

Daniel

The Structure of Daniel

Daniel can be organized into a chiastic structure which enables us to summarize its message in a single sentence: Daniel encourages the faithful by showing them that though Israel was exiled from the land of promise, they will be restored to the realm of life at the resurrection of the dead, when the four kingdoms are followed by the kingdom of God, so the people of God can trust God and persevere through persecution until God humbles proud human kings, God gives everlasting dominion to the son of man, and the saints reign with him.¹

1, Exile to the unclean realm of the dead

2, Nebuchadnezzar's vision, four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God

3, Deliverance of the trusting from the fiery furnace

4, Humbling of proud King Nebuchadnezzar

5, Humbling of proud King Belshazzar

6, Deliverance of the trusting from the lions' den

7-9, Daniel's visions, four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God

10-12², Return from exile and resurrection from the dead

At the center of the chiasm, Daniel 4 and Daniel 5 assure the persecuted people of God that however powerful human rulers may appear, God is sovereign over who reigns and he is able to humble those who walk in pride. The two narratives of the humbled kings in Daniel 4 and Daniel 5 are bracketed by the two narratives of deliverance. God will humble the proud and deliver the faithful. The schematic revelations in Daniel 2 and 7-9 assure God's people that God has a plan, God is the one who changes times and seasons, and God removes kings and sets up kings. God humbles the proud. God saves his people. God has a plan.

Viewed against a wider literary horizon, the book answers the narrative question of the destiny of the people of Israel currently in exile.

Daniel 1

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim (605 B.C.), Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. Nebuchadnezzar brought the vessels to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.

¹ This structure and summary is found in Hamilton's *With the Clouds of Heaven*.

² Daniel 11 is largely concerned with the events leading up to the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes, who is presented in this chapter as a type of a final opponent of God and his people. For this reason Daniel 12 presents the end of all things following the persecution and affliction wrought by Antiochus. Given what Jesus says about a future abomination of desolation (e.g., Matt 24:15), it seems that Jesus is interpreting what Daniel shows Antiochus doing (Dan. 11:31) as typological of the end.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were Israelite youths who were exiled to Babylon. They were given Babylonian names and were taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans. They were to be assigned a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.

Daniel and his companions resolved that they would not defile themselves with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. They asked to be given vegetables and water. With this diet it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. And God gave these four Israelites learning and skill in all literature and wisdom; Daniel in particular had understanding of all visions and dreams. When Daniel and his companions were brought before Nebuchadnezzar, in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, Nebuchadnezzar found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

Comments on Daniel 1

The siege of Jerusalem doesn't take the Lord by surprise, it is a part of his plan. Jeremiah prophesied that this would happen in Jeremiah 27. The reference to Nebuchadnezzar functions as a cross-reference to the end of Kings (cf. 2 Kings 25), and the reference to Shinar connects Daniel 1 to Genesis 10-11. The exile itself was prophesied in the Torah (cf. Leviticus 26:32-34, Deuteronomy 4:25-31).

Instruction in literature and language is designed to inculturate. Nebuchadnezzar sought to assimilate the Israelite exiles into Babylonian culture by obliterating their religious and cultural identity. The education given to Daniel and his companions was intended to give them elite sensibilities and redefine and reset the parameters of their worldview. It was intended to take over their minds and reeducate them.

How are Daniel and his friends going to live in this new environment? They saw their homes ravaged by an enemy army. They were separated from their parents and their teachers. They were given an elite education and royal food. But Daniel and his friends resolved that they would not defile themselves. Outside the supervision of parents and rabbis, Daniel and his friends resolved to remain faithful to God rather than enjoy the pleasures of the Babylonian kingdom.

Daniel, likely a teenager when he was carried captive, would not allow Babylonian theology to displace the truth of the scriptures. He would not allow Babylonian food to defile him. He was turned loose in Babylon, but did not become Babylonian. Daniel resolved to be faithful to Yahweh.

Daniel 2

In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled him. He summoned the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to

tell him his dream and its interpretation. They were unable to do so. The king became angry and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. Daniel and his companions were to be killed, but Daniel requested a time to tell the king his dream and its interpretation. Then Daniel and his companions sought mercy from God and the mystery of the dream was revealed to Daniel in a vision.

