

# Belleville First Assembly of God

## Defending Your Faith - 2017

### Topic 6: Fulfilled Prophecy and History

Class Goal: Equip the believer to respond to common challenges to Christianity in order to evangelize the lost and to disciple those with doubts.

Objectives for Meeting Our Goal: Upon completing this class, the believer should be able to...

1. Recognize common challenges to Christianity, categorize them, and...
2. Prayerfully and gently respond to these challenges (2 Tim 2:23-26; 1 Peter 3:15)

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1. Questions from previous discussions or challenges from skeptics?
  2. Introduction: Another source of tools in defending our faith (or in assisting a genuine seeker) is found in Christianity's unique claim to have substantiated fulfilled prophecy. Christians are justified in embracing the truth of their belief because fulfilled prophecy strongly supports the Biblical prophets' own claim of revelation from the true and living God, who alone knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10).
  3. Old Testament:
    - a. An exiled Israel will return as a nation (Hosea 3:4-5 and Isaiah 11:10-12)
      - Without king and prince.
      - Without sacrifice and cult pillar.
      - Without ephod and teraphim.
      - Returning from all nations mentioned in Isaiah 11:11.
      - Israel is unique in world history as a globally-dispersed group that returned to their native land and resettled it after two thousand years. Odds: 1:400,000.<sup>1</sup> This figure does not include the fulfillment of similar prophecies in Ezekiel 36:24-31; Zechariah 12:10-13:1, 13:8-9, 14:21; and Revelation 11:1-13.
    - b. Biblical predictions concerning peoples beyond Israel. A number were fulfilled after 150 BC (when independent evidence exists that the prophecies had already been written).<sup>2</sup>
      - Ammon was destroyed by Nabatean Arabs from the east, as predicted in Ezekiel 21:31-32, 25:4-7 and 10b.
      - The Edomites were driven by Arabs out of their homeland into the Negev of Judah, where in about 120 BC they were conquered and *incorporated into Israel* by John Hyrcanus (as predicted in Ezekiel 25:12-14, Obadiah 18-21, Malachi 1:4-5).
      - The Philistines were weakened by the Babylonian and Greek invasions of their lands, and their cities were taken over *by the Maccabees* in 148-146 BC (as prophesied in Amos 1:8, Obadiah 19, Zephaniah 2:4-7).
      - Many scholars see the prediction in Isaiah 19:23-25, "The Egyptians will worship [the Lord] with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be a third with Egypt and Assyria," as

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Bloom, Robert C. Newman, and Hugh G. Gauch, Jr., "Public Theology and Prophecy Data: Factual Evidence That Counts for the Biblical Worldview", September 2002, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

fulfilled during the Byzantine period, when Christianity swept Egypt and Assyria, and Egypt became a leading Christian country from the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

