

Wonders of Prophecy

Robert T. Boyd

The Testimony of Fulfilled Predictions of Scripture

IT may come as a surprise that Egypt is mentioned at least 601 times in the Bible, and the term “Egyptian(s)” is mentioned at least 120 times, making a total of 721 times this country and its people are referred to – second only to Israel. Her past culture, sciences (medicine, arithmetic, architecture), religions (over 2,500 deities), and wealth (King Tut’s fabulous treasures) are second to none. She was an ancient world power, an industrious people with some skills that cannot be equalled in our day and scientific age. Yet God predicted the decline of this mighty nation through Isaiah (ca. 750 B.C.) and Ezekiel (ca. 590 B.C.).

Egypt to become the basest of nations, no longer to have rule over other nations.

Prediction

This prediction made by Ezekiel, also saying that God would diminish them... and the pride of power shall come down (29:14-15; 30:4-6).

Fulfilment

For centuries after these predictions were made, all continued to go well for Egypt. However, God’s reckoning day came to pass, and in the seventh century A.D., things began to happen. From about 638 A.D. to World War I, God’s Word was fulfilled, and Egypt became the basest of kingdoms. The abject condition of the peasantry was appalling. Her villages were mud brick huts, her people became the poorest of the poor, there was child labour, primitive threshing floors, disease, primitive water wheels for irrigation (even today in outlying areas some customs are the same as they were in Abraham’s day). Egypt existed as a nation but simply had no power and influence as the once proud and mighty

nation had in ancient times. She had become what God said she would be – the basest of kingdoms. There was nothing but mere existence – squalor, filth, and depression.

Unemployment, with outsiders causing Egypt to err in every work.

Prediction

One of the thriving industries of the Egyptians was their work in fine linen and the weaving of cotton. They could weave linen so finely that a mummified body could be wrapped in as much as 600 yards! There were 540 threads to the inch and the knots and breaks were not discernible even when held to the light. Isaiah made mention that there would come a time when the weavers would become ashamed of their work and lose hope in what they were doing (19:9). He also mentioned the absence of Egypt’s wise men, that outside influence would seduce them, that the Lord would mingle a perverse spirit in her midst, causing her to err in every work (lose the art of originality), as a drunk man staggers in his vomit, resulting in no work – idleness (19:9, 14-15).

Fulfilment

When one visits the tombs of the ancient Pharaohs and sees artistic work as though it had been painted yesterday, seeing garments coloured with dyes, noticing the architectural styles of structures still standing, mummified bodies, metal objects, surgical and dental tools, coloured glass and porcelain objects, and then looks at what Egypt has to offer today - evidently, the art has been lost. The result of Egypt’s becoming the “basest of kingdoms” led them into this economic depression mentioned in

Isaiah. Having sought advice from others, she was constantly led astray. A good example, even in our day, is her having been deceived by Russia, which resulted in the 1967 “Six-Day” War, in which the Jews soundly defeated the Egyptians. The Aswan Dam is the result of bad advice, and the Nile River is not as productive as it once was nor is the land as fertile.

The paper reeds shall wither, and there shall be no more fish.

Prediction

Paper reeds refer to the papyrus which grew by and in brooks and the Nile. It grew in abundance and helped give life to bodies to water. Ancient tomb paintings show royalty hunting and fishing among papyrus. Its leaves were split, laid parallel, and pressed with ooze from the Nile, producing a linen paper. It was so plentiful that the rich and poor used it. Some of our New Testament manuscripts were written on papyrus. Isaiah predicted that this “paper reed” would wither – vanish (19:7).

Isaiah (19:8) also predicted that the fishermen would mourn and languish as they sought to catch fish for a living. Tomb paintings show spear-fishing, and records relate a tax revenue that one Pharaoh received from a very prosperous fishing village - over £600,000. Yet Isaiah prophesied that fishing would cease.

