

I. Introduction

A. We cannot prove that Christianity is true or that Jesus is God in the same way we might prove that $2 + 2 = 4$ or that Hydrogen plus Oxygen combine to make water. That's not the nature of historical arguments nor of faith in general.

B. But we can build an argument for faith – a cumulative case – that is remarkably compelling. And though I increasingly find myself more drawn to the beauty of Christ – his love and wisdom and grace, the remarkable example he sets, the things he says and does – from time to time, I find it helpful to review some of the numbers that are on our side. There are a couple places where these emerge.

C. One set support what we refer to as the teleological argument for God's existence.

1. There are several arguments for the existence of God: the cosmological, ontological and teleological are among them. The teleological argument is the argument from design, famously illustrated by referring to a watch. If you were walking through a forest and found a watch, you would not think that it fell together by accident. That somehow all of the parts – the gears and springs and numbers – just randomly assembled themselves. You would assume that if there is a watch, there must be a watch maker.

2. Is it possible that it just fell together? Well, technically I suppose there is a one in five hundred trillion chance. Is it possible that 100 monkeys playing around on 100 keyboards might write all of Shakespeare's plays? Maybe once every ten trillion, trillion, trillion years you'd get a few Acts. So, I suppose there is a chance. But the odds are imaginably small. No one reads Hamlet and thinks the monkey were lucky.

D. Well, the universe is far more complicated than Hamlet or a watch. There are a million details that have to be just right for life on this planet to work. We've known about many of these for some time.

1. In order for life to exist we need temperatures on earth to stay mostly between 30 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The sun is 12,000 degrees Fahrenheit and we are 93 million miles away from – which just happens to give us the perfect temperature for life. As has been talked about quite a bit in the last ten years, if our temperature changes even a few degrees, life as we know it may cease.

2. We rotate 365 times a year as we pass around the sun. If we rotated much slower our days and nights would be longer, making the nights unbearably cold and the days much hotter – and life as we know it would be impossible. If it spun much faster the oceans would swirl us around like we were in a blender.

3. Our atmosphere has 21% oxygen – the perfect amount. If it were much higher, the first time someone lit a match we'd all be toast.

4. If the earth was much smaller it wouldn't have an atmosphere. If it was much bigger it would contain free H atoms and life as we know it wouldn't work.

E. There has been a long list of things that have to be just right. But in the last twenty years astrophysicist and others have identified a handful of other factors that make the teleological argument much more compelling. For instance, if the ratio of the gravitational constant to the electromagnetic constant differed by as little as one part in 10^{40} (one part in ten thousand trillion trillion trillion), life would be impossible.¹ And oh by the way – in the last couple decades they have identified 37 other numbers that must all be controlled. Of these, the most sensitive is the space energy density. Its value cannot vary by more than one part in 10^{120} and still allow for the kinds of stars and planets physical life requires.²

F. These new discoveries have led many in the scientific community to change their minds about God. Not everyone. When you present this evidence to the seasoned atheist they are likely to reply, “Right, there is only one chance in a hundred trillion, but there are hundreds of trillions of galaxies. We just won the lottery.” And the reason they hold to that line of thought is because – no matter how improbable it is, it's the only chance that they have of being right given that they hold the alternative – the idea that there is a God – to be unbearable. They do not want to give up their freedom. (Or they look at us – or other theists – and think, “I do not want to be a part of that). The reasons are not entirely rational.

¹ Hugh Ross, *Anthropic Principle: A Precise Plan for Humanity*, Reasons to Believe, reasons.org.

² This new information has led many to write about what they call the Anthropic Principle – the idea that the universe was designed for human life.

G. And for the record, as we've noted before, there are a growing number of scientists who have changed their mind on the basis of information like this and stated, "there has to be some sort of intelligent designer. The odds are conclusive."³ The most famous about face came a few years ago when Dr. Anthony Flew – who spent decades debating Christians on college campuses all over the world – changed his mind and said, "I've been wrong. The case for God is too compelling. I do believe that God does exist."⁴

H. The teleological argument is one place where math makes it clear that the odds for God's existence are very compelling. Today I want to look at another – I want to show that the odds that any one person could fulfill the Messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled by chance are impossibly small.

