The Book of Daniel

by

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Preface

Writing an exposition on the Book of Daniel is like cleaning one's rifle without unloading it. The risk is high! Especially because of the proximity of the change in millennia, prophecy buffs are developing all sorts of schemes to calculate the end of the world, and central to most of them is this book. The book of Daniel has become an object of polarization. Eager prognosticators dig into it with relish, and others, frustrated with the reckless interpretations of self-appointed prophecy experts, tend to ignore it. Both treatments of the book are unfortunate, and this exposition is offered in the hope of striking some balance. In particular, this exposition will attempt to review some of the major interpretations of the apocalyptic sections of the book, offering both the pluses and minuses of each view. It is hoped that this approach will benefit the reader by helping him or her sort through the maze of conflicting opinions. In the end, nothing better can be said than what was offered long ago by an unnamed Christian: in essentials unity, in doubtful matters liberty, in all things charity.

The Book of Daniel

The Book of Daniel, by all accounts, is one of the most enigmatic writings in the Bible. Though the book was not numbered among the prophets of the Hebrew Bible (it appears near the end of the third section of the Hebrew canon called "The Writings"), in the New Testament Jesus recognized Daniel as a prophet. Scholars long have debated the authorship and dating of the Book of Daniel. Opinions about the book range from the dispensational assessment that it is the prophetic key to unlock the mysteries of the end of the world to the critical opinion that it had nothing to say beyond the events of the Maccabean Revolt nearly two centuries before the time of Jesus.

In the midst of all this controversy, the book provides one of the most famous of children's Bible stories, "Daniel in the Lion's Den," yet it offers one of the most powerful penitential prayers in the history of religious literature, Daniel's confession of national sin in behalf of his own people.

Introduction

The name *Daniel* (= God is my judge) was not unknown in Hebrew antiquity, for David so-named one of his sons (1 Chr. 3:1), and a priestly family among the returned exiles also carried this name (Ezr. 8:2; Ne. 10:6). Ezekiel refers to a *Daniel* (Eze. 14:14, 20; 28:3), but since the Hebrew spelling is different than the namesake of the Book of Daniel,[1] it is unclear whether or not this reference is to the biblical Daniel. In short, then, all information about the biblical Daniel must be drawn from the single book that bears his name, and admittedly, this is not much. We know nothing of his early life in Judah prior to his exile, when, along with a number of other youths of royal or noble descent, he was taken to Babylon in an early deportation (Da. 1:1-2, 6; cf. 2 Kg. 24:1-2; 2 Chr. 36:5-7). In Babylon, he rose in rank under Nebuchadnezzar, first as a seer (1:17b; 4:9; 5:11) and later as a provincial governor and resident at the royal court (2:48-49). Later, he was elevated as the third highest ruler in the empire (5:29), and when the government shifted to Medo-Persia, Daniel was named as one of the three administrators over the 120 provincial satraps with the potential to become vice-regent (6:1-3).

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[1]Ezekiel refers to *Dani'el*, while the Book of Daniel refers to *Daniyye'l*.

Text

Like the Book of Ezra, the Book of Daniel is written in two languages (possibly three, if one counts the Apocryphal "Additions to Daniel").[2] The sections in 1:1--2:4a and 8:1--12:13 are in Hebrew, while the long section in 2:4b--7:28 is in Aramaic. Aramaic, which is a Semitic dialect closely related to Hebrew, was the language of diplomacy in the Persian Period.

Why the book comes down to us in these two languages is not immediately clear. Various suggestions have been offered. One is that the book originally may have been composed in a single language, parts were lost, and the lost parts replaced from an extant translation in the second language (theories exist for both Hebrew to Aramaic and Aramaic to Hebrew). Another suggestion is that parts of the book may have been drawn from pre-existing literary documents which were in a language different than the author used for the other parts. Yet another is that the author used Aramaic when writing those parts that addressed the nations of the world, and he used Hebrew when writing about the future of Israel and the kingdom of God.[3] In the end, no suggestion has won the day and the jury is still out. Some scholars view the two languages as evidence that the book was either written or edited in the Maccabean Period and/or that the book has more than one author. Those scholars who support the unity of the book see the two languages as intentional and generally accept the theological explanation mentioned above.

Structure

The Book of Daniel naturally falls into two divisions, each consisting of six chapters. The first section (chapters 1-6), written in the third person, is historical, and it details Daniel's exile in Babylon, some of the trials faced by the exiles, and Daniel's role as a seer in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius. A repeating theme in this section is the recognition of the supremacy of the Hebrew God by pagan potentates (3:28-29; 4:34-37; 6:25-27). The second section (chapters 7-12), mostly written in the first person,[4] is apocalyptic, and it describes Daniel's prophetic visions of the future great world empires. Bifid compositions (works written in two distinct but related halves) were not uncommon in the ancient Near East.[5]

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[2]There is debate as to whether the Apocryphal additions were originally composed in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek, but in any case, the only extant manuscripts containing these sections are in Greek.

[3]O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 516-517; E. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 375-376.

[4]Only the introductions to the visions in 7:1-2a and 10:1 are in third person form.

[5]R. Harrison, *ISBE* (1979) I.860.

Historical: Chapters 1-6 (3rd person)

Daniel and his friends obey Hebrew Kosher laws in Babylon (1)

Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream about world empires (2)

The three Hebrews refuse to participate in pagan worship and are thrown into a furnace of fire (3)

Daniel's prophetic interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of madness (4)

Daniel reads the handwriting on the wall about the fall of Babylon (5)

Daniel continues to pray to his God despite the threat of execution in a lion's den (6)

Apocalyptic: Chapters 7-12 (1st person)

Daniel's dream about future world empires (7)

Daniel's vision of the ram and the goat (8)

Daniel's confession of his nation's sins and the prediction of the seventy weeks (9)

Daniel's vision of the kings of the north and the south and the time of the end (10-12)

Place in the Canon

The Book of Daniel, following the order of the Septuagint, falls after Ezekiel in the English Bible. As such, the Book of Daniel commonly is regarded as one of the "major prophets," that is, one of the longer prophetic compositions in comparison to the relatively shorter "minor prophets." This designation is not entirely satisfactory, however, since it does not reflect the ordering of the Hebrew Bible nor the traditional understanding of prophethood in Israel. In fact, in the Hebrew Bible, Daniel is not accorded the title *nabi* (= prophet), but instead, is described as a man of *hokmah* (= wisdom) and *hazon* (= vision). This may seem to be a distinction without a difference, but it should be observed that the title *nabi* is reserved for those characters or books in the *Nebiim* (= Prophets), the second division of the Hebrew canon. Daniel falls in the third division called *Kethubim* (= Writings), which collects the works of seers, wise men and priests. As such, Daniel was not a prophet in the traditional sense of one who stood between God and the nation, speaking to Israel on behalf of God during Israel's national history. Instead, he served as a statesman in a heathen court, exiled from his homeland and unable to address his people directly. On the other hand, Daniel did offer predictions about the future, and it is in this sense that Jesus refers to him as a prophet (Mt. 24:15), a designation that also has been

attested in the Qumran scrolls.[6]

Author and Date

The tradition of the Christian Church and the Synagogue has been generally uniform up until about the 19th century. The Book of Daniel was believed to have been written by its namesake in the 6th century B.C. Daniel's prophecies about the future were recorded centuries before they were fulfilled in the Greek and Roman Empires. To be sure, this consensus was challenged in the 3rd century A.D. by Porphyry, a Neoplatonist with an ax to grind against Christianity in general and prophecy in particular. Porphyry argued that the book was written in the Maccabean Period as an encouragement to the Jewish people during their persecutions by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. However, it was not until the past two centuries that this critical approach to Daniel came to be dominant. The critical viewpoint, which echoed the thoughts of Porphyry, is that Daniel was not written as traditionally supposed by a 6th century Jewish exile, but rather, by a Maccabean apocalyptist who did not hesitate to use prophecies-after-the-event to urge the authority of his viewpoint.

Arguments in favor of a late date for Daniel include a plethora of technical details. First, the visions of Daniel 8 and 11-12 offer remarkably accurate forecasts of the 3rd and 2nd century Greco-Persian and Syrian-Egyptian conflicts and the 2nd century period of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, accounts that might well have been given by an eyewitness (more on this at the beginning of chapter 11). Second, there are apparent historical inaccuracies in the book, some regarding Israelite history (i.e., the notion of a deportation by Nebuchadnezzar in Jehoiakim's third year, 1:1; cf. Je. 46:2) and some regarding Babylonian history (i.e., the notion that Belshazzar was the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar, when in fact, Nabonidus was the father of Belshazzar). Such inaccuracies seemed intolerable for someone who was contemporary with the events, but they were quite plausible for someone writing two or three centuries later.[7] Third, the book contained a number of Persian and Greek loan words which seemed anachronistic in a 6th century context. Fourth, the theology of angels, the last judgment, the resurrection of the dead, and the victory of the kingdom of God over the world seemed more at home in the period of Jewish Apocalyptic and the Apocrypha than in the 6th century. Finally, the fact that Daniel was placed in the *Kethubim* rather than the *Nebiim* of the Hebrew Bible was thought to suggest it was later than the historical period of the kingdom of Judah. By the 19th century, the majority of biblical scholars had rejected the traditional authorship and dating of Daniel in preference for an unknown author/compiler during the Maccabean

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[6]R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 1107.

[7]For these and other alleged inaccuracies, see Eissfeldt, 521.

Period. To be sure, some of them suggested (and still suggest) that the book may have used earlier material, in fact, material that might be as old as the Babylonian and Persian Periods.[8] Still, the present form of the book was not earlier than the Maccabean Period.

Against this conclusion a minority of biblical scholars have continued to support the traditional author and date. They suggest that behind the late date theory lies an *a priori* rejection of predictive prophecy's miraculous character. They also offer explanations for the apparent historical discrepancies. For instance, different calculations of regnal years between Daniel (who uses the Babylonian system) and Jeremiah (who uses the Hebrew system) may account for apparent inconsistencies. Furthermore, the Hebrew idiom "son of," when describing Belshazzar as Nebuchadnezzar's offspring, may mean only "descendent of." Additional research indicates that Persian and Greek loan words were more widely circulated in the ancient world than popularly assumed. The theology of angels, the victory of God's kingdom over the world, and belief in the last judgment are present in Zechariah (which is in the *Nebiim*), as well as other portions of the Old Testament, so such expressions in Daniel do not mandate a late date. Finally, if any of the psalms are by David, and most scholars credit at least some to him, then the fact that the Book of Daniel appears in the *Kethubim*, which also contains the Psalms, is not a strong argument for a late date.[9] More recently, since texts from Daniel have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and especially since one of them refers to "Daniel, the prophet" (4Q), an expression that suggests canonical recognition, this *terminus ad quem* may make a Maccabean date unlikely if not impossible. The scrolls are all copies, and as Harrison states, "The autograph of Daniel and other OT canonical works must of necessity be advanced well before the Maccabean period if the proper minimum of time is allowed for the book to be circulated and accepted as Scripture."[10]

Thus, the battle for the authorship and dating of Daniel has been sharply polarized. If the critical position is accepted, several uncomfortable conclusions follow. First, significant portions of the book obviously purport to have been written by Daniel, since they are composed in the first person with the repeating line "I, Daniel." If this is not true, then the book perpetrates a fraud. No amount of urging that such pseudonymous authorship was accepted in ancient times as a literary convention has been able to remove the sting of this accusation. Furthermore, Jesus himself quoted from Daniel 9:27, and he did so with the qualifying phrase "spoken by

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[8]Eissfeldt, 522ff.

[9]Conservative arguments in favor of the traditional dating may be found in Harrison, *Introduction*, 1105-1134; E. Young, *Introduction*, 360-377; R. Wilson, *Studies in the Book of Daniel* 2 vols. (New York: 1917, 1938); G. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 377-403.

[10]R. Harrison, *ISBE* (1979) I.861.

the prophet Daniel" (Mt. 24:15). Were Christians then to suppose that Jesus, the Son of God, either reduced his language to conventional thought (even though it was inaccurate), or worse, that he so condescended in his humanity that he was unaware of the real state of affairs? Belief in an inspired Bible and the acceptance of a Bible with blatant deception and historical inaccuracy seemed mutually exclusive. As one writer put it, "The book of Daniel is especially fitted to be a battle-ground between faith and unbelief. It admits no halfway measures. It is either Divine or an imposture."[11]

Out of this polarized debate, three general positions are possible, each with supporters. Critical scholars have not backed away from their commitment to a late date for Daniel in its present form. The book, in their view, is the literary creation of a Maccabean Jew. Conservative scholars have been just as resilient in defending an early date for Daniel, and they continue to argue for the traditional 6th century B.C. author and date. As a sort of middle ground between the extremes, some argue for a Maccabean redactor who edited material from an earlier period. In this way, they hope to salvage the theological integrity of Scripture without sacrificing altogether the conclusions of critical scholarship. Surrounding all this debate is the underlying question, "Should historical questions be answered on theological grounds?", or more to the point, should the historical date and authorship of the Book of Daniel be decided by the doctrine of inerrancy? The one side says, "Yes," and the other, "No." It is to be hoped that more data might be forthcoming which will clarify the historical picture, but until it does, it seems more prudent to rest with the canonical conclusions of the early Christian church. The Book of Daniel describes a real person in the 6th century B.C. who predicted remarkable historical events long before they happened. The critical question as to whether the final form of the book dates to the 6th century or later must be left somewhat open, given the paucity of historical evidence, but the primary material of the book should be credited to Daniel as traditionally believed.

Historical Circumstances

The nation of Judah was in its death throes near the end of the 7th century B.C. After the debacle of Manasseh's reign, Yahweh determined to bring the monarchy of David to an end (2 Kg. 21:10-15; cf. Je. 36:27-31), and though a brief respite was gained because of Josiah's reforms (2 Chr. 34:22-28), the disaster was only prolonged (2 Kg. 23:26-27). Judgment was so certain that even if Moses, Samuel, Noah, Daniel and Job interceded, it would be to no avail (Je. 15:1-4; Eze. 14:14, 20). The rising threat, of course, was Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. Assyria, the previous empire-builder, had begun to fragment under the reign of Ashurbanipal. By 614 B.C. Ashur had fallen, and by 612 B.C. Nineveh followed. Judah, under the kingship of

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[11]The 19th century English scholar E. B. Pusey of Oxford in his *Daniel the Prophet* (Oxford 1865), quoted by Young, 363.

the young Josiah, became a free country by default. However, with the Assyrian refugee government in Haran fighting a losing battle in 609 B.C., Neco of Egypt marched his armies northward through Palestine to support the Assyrian cause. Josiah, who had little reason to back either Assyria or Egypt, interposed the Judean army in the path of Neco at Megiddo, was fatally wounded, and his armies routed. His son Jehoahaz lasted only three months before Neco clapped him in irons and set up a puppet government under Jehoiakim, another of Josiah's sons (2 Kg. 23:31-35//2 Chr. 36:2-4).

Vassalship under Egypt was no guarantee of safety, however. In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar attacked Egyptian forces at Carchemish and overwhelmed them. The death of Nebopolassar, his father, delayed his follow-up, but by the end of 604 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians once more descended into the coastal plain of Palestine, destroying Ashkelon and deporting its leading citizens. Judah's vassalship switched from Egypt to Babylon at this time (2 Kg. 24:1a), and it is probable that Daniel and his friends were exiled to Babylon as evidence of good faith on the part of Jehoiakim in deference to his new Babylonian suzerain (Da. 1:1).[12] Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were taken to the Babylonian court in Mesopotamia. It is in Babylon that the biblical history of Daniel begins. The last recorded vision of Daniel occurred on the banks of the Tigris River in 536 B.C., the third year of Cyrus (Da. 10:1, 4). By this time, he had been in Babylon for almost seventy years, so he must have been well advanced in age, probably over eighty.

Purpose

It seems obvious that the Book of Daniel is neither an autobiography nor a history, though it certainly contains autobiographical and historical details. Rather, the book intends to offer insight into God's future plans for his people even though the Jews were enmeshed in the trauma of losing their land, temple, kingship and capital. Yahweh controlled the destinies of the nations, and the theme of the Book of Daniel anticipates St. Paul's majestic description that God's people are predestined "according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ep. 1:11). The scope of this divine plan moves from the captivity of Judah to the triumph of God's kingdom over the whole world. It includes the persecution of the elect, the appearance of the Messiah, and the resurrection of the dead.

It is axiomatic that how one answers the question of authorship and date becomes a primary determinate for discerning the purpose of the book. If the book is from the Maccabean Period, as most scholars think, then the purpose of the book is to

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[12]J. Bright, *History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 323-326.

encourage the Jews in their struggles against Antiochus IV Epiphanes by citing the examples of Daniel and his friends. More to the point, the book seeks to confirm the fulfillment of Daniel's earlier prophecies and to announce that the climax of history is near. In spite of the terrors of the pagans, the Jews must remain firm in their faith.[13]

While the value of the book to the Jews during the Maccabean Period should not be rejected, even by those who accept the traditional date of composition in the 6th century B.C., the purpose of the book is surely larger. The sovereignty of God over the nations is clearly the dominant theme, and the Syrian-Greeks of the Maccabean struggles are only one among several political entities over which God exercises sovereign power. The Book of Daniel demonstrates that the death of the kingdom of Judah was not the end of God's purposes for his people. That Yahweh had allowed his temple and land to be destroyed by pagans was no evidence that he was inferior to the Babylonian deities. In fact, God would display his power in such a way as to show his sovereignty over all history and all nations until the very end of time. The Book of Daniel is more than just a tract for bad times--it is a tract for all times!

