

Feature Article: DN088

## NOSTRADAMUS: A CHALLENGE TO BIBLICAL PROPHECY?

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### SYNOPSIS

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Devoted Nostradamus enthusiasts, nevertheless, consider him the world's most accurate prophet and claim to have discovered the "keys" to correctly unlocking the true meaning of his prophecies, but they commit two errors. First, they propose theories about "devices" Nostradamus supposedly used to obscure or "encode" his prophecies. They then use their theories to prove their theories. This is circular reasoning. Second, by applying an arsenal of these discovered "devices," they manipulate his text to fit their desired interpretation. Words are manipulated by inserting, deleting, or changing any number of letters; phonetic equivalents are used; punctuation and grammar is altered; and other languages are substituted. Numbers and dates are manipulated as well, using arbitrary calculations. The case for Nostradamus's accuracy rests on the interpretations offered by his enthusiasts. According to sound interpretive principles, however, they fail to demonstrate that the prophecies refer uniquely to one person or event.

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## NOSTRADAMUS AND HIS PROPHECIES

In 1555, Nostradamus, a doctor by profession, published the first edition of his most famous work, titled, *The Prophecies* (or, *The Centuries*). Written mainly in French, it was to include 10 groups (centuries) of 100 prophetic *quatrains* (four-line poems) each, covering many nations and spanning from the sixteenth century to the year 3797. These enigmatic quatrains contain old French terms, Latin terms, mythical Greek figures, historical allusions, unique words, anagrams, puns, odd spellings, odd syntax, partial words, inverted word order, and so on. They have been described by one devotee as "a massive verbal jigsaw puzzle."

Since 1775, at least one book on Nostradamus has been published every 20 years, and since 1840, at least one every decade.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 450 years have passed since Nostradamus first published his *Centuries*, yet the number of translations and commentaries found in bookstores bears testimony to the perpetual interest in the French seer and his prophecies.

Ardent devotees claim he predicted many historic events with uncanny accuracy, and they consider him "the most effective prophet in the history of the human race."<sup>2</sup> Did Nostradamus really predict these events? Are his prophecies accurate? Do they pose a challenge to biblical prophecy?

## THE UNIQUENESS OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY

Christian apologists point to fulfilled biblical prophecy as one evidence of the Bible's supernatural source and unique nature as the Word of God. They argue that only biblical prophecy is (1) numerous, (2) specific, and (3) 100 percent accurate (i.e., none of its prophecies have proven to be false), thereby substantiating its supernatural source and uniqueness. This in turn supports the Bible's claim to be the unique Word of God. Though prophecies outside the Bible meet one or even two of these criteria, only biblical prophecy meets all three.<sup>3</sup> This claim that biblical prophecy is unique is challenged by skeptics of the supernatural, critics of the Bible, and even Christians who sometimes ask, "Didn't Nostradamus also make many accurate prophecies?"

In order to respond to this challenge it would be sufficient to demonstrate that just one of Nostradamus's prophecies failed to come to pass. If even one has failed, then his prophecies as a whole fail to meet the criterion of 100 percent accuracy. Though Nostradamus claimed he could not err (see below), few of his enthusiasts suggest he prophesied with 100 percent accuracy, and some even acknowledge he made predictions that were glaring failures. Despite this fatal disproof, however, many people still believe Nostradamus made numerous, specific, accurate predictions that rival biblical prophecy. It is necessary, therefore, to examine the evidence in more detail.

## ARE NOSTRADAMUS'S PROPHECIES SPECIFIC?

The belief that Nostradamus made many accurate predictions rests on the interpretations offered by his enthusiasts. Since they claim to have discovered specific meaning in his enigmatic prophecies, the burden of proof is on the enthusiasts to demonstrate — using sound principles of interpretation — that specific (unambiguous) meaning exists in Nostradamus's prophecies. That is, they must show that each prophecy has only one meaning and uniquely fits the event they claim fulfills it.