Fulfilment

Over the centuries the papyrus has died out. Mr. R.S. Poole, of the British Museum, once wrote: “The monuments and narrative of ancient writers show us in the Nile of Egypt in olden times a stream bordered by flags and reeds, the covert of abundant wild fowl, and bearing on its waters the fragrant flowers of the various coloured lotus. Now, in Egypt, scarcely any reeds or water plants – the famous papyrus being nearly, if not quite, extinct, and the lotus almost unknown – are to be seen in the

marshes near the Mediterranean.” When vegetation is lost in water, fish lose their breeding grounds. Egypt even lost the lotus plant, the national flower of ancient Egypt. The only papyrus Egypt has today is what she imports and what is grown at a Papyrus Museum in Cairo. There are no fish of commercial value today in the Nile. Both the lack of papyrus and fish confirm Isaiah’s prophecy. Since Egypt had to get fish from the Mediterranean Sea for many centuries, attempts have been made to establish fish-breeding farms near the Aswan Lake. One farm alone was expected to yield 1,000 tons of fish a year, and refrigerator cars, each carrying thirty tons, will supply the fish markets of Cairo.

The city of Luxor, Thebes or No, to be ruined.

Prediction

Luxor, or No, was probably the largest city in ancient Egypt (Nahum 3:3). The street which led to the city was called “The Avenue of the Sphinxes,” since it featured sphinxes in the form of animals with the figure of a small man standing between the animal’s front legs. The avenue led into a huge temple area. The “Hypostyle Hall” of the temple is one and three-quarter miles in circumference. Over 100 columns still stand. It takes seven men joining hands to encircle a single column. Obelisks standing 100 feet high were erected in many places. Any number of other temples had been built by Pharaohs’ erecting them in honour of their god or gods. There were sacred pools for people to bathe and have their sins washed away. It was a magnificent city, but Ezekiel said that judgement would be executed upon it and it would be broken up (lie in ruins: 30:14, 16).

Fulfilment

As one visits Luxor (or No) today, 2,600 years after Ezekiel prophesied, the ruins (though many have been preserved), are mute evidence of the truthfulness of this prophecy. Looking at this city that was “rent asunder,” having had more than a million inhabitants, one’s heart is encouraged to

know that God never lies, but always keeps His Word.

The city of Memphis, or Noph, to be waste and desolate.

Prediction

Egypt was probably the most polytheistic nation that ever existed. Over 2,500 gods and goddesses in the form of idols representing man and animals and creeping things were venerated and worshipped. Some idols were half human and half animal, some were all animal and creeping things, reminding us of Romans 1:21-25.

Israel was familiar with the god Apis, a sacred cow or bull, and while in her wilderness journey made a molten or golden calf, fashioned after Apis, and worshipped it. God predicted through the prophet Ezekiel, saying, “I will destroy the idols and will cause the images to cease from Memphis,... and she shall have distresses daily” (30:13, 16). As one reads Ezekiel 30:1-19, attention is drawn to the fact that cities throughout Egypt would be under God’s judgement.

Fulfilment

Noph is the biblical name for Memphis (Jer. 46:19). It was a much older city than No and became the capital of lower Egypt, second only to Thebes. Nearby is the oldest pyramid, the Step Pyramid, built around 2600 B.C. This city suffered God’s wrath because of her idolatry, and was so completely destroyed that as late as a century ago, its location was in dispute. Archaeologists dug beneath twenty feet of sand and mud to find it. All that was left was a colossal statue of Rameses and a granite sphinx. When a tomb was found in the vicinity, it was thought at first to be that of a Pharaoh. It turned out to be a tomb containing twenty-nine sarcophagi, each preserving the mummified body of a sacred bull, each sacred to the god Apis, god of the sun, the god of creation. They had been worshipped, fed the best of food, bathed daily, and upon death had been

given a royal funeral at a cost of between £15,000 and £21,000 per bull.

Because of such idolatry, the land had become impoverished. Only by divine revelation could Jeremiah and Ezekiel have predicted that the sin of idolatry would bring about the destruction of No and the annihilation of Noph.

Foreign rulers over Egypt, the land to be sold.

Prediction

Ezekiel prophesied that “the sword shall come upon Egypt,” and that God would “sell the land into the hand of the wicked... by the hand of strangers [foreigners]” (30:4, 12).

Fulfilment

In losing her power, influence, and wealth, Egypt has been under the rule of many foreign nations – all strangers. History records Egypt has been under subjection to the Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Arabs, Turcomans (tribes east of Iran and west of Afghanistan), Mamelukes (Arabic slaves who became a military caste), Turks and Mongols, and British. Even Israel’s history under foreign masters has been one of continuous oppression. Thousands of natives were cruelly slaughtered by Diocletian in 296 B.C. The barbarous cruelty of Mohammedan leaders in Egypt is almost beyond description. Of 40,000 Egyptians conscripted to build a canal 40 miles long and 200 feet wide, having no tools but their hands, 23,000 died.