II. This is another piece of the puzzle – another powerful argument in support of the deity of Christ.

1. We should follow him. We should accept his grace-based offer of forgiveness and eternal life, bend our knee and re-orient our lives around him.

³ The idea that in some sense the Universe "must have known that we were coming," is the same sentiment expressed by two prominent cosmologists, Frank Tipler and John Barrow, in their 1986 book, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, which discussed the possibility that the Universe seems to have been "tailor-made" for man. Interestingly, a mere eight years after that book was published, Dr. Tipler authored another book, *The Physics of Immortality*, in which he professed: "When I began my career as a cosmologist some twenty years ago, I was a convinced atheist. I never in my wildest dreams imagined that one day I would be writing a book purporting to show that the central claims of Judeo-Christian theology are in fact true, that these claims are straightforward deductions of the laws of physics as we now understand them. I have been forced into these conclusions by the inexorable logic of my own special branch of physics (1994, preface)." Likewise, New York Times science writer James Glick, writes: Nowadays, we have incredibly well-tuned constants of fundamental physics - to name just one, the gravitational force, which, if put ever-so-slightly out of whack, would have turned the universe into a collection of red dwarf stars or blue giant stars, either way presumably inhospitable to life. When modern cosmologists calculate the odds against life as we know it, they no longer speak of "billions to one." They toss around numbers like 10⁴⁰, or 10³⁰¹, or 10 to the 10 to the 30th, a number that cannot even be typeset without either two levels of superscript or a universe full of zeroes. (James Gleick, *Science on the Track of God*, New York Times, Jan. 4, 1987)

⁴ Flew began to reconsider his position in 2001. In 2004 he announced that he had become a theist, stating that, "the most impressive arguments for God's existence are those that are supported by recent scientific discoveries" and that "the argument to Intelligent Design is enormously stronger than it was when I first met it". Flew later wrote the book, *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*.

2. Recognize that He is so incredible, wise, loving, powerful and good that we can do nothing better than to say, “I’m with him. I want my life to line up with what He said and did and I want to point others to Him. I believe in Him. I am a follower of Jesus Christ.”

B. In the first message I pointed out that we live in a Jesus-impacted world – that he is the most significant, influential person to ever live and did more for the collective good of humanity than anyone else.⁵

C. In the second message we examined his teaching. Both his ethics – which stand above all others -- and the remarkable claims he made about himself. We noted that even though he was small in some ways – he arrived as a baby, he served, he spent his time with the have-nots – we noted that even though he was small in some ways, he made the boldest claims anyone could ever make. He claimed to be God with a capital G. Eternal. All Powerful. One with the Father. The future judge over all mankind.

1. In that message and the next one, I argued that this sets up a take-it-or-leave-it offer. He is God and we follow. We worship. We orient our live around him. We accept his values and views as the right ones and work to expand his kingdom. Or we walk away. We say that he is a liar or a lunatic.

D. In the third message we looked at one aspect of what He did. We turned to John 9 to look at his power – his displays of power over sickness, death, evil and nature. I pointed out that these “miracles” were actually “signs” designed to point back to Jesus. I noted that the big take-away we are supposed to take away from these reports is that He is God.

E. There are other things we could look at to argue that Jesus is God, such as:

1. The response of those closest to him – they worshipped. They didn’t simply admire. They didn’t try to imitate. They didn’t talk about him as if he was only a great man. They worshipped him as God.

2. Or, the Resurrection, which stands as the key miracle and ultimate proof that he was who he claimed.

F. There are other things we might examine. But today I want to look at the way Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies made about the Messiah.

III. This is a big topic. Let me reduce it to four basic points.

⁵ Whatever good the church has done has come only because of Jesus.

