

The Living and Powerful Word of God Christmas, 2024

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:1, 14

“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, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.... And His name is called The Word of God.”

Isaiah 9:6; Revelation 19:13

The Transmission and Preservation of the Word of God

In our weekly Friday night Bible study, we have been studying the Doctrine of Canonicity—how the Bible has come down to us. Our eager students in that class have been enthralled with the many miracles involved in getting the Word of God into our hands in our own language. One of the priceless principles we have observed is that **prophecy proves inspiration**. No objective mind could deny that the multitude of specific prophecies given in Old Testament times, and later fulfilled hundreds and even thousands of years later, could only come by divine inspiration from Him who is *“the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End”* (Isa. 44:6, 10; Rev. 22:13). Those who ask for proof that the Bible is the Word of God have all the proof any unbiased mind could require by simply studying prophecy and fulfillment.

However, there is another axiom that goes hand in hand with the one above. That is that **prophecy proves identification**. Not only is the evidence of inspiration overwhelming, but so is the evidence for the identification of the only man in history who could be the Savior of the world.

The Christmas season always turns my mind to the subject of prophecy, as it should for every believer in Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world at precisely the time Daniel had predicted (Dan. 9:25). He was born in Bethlehem just as Micah said He would be (Micah 5:2). How astounding that Micah links the birth of the Messiah—the King of Israel—to the ancient *“tower of the flock”* (tower of Eder) in Micah 4:8.

This takes us back to the story of Jacob and Rachel in Genesis 35:16–21. Having departed from Bethel (the House of God), Jacob travelled to just outside Ephrath (Bethlehem, see v. 19), when Rachel (whose name means “Ewe”), went into labor. Her labor was fatal, and as she was dying, she named her newborn son “Ben-Oni” meaning “Son of my sorrow.” Jacob, however, changed his name to Benjamin, “Son of my right hand.” Rachel was buried there, and grieving Jacob then went “beyond the tower of Eder” and pitched his tent. The suggestion is that “the tower of Eder” is where Benjamin was born, and Rachel died.

Micah, written seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, identifies His birthplace as “the tower of the flock.” The tower of Eder was situated in the shepherds’ fields, just outside Bethlehem. It served two purposes: first to be a watchtower, on the lookout for raiders. Secondly,

it was situated above a cave or grotto that was used for a shelter, as well as the birthing place for the ewes to bring forth their lambs.

Not only did God foretell the time and place of Jesus' birth, but the prophecies included the idea that He would be both God's sacrificial Lamb, as well as the Guardian of the flock of God.

The flight of Joseph and Mary with the infant Jesus, into and then out of Egypt, was anticipated by the prophet Hosea (Hos. 11:1). His growing up in Nazareth is foretold by the many "branch" prophecies (Isa. 4:2; 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zec. 3:8; 6:12), which are interpreted for us by Matthew, "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'" (Matt. 2:23). Both words, "Branch" and "Nazareth" coming from the Hebrew word *Netzer*.

The atheist Peter Stoner, mathematician and probability scientist, set out to prove the Bible was false. He knew that to do this he would have to disprove prophecy. Taking just eight specific prophecies regarding the coming of Jesus and calculating the "chance" fulfillment of those prophecies, he came to the conclusion that the odds of their fulfillment by "chance" were 1 in 10 to the 17th power (i.e. seventeen zeros).

To put this into terms we can understand, he said that if we were to cover the state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep, with one of them marked, and send someone into the state to find that one marked silver dollar, their chances would be the same as the "odds" of Jesus fulfilling only eight of the over 300 prophecies concerning His first coming alone. By the way, Peter Stoner became a believer in Jesus Christ as a result of his research into prophecy!

Coming back to Jesus and His birth outside Bethlehem, at the tower of Eder: Here are quotes from the website Promised Land Ministries:

"Here are the meanings of the names involved in this account:

Bethel—House of God

Israel—God prevails

Rachel—ewe

Benoni—son of my sorrow'

Benjamin—'son of the right hand'

I immediately saw a parallel between both of these births recorded in Scripture: both in Bethlehem, both related to the tower of the flock (*Migdal Eder*). Rachel, the 'ewe,' is carrying her little 'lamb,' who leaves the 'house of God' to be born in Bethlehem (the 'house of bread'). When children were born in biblical times, they were often named by the circumstances in which they were born. Knowing she would be dying, Rachel named her little 'lamb,' *Benoni* (son of my sorrow). But Israel ('God prevails') renames him Benjamin, 'son of the right hand.'"

And so, we see the two axioms that work together to bind the written and the Living Word of God together: **prophecy proves inspiration**, and **prophecy proves identification**. God has gone to great lengths to provide us with comfort, assurance, and security through our trust in His written word, which leads us to faith in the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

End of Year Review

This year we were able to execute missions to India, Nagaland, and Cuba. These trips involved pastor training seminars, Bible student training and graduations, church building projects, children's ministry and evangelistic outreach. In addition, we hosted five Bible conferences, as well as our annual retreat for young pastors and their wives, which was special this year as our daughter Katie and her husband Daniel were able to join us from Australia for some valuable sessions of teaching and discussion.

New Year Plans

The new year is upon us, and plans are in the works for many ministry opportunities. Nan and I will be departing January 7 for South Asia. We will host, along with our ministry partners, a three-day Pastor/wife conference attended by village pastors and their wives. This is a refreshing time for them as we provide comfortable accommodations, food, sound teaching, and fellowship. It is a time away from duties and hardships to be encouraged in their ministry.

The conference will be followed by three days of training for Bible students, then a journey into the high (and very cold) mountains to deliver much needed support for Bible College students. We will be at the Bible College for ten days of teaching with the students and join in the 25th-year anniversary celebration of the school. This will be a big event and bring pastors and workers together from many villages for a time of teaching and rejoicing. Before leaving the area, we will visit the precious girls at the orphanage we support.

News will be coming out in the near future for our 2025 Bible conference schedule in the USA. Also, many requests are coming for Africa, so we are looking into returning there later in the New Year.

Thanksgiving

We are so grateful for the matchless grace of God that allows us to serve in so many ways, and for sustaining our health and strength to be able to go "to the uttermost parts of the earth," to proclaim God's plan of salvation, "by grace, through faith, plus nothing."

Also, we are so very thankful for each of you who lift us up in your prayers, and for every offering that is sent to support our work. In eternity, we will all share in the rewards of what God has done by allowing us to each play a part in His amazing redemptive plan.

May God richly reward and bless every believer who is available to serve, and who uses the resources given by God for His glory. We pray that this new year, in which God has miraculously provided a chance for America to return to Him, and for Truth to prevail, will be filled with rich blessings and effective service to each and every one of you.

God bless you for joining us in His adventure.

Merry Christmas!

Gene and Nan Cunningham
And the BTBM team