

Prewritten History, Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1349

INTRODUCTION

One mark of divine revelation is fulfilled prophecy. In the Scriptures God has prewritten the events of history with absolute precision. Such accuracy demands a divine authorship because only God could have foreseen and recorded events before they occurred. So this is essentially an argument based on the omniscience of God. The Bible is the product of One who knows everything. Try as they may, men cannot predict the future; only God can. The Bible alone gives us history in detail--before it happens.

A. The Definition of Prophecy

Let's begin our study with a definition of prophecy. One I believe is helpful is by Charles McIlvaine: "Prophecy is a declaration of future events, such as no human wisdom or forecast is sufficient to make; depending on a knowledge of the innumerable contingencies of human affairs, which belongs exclusively to the omniscience of God; so that, from its very nature, prophecy must be divine revelation" (The Evidences of Christianity [Philadelphia: Smith, English and Co., 1861], p. 185).

So prophecy is not merely a good guess or conjecture; it is a statement of historical fact that is beyond the scope of human predictability. The study of history gives us insight into past events but we have no predictive faculty. Man can foresee a trend in business or politics, or forecast the weather by observing certain atmospheric conditions but no man can predict what will take place in the future with exact detail that includes actual names and places. Such prediction is a unique claim of Scripture. True prophecy is a revelation of God. In fact God Himself said, "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done" (Isa. 46:9-10). God alone is omniscient and so only God's Word can predict the future.

B. The Distortion of Prophecy

Someone might object, "If only God can predict the future, what about the claims of Nostradamus, Mother Shipton, Edgar Cayce, and Jeanne Dixon?" First of all, the predictions of such people are very general, allowing for various interpretations. And if you examine all the prophecies, you'll find that a significant percentage never came to pass, which disqualifies them biblically (Deut. 18:21-22). Even the fulfillments are only apparent, lacking in detail. Furthermore, predictions can be demonically assisted. The demons, possessing limited power to control events, can predict the general outcome of things under their power for their own ungodly ends (cf., Deut. 13:1-5). As a result, many are deceived by what claims to be genuine prophecy. Yet neither man nor demon can predict events in detail.

Seventeenth century French scientist and philosopher Blaise Pascal said, "Under the Christian

religion I find actual prophecy, and I find it in no other" (cited by John Urquhart, *The Wonders of Prophecy* [New York: Gospel Publishing House, n.d.], title page; cf., *Selected Thoughts of Blaise Pascal* [London: Walter Scott, n.d.], pp. 111, 190). Non-Christian religions fail to demonstrate fulfilled prophecies. Many religions simply exclude the element of prophecy, knowing it would only discredit them. However the Bible not only doesn't avoid prophecy, but it also repeats the matter over and over again with absolute accuracy.

C. The Divine Standard of Prophecy

1. Deuteronomy 18:20-22--God said to Moses, "The prophet, who shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously; thou shalt not be afraid of him." God's standard for prophecy is absolute accuracy. If just one prophecy in the Bible were wrong, all Scripture would be open to the charge of fallibility.

2. Isaiah 41:21-23--"Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen; let them show the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." A true prophet predicts the future with one-hundred percent accuracy.

3. Jeremiah 28:9--"The prophet who prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him."

D. The Divine Nature of Prophecy

I believe the greatest proof of the truthfulness of Scripture is fulfilled prophecy. Fulfilled prophecies are numerous, verifiable, and unanswerable as an argument for the verity of Scripture. The first Christian sermon, which was preached on the Day of Pentecost, was based on fulfilled prophecy. Peter proclaimed that God raised Christ from the dead according to prophecy recorded in Psalm 16 (Acts 2:24-28).

E. The Documentation of Prophecy

1. The beginning of prophecy

The first prophecy about Christ is in Genesis 3:15. God said to the serpent in Eden, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." God prophesies that the seed of a woman [Mary] will bruise the head of the serpent [Satan]. The crucifixion of Christ is the fulfillment of this verse. From the very beginning, Scripture is replete with prophecy.

2. The broadness of prophecy

Prophecies in the Bible cover a very broad area. Some relate to large groups of people, some to individuals, some to rulers, some to cities, some to nations, and some to the whole world. For

instance in the New Testament are prophecies that cover entire cities in Palestine such as Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin (Matt. 11:20-23). Also a large portion of the Bible is prophetic. For example: 20 chapters in Isaiah, 17 chapters in Jeremiah, 9 chapters in Ezekiel, and 2 chapters in Amos.