### What Did Nostradamus Say?

Nostradamus made contradictory claims regarding the possibility of interpreting his prophecies. He repeatedly stated that future generations, even those antagonistic to him, ultimately would understand the meaning and truth of his predictions though they are veiled in obscure language: "For although they are written under a cloud, *the meanings will be understood*. When the time comes for the removal of ignorance, *the*

*event will be cleared up still more*" (emphasis added).<sup>4</sup> He also denied, however, the possibility of correct interpretation: "Most of the prophetic quatrains are so ticklish that *there is no making way through them, nor is there any interpreting of them*" (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

### What Do Others Say?

Critics argue that Nostradamus's prophecies are ambiguous and therefore could refer to many persons, places, or events. One of Nostradamus's contemporaries observed: "The style of the [prophecies] is so multiform and nebulous that each may, with a little effort and good will, find in them what he seeks. Like airy vapors, they assume as they unroll, the figures which the spectator's imagination lends to them...."<sup>6</sup> Even ardent enthusiasts agree that it is possible to find more than one meaning in Nostradamus's prophetic verses. Peter Lemesurier describes them as "a massive verbal jigsaw puzzle." "Moreover," he adds, "their language is often obtuse and sometimes positively arcane....the result is that a further layer of impenetrability is added to an already chaotic text."<sup>7</sup> John Hogue admits that "his writing is muddled enough to be taken any way one wishes....His ambiguities have kept the controversy of his prophecies alive, and even enhanced his stature as a seer in the centuries following his death (just as he predicted)."<sup>8</sup>

### A Clear Example of Ambiguity

Nearly any of Nostradamus's quatrains might be used to illustrate this ambiguity. Quatrain 1-35 launched the prophet's career and has arguably been his most famous. One would expect this quatrain to be among his least ambiguous:

The young lion will overcome the old one,  
On the field of battle in single combat;  
He will burst his eyes in a cage of gold,  
Two fleets one, then to die, a cruel death.

This quatrain is said to refer to the accidental death of King Henry II of France. At a royal wedding festival, Gabriel, Count of Montgomery defeated King Henry (*young lion will overcome the old one*) in a friendly jousting competition (*on the field of battle in single combat*). The count's lance shattered, and a splinter ran through Henry's helmet (*cage of gold*) into his brain, entering just above his eye (*burst his eyes*). Henry died after days of suffering (*then to die, a cruel death*).

Critics argue that the items in this quatrain are either not specific or just do not fit the event closely enough to support the accuracy ascribed to it. First, contrary to what the enthusiasts declare, the French never used the "lion" as an emblem, so this figure of speech fits neither Henry nor the count in that respect. Second, "young lion" versus "old one" at best overstates the age difference between the two, Henry being at the most six years older; nor was Henry "old," being only 41. Third, "The field of battle in single combat" could refer to any number of battles in history, and it is unlikely to be a reference to a friendly jousting competition at a marriage festival where, as James Randi points out, it was a serious *faux pas* even to draw blood.<sup>9</sup> Fourth, the shattered lance did not "burst" Henry's eyes but entered his brain above only one eye. Fifth, "a cage of gold" could only vaguely refer to a helmet of gold. In any case, neither competitor wore a gold helmet since gold is a metal too soft to be used for protective armor; nor is there any evidence Henry's helmet was gilt in gold. Sixth, the phrase "two fleets one" presents a problem. The French word *classe* is translated "fleet" everywhere else in the *Centuries*. Since "fleet" does not fit anything in this event, the enthusiasts, without justification, find a similar sounding Greek word, *klasis*, which means "a fracture," and change the line from "two fleets one" to "two wounds made one," meaning one wound for Henry and another for France who lost her king. Finally, the only line that is remotely descriptive of this event is that Henry "died a cruel death" after days of suffering.

The connection between this famous quatrain and Henry's accidental death has not been demonstrated using sound principles of interpretation. Because these phrases are ambiguous, to what or whom this prophecy refers remains a mystery. Even if it is allowed that Nostradamus accurately predicted the king's

death in this quatrain, in other prophecies (e.g., Quatrain 4-77) it is obvious he had high expectations for Henry to become the new Charlemagne.

