FULFILLED PROPHECY

God's Challenge to the Skeptic

Agnostics say the trustworthiness of God's Word is at stake. The Bible either stands or falls according to the fulfillment of the remarkable prophecies it boldly makes.

Here is a challenge to the unbeliever and the skeptic! God says that He can and does foretell the future.

The Bible is about one-third prophecy. If the Bible is truly the inspired Word of God, every one of those prophecies must have come to pass just as predicted or must now be awaiting accurate fulfillment.

Three of the most remarkable Bible prophecies concern two ancient leaders of world empires and a Middle Eastern king. All three instances are well documented in the historical record. These three examples are representative of the absolutely sure word that is Bible prophecy.

Cyrus, ruler of Persia

The first example is that of Cyrus the Persian, the first ruler of the Persian empire, who lived in the sixth century B.C. The stories of Cyrus' birth and youth as recorded in the histories of the time are so remarkable that they seem almost like children's stories. Herodotus, the Greek historian of the fifth century B.C., recounts one of these stories, here summarized.

Astyages, the son of Cyaxeres, king of the Medes, had a daughter, Mandane. He became fearful because he dreamed that this daughter would bear a child who would rule in his place, not only his kingdom but all of Asia. He wanted to prevent this at all cost.

When Mandane had her first child, a son, Astyages instructed one of his trusted servants, Harpagus, to have the child killed. Harpagus, not wanting to do such a horrible thing, entrusted the terrible responsibility to Mitradates, a herdsman. Mitradates, on finding that his own child had just been stillborn, took and reared Mandane's son as his own. When

Persian emperor Cyrus the Great. Isaiah foretold, almost two centuries in advance, his reconstruction of the Temple!

the boy was about 10 years old his true identity became known.

His grandfather, Astyages the king, now accepted him and in due time this boy, Cyrus, ascended the throne in about 558 B.C. By about 549 B.C. Cyrus had become king over all Media, and by about 548 B.C. he ruled all Persia. He conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. and the Persian empire succeeded the Babylonian empire.

This story would not be so remarkable by itself, but predictions about Cyrus are included in Bible prophecy. You will find these predictions in the last verses of Isaiah 44 and the first part of Isaiah 45.

"That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44:28).

Isaiah gave this prophecy *almost two centuries* before Cyrus made his proclamation about rebuilding God's Temple in Jerusalem!

"Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah" (Ezra 1:2).

Not only did God name Cyrus long before he was born, He saw to it that Satan did not succeed in having him put to death by his grandfather! He also saw that Cyrus issued the proclamation to rebuild the Temple, as God said he would! But there is more.

The two-leaved gates

"Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the *two leaved gates;* and the gates shall not be shut" (Isa. 45:1).

Isaiah prophesied that God would make it possible for Cyrus to conquer the many kingdoms that ultimately made up his empire. Also, the "two leaved gates" would not be shut or locked. This refers to the remarkable way in which Cyrus was able to capture the city (and consequently the empire) of Babylon.

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The large city of Babylon, with its massive high walls, appeared impregnable from the outside. When Cyrus' armies encamped around the city, the Babylonians only laughed! They could survive a siege of years.

Unbeknownst to the Babylonians, however, Cyrus' men were able to divert most of the Euphrates River, which normally flowed through massive gates into the city. Cyrus also had gotten a spy into the city, who on the appropriate night had the inner gates along the river unlocked. With the lowered river level, the army was able to invade the city by way of the river route and through these gates, taking the Babylonians by complete surprise. Part of the remarkable fulfillment of the prophecy about the "two leaved gates" is described in Daniel 5, the rest in various secular histories.

Alexander's conquest

The second prophetic personality we will consider is Alexander of Macedon, also known as Alexander the Great. He was the first king of the Graeco-Macedonian empire. Upon the death of his father Philip in 336 B.C., he ascended the Greek throne, being only about 20 years old.

