

The Message of Daniel

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The Book of Daniel is not only one of the most intriguing texts of the Tanach, but it also has experienced a great deal of varied, and sometimes even colorful depictions and interpretations. Many in the history of both Judaism and Christianity have had difficulty examining Daniel, not quite knowing what to make of its words and messages. Even today, Biblical scholars are not agreed as to whether Daniel depicts events that are entirely past, events that have occurred in the past with some to occur in the future, or even if the Prophet Daniel was actually a real prophet of God in ancient times, or just a pseudo-historical figure used to critique a period in Jewish history.

Contrary to conservatives, who mostly regard Daniel as an authentic work of a real Prophet Daniel and/or his contemporaries written in the Sixth Century B.C.E., liberals often view the Book of Daniel as a late work compiled during the Second Century B.C.E. From this vantage point, Daniel does not include prophetic words delivered via a Jewish exile in Babylon and Persia, but rather some kind of religious zealot during the time of the Maccabees, an ahistorical fiction designed to bolster the resolve of the Jews who might give into the Seleucid Greek assimilation. Views like the resurrection, then, clearly depicted in Daniel (12:2-3), are considered by such liberals to be a rather late addition to Jewish theology that were probably picked up from interactions with the Greeks.¹

As you can imagine, when a person hears that not all interpreters are convinced that *Daniel* is the main theme of the book that bears his name, it does not sit well. Many of today's evangelical Christians, who often know very little about the inter-Testamental period,² are able to easily brush it off. "Who were the Maccabees, anyway?" they might ask. For those Christian traditions that accept the Apocryphal books of 1-4 Maccabees as canonical or deuterocanonical Scripture, they cannot as easily dismiss the proposal that Daniel may be a pseudo-apocalyptic work. Even though there are excellent reasons for us to consider Daniel to be the product of a real man who lived in Babylon and Persia—and I do accept genuine Danielic involvement with the text—the Greek period and the Maccabees will still

¹ This, and related subjects, are discussed in more detail in the article "To Be Absent From the Body" by J.K. McKee.

² That is, the approximate 400 years between the prophecies of Malachi and the birth of Yeshua.

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inevitably factor into one's interpretation. How do we learn to approach the Book of Daniel properly?

Messianic Believers who consider the holiday of *Chanukah* to be a worthy celebration to consider each Winter—commemorating the rededication of the Temple—need to consider what Daniel says. We might be dealing with a book of the Bible with a great deal of symbolism and some definite future prophecies of the Last Days. Yet, when we consider what the Book of Daniel prophesied about the time of the Maccabees, perhaps we can more greatly appreciate it for what it says about the times to come, and how sometimes people do not understand prophetic fulfillment until events actually occur.

Aside from what some modern interpreters may claim, the Book of Daniel itself begins at a legitimate, and not an ahistorical point, in Jewish history. It begins when King Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem, King Jehoiakim is brought into his hands with various Temple treasures, and spoils are taken back to Babylon (1:1-2). Preparing to return to Babylon, new courtiers are to be made from members of Judah's royal family and nobility, "young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace," who were to be "taught the language and literature of the Babylonians" (1:4). Among those who were to be taken from Judah to Babylon were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—who were promptly given the Babylonian names Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (1:6-7).

While these Jewish exiles would be trained in the ways of the Babylonians, they would never forget who they were or who their God was. Daniel and his friends were shown some favor by the chief Babylonian official who administered their training, being given some leeway for not eating the allotment of royal food and wine, which would have defiled them (1:8-10), likely having originally been first involved in idolatrous worship. Having eaten only vegetables for a period of ten days, Daniel and his friends actually looked healthier than those who had eaten the royal food (1:11-16). It was clear that even though their nation had been defeated by Babylon, "To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds" (1:17).

For some reason or another, these young men were so wise that King Nebuchadnezzar "found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom" (1:20). While probably being familiar with what the Babylonian arts of astrology and divination were, **there is no evidence in Daniel that they actually used them**, and instead Daniel and his colleagues were placed in Babylon to uniquely serve the interests of God and the Jewish exiles. When Babylon's officials could offer no help or provide no advice for the king, Daniel and his friends would be there to testify of the unique wisdom and insight that only came from their God. About half of the Book of Daniel (chs. 2-5) is spent with Daniel interpreting the dreams of the Babylonian kings.