Daniel explained to the king that the dream was of an image. The head was of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its leg of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. A stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces and then became like chaff carried away by the wind.³ The stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel then gave the interpretation. God has given the kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar, who is the head of gold. Another kingdom inferior to him will arise after him, and yet a third kingdom of bronze. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron. The feet and toes, made partly of clay and partly of iron, represent the division in the fourth kingdom. In the days of those kings God will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all other kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.

The king paid homage to Daniel for revealing the dream and interpretation. He then made Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.

Comments on Daniel 2

The wisdom of Babylon was powerless to reveal truth and explain mysteries and the wise men of Babylon acted solely out of self-preservation and self-interest. Daniel however, when he found himself in an impossible situation, did not go to the worst conclusions. He prayed to God and trusted in God as the one who is sovereign over seasons and kings (Daniel 2:21) and is able to reveal mysteries.

The head of gold represents Babylon (605-539 BC), the chest and arms of silver represent the Medo-Persian empire (539-331 BC), and the middle and thighs of bronze represent Greece (330-63 BC). The stone represents the kingdom of God.⁴

The fourth kingdom is never identified in Daniel, whereas the first three kingdoms are all named. In my view this leaves two possible options. The fourth kingdom is a type, and the pattern receives installments from Rome (63 BC) and other future kingdoms, awaiting fulfillment in the final kingdom. Or the fourth kingdom could refer solely to the final kingdom

³ Daniel 2:35 (cf. Psalm 1)

⁴ Cf. Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22

that will be destroyed by the kingdom of God at the second coming.⁵ In Daniel 2:34 the fourth kingdom is destroyed “by no human hand”: the line of wicked kingdoms will finally be destroyed apart from human agency.

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was of events that will take place “in the latter days” (Daniel 2:28).⁶ A gigantic human image is struck down by a rock made without hands, taken from a mountain. This rock then grows to fill the entire earth. The human image is a parody of the divine creation in Genesis 1, where God makes humans in the divine likeness to rule the world. The gigantic stature of the image that is destroyed by a small stone cannot help but bring to mind also the confrontation of Goliath with David and the resultant defeat of the former with a small stone from the brook. This is a Davidic rock, which will grow to be a kingdom without borders. This rock taken from the mountain echoes other passages in the Bible as well. God’s holy mountain grows to be the highest mountain, and will result in the end of war (Isaiah 2:1-5). The extent of the holy mountain will be the entire earth (Isaiah 11:9).

Daniel 3

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and commanded people to worship it or else be cast into a burning fiery furnace. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah do not worship the image and are bound and thrown into a fiery furnace. However, Nebuchadnezzar was astonished to see that although three men were cast bound into the fire, he saw four men walking, unbound and unharmed, in the midst of the fire, with the fourth having an appearance like a son of the gods.⁷ Nebuchadnezzar then called Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to come out of the fire and blessed the God of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. He made a decree that any person who speaks against the God of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah is to be torn limb from limb. Then the king promoted Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in the province of Babylon.

Comments on Daniel 3

Nebuchadnezzar created an image of gold in response to the image of Daniel 2. While in Daniel 2 only the head was gold, representing Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon, in Daniel 3 Nebuchadnezzar made the whole image of gold. He was attempting to defy the plans of God.

Nebuchadnezzar made the image, and therefore there is no binding moral obligation to worship the image of gold. This perspective is reflected in the attitude and behavior of the three Hebrew men. Their perspective is that they are obligated to obey God because God made them in his image. If God created us, we are morally obligated to him. If God created us, he has the right to set normative requirements when it comes to the question of human behavior. The story of

⁵ Daniel 2:40-41 says the fourth kingdom shall “break and crush” the previous three kingdoms and that it will be a “divided kingdom.” The Roman empire did not cover all of the geographical area of the previous three kingdoms and was not necessarily a divided kingdom.

⁶ The term “latter days” is an expression loaded with eschatological freight (cf. Isaiah 2:1).

⁷ Cf. 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 2

what we believe about the world will shape how we view what happens in that story. The grand narrative is going to be reflected in how we evaluate the world. If we believe God is our creator, then what he commands is normative for us. Without the creator there is no true ethical behavior.

