



For resources on “endtime economics” and to subscribe to the free newsletter, *Eternal Value Review*, visit Wilfred’s website www.eternalvalue.com or contact him at: staff@eternalvalue.com

Popular Prophecy: Checking Dogma Twice

By Wilfred Hahn

Why are there sometimes such sharp differences in interpretations of Scripture? Two individuals, selflessly studying the Bible, desiring nothing more than to discover the truths of God, can arrive at very different perspectives.



We observe that God has allowed certain tensions and ambiguities to exist in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul saw a benefit of these interpretational differences between fellow believers, saying, “No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval” (1 Corinthians 11:19).

Not only do apparent scriptural ambiguities have the beneficial sharpening effect mentioned by the Proverbs writer (“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” – Proverbs 27:17), but they also produce the never-resting imperative for deeper study of the Bible.

Like the irritating effect of even a small grain of sand in an oyster’s mantle tissue, the chafing of differences can produce refined pearls of truth.

All of this is a somewhat laborious introduction to the topic of this article—popular prophecy dogma. Are we absolutely sure of our dogma? No doubt, this is sure to be a “flash point” subject, precisely because there are so many different opinions.

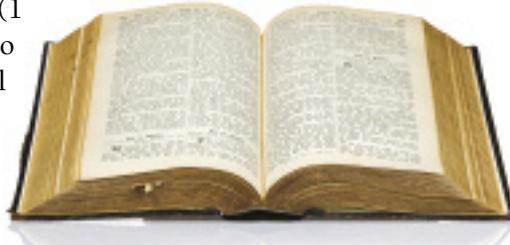
However, we will take care to heed the words of the Apostles in such matters. First, to examine other viewpoints “[...] with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15), and not by way of personal attack. Secondly, to conduct our exami-



Prophecy misinterpretations can be of different types. For example, we might incorrectly assume that the Bible is using symbol rather than literal language.

nation in a spirit of humility, recognizing that we all “see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12, KJV).

And, while we are not to devote ourselves “to myths and endless genealogies,” or “to promote controversies rather than God’s work—which is by faith” (1 Timothy 1:4), we also are counted to do well if we “pay attention to [the word of the prophets]” (2 Peter 1:19).



Dogma Defined

Just what is dogma, and is it good or bad? Dogma is any religious belief that is held to be true and settled ... perhaps considered an established tenet of a faith. It may be correct; or it may be wrong. However, more often than not, the word “dogma” these days carries a stigma, implying calcified beliefs that are no longer tested. It’s that type of dogma that we want to guard against.

That said, we all could be vulnerable to incorrect or “out-of-date” dogma. Things may be believed that we have never ourselves corroborated from Scripture, or for reasons that we cannot recall. Of course, we should “[...] be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). But, realistically, it requires continuous Bible study to work out our faith ... an ongoing process of “sharpening” our dogma.

Wrong dogma most certainly also applies to interpretations of endtime prophecy. If anything, this field of beliefs may be most vulnerable of all. How so? Here we face additional challenges in our understandings. Not only does much prophecy deal with the future, a timeframe that will always remain dark

to the viewer in some respects, we inevitably will be influenced by our sight ... by what we already know to be familiar to us today. The reader will subconsciously tend to interpret future prophecy colored in the light of observed trends and world conditions of today and the past. As a result, we may exclude certain future scenarios simply because these do not fit the conditions of the world we observe today.

Prophecy misinterpretations can be of different types. For example, we might incorrectly assume that the Bible is using symbol rather than literal language. To illustrate, consider Ezekiel 38-39. It describes warfare—widely agreed still to be in the future—taking place on horseback (Ezekiel 38:4), mentioning horses three times (verses 4, 15, and 39:20). These horses are popularly interpreted as symbol because today we conduct mechanized warfare (fighter jets, tanks and helicopters), not from horseback. But is this view correct?

We are entitled to our opinions, but these must not ascribe zero probabilities to other scenarios if we cannot be 100% certain that these will not occur. The Bible does use the Hebrew word for horses in this instance, not once indicating that Ezekiel’s prophecy is only intending a symbolic likeness to horses. Mankind’s age of mechanized warfare is a little more than a century old. Who is to know what will happen in the next 10, 20, or 50 years, let alone should apocalyptic events intervene?