A. Number One: One of the ways God proved that He was God – the Creator and sustainer of all things, the all-powerful, all-knowing God of the universe – was by predicting what would happen in the future.⁶

1. He won the confidence of Abraham and Sara by predicting that though they were very old they would have a child.⁷ He won over Moses by telling him that his brother was about to appear.⁸ He gained the confidence of the Jewish slaves by making a series of predictions we call the Ten Plagues. (He didn't need ten tries to finally extract them from Egypt. He was winning their confidence in part by what he was able to do, but in part by predicting what was going to happen). He said to Pharaoh via Moses, "Let my people go free, or else: darkness, locust or hail or death." And that is what happened.

2. These predictions were designed both to show that God was God. Idols could not predict the future.

3. It's worth noting that God also used prophecies to confirm that a prophet was speaking for him.

a) There were three chief offices in the Old Testament: prophet, priest and king. The king was over civil affairs. The priest was the one who represented the people to God. The prophet was the one who represented God to the people.

b) Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Zechariah, Obadiah – these are all prophets. We have their messages recorded in the Old Testament. In fact, much of the Old Testament is given over to the writings of the prophets.

⁶ In Isaiah 41:23 we read, "Present your case," says the LORD. Set forth your arguments," says Jacob's King. Tell us, you idols, what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. (Here God is challenging the people to go to their idols and see whether or not they can predict the future - because, he can!) In Isaiah 44:7 we find more of the same, "This is what the LORD says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come – yes, let them foretell what will come. Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."

⁷ Gen. 18:10-14

⁸ Ex. 3:11; 4:1 -14

c) Most of the time they were telling people to get their act together – that they needed to honor God, care for the poor, keep their promises, uphold their half of the covenant they had made with God. Some of the time these prophets would make predictions about what was going to happen in the future. They were expected to be right 100 percent of the time.

d) In fact, if they were ever wrong – if they claimed to be speaking for God and they were wrong, they were to be killed.

4. Also, it's important to note that these prophecies were not vague predictions about the future, but very specific things that could not be controlled by the prophet. If I were to say, "I predict that in the next two weeks you will hear a lot about politics," no one would be impressed. That is too easy to predict.

a) Yesterday there was a 5K race in Lake Bluff. Before I left home I predicted that I would win my division – which I did. My division is 51 year olds who live in my home. (This is also not a very helpful – compelling - prophecy).

b) In order to get someone's attention you have to make a prediction that is quite specific and cannot be controlled by the prophet or his supporters.

B. Two: Many of these prophecies were made about the Messiah.

1. There is a whole subset of prophecies about a Rescuer. Genesis 1 – 11 sets up the context for all that follows. There we learn that God is the creator. Originally everything was God. We rebelled and as a result are broken and condemned and separated from God. We are unable to fix ourselves – unable to pay our moral debt. The bad news is really bad, however, in Genesis 3:15, God makes the first of a series of promises about sending someone to rescue us. In that passage, which we refer to as the *proto-evangelion*, the first proclamation of the Good News, God reports that the "seed of woman" will eventually crush the head of evil.

2. This is the first prophecy about Christ. We are told that someone will come and we are given a few clues about who he will be. The phrase “seed of woman” is cryptic – it’s not possible to know from this statement that the Messiah will be conceived by a virgin – but like many prophecies, once it’s fulfilled it makes sense.⁹
3. Many other prophecies follow. That is to say, over hundreds of years, God would occasionally remind everyone that he was going to send someone and offer additional descriptions about The One he is going to send. These were given to encourage the people that God was still planning to keep his word, and to help people identify the savior when he came.
4. In Genesis 12 God calls Abraham and says, if you will follow me I will give you land and descendants and I will bless the world through you. Here – in what we refer to as the Abrahamic Covenant – is more information about the Messiah. We learn that: He is going to be a male descendant of Abraham.
5. In Genesis 49:10 we learn that he’ll be from the tribe of Judah.
6. In Deuteronomy 18:15 predicts that he will be like Moses – a prophet of great authority
7. In Psalm 22, which was written a thousand years before Christ was born and hundreds of years before crucifixion was “invented” – David describes Christ’s death on the cross.¹⁰
8. In Isaiah 9 we are told that as a child he will be hailed as a King over an everlasting kingdom.

