

Through the Bible Book by Book

Old Testament

by Myer Pearlman

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Daniel

Theme: The book of Daniel is, for the most part, a prophetic history of Gentile world-power from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar to the coming of CHRIST. The prophets in general emphasize GOD's power and sovereignty in relation to Israel, and they reveal Him as guiding the destinies of His chosen people throughout the centuries until their final restoration.

Daniel, on the other hand, emphasizes GOD's sovereignty in relation to the Gentile world-empires, and reveals Him as the One controlling and overruling in their affairs, until the time of their destruction at the coming of His Son.

"The vision is that of the overruling GOD, in wisdom knowing and in might working; of kings reigning and passing, of dynasties and empires rising and falling, while GOD enthroned above rules their movements" (Campbell Morgan).

The theme of Daniel may be summed up as follows: GOD revealed as the One controlling the rise and fall of the kingdoms of this world, until their final destruction, and establishing His own kingdom.

Because of its many visions, the book of Daniel has been called "*The Revelation of the Old Testament*."

Author: Daniel was of the tribe of Judah and probably a member of the royal family (1:3-6). While yet a youth he was carried captive to Babylon in the third year of King Jehoiakim (II Chronicles 36:4-7), and eight years before Ezekiel. Together with three other young men he was stationed at the court of Nebuchadnezzar for special training in the learning of the Chaldeans.

There he attained to one of the highest ranks in the kingdom, a position which he retained under the Persian rule, which succeeded the Babylonian. He prophesied during the whole of the captivity, his last prophecy being delivered in the reign of Cyrus, two years before the nation's return to Palestine.

Because of his unblemished life amid the corruptions of an oriental court, he is one of those mentioned by Ezekiel as outstanding examples of piety. The same prophet bears witness to his wisdom (Ezekiel 28:3).

Scope: From Nebuchadnezzar to Cyrus, covering a period of about 73 years from the year 607 to 534 B. C.

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- I. Introduction: Daniel and his companions (Ch. 1).
- II. GOD's control of the empires of the world in relation to their development and to His kingdom (Chs. 2-7).
- III. Daniel's vision in relation to the fortunes of GOD's people (Chs. 8-12).

I. Introduction: Daniel and his companions (Ch. 1)

Daniel's resolve. Daniel was a truly great man. As concerning personal holiness, he lived a blameless life amid the sensuality of an oriental court; as concerning wisdom and knowledge, he excelled the greatest of Babylon's wise men; as concerning position, he occupied one of the highest stations of the kingdom. Verse 8 reveals the secret of his success: "**But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself . . .**" It was customary among the Babylonians to throw a small part of food and drink on the earth as an offering to the gods, in order to consecrate to them the whole feast. For Daniel to have partaken of such food would have been to sanction idolatry; therefore, like Moses and Joseph he "**chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.**" As in the case of Joseph, Daniel and his companions were well rewarded for their faithfulness.

II. GOD's control of the nations of the world in relation to their development and to His kingdom (Chaps. 2 to 7)

1. In response to an unexpressed desire on the part of Nebuchadnezzar to know the future of his great empire, GOD gave him a dream, which interpreted by Daniel, gave that monarch a revelation of the rise, progress and fall of Gentile world power during that period described by CHRIST as "**the times of the Gentiles**" (Luke 21:24). By the "**times of the Gentiles**" we mean that period of time during which world dominion is in the hands of the Gentiles instead of the Jews, and during which the Jews are under Gentile rule. This period began with the captivity, 606 B. C., and will end with the coming of CHRIST. The succession of world empires is set forth under the figure of a gigantic image composed of various metals. In the diminishing value of the metals composing the Image may be seen the deterioration of world empires in relation to their character of government. The following is the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

(a) The head of gold represents the empire of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon (606-538 B. C.). The power of Nebuchadnezzar was absolute, he could do what he willed (Daniel 5:19). His empire was a unit.