## THE INTERPRETIVE METHODS OF NOSTRADAMUS'S ENTHUSIASTS

There are nearly as many methods of interpreting Nostradamus's predictions as there are enthusiasts. Theories from many viewpoints are proposed: astrology, the occult, "green language," esoteric keys, cabala, numerology, hidden codes, and psychic hypnotism. The task of examining each of these would be daunting. Regardless of the approach, however, two errors are common to the enthusiasts' interpretations: first, *proposed theories beg the question*, in other words, *the theories are used to prove the theories*; and second, *the text is arbitrarily manipulated to get the desired result*.

### Proposed Theories Beg the Question: The Theories Are Used to Prove the Theories

The enthusiasts all follow a similar procedure: First, they assert that Nostradamus used some literary or mathematical device to obscure or "encode" a word, name, phrase, or date that refers to some event. Second, they argue that because they can make the text fit some event by using this device, this proves Nostradamus used the device. This is circular reasoning. Randi comments on the fallacy of their arguments: "Once they establish — to their satisfaction — that a certain usage or rule makes the prophecy work, the Nostradamians invoke it again and again for any subsequent situation that even remotely resembles the one in which the artifice was established.... They use the theory they are trying to prove, to prove the theory they are trying to prove."<sup>10</sup>

One example of this method of justifying a theory comes from enthusiast Bardo Kidogo, who suggests that one of Nostradamus's methods of obscuring dates was to use A.D. 325 as a start-date for chronological calculations rather than A.D. 1. He concludes, "The proof that 325 A.D. is the start-date of this system is quite simply that all the dates included in the system fit the events described in their verses. There could be no stronger proof than that."<sup>11</sup> The only thing this proves, however, is that *some dates fit using this system*. It proves nothing about whether Nostradamus used this system. Kidogo, furthermore, offers no evidence to verify which dates are included in this system; apparently, those dates that fit are included, those that don't fit are not included. This is special pleading and ensures that *only dates that fit are included*; no negative evidence is possible. In fact, because all the dates do not fit using only this system, Kidogo must propose several others.

So it goes. If one device does not render a fit with the desired event, then another device that does is "discovered."

### Arbitrary Manipulation of the Text

Another fundamental error of the enthusiasts is *manipulation of the text*, which is really the goal of their many theories. By applying these discovered devices to Nostradamus's text, any alteration becomes possible in their hands.

**Anagrams.** Anagrams are the favorite device of the enthusiasts. An anagram is formed by rearranging the letters of a word, name, or phrase to make another word, name, or phrase. The more letters a word contains, the more possibilities that some combination might form a recognizable name or phrase. For example, the name NOSTRADAMUS contains 39,916,800 possible combinations, including USDA MAN ROTS, TOAD MAN USSR, and A SUDAN STORM.<sup>12</sup>

Anagram is a legitimate literary device and one Nostradamus did use. In addition to merely rearranging letters, however, enthusiasts frequently refer to something they call "rules of anagram" that allow any number of letters to be inserted, removed, or changed. This kind of arbitrary manipulation of the text provides unlimited possibilities for "discovering" some name or event in Nostradamus's cryptic words. For example, the name "Mabus," which appears in several quatrains, is frequently manipulated by the enthusiasts:

*Mabus then will soon die, there will come*

*Of people and beasts a horrible rout:*

*Then suddenly one will see vengeance*

*Hundred, hand, thirst, hunger when the comet will run.*

Nostradamus “expert” John Hogue suggests the name is a clue to the identity of the third Antichrist. Using the “rules of anagram,” Hogue offers a variety of possible solutions (the following are not direct quotes unless quotation marks are used):

