

CHAPTER 4

THE WORLD'S MOST ACCURATE HISTORY BOOK

The Bible is God's book to mankind written to show man his sin and his need of a savior. It tells about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for man's sin and how one can personally know, worship, and talk with God as well as have the promise of eternal life. The Bible, God's book, is totally accurate when it speaks about history. Looking at the book of the prophet Daniel will help us understand more about how accurate God's word is.

A. THE BIBLE AND HISTORY

1. When you think about the Bible and what it declares about itself, which verses come to your mind? Possibly II Timothy 3:16, ". . .all scripture is God-breathed . . ." or II Peter 1:21. "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (NIV).

Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:35 where he says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

These Scriptures assure us that the Bible is trustworthy, calling it God's Word more than 3,000 times. Jesus referred to the people and occurrences of the Old Testament, not as metaphors but actual historical figures and events.

2. Below is a partial list of people, nations, places, and events recorded in Daniel. The names underlined in the list below are mentioned in secular Persian history as well as in Bible history as recorded in the Book of Daniel.

People

Jehoiakim	1:1
<u>Nebuchadnezzar</u>	1:1
Ashpenaz	1:3
Daniel (Beltshazzar)	1:6-7
Hananiah (Shadrach)	1:6-7
Mishael (Meshach)	1:6-7
Azariah (Abed-nego)	1:6-7
<u>Cyrus</u>	1:21
Arioch	2:14
<u>Belshazzar</u>	5:1
<u>Darius the Mede</u>	5:31
Jeremiah	9:2

Places

Nations

<u>Babylon</u>	1:1
<u>Medes (Media)</u>	5:31
<u>Medes-Persians</u>	8:20
<u>Greece</u>	8:21

Events

<u>Jerusalem besieged</u>	1:1-3
Humbling of Nebuchadnezzar	2:1-48
King's dream	2:1-49
Nebuchadnezzar image of gold	3:1-8

Nebuchadnezzar fiery furnace	3:13-30
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<u>Jerusalem</u>	1:1	Feast with Belshazzar	5:1-30
<u>Judah</u>	1:1	<u>Fall of Babylon</u>	5:25-31
<u>Babylonia</u>	1:1	Daniel in den of lions	6:1-24
Plain of Dura	3:1	Darius' proclamation	6:25-28
<u>Susa (Shushan)</u>	8:2		
<u>Elam</u>	8:2		
<u>Tigris River</u>	10:4		

3. What are some reasons why secular history studied today might not be accurate and why Bible history sometimes disagrees with secular history?
- a. Terrain, such as rivers and coast lands, as well as climate change over time. Likewise demographics change. Cities grow or disappear.
 - 1) In the past, Tehran, like many other Middle Eastern cities, was surrounded by walls. Twelve gates provided access in and out of the city. Over the years the walls and gates were destroyed. Yet sections of Tehran were still named after the gates that once protected them: the "Gates of Shimeran" and the "Gate of the Government." People were reminded of their history using names like these.
 - 2) Most names of cities whether in the States or abroad have historical references which may or may no longer be valid. I live near a town in Pennsylvania called "Sinking Spring" because at one time, the spring that ran through it was sinking into the ground. Apparently the spring sunk and disappeared a long time ago, but the name Sinking Spring still stands.
 - 3) I have a friend who lives on a street called Oceanview. The name of the street is a lie because the ocean is over 10 miles away and you can not see the ocean. Perhaps archeologists digging 500 years ago and finding the name of that street would conclude that the ocean must have been within a hundred meters of that home.
 - b. Names of people and places change in translating from one language to another. In Iran, for instance, people call one country in Europe Alman. The Germans themselves call their country, Deutschland. The Americans call it Germany.
 - c. Historical perspectives change depending on who gives the history. Present day Russia and China, for example, have purged much of their ancient and some of their modern history. Furthermore, different countries emphasize their own historical perspectives. England and America give two very different historical viewpoints concerning the American Revolutionary War. In American history books it is called a fight for freedom while history books in England call it a rebellion.
 - d. Information is not always available. Manuscripts disintegrate with time.

Records are lost or destroyed in wars. Many records in ancient times were kept through oral tradition for lack of writing material and technology.

- e. God's focus in Scripture is the redemptive history of mankind. In the Old Testament this redemption focuses on the nation of Israel, and later it broadens to all peoples through the Messiah in the New Testament. While the Bible is not intended to be a history book, we can count on the fact that the history within it is accurate because it is God's truth.