King Nebuchadnezzar has a very disturbing dream, causing him not to sleep, and summoning his astrologers and magicians (2:1-3) he actually threatens them with: "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts

and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and explain it for me” (2:5-6). The sorcerers ask the king to tell them his dream so that they may interpret it for him (2:7), but he recognizes “I am certain that you are trying to gain time” (2:8a). They recognize the futility of their requests of him, and “The astrologers answered the king, ‘There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men’” (2:10-11).

Nebuchadnezzar is furious that his cohorts cannot help him, and so he orders their execution. This would have also included Daniel and his friends, who had been trained as apprentices of those who served the king (2:12-13). Being rounded up by Arioch of the king’s guard, he is told why he and his friends are to be executed (12:14-15), and “at this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him” (2:16). Apparently, while considered to be of the king’s astrologers, he is not depicted as one who saw him on a regular basis, and here he might have to suffer from the incompetence of those who personally serviced the king.

Daniel urges his friends to pray to God, specifically “so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon” (2:18). “During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision” (2:19), and Daniel issues a great praise to God (2:20-23). Rather than seek out the mysteries via star searching, Daniel and his friends entreat the Lord in great prayer and intercession.

Daniel goes to Arioch, who will in turn allow him to approach the king, tell him what he dreamed, and then interpret the dream for him (2:24-26). Daniel is quite keen to open his words with, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these” (2:27-28). Daniel says that Nebuchadnezzar was shown things by “the revealer of mysteries,” meaning his God, and that he was shown the same things so that he “may know the interpretation and that [he] may understand what went through [his] mind” (2:30).

The vision that Daniel explains Nebuchadnezzar saw is one of a great statue. “The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay” (2:31-33). A rock was able to smash the statue into pieces with great ease, and “The wind swept” the pieces “away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth” (2:35). Such a dream would have undoubtedly caused King Nebuchadnezzar some consternation.

Daniel recognizes the great power that Nebuchadnezzar possesses (2:37), in fact acknowledging him to be the head of gold on the statue (2:38). Daniel discusses how various parts of the statue represent successive kingdoms that will follow after him and rule, each becoming less prestigious than the other (2:39-41). The final kingdom that will rule is depicted as a division of not only two feet, but ten toes. Mixed of both iron and clay, it will be strong but it will also be divided (2:42-43). While these kingdoms of humanity might all wield some power to varying extents, they will all find themselves defeated:

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“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces” (2:44-45a).

What Daniel assures Nebuchadnezzar of is that “The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy” (2:45b). All Nebuchadnezzar can do is bow to Daniel in honor, acknowledging that “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery” (2:46-47). Daniel and his friends are elevated in prestige in the Babylonian court, with Daniel being made ruler of the province of Babylon (2:48-49).

While King Nebuchadnezzar had recognized something special about Daniel and his God, by no means is he finished with making some rather rash decisions in his kingdom. Perhaps thinking that he is special because he has been shown some glimpses of the future, what does he do? He erects a 90-foot high statue of gold that all those in his realm are to bow down and worship (3:1-5). Not only are all to worship this statue, but he decrees “Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace” (3:6). It should be no surprise why “as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshipped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up” (3:7).

Even though they had to worship this image, some Babylonian astrologers approached Nebuchadnezzar and denounced Daniel’s Jewish friends Shadrach, Mesach, and Abednego, who administered the province of Babylon (3:8-12). King Nebuchadnezzar has these men brought before him (3:13-15a), berating them that “if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?” (3:15b). These Jewish men are confident in their faith, claiming to him, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (3:17-18). Rather than impressing Nebuchadnezzar by their tenacity, it only infuriated him more so that he had the furnace “heated seven times hotter than usual” (3:19). So hot was this furnace, that as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are preparing to be thrown into it, flames blazing from it killed some of the Babylonian soldiers (3:22).

These three, who were defiant in not worshipping Nebuchadnezzar’s idol, should have been instantly killed in the fire. Witnessing the event, King Nebuchadnezzar asks, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” (3:24). He observes instead, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed” (3:25a), with the Aramaic saying, *v’riveih di reviaya dameh l’var-Elahin* (3:25b). Translations are not agreed on how this is to be rendered, varying from “and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of *the* gods!” (NASU) to “and the fourth looks like a divine being” (NJPS). Other versions have, “the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (NKJV). While Nebuchadnezzar may have simply thought of this fourth being as perhaps just an angel sent by the

Jewish God—many commentators and theologians are agreed that this could very well have been a pre-Incarnate manifestation of Messiah Yeshua.

