

Introductory Thoughts on Daniel

2009 July 13th for August 24th

Daniel is the final “major” prophet in the Bible, that is, a prophet who wrote a relatively large book that was included in the canon. There are several minor prophets after this, but beginning Daniel means that our journey through the Old Testament will be winding down soon. There are only about 100 pages left (out of nearly 1500).

Daniel is the source of several Bible stories that children learn in Sunday School, powerful enough to be mountainous examples of faith in the omnipotent and only God, yet clean enough for children of the modern, post-Victorian era. These include Daniel in the lion’s den, his proteges Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego (their Babylonian names) in the fiery furnace, and, in Daniel’s old age, the real, instigating case of the “handwriting on the wall: Mene Mene Tekel, Parsin.” We’ll get to these in turn. There is also a great deal of symbolic or prophetic material reminiscent of the later book of Revelation. This material deals with apocalyptic times and even the return of Christ who, in the lifetime of Daniel, had not yet come for even the first time.

Daniel was one of the exiles in Babylon who, as an upstanding, intelligent young man, was tapped to serve as a major official in the king’s court. To qualify for this he was made a eunuch (which, incidentally, would have disqualified him for the Levitical priesthood had he been a Levite serving in high office back home). As was directed by other prophets such as Jeremiah, Daniel made the most of his situation and thrived in his position. His unwavering devotion to God, and even his devotion to a vegetarian Hebrew diet, caused consternation in the high courts of the great superpower of his era, in which he served.

Daniel lived to see some of the first exiles returning to their homeland, but did not return himself.

Daniel 1

2009 July 15th for August 25th

Daniel receives his commission:

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

“Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility -- young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service.”

Notice that this is like going to college.

“Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

“But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, ‘I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.’

“Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ‘Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.’ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

“At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

“To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

“At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

“And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.”

Notice that this part of the text uses only their Hebrew names.

Daniel 2:1 - 23

2009 July 16th for August 26th

In the second year of his reign, king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that was so disturbing he could not sleep. His closest advisors (including magicians, astrologers, diviners, and enchanters) wanted to help him. They asked him to tell the dream and they would interpret it. He replied that he had made up his mind that *they* would tell *him* the dream, and then interpret it for him.

This seemed difficult. The king and the advisors went around about this a few time, the advisors claiming that it was too difficult, that only the gods could do something like that, and that a request like this was unprecedented in history. The king eventually tired of all this and ordered them all killed.

Specifically, the penalty was, “I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble.”

Among the “wise men of Babylon” under the death decree were Daniel and his cohort. When Arioch, the commander of the king’s guard, came around to announce the decree, Daniel asked him what the problem was. After hearing, “Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.”

‘Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his colleagues Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said:

“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his.
He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them.
He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.
He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.
I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

Daniel 2:24 - 49

2009 July 16th for August 27th

Daniel then went to Arioch and asked for an audience with the king. Arioch, who seems not to have been too enthusiastic about his assignment to execute all the wise men in the country, took him right in.

“Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, ‘I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.’”

Note Daniel’s introduction as “one of the exiles.”

“The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), ‘Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?’”

Daniel, possibly having learned from Moses about taking credit, immediately declined credit:

“Daniel replied, ‘No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:

“As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

“You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue -- an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

“This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

“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, strong as iron -- for iron breaks and smashes everything -- and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of the mountain, but not by human hands -- a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

This is the origin of our term “feet of clay” indicating weakness in greatness.

“The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy.”

Thus Daniel certifies his work.

“Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, ‘Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.’”

Notice the great king bowing down before Daniel!

“Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.”

Daniel 3

2009 July 17th for August 28th

But as every success sets up a new challenge, so Daniel and his cohort receive a strong First Commandment attack. This is the famous story of the fiery furnace which, for poetic value (notice the pompous repetitions throughout), I’ll repeat verbatim.

It could also be titled, “It’s tough to get and hold a promotion around here!”

“King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

“Then the herald loudly proclaimed, ‘This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.’

“Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

“At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, ‘O king, live forever! You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down

and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon -- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego -- who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.'

"Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, 'Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?'

"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.'

"Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

"Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, 'Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?'

"They replied, 'Certainly, O king.'

"He said, 'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'

"Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, 'Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!'

"So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

“Then Nebuchadnezzar said, ‘Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.’

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.”

Daniel 4:1 - 18

2009 July 20th for August 31st

This chapter begins like a letter written from Nebuchadnezzar to all the people of the earth. It declares that Daniel’s God is Most High and wonderful, that his dominion is everywhere and his wonders are mighty.

Nebuchadnezzar describes that he was contented and prosperous when one night he had a dream that terrified him. Daniel was the only one who could interpret it. In the dream there was an enormous tree in the middle of the land. “The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.”

But in the dream a holy messenger came down from heaven and ordered the tree cut down and its branches trimmed. “But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field.”

The messenger also declared: “Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.”

Nebuchadnezzar then asked Daniel (that is, Belteshazzar, Daniel’s Babylonian court name) to tell what the dream meant “because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”

Daniel 4:19 - 37

2009 July 21st for September 1st

Nebuchadnezzar continues his letter to the people of the world in which he recounts his dream and asks Daniel for interpretation.

Daniel interpreted the dream for him beginning by saying that he it would be better if it was about the king’s enemies. Nebuchadnezzar himself was the great tree and a decree would come from heaven cutting it down and making him live with the wild animals. Daniel ends with advice to the king: “Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”

But one day a year later, Nebuchadnezzar was walking around on the roof of the palace admiring his city and himself when the decree did come from heaven. The king said, “‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’

“The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, ‘This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdom of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.’”

And all of this happened to Nebuchadnezzar.

After that he did praise God, saying,

“His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’”

And at that point, his sanity, kingdom, honor, splendor, and authority were restored to him. Then he said:

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

A note nearby says that “Nebuchadnezzar’s condition has been described as boanthropy, or cow-like behavior. There are also other interpretations.

Daniel 5

2009 July 23rd for September 2nd

Some time after Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon had a new king Belshazzar.

“King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.”

This was, of course, a blasphemy.

“Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.

“The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, ‘Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.’”

They all came, but no one was helpful. Then the queen remembered that there had been a wise man, Daniel, in Nebuchadnezzar’s reign who “was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems.”

Apparently all of Daniel’s promotions to high position had worn off.

Daniel was brought in. The king explained the situation, pointing out the writing on the wall, and the fact that no one could read it. He also made his offer of promotion to third in the kingdom.

“Then Daniel answered the king, ‘You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.’”

Daniel then told the story of Nebuchadnezzar who had been humbled by God and made to behave like a cow for a time because of his pride and arrogance but who had in the end “acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.”

He then lectured Belshazzar for not doing this and for using the precious goblets from the temple for his drunken party.

“‘But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.’

“This is the inscription that was written:

“MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

“This is what the words mean:

“Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.” (times two!)

“Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

“Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

The Hand apparently writes in a very compact language.

“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 is once again a high ruler, but...

“That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.”

Daniel 6

2009 July 24th for September 3rd

“It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.’

“So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: ‘O King Darius, live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered -- in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.’ So King Darius put the decree in writing.”

The king was now trapped by his own decree, as dictated by the law of the Medes and Persians.

“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: ‘Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions’ den?’

“The king answered, ‘The decree stands -- in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.’

“Then they said to the king, ‘Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.’ When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.”

Note the class distinction, “... one of the exiles.”

“Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, ‘Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.’

“So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, ‘May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!’

“A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.”

The sealing of the den on the condemned must have been quite a dramatic ceremony.

“At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, ‘Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?’”

Daniel is now able to plead his case, after the death sentence was carried out.

“Daniel answered, ‘O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king.’

“The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

“At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions’ den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

“Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land:

““May you prosper greatly!

“I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

“For he is a living God and he endures forever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.
He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth.
He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.”

The lions are nearly an afterthought in the decree.

