

Does the Bible mention Alexander the Great?

The name “Alexander” or “Alexander the Great,” referring to the Macedonian king, never appears in the Bible. However, the prophets Daniel and Zechariah wrote prophecies concerning Greece and Alexander’s Macedonian Empire. The non-eschatological prophecies in Daniel have proved so reliable that some critics have tried to post-date his writing, even though copious literary, historical, and biblical factors point to a date of writing in the sixth century B.C. (see the third paragraph of this article). Zechariah, writing sometime between 520 and 470 B.C., was also well before Alexander’s rise to power.

World History Surrounding Alexander the Great

Alexander’s legacy was quickly made, briefly lived, and has lasted to this day. Born in 356 B.C. and dying 32 years later, he only reigned for 13 years – the vast majority of which he spent outside of his home state of Macedon. His legendary conquest of nearly the entire known world resulted in one of the largest empires in ancient history. Alexander overthrew the entire Persian Empire: Asia Minor, Persia, Egypt and everything in between, including Israel. Alexander died undefeated in battle but without a clear heir, which led to the division of his empire among four of his generals.

Although Alexander’s empire split, the Hellenism he spread continued. Greek became the universal language, and Greek culture was either required or encouraged in all parts of the divided empire. Israel changed hands between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms. Israel later gained its independence from 167-63 B.C., a time referred to as the Hasmonean Period and recorded in the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. The end of this period was marked by the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 63 B.C.

Prophecy Regarding the Empire

Daniel discusses a great deal of then-future events which, as mentioned above, have proved true. By God's inspiration, Daniel predicted that there would be a succession of four "global" empires. His prophecy included many details, including the fact that the Greek Empire would split into four parts.

The Four-Kingdom Succession:

Daniel chapter 2 tells of Daniel's interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a large statue made of a gold head, silver chest and arms, bronze belly and thighs, and iron legs. Each of these metals is progressively less valuable and represents a different kingdom, the first of which Daniel identifies as Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar's empire. From our vantage point in history, we now know the four kingdoms are the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires.

The Greek Conquest and Split:

Daniel also received a vision of the demise of the Medo-Persian Empire, which had, in 539 B.C., overtaken the Babylonian Kingdom. God specifically names the Medo-Persian and Greek empires in Daniel 8:20-21 and 10:20-11:4. The first half of chapter 8 is a highly symbolic passage about a ram and a goat. The ram had two horns, one longer than the other, representing the empire of the Medes and the Persians (Daniel 8:20), and "none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great" (Daniel 8:4).

Then a goat “came from the west” (Daniel 8:5) with a single horn between its eyes. The horn represents the king, Alexander. The goat killed the ram and “became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off” (Daniel 8:8) – a prediction of Alexander’s untimely death. In Daniel’s vision, the single horn is replaced with four new horns, which are “four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power” (Daniel 8:22). The four new kingdoms are mentioned again in Daniel 11:4, which says that “his [Alexander’s] empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised.” These passages describe, two centuries in advance, precisely what happened to Alexander and his empire.

Conclusion

Approximately 250 years before Alexander began his world conquest, God provided Daniel with a glimpse into the future. This was important to Daniel and his people, as God also told them that they would return to their land and He would take care of them through the coming tumultuous times. Kingdoms rise and fall, but God holds the future, and His Word stands.