

Bible Reading: Isaiah 7:14

Q 97 What was to be special about the birth of the Messiah?

A. The Messiah would be born of a virgin.

Every baby is special. Every baby has a purpose in life. The Bible says that God knew each baby before it was born while it was being formed inside its mother. God knew you before you were born. He knew what you would look like. He knew what color your eyes would be. God made you special. God is so great and so wise that He knows what will happen in the future. That is how He knew about you before you were born.

Long before the Messiah was born, God knew what he would be like, too. There was something very special God knew about the Messiah. He knew that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. Her name would be Mary. The Messiah would be a miracle baby. God would be his father. God wanted people to know ahead of time what to expect the Messiah to be like. About 700 years before the Messiah was born, God inspired the prophet Isaiah to write that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. Do you know who the Messiah is? It is Jesus.

Thinking Deeper

Without the virgin birth of Christ, the whole Christmas story would fade into nothing. It is precisely because Jesus would be born of a virgin that Christmas is the season it is. The angels announced the birth because it was special. They came for the expressed purpose of announcing this one of a kind birth. Mary was visited by the angel because this was a birth like no other. Joseph was visited by the angel for the same reason. The angels came to the shepherds to herald this special birth. It is because Jesus was the virgin born son of Mary and the only begotten Son of God that this was the most special of all births that ever happened or ever would happen on earth. These things were prophesied by Isaiah long before the actual events.

Skeptics, agnostics and atheists attack the virgin birth because it is so crucial to the Christian faith. If it can be shown to be false, the rest of the faith will fall. However, the weight of history, the fulfilled prophecies, the uniqueness of the events surrounding the birth, the singularity of the life of Christ, all undergird the claims to the virgin birth. In the virgin birth, we have a great witness to the supernatural intervention of the Transcendent One in the affairs of men. Earth has had a Divine invasion. As C.S. Lewis said, "God has landed on our shores."

Tuesday Week 25 Prophecies of the Messiah

Bible Reading: Micah 5:2

Q 98 Where was the Messiah to be born?

A. The Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea.

Zhang Xiaoyan hoped that her baby would be able to be born. She was a Chinese woman who had been buried for fifty hours by the large earthquake of May 2008. It caused so much damage that almost 70,000 people were killed. She said that while she was trapped, she kept hoping that somehow she would be rescued. Her greatest wish was that even if she died her baby would live and be born. Her wish came true. Rescue workers finally got through to her. She was taken to a hospital where she gave birth to a healthy little girl. She named the girl Ai, which means love.

Not everyone is born in a hospital. Some people were born at home. Some babies have been born in the car on the way to the hospital. The Bible gave a prophecy about the Messiah's birth. He was to be born in a certain city. When the Hebrews wanted to see where their Messiah would be born, they went to the Bible. The prophet Micah said the Messiah would be born in the little city of Bethlehem in Judea.

Thinking Deeper

This prophecy of Micah is very specific. There were two cities named Bethlehem identified in the Old Testament. There was a Bethlehem in the territory assigned to the tribe of Zebulun (Joshua 19:15). That was not the Bethlehem where Messiah would be born. Micah pointed to another city, Bethlehem Ephrathah, as the place. Unger refers to Bethlehem Ephrathah as "the ancient name of Bethlehem in Judah." Genesis 48:7 documents Unger's case: "And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet *there was* but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same *is* Bethlehem." So Micah clearly settled on the Bethlehem in Judah's territory as the birthplace of the Messiah, as distinct from the Bethlehem in Zebulun's territory.

Why is this important? Because God wanted to make clear to us that He knew exactly where and when He would fulfill His promises. He was not making guesses. He was showing exactly how things would happen. How did He know, hundreds of years before, where the Messiah would be born? He knew because He is God. He knows the end from the beginning. He made specific prophecies so that their fulfillment would be confirmation that all of His plan is unfolding according to His will. "In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son..."

Bible Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15; Isaiah 61:1-2a

Q 99 What kind of ministry was the Messiah to have?

A. The Messiah would be a prophet and a preacher.

Sometimes parents want to decide what their children will do when they grow up. One father wanted his son to do well in school. But his son was the poorest student in the class. His father was very unhappy with him. It looked like his son would be worthless. But his father was wrong. Winston Churchill was not the best of students in his school, but he became one of the best leaders in the world during World War II.

Long before the Messiah ever came to earth, Moses wrote about what he would do when he grew up. Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy around 1460 B.C. In it, he predicted that when the Messiah came, he would be a prophet. Seven hundred years later, Isaiah also wrote about the Messiah that was to come. He said he would be a preacher of good news. The Holy Spirit inspired both Moses and Isaiah to describe what kind of ministry the Messiah would have when he came to earth. His words would be awesome and gracious. He would tell things to come, and he would give good news to people who truly wanted to know God.

