

What does the Bible Say?

Fulfilled Prophecy

The difficulty in approaching a topic like fulfilled prophecy is certainly in finding such a prophecy in the Bible as it is filled with approximately 2000 such examples of perfectly fulfilled prophecies. The difficulty really lies with what prophecies we are going to turn our attention to in the short period of time that we have set aside.

Last week we took some time to consider the subject of prophecy itself, asking ourselves why prophecy matters? We looked primarily at three reasons of why prophecy matters to us today:

1. It reveals God's power
2. It unveils God's plan
3. It informs our perspective

If you left last week thinking that message was deficient, and that there are other reasons that prophecy matters - you are correct. It was not even close to being every reason, and if you would like to add another reason to the list one of the reasons that prophecy matters to us today is that it presents powerful evidence to the divine origins of the Bible, its perfect accuracy establishing it in a class of its own even among literature claiming to foretell the future.

Of course, God is not the only one who attempts to foretell the future, as even Satan uses false prophets to deceive. In Deuteronomy the Lord established a litmus test of sorts for His people to determine a false prophet from a true prophet. Here God made it clear that He is never wrong, and that a true prophet will be 100% accurate!

- Nostradamus - 70% accuracy
- Baba Vanga (*Blind Bulgarian Prophtess and mystic*) - 80% accurate

1. The Integrity of Biblical Prophecy (*We can trust it*)

a) World History

- The book of Daniel has what are perhaps some of the most incredible prophecies concerning human history. In chapter 2 we see Daniel interpret the dream of Nebuchadnezzar which lays out a broad framework for major world kingdoms that would rule, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar himself and ending with the establishment of the kingdom of God over the final kingdom of men that is yet to come.

NOTE: In chapter 7 Daniel himself has a dream that parallels this in many ways, however it seems to be a prophecy with a divine perspective rather than an earthly one.

- In chapter 8 we come to another prophecy that is somewhat technical in its detail, but it's one that I want to consider with you today as it helps to establish some of the important points that I want to make this morning.

READ: Daniel 8:1-14

- If you are wondering, "What does this mean?" You're not alone – as Daniel himself didn't understand what it meant either. Thankfully, this is one of the prophecies where we have the interpretation divinely given through the angel Gabriel.

READ: Daniel 8:15-22

NOTE: While the vision clearly refers to the time of the end, Gabriel includes kingdoms in his interpretation that are in our past.

- The ram represents Media and Persia:
 - The ram is seen in 8:3-4 with two horns, one higher than the other but with unstoppable power pushing everywhere but the east.

NOTE: *"Ammianus Marcellinus, a fourth century historian, states that the Persian ruler bore the head of a ram as he stood at the head of his army." (Wood) "The ram was the national emblem of Persia, a ram being stamped on Persian coins as well as on the headdress of Persian emperors." (Strauss)*

- The Persian's became the more powerful of the two horns, and it is historical fact that this empire conquered lands to their north, their south, and their west but no significant conquests to their east.
- The male goat represents Greece:
 - The goat is seen in 8:5-8 as coming from the west, with a notable horn between its eyes and experiencing victory over the ram.

NOTE: Like Persia, Greece was commonly connected to the imagery of goats.

- To have said that Greece would rise to become a world power at this time, approximately 200 years before Alexander conquered Persia, would have most likely elicited laughs. However, history teaches us that these prophecies were written in stunning detail with perfect accuracy!

Daniel 8:5-8

- **From the west:** The Greek Empire rose from the west of previous empires.
- **Suddenly...without touching the ground:** The Greek Empire rose with great speed
- **Notable horn:** The Greek Empire had a notable ruler, Alexander the Great
- **Confronting the ram:** Alexander the Great had a famous war with the Medo-Persian Empire
- **Furious power . . . moved with rage:** The Greek Empire and the Medo-Persian Empire hated each other - some of the fiercest battles of ancient history were fought between the Greeks and the Persians.
- **No one that could deliver the ram from his hand:** The Greek Empire conquered the Medo-Persian Empire
- **The male goat grew very great:** The greatness of Alexander's Empire was not only in its vast dominion, but also in its cultural power. Alexander the Great was determined to spread Greek civilization, culture, and language across every land he conquered. He died at the age of 32.
- **The large horn was broken:** The reign of the notable leader of the Greek Empire was suddenly cut short – he died at 32.
- **In place of it four notable ones came up four winds of heaven:** After the end of

Alexander the Great's reign, the Greek Empire was divided among four rulers who would rule their own dominions, not the entire empire together

