

Covenant Pulpit



**ANTICIPATION**  
**Amazing Prophecies**  
**November 30, 2008**

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Amazing prophecies from an ancient Mayan stone calendar are the hot stuff of Internet chat rooms, websites and *You Tube* videos. In a troubled world, people are fixated on the Mayan doomsday date: **December 21, 2012**.

The Mayans carved one of the world's great civilizations out of the jungles of Central America. No people in history have matched their skills in astronomy and mathematics. They invented the concept of the zero, and had names for numbers so large that today's mathematicians still can't grasp them. Mayans figured out black holes in outer space 2800 years before modern scientists understood the concept.

Their uncanny plotting of solar systems made them history's greatest masters of time. Mayan stone calendars are so accurate that their predictions of solar movements 3,000 years later have never been off by more than 33 seconds. They also discovered that about every 25,000 years there is a shift in the earth's poles. It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that Albert Einstein uncovered the same fact. In their famous *Long Calendar* the Mayans predicted that the next pole shift would take place on December 21, 2012, unleashing catastrophic changes that would end life on earth as we know it.

The end of the Mayan calendar lines up with *I Ching*, the earliest written text in China. Called the book of change, it predicted with startling accuracy major historical events thousands of years into the future. Among *I Ching's* prognostications is the end of the world on December 21, 2012. Sources as varied as ancient Roman prophecies, the Aztec Calendar, and Sir Isaac Newton's mathematical calculations of biblical prophecies all predict the year 2012 as a cataclysmic year.

From New Age websites to Evangelical prophecy aficionados to average *Joes* at the water cooler, people are fixated on the year 2012. The rock group *The Killers* has recorded several songs that speak about the urgency of life as it approaches 2012. In their CD *Day and Age* a song entitled "Joy Ride" has a line that captures at least one useful outcome of 2012 end time hype: "I'm on my knees looking for answers."

As the world approaches the year 2012, expect this doomsday fear to pick up steam. Whether or not it turns out to be another bust like the Y2K scare, there's an explosive interest in "end time" speculation. Hardly a week goes by without the *History* or *Discovery* channel running some nightmarish documentary on Armageddon or falling asteroids or other disaster that will snuff out life on this planet. On your Internet

you will find thousands of worldwide websites prophesying the end. Even longtime televangelists like Jack Van Impe are touting the Mayan Calendar and the *I Ching*, telling Christians to get packed and ready to go on December 21, 2012.

I'm fascinated by all this, but take it with a grain of salt. When his disciples begged him to give the date for the end, Jesus replied, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Mark 13:33) When Jesus said, "No one knows..." I assume that included the Mayans, *I Ching*, Nostradamus, Sir Isaac Newton, and Jack Van Impe. Just before he ascended to heaven, his disciples again pressed him to date his return. Jesus replied in Acts 1:7, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

And yet, Jesus wants us to be ready for his return, and the Bible is filled with amazing prophecies that far surpass ancient pagan predictions in number, detail and accuracy. Some 333 prophecies of the ancient Jewish Scriptures, many of them written as much as a thousand years before Christ, predicted the events of his life in exacting detail. The most amazing facts of his birth were written by people who could not have known the historical events that had to take place over intervening time to make these predictions come to pass. Graphic descriptions of his death were prophesied centuries before Rome existed or crucifixion had been invented. For these reasons, we can depend on this logic:

**Predictions proven in the past can be counted on in the future.**

Let me introduce you to some ancient stargazers. These mysterious mystics of Persia were as sophisticated as the Mayans in plotting movements of the solar system. Ancients called these high priests of Zoroastrianism the *Magi*. We get the word *magic* from *Magi*. Using their magic arts, they made fabulous fortunes by preparing horoscopes and reading tarot cards for kings and nobles from Israel to India.

The *Magi* were the greatest scholars of the ancient Orient. Hence they came to be known as the *Wise Men*. They were the scientists, philosophers, mathematicians, doctors and legal authorities of the Middle East. From the word *Magi* we get our word *magistrate*. Numbered among the ancient *Magi* in the Babylonian courts some 600 years before Christ was a Jew by the name of Daniel. This Jewish *Magi* would later become the Prime Minister of both Babylon and Persia while writing an amazing book of prophecy.

