

A Commentary On The Book of Daniel

A Man of Faith, Integrity, and Insight



Prepared for BEE World

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Preface

In the mid-1980's I was privileged while completing my PhD at the University of Texas at Austin to study Aramaic under the tutelage of Dr. Aaron Bar Adon. The primary text for our studies one semester was the Aramaic section of the book of Daniel, namely, chapters two through seven. I had long been fascinated by the court tales and astonishing prophecies of this book, yet I was supremely rewarded by our studies in the original language of this unique book of the Bible. I went on to lead a Bible study on Daniel in the spring of 1990 for a group of graduate students at UT, which fostered an even deeper love for this book. In the course of my academic career as a professor at several theological schools, I taught the book of Daniel on a number of occasions and had the opportunity to deepen my research even further, eventually producing several articles for publication. I was delighted when Dr. Jody Dillow, president of BEE World at the time, asked me to consider writing a course on the book of Daniel that could be translated into many different languages and be used by students all over the world. This commentary is designed as an integral part of that course.

The English version of this commentary was originally written for the ministry of BEE World using the NET Bible as the primary biblical text. To help make the commentary more beneficial for a broader audience, all Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic words have been transliterated. I trust that this commentary--though only of modest length and depth--will prove to be a blessing for those who wish to study this book and apply its teachings to their lives. In doing so, may all who enter in seek to become as much a man of integrity and prophetic insight as Daniel himself was.

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Those who wish to dig further in their studies of the book of Daniel are invited to visit my website, where I have a number of additional materials available:
www.paultanner.org

Abbreviations

AD	anno Domini ("in the year of our Lord"); reference to years since the birth of Christ
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i> (3 rd ed.), ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton Univ. Press, 1969)
Ant.	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i> by the first century AD Jewish historian Josephus
Aram	Aramaic
BC	"before Christ"; reference to the years preceding the birth of Christ
BDAG	The 3 rd edition of <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian literature</i> (by Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker; revised and edited by Frederick William Danker; The Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000)
BDB	<i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , ed. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977)
ca.	about, approximately
cf.	compare
chap.	chapter
chaps.	chapters
e.g.	for example
esp.	especially
Eng	English
ff.	following (usually refers to "following verses")
Gk	Greek
Heb	Hebrew
i.e.	that is
ISBE	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979-1988)
lit.	literally
LSJM	The updated 9 th edition of <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996)
LXX	The Septuagint (the Greek translation tradition of the Old Testament)
Macc	Maccabees (books found among the Apocrypha)
mss	manuscripts
MT	Masoretic Text (the Hebrew text of the OT as found in the <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> edition)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	The NET Bible translation (available on the Internet at www.bible.org)
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
p	page
pp	pages
poss.	possibly
r.	reigned (indicating years of a king's reign)
v	verse
vv	verses
viz.	namely

I. The Historical Setting: God's Elevation of Daniel and His Friends In the Court at Babylon (1:1-21)

The opening scene of the book of Daniel coincides with a major historical event in the year 605 BC. Although the mighty Assyrian Empire had ruled the Middle East for some three hundred years, in 612 BC the combined forces of the Babylonians and Medes successfully conquered Assyria's capital of Nineveh. A power struggle ensued in which the two most powerful remaining kingdoms, Babylonia and Egypt, clashed. Their armies met in battle at a site called Carchemish (present day lower Turkey) in the summer of 605 BC. The Babylonians, led by crown prince Nebuchadnezzar II, defeated the Egyptians and pursued them southward towards Egypt. In pursuing the Egyptians, the Babylonian army came through Judah. Since 609 BC, Judah had been a vassal state to Egypt, with Jehoiakim serving as a puppet ruler to Egypt's Pharaoh Neco II. Nebuchadnezzar naturally wanted to ensure that Judah's loyalty would now shift to Babylon and therefore laid siege to Jerusalem. Among those of Judah being directly affected by this invasion was a young Jewish lad named Daniel. The rest of the book goes on to tell the story of how Daniel rose to power in the courts of Babylon, became an interpreter of dreams and received several powerful visions from the Lord that revealed the future in store for the nation of Israel.

A. Nebuchadnezzar's Siege of Jerusalem and the Deportation to Babylon (1:1-2)

1:1. Historical records reveal that 605 BC was “the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah.” Jehoiakim had been placed on the throne in October 609 BC following King Josiah's death at the hands of Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt. Judah thus became a vassal state of Egypt with the responsibility of paying annual tribute to her. Nebuchadnezzar's motive for laying siege to Jerusalem was not only to ensure Judah's loyalty to him but to create a buffer state that would prevent Egypt from pushing northward again.

1:2. While verse 1 gives the impression that Judah was simply suffering the sad fate of being caught up in the midst of an international shakeup and power struggle, verse 2 provides the spiritual perspective. God had His reasons for allowing Nebuchadnezzar to successfully lay siege to Jerusalem, and thus “the Lord delivered King Jehoiakim of Judah into his power.” The Hebrew word translated "Lord" (*'adōnay*) stresses the *sovereignty* of God, reminding us that He was totally in control. Nebuchadnezzar's victory was not due to his military might but to God's purposes for Israel.

When the LORD led the nation of Israel out of Egypt in 1446 BC, He first brought them to Mount Sinai. There they entered into a covenant with the LORD (the Mosaic covenant), whereby they agreed to keep the Law as His holy nation. Later He gave them the book of Deuteronomy, in which He promised that the nation would be blessed if they obeyed His Law and cursed (disciplined) if they disobeyed (see Deut 28:1-2, 15). He also warned them that continued disobedience and rebellion (particularly for idolatry) would result in the LORD sending foreign armies against them and eventually removing them from the land of promise

altogether (cf. Deut 28:36-37, 41; 29:22-28). This, then, is the true explanation why the Babylonians were besieging Judah in 605 BC. This was God's discipline for their sin.

Nebuchadnezzar not only laid siege to Jerusalem, but the LORD even allowed him to confiscate “some of the vessels of the temple of God.” These utensils (originally designed for use in the temple of the Holy God in Jerusalem) were then taken back to “the land of Babylonia” and placed in one of the pagan temples. By this, Nebuchadnezzar sought to proclaim the superiority of Babylon's gods to the deity (or deities) worshipped by those he conquered. The national god of Babylon was Marduk, and it was probably in his temple that the vessels were placed. Thus the Babylonians attributed their success to Marduk and the gods of Babylon, but the readers know that it was really the sovereignty of God at work, as He disciplined His people for their continued idolatry over many years.

B. Nebuchadnezzar's Attempt to Reprogram Daniel and His Friends (1:3-7)

Along with the temple vessels, a certain number of young Jewish males were taken to Babylon. (This was only a minor deportation; larger deportations took place in 597 BC and again in 586 BC.) The journey to Babylon would have amounted to roughly 680 miles (about 1100 km). The deportation of Jews in 605 BC focused on young Jewish males who could be trained and educated for diplomatic service in the Babylonian Empire. Their training, however, was meant to strip them of their national and religious affections, and to conform them to the pagan worldview of the Babylonians.

1. The selection of the candidates (1:3-4)

The choice and preparation of the candidates was entrusted to one of the king's confidants by the name of Ashpenaz, whom the text describes as being “in charge of his court officials.” Verses 3-4 tell us the qualifications by which all the candidates were chosen. First, they needed to be “of royal and noble descent”, i.e., they had to be related to the royal family in Judah or from the nobility of the land. Second, they had to have the right look physically, with “no physical defect and who were handsome.” Any physical handicap would have disqualified them. Third, the candidates had to be of superior mental acumen--“well versed in all kinds of wisdom, well-educated and having keen insight.” Fourth, they needed to be “capable of entering the king's royal service.” This would refer to the proper manner of court behavior, how to conduct oneself properly in the presence of the king and how to relate to others at the royal court.

