

Evidence is both objective and subjective

### **Objective: Prophecy**

The search for evidence begins ...

*Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, by J. Barton Payne, lists 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament, and 578 prophecies in the New Testament. That works out to a total of 1,817 prophecies. Those prophecies take up 8,352 of the Bible's verses. So, because there are 31,124 verses in the Bible, 8,352 verses equals about 27 percent (26.83) – meaning that roughly one-quarter of the Bible is prophetic.

Prophecy is a unique characteristic of the Bible. No other major religious literature contains prophecy on par with what the Bible declares.

Principle: Prophecy only works if the future is definite.

Prophecy is so central to the Bible that Deuteronomy 18:21-22 says, "And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?'— when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him."

So God is concerned for the accuracy of His word.

*Prophecy allows you to check it.*

"Behold, the former things have come to pass, And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I tell you of them." (Isaiah 42:9)

"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, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure'." (Isaiah 46:9-10)

"Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He." (John 13:19)

That means, you can check it. If the Bible is God's word, then it can stand scrutiny.

Peter makes the point that accurate prophecy must come from God.

2Pet. 1:20-2:3

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

### Messianic Prophecy

For instance, the Bible contains many Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah to come. By some counts, there are over 400 prophecies in the Old Testament that point to the coming Messiah, His life, and His death. According to the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth perfectly fulfilled every one of them. The odds of someone doing are astronomical. And, if it's true, it's certainly evidence that the Bible is God's word.

The problem is: The prophecies and the fulfillments are all found in the Bible. So, if it's not genuinely God's word, and if the New Testament writers were simply making up a new religion, then it would be easy for them to make bogus claims about their newfound Messiah and say that he satisfied the Old Testament details.

What about evidence that can be proven without faith at its core? What about substantial proof from history?

### The Facts (4 examples)

The prophet Isaiah foretold that a conqueror named Cyrus would destroy seemingly impregnable Babylon and subdue Egypt along with most of the rest of the known world. This same man, said Isaiah, would decide to let the Jewish exiles in his territory go free without any payment of ransom (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1; and 45:13). Isaiah made this prophecy 150 years before Cyrus was born, 180 years before Cyrus performed any of these feats (and he did, eventually, perform them all), and 80 years before the Jews were taken into exile.

History tells us that in 538 BCE Cyrus ascended to power and signed the two edicts of restoration.

Now, either the authors of the Bible (if it's fake) got really lucky, or there is in fact divinity at the heart of this book.

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Jeremiah predicted that despite its fertility and despite the accessibility of its water supply, the land of Edom (today a part of Jordan) would become a barren, uninhabited wasteland (Jeremiah 49:15-20; Ezekiel 25:12-14). His description accurately tells the history of that now bleak region.

How would he know something that specific about a region of the planet? Was he merely an early meteorologist, or did he have insider knowledge?

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Daniel predicted the rise and fall of the nations that would follow Babylon, occupy that same territory, and oppress the children of Israel: Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome. He likened Medo-Persia to a bear that rose up on one side, fulfilled as Cyrus the Persian became more powerful than Darius the Mede. Daniel likened the first king of Greece to a leopard with wings, describing the speed and ferocity of Alexander the Great. But, Daniel also accurately predicted that Alexander's power would not go to his progeny, but to four generals.

And that's exactly what happened.

*The testimony of Josephus.* The Jewish historian records that Alexander the Great was shown a copy of Daniel when he passed through the Jewish realm. He was mightily impressed by the prophecy that referred to him and treated the Jews kindly - as evidenced both by Josephus and otherwise known histories of the period. Josephus also affirms the content of the book of Daniel as historical and authentic [Verm.JosDan].

Ezek. 14:12-20 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it, and cut off from it both man and beast, 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. "If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the beasts, *though* these three men were in its midst, as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "they could not deliver either *their* sons or *their* daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the country would be desolate. Or *if* I should bring a sword on that country and say, 'Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,' even *though* these three men were in its midst, as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "they could not deliver either *their* sons or *their* daughters, but they alone would be delivered. Or *if* I should send a plague against that country and pour out My wrath in blood on it, to cut off man and beast from it, even *though* Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "they could not deliver either *their* son or *their* daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness."

In Ezek. 28:3 God said, rather mockingly, to the king of Tyre, "Behold, you are wiser than Daniel;"

And, of course, Jesus Himself calls Daniel a prophet in Matt. 24:15.

Consequently, critics attempted to late-date Daniel. They said it was written after the fact (during the time of the Maccabees, 169-165 BC) and then passed off as a book of prophecy.

But, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the Qumran caves, along with early versions of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other seminal books of prophecy, the late date theory essentially fell apart. And that means that Daniel was written before the succession of kingdoms took place, in the 6th Century BC, and that makes it legitimate prophecy.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 allowed us to compare the manuscripts composing the Hebrew Bible that were a thousand years older than those we had previously possessed, and we learned that the painstaking copying systems used by the Jewish scribes---such as the Talmudists and Massoretes---effectively preserved accuracy. Archaeologist William F. Albright comments that most of the Dead Sea Scrolls “scarcely differ at all from the consonantal text of our Massoretic Bible” (from which our modern English versions are translated). “This fact,” says Albright, “proves conclusively that we must treat the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible with the utmost respect and that the free emending of difficult passages in which modern critical scholars have indulged, cannot be tolerated any longer.” [William Foxwell Albright, *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1955), p. 136.]...

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Some 400 years before crucifixion was invented, both Israel's King David and the prophet Zechariah described the Messiah's death in words that perfectly depict that mode of execution. Further, they said that the body would be pierced and that none of the bones would be broken, contrary to customary procedure in cases of crucifixion (Psalm 22 and 34:20; Zechariah 12:10). Again, historians and New Testament writers confirm the fulfillment: Jesus of Nazareth died on a Roman cross, and his extraordinarily quick death eliminated the need for the usual breaking of bones. A spear was thrust into his side to verify that he was, indeed, dead.

Jesus did exist as a man, as a person. Tacitus, the Roman historian writing early in the 2nd century A.D., in his *Annals* 15.44, mentions Jesus and the Christians in his account of how the Emperor Nero went after Christians in order to draw attention away from himself after Rome's fire of 64 AD:

“But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the Bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements Which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero From the infamy of being believed to have ordered the Conflagration, the fire of Rome. Hence to suppress the rumor, he Falsely charged with the guilt, and punished Christians, who were Hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was Put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign Of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time Broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief Originated, but through the city of Rome also, where all things Hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their Center 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.”