

An Amazing Bible Prophecy

THERE are many amazing prophecies in the Bible, but there's one that's in a class of its own. The prophecy contained in the first half of Daniel chapter 11 is unlike any other, because of the sheer volume of detail it contains.

The Bible's critics generally try to dismiss the fact that its prophecies come true as lucky coincidences, but when it comes to Daniel 11, this is just not plausible. So instead they suggest that the prophecy was written **after** the events it describes.

In this article we'll look at this remarkable prophecy. Then we'll look at the compelling evidence that it was actually written **before** the events.

Persian Kings

Daniel was a Jew who had spent most of his life in exile after the capture of his country by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He rose to high office in the Babylonian empire, and when Babylon itself was captured by the Persian king, Cyrus the Great, Daniel continued to be important.

The first verse of Daniel chapter 11 locates the prophecy in the 'first year of Darius the Mede'. Darius the Mede is thought to be a title given to Cyrus' general Gobryas, who Cyrus appointed as governor over the province of Babylon. The date is 536 BC, and the prophecy begins:

Now I will tell you the truth: Behold, three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all; by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece (Daniel 11:2).

Cyrus the Great was succeeded by three more kings: his son Cambyses, his other son Smerdis, another Darius, then Xerxes. Xerxes is notorious as being the richest of all the Persian monarchs. (Incidentally, he's thought to be the Ahasuerus of the Bible book of Esther.) He led an unsuccessful invasion of Greece, which was defeated in 480 BC, and this was the start of the decline of the Persian empire.

Greece and Beyond

Verse 3 whisks us forward 150 years to the climax of the Greek empire, the brief but spectacular reign of Alexander the Great, 336–323 BC.

Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not among his posterity nor according to his dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted, even for others besides these (v3–4).

Alexander died at the height of his power; he had two children but neither succeeded him. His dominion was quickly divided between four of his generals: Ptolemy



established himself in Egypt, commanding the southern section of Alexander’s empire; Cassander in Greece, Lysimachus in Asia Minor, and Seleucus in Syria.

Also the king of the South shall become strong, as well as one of his princes; and he shall gain power over him and have dominion. His dominion shall be a great dominion (v5).

Ptolemy established himself as a ruler in his own right and founded a kingdom in Egypt (he’s called ‘the king of the South’). Seleucus had started off as one of Ptolemy’s generals (‘princes’), but in the power struggle that followed Alexander’s death he established a rival dynasty. For a while his kingdom (the Seleucid kingdom) was stronger than the Ptolemaic kingdom. The other two generals waned, and by

280 BC the Middle East was dominated by these two rival kingdoms – the Ptolemies in Egypt, and the Seleucids in Asia Minor.

Detail Over a Long Period

From now on the prophecy refers to the Ptolemaic kings as the ‘kings of the south’ and the Seleucid kings as the ‘kings of the north’. The next 25 verses describe in vivid detail the 150 years’ power struggle between these two kingdoms, which often involved fighting over the land of Israel in the middle.

If you read through the prophecy it won’t make much sense, unless you’re familiar with that period of history! It is very detailed and specific as to what happened, but here’s a flavour of the way it works:

And at the end of some years they shall join forces, for the daughter of the king of the South shall go to the king of the North to make an agreement; but she shall not retain the power of her authority, and neither he nor his authority shall stand; but she shall be given up, with those who brought her, and with him who begot her, and with him who strengthened her in those times. But from a branch of her roots one shall arise in his place, who shall come with an army, enter the fortress of the king of the North, and deal with them and prevail (v6-7).

This is how these verses were fulfilled. In 252 BC, in a political move, Ptolemy II (king of the South) gave his daughter Berenice to Antiochus II (king of the North). He did so on the condition that Antiochus should divorce his existing wife, and that their two sons should lose any right to inheritance of the kingdom. That right would pass instead to any son that Antiochus and Berenice would have.

A son was born to Antiochus and Berenice, but shortly afterwards Ptolemy II died. Antiochus divorced Berenice and took back his first wife. She took her revenge by arranging the murder of Antiochus, Berenice, and their infant son.

In 246 BC Ptolemy III, the brother of Berenice, mounted a successful invasion of the Seleucid kingdom in revenge for his sister's murder.

The prophecy uses pictorial language and describes the events with undeniable accuracy. This is consistently the case as the chapter continues.

Refocus on Israel

Finally we come to the last big character of the prophecy, the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes. Verses 21 to 30 foretell in detail how Antiochus ascended to the throne by intrigue and diplomacy, acquired the provinces of Syria and Israel by political manoeuvring and bribery, performed military exploits, and finally (verse 30) attacked Jerusalem. Here he desecrated the temple and commenced active efforts to turn the Jews away from their religion.

It's now around 170 BC and the time of the Maccabees, a Jewish resistance movement which achieved a degree of independence for Israel for a while before it was absorbed into the Roman empire – which is how we see the nation at the beginning of the New Testament when Jesus is born.

