

Chapter 13: The death of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

A week later, the boys arrived punctually at Professor Ho's office. "Today we're going to talk about the crucifixion, right Professor Ho?" Xiao Li asked.

"Yes," affirmed Professor Ho, then turned toward Xiao Wang. "The death of Jesus Christ is the very heart of Christianity. It's the thing that really sets the gospel apart from all other religions. Other religions might agree that humanity has a problem, has sin in fact, but their solutions almost always center around what human beings should do to make themselves right. In contrast, the cross of Jesus Christ is *God's* solution to the problem of our sin." The three fell silent as Professor Ho pulled his old Bible to the center of the desk.

"After Jesus's three and a half years of ministry, He was betrayed by one of His disciples, unjustly condemned by the Jewish and Roman leaders, and crucified. A remarkable number of the details of these events were predicted in the Old Testament hundreds of years before they happened.

"Of course we've already seen that the many aspects of Jesus's ancestry, birth and miracles were predicted in advance [see chapters 11 and 12], including the timing of the start of His ministry in 26 AD [see chapter 9]. But as we approach the end of Jesus's life on earth, the extent of the prophecies and the level of detail increases.

"There are many of these prophecies about Jesus's suffering—one writer finds 29 of them fulfilled in a single day¹—but today I would like to focus on three sets, one about His betrayal and two about His crucifixion.

[Here it is suggested that the reader read Matthew chapters 26-27.]

The Messiah: His betrayal and arrest

"Jesus's betrayal, arrest and condemnation are extensively reported in all four gospels and referred to in many of the other books of the New Testament. These facts formed an important part of the most basic Christian preaching from the very beginning. Let's look at part of Matthew's record." Professor Ho opened his Bible to near the beginning of the New Testament and read:

14 Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests, 15 and said, "What are you willing to give me to deliver Him up to you?" And they weighed out to him thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Him. [Matthew 26:14-16 NAS]

Professor Ho looked up from his reading. "Money! The thing that runs the world—and destroys it. The Bible warns that 'the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil' [1Timothy 6:10]; any sin that anyone has ever committed, someone will be willing to commit for money. That includes murderous betrayal.

"The greed that was Judas's downfall was not a sudden occurrence. Over in the gospel of John, we learn that he was the treasurer for Jesus's group of disciples:

...he [Judas] was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. [John 12:6 NAS]

Apparently this had been his habit for some time, maybe from the beginning."

"But if Judas was making money off being Jesus's treasurer, why would he want to betray Him?" Xiao Wang asked.

"Doubtless part of the answer is that he expected a better return from betrayal than from embezzlement," Professor Ho replied. "The thirty pieces of silver were equivalent to about four months' wages for a day laborer. And that may have been only the down payment; it seems they promised to pay more if he succeeded in enabling them to seize Jesus [see Mark 14:11, Luke 22:3].

"But there was probably an additional factor in Judas's decision to betray Jesus at that point. There's no reason to doubt that Judas, like the rest of the disciples, originally thought that Jesus would lead an uprising, drive out the Romans, and become king of Israel. Then Judas himself would be a high official under Jesus. It's clear that some of His followers still had this expectation even while Jesus was headed for the cross on His last journey to Jerusalem:

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons [the disciples James and John], bowing down and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left." [Matthew 20:20-21 NAS]

Notice that not only the mother, but also both the disciples James and John came and made this request. Clearly they were still thinking in terms of an earthly kingdom in the near future. They had Old Testament basis for that expectation, and when Jesus returns to the earth at His Second Coming, He really will rule over a physical kingdom in this world [see chapter 15]. But, as we'll see later today, the Old Testament also taught that the Messiah would be rejected, suffer, and die the first time He came—not rule over an earthly kingdom. The disciples should have understood this, if not from the Old Testament prophecies, then at least from Jesus's plain and repeated statements. Ironically, painfully ironically, the request about sitting on Jesus's right and left was made just after Jesus had told them for the umpteenth time that He was headed for crucifixion:

17 As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve *disciples* aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, 18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to

mock and scourge and crucify *Him*, and on the third day He will be raised up." [Matthew 20:17-19 NAS]

James and John seem to have missed the point that Jesus was about to die, but I have a suspicion that Judas didn't. I think Judas realized that Jesus was going to let Himself be killed in Jerusalem.^A If that were the case, the future would not be very bright for His twelve chief followers! At a minimum, there wouldn't be any more opportunities for making money as treasurer. In fact, things might become downright dangerous. Betraying Jesus was definitely a way to make money before everything fell apart. Conceivably Judas also felt it would provide him protection after his leader was condemned as a criminal, though I admit that part is just a speculation.

"The chief priests wanted the betrayal to happen in a quiet place, 'apart from the crowd' [Luke 22:6]. They were afraid to seize Him in the Temple or other public places where crowds were listening to His teaching and might start a riot. A few days after he received the thirty pieces of silver, on the night before Passover, Judas found his opportunity when Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane in the middle of the night with His disciples. Matthew was there and records:

47...while He [Jesus] was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up, accompanied by a great multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I shall kiss, He is the one; seize Him." 49 And immediately he went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. 50 And Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. [Matthew 26:47-50 NAS]

Greed led to betrayal, and betrayal to hypocrisy, and finally Judas betrays his loving Master with a kiss! Next Jesus was tried and condemned to death. We'll look some details from the trial in a moment. But first we need to finish Judas's story.

3 Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See *to that* yourself!" 5 And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood." 7 And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. 8 For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel; 10 AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER'S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME." [Matthew 27:3-10 NAS]

When Judas saw the outcome, he was filled with regret and despair. Suddenly the silver he had coveted seemed to be covered with blood and accusing him. He tried to return the money to the chief priests, a vain attempt to assuage his guilty conscience. Unsuccessful, he throws the coins into the temple, despairs completely, and kills himself."

"Could Judas have been forgiven?" Xiao Li asked.

"Certainly," Professor Ho affirmed, "if he had repented and put his trust in Jesus. But he was remorseful, not repentant. Remorse just leads to despair, as the Bible says elsewhere:

10 For the sorrow that is according to *the will of God* produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. [2Corinthians 7:10 NAS]

Judas was sorry for himself—sorry that he was such a bad fellow and had to feel so much pain in his conscience. That kind of regret is really a form of self-pity, and it sinks into despair. The person who has 'sorrow that is according to the will of God' is sad about having offended against God and harmed someone, not just sorry that he feels so bad. That proper sorrow over sin leads to repentance, which is a determination never to sin again, and opens the possibility of receiving forgiveness and salvation. As a Jew familiar with the Old Testament, Judas knew about King David being forgiven for murder. He could have known forgiveness was available to him. But he did not choose to repent."

Judas's betrayal fulfilled Old Testament prophecy

"After Judas threw the money into the temple, the chief priests faced a conundrum. They didn't care much about justice or blood guilt, but they were great sticklers for the ceremonial law of the Old Testament. They knew they couldn't just put such ill-gotten gains into the temple treasury. So they purchased a potter's field as a burial place for corpses of visitors who died in Jerusalem. The hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who attended the major festivals in Jerusalem each year would have made this an ongoing problem, especially since the law of Moses required same day burial. Some scholars think they used a legal fiction to regard the field as having been bought in Judas's name, and thus belonging to Judas. This would have further distanced them from the unclean money.

