

Religion & Spirituality

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Examining the Historicity of the New Testament

By Constantinos E. Scaros

Welcome to the inaugural edition of The National Herald's Religion Insert. This is not a section devoted to members – clergy or laity – of the Greek Orthodox Church, or of the Church, or any church, as a whole.

Rather, it is a forum in which matters of theology, spirituality, and religion are discussed, and no subject is off limits.

Moreover, this Insert is conceptualized to be a thought-provoking collection of essays and to inspire further discussion. It is not a rehashing of rudimentary aspects of the faith. Though certainly some broad topics will be explored, and in lay terms, this is not Orthodoxy 101, or even Christianity 101.

means historical authenticity. For example, if we held in our hands a copy of the July 10, 2014 edition of the New York Times, we could read the weather report, which stated that it had not snowed in New York City the day before. Most likely, we would consider the report reliable. The information is either correct or incorrect. If it is incorrect, then the error was intentional or accidental. Let's take a look at both possibilities – first that the Times would intentionally report the previous day's weather inaccurately. For what possible reason would it do that? What could it have to gain? Any furtherance of its political agenda? Apparently, none at all. Confirmation of its reputation as a credible news source? Quite the opposite, in fact. Any economic gain that

the near-2 million daily readers the Times has, surely a large number of them – but certainly one, at least – would have noticed the fallacious weather report and informed the newspaper of the mistake. As the Times regularly publishes its corrections, all we would have to do is look at editions in the ensuing week or two, and if the weather report had been false, the chances are great that we would read the corrected version. Next, we could compare the Times' weather report to an innumerable array of other sources, from the U.S. Weather Bureau, to countless other publications that reported on the weather that day. Finally, if we were not in New York City ourselves on July 9, we could call a near-endless array of people and get their confirmation within seconds: "Snow, in July? No way!"

These, then, are steps that would eliminate any reasonable doubt as to the Times weather report's historicity. With that in mind, we ask to what extent the New Testament has undergone historical scrutiny.

BIBLICAL PROPHECIES

Historically, one of the most prevalent components in arguing for the validity of the Bible as the Word of God is that the prophecies written in the Old Testament were fulfilled thousands of years later in the New Testament.

For instance, the Old Testament's Daniel 9:25-26 (written circa 165BC) describes that "seven sevens" (49) and "sixty-two sevens" (434) after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (483 years total), the Messiah would come and would be put to death. Cross-referencing to the Book of Ezra, Artaxerxes of Persia in 458BC directed the reconstruction of Jerusalem. Moving 483 forward from that point brings us to 26AD, roughly the start of Jesus' ministry.

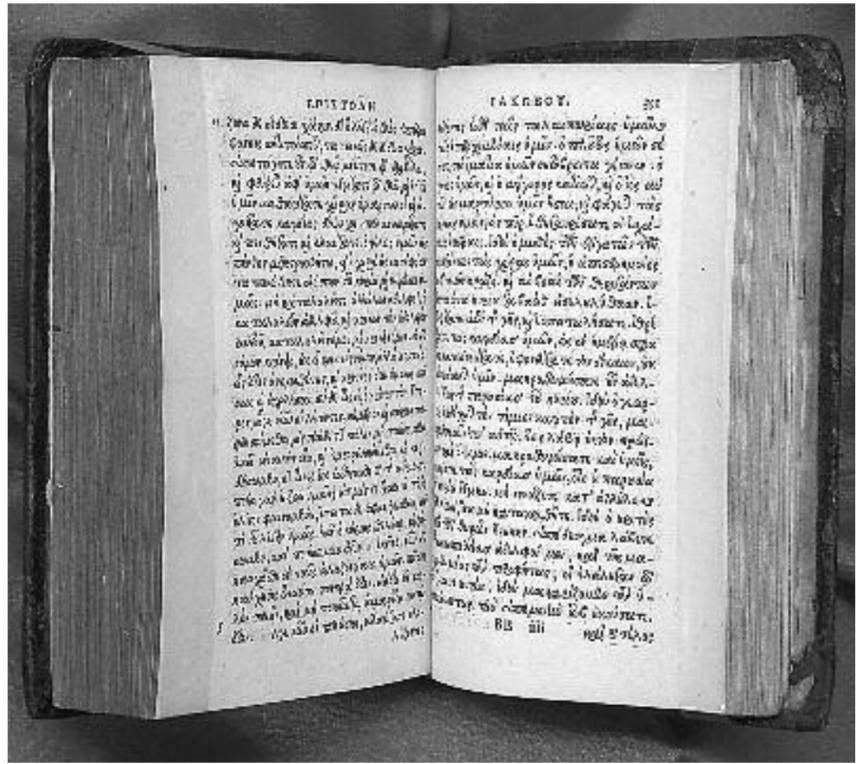
Another and even simpler Old-to-New Testament prophecy is that found in Micah 5:2, claiming that the Messiah would be born in the little town of Bethlehem. Micah was written sometime during the 6th Century, BC. Its prediction about the exact place of Jesus' birth – an obscure little town at that – at least 600 years later would have been as if someone around 1350AD predicted that about 630 years later, a leader of the world's most powerful nation would emerge, born in the little town of Tampico, IL (Ronald Reagan, President of the United States).