Two years later he entered Asia with about 30,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. He put to flight superior Persian forces at the battle of Granicus and then in October, 333 B.C., he faced Darius III, the Persian king, who had an army 10 times greater than his own. This battle of Issus won him an overwhelming victory. Alexander later won a conclusive victory over Persia at the Battle of Arbela on Oct. 1, 331 B.C., even though Darius III fielded an army of more than one million men.

This young man went on to extend his empire to the Indus River. He died of fever when he was less than 34 years of age, after a reign of only about 13 years.

The prophecies about this man are found in Daniel, chapters 8 and 11. Part of this prophecy states: "And as I was considering, behold, an he goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. And he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran unto him in the fury of his power" (Dan. 8:5-6).

The "notable horn" represented Alexander (the first king of Grecia, verse 21) who conquered the "ram" (the king of Persia, verse 20). Alexander is also referred to in Daniel 11:3-4.

This prophecy was given by Daniel in the sixth century B.C., but its fulfillment by Alexander did not occur until about two centuries later, in the fourth century B.C.!

Jews protected

An interesting sidelight of this prophecy concerns the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish people there.

On Alexander's drive southward, after his conquest of Syria, he bypassed Jerusalem, continuing along the seacoast to Gaza, which he took in the fall of 332 B.C. After this he headed with his armies toward Jerusalem.

He had previously written Jaddua, the Jewish leader and high priest, requiring certain provisions. Jaddua replied that he had given an oath to King Darius of Persia that he could not violate as long as Darius lived. This greatly angered Alexander.

"Now Alexander, when he had taken Gaza, made haste to go up to Jerusalem; and Jaddua the high

priest, when he heard that, was in an agony, and under terror, as not knowing how he should meet the Macedonians, since the king was displeased at his foregoing disobedience" (Josephus, *Ant.*, Book XI, Chapter VIII, section 4).

Jaddua then exhorted the people to pray and offer sacrifices to God, whereupon God told him in a dream how to receive Alexander and his armies. Here is how the momentous meeting took place.

"Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head, having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the high priest."

Alexander then said: "I saw this very person in a dream, in this very habit, when I was at Dios in Macedonia, who, when I was considering with myself how I might obtain the dominion of Asia, exhorted me to make no delay . . . And when the book of Daniel was shewed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended" (ibid., section 5).

As a result of these events, Alexander dealt kindly with the Jews. This interesting story gives a little more detail on how God brings about the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, sometimes in remarkable ways.

An abomination in God's Temple

The last event we will consider relates to Antiochus Epiphanes, who was king of Syria during the second century B.C.

After Alexander's death his empire was divided into four kingdoms (Dan. 7:6, 8:8, 22, 11:4). One of these four kingdoms was that of Syria. Here is what Daniel says about Antiochus:

"And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land. And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them. Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered" (Dan. 8:9-12).

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This prophecy was fulfilled in a terrible way. Antiochus took over Jerusalem and the Temple. He stopped the daily sacrifices, burned copies of the Hebrew Bible and forced pagan religion on the Jews.

This time has rarely, if ever, been equaled in the history of Israel or Judah. Not only were the people butchered, even fried in huge pans, but Antiochus personally entered into the Holy of Holies in God's Temple and took away the gold vessels in the Temple. He erected a "Greek altar on the site of the old one on 25 December [sic] 167" (*The New Bible Dictionary*, article "Antiochus").

Finally Judas Maccabaeus, his brothers and the Jews were able to recapture Jerusalem three years later, cleanse the sanctuary (Temple) and reinstitute the worship of God.

It should be noted here, however, that this prophecy of Daniel 8:9-12 is dual. Antiochus fulfilled it in type, but it is even now awaiting a much more terrible fulfillment in this end time!

Prophecy for today

These three examples show that God not only knows the end from the beginning and has predicted the future, but He also sees to it that the prophecies are fulfilled.□