

Is the Bible a message from a God I can't see?

— Accurate long-term predictions (part 1)

1. Introduction

We've all seen castles in various conditions. They can be virtually intact, ruins, or just a few foundation stones in the ground.

The same applies to cities and nations. Some seem to thrive and prosper while others decline or disappear altogether.

Who could have predicted the future of any particular city or nation?

As we shall see in this section, the Bible prophets have done just that *and got it right every time*.



If we are to be satisfied that predictions are accurate, we must be sure we know when the predictions were written down.

Historians agree that in the third Century BC Ptolemy II, King of Egypt, asked for a Greek translation of the Old Testament for the Great Library in Alexandria.

The earliest writer who gives an account of this translation, the Septuagint version, is Aristobulus, a Jew who lived at the start of the second century BC.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that the original manuscripts of the Old Testament were in existence in the third century BC. Most of the predictions we will look at were fulfilled after this time.

Overview

We shall look at predictions relating to several nations and cities.

We shall see that they are:

- Clear and precise – there is no doubt what they mean
- Known to have been written down before the event
- 100% accurate
- Written by people who had no power to make them come true
- Fulfilled by people who were not aware they were doing so

We shall also see that contrasting fortunes are predicted for different cities and nations, but that the Bible writers made the correct prediction every time.

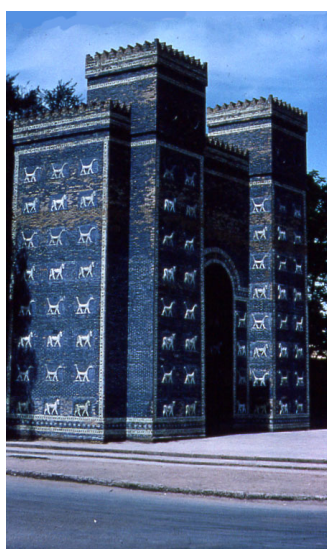
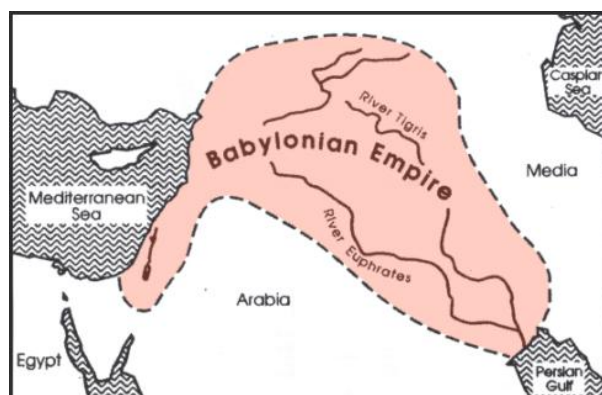
Finally, we shall contrast this with how people today attempt to foretell the future. Again we'll see how remarkable the Bible predictions are in contrast to man's efforts at predicting the future.

2. The superpowers which led to modern Europe

The prophet Daniel records a dream which the king of Babylon had. It gave an overview of the superpowers which led to modern Europe. Daniel told the king what the dream meant.

He outlined what would happen for the 2,500 years following the fall of the superpower of his day - Babylon.

The map opposite shows the extent of the Babylonian empire.



The grandeur of ancient Babylon can be seen from this re-creation of the Ishtar Gate, built in the 1930s with tiles from the site of ancient Babylon.

It was dedicated to Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. It was built with glazed blue tiles with alternating rows of dragons and bulls. The dragons were a tribute to Marduk, the god of water, vegetation, judgment and magic. The bulls were dedicated to the rain god, Adad.

The prophet Daniel told the king of Babylon:

After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom.

Daniel 2 v 39 and 40 (New International Version)

The first prediction Daniel made was: “*After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours*”



The Babylonian Empire was conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire. This empire was built up by Cyrus the Great and spanned three continents.

The empire was larger in area than the Babylonian Empire, but the king shared the power of government with other people, so

his power was inferior to that of the king of Babylon, whose sole word was law throughout his empire.

These are the ruins of the city of Persepolis (in Iran), which served as capital of the Persian Empire for several generations. The city was built during the reign of Darius I.

Ruins of a number of colossal buildings exist on the site. All are constructed of dark-grey marble. Fifteen of their pillars stand intact. Three more pillars have been re-erected since 1970.