"What Judas and the chief priests did that day fulfilled in remarkable details predictions made by the prophet Zechariah in about 500 BC." Professor Ho turned back to the Old Testament and read:

^A Consider also that Judas goes to the chief priests after hearing Jesus explicitly repeat His expectation that His own death was imminent. See Matthew 26:11-16.

12 And I said to them, "If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!" So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages. 13 Then the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them." So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD. [Zechariah 11:12-13 NAS]

This prediction was actually written over 400 years before Jesus—and no one, not even the most extreme of the unbelieving critics, can deny it was written over a hundred years before the betrayal. The prophecy in Zechariah chapter 11 is complex.^B The prophet is symbolically dressed up as a shepherd, representing Jehovah, the good shepherd of Israel. But the Jews are rejecting Jehovah's shepherding. As they send this shepherd away, they give him his last payment. It was thirty pieces of silver, which was the standard price for a slave in the Old Testament. God says that was the price at which the Jews valued Him! Then, in an odd twist, the money is thrown to a potter in the temple of the LORD.

"This prophecy must have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to fully understand before it was fulfilled. The meaning is clear enough now. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was rejected by the Jewish leadership, and by most of the common people. The chief priests were glad to spend a mere thirty pieces of silver to get rid of Him—to get rid of God the Son, Jehovah come to earth as a man! But those thirty silver coins wound up throw into the temple, then spent on the potter's field. Consider the how detailed the fulfillment is. The payment had to be:

1. from the Jews in rejection of the LORD's appointed shepherd;
2. 30 pieces—not 20, not 40;
3. silver—not gold or copper;
4. thrown—not placed;
5. in the temple, the house of the LORD—not in the king's palace or the farmer's barn;
6. the money goes to a potter—not to a baker or a soldier."

"Professor Ho," Xiao Li asked, "why does it say in Matthew that the prophecy is in Jeremiah?"

"A good question! Matthew's quotation probably combines a part of a verse from Jeremiah 18 or 19 along with part of Zechariah 11:12-13. That might be why he references Jeremiah the prophet. Other scholars suggest the word 'Jeremiah' refers to the first book in the scroll which contained both Jeremiah and Zechariah according to the order of books in the Old Testament which Matthew was using. I incline to the first view, that Matthew is combining quotations. That might seem odd to us, but it was certainly done by the Jews sometimes when they were quoting Old Testament scriptures,^C and Matthew is a very Jewish gospel."

"I have some questions," said Xiao Wang.

"Ask away!" said Professor Ho. "I've probably asked them myself."

Xiao Wang smiled. "You probably have! First of all, how do we know they didn't fulfill the prophecy about the thirty pieces of silver on purpose?"

Professor Ho raised both eyebrows. "May I ask *who* of the parties involved would have wanted to? Not greedy Judas, who obviously *didn't* believe Jesus was God and was just trying to salve his conscience. Certainly not the chief priests, who stoutly denied that Jesus was the Messiah. And I rather doubt the owner of the potter's field was trying to prop up Jesus's claims! None of the people involved here *wanted* to fulfill Zechariah's prophecy. But it required all of these working together to complete the fulfillment."

Xiao Wang pondered for a moment, then admitted, "You have a good point. I didn't think about that before I asked the question." He smiled wryly and added, "Maybe I've spent too much time on the skeptics websites! But I have another question: Did Jesus know what Judas was going to do?"

"Yes," Professor affirmed with a grave look on his face, "He knew it all along. The apostle John records Jesus's statement about it over a year before the crucifixion, though Jesus didn't mention any names then:

70 Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and *yet* one of you is a devil?" 71 Now He meant Judas *the son* of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him. [John 6:70-71 NAS]

64 ... For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. [John 6:64 NAS]

Elsewhere it is made clear that Jesus knew Judas was going to do it that very night [John 13:21-30]."

Xiao Wang was perplexed. "Did God want Judas to betray Jesus? Or did Jesus want him to?"

"Jesus *is* God," Professor Ho reminded him, "so if God wanted it, then so did Jesus. But the answer is: no, God the Father and God the Son didn't want Judas to betray Jesus."

"Then why didn't Jesus stop him? He could have confronted Judas openly and made him afraid to do it," Xiao Wang protested.

"Yes," Professor Ho agreed, "Jesus could have done that. But it would have amounted to using His omniscience to force Judas not to sin. God could do that all the time if He wanted to; but instead, He gives us *real* free will. [See chap-

^B See Appendix 13-1 at the end of this chapter for an outline.

^C See, for example, Matthew 21:5 which combines quotes from Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9 but names neither prophet, or Mark 1:2-3 which quotes from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, but only mentions Isaiah's name. Jews familiar with the Old Testament would have readily understood these references and known which books they came from.

ter 2.] Jesus made it clear that Judas was responsible for his choice and would wind up in hell for it, even though that choice was fulfilling prophecy:

24 "The Son of Man *is to go*, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." [Matthew 26:24 NAS]

Note that Judas was present when Jesus said these words during the last supper; it was another chance for Judas to repent, to decide that he would not be the betrayer. Jesus gave Judas a final open warning, but it was delivered in a way which still left him free to choose to follow through with the betrayal. Here Jesus affirms that Judas's choice to betray the Son of Man was foreknown: 'just as it is written.' At the same time, Judas is clearly going to hell: 'good for that man if he had not been born.' God is just; if Judas is going to punishment in hell, it can only be for something which he freely chose to do."

"But Professor Ho," Xiao Wang protested, "I'm still bothered by God having everything planned in advance. If God's in control of everything like that, how can there be free will? That's always bothered me about fulfilled prophecy. It looks like God is controlling the game!"

Professor Ho nodded. "You and I, and many others, have been bothered by that! The answer is surprisingly simple: God doesn't force people to make certain choices. He simply foresees what choices they will make and then sets up His plans accordingly. God foreknew that Augustus, given the chance, would order a census, and when that census would impact Palestine. That way he could use it to get Jesus born in the right place. God foreknew that Judas, given the chance, would both choose to become Jesus's disciple and choose to betray Him."

Xiao Wang was still not satisfied. "But if God foresees people's choices before they happen, before the people are even born, then all their actions are predetermined. Where's the freedom in that?"

"If it really were predetermined, there wouldn't be any freedom," Professor Ho agreed. "But I think you may have confused two different things: foreknowing and predestining. To know is not the same as to cause. Consider a human example. You 'knew' yesterday, before it happened, that the sun would rise in the east this morning, at least with as much certainty as a human being can have about anything that's in the future. And you could have adjusted your plans according to your foreknowledge, say, by leaving the curtains open on your eastward facing window so you would be awakened at sunrise. But you didn't *cause* the sun to rise in the east! It's the same way with God's knowledge about human choices in the future: He foreknows them, He plans around them to ensure His objectives are achieved, but He doesn't cause or control them."