- (1) (Therbo)-*Majus* = Ma(b)us? In the 1970s, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) headquarters was located near the ruins of Thurbo-Majus.
- (2) *Megabyzus* = M(eg)ab(yz)us = Mabus? Megabyzus was an ancient Persian terrorist who attacked enemy states from within. This could predict the attack of Saddam Hussein from within by a Persian (or Iranian) ally.
- (3) *Saddam* (Hussein) = Maddas = Ma(bb)(u)s = Ma(b)(u)s? Hogue’s method for producing this interpretation is quite ingenious: “Take a piece of paper and write ‘Saddam’ backwards to get ‘Maddas.’ Now hold it in front of a mirror. If you are dislexic as I am you will soon see ‘Saddam’ and wonder if Nostradamus spelled his approximated name backwards to get ‘Mabus.’ By following the rules of anagram, take one *d* out of ‘Maddas’ to get ‘Madas.’ Then reverse the second *d* to get a *b* for ‘Mabus.’”<sup>13</sup>
- (4) *Al Abbas* = (M)abbas = (M)ab(u)s? In addition to being a person, “Mabus” might also be a thing, such as the Al Abbas version of Saddam’s scud missiles, which one day may be used as weapons by the Antichrist.
- (5) Raymond *Mabus* = Mabus? “Mabus” could be former governor of Mississippi and US ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Raymond Mabus, who in this scenario would be a potential victim of the Antichrist.<sup>14</sup>

Hogue’s manipulation of the text is apparent. Note that the solutions offered cover the outcome in either direction: “Mabus” could be either Saddam’s *enemy* or Saddam *himself*, the *attacker* or the *attacked*, a *weapon* of Antichrist or a *victim* of Antichrist. If these were not enough, Hogue recently added three more names to his list of possible solutions:

- (6) *Usama bin Laden* = Usama b = Usaam b = MaabUs = Mabus?
- (7) Yasser Arafat (*Abu Amar*) = Abu Am(s) = Maabu(s) = Mabu(s)? Arafat’s secret PLO code name was “Abu Amar.”
- (8) George W. *Bush* = W Bush = (M) Bus = M(a)Bus = Mabus?<sup>15</sup>

All that is needed is some violent event to occur involving the Middle East or America, and Hogue, using one of these interpretations, can point to this quatrain as a fulfilled prediction.

**Dates.** Dates are also manipulated to achieve desired outcomes. Enthusiast Jean-Charles de Fontbrune, for example, argues that Nostradamus predicted the end of the world to be around A.D. 3000, preceded by one thousand years of universal peace. As evidence, he points to quatrains that mention the seventh millennium as the end of the world. Fontbrune argues that the year 7000 is really the year 1999; but Nostradamus stated that his *Centuries* were “comprised of prophecies from today to the year 3797.” How then does Fontbrune reconcile these four dates? He begins by calculating the difference between the year the prophecy was written, 1555, and the year 3797:

The result is 2,242 years. This should be carried over to the biblical chronology given in the Letter to Henri, Second King of France, i.e. 4,757 years from Adam to Christ. If one adds to these 4,757 years 2,000 years AD, the result is 6,757 — which does not make up the full seven millennia. I believe this is the reason why Nostradamus ‘fabricated’ this extra segment of time in order to cover the 242 years required to reach the year 7000

according to global chronology ( $6,999 - 6,757 = 242$ ). By adding this segment of 2,242 years to the biblical reckoning one obtains  $4,757 + 2,242 = 6,999$  (i.e., 1999 AD), a date clearly specified in [Quatrain 10–72].<sup>16</sup>

Why should Fontbrune start with the date the prophecy was written or use Nostradamus's first chronology in his Letter to Henry, which dates Adam at 4758 B.C., rather than his second one, which dates Adam at 4174 B.C.? Why, furthermore, didn't Nostradamus just "fabricate" 243 years so the result would be the full 7,000 years instead of only 6,999? Only by a mathematical shell game can Fontbrune reconcile these discrepancies. Despite all the effort expended arguing for the year 1999 or 2000 as the beginning of the final millennium, Fontbrune elsewhere states, "According to Nostradamus, this thousand-year period begins in 2026, not 2000."<sup>17</sup>

**Keys.** Nostradamus enthusiasts commonly claim to be the only recipients or discoverers of a secret knowledge or unique "key" that "unlocks" Nostradamus's cryptic predictions. David Ovason argues the key is an occult "green language."<sup>18</sup> Ottavio Cesare Ramotti insists the key is cabala.<sup>19</sup> Charles de Fontbrune denies the influence of cabala and argues the key is philological.<sup>20</sup> So go the many competing theories.