[13]B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 614-618.

Historical Section (Chapters 1-6)

Daniel And His Friends Obey Hebrew Kosher Laws In Babylon (1)

The first historical narrative in Daniel describes what happened to the Hebrew exiles shortly after their arrival in Babylon. Several events preceded their trek to Babylon. Jehoiakim, the puppet-king placed on the Judean throne by Pharaoh-Neco after the death of Josiah in 609 B.C., had been under siege by the Babylonian war machine (1:1). The Babylonians had repulsed the Egyptian advance in the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. (2 Kg. 23:1--24:1//2 Chr. 36:1-8; Je. 25:1-14; 46:2-24).[14] At that time, Judah's fealty changed from Egypt to Babylon in Jehoiakim's third regnal year.[15] To appease his new suzerain and assure him of his vassal loyalty, Jehoiakim was obliged to plunder the temple in Nebuchadnezzar's behalf as well as send a cortege of Judean nobility for training in Babylon as diplomats (1:2-4). Here, the Judean representatives would be exposed to the Babylonian world view with its pantheon of gods and goddesses, the magic arts, and astrology, not to mention the splendors of Babylon itself. Prominent among the latter were the palaces, the Ishtar Gate,[16] and the famous "Hanging Gardens of Babylon," one of the seven wonders of the ancient world described by Herodotus.

The Challenge to Hebrew Kosher Laws (1:5-16)

The new arrivals from Jerusalem were elevated to a position of privilege from the start. They were assigned food from Nebuchadnezzar's own table and enrolled in a three-year education program to prepare them for diplomatic service (1:5). Four of the young men are named, Daniel being the most prominent among them, and the text offers both their Hebrew names as well as their new Babylonian names (1:6-7).[17]

They were:

Daniel (= God is my judge)

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[14]Nebuchadnezzar's own court records detail his crushing defeat of Egypt. The Babylonian forces marched up the Euphrates, engaging the Egyptians at Carchemish in May/June 605 B.C. (British Museum Tablet No. 21946). Nebuchadnezzar pursued the fleeing Egyptians down the Mediterranean coastline, and though his court records make no mention of it, it is likely that he put Jerusalem to siege at this time (Da. 1:1).

[15]The "third year" mentioned in 1:1 appears to be a Babylonian reckoning, cf. J. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1978) 20-21. Jeremiah uses the Hebrew reckoning when he lists the ascension of Nebuchadnezzar and the Battle of Carchemish as occurring in Jehoiakim's "fourth year" (cf. Je. 25:1; 46:2).

[16]Among the excavations of Babylon is one of the frontispieces of the Ishtar Gate containing a depiction of the dragon of Marduk. It is permanently displayed in the Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan.

[17]That it was not uncommon for elevated foreigners to receive new names from their adopted culture can be seen also in the story of Joseph, who was named Zaphenath-Paneah by Pharaoh (Ge. 41:45).

Belteshazzar (= Lady [wife of the god Marduk], protect the king, cf. 4:8)

Hananiah (= The LORD has been gracious)
Shadrach (= I am very fearful [of a god])

Mishael (= Who is what God is?)
Meshach (= I am of no account)

Azariah (= The LORD has helped)
Abednego (= Servant of the shining one)

The assignment of food from Nebuchadnezzar's royal table was immediately problematic for the young Hebrews. Though they did not object to much of the new Babylonian culture, accepting even their new Babylonian names without resistance, they stoutly resisted any violation of their kosher laws. The Torah bound them to certain dietary restrictions, forbidding them to eat fat, blood, pork, horse, camel, rabbit, coney, dog, cat, lizard, snake, shellfish and various fowl (Lv. 3:17; 11:1-47).[18] Since food preparation for Nebuchadnezzar's table was totally out of the young men's control, the simplest method for maintaining piety was to abstain altogether. Furthermore, if they ate from Nebuchadnezzar's table might not their acceptance of his food be taken as having covenant significance? In the ancient Near East, sharing food was often a sign of covenant faithfulness. So, they requested to abstain, and in order to prove their dependence on God, they submitted to a ten-day test on a vegetarian diet (1:8-14). Having successfully passed the test, they were allowed to continue the safe route of vegetarianism (1:15-16).

God's Blessing for Obedience (1:17-21)

The challenge of "where to draw the line"--where should one compromise and where should one refuse to capitulate--is both ancient and modern. For the Hebrews, whose nation had so severely compromised its integrity that God determined the only resort was destruction, the explicit commands of Torah must be upheld at all costs. God blessed the Hebrews for their piety and commitment, helping them excel in their education and enabling Daniel to have the insight of a seer (1:17). At the conclusion of their three-year program, the four Hebrews surpassed all the others (1:18-20).

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[18]Various theories exist as to the reason behind such kosher restrictions, the two most prominent being that 1) the restricted foods were carriers of disease or 2) such restrictions reflected societal values in some way, cf. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16 [AB]* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 718-736.

They were elevated to diplomatic service, a position that Daniel was to hold for the next several decades until 539 B.C., the year Cyrus assumed control of Babylon (1:21).

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream About World Empires (2)

Nebuchadnezzar's Disturbing Dream (2:1-30)

Within a year or so of entering the Babylonian educational program, Daniel's wisdom earned him the opportunity to address Nebuchadnezzar directly. Nebuchadnezzar had experienced a disturbing dream, the details of which either he had forgotten or was keeping back as a test for his court counselors. He threatened execution to his coterie of divination specialists if they could not recover the dream and its meaning (2:1-9). Dream interpretation was difficult enough, but the demand to recover the details without the benefit of Nebuchadnezzar's memory was impossible (2:10-11). True to his threat, Nebuchadnezzar ordered the executions, which included the execution of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (2:12-13). When Daniel was summoned for execution, he requested an audience with Nebuchadnezzar (2:14-16). After being granted a brief reprieve, Daniel called his three Hebrew friends to prayer, and that night in a vision, God gave Daniel both the dream and the meaning (2:17-23). The execution order was stayed, and Daniel was brought before Nebuchadnezzar to refresh his memory and tell the meaning of the dream (2:24-30). Critical to the interpretation was that the dream foretold "what will happen in days to come" (2:28-29). The expression "days to come" or "the last days" had by the time of Daniel become a stock phrase of the prophets, since it was used by Isaiah (2:2), Micah (4:1), Hosea (3:5), Jeremiah (23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39) and Ezekiel (38:8, 16). The phrase contains a certain semantic range, however, and in the near sense it could refer to events as close as the repatriation of the Jews from exile while in the far sense it could refer to international peace to be established by the Messiah.

The Dream and Its Meaning (2:31-45)

The central object of the dream was a huge statue constructed out of precious, semi-precious, base metals and terra cotta. The head was gold, the chest and arms silver, the belly and loins bronze,[19] the legs of iron, and the feet a mixture of iron and clay,[20] possibly either pottery molded over an iron skeleton or glazed tile mixed with

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[19]Lit., *nehash* (= copper), but copper was usually used with tin to make the alloy bronze.

[20]The odd explanation in 2:43 that the iron mixed with clay means that "they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men" (KJV, ASV, NASB) has been variously translated and understood. Some scholars understand it to refer to mixed marriages and render it "they will mix with one another in marriage" (so RSV, NEB), i.e., unsuccessful interdynastic marriages, cf. L. Hartman and A. DiLella, *The Book of Daniel [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday,

pieces of iron (2:31-33).[21] The obvious character of the statue is that the values of the metal decrease as one moves downward while the strengths of the metal increase, except for the feet. The clay feet of the image were shattered by a huge rock cut out by superhuman power with the result that the entire statue crumbled. The wind swept away all the pieces, but the rock became a great mountain filling the whole world (2:34-35).

Daniel interpreted the dream as representing future kingdoms beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon and extending until God would set up a kingdom that would endure forever (2:36-45). The clearest identifications in the interpretation are Daniel's direct assertion to Nebuchadnezzar, "You are that head of gold," and his description of the eternal kingdom set up by God. The identity of the intermediate kingdoms has been much debated. Critical to the debate is whether or not Daniel is to be accorded the status of a prophet. Those who deny a context in the sixth century B.C. are often skeptical of predictive prophecy. In their view, the "prophecy" is offered after the fact, and such interpreters look backward from the Maccabean Period to find historical parallels of which the unknown author might already have been aware. Those who accept a context in the sixth century B.C., and more particularly, who accept Jesus' assessment that Daniel was a prophet, have no *terminus ad quem* restricting the range of possible fulfillment. In fact, many of them extend the range of the prophecy to the very close of human history at the second coming of Christ.

In the present exposition, as we have said, we accord full credit to predictive prophecy and Daniel as an historical figure in the 6th century B.C. At the same time, while Daniel may have been looking forward, today we have no choice but to look backward. The fact that various political entities arose in the ancient Near East after the time of Daniel exacerbates the problem of interpretation. After Babylon there is the Medo-Persian Empire, but is Media to be regarded as a separate entity from Persia, or should they be lumped together in interpreting the image? After the Medo-Persian is Alexander's Empire, and after his death, the division of his empire among his generals. The two most prominent parts of Alexander's divided empire, at least as far as Palestine was concerned, were Egypt and Syria, and both attempted to control the land bridge that lay between them. Then comes Rome, and during the time of Rome, Jesus Christ and the beginnings of the Christian church.

Yet another critical factor is the question of how many kingdoms Daniel intended to describe. Four times he identifies kingdoms, naming Babylon as the first, making only a cursory reference to the second, and specifically labeling the "third" and "fourth." However, are the mixed materials of the feet and toes intended to

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1977) 141. Others offer some form of dynamic equivalency that retains the idea of a lack of cohesiveness without attempting a word-for-word rendering, such as, the "the people will be a mixture" (so NIV).

[21]Heb. *hesaph* (= pottery, terra cotta).

represent yet a fifth kingdom prior to the establishment of a kingdom by God, or do the iron and clay simply indicate that the later period of the fourth kingdom will be fragmentary and weak?

In summary, there are at least three major interpretive schemes for Nebuchadnezzar's dream which assess the above factors differently. They all have a common starting point, taken from the explicit identification of Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold (2:38b). Then, they all attempt to identify the last kingdom prior to the one set up by God. This, in turn, determines the interpretation of the intermediate kingdoms. For those accepting predictive prophecy, the kingdom set up by God refers to the messianic kingdom inaugurated by Christ. For those rejecting predictive prophecy, the kingdom set up by God is the independent Jewish state established by the Maccabees. Here, then, are the three theories.

The *Maccabean Theory* (generally accepted by critical scholars) holds that there are four successive empires, Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece. The fourth one extends into the branch of the Greek Empire headed up under Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid dynasty in Syria. The stone kingdom that God establishes is the independence won by Judas Maccabeus and his brothers. A primary weakness of this view is the splitting of Media and Persia into two empires, which strains historical data.[22]

The *Traditional Theory* (generally accepted by scholars who accept predictive prophecy and by the historical church at least back to the time of Jerome in the 4th century) is that the four successive empires are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The stone cut from the mountain is the kingdom of God and/or the church inaugurated by Jesus in his public ministry. Here, the feet and toes represent the later stages of the Roman Empire when it began to fragment. During the time of Rome, the kingdom of God was inaugurated, and ultimately, it will destroy all worldly powers when Christ returns the second time. However, the power of God's kingdom is not merely reserved for the future, for it is already present and active in the world.[23]

The *Dispensational Theory* (accepted by the dispensational school of eschatology) agrees with the traditional theory that the four successive empires are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. However, dispensationalists argue that the feet and toes are yet a fifth empire, the kingdom of the antichrist, which would arise at the end of the ages. It will be a "revived Rome" composed of a coalition of nations represented by the ten toes. Some dispensationalists argue that this fifth empire is currently being formed in the European Union of the late 20th century. The stone

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[22]Media and Persia were not successive empires but joined together in the single Medo-Persian Empire. For a sample of the Maccabean Theory, see A. Jeffrey and G. Kennedy, "The Book of Daniel," *IB* (1956) VI.385-390.

[23]For a sample of the traditional view, see M. Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Marshallton, DE: Sovereign Grace Publishers, n.d.) II.1244-1246.

kingdom established by God is the millennial reign of Christ to be established after his second coming.[24]

	Maccabean	*Traditional*	*Dispensational*
HEAD OF GOLD	Babylon	Babylon	Babylon
CHEST OF SILVER	Media	Medo-Persia	Medo-Persia
BELLY OF BRONZE	Persia	Greece	Greece
LEGS OF IRON	Greece	Rome	Rome
FEET AND TOES	----	----	Antichrist
STONE KINGDOM	Maccabees	Church	Millennium

The traditional view seems to have the fewest problems historically and theologically. Everyone agrees that Babylon is the first kingdom. The historical successor to Babylon was Cyrus and the Persians, while Alexander the Great and the Greeks followed them with a kingdom that ruled "over the whole earth" (2:39). The iron empire well suits the character of Rome, and the fragmentation of the feet and toes well suits the latter stages of Rome before its fall. The eternal kingdom established supernaturally that will never be destroyed and that ultimately will crush all worldly kingdoms seems an admirable description of the kingdom of God as preached by Jesus and the apostles. This conclusion is the more plausible, since the stone kingdom arises "in the days of those kings" (2:44a), that is, the time of the rulers of the Roman Empire.

The Maccabean theory, on the other hand, depends upon splitting Media and Persia into two empires, a conclusion that seems historically unjustified. Its proponents frequently embrace an assessment of Scripture which is incompatible with inspiration and infallibility. To be sure, there are a few advocates of the Maccabean theory who do not reject predictive prophecy or an inspired text, and they should be recognized,[25] but on the whole, they are a minority.

The dispensational theory is less attractive, since it depends too much on the system that underlies it and not enough on exegesis of the biblical texts. In particular, some dispensationalists have tied the interpretation of Daniel 2 to the shifting sand of late 20th century politics, a course that seems too ambitious and sensational.

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[24]For a sample of dispensational interpretation, see J. Walvoord, *Daniel, the Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) 62-76.

[25]One such commentator is J. Goldingay, *Daniel [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1989). Another is F. F. Bruce, who though he did not write a commentary on Daniel, indicates elsewhere that he accepts a Maccabean date for the book.

The Hebrews are Elevated (2:46-49)

When Nebuchadnezzar had heard Daniel's explanation, he was awed. This was certainly the dream he had dreamed, and the fact that Daniel had recounted the dream by God's revelation confirmed his interpretation of it (2:46-47). As a result, Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel as the provincial ruler of the capital and administrator over all the other court advisors (2:48). He even granted Daniel's request to elevate his friends as provincial administrators (2:49).

The Three Hebrews And The Furnace Of Fire (3)

If the first test of the young Hebrews' faith was the threat to their kosher observance (1), the second was even more severe. It involved the erection of a huge monolith to which the entire empire was to pay homage (3:1).[26] A description of the monolith is not offered except to say that it was gold, probably gold-plated (cf. Is. 40:19). Whether it was more on the order of an obelisk or a statue is unclear, but the underlying purpose seems to have been political and religious unity, since the imperial order was for universal obeisance at its dedication, a refusal which was punishable by death (3:2-6; cf. Je. 29:21-22).

Interpretation of this setting is varied among biblical scholars. Those who regard Daniel as a 2nd century B.C. work general view the story as a heroic fiction, a legend intended to encourage the Jews who were being pressured to assimilate their faith to Greek ideals. As such, the story is not historical but allegorical, though some would concede that it may have an historical core that has been amplified considerably. The presence of Greek terms for musical instruments,[27] while not requiring a second century setting, lend weight in that direction.

Those who regard the Book of Daniel as a 6th B. C. century historical event point out that nothing in the story is implausible, historically or otherwise, for such a setting. Greek musical instruments were probably available in the Near Eastern markets as early as the Assyrian Period,[28] and the erection of monoliths was a familiar feature of the Babylonians as well as the Persians and Greeks. Death by a fiery furnace was known in ancient Babylon as far back as the 18th century B.C.[29]

At the dedication of the monolith, all the attenders prostrated themselves, just as Nebuchadnezzar had ordered--all except for the three Hebrews, whose erect

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[26]Though quite high (90 feet), the monolith was still smaller than the colossus at Rhodes, which topped out at 105 feet, cf. W. Mare, "Rhodes," *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. Blaiklock and Harrison (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 387.

[27]The words for "lyre," "harp," and "pipes" are all Greek loanwords, cf. Hartman and Di Lella, 157.

[28]G. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," *EBC* (1985) VII.52.

[29]J. Alexander, "New Light on the Fiery Furnace," *JBL* (Vol. 69 1950) 375ff.

postures must have stood out in bold relief against the others (3:7-12).[30] When the protest of the young Hebrews had been reported, Nebuchadnezzar was furious. Still, he offered them an opportunity to recant (3:13-15). They remained confident in their refusal, citing their absolute dependence upon God without conditions (3:16-18). So, as he had threatened, Nebuchadnezzar had them thrown into a super-heated furnace of fire which was so hot that some of the executioners succumbed in the act of casting the Hebrews into it (3:19-23).