The next part of Daniel's prediction was:

“Next, a third kingdom ...will rule over the whole earth”

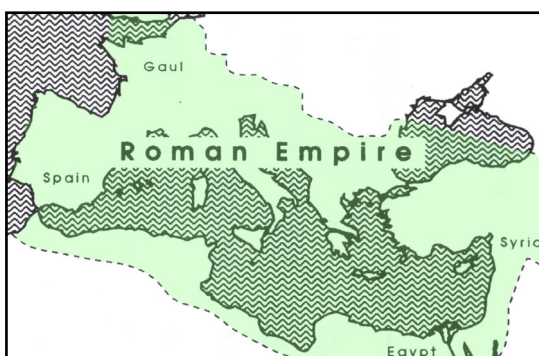


It was in 331 BC that the famous Greek general Alexander the Great defeated the Persian army.

The Parthenon, a temple dedicated to Athena, located on the Acropolis in Athens, indicates the culture and sophistication of the Greek Empire. The Greeks have had a great influence on our world in many areas, such as language, politics, educational systems, philosophy, science and the arts.



Daniel then went on to say: *“Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom”*.



It was around 150 BC that the Roman power began to overcome the Greek power.

In the next few years the Roman power expanded and replaced the Greek Empire. Because of the Roman Empire's vast extent and long endurance, its influence upon the language, religion, architecture, philosophy, law and government of nations around the world lasts to this day.

The Roman Empire reached as far as England. The picture shows part of Hadrian's Wall, which protected the northern extent of the Roman Empire. Begun in AD 122, the wall is a stone or turf and timber fortification, 73.5 miles (117 km) long, built by the Romans across the width of what is now northern England, from Newcastle upon Tyne to Carlisle. It was the main northern defensive barrier for up to 10,000 Roman troops until their withdrawal from Britain.



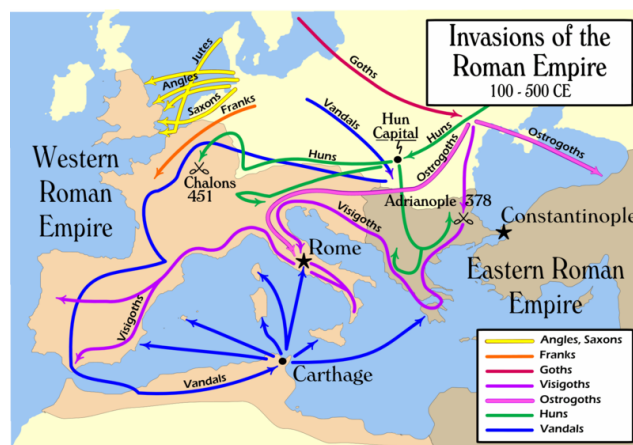
Daniel then told the king that the fourth kingdom:

will be a divided kingdom...and will not remain united

Daniel 2 v 41 and 43 (NIV)

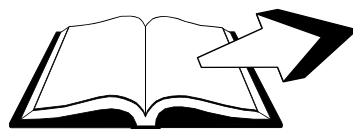
We can see that Daniel was predicting that the fourth superpower would not be conquered by another, but would fall apart and become divided.

The Roman superpower disintegrated into a number of smaller powers. The map shows how the Roman Empire split into East and West before being invaded by several tribes. The invasions from all sides caused conflict and division, which eventually resulted in the nations of Modern Europe.



Composite flag of the modern European nations

Babylon was the most powerful nation of its day. It was the equivalent of America nowadays. It would take a brave person to predict in our days that America will be superseded by three more superpowers, and that it will not be a superseded by a fifth. But Daniel made a similar prediction and was 100% correct!



Accurate Clear Predictions

- Four consecutive superpowers, each overthrowing the previous one
- Rome, the fourth superpower, was not to be conquered by another
- It would fragment and become many nations

3. Middle East nations and cities

3.1 Egypt



Ruins of the temple at Karnak

a) Thebes

The picture on the right shows the magnificent ruins of the temple at Karnak, part of the ancient city of Thebes. The past grandeur of the city of Thebes and its temple can be seen from the ruins that still remain. The size of the people in the picture shows the vast scale of the temple.

