

DEBUNKING "PROOF TEXTS" FROM THE PROVERBS¹

I. INTRODUCTION

The set of "messianic prophecies" identified by Christians in the Christian "Old Testament" is not congruent with the set of "messianic agenda items" developed by the Jewish prophets in the Hebrew Bible. A detailed comparison of the Christian and Jewish perspectives on "messianic prophecy" is presented in the series of essays on the Psalms and will not be repeated here.^{2,3,4,5,6,7,8}

Among the hundreds of alleged "messianic prophecy"-“fulfillment” pairs on the *reference list* used in the essays on the “proof texts” in the Psalms are three passages from the Book of Proverbs.⁹

In this essay, these three claimed "messianic prophecies" in the Book of Proverbs and their respective "fulfillments" in the New Testament are analyzed, and the claims of their validity tested.

¹ Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in ***SMALL CAPS*** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
 - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
 - A vocalized letter י is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
 - The letter ה is transliterated as “h”
 - The letter ח is transliterated as “ch”
 - The letter כ is transliterated as “k”
 - The letter ק is transliterated as “q”
 - A vocalized **SHVA** (וְ אֵיִשׁ) is transliterated as a superscripted “e” following the consonant
 - There is no “doubling” of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **daGESH** (emphasis)

² Debunking "Proof Texts" from the Psalms, Part 1 – Psalms 8, 16, 18 -

<http://thejewishhome.org/counter/PsalmsPrfTxt1.pdf>

³ Debunking "Proof Texts" from the Psalms, Part 2 – Psalms 27, 31, 34, 35, 38 -

<http://thejewishhome.org/counter/PsalmsPrfTxt2.pdf>

⁴ Debunking "Proof Texts" from the Psalms, Part 3 – Psalms 40, 41, 45 -

<http://thejewishhome.org/counter/PsalmsPrfTxt3.pdf>

⁵ Debunking "Proof Texts" from the Psalms, Part 4 – Psalms 55, 68, 78, 80, and 89 –

<http://thejewishhome.org/counter/PsalmsPrfTxt4.pdf>

⁶ Debunking “Proof Texts” from the Psalms, Part 5 – Psalms 69 –

<http://thejewishhome.org/counter/PsalmsPrfTxt5.pdf>

⁷ Debunking "Proof Texts" from the Psalms, Part 6 – Psalms 102, 109, 118, and 132 –

<http://thejewishhome.org/counter/PsalmsPrfTxt6.pdf>

⁸ *Debunking "Proof Texts" from the Psalms [Part 7: The "Big Picture" -*

<http://thejewishhome.org/counter/PsalmsPrfTxt7.pdf>

⁹ *Jesus is the Messiah: The Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled By Jesus Christ Ordered by Category -*

<http://contenderministries.org/prophecy/jesuss Messiah2.php>

II. ANALYSIS OF CLAIMED "MESSIANIC PROPHECIES" AND THEIR "FULFILLMENTS"

To say that a prophecy has been fulfilled means that the foretold event, condition, or situation has happened, and that one no longer needs to await its completion or fulfillment. On the other hand, a prophecy that has not yet happened, or is yet to be completed, remains a prophecy not fulfilled.

The items typically claimed by Christians to be "messianic prophecy" often consist of a short passage, a single verse, or even a portion of a verse, from the Christian "Old Testament", and the same is true of the respective texts in the New Testament that are claimed to be accounts of "fulfillment"

The "messianic prophecies" claimed to be present in a given proverb and the respective accounts of their "fulfillment" from the New Testament are addressed in the following subsections. The analysis helps determine whether these pairs of passages in the Christian "Old Testament" and New Testament qualify as "messianic prophecy" and its "fulfillment", respectively.

A. Proverbs 8

The *reference list* indicates that Proverbs 8 contains one "messianic prophecy" that is "fulfilled" according to the New Testament, as shown in Table II.A-1.