Those who could pass these initial screening tests were then to be taught the literature and language of the Babylonians.” While much of this literature would have been of an historical or legal nature, an extensive amount would have been of a religious nature... including omen texts, magic, sorcery, occult practices and the science of astrology. The practice of such occult techniques was banned under the Mosaic Law (Deut 18:10-12; see also 1 Sam 28:3ff.). Although the reading of this material was not in itself a sin, one would have needed a strong walk with God (and a mind set on the Word of God) to keep from being indoctrinated and coming under the influence of this material.

Further consideration of verses 3-4 helps us see that the king's qualifications did not reflect God's value system. Nebuchadnezzar's qualifications smacked of elitism and humanistic standards... an environment in which everyone was aspiring to be humanly the best. Noticeably absent was any esteem for devotion to the LORD God and a corresponding moral lifestyle based on His standards of righteousness.

2. The king's regimen for the candidates (1:5)

The king allotted three years for their intensive training, during which they were given a special diet--"a daily ration from his royal delicacies and from the wine he himself drank." Although the food may have been intended to help them become strong and healthy, this stipulation posed a dilemma for the Hebrew youth. To eat it would mean defiling themselves before the LORD (note v 8). The reason could be due to one of two things. First, the food may have violated the OT dietary laws, which were applicable in their day (see Lev 11 and Deut 14:3-21 regarding "unclean" foods). Second, these foods may have been the product of pagan sacrificial use (cf. Exod 34:15; Deut 32:38). In Babylon, it was customary for food to be served to idols and later eaten by the king's court.

3. The assignment of new names (1:6-7)

It was common in Hebrew culture for parents to give names to their children that honored the LORD God. For instance, a portion of the name might include the element *'ēl* (meaning "God") or *Yah* (an abbreviated form of "Yahweh," God's personal name). Hence, the name Daniel was composed of the Hebrew verb *dîn* (meaning "to judge"), combined with *'ēl*. Together, his name means "God is my judge." Appropriately, on numerous occasions God brought justice for Daniel. In similar fashion, Hananiah means "Yahweh has been gracious," Mishael means "Who is what God is?" and Azariah means "Yahweh has helped." Although the meaning of the new names is not absolutely certain, they basically reflect the names of Babylonian deities. Hence, the changing of the names was meant to reflect a change of identity, whereby they became more closely associated with Babylonian culture and religion. For example Azariah's new name became Abednego, meaning "Servant of (the god) Nebo." The meaning of Daniel's name, Belteshazzar, is uncertain. One possibility is that it means "protect his life," implying "May Bel protect his life!" Such names would have been a disgrace for these Hebrew youth and an insult to their God.

C. Daniel's Resolve Not to Compromise His Faith (1:8-16)

Of all the issues that the Hebrew youth confronted in their Babylonian training program, the issue of the food proved to be the most challenging. The rest, as pagan and humanistic as it was, did not force them to disobey God. The main point of these verses is to show how Daniel's decision to obey God was met by God's faithfulness to act on his behalf.

1. Daniel's decision and his appeal to the commander (1:8-10)

1:8. Daniel was not alone in this test, though the emphasis falls on him (note verse 12 – "test us"). Perhaps he was the spokesman for all four young men, though the decision to obey God appears to have been a mutual one. More importantly, this decision took courage and faith! When verse 8 tells us that "Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself," we must understand that this was a choice of faith, in which obedience to God became more important than what might have been momentarily more convenient. Godly men and women live with convictions, and they stick by them even when this puts them at odds with the world.

Just as remarkable as the faith decision itself is the manner in which Daniel handled the crisis. He asked "permission not to defile himself" (v 8). What a beautiful balance this portrays: not only are we responsible for obeying God, but we are also responsible as to *how* we obey God before others. In this case, **respect for authority** needed to be maintained (even though they were pagan unbelievers). We honor God by honoring the lines of authority that He has permitted to exist (cf. Rom 13:1-7; 1 Tim 2:1-2; 1 Pet 2:13-15).

Though Daniel and his friends were prepared to pay the consequences, if it had been necessary to disobey the commander, in this case God honored their faith. Verse 9 states that **God made the overseer of the court officials sympathetic to Daniel**, a beautiful example of the sovereignty of God at work. In this case, He even turns the hearts of unbelievers to do His will and accomplish His purposes (cf. Prov 21:1). Verse 9 seems to anticipate the ultimate outworking of events, since verse 10 obviously reflects that there was initial hesitation. His concern was that by not partaking of the official diet, the faces of the youth would appear more "malnourished" (Heb *zō 'āpîm*) than the others. This word means to be dejected or sad (as in Gen 40:6), and the commander's concern was that he might be held accountable for such an appearance, perhaps even forfeiting the loss of his head.

2. Daniel's creative proposal of an alternative (1:11-13)

Although the initial response of the commander was not favorable, even this was part of God's design. Such delay gave opportunity for the Hebrew youth to learn to persevere in prayer and in faith. In due time God placed on Daniel's heart a creative idea that he submitted, not to the commander himself, but to the warden (or guardian) that had been placed over them. The suggestion of a ten-day test "with some vegetables to eat and water to drink" was not as restrictive as one might think. The word translated "vegetables" is from the Hebrew word *zera'* which has the basic idea of that which grows from seed. This would include not only vegetables, but fruits, grains, and bread made from grains. All in all, this would have been extremely healthy.

3. The successful outcome of the test (1:14-16)

The warden permitted the test, and after ten days there was a noticeable outcome. In fact, rather than looking malnourished (or "dejected"), "their appearance was better and their bodies were healthier" in comparison with the others. (The word "healthier" is literally fat of flesh. Though the adjective *bārî'* can mean fat in reference to humans, the expression in this context is

probably metaphorical for "healthy, well-nourished" [cf. Ps 73:4].) Hence, they were allowed to continue the alternative diet (presumably with the commander's knowledge and authorization).

D. God's Elevation of Daniel and His Friends (1:17-21)

Virtually nothing is said about the next three years, but apparently the Hebrew youth applied themselves diligently in the king's special program. More importantly, God Himself blessed them and caused them to succeed. Although the chapter began on a dismal note with Jerusalem under siege, it ends on a positive note with God blessing these young men who were faithful to obey and serve Him.

1. God's reward for the four Hebrew youth (1:17)

The key words in verse 17 are "God endowed them." Certainly they applied themselves, but ultimately it was God giving them their success. Their faithfulness to God was met with appropriate reward... not their freedom from Babylon (their natural desire) but rather being equipped for their God-given mission in Babylon. In general all four youth were endowed with "knowledge and skill in all sorts of literature and wisdom." The word translated "skill" (Heb *haskēl*) means insight or understanding. The point is that God gave them a special ability for **comprehending** the Babylonian literature they studied. What Nebuchadnezzar sought in verse 4 we now see actualized with them. In distinction from the others, Daniel was able to discern "visions and dreams" (a statement that prepares us for his unique role of interpreting dreams and receiving visions in subsequent chapters). Yet he did not do this by means of the occult, but rather by God's supernatural ability given to him. To be able to interpret dreams was of great importance in Babylonian culture, and the "wise men" that surrounded the king had a highly developed methodology for interpreting dreams and visions.

2. The examination of the king (1:18-20)

1:18-19. At the end of three years, Ashpenaz, "the overseer of the court officials," formally presented the successful candidates to the king. According to verse 19, "the king spoke with them" and found the four Hebrew youth better than all the others. Hence, they were given important positions within the Babylonian government.

1:20. They were considered to be far superior to "the magicians and astrologers" that served in the king's realm (v 20). This comparison is made, because these men served in official capacities in the government. The "magicians" (Heb *ḥarṭummîm*) were diviners who used some sort of inscribed chart or magical design as an aid to answering questions put to them. The word translated "astrologers" (Heb *'aššāpîm*) [rendered "conjurers" by the *NASB* and "enchanters" by the *NIV*] is derived from an Akkadian word meaning incantation priests. With their spells and incantations, they were believed to be able to communicate with the spirit world. Using their occult techniques and supposedly in touch with the world of the spirits and gods, both types of officials served as advisors to the king. Yet for all their skills, the king found the four Hebrew youth vastly superior in **wisdom and insight**.

