

The Accuracy of Prophetic Fulfillment

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THROUGH the prophet Isaiah, the Lord gives evidence that Holy Scripture is indeed the voice of the living God: "I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: . . ." Isaiah 48:5.

When we see the fulfillment of prophecy in past events, we know that the things spoken of the future are certain to be fulfilled in their time.

In the days of Babylon, the prophet Daniel was shown the course of world empire to the end. The universal monarchies from Babylon onward were represented to his vision under the symbol of four great beasts succeeding one another on the field of action. This series of prophetic pictures, which passed in moving panorama before the eyes of the ancient prophet, has its message for us to-day.

This is what the prophet saw: "Four great beasts came up from the sea." (1) "The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings;" (2) "a second, like to a bear; and it was raised up on one side;" (3) "another, like a leopard. . . upon its back four wings; . . . the beast had also four heads;" (4) "after this I saw in the night visions, and, behold, a fourth beast, terrible and powerful, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet." Daniel 7:3-7.

The angel thus explained the vision to Daniel: "These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, that shall arise out of the earth." Verse 17. This prophetic picture is clearly seen developed in history.

1. Babylon the first, "the glory of kingdoms," as the lion which symbolized it is the king of beasts. The eagle's wings on the lion are fitting to the symbol; for the prophet Habakkuk said of the Babylonians, "They shall fly as the eagle."

2. Medo-Persia was represented by the bear lifting itself up on one side. It was a dual kingdom; and one side, the Persian, was in the ascendancy.

3. Greece, the leopard, quick to spring, and, with the wings, flew above all. Alexander's campaigns were never equaled for swift and long marching, having carried the Grecian arms from Macedon into India within a few years. And the four heads correspond to the division of the empire "toward the four winds" (Daniel 11:4), soon after Alexander's death.

4. Rome, "the iron monarchy," as Gibbon calls it, was the fourth. Rome was "strong exceedingly" and it broke in pieces the residue with its feet."

ROME EXACTLY FULFILLED PROPHECY

The correspondence between the symbol and the power represented is clear in every case. Certainly the Roman Empire answered fully to the picture. As Cardinal Manning wrote:

"The legions of Rome occupied the circumference of the world. The military roads which sprang from Rome traversed all the earth. The whole world was as it were held in peace and tranquility by the universal presence of this mighty heathen empire. It was 'exceedingly terrible,' according to the prophecies of Daniel; it was as it were of iron, beating down and subduing the nations." Temporal Power of the Pope, London, 1862, page 122.

But as the prophet looked, he saw still further: "And it [this fourth beast] was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among

them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things." Daniel 7:7, 8.

No wonder the prophet said, "Then I would know the truth of the fourth beast." Verse 19. And the angel told him the truth about it: "The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from till the kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And as for the ten horns, out of this kingdom shall ten kings arise: and another shall arise after them; and he shall be diverse from the former, and he shall put down three kings." Verses 23, 24.

PAPACY SUCCEEDS IMPERIAL ROME

The fourth kingdom, Rome, after subduing all the earth as no kingdom before it had done, was to be divided. In the same historic outline in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2), the prophet had said of this fourth empire, "The kingdom shall be divided." And coming up among these kingdoms of divided Rome, the prophet saw another power, a kingdom, yet a kingdom "diverse from the former." It was a different kind of kingdom. This was a religious power, exalting itself above the others, and "speaking great things." It is clearly the same power described by the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2.

The outline picture of the prophecy is seen fully developed in history. No historian can go over this period without reproducing the prophetic picture. For instance, take the text of a popular schoolbook-Myers's "General History for Colleges" and place the picture of the prophecy alongside that of the history.

Prophecy: The prophetic picture (by the prophet Daniel and the apostle Paul) shows us a spiritual power exalting it in the church, beginning to work in apostolic days, but hindered from full development by some power that was later to be taken away. (2 Thessalonians 2: 7); Then the breaking up and division of the Roman empire, into lesser kingdoms; and among these kingdoms, as the great empire breaks up, this religious power develops fully, bearing sway over the nations, and speaking "great words." Daniel 7: 8, 25.