Another misinterpretation can result because we do not yet have a complete understanding of future possibilities. For example, can Daniel’s prophecies be



understood better today than 2500 years ago? Very definitely. Not only has our understanding benefited through the collective study of many Bible students (both clergy and lay people) over the years—the action of iron sharpening iron—the times, eras and technologically possibilities have also changed. Daniel's visions are therefore more understandable today. In this sense, previously adopted interpretations of prophecy, though having become dogma, can be proven to be incorrect.

If past dogma has been proven false, it should no longer be believed. But this is not always the case.

Dogma in Prophecy Today

If all prophecy teachers were opposed to “sharpening” their interpretations, we would today still be teaching that Nero, the Roman emperor of the first century, was the Antichrist. For example, in the earliest existing commentary on Revelation, Victorinus, Bishop of Pettau, writing in the late 3rd century, mentions Nero as having been considered the Antichrist.¹ At times, many other incorrect theories abounded (and still do): for example, that the Herodian dynasty was the manifestation of the 7 heads on the scarlet beast shown in Revelation 17.

We can study how the passage of time sometimes influenced the interpretations of the early church fathers. For example, a brief review of the perspectives on the last-day “ten kings” will be illustrative. Irenaeus, writing later in the 2nd century, sees the ten kings existing closer to his times. He theorizes that the development of the 10 kings results from a division of the then existing Roman Empire. He says,

[...] concerning the ten kings who shall then arise, among whom the empire which now rules [the earth] shall be partitioned. [...] It must be, therefore, that the king-

dom, the city, and the house be divided into ten; and for this reason He has already foreshadowed the partition and division [which shall take place]. Daniel also says particularly, that the end of the fourth kingdom consists in the toes of the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar. [...] The ten toes, therefore, are these ten kings, among whom the kingdom shall be partitioned [...].²



If all prophecy teachers were opposed to “sharpening” their interpretations, we would today still be teaching that Nero, the Roman emperor of the first century, was the Antichrist.

While we are encouraged to see that Irenaeus linked the 10 kings with the 10 toes of Daniel 2, we clearly do observe a bias working in the theories of Irenaeus. Rather than seeing that the final formation of the 10 kings will be driven by a motive of “aggregating” power sufficient to dominate the world, allowing this beast (and later, the Antichrist himself) to continue “[...] crush[ing] and devour[ing] its victims and trample[ing] underfoot whatever was left” (Daniel 7:7), his perspective is more influenced by the vista of his day. At that time, the Roman Empire was still powerful and a single entity. Therefore, to his mind, a division was required to bring about the 10-king empire.

How could he have accurately predicted in his day that the Roman Empire



Today, we are more naturally inclined to see the 10-king arrangement as a collection of power ... a coming together ... as opposed to a division. After all, the 10 kings “have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast” (Revelation 17:13 KJV).

was yet to collapse, only to revive again much, much later, the 10 kings only appearing after that time? It can be deduced today that the 6th head on the beasts of Revelation 12, 13, and 17 is the Roman head. Today, we are more naturally inclined to see the 10-king arrangement as a collection of power ... a coming together ... as opposed to a division. After all, the 10 kings “have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast” (Revelation 17:13 KJV).

An interpretation similar to that of Irenaeus carried through to later Fathers. Cyril of Jerusalem, probably writing in the middle of the 4th century, also believed that the 10 kings were to occur in his day, seeing the kings as coming out of the Roman Empire. A few decades later, Jerome (living between 340 and 420 AD) saw things the same way, preserving the dogma established in earlier times. He says:

We should therefore concur with the traditional interpretation of all the commentators of the Christian Church, that at the end of the world, when the Roman Empire is to be destroyed, there shall be ten kings who will partition the Roman world amongst themselves.³

What is interesting is that the Roman Empire of the late 4th and early 5th century was already a shell of its former grandeur. Rome was sacked by the Ostrogoths in 410 AD. The empire’s final demise is considered by most historians to be around 470 AD. Yet, even though the Roman Empire was clearly disintegrating, this idea of “partitioning” into ten kings still held, though there was not much left to be divided up. At no time during the first five centuries AD, was there ever any group of 10 nations or peoples that existed contemporaneously, nor even re-

motely representing an orderly partitioning of Rome into 10 following kingdoms.

Today, we see the same sort of bias at work. Previous theories of prophetic fulfillment can continue to be favored even when new developments have interceded that clearly prove them incorrect. Even in matters where no definitive answer may be possible, at least the recognition that alternate scenarios exist is an interpretational improvement.