Thinking Deeper

When King David sinned, who was to make him accountable? Of course, the Holy Spirit is faithful. However, David somehow either missed the promptings of the Holy Spirit, or ignored them. In his case, it took the prophet Nathan to bring him to account for what he had done. The Holy Spirit moved Nathan to speak to David, so ultimately it was the promptings of the Spirit that got David's attention. In David's case, the Holy Spirit's work was very effective through the prophet Nathan.

The ministry of a prophet was two-fold. The prophet would foretell events that would follow. Also, the prophet would apply truth directly to the circumstances of life. Jesus did both in his ministry. He prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, which came to pass in 70 A.D. when Rome invaded. He also spoke directly to the circumstances of people. He applied Scripture to the Pharisees, spoke pointedly to his disciples, and preached good news to the poor. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the prophecies of God's anointed prophets.

In the present, the church with its spiritual gifts has the responsibility of fulfilling the ministry of prophet and preacher. There are individuals in the church, often "prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers" who are specifically called to bring the Word of God to bear on circumstances. As the prophets of old, and Jesus in his earthly ministry, the church must faithfully apply God's truths. The present age needs the prophetic ministry of the church.

Bible Reading: Psalm 41:9; Zechariah 11:12; Isaiah 50:6

Q 100 What would happen at the end of the Messiah's life?

A. He would be betrayed, sold, and shamed.

“You’ll never amount to anything!” Jimmy’s dad yelled. Tears stung Jimmy’s cheeks at his father’s words. He wanted to please his dad. Instead, no matter what he did made his dad angry. However, Jimmy grew up and did amount to something. He became a good husband and a loving father. His dad was wrong about him. It’s good that Jimmy didn’t give up when he was young. Sometimes dads don’t know what is going to happen. But God always knows.

God the Father knew what would happen to the Messiah. The Holy Spirit moved on the prophets to write about what would happen when the Messiah came. The Messiah would be kind and loving, but evil people would treat him badly. The Messiah would know what would happen to him. But God also promised to help him when the bad people hurt him. God was right. Things turned out just like He said they would.

If you trust God, He will watch over you, too.

Thinking Deeper

About 1000 years before the Messiah was born, David wrote a psalm predicting that the Messiah would be betrayed by a very close friend. Three hundred years later Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be openly shamed and spit upon. In another two hundred years, Zechariah wrote that the Messiah would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver.

These prophecies are notable on several levels. How could people from three different centuries write accurately about the same person who would not be born for hundreds of years to come? How could one prophecy be so specific that it detailed the exact amount for which the Messiah would be betrayed? How could they all know that the Messiah would suffer at the end of his life? The only explanation that makes sense is that God knows the future and has revealed bits of it. Despite the claims of contemporary psychics, God is the only one who knows the future. Trust God. “But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall **come** forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Review the week's questions.

Q 97 What was to be special about the birth of the Messiah?

A. The Messiah would be born of a virgin.

Q 98 Where was the Messiah to be reborn?

A. The Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea.

Q 99 What kind of ministry was the Messiah to have?

A. The Messiah would be a prophet and a preacher.

Q 100 What would happen at the end of the Messiah's life?

A. He would be betrayed, sold, and shamed.

A family kept getting more children so they had to sell their car and buy a bigger one. One day while they were shopping they saw a car parked by the road that looked like the one they had sold. "Look! There's our old car!" The children ran to the car like it was a long lost friend.

How did they know it was the same car? They noticed it was the same make – a Nash. It was blue-green like theirs had been. It was the same year. Something else made them positive it was the same car. There was a long dent below the doors from a small accident. They recognized the dent. It was their old car!

How would people know who the Messiah would be? God made a lot of prophecies in the Bible about him. The Bible told where he would be born, that kings would come to visit him, that he would be a preacher and a prophet. It also said that later in his life he would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. When the Messiah came, people who were looking for him would recognize who he was. If they read the Bible, they would know what to look for.

Thinking Deeper

It appears that God wanted to make the coming of the Messiah so clear that anyone with an opened mind would recognize who he was. God did not hide what He was going to do. He spelled it out clearly. Reading through the Old Testament is rewarded by finding clues about things yet to come.

What are the probabilities that the prophecies about the Messiah could be fulfilled by chance? Peter Stoner calculated that just eight of the prophecies being fulfilled in one person has the probability of 1×10 to the 17th power. That means a 1 with seventeen zeros behind it. Stoner said that happening by chance would be like covering the state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep. Mark one of them with an X and then stir them up. Put a blindfolded man in the state and have him go wherever he wants. His chances of picking up that one silver dollar are the same as eight prophecies being fulfilled by chance in one person.* But there are not only eight prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament; there are many more. The probabilities of them being fulfilled by chance are so remote that it is impossible.

The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies is a great evidence that God is behind those sacred writings. "Every word of God is pure" (Pr. 30:5).