (1 Kings 17:1) and then finally prophesying when the rain would come (1 Kings 18:41-45); He multiplied oil and meal for a starving widow and her son when she was willing to share her portion (1 Kings 17:14); He raised a widow's son from the dead (1 Kings 17:22). Jesus calmed the waters in a storm (Mark 4:35-41); He multiplied food (loaves and fishes) for crowds who had come to hear him when a boy was willing to share his portion (John 6:1-15). Jesus raised a widow's son (Luke 7:11-17).

Let's consider Ahijah of Shiloh.

1. Solomon built high places for his foreign wives and although the practice may have commenced as 'courtesy worship', it soon became an established part of religion in Israel to worship foreign gods, notably:
1) Ashtoreth/Astarte: the goddess of the Sidonians. A mother goddess of fertility and war (Judg 2:13, 10:6; 1 Sam 7:3-4; 12:10). Female deities of this nature were invariably earth mothers. Today the New Age movement frequently use similar motifs. 2) Molech: the detestable god of the Ammonites generally considered to have the meaning of 'king of shame' because of the practice of child sacrifice in the fire (Lev 18:21, 20:2-5; Jer 32:35 cf. 2 Kings 17:31). 3) Chemosh: the detestable god of the Ammonites also contained the practice of child sacrifice. The whole concept of monarchy and, to some degree, even the institution of the Temple was regarded by some as a foreign institution, alien to the covenant with God. God did not live in a Temple but was omnipresent. Israel's call was not to be like other nations, but to be free of idols and to be dedicated to the Lord alone. We find a primary expression of these tensions in Ahijah's appellation 'of Shiloh'. Shiloh was situated on the north side of Bethel (Judg 21:19) and it was here, in the early days of conquest, that the tent of meeting was set up (Josh 18:1).
2. Ahijah makes a dramatic entrance (1 Kings 11:29) encountering Jeroboam on the road and proceeded to declare the end of the united kingdom by rending his garment into 12 pieces and presenting 10 to Jeroboam. These pieces represented his forthcoming rule (1 Kings 11:31). God revealed through Ezekiel His plan to unite the two nations. "As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: "For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions." Then take another stick and write on it, "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions." Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand... And when the children of your people speak to you, saying, "Will you not show us what you mean by these?"—say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Surely I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand'" (Ezekiel 37:16-19, 21-22).

For Jesus, the idea that he had to first die as an atonement for our sins, and then rise from the dead, made perfect sense—and was, in fact, necessary—as the fulfillment of what the prophets of the Hebrew Bible had said. This was how he understood himself, and he argued that this was the only way his followers could understand him.

Next Week | Lesson 9 | The Messiah in the Later Prophets.