

Prophecy is Proof: Time Tells

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“Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” Kids love to sing this song and we love to hear them sing it. But in a few years, those kids go to college and hear a professor say, “You can't believe it just because the Bible tells you so.” Or, they may see something online that leads them to question the Book they've carried to church all those years. Yes, the Bible says Jesus loves me. But is the Bible true?

Can we know the Bible is the Word of God? If so, how? Christians are facing this question more and more in this postmodern, skeptical age. Many in this generation have declared war on the Bible. Atheists and skeptics ridicule the Bible. But the attacks are not just from the secular world. Many religious people try to undermine the inspiration of the Scriptures. Unbelieving Jews, Muslims and liberal theologians in seminaries and in Bible colleges are on a mission to destroy faith in the Bible. Casual conversations reveal this trend. Surveys confirm it. Online videos and articles attempt to destroy the Bible.

Today more than ever we must defend the Bible. That's why we're beginning a study of the strongest evidence of the divine inspiration of the Bible. It is prophecy, or, more precisely, *predictive* prophecies in the Bible, predictions of the future that are so sure only God could have made them. The word prophecy in the Bible is used in at least two different ways. In a general sense, the word prophecy simply means revelation from God. Usually, that is the meaning in the Old Testament. It can be about the past, the present, or the future. But it sometimes means a prediction about the future. That's the idea we are looking at in these lessons.

A biblical prophecy is not a simply a prediction, however. People make all kinds of predictions about football games, the stock market, or the weather. These predictions may be right or wrong. Even those who seem to guess right much of the time always get it wrong sometimes. But Bible prophecies are not just right *most* of the time. The Israelites didn't trust the Old Testament prophets because 70 or 80% of their predictions came true. Prophecies were right 100% of the time because they were from God, not men.

A prophecy in the Bible is certainly not a hunch or feeling about something in the future. Sometimes we say, “I had a feeling this would happen.” But even if it *did* happen, that doesn't mean that God sent us a warning about it. Let's be honest and ask this question: how many times have you had a feeling that something would happen and it *did not* happen? So what does all this prove? It simply shows that our feelings are not reliable in this matter. The fulfillment of Bible prophecies was not a coincidence that happened after a feeling of premonition.

A prophecy of the future in the Bible is not merely a general promise God made. It is more than that. For instance, the Lord promised that the forces of nature will continue as long as the world stands. That promise of the Creator will hold true in spite of the predictions and warnings of climate change alarmists. God said, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22). But that is a promise, not a prophecy. A prophecy in Scripture is a prediction about something more specific.

So what is a *biblical* prophecy? How is prophecy in the Scriptures different from so-called prophecies? What are the *essential aspects of genuine prophecy*?

First of all, prophecy was *revealed by God to man*. Only God can see the future, and man can't know anything about it unless God tells him. The Lord said, “Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done” (Isa. 46:9-10). The

book of Isaiah is full of prophecies—prophecies about individuals and nations and especially prophecies about Jesus and the church.

God knows the future. He and only He can tell man what will happen. The Bible speaks of “the foreknowledge of God” in I Peter 1:2. Acts 2:23 says Jesus was “delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God.” Every prophecy is both a manifestation and proof of His foreknowledge.

This is really the issue at stake when people question the prophecies of the Bible. They are not simply objecting to statements made in the Bible, they are questioning the One who gave them—God. If God knows the future, it is a simple thing for Him to tell us about it— when He so chooses.

Skeptics and even some Christians stumble at this point. The most common question is, “How can God know the future without making it happen? If He knows the future, then our destiny is set and we have no choice.” Some of the brightest theologians have tried to explain this and have made some good points. But in the end, we have to admit that this is one of those things that we simply cannot comprehend. And yet, our inability to explain something to our satisfaction is not proof that it can’t happen. Other questions are just as difficult. For instance, the Bible also teaches that God knows our thoughts (Psa. 139:2; Luke 16:15). Can we comprehend that? Or, consider the fact that God is eternal (Rom. 1:20); He “inhabits eternity,” not time (Isa. 57:15). Do we deny that God is eternal because we can’t comprehend it? How can we who live in a realm of space and time grasp the concept of God who is pure spirit? And, who can fathom the fact that God created the world out of *nothing* (Heb. 11:3)?