All the theories proposed by the enthusiasts fundamentally involve a key, or system, or device Nostradamus supposedly used to "encode" his text or meaning. This key, system, or device must be applied in reverse to "decode" the text or meaning; nevertheless, on even the most basic level of codemaking — the anagram — even a slight change in the rules, such as arbitrarily adding or deleting letters, pollutes the "decoding" process. The number of devices and *ad hoc* rules proposed by the enthusiasts pollute the interpretive process and provide unlimited possibilities for generating the desired "decoded" text.

**Astrology.** Another prominent theory among enthusiasts is that Nostradamus used an astrological system whereby he related important events (past and future) to the position of the planets. In Quatrain 6–100, however, which bears the title "Incantation of the Law against Inept Critics," Nostradamus placed astrologers first in a list of unwelcome interpreters:

Let those who read this verse consider it profoundly,  
Let the profane and ignorant herd keep away:  
And far away all Astrologers, Idiots and Barbarians,  
May he who does otherwise be subject to the sacred rite.

This curious statement is difficult to reconcile with the claim, made by many enthusiasts, that astrologers are those best equipped to interpret Nostradamus's prophecies. Enthusiasts argue the reason Nostradamus scorned astrologers was because his astrology was different from that of his contemporaries. Again, they use their theory to prove their theory.

Little in Nostradamus's text suggests he possessed a profound understanding of astrology.<sup>21</sup> Astrological theories nevertheless abound while interpretations based on these theories yield no proof. For example, to demonstrate the superiority of his knowledge of the prophet's literary and astrological devices, enthusiast Peter Lemesurier interprets Quatrain 10–72 (see below). After much twisting and straining of the language and text, his method yields an interpretation about a Muslim invasion of Europe in July 1999.<sup>22</sup> Lemesurier reminds readers, "Arriving at such a version as the above, however, demands a great deal of study and analysis." Since July 1999 passed without this event having occurred, however, either Nostradamus's prophecy was wrong or Lemesurier's theory is wrong. Like all the other astrological theories, Lemesurier's "key" fails to unlock any successful, specific predictions or even to provide any real insight into their meaning.

### ARE NOSTRADAMUS'S PROPHECIES ACCURATE?

One definition of a false prophecy is a prophesied event that fails to occur. Deuteronomy 18:22 declares, "If the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not

spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously" (NASB). If even one of Nostradamus's prophecies has proven false, then his prophecies as a whole fail to meet the criteria of 100 percent accuracy claimed for biblical prophecy.

### What Did Nostradamus Say?

Nostradamus explicitly stated he *could not* be mistaken: "I cannot fail, err or be deceived, though I am the greatest sinner in this world, subject to all human afflictions" (emphasis added).<sup>23</sup> He further claimed that his predictions set "forth the places and times so that men coming after may see them, knowing the events to have occurred *infallibly*" (emphasis added).<sup>24</sup>

Contrary to these claims, however, Nostradamus suggested the possibility of error: "I have calculated and composed all during choice hours of well-disposed days, and as accurately as I could...."<sup>25</sup> "Should I, however, have made any errors in my calculation of dates, or prove unable to please everybody, I beg that your more than Imperial Majesty will forgive me" (emphasis added).<sup>26</sup> "Although my calculations may not hold good for all nations...."<sup>27</sup>

### Prophecies That Failed

Nostradamus's few dated prophecies should provide the best examples of his accuracy since they are specific in at least that respect. The dated prophecies, however, were consistent failures: the Roman church did not conduct any widespread persecutions of astrologers in 1607 (Quatrain 8–71), the Arabs did not capture the King of Morocco in 1607 (Quatrain 6–54), no monk from Campania was elected Pope in 1609 (Quatrain 10–91), Turkey did not subjugate vast areas of Europe in 1700 (Quatrain 1–49), the Turks did not capture the King of Persia in 1727 (Quatrain 3–77), no upheavals of nature or famine nearly destroyed the human race in 1732, and no culmination of a long and savage religious persecution occurred in 1792 (Epistle).

