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Statistics And Probability

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Christianity stresses the role of faith in its application. When Jesus Christ spoke of faith, He used a particular word. That word was “pistis (pis'-tis); from NT:3982 meaning persuasion, i.e. credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher), especially reliance upon Christ for salvation; abstractly, constancy in such profession; by extension, the system of religious (Gospel) truth itself” and as used in the Bible (KJV) means “assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity.” (See [Strong's Greek-Hebrew Dictionary](#) NT:4102). The first time Jesus used this word was during His encounter with the centurion when He was asked to heal the centurion’s servant.

Matthew 8:5-10

** New International Version	King James Version
<p>5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." 7 Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." 8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."</p> <p>10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.</p>	<p>5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,</p> <p>6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. 7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. 8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. 9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.</p> <p>10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.</p>

When Jesus talked about those of “little faith”, He used another word. That word was “oligopistos (ol-ig-op'-is-tos); from NT:3641 and NT:4102 meaning incredulous, i.e. lacking confidence (in Christ)” and as used in the Bible (KJV) means “of little faith.” (See [Strong's Greek-Hebrew Dictionary](#), NT:3640). In the sixth Chapter of Matthew following His teaching concerning the proper way to pray, Jesus basically tells His disciples not to worry about running after the things of this world for that is foolishness. God knows what you need. Rather, you should seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; all of these other things will then be added unto you.

Matthew 6:30

** New International Version	King James Version
30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?	30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Christ then went on to talk about the importance of faith and the amount of faith required to do great things. He emphasized to His disciples that a great deal of faith is not required but if they simply had the faith no bigger than that of a mustard seed, great things could be achieved.

Matthew 17:20	
** New International Version	King James Version
20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."	20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

One of the greatest things that can ever be achieved is the salvation of the soul. When the Holy Spirit calls a person to faith in Jesus Christ, how much faith is really necessary? Perhaps, as above, it only takes faith no greater in size than that of a mustard seed. Where does one find that kind of faith today?

In today's world people are probably more familiar with the area of statistics and probability than any other time in history. The reason for that familiarity is that we are surrounded by politics and gambling. These topics pervade our society and for better or worse, they have exposed us to the reality of the application of statistics in everyday life.

Every other year, and especially every four years, we are inundated with polling data suggesting that particular candidates hold a certain percentage of voters and how those numbers are prone to movement depending on the position the candidate takes politically. Before every election pollsters and statisticians tell us how likely it is that one candidate will prevail over another, plus or minus the margin of error. In fact this activity became a problem when these same pollsters were telling the American public who was going to win a certain presidential election before the polls actually closed. Congress rectified this problem but it illustrated how statistics could be used to manipulate election results.

I don't know if you have noticed but in this country, the gambling industry is exploding. Everywhere people can now play some state or multi-state lottery; they can play a magazine sweepstakes; or they can drive down the road to their local casino. Once again, statistics and probability come into play in these activities and if people really understood and applied these concepts, the gambling industry would die. A multi-state lottery claims that the odds of winning the grand price are 1 in 80 million while a magazine sweepstakes claims that the odds of winning are 1 in 120 million. (I can't even win a coin toss to see who gets to go first in a game of horseshoes so what makes me think that I can possibly win one of these games.) In organized casino gambling, the house always has the odds and in some games, the odds of winning are so remote as to be preposterous (sort of like the lottery). That is how they stay in business. They are not there to give away money; they are there to keep your money. However, once again, people are exposed to statistics if they pay attention.

The area of statistics and probability also come into play when it comes to the Bible. I am not being heretical when I say that you can consider the Bible and apply statistics to certain aspects in order to strengthen your faith. While I understand and appreciate that faith is a "belief in things

unseen”, this is an instance where evidences give rise to opinion that does not have to rely upon faith. The area that I am referring to concerns the prophecies about the life of Christ and how those prophecies were fulfilled in one man – Jesus the Messiah.

I have taken the liberty of summarizing certain prophecies and providing the verse for the prophecy along with the verse evidencing its fulfillment. These verses are as follows:

Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled in One Person:

