

What Are The Odds?

Do you ever play longshots? Most of us have at least bought a lottery ticket, even though we knew winning was highly unlikely. The odds of hitting the record Powerball jackpot last November, for example, were 1 in 292,000,000. But let me tell you about a *real* longshot – something I've been contemplating since the Christmas Day sermon I heard mentioned how God orchestrated the birth of Jesus.

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world... And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born... (Luke 2:1-6)

The prophet Micah (5:2) had foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But that was no slam dunk since Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, about ninety miles away. After all, what would convince a man to undertake a grueling 4-day journey on foot with a heavily pregnant wife, not even knowing where they would stay when they got there? Probably nothing less than a binding order from the emperor himself! So when Caesar Augustus (the most powerful man on the planet at the time) suddenly took a notion to order a census, he was no more than a pawn in the hand of God Almighty.

While it's intriguing to think of God manipulating Caesar like a piece on a chess board, there is of course another possibility. God is omniscient. So, knowing in advance what would happen, God could have caused the prophet Micah to write about it hundreds of years beforehand. That would be no less miraculous. And the same principle applies to all the other prophecies Jesus fulfilled.

Now I'm going to throw some serious numbers at you. Biblical scholars have documented over 300 Old Testament prophecies pointing directly to the promised Messiah. The odds of any one person fulfilling even 8 of key importance have been calculated as 1 in a number with 28 zeros behind it. Yes, 28! And yet Jesus, by his birth, life, death, and resurrection fulfilled all 300+. In other words, there's NO chance that it happened by accident or mere coincidence; it was by God's ordaining. And since it's estimated that about 117 billion (with only 9 zeros) people have ever been born on this planet, there's also NO chance that anybody else, before or since, did the same. Betting on Jesus as our true Savior isn't a longshot; betting on anything or anybody else is.

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