

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 46

DANIEL – Part Two

I. INTRODUCTION

Last week, we set out the background and historical narrative contained in the book of Daniel. This week, the focus will be on the prophecies in Daniel, their interpretations, and the criticisms levied on the date Daniel was written.

II. TEXT

A. *Prophecies*

The first six chapters of Daniel dealt with information set in a historical setting. Chapters 7–12 deal with visions that set forward the future of the Hebrews in relation to the Gentile nations. There are four basic dreams/visions in these chapters.

1. Vision One: Daniel's dream of Four Beasts (Chapter 7).
2. Vision Two: Daniel's vision of the Ram and the Goat (Chapter 8).
3. Vision Three: Vision regarding the 70-year desolation of Jerusalem (Chapter 9).
4. Vision Four: A revelation of the period proceeding the Messianic age (Chapter 10 - 12).

These prophecies are part and parcel with the debate on WHEN Daniel was written. The prophecies have such a clear association with the actual history that did unfold for the Hebrews and the Middle East that skeptics have long held that the prophecies must have been written AFTER the events described. Before we consider this criticism in dealing with the date of authorship, let us look at the visions in brief.

HISTORICAL VISION:

Before we get to the first vision in chapter 7, we need to go back into the historical narrative section of Daniel and probe a little deeper than last week's lesson on the dream Nebuchadnezzar had in Daniel chapter two.

Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a large statue. The head was made of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze, and its legs of iron with feet of iron and clay. Then, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a large rock cut out, but not with human hands, which struck the statue on its feet, smashing them and causing the rest of the statue to break. The wind swept the statue's remains away but left the rock, which became like a mountain that filled the earth.

Daniel explained the statue as representing the kingdoms to come. The head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar himself and the Babylonian empire. The silver represented a second kingdom to follow the Babylonian, although it would be inferior. The third kingdom was the bronze, which would "rule over the whole earth" (2:39). The iron was the fourth kingdom that would crush and break all others, just as iron would crush gold, silver, or bronze. The significance of the added clay was that this kingdom iron represented would be a divided kingdom that would not remain united. The rock was a kingdom God himself set up that would bring all other kingdoms to an end but would itself endure forever.

Consider this vision in light of undisputed history. The kingdom of the Babylonians and Nebuchadnezzar was followed by the inferior kingdom of the Medes and Persians. This kingdom lasted until Alexander the Great conquered it en route to conquering the whole known world. The next empire was that of the Romans. History is replete of the turmoil that led to the fall of the Roman Empire. The fall did not occur, however, until the kingdom of God was established through the death and resurrection of Christ followed by the institution of the church. Needless to say, that kingdom has survived to this day.

These kingdoms so clearly follow the prophecy that numerous cynics have argued that Daniel must have been written after the rise of the four kingdoms. These folks are at still at a loss to explain the kingdom of the uncut rock that becomes a mountain and lasts for the duration of the earth.

VISION ONE: Four beasts.

In this vision, Daniel sees four great beasts come out of the sea. The first was a lion, the second a bear, the third was a leopard, and the

fourth was terrifying and powerful with iron (again like the fourth kingdom in the vision of chapter two which had the iron legs and feet) and ten horns. Each beast is stripped of its authority and the vision ends with:

one like a son of man, 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 worshipped 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)

As Daniel seeks to understand the vision, he is told that the four beasts are “four kingdoms that will rise up from the earth” (7:17). The import of the son of man at the end of the vision was that “the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever” (7:18). Daniel then presses and gets further elucidation on the fourth beast.

These beasts again align perfectly with the historical development of world history vis-à-vis the Middle East and Mediterranean world.

VISION TWO: The Ram and the goat.

In this vision, Daniel sees a two-horned ram in command and control until a one-horned goat arises, strikes the ram down and tramples him to the ground. At the height of the one-horned goat’s power, the horn is broken off and four more grew up in its place. Of those four horns, one starts small but grows large and begins to afflict the “beautiful land” (8:9). This horn then sets itself up as the Prince of the starry hosts and stops the sacrifices to the real Prince of the starry hosts. The vision concludes noting that this horn would not last, but would also ultimately be destroyed.

This vision, like those before, clearly finds historical accuracy in its fulfillment; so much so, that cynics who cannot believe that God or anyone or anything else could ever truly prophesy specifically about an event, mandate that this passage must have been written in the range of 165 B.C.