3. Daniel's longevity of service (1:21)

Daniel was still on hand at the time that Cyrus the king conquered Babylon in 539 BC. Cyrus served as king of the Medes and Persians, and his “first year” would refer to his ruling over Babylonia in addition to the territories of the Medes and Persians. Hence, the significance of verse 21 is not to indicate how long Daniel lived, but to make the point that Daniel outlived the Babylonian Empire. We know from such verses as Daniel 10:1 that he lived and served in the Persian period after 539 BC. This also indicates that Daniel lived to see the day when (in accordance with God's mercy and faithfulness) Cyrus issued a decree permitting the Jews in exile to return to their land (cf. Ezra 1:1-3).

II. The Demonstration of God's Sovereignty Over the Gentile Nations That Israel Was Being Subjected To (2:1–7:28)

Chapters 2–7 form a major section of the book, and interestingly these chapters are written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. In Daniel's day, Aramaic was the common language of the Gentile world. Since chapters 2–7 emphasize the Gentile nations that Israel was being disciplined by and subjected to (during the Babylonian exile and the long history following it), it

Literary Structure of Daniel 2–7

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Four-Part Image	Refusal to Worship the Image of Gold	Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Tree	Belshazzar's Feast	Daniel's Refusal to Stop Praying	Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts
Gentile Powers and Messiah's Kingdom	Deliverance From the Furnace	Humbled For His Pride by Animal-like Madness	Humbled For Arrogant Defiance by Defeat of Babylon	Deliverance From the Lions	Gentile Powers and Messiah's Kingdom
Chap 2	Chap 3	Chap 4	Chap 5	Chap 6	Chap 7

A-----B-----C-----C'-----B'-----A'

was appropriate that these chapters would be written in “the Gentile language.” The role of Messiah’s kingdom is highlighted in both chapter two and chapter seven, underscoring the significance of this theme to this section. Chapters two through seven thus depict the role, character, and succession of the Gentile nations of the world under whom Israel is being disciplined prior to Messiah’s kingdom. These Gentile kingdoms are temporarily given world sovereignty (under God's authority) until God is pleased to establish the everlasting Messianic kingdom. Yet God will hold these nations accountable and humble them for their arrogant defiance to his rule. This is reflected in the literary structure in which these chapters are composed.

A. Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream of the Four-Part Image, and the Eventual Establishment of Messiah's Kingdom (2:1-49)

The section opens with a dream divinely given to King Nebuchadnezzar. Perplexed to understand it, he attempts to turn to his “wise men,” those who used occult measures to discern the supernatural and interpret dreams. Their inability to interpret the dream leads to Daniel's opportunity to provide the correct interpretation, thus revealing the superiority of Daniel's God to the gods of Babylon. The dream shows that Babylon's momentary defeat of Judah is only part of a larger plan of the LORD God... a plan in which Babylon will eventually be superseded by another kingdom, and ultimately all earthly kingdoms will be replaced by an everlasting kingdom of God's own making.

1. The inability of the Babylonian “wise men” to interpret the king’s dream (2:1-13)

These verses record the fact of the dream and the king’s vain attempt to have his “wise men” interpret it.

a. *Nebuchadnezzar startled by a divinely given dream (2:1-3)*

2:1. Although the text indicates that the dream took place “in the second year” of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, this was probably after the three-year training program (v 1). The first year of his reign was considered his accession year, lasting from September 605 BC until the month Nisan (March/April) of 604 BC. Then the year after that would be regarded as his first official or regnal year, counting from Nisan of 604 until Nisan of 603 BC according to Babylonian practice. The “second year” then is probably a reference to a time late in his *second regnal year*, which would technically be sometime in his third actual year of rule. Knowing that a part of a year could also be counted as a “year,” this would allow for the training program to have been completed by this point.

2:2-3. Not being able to sleep because of the disturbing dream, Nebuchadnezzar’s first reaction was to call for the wise men who advised him. Four specific categories are mentioned. Regarding the magicians (Heb *ḥarṭummîm*) and astrologers (Heb *’aššāpîm*), see comments for 1:20. The third category is the “sorcerers” (Heb *m^ekaššēpîm*), who used herbs, charms and various potions. In essence, they practiced witchcraft, which was strongly forbidden by the Bible (Exod 7:11; 22:18; Deut 18:10; Isa 47:9, 12; Jer 27:9). The fourth category is the “Chaldeans” in most translations (NASB, Heb *kašdîm*). The NET Bible uses “wise men,” possibly because Chaldeans has a more specialized meaning in this context for the experts/priests of the Chaldean religion who relied heavily upon astrology to ascertain the outcome of future events. Note: for the purposes of this discussion Chaldeans will refer to the third group and wise men will refer to all four categories. Their importance to the king is reflected in the prominent role they have in the following dialogue with the king. One of the noted skills of the court wise men was the interpretation of dreams, which explains why the king urgently summoned them. This had become a highly developed discipline in the ancient Near East, such that “dream manuals” had even been composed with elaborate instructions on proper interpretation.

b. *The first response of the Chaldeans (2:4-6)*

The Chaldeans responded in a way that seemed logical to them: “Tell your servants the dream, and we will disclose its interpretation.” The dream obviously had to be declared (so they thought) before it could be interpreted. This was standard procedure, and normally the king would have done that. On this occasion, however, the king departed from normal practice, demanding to be told both the content of the dream and its interpretation. He reasoned that if he told them the dream, they might just make up an interpretation. If they really had supernatural abilities, then they should be able to tell both the dream and its interpretation. If they could do that, then the king would know the interpretation was reliable. Why would the king have used such an unorthodox approach? Most likely this was due to the unique nature of the dream and the possible frightening implications that it may have had for the king. (This was a dream from the one true God, and even Nebuchadnezzar recognized something unique about it.) To make his point, the king threatened to kill them if they could not do this but promised great rewards if they could.

c. *The second response of the Chaldeans (2:7-9)*

The Chaldeans dared not challenge the king's threat, so they simply repeated their request to hear the dream, hoping (no doubt) that he would soften his stance and tell them what he had dreamed. Nevertheless, the king saw through their antics, knowing they were "attempting to gain time." Then he accused them of conspiring together against him to lie: "you have agreed among yourselves to report to me something false and deceitful." His obvious mistrust of them may have been directly related to the dream itself. The thought of a stone destroying a statue that he saw in his dream (note 2:35) may have been regarded by him as a kind of divine omen that he would be assassinated or his kingdom overthrown. This would have heightened his paranoia and made almost everyone suspect in his eyes.

d. *The third response of the Chaldeans (2:10-13)*

2:10-11. Knowing it was useless to make a third request to hear the dream, the wise men sought to reason with him by making three points. First, they tried to point out the impossibility of what the king was asking: "There is no man on earth who is able to disclose the king's secret." Second, they tried to point out that wise men have never been asked to do such a thing, even by great kings. Third, they pointed out that the king's request was so difficult that only "the gods" (such as those worshipped by the Babylonians) could do such a feat. Note the irony of their final point. The whole purpose of these wise men was to discern the will of the gods and the outcome of earthly events. Now they are confessing their inability and even how flawed their system was! Thus, verses 10-11 demonstrate the limitations of human wisdom and knowledge, even when aided by occult techniques. Man needs *special revelation*, which only the God of the Bible can supply reliably and faithfully.

