



discover the saviour

*Uncover earth's ultimate hero as predicted in prophecy
and how we are involved with Him*

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The late atheist astronomer Carl Sagan wrote about a photo taken in 1990 of the earth from the spacecraft Voyager 1, about four billion miles away. Because the earth was basking in light from the sun, it appeared as if it were, he wrote, in a privileged position.

That appearance was, he said, an illusion.

Our planet, Sagan said, is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from anywhere else to save us from ourselves.

Sagan had it partly right. We do need help in order *to save us from ourselves*. Who doesn't see that? The idea, once very popular, that humans were progressing toward perfection and Utopia died out in the trenches of World War I, in the death camps of World War II, in the Killing Fields of Cambodia, and in the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York in 2001.

SUPERHEROES

Thus, sensing the grand epic that we find ourselves in is beyond our control, we all face the future with a bit of fear and trembling. We are trapped on a scary world, and we can never escape from it. Our only out, it seems, is under it - not the most exciting of prospects. And even if things might be going well for us now - today - who isn't aware of forces that can, without warning, toss our lives around like a soggy cigarette butt in a typhoon?

Maybe that explains our fascination with superheroes: Ironman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Spiderman, the Hulk, Superman, even Captain Australia. Perhaps it's the realisation, which Sagan hit on, that we cannot save

ourselves, which causes us to reach out in fantasy for someone who through mighty deeds and exceptional powers can. For a few hours, immersed in light and background music and an exciting theme, we can forget what we have to face when the credits are over and we walk out the theatre door into the angst of our own immediate existence, or when we eject the DVD and the computer screen brings us the latest catastrophe from which no Superhero saved anyone.

THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE

Many, though, believe that someone will save us, that someone *has* to or else we are lost, doomed to disintegrate into dust on this *lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark* that Sagan warned about. It seems that the desire for a hero is programmed into us.

In 1982, a man named Benjamin Creme spent two hundred thousand dollars putting full-page ads in newspapers around the world, proclaiming: *THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE*. The Christ, who was also, he said, Buddha Maitreya - and a host of other religious personalities all rolled into one - would appear and bring that salvation. He even invited journalists to an Indian restaurant in London where this Christ just might show up and save the world. An old man in robes did walk in, and as folks held their breath in anticipation - *Could this be the long-awaited Saviour?* - the old fellow asked for a cigarette from the maitre de and walked out.

No question, though, whatever one might think of Creme's bogus ad campaign for Christ, we need help. As we have seen in the *Discover Meaning* topic, we are in the midst of a great controversy between good and evil, and sometimes it seems that evil might win out.

But the Bible teaches something radically different. It teaches that though this world is filled with evil, and that though suffering, death, and fear, and sickness are part of this existence - they won't last forever. We're so used to death that we assume it's just part of life. But death is the negation of life, not part of it. And the great hope given us in the Bible, for which we have many reasons to trust, is that Jesus Christ - the true Messiah - has come to save us, not just from ourselves but from everything else.

That was the part Satan had wrong - big time.

Talking about Jesus, the Bible says, *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.* Hebrews 2:14

Notice in that text the theme we will be seeing over and over - the battle between good and evil, Christ and Satan. It's crucial to understanding the world, our place in it, and the hope offered us through Jesus.

What's even more astounding is that Jesus did all this for us in an amazing fulfilment of Bible prophecies, prophecies written many centuries before He came, prophecies that gave people in those days hope, and that give us powerful reasons for trusting that He is the true Messiah, the One predicted in the Old Testament. Jesus' life, death and resurrection were fulfilments of prophecies that have helped millions trust Him as the true Superhero, the only One who can do for us what we can never do for ourselves.

A NEW TESTAMENT PREDICTION

Though this study is about Old Testament prophecies that pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, we want to start with one New Testament prophecy, one that had a fulfilment in what we just read about with Mr Creme's ad campaign.

As we saw in the last booklet, from a purely human perspective, Jesus of Nazareth, who died young, was just one Jew among hundreds of thousands who perished at the hands of the Romans. As such, this Christ should have vanished into obscurity. Instead, look at what He said about Himself almost two thousand years ago:



Then if anyone says to you, Look, here is the Christ! or There! do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

Matthew 24:23-25

How did He know that all through history people would come and claim to be Him? And Benjamin Creme's ad is just one of hundreds of examples.

The answer is easy. It's because He was the Christ, the Messiah predicted in amazing prophecies throughout the Old Testament, and the only person in history who fulfilled them all!

ALL THINGS MUST BE FULFILLED

After the heart-wrenching trauma of His death, which the disciples though repeatedly warned about, weren't expecting, Jesus rose from the grave. This was another unexpected event, though they were told about it too. Then He met with them and said the following crucial words:



Then He said to them, These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

Luke 24:44-45

The point made here - and in many other places throughout the New Testament - is that so much about Jesus was predicted in the Old Testament, including the nature of His birth, the place of His birth, the kind of life He lived, His death and resurrection, and more. Jesus said they all *must be fulfilled*. And it is in their fulfilment that those who are seeking truth can find powerful evidence for faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah - the one who can, and will, ultimately save us from ourselves.

BIRTH IN BETHLEHEM

For instance, more than 700 years before His birth, the Bible told where He would be born. The prophet Micah wrote:



***But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,***

***Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting.***

Micah 5:2

The word for *everlasting* can mean from *eternity* - that is, He had no beginning. He was a divine personage. No wonder then that, for centuries, Jewish scholars saw this as a prophecy pointing to the Messiah.

Of course, in the New Testament, one of the best-known stories about Jesus, celebrated every Christmas - though Jesus wasn't born on December 25 - was His birth in Bethlehem.



Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.