Another prophecy is found in Zechariah 11, predicting that the Messiah would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Written no earlier than the 5th century BC, that prediction was later confirmed over 600 years later in Matthew 27.

HOW DO WE KNOW?

Naturally, the fulfillment of even these three Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament, let alone the hundreds if not thousands of other ones, gives great credibility to the notion that the Bible is in fact the most incredible book ever compiled, and tends to point to its declaration as being the Word of God.

Skeptics, new to and experienced in theological scholarship alike, often counter with this hypothesis: what if the New Test-



The New Testament, originally written in Greek, contains passages that fulfill countless Old Testament prophecies written thousands of years earlier. The National Herald calls on theologians and laypersons alike to discuss its historicity.

tament writers simply tailored the ending to propose that the prophecies were in fact fulfilled? What if they so desperately wanted to convince the masses that Jesus was in fact the Messiah and thus, knowing how the masses relied on the Old Testa-

ment prophecies, insisted that Jesus – by virtue of his birth, ministry, and death – had fulfilled them?

This, then, is the question we propose to those who choose to respond: a reply to such skeptics. An argument for the his-

toricity of the New Testament. Because if the New Testament is credible beyond reproach, then the prophecies have in fact been fulfilled. And if that is the case, then can there be any doubt that the Bible is the most amazing book ever written?



St. John Chrysostom, whose Divine Liturgy is the foundation of Greek Orthodox Church Sunday services, emphatically declared the Bible an endless treasure trove – a bottomless well. TNH seeks modern-day contributors to establish a compendium of historicity to satisfy the skeptics.

On the other hand, though contributors will range from theological scholars to virtually anyone interested in the topics – with our without any formal theological education or background – the language will not be overly technical. Rather, it is designed for our readership as a whole.

The topic we have selected for this first edition, certainly not a simple one and one that continues to perplex some of the greatest thinkers of modern times, is the historicity of the New Testament.

HISTORICITY

Before we delve into our discussion, let's begin with the word "historicity" itself. It

might come of it? Not unless it attracts readers who enjoy reading incorrect information. Accordingly, we can logically conclude that the Times would have no plausible reason to report the weather incorrectly on purpose.

Next, what are the chances the Times' account of the previous day's weather was wrong? Again, slim to none. First of all, even though the Times has correspondents all over the world, it is most probable that the one who covers the weather in New York is also physically situated in that city. Surely then, he/she would know that if the unusual phenomenon of snow on July 9 had in fact occurred, and would not mistakenly have reported that there was none. Second, of



An icon depicting Judas receiving 30 pieces of silver in exchange for betraying Jesus Christ. An account of that was written in Matthew, and was predicted over 600 years earlier in Zechariah.

Is the Bible A History Book?

By Very Rev. Fr. Peter-Michael Preble



Fr. Peter Preble

I have often been involved in discussions with people about the historical accuracy of the Bible. Was the world created in seven days? Did Jesus really walk on water? Was Moses a real person or is he a combination of several people? It is very common in our 21st century Western world to ask questions and to seek proof, but from an Orthodox Christian perspective this is not always necessary.

The first thing I would say is that the Bible is not a question and answer book – there is no FAQ page in the Bible. Many of the questions that we face in our daily walk are not answered in Scripture. When I teach a Bible study class I always remind my students that the Bible was written in the 1st century and by very specific people to very specific people. Does it have relevance in our lives today? Sure, but it is not a place to find the answers to all of the questions we might have.

The Bible is not a compilation of historical themes and events; it is the "manual for life", if you will, and should be read in that light. If you want to learn and understand the history of 1st century Palestine there are many wonderful books available on the market today that will give the reader a very good understanding of history. The Bible is a book of salvation history and the times and dates are not important - the story itself is what it is all about, not the timeline of events.

Author Peter Enns in a recent essay writes about the 10 Things I Wish Everyone Knew about the Bible. Number 7 of the 10 things is that the "Bible does not record history objectively but interprets it." He goes on to say "the biblical writers didn't try to get history 'right' in the same sense an author of an academic textbook does. Instead, they interpreted the past in their place and time, for their own communities, to answer their own questions of faith. That's why the Bible contains two very different 'histories' of Israel and the four Gospels that recount Jesus' life differently." The challenge

for us, and for those who preach each week, is to make this information relevant to the community today and it is very relevant to the community today.

The writers of the Bible lived in the ancient world and used the vocabulary of people of their day. Very often images were used that become very foreign to the ears of someone living in the 21st century. I am not a fisherman or a farmer, but Scripture is full of references to fishing and farming because those were familiar images to the people who would be reading what was written.

So the next question would obviously be, if the Bible is not a history book how can we believe what it says is true? Well, this might sound like a cop out answer but we have to have faith that what is written is the truth. Turning to the Scripture itself St. Paul gives us the definition of faith in chapter 11 of his Letter to the Hebrews: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Yes, that is difficult for the 21st century – we want objective truth – but when speaking of Scripture we have to surrender part of that way of thinking to faith.

