

Daniel – A special Study

Daniel is not the easiest book to understand. Sure, the historical portions that deal with things like Daniel's venture into the lion's den and his friend's time spent in the fiery furnace are simple enough, as are some of the dreams and other figures that occur early in the book for they are explained in fairly good details. However, by the time we reach chapter seven things begin to change in Daniel. We move from a simple history of Daniel's captivity and interaction with his captors to visions about things to come, which often muddies the waters of interpretation.

This study is to help in some small way explain these sections of scripture. As a word of warning I will say that these sections have been variously interpreted by many different people and by no means are we exhausting all possibilities. As a matter of fact, we are giving one simple line of reasoning for each of the visions and sections. You are encouraged to consider alternative views and examine them under the looking glass of the entirety of scripture. Time and space simply do not allow any other course.

Chapter 7

The Vision of the four beasts (7:3-8)

First, the lion with eagle's wings represent Babylon. Both are frequently used symbols for this world power (Jeremiah 49:19; 50:17, 44; 48:40; Ezekiel 17:3, 12). The wings represent the speed of the Babylonian take over. The fact that the wings are plucked refers to the pride of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4), which caused him to proclaim that "God rules in the kingdoms of men." Or perhaps, this plucking refers to the fact that with the death of Nebuchadnezzar the Babylon kingdom began its fall.

Second, the bear with three ribs and raised up on one side represents the Medo-Persian Empire. It too is a carnivore that devours. The fact that it is raised up on one side shows the dominance of one of the powers. Persian, under the leadership of her first king, Cyrus, proved to be stronger and in time simply became the Persian Empire. The ribs in the bear's mouth are the empires she devoured – Egypt, Lydia and Babylon.

Third, we are told about the leopard with four wings and four heads. Alexander the Great and the Grecian empire are prefigured in this language. Persia tried many times to defeat Greece, but was unsuccessful, causing great animosity to exist between these nations. After Alexander came to power he turned the tide of battle and within ten years had conquered from Greece to Egypt, to what is now Afghanistan, to the Himalayas, and the Indus River bordering India. The four wings of the leopard represent the speed not only of the conquest itself, but the swiftness of Alexander's armies. The fact that we are told "Dominion was given to it" tells us that Alexander's power was divinely appointed. The four heads speak to the division of the kingdom after Alexander died since he did not have an heir to place on the throne. The four head were – Ptolomy, who governed in Egypt; Seleucus, who governed in Syria; Cassander, who governed in Macedonia; and Lysimachus, who governed in Thrace.

The fourth beast that is diverse, terrible and exceedingly strong is undoubtedly the Roman Empire, though it is not really identified as such. History, however, bears out the validity of this assertion. Rome was abjectly ravenous, vicious, and cruel. She was little concerned about those she had conquered as were previous nations like Babylon and Greece, but simply mowed over the occupants of various lands. They were an exploitive and imperialistic nation that cared little for those of other cultures, though they did, in many ways tolerate them.

The ten horns of this beast represent the multiplicity of powerful rulers – the first ten rulers of the empire. These ten ruler’s history will span the time between 30 BC and 96 AD. If it is the case, as many suggest, that Revelation was written about 96 AD then these ten rulers are those that would be contemporary with Hebrew and Christian history. These emperors include Augustus, Tiberias, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. If, however, we begin the count with Pompey then the first ten would be Pompey, Julius (neither of which were actually referred to as emperor), Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius and Vespasian. This scheme of counting works well for those who see the narrative of the Bible ending around 70 AD.

The identification of the “little horn” will depend in part on how we count the rulers, as mentioned above. In both cases, the little horn will be the tenth ruler – either Domitian or Vespasian. If the vision has in mind the counting of these rulers in a historical fashion then it is most likely the latter ruler, Vespasian, who fits the bill since it was he who put down three other horns – Galba, Otho and Vitellius – in the course of a single year to bring stability to Rome. It should also be noted that it was Vespasian that led the armies of Rome against Jerusalem, destroying the temple and holy city, which lasted 3.5 years or times, time and a half time. It was then that the saints fled (Luke 21:20-22) and went on to conquer the world, surpassing the doomed Roman Empire, which fell around 476 AD.