While this enormous temple was still in use, God told the prophet Ezekiel:

I will ... inflict punishment on Thebes. ... and cut off the hordes of Thebes... Thebes will be taken by storm.
Ezekiel 30 v 14 to 16 (NIV)

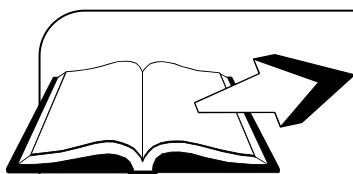


General view of the ruins at Karnak

This prediction about Thebes was finally fulfilled in the first century BC, when it was besieged by Ptolemy Lathyrus, the grandfather of Cleopatra. For three years it defied the efforts of the besiegers. But when it did eventually fall, Lathyrus levelled most of Thebes to the ground.



The city eventually continued as several hamlets. The picture shows one of them – now known as Luxor. The population of the area was drastically reduced – the “hordes” were indeed cut off, as Ezekiel predicted.



**Accurate Clear
Predictions**

- Thebes would suffer an attack from a large force
- Its large population would be “cut off”

b) Memphis

There are two interesting predictions about Memphis
*...Memphis will be laid waste and lie in ruins
 without inhabitant.*

Jeremiah 46 v 19 (NIV)

The picture opposite shows how literally this has
 been fulfilled.

The second prediction is even more detailed:

*This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘I will
 destroy the idols and put an end to the images
 in Memphis.’*

Ezekiel 30 v 13 (NIV)

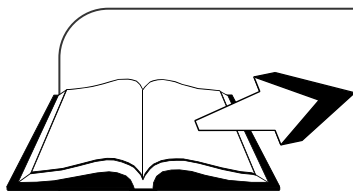


Ruins of Memphis

As you will see from the picture, very little of Memphis or its temples still stands. This is confirmed by what the website Egyptologyonline.com has to say about Memphis:

*... there is little left of Memphis today, at least that can be seen. Originally, the city had
 many fine temples, palaces and gardens. But today, other than the scattered ruins, most of
 the city is gone, or lies beneath cultivated fields,*

By contrast, we have already seen that extensive remains of the temple at Thebes have been found. Temple ruins also exist elsewhere in Egypt. So the detailed prediction was absolutely right about the destruction of the idols in the temple at Memphis.



**Accurate Clear
Predictions**

- Memphis would be totally demolished
- The objects of worship would be completely destroyed

c) The decline of Egypt

Despite being a superpower for many centuries, the decline of Egypt was clearly foretold. The prophet Ezekiel said of the nation:

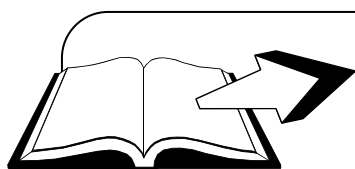
There they will be a lowly kingdom. It will be the lowliest of kingdoms and will never again exalt itself above the other nations. I will make it so weak that it will never again rule over the nations.
Ezekiel 29 v 14 and 15 (NIV)



The power of Egypt has declined gradually. The sun has set on the mighty Egyptian nation of old.

- Arabs conquered the country in the 6th century AD.
- After that the country declined rapidly.
- Since then it has been dominated by many other powers.
- It is only in recent times that Egypt has got its sovereignty back. But it is not the dominant player on the world scene that it used to be.

Ezekiel was 100% correct – Egypt did decline from its superpower status and has been dominated by other powers for many centuries.



**Accurate Clear
Predictions**

- Egypt would become a “lowly” nation
- It would not dominate other nations any more

