

Absolute Truth & Prophecy

Robert Palaszewski

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OF WARNINGS, THREATS & PROPHECY

The war of words between Israel and Syria continued amidst the background of reports of continued war preparations. Some of the exchanges suggested that the very real fulfillment of prophetic-Biblical projections may not be far off. According to DEBKA, Egyptian military sources purposely leaked to the Egyptian press that American and Israeli naval forces have “been charting Persian Gulf waters and Iranian shorelines in preparation for attacks by Israeli naval and special operations forces.” Israeli intelligence and special forces units were coordinating plans for a series of strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.¹ Those very real concrete preparations were accompanied government pronouncements at the highest levels that hinted at Scriptural fulfillment.

Israel’s Defense Minister Barak first warned that the situation between Syria and Israel could – in the words of Haaretz – “deteriorate into all out war.” Foreign Minister Walid Moallem responded for Damascus. “Israel is indeed planting the seeds of war in the region, I would tell them stop playing the role of thugs in the Middle East.” He went on to warn Jerusalem, not to “test the power of Syria since you know that the war will move into your cities.” Then Foreign Minister Lieberman answered back for the Israelis. “Assad should know that if he attacks, he will not only lose the war. Neither he nor his family will remain in power...Our message should be that if Assad’s father lost a war but remained in power, the son should know that an attack would cost him his regime”^{2 3 4}

But the fact is, that President Assad of Syria feels somewhat trapped by the inevitable. In some ways he speaks like a man whose actions are pre-ordained. He explained this in an interview with Seymour Hersh of *The New Yorker* magazine. Citing the half-million Palestinians that have called Syria home for three generations, he explained the difference between peace and a peace treaty. “Peace treaty is what you sign, but peace is when you have normal relations. So, you start with a peace treaty in order to achieve peace.... If they say you can have the entire Golan back, we will have a peace treaty. But they cannot expect me to give them the peace they expect.... You start with the land; you do not start with peace.”⁵ It makes war seem the inevitable outcome – no matter the result of the negotiations. In the meantime – and perhaps afterward, the threatened attacks remain on the table. And Israel has in the past threatened swift retaliation – against Damascus itself - should they occur.

And events, as they unfold seem to be setting the table perfectly for the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. It has often been speculated that it would be just such an attack against the Israeli population centers – especially if it involved chemical or biological warheads - that would serve as the catalyst that would lead to a massive Israeli response against Damascus. That oldest of all surviving cities is the hub of terrorism – with many terror groups having their head quarters there. Isaiah 17:1 foretells the destruction of Damascus. It suggests something akin to a nuclear attack. **“The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.”** (KJV) Verse 3 of the same chapter suggests regime change brought about by the desolation of Syria’s capital. **“The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus.”** (KJV) Isaiah finishes that passage with a description of the war that will frame that prophetic event. Though the particular actions may be the result of human hands, the power and the judgment which allows them will come from the hand of God. **“The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. And behold at eveningtide**

trouble; and before the morning he is not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us.” (Isaiah 17:13-14) (KJV)

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS – PART III

What did the Jews know and when did they know it? Jesus was not just a blip on the tides of history. He was not just some man that came on the scene with no past and no prophetic perspective. There was a history here and a heritage that meant that the Christ; - the Messiah, - should have been expected, - and recognized. Let's look at the evidence.

WHAT DID THEY KNOW & WHEN DID THEY KNOW IT ?

Let's try and put this all in perspective. What can we really know? We know for instance that the testimony of his contemporaries confirms so much that we know about Jesus. A passage in the Babylonian Talmud, a Jewish book of commentary on the Scriptures, contains references to “Yeshu, the Nazarene”. Writings dated to the 2nd century confirm that he was hanged “on the eve of the Sabbath”, at the time of Passover. The passage also mentions Joseph of Arimathaea, who buried Jesus in his own tomb, and refers to the fact that he was accused of sorcery. This latter reference confirms the reaction of the Pharisees to his casting out of a demon that was described in Matthew 12. Other Talmudic passages speak about Jesus' disciples, identifying at least Thaddeus and Matthew and also speak about the powers of one Jacob who was said to have healed “in the name of Yeshu”. This is all evidence that his contemporaries never questioned the fact that Jesus was a performer of miracles. Instead opponents tried to attack him on the grounds that his power was derived from the devil. The public nature of his ministry meant that he could not be so easily dismissed.⁶