Table II.A-1 – Claimed "Messianic Prophecy" and its "Fulfillment"

Statement	Citations	
	"Prophecy"	"Fulfillment"
The Messiah would be from everlasting	Proverbs 8:22-23	John 17:5

1. Overview

Proverbs 8 and 9 are discourses on the nature of wisdom. The eighth chapter in the Book of Proverbs addresses the excellence of wisdom, a metaphoric reference to the Torah. Following summary of this chapter:¹⁰

- Verses 1-11 -** **Wisdom's (Torah's) call, in which she invites all to learn from her.** She proclaims the delights of God's teachings (Torah), which brings happiness and life, and declares that her moral value is higher than all earthly riches.
- Verses 12-21 -** **Wisdom (Torah) speaks for herself about her attributes.** She is the source of the truest success. This is the discipline that wisdom proclaims, and only the humble and truthful are allowed to discover her treasures and truth. By enduring themselves with the wisdom of Torah, kings become righteous sovereigns, leaders manifest leadership, princes gain authority, and judges remain dedicated to truth and justice. The Torah is generous to those who love her.

¹⁰ This outline is based on the commentary for Proverbs 8 in *The Stone Edition Tanach*, p. 1579, Mesorah Publications, 1996), and in *Soncino Books of the Bible – Proverbs*, Rev. Dr. A. Cohen, Editor, pp. 44-51, The Soncino Press (1992)

Verses 22-31 - Wisdom (Torah) describes her role at Creation. She preceded everything, and is the "blueprint" of Creation. God created the Torah before He created the universe¹¹; it is manifest in Creation, preserves the world, and is a guide to all mankind.

Verses 32-36 - Wisdom's (Torah's) closing appeal to follow the path she paves. She advises us to be wise, to follow Torah and its teachings. This path will lead the Jew to fulfillment, "Hearken unto discipline and grow wise." Only by unswerving obedience to Torah can we succeed.

2. Investigating the claimed "Messianic Prophecy" [and "Fulfillment"]

a. *The Messiah would be from everlasting*

The relevant texts from the King James Version (KJV) "Old Testament" and New Testament, and the corresponding Jewish translation for reference purposes, are shown in Table II.A.2.a-1, with the respective relevant portions of the passages shown in highlighted form.

Table II.A.2.a-1 – Proverbs 8:22-23 and John 17:5

"Messianic Prophecy"	"Fulfillment"	
KJV "Old Testament" Translation	KJV New Testament Translation from the Greek	Jewish Translation from the Hebrew
Proverbs 8:22-23	John 17:5	Proverbs 8:22-23
22. The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. 23. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.	And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.	22. The Lord acquired me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. 23. I was enthroned from everlasting, from the beginning, from before the earth [existed].

The two verses from the Hebrew Bible embody the concept that wisdom (i.e., the Torah) served as God's "blueprint" for Creation, an idea that is also reflected elsewhere in the Book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 3:19 – The Lord founded the earth with wisdom; [He] established the heavens with discernment.

The notion that wisdom preceded Creation must be understood in a logical sense rather than within the framework of time, which itself was part of Creation – a "plan" was necessary prior to the act of Creation, as indicated in the opening verse of a correct translation of the so-called "proof text":

Proverbs 8:22 - The Lord acquired me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old.

The "fulfillment" text appears to echo wisdom's words, and ascribes them to Jesus, who is claimed to have existed prior to Creation. However, this

¹¹ According to the Jewish Sages, seven things were created before the world was created, one of which is the Torah. (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *P^esaCHIM*, Folio 54a, and Tractate *N^edaRIM*, Folio 39b)

assignment creates a serious logical problem for a foundational concept of Christian theology. Namely, that Jesus, as God, was "the alpha" [first] and "the omega" [last] (see Revelation 1:8,11, 21:6, 22:13), i.e., he was not created or formed, and that he is "eternal". Whoever selected this passage as the "fulfillment" account apparently ignored the rest of this chapter since wisdom states in verses 24&25 that she was formed before the waters and mountains appeared.

