

Response to Evan Fales= review of *In Defense of Miracles*

Specifically my chapter AFulfilled Prophecy as Miracle@
Robert C. Newman

Unfortunately, Professor Fales is correct when he doubts that Amainstream@ biblical scholarship takes fulfilled prophecy seriously. Hume=s dictum B prefer any explanation to a miracle B has come to dominate biblical studies to such an extent that virtually anything non-miraculous will be accepted instead.

For instance, the writing of the first five books of the Bible has been taken from Moses and given to four anonymous authors J, E, D and P (and at least as many editors) living five to ten centuries later so as to avoid admitting the historicity of the miraculous plagues, the parting of the Sea, the giving of the law at Sinai, and the predictions about covenant curses and kingship.¹ Never mind that a stupendous array of plot theories is then necessary for the many times each successive new version is introduced to the Israelis in order to convince them that this document has been in existence and circulating publically for centuries. Similar problems face partitioning theories for Isaiah and Zechariah, and assigning late dates to other works such as Daniel and the Psalms.

For the New Testament Gospels, which narrate the miraculous works and predictions of Jesus, a number of theories have been proposed to separate them from the apostles. In the twentieth century, a consensus developed around one such model, in which the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are almost totally dependent on the Gospel of Mark and on a hypothetical source of Jesus=s sayings labeled Q, thus reducing the threefold witness to one or two, and casting doubt on the reliability even of these.² Never mind that this reconstruction runs roughshod over both the earliest traditions and book titles, where these Gospels are always and only assigned to Matthew, Mark and Luke B an apostle and two close associates of the apostles. How, if they were

1. See S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 9th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913); Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. Ackroyd. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965); Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1987). For critiques of the JEDP theory in particular, see William Henry Green, *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (New York: Scribners, 1895); Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1949); Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961); Allan A. MacRae, *JEDP: Lectures on the Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (Hatfield, PA: IBRI, 1994).

2. See R. W. Funk, R. W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); John Shelby Spong, *Liberating the Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996); E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM, 1989); for responses, see Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987); Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* trans. Robert W. Yarborough. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem* (Dillsboro, NC: Western North Carolina, 1976).

originally anonymous, or known to have been written by someone else, did this information get completely and unanimously replaced?

Where a prophecy cannot be dated later to make it a prediction after the fact, the prophecy may be claimed to be vague, or its fulfillment coincidental, or (as Fales does several times) one may deny that the prophet intended to speak about anything beyond his own generation. Yet critical scholars themselves regularly admit that some prophecies were fulfilled centuries after they were allegedly made (e.g., the deathbed predictions of Jacob in Genesis 49). Of course, they assign this prediction to a time much later than Jacob. But in doing so they must at least admit that this later author thought prophets predicted events centuries in advance! The objection is thus incoherent. If the ancients thought that a prophet might be predicting events centuries in advance, why not the prophet himself?

My point in all this is to make it clear that Hume's dictum is skewed. Even if a miracle has occurred, one who follows Hume's advice will always deny it. No matter how strong the evidence, the witnesses may be lying, my senses may be deceived, or I myself may be dreaming!

But suppose you would *really like to know* whether miracles occur. How would you go about finding out? For historical miracles, the evidence cannot be any stronger than historical evidence. For fulfilled prophecy, we can at least begin such a program by trying to locate predictions where the fulfillment would come after the latest date possible for prediction. That is why we chose the particular examples we did, which Fales dismisses by claiming that a prophet can't be referring to events so far from his own time period. Of course if we chose events close to the prophet's time, Fales would then claim the prediction was actually made after the fulfillment!

Let me respond to some of Fales' particular objections. I suggest that the late date which critics assign to Daniel is merely because of fulfilled prophecy in the book, and that other alleged evidences are not such as would be convincing by themselves. In fact, Josephus reports that Alexander the Great was shown the prophecies of Daniel about himself, a century and a half before critics are willing to date the book.³ On the critical late dating, the earliest manuscripts of the book are breathing down the neck of the author.⁴ The author of Daniel knows (about the

3. Josephus, *Antiquities* 11.329-339 (11.8.5).

4. There are now eight manuscripts of Daniel known from Qumran, more than for any other Old Testament book but the Torah, Psalms and Isaiah – pretty impressive for a book which (on critical dating) was very recently written! With the earliest of these manuscripts dated by Frank Moore Cross to the late 2nd century BC, the distance from origin to first surviving text for Daniel is now (from the critical perspective) small than for any other Old Testament work, and for any other New Testament work but the Gospel of John! Yet somehow this book was viewed and accepted as the work of a prophet from the Babylonian and Persian period, not only by the sect of Qumran, but by ancient Israel in general. See the information provided (and concessions made) by Eugene Ulrich in the section “Hebrew and Aramaic Text” of the article “Daniel, Book

