



This eight-part series in “Awake!” is examining an outstanding feature of the Bible—its prophecies, or predictions. The articles will help you to answer these questions: Are Bible prophecies merely the work of clever humans? Do they bear the hallmark of divine inspiration? We invite you to weigh the evidence.

The Bible Foretold That the Christ Would Suffer and Die

WHEN Jesus Christ was on earth some 2,000 years ago, he knew that he would die a cruel death at the hands of his enemies. Why did Jesus know this? He was thoroughly acquainted with the prophecies concerning himself in the Hebrew Scriptures, or the “Old Testament.” A number of those predictions were written by the prophet Isaiah more than 700 years before Jesus was born. How can we be sure that Isaiah’s words were written aforetime?

In 1947, in the West Bank, a Bedouin shepherd found scrolls hidden in a cave at Qumran, on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. Those scrolls, along with others found in nearby caves, came to be called the Dead Sea Scrolls. They include a copy of the entire book of Isaiah.* This copy has been dated to about the second century *before* Jesus’ birth. Therefore, what Isaiah wrote was, in fact,

* The only complete scroll contains the entire book of Isaiah. The other scrolls are fragments.

prophecy. What did he foretell about the sufferings of the Christ, or Messiah?*

Consider two of Isaiah's prophecies.

Christ's Sufferings Foretold

Prophecy 1: *"My back I gave to the strikers."*
—Isaiah 50:6.[#]

Fulfillment: In the year 33 C.E., Jesus' Jewish enemies brought him before Roman Governor Pontius Pilate for trial. Recognizing Jesus' innocence, the governor tried to release him. However, because the Jews relentlessly clamored for Jesus' death, Pilate "gave sentence for their demand to be met" and handed Jesus over to be impaled. (Luke 23:13-24) First, however, "Pilate took Jesus and scourged him," or had him severely flogged. (John 19:1) As Isaiah foretold, Jesus offered no resistance but 'gave his back to the strikers.'

What history reveals:

● History confirms that the Romans commonly scourged their victims before executing them. According to one reference work, "flogging was done with a whip made of a number of leather strips weighted with pieces of lead or sharp metal. The victim was . . . beaten on the bare back . . . until the flesh was torn open. Sometimes death resulted." Jesus, however, survived this initial ordeal.

Christ's Death Foretold

Prophecy 2: *"He poured out his soul to the very death."* (Isaiah 53:12)[△] Adding more

* See the July 2012 issue of *Awake!* to learn of additional Bible prophecies that help to identify the Messiah.

[#] The context indicates that the "I" in this prophecy refers to Christ. For instance, verse 8 states: "The One [God] declaring me [Jesus Christ] righteous is near." When on earth, Jesus alone was righteous, or without sin, in God's eyes.—Romans 3:23; 1 Peter 2:21, 22.

[△] Isaiah 52:13–53:12 contains many prophetic details about the Messiah. For example, Isaiah 53:7 states: "He was being brought just like a sheep to the slaughtering . . . He also would not open his mouth." Verse 10 adds that he presented his soul "as a guilt offering."

information, Psalm 22:16 states: "A band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet."—"New International Version."

Fulfillment: "After having Jesus whipped, [Pilate] handed him over to be impaled," says Mark 15:15. In Jesus' case, this cruel form of capital punishment involved nailing his hands and feet to a stake. (John 20:25) Some hours later, "Jesus let out a loud cry and expired."—Mark 15:37.

What history reveals:

● Although secular accounts say little about the nature of Jesus' death, respected Roman historian Tacitus, born about 55 C.E., wrote that "Christus, from whom the name [Christians] had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus."* Tacitus' words fully harmonize with the Gospel accounts, which also mention Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, and other officials.—Luke 3:1; 23:1-33; John 19:1-24.

History also confirms that the Romans impaled slaves and people they viewed as despised criminals. Sometimes the Romans tied their victims to a stake. At other times they used nails. "Nails were driven through the hands and feet," says a reference work, "and the victim was left hanging there in agony," experiencing "insufferable thirst, and excruciating convulsions of pain."

As mentioned earlier, Jesus knew well ahead of time that he would die a cruel death. Hence, as his end drew near, this courageous man could say to his loyal followers: "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death,

* Other ancient chroniclers also mention Christ. These include respected Roman historian Suetonius (first century); Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia (early second century); and Jewish historian Josephus (first century), who refers to "James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ."

and will deliver him up to men of the nations to make fun of and to scourge and to impale.” (Matthew 20:18, 19) But why, some ask, did Jesus have to die? The answer to that question involves us all, and it provides the very best news we could ever receive!

“Crushed for Our Errors”

As imperfect humans, we often do wrong. The Bible calls this sin. Sin might be likened



CHRIST'S SACRIFICIAL DEATH FORESHADOWED

God's Law to the nation of Israel included regulations that foreshadowed, or served as a model of, what the Messiah would later do. For example, after an Israelite sinned, or disobeyed God, he had to offer up a sound animal. (Leviticus 17:11; 22:21) Could sacrificial animals fully atone for sin? No. (Hebrews 10:4) But they could, and did, prefigure the sacrifice that would cover sin—the sacrifice of “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29; Hebrews 10:1, 5-10) All who exercise faith in that figurative Lamb, Jesus Christ, have the precious hope of everlasting life.—John 6:40.

to grit in an engine. Eventually, grit will cause that engine to wear out and stop. Similarly, sin causes us to grow old, get sick, and die. “The wages sin pays is death,” says Romans 6:23. Christ's death, however, makes it possible for us to be set free from this tragic condition. How so? In another amazing prophecy, Isaiah wrote concerning the Christ that he would die “*for our transgression*,” or be “*crushed for our errors*,” and that “because of his wounds there has been a healing *for us*.”* —Isaiah 53:5.

Isaiah's prophecy calls to mind Jesus' words found at John 3:16: “God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.”

How can you develop faith in Jesus? By learning about him. Jesus said in prayer: “This means everlasting life, their *taking in knowledge* of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ.” (John 17:3) That precious knowledge is found in the Bible.—2 Timothy 3:16.

Understandably, Jesus wants as many people as possible to gain everlasting life. Accordingly, he made this remarkable prediction shortly before his death: “This good news of the kingdom [God's government, which will administer the benefits of Christ's sacrifice] will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations.” (Matthew 24:14) As we shall see in the next two articles in this series, that prophecy also proved to be most accurate.

* Jesus “committed no sin” and thus did not forfeit his life. (1 Peter 2:22) Instead, he gave it for us, paying the penalty for our sins and redeeming us from death's grip. Thus, Jesus' death is called a “ransom” sacrifice. (Matthew 20:28) For more information on this topic, see the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* accessible at the Web site www.jw.org.