I’m not trying to prove anything to skeptics with these examples; at this point, I’m applying them to Christians. Obviously, the mere fact that the Bible states these things is not proof to a skeptic, but it does show that Christians shouldn’t deny something just because they can’t understand how it can be. I am simply saying that if Christians believe these other things without understanding them, then why should they refuse to believe in the foreknowledge of God because they cannot comprehend it? When Christians say they believe the Bible and then deny God’s foreknowledge, they are not consistent, because prophecy *is* the foreknowledge of God at work! If God doesn’t know the future, then there is no such thing as prophecy.

So the first characteristic of prophecy is that the all-knowing God who sees the future revealed it to someone who was usually a prophet. Then, so that it would count as evidence for others besides the prophet, the prophecy was made public. It had to be spoken or written by the prophet, and in many cases both. In order for the prophecy to be permanent proof of God speaking, it had to be preserved for future generations. This is why prophecy was recorded in the Scriptures.

When we use prophecy as proof of the divine inspiration of the Bible, we must be able to prove that it was revealed and written before it was fulfilled. In the case of Old Testament prophecies about Jesus and the church, the facts are clear. The Old Testament books were already an accepted body of books before Jesus was even born! Here is some of the proof of the age of the Old Testament. It is literally very OLD.

- **The Apocrypha** is a collection of books written by Jews between the Old Testament and the New Testament. They are not inspired. They have no marks of divine inspiration. In fact, one of them—the book of I Maccabees—says that *prophecy had ceased* in Israel when it was written. I Maccabees 9:27 says, “There was great distress in Israel, the likes of which had not been since the days when the prophets ceased to appear among them.” So this book admits that prophetic activity had “ceased.” This implies that the books of the Old Testament had

long before been completed and accepted among the Jews! I Maccabees was written over 100 years before Jesus was born.

- The same book of I Maccabees records the exploits of the Syrian ruler Antiochus IV or Antiochus Epiphanes. This evil king sent his soldiers into Jerusalem to punish the Jews. It says, “And when they had rent in pieces the **books of the law** which they found, they burnt them with fire. And whosoever was found with any **book of the testament**, or if any consented to the law, the king’s commandment was, that they should put him to death” (I Maccabees 1:56-57). This happened in 167 A.D.
- The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures. It began as a work of Jewish scribes living in Alexandria, Egypt in the third century B.C. This means the Old Testament books must have been in existence prior to the time this translation was made.
- One of the Dead Sea Scrolls is known as the “Isaiah Scroll.” It is a manuscript of the book of Isaiah that appears to date back to around 100 B.C. And, Isaiah is a critical book in the study of prophecy.
- The Jewish historian Josephus, who lived from 37-100 A.D., affirmed that the books of the Apocrypha were not inspired like the Old Testament books were. He said regarding these Scriptures, “During so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them or take anything from them” (*Against Apion*, 1.8).

So the evidence is clear: the prophecies of Psalms and Isaiah and other Old Testament books were not forged by Jesus’ disciples. They were not written after He died. They were recorded and studied for centuries before He entered the world as the Messiah!

Skeptics, unbelieving Jews and higher critics cannot refute this evidence. They do try to push the date of these OT books forward as much as possible. In other words, they often say that Moses didn't write much of the Pentateuch, or that Isaiah didn't write all of the book called Isaiah.

Now their efforts to re-date these books are futile because the evidence is against their claims. But my point is this: even IF the latest dates they ascribe to these books are true—for instance, even IF the book of Isaiah was mostly written in the fifth century B.C.—still, the prophecies in it and in other Old Testament books are centuries in advance of Christ and His church! Even the most liberal dating of the Old Testament puts these prophecies long before their fulfillment!

These critics know they can’t undermine biblical prophecy by denying their antiquity. That’s why many of them say, “Yes, the statements you call prophecies in the Old Testament were made long before the time of Christ. But those statements are not really predictions like you claim.” In other words, since they can’t disprove *when* the prophecies were written, they just deny what they *mean*. We will look at that line of attack on biblical prophecy in another lesson. For now I am simply showing that the antiquity of these prophecies is an established fact.

An important aspect of true prophecy regards the *circumstances* of how it was made and how it was fulfilled. The circumstances must have been such that it would have been impossible for the prophet to **know**, by his own investigation, that the prophesied event would occur, or, to **cause** it to happen by his own power. The prophecy was beyond the calculation or orchestration of the prophet.