King Nebuchadnezzar realizes that the three Jewish men, who rejected his demand for worshipping the gold statue, had the presence of God with them. He goes to the furnace, and shouts to them, “servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” (3:26). And so they come out, and both Nebuchadnezzar and his officials “saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them” (3:27b). What can Nebuchadnezzar do? He actually exclaims, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel³ and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way” (3:28-29). **King Nebuchadnezzar has now seen the true power of God for himself.**

One would think that after this significant display of God’s great power that King Nebuchadnezzar would practically be converted to His service. But there is still one last vignette to consider with him as the focus. Nebuchadnezzar has another dream, which begins with him being written a letter about how great the Most High God is (4:1-3). Nebuchadnezzar, narrating this scene, says “I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me” (4:4-5). The Babylonian magicians and astrologers could not help him, so he instead had to turn to Daniel for help (4:6-8).

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is very strange. He sees a huge tree grow that extends itself out over the Earth, a tree that was very fruitful, where birds made their nests and where animals found shade (4:9-12). But then Nebuchadnezzar says that a messenger came from Heaven and ordered, “cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field” (4:14-15). The critical message Nebuchadnezzar is given, an obvious indication that this tree represents a person, is “Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass for him” (4:15-16).

Daniel (or Belteshazzar as Nebuchadnezzar addresses him) is rather perplexed at the dream, and so the king asks him not to be (4:19a). Daniel has to break the news to him that even though he would prefer the tree to represent his enemies (4:19b), it is instead, “you, O king, are that tree. You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth” (4:22). Daniel informs him, “You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes” (4:24-25). Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom will remain intact (4:26), but Daniel advises him to “Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and

³ Heb. *di-sheleach malakheh*; “who hath sent His messenger” (YLT).

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your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue” (4:27).

King Nebuchadnezzar apparently does not take Daniel's counsel. “Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon, he said, ‘Is this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’” (4:29-30). It was at that point that a voice from Heaven spoke out the decree that he would lose his mind and live like an animal (4:31-32). “Immediately what had been said to Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird” (4:33). After the designated time was over, the sanity of King Nebuchadnezzar is restored to him, and he acknowledges the Most High God (4:34-36). He testified, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (4:37).

The Book of Daniel portrays how King Nebuchadnezzar, who had taken away the Jewish exiles to Babylon, had an encounter with Israel's God. But he would not be the only Babylonian king who had a unique spiritual experience. His son and successor, King Belshazzar, too experiences something. During a large banquet he holds for his nobles in Babylon, Belshazzar orders that golden goblets taken from the Temple in Jerusalem be brought out. And so they drink wine from them, praising Babylon's gods (5:1-4). While they drink, a hand appears on one of the walls and writes something. “The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way” (5:5b-6).

Not surprisingly, the enchanters and diviners of Babylon did not know what to make of this (5:7-9), and so Daniel must be brought in to solve the king's dilemma (5:10-12). King Belshazzar recognizes that Daniel had special abilities, and promises to reward him, but Daniel simply says that he will read what was written and give him an appropriate interpretation (5:13-17). Daniel relates how Belshazzar's father, Nebuchadnezzar, was a great king who expanded his empire, and who killed whomever he wanted. Yet, King Nebuchadnezzar was humbled before the Most High God, and acknowledged Him as Supreme Sovereign (5:18-21). Quite contrary to this,

“But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you... You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways” (5:22-23).

The inscription that was written upon the wall included the Aramaic words “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN” (5:25), and speak of how Belshazzar has been found wanting. Ultimately “Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians” (5:28). Daniel was actually “proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom” (5:29) at that moment, and we see “That very night [how] Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom” (5:30) as Babylon had fallen to the Persian Empire.⁴

⁴ The Greek historian Herodotus records the fall of Babylon in his *Histories* 1.189-191. The Persian army entered into the city through the riverbed which flew through it, having receded enough for his

The narrative of the Book of Daniel moves forward, and Daniel now finds himself as a high ranking official in the succeeding Persian Empire. This should not be too surprising, as the Persians had a policy of tolerance toward other peoples, and especially toward those who would be liberated from the regimes they conquered, such as the Jewish exiles in Babylon. We see how “Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom” (6:3). This caused the other Persian officials to become jealous of him, because no grounds against him or corruption could be found (6:4). “Finally one of these men said, ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God⁵’” (6:5).

