

Bible Reading: Psalm 22:16

Q101 How would the Messiah die?

A. The Messiah would be crucified.

Very few people know how they will die. It is not the kind of information we usually want to know. One little boy was about four years old when he heard that a neighbor man died. It made him feel badly. He looked up into the night sky at the stars and thought, "I wish I would never have to die." As he grew up, though, he kept hearing about others who died. Dying was something that happened – all the time. When that boy became a man, he heard about having eternal life. He opened his heart to Jesus, and was born again. After that, he wasn't afraid of death. He had hope of living forever. That hope was because Jesus, the Messiah, died for his sins.

The Messiah knew how he would die. The prophets wrote about it many years before he was born. He would die for the sins of people. And he would die by being crucified. The death of the Messiah was part of God's plan to bring man salvation. God planned it before the world was ever created. He was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8b).

Thinking Deeper

One of the earliest accounts of crucifixion comes from as far back as the 7th century B.C. where the Persians apparently practiced it. (There are some who suggest that crucifixion may have happened much earlier, citing Pharaoh hanging his former baker on a tree. Whether or not that was crucifixion or historical conjecture is probably debatable.) Later, the Romans used it much more extensively. It is quite interesting that David, who wrote Psalm 22, described the crucifixion of the Messiah with the words, "they pierced my hands and my feet." This was about 300 years before the Persians practiced it. The Jewish people certainly did not practice crucifixion. So David's prophecy about the Messiah being crucified is certainly significant.

This prophecy is so significant that it is no wonder skeptics attack it. According to some skeptics, the word "pierced" should instead be translated "like a lion." Those who deny that Psalm 22 is a Messianic psalm promote this view. But one fact stubbornly resists their explanation. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament written two hundred years before Christ, uses the word "pierced." So there was no "Christian bias" in the translation. Conservative scholars have concluded that there is no reason to question the accepted translation of David's prophecy "they pierced my hands and my feet."

Bible Reading: Isaiah 53:9

Q 102 Where would the Messiah be buried?

A. The Messiah would be buried in a rich man's tomb.

Dodge City, Kansas has a cemetery which is called Boot Hill. In it were buried people who "died with their boots on." That is a way of saying they died while in a gunfight, and they lost. It is claimed that thirty people were buried in Boot Hill, "with their boots on." Another part of the story is that few of these were buried in coffins. The wood to make coffins was too expensive, so when they died, they were buried without a coffin in Boot Hill.

Seven hundred years before the Messiah came, Isaiah wrote that he would be buried in a rich man's tomb. The Messiah would not be a rich person. He would be forsaken by his own people. Yet after he died, he would not be buried where poor people were usually buried. They were taken to a place called the Potter's Field, or the field of blood. Isaiah clearly said that he would be buried in the place where rich people were buried. He would be buried "with the rich." God inspired the prophet to write about how the Messiah would be buried so we would know who the Messiah is.

Thinking Deeper

Could a person who wanted to have fame for himself have orchestrated events to make it look like he was the Messiah? That's what some people propose. They don't want to believe that the true Messiah has come and fulfilled all of the prophecies, so they suggest that Jesus fulfilled them on purpose and perpetuated a fraud. But consider some of the prophecies. Could he have fulfilled where he was born by manipulating things? No human could do that. Imagine the difficulty: before he is born, he convinces his mother Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem. How could he have done that? He couldn't speak to them, and Morse code was not yet invented, so tapping the message would not have been possible. Actually, the suggestion that he could have fulfilled that prophecy is absurd. Another prophecy states "out of Egypt I have called my son." It is slightly more believable that as a child under two years old he could have convinced his parents that they needed to flee to Egypt. Again, it is slightly more believable, but that "slightly" is really inconceivable. How many parents move out of the country at the direction of their two year old? Could he have manipulated where he was buried? That is conceivable, but highly unlikely. There is no evidence that he had the money to buy a tomb, let alone the tomb of a rich man like Joseph of Arimathea. An itinerant preacher with no money and dwindling popularity could hardly have been buried anywhere but in the place for the lowest class. That would have been the Potter's Field. Actually, to suggest that Jesus fraudulently fulfilled the prophecies to deceive people into believing in him is absurd. The facts shout that Jesus is the promised one, the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel.

Bible Reading: Psalm 16:8-11

Q 103 What would happen to the Messiah after he died?

A. He would not be dead long enough for his body to decay.

One day some people in a country church noticed a strange smell. It reminded them of the odor of a dead skunk on the highway. They looked around but didn't see anything. Several days passed, and the smell only got worse. Finally, it was so strong that people could smell it throughout the whole church. Something had to be done. After looking everywhere they could think of, they took a flashlight and shined it down a drainpipe that was not yet connected to a rainspout. There was the problem. A skunk had climbed into the pipe, fallen to the bottom, got stuck and died. It was the worst odor some of the people had ever smelled. That skunk did what all dead things do; it decayed.