His most recent dated failure was anticipated and dreaded for many years:

10-72

*The year 1999, seventh month,*

*From the sky will come a great King of Terror:*

*To bring back to life the great King of the Mongols,*

*Before and after Mars to reign by good luck.*

The name "King of Terror" has been applied to, among other subjects, the Antichrist, nuclear war, a giant meteor, and a foreboding solar eclipse. Enthusiast Henry Roberts suggests the quatrain refers to the arrival of the "Beast of the Apocalypse." In defense of this interpretation he notes, "By a simple reversal of the numbers and turning 999 upside down we obtain 666."<sup>28</sup> None of these terrors came from the sky in July 1999.

### Headlines and Flawed Interpretations

Each generation of enthusiasts finds the headline events of their time in Nostradamus's quatrains. They suggest that Nostradamus foresaw many famous figures from Napoleon, to Hitler, to Ronald Reagan; historic events from the French Revolution, to the Civil War, to the Cold War; modern inventions from the hot air balloon, to the submarine, to the radio and light bulb; and many contemporary events from the spread of AIDS, to the O. J. Simpson trial, to the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The process is generally the same. After a connection has been made — however spurious — between a word or phrase in a quatrain and some historical person, place, or event, the rest of the text is either ignored or twisted to fit the desired interpretation using an arsenal of discovered "devices." What is important to note is that justification for these interpretations, if any is given, is at best weak or faulty and

at worst deceptive. Because the enthusiasts use so many tedious and confusing devices, it would take volumes just to examine the errors. The following critiques, then, are by no means complete analyses of the interpretations offered. They are, rather, given to illustrate that the case for the accuracy of Nostradamus is riddled with interpretive problems and errors.

1-25

*Lost, found, hidden for so long a time,  
The pastor [pasteur] will be honored as a demigod:  
Before the Moon finishes its full period [cycle]  
He will be dishonored by other winds.*

This quatrain is said to refer to scientist Louis Pasteur, who discovered pasteurization. The Pasteur Institute was named in his honor. John Hogue includes this quatrain in his list of 10 debunker's nightmares, but his unjustified interpretation offers no support. Hogue acknowledges that in Quatrain 6-28 the French word *pasteur* clearly means "pastor of a church" (the Pope?). The natural interpretation of line two in Quatrain 1-25 is that a pastor will be deified, but Hogue offers no explanation why he rejects this reading here. He translates the beginning of line three, "This happens when..." instead of "Before..." but offers no justification for changing this preposition. Hogue states that the Institute was created in 1889, the end of the last great lunar cycle in astrology, but the Institute was actually established in 1887 and inaugurated in 1888.<sup>29</sup> Finally, to suggest how the scientist *might* be dishonored by, as he translates line four, "other rumors as foul as farting," Hogue points to a book written a century later that exposes Pasteur's sloppy research procedures.<sup>30</sup> Line one is left unexplained. Hardly a debunker's nightmare!

1-26

*The great one of the lightning falls in the daytime,  
Evil predicted by the bearer of demands:  
According to the prediction he falls in the nighttime.  
Conflict at Reims, London, Tuscan plague.*

Hogue claims the *falls* in this quatrain refer to the assassinations of John F. Kennedy at 12 noon (*daytime*) in 1963 and Robert Kennedy at 1 A.M. (*nighttime*) in 1968.<sup>31</sup> No explanation is offered for the phrase *of the lightning*. He suggests that *the bearer of demands* (or *petitions*) in line two might be Jean Dixon, who supposedly predicted JFK's assassination in 1956. No textual support for this suggestion is offered. Line four supposedly refers to student riots in France (*Reims*) and London in 1968-69 and the environmental effects of a flood in Tuscany, which occurred in 1966. The justification offered is that these events occurred near the year of Robert Kennedy's death. Half a century ago Henry Roberts saw in this quatrain the taking over of Czechoslovakia by Hitler.<sup>32</sup> It has not been demonstrated that this quatrain uniquely fits either of these events.