- Cassander, ruling over Greece
- Lysimachus, ruling over Asia Minor
- Seleucus, ruling over Syria including Israel
- Ptolemy, ruling over Egypt

- The Jewish historian Josephus refers to the time when Alexander the Great came to Jerusalem. Both he and the high priest of Israel were warned in a dream for how their meeting ought to be. For the priest the instruction was given to meet Alexander in peace outside the city walls, and for Alexander the instruction was given that the priest would give him a divine blessing of a successful campaign against the Persians.
- We then read that Alexander gave his right hand to the high priest and came into Jerusalem where he made a sacrifice according to the high priest's direction

Antiquities of the Jews Book 11 Chapter 8

"And when the Book of Daniel was showed him wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended."

- God has always been involved in, and in control over world history, time and space, kings and kingdoms! Though not every king honored God, every king was appointed by Him to accomplish His plan.

NOTE: As God guided history, He used Alexander's passion to spread Greek culture to prepare the world for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because of Alexander's influence, koine (common) Greek became the common language of the civilized world - and the language of the New Testament.

b) Israel's History

- Much of fulfilled and future prophecy involves and revolves around the nation of Israel. While we catch a glimpse of world events, the vision quickly finds its focus on the glorious land, the sacrifice, and the sanctuary.

NOTE: While God does prophecy concerning His work among the nations, the Biblical narrative of human history revolves around one promise that God made to Abram in Genesis 12.

Gen 12:1-3
"Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father's house,
To a land that I will show you.
2 I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

- One cannot hope to grasp God's prophetic timeline without understanding God's work with and through the nation of Israel!

NOTE: In fact, even in recent times we have seen God continuing to fulfill prophecies toward the nation of Israel!

- They have been regathered after being scattered throughout the nations - Isaiah 43.
- Return to Jerusalem in 1967 – Zechariah 8:7-8
- Become Prosperous – Ezekiel 36:11
- Trees would grow again (more than 200 million tree planted in to 1900s – Isaiah 41:18-20)
- Fruitfulness that would fill the world – Isaiah 27:6

2. The Interpretation of Biblical Prophecy *(We can understand it)*

- Aren't there different ways to read and understand prophecy? Yes - but not all methods of interpretation are equally as valid, and there is only one that is right.
- When it comes to understanding prophecy, there are different methods of interpretation that are used. I believe that a study of fulfilled prophecy helps us to understand which hermeneutics are the right ones.

a) Close and Complete

- Sometimes when we study prophecy, we will see both a near and a far fulfillment, now and not yet, or a close and a complete fulfillment. We see this rule throughout OT prophecy and often with Jesus. It is also something that we see here with a bit of study.

Close: 8:9-12

- Arising from the Seleucid dynasty came a ruler that would fulfill these prophecies in dramatic though not perfect fashion – Antiochus IV Epiphanes

NOTE: Antiochus IV assumed the title "Epiphanes" meaning, "illustrious" and alluding to deity. The Jews turned it into "Epimanes" meaning, "madman." Antiochus Epiphanes is such an accurate and dramatic fulfillment of this prophecy that critics insist that the Book of Daniel *must* have been written *after* his time.

- Antiochus Epiphanes exerted his dominion **toward the south, toward the east, and toward the land of Israel.**
- Antiochus Epiphanes murdered other rulers and persecuted the people of Israel (**cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them**)
- Antiochus Epiphanes blasphemed God and commanded idolatrous worship directed towards himself (**exalted himself as high as the prince of the host**)
- Antiochus Epiphanes put a stop to temple sacrifices in Jerusalem (**by him the daily sacrifices were taken away**)
- Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple (**the place of His sanctuary was cast down**)
- Antiochus Epiphanes opposed God and seemed to prosper (**he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered**)

NOTE: By some estimates, he was responsible for the murder of approximately 100,000 Jews.

- Antiochus's suppression of the Jews came to a head in December of 168 B.C. when he returned in defeat from Alexandria. He ordered his generals to seize Jerusalem on a Sabbath. There he erected an idol of Zeus and desecrated the altar by an offering of swine and sprinkling the pig's juices in the sanctuary. Sacrifice was ceased because the temple was desecrated.

QUESTION: If this was fulfilled by Antiochus nearly 100 years before Christ, why then does

Gabriel say that this vision concerns the time of the end, and the latter time of the indignation?

- The answer to this is simple, Antiochus was the close fulfillment while there will arise another in the future who will be a complete fulfillment – who we call the Antichrist.

Complete: 8:20-25.