Modern Prophecy Dogmas Still Exist

Olden-time dogmas need “sharpening” from time to time. Are there incorrect dogmas today in some circles in respect to prophetic interpretations? Most certainly there are. Are there many, and how influential are these? I am not knowledgeable enough to offer a credible opinion. However, I can point to at least a few, and will mention just three that are related to one popular topic, the meanings of the scarlet beast shown in Revelation 17 ... a theme already introduced earlier.

But before we continue, just why should we even care that dogmas may be false? Though many aspects of prophetic interpretation do not rank as doctrine, error is still likely to cause harm, even if only subtly. On the other hand, misinterpretations leading to Millennialism or Amillennialism can have a significant impact upon faith, possibly leading to other church corruptions. We will conclude on these results, as there is one impact that is sure to please the Enemy.

Just what are some examples of dulled dogmas? A few decades ago, many prophecy experts were absolutely sure that the endtime fulfillment of 10 kings was in place when Greece joined the European Common Market (ECM)





in 1981 as the 10th member. Some had jumped to this conclusion even earlier, in 1967, when Norway, the UK, Denmark and Ireland were accepted for application to membership. The planned addition of the three would have brought the ECM to 10. As it turned out, Norway did not accede in 1973 due to a lost national referendum on membership. It would take another 10 years before the 10th member, Greece, was to accede. Alas, only five years later, both Portugal and Spain joined, pushing ECM membership to 12. Today, the ECM has transitioned to a 27-member European Union.

Interestingly, even much earlier in the last century, it was thought that the Council of Ten nations who were the victors of World War I, may possibly be the manifestation of the final 10 kings.

Could the final 10 kings eventually come out of the European Union? Definitely, yes. It is a very feasible theory. However, we still cannot prove without a doubt from Scripture that this must happen. There are other credible theories. As such, we cannot pronounce that the European Union (EU) that we see

today is the sure forerunner of all 10 kings. If this cannot be proven conclusively from Scripture, or if other possibilities exist, then it must be treated as a theory and not dogma. Otherwise, we risk marring the veracity and interpretation of Scripture.

The prophecy community, which had promoted the “dogma” of a European 10-king coalition, with specific statements subject to many twists and permutations, lost some of its credibility. Neither did it reflect favorably upon the Bible.

Other Vulnerable Dogmas Today

Keeping to the theme of the “scarlet beast,” there are surely other examples of incorrect interpretations that qualify as dogma in some circles. Some teaching distortions stem from overlooking the fact that the Antichrist appears only after the 10 kings are on the scene, and not before. Daniel 7:24 expressly proves this chronology, saying that “the ten horns [...] are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first” (KJV). How much ink and paper has been

Could the final 10 kings eventually come out of the European Union? Definitely, yes. It is a very feasible theory. However, we still cannot prove without a doubt from Scripture that this must happen. There are other credible theories. As such, we cannot pronounce that the European Union (EU) that we see today is the sure forerunner of all 10 kings.



Pope John Paul II assassination attempt

The location of the shooting, marked by the tablet, in St. Peter's Square.

Seemingly every time a major world leader or prominent figure has suffered a near-death experience (perhaps surviving an assassination, as in the case of Pope John Paul II in 1981), the speculation mills point to their candidacy for the Antichrist.



wasted over the centuries on idle speculations of the identity of the Antichrist. The 10 kings arrive first. If the 10 kings are not first clearly evident, then the Antichrist cannot yet have arrived in power.

Why would this clarification even matter? One reason is that it would quell the rampant speculation—hyped seemingly almost every day—about a peace treaty with Israel, among other prophesied Middle Eastern developments. How many times do we read that the very next peace negotiation with Israel will unveil the Antichrist's identity, perhaps even today? Well, possibly yes. But not until after the 10 kings are on the scene. In the meantime, countless unnecessary speculations and sensationalizations are proven to be wind. Of course, this does not mean that we should be unconcerned with Middle East developments or should stop praying for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6), but to do so grounded in Scripture.

Finally, we will address one more prophecy interpretation that is popularly received as dogma. Seemingly every time a major world leader or prominent figure has suffered a near-death experience (perhaps surviving an assassination, as in the case of Pope John Paul II in 1981), the speculation mills point to their candidacy for the Antichrist. It is widely believed in some

circles that it is the Antichrist (in human form) who suffers the wound to the head mentioned in Revelation 13:3, 12, & 14. No, the Antichrist is never shown as one of the heads on the beast, but rather as a horn that grows out of the 7th head on the beasts shown in Revelation 12, 13, and 17. Revelation 17 expressly says he is of the 7 kings (which are shown as 7 heads) and becomes the 8th king. Therefore, the actual physical Antichrist is not even presented in the picture of the scarlet beast of Revelation 17.