Those who are jealous of Daniel convince King Darius to issue a non-repealable decree that anyone who prays to a deity other than him, for a period of thirty days, be cast into a lion’s den (6:6-9). Daniel heard of it, but was not bothered. He continued as was his custom, and prayed three times a day with his windows open toward Jerusalem. When his opponents caught him praying to his God, they approached the king on the matter (6:10-12). The Persian king, because his law could not be repealed, was actually quite distressed, and “he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him” (6:14). He is reminded that he cannot change his law (6:15), and as Daniel is thrown into the lions’ den, he tells him, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!” (6:16). Knowing that Daniel was in the lions’ den, the king could not eat or sleep (6:17-18).

The next morning King Darius goes to the lions den, and he actually speaks out, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?” (6:20). Daniel acknowledges how “My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king” (6:22). Daniel is lifted out of the pit (6:23), and those who had falsely accused him, along with their families, are instead thrown into it (6:24). King Darius issues a decree throughout his realm that the God of Daniel be honored, because He had delivered him from the lions’ den (6:26-27).

The remainder of the Book of Daniel depicts various scenes while he is in Babylonian exile, both during and after Babylon’s fall to Persia, where *he is shown* various dreams and visions by the Lord (chs. 7-12).

The first dream that Daniel experiences is one of four beasts, which he apparently writes down (7:1). “Daniel said: ‘In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea’” (7:2-3). These four beasts are described as a (1) lion with eagle’s wings, (2) a bear with three ribs between its teeth, (3) a leopard with four wings of a bird, and (4) a ten-headed beast with large iron teeth (7:4-7). While contemplating these beasts, a little horn enters in among the ten horns, uprooting three horns (7:8a). “This horn had eyes

troops to easily walk right into the city center. The Babylonians were feasting at the time, and were caught totally unaware.

Consult Herodotus: trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt, *The Histories* (London: Penguin Books, 1954), pp 116-118.

⁵ Ara. *b'dat Elaheh*.

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like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully” (7:8b). From this enters in a scene with the Ancient of Days, the Lord Himself, preparing to judge with books opened (7:9-10).

The little horn continues to speak boastful words, and Daniel observes it until it is slain and its rule is brought to an end (7:11). Many pre-millennial interpreters are agreed that this little horn is most likely the coming antimesiah/antichrist. In contrast to this little horn, Daniel says, “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man,⁶ coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (7:13-14). This very much echoes the Second Coming of Yeshua in Revelation 11:15: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.” The little horn or antimesiah, one whose reign will be temporary and end, is **contrasted to the Lord Yeshua whose reign will never end.**

Daniel, being shown this vision of four beasts, is naturally disturbed, and so he asks an angel what all of these things mean (7:15-16). He is told, “The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth” (7:17), although “the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever” (7:18). While encouraging as the end may ultimately be, Daniel is quite curious about the fourth beast, who the ten horns are and the three horns who fell, and why this little horn is able to fight against the saints (7:19-22). The angel only says that the fourth beast is the final kingdom that will devour the whole Earth, ten kings will come forth from this kingdom, and that three kings will be subdued from it (7:23-24). Another king will arise, speaking against the Most High and changing the laws (7:25a), and he will be able to oppress the saints “for a time, times and half a time” (7:25b).

Many interpreters have seen a reference here to the coming antimesiah and how he will arise to power, but are not entirely agreed on what the ten kings, three kings, and what the fourth beast entirely means. Some see a revived Roman Empire in the form of today’s European Union, others see a future United Nations, and some, more creative solutions are proposed. Daniel himself was troubled and did not quite know what to think (7:28). **The significant point that all should be agreed upon is that the beast’s realm will be defeated by God, and all the world will fall into His everlasting dominion and worship Him (7:27).**

Daniel’s vision of the ram and goat is one that is not only fascinating, but one that is so accurate there are various interpreters who think that it had to have been written *after* the fact. Given to him during Belshazzar’s reign (8:1-2), Daniel describes how “I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns...and the horns were long. One of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later. I watched the ram as he charged toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great” (8:3-4). As this ram had been charging, Daniel witnesses “a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes [coming] from the west...He came toward the two-horned ram I had seen...and charged at him in

⁶ Ara. *k'bar enash*.

great rage. I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns. The ram was powerful to stand against him; the goat knocked him to the ground and trampled on him, and none could rescue the ram from his power” (8:5-7).