Upon peering into the furnace, probably through a stoke hole or vent, Nebuchadnezzar was staggered to see the three Hebrews walking in the flames unhurt and unbound, and along with them, a fourth figure, presumably an angel, that looked "like a son of the gods" or god-like (3:24-25).[31] Calling through the opening, Nebuchadnezzar summoned the Hebrews and discovered that they were completely unharmed (3:26-27). As a result, the Jewish religion was to be tolerated and protected throughout the empire, while the three Hebrews were given promotions (3:28-30).

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream Of Madness (4)

Once more, as in chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar experienced a disturbing dream. This one he could remember, but the details were so bizarre he felt it must mean something portentous. The narrative begins in the first person, with Nebuchadnezzar confessing in an open declaration to his subjects why he had come to recognize the deity of a small, western nation he had conquered (4:1-23).[32] His great construction projects were now complete (cf. 4:30), and these probably included the outer ring of baked brick walls some 11 miles in length, the summer palace covering the northern part of the mound of Babel, the inner ring of walls forming a wide rectangle with a perimeter of just over 5 miles and split into unequal halves by the Euphrates River. The most famous of the several gates, of course, is the Ishtar Gate with its glazed brick and bas-reliefs which lay at the end of a processional avenue some 273 yards long and 22-26 yards wide. An excavated inscription indicates that Babylon's citadel

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[30]How Daniel escaped this test, we are not told. Perhaps he was absent on official business.

[31]The older English versions (KJV and earlier) generally translated this expression as "like the Son of God," which implies a preincarnation of Jesus, both by the capitalization of the words "Son" and "God" as well as by the use of the definite article "the." This interpretation takes its lead from some of the church fathers, cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV.xx.11; Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, IV.x; IV.xxi. However, the interpretation is unclear, since the Masoretic pointing does not make the phrase articular, the Aramaic word *elahi'n* (= gods) is plural, and it seems doubtful whether a pagan king like Nebuchadnezzar could have any conception of the incarnate Son of God. English versions later than the KJV have usually rendered the phrase "a son of the gods" or something comparable (so ASV, RSV, NAB, NEB, NASB, NIV, etc.).

[32]One should not read more than is stated about Nebuchadnezzar's recognition of the Hebrew God. Nebuchadnezzar probably remained a polytheist, but at least he was willing to recognize Daniel's God as the "King of Heaven" (cf. 4:37).

was constructed by Nebuchadnezzar as well.[33] His projects also presumably included the famous "Hanging Gardens" described by Herodotus (5th century B.C. Greek historian) and Berossus (3rd century B.C. Babylonian priest). Nebuchadnezzar constructed the gardens, a brick terrace about 400 feet square and 75 feet above the ground, to please his wife or concubine who had been reared in Media and had a passion for mountain-like surroundings. Flowers and trees in the gardens were irrigated by slaves working in shifts turning screws to raise water from the Euphrates River.[34]

The Dream (4:4-18)

Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a great tree standing in the middle of the plain. It was luxuriant, fruitful and provided shelter for both bird and beast (4:9-12). However, a heavenly "watcher," presumably an angel (Zec. 1:10; 4:10), descended to announce that the tree was to be hewn down and stripped, though the stump would remain protected by metal bands, possibly to keep it from splitting (4:13-15a). The announcement soon made clear that the tree and stump represented a human, for he was to be drenched with dew while living in the field as an animal for "seven periods" (4:15b-16).[35] This mania, announced by the watchers, would be a judgment demonstrating God's sovereignty over the whole human race (4:17).

Though Nebuchadnezzar appealed to the members of his oriental retinue of wise men, none could offer an interpretation. It was left to Daniel to provide meaning to the dream (4:4-8, 18).

The Meaning of the Dream (4:19-27)

Daniel's reluctance to explain the meaning is quite understandable in view of Nebuchadnezzar's power and the unhappy interpretation (4:19), but after being reassured, he began. The tree represented Nebuchadnezzar in his glory years (4:20-22). The heavenly watcher's announcement was a judgment to be delivered against Nebuchadnezzar personally, for he would become mad for "seven periods," during which time he would live as an animal until he acknowledged the sovereignty of the Hebrew God. The stump bound with bronze indicated that his life would not end,

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[33]E. Klengel-Brandt, "Babylon," *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 1.251-255.

[34]Since in the excavations of Babylon no remains have been uncovered so far of the famous gardens, some scholars doubt that they even existed. Still, they are generally listed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, largely on the testimony of Herodotus.

[35]The expression "seven times" or "seven periods" (Aramaic) is usually taken to mean seven years, but it could just as well be seven seasons or any other increment of time measurement.

however, but he would be preserved so that he could be restored to his former glory when he gave proper recognition to God (4:23-26).[36] Daniel's concluding advice was for Nebuchadnezzar to repent and change his ways in the hope that God would spare him (4:27).

The Dream's Fulfillment (4:28-37)

Nebuchadnezzar did not take Daniel's warning to heart. About a year later, while he was absorbed in a moment of self-congratulation, he was stricken with a terrible malady (cf. Ac. 12:21-23). A pronouncement from heaven indicated that the judgment promised twelve months earlier would now be fulfilled (4:28-32). Immediately, Nebuchadnezzar became mad (4:33).[37] His sickness is usually diagnosed as lycanthropy (a schizophrenic condition where a human assumes the characteristics of a wolf), though the recorded occasions of this malady exist before modern times. A more contemporary diagnosis would probably be that he suffered some sort of psychological breakdown which included the delusion that he was an animal. The description of his hair and nails may be merely comparative, i.e., his hair was matted and his nails uncut. The Aramaic text literally reads, *His hair grew like eagles and his nails like birds*.

When the ordeal had lasted for the ordered "seven periods," Nebuchadnezzar recognized the sovereignty of the Hebrews' God. His insanity went into remission, and he was restored to his throne (4:34-37). This experience lay behind the open confession he published for all his subjects.

The Handwriting On The Wall (5)

Chapter 5 marks the transition between Babylon and Medo-Persia which Daniel anticipated in his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. Some historical background is in order to appreciate this account. First, there is no indicator in the text about the time that must lie between chapters 4 and 5, except the potentate in chapter 5 is no longer Nebuchadnezzar but now Belshazzar. Until the mid-19th century, our only knowledge of Belshazzar was confined to the biblical text, but since that time several independent witnesses have been uncovered to help piece together the history.[38] First, he was the son of Nabonidus and probably the grandson

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[36]Incidentally, the expression "heaven rules" (4:26) is the oldest example of a euphemism for God, a practice that would become so prevalent later that the tetragrammaton (*YHWH*) was no longer pronounced.

[37]Some ancient references to Nebuchadnezzar's sickness exist, but they are all considerably later than the event. Since their credibility is doubtful, the biblical record stands as the single testimony to the event. Since the last years of Nebuchadnezzar's life are largely unknown, no corroborating information exists to fill out the history, cf. Baldwin, 107-109.

[38]For the historicity of Belshazzar in light of archaeological data, see A. Millard, "Daniel and Belshazzar in History," *BAR* (May/June 1985) 72-78.

of Nebuchadnezzar.[39] He was coregent with his father, Nabonidus, at the time of Babylon's fall to the Persian army in 539 B.C. (During his coregency with his son, Nabonidus was conducting military campaigns in Arabia. He would return too late to save Babylon, but soon enough to be killed!) An inscription from Haran in northwest Mesopotamia puts Nabonidus' absence from the capital at ten years. Two cuneiform legal texts demonstrate that Nabonidus and Belshazzar were coregent, for in them oaths were recorded as sworn by the life of Nabonidus, the ruler, and by Bel-sar-usur (Belshazzar), the crown prince. Other texts, also, corroborate Belshazzar's role in Babylon during his father's absence.[40] So, as Alan Millard has well-stated, "Archaelogical discoveries like these cannot, of course, prove that the narratives in Daniel report events that actually occurred in the sixth century B.C., but they, and other finds like them, do indicate that those narratives preserve correct information about Babylon at the time they were supposed to have occurred. To discard the evidence of Daniel as fiction or to belittle it as folklore is to run the risk of ignoring a unique source for a vital moment in human history--when the Persian Empire replaced the power of Babylon."[41]

By now, Daniel had been in Babylon for more than sixty years (ca. 605-539 B.C.), and assuming he was in his late teens when first deported from Jerusalem, he was by this time probably in his eighties.

Belshazzar's Feast (5:1-12)

The story is well told, and the scene of Belshazzar's celebration with his officials and guests was probably a glitzy show of false bravado intended to dispel fears of the inevitable. The cuneiform Nabonidus Chronicle indicates that the Persian armies were already closing in.[42] At the feast, Belshazzar ordered that the temple vessels taken as booty from the Jerusalem temple were to be brought in for wining the guests (5:1-4). This act was probably more than simply disrespect (though it was certainly disrepectful as well). Warfare in the ancient Near East was almost always a religious affair, and the use of sacred vessels from a conquered land was a reminder of the strength of Babylon's gods, who in the Babylonian view had defeated the god of Judah.[43] This may have been an attempt to bolster the flagging spirits of his court

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[39]The Aramaic expression "father of" (5:2, 11, 13, 18), like the Hebrew idiom "son of," is capable of a broader interpretation than we generally use in English. As indicated in the NIV footnotes, it may be taken as "ancestor" or "predecessor," and given what we now know of the historical figures involved, it should probably be taken in this more remote sense.

[40]R. Harrison, *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. Blaiklock and Harrison (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 96.

[41]Millard, 78.

[42]The Nabonidus Chronicle, a cuneiform text, describes Cyrus as already on the attack.

[43]For the ancient Near Eastern background of war as a religious act, see P. Craigie, *ISBE* (1988) IV.1018.

in view of the encroaching Persian army.

Abruptly during the festival, fingers resembling a human hand appeared and wrote on the wall of the palace near the prominent lampstand.[44] Belshazzar, who watched the hand as it wrote, was staggered and unnerved (5:5-6). Suddenly calling out, he summoned his coterie of court wise men to read and interpret the strange inscription, adding that he would reward with third rank in the kingdom whoever could successfully decipher the writing (5:7). (Since Nabonidus was the ruler of the empire, and Belshazzar was coregent, this offer meant that the successful reader-interpreter would be next to Belshazzar himself.) The wise men were as baffled as the king, but at the queen's[45] advice, Daniel was called in (5:8-12). The words of the inscription, in themselves, were quite understandable, for they were common Aramaic words for monetary weights (cf. 5:25). The inscription simply read, "*Mina* (50 shekels), *mina, tekel* (one shekel) *and parsin* (a half-mina, half-shekel or half-weight of anything)."[46] But what could the words possible mean? A rough modern equivalent would have been, "Five dollars, a dime, and a nickel."

Daniel's Interpretation (5:13-28)

When the elderly Daniel arrived and had been coached about his task, he declined the offer of a reward (5:13-17). However, since Belshazzar had mentioned Nebuchadnezzar as the conqueror of Judah (5:13), Daniel boldly reminded him that his esteemed predecessor had been conquered by the Hebrew God through mania and deposition until he acknowledged God's sovereignty (5:18-21). By his blasphemous defilement of Jerusalem's temple vessels, Belshazzar had arrogantly set himself against the true God, and therefore, God had sent this curious writing (5:22-24).

With this preface, Daniel now set himself to explain the writing. The monetary weights Daniel interpreted as puns (5:25-28). *Mene*, in addition to referring to a monetary weight, also has a verbal root which means "numbered." *Tekel* has a verbal root meaning "weighed" or "assessed." *Parsin*, the plural form of *peres*, means "divided." The inscription was a sign from God, and it meant that the time of Belshazzar's reign had come to an end (numbered), he had been assessed by God (weighed) and he had come up drastically short (only a half-weight). The empire would be divided and shared among the Medes and Persians. (And, in fact, the final word, *Peres*, is a word-play on the term Persian as well as the verb "divided".)[47]

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[44]In the excavations of Babylon, a Throne Room was uncovered (about 56 yards by 18 yards). One wall was faced with blue ceramic covered bricks, while the other walls were plaster, cf. Baldwin, 120-121.

[45]Possibly the queen-mother, since Belshazzar's wives and concubines were already at the feast (cf. 5:2).

[46]In contemporary weights, a mina is about 500-600 grams and a shekel about 10 grams.

[47]Some interpreters have seen symbolical significance in the three weights as well. The *mina* (the heaviest weight) referred to Nebuchadnezzar. Nabonidus was represented by 1/50 the weight of Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar

The Fall of Babylon (5:29-30)

As he had promised, Belshazzar elevated Daniel to third rank in the empire (5:29), but it was to be a short-lived promotion. That very night, the Persian army broke into the city, Belshazzar was killed, and the empire fell (5:30). The Nabonidus Chronicle contains the intriguing account:

> *The 14th day, Sippar (city to the northwest of Babylon) was seized without battle. Nabonidus fled. The 16th day...the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle. Afterwards, Nabonidus was arrested in Babylon when he returned [there]. ...in the month of Arahshamnu, the 3rd day, Cyrus entered Babylon, green twigs were spread in front of him--the state of 'Peace' was imposed upon the city. Cyrus sent greetings to all Babylon.*[48]

Babylon fell on October 12, 539 B.C. Cyrus was welcomed into the city on October 29th as a liberator. Less than a century later, the Greek historian Herodotus would explain that the fall of Babylon was accomplished through the strategem of diverting the Euphrates River, which ran under the fortification wall of the city, into an old channel which had been dug by a previous ruler. The water level in the river dropped abruptly, well below the river gates, and the Medo-Persian troops waded in at night to take the city by total surprise.[49] When Cyrus arrived to be received by the Babylonians, they welcomed him "with jubilation and rejoicing." Apparently, conditions under Nabonidus and Belshazzar had not been good, and by his own testimony, Cyrus said that he "brought relief to their dilapidated housing, putting (thus) an end to their (main) complaints."[50]

Daniel In The Lions' Den (6)

With the change in administrations, and especially with Daniel officially in the office of third rank in Babylon, it might be supposed that he would perish under the heel of the new conqueror. To the contrary, the new administration continued to hold Daniel in high esteem, elevating him to the triumvirate of administrators heading the 120 satraps (governors over provinces) over all the empire.[51] Even more, Darius

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was a half-weight at best, only a pale shadow of his powerful grandfather.

[48]J. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1958) I.203-204.

[49]Herodotus, I.191.

[50]These comments are found on the cuneiform Cyrus Cylinder, currently housed in the British Museum, cf. Pritchard, 206-208.

[51]The term *satrap* is a Persian word meaning "protector of the kingdom." While Herodotus, the Greek historian,

intended to make Daniel his vizier over the whole kingdom (6:1-3).[52] This elevation was not welcomed by the others, however, and they sought how Daniel could be discredited, finally deciding that it must be on religious grounds (6:4-5).

The Plot (6:6-14)

In general, the Persians were tolerant of most religions. If Daniel was to be indicted on the basis of his religion, his enemies would have to be devious. To snare Daniel, they approached Darius with a proposal to strengthen his new administration, reinforce unity among the conquered peoples, and boost his ego all at the same time. For thirty days, Darius would be hailed as a god-king, the only mediator between heaven and earth. All other priesthoods and religions in the kingdom must remain static for this period in order to demonstrate loyalty to the new potentate. Since most ancient Near East potentates were considered demi-gods anyway, and since the proposed period was relatively short, Darius had no suspicion of ulterior motives. The penalty for lack of compliance was severe, but Darius had no reason to believe that anyone would resist. He signed the proposal into law (6:6-9).

The description of Medo-Persian law as immutable, even incapable of being countermanded by the king himself, is also mentioned in the Book of Esther (Est. 1:19; 8:8).[53] This policy was probably aimed at protecting the king's decrees from subversion by his subordinates. However, once signed into law, it could not be contravened by the king himself. An incident in the reign of Darius III bears out this policy historically, when Darius executed a man he knew to be innocent because of the immutability of Medo-Persian law.[54]

Daniel, of course, refused to bend from his exclusive daily worship of Yahweh. Turning his face toward Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, he continued to pray toward the ruins of the temple as before (6:10). When Daniel's disobedience was reported, Darius was chagrined, but there was nothing he could do (6:11-14).

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various lists twenty, twenty-one, twenty-three and twenty-nine satrapies (districts), Daniel refers to the officials themselves. There may well have been more than one official over a given district.

[52]The reference to Darius the Mede in 5:31ff. has been problematic. He can hardly have been Darius I Hystaspes (522-486 B.C.), or his successors Darius II (423-404 B.C.) and Darius III (336-330 B.C.), since the chronology is wrong, and in any case, all three were Persians, not Medes. Furthermore, cuneiform inscriptions show that Cyrus the Great was the immediate successor to Nabonidus and Belshazzar. At least two explanations are possible. One is that Darius was a throne name (similar to Caesar), and as such, Darius is another name for Cyrus. If so, then the translation of 6:28, following the NIV margin, would be, "So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus." The other explanation is that Darius the Mede is the same as Gubaru, the appointed governor of Babylon, cf. D. Clines, *ISBE* (1979) I.867; Baldwin, 23-28. For other identifications, see Goldingay, 112.

