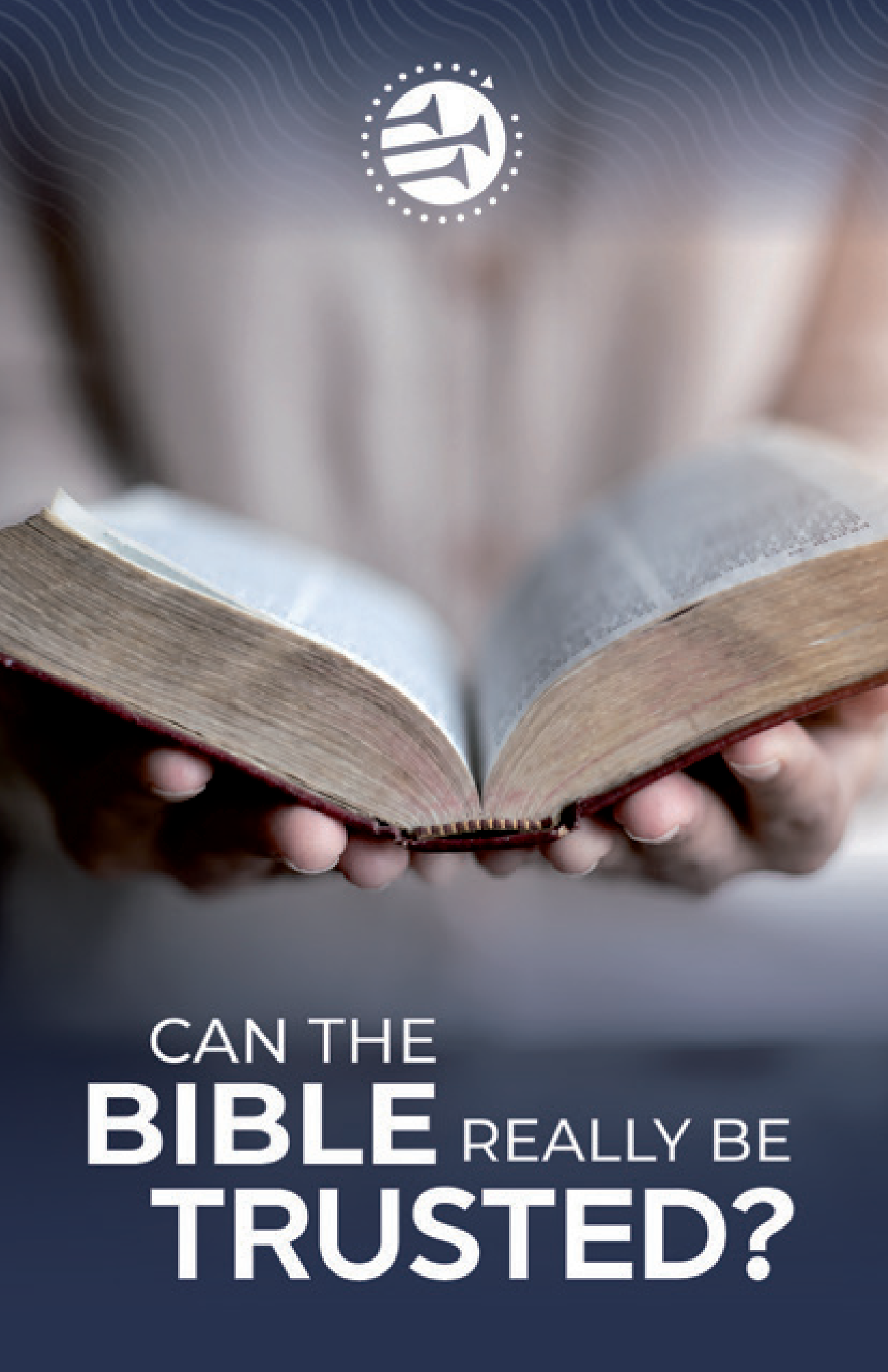

CAN THE BIBLE REALLY BE TRUSTED?

World War II was raging. Germany's forces had driven into the heart of Russia with speed. Hitler vowed that the Third Reich, uniting Europe and Russia, would last a thousand years. Drafted into the German army, corporal Franz Hasel was assigned as the clerk of Pioneer Park Unit 699, a bridge-building engineering unit in the southern part of the Russian war front. For several years, they fought their way through Ukraine and into the Caucasus Mountains toward the city of Baku and the Caspian Sea, which contained Russia's oil reserves.

One day, Franz's commanding officer, Captain Miekus, asked him a direct question: "Do you think Germany will win the war?" Expected to show national patriotism, Franz hesitated. Then he quietly asked, "Is this a private or an official question?" The officer told Franz he could answer unofficially. Franz reached into his pocket and pulled out a worn black book. It was his Bible. He reverently opened it to Daniel chapter 2 and began to read an ancient story.

The Great Statue in History

Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest king of Babylon, had experienced a terrible dream, but

when he awoke, he couldn't remember it. Daniel, a Hebrew captive, told the king, "There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Daniel 2:28). This dream would reveal the future.

Daniel then described to Nebuchadnezzar his dream of a statue of a man with (1) a head of gold, (2) arms and chest of silver, (3) thighs of bronze, (4) legs of iron, and (5) feet of iron mixed with clay. Daniel declared, "You are this head of gold" (Daniel 2:38), identifying Babylon as the first kingdom. "But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze" (Daniel 2:39).