F. The Distinctiveness of Prophecy

Since the fulfillment of prophecy is always in the future from the standpoint of the prophet, many of the prophets did not fully understand their own predictions. That is because many of the prophecies seemed unlikely at the time to occur, such as the destruction of mighty Babylon. As in the majority of cases, that prophecy went beyond human comprehension because it was so foreign to current circumstances.

Peter confirms this lack of comprehension by remarking that "the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, when he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and glory that should follow" (1 Pet. 1:10-11). Although the prophets foretold the coming of Christ, they did not fully understand the details of that prophecy. Yet their prophecies were accurate.

1. Isaiah 44:28--"[God] saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." Moved by the Holy Spirit, Isaiah specified that king Cyrus of Persian would release the Jews from captivity and send them back to Jerusalem to build the wall around the city and the Temple, which he did in 539 B.C. Isaiah spoke those words at least 100 years before Cyrus was born!

2. 1 Kings 13:2--"Thus saith the Lord: Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places who burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burned upon thee." Three hundred years before Josiah was born, God said what he would do and Josiah did it.

God went out of His way to affirm the reliability of Scripture through the accuracy of prophecy. The Bible has and continues to be put to the test, yet it always stands up to the scrutiny of examination because it is never wrong. Jesus said in Mark 13:23, "Take heed; behold, I have foretold you all things." One proof of Christ's deity is that He spoke of the future. Both the written Word and the incarnate Word are vindicated by fulfilled prophecy.

LESSON

I. BIBLICAL PROPHECY CONCERNING TYRE (Ezekiel 26:1--28:19)

A. The Forecast

1. The specifics

- a) That King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon would destroy the mainland city of Tyre (26:7-8).
- b) That many nations would rise up against Tyre. These nations would come like waves of the sea, one after another (26:3- 4).
- c) That Tyre will be made like a flat rock (26:4, 14).
- d) That fisherman will dry their nets there (26:5, 14).
- e) That the rubble of the city would be cast into the sea (26:12).
- f) That Tyre would never be rebuilt (26:14).

2. The setting

Tyre was a great city. It was one of the largest and most powerful cities of Phoenicia, which is modern day Lebanon.

It was well fortified. A great wall protected the city from land attacks while their world-renowned fleet protected them from attack by sea.

Tyre was a flourishing city during the time when Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land. King Hiram, who began his reign during the rule of David, offered David cedars from Tyre to build his palace. He also loaned David his artisans to craft parts of the great palace (1 Chron. 14:1). Hiram also helped Solomon build the Temple by floating cedars down the shoreline to be picked up and hauled to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 2:16). So Tyre was a great city, and both David and Solomon looked to it for aid.

B. The Fulfillment

1. The prophetic call

a) To Nebuchadnezzar

Not long after the prophecy given by Ezekiel, Nebuchadnezzar did exactly what had been predicted-- he laid siege against the city in 585 B.C. For thirteen years Nebuchadnezzar cut off the flow of supplies into the city. In 537 B.C. he finally succeeded in breaking the gates down, but found the city almost empty.

During the thirteen-year siege, the people of Tyre moved all their possessions by ship to an island one-half mile offshore. So Nebuchadnezzar gained no plunder (Ezek. 29:17- 20). Although he destroyed the mainland city (Ezek. 26:8), the new city offshore continued to flourish for 250 years. The prophecy of Ezekiel 26:12--"they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water"--remained unfulfilled.

b) To Alexander the Great

At age twenty-two, Alexander the Great came east conquering the known world with an army of between thirty and forty thousand men. Having defeated the Persians under Darius III, Alexander was on the march toward Egypt.

(1) The dilemma

Alexander arrived in the Phoenician territory and demanded that the cities open their gates to him. The citizens of Tyre refused, feeling they were secure on their island with their superior fleet.

(2) The decision

Realizing he did not have a fleet that could match Tyre's, Alexander decided to build a causeway to the island using the ruins from the mainland city. It was about two hundred feet wide. The prophet said that the city would be thrown into the water, and that's exactly what happened.

(3) The details

Arrian, a Greek historian, wrote about the overthrow of Tyre and how it was accomplished (The

Campaigns of Alexander [New York: Penquin, 1958], pp. 132-43). The fortification of Tyre resembled Alcatraz. The city sat offshore like a rock with walls that came down to the edge of the water. Alexander set out to build the only means to approach the city--a land peninsula. Soldiers started pitching rubble into the water, leveling it off as they went so they could march on it. The water got deeper as they approached the island, and to make their task even more difficult, the people of Tyre bombarded them with missiles.

Werner Keller in *The Bible as History* tells us that to safeguard the operation, Alexander built mobile shields called "tortoises" (New York: Bantam, 1956], p. 361). Knowing that when they reached the city they would have to scale the walls, Alexander built "Hele-poleis," which were mobile siege towers 160 foot high. The idea was to roll these structures across the causeway and push them up against the walls. A drawbridge on the front of the towers enabled the soldiers to march across the top of the walls and into the city.