[53]In fact, significant to the story-line in Esther is the immutability of Medo-Persian law. In the case of the pogrom instituted by Haman, the decree could only be counter-acted by a second decree which authorized the Jews to defend themselves by force against any attack (cf. Est. 8:11-13).

[54]Cf. Baldwin, 128.

The Sentence and Its Commutation (6:15-28)

With a heavy heart, Darius gave the order. Daniel was cast alive into a den of lions, the opening was sealed with the king's signet, and Darius returned to his palace to spend a wakeful, uneasy night. His last words to Daniel were, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you" (6:15-18)!

Lions were familiar animals in Mesopotamia, both in art and in the field. Excavations in Nimrud and Babylon show many bas-reliefs of lions, while the processional street of Babylon was decorated with blue glazed reliefs of lions. Lion hunting was the sport of kings, and it is not unlikely that the lion's den was where lions for royal hunting were kept.

At first light, Darius hurried to see the outcome. To his amazement and joy, Daniel had been protected by an angel (6:19-23)! Now, it was time for a reversal. Darius ordered the conspirators to be thrown into the same den, along with their entire families,[55] and the lions made short work of them (6:24). Darius, like Nebuchadnezzar before him, now composed a decree ordering respect for the Hebrew God (6:25-27). Daniel, for his part, continued to receive honor under his new overlord (6:28).[56]

Apocalyptic Section (Chapters 7-12)

The theology of the historical section of Daniel (chapters 1-6) emphasizes the sovereignty of God over the most powerful potentates of the ancient Near East. This truth was a necessary corrective to the arrogant assumptions by these rulers that their rise to power was due to their own ingenuity and the superiority of their gods. Nebuchadnezzar was compelled to recognize that even though he was the conqueror of Judah, he was not the conqueror of Judah's God. His power and kingdom ultimately would fail (2:39), the people of Yahweh could be protected against him in ways he never could have imagined (3:25), and the God of the Hebrews could debase him at will (4:31), for "the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes" (4:32). To Belshazzar, the message was the same, for as Daniel told him, "God...holds in his hand your life and all your ways" (5:23). Darius, also, was compelled to proclaim that the God of Daniel was "the living God...his kingdom will never end. He rescues and saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth" (6:27).

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[55]The execution of criminal's families is attested by Herodotus, iii.119.

[56]The NIV marginal translation is to be preferred if Darius is simply another name for Cyrus, i.e., "...during the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus" (see discussion in footnote 52). Some translators who reject this interpretation pluralize the term "reign" into "reigns", i.e., "the reigns of Darius and Cyrus the Persian," even though in Aramaic the term is singular (so NEB).

It is on the ground of God's sovereignty demonstrated in the historical section that the revelations of the apocalyptic section rest. If God is truly the Lord of history, then he controls the future as well as the present, and, as Amos had said more than two centuries earlier, "Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets" (Am. 3:7).

The four apocalyptic visions of Daniel seem to have been interspersed throughout the later years of his life in Mesopotamia. The visions are dated by the regnal years of the current rulers (7:1; 8:1; 9:1; 10:1).

Daniel's Dream About World Empires (7)

The Vision (7:1-14)

The first vision occurred in the initial year of Belshazzar's coregency with his father Nabonidus (about 553-552 B.C.). Daniel recorded a dream in which the four winds troubled the sea, and four great beasts emerged from it (7:1-3). The first beast, a lion with eagles wings, had its wings torn off, and it was elevated so that it stood on its hind feet like a human, while a human heart was given to it (7:4). The second beast was a bear with the remains of a carcass in its mouth (7:5). The third was a leopard with four wings and four heads (7:6). The fourth, unnamed except to say that it was "terrifying and frightening" and diverse from the others, had large iron teeth and ten horns (7:6). While Daniel contemplated the beast with ten horns, yet another horn, a little one, appeared which tore out three of the original horns. This little horn had human eyes and an arrogant tongue (7:7-8).

Then, Daniel viewed a court (7:9-10). The elderly presiding judge seated on the judgment throne resembled Ezekiel's vision of the chariot throne of God with its blazing wheels and fiery radiance (cf. Eze. 1:16, 26-28). The judge, called the Ancient of Days, was accompanied by myriads of attendants. The court convened, and the books of written evidence were made available.

Daniel continued to watch until the fourth beast and the little horn were judged and destroyed and all the other beasts were stripped of their power (7:11-12). At last, yet another figure appeared, this one like a human but entering the court amidst the clouds of heaven (7:13). The Ancient of Days awarded him sovereign power over all the peoples of the world forever (7:14).

The vision contains symbolisms which are obvious even before the full interpretation is offered. First, there is the striking parallel of the number of beasts and the number of kingdoms depicted in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image (chapter 2). It has been debated whether or not the two dreams describe the same four

political entities, but most interpreters agree that they do.[57] The parallels are too striking to be coincidental. Second, the beasts seem to represent political entities with power over nations, especially in light of the expression about the third beast, "...it was given authority to rule" (7:6). In a number of prophetic oracles, the sea represents the restlessness of peoples and nations (cf. Ps. 72:8; 89:25; Is. 17:12; 57:20; Je. 6:23; 49:23; 50:42; Eze. 26:3), and if it does so here, then the four beasts from the sea are kingdoms arising from among the nations.[58] Later, Daniel will be told directly that the four beasts represent four kingdoms (7:17). Thus, when Daniel sees the beasts "stripped of their authority" (7:12), it is clear he intends to describe the fall of the worldly kingdoms. This is all the more apparent when, at the demise of these ferocious beasts, the human-like figure coming with clouds is given sovereign power over all the peoples of the world forever (7:14). There is little doubt that the Ancient of Days represents the eternal God with a river of fire flowing before his fiery throne. From the firepot in God's covenant with Abraham (Ge. 15:17) to the burning bush (Ex. 3:2) to the blazing mountain (Ex. 19:18), God repeatedly revealed himself by fire, so much so that the New Testament writer can simply conclude, "Our God is a consuming fire" (He. 12:29).

The Interpretation (7:15-28)

The interpretation of the vision was provided by a heavenly guide, presumably an angel (7:15-16; cf. Zec. 1:8ff.).[59] The guide explained that the four beasts represented four kingdoms arising from the earth (7:17), while the climax of the vision promised that God's holy people would be established in an eternal kingdom (7:18). The explanation then concentrates on the fourth beast without further comment on the first three. More should be said about the first three kingdoms, however, since their identities figure significantly in identifying the fourth one.

Once again, as in chapter 2, the issue revolves around the date for the Book of

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[57]Only if the entire book is taken to be a composite by different authors does the view have much weight that Chapters 2 and 7 are unrelated. From the earliest centuries of Christianity, however, almost all expositors have taken the parallelism between Chapters 2 and 7 to be to apt to be coincidental. While different dates for Daniel may affect how the two chapters are to be interpreted (i.e., 6th century or 2nd century), most expositors still agree that the two dreams are versions of the same sequence.

[58]Part of the stock mythology of Mesopotamia was that the world was in a constant struggle between the forces of chaos and the attempt to establish order. The churning seas were frequently depicted as the forces of chaos, while chaos monsters arose from the seas to threaten human existence, see especially the essays, B. Anderson, "Mythopoeic and Theological Dimensions of Biblical Creation Faith," and H. Gunkel, "The Influence of Babylonian Mythology Upon the Biblical Creation Story," *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 1-52. War and conquest in the ancient Near East were viewed as the means by which an orderly cosmos was established and maintained, cf. Craigie, *ISBE* (1988) IV.1018.

[59]The use of heavenly guides to interpret visions of the future is one of the earmarks of apocalyptic literature, and in the Bible it is especially characteristic of the books of Daniel, Zechariah and Revelation. Other Jewish literature, such as 2 Esdras and various works in the Pseudepigrapha, make use of the same technique.

Daniel. If, on the one hand, predictive prophecy is rejected and the dating of Daniel lies in the Maccabean period, then the four kingdoms must be fitted into a chronology prior to the mid-2nd century B.C. If, on the other hand, predictive prophecy is to be affirmed, there is no need to argue for a Maccabean *terminus ad quem*. Critical scholars generally argue for the former, while conservative scholars generally argue for the latter.

Most agree that the lion represents Babylon (the lion parallels the head of gold in the image of chapter 2). The long processional street approaching the Ishtar gate in Babylon was filled with the ceramic bas-reliefs of Babylonian lions, while an earlier Hebrew prophet had used the symbols of the lion and eagle to represent Babylon (cf. Je. 49:19-22). The tearing off of the wings and the gift of a human heart (7:4) seems to accurately depict the humiliation and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar (chapter 4).

The second and third kingdoms are more debatable. Those wishing to terminate the vision in the Maccabean period make them Media and Persia consecutively, and though this is historically inaccurate, they attribute the inaccuracy to the author's limited knowledge. Those who are unrestricted by a Maccabean date make the second and third kingdoms to be Medo-Persia and Greece, and this viewpoint agrees with Daniel's earlier indications that the Medo-Persian empire immediately followed Babylon (6:8, 12, 15). If, as will be argued later, chapter 8 bears upon the second and third kingdoms (though using different symbols), then a clear identification of the second beast can be made within the book of Daniel itself. The second kingdom, then, is Medo-Persia (8:20). Alexander of Macedon, of course, conquered the Persians to usher in the third kingdom. Here, then, are the parallels between chapters 2 and 7 according to the two most widely accepted interpretations.

Chapter 2	**Chapter 7**	**Maccabean**	**Traditional**
HEAD OF GOLD	*Lion*	*Babylon*	*Babylon*
CHEST OF SILVER	*Bear*	*Media*	*Medo-Persia*
BELLY OF BRONZE	*Leopard*	*Persia*	*Greece*
LEGS OF IRON	*Terrible Beast*	*Greece*	*Rome*

If the interpretation be granted that the first three kingdoms are Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece (the traditional view), some other possible symbolisms should be mentioned. The bear which was raised up on one of its sides may represent the dominance of Persia within the Medo-Persian alliance. The three ribs from a carcass that the bear had recently devoured might refer to Lydia, Babylon and Egypt, which were incorporated into the Medo-Persian Empire by conquest. Concerning the third beast, the four heads likely portray the kingdom of Alexander and its division

into four parts after his death.[60] The next great empire to follow Greece was Rome, and it is this fourth beast about which Daniel was especially curious.

Given that interpreters are sharply divided along two major lines of explanation, it will be appropriate to explore each viewpoint in turn. The Maccabean view is that the fourth kingdom is the Seleucid Empire of the Greeks (7:19-27). The ten horns are Alexander's successors, while the little horn is Antiochus IV Epiphanes who ruled from 175-164 B.C. and against whom the Maccabees revolted. Antiochus inflicted terrible persecution in his efforts to Hellenize the Jews.[61] In fact, the prediction that the little horn would seek to "change set times and laws" has been interpreted to refer directly to Antiochus Epiphanes' restrictions against sabbath-keeping and the Jewish festivals, not to mention his burning of the Torah scrolls (1 Maccabees 1).[62] The saints, in this view, are the Jews of mid-2nd century Palestine, while the kingdom of God is the kingdom of the Maccabees, which was miraculously established against overwhelming odds and expected to last forever. The "time, times and half a time" (7:25), usually taken to mean three and a half years, refer to the period of desolation when Antiochus desecrated the temple by offering pagan sacrifices within its precincts (1 Mac. 1:54-55). The haughty, blasphemous decrees of Antiochus are well documented (1 Mac. 1:41-53), and his arrogance is especially to be seen in his adopted name *Epiphanes*, which means "God manifest." The identity of the three horns which Antiochus overthrew is less clear (7:8, 24),[63] but all interpreters of this line agree that the other details match the Maccabean period amazingly close.[64] Finally, the "one like a son of man" is a personification of the people of God in which the figure of a human champion symbolizes the collective community of Israel.

In spite of some remarkable parallels, there are difficulties with the Maccabean interpretation. In the first place, there is the historical inaccuracy of making Media and Persia consecutive kingdoms when, in fact, the two were in an alliance. To put

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[60]Alexander left no heir, and tradition relates that on his death-bed in Babylon, where he was dying of swamp fever, he was asked to designate a successor. Alexander simply replied, "To the strongest." Consequently, his empire was divided up among his highest ranking generals. Seleucus took Persia, Mesopotamia and Syria. Lysimachus assumed control of Asia Minor and Thrace. Cassander took Macedonia. Ptolemy took Palestine and Egypt, cf. E. Burns et al., eds., *World Civilizations* 6th ed. (NY: W. W. Norton, 1982) I.212-213.

[61]Details of this persecution are to be found in 1 and 2 Maccabees in the Apocrypha.

[62]The language of the Maccabees seems similar to the language of Daniel, for it describes Antiochus' orders that the Jews should "forget the law and change all the ordinances" (1 Mac. 1:49).

[63]Some interpreters take them to be Ptolemy VI Philometer, Ptolemy VII Euergetes of Egypt and Artaxias of Armenia, whom Antiochus defeated in 169 B.C., 168 B.C. and 166 B.C. respectively, cf. Hartman and Di Lella, 216. However, this interpretation has the problem that these three kings were not rulers in the Seleucid dynasty, which seems to be implied if the rest of the vision is taken to refer to the Greek Empire of Antiochus.

[64]For more details from this viewpoint, see R. Anderson, *Daniel: Signs and Wonders [ITC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 75-90.

this inaccuracy down to the limited knowledge of the author, who is allegedly writing more than two centuries after the fact, does not take into account that the author seems fully aware of the Medo-Persian alliance. The author plainly names the conqueror of Babylon as "the Medes and Persians" (5:28), and in the vision of the ram, the figure of the ram implies that "the kings of Media and Persia" were a single political entity (8:20). Also, there is a historical problem with making the ten horns the Seleucid kings between Alexander and Antiochus, since in order to find historical correspondences for the full ten one must also include an assassin who never reached the throne,[65] or some other figure or figures who were not properly kings. Finally, for most evangelical Christians, the claim of Jesus that he was himself the "Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven" (cf. Mt. 24:30//Mk. 13:26//Lk. 21:27), a direct allusion to Daniel 7:13, is decisive and militates against the view that the "one like a son of man" in Daniel refers to the Maccabean community.[66]

The traditional view, going back once more to the ante-Nicene fathers, is that the vision in Daniel 7 parallels the vision in chapter 2, and the sequence of kingdoms in both visions is Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.[67] The "one like a son of man" is Jesus Christ, who receives eternal lordship over all earthly powers from God,

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[65]A. Millard, "Daniel," *The International Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 861. For more information about the Seleucid dynasty, see J. McCann, Jr., *ISBE* (1988) IV.385-386 and B. Waltke, *ISBE* (1979) I.143-144. The Seleucid kings from the time of Alexander until Antiochus Epiphanes are as follows:

Alexander III the Great (356-323 B.C.)
(Period of struggle by the Diadochi over the remnants of Alexander's Empire)
Seleucus I Nicator (312-281 B.C.)
Antiochus I Soter (280-261 B.C.)
Antiochus II Theos (261-246 B.C.)
Seleucus II Callinicus (245-225 B.C.)
Seleucus III Soter (225-223 B.C.)
Antiochus III the Great (223-187 B.C.)
Seleucus IV Philopator (187-175 B.C.)
Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.)

As can be seen, there are not enough kings to make the ten horns, especially since Antiochus Epiphanes is supposed to be the eleventh king. Some interpreters, however, make Antiochus to be both the tenth horn and the little horn, and when they add an intermediate name during the period of struggle immediately following Alexander's death (either Alexander Aegus or Philip Arrhidaeus), then the scheme works out, cf. L. Hartman, "Daniel," *JBC* (1968) I.456.

[66]The eschatological importance of Jesus' "son of man" self-claims cannot be overemphasized, for repeatedly Jesus draws upon this title to describe his return at the end of the ages, an intentional allusion to Daniel's vision. For a more thorough discussion of Jesus' use of the "son of man" title, see D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981) 277.

[67]*Epistle of Barnabas*, IV; Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, LI; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.xix.2; IV.xx.11; V.xxv.3; Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, III.xxv; IV.x, xi, xli; Hippolytus, *Fragments*, II.1, 3; VII.1ff.

the Ancient of Days. The exaltation of the "son of man" in Daniel is the fulfillment of God's oath, "Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear" (Is. 45:23; cf. Phil. 2:9-11). The ten kings are variously interpreted. Some take them to be successive rulers within the Roman Empire, and if so, the ten kings usually are reckoned from Julius Caesar to Titus, Titus being the "little horn," who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D.[68] Others take the ten kings to represent ten simultaneous kingdoms or land areas comprising the Roman Empire, and the "little horn" could be Titus, Nero or Domitian, all of whom persecuted either the Jews or the Christians.[69] Still others make no attempt to find an historical parallel but suggest that the horns are symbolic of the totality of Roman power, the number "ten" being a symbol-laden figure with apocalyptic value (though here the uprooting of three kings can hardly be symbolic). The saints, in the traditional view, are either Jews or Christians who would be afflicted under the imperial persecutions of Rome but who would triumph in the end and inherit God's kingdom forever. The duration of "time, times and half a time" refers either to the period of the Jewish Wars, during which Titus desolated Jerusalem and the second temple, or the period of Roman imperial persecutions against Christians.[70]

The traditional view, as well as the Maccabean view, also has difficulties to be addressed. While the sequence of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome seem to match known history quite accurately, precise parallels are difficult to find for the sequence of the ten kings. Ronald Wallace is certainly correct when he states, "The whole field of the Roman period...is so vast and so studded with petty dynasties and rising and falling monarchies that it is not difficult with a little ingenuity to fit these into some historical pattern of events."[71] This "vast field," however, is just the problem, and it undermines certainty for any particular interpretation. Another difficulty is determining just who the "little horn" represents. Is it Titus in the Jewish Wars, is it Nero in his mad blaming of the Christians for the fire that destroyed much of Rome, or is it Domitian and his demand for Caesar worship that resulted in so many Christian martyrdoms? Again, there are enough options to make certainty doubtful.