Matthew 2:1-2

That would be like someone living in the 14th century predicting in what city a person would be born today. Even more interesting is that one of the most famous rabbinical commentators named Rashi, who lived in the 11th century AD, applied Micah 5:2 to the Messiah. He wasn't thinking it was Jesus, of course, but he still saw it as Messianic - that is, pointing to the Messiah.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Unquestionably, especially in our secular age where the whole culture and educational system is built on naturalism, a view that leaves no room for the supernatural, the idea of the virgin birth of Jesus, is mocked. And yet that's what prophecy predicted, and what the New Testament said happened.



Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

Again, this was written 700 years before the birth of Jesus. What does the New Testament say? In the well-known story, Mary who *did not know a man* (Luke 1:34), *is found with child of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 1:18), before being married to Joseph, who wanted to end the relationship because he thought that she had been unfaithful to him.



But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins. So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, God with us.

Matthew 1: 20-22

An ancient Greek translation of the Bible, written a few hundred years before the birth of Jesus, translated the Hebrew with a word that means primarily virgin. Thus, people who had no reason to try and deny that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy - He wasn't even born then - saw a good reason to translate the word as virgin. Again, the fact that she was a virgin is what made it so miraculous, so special. Otherwise it would be nothing out of the ordinary.

GOD IN THE FLESH

Here is another Old Testament prophecy, which some traditional ancient Jewish sources have seen as Messianic as well.



For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

Even the simplest reading of this text reveals that God Himself would be born into humanity. What's crucial is that this verse, written 700 years before the birth of Christ, captures a key New Testament truth about Jesus and the plan of salvation - that Jesus was God Himself!

Here are just a few New Testament texts that testify to the divinity of Christ.

Talking about Jesus, John wrote:



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:1

Verse 14 indicates the *Word* is referring to Jesus.

Another time, in a discussion with leaders on His identity, this is what happened:



Jesus said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM. Then they took up stones to throw at Him.

John 8:58

The reason for their harsh reaction is simple. Jesus used the phrase *I AM* for Himself, a clear reference to God. Centuries earlier, when the Lord appeared to Moses in order to use him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses asked for the name of the God who was sending him to lead his kinsmen to salvation.



And God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM. And He said, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.

Exodus 3:14

Thus, when Jesus used that phrase for Himself, the religious leaders acted as they did because they saw a man, a human being, refer to Himself as God! In this case, though – He was!

ISAIAH 53

One of the most powerful prophecies that pointed to Jesus, especially to His sacrifice for the sins of the world, came also from Isaiah 53, a prophecy that many traditional Jewish sources interpreted as Messianic. In fact, even in our day, the followers of Rabbi Menachem Schneerson have

applied this prophecy to Schneerson. However wrong in their application, they still interpreted it as a Messianic prophecy.

Though we can't quote the whole prophecy here, it says in part:



***Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.***

Isaiah 53:4-6

If you have a Bible, read Isaiah 53 in total. It is amazing in its prophetic detail.

This is one of the clearest Old Testament predictions of the key truth of the New Testament - Jesus suffered for our sins; and He bore in Himself the punishment for the evil that we have done. This chapter is quoted or referred to all through the New Testament.

Just one example:



He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by

Isaiah the prophet, saying: He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.

Matthew 8:16-17

Volumes have been written showing how these themes in Isaiah 53 - such as that of human sinfulness, and Christ's death for that sinfulness - unmistakably point to the death of Jesus on the cross, a death that offers us all the hope of eternal life.

DANIEL 9

Another powerful Messianic prophecy, which actually gives the time when the Messiah would come, appears in Daniel 9. This prophecy was written more than 500 years before Christ. Though we can't get into it in depth here, this amazing prophecy pinpoints dates that fit Jesus perfectly.

Here's just one part:



***Know therefore and understand,
That from the going forth of the command
To restore and build Jerusalem
Until Messiah the Prince,
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks ...***

Daniel 9:25

The command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 587/6 BC, was given in the year 457 BC. Briefly, *seven weeks and sixty-two weeks* - or sixty nine weeks taken literally - would have meant the Messiah would have come in less than two years after the decree, a date that's nonsensical. However, the Bible

teaches the day-year principle, in which a day equals a year for many of the prophecies.

Here are two examples where the day-year principle, acknowledged for centuries by Jewish and Christian Bible students, appears:



According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection.

Numbers 14:34



And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year.

Ezekiel 4:6

Much more evidence for this important principle of prophetic interpretation is found in the Bible. In the prophecy of Daniel 9, the 69 weeks - with 7 days in each week - equals 483 years. Starting from 457 BC, which is from the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, and adding 483 years to that date, brings us to the early decades of the first century AD.

The first century what?

AD. AD stands for what? The Latin phrase Anno Domini, which means the year of our Lord. What Lord? Of course, the Lord Jesus Christ to whom that prophecy, half a millennium earlier, pointed.

Talk about evidence!

JESUS, THE MESSIAH

The deeper one studies these prophecies, the clearer it becomes that only one person - Jesus Christ - fulfilled them. And by so doing He has offered us a whole new perspective, not only of the world, but of our place in it.

Sagan said the picture of the earth from Voyager 1 *offered no hint that help will come from anywhere else to save us from ourselves.*

That's one narrow view from one tiny and distant spaceship. The view offered from the Bible tells us, each of us, an entirely different story.

So, how does this fit into the cosmic drama in which we find ourselves? The entry of God in the person of Jesus into human history 2,000 years ago is the most dramatic demonstration of love planet earth has ever, or will ever, see. Single handedly He took on the villain and all he represents, and made a way of escape for us. And we are not done with this superhero yet. Soon He will return for the final death struggle in this great controversy between good and evil, between Christ and Satan. The prophecies pointing to this final struggle will be fulfilled just as surely as were the prophecies for His first coming.



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