3.2 Other Middle East nations and cities

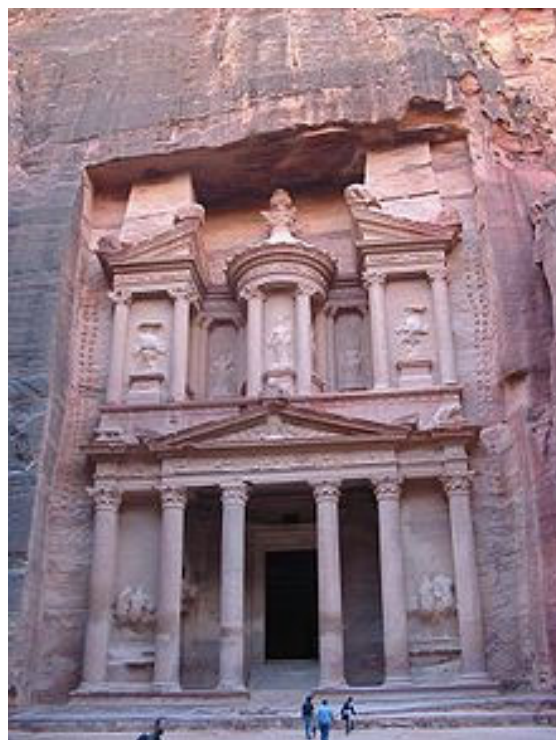
Although most predictions in the Bible relate to the Jews, there are some interesting prophecies relating to other nations.

a) The Edomites



(Boundaries of modern Israel shown on maps for comparison)

One of the neighbours of the ancient Israelites was Edom. It occupied some of the land we now know as Jordan.

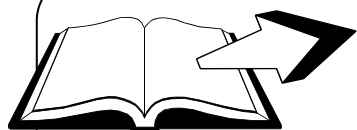


The picture shows one of the best monuments of the ancient city of Petra. Petra was a market city of the Edomites. It was on the main trade routes, making it a very prosperous city. It was in about AD 106 that the trade routes changed and the city along with Edom itself became desolate.

This is just as Ezekiel predicted later in the same chapter:

I will make Mount Seir a desolate waste and cut off from it all who come and go.
Ezekiel 35 v 7 (NIV)

The prophet Ezekiel refers to Edom as “Mount Seir” because that is the area they lived in:



**Accurate Clear
Predictions**

- The land of the Edomites would become desolate
- The decline would be caused by the disappearance of passing traders

b) The Ammonites

The Ammonites were also neighbours of the ancient Israelites. They were to the north of the Edomites whom we have just looked at. This is what the prophet Ezekiel said about them:

Son of man, set your face against the Ammonites, and prophesy against them...

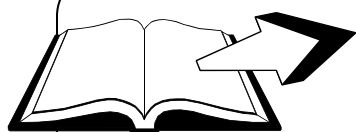
I will stretch out My hand against you, and give you as plunder to the nations; I will cut you off from the peoples, and I will cause you to perish from the countries.

Ezekiel 25 v 2 and 7

The absence of the Ammonites from modern maps confirms the accuracy of this prediction. The Ammonites ceased to exist as a separate nation when they were absorbed by the Arabs after the second century BC. The capital of the Ammonites was on the same site as part of the capital of Jordan. Its name, Amman, is a reminder of the extinct Ammonites.



The modern city of Amman



**Accurate Clear
Predictions**

- The Ammonites would disappear as a separate nation

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Summary

In the first half of this session we saw that the Old Testament prophet Daniel predicted:

- Four consecutive superpowers, starting with Babylon
- The successive empires each overthrowing the previous one
- Rome, the fourth superpower, was not to be conquered by another
- The Roman empire would fragment and become many nations

We could ask, “how did Daniel know that there would be four successive empires – why not three or five?” And how did he know that the fourth would not be followed by a fifth. Furthermore, how did he know that the fourth empire would fragment. It could have just declined in the same way that Egypt did.

We then looked at what the Bible prophets said about the two ancient cities of Thebes and Memphis:

- Thebes would have a violent end and its large population would go
- Memphis would be a total ruin, without any population, and there would be no temple remains

Again we could ask “How did the Bible prophets know which prediction to attach to which city?” If the predictions had been reversed, they would have been wrong!

Finally in this presentation, we looked at what the Bible prophets predicted about the Egyptians, the Edomites and the Ammonites:

- Egypt would become a lowly nation and not dominate other nations
- Edom would become desolate, its decline caused by disappearance of passing traders
- Ammon would disappear

If the any of the predictions had been switched round they would have been wrong! We could ask again “How did the Bible prophets know which prediction to attach to which nation?” Egypt was a superpower like Babylon, it could have been overthrown and replaced by other superpowers like Babylon was. Once more we see the Bible prophets choosing the correct prediction for each nation and city.

One or two correct predictions could be lucky guesses! But the Bible appears to be getting it right every time. This would seem to imply that there is more than chance involved!