History: "The downfall of the Roman imperial government in the West was further, an event of immense significance in the political world, for the reason that it rendered possible the growth in Western Europe of several nations or states in place of the single empire.

"Another consequence of the fall of the Roman power in the West was the development of the papacy. In the absence of an emperor in the West, the popes rapidly gained influence and power, and soon built up an ecclesiastical empire that in some respects took the place of the old empire, and carried on its civilizing work." Myers's "General History for Colleges," page 316.

The views are identical. What the prophets saw in vision and described, the historian finds in history and records. The history answers in every detail to the picture that prophecy gives of the great apostasy which was to come.

IS THE POPE VICE PRESIDENT OF GOD?

CHRIST has called many to represent His gospel to men; many messengers and ambassadors of the kingdom of grace; but He has only one Representative to stand in His place, now that He ministers for us as our High Priest above.

"I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever." John 14:16. "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things." Verse 26.

This leaves no place for an earthly vicegerent of Christ; and of a truth, here is something very suggestive in the relationship of the two words "vicegerent" and "antichrist," one from the Latin, the other from the Greek.

It is claimed that the pope of Rome is the "vicegerent of Jesus Christ."

That is one of his most familiar titles. Our use of the word "vice" in "vice president," "vice chairman," etc., has made its meaning clear. A vicegerent is one who acts "in the place of another," "a deputy." The title is based on the claim that the pope is authorized to act in the place of Christ, as a vice Christ, or as the "vicar of Christ."

"ANTICHRIST" AND "VICEGERENT" SYNONYMOUS

Referring to the assumption of this title by the pope, the old English writer Dr. Hales, in his "Chronology," has this comment: "The vicegerent of Jesus Christ,' which, by a singular concurrence, meant the same as the obnoxious term antichristos, 'antichrist,' originally signifying a 'pro-Christ,' or 'deputy Christ,' . . . or 'a false Christ,' who assumed His authority, and acted in His stead." Volume 2, part 1, page 550.

In very common usage, the prefix anti in Greek was the same as vice in the Latin. An illustration of this appears in the ancient "Chronicle of Zachariah, of Mitylene." The author (whose work is translated in Bury's "Byzantine Texts") lived in the days of Justinian, in the sixth century. In the introduction to his ninth book, he says:

"The ninth book, concerning the reign of Justinian, states how he became anti Caesar." And in the ninth book he says:

"In the year 5, Justin was king, that old man of whom we related above, that he came from the country of Illyricum, he made his sister's son, who was general, anti-Caesar; and Justinian became anti-Caesar on the fifth day of the week in the last week of the fast. And, after he had governed for three months, his uncle died, at the end of July, and he became emperor." Chapter 1, paragraph 1.

JOHN WARNS AGAINST ANTICHRIST

Justinian was not acting in opposition to the emperor, but as a pro-Caesar, or vicegerent of the emperor. The title "anti-Caesar" is also applied by this old Greek text to Odoacer and to Theodoric, who ruled as sovereigns in the West, though nominally as deputies of the emperor of the East. The same usage appears in the New Testament (Acts 13: 7, 8, 12), where the evangelist Luke speaks of Sergius Paulus, the "proconsul," or anti-consul, the Roman deputy.

Thus the prefix 'anti' was used not only in the sense of "against," but as meaning "in the place of," as well. When, therefore, the apostle John warned the church of the antichrist who was to arise, and whose spirit was already beginning to work in the spreading apostasy, it was a warning against any human authority exalting itself to act in the place of Christ, as His "vicegerent," as well as a warning against any power placing itself in direct opposition to Christ.

The Holy Spirit, Christ's Representative, bears witness, by the Word, against the usurpation, by man, of the place of the eternal Spirit. persecuting the people of God. The trail of ruin this power left

THE "INDEX PROHIBITORIUS"

How The Roman Catholic Church has destroyed public records that affect her reputation:

IN Bishop Burnet's "History of the Reformation of the Church of England," written in the seventeenth century, there is an interesting side light thrown on the method by which the Roman ecclesiastical

authorities in Reformation times kept damaging documents from passing into history. In the preface to his first volume, Bishop Burnet says:

“In the search I made of the rolls and other offices, I wondered much to miss several commissions, patents, and other writings, which by clear evidence I knew were granted, and yet none of them appeared on record. This I could not impute to anything but the omission of the clerks, who failed in the enrolling of these commissions, though it was not likely that matters of so high concernment should have been neglected, especially in such a critical time, and under so severe a king.