Only Yahweh can truly inspire worship. The golden image did not compel worship. The golden image was only being worshiped because people were threatened with death if they did not worship it. The only way for genuine religious liberty and religious toleration to exist is to recognize that worship should not be constrained. To have people genuinely respond with praise and worship, they cannot be compelled by the threat of punishment. If we want freedom, we must have a context where people freely discuss ideas and choose to worship whatever they find compelling.⁸ For Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, it was better to die than to worship false gods. They had a vision of God such that he is more valuable and precious than life itself.

Daniel 4

Nebuchadnezzar had a second dream that made him afraid. He brought before him all the wise men of Babylon to make known the interpretation of the dream but they were unable to do so. Then Daniel was brought in to interpret the dream. The dream was of a tree that grew and became strong, with leaves that were beautiful and abundant fruit. A watcher came down from heaven and proclaimed that the tree be chopped down. The stump of its roots were left in the earth. Its portion was to be with the beasts of the earth. His mind was to be changed from a man's mind to a beast's mind. And seven periods of time were to pass over him. This decree was by the watchers, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

Daniel interpreted the dream. The tree is Nebuchadnezzar. He is to be driven from among men and his dwelling will be with the beasts of the field. Seven periods of time will pass over him until he knows that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will. And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom shall be confirmed for him from the time that he knows that Heaven rules.

All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. After the seven periods of time Nebuchadnezzar's reason returned to him and his kingdom was returned to him. Nebuchadnezzar blessed, praised, and honored the Most High. He declared that God's dominion is an everlasting dominion, God's power is a sovereign power, and God is able to humble the proud.

Comments on Daniel 4

There's a case to be made that Nebuchadnezzar functions as a parable for Israel. In Isaiah 6 a tree symbolizes the nation of Israel. The tree is chopped down, representing the exile, but the stump remains. In Isaiah 11 a shoot from the stump of Jesse comes forth and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. In Isaiah 53 the suffering servant grew up like a young plant and a root from

⁸ This is something Nebuchadnezzar still does not understand at the end of Daniel 3 (cf. Daniel 3:29).

dry ground. Isaiah paints a picture of a tree that is born again or raised from the dead as the messianic shoot comes from the stump of Jesse and the tree once again grows into the vineyard of the Lord. Daniel 4 is a parabolic depiction of that.

Nebuchadnezzar	Israel
Exercises dominion (v20-22)	Supposed to exercise Edenic dominion
Driven out of the realm of mankind into the realm of beasts (v25)	Driven into exile where they would serve gods of wood and stone which do not see or understand
7 periods of time (v23)	70 years in exile
Chopped down tree will be restored (v26)	Messianic shoot from stump of Israel
Restoration will happen when Nebuchadnezzar knows that God rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he wills (v25)	Exile for Israel will end when the Israelites seek the Lord and search after him with all their hearts

Also note that in Psalm 1 the king of Israel is like a tree. And in Matthew 13 the kingdom of God is like a great tree that grew from a mustard seed.

Nebuchadnezzar became beastly, reflecting the dehumanizing reality of not living according to God's commands. God humbles Nebuchadnezzar and his prideful, self-exalting mindset. God demonstrates to Nebuchadnezzar that God is sovereign. All things are being accomplished according to God's will. God is accountable to no one. No one can evaluate God, and no one is in a position to stay God's hand. No one has the authority to call in question what God does.

Daniel 5

King Belshazzar, coregent of his father Nabonidus and "son" of Nebuchadnezzar, held a large feast and commanded the vessels of the temple in Jerusalem, holy objects, be brought out that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them.⁹ They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

⁹ Belshazzar was referred to as the son of Nebuchadnezzar possibly because he sat on the same throne of Nebuchadnezzar. The terms "father" and "son" in Daniel 5 could mean that Nebuchadnezzar was the predecessor, "father," of Belshazzar and that Belshazzar was Nebuchadnezzar's successor, "son." In the Assyrian text commonly referred to as the "Black Obelisk" of Shalmaneser III, Jehu is called the "son of Omri," although Jehu was not a descendant of Omri. He was of another lineage altogether. "Son" is unquestionably used in that text, as elsewhere, in the sense of "successor." See Stephen Miller's Daniel commentary (NAC) for other explanations.

The fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace. And the king saw the hand as it wrote and became alarmed. He called for the wise men of Babylon to read the writing and show its interpretation.¹⁰ Whoever does so will be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.¹¹ The wise men could not read the writing or make known to the king the interpretation.