2:12-13. As reasonable as their points seemed to them, it only served to make the king "furiously angry." Whether he disliked their reasoning or felt insulted that they dared to challenge him, we are not told. At this point, however, he ended the discussion and ordered the destruction of "all the wise men of Babylon." The king's decree was rash, for he made it applicable even to those who were not present that day, including Daniel and his companions. Yet the tenseness of the moment perfectly sets the stage for the LORD God to miraculously work through Daniel and thereby demonstrate His sovereignty and greatness. (God knew Daniel would not lose his life.) God could have spoken directly to Daniel with a vision and message for the king, (rather than giving Nebuchadnezzar a dream), but this would not have had near the impact upon Nebuchadnezzar.

2. Daniel's intercession and prayer (2:14-23)

The command to slay all the Babylonian wise men included Daniel and his companions. This paragraph illustrates the beauty of believers handling a crisis with prayer, and then the glorifying of God once their prayers have been answered.

a. *Daniel's intercession with the king (2:14-16)*

2:14-15. Daniel’s maturity is shown in the way he “spoke with prudent counsel” to Arioch, the man in charge of the executions. That is, he tactfully used words of discretion and thereby showed respect for authority. Notice the contrast between the king’s violent explosion of anger (v 12) and Daniel’s calm reaction and rational thinking. The principle illustrated here is that when a believer is solidly convinced that God is sovereign and in control, he does not panic in the face of startling news but keeps his cool.

2:16. That Daniel “went in and requested the king” does not conclusively mean that he personally spoke with the king. Perhaps he did, but this statement may mean nothing more than the fact he was able to get a message to the king (cf. 2:25). The more significant observation is that the king apparently granted him his request of having some additional time (since Daniel had time to meet with his friends), which was the very thing that the king had denied the Chaldeans (recall 2:8). Obviously the king did not regard Daniel’s request as a stall tactic, as though he were trying to bargain for time. This implies that the king must have already had a fair amount of respect for Daniel as a man of integrity and great wisdom. The most logical way to account for this is to assume that Daniel had already completed the required training program and had personally been interviewed by the king as depicted in Daniel 1:19-20.

b. Daniel’s prayer with his friends (2:17-18)

Once again Daniel shows great maturity in the way he handles this crisis situation. He seeks out godly companions to be with and pray with. The use of their original names in this verse (contrast the names used for them in 2:49) reminds us of their godly heritage and their identity with the one true God. Here they are acting in accord with their true identity. Verse 18 clarifies that Daniel did not bring this news to them that they might feel sorry for each other or complain. Rather, he “asked them to pray for mercy.” (In the Aramaic original, verse 18 is clearly a purpose clause, i.e., he informed them for the purpose that they might pray.) The word “mercy” (Aram *raḥāmîn*) might be better rendered compassion. This word stresses the **deep tender feelings** of God that they hoped would be touched by their prayers.

The expression for God in this context, “the God of heaven,” is rare but particularly appropriate. The Babylonian wise men sought help from the starry heaven through astrology. Daniel’s God was the maker of heaven, and their prayers for compassion went directly to Him. From Him they hoped to learn the “mystery” (Aram *rāz*). The word (possibly a Persian loan-word) means something secret. What had been shown King Nebuchadnezzar was a secret known only to the true God of heaven, and no occult gimmick in the world could discover what this was about. Yet God could choose to **reveal** it, and knowing this prompted them to pray to that end.

c. Daniel’s praise in response to God’s revelation of the mystery (2:19-23)

2:19. During the night, Daniel was given a “vision” by God in which the mystery of the king’s dream was “revealed” to him. Apart from this revelation by God, Daniel would have had no way of knowing the dream or its interpretation. Hence, all the credit clearly belonged to the LORD, not to Daniel. Although the natural human tendency would have been to immediately

run to the king's palace with the news, Daniel appropriately "praised the God of heaven," i.e., he first took the time to thank and worship the LORD before taking care of business. The blessing of God is cast in the form of a poem. Although the mystery was revealed to Daniel, the poem of blessing is apparently made in the presence of his companions in light of the plural pronouns in verse 23. (Literally, the end of v 23 says, "You have made known to us the matter of the king," although the NET Bible has used a singular pronoun.)

2:20-23. The focus of Daniel's praise was for God's **wisdom** (*hokmâ*) and **power** (*g^ebûrâ*). Notice how these terms are repeated in both v 20 and in v 23, and how the prayer is carefully structured around these concepts:

- A Praise for God who possesses wisdom and power (20)
- B God's power: He controls human thrones (21a)
- B' God's wisdom: He has all understanding and reveals hidden knowledge to men (21b-22)
- A' Praise for God who dispenses His wisdom and power (23)

This **wisdom** and **power** should be seen in regard to the dream and its revelation about the future kingdoms (vv 31ff.). God's power is illustrated by His complete control over the events of history. Verse 21 indicates that "He changes times and seasons, deposing some kings and establishing others." The words "times" (Aram *'iddānayyā'*) and "seasons" (Aram *zimnayyā'*) are near synonyms. They look at the appointed times of history (i.e., when events will occur), as well as the periods or epochs of history (i.e., the stages and duration of things, as in Dan 7:12). Because He does control the times and seasons, He intervenes especially in the establishment and deposing of earthly kings. God's wisdom is seen in His infinite knowledge and understanding of everything, and by His ability to reveal that to men of His choosing. Verse 22 ("light resides with Him") reflects God's omniscience--His complete awareness of all that exists, and of all that can happen and will happen. He knows the end from the beginning! What would otherwise remain unknowable and hidden (i.e., in the darkness), God has seen fit to reveal to Daniel that he, in turn, might make it known to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Lastly, we should notice the ironic comment in verse 21, "He gives wisdom to the wise." The *wise men* of Babylon had nothing to offer the king, whereas the man who sought God's wisdom (Daniel) was made truly wise.

3. Daniel presented to King Nebuchadnezzar (2:24-30)

Daniel made the LORD his first priority, taking the time to bless His name. With this having been done, he took the next step of going to Arioch, who had been appointed to oversee the slaying of the wise men.

a. *Daniel's approach to Arioch (2:24)*

Although we are not told much about Arioch, we can only surmise that he was not looking forward to having to destroy the Babylonian wise men. If so, Daniel's arrival with good

news must have brought him some relief. Yet notice the way Daniel breaks the news to him. He does not begin by boasting that he can tell and interpret the king's dream. Rather his first concern is for the pagan wise men whose lives were in danger. Hence Daniel's first words were, "Don't destroy the wise men of Babylon!" We do not know how well Daniel personally knew these men or what relationship he might have had to them. Daniel's obvious disdain for their occult practices and refusal to engage in their arts might have aroused their contempt for him (and certainly their suspicions). Nevertheless, Daniel had compassion on these men who were lost and without the LORD. Their welfare was of more concern to him than his own personal success and reward.

b. Daniel's appearance before Nebuchadnezzar (2:25-26)

2:25. Although Daniel was not pursuing personal acclaim, he was the real hero of the moment. Nevertheless Arioch tried to take advantage of the situation to promote his own welfare. As he ushered Daniel in before the king, he introduced him with the words, "I have found a man... who can make known the interpretation." Arioch was seeking to gain some of the credit for himself, hoping perhaps that the king would feel obligated to pass along some of the rewards he had offered to him (recall 2:6). In Arioch we see a man out to promote himself, taking the credit for what rightfully belonged to others.