⁹ Another example of the obscure nature of the prophecies would be Christ’s prediction that he would rise from the dead. He didn’t say, “After I am killed, three days later I will rise from the grave. Instead he made references to Jonah’s experience and said that he would have a similar experience in the “heart of the earth.” (Mt. 12:40). Likewise, he also said, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” (Jn 2:18f). No one understood these going forward, but in hindsight they were very clear.

¹⁰ There we read: “Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” In other words, he will be mocked, his hands and feet will be pierced and people will gamble for his clothes.

9. In Isaiah 53 – the passage that was read earlier in the service, a passage that was written hundreds of years before Christ was born – we are given more details about his death. We learn that: 1) The Messiah will be wounded and bruised; 2) He will be killed with thieves; 3) He will be pierced; 4) And He will be buried in a rich man’s tomb; 5) and the idea that his death will be for us – that it will be a sacrificial and substitutionary one – is played up.¹¹

10. There are many more.

a) Asaph notes that the Rescuer will speak in parables.

b) Zechariah says that he will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey.¹²

c) In Micah 5 we are told that the Messiah will be from eternity – an eternal being – but born in Bethlehem.

d) Daniel 9 points out that Jesus will arrive before the destruction of the Second Temple.

11. So – the Old Testament contains many statements made about the Messiah. Descriptions about what he will be like.

C. Three: The odds that any one person could accidentally fulfill even a few of these are astronomical.

1. Let me call a timeout for a quick review of probabilities. I have a coin. What are the odds that I correctly predict a coin toss? One in two. What are the odds that I get it right the second time? Well, the odds that I get it right the second time are also one in two. However, the odds that I get both right are $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$.

2. Let’s change a coin for a die. What are the odds that I predict the die correctly? One in six. What are the odds that I predict the die correctly two times in a row? $\frac{1}{6} \times \frac{1}{6}$ or 1 in 36 attempts.

3. The math is pretty simple. What we have is a bit of a story problem. Some of it is easy and straight forward to set up. What are the odds that as a Jew, Jesus would be born from the tribe of Judah? Well, there are 12 tribes, so $\frac{1}{12}$. Some of these prophecies require a bit more work.

¹¹ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

¹² Zech. 9:9

- a) What are the odds that he'll be born in Bethlehem? Well, we need to divide the population of Bethlehem and divide it by the population of the world at the time. Those who have done that come up with 1/300,000
4. What are the odds that the Messiah would both be from the tribe of Judah and born in Bethlehem. $1/12 \times 1/300,000 = 1/3,600,000$
5. As you can see, the numbers get pretty extreme pretty quickly.
6. In fact, in a widely cited illustration, a math professor at Westmont College¹³ had his class figure out the odds that any one person could fulfill eight of the Messianic prophecies and came up with the number 1×10 to the 17th power. That is a one followed by 17 zeros.
7. As you may remember from an earlier story, before his retirement from the chair of the Geology Department at the University of Texas, my uncle was one of the world's leading experts on sand. He mostly used his expertise to help oil companies find oil. But he had a sand collection with sands from all over the world and it was briefly confiscated by the FBI because it could be used to help solve crimes. Indeed, sand is unique. It's a bit like a finger print. Different sands have unique features – e.g., the sand from the beaches of Normandy are 17% shrapnel.
8. So, my uncle was one of the world's leading experts on sand. Well, one of the things he did was file his guess as to how many grains of sand there are in the world. (This is mostly a joke, but it's something sedimentary geologists all do. They make their guess. After he retired my uncle spent a fair bit of time on this. He told me he was working on it over some months – and in the end was miffed because the number he came up with was the same number his colleague had arrived at after 30 minutes of work. Their numbers were the same: 1×10 to the 17th power.
9. In other words, what are the odds that any one person could randomly fulfill eight of the Messianic prophecies? The odds are the same as the odds that if all the sand in the world was in one big pile – the sand from every beach and ever desert and ever ocean floor – and you were given one chance to pick the right grain.
10. Which leads to point four. The odds are unimaginably off the charts – beyond comprehension for any person fulfilling eight of them.