Then Daniel was brought in before the king. Daniel refused the gifts and told Belshazzar that Belshazzar has not humbled his heart, though he knew about all that happened with Nebuchadnezzar, but has lifted up himself against the Lord of heaven. Daniel reminded Belshazzar that Belshazzar used the vessels of God's house to drink wine with his lords, his wives, and his concubines, and praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know. And Daniel told Belshazzar that Belshazzar has not praised God in whose hand is Belshazzar's breath.

Daniel then read the writing and made known the interpretation. The writing was "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN." This is the interpretation: MENE, God has numbered the days of Belshazzar's kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, Belshazzar has been weighed in the balances and found wanting; PERES, Belshazzar's kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.¹² That very night Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Mede received the kingdom.¹³

Comments on Daniel 5

The king had to offer rewards to constrain the obedience, truthfulness, and help of false prophets. For Daniel no reward was needed and ultimately truth is not from him, God is king and God is the one who gives wisdom and reveals truth. If Daniel decided to manipulate the situation for his own benefit by telling Belshazzar what he may have liked to hear, he would have been immediately exposed. If he didn't say what was true, Belshazzar was going to die anyway and Daniel would fall into the pit he dug for himself. If he genuinely declared what was revealed, he would be safe. If we will speak the truth of God's word, even if it looks like it lands us in a fiery furnace, God will ultimately deliver us.

Daniel's perspective is one we desperately need. There was no worldliness in Daniel. He had been in Babylon from 605 BC to 539 BC, that is 66 years he had been in Babylon. He had been in Babylon all his life and he had not become a Babylonian. He had been in Babylon all his life and he still valued faithfulness to God over all that he could do as third ruler of the kingdom,

¹⁰ The problem is not that the letters can not be deciphered, but that it is unknown how to divide the letters and how to do the pointing.

¹¹ Daniel 5:7 is reminiscent of Joseph, indicating that Daniel is an installment of the typological pattern found in Joseph.

¹² *MENE* sounds like the Aramaic for *numbered*. *TEKEL* sounds like the Aramaic for *weighed*. *PERES* (the singular of *Parsin*) sounds like the Aramaic for *divided* and for *Persia*.

¹³ Darius may be the same person as Cyrus. If so, Daniel may have referred to Darius as Darius the Mede rather than Cyrus the Persian because he sees this event as fulfillment of prophecy that Babylon would fall to the Medes.

over all the status that would be afforded to him by a gold chain and purple robe. We have to guard our hearts lest the attractions of the world begin to lure us away from our commitment to God's kingdom. We are not here to cultivate sophistication and worldly tastes, we are here to make disciples. Not that sophistication is bad, Daniel was a very sophisticated man who knew how to present himself, who knew how to conduct himself, and who to a certain degree fit where he was. Daniel had means, used means, and was someone who could walk in the royal court and not be laughed out of the room. He walked into the royal court and people listened to him. He had learned the language, he wore clothing appropriate to his station, he had access to that which was appropriate for a man of his position, but he was not captive to those things. The things of the world were not what were driving him. The possibility of losing or gaining the things of the world were not dictating his behavior.

God had placed Daniel where he was and gave Daniel opportunities. Daniel did not take the foolish path of rejecting the world nor of compromising his integrity to store up for himself the things of the world.

Daniel rebuked Belshazzar for not responding to the light that had been given him and for worshiping that which he had made and that which can not hear, can not see, does not know, and can not help. Daniel's rebuke is a reminder to us of the insanity of idolatry. Money has no sympathy for us and money is not a god that will be there for us. We should not worship money, it can not hear our cries for help and it can not respond to those pleas. We should not worship position, influence, status, or safety. They will not be there for us, they can not reply to us. We should worship the one who sees, hears, and knows.

In Daniel 5:25-28, "mene," "tekem," and "parsin" are Aramaic passive participles. Therefore "mene" means "numbered," "tekem" means "weighed," and "parsin," means "divided." "Mene" was written twice to stress that the divine decision was certain of fulfillment. So the message literally read, "Numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided."

God is ultimately sovereign over the kingdoms of the world. In Isaiah 13:17 and Jeremiah 51:11, it is prophesied that Babylon will fall at the hands of the Medes. Just as Babylon was born in linguistic confusion (cf. Genesis 11:1-9), so it ends in the same way.