“But as I continued down my search to the fourth year of Queen Mary, I found, in the twelfth roll of that year, a commission which cleared all my former doubts, and by which I saw what was become of the things I had so anxiously searched for. We have heard of the expurgation of books practiced in the Church of Rome; but it might have been imagined that public registers and records would have been safe; yet lest these should have been afterward confessors, it was resolved they should then be martyrs; for on the twenty-ninth of December, in the fourth year of her reign, a commission was issued out under the great seal of Bonner, bishop of London, Cole, dean of St. Paul’s, and Martine, a doctor of the civil law, which is of that importance that I shall here insert the material words of it:

“Whereas, it has come to our knowledge that in the time of the late schism divers errors, books, scrolls, instruments, and other writings were practiced, devised, and made concerning professors against the pope’s holiness and the see apostolic, and also sundry infamous scrutiny taken in abbeys and other religious houses, tending rather to subvert and overthrow all good religion and religious houses than for any truth contained in them; which being in the custody of divers registers, and we intending to have those writings brought to knowledge, whereby they may be considered, and ordered according to our will and pleasure;’ ... therefore [says Burnet], those three, or any of them, are empowered ‘to cite any persons before them, and examine them upon the promises upon oath, and to bring all such writings before them, and certify their diligence about it to Cardinal Pole, that further order might be given about them.’

“When I saw this, I soon knew which way so many writings had gone; and as I could not but wonder at their boldness, who thus presumed to raze so many records, so their ingenuity in leaving this commission in the rolls, by which any who had the curiosity to search for it might be satisfied how the other commissions were destroyed, was much to be commended.”

It is worth while remembering that these ecclesiastics of Queen Mary’s time, who thought to obliterate accusing records, themselves left records, in the persecution, imprisonment, and martyrdom of believers, that are more damaging to Rome than any written records pertaining to former times, that they could have removed from files. The papacy is the great apostasy of the Scriptures, which the prophets saw warring against God and His truth, and persecuting the people of God. The trail of ruin this power left through the centuries could never have been covered in any period.

A LESSON FOR THE IRRESOLUTE

In the year 1519, when Luther’s writings were stirring the minds of men to renewed thought in all northern Europe, Erasmus wrote from Louvain to Luther:

“I have not words to tell you what an excitement your books have raised here. Up to the present moment, the false suspicion cannot be torn from the minds of these creatures, that your works have been written by my assistance, and that I am the standard bearer of the ‘faction,’ as they call it.” Emerson’s “Erasmus,” page 295.

Both men stood on the threshold of the great Reformation. Erasmus desired a reform, and had been one of the agencies of God's providence in preparing the way for the new time. Neither Erasmus nor Luther contemplated a reformation that would lead to separation from Rome.

But "the fullness of time" had come. The Reformation was not man's work, but God's. The Lord, however, works through human agencies. We may not assume to read the undeclared providences of God; but it truly seems that Erasmus, with his splendid preparation as a scholar and his love for an upright life, was definitely called to join as a leader in the reform movement. His edition of the Greek New Testament and his writings against the theological prejudices of the time had prepared the way for an awakening.

THE SPINELESS NEUTRAL

Erasmus, however, loved the quiet life. Had he been with the disciples when Christ said that He came not to send peace on earth, but a sword, to set friend against friend, and brother against brother, the temperament of Erasmus would have said, "Be it far from Thee, Lord."

When controversy was aroused, and believers were called to take their stand upon the divine foundation of the word of God, Erasmus's heart was filled with dismay at the prospect. He endeavored to persuade Luther to be of his mind. He wrote to the Reformer:

"I think a well mannered reserve will accomplish more than violence, etc. We ought to keep an even temper. . . . I am not urging you to do all this, but just to keep on as you are doing." - Id., page 297.