The other part of all of this that I remind my Bible study students is that the Bible as we know it today did not come down in a leather bound volume from the Holy Mountain. The books and letters included are the result of many years of research and debate centered on their message and authenticity. As funny as this is going to sound, the Bible came to us from a committee!

The Orthodox Church does not hold that the Bible is the center of all of the belief but the source of the belief. Holy Tradition is also part of what the Church believes, and this tradition has come to us over the past two thousand plus years of church history. These debates continue to the present day, but some of it has been settled.

The belief of the Church has developed since the Church began. We read in the Acts of the Apostles of the first gathering of the

"bishops" of the Church to discuss the matter of non-Jews following the Jewish ritual law. There is nothing of this from the mouth of Jesus recorded in the pages of the Bible, but the leaders of the Church gathered together and debated and decided on the position and direction and this is a process that has been ongoing since that time.

The Bible itself invites this sort of questioning and debate and this is not a bad thing. There is an entire body of work, the Talmud, that is read and debated by Jewish scholars to this day. There are many, many volumes of scholarly commentaries on the Bible but in the end it is not, and should not, be used to prove one right and the other wrong but to deepen our devotion and to assist us in our lives to live a spiritual life. I mentioned that the Bible is the owner's manual of our lives, and that it is. Does it leave us with more questions than answers? Sure, but that is done by design. It is by asking questions that we learn and grow and develop in our spiritual maturity.

Faith is something that needs to be lived and experienced, not read about in an attempt to understand it. Faith is a very complex thing – well, we have made it complex. It is really rather simple and requires a lifetime of practice and yes, study. But if we start with the understanding that the Bible is the start of the story and that we read and interpret it through the lens of the Church and her two thousand plus year history then we will be on the right road. And I repeat, if you are looking for a historically accurate or scientifically correct book, then perhaps you should choose a different book to read. However, if you are ready for a life changing experience that is based on faith and lived experience, then the Bible is for you.

Follow me on Twitter @frpeterpreble.

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Historical Reality or Wishful Mythology: Did Jesus Really Exist?

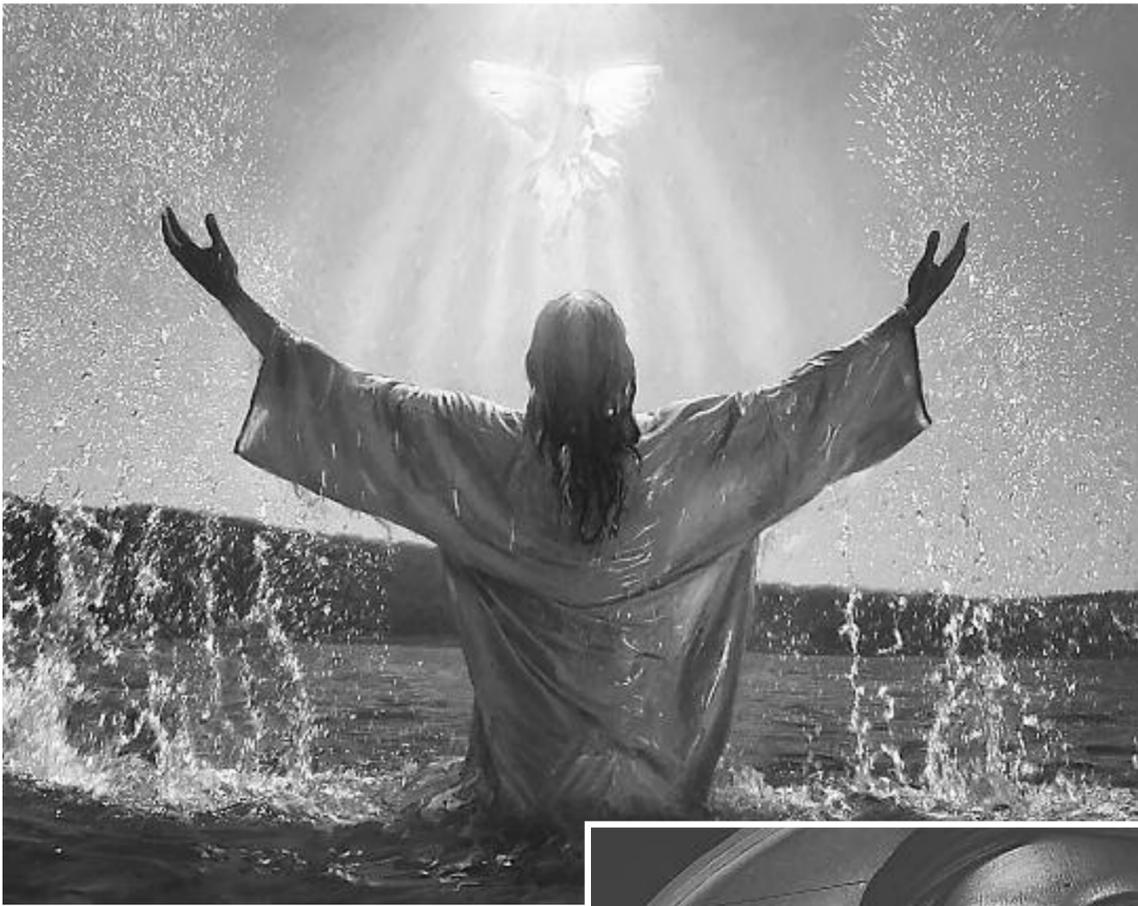
Dr. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou

In the past few years the mere existence of Jesus has become a subject of debate. Many other theological issues have also come into the crosshairs as people take aim at religious faith, especially at Christian claims: Is the Bible a reliable source of information? Why should anyone believe in such things as the Resurrection of Christ? Was the divinity of Christ invented by Christians long after his death? Did Jesus himself ever claim to be God? Were the gospels written too many years after the events to be credible? Wouldn't oral tradition be entirely unreliable? Why weren't books written about Jesus during his lifetime? Whether such questions are a sign of intelligence, healthy skepticism, or intractable cynicism they must be addressed. In the coming months we will delve into these questions. But a basic question must be posed as a preliminary issue: Did Jesus even exist as a historical person?

Some people deny that the moon landings ever occurred. Others deny the Jewish Holocaust of World War II. Most of us would consider such people ignorant or irrational. "But," you might say, "there is proof of those events, yet there is no proof that Jesus existed." Clearly, we cannot demand "proofs" of Jesus' existence in the form of photographs or film. When studying ancient history we look to other types of proof. Expecting or demanding that Christians provide forms of evidentiary proof which would satisfy modern standards is irrational and unreasonable. Whether or not Jesus existed does not depend on whether that fact can be proven to the satisfaction of any given individual by current standards.

In order to decide whether answers to such questions are plausible and credible, one first needs to keep an open mind. Demands for "proof" can be presented as a more "enlightened" or more "intelligent" position when in reality this is simply serving as an excuse to reject the object of the inquiry entirely. All the "proof" in the world will not convince someone who refuses to be convinced, such as those who deny the moon landings or the Holocaust. If we are to investigate the existence of Jesus and other questions we must recognize that different kinds of evidence suffice to serve as credible confirmation for events in antiquity. We often must draw conclusions based on inference. We rely on details which support statements. Rarely can we find the type of evidence which one would demand when evaluating contemporary historical claims. Religious texts, such as the New Testament, are valuable historical records and should not be dismissed outright simply because they support a faith claim or because they present a faith perspective. We should neither believe blindly nor should we reject blindly. Both attitudes are equally narrow-minded and untenable.

Secondly, if we are honest we must acknowledge that we all have biases. Each of us is the product of our experiences, our education, our background, our



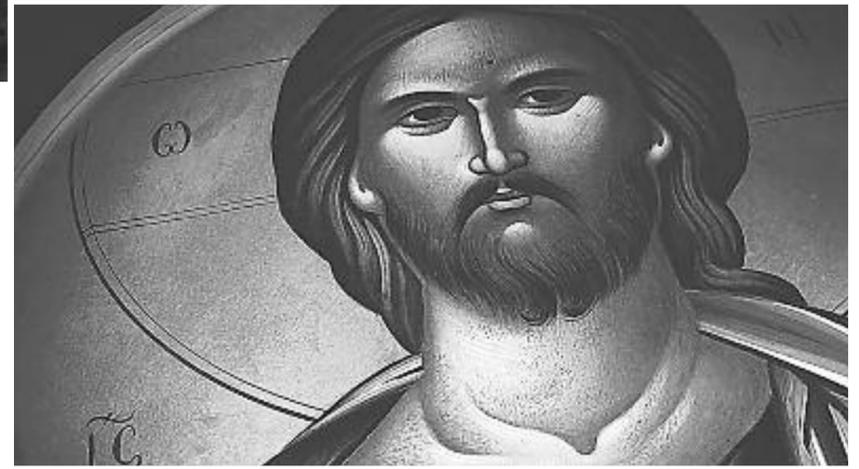
gender, and countless other factors. No one approaches any subject without a viewpoint, which is an inherent bias. However, what is important is that we recognize our individual biases and that we remain open to learning and considering a new perspective.

I will lay bare my perspective. I am a Greek-American Orthodox Christian. I was raised in the Orthodox Church but that is not why I remain an Orthodox Christian today. It is not uncommon for people of faith to be ridiculed as weak, gullible, backwards or ignorant. I am none of those. I am a professor of biblical studies, theology and early Christianity. I am also a lawyer (State Bar of California) and I have been an attorney far longer than I have been a theologian. I am highly analytical and I ex-



Two Roman historians Tacitus (L) and Suetonius (R), have references to Jesus.

pect claims to be supported by evidence. I will be offering you my reflections on faith issues in the modern age as someone who is a skeptic by nature. I silently suffered from doubt for many years – doubt about the existence of God, the person of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, etc. I was afraid to talk about it. People struggling with doubt are ashamed to admit their doubts. But doubt is normal. Some apostles doubted, even after the resurrection. The secular world and the media encourage doubt and seem to delight in destroying religious faith. But there are many reasons to believe. You have the right to raise questions. You have the right to embrace faith, to seek faith, even while you are still struggling with doubt. But you must be open to faith in or-



der to find it. Just as doubt is nothing to be ashamed of, neither is faith. As we begin our enquiry, I hope you will share my intention to pose and discuss these questions with honesty,

sincerity and respect.