Daniel 6

Daniel, now over 80 years old, was one of three presidents who were over the 120 satraps that were set over the kingdom. Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps and king Darius planned to set Daniel over the whole kingdom. The presidents and satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but could not do so because Daniel was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then the presidents and satraps agreed the king should establish an ordinance that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to the king, shall be cast into the lions' den. King Darius signed the document establishing the ordinance. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward

Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.¹⁴ Daniel was reported to the king and the king became distressed but could not save Daniel. Daniel was thrown into the lions' den and a stone was laid on the mouth of the den. The next morning at the break of day, Daniel was found to be alive. An angel shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed him because Daniel was found blameless before God and trusted in his God. Daniel is then taken out of the den.

Comments on Daniel 6

Daniel knew the document was signed and knew the consequences, but it mattered more to him that Jerusalem be restored than that he avoided trouble. Daniel kept the windows open. To him, prayer was more valuable than life. Daniel was confident in God's sovereignty. The Lord changes times and seasons. He sets up kings and takes kings away. He does as he pleases in the heavens above and the earth below and nobody can stay his hand.

Despite the accusations of the presidents and satraps, the king was distressed at what he knew to be a setup for Daniel and tried to deliver Daniel with all of the resources at his disposal. The king was emotionally invested in Daniel. The king knew Daniel's agenda had not been to advance himself. The king trusted Daniel. He knew Daniel was not in it for himself. Daniel had proved himself. Daniel had won the king as an ally.

Daniel's descent into the lions' den and then his ascent out of it is a typological prefiguring of Jesus's death and resurrection. At the rising of dawn the stone is rolled away and the one who was certainly dead comes out of the pit.

When Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, the wild beasts were made subject to him as to a second Adam (cf. Genesis 2). God had delivered and rescued Daniel.

Daniel 7

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and vision of his head as he lay in his bed. The four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea and four great beasts came up out of the sea. The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. A mind of a man was given to it. The second was like a bear. It was raised up on one side, it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth, and it was told, "Arise, devour much flesh." The third was like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back and with four heads. The fourth was a terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong beast. It had ten horns and there came up among the ten horns another horn, a little one. And in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

Then Daniel saw the Ancient of Days take his seat. His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten

¹⁴ Daniel 6:10 (cf. 1 Kings 8:46-51)

thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. The fourth beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

Then with the clouds of heaven came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that will not be destroyed.

Daniel is told that the four beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever. The little horn of the fourth beast made war with the saints and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the other kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them. He shall speak words against the Most High and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court will sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.

Comments on Daniel 7

Daniel has a vision of four beasts representing four kingdoms. The first beast represents Babylon. What happens to the first beast is similar to what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. The second beast represents the Medo-Persian empire. The Persians had greater authority in the kingdom than the Medes and so the beast was raised up on one side.¹⁵ The three ribs represent three conquests. The third beast, a leopard with wings, represents Greece. Leopards move fast and wings move fast. Alexander the Great was famous for the speed in which he accomplished his conquests. The third beast had four heads which represent the four rulers that replaced Alexander after he died.¹⁶ I see two options for interpreting the fourth beast. The first option is that it represents Rome but is also typological of satanic empires. Rome is an installment in a pattern which awaits final fulfillment. The second option is that it represents a single kingdom that comes after Rome. The little horn of the fourth beast is the antichrist.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cf. Daniel 8:3, 20

¹⁶ Cf. Daniel 8:8

¹⁷ The little horn of the third kingdom in Daniel 8 is described similarly to the little horn of the fourth kingdom in Daniel 7. This suggests that there is an antichrist pattern.

The beasts arise from the sea. The sea was an image of the deep, dark unknown from which evil comes.¹⁸ Various beasts come up from the sea, climaxing in a terrifying monster that rages against the people of God. This is evocative of the battle between the serpent and the seed of the woman. Beastly empires are brutal, predatory, not necessarily rational, and don't have the sensitivity of humanity. These empires have been dehumanized by their idolatry. In this world where Adam was given dominion to rule creation, beasts have taken over.

God sits on a fiery throne with wheels.¹⁹ Fire represents purifying burning that is associated with God's holiness.²⁰ One like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven and restores God's reign over the earth which the beasts subverted.²¹ Language that has been used to describe God's kingdom throughout Daniel is now being used to describe the kingdom of the son of man in Daniel 7:13-14.