1-81

*Nine will be set aside from the human flock,  
Removed from judgment and counsel:  
Their fate will be determined on departure,  
K., Th., L., dead, banished, astray.*

This quatrain is said by some enthusiasts to refer to the Challenger space shuttle disaster. Seven crew members were sent off (*set aside*). Even before liftoff the booster rocket began to fail (*fate determined on departure*), and the ground crew could do nothing (*removed from judgment and counsel*). *K, Th, L* (Greek: Kappa, Theta, Lambda) is supposedly an anagram for TH(iO)K(o)L, referring to Morton Thiokol, Inc., manufacturer of the faulty rocket engine. The crew died (*death*) while a number of NASA officials were fired (*banished, astray*).



There are several problems with this interpretation. First, the number of crew members was seven and not nine. Second, enthusiasts offer no contextual reason why *set aside from the human flock* uniquely indicates being *launched into space*, or why *judgment and counsel* refers uniquely to the ground crew, except that they fit the interpretation. Third, there is no evidence validating that *K, Th, L* is an incomplete anagram rather than initials or an acronym. Henry Roberts offered another interpretation, saying this quatrain refers to the nine members of the Supreme Court.<sup>33</sup>

2-24

*Beasts ferocious from hunger will swim across rivers:  
The greater part of the region will be against the Hister,  
The great one will cause it to be dragged in an iron cage,  
When the German child will observe nothing.*

This quatrain is said by some enthusiasts to refer to Hitler and the German army (*beasts*) battling across the Rhine river. In the earliest manuscripts, the *s* in *Hister* appeared as a tall, thin Gothic *ſ*, which resembles an *l*. With little effort *l* can be substituted for *ſ* and the letters transposed to spell Hitler. There is no justification, however, for doing so except that it is needed to fit the interpretation. A simpler explanation is that, in Nostradamus's day, the Lower Danube River was known as the *Ister* or *Hister* and was associated with the Rhine River. Enthusiasts make the quatrain fit either interpretation. The *iron cage* in line three fits nothing in Hitler's battles, so it is sometimes interpreted as the moving van in which Mussolini was kidnapped and murdered — a strained and unconnected interpretation at best.

6-97

*At forty-five degrees the sky will burn, Fire to approach the great new city: In an instant a great scattered  
flame will leap up, When one will want to demand proof of the Normans.*

10-49

*Garden of the new world near the new city, In the path of the hollow mountains: It will be seized and  
plunged into the Tub [Vat], Forced to drink waters poisoned by sulfur.*

In addition to several fabricated quatrains that began to circulate after September 11, these two authentic quatrains are currently being applied by some enthusiasts to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center towers (*hollow mountains*) in New York City (*new city*), which were near New Jersey, the Garden State (*Garden*). According to the enthusiasts, the sixteenth-century prophet described the unusual sight in his own figurative terms. New York City, however, is *not* at latitude 45 degrees, and Hogue even admits, "There are no cities exactly on or near latitude 45 that one could call 'new.'"<sup>34</sup> Second, the planes were neither on fire nor shooting fire from their engines when they approached the city.

These differences are significant. Quatrain 10-49 could just as easily refer to a volcanic eruption (*flame will leap up*) of Mount Vesuvius (*hollow mountain*), which is about 15 miles from Naples (*Nea-polis, new-city*), separated by a fertile, lava-enriched plain (*Garden*).<sup>35</sup> Henry Roberts saw in this a great poisoned tidal wave coming from a pleasure resort near the new city.<sup>36</sup> Again, it has not been demonstrated that these prophecies refer uniquely to any of these events.