B. THE BIBLE AND SECULAR HISTORY

1. When secular history conflicts with the biblical record, sometimes new discoveries confirm secular history was wrong. As we will see, the Bible is already complete—but historical records continue to change. Read Daniel 5.
 - a. The biblical account for the fall of Babylon is, as follows: King Belshazzar, successor to Nebuchadnezzar, had a wild, drunken party during which he saw a hand writing a message on a wall. Shaken to the core with fear, he promised that any man who could give an interpretation would inherit the third highest position in his kingdom. But none of his wise men could discern the message. Daniel was brought in and he gave the proper interpretation: the reign of Belshazzar had come to an end and the Babylonian Kingdom would be given to the Medes and Persians. King Belshazzar was so pleased to get an answer that he had Daniel clothed in purple with a golden chain placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. But that very night Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62.
 - b. Until the early 20th century, secular historians claimed that King Belshazzar of Daniel 5 never existed. Secular historical fact stated that a man named Nabonidus was the king when Babylon was conquered by Cyrus and that, in fact, Nabonidus was never killed in the conquest; but was given a lifelong pension when his city was conquered.
 - c. Archaeological discoveries of ancient clay tablets, however, at the end of the 19th century revealed some additional facts. Nabonidus was king of Babylon, but in his later years he shared his power with a co-regent and son, Belshazzar. Other tablets record commercial contracts which were established through the taking of oaths in the name of the reigning king. The oaths name both Nabonidus and Belshazzar.

In recent years research by R. Dougherty, late professor of Assyriology at Yale University, shows that Nabonidus spent most of the latter years of his reign in Arabia and left Belshazzar in Babylon to rule the country. Do you see why Daniel only was offered the third highest position in the kingdom? Belshazzar already held second place. Although history concedes to biblical truth concerning Belshazzar, most scholars deny the biblical account of Darius the Mede who succeeded him.

“Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.” Daniel 5:16

“Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.” Daniel 5:29

2. Archeology may never clear up all the discrepancies between secular history and the Bible. Liberal scholars and historians today, for example, often laugh at the account of Daniel and the lion’s den because among its cast of characters is King Darius the Mede. Historical records reveal that a Persian King named Darius who actually reigned 18 years after Cyrus conquered Babylon and therefore, was not a contemporary of Daniel.

However, note how accurately the Bible describes Darius the Mede in Daniel 5:31. He was 62 years old (Daniel 5:31) when he was made king over the kingdom (Daniel 9:1). Who was this Darius the Mede if he was not the famous future king of Iran and why the discrepancy? There are a few possible explanations

- a. A few say that Darius the Mede and King Cyrus mentioned in the Bible actually are the same person with two titles, based on an interpretation of Daniel 6:28 which states:

“So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

- b. Others say that Darius the Mede was a conquering general of Babylon under Cyrus’ direction or Cyaxerxes, a Median king, who after being conquered by Cyrus joined his campaign.
- c. The most reasonable explanation is that Darius was referred to by another name, Gubaru, whom Cyrus appointed to rule Babylon. Information about Gubaru, a historical governor appointed to rule over Babylon, is found in the Behistun inscription (outside of Baktaran or the old city name of Kermanshah) Nabonidus Chronicle, Contenau Texts, Pohl Texts, and Tremayne Texts. (For further detailed research and study see J.C.

Whitcomb’s 83 page book, Darius the Mede, The Presbyterians and Reformed Publishing Company 1963.)

C. CONCLUSION

A good interpretative principle in studying the Scripture is, “when the Bible makes good sense,

seek no other sense.” Although the Bible is a book of salvation and knowing God, its history is accurate! Praise the Lord that the archeologists are finding new facts constantly which confirm Bible history. However, the foundation of our faith in God’s Word is that which Christ Himself stated, “Thy Word is truth.”

D. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION

Do you believe the Bible is true historically? We have said that while the Bible is complete, always accurate, history is not. How does understanding that fact help as you face discrepancies between the Bible and secular history?

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1. How did Jesus Christ in the gospels refer to Old Testament people and events? Were they historical or merely literary teaching tools? Make a list of all the people and events in the Old Testament mentioned by Jesus and note how He refers to them. For example, he talks about Adam and Eve as real people and that the flood at the time of Noah actually happened.
2. How would you deal with a person who says he has a different way of interpreting the Old Testament? Just the spiritual meaning of things like Daniel in the lions’ den, the flood of Noah, etc. are important to such a person. Whether or not they happened historically really doesn’t matter. How would you show them that these events are actual historical ones?