Alexander's men were under constant attack from people within the city and from the Tyrian navy. Realizing that he needed ships to defend his flanks, Alexander returned to the cities he had conquered and demanded their assistance. That fulfilled the prophecy that God "will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth its waves to come up" (Ezek. 26:3).

(4) The destruction

Alexander's plan succeeded. Eight thousand people were slain and thirty thousand were sold into slavery. It took Alexander seven months to conquer Tyre. The causeway he built can be seen to this day.

2. The prophetic result

How did Ezekiel know all those things would happen? The only explanation is he expressed the mind of God. Historian Philip Myers said, "Alexander the Great reduced it [Tyre] to ruins (332 B.C.). She recovered in a measure from this blow, but never regained the place she had previously held in the world. The larger part of the site ... is now as bare as the top of a rock--a place where the fishermen that still frequent the spot spread their nets to dry" (General History for Colleges and High Schools [Boston: Ginn and Co., 1889], p. 55). That fulfills the prophecies of Ezekiel 26:4-5, 14. The island city was repopulated, later to be destroyed by the Moslems in A.D. 1281. However, God said the mainland city would never be rebuilt--and it never has. Jerusalem has been rebuilt many times but Tyre will never be rebuilt because a prophet in Babylon said twenty-five centuries ago, "Thou shalt be built no more" (Ezek. 26:14).

II. BIBLICAL PROPHECY CONCERNING SIDON (Ezekiel 28:21-23)

A. The Forecast

"Son of man, set thy face against Sidon, and prophesy against it, and say, Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I am against thee, O Sidon, and I will be glorified in the midst of thee; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. For I will send into her pestilence, and blood into her streets, and the wounded shall be judged in the midst of her by the sword upon her on every side; and they shall know that I am the Lord."

Twenty miles north of Tyre was the ancient city of Sidon. Genesis 10:15 tells us that Sidon was the name of Canaan's first-born. It became the center of idolatry connected with Baal, Ashtaroth, and Tammuz. Prophecy said there would be blood in the streets and swords everywhere, but it does not

say that Sidon would be ultimately destroyed.

B. The Fulfillment

The prophecy concerning Sidon was fulfilled in 351 B.C. The city at that time was ruled by Persia, but Sidon revolted. When the Persian army tried to quell the revolt there was a horrible slaughter. It was so bad that the citizens of Sidon, rather than face the vengeance of the Persians, locked themselves in their homes and set them on fire. Consequently, forty thousand people perished in the flames.

The city was rebuilt many times. Floyd Hamilton said, "Blood has flowed in the streets again and again, but the city stayed in existence and stands today, a monument to fulfilled prophecy" (The Basis of the Christian Faith [New York: George H. Dugan, 1927], p. 300). Sidon was destroyed three times by the Crusaders, three times by the Moslems, and in 1840 it was bombarded by the combined fleets of England, France, and Turkey--yet it still stands. Today Sidon is a seaport in Lebanon.

No man could have looked down the corridor of time and seen that Tyre would be destroyed, never to be rebuilt and that Sidon would stand. Only God could.

III. BIBLICAL PROPHECY CONCERNING EGYPT (Ezekiel 30:13-16)

A. The Forecast

"Thus saith the Lord God: I will also destroy the idols, and I will cause their images to cease from Memphis, and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt; and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt. And I will make Pathros desolate, and will set fire in Zoan, and will execute judgments in No [Thebes]. And I will pour My fury upon Sin [Pelusium], the strength of Egypt; and I will cut off the multitude of No. And I will set fire in Egypt; Sin shall have great pain, and No shall be torn asunder, and Memphis shall have distresses daily."

B. The Fulfillment

1. Memphis

Memphis was the capital of the middle Egypt area and a stronghold of idolatry. But God said He would destroy it and He did. In 525 B.C. the Persian king Cambyses devastated Egypt. To taunt his captives, he took many of the idols in the area, including those of Memphis, and ridiculed or destroyed them to show that his army was more powerful than the gods of Egypt.

Today, people can only point to a general area where Memphis once stood. The sands blow over what was once the second largest city in Egypt.

2. Thebes

Cambyses also destroyed the city of Thebes in 525 B.C. He burned their temples and destroyed

much of the city, but it eventually recovered. Around 89 B.C. a siege was laid against the city; when it fell it never rose again. Strabo, a Greek geographer, observed Thebes in 25 B.C. He claimed that the city was broken up into multiple villages and disunited (Geography 17.1.46). Verse 16 says that the city would be "torn asunder" and that is exactly what happened.