Chapter Eight

This chapter basically continues the same historical allusions wrapped in figurative language as we saw in chapter 7, though it is much more specific. It gives us a little closer look at the second and third kingdoms (Medo-Persians and Greeks).

The vision of the Ram and Goat

In 8:3-4 we are shown the vision of a ram with two horns. This, like the bear with one shoulder higher than the other, represents the time of the Medo-Persians. Notice that one of the horns is higher than the other, indicating one of the powers was stronger than the other. The pushing North, South and West show the directions of her conquest.

In 8:5-8 we are shown a vision of a he-goat. The fact that it comes from the west over the face of the whole earth tells us that this is the Grecian Empire, which lay to the west and did conquer the whole of the known world during Alexander’s time. The most conspicuous horn is certainly Alexander, the most noted conqueror of all time. He first breaks apart the ram or Perisa and then magnifies himself or expands his reign over the earth. The Bible then tells us “when he was strong, the great horn was

broken.” While on his way home from the border of India, Alexander, at the age of 33 died in 323 BC. At this point his four generals take over (see their names in the explanation of chapter 7).

After the death of Alexander, Palestine was under the rule of the Ptolomaic kings. However both Palestine and Egypt were coveted by the Seleucid kings of the Greek Empire. Thus after about 100 years under mostly peaceful rule of the Ptolomies, warfare and political intrigue developed between the Greek kings of the North and the south. This is detailed to a great extent in chapter 11 of Daniel.

The Little horn (9-14)

This horn is not to be confused with the little horn of chapter seven. The little horn of chapter seven referred to the era of the Romans, while the little horn of chapter eight rises from Alexander’s rule and is thus Grecian. Similar language is used, but these are two completely different figures, as far as their interpretation is concerned.

Most commentators agree that the little horn of chapter eight is the infamous Antiochus IV, also known as Epiphanes, whom Josephus describes in his Book of Antiquities. Josephus says, “And there would arise from their number a certain king who would make war on the Jewish nation and their laws, deprive them of the form of government based on these laws, spoil the temple and prevent the sacrifices from being offered for three years. And these misfortunes our nation did in fact come to experience under Antiochus Epiphanes, just as Daniel many years before saw and wrote that they would happen.”

Daniel also reveals that this would last 2,300 evenings and morning, which is about 6 ½ years. Amazingly enough it the span of time between Antiochus deposing the legitimate high priest and the cleansing of the temple after his defilement is 6 ½ years.

So, who was this man? The name “Antiochus” means “one who withstands. Epiphanes means “illustrious or enlightened one.” The Jews, however, referred to him as Epimanes, which means “madman.” He was the fourth of the Seleucian kings to call himself Antiochus and he reigned from 175-163 BC. He was born in Athens, but as a boy lived in Rome for 12 years as a hostage. He later took on the name “Theos Epiphanes,” because he saw himself as the god Zeus incarnate.

He is known as one of the cruelest of tyrants of all time, using his self-proclaimed divinity as a launch pad for cruelty especially against the Jews. Among other things, he sold the office of high priest to the highest bidder, established a gymnasium in Jerusalem where naked athletes competed in Greek sporting events. He prohibited Jewish worship in Jerusalem and introduced the worship of Zeus. He slaughtered thousands of Jews. Josephus says that he often killed circumcised babies and hung them on cords around their mother’s necks. He forbade circumcision. He ransacked the temple of its treasures to fill his own. Finally, he had a sow sacrificed on the altar of the temple, desecrating it. All of this led to the Maccabean War, which is detailed in the apocryphal books of the Maccabees, which, though not inspired, have proven to be a accurate history of what we commonly call the “period of scriptural silence.”