2:26. Nebuchadnezzar quickly turns to Daniel and asks him if indeed he can make known the dream and the interpretation. Yet before the question, the text makes an important comment about Daniel: "whose name was also Belteshazzar." Of course we already knew this, because it had clearly been stated in Daniel 1:7 that Daniel's name was being changed to Belteshazzar. A similar statement occurs in Daniel 4:8: "Daniel entered (whose name is Belteshazzar after the name of my god)." The name Belteshazzar was clearly associated with the Babylonian deity named Bel (an alternative name for Marduk, the national god of Babylon). The man who bore the name of Belteshazzar would be expected to bring glory and honor to Bel, and at least this is how the king thought of Daniel. How ironic it now becomes that the one who bears the name of Belteshazzar in honor of Bel/Marduk is going to be the one who glorifies the God of the captive Judeans! In essence, God vindicates the original name of Daniel (meaning "God is my judge") by defending his interests, and thereby revealing that He alone is the unrivaled God. Bel is nothing, as evidenced by the fact that none of the wise men serving him can tell the dream.

c. Daniel's witness to King Nebuchadnezzar (2:27-28)

Daniel handles this situation very wisely. The king was certainly anxious to have someone tell him the dream and interpretation, but Daniel momentarily delays. This was a unique moment when he had the king's full attention, and it was a perfect moment to bear witness to him about the true God of the Bible. Daniel's witness is both negative and positive. He first denies the ability of the Babylonian wise men to accomplish the king's demand, and then he affirms that His God is able to do this.

2:27. Although Daniel had compassion for the wise men of Babylon who were under a death sentence (2:24), he does not hesitate to undermine their activities in front of the king. As humans, he had compassion on them and wished to see them spared. As practitioners of occult practices, however, he wanted the king to know that these things were evil and unacceptable to the Living God. Hence, he specifically mentions several of the different types of occult practitioners. All but one of these have already been introduced earlier. The one new category he mentions is the **astrologers** (Aram *gāz^erîn*), translated “diviners” by the *NASB* and *NIV*. Their function probably included astrology, but was not limited to that. More accurately, they were “determiners of fate” who used several forms of divination in their pursuit of supernatural knowledge, the goal being to determine the outcome of an event or what awaited a person. Despite their methods, they were powerless to do anything, and they deserved being exposed as impotent to help the king (cf. Isa 47:12-13). Daniel clearly and boldly discredited the polytheistic religion of Babylon.

2:28. Next Daniel proceeded to introduce the king to the “God in heaven” who had given him such an awesome dream. He “reveals mysteries” (secret matters; see 2:18), because He is omniscient and no secret is beyond His reach. Part of the reason the king had this dream was so that this God could make known to him what would happen “in the times to come” (*NIV* “in days to come”; *NASB* “in the latter days”). This Aramaic phrase is equivalent in meaning with the Hebrew phrase “in the latter days” (*b^e’ahārît hayyomîm*), occurring thirteen times elsewhere. Although this phrase can sometimes be used to refer to an indefinite time in the future (e.g., Deut 31:29), it primarily refers to the far distant future, especially when Messiah will reign over the world (e.g., Isa 2:2-4; Mic 4:1). Not everything about the king’s dream will pertain to the latter times, for (as we shall soon see in Dan 2:31-45) the events of the dream begin with Nebuchadnezzar and stretch to the ending of Gentile powers and setting up of a kingdom by the God of heaven (2:44). However, the climactic part of the king’s dream is the latter part of this spectrum (particularly the kingdom), and thus Daniel tells him that God has made known to him what will happen “in the latter times.”

d. Daniel’s humility in announcing the king’s dream (2:29-30)

2:29. In telling King Nebuchadnezzar “your thoughts turned to future things,” Daniel was essentially reiterating the matter about “the latter times” mentioned in the previous verse. One of the reasons that the dream was so perplexing is that it conveyed truths related to the far distant future. Daniel describes the One who is making these future things known to the king as “the revealer of mysteries,” because He alone could see the distant future and know what was a **secret** to all others (see the word “mystery” in Dan 2:18). If Nebuchadnezzar would just reflect upon this ability of Daniel’s God, he would quickly realize how vastly superior the LORD God was in relation to the Babylonian deities (though the latter did not really exist at all). The fact that He alone (not the Babylonian deities) can know and foretell the distant future establishes this point!

2:30. Before disclosing the dream and its interpretation, Daniel clarifies that he is not doing so because of any special **wisdom** that he possesses. He would not have known these

things had not his God revealed them to him. In saying this, he is careful to let God have all the glory for what now happens. Furthermore, God revealed these things to Daniel, “so that the king may understand the interpretation and comprehend the thoughts” he had. Daniel’s God desired that Nebuchadnezzar know and understand these things. As he comprehends them, he will realize not only that Daniel’s God is unique and superior (because He foretells the future), but Nebuchadnezzar can now realize how the Gentile kingdoms (his own included) fit into the grand scheme of things.

4. Daniel reveals the dream and its interpretation (2:31-45)

This section is composed of two distinct paragraphs. In the first (vv 31-35), Daniel declares the king’s dream, just as he had demanded. In the second (vv 36-45), Daniel provides the interpretation of the dream. The dream concerned a symbolic depiction of successive Gentile kingdoms that would rule and exercise authority over Israel until finally being destroyed and replaced by a kingdom from heaven.

a. *Daniel’s declaration of the dream (2:31-35)*

2:31. The main thing that the king had seen in his dream was a large statue, which appeared to have had a very bright luster to it. The appearance of the statue **caused alarm**. The word used for “caused alarm” (Aram *d^ehîl*) properly means that it was terrifying (rather than awesome, as suggested by some translations). Nebuchadnezzar was frightened by what he had seen, and this fear partially explains his harsh tactics.

2:32-33. As Daniel describes the statue, he begins with the head and moves downward. The “head was of fine gold,” but as he proceeds downward the various body parts of the statue are composed of metals of decreasing value, until at last he comes to the feet of an iron/clay mixture. At the same time, however, the materials are listed in order of increasing hardness (gold being the most pliable and iron the strongest). These qualities appear to reflect the nature of the kingdoms they represent (e.g., precious gold would reflect the grandeur that characterized Babylon, whereas iron is hard and suitable for crushing all opposition). The fifth and final part of the statue is the most unique of all: “its feet were partly of iron and partly of clay.” Obviously the final part is not a pure metal at all, but a composite of metal and clay (which do not easily blend or adhere to one another). Also, it shares the same metal as the fourth part, namely iron (which probably suggests there is a close connection between what is symbolized by the “legs” and the “feet”). The last stage is made of hard iron and hard (but brittle) baked clay.

2:34-35. As large and imposing as the statue was, however, it does not last forever. According to verse 34, a stone “struck the statue,” breaking it in pieces and thus bringing about its end. Daniel is careful to point out that this stone “was cut out, but not by human hands” (cut out from a mountain according to Dan 2:45). The words “but not by human hands” indicate that its origin and power are not from any human source, but rather divine. The destruction of the statue is a divine undertaking, and the words “it struck the statue on its iron and clay feet” indicate this is the point of assault. Since the statue represents successive kingdoms, this would imply that it is during the days of the final kingdom (symbolized by the feet) that the statue is

destroyed. This marks the end of human kingdoms (that defy God and do not honor His name). Like worthless chaff that is blown away in the harvesting process, these human kingdoms are removed. Instead, “the stone that struck the statue became a large mountain that filled the entire earth.” Since a mountain is sometimes used metaphorically in Scripture to depict a kingdom (cf. Isa 2:1-4), we can conclude that once the stone has destroyed the human empires, it will go on to become a universal kingdom. (This should not be taken to mean that there will be no more Gentile nations in an absolute sense, for there will be nations *in submission to* this final kingdom after the “stone’s victory.”)

b. Daniel’s interpretation of the dream (2:36-45)

(i) Preliminary discussion: interpretative differences

The interpretation provided by Daniel clarifies that the statue the king saw in his dream was a symbolic depiction of various kingdoms that will come into power, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar’s own. What these kingdoms have in common is their dominion over God’s chosen people Israel. From the time that they are taken into exile by Babylon, they are ruled over and made to submit to one Gentile kingdom after another. This continues until the statue has run its course and a kingdom established by God is founded.