"But the sun might not have risen this morning; it could have blown up in a supernova, or the world could have ended!" Xiao Wang pointed out.

"True enough," admitted Professor Ho, "but that's where God is different from us. We can't know the future with absolute certainty; He does know. But to know, in this case to foreknow, is not the same thing as to cause."

This time it was Xiao Li who was puzzled. "You said God isn't forcing or controlling people's choices, and I agree. But how can God foresee choices that people haven't made yet? They don't exist yet!"

"An excellent question, to which I have no answer!" Professor Ho replied immediately. "Somehow or another God exists, as it were, outside of time. But I don't! I can't fully understand all of God's abilities and attributes. But that's not so surprising, since He's omniscient—and I'm not!"

[Here it is suggested that the reader read Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52:13—53:12.]

Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 predict the details of the death of the Messiah

"What happened next is the most sacred and terrible event in all of human history. As you know, boys, the cross is the symbol of Christianity. The cross is the heart of the gospel, the thing that really sets Christianity apart from all other religions. On the cross, God the Son, God become a human being, was put to death by human beings. God the Father, Son and Spirit allowed this to happen so that Jesus the God-man could take the punishment that had to be paid for our sins. If He hadn't paid it, we would have to—in hell, forever.

"You will recall that the prophet Daniel, in addition to predicting the precise timing of the coming of the Messiah in 26 AD, also predicted His violent death:

...the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing... [Daniel 9:26 NAS]

Daniel doesn't give us much more information, but a large number of the details of Jesus's suffering and death were predicted hundreds of years before He was born. These occur throughout the Old Testament, but today I just want to focus on the two most concentrated sections: Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

"Let's compare the predictions with what actually happened to Jesus." Professor Ho shuffled through the file folder on his desk, took out another sheet and laid it on his desktop.

Isaiah predicted the Messiah would be despised and rejected by the Jewish nation

"As you will remember, boys, Isaiah lived 700 years before Jesus. Furthermore, the oldest copy of Isaiah that we presently have dates from over 130 years before Jesus's death [see chapter 7]. In other words, there's absolutely no question that the prophecies predate the fulfillments. In the section 52:13—53:12, Isaiah predicts Jesus would be rejected by the majority of the Jews, unjustly condemned, and die. Isaiah also says Jesus would be sacrificed to bear the punishment for the sins of humanity, and that afterwards He would come back to life, be exalted, and that people from many

different ethnicities would come to believe in Him. Let's look at some of the details." Professor Ho turned to the chart on the desktop.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
<p>Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. [Isaiah 53:1-3 NAS]</p>	<p>But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; [John 12:37 NAS]</p> <p>Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; and they plotted together to seize Jesus...and kill Him. ...</p> <p>...the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask...to put Jesus to death. ...</p> <p>Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let Him be crucified!" And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!" [Matthew 26:3-4; 27:20, 22-23 NAS]</p>

"Isaiah is explicit that the Messiah will be rejected by the Jewish people as a whole, and not only rejected, but despised and put to grief. None of them could deny that Jesus had performed many miracles, but as Jesus pointed out in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus [chapter 12] miracles alone will not convince people whose hearts are hardened."

"Why did the leaders hate Him so much?" Xiao Wang wondered.

"Above all because He pointed out their hypocrisy and sin. You remember we studied part of the Sermon on the Mount. The moral standard preached by Jesus, God's actual moral standard, was so much higher than that of even the most religious people of Jesus's day. And Jesus did not hesitate to point out their sin directly, including the sin of the religious leaders [see Matthew 23]. In addition, they felt He was a threat to social stability and their governing authority:

47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man [Jesus] is performing many signs. 48 "If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." [John 11:47-50 NAS]

Finally, the majority of the Jewish leaders, a crowd of the common people, and Pilate the Roman governor, all agreed to put Him to death. They 'despised' the Messiah, just as Isaiah had predicted. They paid no attention to Isaiah's prophecy, despite the fact that every Jew was very familiar with it."

"But what about the people who did believe in Jesus?" Xiao Li asked. "Don't they count?"

"Those were the exception," agreed Professor Ho, "but they were far fewer than you might imagine when you read about the crowds of people who listened to Jesus's preaching. It's easy to demonstrate this. Jesus was crucified during the Passover season. There were hundreds of thousands of Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem for the festival. If even ten percent of them had tried to stop Jesus's crucifixion, they could have easily succeeded in saving Him. The Romans only had a few thousand troops in the city,² and it seems that only a handful of these accompanied Jesus to the cross. As we'll see in a moment, the crucifixion of Jesus was publically announced before it was carried out, and He was paraded through the streets. If even one or two thousand Jews had truly believed Jesus was the Messiah and had taken determined action, they could have rescued Him. But apparently no one even tried. Jesus was not the kind of Messiah the Jews expected or wanted, so neither His miracles nor Isaiah's prophetic warning were convincing to them."

Isaiah predicted the Messiah would not defend Himself when accused

<p>He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. [Isaiah 53:7 NAS]</p>	<p>Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. They did not find <i>any</i>, even though many false witnesses came forward. ...</p> <p>... And the high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You make no answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." Then the high priest tore his robes, saying, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death!"</p> <p>... Now Jesus stood before [Pilate] the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "It is as you say." And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He made no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so that the governor was quite amazed. [Matthew 26:59-60a, 62-66; 27:11-14 NAS]</p>
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“For the most part, Jesus made no reply to the false accusations which the Jewish leadership orchestrated against Him, just as Isaiah had predicted. Jesus only spoke when directly asked whether He was the Messiah and the Son of God. To have been silent then would have been to deny His identity, so Jesus publically declared His deity, His Messiahship, and His humanity. He quotes two messianic scriptures, Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13, and explicitly identifies Himself with the eternal ruler called the Son of Man in Daniel. The priests were perfectly clear that Jesus was claiming to be God—that’s why they condemned Him for blasphemy.

“The Roman government did not permit the native leaders in colonized areas to carry out a death sentence. Only the local Roman ruler had that authority. Therefore the priests took Jesus to the Roman governor, Pilate. Before Pilate, the priests made a different accusation, saying that Jesus was leading a rebellion. Once again, Jesus did not defend Himself. He only affirmed that He was the King of the Jews.”

Professor Ho paused and looked sober. “There’s something very terrible and very beautiful hidden in Jesus’s silence before His accusers. I’m sure He easily could have refuted their falsehoods. But I think that at this point, Jesus was beginning to take the place of us sinners. Put yourself in Jesus’s place for a moment. If you enemies wanted to point out your sins, think of all the things they could rightfully accuse you of! If you or I had to stand in front of God, or even man, and face accusation for all the sins we have committed, we would have nothing to say in our own defense. Jesus took our place that day.”