One of the prophecies about the Messiah was that after he died, his body would not decay. He would not "see corruption." That means that before a very long time passed after he died, he would be raised out of the grave. The Messiah was going to be different than any other religious leader that had ever lived and died. He was going to rise in a short time and be alive again. He would rise from the dead.

Thinking Deeper

The Bible records more than one resurrection from the dead. The prophet Elijah was instrumental in the raising the son of the widow's daughter from the dead. Elisha, who received a double portion of Elijah's spirit, was involved in two resurrections. One was the son of the Shunamite woman, and the other is recorded in 2 Kings 13:21. "And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band *of men*; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet." These accounts indicated that God had the power to raise a person from the dead.

The prophecy regarding the Messiah indicates a difference. The boys that the prophets raised from the dead eventually died. The man whose body touched Elisha's bones and revived, died at a later date. They were buried. And, like all flesh, they decayed. But the Messiah would be different. He would die. He would rise from the dead. But he would never die again. 'I *am* he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev.1:18).

Bible Reading: Isaiah 44:6-8

Q 104 Why are the Bible prophecies of the Messiah so special?

A. The Bible promises are special since no other god exists that can give true prophecies of the future.

It was Game 3 of the 1932 World Series. Babe Ruth was at bat. He had two balls and two strikes on him. The players from the other team had been giving him a hard time, yelling at him. Babe Ruth lifted his arm and pointed toward the bleachers in center field. The pitcher wound up and threw a curveball. Crack! Ruth hit the ball high and deep. Going, going, Gone!

People still talk about that home run. Did Babe Ruth really predict that he would hit it? If he did, it was quite an accomplishment. Or was he just pointing at the pitcher in some kind of friendly rivalry? We don't know. What we do know is that people don't really know what is going to happen. That's what makes what he did so interesting to talk about.

What makes the prophecies about the Messiah so special is that they came true just as the prophets wrote. God moved on them to write what they did. That's how they got it right. God's Word is truth.

Thinking Deeper

Psychics are people who claim to have a supernatural gift to see into the future. One famous psychic was Jeanne Dixon. She supposedly predicted the assassination of John Kennedy. Actually, before the election she predicted that the next president would either be assassinated or die in office. It is notable that from 1840, when William Henry Harrison was elected and died in office, the president that was elected every twenty years died in office up to the time when she made the prediction. Her prediction wasn't really that spectacular. Kennedy was elected in that twenty year cycle. So rather than a psychic prediction, it was more like a guess based on what had been happening in the past. It turns out that she made a tragically lucky guess, which was rather general in nature, but was made to fit in retrospect. Some of her other predictions were not even that lucky. She also predicted that World War III would break out in 1954, that Russia would put the first men on the moon, and that Castro would be overthrown as leader of Cuba and flee in 1970. Few people point these out as significant evidences of fulfilled prophecy. She was simply wrong.

God's standard for the true prophet was 100% accuracy. The penalty for claiming to prophesy the future and give false prophecies was death by stoning. "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, *but* the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him" (Deuteronomy 18:22).

Review The Week's Questions:

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What kind of book would God write? It would have to be a book that told the truth about everything. It would tell the truth about man and his sinfulness. It would tell the truth about how everything came into existence. It would tell the truth about the trouble in the world. And it would tell the truth about how to fix the problems. That's just what the Bible does.

The Bible tells the truth about all of these things. It tells about creation, about the sin of man and the Fall. It tells about God's law and man's need for salvation. It also tells about how God will fix the trouble of man. He will send a Promised One, a Messiah, to take man's place and die for his sins. The Bible describes this Messiah in detail: where he will be born, what he will be like, what he will do, how he will be rejected, how he will be mistreated, and how he will die. It also describes how he will rise from the dead.

If you want to find a book that is the kind of book God would write, look at the Bible. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

Thinking Deeper

The Bible reveals that some supernatural activity in the world can be ascribed to demonic forces. When Aaron threw down his rod, it became a serpent. Pharaoh's magicians threw down their rods which also became snakes. The difference was that the serpent from Aaron's rod swallowed the serpents of the magicians. God, whose power was on display, showed himself stronger than demons. Yet from this account we see that there is real demonic activity in the world.

Demons may be able to demonstrate some power, but one thing they have never been able to do is to accurately predict the future. They simply do not know what will happen in days to come. That is why Pharaoh's wise men failed to interpret his dreams. The demonic spirits they relied on could not see into the future. On the other hand, Joseph did correctly interpret the dreams because God revealed the future to him.

This explains why no religious works other than the Bible have significant prophecies that are clearly revealed and fulfilled. What the Old Testament revealed about the coming Messiah stands alone as prophetic literature. It really has no competition. In this aspect alone, the Bible bears the mark of divine inspiration. It is the handiwork of the God who is there.