The Hebrew conjugated verb used in verses 24&25 is חוֹלְלָתִי (holalti), I **was formed**, which derives from the root verb חיל (HET-YOD-LAMED), [to] **give birth, [to] bring forth, [to] form** (also [to] **tremble** [from pangs of birth, or from fear]):

Proverbs 8:24-25 – (24) I was created [חוֹלְלָתִי] **when there were yet no deeps, when there were no fountains replete with water. (25) I was created** [חוֹלְלָתִי] **before the mountains were sunk, before the hills;**

Proverbs 8:24-25(KJV) – (24) When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. (25) Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:

The identically conjugated verb, חוֹלְלָתִי, appears only one additional time in the Hebrew Bible, in the following passage:

Psalms 51:7 – Behold, with iniquity I was formed [חוֹלְלָתִי], **and with sin my mother conceived me.**

Psalms 51:5(KJV) – Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

King David, the speaker here, makes a statement about his own birth. Therefore, the fact that wisdom was created and King David was formed eliminates the possibility that Jesus could be called "wisdom" and thereby become deified. In fact, by the accounts in the New Testament, Jesus cannot even be a personification of wisdom since he had to acquire it:

Luke 2:52(KJV) - And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

How could God, being all-wisdom, be described as increasing in wisdom?

Conclusion: Proverbs 8:22-23 is not a valid "messianic prophecy".

B. Proverbs 30

The *reference list* indicates that Proverbs 30 contains two "messianic prophecies" that are "fulfilled" according to the New Testament, as shown in Table II.B-1.

Table II.B-1 – Claimed "Messianic Prophecies" and their "Fulfillments"

Statement	Citations	
	"Prophecy"	"Fulfillment"
The Messiah would ascend and descend from heaven	Proverbs 30:4a	John 3:13
God would have a Son	Proverbs 30:4b	Matthew 3:16-17

1. Overview

The superscription attributes Proverb 30 to *AGUR the son of YaQEH*, yet the authorship of this chapter in the Book of Proverbs remains uncertain. Some say this is a reference to King Solomon, arguing that it was common in those days to use poetic metaphors instead of actual names to identify someone (this is similar to the later usage of pseudonyms). Others postulate that the author, *AGUR the son of YaQEH*, lived during a later era, and both Scriptural and Rabbinic evidence has been offered to support the notion that the Book of Proverbs, in its present form, is not the work of a single author. Rather, that it is a compilation of ethical works spanning a period of several hundred years, beginning at the time of King Solomon and ending during the era of the scribes who followed Ezra (see, e.g., Proverbs 25:1 and Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Bava BATHra*, Folio 15a, respectively).

Regardless of who authored it, Proverbs 30 appears to be the product of an inquiring mind that was intrigued by the mysteries and problems of human existence.

2. Investigating claimed "Messianic Prophecies" [and "Fulfillments"]

Having this verse divided into two segments, each of which representing a separate so-called "proof text" and "messianic prophecy", makes the response somewhat clumsy. Nevertheless, the respective responses will follow this division as much as possible.

a. *The Messiah would ascend and descend from heaven*

The relevant texts from the KJV "Old Testament" and New Testament, and the corresponding Jewish translation for reference purposes, are shown in Table II.B.2.a-1, with the respective relevant portions of the passages shown in highlighted form.

Table II.B.2.a-1 – Proverbs 30:4a and John 3:13

"Messianic Prophecy" KJV "Old Testament" Translation	"Fulfillment" KJV New Testament Translation from the Greek	Jewish Translation from the Hebrew
Proverbs 30:4a	John 3:13	Proverbs 30:4a
Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? [what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?]	And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.	Who ascended to heaven and descended? Who gathered wind in his fists? Who wrapped the waters in a garment? Who established all the ends of the earth? [What is his name and what is the name of his son, if you know?]

One way to understand this passage is as a series of rhetorical questions that describe the infinite nature of God.¹² Their purpose is to point out that it is impossible for any mortal, such as *AGUR* who admits he cannot even understand the workings of the human mind, to understand the way that the "Infinite Mind" functions. To have this knowledge would mean that one also had to be able to accomplish the following:

- **Ascend to heaven and descend, which only God had done** (Genesis 11:7; Exodus 19:18)
- **Gather the wind, an act of God** (Amos 4:13; Psalms 135:7)
- **Wrap the water in a garment, as God stores the water in the clouds for the rains, without which there is no existence** (Job 26:8)
- **Establish the boundaries of the earth as the place of human habitation, separated from the oceans, as God had done at Creation** (Genesis 1:9-10)

Could any mortal have done all this?

