Messianic Prophecies Podcast

Introduction:

1. They hold a singular place in apologetics; a prophecy by its nature foretells a future event, but we see them in the light of their fulfillment.
   1. One would think that this fact alone: that the coming of Jesus Christ, and striking elements of his life, death, and purpose on earth were foretold centuries before his birth would be a show stopper. The coup de grace of apologetical argument.
   2. Whether due to good will or bad, this has not always been the case.
2. Before we get into details, I would like to give an overview of what prophecy is, and what elements we ought to expect from it, and what not to expect from it.
3. Notion:
   1. “**Prophanai**” (Greek) – to speak for another. In a Scriptural context, this “another” is God.
      1. “*A prophet of God is nothing more than a proclaimer of God's words to men.*” (St. Augustine, *Quaestio 17 in Ex.7:1*)
      2. This explains the wide use of “prophet” in Scripture. Anyone who speaks under a divine impulse whether teaching, foretelling, of even praising (God).
      3. OLJC is called the Prophet not so much for His predictions as for His teaching/revealing. This is why we say that the teaching power of the Church is a share in Christ's prophetical office.
      4. Since those moved by divine impulse were often revealing hidden things, the term became more and more restricted to the revealing of future events – of all things the most naturally hidden.
   2. **Real Definition** **– “the infallible prediction of a future contingent thing which, by supernatural light alone, is able to be foreseen with certainty.”[[1]](#footnote-1)**
      1. Prophecy is, therefore, distinguished from conjecture (not knowledge) and divination (of diabolical not supernatural origin)[[2]](#footnote-2).
      2. Prophecy is a supernatural fact which is able to come from God alone due to His infinite knowledge. A future event (being absolutely unknowable by an intellect except God's) is most properly the object of prophecy. See II-II, Q.171, a3.
      3. It is “miraculous” in a wide sense, but it is not a miracle properly speaking since, in itself, it is not of the sense order but of the intellectual order – even if it must be manifested sensibly in order to be a motive of credibility.
      4. Because prophecy consists mainly in knowledge it is **e.g.** Joseph in prison (*who interpreted the dreams*) who is the prophet, not the servants of the pharaoh who actually had the dreams.
      5. Prophecies may use symbols or may not be expressed in the most precise language possible e.g. “*A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son,*” (a virgin before she conceives only – or even afterward?), but a real prophecy will not be couched in equivocal terms like the statements of pagan oracles or fortune-tellers.**[[3]](#footnote-3)**
      6. Prophecies like miracles might be distinguished as absolute or relative, beyond all created foresight, or that conjectured by angelic knowledge or human genius.
   3. Components of Prophecy
      1. First, the representation of certain realities: via senses, imagination, or intellect
      2. Second, the intellectual light (the essential and sufficient component rendering one a prophet) to make a two-fold judgment:
         1. The meaning of the representation. Yet the prophet need not understand everything that God tends to convey by the message because the human mind is an imperfect instrument compared to the principal agent.
         2. The certainty that it has been revealed by God.
   4. Possibility of Prophecies
      1. They are certainly possible if God knows future events and if He can communicate His knowledge to men.
         1. God does know future things (Dz 1784)
            1. There is no past, present, or future from God's point of view.
            2. God is the cause of all things.
         2. Revelation is simply God conveying his ideas to men. If men can do this with one another; unreasonable to hold that God cannot.
   5. Recognizability of Prophecies
      1. Historical Truth
         1. Two elements
            1. Did a positive and definitive prediction take place?
            2. Did the event predicted subsequently occur?
      2. The meaning of the prophecy must be established to know whether or not it has happened. **Apologetically, the battle is usually here, at the level of meaning.** For example:
         1. Jews do not accept our interpretation of the Messianic prophecies.
         2. Adventists do not accept our interpretation of prophecies on the parousia (2nd coming)**[[4]](#footnote-4)**.
      3. As we go through them, we will see that there is really no other way to interpret them in a logical and coherent way, apart from the meaning that the Catholic Church has understood them.
4. Philosophical Truth
   1. *As with miracles*, must exclude other explanations i.e. human/diabolical foreknowledge or chance.
      1. Human Foreknowledge/Chance
         1. Events which depend exclusively on God's free will.
         2. Events which depend on a series of free human actions.
         3. Events which depend on a series of natural causes *whose existence or interaction are not known* e.g. that a storm or plague will strike at a precise place and at a precise (but distant) time.
      2. Diabolical Foreknowledge
         1. Note that devils do have great intelligence and years of experience so can guess well.
         2. As with prodigies, devils' “prophetic” action is conditional upon divine permission.

On the contrary:

* + - 1. There are certain things about which the devils **cannot** make even a probable guess:
         1. Events which depend on the free will of God
         2. Events not occurring until far into the future especially when human freedom is involved.