Franz explained that Babylon was conquered by Cyrus the Great in 539 BC, ushering in the Medo-Persian Empire. After the Persian king Xerxes desecrated the temples on the Acropolis of Athens, the Greeks dreamed of avenging themselves. In 334 BC, their ruler, Alexander the Great, crossed into Asia, conquering the Medo-Persian Empire. This established the third kingdom—the Greek (or Hellenistic) Empire. "And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters

everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others" (Daniel 2:40). Franz described how ancient Rome overthrew Greece in 168 BC, establishing a powerful empire that encompassed most of Europe.

But according to the prophecy, the Roman Empire would not last. "Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay" (Daniel 2:41). The toes represent the breakup of the Roman Empire into the European nations. "As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay" (Daniel 2:43). Franz explained: "Royal families tried to hold Europe together through intermarriage. Napoleon tried to reunite it militarily. But each failed. The successive empires from Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century BC to the present day demonstrate that this prophecy is sure. Europe was not united then; it will not be united now under a Third Reich. Hitler cannot win this war." When Franz had finished, his

commanding officer, Captain Miekus, was silent. He asked Franz for his Bible and dismissed him.

Sometime later, Franz was summoned once again, this time with two other high-ranking officers present. He was handed the Bible and was told to repeat the entire Bible study. After nearly two hours, he again concluded that Hitler could not win. Then his commanding officer introduced the two men. They had both been history professors at leading German universities before being drafted into the armed forces. "They have confirmed the historical sequence of empires and dates provided," he said. After dismissing the professors, the commanding officer asked Franz to quietly ration their gasoline and operate only a third of their motorized vehicles in the days to come. Some months later, Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945. The rationed gasoline made Unit 699's retreat back to Austria possible.

History, Prophecy, and Archaeology

The Bible assumes God is the central actor on the stage of history and prophecy, allowing us to rationally and objectively test its accuracy.

The interplay of history and prophecy is not contained in any other sacred text of major world religions. As a historian and archaeologist, I have spent decades investigating the Bible's history and have seen hundreds of ways that history has been corroborated. There are inscriptions from Nebuchadnezzar himself that verify his existence (as well as more than a hundred other individuals mentioned in the Bible) and his specific attacks against Jerusalem. There are also records documenting the Judean captives as they were resettled in Babylonia. When we excavate the massive destructions by Nebuchadnezzar's armies in cities like Jerusalem and Lachish, we see the evidence of fulfilled prophecies (Micah 3:12; Isaiah 22:10–21; Jeremiah 32:26–35).

This dream of an ancient king, which predicted the outcome of the deadliest war in modern human history long before it occurred, gives us assurance that God is in control of the rise and fall of nations.

It also gives us certainty that the future is in God's hands. How so? Well, one final part of the dream has not been fulfilled yet. After the part describing the rise and fall of empires and the breakup of the Roman Empire, there was a

stone, “cut out without hands,” that struck the statue, completely destroyed it, and grew into a large mountain (Daniel 2:34, 35). It represents a kingdom that God will set up, “which shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44).

Because every other aspect of this dream has come true so accurately, we can trust that this final part will too. God will soon come and set up His eternal kingdom!

My grandfather Franz believed and trusted the Bible during his years on the war front. Today, as a scientist investigating biblical history through archaeology, I am privileged to witness increasing evidence for an intelligent faith. Not only do we have hope; we also have an abundance of evidence that God’s kingdom is soon to come. Where will you put your faith?

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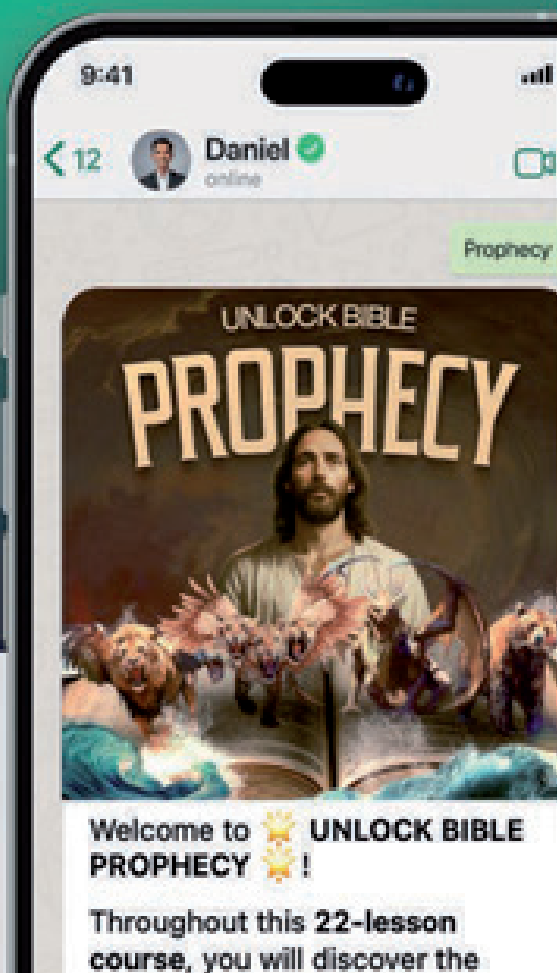

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