It's incredible to me that the people of God would be caught napping at Christ's first advent while occult practitioners would travel more than 1200 miles across trackless wastelands to worship him. Some 2000 years later we are still astounded at their question in Matthew 2:2:

"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

We are even more struck by the Jewish response in verse three: "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all of Jerusalem with him." The word *disturbed* is a strong one in the original language. It speaks of high anxiety and fear. Herod was the original *Grinch Who Stole Christmas*. He didn't want competition from another king. The people of Jerusalem also didn't want to have their well-ordered lives disturbed by the first advent of Christ. Today lots of Christians are just as disturbed at his second coming. They find "end times" talk to be frightening. Like Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, they say, "I'll think about it tomorrow."

What happens next would be comical if it weren't so tragic. King Herod has to call in scholars to find out where the Messiah's birth was prophesied. He was clueless when it came to biblical predictions about Christ's first advent, and most Christians are ignorant about his second. In Matthew 24:43 Jesus said that he would return with the suddenness of a thief. St. Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, "For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly..." Wise men may not know the exact times and dates of Christ's arrival, but they mustn't be caught unprepared. To that end we must be committed to three truths:

**1. The stars can take you part way, but only the Scriptures can take you all the way home.**

What led these mysterious Magi to Jerusalem? They say in verse three, "...We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." Both historians and astronomers tell us that in the year 7 BC the planets Jupiter, Saturn and Mars came together in a conjunction so rare that it hasn't happened since. This juxtaposition of planets lit up the night skies. To ancients, Jupiter was the planet of kings. Mars represented war. Astrologers knew that a great warrior king was about to be born. Four years later Jupiter came into conjunction with Regulus, the brightest star in the constellation Leo. This would be a Lion King. The Jewish word for Jupiter is *Sedeq* which means "righteous." This would also be a King of Righteousness. Then, in

the year 2 BC, Jupiter moved through Pisces. Ancients regarded this “constellation of the fish” as that of the Jews. This great king would be born in Israel. Astronomers tell us that Jupiter would have been stationary about December in the year 2 BC—just above Bethlehem!

Like the Magi, the Mayans also unlocked secrets in the movements of the solar systems. Were they accurate in their predictions about 2012? We won't know until January 1, 2013. But we need to learn from the Magi that the stars are never enough. It's the Bible, not the Mayan calendar, that's our guide. The star could only take the Magi as far as Jerusalem. They were in need of a GPS navigational system far more specific and sophisticated. It wasn't until the Scriptures were searched that we read in verse five:

“‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of his people Israel.’”

This is a stunning prediction from Micah 5:2. Micah lived more than 700 years before Christ. In Micah's day Bethlehem was a wide-spot-in-the-road, dirty and despised village. No one in Micah's day would have dreamed up Bethlehem for the King of kings. This could only have been conceived in heaven. For this reason alone we need to find our answers in Scriptures, not the solar movements of the Mayan calendar or Persian astrologers.

## **2. The amazing Bible contains 333 predictions of Christ's first coming that are without error or contradiction.**

There are many sacred books among the world's religions, but only the Bible has the audacity to claim in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is God-breathed...” 2 Peter 1:21 makes this claim: “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but man spoke from the will of God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The Greek verb for “carried along” is *phero* which means to be swept along by a force stronger than you. Each prophet spoke his own words, yet every syllable was God-breathed.

The most amazing thing about the Bible is that it consists of 66 different books, written over a period of 1500 years, by 40 separate authors in three different languages, by people as diverse as kings and fisherman, and in places as varied as prisons and palaces. Yet there are no errors or

contradictions. The odds against such perfect accuracy from so many sources is astronomical. Think about the following:

### **1) The amazing prophecies of his birth, life, and death**

The New Testament writers cite messianic prophecies from the Old Testament more than 130 times. There are 333 of those prophecies. What are the chances of all these prophecies, given over 1500 years of history, being fulfilled in one person? Skeptics say they are mere coincidences.

Astronomer and mathematician Peter Stoner, in his book *Science Speaks* shows the mathematical probability that these prophecies could have been fulfilled by a single person by pure chance. He says that the chance that only *eight* of these 333 predictions could be fulfilled in one man's life is 1 in 10 to the 17<sup>th</sup> power. This would be one chance in 100,000,000,000,000,000.

Stoner illustrates the mathematical probabilities: "...Take 10 to the 17<sup>th</sup> power number of silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas [with its land area of 262,000 square miles]. These silver dollars would cover the entire surface of Texas two feet deep. Now mark one of those dollars and hide it somewhere in the mass of silver covering the 262,000 square miles. Blindfold someone and tell him that he can travel as far as he wants across Texas. But he must eventually pick up one silver dollar. What are the chances that he would pick up the marked coin? They would be the same as just eight Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in one man.

