

Validity of the Evidence Supporting Jeremiah's Prophecy

This is the last in a series of five essays discussing Jeremiah's prophecy of Israel's seventy-year servitude in Babylon. This essay defends the sufficiency of the evidence supporting the validity of the prophecy.

In the case of fulfilled prophecy and of miracles in general, skeptics appeal to an alleged law of evidence that states: "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof." But how extraordinary must the claim be before the "law" applies, and how extraordinary must the proof be before it will be accepted? Should it be greater than what is accepted in a court of law? Should it be greater than what is required by the canons of historical research? Life is full of extraordinary events that we believe without extraordinary proof. Robert Ripley recorded thousands of extraordinary people and extraordinary events which we believe without extraordinary proof. Evidently skeptics do not intend for this "law" to apply to that type of extraordinary event; ordinary evidence is sufficient for them there. The bottom line is that the skeptic's "law" really applies only to supernatural claims, not to extraordinary claims. So this "law" becomes rather ridiculous. If it is restated according to how skeptics intend for it to be applied, it would read: "Supernatural claims require supernatural proof." So what kind of supernatural proof would a skeptic accept? The witness of an angel? A notarized affidavit from God Himself? No. The skeptic's anti-supernatural presupposition rejects the possibility of any supernatural proof. Thus, the skeptic's "law" is just a clever restatement of his anti-supernatural presupposition in disguise. It means that he will not accept any proof of fulfilled prophecy, no matter how extraordinary it may be.

My question to the skeptic is: What law of nature does prediction violate? Nearly every law of nature includes the capacity for predicting future events. In fact, the predictive capacity of a law of nature is one characteristic used to validate it. The more well defined the law, the greater its predictive power. Thus Newton's laws of motion enable astronomers to predict the exact position of the sun, moon, planets, and comets thousands of years in advance; and their predictive power enables astronauts to land on the moon, and to send a space craft to a distant planet like the recent landing on Mars. Prediction is a necessary ingredient of normal living. Without the capacity for prediction, life would be hopelessly perilous. No one could safely drive a car, fly an airplane, or even cross the street. We would have no sports, business, or agriculture; in fact, animate life can scarcely survive without prediction.

So prediction is not what radical skeptics deny. Perhaps they only object to predictions for which no natural law is known to them. But that's not even the case, for some things involving prediction occur regularly in nature for which no one has yet determined a law. Who knows what law of nature causes the swallows to return to Capistrano on the same day every year? One must therefore assume that some natural law exists that explains such events. The skeptic does not object to such assumptions or to such unexplainable extraordinary predictions, nor does he demand extraordinary proof for them. Why? Merely because the phenomena are observable, even though not explainable. He does not even have to observe the extraordinary predictive ability himself; he is willing to accept the witness of someone else, perhaps someone like Robert Ripley, or even the report of an ancient observer. The only kind of prediction the skeptic objects to, or for which he

demands extraordinary proof, is a prediction attributed to God. Clearly this is a theological objection, not a logical one.

What radical skeptics fail to realize is that their own anti-supernatural presupposition is based on a sequence of unverifiable fabulous claims—claims like those they say should have extraordinary proof.

Now, most of the classical arguments favoring the existence of God are based on known laws of nature with which the arguments are in harmony. Whereas opposing arguments involve accepting unverifiable fabulous claims. For example, the argument from the law of cause and effect involves accepting one of two alternate claims: (1) a sufficient first cause based on the second law of thermodynamics which extrapolates to a beginning in the past and predicts an end in the future; or (2) an infinite sequence of causes contrary to the second law. Now, while neither claim can be proved or disproved rigorously, common sense and reasonableness say the first is more likely because it is conceivable, and is in harmony with perceived reality and with two verifiable laws of nature; whereas the second alternative has the characteristics of a fabulous claim--infinity (by definition an inconceivably limitless value) and the contradiction of a verifiable natural law. Now, the same observation is true for all the classical arguments. Those who choose to believe in God regard the joint consensus of the classical arguments to be far more likely and more than sufficient reason to believe, whereas atheists choose to believe the joint witness of a sequence of unverifiable fabulous claims. In the final analysis, it is a matter of choice. The atheist has chosen to accept the witness of a sequence of fabulous claims contrary to his own declared method of reasoning.

To those who believe in an omniscient God, the idea of fulfilled prophecy attributed to Him is not a fabulous claim, but what one would reasonably expect. To them an instance of such fulfilled prophecy requires only ordinary, not extraordinary, evidence as sufficient reason to believe it. I acknowledge that this discussion is not about the existence of God, but the above discussion was necessary in order to expose the true foundation of a skeptic's anti-supernatural presupposition. It is not based on common sense and reason, but on a theological choice supported by a string of unverifiable fabulous claims that common sense and reasonableness reject. Logically the presupposition involves the fallacy known as a hasty generalization, and when appealed to in discussions like this, it involves the fallacy of assuming the conclusion--circular reasoning. An unbiased skeptic will admit the possibility of fulfilled prophecy no matter how unlikely it may seem, and let the evidence decide the case. Many unlikely events are recorded in ancient records the validity of which historians accept on the basis of good (but not extraordinary) evidence.

What the radical skeptic means by "extraordinary proof" is evidence that is superior to that which is possible to obtain from ancient records. He wants to evaluate historical evidence by a double standard, one that admits the possibility of natural events but denies the possibility of supernatural events. In other words, no matter how valid and convincing the ancient evidence may be otherwise, if it involves a possible fulfilled prophecy (or any miracle), the evidence automatically will be insufficient by his standard.

My appeal to an unbiased agnostic is to accept valid historical evidence for fulfilled prophecy without demanding extraordinary proof of the supernatural element of the prophecy. If the prophecy was given by a reputable prophet at a verifiable date, its essential details are beyond the

possibility of human foresight, these details were verifiably fulfilled at a verifiable time well beyond the lifetime of the prophet, and there is no evidence of fraud, then common sense and logical reason expect the prophecy to be valid. The supernatural element can be inferred because the prediction was beyond the possibility of human foresight, and there is no other known explanation; but the supernatural element cannot be proved. It is reasonable to accept the prophet's word that it came from God, without demanding proof that is beyond possibility. It is not reasonable to deny the validity of an otherwise verifiable fulfilled prophecy merely on the basis of a claim of a supernatural source. Accepting the validity of such a fulfilled prophecy is not an act of blind faith, it is a logical inference based on sufficient reason to believe. I believe the prophecy of Jeremiah 25 fulfills all those expectations and should be accepted as a valid example of fulfilled prophecy.

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