Isaiah predicted the Messiah would be unjustly condemned and executed

<p>By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of My people to whom the stroke was due? [Isaiah 53:8 NAS]</p>	<p>Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, in order that they might put Him to death; and they did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. ... [Matthew 26:59-60a NAS]</p> <p>...[Pilate] knew that because of envy they had handed Him over. [Matthew 27:18 NAS]</p> <p>And Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. I will therefore punish Him and release Him." ...</p> <p>But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man...!" ...</p> <p>And Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, but they kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!" And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; I will therefore punish Him and release Him." But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail. And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand should be granted. [Luke 23:13-16, 18a, 20-24 NAS]</p>
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“The Roman governor Pilate knew perfectly well that the accusations were false and Jesus was not guilty of inciting a rebellion or any other crime worthy of death. He understood the Jews well enough to know that it was all an interne-cine quarrel over religious issues. Nonetheless, for fear of inciting a riot among the masses gathered in Jerusalem, Pilate granted their demands and condemned Jesus to death, an act that gained him an eternal reputation for injustice and cowardliness.

“Isaiah had predicted that the Messiah would be unjustly condemned to death, ‘cut off out of the land of the living’ ‘by oppression and judgment.’ But the Holy Spirit also revealed to him the reason, a reason that would be hidden from the Jews of that time: ‘for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due.’ Jesus was to be executed in place of others who *did* deserve to be punished.

“Three hundred years before Isaiah—more than a thousand years before Jesus was crucified—King David had already received a prophetic revelation including many details of Jesus’s execution.”

David predicted the details of the Messiah’s death

“Psalm 22 was written by David, who died around 970 BC [see chapter 6]. In Psalm 22, David used the first person ‘I’ to narrate the events. However, when we compare the contents with David’s extensive biographical record in the Old Testament, it’s indisputably clear that the occurrences detailed in Psalm 22 never happened to him.^D It is an inspired prophecy of things which would happen a thousand years later to David’s greatest descendent, the Messiah Jesus.

“To understand how amazing this prophecy is, we must understand crucifixion. The person to be punished was stripped naked. The soldiers who carried out the execution were allowed to keep the crucified person’s clothing and personal effects. The victim’s hands and feet were nailed (or sometimes tied) to a wooden beam, and then he was left there to die slowly. Under these circumstances, the crucified person’s breathing gradually became very difficult, and he had to use his hands and his feet to painfully force his body up before he could take a breath. It seems that the victim

^D Interested readers may consult David’s detailed biography in 1 Samuel 1—16, 2 Samuel 1—24, 1 Kings 1—2, 1 Chronicles 3, 11—29.

usually died because in the end he became too weak and exhausted to raise himself, and finally died of asphyxiation. This usually required from one to three days.

“Many violent deaths and executions are recorded in the Old Testament, sometimes in surprisingly graphic detail, but there is no mention of a person being crucified. The earliest historical record we have of crucifixion comes from Persia in 522 BC. It seems that it did not come into Palestine until 331 BC, with the Greeks under Alexander the Great.³ It seems impossible that a Jew living at the time of David had seen a crucifixion. God let King David see what would happen in the future to his descendant, the Messiah.”

David predicted the Messiah would be rejected and mocked

<p>But I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, "Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him." ... Many bulls have surrounded me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, as a ravening and a roaring lion. [Psalms 22:6-8, 12-13 NAS]</p>	<p>[After Jesus was condemned by the Jewish Council,] ... they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, and said, "Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?"</p> <p>...</p> <p>Then the soldiers of the [Roman] governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. And they stripped Him, and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they kneeled down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. And after they had mocked Him, they took His robe off and put His garments on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.</p> <p>...</p> <p>At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET HIM DELIVER Him now, IF HE TAKES PLEASURE IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' " And the robbers also who had been crucified with Him were casting the same insult at Him. [Matthew 26:67-68; 27:27-31, 38-44 NAS]</p>
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“Psalm 22 predicts public mockery of the Messiah. It was mercilessly fulfilled. The chief priests and leaders of Israel, the Roman soldiers, the people passing by the site of the crucifixion, even the criminals being crucified at the same time as Jesus all mocked Him. As we just saw, during His trial, Jesus had plainly affirmed that He was both the Messiah and the Son of God [Matthew 26:63-64; Mark 14:61-62; Luke 22:70]. Claiming to be the Son of God was held to be blasphemous—which it would have been, if it were not true. As Jesus hung on the cross, both His claims to deity and to Messiahship were hurled back at Him in sarcastic derision.”

Professor Ho paused. He looked thoughtful and solemn. “ ‘He saved others; He cannot save Himself.’ How little they understood! Jesus could have easily saved Himself; but then He *could not have* saved others. If Jesus hadn’t let Himself die on the cross in our place, no one could have been saved. ‘Let Him come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him.’ If Jesus had come down from the cross then, it would have been to judge them and throw them into hell immediately, not to give them a chance to believe! At what seemed to them Jesus’s moment of greatest weakness and defeat, He was doing His greatest work, the work of making it possible for sinners like them and us to be saved.

“Psalm 22 goes on to predict how Jesus would be attached to the cross.”

David predicted the Messiah’s hands and feet would be pierced

<p>For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. [Psalm 22:16 NAS]</p>	<p>38 [Appearing after the resurrection, Jesus] said to them [ten of the disciples], "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. [Luke 24:38-40 NAS]</p> <p>The other disciples therefore were saying to him [Thomas], "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing." [John 20:25-27 NAS]</p>
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“The Romans used either nails or ropes to attach a victim to a cross.^{4,5,E} It’s clear from the New Testament ac-

^E Remains of at least one crucifixion victim from the 1st century AD period have been discovered in Palestine. Nails had been driven [continued on next page...]

count that they used nails on Jesus; the marks were still visible after His resurrection. The prophetic prediction of this cruelty is one of the most amazing details in Psalm 22. Certainly David's own hands and feet were never pierced by his enemies. Nor would he have ever seen a crucifixion. In spite of this, he accurately prophesied that the Messiah's hands and feet would be 'pierced.' A revelation from God enabled David to know what would happen in the future to Jesus Christ. And the nailing was not the only detail he foresaw."

David predicted the Messiah would be stripped and His clothing gambled over

I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. [Psalm 22:17-18 NAS]	And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots; [Matthew 27:35 NAS] The soldiers therefore, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. They said therefore to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be"; that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "THEY DIVIDED MY OUTER GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS." [John 19:23-24 NAS]
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"Portrayals of Jesus on the cross have a piece of cloth wrapped around His waist. That representation is appropriate, for modesty's sake, but in fact Jesus was stripped naked before He was put on the cross, suffering the shame of public nudity. He was in a public place outside the city walls. It was the most important festival of the year, Passover, so Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims from all over. Probably thousands, maybe even tens of thousands of people saw Him. His body was stretched out on the cross, with His bones visible, protruding under His skin and perhaps even visible through some of the lacerations. It was a grim sight.

"Meanwhile, the guards gambled for His clothing, as predicted. Historians say the crucifixion squad would have consisted of four soldiers led by a centurion. The soldiers had the right to keep the executed man's clothing. Scholars say Jesus would have been wearing an outer robe, a headdress of some sort, a sash at His waist, and sandals. Those divided up neatly among four legionnaires, but in addition Jesus would have had an inner garment, a fairly long tunic woven in one piece.⁶ Rather than tearing it up and ruining the weave, they decided to gamble for it—thus unwittingly fulfilling a thousand year old prophecy.