The Seventy Weeks of Daniel (9:24-27)

In a nutshell, the prophecy of the seventy weeks of Daniel is a wonderful prophecy about the kingdom that Christ would establish in days future to Daniels, and of the redemption and the new covenant that would be ushered in at the same time, putting an end to the bondage of sin that held man in its grip. It goes even further than the establishment of the church to discuss the fact that he was rejected by his own, who brought down God’s wrath in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70.

Let us first note that the “seventy weeks” is not literal, but figurative. Seventy literal weeks after Daniel was given the prophecy would be less than a year and a half, which would be a period of time far too short for all the events described in the prophecy to happen. Most, instead, use what is called the year-day principle of Leviticus 25:8; numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6 to give us seventy sevens or 490 days, each of which stand for a year or 490 years total. The seven weeks become $7 \times 7 = 49$ years; the three score and two weeks (62) then become $62 \times 7 = 434$ years; and the 1 week = 7 years, making a total of 490 years.

Thus, the prophecy is divided into three periods – the time of rebuilding Jerusalem; the silent years; and the final week, which begins with the ministry of Christ and ends with the decree that Jerusalem will be destroyed, though its destruction is not part of the 70 weeks timeline, but “decreed” (v. 26).

7 weeks	62 weeks	1 week
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 49 years • Rebuilding Jerusalem • v. 25 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Silent yrs. • The messiah's advent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split into two 3.5 yr. periods • Anointed cut off midweek • Final half leads up to the destruction of Jerusalem, but does not include it

This breakdown may be an oversimplification of the prophecy, but gives a basic outline leading from the rebuilding of Jerusalem up the time right before Jerusalem is destroyed.

Chapters ten, eleven and twelve

These chapters form a unit that we do well to study together though our study will not be in depth by any means. The details and accuracy of these prophecies are so precise that it has caused many skeptics of the Bible to reject the notion that these chapters were written nearly 350 years before the events. Let us offer just one fact in favor of Daniel’s authorship and the genuine nature of these prophecies.

The Septuagint Version was translated around 270 BC and the entire book of Daniel was a part of the translation, proving that it had to be written and accepted as part of the Jewish canon many years prior to that translation.

Unfortunately, we do not have the space at this time to go into a detailed study, but will present merely the following outline and a few notes on some of the more perplexing sections of scripture.

- I. Vision of the Heavenly being (10:4-9)**
 - a. April 24, 536 BC on the banks of the Tigris
 - b. A description of Christ pre-incarnate
- II. An Encounter with Angels (10:10-11:1)**
 - a. Angel of Persia hindering answer to Daniel's prayer – most likely a reference to the influence of Satan in this world
 - b. Daniel is strengthened
 - c. Fighting against the angels of Persia and Greece
- III. Summary of Persian Kings and First king of Greece (11:2-4)**
 - a. Cyrus the Great
 - b. Four following him – Cambyses, Pseudo-Smerdis, Darius Hystaspes, Xerxes
 - c. Alexander the Great and the breakup of the Grecian Kingdom into four
- IV. Wars between kings of the north and south for dominion of the Holy Lands (11:5-20)**
 - a. The Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria
 - b. Plotting, intrigue, marriages, alliances and the effects on the Jews in Palestine
- V. Antiochus Epiphanes and his hatred of the Jews (11:2-45)**
 - a. The rise of Antiochus IV (21-24)
 - b. The first campaign into Egypt (25-28)
 - c. His second campaign into Egypt thwarted by the Romans (29-30a)
 - d. His wrath on the Jews; the emergence of the Maccabees (30b-35)
 - e. The Great arrogance of Antiochus (36-39)
 - f. A recapitulation of Antiochus reign of terror (40-45)
- VI. Triumph and the end of trouble (12:1-4)**
 - a. The end of trouble and triumph of the saints (12:1-4)
 - b. The cleansing of the sanctuary (12:5-13)

The Prince of Persia

Perhaps one of the most difficult section of this set of prophecies is found chapter 10 and concerns the brilliant figure that Daniel sees and what is called the Prince of Persia. It is a difficult section that has been variously interpreted. Upon first reading it almost sounds as if there is some great unseen battle taking place either literally or figurative that we are simply not made privy to. Furthermore, little else is revealed about it other than the fact that this battle was the reason that angel had not appeared for three weeks, leaving Daniel in his sadness and weeping.