Let's begin with our first question: Did Jesus exist as a historical person? Yes, Jesus existed as a historical person. In fact, more independent evidence exists for Jesus than exists for Socrates, Homer, Abraham or Moses, all of whom were important historical figures whose existence people would never think to question. Let's begin with the evidence of Jesus' existence outside of the New Testament.

Two Roman historians from the late first /early second centuries, Tacitus and Suetonius, have references to Jesus. Tacitus reports Nero's persecution of Christians in his book *Annals* (15.44) and remarks that Jesus was executed by crucifixion under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Tacitus disparages Christians and certainly has no bias in favor of Christianity. Suetonius used the Roman imperial archives to research his history of the Caesars but his reference to Jesus is indirect. Suetonius reports that the Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from the city of Rome because of "disturbances" among the Jews in Rome concerning "Chrestus." Most scholars believe that this is a reference to arguments in

the synagogues over whether Jesus was the "Christos," the Messiah. Claudius' expulsion of the Jews of Rome took place in the year 49 AD. Arguments about whether Jesus was the Messiah had been dividing Jews all over the Roman world. If Jesus never existed certainly Jews would not be arguing about whether he was the messiah in the years immediately following his death and resurrection.

An important source for the existence of the historical Jesus is a first century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, in his book *Antiquities* 18.3.3, composed approximately 90 AD. Josephus mentions Jesus' teachings, his wonder-working abilities, that the Jewish leaders conspired against him, that he was crucified under Pilate and that the followers of Jesus, (whom Josephus calls "the tribe of the Christians"), were still around when Josephus was writing his history. Josephus was Jewish and he was not promoting Christianity. Josephus not only discusses Jesus, but also John the Baptist and James, the head of the Church in Jerusalem. We know about James and John the Forerunner and Baptist from the New Testament, just as we know about Jesus from the New Testament. Would these two men

be real, historical people, whose existence is confirmed in the writings of Josephus, but Jesus alone be a total fiction?

Tacitus, a pagan Roman, and Josephus, a Jew, confirm two basic and incontrovertible facts about Jesus in the New Testament: that he died by crucifixion under Pilate and that he had followers. Would these historians, a Jew and pagan Roman, writing independently of each other, in different places and different times, conspire to promote a mythological figure, Jesus? Were these highly educated and intelligent historians fooled? Jesus existed and no one in antiquity – those living closest to the historical time period – denied that. In fact, the earliest known reference to Jesus outside of the New Testament was made by a pagan historian who wrote only about twenty years after the crucifixion of Christ. We'll discuss that and other evidence of the existence of Jesus next time.

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The Old Testament Flows into the New

By Jordan Zanetis



Jordan Zanetis

teachers spoke also of a Messiah who would come to restore peace and justice to the world. As Holy Scripture tells us, the Hebrew people settled in the region known today as Israel and in this land the Savior was born – Jesus Christ.

Just as the prophets and teachers of the Old Testament foresaw and proclaimed the Messiah, the Apostles and Saints of the New Testament proclaimed that the Messiah did indeed descend from heaven and come to live among people. While remaining fully God, He was also fully man.

The prophets of the Old Testament and the saints of the New Testament point to Christ and to one another and make up a group of holy men and women who lived to do the will of God. Many events in Holy Scripture allude to one another and emphasize the nature of Christ's Messiahship as God-man. These are known as types,

or typology.

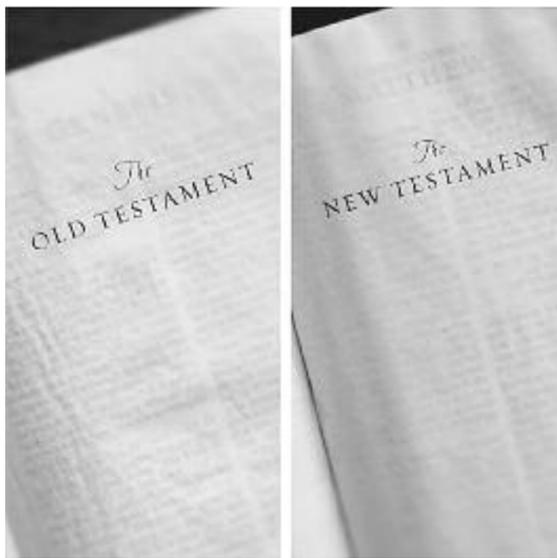
One such event is the encounter of the Prophet Moses and the burning bush in the book of Exodus. While walking in the wilderness, Moses encounters God revealing Himself as fire in the midst of a simple bush. While the bush was consumed fully by fire, it did not burn, but remained whole and

was not scorched by the blazing fire. God reveals Himself in that moment as "I AM," revealing Himself as the Creator and existing before time and place. While the bush, a created and natural thing composed of carbon, should have quickly been consumed by the presence of God – God allowed the bush to remain to fulfill His will. The burning bush is a type of the Most Holy Theotokos, Mary the Mother of God.