Dr. Stoner goes on to remind us that he is only talking about *eight* messianic prophecies. Using the same science of probability, the chance of as many as 48 of these prophecies coming to pass in one person is 1 in 10 to the 157<sup>th</sup> power, or a one followed by 157 zeros. And even then, we haven't even considered half of the prophecies about Christ's life on earth. Only an irrational or close-minded person could claim that the fulfillment of those prophecies is coincidental. In Christ's case, the law of probability quickly becomes absolute certainty. I'll show you just one of those prophecies:

### **2) The amazing prophecy of Daniel**

Daniel was a Jew who lived in Babylon about 600 years before Christ. He became one of the *Magi* who served the Babylonian kings. He also delivered some of the most breathtaking prophecies in all of Scripture. He predicted the rise of Alexander the Great and the history of the Middle East for the next 600 years. He predicted the rise of Rome and

the next 2000 years of world history. Next to Daniel, Nostradamus is a piker. Among his prophecies is this one recorded in Daniel 9:26:

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two sevens, the Anointed One will be cut off, and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood...”

Daniel could not have known that, years later, through a chain of unlikely events, the King of Persia would issue a decree that would bring captive Israelites back to their land. But long after Daniel died, King Cyrus issued a decree and Nehemiah was sent to rebuild Jerusalem. In the book of Nehemiah, the exact day of the beginning of the restoration of the city by the Babylonians is recorded. On the exact day, 483 years after Nehemiah began to restore the walls (in accordance with Daniel's time prediction), Jesus, the Anointed One, entered the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. A week later he was “cut off with nothing”—stripped of everything he possessed and crucified. And after that the Romans came and destroyed the city and sanctuary, just as Daniel prophesied more than 500 years before. Prophecies like Daniel's are beyond human coincidence.

### **3. The accurate forecasts of his First advent give us confidence to believe those about his Return.**

Please come with me to the first chapter of Acts and read about Christ's ascension to heaven. After Jesus had ascended into heaven two angels speak to the disciples in verse 11, “‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’” We have assurance of three things: 1) we don't have to keep looking up in anxiety; 2) his return is certain; and 3) he will come back the same way he left. Just as things prophesied before he came the first time took place, so will things prophesied for his Second Coming take place. There is a certainty about one thing only: he *will* return! So how do we live in the light of the one thing we can know for certain? Three things, for sure:

#### **Don't fixate on his coming.**

Before he leaves, the disciples are again pestering him to tell them when he will come again. He replies in verse seven, “It is not for you to know the

times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” To some extent God wants to leave us in the dark. He doesn’t want us fixating on the signs of the time, or trying to nail down a date for his return. While we need to know enough not to be deceived by the devil or unprepared at his coming, we ought to be careful that we don’t get knotted up in trying to figure out all the mysteries of his Return. Date setting, charting the timing of the rapture, or figuring out who the 144,000 are, or how Russia, or China, or Israel, or Iran, or America will fit in, may be good clean theological and speculative fun, but it shouldn’t be the stuff of arguments, or church divisions, or unhealthy fixation. We have better things to do with our time.

#### **Do focus on his commission.**

Jesus goes on in verse eight to say, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” In other words, you only need to know one thing about the Second Coming: it will happen, and you had better be ready. Meantime, there are lots of folks who won’t be ready. They will face the Final Judgment without a hope because they haven’t trusted in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They will go into a horrific eternity in outer darkness. Your job is to get out there and share the gospel with as many people as possible, in as many places as possible, before the Lord returns. It’s not the Second Coming, but the Great Commission, that should consume our energy. In fact, the Second Coming only makes the Great Commission more urgent! There’s no time to waste, so don’t waste it!

#### **Look forward with anticipation, not upward with anxiety.**

After Jesus ascends, the disciples are terrified about life without him at their side. They are caught between when Jesus is beside them and several days later (on the Day of Pentecost) when the Holy Spirit will put Jesus inside them. You can feel for them at that moment. But the angels give them two pieces of advice: 1) look forward with anticipation. Jesus “will come back in the same way you have seen him go.” His Return is a sure thing. It is what the Puritans called “Our blessed hope.” It’s what keeps us going in the insanity of this sin-sick world. 2) Don’t look upward with anxiety. “Why do you stand here looking into the sky?” God’s got it under control. He’s going to take care of you. Don’t let the Mayan calendar distress you. Don’t worry about how all the “end time” pieces fit together. Enjoy the present, work in the interim, be aware of the signs of the time, and don’t get caught unprepared.