

The Book of Daniel

- I. Introduction to the Book
- II. Comment and Commentary on the Book.

Part One: The Life Ministry of Daniel (and friends) in Babylon, 1:1-6:28

Part Two: The Visions and Prophecies of Daniel in Exile, 7:1-12:13

Four visions or revelations are in this section: Two in the first and third year of Belshazzar (chapters. 7, 9) and two to Medo-Persian monarchs (unless Darius and Cyrus are the same person, chapter 8 and 10-12).

Introduction

- A. Daniel's Vision of four Successive Kingdoms, 7:1-28
- B. Daniel's Vision of the Fourth Kingdom, 8:1-27
- C. Gabriel's Revelation of the "Weeks," 9:1-27
- D. Daniel's Final Vision: The Third Empire, 10:1-12:13

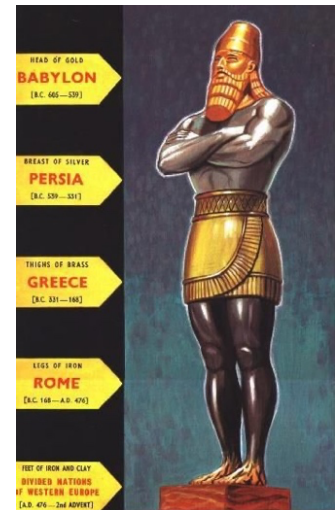
The division of the long discourse is three-fold: The preparation for the final vision (10:1-11:1), the content of the vision (11:2-12:3), and final instructions to Daniel (12:4-13).

- 1. The context, 10:1-3
- 2. The vision of a heavenly messenger, vv. 4-9
- 3. The deliverance of the messenger's message, vv. 10-14
- 4. The discourse between Daniel and the messenger, 10:15-11:1
- 5. The troubling revelation disclosed, 11:2-12:3

- a. The context: A Persian invasion, v. 2

The essence of the vision concerns two kingdoms in succession: Persia and Greece. Four kings will reign in Persia with the last attacking the Kingdom of Greece. Three kings did succeed Cyrus the Great in Persia: Cambyses (530-522), Smerdis (also called Gaumata, 522) and Darius I (522-486). The fourth was Xerxes I (486-465).

In Xerxes' idealization of power, he sought to conquer Greece by a massive sea invasion (300,000 soldiers) only to suffer a series of defeats spelling the decline of the empire and his assassination. The preparation for the invasion of Greece is the context of the Book of Esther (the disposition of Vashti and Xerxes' marriage to Hadassah or Esther).



- b. The rise of Greece, vv. 3-4
The “mighty king” that arose was Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire which brought an end to the Persian Empire in 334-331. He died in 323 with none to succeed him, his two sons having been murdered.

With his death, the Greek Empire was divided to his four conquering generals. Of importance to the biblical narrative are two of these generals who become kings over a portion of Alexander’s empire: Ptolemy and the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt and Seleucus I and Seleucid dynasty in Syria. Israel was tormented between two powers seeking to destroy each other.

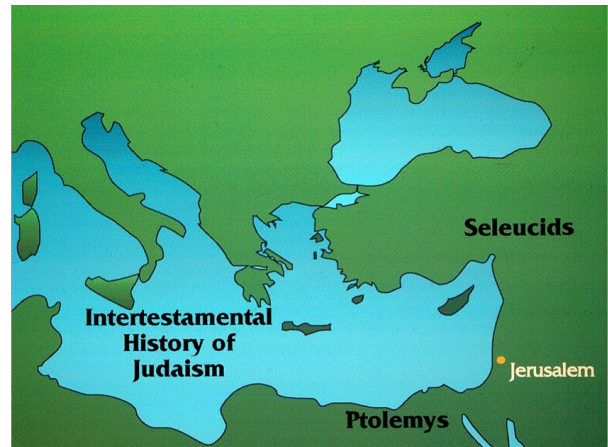


- c. The Syrian-Egypt Wars, vv. 5-20

These verses rehearse the continued military conflict between the Ptolemy’s of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria. The conflict brought armies that crossed and pillaged the returned Jewish exiles.

- 1) Ptolemy I Soter, v. 5

The “king of the South (Ptolemy I), one of Alexander’s generals, was granted authority over Egypt in 323, kingship in 304. “One of his (Ptolemy I) commanders,” Seleucus I Nicator (312-280) acquired significant power, defeated another general, and became king (305) over Persia, Babylonia, and Syria (a huge territory). Thus, the stage was set for conflict between the two dynasties for supremacy in the East.