Thoughts to Ponder

There are more contestable prophecy interpretations that could be mentioned. However, our objective was simply to show that it is not unusual that there should be differences in interpretations ... certainly not in matters of future prophecy fulfillment. Many of these do not qualify as reasons to break fellowship. What does matter is the reputational damage inflicted upon inerrant Bible prophecy due to unfounded, speculative statements ... fears sometimes being hyped for profit.

There came the time that the boy “who cried wolf” was no longer believed. When the wolf finally did arrive, no one cared to listen to the boy's warnings. Why? The boy had lost his credibility and reputation for sound witness.

For this and other reasons, it is compelling to remain vigilant and always open to new interpretations that will be more faithful to Scripture. Moreover, we should always strive to separate opinion and speculation from factual representations of what the Bible actually does and does not say. This writer has certainly made such errors in the past and hopes not to make too many more in the future.

God has chosen prophecy as one of the unique means of proving his exist-



tence. Therefore, a cunning enemy would not overlook the strategic importance of discrediting the Bible by way of sensationalist and fraudulent prophecy teachers, who are prone to jump to incorrect and speculative pronouncements.

The Bible says the whole world is overtaken by darkness during the last days—particularly so during the Tribulation period. A number of prophecies alert us to this characteristic of the end-time period. “See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples” (Isaiah 60:2). “Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light—pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?” (Amos 5:20). Darkness and evil are a mark of these times.

Given such conditions, it would not be surprising if the course of geopolitical events is even being deliberately planned to deceive and to discredit Bible prophecy. After all, the father of lies and deception is in control of the world at this time. Bible prophecy works to his disadvantage, as it serves to us as a “light shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19).

As far as the “10-king” fulfillment theories are concerned today, even

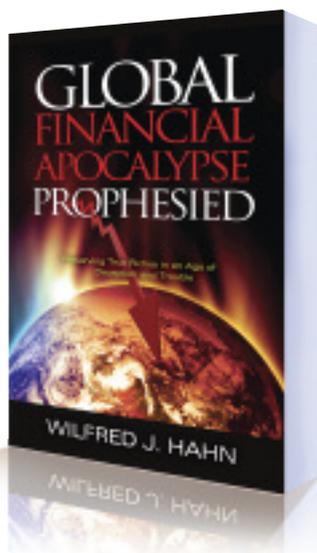
though Europe has unified itself in a remarkable fashion over the past 50 years, the final, 10-nation coalition is still not obvious ...certainly not identifiable in exact detail. We may feel urged to declare answers to the many open questions of end-time prophecy, but who can know the exact course of events, even over the next few months.

What can we conclude? Without a doubt, some great geopolitical shifts and world-reverberating tumult still lie ahead. Yes, we do have the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 13:2) and know that the very “testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). Yet, “We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7), believing that all prophecy will be fulfilled literally. (MC)

God has chosen prophecy as one of the unique means of proving his existence. Therefore, a cunning enemy would not overlook the strategic importance of discrediting the Bible by way of sensationalist and fraudulent prophecy teachers, who are prone to jump to incorrect and speculative pronouncements.

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Vol. XVIII, Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Published by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1870.
- 2 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* (Book V, Chapter 26) (A.D. 180/199).
- 3 Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, Chapter 7, Verse 8: (Source: http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_daniel_02_text.htm).



Preserving True Riches in an Age of Deception and Trouble

Why a book with such a chilling title? This is not just another reactionary book to the recent Global Financial Crisis. Rather, it provides an urgent look at what the future holds for our modern Mammon-enclaved society. Wilfred Hahn picks up the trail from his previous book, *The Endtime Money Snare*, published in 2002. Well in advance, it clearly warned about the risks and dangers of an impending world economic crisis, much as we are experiencing today. Hahn now again provides his unique insights for the challenging and deceptive times ahead. Just what lies ahead for America?

GLOBAL FINANCIAL APOCALYPSE PROPHESED

ITEM# 1068 • 372 pgs. • Paperback

\$14.95 • Author: Wilfred J. Hahn