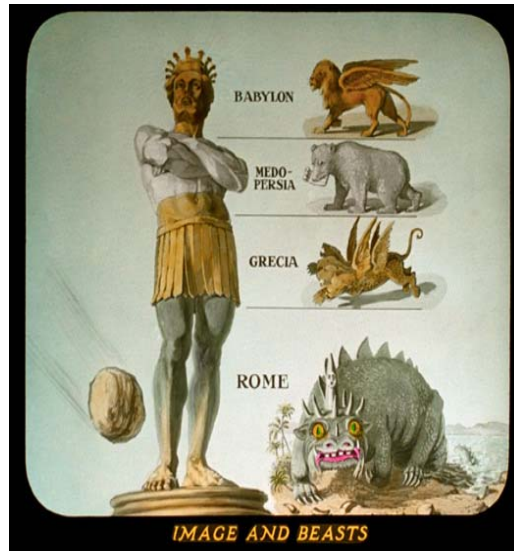


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Bible Prophecy *Can It Be Believed?*

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:20,21

The Bible is the most widely circulated book in the history of man. Over 150 million Bibles are sold each year. It is a book that many have died to defend and to have the right to read. Yet, it is also a book that today often sits on a table or a shelf and collects dust. Some perhaps do not read it because they have been convinced that they cannot understand it. Others might fear its message. Still others consider it a book of myths and contradictions not worthy of their time.

The Bible is unique among other ancient writings. Although it was written by many different writers over a period of more than 4,000 years, it tells a unified story. Of all the works of ancient writers, more manuscripts exist of the New Testament than of those of any other of the well-known authors including Plato, Herodotus, Aristotle and Homer—and the oldest Biblical manuscript found dates less than 100 years from the events recorded whereas the manuscript copies of other writers have a gap of more

than 500 years. The Old Testament books were carefully preserved by the Jews, often quoted by Jesus, and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1946, the oldest recovered manuscript dating back to the time of the second temple, confirmed the exactness of Hebrew text.

There appears to be strong evidence that God has preserved the Bible throughout the ages, but is the Bible what it purports to be—the inspired word of God? Is it truly an authoritative guide for our lives and a predictor of future events? Were its writers inspired by God to write what is found in the Bible?

The Book of Daniel confirms the truth of the divine inspiration of the Bible. Because Daniel's prophecies are so precise, so direct, so unambiguous in content, and because they predicted history in advance with such accuracy, there is only one of two ways in which they can be explained: either he was a divinely inspired prophet or

he was a fraud who wrote after the fact. Critics of the Bible argue the latter view. However, the Bible itself tells us that a matter can be established by the mouth of two independent witnesses. (Deuteronomy 19:15) In the Bible we are given two such witnesses concerning the prophet Daniel.

The first of these is the Prophet Ezekiel who wrote concerning punishments upon Israel if it should stray from God's law: "Even though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves, declares the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 14:14 —NASB)

The second witness is Jesus himself. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)" (Matthew 24:15) By this statement Jesus put his endorsement on Daniel and his prophecies.

So, what is it about Daniel's prophecies that creates such skepticism? It is the fact that Daniel not only described the rise of empires many hundreds of years future from his time, but also gave specific details about them and specifically named one that arose 200 years future to his lifetime.

Who was Daniel? Daniel was part of the Israelite nobility, taken as a teenager into Babylon in the first wave of conquest by Nebuchadnezzar in an effort to insure the submission of the king of Israel. Two other prophets were contemporary with Daniel: Ezekiel, who was older and was taken into captivity at a later time than Daniel, and Jeremiah, who remained in Israel.

Daniel, with three other young Hebrews, was being prepared by Nebuchadnezzar to serve in the court of Babylon. In the beginning of the book we are introduced to him and his companions and learn of their determination to be faithful to God. For this reason God favored them with special abilities and protection. (Daniel 1:8, 17)

In the second chapter of Daniel is the account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great statue. Its head was made of gold, its arms and breast of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet of iron and clay mixed together. In the dream a stone was cut out of a mountain without hands and struck the statue on its feet. The stone shattered the whole image and ground it into a

powder that was blown away by the wind. Then the stone grew into a great mountain that filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:1-45) Nebuchadnezzar called for his wise men to explain the meaning of his dream, but none were able to do so. He was ready to have them all put to death when Daniel intervened and offered Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation which had been given to him by God. (vss. 19-23,28)

Daniel explained to the king, "thou art this head of gold." (vs.38) In time another more inferior kingdom would arise, followed by a third kingdom that would extend its rule over the whole known earth. That one would be supplanted by yet a fourth kingdom that would be very strong, as shown by the iron. Its strength would later become mingled with clay and become partly strong and partly brittle, and it would be divided into ten divisions. (Daniel 2:36-43)

Historically, the Babylonian Empire was succeeded by Medo-Persia, followed by Greece, and then by Rome. In AD 539, the Roman Emperor Justinian gave temporal power to the Bishop of Rome. Thus Rome evolved into the Holy Roman Empire, a church state amalgam with the Emperor and the Pope vying with each other for political supremacy. The various kingdoms of Europe were the offshoots of this empire.