- 2) Ptolemy II (285-246) and Antiochus II (305-262), v. 6

Clashes continued under the successors in Egypt and Syria. However, a peace treaty ended the hostility. The agreement was affirmed with the giving of Ptolemy II’s daughter, Berenice, to Antiochus in marriage. The agreement fell apart when Antiochus II, Berenice, and their child were murdered by Laodice, a wife of Antiochus, who then ruled Syria (246-226). She was murdered by Berenice’s brother who later became Ptolemy III.

Ptolemy II sponsored a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, the Septuagint, in Alexandria, Egypt.

- 3) Ptolemy III (246-241) and Seleucus II (246-225), vv. 7-9

In retaliation for Berenice’s murder, war broke out between the two nations with the “king of the North” being defeated and his capitol, Antioch, captured, and their gods taken to Egypt. Laodice was captured and murdered. Later the “king of the North attempted to attack Egypt but met with defeat.

- 4) Ptolemy IV (221-203), Ptolemy V (203-181), Antiochus II (262-246), and Antiochus III (175-163) vv. 10-19
 - a) The military conquest of the “beautiful land” and Phoenicia, v. 10
With Seleucus’s (187-176) death his two sons succeeded, Seleucus III 227-223) and Antiochus III (223-187), who continued the wage war with the Ptolemaics bring their authority over the exiles, and even to the border of Egypt guarded by a string of fortresses.
 - b) The defeat of the Ptolemaics by Antiochus III, vv. 11-12
After a short-lived counterattack by Ptolemy IV (221-204), in which thousands of Syrians were slaughtered, Antiochus pushed the King of the South back.
 - c) The control of “the beautiful land and Egypt by Antiochus III, vv. 13-19
Taking advantage of internal chaos, Antiochus III invaded Ptolemaic territories again (202) capturing the city of Gaza on the border of Egypt (“a well-fortified city, v. 15). Thus, the “beautiful land” came under Seleucid control. This sets the stage for chaos that Antiochus III occasioned in Jerusalem causing the Maccabean Revolt by the Jewish people (168-164).

Antiochus executed a peace plan that he hoped would bring Syrian power over Egypt without the need for military intervention. He gave his daughter Cleopatra as a wife to Ptolemy V (204-181). It failed as Cleopatra became loyal to her new husband and the nation.

After experiencing the defeat of his army by the emerging Roman Empire near Smyrna (Turkey), Antiochus was killed (187) by an angry mob.

- 5) Seleucus IV (187-175), v. 20
Antiochus III’s son reigned for a short time and was murdered by an angry mob because of heavy taxation to pay tribute to Rome.
- 6) The reign of Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175-145), vv. 21-35
The historical survey given to Daniel by the messenger was a precursor (vv. 2-20) for what is to follow during the reign of this monarch; he is the “little horn” (9:8) that emerged from among the four horns (though small, to come powerful).
 - a) The character of Antiochus IV, vv. 21-24
In Jewish history, to say he was a “contemptible” person, (‘Epiphanes’ means ‘the illustrious one; and ‘Epimanes,’ ‘the Man’)) almost misses the gravity of his reign. He was not the rightful heir to the throne gaining it by “intrigue” from his brother; he is the one that desecrated the Temple.

His acceptance by the people, not the Jews, came from his military successes and the prosperity.

- b) The defeat of the King of the South, vv. 25-28a
Antiochus defeated a large Egyptian at the Nile and sought friendship with Ptolemy VI. But, the attempt failed as neither side negotiated with integrity (“...their hearts will be intent on evil and they will speak lies to each other at the table”). He was not able to totally conquer Egypt, so he retreated with “much plunder.” On his return (170), he desecrated the Temple, a harbinger of later events (the text simply says “his heart will be set against the holy covenant” without further details.
- c) The defeat of the King of the North, vv. 28b-30a

Two years later he invaded Egypt, the balance of power in the East was shifting once more as Antiochus would encounter “the ships of Kittim,” the Roman military stationed in Cyprus. Faced with an immediate ultimatum: fight or retreat, in frustration (“dishearten”), angry, and with the realization that his power was waning under the colossal shadow of Rome, he retreated.

d) The desecration of the Jewish Temple, vv. 30b-35

For the second time Antiochus vented his spleen through his hatred of the Jewish exiles, “the holy covenant,” in the “Beautiful Land.” He abolished daily sacrifices, erected a shrine to Zeus on the altar of Burnt Offerings and sacrificed a pig (“the abomination of desolation [v. 31]”), and attacked the city with a large army (22,000) destroying much of the resisting population. Sadly, he ordered that a pig be offered the 25th of each month to celebrate his birthday. According to the vision of 8:14, which describes the same event, the desecration would last a total of 1,500 days (2,300 “evenings and mornings”). Thus, the total time between the two desecrations of the Temple (“the covenant,” 164-167).