The New Testament tells us that the Virgin Mary was visited by Angels from heaven and was prepared for her life as Mother of the most holy God - inaugurating her into the heavenly life. She conceived Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit forming Christ in her womb out of her own genetic material, her own blood as the Fathers write. During her nine months carrying Christ in the womb the Theotokos was fulfilling the type of the Burning Bush - containing God yet remaining whole and unconsumed by the incredible experience of containing the uncontainable God. The hymns of the Nativity of Christ describe the Theotokos during her pregnancy as "more spacious than the heavens" and "greater than the universe." This event fulfills God's own prefiguring of the In-

carnation of the second person of God, Jesus Christ.

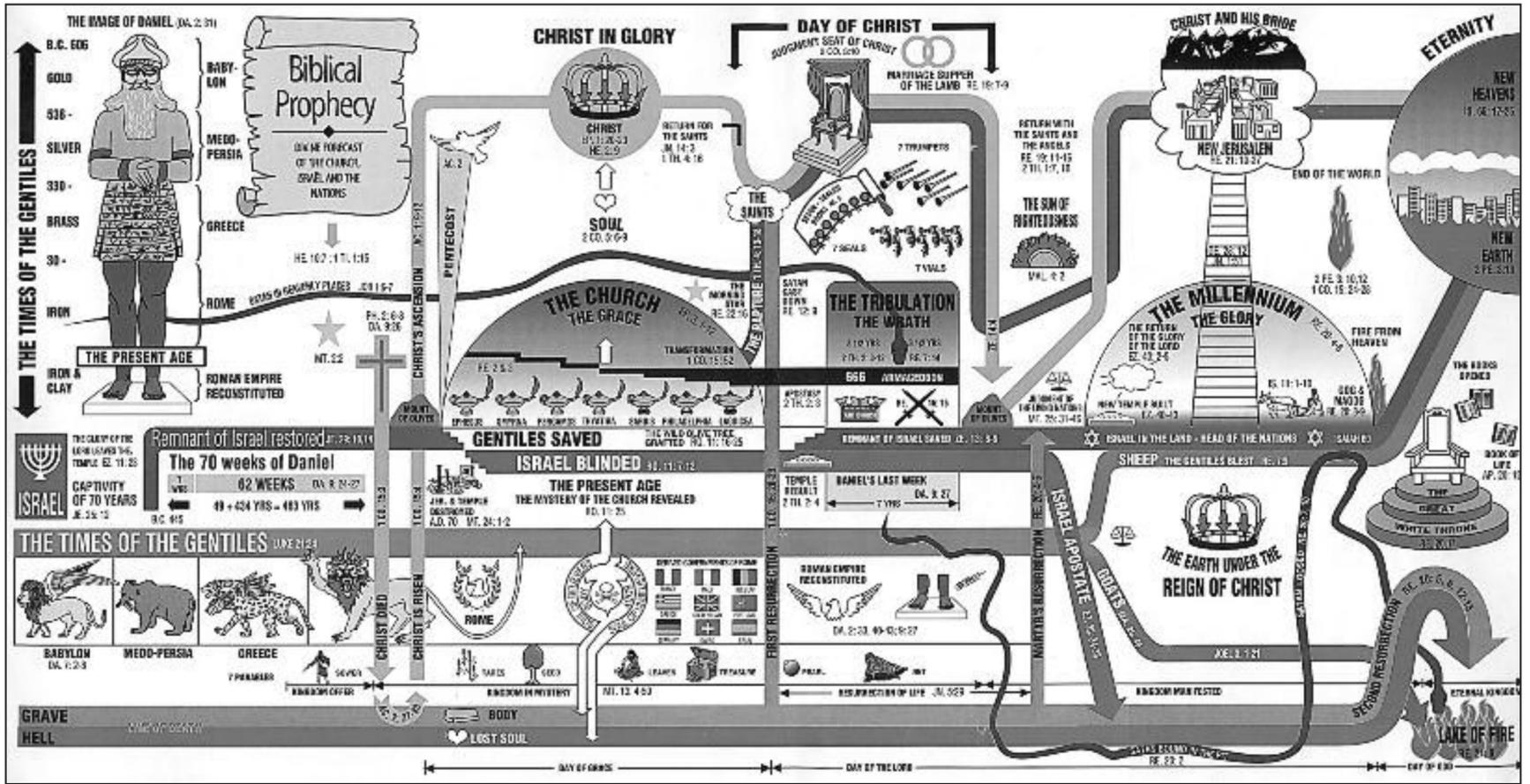
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Are the Biblical Prophecies Reliable?

By Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos

In Holy Scripture God makes many covenants and promises with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophet Samuel and the other numerous prophets of the Old Testament. These covenants and promises were part of God's overall plan, known to God eternally, for the rescue of humanity and all creation from the powers of evil, sin, and death. Because of free will, however, the human partners often did not live up to their commitments. God in his love and wisdom had to take on the role of a Chess Grandmaster, anticipating human failures and making new moves, new covenants and new promises, in order to keep humanity on the path of redemption. God's final covenant and universal promise of salvation was enacted through Jesus the Christ, the incarnate Son of God, the Savior and Lord of all.

The main figures chosen by God to lead God's people were divinely inspired. They received God's word or message often through visions, dreams, and symbolic signs. The prophets did not entirely understand the total content, timing, and impact of the oracles they announced. God reveals himself yet remains veiled and hidden. It is the awesome nature of God that God cannot be pinned down by hu-

man reason or human ploy. "We see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor 13:12). A strong dose of humility is needed in trying to track the meaning and impact of God's oracles (2 Pet 1:20-21). That is the first principle to bear in mind.

To understand the fulfillment of God's promises properly, Bible readers must keep the big picture in view. It is utterly misleading to mine individual texts from different authors, different books, and different contexts in biblical history, and then try to put them together as if they all belonged to one huge jigsaw puzzle. God does not work rigidly and mechanically with living and thinking beings. Such an approach, ignoring the dynamism and complexity of history, the turns and twists in the great drama of God's dealing with humans, proves historically impossible and theologically foolish. Instead, readers ought to look for the significance of the overall course of the history of salvation and the key contents of God's promises and their fulfillment. That is another principle to keep in view.

The meaning of the term prophet (from Greek prophetes) signifies one who both speaks on behalf of God and also predicts the future. Prediction was in fact only part, although a significant part of prophecy. The main purpose of prophecy was to convey God's will and mes-



sage to the prophet's contemporaries concerning their ongoing life, their issues and circumstances, their faithfulness and conduct as God's people. That is still another principle to remember. Prophecy was not only about the future but about how God's people lived in the present. Let's take a couple of examples.

Properly speaking, the phenomenon of prophecy began in the eighth century BC. Amos (786-746 B.C.) was one of the earliest prophets. A shepherd by trade, Amos was called by God to announce God's message to Israel (the Northern Kingdom) at a time of national expansion

and prosperity. The power and wealth of Israel were viewed by many as God's favor upon them. But Amos brought bad news, not good news. He denounced reliance on military power and wealth; he condemned immorality and injustice in society, and generally he repudiated people's hollow piety. Amos' main positive message was a call to sincere repentance and faithful observance of God's ways. He also warned that otherwise Israel faced God's judgment and future doom by foreign foes. This foretelling was fulfilled after many events of political instability when the Northern Kingdom was finally

destroyed by the Assyrians (721 BC) and the "ten lost tribes of Israel" vanished from history.

There were similar patterns of prophecy in Judea (the Southern Kingdom) involving the extended ministries of the great prophets Isaiah (742-701 BC), Jeremiah (627-587 BC) and Ezekiel (593-563 BC). Judea, the Southern Kingdom, too, faced external threats from the day's world powers (Assyria, Egypt, Babylonia) and was also racked by internal troubles in the form of political intrigues, oppression of the wealthy class surrounding and supporting the various kings, injustice toward the working poor and indigent, pagan idolatrous practices, immorality and superficial confidence in God's protection on the assumption that they were God's chosen people. In a famous instance, Jeremiah stood at the gate of the Temple to proclaim harsh words on behalf of God: "You say 'we are safe!—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight' (Jeremiah 7:10-11)?"

Judgment and doom fell upon Judea too when Jerusalem was stormed by the Babylonians (586 BC), the Temple was burnt to ashes, and the upper social strata exiled to Babylon. However, next to oracles of God's judgment these great prophets also announced God's promise of encouragement, comfort and hope of return and restoration in Judea. These events, including the re-building of the Temple, were gradually fulfilled with the changed policies of the Persians who ruled the Near East during ca. 550-350 BC.

At the time Christ came, the Jewish people continued to suffer from internal troubles and external foes as the Greeks and then the Romans ruled Palestine. Looking back on God's covenants and promises, the Jewish people nurtured a deep hope of a new age of rescue and liberation. God himself or through an anointed leader (Messiah), a descendant of King David, would take charge of affairs on earth. God would do away with evil, violence and injustice. He would punish the other nations and exalt God's people, renewing their hearts and minds with a new covenant for perfect obedience to God's law and to Temple worship. He would establish a reign or "kingdom" of justice, peace and prosperity on earth. Many Jewish leaders and thinkers differed among themselves in their understanding and application of God's prophetic promises and their fulfillment. That's another factor to ponder.

Most important of all, as principle and criterion, is that Jesus believed and proclaimed that God's new age of salvation dawned in his own person, words and deeds. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15; Lk 4:16-21)! But Jesus' interpretation of God's new day of salvation was distinct and unique. Forsaking worldly power and violence, he radically rejected the popular notions of Messiah as conqueror over the nations. He defined his work as that of a Servant Messiah, embodying the love and forgiveness of God, One who came to serve and "give His life as redemption for many" (Mk 10:45). The new covenant was to be through the sacrifice of his sacred Body and Blood on the

cross (Mk 14:22-25).