## WHAT SHOULD WE THINK?

Writing at about the time of Nostradamus, Italian scholar Francesco Guiciardini mocked the credulity of those who had willingly accepted Nostradamus's prophetic ability despite evidence to the contrary. He declared, "How happy are the astrologers! who are believed if they tell one truth to a hundred lies, while other people lose all credit if they tell one lie to a hundred truths."<sup>37</sup>

There is no need to be uncritical or uninformed regarding Nostradamus's enigmatic prophecies. Beyond failing the biblical test of 100 percent accuracy, most of Nostradamus's prophecies are vague and ambiguous. His reputation as an accurate prophet rests on spurious and unjustified interpretations. His prophecies pose no real

challenge to the uniqueness of biblical prophecy, which is specific and accurate; nor should they cause us to fear the future or doubt the sovereign control of God, who has revealed all we need to know about the future through the biblical prophets.

## NOTES

1. See Edgar Leoni, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* (New York: Bell, 1961), 57–75, for a thorough overview of commentators and critics up to 1961.
2. Manuela Dunn Mascetti and Peter Lorie, *Nostradamus: Prophecies for Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 16.
3. See Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 12–13, 164–202.
4. Leoni, Preface, par. 33, 131. All translations of Nostradamus are from Leoni unless otherwise noted. “Preface” and “Epistle” refer to the prose sections in the *Centuries*.
5. *Ibid.*, Epistle, par. 4, 327.
6. Eugene Parker, “Michel Nostradamus — Prophet” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1920), 63–64.
7. Peter Lemesurier, *The Nostradamus Encyclopedia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 138.
8. John Hogue, *Nostradamus: The Complete Prophecies* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1997), 11.
9. James Randi, *The Mask of Nostradamus: The Prophecies of the World’s Most Famous Seer* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993), 175.
10. *Ibid.*, 166–67.
11. Bardo Kidogo, *The Keys to the Predictions of Nostradamus* (New York: Foulsham, 1994), 97.
12. To calculate the number of possible combinations of a given number of letters such as in a word or name, start with the number of letters and multiply by the next decreasing number until you reach 1. NOSTRADAMUS has 11 letters, so the calculation would be  $11 \times 10 \times 9 \times 8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 = 39,916,800$ . There are many Web sites that can figure some of the anagrams of any word entered, e.g., <http://www.wordsmith.org/anagram/>.
13. Hogue, *Complete Prophecies*, 202.
14. *Ibid.*, 201–3.
15. John Hogue, *Nostradamus: The New Millennium* (London: Element, 2002), 175–90.
16. Jean Charles de Fontbrune, *Nostradamus: Countdown to Apocalypse*, trans. Alex Lykiard (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 33.
17. *Ibid.*, 155.
18. David Ovason, *The Secrets of Nostradamus: The Medieval Code of the Master Revealed in the Age of Computer Science* (London: Century, 1997), 1.
19. Ottavio Cesare Ramotti, *The Nostradamus Code* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1998), viii.
20. Fontbrune, quoted in Randi, 167.
21. Liberté E. LeVert [Everett Bleiler], *The Prophecies and Enigmas of Nostradamus* (Glen Rock, NJ: Firebell Books, 1979), 14.
22. Lemesurier, 142.
23. Leoni, Preface, par. 18, 127.
24. *Ibid.*, Preface, par. 33, 131.
25. *Ibid.*, Epistle, par. 6, 327.
26. *Ibid.*, Epistle, par. 9, 328.
27. *Ibid.*, Epistle, par. 11, 329.
28. Henry C. Roberts, *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus* (Jericho, NY: Nostradamus, 1979), 336.
29. “The History of the Pasteur Institute,” [www.pasteur.fr/english.html](http://www.pasteur.fr/english.html) (13 April 2002).
30. Hogue, *Complete Prophecies*, 87–88.
31. *Ibid.*, 88–89.
32. Roberts, 17.
33. *Ibid.*, 36.
34. Hogue, *New Millennium*, 7.
35. Leoni, 746.
36. Roberts, 328.
37. Randi, 87.