Though it’s not necessary, a large amount of *time* between the making of a prophecy and its fulfillment makes this impossibility even more obvious. As we will see, biblical prophecies were delivered hundreds of years before they were fulfilled.

To show the weight of this evidence more clearly, let's consider a few Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillment:

- *Psalm 22*—This is one of the most amazing prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament. In this Psalm, David wrote the very words later quoted by Jesus: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” He even gave the words that Jesus’ enemies said to Him as He hung on the cross: “He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!” Psalm 22 is the prophecy that says, “They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones” and “They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.” These are amazing details. But at this point, we're not looking at the *details*. We'll discuss that aspect of prophecy in the next lesson. Right now we're looking at the *date* of this Psalm. And that time was about 1,000 B.C.—1,000 years before Jesus was born!
- *Isaiah 53* is probably the clearest example of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. This is the chapter that is quoted in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John because it foretells one who “is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (v. 3); one who “was wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities” (v.5). This is the section the Ethiopian eunuch was reading in Acts chapter 8 which says, “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (v. 7). This fascinating prophecy ends with these words: “He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (v. 12). Again, we'll go into these details and their fulfillment in Christ later. What we're establishing now is that this was written too far in advance of the life of Christ to be guesswork. Isaiah lived and wrote this book over 700 years before Jesus lived!
- *Micah 5:2* is another breathtaking prophecy: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” Like Isaiah, Micah lived over 700 years before the birth of Christ! How could anyone brush these prophecies aside and say they were just coincidences?

Furthermore, how could the prophet Micah or anyone who read his words have *caused* Jesus to be born in Bethlehem? In a similar way, the Jewish leaders didn't put Jesus to death because they thought they were fulfilling prophecy. Jewish leaders in Jesus' day were not instructed or incited by Isaiah 53. They were not even aware that they were fulfilling prophecy (I Cor. 2:8; Acts 13:27). Thus, the fulfilling of prophecies was outside of the prophets' hands, and, outside of the ability of anyone who tried to stage their fulfillment.

Another way to appreciate the strength of this evidence is to compare biblical prophecies with predictions made in other religions. For instance, the book *Doctrine and Covenants* of the Mormon Church contains a so-called prophecy given by Joseph Smith. In Section 87 of Doctrine and Covenants, there is an alleged prediction about the Civil War or the War Between the States in America: “*1 Verily, thus saith the Lord concerning the wars that will shortly come to pass, beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina, which will eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls; 2 And the time will come that war will be poured out upon all nations, beginning at this place. 3 For behold, the Southern States shall be divided against the Northern States, and the Southern States will call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, as it is called, and they shall also call upon other nations, in order to defend themselves against other nations; and then war shall be poured out upon all nations. 4 And it shall come to pass, after*

many days, slaves shall rise up against their masters, who shall be marshaled and disciplined for war.”

The heading of this section of Doctrine and Covenants reads: *“Revelation and prophecy on war, given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, at or near Kirtland, Ohio, December 25, 1832. At this time disputes in the United States over slavery and South Carolina's nullification of federal tariffs were prevalent. Joseph Smith's history states that 'appearances of troubles among the nations' were becoming 'more visible' to the Prophet 'than they had previously been since the Church began her journey out of the wilderness.'”*

Mormons tell us that this is proof that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. How did Joseph Smith know that the Civil War would begin in South Carolina?

The truth is, this so-called prophecy was delivered only 30 years before that war began! And, this section admits that this was common knowledge!

The truth is, Joseph Smith was just repeating what he had heard. Newspapers in his day were reporting that trouble was brewing in America. On July 14, 1832, five months before Joseph Smith supposedly received this prophecy, Congress passed a tariff act which South Carolina rejected. The tension was so bad for years that many people inside and even outside the United States feared that war between the Northern states and the Southern states was inevitable. Joseph Smith didn't reveal anything about the future. He simply recorded what was unfolding in his time. Old Testament prophecies, on the other hand, were far removed in time from their fulfillment.

So far we have looked at two aspects of this element in prophecy. First, we have to know that the prophecy was actually made before the predicted event occurred. Second, the prophet must have been unable to know by human means that the predicted event would occur or to cause it to happen by his own power. To make this extra clear for us, God often placed a significant amount of time between the making of the prophecy and the fulfilling of it.

