



Learn Your Bible

Resources to help you learn and understand the Bible

Short Study 020: Christmas in Prophecy

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Read Luke 24:44.

There are four Old Testament prophecies that are quoted annually around Christmas time. This Study will examine those prophecies in their original contexts. Commentaries will tell you that these prophecies had fulfilments prior to the coming of the Messiah. This is not an 'either/or'. Prophecy is open to more than one fulfilment, sometimes with a later fulfilment that had a wider or deeper significance than the original.

1. Immanuel. Read Isaiah 7:14-16 and Isaiah 9:6-7, then Matt 1:18-23. Initially, the *Immanuel* prophecy was a sign offered to faithless King Ahaz of Judah who was being threatened by a coalition of two neighbouring states. Deliverance would lie not in military force but in the presence of God, who would come not in a show of force but in the gentleness of a child. The sign for Ahaz, that he could trust in God, would be the destruction of both the hostile states within the time it takes for a baby to be weaned and reach the age of discretion. The sign for future generations, that God would be with His people, would be the coming of a child born of a virgin. Did Ahaz respond to the message and trust in God? See 2 Kings 16:7 for the answer. What does that tell us about *our* response to the message of 'Immanuel' (God with us)?

2. Bethlehem. Read Micah 5:2 then Matt 1:1-11. Micah had been declaring God's impending judgment on the land of Judah, whose rulers had led the people in godlessness. (The leaders are chastised in Chapter 3). He prophesies that a new ruler will emerge, who will be born in the same town as his ancestor David. What do this ruler's origins imply (you might like to compare this with John 1:1-2).

The next two were fulfilled a short while after the birth of Jesus....

3. Weeping in Ramah. Read Jeremiah 31:15 then Matt 2:16-18. Jeremiah was using the image of *Rachel* (the wife of Jacob) *weeping for her children* as an image of grief over the losses of people after judgment had fallen. A further, literal weeping was now taking place with Herod's slaughter of the babies in his attempt to eliminate one whom he feared would threaten his rule. What connects *Ramah* with *Rachel*? (Clue: what tribe lived in Ramah and from whom were they descended? Use a Bible Dictionary to find out.)

4. Called out of Egypt. Read Hosea 11:1 then Matt 2:13-15, 19-21. Hosea was referring to the deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, as recorded in the Book of Exodus. Prophetically, it described the move of Jesus and His parents to Egypt to escape the slaughter of the babies; more particularly to Jesus (the Son) coming back out of Egypt to the land of Israel. Read Hosea 11:2 to see the context of the prophecy. What difference can you see between the nation as God's beloved 'son' and Jesus as God's beloved Son (Matt 3:17)?

To think about: Why did our Lord come into the world in such humble circumstances – as a baby instead of a fully-grown man; born to lowly parents in a stable instead of to royalty in a palace?

To dig deeper: Read the original prophecies in their context (the whole passages in which they occur) and read commentaries that explain more about the original situations (the Isaiah passage in particular).