- Babylon: At the height of Babylon's power, Isaiah (13:20–22) predicts that “she will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations,” and Jeremiah (51:26) says that no rock or stone from her ever will be reused for building materials. About the time of Christ, Strabo visited this city that had been the cultural and political center of the world for centuries and found Babylon so deserted that he remarked jokingly, “the great city is a great desert.” For superstitious reasons, Arabs do not live in the ruins, which have become the home of desert animals. The soil among the ruins is so poor that it does not provide enough grass for sheep. Interestingly, as Jeremiah predicted, natives who work the site for building materials only take bricks; they burn the stones they find for lime.
- Nineveh (capital city of the Assyrian Empire): At the height of Nineveh's power, Zephaniah (2:13–15) portrays its future state as “utterly desolate and as dry as the desert. Flocks and herds will lie down there, creatures of every kind.” Today the ruins of Nineveh, which are across the river from Mosul, Iraq, include on-site museums. Strikingly, the largest mound of the site bears the old Arabic name *Kuyunjiq*, which means “many sheep.” Irrigation and rainfall are generally plentiful enough that the plains around the mound are cultivated, and the ruins in this area are grazed during the rainy season.
- Tyre: Speaking to this proud Phoenician city, Ezekiel (26:3–14) predicts that waves of enemies will attack Tyre, and that “I will make you a bare rock, and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt.” Tyre was indeed leveled by Alexander the Great, and again by the Mamelukes during the Crusades, fulfilling the “waves of enemies” portion, and in the 1960's, a small fishing village (a place for the spreading of fishnets) was established on the bare rock isthmus where a world-trade center and naval empire once stood.
- Memphis: At the city's height, Ezekiel (30:13) quotes God as saying, “I will destroy the idols and put an end to the images in Memphis.” In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, following the conquest of Egypt by the Muslims, the caliph Omar restricted the army from making Alexandria the Muslim capital because water [the Nile] would come between the caliph and the army. Thus, the army chose to settle at the encampment from which they had besieged the fortress protecting Memphis. This army headquarters, called Fustat, grew over the centuries into the city of Cairo. As this new city grew, the population of Memphis drifted to Cairo, and the stone work of Memphis became a convenient quarry for expanding the new capital city because it happened to be only fifteen miles away. Today the colossal statue of Ramses II remains one of the few objects at Memphis visible above ground, matching Ezekiel's prophecy exactly.
- The cumulative odds for all of these predictions about surrounding nations being correct is about 1:38,000,000. There is much detail in these prophecies that makes accurate fulfillment quite remarkable.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

4. New Testament:

a. Jesus Christ fulfills over 300 Bible prophecies.<sup>4</sup>

- One example: Daniel 9:25-26, “Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and have nothing.” Commencing with Artaxerxes’s commission to Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:1–6) to rebuild the city wall (445 BC), thereby making Jerusalem a fortified city again, one may count 69 Sabbatical cycles and arrive at the 28-35 AD cycle... exactly the time that Jesus of Nazareth was “cut off” in Palestine while claiming to be God’s Messiah!<sup>5</sup>

b. Class exercise: Name other OT Messianic prophecies which were fulfilled by Jesus.

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c. By examining only 20 of these fulfilled prophecies (all possessing clear empirical verification), the cumulative odds of all 20 being fulfilled are 1:120,000.<sup>6</sup>

5. Conclusion: The odds for all of these prophecies coming true just by luck or chance is only one in about  $10^{18}$ , and yet this examines only a small portion of the available data. Therefore, we have more justification for our true belief because out of all the ancient “sacred” texts, only one contains verifiable fulfilled prophecies. This proves that the Bible’s Author alone knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10).

6. Challenge: “You Christians base your faith (and lives) on mere stories from ancient, biased authors.” In light of today’s topic, how would you respond?

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<sup>4</sup> Herbert Lockyear, *All the Messianic Prophecies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> Bloom, *et. al.*, 24-27.

<sup>6</sup> Bloom, *et. al.*, 29.



## The Study of Israel's History is Best Explained by Ancient Hebrew Scriptures

1. What does the Bible prophesy about the nation of Israel?
  - a. God's promise to Abraham [Genesis 15]
  - b. Conquered by Babylon [Jeremiah 25:9-12; 29:10; and others]
  - c. Return by Cyrus [Isaiah 44:24-45:25]
  - d. Return in 1948 [Amos 9:14-15; Ezekiel 4:3-6; and others]
  