This does not mean that Jews had to wait until the time of Christ to know that the Scriptures were inspired of God. For instance, consider a Jew who lived before the New Testament era, let's say, in the year 200 B.C. Could he know that the Scriptures we know as the Old Testament were the inspired Word of God—before all the prophecies of Jesus were fulfilled? Yes he could.

Let's go back before that time. The Israelites saw the miracles of God especially from the time of Moses. No one who saw the miracles of Moses could have honestly questioned that the law he gave was from God. Miracles confirmed the spoken and the written Word of God. Though there was a greater concentration of miracles in the time of Moses than any time afterward until the coming of Jesus, there was enough evidence to prove that the prophets spoke from God and the books they wrote were inspired.

Some of the evidence of God's words and His works came through human testimony—not hearsay, but trustworthy testimony from verifiable witnesses. Even people outside the Jewish nation heard and accepted this evidence. Rahab said that the people of Jericho had heard of the great works God did for Israel and that was why their hearts melted (Josh. 2:9-10). If Gentiles could examine this evidence and come to the right conclusion, then how much more could God's chosen nation do so? How far and how long this testimony was sufficient proof after the events occurred is hard to determine, but it was part of the evidence.

Some of the proof that the words of the prophets were inspired of God came from prophecies that were made and fulfilled in the lifetime of those who heard them. These were short-range prophecies in contrast to long-range prophecies. For instance, Joseph foretold what

would happen in the lives of individuals like the butler and the baker; he also foretold the coming famine in Egypt and surrounding nations (Gen. 40-45). Daniel foretold the demise of Belshazzar and was there when it happened (Dan. 5). Jeremiah prophesied the death of the false prophet Hananiah which occurred the same year (Jer. 28). The fulfillment of these predictions was proof that these men spoke from God.

But I would suggest that prophecies that were fulfilled after a much longer amount of time are an even stronger proof of their inspiration.

Moses also gave a test to distinguish genuine prophesy from false prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:21-22: "And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?'--when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." This was not the only test of a false prophet. They could know a man was a false prophet when he contradicted the law of God, for instance. But the test given by Moses in Deuteronomy 18 was one way they could know.

There was also, as Josephus writes, and as the First book of Maccabees shows, a *line or a succession of prophets* in the Old Testament. That's why I Maccabees 9:27 talks about a time when there was not a prophet seen in Israel—in other words, there was a time when prophetic activity ceased in Israel and there were no more prophets. But during the time from Moses to the last inspired writings in the Old Testament, there was a continuation of prophets and their Scriptures in Israel.

But there was more. Let's go back to the Jew living in 200 B.C. There were no prophets or miracles at that time. So, could he know the Scriptures were inspired? If prophecies of Jesus hadn't been fulfilled at that time, then how could he have known that the Old Testament was written by inspiration of God?

There were other marks of inspiration in the Old Testament besides prophecy. Interestingly, today when we point to proofs of the inspiration of the Bible, what do we usually mention? One evidence is scientific foreknowledge, and we usually go to the Old Testament for examples. The knowledge of biblical writers was far in advance of modern scientific discovery—so far in advance, in fact, that the statements they made must have come from God. For instance, the OT mentions the "springs of the sea" in Job 38:16. Job wrote about these fountains on the deep ocean floor thousands of years before they were directly observed in 1973. But what about people who lived before these discoveries? What about someone who lived, let's say, in the year 1,000 A.D.? You couldn't tell him to believe in the Bible because of this case of scientific foreknowledge. Or what about the Jew living in 200 B.C.?

You see, the use of scientific foreknowledge as evidence of the inspiration of the Bible, for the most part at least, is by its very nature of relatively recent origin. We could say a case could have been made by Jews living between the testaments based on the evidences of the unity of the Bible, the unparalleled moral standard of the Bible, and other marks or indications of the divine origin of Scripture. But the most important evidence for anyone living after prophecy had ceased in Israel in this 400-year period was the *fulfillment of prophecies in that span of time*—not prophecies of the Messiah, but inspired predictions about *nations and rulers*. That's where the book of Daniel comes in.