Surely Egypt had been sold (surrendered and occupied) into the hands of strange, wicked men just as God has said she would be.

Egypt and neighbouring countries to be ruined.

Prediction

Ezekiel made a sad prophecy concerning Egypt’s becoming desolate. But to make the prophecy all the more effective, he said that Egypt would be desolate “in the midst of countries that are desolate.” This

means that these neighbouring countries could be of no help to Egypt (30:7-8).

Fulfilment

In our Lord's time, and for six centuries afterwards, Egypt was a powerful and beautiful country. But that is not so now. In every direction ruins and wreckage of ancient magnificence are to be found. Furthermore, in the northwest, the province of Barca in Tripoli was once a place of wealth and busy cities of splendour, retaining their prosperity even up to the time of Christ. Today, only two or three cities are left.

Fezzan, in southwest Libya, was repeatedly conquered. Practically all trade of the past vanished, and today fewer than 26,000 people live there in poverty. Ethiopia was a nation formerly characterized by strength, civilization, and order. Mohammedans sapped its strength and the country was finally divided into small states. Today there is tragic disorder and famine.

City of Tyre

Prediction

Isaiah prophesied against Tyre (ch. 23). Ezekiel prophesied its doom (26:1-14). It was a mighty, well-fortified, impregnable, proud city. Ezekiel said its stones, timbers, and dust were to be laid in the midst of waters (Mediterranean Sea). It would never be rebuilt; it would be a place for the spreading of fishing nets.

Fulfilment

When the Assyrians came to power in the 700s B.C., Sennacherib failed to conquer it after several years of war. Later, after Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was enthroned, he besieged the city for thirteen years and failed to gain victory. However, he destroyed the mainland. The citizens of Tyre fled to an island half a mile off shore for security. Since Nebuchadnezzar had no fleet, he left. The new city of Tyre was rebuilt on the island and it lasted until Alexander the Great approached it in 332 B.C. When his demand for

surrender was refused, he ordered his men to take the rubble from the old city and build a causeway to the island. Marching his troops over this bridge, he conquered and destroyed Tyre. Ten thousand Tyrians were slaughtered, and 30,000 became slaves for resisting Alexander. The city has never been rebuilt, and today fishermen spread their nets to dry on the stones that remain of Alexander's causeway.

How true the Word of God, even in such small details as fishermen drying their nets (v. 14). The Tyre of which Ezekiel spoke was "Palae-Tyre," the continental Tyre. It is the Tyre from which people came to hear Jesus (Mark 3:8), and is the same Tyre that Paul visited (Acts 21:3). This Tyre has about 7,000 inhabitants today.

City of Sidon

Prediction

In order for Sidon to recognize that God is Lord, Ezekiel prophesied that God would execute judgments against her by sending pestilences and war. Blood would run freely in her streets, and the wounded would be judged in the midst of her by the sword (28:20-23).

Fulfilment

Sidon was a Phoenician city, and the Phoenicians were warlike people. Her history has been one of violence and bloodshed. She had a bad name in Scripture as a hotbed of idolatry. Ashtoreth was the goddess of the Zidonians (Sidonians), the goddess Solomon went after (1 Kings 11:5).

Since the Zidonians did not recognize God as God, He said He would see to it that they were judged during the course of their history. Down through the years she fell under the power of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. History shows that Ezekiel's prophecy came true. Although Ezekiel prophesied judgment and bloody war, he did not pronounce doom as he did for Tyre. Even though it was bombarded by the Turks and British as late as World War I, it still stands today in southern

Lebanon with a population of about 27,000. They live in fear of militant Arabs and invading Jews as they have for many centuries.

City of Nineveh

Prediction

The book of Nahum gives a vivid prophetic picture of Nineveh's doom. Their savage atrocities, wicked violence, arrogant pride, and idolatry were causes for God's wrath and actions against them. The following predictions were made for her utter destruction:

1. Opening gates of the river, waters running wild, overwhelming flood, palace dissolved (1:8; 2:6, 8)
2. While its leaders are drunk, they shall be devoured as stubble (1:10)
3. Their enemy shall be like chariots of flaming torches (2:3-4)
4. In drunkenness they shall seek to prepare their defences (2:5)
5. To be levelled: become empty, void, and waste (2:10; 3:7)
6. Her chariots shall be burned in the smoke (2:13)
7. Fire to destroy her strongholds (3:13)
8. No hope for survival. God "will make an utter end of the place" with "no healing of thy bruise" (1:8; 3:19)

To summarize, "The LORD hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown; out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image; I will make thy grave, for thou art vile" (Nahum 1:14).