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[68]The ten kings, then, would be Julius (46-44 B.C.), Augustus (27 B.C.--A.D. 14), Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), Gaius Caligula (A.D. 37-41), Claudius (A.D. 41-54), Nero (A.D. 54-68), Galba (A.D. 68-69), Otho (A.D. 69), Vitellius (A.D. 69) and Vespasian (A.D. 69-79). Titus (A.D. 79-81) is the "little horn," or the eleventh king. In this view, the three uprooted horns were Galba, Otho and Vitellius.

[69]If so, then they might be Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Britain, Samartia, Panonia, Asia, Greece and Egypt, cf. Matthew Henry, loc. cit.

[70]Once again, as in chapter 4 (see footnote 35), the term "time" or "duration" is very general. Though the whole expression "time, times and half a time" is often taken to mean three and a half years, based on similar references in the Apocalypse of John (i.e., 11:2-3; 12:6; 13:5), the actual Aramaic is not so specific.

[71]R. Wallace, *The Lord is King* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979) 130.

There is yet a third approach which grows out of the traditional view but with an extra twist. This interpretation agrees with the traditional view that the four beasts are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, but it separates the fourth beast from the ten kings, suggesting that the ten kings are some future coalition at the close of the age. In effect, it argues for five kingdoms instead of four (and in chapter 2, this same interpretive approach argues that the ten toes are to be distinguished from the iron legs in the same way.) Here, the ten horns are a kind of revived Rome near the end of time. The "little horn" is the eschatological antichrist, and the saints are either Christians who suffer under the antichrist near the end of the age (the non-dispensational view) or Jews who suffer during the great tribulation after the church has been caught up to heaven (the dispensational view). The "time, times and half a time" period in Daniel parallels the great persecution in Revelation, which is variously described as "forty-two months," "1260 days," and "times, time and half a time" (Rv. 11:2; 12:6, 14; 13:5). The sovereignty over the nations given to the "son of man" and the "saints" refers to the triumph of Christ over the nations at his second coming and the promise that his people will "rule and reign with him" (Rv. 2:26-27; 11:15-18; 12:5; 15:2-4; 19:6-7; 20:4-5).

Probably the most difficult aspect of the third view is, once again, the attempt to identify the ten kings. Dispensationalists, in particular, have sometimes proposed that they are the 20th century nations in the European Union (formerly called the European Economic Market),[72] but since the number of member nations has fluctuated back and forth several times already, the theory lacks credibility. Nondispensationalists, for their part, are reluctant to offer an identity for the ten kings.

In the end, no explanation is without its Achilles heel. The traditional interpretation that the four beasts are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome is preferable on historical grounds to the Maccabean interpretation, which maintains such a skeptical stance about the historicity of Daniel. Those who accept the traditional view, however, are divided over the nature of the kingdom of God and whether or not there is a fifth worldly kingdom. Dispensationalists argue for a fifth worldly kingdom and take the references to God's kingdom to refer to the millennial reign of Jesus Christ after his second coming. Non-dispensationalists either reject the idea of a fifth kingdom, or, if they accept it, they leave open the identity of the ten kings. Non-dispensationalists take God's kingdom to refer to what was inaugurated by Jesus Christ in his first advent, though it will not be consummated until his second advent. Perhaps contemporary Christians might do well to take Daniel's own lead before they speculate too freely, for Daniel closes the vision by saying, "I...was deeply troubled...but I kept the matter to myself" (7:28).

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[72]While quite a number of dispensational books offer this explanation, the most well-known is surely Hal Lindsey's, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 88-97.

Daniel's Vision Of The Ram And The Goat (8)

With the beginning of chapter 8, the reader completes the Aramaic section of the book and moves back into the Hebrew section (see introductory comments on the Text). Once more, Daniel describes symbolic beasts representing political powers in the ancient Near East. On the whole, most interpreters from all persuasions (traditional, critical and dispensational) agree on the general meaning of the vision in this chapter. If earlier, Daniel predicted a series of empires beginning with Babylon and stretching all the way to the kingdom of God, which would never be destroyed, here he focuses on the middle kingdoms, the coming of the Medo-Persian rulers followed by the Greek rulers. In chapter 2, these middle kingdoms were described as the chest and arms of silver and the belly and thighs of bronze. In chapter 7, these middle kingdoms were described as the bear and the leopard. Here, the same kingdoms are in view, and they are depicted as a ram and a goat.

The vision occurred in Belshazzar's third regnal year, just two years after the vision of the four beasts (8:1; cf. 7:1). Assuming this to be 550-549 B.C., it would have been the same year that Cyrus the Great formed the Medo-Persian alliance. Where Daniel received the vision is not stated, but in the vision he saw himself in Susa, Elam beside the Ulai Canal (8:2).[73]

In the vision, Daniel saw two animals. The first was a two-horned ram charging to the west, north and south (8:3-4). The second was a goat, a truculent billy with a single great horn, who charged eastward, shattering the ram's horns and trampling him (8:5-7). After the goat's victory over the ram, his great horn was broken off and replaced by four other horns (8:8). Out of one of these four horns, yet another smaller horn emerged to exercise power against the "Beautiful Land" (8:9). This small horn and its aggressions are described in considerable detail.

The Struggle Between Persia and Greece (8:3-8)

Not since the statement in 2:38b that Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold has Daniel offered such a precise identification for his symbols, but in chapter 8 he clearly interprets the two-horned ram as the kings of Medo-Persia and the goat as the king of Greece (8:20-21). Given this precision, there is considerable unanimity among interpreters about the historical meaning of this vision. The two-horned ram, with one horn longer than the other (even though it grew up later), accurately describes the Medo-Persian alliance (8:3). Cyrus the Persian, though he came later than Cyaxeres

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[73]It may be remembered that Susa in Elam is the setting for the Book of Esther. The city lay north of the Persian Gulf, and archaeologists have uncovered thousands of cuneiform texts in the excavations there. During the Medo-Persian regime, Susa was the administrative and diplomatic capital where the ruler and his court stayed during the winter months, R. Ghirshman, *ISBE* (1988) IV.667-669. The Ulai canal was an irrigation stream about 900' wide flowing between the Kerkha and the Abdizful Rivers, cf. R. Hubbard, Jr., *ISBE* (1988) IV.941-942.

and Astyages of Media, certainly outstripped his Median predecessors. The disproportionate size between the two horns recalls the bear of chapter 7 which was raised up on one side (7:5), and both passages reflect the Persian dominance in the alliance. Cyrus' conquests against Babylon spread his empire to the west, north and south of Persia (8:4).

The goat's single great horn represents Alexander III (the Great), who between 336 B.C. and his death in 323 B.C. conquered Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and Medo-Persia (8:5). In 333 B.C., Alexander's armies met an estimated half-million solders of Darius III at the Battle of Issus, where the Persian army was crushed (8:6). Flushed with victory, Alexander marched southward, securing Palestine and Egypt. Marching back into Mesopotamia, he again met Darius and the Persian cavalry on the Plain of the Tigris, once more delivering a crushing defeat and then continuing on into India (8:7). "At the height of his power," however, "his large horn was broken off" (8:8a), which vividly describes the death of Alexander at the age of thirty-three, when he died of fever in Babylon. His empire was left to four of his generals (see footnote #60), represented by the four "prominent horns" (8:8b). The four horns parallel the four heads of the leopard (7:6).

The Attempt to Hellenize the Jews by the Seleucids (8:9-14)

Cyrus the Great, as is well-known, issued an edict of repatriation in which dislocated peoples in the empire could return to their ancestral lands (2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezr. 1:2-4; 6:3-5). Many of the Jews in Babylon took advantage of this generosity. Under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah and Ezra (Ezr. 1:8; 7:8; Ne. 2:7-11; Zec. 4:9), and augmented by the prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezr. 5:1-2; 6:14), they returned to Jerusalem to rebuild their city and temple.

With Alexander's conquest of Palestine, however, the Jews in Judah were now under Greek rule. It had been an ideal of Alexander's to spread Greek culture into all the world. Even though upon his death the empire fragmented into four political power centers, this cultural ideal was not abandoned. Judah was now sandwiched between two of these dynastic power centers, the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria. Though both domains sought to control Palestine, both also championed Hellenism. Many Palestinian cities were won over to the Greek way of life with its elected representatives, public forums, such as, gymnasiums and amphitheaters, and a strong affectation for the Greek style of art and aesthetics. Furthermore, the influence of Hellenism was deeper than simply external cultural values, for it brought with it a syncretism of many religions, including homage to the Greek pantheon. All these influences were threats to the Jewish tradition and way of

life.[74]

It is to the Greek Seleucid dynasty that the "small horn" of Daniel 8:9ff. belongs.[75] This horn grew out of the one of the four divisions of the empire. Since it set itself against "the Beautiful Land," an obvious reference to the Holy Land (cf. Je. 3:19; Eze. 20:6, 15), and since its range was "south and east" (8:9b), it must refer to some ruler among the Syrian Greeks of the Seleucid dynasty. Hardly any interpreter doubts that it refers to Antiochus IV Epiphanes; the parallels are too striking to be coincidental. Antiochus, with his adopted name "God Manifest" (Epiphanes), ascended to the Seleucid throne in 175 B.C. with a determination to abolish Jewish ceremonialism and compel the Jews to conform to Hellenistic culture. After a successful raid into Egypt, he looted the temple in Jerusalem, sacked the city, forbade sabbath-keeping, outlawed circumcision on pain of death, set up pagan sacrifices within the temple, and burned the Torah scrolls. Women who had their male children circumcised were executed, and their infants were hung from their mothers' corpses. This oppression reached a zenith in 168-167 B.C., when Antiochus sent his troops to seize Jerusalem on a sabbath. He erected an idol of Zeus and defiled the temple altar (1 Macc. 1:54-61; 2 Macc. 6:1-6).[76]

With his title, "God Manifest," it is not difficult to see why Daniel's vision depicts Antiochus as reaching up to "the host of the heavens." In his attack upon the second temple, its priesthood and people, he was attacking the very throne of God in Jerusalem and the "stars" of God which surrounded it (8:10).[77] While the phrases "host of the heavens" and "starry host" often depict stellar bodies or even angels, here they probably symbolize the people of God, the Jews, who were promised a proliferation like the stars of the heavens (Ge. 15:5; Je. 33:22; Da. 12:3). Indeed, in later Jewish literature, the Jews during this period of persecution were labeled the "children of heaven" (2 Macc. 7:34) and the "stars of heaven" (2 Macc. 9:10). The identity of the "Prince of the host" whom Antiochus opposes is less certain (8:11a). Either he is Michael, the archangel "prince" who stands as the protector of the Jewish people (12:1; cf. Jos. 5:13-15), or he is Messiah (cf. 9:25), or he is God himself, the "Prince of princes" (8:25), or he is Onias III, the high priest in Jerusalem whom Antiochus deposed and had executed (cf. 11:22). In his self-aggrandizement, Antiochus abolished the morning and evening sacrifice prescribed in the Torah (Ex. 29:38-42), and in so doing, he launched an attack upon God's own sanctuary (8:11b).

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[74]D. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965) 13-27.

[75]The "small horn" of Daniel 8:9ff. is probably not the same as the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8ff. In the first place, though the language is similar, it is not identical (in 7:8 the adjective is *ze'e'r* = little, while in 8:9 it is *tsa'ir* = small). Secondly, in chapter 7 the little horn arises from among ten horns, while in chapter 8 the smaller horn arises as an outgrowth of one of four horns.

[76]B. Waltke, *ISBE* (1979) I.145-146; Josephus, *Antiquities*, XII.v.4.

[77]Coins struck in 169 B.C. with Antiochus' profile depict his head surmounted with a star, cf. Goldingay, p. 210.

Such sacrilege was only permitted by God as a judgment upon those Jews who capitulated to pagan ways (8:12a).[78] So, the small horn continued to succeed in his efforts to throw down God's truth (8:12b).

At this point, Daniel was privileged to overhear a conversation between two "holy ones," that is, angels (cf. 4:13, 17). At issue was the length of time the temple sacrilege would continue, and the answer was given that it would continue for "2300 evening-mornings" (8:13). While one might be tempted to take this to mean 2300 days (adopting the "evening and morning" language of the creation account in Genesis 1), the context is better served by taking the "evening-mornings" to refer to the *tami'd* (a technical term for the continual offering), that is, the evening and morning sacrifices mentioned earlier (cf. 8:11). As such, the sacrilege would last for 1150 days. After this, the sanctuary would be rededicated (8:14). While this exact time period cannot be precisely corroborated, Josephus indicates that the time Antiochus took and held Jerusalem by force before being expelled in the Maccabean revolt was three years and three months.[79] Using the Jewish reckoning of lunar years (360 days) and lunar months (30 days), this computes to 1170 days, which, while not the exact figure given by Daniel, is quite close.

The Angelic Interpretation (8:15-27)

Based on the clear identification of the ram and goat in 8:20-21, the foregoing historical interpretation seems reasonably clear. Daniel, of course, was not privy to such an advantage at the first. However, while he was still contemplating what the vision might mean, he heard a voice from the Ulai canal instructing Gabriel to enlighten him (8:15-16). Gabriel is the first angel to be named in the Hebrew Bible, while Michael will be named later (cf. 10:13). (Not until the writing of the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are other angelic names offered.) That Daniel is addressed by Gabriel as a "son of man" implies the difference between being human and angelic.

The interpretation began with a declaration that the vision concerned a future time (8:17-19).[80] The ram, as discussed earlier, symbolized Medo-Persia, while the

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[78]This interpretation agrees with the assessment in 2 Maccabees, where it says that these calamities were designed to discipline the Jewish people for their sins (2 Macc. 6:12-16).

[79]Josephus, "Preface," *Wars of the Jews*, 7.

[80]The prophetic vocabulary concerning the "time of the end" merits comment. First, as the NIV margin points out, the parallel phrase in 8:19 might be rendered "the end will be at the appointed time." In any case, the idea of "the end" in prophetic thought does not necessarily mean the end of all things. Ezekiel, for instance, used the expression "the end" to refer to the end of Judah as a political entity (Eze. 7:2-3). Earlier, in a pun on the Hebrew word "end," Amos had used the same kind of language to refer to the end of the northern nation (Am. 8:2). In context, the "end" here must refer to the end of the period of persecution described in the vision, a period that lay well ahead of Daniel in history.

goat represented Alexander of Greece. Alexander's succeeding generals were depicted by the four horns (8:20-22). In the latter part of the Greek divided empire, after many Jews had already rebelled against their biblical heritage by adopting Greek customs and culture,[81] the wicked king, the small horn, would come to power (8:23). He would be skilled in double-talk and intrigue, rising quickly to advance his cause against the Jews and even God himself, the "Prince of princes" (8:24-25). That he would become strong through a power other than his own probably means that his rise to power was with divine permission; his fall also would be controlled by the Sovereign Lord of history. His death occurred during a military campaign in Persia, and according to later Jewish tradition, God struck him with an incurable disease of the bowels which was fatal (2 Macc. 9).

Gabriel concluded the interpretation by reaffirming that the events would happen in the distant future (8:26). Until then, the prophecy would be sealed. Perhaps, as one commentator notes, the change from Aramaic to Hebrew at the beginning of chapter 8 is the method of sealing the vision from common exposure.[82] Daniel, for his part, was so distressed by the vision that it was several days before he could return to his affairs of state (8:27).

The Prediction Of The Seventy Weeks (9)

The burden of all the prophets is, to greater or lesser degrees, Deuteronomic, that is, the messages of the prophets all reflect the covenant theology of blessing and cursing which is most clearly outlined in Deuteronomy 27-30. The two historical foci upon which the history of the Old Testament rests is the exodus and exile. In the exodus, Yahweh entered into covenant with Israel; in the exile, he demonstrated that he was true to his covenant promises, especially the promise that if Israel broke covenant the nation would lose the promised land. All the prophets preached out of a deep awareness of the danger of covenant violation. The exile, when it finally happened, was no more than the prophets had been predicting for years and no more than God himself had promised long ago at Mt. Sinai when the covenant was first established.

Daniel is no exception to this Deuteronomic pattern. While most of the Book of Daniel, given its setting in a pagan land, refers to God by the more general titles *'El* or *'Elohim* (Hebrew) and *'Elah* (Aramaic), chapter 9 alone uses the covenant name Yahweh. This usage marks off chapter 9 as especially concerned with God and his covenant with Israel. Since the land was now gone, what would the future hold? Had God's covenant fallen? The profound theological questions that lie behind Daniel 9

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[81]Some Jews even tried to reverse their circumcision by a slight surgical procedure called epispasm, R. Hall, "Epispasm: Circumcision in Reverse," *BR* (August 1992) 52-56.