Erasmus represented a type that is always with us. He would be neither for nor against--the friend of both parties--when a crisis was on calling for action and for men to line up and take their stand. In 1518, he had written of Luther to Cardinal Wolsey:

A MAN OF DECISION AND CONVICTION

"The man's way of life is approved by all, and this is not slight argument in his favor, that his character is so sound that not even enemies can find anything to criticize. But even if I had ever so much time for reading him, I cannot take upon myself to pronounce upon the writings of so great a man, even though nowadays boys are everywhere, with the greatest boldness, declaring this to be false and that to be heretical." Id., page 298.

Luther well understood Erasmus's attitude. "Erasmus," he said, "wants to walk on eggs without breaking their shells." Luther was being hurried along the way of reform after an experience quite different from that of the sage of Rotterdam. In the quietness of the study, Erasmus saw and apprehended, in a large measure, the beauty of the true gospel, and he shrank from the spirit of ecclesiasticism. But Luther had been drawn into the work of reform over the road of a deep personal experience. He was a sinner, grieving over the guilt within, and longing for personal deliverance. He had sought for it after the mechanical ways of the Roman Church, and sought in vain. As he climbed up the holy stair at Rome, the Spirit of God flashed the Scripture text into his heart, "The just shall live by faith." He rose a new man, and the Reformation was born that day in his soul.

Swiftly events swept on to the Reformer's appearance before the imperial council at Worms. We know the story of those hours before the Diet, and of the final summons to Luther to say Yea or No. We quote the story as told by a Roman Catholic historian, Dr. John Alzog:

"HERE I STAND"

"The chancellor pressed for a categorical answer. 'Will you or will you not retract?' he said, addressing him. Luther replied: 'Inasmuch as it is certain that both popes and councils have time and again fallen

into error, and denied at one time what they had affirmed at another, I cannot bring myself to put faith in them. My conscience is captive to the words of God; and unless I shall be convicted of error by Scripture proof or by plain reason, I neither can nor will retract anything. God help me. Amen.” “Universal Church History,” volume 3, page 39.

Whatever one’s attitude may be toward Luther or toward the Reformation, one must acknowledge that here spoke a man of true heroic mold, with the courage of his convictions and with dependence upon God. Before he gave that answer, Luther in prayer to his heavenly Father and rededicated his life, had placed himself upon the altar for sacrifice if God so willed. But as for giving up his hope of salvation through Jesus Christ, he could not do it, neither could he refrain from telling to others the truths which had blessed his own soul. So with his hand upon the word of God, before the council representing all the power of earth and all the power of an earthly church, he took his stand, his closing words, as he himself later reported, being, “Here I stand, I can do no other; God help me.”

Even his opponents recognized the valiant stand he had made, however enraged they were against him. Aleander, the legate of the pope at the Diet, wrote in his dispatch dated Worms, April 19, 1521:

“As Martin went out from the imperial hall, he raised his right hand on high, after the manner of the Roman soldiers when they exult over a good blow in a tournament.” Brieger’s “Aleander and Luther,” page 34, quoted in footnote of Vedder’s “Reformation in Germany,” page 157.

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

Did Jesus form a priestly monopoly of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, or are they a boon freely given to every man who will accept?

“I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall he bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Matthew 16:19.

It was word to the church, to the believers, and not to any one person in the church. For in speaking of the local congregation of believers acting in counsel of God, the Savior repeated the assurance: “Verily I say unto you, What things so ever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things so ever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Matthew 18:18

What are the keys of the kingdom? And what is signified by this gift to the church? We are familiar enough with one interpretation of this declaration. The claim is made in behalf of the priestly order, that it holds exclusive possession of the keys of the kingdom. Those who do not acknowledge the powers of this order are supposed to have the door of heaven closed against them. The priest alone holds the key.

A priestly caste had set up the same claim in the days of our Savior’s first advent. Christ rebuked them in the scathing words, “Ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men: For you enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter.” Matthew 23:13.