Fulfilment

The prophecy God levelled against Nineveh doesn't sound much like the action of a God of love. Nahum reminded them that God is "slow to anger" (1:13).

He had sent Jonah to preach repentance toward God, and they did. Their turnabout did not last long, and about one hundred years later, they had rebelled and were back to their old ways of life. She was like those who rebel against light, and when light becomes darkness, how great is that darkness (Job 24:13; Matt. 6:23b). Nahum (3:8-10) used the illustration of God's destroying No and other cities in Egypt, hoping, no doubt, that this would wake them up, but to no avail (see Jer. 46:25; Ezek. 30:14-16). The Egyptian cities fell in 663 B.C. Nahum's prophecy was made soon after.

Nineveh got off to a bad start. It was built sometime between the flood and the building of the tower of Babel by either Nimrod or his descendants (Gen. 10:11). Nimrod means "rebel," one who rebels against the divine order of things – a self-willed man. The whole of Mesopotamia, or the Assyrian Empire, became known as the land of Nimrod (Mic. 5:6). He was a ruthless tyrant who captured, tortured, and enslaved people.

The Ninevites (Assyrians) of Nahum's day lived up to the name of the city's founder. They, too, were brutal, murderous tyrants. Archaeological discoveries show that the heinous, barbarous treatments inflicted upon prisoners of war as well as some of its citizens were gruesome. Some would have their arms and legs spread out and staked on the burning sand; some would have their eyelids cut off and were made to stare at the sun until blinded. Others were skinned alive and their skin wrapped around building pillars to dry out for drums and leather products. Some were impaled; poles were rammed into their stomachs and then erected as the victims screamed in agony. Some were forced to march into flaming pits to be burned alive. Eyes were gouged out, ears were cut off, legs and hands and other extremities were chopped off, and many had their tongues torn out by the roots. Pregnant women would have their abdomens ripped open with swords. This gives some idea of Assyrian

brutality. (Keep in mind that modern Iraq is ancient Assyria.)

In spite of God's being slow to anger, He must judge sin, so He predicted He would make a full end of this wicked adversary, Nineveh (1:8). At the time of Nahum's prediction, Nineveh was at its height of fame and fortune. The city was about 60 miles in circumference, and its walls were about 100 feet high and 25 feet thick. The walls were strengthened by 1,500 towers and were wide enough for three chariots to ride abreast. The city stood on the left bank of the Tigris River, and the side not protected by the river was surrounded by a moat. The oldest aqueduct in the world was constructed to bring fresh drinking water for its inhabitants. Many magnificent palaces of the Assyrian kings mentioned in Kings and Chronicles, such as Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Pul (Tiglath-Pileser), and Sargon, were wonders to behold.

In 612 B.C., the kings of Babylon and Persia joined forces to invade Nineveh. Demolition experts destroyed the aqueduct and diverted the river. This dual engineering project caused floodwater to pour into the city, fulfilling Nahum 1:8; 2:6, and 8. Torches were set to buildings standing above the water as Nahum had said (2:13; 3:13). Nahum was right: "Wasted is Nineveh, she shall be no more heard" (3:7, 2:13).

In less than 300 years after its downfall and destruction by the Babylonians and Medes, Alexander the Great took an expedition over the site and was ignorant of the fact that he was walking over the ruins of one of the mightiest empires that ever existed.

The prophet Zephaniah (2:13-15) said that after its destruction, "flocks shall lie down in the midst of her." Although the government has been rebuilding parts of its wall and gate entrances as a tourist

attraction, one sees today on its ruins just what Zephaniah said: "grazing flocks of sheep!"

Edom

Prediction

In about 585 B.C. three prophets made predictions against the people of Edom, who lived in Seir, southeast of the Dead Sea. Isaiah said these people were cursed of God to judgment (34:5, 12). Ezekiel said God would cut off man and beast from Edom and that Israel would "do in Edom according to my fury, that they shall know my vengeance" (25:12-14).