- In the latter time of their kingdom:** The prophecy in this passage reads equally true of both Antiochus and Antichrist. This is an example of a prophetic passage that has both a near and far fulfillment.
- Having fierce features:** Antiochus Epiphanes was known for his cruel brutality; this will also become the legacy of the coming Antichrist.
- Who understands sinister schemes . . . through his cunning:** Antiochus was known for his flattery and smooth tongue. The coming Antichrist will confirm a covenant with Israel (Daniel 9:27).
- His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power:** Antiochus Epiphanes was empowered by Satan and allowed by God. The same will be true of the coming Antichrist.
- Shall prosper and thrive:** Antiochus Epiphanes looked like a total success. The coming Antichrist will look like a complete winner until God topples his reign.
- He shall destroy the mighty, and also the holy people:** Antiochus Epiphanes not only destroyed his enemies, but also harshly persecuted the people of God. The coming Antichrist will also destroy and persecute.
- He shall cause deceit to prosper:** Both the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes in the past and the Antichrist in the future are marked by **deceit**. *The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.* (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10)
- He shall magnify himself in his heart:** The coins of Antiochus Epiphanes were inscribed with this title: *theos epiphanies* meaning, "God manifest." The coming Antichrist will also exalt himself: *So that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.* (2 Thessalonians 2:4)
- He shall even rise against the Prince of princes:** Though Antiochus Epiphanes hated and fought against the people of God, it was because he really hated God. The same will be true of the coming Antichrist, who will hate the Jews because they hate God.
- Broken without human hand:** History tells us that Antiochus Epiphanes died of disease, not by the hand of man. In a similar way, no man will defeat the coming Antichrist, but the hand of Jesus will strike him down (Revelation 19:20).
- Therefore seal up the vision:** Daniel must do this because in his day the vision referred to a period far distant in its ultimate fulfillment. For us, the time is near (Revelation 1:3) and the book is unsealed (Revelation 22:10).

b) Literal and Symbolic

- Another important principle in understanding prophecy is to understand the prophetic use of symbolism that is meant to illustrate literal fulfillment.

NOTE: As we have seen, the prophecies given to Daniel involved symbolism. In the book of Daniel alone Greece is seen as the belly and thighs of bronze through the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, a leopard with four wings through the dream of Daniel, and a goat with a prominent horn through his vision. However, these illustrations are not meant to present a metaphor but rather a more complete picture of a literal fulfillment.

NOTE: One common method of interpreting prophecy is to view it through an allegorical, or metaphorical lens saying that the prophets are speaking as a figure of speech, or in a certain apocalyptic or poetic form in order to teach an important lesson.

- While it is true that prophecy is filled with symbolism, symbols are most often used to illustrate real people and real events. Symbolism helps us to understand differing aspects of the literal, it shouldn't keep us from ignoring it!

3. The Inspiration of Biblical Prophecy *(We should study it)*

a) It brings light.

2 Peter 1:16-21

16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

- Peter had an incredible encounter with Jesus, seeing Him in His glory and having the prophetic word confirmed to Him however was not the only confirmation that he offered to those that he was writing. He goes on to express that the prophetic word which was confirmed through Christ was to be something continually consider.

NOTE: The prophecies mentioned this morning are important, but when it comes to the consideration of fulfilled prophecy what is of even greater value are those fulfilled by Jesus! This is something that we will see clearly as we study through the gospel of Matthew together.

- The prophecies of the Bible are something that Peter encourages us to hold on to in dark times, as we await the dawn of Jesus return!

APPLICATION: There are times when people rise up claiming to have some sort of private interpretation of prophecy. Often such interpretations are attractive, as they make us feel like we know the truth that others are missing. Peter states clearly however a principle that we ought to grasp – The spirit of God who speaks prophecy is also the spirit that gives understanding to it!

b) It testifies of Jesus.

Rev 19:9-10

9 Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." 10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

- This is certainly one of the most important principles when considering prophecy, the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Christ! In fact, the book of revelation itself is the unveiling of Jesus!

NOTE: If we are speaking of the kingdoms of the gentiles – we end with the kingdom of God being established through Christ. If we are speaking about the nation of Israel, we see Messiah

coming through Israel to save the world! If we are speaking of the antichrist, we have to speak of Jesus Christ!

Matt 5:17-19

17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

- Prophecy ought to always lead us back to Jesus, but sadly there are some people who disregard the spirit of Biblical prophecy by focusing too much on something other than Jesus!

FINAL NOTES: May we learn from those who were rebuked by Jesus in His time – as we study these things.

John 5:39-40

39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.