The continuity of this evidence of divine revelation depends to a large extent on the book of Daniel. That is why this book is so pivotal in Scripture. Before the prophets ceased in Israel, Jews could know that men like Jeremiah and Daniel were prophets; they could know that writers after the return from Babylonian captivity like Malachi and others were men of God. When this

latter group of inspired men died we don't know. So there was the presence of some of these later men of God that extended to somewhere around 400 B.C.; and then there was the testimony of firsthand witnesses of their words and work that passed down perhaps further.

But there was one special means of divine authentication of the OT Scriptures that would unfold during this 400-year period. That evidence was the prophecies that were written in the book of Daniel that were fulfilled in this period. That is why the book of Daniel is such a key link in the chain of evidence for the inspiration of the Old Testament. There were no prophecies *delivered* in the intertestamental period, but some were *fulfilled* in those centuries.

Let's look at a few examples in Daniel. The book of Daniel is a remarkable book about God's knowledge of the future and His power over nations. This insight begins in chapter 2 with the dream of king Nebuchadnezzar. He saw a great image whose head was of gold; the arms and chest were of silver; the waist and thighs were of bronze and its legs were made of iron. In the interpretation Daniel told the king, "You are this head of gold" (Dan. 2:38). So the gold clearly represents the Babylonian empire.

Then Daniel, guided by God Himself, reveals the fate of the most powerful nations on earth in just a few words. He said, "But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others" (Dan. 2:39-40). The second kingdom represented in the dream by silver was the Medo-Persian and later just the Persian Empire. We see that transfer of power in Daniel 5 and in secular history. We also read about the kingdom of bronze in Daniel 8 which is identified as the kingdom of Greece. The next empire was strong as iron and one that would crush everything in its path. The only empire that fits that description in that timeframe, and in terms of sheer power, was the ancient Roman Empire.

That is a general sketch of the future of these civilizations. In the chapters after Daniel 2, God "zooms in" closer and closer and gives a more detailed look at these future transitions in political power. These chapters reveal how He would work out His plan for His people and for His spiritual kingdom in spite of the conflict between world powers.

In chapter 7, Daniel repeats the succession of empires revealed in chapter two. But this time he uses different images: Babylon is the lion with eagles' wings. Persia is the devouring bear. Greece is swift leopard with four wings of a bird. The fourth, the mighty Roman Empire to come, is the beast which would be "dreadful and terrible" and "exceedingly strong" with huge iron teeth that broke to pieces and trampled everything in its path (Dan. 7:4-7). But this image is not just a repetition of the superpowers in chapter two. It gives more insight into the nature of the kingdom God would set up and the exploits of one of the rulers of Rome in Daniel 7:8-27.

Then in Daniel 8 God focuses even closer on the transition from Persian supremacy to Greek domination. The details about these two civilizations are astonishing. The chapter begins with these words,

"1 In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me--to me, Daniel--after the one that appeared to me the first time. **(The vision that he saw the first time is the one in chapter 7—the vision of the four beasts which represented four empires. Chapter 7 was in the first year of king Belshazzar's reign, and this chapter is in the third year).**

2 I saw in the vision, and it so happened while I was looking, that I was in Shushan, the citadel, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision that I was by the River Ulai.

3 Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. **(There is no question about what this ram represents. We have the interpretation straight from the angel Gabriel later in this chapter. In verse 20 Gabriel told Daniel, “The ram which you saw, having the two horns--they are the kings of Media and Persia.” One of the horns was higher than the other; Gabriel said it came up last. The Persian element of this kingdom became more prominent in the end).**

4 I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great.” **(For a time, the Persians were invincible. No army could defeat them. The Persian military conquered at will in any direction they chose. But all armies eventually face an enemy who is stronger, and this is what happened to the Persians).**

5 And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. **(There is also no doubt about who this goat represents. Gabriel said in verse 21, “And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king.” In this *vision*, this goat—the army of Greece—came from the *west*. That corresponds geographically to Persia which was to the east of Greece. The male goat in verse 5—the Greek army—“came across the surface of the whole earth.” That is, the army was very large, well-trained, and highly motivated. And, the Greek army moved swiftly—“without touching the ground”—so quickly that it was like they lunged through the air when they struck. Verse 5 also says this goat had a “notable horn between his eyes.” Gabriel also tells us who that horn represents: “The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king” (v. 21). The king who led the Greek army against the Persians was none other than Alexander the Great. Here, in this chapter, Daniel foretold the conquest of Alexander over the Persians—over 200 years before it happened! That is in sharp contrast to Joseph Smith’s so-called prophecy of the American Civil War beginning in South Carolina. Alexander is called the “first king.” He was the first king of the consolidated empire of Macedon and the rest of Greece. Daniel prophesied that he would be a “notable” ruler— a great leader, especially in terms of military strategy and courage.**

6 Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river, and ran at him with furious power.