D. Four: Jesus fulfills them all.

¹³ Peter Stoner.

1. Jesus is a perfect match with the description given in the Old Testament. By some counts there are several hundred Messianic prophecies.¹⁴
2. Would you invest money in a business venture if you were that certain that it was going to work out? Every penny you had.
3. So, will you put your trust in Christ? Who not fits the description but who also: 1) Did more to shape the world than any other person; 2) Taught with unmatched power; 3) gave us the greatest ethical system we have; 4) demonstrated power over sickness, evil, death and nature; and 5) claimed to be God.

IV. Some of you are shaking your heard here. This is all coming too fast. You have a few questions.

A. First, why haven't I heard this before? I'm not sure. The idea that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies is something that the church has pointed to for 2,000 years. Hey, we see it in Paul's speech before King Agrippa and Festus, recorded in Acts 26. There Paul says: I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles. Perhaps the case is not made enough by preachers today because it assumes people are conversant with math and the Old Testament. No doubt part of the problem is that we are not very familiar with prophetic literature. But let me assure you, it's all here. And let me promise you, if you read The Book over and over these things start to jump out at you.

B. Well, what do people say when you point this out to them? Well, the more interesting question is, "What do Jews say about this passage?" The answer here is, all kinds of things. My experience is that most are not familiar with these prophecies. And when you point them out, some believe. But, remember, there is not enough evidence to convince people who do not want to believe – who have already made up their mind that they are not going to believe. Faith is not just a math problem.¹⁵

¹⁴ In their book, *The Case for Jesus the Messiah: Incredible Prophecies That Prove God Exists*, (John Ankerberg Evangelistic Association, 1989) John Ankerberg, John Weldon and Walter Kaiser state that 456 identifying characteristics of the Messiah were given. (p. 18).

¹⁵ In order to ultimately be persuasive: 1) they need to believe that Old Testament is divinely inspired; 2) be familiar enough with them that they know they contain Messianic prophecies; 3) have someone explain to them how Jesus fulfills them; 4) have God working in their heart. This isn't just a math problem. There is not enough evidence to persuade those who are not willing to believe.

1. That said, it's worth noting that, for instance, Isaiah 53 presents such a powerful argument for Christ that during the Middle Ages their official interpretation of it changed from being a Messianic prophecy to being a description of the nation of Israel. And today it is seldom read – it is not part of the reading they do in the synagogue.

C. Those who want to dismiss the arguments that flow out of prophecy need to do one of three things: 1) Argue that these prophecies were written after the fact; 2) Argue that Jesus deliberately set out to fulfill them; or 3) argue that we are misinterpreting them. These are very difficult arguments to win. For starters, the prophecies Jesus fulfilled were in place at least 400 years before he was born.¹⁶ Most of them were outside his control to fulfill. You can't control where you were born. You can't control what tribe you are from. You can't control what happens to your body after you die. And while a few of them may be a stretch, I just don't see how you can argue against the bulk of evidence that is presented.

D. What most people end up doing is just ignoring them, because to admit that they are real is to admit that you must face God. It means we lose control of our life. And many are unwilling to do that because it seems like loss, rather than what it quickly becomes – huge gain. Relief. Peace.

V. Announcements

¹⁶ There is some debate about the 400 years. There can be no debate over the fact that the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) was completed by 247 B.C.. So, when it comes to Christ, all must admit that the prophecies he was fulfilling were in place at least 250 years before he was born.