Christ also foresaw the conversion of Gentiles and the birth of the Church (Mt 8:11; 28:19-20; John 10:16). Equally significant was his focus on the conduct of his followers, evident from the Sermon on the Mount and other discourses. The great enemy was the power of evil in the world—Satan, sin, corruption and death—not the misguided nations whom Christ instructed to love and disciple! All these and many others the Lord Jesus said and did with love and persuasion, based on the intrinsic truth and goodness of his testimony, without seeking to prove Himself and to compel faith through spectacular signs or even absolute proofs of prophecy fulfillment. His miracles were "signs," not absolute proofs (Mt 4:1-10; 11:4-6; Mk 8:11-12; John 6:14-15). That's important to recall, too.

The early Christians followed in the footsteps of Jesus in the way they embraced and interpreted the new covenant. For them, fulfillment of the ultimate intent and goal of all prophecy was Christ (2 Cor 1:19-20). The new covenant centers of life and thought were God's gifts of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Church. Christ replaces the Temple as the place where we meet the fullness of God's presence. God's Spirit is poured out on both Jews and Gentiles who now made up the one community of Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit. God's law given through Moses had a historical function to keep God's people together until the coming of Christ, the goal and termination of the Mosaic law (Rom 10:4; Gal 3:19-29). The new law, of which the highest ideal is love of God and neighbor, is embodied and taught by Christ (Mt 28:20; Gal 6:2; Rom 15:1-7). Such are the key contents of the fulfillment of God's promises.

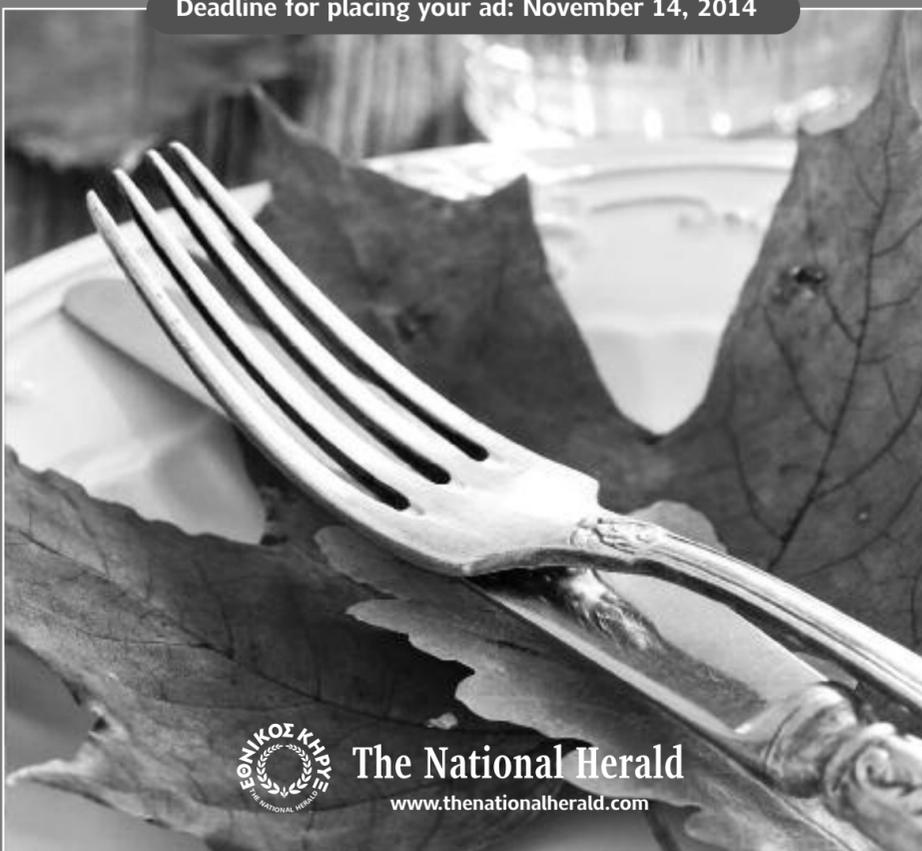
In their enthusiasm to make all possible connections between the Old Testament texts and the details of Christ's ministry, in some instances the early Christians exercised creative exuberance. For example Matthew, unlike the other Evangelists, reports that Jesus used two animals, not one, in his entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21:2-7). This may well be a misunderstanding of the poetic parallelism of the Hebrew text making two references to a single donkey (Zech 9:9). This looks like a creative crafting of the details of the biblical narrative and is one among many aspects of the human element involved in the authorship of biblical texts. Searching out these instances and conjecturing about them disclose appropriate insights into the human side of the Bible. For the reliability of the fulfillment of biblical prophecies, readers must look to the whole landscape of Scripture, its governing message and main themes, its direction and results found in Christ and the early Church. The greater challenge still is for Christians to demonstrate the reality of the new creation in Christ, the love, justice and peace Christ brought to the world, truly lived and testified by the Church, and offered in good faith and joy to a lost and suffering world in our own days.

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