In Daniel 7:25, the first occurrence of "Most High" is translated from the Aramaic word *illaya* and refers to the Ancient of Days. In the same verse, the second occurrence of "Most High" is translated from the word *elyonin* which is a Hebrew word that has been brought into Aramaic; this "Most High" refers to the one like a son of man.²² The son of man is presented before the Ancient of Days, enthroned, and then referred to with a term that is synonymous with the Ancient of Days as though he is equal with Ancient of Days, partaking of the same level of dignity and honor and due the same level of worship and devotion. Daniel refers to the Ancient of Days as the "Most High" in the Aramaic term and then refers to the son of man as the "Most High" with the Hebrew term. Daniel is referring to the Ancient of Days and the one like a son of man both as the "Most High" but he is using different terms to do so. It is like Daniel recognizes somehow that the Ancient of Days and the son of man partake of equal dignity. The son of man is there with the Ancient of Days, distinct from the Ancient of Days, and in some sense equal in dignity and honor with the Ancient of Days.

The four beasts are savage beasts, manifestations of an archetypal beast, with superhuman strength. In contrast, the son of man is distinctly human, and thus seemingly weak and insignificant compared to the beasts. While his name connects him to earth, the fact that he comes on clouds links him to heaven. His origin is in heaven, and this passage reflects on the meaning of humans made in the image and likeness of God found in Genesis 1, where human beings are made rulers of creation with everything - including beasts - put under their feet. Psalm 8 provides a commentary on Genesis and uses the expression "son of man" to describe the exalted position of weak and insignificant humanity as God's vicegerent of creation. Such a term was also used to designate the Israelite king whose suffering fortunes are tied to the nation (Psalm 80:15-19). This individual is also called *bar* (Psalm 2:12), the Aramaic term for "son"

¹⁸ Cf. Revelation 13:1

¹⁹ Cf. Ezekiel 1:13-28

²⁰ Cf. Isaiah 4:4, 6:6

²¹ Cf. Psalm 104:3

²² Compare Daniel 7:14 with Daniel 7:27.

used also in Daniel 7. And this son in Psalm 2 is destined to rule the world to restore the lost Adamic glory.

Interestingly, in Daniel, the son of man does not seek to establish his own authority or to wrest authority through violence, but is simply given authority over the world by God. The contrast between the beasts and the son of man is a contrast between a parody of the divine image and the divine image itself, humanity as it was intended to be.

Daniel 7:25-27 describes a period of intense persecution of God's people for a time, times, and half a time, followed by decisive judgment, and then the establishment of God's kingdom. Daniel 12:7 describes a similar sequence of events. Daniel 7 and 12 seem to speak of a three and a half year period in which the people of God will face terrible persecution: they will be "worn out" and given into the hand of the beast (Daniel 7:25); it will be "a time of trouble, such as never has been" (Daniel 12:1). But then both Daniel 7:25 and Daniel 12:1-13 indicate that after this three and a half year period of trouble, the power of the beast will be broken and the people of God will be delivered.

Daniel 8

In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to Daniel. Daniel saw a ram with two horns, but one horn was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. The ram charged westward and northward and southward. No beast could stand before him, and there was no one who could rescue from his power. A male goat came from the west and had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. The goat ran at the ram and struck the ram and broke his two horns. The ram was cast down to the ground and no one could rescue the ram from the goat's power. Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it came up four conspicuous horns. Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper.

A holy one said that the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot was to be for 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.

The angel Gabriel explains to Daniel the vision. The ram with the two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. At the latter end of their kingdom, a king of bold face shall arise. His power shall be great, and he shall cause fearful destruction and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit

prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he will become great. Without warning he will destroy many. And he will even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he will be broken, but by no human hand.²³

Comments on Daniel 8

Daniel 8 focuses on the second and third kingdoms. The first horn of the goat was Alexander the Great. After Alexander died, his kingdom was taken over by four generals. The little horn of the third kingdom is Antiochus Epiphanes (8th ruler of the Seleucid Greek Empire, 175-163 BC). This human king is described in lofty terms.²⁴ He is described in terms that correspond with the antichrist figures of Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 12:11. He will cause the host and sanctuary to be trampled.²⁵ This will be for 2,300 evenings and mornings.²⁶

There are enemies of God who will try to stamp out the worship of God and they have a constrained amount of time. They have a relatively short amount of time where they are going to do work. So let us persevere and not give up. If worship is banned and the people of God are persecuted, God knows this is happening and it is not going to last very long. Let us not go with the world. The kingdom of God is an everlasting kingdom that will never be destroyed.