[82]Archer, *Daniel*, 105.

are much the same as would be posed rhetorically by St. Paul many years later: "Did God reject his people? Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?" (Ro. 11:1, 11). Here, as there, the answer is the same: "By no means!"

Daniel's Perception that the Exile is Near Its Completion (9:1-3)

Daniel's third apocalyptic vision is prefaced by his calculation, based on Jeremiah's oracles, that the exile was nearly complete. It was now 539 B.C., the first year of Darius the Mede (9:1; cf. 5:31),[83] and the year of transition between Babylon and Medo-Persia. Jeremiah had predicted the length of Babylonian exile would be seventy years during which the Holy Land would be under judgment and the nations of the Levant would be absorbed into the Babylonian Empire (9:2; cf. Je. 25:8-11; 2 Chr. 36:21; Lv. 26:32-35). At the end of this period, Babylon itself would be conquered (Je. 25:12-13), and the exiles in Babylon would be allowed to return to their Judean homeland (Je. 29:10). Jeremiah did not provide a precise beginning point for his prediction of seventy years, but if Daniel reckoned it from the time of his own entry into Mesopotamia in 604 B.C., which, though it was earlier than the large scale deportations to follow, was the first advance of Jews into Babylon, then he was within four or five years of the anticipated terminus.[84] The fall of Babylon to Persia, a concrete fulfillment of Jeremiah's prediction, certainly must have stirred him. Whether or not Daniel was aware of the prediction that named Cyrus the Great as the ruler to give the Jews permission to return to Palestine is unknown (cf. Is. 45:1, 13), but he might well have been. In any case, Daniel began a season of prayer and repentance on behalf of his nation, now under judgment, but soon to be set free (9:3).

Daniel's Prayer of National Repentance (9:4-19)

Daniel's prayer is steeped in the language of covenant. He speaks not as an individual but as a member of the community of Israel, hence, the use of the first person plural. The frank admission of covenant violation (9:4-5, 8, 11a, 15), his people's obstinate refusal to heed the warnings of the prophets (9:6, 10), and the

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[83]For the view that the name Darius was a throne name for Cyrus the Great, see footnotes 52 and 56. While the Hebrew text lists Darius' father as Ahasuerus (and most English versions follow accordingly), Ahasuerus' more familiar name in Greek was Xerxes (so NIV). Xerxes, however, may also have been a throne name, cf. Baldwin, 163.

[84]As is well known, the calculation of the seventy years is beset with historical difficulty so that there is no single reckoning. If it dates from Jeremiah 25:11 (i.e., 605 B.C.) until Cyrus' decree of repatriation in 539 B.C., it falls short. If it dates only from the major deportation (587 B.C.) until the return (538 B.C.), it falls considerably short. If it dates from the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C. to its complete restoration in 516 B.C., the calculation is very close, though this reckoning does not seem to be the one used by Daniel. On the other hand, a period of seventy years is the general span of a person's natural life, and if the prediction is taken in this idiomatic way, precision is unnecessary. In any case, it is sufficient to know that Daniel took the prediction seriously and, whatever his method of calculation, anticipated that the period of exile was nearing its terminus.

divine sentence of exile (9:7, 11b-14) are spelled out in a moving litany. Still, the same covenant which promised judgment for covenant violation also promised forgiveness and restoration if the people repented (cf. Dt. 30:1-10), and it is to this hope that Daniel appeals (9:9, 16-18). The final *Kyrie Eleison*, "O Adonai, listen! O Adonai, forgive! O Adonai, hear and act!", rings with the passion of heart-felt entreaty (9:19a). Nothing like the destruction of Jerusalem had ever happened before (9:12b), because no other city except Jerusalem had been chosen by Almighty God as a place to enshrine his name (cf. Dt. 12; Ps. 78:65-72; 132:13-18). Now, for the sake of Yahweh's name carried by both Israel and Jerusalem, Daniel pleads for mercy and forgiveness (9:19b).

The Prediction of the Seventy Sevens (9:20-27)

A direct response to Daniel's prayer came from the angel Gabriel (cf. 8:16), who flew to appear before Daniel at about the time the evening oblation should have been offered had the temple still been standing (9:20-23; cf. Ex. 29:38-41). His message was that the future of the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem was fixed for "seventy 'sevens'" (9:24a). The period marked off is somewhat more ambiguous than might be suspected. In the first place, no actual unit of time, such as days, weeks, months or years, is offered.[85] However, since this response to Daniel's prayer is given in direct association with the seventy years of exile, and since the seventy years were calculated in the first place as a replacement for the yearly sabbaths that had been neglected (cf. 2 Chr. 36:21; Lv. 26:34-35, 43), and since the Torah's reckoning of time already uses the calculation of weeks of years (Lv. 25:8), most interpreters understand the "seventy 'sevens'" to be weeks of years, or 490 years. This length of time remained for the Jewish people in their covenant with Yahweh.

The period of 490 years would see a number of things accomplished, and they are listed in two triads, the first concerning sin and the second concerning salvation. In the first triad, transgression would be finished, sin would be ended, and wickedness would receive atonement (9:24a). On the one hand, these phrases might be taken to refer to the Israelites' future transgression against the covenant as a continuation of their covenant unfaithfulness during their national history. Covenant violation was the persistent pattern in Israel's past. Her subsequent history, to judge by the records of Nehemiah, Malachi and 1 and 2 Maccabees, was marked with significant failure as well. As such, Israel would continue to rebel against the covenant for another 490 years. On the other hand, many interpreters take these phrases to refer to sin and transgression on a wider scale, i.e., the transgressions of the whole human race. Given the context, the former interpretation seems more likely, but overtones of the

[85]The traditional "seventy weeks" is more an interpretation than a translation. The NIV's "seventy 'sevens'" is more precise.

latter interpretation may be present, too.

The second triad concerns salvation (9:24b), and it anticipates that the 490 years will bring in eternal justice, will authenticate the predictions of the prophets,[86] and will see the anointing of the most holy.[87] Such phrases, if they mean anything at all, must embrace the inauguration of the kingdom of God, earlier described in Daniel's interpretation of the stone kingdom (2:35, 44-45) and his vision of the four beasts (7:13-14, 26-27).

Gabriel then divided the 490 years into smaller increments. The first increment would last for "seven 'sevens'", or forty-nine years. It would commence with the decree to restore and rebuild the city of Jerusalem (9:25), and the city would be reconstructed with streets and a conduit.[88] This reconstruction, however, would be carried out in the midst of difficulty. The second increment would last for "sixty-two 'sevens'", or another 434 years. What would happen during this period is not stated, but after it was completed, the anointed one would be cut off (9:26a).[89] There would also arise a future ruler, presumably sometime after the second increment is completed, and his people would destroy both Jerusalem and its temple. War and desolation would attend this destruction, and the fall of the city would come with the suddenness of a flood (9:26b).

The final increment, the last "seven," would be marked by a covenant to be confirmed by some unknown individual (9:27a).[90] Is he the ruler of the people who destroyed Jerusalem (the closest antecedent)? Is he the anointed one who will be cut off (also possible)? Is he simply an undetermined "one"? Is he God? All these suggestions have supporters. Whoever he is, in the middle of the final seven, he will terminate temple sacrifice and offering (9:27b). This action will be augmented by yet another person[91] who will cause desolation and will put abominations on the temple's

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[86]Or, alternatively, it will bring the function of both "vision" and "prophet" to a close, since the time of fulfillment will have come.

[87]The Hebrew phrase is ambiguous and could mean "most holy place" (so NEB, NASB, RSV) or even "most holy One." Many translations are content to simply leave it ambiguous (so NIV, KJV, NAB, ASV). Taking it as the "most holy place" depends upon the frequent uses of the same phrase in connection with the Tent of Meeting or Temple. Taking it in a personal way depends upon connecting the "most holy" with the "anointed one" (9:25-26).

[88]The meaning of the Hebrew word *haruts* has been verified by the Qumran Scrolls, and it refers to a moat or conduit (so NIV, NEB, RSV, NAB, ASV, NASB). The KJV translation "wall", which was only a guess in any case, is unlikely to be correct, and the NKJV offers "moat" in the margin.

[89]The phrase *we'eyn lo* (= and he will have nothing) has been variously understood. It might mean that he would be lacking in justice, followers, defenders, descendants, rule, realm, etc. The reader must supply this meaning from the interpretation of the larger context.

[90]The hiphil form of the verb *gabar* (= to be strong) has the causative nuance, i.e., "he will cause to excel," hence, "confirm," the covenant. This may mean either that he makes a firm covenant or that he forces a covenant.

[91]The use of the participle *meshomem* (= one causing desolation), instead of the pronoun "he," seems to imply someone other than the one confirming the covenant.

wing[92] until the judgment decreed for him has been poured out (9:27c).

The Meaning of the Seventy Sevens

Rarely are there more widely diverse interpretations of a biblical passage than this one! The ambiguities within the text exacerbate the hermeneutical challenge. The only thing interpreters agree on is the meaning of "the holy city," which in the present context must surely refer to Jerusalem. Virtually every other element in the prediction is debated. As might be expected, the dating of the Book of Daniel affects the interpretation, just as it did in the visions in chapters 2 and 7.

The Maccabean view, which adopts a late date for Daniel and exempts the book from predictive prophecy, interprets the "seventy 'sevens'" as culminating with Antiochus IV Epiphanes' desecration of the second temple (168-167 B.C.). The first increment, the "seven 'sevens'", encompasses the period from the fall of Jerusalem (587 B.C.) to "an anointed one," who is either Cyrus the Great (who gave the decree of repatriation, 2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezr. 1:1-4; Is. 45:1) or Zerubbabel (the leader of the rebuilding group, cf. Zec. 4:6-9; Ezr. 3:2, 10-11; 6:14-15) or Joshua ben Jozadak (the high priest accompanying Zerubbabel, cf. Zec. 3; Hg. 1:1-4, 12-15). Whoever is the anointed one (and all three--Cyrus, Zerubabbel and Joshua--are called "anointed" in the biblical texts, cf. Is. 45:1; Zec. 4:14), the commencement for rebuilding is the same, about 538 B.C., which date falls at the end of the first forty-nine years. The second increment of "sixty-two 'sevens'" is more difficult, because not nearly enough time elapsed between 538 B.C. and the time of Antiochus Epiphanes' persecutions in Jerusalem to account for another 434 years. This incongruity is put down to either inaccuracy in the author's understanding of history or the supposition that he was uninterested in precision for the intermediate time increment. His primary interest was in the first increment and the last one. As such, the middle one had only an artificial number to make up the number seventy and so join the other two.[93] The final "seven" is more precise, since it began with the summary execution of Onias III in 171 B.C. As high priest, Onias was "the anointed one" who was "cut off" (9:26). In 168-167 B.C., halfway through the last increment of seven years, Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the sanctuary, forbidding Jewish sacrifices and setting up pagan worship in the Jerusalem temple. This treachery was known by the Jews as the "desolating sacrilege" (1 Mac. 1:54; 2 Mac. 6:2-6). The horror continued until 164 B.C., when Judas Maccabeus consecrated the temple once again (1 Mac. 4:36-61; 2 Mac. 10:1-9).

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[92]The meaning of *kenaf* is debated. In the context of birds, it means "wing," and in the context of clothing it means "skirt." In architecture, its meaning is less certain, but it probably means something like "corner" or "outer edge," hence some translators opt for "pinnacle" of the temple.

[93]Hartman and DiLella, 250; Anderson, *Daniel*, 116.

As can be seen, several striking parallels are to be found between the descriptions in Daniel 9 and the historical events which followed. A major difficulty, however, is the loose interpretation of the middle increment of 434 years, which if it lies between 538 B.C. and 171 B.C. is sixty-seven years short of the prescribed length. Relegating this shortfall to ignorance on the part of the author or his lack of concern about precision seems unwarranted, especially if he was so accurate and concerned with precision for the first and third periods. This historical problem, coupled with the usual reluctance in the Maccabean school to admit predictive prophecy or a 6th century Daniel, make the Maccabean interpretation doubtful.

We turn, then, to the traditional interpretation which embraces both a 6th century Daniel and predictive prophecy. Sometimes called the Messianic View, this interpretation has generally been held throughout the history of the Christian church. Here, the two critical factors are 1) the interpretation that the "Anointed One" who is "cut off" (9:26) is Jesus Christ, the Messiah,[94] and 2) the fact that Jesus anticipated the "abomination of desolation" as still in the future (Mt. 24:15//Mk. 13:14), thus contravening the idea that it could have been exhausted in the Maccabean Period. The rest of the schematic is worked out from this central position.

As such, the first increment of forty-nine years begins with a decree to rebuild Jerusalem, and it extends through a lengthy period of reconstruction. Since there were three such decrees, one by Cyrus in 539 B.C. (Ezr. 1:1-4), one by Darius to Ezra in 458 B.C. (cf. Ezr. 6:6-12), and one by Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in 445 B.C. (Ne. 2:1-8), the interpreter must decide between them. The first one will not work, since in the overall scheme the period between Cyrus and Jesus would be too long. There are advocates for both the second and third ones, however, and each of the advocates calculates the date of Jesus' crucifixion differently. If Jesus died in A.D. 30 (the majority opinion), then his public ministry began some three and a half years earlier, i.e., A.D. 26. From 458 B.C. to A.D. 26 is about 483 years, the amount of time necessary to correlate Daniel's prediction with its fulfillment in the life of Jesus. (That there is no year zero complicates all such calculations.) On the other hand, if Jesus died in A.D. 32 or 33 (a minority opinion),[95] then the 483 years can be calculated from 445 B.C. by using lunar years (i.e., Jewish years of 360 days rather than solar years of 365 days).[96]

In the traditional view, the "Anointed One" is Jesus of Nazareth. In his death,

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[94]As is well-known, the title *Messiah* or *Christ* means "anointed one."

[95]For more information on calculating the year of Christ's crucifixion, see H. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 95-114.

[96]Although his reckoning has been challenged, Sir Robert Anderson calculated that from March 14, 445 B.C. (the 1st of Nisan in Artaxerxes' 20th year, Ne. 2:1) to April 6, 32 A.D. (the calculated date of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem) was 173,880 days, exactly 483 lunar years of 360 days each, R. Anderson, *The Coming Prince* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895) 51-129.

he was "cut off" and "had nothing," since even his apostles abandoned him. About forty years after Jesus' death, the city of Jerusalem was indeed destroyed by the Roman general Titus Vespasian in 70 A.D. Titus, then, is the coming "ruler," and "his people" are the Roman legions (9:26). The prediction about Titus, however, is parenthetical, and in 9:27, Daniel returns to the mission of "Messiah, the Prince," who is the central figure of the prophecy. The "Anointed One," Jesus, is the antecedent of the pronoun "he" in 9:27, the one who would confirm a covenant with many for seven years. This covenant is the new covenant of grace of which Jesus spoke at the last supper (Mt. 26:28//Mk. 14:24//Lk. 22:20). The final seven years is the Jewish period that included Jesus' public ministry, his crucifixion in the middle of the week (i.e., after three and a half years), and the earliest period of the Christian church before the gospel extended beyond the Jewish circle. Here, the end of sin, the inauguration of eternal justice, and the cessation of sacrifice is God's termination to the Aaronic system, since it had been superseded by the once-for-all sacrifice of God's own Son (He. 9:26). The prediction of desolations in the temple were fulfilled by Titus, just as Jesus predicted (Mt. 24:15//Mk. 13:14).

The biggest difficulty in the traditional interpretation is finding a rationale for the final half of the last week. Up to that point, the scheme seems plausible enough, but if Jesus were crucified in the middle of the last seven years, the final three and a half years are left dangling without any historical event of significance to mark their termination. To be sure, the early period of Christianity was entirely Jewish, as this view holds, but the transition from Jewish Christianity to a mixture of Jewish and Gentile Christianity was gradual, not abrupt. Furthermore, the idea of a seven year covenant of grace confirmed by Christ has no parallel in the New Testament. That Christ came full of grace and truth no one debates, and that he inaugurated the new covenant in his death is clear, but what rationale could lie behind confirming the covenant for seven years, when Jesus' ministry lasted no more than three and a half years? In addition, there is the silence of the New Testament regarding the interpretation that the "Anointed One" refers to Jesus. Though there are literally scores of Old Testament passages adduced by the apostles to confirm that Jesus was the Messiah promised by the prophets, it is remarkable if not incredible that they passed over one that ought to have been obvious.