In quite a different approach to this passage, RaSHI considers these feats as metaphoric representations of accomplishments by Moses:¹³

- **Who ascended to heaven and descended? Moses ascended to heaven to receive the Torah and bring it down to earth for Israel** (Exodus 19:3,20-25, 24:12-18, 31:18, 32:15-16, 34:1-4)
- **Who gathered wind in his fists? Moses controlled the winds**¹⁴ (Exodus 10:13,18-19; 14:21)
- **Who wrapped the waters in a garment? Moses restricted the waters of the sea** (Exodus 14:15-22,26-29)

¹² See *Soncino Books of the Bible – Proverbs*, Rev. Dr. A. Cohen, Editor, pp. 44-51, The Soncino Press (1992)

¹³ *The Stone Edition Tanach*, p. 1612, Mesorah Publications, Ltd. (1996)

¹⁴ In his Metzudath David commentary (*The Book of Proverbs*, pp. 188-189, Judaica Press, Inc. [1993]), Rabbi David Altschuler contends this actually alludes to the 6th plague, boils, which Aaron and Moses brought upon Egypt by taking handfuls of soot from the furnace and throwing it skyward to let the wind distribute it over Egypt (Exodus 9:8-10). It was as though Moses gathered the wind in his fists and harnessed it to scatter the soot all over the entire land.

- **Who established all the ends of the earth? Moses erected the Tabernacle**¹⁵
(Exodus 40:17-18)

Who else, other than Moses, accomplished all this?

The "fulfillment" text ascribes the ascent and descent to and from heaven to Jesus and no one else, even though Proverbs 30:4a is neither directly referenced nor quoted in the New Testament. This presupposes the deity of Jesus and his incarnation in the flesh as a man, which has already been disproved elsewhere.¹⁶ Although Christianity considers the appearance of Jesus as a man, posed in the first question as having "... descended [from heaven] ...", to be part of the messianic advent, the actions covered by the remaining questions in the first segment of the verse were all completed at the time of Creation, thousands of years prior to start of the Christian era. [The impossibility of this passage speaking about Jesus becomes much more obvious when the second segment of the verse is analyzed.]

Conclusion: Proverbs 30:4a is not a valid "messianic prophecy".

b. God would have a Son

The relevant texts from the KJV "Old Testament" and New Testament, and the corresponding Jewish translation for reference purposes, are shown in Table II.B.2.b-1, with the respective relevant portions of the passages shown in highlighted form.

Table II.B.2.b-1 – Proverbs 30:4b and Matthew 3:16-17

"Messianic Prophecy"	"Fulfillment"	
KJV "Old Testament" Translation	KJV New Testament Translation from the Greek	Jewish Translation from the Hebrew
Proverbs 30:4b	Matthew 3:16-17	Proverbs 30:4b
[Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth?] what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?	16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: 17. And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.	[Who ascended to heaven and descended? Who gathered wind in his fists? Who wrapped the waters in a garment? Who established all the ends of the earth?] What is his name and what is the name of his son, if you know?

According to the first view presented earlier, the last two in the series of rhetorical questions about the infinite nature of God are idioms that convey a tone of sarcasm:

¹⁵ The Sages point out, "If not for the service [of the Tabernacle and Torah] the foundations of heaven and earth would not have been established." (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Megillah*, Folio 31a)

¹⁶ *Why Jews Must Reject the Belief in Jesus* - <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/WhyRejectJC.pdf>

- **"What is his name?"** This is a sarcastic question by which the one asking it really means: "If you assert that any man possessed these powers, then who is he?"
- **"What is the name of his son?"** This is more sarcasm, where the one asking the question really means: "should you claim that such a person has existed, let me test your knowledge of him; if you give me his name, what more do you know of him? What was his son called?"

If the author of this proverb was referring to God in verse 4, then the question "*what is His name?*" would be rhetorical since, in general, most adults know the Creator's name in their own language (and religion). So, the message conveyed by this sarcasm is that there is no mortal who accomplished all of this. Moreover, it does not say that "the son" did any of this; rather, it can be only the work of the Creator.

According to RaSHI, the last two questions test the knowledge of anyone who may claim to know someone who accomplished these deeds:

- **"What is his name and what is the name of his son, if you know?"** This is the English translation of a common Hebrew idiom, מַה־שְּׂמוֹ (MAH-SHMO), **what is his name**, which may be paraphrased as follows: "If you say to us that there already was someone such as he [the one all these questions are about], then tell us what his son's name is. Identify the family that has descended from him, and we will know who he is."