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

Daniel 7:1 - 14

2009 July 28th for September 4th

Daniel had a dream of his own that he wrote down. It is an apocalyptic vision and has most impact if repeated verbatim in its poetic form. (We may have to do this with the entire book of Revelation.) Interpreters often try to make future historical narratives out of them such as the rise and fall of nations with symbols like the eagle and the bear. Notice the highly Messianic description at the end.

“In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.

“Daniel said: ‘In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.

“ The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it.

“And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, “Get up and eat your fill of flesh!”

“After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

“After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast -- terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.

“While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully.

“As I looked,

“thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

“Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

Daniel 7:15 - 28

2009 July 28th for September 7th

Daniel now interprets his own dream by entering into it and interacting with it. The interpretation is as mystical as the dream itself. The “time, times, and half a time” is often interpreted as three and a half years.

“I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this.

“So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: “The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever -- yes, for ever and ever.”

“Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws -- the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell -- the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until

the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

“He gave me this explanation: “The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from these kingdoms. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

““But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.”

“This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.”

Daniel 8

2009 July 29th for September 8th

Daniel had another vision. He saw Susa and there was a ram with two horns there. One of the horns was longer but the other grew. The ram charged in all directions. No animal could match him. “He did as he pleased and became great.” Then a goat with one horn came from the west “crossing the whole earth without touching the ground.” He attacked the ram in a rage and shattered his two horns making him powerless. The goat was very strong but then his horn was broken and replaced by four, one in each direction.

And then out of one of those horns another grew. It was wily and threw some of the stars out of heaven. The daily sacrifice and many saints were victims of it. “It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.” Daniel heard voices talking about the loss of the daily sacrifice. How long would it be? It would be 2300 days before the sanctuary was re-consecrated.

Puzzled by the vision, Daniel saw a man standing in front of him. “And I heard a man’s voice from the Ulai calling, ‘Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision.’”

The vision concerned the “end times,” Daniel was told. The two-horned ram was Media and Persia. The goat was Greece. The four horns were four kingdoms that split out of Greece but did not have the same power.

“In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the

mighty men and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.

“The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.’

“I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king’s business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.”

Daniel 9

2009 July 31st for September 9th

Daniel was reading Jeremiah one day and realized that “the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.” So he pleaded with God in “prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.” Daniel confessed the great sins of his people, their ignorance of God’s law, and their deafness to his prophets. He acknowledged that the judgments prescribed by Moses had been poured out on Israel. He asked God, the One who had delivered them from Egypt for deliverance, for forgiveness, and for mercy. He asked for a fast response.

Daniel received a response which has been widely interpreted in the apocalyptic study communities. What it has to do with his pleadings is unclear.

“While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill -- while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, ‘Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision:

“Seventy “sevens” are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes there will be seven “sevens,” and sixty-two “sevens.” It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two sevens, the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood. War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one “seven.” In the middle of the “seven” he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

Note for your own reference that seventy times seven is 490. Sixty two times seven is 434. Seven times seven is 49, of course. Also, 2300 days is six and a third years. All of this is used by numerical interpreters to make claims about all this as pointing to the coming (first and second) of Christ. Neither one really fits the first coming very well (dates for Daniel are given as 560s BC or 150s BC depending on the school of thought). Some interpretations have the flow of years interrupted at various times, such as at the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. up until its reconstruction in our own future. They would have us believe that the last “seven” is yet to begin even now. The “Tribulation.” Others discuss “rolling prophecies,” that is, ones that are fulfilled several times at different scales such that this has already happened one or more times but will happen again in our own future.

Machinations like that with the text are not very compelling. Perhaps they miss the point, though I must confess, I don't follow well what the point could be.

Daniel 10

2009 July 31st for September 10th

“In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.

“At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.

“On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

“I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left; my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

“A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, ‘Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.’ And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

“Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of

Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.’

“While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me. ‘I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe.’

“Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. ‘Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed,’ he said, ‘Peace! Be strong now; be strong.’

“When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, ‘Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength.’

“So he said, ‘Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince. And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I took my stand to support and protect him.)’”

I have no idea what this parenthetical remark means or how it fits in.