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream a "stone cut out of the mountain without hands," struck the image on its feet breaking it into pieces. (vss. 34, 44, 45) Until World War I the crowned heads of Europe considered that they ruled by divine right. The First World War ended reigns that had existed for hundreds of years without interruption. Then "the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." (vs.35) The stone represents the next universal kingdom, Christ's kingdom, which will be set up by the God of heaven, and which will last forever.

In the first year of Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's son, (chapter 7) Daniel was given a vision of these same empires but in the form of beasts, with further characteristics pictured. Again, after the fall of Babylon to Medo-Persia, Daniel received yet another vision of the same coming empires, again pictured as beasts, but showing other facets of their natures and this time Greece is named although there would be 200 years before it rose to power. This is found in Daniel 8:1-10, 20-24. In verse 16, we learn that the angel Gabriel revealed to Daniel the meaning of the vision. Daniel knew he was not able himself to interpret this dream nor to predict future events,

but acknowledged that it was God who revealed everything to him. (Daniel 2:19-23)

In Daniel 8:20-22, a ram with two horns pictures the joint kingdom of the Medes and Persians. The rough goat with a conspicuous horn that rushed at the ram and trampled him, Daniel identifies as Greece, and the horn, its first king. This horn is broken and four horns come up in its place. Looking back over history we see the accuracy of this prophecy as Greece under Alexander the Great overthrew the Medo-Persian Empire. But at the peak of his greatness, Alexander died leaving his empire to his four generals, also shown by the four heads on the leopard in the vision of the 7th chapter. At Daniel's time, 200 years before the rise of Greece under Alexander, there was nothing about the disorganized Greek provinces to hint of the coming greatness of the Grecian nation.

In chapter 11, Daniel gives another outline of history's events. Daniel's prophecy showed that three kings would arise in Persia, and that the fourth would have great riches and would oppose the realm of Greece. (vs.2) Cyrus was the first king of Persia, followed by his son Cambyses, then Smerdis, then Xerxes. It was Xerxes who gathered all his riches and fought a great battle against Greece at Marathon. The Persians were defeated by the Greeks but the Greeks went home. One hundred fifty years later, Greece came back against Persia to become the third universal empire under Alexander.

While all other empires were passed down whole from father to son, Alexander died childless so his empire was divided between his four generals. As Daniel 11:4 states, "And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity..." Such precision in prophecy is truly extraordinary! The prophecy goes on to describe what Bible commentators recognize as an historical narrative of events which involved Rome and Egypt.

Time prophecies in Daniel based upon the "day for a year" principle, (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6) accurately indicated the time of Messiah's first advent, and give clues to "the time of the end." (Daniel 9:25,26; 11:35,40; 12:9) In Daniel 12:3 our own day is described as a time when "many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased." He also wrote of a "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation." (vs1) Jesus also speaks of such a time. (Matthew 24:21,22) Our nuclear age truly fits his description.

The value of Bible prophecy was demonstrated by Jesus when he pointed two of his disciples to the testimony of the prophets concerning him when he appeared to them after his resurrection: "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27) In the Gospels we have numerous references to Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Jesus. (Matthew 2:5,6; 4:14-16; 12:17-21; 26:56; Luke 4:18-21; John 17:12; 19:24) The Apostles Peter and Paul used the Old Testament prophecies to preach Christ. (Acts 17:2,3; 2:16-21, 25-28; 3:22,23)

In our day we see the fulfillment of prophecies concerning the reestablishment of Israel as a nation. (Amos 9:11,14,15; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Jeremiah 30:3,7-11; 16:14-16) That a nation that went out of existence for nearly 2000 years, and whose people were scattered throughout the world, should be reborn in its own land is an event unparalleled in world history. That ancient writers predicted that it would happen should serve to increase our faith in the inspiration of the text.

God has provided for his people in wonderful ways to support and sustain them in this skeptical age. Every discovery of science is demonstrating the existence of intelligent design—God—and history and archeology are confirming the Bible records. There is ample evidence to believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

*"I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.
I say, 'My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please.'"
Isaiah 46:10(NIV)*

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