1. Betrayed by a friend. (Psalms 41:9; Matthew 26:49).
2. Thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:15).
3. Betrayal money cast to the floor of the temple (Zechariah 11:13; Matthew 27:5).
4. Betrayal money used to buy the potter’s field (Zechariah 11:13; Matthew 27:7).
5. Forsaken and deserted by his disciples (Zechariah 13:7; Mark 14:50).
6. Accused by false witnesses (Psalms 35:11; Matthew 26:59-60).
7. Silent before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 27:12).
8. Wounded and bruised (Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 27:26).
9. Hated without a cause (Psalm 69:4; John 15:25).
10. Struck and spat upon (Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 26:67).
11. Mocked, ridiculed and rejected (Isaiah 53:3; Matthew 27:27-31 and John 7:5, 48).
12. Collapse from weakness (Psalms 109:24-25; Luke 23:26).
13. Taunted with specific words (Psalms 22:6-8; Matthew 27:39-43).
14. People will shake their heads at Him (Psalms 109:25; Matthew 27:39).
15. People will stare at Him (Psalms 22:17; Luke 23:35).
16. Executed among “sinners” (Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 27:38).
17. Hands and feet will be pierced (Psalms 22:16; Luke 23:33).
18. Will pray for his persecutors (Isaiah 53:12; Luke 23:34).
19. Friends and family will stand afar off and watch (Psalms 38:11; Luke 23:49).
20. Garments will be divided and won by the casting of lots (Psalms 22:18; John 19:23-24).
21. Will thirst (Psalms 69:21; John 19:28).
22. Will be given gall and vinegar (Psalms 69:21; Matthew 27:34).
23. Will commit Himself to God (Psalms 31:5; Luke 23:46).
24. Bones will be left unbroken (Psalms 34:20; John 19:33).
25. Heart will rupture (Psalm 22:14; John 19:34).
26. Side will be pierced (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34).
27. Darkness will come over the land at midday (Amos 8:9; Matthew 27:45).
28. Will be buried in a rich man’s tomb (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60).
29. Will die 438 years after the declaration of Artaxerxes to rebuild the temple in 444 BC (Daniel 9:24).
30. Will be raised from the dead (Psalms 16:10; Acts 2:31), ascend to heaven (Psalms 68:18; Acts 1:9) and be seated the right hand of God in full majesty and authority (Psalms 110:1; Hebrews 1:3).

Professor Peter W. Stoner who authored “Science Speaks” stated that the probability of just eight particular prophecies being fulfilled in one person is 1 in 10^{17} . i.e. 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000). The eight prophecies used in the calculation were:

1. Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; fulfilled in Matt. 2:1-7; John 7:42; Luke 2:47).
2. Messiah is to be preceded by a Messenger (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; fulfilled in Matthew 3:1-3; 11:10; John 1:23; Luke 1:17).
3. Messiah is to enter Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9; fulfilled in Luke 35-37; Matthew 21:6-11).
4. Messiah is to be betrayed by a friend (Psalms 41:9; 55:12-14; fulfilled in Matthew 10:4;

26:49-50; John 13:21).

5. Messiah is to be sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12; fulfilled in Matthew 26:15; 27:3).

6. The money for which Messiah is sold is to be thrown “to the potter” in God’s house (Zechariah 11:13; fulfilled in Matthew 27:5-7).

7. Messiah is to be silent before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7; fulfilled in Matthew 27:12).

8. Messiah is to be executed by crucifixion as a thief (Psalm 22:16; Zechariah 12:10; Isaiah 53:5,12; fulfilled in Luke 23:33; John 20:25; Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27,28).

This statement was validated by the American Scientific Affiliation. This number has been illustrated as follows:

If we take 1×10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas, they'll cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one?

Professor Stoner went on to consider 48 prophecies and says, “... We find the chance that any one man fulfilled all 48 prophecies to be 1 in 10^{157} .

“This is a really large number and it represents an extremely small chance. Let us try to visualize it. The silver dollar, which we have been using, is entirely too large. We must select a smaller object. The electron is about as small an object as we know of. It is so small that it will take 2.5 times 10^{15} of them laid side by side to make a line, single file, one inch long. If we were going to count the electrons in this line one inch long, and counted 250 each minute, and if we counted day and night, it would take us 19,000,000 years to count just the one-inch line of electrons. If we had a cubic inch of these electrons and we tried to count them it would take us, counting steadily 250 each minute, 19,000,000 times 19,000,000 times 19,000,000 [nineteen million times nineteen million times nineteen million] or 6.9 times 10^{21} years.

This is approximately **the total number of electrons in all the mass of the known universe**. In other words the probability of Jesus Christ fulfilling 48 prophecies is the same as one person being able to pick out one electron out of the entire mass of our universe.

Such is the chance of any one man fulfilling any 48 prophecies. Yet Jesus Christ fulfilled not just 48 prophecies, not just 61 prophecies, but **more than 324 individual prophecies** that the Prophets wrote concerning the Messiah. I haven't been able to find the statistical projection representing the possibility of Jesus Christ fulfilling 324 prophecies but I really don't think it matters given the illustrations set forth above.

Does it really take faith to come to salvation through Jesus Christ? Absolutely but that faith is not a blind faith as some would want you to believe but instead, it is a faith based upon facts. How much faith? Maybe not very much if one really takes the time to look at the facts and take into consideration the statistics and probability of the prophecies concerning the Messiah.

When someone tries to tell you that Christianity is a religious faith based upon ignorant acceptance of certain precepts that have no basis in fact, they are sadly mistaken. Christianity only makes sense. It is a faith that not only can be an emotional faith (which it is), it is also an intellectual faith.

Given the odds, I wouldn't bet against it. Would you?

** A modern language quote is provided for readability along with an accompanying KJV version believed by many to be a more accurate representation of the original scripture.

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