Although all biblical scholars agree that the parts of the statue symbolize various kingdoms, they do not agree on the interpretation of all the details. The primary issues are the identification of the successive kingdoms and the nature of the kingdom set up by God (v 44). Most evangelicals today (regardless of their eschatological viewpoint) and virtually all the early church fathers interpret the first four kingdoms as beginning with Babylon and extending to the Roman Empire. Critical scholars, on the other hand, agree that Babylon is the first kingdom but insist the fourth is Greece (not Rome). The stance of these critical scholars, however, is swayed by their bias against the book. According to them, the book of Daniel is supposedly a pious forgery, written not by the historical Daniel living in the sixth century BC, but rather by an anonymous writer about 165 BC. (Their dating of the book stems from the reference to the Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes IV and other matters in Dan 11.) Since these critical scholars deny any plausibility for predictive prophecy, the book cannot have any reference to Rome, because Rome did not come into power (over Judah) until after 165 BC--so they say. Therefore, they contend that the fourth major kingdom must be that of Greece. Evangelical scholars, however, have rightfully rejected the arguments and conclusions of critical scholarship. For critical scholars to end with Greece, they have to make Media the second kingdom (rather than Medo-Persia as do evangelicals), but this is simply not tenable:

- 1) Historically, there was no independent kingdom of Media that followed Babylon. Instead, Babylon was conquered by the Persian king Cyrus the Great who ruled over the joint empire of the Medes and Persians.
- 2) In Daniel 5:28, the writing on the wall declared that Babylon would be given over to the Medes and Persians . . . not merely to the Medes.

3) Daniel 6:8 refers to “the law of the Medes and Persians” (attesting that they were viewed by the author of Daniel as one empire).

4) In Daniel 8, two animals are used to symbolize Gentile kingdoms, a ram with two horns and a shaggy goat. The latter is identified by the text itself as Greece (Dan 8:21), while the ram (one entity) represents Media and Persia (v 20).¹

The correct interpretation, then, is that the first kingdom is Babylon (with Nebuchadnezzar as its head), and this would be followed by Medo-Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire.

(ii) *The first kingdom = Babylon (2:37-38)*

2:37-38. Interpreting the head of the statue, Daniel announces “You, O king, are the king of kings.” With this, it is clear that the head of gold symbolized the Babylonian Empire and its great king, Nebuchadnezzar. (Historians typically refer to this as the Neo-Babylonian Empire, in distinction from the Babylonian Empire of the second millennium BC.) Notice that both the king and the kingdom he represents are included in the symbol, since verse 39 points out that “another kingdom” arises after Babylon. The element of gold appropriately reflected the **quality** of Nebuchadnezzar’s rule in comparison with the rulers who followed him. Yet Nebuchadnezzar was also famous for his special taste for gold. In the temple to Marduk in Babylon, the inner shrine was embellished with gold. Despite how great and how famous Nebuchadnezzar was, it was not Marduk or any other Babylonian deity that established his rule. Daniel pointed out that “the God of heaven granted sovereignty” to Nebuchadnezzar (v 37). Ancient Near Eastern rulers typically claimed that their god(s) had given them their kingship (and we know from inscriptions that have been unearthed that Nebuchadnezzar claimed Marduk as the one giving him Babylon and his empire). Yet Daniel boldly stated that his kingdom, the power that he exercised and the resulting honor/glory that he enjoyed, had been given to him by the God of heaven, i.e., the LORD God.

(iii) *The second kingdom = Medo-Persia (2:39a)*

2:39a. In contrast to Babylon, the next two kingdoms are only treated briefly (though they will be given more attention in chapters 7 and 8). Daniel did not tell Nebuchadnezzar how long his personal rule would last or how long Babylon would rule the Middle East. Yet it was clear that **another kingdom** would eventually replace Babylon. As it turned out, Nebuchadnezzar had a lengthy rule, from 605-562 BC, and was followed briefly by a few other Babylonians. Nevertheless, Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon in 539 BC with a combined army of the Medes and Persians (cf. Isa 45:1-4), thus bringing an end to the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

¹ Observe that the shaggy goat (Greece) in Daniel 8 is characterized by four horns (8:8), which is parallel to the leopard in chapter seven that has four heads (representing the four generals of Alexander the Great). Since the first beast in Daniel 7 is Babylon and the third is Greece, the second must be Medo-Persia (a perfect correlation with Dan 8 in which the ram precedes Greece).

The only clue that Daniel revealed about the Medo-Persian Empire (symbolized by the breast and arms of silver) is that it would be **inferior** to Nebuchadnezzar's. However, Medo-Persia was larger and endured longer than Babylon. Perhaps, then, it was inferior in terms of the authority enjoyed by the king. Nebuchadnezzar had unfettered power, but during the Persian Empire the king was restricted in his authority, for he could not annul a law once he had made it (cf. Dan 6:8).

(iv) *The third kingdom = Greece (2:39b)*

2:39b. The third kingdom (symbolized by the belly and thighs of **bronze**) would be Greece, made famous by Alexander the Great when he conquered Darius III (the last of the Persian kings) at the site of Gaugamela in 331 BC. (Gaugamela is near the present-day city of Irbil in northern Iraq.) Daniel pointed out that this kingdom “will rule in all the earth.” At the height of his power, Alexander ruled over the most extensive realm that had ever existed on the earth until that time. Although Alexander himself died surprisingly young in 323 BC, his kingdom was parceled out among four of his generals, each of whom spread Hellenistic culture and the Greek language to their realms.

(v) *The fourth kingdom = Rome (2:40)*

2:40. The fourth kingdom (symbolized by the legs of **iron**) represented Rome. Being “strong like iron” was appropriate for Rome, since the Roman legions were noted for their ability to crush all resistance with an iron heel. In 64 BC the Roman General Pompey claimed Syria for Rome, and with it Judea was brought into the fold of the Roman Empire shortly thereafter.

(vi) *The kingdom in the distant future (2:41-43)*

2:41-43. Far more attention is given to the “feet and toes” than to the legs. Since the legs are of iron and the feet and toes are partly of **clay** and partly of **iron**, does the commonality of iron suggest that these are one and the same kingdom, or are they actually different kingdoms in time? On this point, even evangelical scholars are divided. Because of the *iron commonality*, some think that the legs and feet all refer to the same kingdom, and thus to ancient Rome. Others, however, think that despite the commonality of iron, there is a distinctive difference between the legs and the feet. The latter usually take the position that the feet (and toes) look at a kingdom still to come in the future, though having a connection with the ancient Roman Empire. This would imply that there must be some unspecified *gap in time* between the demise of the fourth kingdom (Rome) and the feet/toes.

There are several convincing reasons why the feet and toes should be understood as a different kingdom than the legs. First, the very fact that the feet and toes have mixed components of iron and clay suggests that there is something inherently different about it. Second, when the everlasting kingdom is set up by God according to verse 44, these Gentile kingdoms will end (“it will . . . bring about the demise of all these kingdoms”). The most devastating argument against the position that the kingdom represented by the feet and toes is to be found in the ancient Roman Empire, is the fact that there is no kingdom set up by God in the

past that "broke in pieces" and "brought about the demise" of Gentile kingdoms. If one says that the kingdom is that established by Christ in His first coming, he faces the very serious problem that this kingdom (Christianity? The church?) did not "put an end" to the ancient Roman Empire. Even the western portion of the Roman Empire lasted until AD 476. Third, the mention of "toes" in verse 42 opens the possibility that the final Gentile "kingdom" could be a confederacy of ten nations or kings, just as there are ten toes on the feet. The mention of "toes" twice (both in v 41 and v 42) does give emphasis to them. Many scholars have noted that Daniel 2 is parallel to chapter seven. In both chapters, we have a symbolic depiction of successive kingdoms that eventually give way to a kingdom established from heaven. Since chapter seven very explicitly emphasizes "ten horns" that symbolize ten kings arising out of the fourth kingdom of Rome (see Dan 7:23-24), this very naturally explains the role of the ten toes in Daniel 2. Furthermore, the book of Revelation reveals that these ten horns (= ten kings) are a confederacy of ten kings that will rise up in the future tribulation period just before the second coming of Christ and be in league with "the beast" (Rev 17:12).

