

THE POSTULATE OF PREDICTIVE PROPHECY

MY FRIENDS, we are currently occupied with the fascinating subject of the re-emergence into the contemporary scene of human affairs of Medinat Yisrael, the restored State of Israel, and we are gradually approaching the consideration of our new State in its possible relationship to the amazing — indeed, I may say, the dramatic — Biblical prophecies of יחזקאל בתנ"ך, that is, of Ezekiel in the so-called Old Testament.

Now, believe me, I am eager to press on into the centre of this most absorbing subject, but I must restrain my natural impetuosity for your sakes, because the proper understanding of our subject dictates — indeed, it demands — some preparatory and, I believe, equally interesting prior knowledge.

You will recall that in my last message we confronted ourselves with two incontrovertible facts. The first was a fact embedded in the chronicles of recent history; the second, a fact enshrined in the records of Biblical predictive prophecy.

What was the first, the historical fact? Simply this — that again, after two millennia, the State of Israel was reborn in the year 1948 of the Gregorian Calendar and this within the lifetime of many listening to this message.

What was the second, the vaticinatory fact? Surprisingly this — that our ancient Jewish Scriptures include in their prophetic content just such a restored and reborn State as we have witnessed in our very own day.

Now, either of these twin facts, if considered singly, is arresting enough but, when conjoined, they constitute a phenomenon that creates a formidable challenge to our most sober interrogation.

With history we are all more or less familiar, particularly where it has impinged upon our own persons either at the waistline or in a depletion of the filamentous outgrowth of our cranial epidermis.

With the subject of prophecy, however, we may not be quite so familiar. Indeed, some of us could be even a little skeptical; nor are we to be unduly blamed for our scepticism in view of the unpalatable mixture of dogmatism and extravagance with which we have, upon occasions, been presented by some rash adventurers into this admittedly enticing field.

Let me begin, therefore, by asserting that it is imperative that we distinguish very carefully and clearly between human prognostication on the one hand and Divine Biblical prediction on the other hand.

Human prognostication is based entirely upon human appreciation and assessment of available facts and tendencies. Human capacity, as we know, is limited, particularly with regard to penetration into the future; moreover, man's foresight is capable of the gravest error.

Let me illustrate this latter point.

In March 1848 Lord Hardinge interviewed that powerful Austrian statesman Prince von Metternich (1773–1859) at Vienna. Metternich spoke of the sinister trends and events of those days without the slightest apprehension; indeed, he prophesied that there would be absolutely no undue disturbance of routine equilibrium.

Although he was superlatively qualified to venture into such a prophecy, how grossly wrong was his augury! Why, within four days of his very own prediction, he himself was obliged to flee from Vienna, and his own house was sacked and burnt!

Coming nearer to our own times, listen to the words of so great and so well-informed a man as David Lloyd George, former Prime Minister of England. In his speech at the Guildhall after the signing of the Armistice concluding World War I, he uttered these words packed with prognostication:

“This solemn moment of triumph, one of the greatest moments in the history of the world ... this great hour which rings in a new era ... and which is going to lift up humanity to a higher plane of existence for all the ages of the future.”

Since David Lloyd George uttered this prophecy, World War II bathed the globe in yet another blood-bath; moreover, the higher plane of existence to which he pointed is more likely to be a higher plane of non-existence, reached somewhat violently and precipitatedly by the ghastly upsurge of the hydrogen bomb!

Divine prophecy, however, contains no such heartbreaking disappointments and disillusionments. It is quite incapable of error because it flows, not from human foresight, but from unlimited foreknowledge issuing from Divine omniscience.

The Eternal, Blessed be He, is timeless, and He knows what we call “the end” from even before what we call “the beginning.” To the Omniscient Godhead what we call “the future” is as an open book.

Let me give you one Scripture quotation on this point. God, using the mouth and human personality of Isaiah but without, of course, destroying either, declares:

“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is no other; 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 ... ” (Isaiah 46:9, 10)

God, in sovereign will, selected certain human beings and imparted to them His infallible knowledge of futurity in a manner quite independent of the ordinary laws of knowing.

These selected men were known as נביאים, Prophets. A נביא, a Prophet, is an Announcer, as announcer to mankind of revelations vouchsafed by God in the furtherance of His Divine redemptive purposes.

Am I suggesting the supernatural? Yes, I am. Let us not shrink from the approach of this fact. It is notorious that so many of us seem to writhe in a most painful reluctance when asked to admit or even permit the Divine Hand in human affairs, either collective or individual; nevertheless, “there is a sense in which the natural order of things — that is, the constitution of nature as governed by certain fixed physical and metaphysical laws — must always be touched if not pervaded by the supernatural, that is, by what is not matter of our constant experience.” (Pope, I, 62)

Very well then, let us realise that reluctance to accept the fact of direct contact between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man robs us of sweet reasonableness and renders applicable Milton’s declaration that “Unbelief is blind.” (Milton – Comus)

If any of us have locked within the chambers of our minds the gaunt and gloomy ghost of unbelief that shrouds its headless form against the fact of supernatural Divine revelation, may we throw open the casements of our intellect and allow the aromatic fragrance of sweet reasonableness to purge the sheeted spectre from his haunts.

I assure you Divine revelation will not lack its incontestable credentials and you will discover that Biblical predictive prophecy is one of these credentials.

The term “revelation” combines the idea of a Divine apokalupsis or unveiling, with a phanerosis or making known; God unveils and makes known to man those matters essential to man’s spiritual wellbeing.

Moreover, the Godhead attests this vouchsafed revelation by at least three credentials, and Divine predictive prophecy — a facet of which we are currently exploring — is one of those credentials and is a Divine sign to every successive generation, including our own.

Thus the historic fact in my former message is silhouetted against the golden glory of Divine Biblical predictive prophecy, and it is this element of the supernatural which invests our subject with such great attractiveness, deep meaning, and considerable portent particularly in these days, and it will undoubtedly reward our further inquiry.

Having postulated the fact of Divine predictive prophecy, in my next message I shall substantiate the subject by calling your gracious attention to some major Biblical predictive prophecies which have had full, eloquent, unmistakable and emphatic fulfilment in Israel’s history and experience.

This should prove a potent prelude encouraging your full confidence to believe and accept those wonderful Divine prophecies through God’s chosen Announcer, הנביא יחזקאל, the prophet Ezekiel, prophecies which, I believe, are yet to find fulfilment in the days ahead of us — perhaps

immediately ahead of us — days which need not be heavy with foreboding if lightened and illumined by the sure knowledge and Divine assurance that

הנה לא־ינּוּם וּלֹא יִישָׁן שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל

“ . . . He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” (Psalm 121:4)

Dr Lawrence Duff-Forbes

(1900–1964)

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