I find all these princes of countries interesting. Some interpret the prince of Persia as the devil or one of the devil’s followers. They probably make this interpretation because they fight against Michael and Gabriel who are on God’s side and everything, of course, is spiritual warfare.

Tomorrow we see what “the man” actually said.

Daniel 11

2009 August 4th for September 11th

A lengthy prophesy about the future political arrangement of the known world follows.

Four kings will appear in Persia, one much richer than the others. The one will also be more powerful, but after his ascent, his empire will go to the four winds. The king in the South will be strong, but one of his commanders will be stronger. He will try to make a marriage alliance with the king in the North but their power will fade. The daughter involved will have a child that will arise and become victorious and will seize all of their gods and take them off to Egypt.

There will be battles between north and south, alliances, rebellions, and insolence that backfires. Taxation by the successor will lead to ruin.

A contemptible person will become king. “With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very

powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him. Those who eat from the king's provisions will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall in battle. The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time. The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it and then return to his own country."

Later he will attack the South again, but a navy of ships along the coastline will get involved. Rather than face them, he will turn against the holy covenant and abolish the daily sacrifice, setting up the abomination of desolation.

The "abomination of desolation" figures prominently in eschatological prophecy interpretations.

The king will exalt himself above everyone and every thing. He will regard no gods but will invent new ones, including a "fortress god" that will help him attack fortresses and prevail. He will mix it up with the kings of the South and North and even invade the Beautiful Land. Many will fall but some will be delivered, such as Edom, Moab and Ammon. Egypt will not escape. He will be alarmed by rumors but will pitch his royal tents "between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him."

Daniel 12

2009 August 6th for September 14th

Quoting verbatim as Gabriel continues to address Daniel.

"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people -- everyone whose name is found written in the book -- will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.'

"Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, 'How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?'

"The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, 'It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.'

"I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, 'My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?'

“He replied, ‘Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.

“From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

“As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.”

And that is the end of the book of Daniel.

This looks Messianic and apocalyptic all at the same time. In this chapter I see the rapture, the tribulation, the antichrist, and the ultimate ascent of Jews. I can't comment much on all this. I can comment on the numbers. A “time, times, and half a time” is often interpreted as 3-1/2 years (1 + 2 + 1/2). Three and a half years is also close to 1290 days, which therefore seems to be confirming. I don't know (or recall) the interpreted significance of the 45 days between the 1290 and 1335.

In our time, as in all times, it has been widely thought that it was the “end times.” I spent my youth waiting for the temple (the third temple) to be established in Jerusalem so that the clock would start ticking on all these things (the 3-1/2 years or days or eons or whatever they are). Actually, the restoration of the Jews to Israel in 1948 was supposed to start the “last generation” which would brought the end around 1968. Or was it 1988? Or 2008? Or 2018...? Many evangelists are growing old today still waiting for these things to happen, or perhaps believing that they are in progress. Others, like the preacher Paul Morrell, who I talked to about it in 1979, sanely for perhaps the first time, have passed on before Christ returned, as they expected to, as anyone should expect to.

Some think that historic figures who conquered Jerusalem and tried to Helenize it, by outlawing Jewish practices and enforcing progressive Greek ones, were the fulfillment of these visions. Others preach a “rolling fulfillment,” both then, now, and at times in between. One thing is for sure, Daniel himself did not know, nor was he told.

Concluding Thoughts on Daniel

2009 August 6th for September 15th

Daniel has some of the best stories in the Bible. Like Samuel, he wrote his own book, but I don't find him to be the cranky old self-justifying man that Samuel was. Daniel is an upright man of integrity, a brilliant leader in the service of the conquerors of his people, an interpreter of dreams and handwriting on walls, a beneficiary of miracles, and most of all, a public and uncompromising follower of the true God, whether popular or deadly.

The end of Daniel contains much about the end times, as we saw yesterday. Is that now? Some time in the past? Both? Daniel reported what he saw but did not understand it. If a man of Daniel's brilliance and close connection with God did not understand these things, who are we to presume we do, or debate our peers?

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