(b) The breast and arms of silver represent the inferior empire of Medo-Persia (538-330 B. C.). This kingdom was inferior to the first, for its monarch depended on the support of the nobility, and could not do what he willed, as shown by the inability of Darius to release Daniel (6:12-16). This empire was dual, composed of the empires of Media and Persia.

(c) The belly and thighs of brass represent the less valuable empire of Greece (330-30 B. C.). "The government of Alexander was a monarchy supported by the military aristocracy that was as weak as the ambitions of its leaders." This empire was later divided into four parts (7:6; 8:8).

(d) The legs of iron, and the feet and toes, part iron and part clay, represent the Roman empire (B. C. 30 till the return of CHRIST). Here is represented a still inferior form of government, in that the emperor of Rome was elected and his power depended on the good will of the people. This empire will, in the last days, be divided into ten parts. The mingling of the iron with the clay in the ten toes suggests a further deterioration of this government into that of a democratic monarchy where the monarch carries out the will of the people (2:41-43).

(e) The stone cut out without hands falling on the feet of the image signifies the coming of CHRIST at a time when the Roman empire will have been restored, His destruction of Gentile world power, and the setting up of His own kingdom.

2. Nebuchadnezzar's image, the refusal of the three Jews to worship, and their deliverance from the fiery furnace (Ch. 3).

3. Nebuchadnezzar's tree vision, his abasement and his restoration (Ch. 4).

4. Daniel's personal history under Belshazzar and Darius (Chs. 5, 6).

(a) Under Belshazzar: his interpretation of the writing on the wall (Ch. 5).

(b) Under Darius: his deliverance from the lions' den (Ch. 6).

5. The vision of the four beasts (Ch. 7). This chapter treats of the same subject as the second chapter - the rise and fall of Gentile power.

In chapter 2 the empires are viewed from the political viewpoint, in relation to their deterioration in form of government; in chapter 7 they are viewed from the moral viewpoint in relation to their fierce and destructive characters as expressed by their symbolization as wild beasts.

In chapter two the vision was adapted to the viewpoint of Nebuchadnezzar who saw superficially the world-empire as a splendid human figure and the kingdom of GOD as a mere stone at first. In chapter seven the vision was adapted to the viewpoint of Daniel, who saw the empires in their true character of wild beasts, and who from the first saw the superiority and triumph of the kingdom of GOD. The following is the interpretation of the vision:

(a) The lion signifies Nebuchadnezzar's empire. Verse 4 may have reference to Nebuchadnezzar's experience recorded in 4:16-34.

(b) The bear symbolizes the Medo-Persian empire. Its being raised on one side is expressive of the superior strength of the Persian empire. The three ribs in its mouth represent three kingdoms this empire subdued - Lydia, Egypt, Babylon.

(c) The leopard represents the Grecian empire. The wings denote the rapidity of its conquests. The four heads signify the four divisions into which the empire was divided after the death of its ruler.

(d) The undescribed beast represents the strong and terrible Roman empire. The ten horns signify the ten kingdoms into which it will be divided in the latter days. Out of these horns comes another - Antichrist. The days of these ten kingdoms will witness the coming of CHRIST in power who will destroy that great world system and its ruler. Revelation, chapters 13 and 19 should be read in this connection.

III. Daniel's visions in relation to the fortunes of GOD's people (Chs. 8 to 12)

1. The vision of the ram and the goat (Ch. 8).

The following is a brief interpretation of this Vision:

(a) The two-horned ram represents the empire of Medo-Persia.

(b) The he-goat signifies the Grecian empire which destroyed the Medo-Persian.

(c) The notable horn between the eyes of the he-goat represents Alexander the Great, the ruler of the Grecian empire.

(d) The four horns coming up after the breaking of the great horn represent the four divisions of Alexander's empire after his death.

(e) The little horn coming out of one of the divisions of Alexander's empire (vv. 9-14; 23-27).