Yet a third position arises in the school of dispensationalism. Dispensationalists generally agree with the traditional interpretation up until 9:27. As such, they agree that the "Anointed One" is Jesus, the Messiah. They agree that the people who destroyed Jerusalem are the Romans in 70 A.D. However, similar to their interpretation in chapters 2 and 7, dispensationalists posit a huge gap of two millennia or more which lies between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, a gap that comprises the age of the church when Israel is not central to God's redemptive plan. While the first 483 years have been fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus, the final seven years

remain to be fulfilled as the closing period of the age. The "he" of 9:27 refers *not* to Jesus of Nazareth but to the eschatological antichrist who is the "ruler who will come" of 9:26. The covenant to be confirmed is not the new covenant inaugurated by Christ, but the antichrist's agreement that the Jews can revive temple worship once more. (Of course, this view presupposes that a third temple will be constructed, a conclusion that must be advanced on grounds other than the Book of Daniel.) In the middle of the seven years, the antichrist will revoke his agreement, stopping all Mosaic sacrifice and replacing it with an idol of himself (2 Th. 2:3-4; Mt. 24:15-25//Mk. 13:14-20; Rv. 13:14-17). This intrusion of the antichrist into the temple is the desolating sacrilege. For the remaining three and a half years, the antichrist will plunge the world into the "great tribulation" (Rv. 11:1-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5). The "time, times and half a time" in Daniel's vision of the four beasts (7:25) are equivalent to the final three and a half years of the seventieth week (9:27), and they are also equivalent to the various expressions in the Apocalypse of John, such as, "forty-two months" (Rv. 11:2; 13:5), "1,260 days" (Rv. 11:3; 12:6), "three and a half days" (Rv. 11:9), and "time, times and half a time" (Rv. 12:14).

The strength of the dispensational view is the correlation of the time units in Daniel with the time units in the Book of Revelation. There seems to be little reason to doubt that John modeled his time units on at least the passage in Daniel 7:25 if not also the implied three and a half time units in 9:27. The weakness of the view is the bifurcation of the "seventy 'sevens'" with the huge interlude between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week. Nothing in the passage itself implies such a hiatus. Furthermore, the idea that a third temple will be constructed with Aaronic sacrifice is at least debatable.

Closing Reflection

There seems no reason to doubt that three great sacrileges are envisioned in the biblical documents--one by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Da. 8:9-12, 23-25), one by Titus Vespasian (Lk. 21:20-24), and one by the eschatological antichrist (2 Th. 2:3-12; Rv. 13).[97] Also, it seems characteristic of prophetic-apocalyptic literature, not to mention typological literature, that a single oracle can encompass more than one event or figure. Sometimes, this superimposing of events over each other makes it virtually impossible to extricate the various events or figures into tightly separated entities. The prediction of David's son, for instance, is just such an oracle (cf. 2 Sa. 7:8-16). Some elements in the prophecy refer to Solomon, and some refer to Christ. The same is true of Zechariah's oracle of the two olive branches (Zec. 4). Obviously, his oracle

[97]We are assuming here, of course, that John's vision of the beast from the sea, while it may depict the imperial persecutions of Domitian and others in the first century, also anticipates an eschatological figure to arise just before the second advent of Christ (cf. Rv. 19:11-21).

refers to Zerubbabel and Joshua in the post-exilic period, but in the Revelation, John offers yet a future meaning (Rv. 11:3-12). The servant passages in Isaiah also come to mind, where the figure of the servant can refer to the people of Israel (Is. 41:8-9; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3), but it can also refer to someone coming in the future who will bring justice to the nations (Is. 42:1-9), someone whose work of salvation will include the people of Israel themselves (Is. 49:5-7). If this superimposing of events and figures in prophetic literature is true elsewhere, it may be true in the prediction of the seventy weeks as well. All three great sacrileges may come under the scope of this single oracle. The question, of course, is whether or not a single passage can mean three things at the same time, and for many, such a solution may be too convenient to be plausible. Also, even if one concedes the possibility of such superimposing, it remains that there will be some incompatibility between the Maccabean, Messianic and Dispensational interpretations. For instance, it is hardly to be supposed that the "he" of 9:27 can refer to both Jesus Christ and the antichrist at the same time.

In the end, tolerance must be extended to proponents of all three views. Each have some strong exegetical and historical points in their favor, and each have some weaknesses that remain without satisfactory explanation. In the meantime, it is not a sin to leave the question open until God, in his time, will make everything clear.

The Kings Of The North And The South (10-12)

Daniel's final vision occupies the closing chapters of the book, and of the four visions, it offers the most historical detail. Concerning the earlier part of the vision up through 11:36, there is general unanimity in interpretation. The latter part, beginning at 11:36, is divided between a Maccabean interpretation and a futuristic one.

The Appearance of a Heavenly Messenger (10:1--11:1)

Once again, Daniel was in mourning, presumably over the sinful history of his people (cf. 9:4ff.) or some distressing news from the exiles who had made the trip back to Palestine under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (10:2-3). It was now 536 B.C., the third regnal year of Cyrus (10:1). While Cyrus' edict of repatriation in his first regnal year had allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, many Jews chose to remain in Babylon. Some, like Ezra and Nehemiah, would go to Jerusalem later. Some would stay in Mesopotamia and continue as part of diaspora Judaism, which now had centers in Alexandria, Egypt as well as in Babylon. Daniel, as is clear from the text, remained in Babylon. If he was as old as seems apparent, the trip was probably considered too harsh for him at his advanced age (see comments at the beginning of chapter 5).

In his vision near the Tigris River, Daniel was confronted by a heavenly

messenger. Though the messenger is unnamed, his appearance was overpowering (10:4-6), so much so that some interpreters understand him to be a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ (cf. Rv. 1:13-16). It is also possible that he was the Angel of Yahweh (see further discussion under 10:21--11:1). Similar to the description of Paul's vision on the Damascus Road, Daniel saw a vision while his companions felt only its effects (10:7; cf. Ac. 9:7; 22:9). As for Daniel, he fell into a trance-like sleep and had to be strengthened by the heavenly visitor before he could receive the message (10:8-11).

Daniel's prayer had been heard from the beginning of his mourning three weeks earlier, but a conflict with a spiritual entity called the prince of Persia detained the heavenly messenger for three weeks (10:12-13). This insight into heavenly conflict recalls the fleeting descriptions of a heavenly council in which all spiritual entities, including Satan himself, are accountable to God (Ps. 82:1, 6; 89:5-7; Job 1:6-7; 2:1-2; 1 Kg. 22:19-23).[98] Daniel, of course, would have known nothing of this conflict had it not been explained to him. The nature of the conflict is not described, but its heavenly orientation seems apparent, especially since it involved Michael the archangel. Since the antagonist was the so-called prince of Persia (and a later antagonist would be the prince of Grecia, cf. 10:20), the heavenly conflict seems to be related to the historical periods of both these empires. Perhaps the spiritual conflicts were designed to limit the destructive forces of the conquest wars in the same way that Paul envisions a restraint upon the "secret power of lawlessness" in the present age (2 Th. 2:7). Perhaps, since Michael is the angelic protector of the people of Israel (cf. 12:1; 10:21b), the conflict might have been in the interest of the Jewish people to protect them from extermination during these periods. The Book of Esther, for instance, describes one such attempt during the Persian period to totally exterminate the Jews (Est. 3:8-15). The Grecian Period, of course, would feature yet other pogroms from the Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties (1, 2 and 3 Maccabees).

This latter explanation is all the more plausible, since the point of the vision

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[98]In the LXX version of Torah (which is supported by the Dead Sea Scrolls and assumed in Sirach 17:17), God divided up the human race so that each nation has an angelic guardian or protector (cf. Dt. 32:8-9). The LXX text reads, "When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God." The precise nature of this guardianship is obscure, but if the so-called prince of Persia (and later the prince of Grecia, cf. 10:20) represent fallen spirits, then the heavenly conflict described here may have involved restraining or limiting the destructive forces of chaos which were unleashed during the Persian and Grecian periods. At least there are a number of poetic figures which describe the forces of chaos subdued by Yahweh in the creation (cf. Job 26:6-14; 38:8-11; Ps. 69:6-7; 89:9-13; 104:5-9; Pro. 8:29), and it is not too big a leap to suppose that these chaotic tendencies are manifested in the devil's minions as well. The modern charismatic interpretation that such territorial spirits are fallen angels with jurisdiction over countries and/or cities and that they must be dispelled by a Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare (SLWS) of discernment and mapping, identificational repentance, and binding may be imaginative, but it is wholly absent from the biblical documents and the practice of the early Christian church, cf. C. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) 143-199.

was to "explain what will happen to your people (i.e., the Jews) in the future" (10:14). The vision describes the severe persecution of the Jews during the period of the Ptolemies and Seleucids (cf. 11:14, 16, 28, 30-35), and it is in this context of pogroms against the Jews that Michael is described as "the great prince who protects your people" (12:1). Michael, alone, is the protector of the Jews, so he is responsible to preserve them (10:21b). Who does the heavenly messenger confronting Daniel support and protect? Surely not Darius the Mede, who had no need of heavenly protection, but Michael, the archangel, who was in conflict with the prince of Persia. As such, Michael supports the heavenly messenger, and in return, the heavenly messenger supports Michael (cf. Jude 9). The heavenly messenger may be the Angel of Yahweh who, in another passage, defends Joshua ben Jozadak, the high priest among the returned exiles now in Jerusalem. Joshua was accused by Satan before the heavenly council and defended by the Angel of Yahweh (Zec. 3:1-2).

After all this, Daniel was near to passing out, but the angelic messenger strengthened him once more to prepare him for the revelation from the Book of Truth (10:15-19, 21a; cf. 7:10; Ps. 139:16; Mal. 3:16).

The Ptolemies and the Seleucids before the Rise of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (11:2-20)

It is due to the contents of chapter 11, more than any other place in the Book of Daniel, that the issue of dating and authorship of the book is so vigorously debated. The details of conflict in this chapter between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids and their invasions of the Holy Land are so many and precise that critical scholars have a hard time accepting that they were composed at any time except after the fact. The other predictions of Daniel, and indeed of all the prophets, do not offer this same amount of detail, which extends even to the minutia of court intrigue, royal marriages, political alliances, and so forth. Thus, the majority opinion of critical scholars is that most of this chapter, while it is staged as though it were an ancient prediction of the future, in fact is not a prediction at all but "prophetic history," that is, history recast in the form of prophecy with the advantage of hindsight.

To be sure, critical scholars also suggest, on the basis of the many examples in Jewish apocalyptic literature, that writing under the name of an ancient person was not necessarily forgery or plagiarism, at least in the modern sense of those terms, but an accepted literary convention that grew out of the Hebrew idea of corporate personality. As such, writers could adopt the names of illustrious characters in antiquity precisely because they were bound together with them in the apocalyptic tradition, and therefore, were inspired to speak in the "spirit" of their ancestors.[99]

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[99]On this viewpoint, see the extensive discussion in D. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic [OTL]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 127-139.

Some, like H. H. Rowley, would cite the Book of Daniel as the first great apocalyptic work in this genre.[100] However, his assumption may be merely a begging of the question, for other than the Book of Daniel, no information is available about the career of a famous historical Daniel in Babylon. One cannot say that a 2nd century writer composed an apocalypse in the name of a famous prophet when the only information about that prophet is in the book the pseudonymous writer composes, for in that case the "traditional Daniel" would himself be a fiction.[101] Whatever one thinks about the legitimacy of pseudonymous authorship among apocalyptic writers, this explanation fails to account for the Book of Daniel.

More conservative scholars, on the other hand, while they concur that the Book of Daniel contains much of the apocalyptic style, at least in the later chapters, are less assured that pseudonymous authorship in the 2nd century accounts for the book. Joyce Baldwin of Trinity College, Bristol is squarely on the mark when she speaks of those who deny predictive prophecy to Daniel: "With regard to prophecy as foretelling, the church has lost its nerve. An earthbound, rationalistic humanism has so invaded Christian thinking as to tinge with faint ridicule all claims to see in the Bible anything more than the vaguest references to future events." With that observation, we turn to Daniel's fourth apocalyptic vision.

The vision begins by summarizing the future of the Persian Empire which would last another couple centuries. It highlights four Persian kings.[102] Who they are, Daniel does not say, and various suggestions have been offered. If Cyrus is counted, then they could be Cyrus (550-529 B.C.), Cambyses (529-523 B.C.), Darius the Great (522-486 B.C.) and Xerxes I (485-464 B.C.). If Cyrus is not counted, then Smerdis, the imposter (523-522 B.C.), might be counted.[103] Most interpreters identify the fourth king as Xerxes I (519?-465 B.C.), since he launched a series of massive but disastrous attacks upon the Greeks (11:2). Earlier, Darius the Great had invaded the Grecian mainland and imposed tribute on the Greeks. With the assistance of Athens, a number of Greek cities revolted against this suzerainty, and Darius set out to punish the Athenians, though he suffered defeat at Marathon. He died before his war with Athens was concluded, but Xerxes, his successor, prosecuted the same cause, and he likewise suffered defeats at Thermopylae, Salamis, Plataea, and Mycale (480-478 B.C.).

Sometime later, yet another mighty king would arise, this one, to judge by the

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[100]The Relevance of Apocalyptic (London, 1963) 43.

[101]L. Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 54.

[102]There were more than four kings between Daniel's time and the end of the Persian Empire, but prophecy often highlights some figures while passing over others.

[103]His real name was Gaumata or Bardiya, though he passed himself off as Smerdis, Cyrus' younger son, after the true Smerdis had been murdered.

subsequent description, referring to Alexander the Great (11:3). As we saw in earlier visions (2:39b; 7:6; 8:21-22), Alexander's empire would be divided into four sections and distributed to his generals (11:4). Out of the divided empire of Alexander, powerful rulers to the south and north of Palestine (Egypt and Syria) would arise. Ptolemy is the "king of the south," while his commander who was "even stronger," was Seleucus. Seleucus, after losing Babylon to Antigonus, found refuge in Egypt, where Ptolemy made him a general (11:5). He helped Ptolemy defend Egypt in 312 B.C. against an invasion by Antigonus, and followed his advantage by recovering Babylon and extending the Seleucid rule over all Mesopotamia and Asia Minor.

The Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties, rulers over Syria and Egypt respectively, both wished to control Palestine, the land bridge between Asia and Africa.[104] Though hostile to each other, they came to terms of peace when Ptolemy II, the ruler in Egypt, consented in 252 B.C. to the marriage of his daughter Berenice to Antiochus II, the ruler of Syria (11:6)a. However, Antiochus already had a wife, Laodice, who even though she had been banished organized a conspiracy in which both Berenice and her infant son by Antiochus were assassinated and Antiochus was poisoned in 247 B.C. (11:6b). Ptolemy II, Berenice's father, died shortly after. Laodice was now queen regent over Syria along with her son, Seleucus II.

Ptolemy III, newly ascended to the throne of Egypt after his father's death, determined to avenge the assassination of his sister in the north. He mustered a large army and attacked Syria in an extended campaign, 246-241 B.C., managing to capture both Damascus and Antioch before returning successfully to Egypt with great booty (11:7-8). After Seleucus II failed in a counter-attack, the two warring factions agreed to a ten-year truce (11:9). Seleucus III and Antiochus III (the Great), the sons of Seleucus II who ruled successively, continued to build the Syrian army after their father's death (11:10). In 219-218 B.C., Antiochus III marched south to attack Egypt, where he was defeated by the smaller army of Ptolemy IV and was compelled to cede Palestine back to Egypt (11:11-12). When Ptolemy IV died, however, Antiochus III, who had been rebuilding the Syrian army, marched southward once again in 202-201 B.C. (11:13). The pro-Seleucid Jews of Palestine also mobilized to break away from Egyptian rule, but they were defeated by the Egyptian General Scopas (11:14). Antiochus III would not be thwarted, however, and in the end he defeated Scopas, captured Sidon on the Palestinian coast, and brought Palestine firmly and permanently under Syrian control (11:15). When he entered Jerusalem in 198 B.C., he was welcomed as a liberator, though as history would bear out, his sovereignty

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[104]The general history of the Ptolemies and Seleucids can be followed in W. Tarn, "The Struggle of Egypt Against Syria and Macedonia," and M. Rostovtzeff, "Syria and the East," *The Cambridge Ancient History: The Hellenistic Monarchies and the Rise of Rome*, eds. S. Cook, et al. (rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975), VII.155-196, 699-731. (See especially the genealogical Table IV at the end of the volume for the Seleucid dynasty.)

over the Holy Land would open the door to terrible oppression, since now he would "have the power to destroy it" (11:16). To secure his gains, Antiochus III married his daughter, Cleopatra I, to Ptolemy V, hoping that she would work behind the scenes to add all Egypt to his territory, but Cleopatra was loyal to her husband, so the ruse failed (11:17). Redirecting his attention to the coastlands of western Anatolia, Antiochus III was initially successful, though in the end he was turned back by the Roman Scipio at Magnesia in 190 B.C., after which he was compelled to sign severe peace terms in 188 B.C. (11:18). Unable to meet the required indemnity forced on him by Scipio, Antiochus III resorted to pillaging temples to raise funds, and the locals near Susa were so angry that they stormed his forces and killed him in 187 B.C. (11:19).