Notable to understanding this symbolism is how, “The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven” (8:8). It is difficult to avoid how what is being described is the ram of the Persian and Median Empire being defeated by the goat of Alexander the Great’s Macedonian Empire. At the height of its power, Alexander died and his conquered lands were split up among four of his generals.

And what became of one part of this four-way power? Daniel is shown that “Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of the sanctuary was brought low. Because of rebellion, the host of the saints and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground” (8:9-12). This is an excellent description of how the Seleucid Greeks, led by Antiochus Epiphanes, would expand their regime over the Land of Israel, and would commit a great sacrilege in the Second Temple. They would also demand that the Jewish people turn away from God’s Torah, and worship their gods and follow their customs. Fortunately, Daniel is told that this problem will only last 2,300 evenings and mornings until “the sanctuary will be reconsecrated” (8:14).

Some readers of Daniel have problems with its accuracy not necessarily because of what is said regarding the ram and goat in 8:1-15, but because the angel Gabriel is directed to give Daniel some of the specifics of what it means (8:16). Perhaps even more confusing is that Gabriel tells him, “Son of man...understand that the vision concerns the time of the end” (8:17), and we are living well over two millennia since these words were originally written. But perhaps this is only problematic because as mortals we often fail to view time from an Eternal God’s perspective.⁷

Gabriel continues, “I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the time of the end” (8:19). Notable to be considered here is that not only may the time of the “end” be a little longer, but how the things described in the ram and goat vision may teach future generations about what is to befall the world at *the very end* near the Second Coming. Gabriel names the ram as Media and Persia, and the goat as Greece (8:20-21). He says, “The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent four kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power” (8:22), a clear reference to the splitting up of Alexander’s empire.

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

⁷ For a further discussion, consult the article “What Happened to Our Eschatology?” by J.K. McKee in his book *When Will the Messiah Return?*

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mighty men and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power” (8:23-25). This easily describes the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes, and the terrible hardships he will force upon the Jewish people who will return to the Land of Israel. Perhaps this is why Daniel is told, “seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future” (8:26). Daniel says that he “was exhausted and lay ill for several days” because he “was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding” (8:27). Fortunately for him, what was described would not take place for another four centuries.

One should not be surprised to see that with all of the terrible things that have befallen Daniel’s people—his deportation to Babylon, his two brushes with death while in Babylon, and the future terrible things that are supposed to occur—that he does entreat the Lord for answers as to when the final redemption of Israel will come. Daniel says how “I...understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes” (9:2-3; cf. Jeremiah 29:10). The exile would have to come to an end, right? Daniel recognizes the sin of his people, and entreats the Lord for His benevolent mercy:

“O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servant the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land” (9:4-6).

It is not insignificant at all that Daniel recognizes the problem of exile as *not* only being an issue that concerns his own Jewish people. Acknowledging, “Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame” (9:7a), he identifies those who are affected by the exile as “the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us⁸ because of our unfaithfulness to you” (9:7b). Here, in his prayers to God, Daniel actually recognizes the problem of exile as affecting both his fellow Southern Kingdom Israelites, and those who had been previously scattered from the Northern Kingdom by Assyria. The judgment of exile that has come down upon them all is just, because of significant disobedience against the Lord and against the Torah (9:8-14). Daniel entreats the Lord to be merciful, and deliver his people from exile, returning them to Jerusalem just as He had guided the people out of Egypt (9:15-19).