In Thebes some idols still stand; in Memphis none stand. The Bible is reliable.

IV. BIBLICAL PROPHECY CONCERNING NINEVEH (Nahum)

A. The Forecast

Nineveh was one of the great cities of the ancient world. But the whole prophecy of Nahum spells out its inevitable destruction: "With an overrunning flood he [God] will make an utter end of the place, and darkness shall pursue his enemies. What do ye imagine against the Lord? He will make an utter end; affliction shall not rise up the second time" (Nahum 1:8-9).

Notice that "an overrunning flood" would bring the end. Chapter 3 verse 10 declares, "Her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets; and they cast lots for her honorable men, and all her great men were bound in chains." These things give the destruction of Nineveh in detail.

Nineveh was a great city but was repeatedly plagued by flooding from the nearby rivers. So King Sennacherib endeavored to change the situation by changing the course of one of the rivers and strengthening the foundations inside the city to withstand flooding.

Nineveh was a strong and large city. Its inner wall was one hundred feet high and fifty feet deep, with two-hundred-foot towers. It was surrounded by a moat that was 150 high, forming a seven-mile circumference. In addition there was a second wall. For an army to take the city it would have to get over the outer wall, go about half a mile, cross the 150-foot moat, and scale wall that was one-hundred-feet high!

B. The Fulfillment

Nevertheless Nineveh was in oblivion only fifty-one years after it reached its apex in 663 B.C. The Medes destroyed the city in three months. It is incredible that one of the major cities of the world could be destroyed in only a three-month period. Yet Nahum said, "All thy strongholds shall be like fig trees with the first-ripe figs; if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater" (3:12).

Not only the fact but the manner of Nineveh's destruction was foretold by Nahum: "The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved" (2:6). And that's exactly what happened, which explains why the Medes were able to take the city after such a short time. Also, Nahum 3:19 says, "There is no healing of thy bruise, thy wound is grievous." In other words the city would never be rebuilt. And in fact, there is no Nineveh today.

CONCLUSION

The implication of prophecy is evident: the Bible is trustworthy. Because the Bible is accurate when it speaks of Tyre, Sidon, Egypt, and Nineveh we know it is trustworthy when it speaks of Jesus Christ. In addition, prophecy that has been fulfilled gives us the assurance that that which has not yet been fulfilled, will come about exactly as the Bible predicts. The Bible is not the Word of God because it is reliable; it is reliable because it is the Word of God.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Define prophecy.
2. Explain how biblical prophecy differs from human predictions such as weather forecasting.
3. Why do many religions exclude prophetic teaching?
4. Why must biblical prophecy be one-hundred-percent accurate?
5. What is the first prophecy in the Bible that points to Christ.
6. What building material was exported from Tyre for use on Solomon's Temple?
7. How was Ezekiel's prophecy in 26:12 fulfilled?
8. Why did Nebuchadnezzar fail to collect spoil from Tyre (Ezek. 29:17-20)?
9. What connection does Alexander's causeway have to the reliability of Scripture (Ezek. 26:12)?
10. How was prophecy fulfilled regarding the destruction of Egypt?
11. How was Nineveh destroyed?
12. How does the accuracy of prophecy concerning Tyre, Sidon, Egypt, and Nineveh impact our understanding of the reliability of the Bible?

Pondering the Principles

1. The accuracy of fulfilled prophecy testifies to the reliability of the Bible. It therefore follows that the

Bible is accurate when it speaks of miracles and the deity of Christ. And on a more personal note, it also follows that the Bible is accurate when it speaks of man's sin. Fulfilled prophecy is a powerful evangelistic tool. Make use of that tool this week in sharing Christ with someone.

2. Many cults have unfulfilled prophecy that is an embarrassment to them. Some will rationalize such inaccuracies by emphasizing the percentage of their predictions that are accurate. We have said that prophecy is essentially an argument from the omniscience of God. Is it possible that God is only partly omniscient? If not, what does that tell us about the prophets of non-Christian religions and the effect that just one wrong prophecy in the Bible would have on the claims of Christ?

3. Have you ever wished you could predict the future? That is a common desire as it is a human tendency to fear the unknown. As a child of God we have a sure hope of the outcome of history. In addition Scripture assures us of God's intimate awareness and involvement in our day-to-day lives. God not only sets up and takes down kings and kingdoms, but also watches over us as well. Are you facing an unknown that is causing anxiety and robbing you of peace and joy? Try meditating on God's omniscience, sovereignty, and goodness. God knows, He cares, and is able and willing to move in our lives for our good and His glory.

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