7 And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. **(It is an established fact of history that Alexander the Great led his army to defeat the Persians who were under Darius III in 331 B.C. Alexander was a bold and daring leader, and Daniel’s statement that he “ran at him with furious power” and that he “was moved against him with rage” describe well what Alexander did. His father Philip of Macedon had been assassinated before he could lead an assault against the Persians, and his son was determined to finish what his father had started. Alexander defeated the much larger Persian army. As Daniel said, no one was able to help the Persians avoid this calamity.**

8 Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven.

(Alexander became “very great”—in power, fame, military achievements, and wealth. He conquered many nations and secured a vast amount of territory. Then “when he became

strong,” in the prime of his life, “the large horn was broken”—he died at the young age of 32 in 323 B.C. He had no son to be heir to the throne. Alexander the Great is still one of the most notable figures in history, but Bible readers will remember him as Alexander the goat. Because he had no son to take his place, there was bound to be division over who would lead this powerful empire next. This happened just as Daniel prophesied. “Four notable ones” arose in the place of Alexander “toward the four winds of heaven,” that is, in all directions of the vast empire he had established. Those four notable ones were four of his generals—Ptolemy, Seleucus, Cassandra, and Lysimachus—who struggled for power until the mighty Greek nation divided. The two main divisions were the Ptolemaic empire in Egypt and the larger Seleucid empire in the north. Most history books focus on Alexander; but Daniel, who was inspired of God, had far more to say about a much less famous king that arose out of the Seleucid empire.)

9 And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land.

(This little horn was Antiochus IV who, as we have seen, named himself Antiochus Epiphanes, The Illustrious One. The Jews nicknamed him Antiochus Epimenes, The Madman, and for good reason. He was a shrewd and ruthless politician who became a very powerful ruler of the Seleucid empire.)

10 And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. **(This is symbolic language. To grow up to, or to exalt oneself to heaven doesn't mean that the ruler went to heaven where God is. It means that, in his mind, because of his pride, the ruler is exalting himself to heaven. This kind of language is common in the Old Testament. For instance, in a passage mistakenly applied by many Bible readers to Satan, the king of Babylon said in his heart, “I will ascend into heaven” (Isa. 14:13). The host of heaven in Daniel 8:10 is not God’s host which would be angels, but great earthly powers of other nations that Antiochus overthrew. He cast down some of the stars to the ground and trampled them. Stars and constellations in the Old Testament often represent famous and powerful kings and princes. Antiochus easily defeated many of them.)**

11 He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down.

12 Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered.

(Antiochus exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host, that is, to the level of God himself. Antiochus was that arrogant. He did this by defying the law of God and by profaning the worship of God at the temple in Jerusalem. He stopped the daily sacrifices and defiled the sanctuary, that is, the temple. We’ve already alluded to Antiochus somewhat in the book of I Maccabees, but let’s delve a little deeper into his exploits. That book says in chapter one, “Antiochus turned about and advanced on Israel and Jerusalem in massive strength. Insolently breaking into the sanctuary, he removed the golden altar and the lamp-stand for the light with all its fittings, together with the table for the loaves of permanent offering, the libation vessels, the cups, the golden censers, the veil, the crowns, and the golden decoration on the front of the Temple, which he stripped of everything. He made off with the silver and gold and precious vessels; he discovered the secret treasures and seized them, and, removing all these, he went back to his own country, having shed much blood and uttered words of extreme arrogance. There was deep mourning for Israel throughout the country... Two years