The Evidence

At this point the prophecy becomes less focused, and so the Bible's critics seize on this. They say it is because the book of Daniel was actually written sometime around 165 BC at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes – they say it was a patriotic national epic designed to bolster the Maccabean resistance movement, written in the style of a prophecy. Therefore, the critics argue, the detailed prophecies in Daniel 11 are actually accounts of what's already happened, dressed up to look like prophecy.

So let's look at the evidence. Was the book of Daniel really written in the late Sixth

Century BC, before the events it describes, in which case it simply has to be the work of God – no one could have foretold those 400 years of history in such detail. Or is it a clever but fraudulent historic epic?

1. First Century Use

The Jews in the First Century CE accepted Daniel as genuine. For example, Jesus mentions Daniel a number of times, and the First Century Jewish historian Josephus actually makes a specific reference to Daniel 11:3. The Jews were very careful and reverent with their scriptures. They believed that the book of Daniel was written by a real prophet 600 years previously – it’s difficult to imagine that they would take as genuine a false document that was only 200 years old.

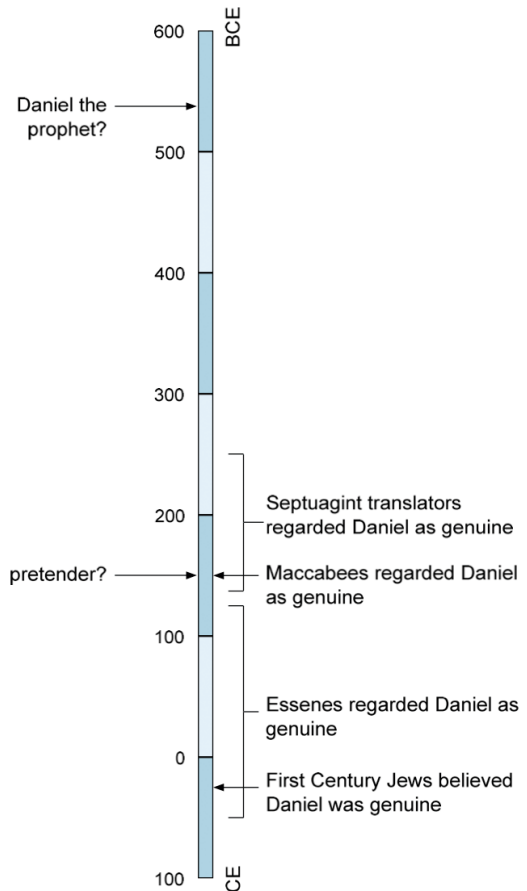
2. The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of manuscripts that were hidden on the shore of the Dead Sea by a sect of Jewish scribes called the Essenes in the First Century CE and rediscovered in the 1940s. There are fragments of eight separate Daniel manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls. These Daniel manuscripts have been dated – the earliest

is believed to have been written in the late second century BC.

Among the other scrolls found in the caves is a document that has been dated to around 100 BC which refers to Daniel’s writings as scripture.

Who wrote Daniel?



So, suppose the book of Daniel is actually a fraud, perpetrated probably within the lifetime of some of the scribes in the community. They must have been very careless to believe it to be authentic and gather numerous manuscripts of it. Actually, what we know about the Jewish scribes is that they were obsessively cautious – they were definitely not careless.

3. Earlier Adoption

The book of Daniel was accepted as scripture during the Maccabean era (164–63 BC). It is mentioned in the contemporary First Book of Maccabees. Moreover, it appears that at this time the book of Daniel was accepted by Jewish communities both in Babylon and in Israel, and by the opposing factions of Pharisees and Sadducees. How could a fraudulent book immediately become universally accepted as genuine scripture, virtually as soon as it was written?

4. The Septuagint

The Septuagint is a translation of the Old Testament of the Bible into Greek, which was made in Egypt between the mid Third Century and the mid Second Century BC. Interestingly, the text of Daniel in the Septuagint is of poor quality – it varies from the majority of other Daniel texts, and contains extra sections. So again, the critics would have us believe that a fraudulent piece of patriotic exaggeration was mistaken by Jewish scribes for genuine scripture, as soon as it was written – and

it had already been copied so many times that the best manuscript they could find was one that had been corrupted!

Surely the reasonable assumption is that Daniel chapter 11 is what it claims to be – a prophecy, written before the events!

Why this Special Prophecy?

It's an intriguing question – why did God give to His people this phenomenal prophecy about the course of Mediterranean politics over the two hundred years from Alexander the Great to Antiochus Epiphanes?

The time period which the prophecy occupies is after the finish of the Bible's Old Testament, and before the start of the New Testament with the miraculous events around the birth of Christ. This period between the two Testaments was a grim time in Israel's history, when marauding armies repeatedly conquered and carved up their land and it might have seemed as though God had abandoned them.

Perhaps this prophecy was given simply to reassure them that God Himself was still watching over the things that happened. Certainly as we read the end of Daniel 11 and into chapter 12, we find ultimate reassurance that God's Kingdom will come.

Whatever the reason for the prophecy, as we've seen it provides a hugely compelling case for the divine authorship of the Bible.

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