"Of course nothing like this happened to David; it was revealed to him as a prophecy by the Holy Spirit.

"Let's go back to Isaiah 53 for another predicted detail about the crucifixion."

Isaiah predicted the Messiah would be regarded as a criminal

...He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. ... we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ... as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke <i>was due</i> ? ... He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors. [Isaiah 53:3, 4, 8, 12 NAS]	Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. [Luke 23:32-33 NAS]
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"Jesus was literally 'numbered with the transgressors,' counted as a criminal and crucified between two robbers who were justly condemned [see Matthew 27:38, Luke 23:41]. The word 'robbers' used for those two men in Matthew and Mark indicates violent, physical assault; the men crucified with Jesus may well have been guilty of murder. Jesus was considered worthy of dying the death of such criminals.

"Even those who loved Him didn't understand what was happening; 'as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off' 'for the transgression of my people'? No one at the time realized that He was suffering God's punishment in the place of us sinners, both Jews and gentiles.

"In all probability, Jesus hung on the cross for around six hours, from about nine in the morning to about three in the afternoon.^F Toward the end, dehydration was making it difficult for Him to speak. David had predicted that."

through each of his wrists, and a single nail through both of his feet. See Notes 4 and 5.

^F This assumes that the gospel of John uses Roman time (see John 19:14). Some scholars think Jesus's total time on the cross was only about three hours, from 12 noon to 3 pm. Interested readers may consult relevant reference works.

David predicted the Messiah's thirst at His death

My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and You lay me in the dust of death. [Psalm 22:15 NAS]	And immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. ...And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. [Matthew 27:48, 50 NAS]
They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. [Psalm 69:21 NAS]	After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop, and brought it up to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit. [John 19:28-30 NAS]

"Why does it say that it was 'in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled' that Jesus said 'I am thirsty'?" Xiao Wang asked. "Was Jesus doing it on purpose to fulfill the prophecy?"

"No," Professor Ho replied, "I'm sure His thirst was genuine! And the person who gave Him the astringent vinegar to quench thirst did it in cruel mockery, not to fulfill prophecy! The apostle John simply means that these events, including Jesus's indirect request for a drink, were the means God used to fulfill the prophecies. It's just like the previous example in John 19:24 where the soldiers dividing Jesus's clothing is said to be done 'that the Scripture might be fulfilled.' The specific prophecy being fulfilled by giving Jesus sour wine (vinegar) was doubtless Psalm 69:21. Psalm 69 is also by David and also Messianic.^G

"In Psalm 22 we find David predicting the extreme thirst the Messiah would experience before He died: His tongue would cleave to his jaws. Jesus's dehydration is not surprising in light of the open wounds from the flogging and up to six hours of exposure on the cross. But I think Jesus's motivation might not have been relief of thirst. I think He may have wanted to wet His parched mouth so He would be able to shout one clear, loud statement just before He died.^H When we combine the records of Matthew and John, we find that shortly before He died Jesus 'cried out' 'with a loud voice' the words 'It is finished!'

"What was finished? What completion did Jesus want to announce so loudly? Let's first look at Jesus's burial, and then return to that question."

Isaiah predicted the Messiah's burial

His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. [Isaiah 53:9 NAS]	And when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given over to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. [Matthew 27:57-60 NAS]
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"As an executed criminal, the body of a crucified person would not normally be given to family or friends for proper burial. In most places, the Romans would have allowed the body to decay on the cross and be scavenged by animals as a final indignity and also as a warning to others. But because of the same day burial rule in the Law of Moses, in Judea such bodies normally would have received an undignified burial, perhaps in a public graveyard like the 'potter's field' purchased with Judas's money.

"Isaiah's prophecy implies that this was the expected treatment of the Messiah's corpse: 'His grave was assigned with wicked men.' Instead, however, Jesus was buried in the tomb of 'a rich man.' Once more, Isaiah's prophecy was minutely fulfilled.

"In Jesus's time, wealthy Jews cut cave-like tombs in rock for themselves and their posterity. They were intended to be used by a family for many generations. The entrances were sealed with huge stones rolled into place. Joseph of Arimathea had had such a tomb hewn out for himself. It was new and thus did not have any other remains in it. There Jesus's body was placed.

"Now let's return to our earlier question: What did Jesus mean by 'It is finished!'? To understand, we need to look at first verse in Psalm 22."

David predicted the Messiah would be forsaken by God

My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. [Psalm 22:1 NAS]	Now from the sixth hour [i.e. 12:00pm] darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour [i.e. 3:00pm]. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" [Matthew 27:45-46 NAS]
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^G Though some parts of Psalm 69 may refer to David's experiences as well as Jesus's, unlike Psalm 22.

^H In support of this hypothesis, note that Jesus's immediately prior statement, "My God, My God..." had been misunderstood by at least some of the bystanders. See Matthew 27:46-49 and Mark 15:34-36.

“Toward the end of His time on the cross, not long before He died, Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 ‘My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?’ For at least some part of the time on the cross, God the Father rejected and forsook His own Son, Jesus. The Father refused to have any interaction with Him; their relationship was severed. That’s the definition of hell: separation from God. While He was on the cross, Jesus’s soul went to hell.

“Why did the Father forsake Jesus? He did it for the only reason that God ever breaks off His relationship with someone: because of sin. But Jesus Himself had never sinned. God the Father had announced it at His baptism at the start of His ministry and again about two and a half years later at His transfiguration: ‘this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased’ [Matthew 3:17, 17:5]. About six months before the cross, Jesus Himself had dared to publically assert that the Father ‘is always with Me; He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him’ [John 8:29]. And even the night before He was crucified, Jesus affirmed ‘I am not alone, because the Father is with Me’ [John 16:32]. What sin separated Jesus from God the Father?”

“Our sin,” said Xiao Li softly.

Professor Ho nodded gravely. “Yes. Our sin. Yours; mine; that of every person in the world. One of the most profound verses in the entire Bible expresses it this way:

21 He [God the Father] made Him [God the Son, Jesus] who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. [2 Corinthians 5:21 NAS]

Jesus was treated as if He were the One guilty of the sins we committed. Jesus was abandoned by the Father and left alone in hell.

“When Jesus said, ‘My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?’ the question was rhetorical; Jesus knew why He was being forsaken. He was quoting Psalm 22 so we would know that it applied to Him, and so we would have some idea of the price He paid to save us from our sins. And that was what He meant a short while later when He said ‘It is finished.’ The work of making a way of salvation for sinners by enduring punishment in our place had been completed. Now God can justly forgive us; now we can return to God by grace through faith.

“All the Jews missed the point that day. But it was explicitly predicted in Isaiah 53.”

Isaiah predicted the Messiah would be punished by God in our place

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. ...

...as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? ...