Other historical confirmation comes from the pen of Flavius Josephus, a priest, Pharisee and generally trusted historian writing in the 1st century AD. Some of Josephus' writings include references to James the brother of Jesus and John the Baptist, whom he described as “a good man”. He is also known to have authored a passage specifically about Jesus, found in his work called ‘*Antiquities of the Jews*’. Though long controversial, experts now agree that the majority of the passage comes from the pen of the historian. In the uncontested version he refers to Jesus as “...a wise man ...For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly.” He goes on to talk about his death at the hands of Pilate and the fact that his followers believed him risen from the dead. Additional confirmation exists. Roman historians Tacitus and Lucian both testified to the execution of Christ under Pilate, Lucian adding that he was considered a lawgiver and worshipped as God. And the work of Caius Suetonius suggests that Christians were known to be able to perform healings and miracles.^{7 8}

A most interesting confirmation of Matthew 27:45 is found in several ancient sources. In that passage Matthew writes, **“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land.”** Luke 23:44-45 states it this way, **“It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining.”** Pagan historian Phlegon of Lydia, writing early in the first century refers to a “great and extraordinary” solar eclipse, dating it according to the Olympic year. He writes, “At the sixth hour the day was turned into dark night, so that the stars in heaven were seen, and there was an earthquake in Bithynia which overthrew many houses in the city of Nice.” Tertullian found evidence of this in the Roman archives of his day. The Greek historian Thallus also wrote of that supernatural event, a most fearful darkness accompanied by earthquakes. Second century teacher Julius Africanus wrote that this was no eclipse of the sun. An eclipse is a predictable event. Working backwards from that time he points out that an eclipse is impossible when there is a full moon. This was evidence then that this unusual darkness not only occurred, but also was not due to an eclipse of the sun but was rather an unnatural event.⁹ The Scripture too, prophesied that unnatural darkness. In Amos 8:9 written long before the event, we read: **“‘In that day’, declares the Sovereign Lord, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight’.”**¹⁰

In fact, in examining the rabbinical writings, we find that the common beliefs included not only the fact that the Messiah was expected to appear at that time but that he was to be no ordinary man. They believed that he had existed since before the creation. The commentaries on Isaiah and Micah give evidence that it was commonly held that the existence of the Messiah was eternal. The text of Micah 5:2, describes a Messiah **“who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times.”** These writings also anticipated his cruel and violent death, the re-establishment of Israel, and redemptive nature of his ministry. Commentaries reveal that they believed that the Messiah would forgive sins because of his position as the “Righteous One”.

Their beliefs were based on ancient Scriptural prophecy and the commentaries on those prophecies. Both the Midrash and the Talmud itself reveal that the Messiah was expected to be the full Son of God. Confirmation of this is found in Psalm 2:7. In the King James Version we read, **“Thou art my Son; this day I have begotten thee”**. Predictions of the Messiah were so prevalent that it was the non-Jewish Magi, possibly originating from a class of Zoroastrian priests, who relied on the prophecy of Micah 5:2 to inform the unschooled Herod that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. They too expected his imminent arrival to redeem Israel. Much of this speculation was based on the very precise prediction found in Daniel 9:24. The Rabbis of that era were aware that no matter how one interpreted the 70 weeks of Daniel, the arrival of the Savior should occur sometime in the first decades of the first century. This belief was confirmed by the teachings of the Essene community that gave us the Dead Sea Scrolls. They firmly believed that Daniel’s prophecy would be fulfilled during their lifetimes.