In conclusion, the best interpretation (in light of the points above) is to regard the "legs" as representing the ancient Roman Empire and the feet/toes as a confederacy of ten kings still to come in the future. Since the feet/toes are partly of iron, then this future kingdom probably has some connection to the ancient Roman Empire (most likely, the future kingdom arises *out of* the same general geographical location as the ancient kingdom in light of Dan 7:24). Some might object to this conclusion on the basis that it necessitates a gap of time between the legs of iron (ancient Rome) and the feet/toes (a future confederacy having some connection to ancient Rome). Nevertheless, there are other places in the OT where such gaps exist (e.g., Isa 41:25–42:9), and in fact another can be found within this same book of Daniel (see Dan 11:2-3).

Like ancient Rome, this future kingdom will have "the strength of iron" (very militaristic and brutal). Yet it will also be a "divided kingdom," just as iron and clay do not mix. Some have suggested that the reference to being "mixed with one another without adhering to one another" could look at a vain attempt to unify the subjects through intermarriage. Others have suggested that the issue is not intermarriage, but merely a failed attempt to bring different people groups together to form this confederation. In either case, there will be great difficulty for the leader(s) to unify this final kingdom.

(vii) *The everlasting kingdom set up by God (2:44-45)*

2:44. The climax of the revelation is that ultimately the God of heaven will establish "an everlasting kingdom that will not be destroyed." Since this kingdom is everlasting and "will not be destroyed," it must be the same kingdom as that depicted in Daniel 7:13-14 that is given to "one like a Son of Man" (note the repetition of these same terms). According to Daniel 2:44, this will take place "in the days of those kings." If the interpretation above is correct that the feet/toes refer to a confederacy of ten kings/kingdoms yet to come in the future, it must be in the days of these kings that the everlasting kingdom of God will be established.

Nevertheless, this interpretation has been challenged by some evangelicals. Edward J. Young, for instance, holds that “those kings” refer to all four preceding kingdoms, with the fourth one (i.e., Rome) representing the others.² This leads him to the conclusion that this kingdom in Daniel 2:44 is established at the time of the ancient Roman Empire, and hence, at Christ’s first coming. He furthermore suggests that this kingdom is a spiritual kingdom (now) in which Christ reigns in the hearts of believers, i.e., those comprising the church. Yet there are several problems with the view that the kingdom spoken of in Daniel 2:44 was established at Christ’s first coming (and any equation of this kingdom with the church). We have already given several reasons above (see comments on 2:41-43) why the feet/legs more likely refer to a future kingdom yet to come, rather than to ancient Rome. To this we might add that the parallel revelation about this kingdom in Daniel 7 does not allow for its establishment in conjunction with Christ’s first coming. A careful study of Daniel 7 (particularly Dan 7:25-27) indicates that the kingdom is not established until after the time of the “little horn.” As we shall show in the notes to chapter seven, this “little horn” is a reference to the Antichrist who emerges in the future tribulation period shortly before Christ’s second coming. (Ironically, even Young [158, 163] agrees with this interpretation of the “little horn.”) Therefore the parallel nature of Daniel 2 and 7 (including the kingdom references in each) clearly points to the time of Christ’s second coming for the establishment of this kingdom. This is consistent with the general teaching found elsewhere in Scripture about the formal inauguration of the “kingdom of God” (cf. Matt 25:31; Luke 21:27, 31; Rev 11:15).

If this kingdom set up by the God of heaven in Daniel 2:44 is a kingdom that will come about at Christ’s second coming, what is the nature of this kingdom and in what sphere does it take place? Some (but not all) who are amillennial in their theology would agree with the timing of the kingdom stated above, but yet hold that the kingdom takes place in the eternal state in heaven (not here on earth). Those who are premillennial, however, believe that Christ’s return will be followed by His physical rule on earth (and most premillennialists would agree that this earthly kingdom will be for one thousand years in accordance with a literal interpretation of Rev 20:1-6). (The word “millennium” means a period of one thousand years.) This author prefers the premillennial view as that which best accounts for all the biblical data.³ Thus Christ will return in glory at a time when the final human kingdom is operative (a confederacy of kings represented by the feet/toes in league with the Antichrist). Christ will put an end to this kingdom (and thus to human government), and then His kingdom will commence with His personal rule

² Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel; A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1949), 78.

³ A full defense of one's view of the millennium is not possible here. For some helpful books on the various millennial positions, the following works are recommended: Robert P. Lightner, *The Last Days Handbook; A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding the Different Views of Prophecy*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998); Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy; A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995); Darrell Bock, ed., *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999); and Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze; Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992).

on earth for 1000 years (Rev 20:1-4) and continue into the New Creation (Rev 21). Thus His kingdom will “stand forever.”

2:45. The **stone** “cut from a mountain” certainly represents the Lord Jesus Christ (the fact that the stone was cut without “human hands” affirms His heavenly origins and power). He is the one who “smashes” the Gentile kingdoms. Psalm 2:8-9 states, “You have only to ask me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth as your personal property. You will break them with an iron scepter; you will smash them as if they were a potter’s jar.” One should realize that the smashing of Gentile kingdoms in this context is looking at His victory over nations that are hostile and in opposition to Him. That is, they want to stand in the way of His coming to rule the world. Finally, if we look back now to Daniel 2:35, we notice that this stone “became a large mountain that filled **the entire earth**” (emphasis added). The fact that the text says it filled the entire earth supports the argument that this kingdom must be **on earth**. Then the Lord Jesus Christ will “rule from sea to sea” and all nations will serve Him in fulfillment of Psalm 72:8-11.

5. Nebuchadnezzar’s response to Daniel’s disclosure (2:46-49)

Daniel described the king’s dream and interpreted it accurately and completely. This elicited a remarkable response from Nebuchadnezzar.

a. *Nebuchadnezzar’s adoration (2:46-47)*

2:46. That “Nebuchadnezzar bowed down with his face to the ground” before Daniel is an act almost too incredible to believe for a Babylonian king. The text also says that Nebuchadnezzar “paid homage to Daniel,” not that he worshipped Daniel but that he saw Daniel as God’s representative and appropriately honored him as such. Notice that the next verse emphasizes the king’s adoration for Daniel’s God.

2:47. Nebuchadnezzar does not mention the name of Daniel’s God, but he does say “your God is a God of gods.” The expression “God of gods” (“*’ēlāh ’ēlāhîn*”) is a Semitic superlative expression equivalent to “the greatest god of all.” Furthermore, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges that He is the “Lord of kings,” i.e., greater than all kings (himself included). We must understand that Nebuchadnezzar is not confessing a personal faith in God. As a polytheist, he could say this. While this does amount to an acknowledgment that Daniel’s God is supreme, it is not the same as saying that his God is the only one. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar remained in spiritual darkness and without eternal life.

b. *Daniel’s rewards (2:48)*

2:48. Nebuchadnezzar was faithful to his promise (recall 2:6) and appropriately rewarded Daniel. In addition to certain gifts, Daniel was granted “authority over the entire province of Babylon” (probably meaning the province that included the capital city of Babylon). This is astonishing for two reasons: (1) Daniel is obviously still a young man at this point; and (2) he was one of the Jewish exiles (a foreigner) that was probably despised by many. In the

years to come--while Daniel still held his high position--there would be two more exiles of the Jewish people (in 597 BC and again in 586 BC). In the sovereignty of God, Daniel was already in a high place of authority to have had a significant role in the handling of these exiles (and that by God's grace).

Daniel was also elevated over the other wise men of Babylon as the "main prefect" (Aram *rab-signîn*). He had authority over them, although he did not need to resort to their occult practices.

c. Daniel's loyalty to his friends (2:49)

Daniel's request for his friends was granted by the king, and they were also given influential positions in "the administration of the province of Babylon." This reflects how unselfish Daniel was, as he remembered his spiritual brothers who had weathered the crisis with him. Daniel's new position called for him to live and work "in the king's court," which may imply that the other three served elsewhere.