1. Existence of the prophecies
   1. From the beginning, we want to be clear that we find in the writings of the Old Testament prophecies strictly so-called. In fact, the history of the Jewish people would be inexplicable without reference to this longstanding expectation and conviction, shared by priests, kings, learned & unlearned, and even by the neighboring Samaritans.
   2. The exact role that the Messias would fulfill was known only confusedly, because of the difficulty of reconciling different elements of the prophecies, but Faith that a Messias would come was a certainty for the Jewish people.
      1. Rationalists and all those attacking these prophecies would make this confused reception of the prophecies as some kind of evidence that they are not prophecies to begin with.
         1. (Rationalists – those that argue that reason is the measure of all truth, and so in principle denies that anything is knowable beyond reason) – as if a man who saw things by the light of the sun, then declared unreasonably that no other light can exist.
   3. But first, let’s consider the elements/aspects of the prophecies that seemed unreconcilable, and which only demonstrated more dramatically the Divine truth of the things foretold.
      1. To the Messias was attributed a threefold function:
         1. Political – He would restore the kingdom of David and bring foreign nations into subjection
         2. Religious – like David, He would be a king and prophet, and even the greatest of the prophets.
         3. Eschatological – He would live forever, and His kingdom would be eternal; His kingdom would be transformed into eternal glory; dead would be raised, the Messias would reign with his saints.
      2. So contrasting were these roles that various ideas were speculated to reconcile them.
         1. One was that there would be 2 Messias
            1. Ben Joseph: peaceful reign of the Messias.

Cf Zacharias 9:9-10. *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion, shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem: BEHOLD THY KING will come to thee, the just and saviour: he is poor, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*

*“And I will destroy the chariot out of Ephraim, and the horse out of Jerusalem, and the bow for war shall be broken: and he shall speak peace to the Gentiles, and his power shall be from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the end of the earth.”*

Born in Bethlehem.

* + - * 1. Ben David: glorious reign of Messias.

Zacharias: 14:

“*Behold the days of the Lord shall come, and thy spoils shall be divided in the midst of thee.*

***And I will gather all nations to Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken****, and the houses shall be rifled, and the women shall be defiled: and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the rest of the people shall not be taken away out of the city.*

***Then the Lord shall go forth, and shall fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle****.*

*And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is over against Jerusalem toward the east: and the mount of Olives shall be divided in the midst thereof to the east, and to the west with a very great opening, and half of the mountain shall be separated to the north, and half thereof to the south.*

*And you shall flee to the valley of those mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall be joined even to the next, and you shall flee as you fled from the face of the earthquake in the days of Ozias king of Juda:* ***and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with him.****”*

Not born, but arriving on the clouds of heaven. (Daniel)

A suffering servant? (Isaias) or a royal king? (psalm 2)

* + - 1. Another Jewish tradition held: “If the people of Israel will be righteous, the Messiah will come in the clouds of Heaven. If they will not be righteous, he will come as a poor man riding upon an ass” (Sanhedrin 98a).
    1. So the fact that someone comes and reconciles these elements and countless more is something truly extraordinary. It is divine.
       1. Like a prism in reverse that receiving many colours of light, would send it forth as a single beam.
       2. Attempts to say that these were just ingenious guesses or the spirit of age is supported by nothing but an a priori rejection of the supernatural.
    2. Character of prophets – not grasped by rationalists.
       1. A classic argument is that the prophets were not unlike pagan soothsayers or religious fanatics.

1. “*Infabillis praedictio futuri contingentis, quod, solo supernaturali lumine, certo praevideri potest.*” Lagrange, *De Revelatione*, Vol.II, p.110. Also perfectly legitimate is Van Noort's definition: “the sure and definite prediction of some future event which could not be foreseen by natural causes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. II-II, Q.172, a5: “Hence the demons, even by their natural knowledge, know certain things remote from men's knowledge, which they can reveal to men: although those things which God alone knows are remote simply and most of all. Accordingly prophecy, properly and simply, is conveyed by Divine revelations alone; yet the revelation which is made by the demons may be called prophecy in a restricted sense. Wherefore those men to whom something is revealed by the demons are styled in the Scriptures as prophets, not simply, but with an addition, for instance as "false prophets," or "prophets of idols."” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *The True Religion*, Van Noort, pp.99-100, footnote 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Adventists are a generic term for several Protestant groups which focus obsessively on Christ's second coming. They tend to believe that it can be predicted accurately, and they tend to interpret prophecies concerning the coming of Christ very literally. They reason that whatever was not literally fulfilled at Christ's first coming will be fulfilled at His second coming e.g. Christ will sit on David's throne for 1,000 year reign. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)