The answer to Daniel’s pleading is given in a very unique form of prophecy. The angel Gabriel appears to him and says, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision” (9:22-23). While many readers of Bible prophecy are familiar with the verses that follow, **what we need to pay careful attention to are the specific reasons why these things are to take place.**

⁸ Heb. *l'ish Yehudah u'l'yosh'vei Yerushalayim u'l'kol-Yisrael ha'qerovim v'ha'rechoqim b'kol-ha'eratzot asher hidachtam sham.*

What Daniel was told is that “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy” (9:24). The purpose of *shavuim shiv'im* or “seventy weeks” (NASU) being completed is not only so that the problem of Israel’s exile and dispersion can finally be solved, but also so that final atonement can be offered for sin, and that everlasting righteousness can be brought in. Some interpreters believe that *all* of these things have now come to pass, via the ministry and sacrifice of Messiah Yeshua, but other interpreters (myself included) conclude that *not all* of them are completed. While Yeshua might have been sacrificed for us, providing final atonement—we still do not see everlasting righteousness or *tzedeq olamim* present in the Earth.

What will take place regarding these seventy “sevens” or “weeks”? The verses that summarize them could be the most dissected and examined in the entire Book of Daniel:

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him” (9:25-27).

If you are confused after reading these verses, then be assured that you are not alone. Those who accept genuine Danielic authorship or involvement in these prophecies are not all agreed at what they mean. Many interpreters feel that what is described here is the ministry of Yeshua the Messiah, which they believe caused the animal sacrifices to come to a complete end. Others feel that while the ministry of Yeshua is a feature of the seventy-weeks prophecy, that it is the coming antimessiah/antichrist who causes sacrifices to end—in a future Seventieth Week of Israel in a future, rebuilt Temple.

While it is easy for many of my post-tribulation colleagues to totally dismiss some of the work of pre-tribulationists, I do not think that dispensational pre-tribulationists are entirely incorrect with some of their interpretations of Daniel 9:25-27. Looking at the sets of “sevens” as years, there are to be sixty-nine “sevens” (9:25) or 483 years in total from the reconstruction of Jerusalem and its walls until the Anointed One or “Messiah the Prince” (NASU)⁹ arrives, who will be cut off. Beginning this count of years in 445-444 B.C.E., when Jerusalem was rebuilt during the time of Nehemiah, places one at 33 C.E., the approximate year of Yeshua’s crucifixion (9:26a).¹⁰

Following this, the people of the ruler to come, the antimessiah/antichrist, will destroy the city of Jerusalem and its Temple (9:26b). This occurred in 70 C.E. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and was certainly followed

⁹ Heb. *Mashiach nagid*.

¹⁰ John F. Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1999), pp 253-254.

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by war (9:26c). Sometime in the future, this ruler will emerge on the scene, making or confirming an agreement for the final set of “seven,” but in the middle of this seven years he will commit a great abomination (9:27). In his writing to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul describes this Abomination of Desolation among a number of things that must happen before Yeshua can return:

“Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

A significant part of the Prophet Daniel's visions do concern the time period of the Maccabees, as is seen in chs. 10-11. “In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel...Its message was true and it concerned a great war” (10:1). So serious was this, that “I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched by lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over” (10:2). As bad as it was for him to be in exile, what he was shown concerned what would befall his people in the future—as even more suffering and hardship would come to them.

Occurring at a season adjacent to Passover (10:4), an angel reveals himself to Daniel (10:5-9), who proceeds to speak to Daniel (10:10-11). This messenger had apparently been delayed after confronting *mal'kei Paras*, “the kings of Persia” (10:13, NASU), believed to be various Satanic agents who oversaw the Persian realm. The archangel Michael came to his assistance (10:12-14), and now this angel is able to communicate with Daniel. While Daniel is overwhelmed, speechless, and drained of energy, the angel assures him to have strength and peace, as he will be shown important things (10:15-19). As he is told, “Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth” (10:20). So, while the Book of Daniel does depict worldly forces engaged against one another—spiritual forces are very much a part of what goes on as well (10:21-11:1).

The revelation that this angel specifically shows to Daniel directly pertains to the time of the Maccabees, and it is greatly accurate when compared to 1&2 Maccabees in the Apocrypha. (This is again a reason why some doubt genuine Danielic involvement with this text.) “Three more kings will appear in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece” (11:2), a reference to Xerxes I and the Persian Wars. “Then a mighty king will appear, who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. After he has appeared, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven...his empire will be uprooted and given to others” (11:3-4), another reference to the rise of Alexander the Great and the division of his Macedonian Empire.