Babylonian period, even before the Persian) what critics have only recently discovered, that Belshazzar could only offer Daniel the third position in the kingdom because he himself only held the second.⁵

In our Hosea prophecy, the phrase Amany days@ is rather vague. Since this prophecy is based upon an acted parable of the marriage between Hosea and Gomer, analogy might provide some clarification. The various events in their marriage include the births of several children, Gomer subsequently running off to her other lovers, falling into slavery (or prostitution), and then being purchased (or hired) by Hosea for many days. This occupies a rather significant fraction of their life together. So perhaps the fulfillment involves a rather significant fraction of the time that God and Israel have been in covenant. A couple of thousand years would not be out of line, though the prophecy says nothing specific about just how long this peculiar relation (of being without king or prince, sacrifice or pillar, ephod or idols) would last, only that it would end in the last days. As I suggested, it looks like it has.

The term AIsrael@ as used in the Old Testament sometimes refers to the whole nation and sometimes to the northern kingdom (often AEphraim@) as contrasted with the southern, Judah. John Bloom has thoroughly researched the subsequent history of both, and both fulfill the prophecy of Hosea.⁶

Yes, the twin cities are not a random sample. One has to go with the data provided by the Bible, not to mention trying to pick examples where the fulfillment is late enough that Fales and others cannot claim prophecy after the fact. But neither are double-blind experiments strictly random. One often picks paired samples to have one receive the real medicine under test, the other the placebo. Yes, some of these prophecies are rather brief. We have to take the data provided. Stock curse formulas that are literally fulfilled would be striking in any age; it is no cultural anachronism to think that people who pronounced a curse on others really hoped it would literally happen to them.

Yes, the Ezekiel prophecy about Tyre was falsified if Ezekiel intended us to understand that Nebuchadnezzar would be the one to fulfil it all. Since we have no time machines to go back

of” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2000), 1:170-74.

5. Raymond Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1929); Alan Millard, ADaniel and Belshazzar in History,@ *Biblical Archaeology Review* 11:3 (May/June, 1985): 72-78. For additional discussion of historical problems with a late, Maccabean dating of Daniel, see Bruce K. Waltke, “The Date of the Book of Daniel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (1976): 319-29; Gleason L. Archer, Jr., “Modern Rationalism and the Book of Daniel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (1979): 129-47; Edwin M. Yamauchi, “The Archaeological Background of Daniel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1980): 3-16.

6. John A. Bloom, AHosea=s Adulterous Wife: A Portrayal of Israel,@ *IBRI Research Report* 14 (1982).

and interview Ezekiel, we have to be satisfied with what he tells us. Since (as Fales notes) Ezekiel does tell us that Nebuchadnezzar didn't fulfill this, he must have had someone else in mind!⁷ In any case, the fact is that few if any other cities have ever had their sites scraped bare to the bedrock and the rubble cast into the sea B and that is what Alexander did at Tyre.

Regarding Babylon, Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 50 are allegedly written long before the return from exile, so how do we know their context is just after the return? Cyrus was not (apparently) a Mede ethnically, but he did become king of the Medes, and they were a part of his army when he took Babylon, destroying its political power.⁸ Yes, Babylon physically lasted several more centuries (as I pointed out), but is it really inconceivable that Isaiah had any interest in the future history of Babylon? Only if (1) biblical prophets have no connection with God (the real point at issue) and (2) God has no interest in the distant future, which the Bible (at least) categorically denies.

So we come to Jesus, the only Jewish messianic claimant who has unarguably founded a world religion of Gentiles. Yes, Jesus violated Jewish expectations of Messiah in some fundamental ways, but not (I think) the ones Fales lists. We should, of course, distinguish between Jewish expectations and biblical (Old Testament) expectations. The Gospels clearly represent Jesus being condemned by the Jewish high court for blasphemy, but his claims fit the paradoxical character of several Old Testament predictions about the person of the Messiah.⁹ As for Jesus becoming a Jewish king, an earthly monarch, who expels the foreign overlords, conquers foreign powers and rules everyone like Egypt, Babylon and Assyria did, I agree with the Jewish (and biblical) expectations, though I cannot claim to speak for my brethren who hold to an amillennial view of the future. Time will tell whether Jesus fulfils these in a second coming,¹⁰ but we would do well to try and make the correct decision in this one life we have been given, rather than betting on the predictions of a biblical scholarship dominated by Hume's dictum.

7. Ezekiel 29:17-20.

8. See Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 4.2.10-11; 8.3.18; 8.4.28.

9. Robert C. Newman, 'The Testimony of Messianic Prophecy,' in *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question* (Dallas: Probe/Word, 1991), 203-14.

10. Ibid.