But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. ...He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors. [Isaiah 53:4-6, 8, 10-12 NAS]

“The prophet predicts that the Messiah ‘would render Himself as a guilt offering.’ Under the Mosaic system in the Old Testament, a guilt offering was an animal sacrificed to God when someone had sinned. This symbolized placing the sin of the person on the body of the animal, and the punishment falling on the animal. But of course an animal could not take the place of a human being. Everyone clearly understood that this was only a symbol, a metaphor. What it symbolized was realized in Jesus. Only a human being with a soul could take the place of a human being. The Messiah, Jesus, did this on the cross. Jesus was ‘crushed for our iniquities’; He was put to death ‘for the transgression of my people.’ We have all ‘turned to his own way,’ that is, we have refused to do what our conscience tells us and instead followed our own selfish desires. But instead of punishing us for it as we deserve, ‘The LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.’

Professor Ho paused and looked down at the desktop, thinking. When he spoke again, it seemed as if he were talking to himself. “Yes, so often we go astray! We often choose to do what we know is wrong. We tell lies to keep out of trouble. We cheat on tests. We lie to our customers to increase our profits. We cheat the government out of taxes. We are filled with vengeful hatred and fly off the handle because of some small offense against us. We gossip behind someone’s back. We lust in our hearts, and then engage in immoral, impure sexual activity. We murder our own children through abortion.

“And even the best of us don’t do one half of what we know we should. We are lazy and steal time from our employers, or we waste our opportunity to study in school. We don’t take time to help others because it would cut into our pursuit of pleasure or money. How many times we have uncaringly walked past a beggar on our way to enjoy a luxurious dinner at a restaurant. We don’t even bother to go home and visit our parents. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves, and we have not loved the God who created us at all.”

Professor Ho looked up. “That’s you and me, boys. Maybe we haven’t committed every one of those sins, but we’ve done a lot of them, even while knowing they were wrong. No wonder God refuses to have a relationship with us! His anger about our sins is completely justified. We are cut off from Him now, and in the future, after we die, He will

punish us forever in hell. And that's exactly what happened to Jesus on the cross. He was put into hell for our sins."

"But, is He still in hell now?" Xiao Wang asked. "You said hell is forever."

"For you and I," Professor Ho affirmed, "hell would be forever. But Jesus somehow endured it during the space of a few hours."

"Wasn't He in hell for three days?" asked Xiao Li.

"No," Professor Ho replied. "His own statements while still on the cross demonstrate that. You may remember that one of the robbers crucified with Jesus repented and asked Jesus to save his soul:

39 One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" 40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 "And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." [Luke 23:39-43 NAS]

Both Jesus and the repentant robber died that day. Note that Jesus says the robber would be with Him 'today' 'in Paradise,' after they died. Furthermore, the last thing Jesus said before His death indicates that His relationship with God the Father had already been restored:

And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last. [Luke 23:46 NAS]

So the time that Jesus's spirit was in hell, that is, treated as guilty of our sin and separated from the Father, was confined to part of the hours on the cross. It's a mystery how Jesus could endure in time a punishment which would have lasted all eternity for us. I don't really understand it. But I know He was not only a human being, but also God. His spirit was not a limited, created spirit like ours. He isn't limited to experiencing things the way we do.

"Through what Jesus did, the possibility of salvation is opened up to us. '[B]y His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.' Having taken the punishment due to us for our sin—'bear their iniquities'—Jesus now can give us the reward due to Him for His righteous; He can 'justify the many.' It doesn't come through us doing good works. God's standard for getting to heaven by good works is 100%, and we are all far from that. Instead this 'justification,' this being regarded as righteous and accepted by God, comes through knowing Jesus, through being in relationship with Him: 'by His knowledge.' And that relationship is established by repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus, just like it was for the robber who was dying on a cross.

"It's always been that way. As Isaiah himself records, God has always been inviting sinners to repent and be forgiven:

Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. [Isaiah 55:7 NAS]

God has always been inviting sinners to have their guilt removed:

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. [Isaiah 1:18 NAS]

And God's method has always been by faith, just like we studied several months ago with regards to Abraham:

Then he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. [Genesis 15:6 NAS]

That's God's way of saving repentant sinners: justification by faith through Jesus taking our punishment on the cross. Abraham's faith, though he didn't totally understand it, was looking forward to Jesus's sacrifice in the future, just like the faith of Christians today looks backward Jesus's sacrifice in the past. And Isaiah predicted it explicitly 700 years before Jesus: 'by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.' "

David and Isaiah predicted people all over the world would revere the executed Jewish Messiah

"The end of Psalm 22 predicts the results of the Messiah's suffering and subsequent deliverance:

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD's, and He rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship, all those who go down to the dust will bow before Him, even he who cannot keep his soul alive. Posterity will serve Him; it will be told of the LORD to the coming generation. They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it. [Psalm 22:27-31 NAS]

There are at least two predictions here. First, because of the Messiah, people all over the world would come to believe in and worship Yahweh, the God of the Jews. Second, this impact would continue into the indefinite future. Isaiah

makes a similar prediction at the beginning of the section about the Messiah's suffering and death.¹ Here also a global impact of the Messiah's sufferings is predicted:

13 Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. 14 Just as many were astonished at you, *My people*, so His appearance was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men. 15 Thus He will sprinkle many nations, kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand. [Isaiah 52:13-15 NAS]

Here Isaiah makes it clear that people from many nations will benefit from the Messiah's death.

"Isaiah's and David's predictions imply the Messiah's resurrection. We don't have time to discuss that today, but I hope we can consider it next week. [See chapter 14.]

"But today let's briefly review the predicted spread of Christianity. Think about the situation in David's day, around 1000 BC, or in Isaiah's day around 700 BC. At that time, apart from the Jews, probably all the world was worshipping idols. Among non-Jews, only the tiny portion who happened to live near Israel had even heard of the name of Yahweh, the true God."

"The circumstances of hadn't changed much by the time Jesus Christ came centuries later. But now, people from 'all the families of the nations' from 'all the ends of the earth' have turned to Yahweh and worship Him [see chapter 7]. This prophecy began to be fulfilled shortly after Jesus's resurrection, and continues to be fulfilled today, as the gospel being spread to the remaining places and peoples were the church still has not been established.

"The final fulfillment of these verses will occur when Jesus comes to the earth again to rule for 1,000 years. As it says in prophecies in several places in the Old Testament of the Bible, at that time everyone on earth 'will bow down before' Jesus and worship Him. That's still future. Clearly however, the predictions in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 about the suffering and death of Jesus and the spread of the worship of Yahweh have already been extensively fulfilled. We Chinese believers are living proof of it!"

Why didn't the Jews, or at least the disciples, realize these things were prophesied?

"Professor Ho, there's something I've always wondered about," said Xiao Li. "With all these clear prophecies in the Old Testament, why didn't more of the Jews believe in Jesus?"

"A good question," Professor Ho affirmed. "And I can make it even harder: Why didn't the disciples realize the Messiah had to die? At least they should have understood it! But they didn't.

"Note first of all that Jesus Himself was quite clear that Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 applied to Himself. On the night before He died, Jesus quoted Isaiah 53:12 to the disciples:

37 "For I [Jesus] tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has *its* fulfillment." [Luke 22:37 NAS]

And of course, as we've just seen, while Jesus was hanging in agony on the cross He deliberately quoted Psalm 22:1, obviously implying that it applied to Himself.