Daniel 9

In the first year of Darius, Daniel recognized that according to Jeremiah the prophet, seventy years must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem.²⁷ Realizing that the seventy years are almost up, Daniel prayed to God for an end to Jerusalem's desolation, and confessed his sin and the sin of his people.

The angel Gabriel came to Daniel and said that seventy weeks²⁸ are decreed about Daniel's people and Daniel's holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. From the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, until Messiah the Prince, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. Then after sixty-two weeks, the Messiah will be cut off and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are decreed. And he will confirm a covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he

²³ The antichrist of the third kingdom will be destroyed by "no human hand" - an indication that the little horn of the third kingdom typifies the little horn of the fourth kingdom.

²⁴ Cf. Isaiah 14:4, 12-13; Ezekiel 28:1-5, 11-16. Archetypal heavenly imagery is being used to describe an earthly reality. Daniel 8:23-24 describes the earthly reality which is an explanation of Daniel 8:10.

²⁵ Cf. 1 Maccabees 1:16-24, 41-57; 2 Maccabees 5:11-14; 6:2-5

²⁶ Evening and morning could refer to the daily evening and morning sacrifices. 2,300 evenings and mornings is therefore 1,150 days which is about the time from when the temple altar was desecrated to its rededication. An alternative view is that 2300 evenings and mornings refers to 2,300 days that began in 170 BC with the murder of Onias III.

²⁷ Cf. Jeremiah 29:1-14

²⁸ This is possibly a seven-fold of the seventy years of exiles (cf. Leviticus 26:18-28).

will put a stop to sacrifice and offering; and on the wing of abominations will come the one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.

Comments on Daniel 9

Daniel recognizes that the exile is a confirmation of Yahweh's word, it took place "just as it was written in the Torah of Moses" (Daniel 9:13). Leviticus 26:34-35 says that all the years Israel is in exile the land will enjoy its Sabbaths. Jeremiah 29:10 says that the exile will be for seventy years. 2 Chronicles 36:21 confirms that the exile prophesied by Jeremiah would last until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths, that is 70 years.

Daniel prays for an end to Jerusalem's desolation (Daniel 9:3-19), and is given the answer that a new world order is coming after the completion of not just seventy years but seventy sevens, which is best understood as seventy weeks of years or 490 years (Daniel 9:24).²⁹ This period will commence its course when the seventy years of exile are completed.³⁰ A specific chronological outline for the future is thus sketched. And when the seventy weeks are completed, the kingdom of God - the little stone, the son of man granted all authority - will be a reality. This is the Israelites' final destiny. There will be an end to transgression, sin, and iniquity. There will be everlasting righteousness, the prophecies will be fulfilled, and God's presence will dwell with the Israelites forever. The seventy weeks will usher in the ultimate Jubilee.

The time period of seventy weeks itself is a significant time frame that would inspire hope to the Israelites. The value of seventy weeks is derived from the year of jubilee. Leviticus 25:8-12 states:

"You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you."

After 49 years comes the Day of Atonement on which liberty is proclaimed to the captives of the land and each person is returned his tribal inheritance and returns to his clan. This is significant because within the Israelite worldview the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 would have

²⁹ The word for "week" used can also mean "seven."

³⁰ One possible date for the commencement of the seventy weeks is 444 BC with the decree of Artaxerxes (cf. Nehemiah 2:1-6).

amounted to a tenfold jubilee of 490 years (70×7). The culmination of all things will come to pass after a ten-fold of 49 years. The Israelites would therefore have interpreted this ultimate tenfold jubilee as a glorious eschatological reality when captives go free and inheritance will be enjoyed. The symbolic time period itself of 70 weeks therefore further reinforces the Israelites' hope that Yahweh will bring about a glorious eschatological future.

The foretelling of a suffering Messiah is an extension of Isaiah's prophecies and gives hope that God will provide an atoning sacrifice for sin. Daniel 9:24 speaks of atonement for iniquity which within the Israelites' worldview would have only been possible through sacrifice. In Daniel 9:26 the revelation tells of how "an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing." These two concepts, atonement for iniquity and the cutting off of an anointed one, connect with Isaiah's prophecies of a glorious eschatological restoration.