LEADERS WERE “DOGS IN THE MANGERS”

How had the Jewish priests and the scribes closed the kingdom of heaven to men in that day? In Luke’s narrative of this same denunciation of the Jewish teachers of the law, we are told that Christ said. “Woe unto you lawyers! For ye took away the key of knowledge: Ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.” Luke 11:52.

They shut the kingdom of heaven against men by taking away the key of knowledge. The knowledge of what? Of the kingdom of heaven unquestionably. And what is it that gives to men all the knowledge they have in the kingdom of heaven? The Holy Scriptures.

In the blessed Bible, the Lord has revealed the glories of the kingdom of heaven; and there, too, He has told the way of access to it. As Paul said in his parting word to the elders of the church of Ephesus, "Now I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance." Acts 20:32. The Holy Scriptures, through faith, are the keys of the kingdom.

TRADITION CHOKES BIBLE TRUTH

"But," some may ask, "how can it be said that the ecclesiastical leaders in that day had taken this key—the Scriptures away from the people, when the Scriptures were regularly read in the public synagogue service?" To be sure, the Scriptures were read, and handled with high professional regard. But in reality, they were covered by ecclesiastical tradition. Christ said, "You have made void the word of God because of your tradition." Matthew 15:6. Traditions of the elders, or fathers, and ecclesiastical rules and interpretations, had covered over and made void the word of God, and the Scriptures had been shut away from the people.

So Jesus came, opening the Scriptures to the people, and showing sinners this way of life. These living oracles, teaching the way of salvation, had been committed to the Jewish church to be given to all men. To those who claim to be the sole interpreters and custodians of the Scriptures, but who were shutting them away from the People: Christ said: "Therefore say I unto you The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Matthew 21:43. It was the nation of the saved, believers on Jesus, who henceforth were to carry the good word of the kingdom. So Jesus said to His disciples, representatives of all who should after believe on Him, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

THE KEY IS THE INSPIRED WORD

Here the key is; we hold it in our hands, the blessed Bible, the book of the kingdom. It came from heaven above, as "men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit!" It is God's blessed gift to all mankind; and "blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words!" Then, in the name of Jesus, let everybody read and every soul hear and receive the blessedness of believing. The office of a key is to open the way. And to the church of believers of God has committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven. It is for every believer to enter in daily into the kingdom of heaven's race, and to invite and urge all others to enter in.

Thank God for the key to the heavenly treasure house. Why should any soul be poverty-stricken, or any heart remain in bondage? The promises of the Bible are living words, every one a key to the riches of infinite grace.

Christian and Hopeful were lying in Doubting Castle, giving way to despair. Suddenly Christian aroused himself. "What a fool I be, am I to die in a stinking dungeon when I may as well walk at liberty! I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle."

Then said Hopeful, "That's good news. Good brother, pluck it out of thy bosom and try." And sure enough, the key of Promise slid back every rusty bolt, and the pilgrims went out again in heaven's sunlight and liberty. The key of the kingdom lets us out of bondage, as well as into the righteousness and peace and joy of the kingdom.

AN OBLIGATION TO EVANGELIZATION

The giving of the keys of the kingdom to the church is really the same as the giving of the great commission to "Preach the Word", the gospel to every creature. The "power of the keys" is the power of the living Word. The authority is in the Holy Scriptures. By the preaching of that Word is accomplished

the binding and the loosing that is recorded in heaven. To those who receive the Word comes liberty, the loosing of the bands of sin, while to the rejecters of it there can be only the abiding still in bondage.

So, accepting the blessed gift of the keys of the kingdom from the Lord Jesus, and “holding forth the word of life,” the believing children of God are to go forward proclaiming the gospel that binds up the broken-hearted and loosens them that are bound.

Let me explain. Jesus talks of “many” coming in his name. For centuries, there’s been a dynasty of popes, [and other church leaders] all claiming to come as, and in the name of Jesus. They have been accepted by many. Out of this dynasty of popes, Boniface 8th officially declares that as a pope, HE IS GOD. Pope Leo 13th also claimed that he held the place of God Almighty upon this earth. [When John Paul Second was shot, Time magazine reported, “It’s like shooting God.”]