later the king sent the Mysarch through the cities of Judah. He came to Jerusalem with an impressive force, and addressing them with what appeared to be peaceful words, he gained their confidence; then suddenly he fell on the city, dealing it a terrible blow, and destroying many of the people of Israel. He pillaged the city and set it on fire, tore down its houses and encircling wall... They shed innocent blood all round the sanctuary and defiled the sanctuary itself... Her sanctuary became as forsaken as a desert, her feasts were turned into mourning, her Sabbaths into a mockery, her honour into reproach... The king also sent edicts by a messenger to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, directing them to adopt customs foreign to the country, banning burnt offerings, sacrifices and libations from the sanctuary, profaning Sabbaths and feasts, defiling the sanctuary and everything holy, building altars, shrines and temples for idols, sacrificing pigs and unclean beasts." **This happened in 167 B.C., which was hundreds of years after Daniel wrote about Antiochus. This amazing account of history before that history happened can only be explained by the foreknowledge of God revealed to Daniel! But this is just the beginning. In chapters 10, 11, and 12, Daniel goes into detail after detail about this fierce king! Again, my point in all this is to show that Jews living between the Old Testament and the New Testament not only had the knowledge of the *prophecies* in Daniel but also their *fulfillment* in the lives of Alexander the Great and his Greek empire and Antiochus Epiphanes. So, yes, Jews living before the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of Christ could know that their Scriptures were inspired of God.**

This is very important because it shows *the seamless transition of evidence* between the Old Testament and the New Testament. As Josephus said, there was not a continuous line of *prophets* between the testaments. But there was a continual line of the *evidence* of their prophecies. Jews could know and in fact they were expecting these prophecies to be fulfilled -- just as other prophecies like those in Daniel had been fulfilled. They didn't know when and how, but they knew these predictions were just as certain to happen.

Now we come to the third aspect of genuine prophecy. We must know that the event predicted in the prophecy actually occurred. In the case of Old Testament prophecies of Jesus, it's clear that these predictions were made centuries earlier. The question is: Did the events of the New Testament actually happen? Did the people mentioned in the New Testament even exist? Was there a real historical Jesus? Did He do the things the prophets predicted? Did the things they said would happen to Him occur just as they wrote? In other words, is the history recorded in the New Testament authentic history?

First of all, consider the books of the New Testament:

1. *The books of the New Testament are consistent with each other.* Paul and Luke do not contradict each other. In fact, there is amazing harmony between them. In 1849, William Paley wrote the book *Horae Paulinae*. In that book he showed the fascinating agreement between the book of Acts, written by Luke, and the epistles of Paul. The details they both mention are so minute and seemingly incidental that there is no way anyone or any group of men could have forged these documents. And what about the records of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? Skeptics and others tell us these accounts contain contradictions. But this is not true. These four accounts are written from different perspectives with different emphases. They don't record every detail in a story or give a word-for-word quotation of what someone said. These are condensed narratives of the life of the most important person who ever lived, and they are inspired of the Holy Spirit. If a person is fair with the Bible and doesn't read it according to the way he thinks it should be written, then he will see its harmony. I realize this is an area that requires much more time

and attention than we have at hand in this discussion. But the alleged contradictions in the Bible have been answered for hundreds of years and they are being refuted in our day as well. Anyone who is willing and fair can research the subject with an open Bible and an open mind and see. Most of the so-called discrepancies are the result of not understanding the context and the nature of the expressions in these accounts. Bible critics either jump to conclusions or blind themselves with prejudice when they say that the Bible contradicts itself. With time, patience and sincerity the seeming contradictions can be resolved with more study. In his classic book on this subject, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, John Haley wrote these words of wisdom: “To the interpreter of Scripture no two qualifications are more indispensable than common sense and honesty” (p. 16).