So, who is this “Prince of Persia” with which the angel struggled and what sort of struggle was it? In my humble estimation this is not a literal prince of Persia, but rather those spiritual beings that would fight against God, as Persia fought against Him. Angels are created beings with freewill (Jude 6). As such there are some that have chosen to work God’s will through providence and others who would battle against His will being done. The latter beings would naturally align themselves with vile and wicked nations such as Persia in attempt to defeat the working of God. This is no doubt why “angels” are mentioned in Romans 8:38-39 as things that we perceive may, but actually cannot keep us from the love of God. It is perhaps also the reason why Paul says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). There are spiritual forces of evil that we cannot perceive, but work against us. Daniel and this angel provide for us a small glimpse into this heavenly realm.

Another clue along this line is the mention of Michael. Michael is mentioned three times in Daniel (10:13, 21; 12:1) and is called the “great prince” that has charge of Daniel’s people. In other words, he was the godly protector of God’s providential work among the Jews. Michael is mentioned twice in the New Testament as well and on both occasions is involved in a heavenly fight (Jude9; Rev. 12:7).

Let us note too that there is also a mention of the Prince of Greece. The angel reveals to Daniel that when he leaves Daniel he will go back to the fight against this evil power that possesses Persia, but eventually that presence will move from Persian and take occupancy with Greece. Historically we understand that Greece is the next great power after Persia and though at first there was great peace, the Jews suffered immensely at the Grecian’s hands, namely Antiochus IV.

Chapters 10-12 summarized

Chapter 10 – In the third year of Cyrus a message was revealed to Daniel. He had been fasting for three weeks. On the 24th day of the month he was beside the Tigris River when he saw a man (pre-incarnate Christ) clothed in linen and whose face burned like lightning. Daniel is then given prophecies concerning Persian and Greece. These prophecies, an angel reveals, concern what will happen to Daniel’s people in the latter days.

Chapter 11 – In the first year of Darius the Mede Daniel comes to strengthen him. Three more kings will arise in Persia (Cambyses, Smerdis and Darius Hystaspes). Then one will come who will stir the Greeks (Xerxes). A mighty one will rise (Alexander the Great), but he will be broken in four (Cassander, Lysymachus, Ptolemy and Seleucus). Seleucus and Ptolemy will fight repeatedly. On from the north (Antiochus IV) will come to Egypt and be withstood and then on his way home will defile the temple in Jerusalem offering a hog on the altar and placing an idol in the temple (abomination of desolation). The Macabees will stand against him and gain freedom. Antiochus will come to his end without aid.

Chapter 12 – At that time, the end of Antiochus, Michael shall stand up. Many of those who sleep in the dust will awake, some to everlasting life. Those who are wise will shine. Daniel is told to seal up the words of prophecy. Daniel by the river sees two men in linen. One asks how long it will be until these things are fulfilled. One responds time, times and half times, all of which is applied to Antiochus and his

reign of terror on the Jews, rather than leading to the far off NT Times. Evidence of this is the time line at the end of the chapter or statement about 3.5 years (times, time and half times). This is the exact amount of time between the defilement of the temple and removal of burnt offering in Jerusalem and the eventual cleansing of the temple.

Conclusion

There is much more we could say or offer to help interpret these puzzling chapters, but hopefully the things we have mentioned will whet your appetite for a more personal an in depth independent study.