Therefore, the issue here is not who this someone's son is, the question is about who this someone is, and about identifying that individual. There is only one other application of the idiom מַה־שְּׂמוֹ in the Hebrew Bible, and the context in which it is used in that particular passage helps clarify the point:

Exodus 3:13 - And Moses said to God, "Behold I come to the children of Israel, and I say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name? [מַה־שְּׂמוֹ]' what shall I say to them?"

In this verse, **"What is his name?"** – מַה־שְּׂמוֹ – is not an inquiry about God's name. After all, Moses came to the Israelites saying, "... **The God of your fathers has sent me to you ...**". Surely, they knew who the God of their fathers was and what He was called. After all, the notion of an "Unknown God" is unbiblical. The noun "name" is used in the Hebrew Bible in more ways than just to identify someone or something. It can be an indication of fame (e.g., Genesis 11:4), and it can also be synonymous with might (e.g., Exodus 9:16). Thus, in Exodus 3:13, **"What is his name?"** means, "*What mighty deeds can you recount for Him; what is his power, that we [the Israelites] should listen to the message you bring from Him?*"

The use of the idiom מַה־שְּׂמוֹ at Proverbs 30:4b is similar in that the purpose of asking about the person's name is to validate his credentials.

Although there is no denying that all these feats credited here to Moses were enabled by God, it was Moses who carried them out.

Both Jewish interpretations of Proverbs 30:4, although quite different, are consistent with Scripture and, therefore, are acceptable.

The "fulfillment" text, on the other hand, attempts to assign to Jesus a realization of the idioms used in Proverbs 30:4b immediately following his baptism. Yet, even if an actual "Father-son" relationship were implied in Proverbs 30:4, no evidentiary support is found in the Hebrew Bible for the Christian doctrine that Jesus was God's "begotten" son, i.e., that he was fathered by God through an act of procreation, as claimed in the New Testament. The Hebrew Bible actually contains several accounts of "son(s)" of God: Israel (Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1; Hosea 2:1, 11:1), King David (Psalms 2:7), King Solomon (2Samuel 7:14; 1Chronicles 22:9-10), and Angels (Job 1:6; Daniel 3:25). However, none of these represents a physical (biological) "son of God" in the familial sense; they merely enjoyed a special relationship with God.

Conclusion: Proverbs 30:4b is not a valid "messianic prophecy".

III. SUMMARY

This study investigated three so-called "proof texts" in the Book of Proverbs, which are claimed to be Christian "messianic prophecies", along with their respective claims of "fulfillment" in the New Testament. The analysis addressed the content, context, and correspondence between each pair of texts in order to assess the validity of the claims. The results of the investigation are summarized in Table III-1.

Table III-1 – Claimed "messianic prophecies" in Proverbs 8 and 30, and their "fulfillments"

Statement	Citations		Valid?
	"Prophecy"	"Fulfillment"	
The Messiah would be from everlasting	Proverbs 8:22-23	John 17:5	NO
The Messiah would ascend and descend from heaven	Proverbs 30:4a	John 3:13	NO
God would have a Son	Proverbs 30:4b	Matthew 3:16-17	NO

It was demonstrated in all three cases that each alleged "messianic prophecy" was the result of an attempt to retrofit New Testament accounts to appear as realizations of claimed prophetic accounts in the Christian "Old Testament". It was also shown how these false interpretations resulted from the disregard of context and the lack of a correct understanding of the original Hebrew text.

As was noted in the analysis, none of these passages in the Christian "Old Testament" are directly referenced or quoted in the New Testament. This would indicate that they were not considered prophetic messianic texts by the authors of the New Testament. Rather, it is likely that they were fashioned into "messianic prophecies" at later times in the history of Christianity.

Finally, by focusing on Jesus, the central figure in the Christian messianic vision, not on the conditions that will prevail in the world due to his accomplishments, these three claimed Christian "messianic prophecy" and "fulfillment" pairs continue to follow the Messiah-centric pattern that emerged from the earlier study of "proof texts" in the Psalms. This is, once again, inconsistent with the messianic vision of Judaism, which is based on the Hebrew Bible, and is, therefore, generally devoid of any prophetic content.