2. *The New Testament is also consistent with secular history.* We have already mentioned the Jewish historian Josephus who lived in the first century. He was a soldier in the Jewish army who was captured by the Romans and became an associate of the emperor Vespasian. His main writings are *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews*. These books coincide with many of the people, places, and events mentioned in the New Testament. There is no evidence that he ever became a Christian, so he didn’t write to convince people to believe in Jesus. This makes his testimony all the more compelling. For example, the New Testament mentions emperors such as Augustus (Luke 2:1), Tiberius (Luke 3:1), and Claudius (Acts 11:28; Acts 18:2); Josephus discusses these rulers in great detail in his books. Would anyone who is skeptical toward the Bible deny or even question that these Caesars actually existed? He also mentions other rulers in the New Testament: the Herods, Pilate, Agrippa, Felix, Festus, Philip the tetrarch of Trachonitis mentioned in Luke 3:1 and several others. Does anyone think all these names were just made up? Josephus also talks about the origin and beliefs of the two most prominent schools of Judaism in New Testament times: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Josephus also records the death of John the Baptist. He says that Herod killed “John, that was called the Baptist” (*Antiquities*, 18.5.2). What makes this reference even more interesting is that John the Baptist is entirely incidental in the context of this section of the *Antiquities*. But, without mentioning John, Josephus later relates the background of his execution. He wrote, “Herodias took upon her to confound the laws of our country, and divorce herself from her husband, while he was alive, and was married to Herod (Antipas) her husband’s brother” (*Antiquities* 18.5.4). The Bible gives this as the reason for John the Baptist’s death in Matthew 14:1-12, Mark 6:14-29, and Luke 9:9. This reference to Herodias is situated in Josephus’ long list of Roman rulers and their family relations. How could Josephus state what the New Testament writers said if there was no John the Baptist and the events recorded about him in the New Testament never happened?

- A. Then there are passages in Josephus about Jesus. The most well known one is this: “Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.” (*Antiquities*, 18.3.3). Notice that this Jewish historian agrees with what the New

Testament says: (1) Pilate executed Jesus by crucifixion; (2) His followers were called Christians; (3) the Scriptures of the Jews foretold His life and death; (4) He rose from the dead on the third day. Do skeptics think Josephus made up these details? Do they believe he just guessed about all this? Or, do they think this was a forged passage? Some say Josephus didn't write this; they claim that Christians later added these words to what Josephus wrote and, thus, it's an interpolation. But they have no textual proof from the ancient manuscripts of Josephus' writings. This is not even worthy of the word conjecture. It's just wishful thinking on their part.

B. Also, this is not the only time Josephus mentions Jesus. In the same book, the *Antiquities of the Jews*, in book 20, chapter 9, verse one, Josephus recorded an event that happened after Jesus died. "But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned." Here again we see remarkable agreement between Josephus and the New Testament. "When Jesus came to His own country, the Jews said, 'Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers **James**, Joses, Simon, and Judas?'" (Matt. 13:55). Now, the death of James, the brother of Jesus, is not recorded in the New Testament. I am simply citing Josephus on this point to show that he is consistent with the biblical record once more. There are three things that make his testimony significant. First, he lived in the first century. Second, he was a Jew, not a Christian. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Josephus only briefly alludes to Jesus. He didn't write a treatise about Jesus of Nazareth or even a chapter on Him. These two references to Jesus are incidental to the purpose of his book. Of course not everything Josephus said was correct. He was not inspired and infallible. But the overall picture he gives of the first century world is accurate, and the key figures and events he relates are indisputable. The life and death of Jesus are interwoven with Jewish and Roman history; there is no honest way to admit that Pilate and Herod lived and deny that Jesus existed; there is no consistent way to accept what Josephus said about Jesus' cousin John and his brother James and claim that this same Jesus never existed.

Another ancient historian who mentioned Jesus was the Roman author Cornelius Tacitus who lived from 56 to 120 A.D. His testimony is important. First, like Josephus, He lived the the first century. Second, he is regarded as an accurate source of information by many non-Christian historians. Third, he was not a Christian—at all. He thought Christianity was just another superstition. He was thus an *antagonistic* witness to the facts he recorded. He unintentionally helped the case for Christianity by writing these words! In his work *The Annals of Rome*, he spoke of the great fire of Rome during Nero's reign. The rumor was circulating that the emperor himself had started the blaze. Tacitus writes "But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and

inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired... (*Annals*, 15.44). Here, then, is another independent witness who tells us exactly what the New Testament says about Jesus being executed by Pontius Pilate!

These are only a few lines of the evidence of the reliability of the New Testament. There is also the ancient manuscript evidence: about 5,800 copies have been discovered. Then there are the citations in the "Church Fathers." These are quotations of virtually every part of the New Testament by writers whose works range from the end of the first century and into the fifth century. The evidence is clear! These predictions were made in the Old Testament, fulfilled in the first century, and recorded in the New Testament!

There is no way mere men could have made these predictions! The only explanation is that God revealed the future to the men who wrote them in Scripture!