2. What is historically proven about Israel?
  - a. In the ancient world (2000 years before Christ), monotheism was unheard of. Only one civilization embraced it, and that was the ancient Hebrews.
  - b. All throughout the ancient Middle East, Israel's neighbors were conquered and assimilated into other cultures, but the Jews remain distinct and maintained their identity wherever they were scattered.
    - They began near prehistoric times as a large clan, only to be absorbed as Egyptian slaves
    - Tens of thousands died in Egyptian service, yet the Hebrews were the only people group to have escaped Egyptian bondage
    - They survived the trip through the desert heat, thirst, hunger, and attacks
    - They conquered their Promised land and defended it for centuries against numerous invaders, to include the Assyrians (recorded by Herodotus and the Assyrian emperor)
    - When they were finally conquered (due to sin) and taken away to Babylon (586 BC), they did not assimilate
    - Cyrus then allowed to return back to their homeland and rebuild (516 BC)
    - When oppressed by the Greeks, they overcame and were allowed to self-rule (164 BC)
    - After rebelling against Rome, they were defeated and a remnant was scattered (70 AD)
    - Continued Roman persecution resulted in 580,000 Jewish deaths (135 AD)
    - Persecuted heavily in Europe by the Roman Catholic Church (Crusades and Inquisition)
    - 320,000 Jews massacred by the Soviet Russians (1917)
    - 6,000,000 Jews massacred by the Nazi Germans (1933-1945)
    - Nation of Israel re-established on May 14, 1948 [see next page]
    - 45,000 Jews were attacked the next day by five neighboring armies, and won!
    - Attacked again in 1956, 1967, and 1973, each time defeating overwhelming odds
    - Attacked almost daily by terrorist bombs and rockets to this very day
  
3. Out of all the ancient civilizations, only one has come back from being exiled twice to become a thriving nation again (and it also happens to be within its original borders and speaking its original language). That civilization is the people of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures (the people of Israel), and they did it in accordance with prophecy recorded in these very same Scriptures thousands of years earlier! This clearly demonstrates the faithfulness and care of the God of those Scriptures. One Jewish author understates, "Why did only the Jews survive? The theological solution seems attractive."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Kelemen, *Permission to Believe: Four Rational Approaches to God's Existence*, Targum Press, 1990.

# Ezekiel predicted when Israel would be re-established<sup>8</sup>

**Bible passage:** Ezekiel 4:3-6

**Written:** between 593-571 BC

**Fulfilled:** 1948

In Ezekiel 4:3-6, the prophet said the Jews, who had lost control of their homeland, would be punished for 430 years. This prophecy, according to Bible scholar Grant Jeffrey, pinpointed the 1948 rebirth of Israel. Here's a summary of Jeffrey's theory:

1. Ezekiel said the Jews were to be punished for 430 years because they had turned away from God. As part of the punishment, the Jews lost control of their homeland to Babylon. Many Jews were taken as captives to Babylon.

2. Babylon was later conquered by Cyrus in 539 BC. Cyrus allowed the Jews to leave Babylon and to return to their homeland. But, only a small number returned. The return had taken place sometime around 536 BC, about 70 years after Judah lost independence to Babylon.

3. Because most of the exiles chose to stay in pagan Babylon rather than return to the Holy Land, the remaining 360 years of their punishment was multiplied by 7. The reason is explained in the Bible's book of Leviticus. (Leviticus 26:18; Leviticus 26:21; Leviticus 26:24; and Leviticus 26:28). In Leviticus, it says that if the people did not repent while being punished, the punishment would be multiplied by 7. And, by staying in pagan Babylon, most exiles were refusing to repent.

4. So, if you take the remaining 360 years of punishment and multiply by 7, you get 2,520 years. But, Jeffrey says those years are based on an ancient 360-day lunar calendar. If those years are adjusted to the modern solar calendar, the result is 2,484 years.

5. And, there were exactly 2,484 years from 536 BC to 1948, which is the year that Israel regained independence.

(In this Bible passage, Ezekiel is asked by God to symbolically act out the 430 years of punishment)

Ezekiel 4:3-6

... Then take an iron pan, place it as an iron wall between you and the city and turn your face toward it. It will be under siege, and you shall besiege it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel. "Then lie on your left side and put the sin of the house of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. I have assigned you the same number of days as the years of their sin. So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the house of Israel. "After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://watchmanbiblestudy.com/Articles/1948PropheciesFulfilled.htm>. Accessed: 17 March 2015.