The successor to Antiochus III was Seleucus IV, his son. The "tax collector" he sent out to raise funds was Heliodorus, the agent described in 2 Maccabees 3 (11:20a). Later, Heliodorus engineered the assassination of Seleucus IV so that he died "not in anger or in battle" in 175 B.C. (11:20b). His death paved the way for the most invasive oppressor the Jews had known to this point, Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes Persecutes the Jews in Judea (11:21-35)

Antiochus IV Epiphanes is "the contemptuous person" of 11:21a. It is apparent from the amount of material provided about him that he is the center of interest for the vision. Earlier, he was described as the "smaller horn" in 8:9-12, 23-25, and in later Jewish works, he is described as "a sinful root" (1 Mac. 1:10) and "an arrogant and terrible man" (4 Mac. 4:15). The rightful heir to the Seleucid throne had been Demetrius, the son of Seleucus IV, but since he was hostage in Rome, Antiochus IV, the younger son of Antiochus III and the uncle of Demetrius, seized the throne. Thus, as the text in Daniel reads, Antiochus IV was "not given the honor of royalty," though he advanced to the throne through a combination of intimidation and intrigue (11:21b). The details of 11:22-24 are somewhat obscure, but the "prince of the covenant" is usually taken to be Onias III, the high priest in Jerusalem, who was deposed in 175 B.C. and assassinated in 171 B.C.

Though Palestine now was under Seleucid control, the Ptolemies in Egypt had not given up on regaining it. Ptolemy VI began mobilizing an army to do so, but Antiochus IV, on the basis of spy reports from his agents in Egypt, preempted this attempt by a first counter-strike, overwhelming the Egyptian army in 170-169 B.C. (11:25-26). While negotiating terms, Antiochus IV sat with Ptolemy VI, each lying to the other at the same table and each trying to gain an advantage over the other but without success (11:27). Finally, Antiochus IV returned to Syria. Now, however, he determined to interfere in Jewish affairs in Jerusalem, and he set his attention against "the holy covenant," that is, against the Torah's prescription for temple worship (11:28). His first "action" was to sack Jerusalem on his way home and rob the temple

(cf. 1 Mac. 1:20-28; 2 Mac. 5:11-20). In 168 B.C., Antiochus IV renewed his campaign against Egypt, but the invasion was foiled by the intervention of Roman warships and an order from the Roman Senate[105] that he must withdraw (11:29-30a).[106] Enraged by this unexpected intervention, Antiochus IV vented his frustration on Jerusalem. Only apostate Jews (i.e., pro-Seleucids) were safe (11:30b)!

Now would follow the most blasphemous act in post-exilic history. All along, the general attitude of the Greek overlords had been to Hellenize their subjects with "superior" Greek culture. Entering Jerusalem, Antiochus' forces desecrated the temple, forbade all Jewish sacrifice, outlawed circumcision, and suspended sabbatical and Jewish festival observances. Worse, they dedicated the temple of Yahweh to the Olympian god Zeus, setting up an altar to this Hellenized Ba'al within the very temple court. It is this altar that Daniel calls "the abomination that causes desolation" (11:31; 1 Mac. 1:41-61; 2 Mac. 6:1-11). To complicate the situation further, the Jews in Jerusalem were divided into two factions. Wealthy Jews, for reasons of social favor with their Greek overlords, long had been courting Greek mannerisms anyway. This Hellenizing party was bitterly opposed by the orthodox Jews, the Hassidim (pious ones). Thus, Daniel 11:32 speaks of both the "violators of the covenant" as well as "the people who know their God." Those faithful to the Torah (i.e., the "holy covenant") were doomed to dreadful persecution (cf. 2 Mac. 6:18--7:42). Their patriotic leaders, the most vehement being the priest Mattathias and his sons, would preach a message of repentance and faithfulness (1 Mac. 1:62--2:14). For three years the desolating sacrilege continued in the temple, but Daniel predicted that there would be a limit to these terrible events (11:33-35).

The Arrogant King and His Downfall (11:36-45)

Up to this point, there is general agreement between all schools of interpretation regarding chapter 11. With the closing passage, however, two lines of interpretation must be explored concerning the description of the arrogant king. One follows the line of the Maccabean struggle, seeing in this description nothing beyond the events in the life of Antiochus IV. The other sees in the arrogant king a prediction of the eschatological antichrist who is prefigured by Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

The Maccabean view stresses the continuity between what precedes and what follows. The most natural interpretation of "the king" in 11:36 is that he is the same "king of the north" who has been under discussion since 11:21. As such, in his vengeance on the Jews in Jerusalem, he will "do as he pleases," exalting himself

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[105]The Hebrew term *Kittim* in 11:30a normally means Cyprus, but by extension, it applies to the islands and coastlands of the Mediterranean, including Rome.

[106]For more details of this event, see F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 141-142.

against God until God's appointed terminus (11:36). He will flippantly disregard even the patron deities of his ancestors in his self-exaltation, spurning the popular Sumerian fertility god Tammuz (Adonis) who annually was lamented upon his death and descent into the underworld (11:37; cf. Eze. 8:14).[107] The only deity he would recognize would be the "god of fortresses," (11:38), possibly referring to Zeus Akraios (i.e., "of the heights"), who now had been installed in Jerusalem's citadel, or perhaps Mars, the Roman god of war, or even Jupiter.[108] With the aid of this foreign deity, he would continue his aggressions against Jerusalem, distributing property and status in exchange for bribes (11:39).

The difficulty of the Maccabean view lies in 11:40-45. Historically, we know that Antiochus IV directed his final campaign in Persia, where he died in late 164 B.C. The following passage, however, predicts that he once more would conduct a massive campaign against Egypt, invading Palestine, sparing Edom, Moab and Ammon, but successfully sacking Egypt (11:40-43). Finally, in response to reports from the north and east, he would head north, bivouacking in Jerusalem where he would meet his end (11:44-45). Since none of these things happened, those supporting the Maccabean view are left to speculate that while up 11:39 the anonymous author of Daniel recorded history until his own time, now he was predicting the future--and his predictions were utterly mistaken. Evangelicals, as might be expected, cannot accept such a solution which denies the historical integrity of Scripture.

The second interpretive position for 11:36-45 is that it envisions something far beyond Antiochus IV Epiphanes. To be sure, Antiochus provides the historical model for what would come later, but, as we have just seen, the prediction about the arrogant king cannot be completely correlated with the known activities of Antiochus. Furthermore, the continuation of the vision in 12:1-3 seems to stretch ahead to the end of the world, the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment, features that are totally incompatible with a Maccabean date, unless one is willing to accept that this portion of the Bible is uninspired conjecture. Hence, many interpreters regard 11:36-45 as referring to the eschatological antichrist. Either Daniel leaves Antiochus IV Epiphanes altogether after 11:35, or else he collapses the figure of Antiochus with that of the antichrist by superimposing them over each other. If the latter, then some elements in the passage might be double entendres referring to both Antiochus and the antichrist. Furthermore, the eschatological interpretation offers an alternative exegesis for several phrases in the passage.

First, the self-exaltation of the arrogant king (11:36) is no more than what later

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[107]H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973) 64-66.

[108]This interpretation assumes that the expression "god of fortresses" is to be taken literally. However, if it is metaphorical it might refer simply to Antiochus himself and his lust for power.

would be described by Paul as the self-exaltation of the man of lawlessness who "opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming that he is God" (2 Th. 2:4). Similarly, John predicted that the beast from the sea would "open his mouth to blaspheme God" and accept worship from all the people on earth, even allowing an image of himself to be installed for mandatory public worship (Rv. 13:5, 8, 14-15). Since even Jesus indicated that the desolating sacrilege predicted by Daniel was not exhausted in the persecutions of Antiochus IV but lay in the future (cf. Mt. 24:15//Mk. 13:14), the interpreter of Daniel must find the ultimate meaning of the arrogant king in the closing period of world history.

If this eschatological interpretation be accepted, then phrases like "the time of the end" (11:35, 40) and "the time of wrath" (11:36) are not limited to the 2nd century before Christ but refer to the close of the age. Unfortunately, some of the phrases in the passage have become the object of reckless speculation. Especially within the dispensational school, the "king of the north" has been interpreted to refer to Soviet Russia during the cold war while the "king of the south" has been interpreted to refer to modern Egypt and the Arab states. The antichrist who will "not regard the god of his fathers" has been taken to mean that the antichrist might be a Jew or even an apostate Christian (or, the Pope in Rome). "The one desired by women," for whom the arrogant king will show no regard, has been taken to refer to the coming Messiah, the desired child of all Jewish women. The battle between the north and south has been connected to the wars of Ezekiel 38-39, Zechariah 14:1-19, and Revelation 9:13-16; 16:12-14; 19:11-21 and interpreted to refer to the armies of the antichrist and the troops of communist China (cf. Rv. 9:13-16; 16:12-14).[109] While it may well be that the apocalyptic visions of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah and John have much in common, the specificity of so many late 20th century interpretations seem gratuitous and unduly sensational.

In summary, the best interpretation that does justice to both biblical and historical integrity seems to lie between two extremes. On the one hand, Daniel 11:36-39 has at least some clear parallels with the known history of Antiochus IV. On the other, the descriptions in 11:40-45 cannot be correlated with his life and must find fulfillment elsewhere. Since the beginning of chapter 12 clearly depicts the end of the world, the view that 11:40-45 superimposes the eschatological antichrist over Antiochus IV seems justifiable. However, temperance should prevail, and wild speculation is unwarranted. Unanswered questions and ambiguities in the biblical text are the fertile ground for undisciplined guesswork and should be avoided.

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[109]L. Wood, *Daniel [BSC]* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 148-150; H. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 81-87; D. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958) 324-336; Walvoord, 270-280.

The Time of the End (12:1-4)

The phrase "at that time" clearly connects what follows with what has preceded, and it refers to the time when the arrogant king has come to his end (cf. 11:45b). Though a period of great distress will certainly accompany this arrogant king's appearance--a misery greater than the world has ever known--Daniel's people, at least all those whose names were entered in the roll of the righteous (cf. Ex. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Lk. 10:20; Rv. 20:12; 1 Enoch 47:3; 108:3; Jubilees 30:20, 22; 36:10), would be delivered through the help of Michael, their national protector (12:1). The larger context (i.e., 11:33, 44) shows that this deliverance does not preclude martyrdom, however. Their deliverance is of a different kind, for at the end, the great multitude of the dead[110] will be resurrected, some to shame and some to reward (12:2-3). Daniel probably was aware of Isaiah's "apocalypse," which speaks of the blessing of salvation and God raising his appointed children from the dead (Is. 26:18-19).

If one adopts the Maccabean interpretation, then this passage metaphorically depicts a great political reversal in the Maccabean period. Those who have been oppressed will be given power, while the oppressor will come to his end. Here, the passage is decidedly "this-worldly," portraying in apocalyptic imagery the survival of the Jews through the devastating persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes. It does not envision a resurrection of the dead at the end of the age, but rather, the triumph of the Jewish people following the Maccabean revolt. The language of resurrection is symbolic, not literal.

Such an interpretation was never entertained by the earliest Christians, however. Clearly, Jesus alluded to this passage in his Olivet Discourse when he spoke of "great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again" (Mt. 24:21//Mk. 13:19). That Jesus regarded this distress as future seems to preclude that the reference in Daniel is exhausted in the Maccabean Period. Thus, it is not surprising that the earliest Christians saw Daniel 12:1-3 as a direct prediction of the resurrection of the dead at the end of the age.[111] The general interpretation of Christians has been the same throughout Christian history, that is, that this passage anticipates what Jesus and Paul explicitly taught in the New Testament: at the end, the dead would be raised, some to reward and others to punishment. The only variation among conservative Christians has come regarding 12:1ff. after the rise of dispensationalism.

While traditionally in Christian history "Daniel's people" have been given the widest definition so as to embrace all the people of faith, including the Christian church, the dispensational school opts for the narrower interpretation that this phrase

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[110]See the insightful comments on *rabbim* (= the many) in Jeremias, *TDNT* (1962) VI.536.

[111]Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV.xxvi.1; Hippolytus, Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 65 and Fragments from Commentaries, Da. 12:1-2; Origen, Against Celsus, V.x.

refers exclusively to the Jews. Dispensationalists, given their commitment to a pre-tribulation rapture, hold that the Christian church will have been taken from the world before the time of great distress. During the great distress (which for the dispensationalist coincides with the seventieth week of Daniel, cf. 9:27), God will actively turn once again to the Jews as his covenant people. Hence, "Daniel's people" refers to the Jews, no more and no less.

Non-dispensationalists (who also are post-tribulational) hold that the Christian church will experience the time of great distress. They place maximum emphasis on the New Testament teaching that the children of Abraham are the children of faith, or to use Paul's expression, "the children of the promise are reckoned for the seed" (Ro. 9:8). Hence, "Daniel's people" must be interpreted more broadly than just to refer to the Jews. "Daniel's people" are the people of faith, including both its Old and New Testament representatives.

The final words of Daniel's heavenly messenger were that the content of the vision should be preserved until the "time of the end," a time when many people would search for the meaning of history (12:4; cf. Am. 8:12). The sealing of the scroll means that it was to be preserved and protected from tampering.

Final Questions (12:5-13)

The Book of Daniel closes with Daniel overhearing a conversation between two other heavenly beings, one on each side of the Tigris River (12:5), who questioned the linen-clad messenger bringing the final vision. The scene implies that the other heavenly beings had heard the revelation given to Daniel and were curious about its meaning. One asked how long before all the predicted things would happen (12:6), and he was told, on oath, that it would be for "a time, times and half a time" before the devastation of the holy people would be finished and everything would be fulfilled (12:7). The form of his oath is picked up by John in the Apocalypse (cf. Rv. 10:1-3a, 5-7), which in turn suggests that the "time, times and half a time" are the completion of God's purpose at the end of the age. This expression, taken from 7:25, connects the fulfillment of the fourth apocalyptic vision to the triumphant establishment of God's kingdom in the earlier vision of the four beasts (cf. 7:25-27).

Does this period so curiously described correspond with the final half of the last "seven" in 9:27? Dispensational interpreters think so, since they interpret the final "seven" as the seven years of the antichrist's covenant with the Jews. On the other hand, to make the "time, times and half a time" correspond with the last half of Daniel's seventieth week presupposes that the seventy weeks are not consecutive. Non-dispensationalists are inclined to reject any direct connection between the phrase "time, times and half a time" and the final half-seven of the "seventy sevens." They do agree, however, that the "time, times and half a time" refer to the closing period of

the age. This same phrase, as employed by John in the Apocalypse (cf. 12:14), seems to refer to three and a half years (Rv. 11:2-3; 12:6; 13:5). If this is the meaning, then the final three and a half years of the age will be the time of great distress, popularly known as "the great tribulation" (cf. Mt. 24:21, KJV). It is during this period that "the power of the holy people" will be broken (cf. Rv. 6:9-11; 11:7-10; 12:13-17; 13:10; 14:12-13). The "holy people" are the same ones John describes as "having the testimony of Jesus," that is, Christians (cf. Rv. 1:9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 20:4).

Still bewildered after the oblique explanation, Daniel asks again in a slightly different fashion for more information (12:8). Though he is warned that the full meaning will remain hidden until the end, a partial answer was that the crucible would be a time of purification and understanding for some and continued wickedness and confusion for others (12:9-10). Yet another cryptic set of numbers are offered, these different than before. The period from the abolition of the daily sacrifice and the desolating sacrilege would be 1,290 days, though a blessing is pronounced on anyone who survives until the end of 1,335 days.

What do these mysterious numbers signify? If one adopts the Maccabean interpretation, the numbers refer to the period of time between the sacrilege of Antiochus Epiphanes and the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus. In 8:14, the period was listed as 2300 morning-evenings, or 1,150 days. Since the Maccabean view usually suggests that the author of the book was writing even as the events were happening, he found it necessary to correct his original prediction of 8:14 when it turned out to be too short. In place of it he offered 1290 days, which again was miscalculated, so he corrected his second guess by offering a final figure of 1,335 days.[112] This interpretation reduces his role as a prophet to simply a failed prognosticator. Another explanation is that the three figures reflect different calendar reckonings for the same period, i.e., Hebrew and Babylonian, though admittedly the reckoning, even with the intercalation of extra days to make up a true solar year, is difficult if not impossible.[113]

If we abandon the Maccabean viewpoint for the eschatological one, we still have no certain ground. Dispensationalists sometimes regard the two cryptic numbers of 12:11-12 as corresponding with the last half of Daniel's final "seven." The extra thirty days of the first figure accounts for the time necessary to complete the last judgment, and the extra days of the last figure indicates the time necessary for setting up the government of the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.[114] As such, the great tribulation will begin in the middle of the last "seven" and will last for three and a half years (1,260 days). Another thirty days will see the completion of the last judgment

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[112]Anderson, 152-153.

[113]Goldingay, 309-310.

[114]Walvoord, 295-296; Wood, 156-157.

(1,290 days). Yet another forty-five days will see the inauguration of the millennial reign of Jesus (1,335 days). Of course, this interpretation is sheer speculation, but so is every other attempt to decipher the numbers. In the end, no explanation is satisfactory, and the matter must be left open.

If nothing else, the cryptic numbers confirm one thing--that when the heavenly messenger told Daniel that the words were "closed up and sealed until the time of the end," further revelations and explanations would not make the prediction any clearer. Daniel, and all who follow him, would have to wait until the fulfillment to fully understand the meaning. In the Apocalypse, a similarly cryptic passage describes an utterance by seven thunders, but when John started to record what they said, he was forbidden and told to seal those messages and not write them down (Rv. 10:3b-4). The counsel of God is always to some degree a mystery, even when it is in the process of being revealed!

The final instruction to Daniel was that he would rest in death until the time of the end, when he would be resurrected to receive his reward (12:13). What is true for Daniel is true for all those who die in faith!