A word detailing the relationship between the South and the North, the rule of the Greek-Egyptian Ptolemies and the Seleucid Antiochans in Asia Minor, is described. Even though descending from Alexander's empire, they will fight among themselves vying for superiority (11:5-15). In the midst of this fighting, a specific king from the North will arise. “The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will establish himself in the Beautiful Land and will

have the power to destroy it" (11:16). Caught in the crossfire of the Seleucid Greeks and Egyptian Ptolemies (11:17-18) will be the poor Land of Israel. Yet the North will find itself humiliated by the South (11:19).

Following the first series of conflicts, a new leader from the North will come to power (11:21-24), and "With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plot devised against him...The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time" (11:25, 27).

Perhaps changing his tactics on how to defeat the South, "The king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it and then return to his own country" (11:28). The Land of Israel will now be a major focus of his actions, as the South, Ptolemaic Egypt, will not be subdued. The angel tells Daniel, "At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before...[H]e will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant" (11:29, 30). The Jewish people will be opposed by this man, except those who turn from their ancestral ways.

The specific actions that this king will commit are that "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him" (11:31-32). The desecration of the Temple that Antiochus Epiphanes will authorize, which would have included the sacrifice of a pig, and the corruption of many Jews into his insidious influence of Greek religion, is clearly detailed. Yet the faithfulness of those, who we now call the Maccabees, is also detailed:

"Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time" (11:33-35).

The personality of Antiochus Epiphanes is described in 11:36-45, although various pre-millennial expositors feel that the personality of the coming antimessiah/antichrist is also seen or echoed here. Antiochus will exalt himself, and speak great blasphemies against God (11:36), disregarding the deities that his ancestors worshipped (11:37). He will serve a foreign god instead (11:38-39). This king will engage in battle with the king of the South and be quite successful (11:40-45), but eventually "he will come to his end, and no one will help him" (11:45b).

The issue of how 11:36-45, while referring to the distant past, also likely includes echoes of the future antimessiah, is how "At that time¹¹ Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise" (12:1a). The scene suddenly shifts from the several-centuries-in-the-future from Daniel's lifetime, to the very distant future. The language in Daniel 12:1b, "There will be a time of distress such as has

¹¹ Heb. *u'b'et ha'he*.

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not happened from the beginning of nations until then,” is picked up by Yeshua in His Olivet Discourse: “For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again” (Matthew 24:21). A resurrection of deceased people will occur at this end-time, not only of righteous but also unrighteous (12:2). And, “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (12:3).

Is the Book of Daniel confusing for you in some places? *It probably is.* It even was for Daniel, as he was told, “close up and seal the words of this scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge” (12:4). Much of what Daniel was shown will only occur at a designated “time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed” (12:7), indicating that a time of Great Tribulation will indeed await the saints. Yet even though horrendous, “Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand” (12:10).

The Book of Daniel portrays a period of time that begins during the Jewish exile in Babylon and Persia, it includes the assault of Antiochus Epiphanes during the time of the Maccabees, and it extends to the Great Tribulation and coming antimesiah. It concerns the distant past, and the coming future. If we understand Daniel’s significance for the past, we can better understand what to expect in the future. Those of the final generation are instructed, “From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days” (12:11-12)—that will ensure a person that he or she actually makes it into the restored Kingdom of God on Earth! Daniel would pass on, but was assured that he would be among those rewarded for his faithfulness (12:13).

The Book of Daniel, perhaps not that different from the other prophetic literature of the Tanach, has provoked a wide variance of interpretations. Some consider Daniel to be so accurate that it had to have been written after the fact. Others would consider Daniel to be an ancient mystic, even though all the text of Daniel says is that he was empowered by God to interpret dreams and visions—and not that he was an astrologer! Daniel was present in the right place and right time to be used by the Lord, and to testify to the kings and officials of the day of His might and power. This would be the most important of all the lessons we can learn from Daniel, so that we might be those who can not only testify of God to others—but that we can actually lead others to righteousness (12:3)! This is something all must do whether we are the last generation, approaching the last generation, or are quite some time away from the consummation of the ages.¹²

¹² Consult the entry for the Book of Daniel in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic* for a summary of its date, composition, etc.

For a consideration of related subjects, consult *When Will the Messiah Return?* by J.K. McKee.