Some scholars believe that the predictions concerning the little horn were fulfilled in a Syrian king named Antiochus Epiphanes, who in his fierce persecution of the Jews, defiled their sanctuary and attempted to abolish their religion. Others contend that the time element mentioned in verses 17, 19, 23 removes the fulfillment of the prophecy to the end of the age when Antichrist, of whom Antiochus is but a shadow, shall appear.

2. The vision of the seventy weeks (Ch. 9).

On learning from the prophecies of Jeremiah that the seventy years of Israel's captivity were accomplished, Daniel went before the Lord in intercession for his people. While praying an angel was sent to reveal unto him the future of Israel. The nation was indeed to be restored from captivity, but that restoration was not the final one. A period of seventy weeks (more literally, "seventy sevens") was to intervene before the consummation of Israel's history (v. 24).

These weeks are not weeks of days but prophetic weeks of years. By careful calculation scholars have found that this period

sets the exact date of Christ's first coming and fixes the time of the reign of Antichrist. The seventy weeks are divided into three periods (See 9:25,26):

(a) Seven weeks, or forty-nine years. The entire period of the weeks was to be reckoned from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem which decree was given in March, 445 B. C during the reign Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:1-10). The period of the 49 years probably represents the time occupied in the building of the wall as mentioned in 9:25.

(b) The 62 weeks, or 434 years. After the period of the 49 years, 62 weeks, or 434 years - 483 years in all - were to elapse before Messiah's coming. Reckoning from March, 445 B. C, the year of the decree to build Jerusalem, making allowance for the different calendar used in those days, and allowing for leap years, students have calculated that the 483 years, or the 69 weeks, ended in April, 32 A. D., the exact month and year in which Christ entered Jerusalem as the Messiah Prince (Matthew 21:1-11). After this period Messiah was to be cut off.

(c) Thus far we have accounted for 69 weeks out of the 70, 483 years out of the 490. There remains yet one week or 7 years to be fulfilled. Between the 69 weeks and the last week is a gap, during which period time is not reckoned in relation to Israel.

This gap is filled by the church age, which age was not revealed to the prophets. The last week or seven years mentioned in verse 26 does not find its fulfillment until the appearing of Antichrist at the end of the age. Verse 27 affirms that a certain ruler will make a covenant with the Jews for a period of the 7 years, which covenant he will break after three and a half years, and after which he will wage war against the religion of the Jews.

This implies that the latter three and a half years of the seven will be a time of tribulation for the Jewish people. The book of Revelation mentions a like period of three and a half years (stated under different symbolic numbers - see Revelation 11:2, 3, 9; 12:6, 14; 13:5), which period it associates with the reign of Antichrist, the tribulation of the Jewish people and the pouring out of GOD's judgments in the earth - a period which is to be followed by CHRIST's coming and the restoration of Israel. Thus we see that the last week of the seventy still awaits fulfillment.

3. Daniel's last vision (Chs. 10-12). These chapters contain a prophetic history of GOD's chosen people from the time of Darius until the coming of the Messiah. The following are the contents of these chapters:

(a) Daniel's vision of the glory of the Lord (Ch.10).

(b) The wars between two of the four divisions of Alexander's empire - Egypt and Syria, the kingdom of the South, and the kingdom of the North (11:1-20). Palestine had a definite relation to these struggles between these countries for she was a buffer state.

(c) A prophetic description of Antiochus Epiphanes, the great Syrian persecutor of the Jews, and a type of Antichrist (11:21-35).

(d) Daniel now looks from Antiochus, the type, to Antichrist, the antitype, and describes the latter (11:36-45).

(e) The Great Tribulation and the deliverance of the Jewish people (12:1).

(f) The resurrection (12:2, 3).

(g) The last message to Daniel (12:4-13). He is told that the words he has written are closed and sealed unto the time of the end; i.e., the visions are not to find their complete interpretation until the end of the age. The prophecies he had written were not for himself (compare 1 Pet. 1:10-12), but for those living at the end-time, at which time the wise - i.e., those having spiritual wisdom would understand (v. 10; compare Matthew 24:15).

With Daniel's instructions contrast those of John in Revelation 22:10.

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