Isaiah 40:1-2 states:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

Here God is comforting his people by saying that "her iniquity is pardoned" because "she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Later on in Isaiah 53 is the explanation for how the people will receive double for their sins.

Isaiah 53:4-5 states:

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

And Isaiah 53:11 states:

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

Isaiah tells of a suffering servant who will be a sacrifice on behalf of the people. This servant is “like a root out of dry ground” (Isa. 53:1) and also the “shoot from the stump of Jesse” (Isa 11:1). So a Davidic suffering servant will come and be a sacrifice for the sins of the people. These prophecies of Isaiah inform what is meant in the revelation to Daniel by “atone for sin” and “an anointed one shall be cut off.” It is possible that Daniel understood the cutting off of the anointed one as the fulfillment of Isaiah 53.

After the first sixty-nine weeks the Messiah will come and be cut off (Daniel 9:26a). And after the cutting off the Messiah “the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary” (Daniel 9:26b), referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Lastly there will be the 70th week when the antichrist makes a covenant with many and for half of the week he puts an end to sacrifice and offering.³¹ The “prince” of Daniel 9:26-27 is the final antichrist who will put an end to sacrifice and offering and who will create a satanic parody of the new covenant.³²

These are the seventy weeks decreed about the Israelites and Jerusalem. Seventy weeks are “decreed” (Daniel 9:24), which literally means that seventy sevens are “cut off” or “divided” for Israel. God has cut off these 490 years from the rest of history to accomplish the deliverance for Israel.

The revelation tells of the trials that will come before their definite end in the consummation of all things. They are the following:

1. Jerusalem will be built again with squares and moat in a troubled time.
2. The people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.
3. The city’s end shall come with a flood.
4. To the end there shall be war.
5. Desolations are decreed.
6. The prince shall make a strong covenant with many for one week.
7. The prince shall put an end to sacrifice and offering.
8. On the wings of abominations shall come one who makes desolate.

³¹ There is a gap between the 69th and 70th week. The 70th week will come at the end times and be followed by the second coming of Christ.

³² See Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven: the Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, 121 for further examples of “satanic parody” within the book of Daniel.

It is only after all these past that “the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” Suffering comes before glory. The Israelites can therefore expect suffering and persecution to precede their glorious eschatological restoration. But they can endure knowing there will be an end to suffering and that restoration will surely come. They can hope in a “decreed end” to the “desolator.”

The revelation given to Daniel in 9:24-27 builds upon Old Testament patterns and prophecies to tell of a glorious eschatological restoration for God’s people. God’s enemies will come to destroy Jerusalem and the sanctuary, but their destruction will not last forever. Finally, God’s enemies will be defeated, sin will be atoned for, righteousness will prevail, prophecy will be fulfilled, and God will dwell with man. Yahweh has decreed it. This is a hope great enough to sustain the Israelite through suffering. For after suffering comes glory.

Daniel 10-12

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel through a vision. Daniel had a vision of angelic beings who tell Daniel of ongoing spiritual warfare and give Daniel a detailed explanation of events to come regarding the second and third kingdoms and also the final antichrist. The vision concludes with the hope of the resurrection and a blessing for those who persevere through the final end-time tribulation.

Comments on Daniel 10-12

Daniel records with amazing detail events to occur regarding the Seleucid dynasty (now Turkey, Syria, Iraq) in the north and the Ptolemaic dynasty (now Egypt) in the south. In Daniel 11 there is a shift in describing Antiochus Epiphanes to describing the final antichrist. Daniel 11:21-35 is probably describing Antiochus Epiphanes who also functions as a type for the antichrist. Daniel 11:36-45 is probably describing the final antichrist. Note Daniel 11:40 says “at the time of the end” and Daniel 12, which describes the final resurrection, begins with “at that time” (Daniel 12:1). Daniel 12:1 describes the final end-time tribulation as “a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.” Terrible persecution of unprecedented magnitude will occur that will last for a “time, times, and half a time” (Daniel 12:7). This will be followed by deliverance of God’s people and resurrection to everlasting life (Daniel 12:2).

God is sovereign. He has a plan. He delivers the faithful. He will ultimately bring an end to suffering and evil. He will establish his kingdom forever. And the saints will rule with him. Let us humble ourselves and entrust ourselves to Yahweh.

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