Obadiah prophesied Edom's doom because of Esau's violence against Jacob; because of pride and exaltation of themselves (vv. 3-4, 10-14).

Fulfilment

The biblical Edomites were originally the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother (Gen. 25:24-26; 36:1). Esau's mother plotted to have Jacob deceive their father Isaac to receive the blessing. On the surface it appeared that Esau forgave his brother, but underneath he held a grudge (Gen. 28; 31:1-16). Esau married many heathen women and became the head or father of the Edomites (Gen. 36:1, 43). Over the next few centuries the story of Jacob's getting the birthright from Esau by deception caused the descendants of Esau to become perpetual enemies of Jacob's descendants. One illustration of this animosity was the Edomites' refusal to let the children of Israel pass through their land in their wilderness journey (Num. 20:18-21). Another illustration occurred when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and took the Israelites captive. The Edomites gloated over their defeat (Obad. 10-14). Ezekiel had prophesied that Edom's doom would come at the hands of Israel (25:12-14). This was fulfilled in the Maccabean Period.

Judas Maccabeus, a Jew, in 164 B.C. defeated the

Idumeans (as the Edomites were called then – 1 Macc. 5:1-5).

After the Romans sacked Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Edomites disappeared. Their stronghold had been in the mountains of Seir, but all that one sees today is rugged terrain. One famous spot in the place where the Edomites dwelt in the clefts of the rocks is the uninhabited city of Petra, called the “Red Rose City, Half as Old as Time”. Facings of buildings carved out of the sides of rock mountains by the Nabateans in the second century B.C. have become a tourist attraction in the country of Jordan today. It was called “Sela” in Old Testament days (2 Kings 14:7). The silence today in this old Edomite area is a testimony to God’s prophecies coming to pass just as He predicted centuries ago.

Babylon

Prediction

The once mighty capital of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom was doomed to become like Sodom and Gomorrah – utterly destroyed (Isa. 13:19). Isaiah also predicted that it would be perpetually uninhabited. Just doleful creatures would live there and no Arabian would pitch his tent there (13:20-22). Jeremiah also had prophetic remarks to make about this mighty city. He foretold of the appearance of its ruins as “heaps” (51:37). He foretold the process of its destruction (50:24-46), and that Babylon’s land of Chaldea was to become desolate (50:23; 51:43).

Fulfilment

When we consider the strength and beauty of this city, which was called the “Lady of Kingdoms” by Isaiah (47:5), it almost seems impossible that such a mighty city would fall and be utterly destroyed. These predictions were made ca. 750 B.C.

The ancient historian Herodotus said that Babylon’s wall was 60 miles in length, 15 miles on

each side, 300 feet high, and almost 80 feet thick. Over 2,550 pillars (monuments), from 50 to 250 feet high, had been erected to her warlords. In the centre of the city were 150 pillars, 88 feet high and 19 feet in diameter, supporting a chapel of solid marble. It contained an image to the god Bel, 40 feet high and overlaid with solid gold. Surrounding this temple were twelve other beautiful temples dedicated to various gods. Gorgeous palaces extended for several miles along the banks of the river Euphrates, and there were the hanging gardens containing plants and trees of all kinds, watered by an ingenious system of machinery. Fields produced abundant crops to support inhabitants in case of a siege, and huge gates of bronze, beaming in the sun defied any enemy. Seemingly, there was not one chance in a million that Babylon would ever be captured, let alone be destroyed. It was described by Isaiah as “the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency” (13:19). Nebuchadnezzar called it “this great Babylon” (Dan. 4:20).

Babylon was still mighty when captured by Alexander the Great in the 330s B.C. At the beginning of the Christian era only a small part was inhabited, mainly by Jews. By the twelfth century A.D. Babylon had become an utter desolation. It had become “heaps” as described by Jeremiah. Archaeological expeditions have unearthed many wall foundations, giving evidence of their magnitude. The region, located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, was once fertile, but when a new trade route was found to India, it met its commercial doom. Today it is just desert. Bedouins graze their flocks on what little growth there is near the rivers, but none will pitch their tent on the site of Babylon. They regard the ruins with superstitious dread. Among the ruins dwell bats, owls, creeping things, and wild beasts, just as Isaiah foretold.