This sacrilege precipitated a revolt led by Matthias Maccabeus and his five sons, called the Maccabean Revolt (166). One of his sons, Judas, was able to restore Temple worship by cleansing the Temple for service in 167 (this is the Feast of Hannukah or Feast of Lights, or Purim).

This type of destruction will come upon the “Covenant people” until the “end time because it is still to come at the appointed time (v. 35),” but it will end.

7) The end of times, vv. 36-12:3

“The king (v. 36) is not identified though we know Antiochus died demented in 145. He will rule in the last days (“at that time of the end,” “at that time”). “This “king” will be like Antiochus, but more excessive in his negative hostilities. Antiochus is a refigure of the evil one, the anti-Christ, who will come at the “End of Time,” the final figure of the Roman World. Further, the Maccabean Revolt resulted in a Jewish victory and the reestablishment of the Jewish state from 168-63 (in the later year Rome ended the second Jewish state when Pompey [106-48] conquered Jerusalem and the Hasmonean Dynasty). The king that desecrated the Temple, the symbol of Judaism in 164-167, prefigures another who will arise and destroy it again at the “end of times.”

a) The rise of anti-Christ, vv. 36-45

(1) His character, vv. 36-39

This king (the beast, the Man of Sin) will rise in power by appointment (the “ten nations” under ten kings [Rev 17:12-13], the “ten toes” of Nebuchadnezzar’s visions [Dan. 2:42-43]) to be the sovereign over all the nations and claim to be god, demanding worship of himself solely (II Thess. 2:14).

He will sanction military power and conquest.

(2) His conduct, vv. 40-45

This “king” will conquer nations with a large military establishment. He will settle disputes and invasions among the nations by overpowering them. He will make the center of his empire Jerusalem.

b) The triumph of Christ, the King of Kings, vv.1-3

In this section, the messenger seeks to console Daniel. He addresses his concern for his people by assuring him that a kingdom of righteousness will come with the true Lord of Lords.

(1) A final rescue amid persecution, v. 1

The rescue of the “people of God,” the people of the faith of Abraham, will come after much turmoil and death (likely the anti-Christ’s attempt to prevent the true king from coming). Michael, the “great prince, the angelic protector of God’s people, will give them a final deliverance (“everyone found written in the book of life”).

(2) The rising of the dead, v. 2

Not only those living, but those who had perished believing, will be resurrected to eternal life (Rev. 20:4), while those who are rebels will rise “to disgrace and everlasting contempt (Rev. 20:5).”

(3) The delight of the saints, v. 3

The future literally is “bright;” saints will be triumphant; they will “shine” “like the stars forever and ever.”

Thoughts:

1. I am impressed with the historic accuracy of the angel’s predictions. Daniel is living in the 6th century BC and minute events revealed to him come about centuries later. It is a wonderful reminder that the Bible, though written by human beings, was guided, even superintended, by God. Its accuracy is like no other book because it comes from the God of the universe! The actions of God are in perfect congruity with his character. He is holy and righteous so you and I can rest in the fact that there is no deception in what He gave us in the pages of the greatest of all books.
2. It is a comfort for us, is it not, that all that is evil and wrong will not have the final word. God is in control of time, events, and final outcomes. We cannot grasp what tomorrow might bring to us, but we know how “tomorrows” will end. Can you imagine shining like the stars, what the resurrected life will be like? What a future for all of God’s children!
3. Daniel had a deep concern and care for the people of God in his day (a day of exile, mighty invading armies, great promise of restoration and returnable understanding how the majestic promises of God). He had trouble understanding how the great promises of God and the foreboding clouds of pain and suffering revealed to him were compatible. You and I are finding that true in our experience as well. While we do not know the events of even tomorrow, like Daniel, we know who holds the future in His hands. Are you not thankful?
4. A great and final judgment day is coming upon this world. Daniel tells us that all will stand before the God of the universe. The books, the evidence collected revealing the motivation in our choices, will be opened. Those who have believed the promises of God, trusting His promise, even some deceased, will receive everlasting life. Those who have not trusted in His promises will experience a resurrection of life but unto everlasting disgrace. Does it not break your heart to see people with no interest in God knowing the awful destiny they will encounter if they persist in unbelief?