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD all that changed. The later commentaries on the Scripture reflect the loss and confusion of a people whose earlier hopes now seemed misplaced. Written after that time, the Babylonian Talmud acknowledged the prophecies of Daniel had predicted the coming of the Messiah, but that the time had already passed. Moses Maimonides, working twelve centuries later, recognized this too. Almost cryptically he refers to the censoring of that teaching by the Jewish religious leaders. He tells us they “...have barred the calculation of the days of Messiah’s coming so that the untutored populace will not be led astray.” [They of course, were protecting the masses against the ‘*Christian Heresy*’.] Grant Jeffrey, writing again in *Jesus the Great Debate*, cites some of the censored Jewish material. The writings confirm the basic account of Christ’s trial and death. Significantly the passage also acknowledges him as a legitimate king of Israel in the line of David and most notably that he was referred to in the prophecies of Daniel. There is little doubt that the Messiah was expected at just the time Jesus came on the scene. Events surrounding an obscure passage in Genesis accentuated the anticipation. Genesis 49:10 reads, **“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the rulers staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes.”** It must be understood that ‘Shiloh’, by general rabbinical concurrence, refers to the Messiah. So what this is saying is that the power to rule, especially the power over life and death, would be secure in Judah until the coming of the Messiah. Throughout all the centuries of Jewish captivity this power had never been removed. Interestingly however the Romans had recently taken this authority. This happened on the occasion of the dethroning of Archelus, the king of the Jews in AD 14. This would have been the same year that Jesus came up to the temple for his Bar Mitzvah at the age of twelve. In his commentary Rabbi Rachmon describes the consternation of the assembly when this power was removed. They were mourning the fact that “...the scepter has departed from Judah and the Messiah has not come.”¹¹ So many of the expectations of the Jews regarding the imminent arrival of their Savior were based on the remarkable Book of Daniel. We need to look at that prophecy that led to such high expectations.^{12 13}

The prophecy beginning in Daniel 9:25 is as follows. **“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild the city of Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler will come and destroy the city and the sanctuary.”**

When Daniel wrote this, Jerusalem had been destroyed. At that time there was no reason to believe that it would ever be rebuilt again. Secondly, Daniel predicted not only the rebuilding, but also the fact that this second Temple would again be destroyed. Of course as already noted, this occurred in AD 70 at the hands of the Romans. So in just the broadest

sense we see that the prophecy was fulfilled. Coincidence? Perhaps, if the prediction it made was just a general statement. But as we read in Daniel chapter 9, we see it contains a claim of the exact timing of its fulfillment. The Jewish community of course understood the meaning and significance of its reference to the seven ‘weeks’ plus sixty-two ‘weeks’. And for them it was this specific phrase that led to the widely held expectation of messianic fulfillment around the time of Christ.

It is the Hebrew word ‘shabuim’, which is translated into the English word ‘weeks’, in this passage. By common custom we know that this word was often used to refer to a ‘week of years’, or seven years in the Hebrew language. This is the context in which it is used here. Now there are to be sixty-nine weeks of years before the appearance of the Messiah. This works out to 483 years **“From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One”** comes. Taking this one step farther we multiply the 483 years by 360days. This was the length of a year in the Jewish calendar. This comes out to 173,880 days from the issuing of the decree. Now the critical question becomes, when did the decree go forth?

By turning to the 2nd chapter of Nehemiah we begin to get an answer to that question. That passage describes a command by King Arataxerxes Longimanus to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. This happened in the 20th year of his reign on the first day of the month of the Jewish month of Nisan. The date of Artaxerxes ascension to the throne is even an easier matter. It can be found in the Encyclopedia Britannica. Counting twenty years from that date we find that day of the decree is fixed as the 1st Day of Nisan in the year 445 BC. Working through astronomical calculations at the end of the 19th century, Sir Robert Anderson confirmed that this date fell on the 14th of March of that year. From that date that we begin counting forward the 173,880 days. What we arrive at is April 6th AD 32.

So what’s so significant about that day? That’s the first Palm Sunday; - the day that Jesus rode in to Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey to the affirmation of the praising crowds of Jerusalem. He was coming into His kingdom.

Confirming evidence can be found in the third chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Luke states that Jesus was about 30 years of age when baptized by John. This was the beginning of his ministry and Luke specifically identifies it as the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. Scholars concur that this puts Christ’s baptism in the autumn of 28 AD. That would put the final Passover of Jesus’ three and a half-year ministry on April 10th of AD 32. The Sunday before that was April 6th. The British Royal Observatory confirmed that date. So traveling this other route, through the history of the gospels, we arrive at the same date that Daniel did in his writings hundreds of years before. More than some vague otherworldly pronouncement, the prophecy in Daniel 9 turns out to be a precisely calculated mathematical prediction, accurate to the very day that Christ presented himself as King and Savior.^{14 15 16} The precision and accuracy of that prophecy given to Daniel is nothing less than breathtaking. By any objective standard, by a preponderance of the evidence, it can only be seen as a remarkably accurate, historically verifiable, confirmation of unambiguous truth.

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WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Want to get a deeper understanding of what you’re reading? If you have any issues or questions you’d like us to address – or if you’d like this Newsletter’s author, Rob Palaszewski, to come and speak to your church or organization please contact us at rob@atpministry.com

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