"The disciples were certainly told well in advance of the cross that the Old Testament predicted the Messiah's death. Several weeks before He died, Jesus expressly told them so:

31 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. 32 "For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, 33 and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." 34 But the disciples understood none of these things, and *the meaning of* this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said. [Luke 18:31 NAS]

It wasn't the first time Jesus told them [see Matthew 16:20-23, 17:22-23], but each time they didn't understand."

"Why not?" asked Xiao Li in perplexity.

"It's not so strange as you think," said Professor Ho. "On the one hand, a suffering and death Messiah didn't fit with their preconceived notions about the Messiah, ideas formed and held since their childhood days sitting in the synagogues. On the other hand, it certainly wasn't what they wanted to see happen. Never underestimate the power of preconceived notions and our aversion to facing unpleasant realities! Those two things together can blind us to the most obvious truths.

"If you want a modern example, think of the defenders of atheistic evolution; they blindly repeat whatever they heard in high school, and ignore overwhelming evidence right in front of their faces! For a lot of them, especially the ones in the West, their not-so-hidden motive is: they don't *want* there to be a God to whom they must answer! This is demonstrated by the fact that they are often, even usually, openly and stridently anti-Christian—at least the ones in the West.^J

"Thus it's not surprising that most of the Jewish people could ignore predictions about the Messiah that didn't fit with their ideas and desires. It's not even really surprising that the disciples didn't see it. They certainly did not *want* to

¹ Note that Isaiah 52:13—53:12 forms a single section. The chapter breaks in our Bibles were not in the original manuscripts.

^J Evolutionist Richard Dawkins of England is the present classic example. He promotes atheism with religious fervor.

face the fact that Jesus was headed for the cross! And as a result, they had absolutely no expectation of His resurrection. That turns out to be an important indirect evidence for the resurrection; as little as the disciples had expected Jesus's death, they still less expected Him to rise from the dead!"

How do we know they didn't fulfill the prophecies on purpose?

Xiao Wang had a very different question. "How do we know that they didn't fulfill the prophecies on purpose?"

Professor Ho smiled. "You and Xiao Li are coming at it from very different angles, aren't you! One of you finds it hard to believe that they ignored the prophecies; the other thinks they not only paid attention to them, but fulfilled them themselves! But it's always like that with the Bible: it gets attacked from both sides, by religious traditionalists and by atheistic skeptics, and also by the moralists and by the libertines! But that's alright, because it can stand the attack, since it really is true.

"Xiao Wang, when you ask whether 'they' might have fulfilled the prophecies on purpose, I assume you are including the disciples?"

"Yes,"

"Very well. Let's consider the reasonableness that the disciples were manipulators purposely trying to fulfill prophecy about a 'pierced' Messiah. First of all, everything we know about them indicates they simply could not grasp the idea of the Messiah suffering and dying. They would have been willing to fight and even die to save Jesus; Peter whips out a short sword on the night Jesus was arrested and wields it with a fisherman's skill, lopping off an ear! But the thought of a suffering, dying Messiah was completely anomalous to them, a contradiction in terms.

"No, Jesus's disciples were not motivated to fulfill prophecy about crucifixion. But there's a more convincing rebuttal of that suggestion. The disciples not only had no such intention; they also had no opportunity. Most of the prophetic fulfillments were not carried out by Jesus or His disciples. Many of the events were outside their control. Many of the main actors could not possibly have intended to make Jesus out as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. In fact, when I consider the people around Jesus, I can't think of *anyone* who could possibly have been motivated to try to make Jesus fulfill the prophecies about the Messiah's suffering and death."

Professor Ho paused and found another paper in the file folder on his desk. "I thought about this problem once years ago, and drew up a list." Professor Ho began to read.

1. "Judas obviously didn't think Jesus was really the Messiah, nor is it reasonable to think he was aware that he was fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy. Recall that he was motivated by money, he obviously originally intended to keep it, and was finally driven by guilt to remorse and despair—not the picture of someone trying to fulfill prophecy!
2. Remember that crucifixion was unknown in days of David. The Jews normally used stoning to execute people, especially for blasphemy [see Acts 7:56-58]. The Romans didn't use crucifixion in Palestine to fulfill prophecy.
3. Jesus couldn't have been crucified without Pilate's decision. Pilate certainly wasn't interested in fulfilling Jewish prophecy.
4. The soldiers who gambled for Jesus's garments, nailed His hands and feet, and pierced His side^K certainly weren't trying to fulfill prophecies they'd probably never heard of.
5. The last thing the chief priests and Pharisees wanted to do was help Jesus fulfill Messianic prophecy! But they were vital to His betrayal, arrest and condemnation.
6. Among other things, the chief priests didn't want Jesus's death to occur during Passover [Matthew 26:3-5] which helped to validate John the Baptist's recognition of Jesus as the 'lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' [John 1:29, 36].
7. The Jewish passersby from among the common people who mocked Jesus on the cross were not trying to fulfill Psalm 22 or Isaiah 53.
8. The disciples clearly *didn't* want Jesus to die and *couldn't* fit the crucifixion with their understanding of messianic prophecy. As a result, they despaired after Jesus died, and they *weren't* expecting a resurrection.
9. Joseph of Arimathea was grieving the death of one he had hoped was the Messiah, who now seemed not to be. Can we really believe he was saying to himself, 'Well, Jesus was a failure, He's not the Messiah, but I'll bury Him in my tomb to fulfill Isaiah 53 anyway...'? He was not motivated to fulfill prophecy! He probably didn't even realize Isaiah 53 was about Jesus. And he certainly was not expecting a resurrection.
10. Believers from 'all the ends of the earth' [Psalm 22:27] and 'many nations' [Isaiah 52:15] didn't become Christians in order to fulfill prophecy."

Professor Ho looked up from his reading. "Obviously this is only a partial list. But you can see how *everything* had to fit together to get the prophecies fulfilled—not just one or two things. No single person had the ability to make it all happen—certainly not Jesus Himself, if He were merely a man! And most of the actors either didn't know the prophecies, didn't believe they were messianic, or were virulently opposed to acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah.

"And so, Xiao Wang, I had to reject the 'fulfilled them on purpose' idea as being completely unreasonable in light of the actual historical circumstances."

^K For the piercing of Jesus's side, see Zechariah 12:10 and John 19:37.

And three days later...

“The prophecies fulfilled during Jesus’s betrayal, trial and death do offer impressive evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. But what came three days later is the final capstone of conviction. He rose from the dead. If you can come next week, boys, I’d like to examine the evidence for Jesus’s resurrection.”

“I’ll be here for that!” said Xiao Wang.

Appendix 13-1: An outline of the events predicted in Zechariah chapters 9 and 11Outline of Zechariah

Chaps. 1-6 520 BC Eight visions. Main point: rebuild the temple! God will be with you and you will succeed.
 Chaps. 7-8 518 BC Religious formalism and hypocrisy rebuked. Blessing promised for obedience.
 Chaps. 9-11 ~480 BC(?) Predictions about Israel from ~331 BC to ~135 AD. Betrayal of Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.
 Chaps. 12-14 ~480 BC(?) Predictions about Israel in Endtimes. Armageddon and Millennium.