Daniel himself, in part, gives us the accuracy of the vision. After having the vision, “Gabriel” explains it to Daniel (8:16). Gabriel explains that the two-horned ram represented:

the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king. The four horns that replaced the one that was broken off represent kingdoms that will emerge from his nation but will not have the same power. (8:20-22)

It does not take a rocket scientist to see the horn on the goat (Greece’s first king) was Alexander the Great who was indeed struck down in his prime. History is clear that after Alexander abruptly died young, his kingdom was divided into four sections. Each section was administered by each of Alexander’s four generals.

The “little horn” that grows out of the four horns but then sets itself up to be the “Prince of the starry hosts” stopping sacrifices to the real Prince is Antiochus Epiphanes (Antiochus IV) (c. 215-164 B.C.) who assumed the Seleucid throne (one of the four divisions of Alexander’s empire) in 175 B.C., reigning until his death in 164. Epiphanes occupied Jerusalem around 170 B.C. and seized much of the Hebrew treasure. He then tried to eradicate Judaism and instituted worship of the Greek gods in the Temple itself.

VISION THREE: Seventy “sevens”

In chapter 9, verse two, Daniel says that during the first year of Darius’s reign (539 or 538 B.C.), Daniel began praying to God because of Daniel’s awareness of what Jeremiah had prophesied in “scriptures” about the limit of Jerusalem’s desolation being 70 years. The prayer is one of confession for the sins of Judah and restoration of Jerusalem in accordance with Jeremiah’s prophesy. While Daniel was praying, Gabriel comes to him and declares that seventy “sevens” (9:24) are decreed for the people and Jerusalem to atone for the wickedness.

Scholars debate over whether this vision was a 490 year period (70 times 7) between the reconstruction of the Temple and the coming of Christ or a reference to the time period before Christ’s second coming. The interpretation of these verses is legitimately open to debate.

VISION FOUR: Messianic Age

While mourning for three weeks in 537 B.C., Daniel receives a revelation. In the vision, Daniel sees a man dressed in linen with a belt of gold. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightening, his eyes like a flaming torch, his arms and legs like bronze and his voice sounding like “a multitude” (10:6). Daniel then receives a vision and explanations that are understandable in part by clear historical events, but other parts seem to be awaiting certain other events as they are referenced against the second coming and final consummation of the messianic kingdom.

The wars between the Egyptian and Syrian divisions of Alexander the Great’s Kingdom after the death of Alexander are discussed in a prophetic way. There seems to be some detail provided for the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.

This vision also recounts the spiritual warring ongoing between angelic and demonic forces. Michael himself is referenced here as battling a demon exercising influence over the Persian realm (“the prince of the Persian kingdom”).

B. Date of Authorship

Orthodoxy, both Jewish and Christian, has consistently taught that Daniel was a real person who wrote the book during his life in the sixth century B.C. Critics of this belief first arose in the 200’s. A heathen philosopher named Porphyry Malchus (233 – c.305) wrote a discourse against Christianity. In this discourse, Porphyry argued that Daniel must have been written at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes because the “prophecies” were too exact to have been written before the events they describe.

In the 1800’s, a school of Biblical criticism arose in Germany that also was quick to seize on a late date of authorship for Daniel. Those critics and their methodologies form the backbone of much scholarship even today. So, it is not uncommon to find many commentaries and books, which deny a Babylonian authorship of Daniel, teaching instead a late date of composition.

There are arguments for an early authorship, as well as arguments for a late authorship, that go beyond the scope of this Biblical Literacy course. Those arguments are given good treatment from a scholar who believes in early authorship in R.K. Harrison's book, *Introduction to the Old Testament*. This 1300-plus page book is available in hard or soft cover on Amazon.com. It is an excellent reference work on issues surrounding such Old Testament questions.

The point for our studies is to never dismiss the claims of the Bible merely because they would dictate supernatural intervention by God. The entire Bible is a claim of God's supernatural intervention. People of faith should never be surprised that God is in control of history as it unfolds.

In fact, as accurate as the prophecies were of the Greek and Roman powers, we must remember the prophecies can NEVER be dated as late as they need to be to truly get rid of any accurate foresight. These prophecies were clear on the full ascension of the Roman powers which did not take place even at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. More importantly, these prophecies were clearly written before the kingdom of God was ushered in by Jesus Christ. This kingdom history as born out has fulfilled the prophecy of going throughout the world and lasting throughout history.

III. POINTS FOR HOME

- A. God Has A Plan.
- B. God's Plan Will Succeed.
- C. God Can Handle The World...
- D. So Figure God Can Handle Our Lives.
- E. God's Kingdom Is Not Temporary...
- F. Nor Is It Made By Hands.
- G. Be Amazed At Scripture.