Historical Timeline

537 BC Jews returned from Babylon begin rebuilding Temple. Work quickly stops.
 520 BC Haggai prophesies: rebuild the Temple! Temple rebuilding begins again.
 520-518 BC Zechariah (chaps. 1-8) prophesies *after* Haggai: Rebuild the Temple! Temple rebuilding continues.
 516 BC Temple completed, dedicated.
 ~480 BC (?) Zechariah’s second set of prophecies (chaps. 9-14) given.
 332 BC Alexander the Great takes Syria, Phoenicia, Philistia; Jerusalem/Judea not harmed. **Fulfills Zech. 9:1-6, 8.**
 167-163 BC Jews led by Maccabees drive out Greeks. **Fulfills Zech. 9:13-17.**
 148-146 BC Jews conquer Philistia. **Fulfills Zech. 9:7.**
 ~104-63 BC Attempts at Hellenization. Increasing internal strife among Jews. Finally civil war. **Partially fulfills Zech. 11:9.**
 63 BC Romans conquer Israel, but resistance continues for decades. **Partially fulfills Zech. 11:10.**
 30 AD Jesus rejected by most Jews, betrayed by Judas for 30 pieces of silver, crucified. **Fulfills Zech. 11:12-13.**
 66-70 AD First Jewish revolt, internal strife among Jews, Romans destroy Temple. Jewish Diaspora (scattering) begins. **Partially fulfills Zech. 11:10, 14-17.**
 132-135 AD Second Jewish revolt, Bar Kokhba (Bar Kosiba) declared Messiah, Romans expel remaining Jews from Judea, Jews completely scattered. **Partially fulfills Zech. 11:10, 15-17.**

Zechariah Chapter 9

9:1-6, 8 Alexander the Great conquers the seacoast from Syria southward toward Egypt in 332 BC. Judea and Jerusalem are not attacked.
 9:7 Maccabees conquer Philistia 148-146 BC.
 9:9 Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in 30 AD.
 9:10 Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah (future).
 9:11-12 (Uncertain: 480-100 BC? Millennial?)
 9:13-17 Maccabees revolt against and expel Greeks 167-163 BC (during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes).

Zechariah Chapter 11

11:1-3 might refer to the Gentile nations in the previous chapters or might refer to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.
 11:4-6 are a prologue, a general statement about what’s going to happen.
 11:7 is the situation from about 538 BC, after the Babylonian captivity, down to about 175 BC
 11:8 might be roughly 175-164 BC, when there was a rapid turnover of high priests due to murder and politics.
 11:9-11 is about 66 BC and onward, continuing to the present
 11:12-13 happened in 30 AD.
 11:14 starts from at least 66 AD.
 11:15-17 probably applies from at least 66 AD onwards, but might especially apply to 132-135 AD, the 2nd Jewish Revolt under Bar Kokhba, who falsely claimed to be the Messiah.

Appendix 13-2: A sampling of the accurate historical details embedded in the New Testament accounts of Jesus’s trial, crucifixion and burial.

Below is a sampling of confirmed historical details including in the Bible’s account of Jesus’s death. Obviously we cannot obtain independent confirmation of every detail in the records; that is not possible for any historical document.

Note that the story of Jesus’s Passion was first circulated within the lifetime of people who would have known about these events. In particular, the gospel of Matthew was written for the Jews and presumably first circulated among them.

Matthew was surely aware that any lies or inaccuracies would have been refuted by the chief priests, who opposed the early preaching of the gospel.

For the historical reliability and first century AD origin of the New Testament in general, please review chapter 10.

1. Pilate: governor of Judea; vacillating and inept in his handling of the Jews; afraid of uprisings (John 18:28—19:16).⁷
2. Frequent uprisings of Jews against the Romans in this period (Barabbas: Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19. Chief priests fear riot: Matthew 26:5).
3. Herod Antipas: ruler of Galilee but not Judea (Luke 23:6-7).
4. Caiaphas: acting High Priest (Matthew 26:3).
5. Annas: Caiaphas's father-in-law, recognized as 'emeritus' High Priest and wielding great authority (John 18:13, 22).
6. The Sanhedrin: composed of chief priests, scribes (teachers of the Mosaic law), and elders, with the High Priest presiding; authority to try both civil and religious cases; not permitted by the Romans to carry out capital punishment (Matthew 26:57-59; John 18:31).
7. Roman use of crucifixion for execution of non-Roman citizens, especially for murder and treason.
8. Roman custom of whipping before crucifying (Matthew 27:26).⁸
9. Right of crucifixion squad to keep personal affects of person being executed (John 19:23-24).⁹
10. ***ref Centurion supervising crucifixion squad (Matthew 27:54).
11. The three languages used for the accusation against Jesus: 'Hebrew,' i.e. Jewish dialect of Aramaic, the mother tongue of the local populace; Greek, the *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean; Latin, the language of the imperial rulers of Palestine (John 19:20).
12. Jesus's use of Jewish Aramaic to say 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?'
13. Jewish superstition about Elijah appearing in time of dire need 'to protect the innocent and rescue the righteous' (Mark 15:35-36).¹⁰
14. Expectation that crucifixion would require a day or more (Mark 15:44).¹¹
15. Bodies of crucified criminals not normally permitted honorable burial (Mark 15:43).
16. Burial customs: anointing the corpse (Mark 14:8, 16:1; John 20:39); rock-hewn tomb with massive stone as door (Matthew 27:59-60); same day burial (implied in John 19:31, with day beginning at sundown).
17. Strict Sabbath observance: Jesus hastily buried to avoid working on Sabbath (John 19:42); women did not return to add more spices until after the Sabbath (Luke 23:56).
18. Sadducee chief priests adherence to the ceremonial law despite not believing in a soul or an afterlife judgment: Refusal to put the money returned by Judas into the temple treasury (Matthew 27:6; probably an extension of the principle in Deuteronomy 23:18); avoidance of ceremonial uncleanness which may have been contracted by entering Pilate's palace (John 18:28-29).

¹ McDowell, Josh D. The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999. Pg. 183-192.

² Vos, Howard F. Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999. Pg. 432.

³ Note 2, Pg. 439-443.

⁴ Note 2, Pg. 440.

⁵ Barker, Kenneth L., General Editor. The NIV Study Bible, 10th Anniversary Edition. Zondervan Publishing House, 1995. Commentary at Mark 15:24.

⁶ Barker, Kenneth L. and John R. Kohlenberger III, Eds. Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary, Volume 2. Zondervan, 1994. Pg. 364-365 (commentary at John 19:17, 23-24).

⁷ For items 1 through 6, consult Josephus's Antiquities of the Jews.

⁸ Note 2, Pg. 440.

⁹ Note 5, commentary at Mark 15:24.

¹⁰ Note 5, commentary at Mark 15:35-36.

¹¹ Note 2, Pg. 443.