B. God's Deliverance of Daniel's Three Friends Who Refuse to Worship the Image of Gold (3:1-30)

Daniel 3 is a wonderful testimony of God's power to deliver from the fiery furnace the three Hebrew young men who refused to compromise their worship of God. Yet it is more than a story of their faith, for this chapter also chronicles Nebuchadnezzar's own journey to faith in the God of heaven.

1. Nebuchadnezzar's decree demanding worship before the statue of gold (3:1-7)

In the previous chapter, Daniel had revealed to King Nebuchadnezzar that the statue he had seen in his dream was symbolic of a series of Gentile kingdoms that would precede the establishment of a unique kingdom set up by God Himself. Furthermore, the head of gold on the statue represented Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom of Babylon.

a. The making of the statue (3:1)

The statue that Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream is obviously the inspiration for the **golden statue** that he had made. (Some translations use the word "image" rather than statue, but the Aramaic term in Dan 3:1 is the same word translated "statue" in Dan 2.) Yet in the dream God intended the huge statue to communicate the message that He would ultimately judge and destroy the idol-worshipping empires. God did not instruct Nebuchadnezzar to erect a literal statue. That he took the initiative to have this done seems to be an act of pride on his behalf. True, the reference to him as the head of gold and the king of kings in Daniel 2:37-38 did portray him in an exalted manner, yet the making of the statue was an egotistical attempt to glorify himself. Seen in this light, the requirement to worship before the statue more likely represented a loyalty check for the king's subjects than a promotion of idolatry (this was not just a mere idol!).

Most likely the statue was gold-plated rather than being solid gold (cf. the “bronze altar” in Exod 38:30, which in light of Exod 27:1-2 was only overlaid with bronze). Although its height of “ninety feet” would have made it quite imposing, this is not beyond reason. At roughly 104 feet (31.7 meters), the Colossus at Rhodes (a bronze statue of the sun god Helios) was even higher. The statue is said to have been erected in the plain of Dura. The precise location of Dura is unknown today, although some scholars have attempted to link it with some mounds known as *Tolul Dura* about 12 miles (19.3 km) from the ancient site of Babylon.

b. The dedication of the statue (3:2-3)

Not only did Nebuchadnezzar order the construction of this gold statue, but he also called for a special dedication ceremony following its completion. All the top government officials of the kingdom were present for the occasion (although the absence of Daniel’s name in this chapter leaves open the possibility that he was not there). This included the “satraps” (a Persian loanword meaning protector of the realm), apparently the rulers over the primary provinces of the empire who reported directly to Nebuchadnezzar. The list of officials in verse 3 reflects that virtually every dignitary of the land was in attendance.

c. The king's decree (3:4-6)

3:4-5. Once the royal officials were all assembled, the “herald” loudly proclaimed the king’s command that everyone was to obey upon hearing the music. The sound of musical instruments was to be the signal to “bow down” before the image. The precise identification of these instruments is still a matter of debate, although many of them are obviously Greek loanwords. This observation, however, should not lead to the conclusion that Daniel had to have been written late (after the conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC). Greek musical instruments and their names could have spread to the Orient long before Alexander, e.g., through mercenaries and Greeks being sold as slaves.

After hearing the instruments, all the subjects were to bow down. Then they were to “pay homage” (Aram *ségid*) to the image. This term may only mean to “pay homage,” (the same term was used in Dan 2:46 when Nebuchadnezzar “did homage” to Daniel). In certain contexts, however, it can have implications of *worship*. In Daniel 3:28, for instance, this same word is used in conjunction with “serve” (Aram *p^elah*), a term having connotations of *worship*. Hence, to obey the king’s command would have been tantamount to idolatrous worship, a clear violation of the first two of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-6).

3:6. Those who refused to do so faced a certain death in a “furnace of blazing fire” (cf. Jer 29:21-22). Furnaces for manufacturing bricks (kilns) have been used in Babylonia from ancient times. Since temperatures in these kilns could reach as high as one thousand degrees centigrade, the thought of being cast into one would have been terrifying.

d. The compliance with the king’s command (3:7)

The music would have heightened and intensified the emotions on this occasion, deadening one's ability to think clearly. The crowd dynamic would have also been compelling, such that the masses readily obeyed the king's command. In light of verse 12, however, Daniel's friends remained true to the LORD and did not submit. They were not willing to compromise their faith in the LORD God, even if it meant their own martyrdom. Their action would bring a further testing of their faith.

2. The Jews are accused of defying the king's orders (3:8-12)

The choice of Daniel's friends to disobey the king's order did not go unnoticed, and certain enemies quickly seized the opportunity to land them in trouble.

a. *The accusers (3:8)*

Although the term "Chaldeans" is sometimes used in an ethnic sense (cf. Dan 5:30), the close relationship between chapters two and three would argue that the term should have the same meaning here as it did in Daniel 2:2, namely, that of experts and priests in the Babylonian religion. Despite the fact that Daniel and his friends had been something of saviors to the *wise men* of Babylon, there was probably still a lingering resentment at these foreigners who had been appointed over them. The Chaldeans had been made to look foolish and impotent when their occult tactics could not help them identify the king's dream and interpretation. Hence, in an act of revenge, they brought "malicious accusations" against these Jews (cf. Est 3:8).

b. *Recollection of the king's edict (3:9-11)*

Before stating their specific charges, the accusers first reminded the king of his own edict. The words, "O King, live forever," would have been standard court protocol, probably having little sincerity behind it (yet still flattering to the king). Verses 10-11 then repeat the king's edict and the penalty for transgressors as uttered previously by the herald in Daniel 3:5-6.

c. *The charges against the Jews (3:12)*

The accusers pointed out that it was "Jewish men" that violated the king's edict, though their ethnic origin was beside the point. In doing so, their prejudice against this unique people is exposed. (Ultimately it is Satan's hatred of the people of God that stands behind their attitude, knowing that Messiah Jesus would come from this line.) The Chaldeans also reminded the king that he himself had graciously given the Jews their positions in his administration, so as to make them appear unappreciative and rebellious. Of the three charges brought against the Jews, only the latter two were true. Not only had they shown proper respect for the king, but they had sought to be respectful to all those in authority over them (note Dan 1:8, 12-13; 2:37, 49). Their disobedience to the king's edict was a case of obeying God rather than man (cf. Acts 4:19-20).

3. Nebuchadnezzar's angry interrogation of Daniel's three friends (3:13-18)

Not surprisingly, Nebuchadnezzar was furious at hearing that some of his subjects had defied his orders. The three Jews are immediately brought in for questioning before the king.

a. *Nebuchadnezzar's interrogation (3:13-15)*

Being in a “fit of rage,” Nebuchadnezzar was in no frame of mind to think clearly and make rational decisions. His pride fueled his anger, for he would naturally assume that they were maliciously defying his authority. That he does not immediately have them killed but gives them an opportunity to escape the punishment by bowing to the image may be due to: (1) his remembrance of his original evaluation of them (1:19-20); and (2) his esteem for Daniel who had requested their special appointment (2:48-49). Whatever consideration he may have had, however, is overshadowed by his arrogance: “who is that god who can rescue you from my power?” (v 15). In saying this, the king reveals that he has not yet come to grips with the power of the God of heaven--so superior to the gods of Babylon--who had given him the dream.

b. *The courage and faith of Daniel's three friends (3:16-18)*

3:16. Their response, “we do not need to give you a reply concerning this,” should not be construed as disrespectful. They were not trying to make excuses for themselves or be deceptive. They had made their decision bravely and in faith, and now they were ready to stand behind it, even if it meant the loss of their lives.

3:17. Much discussion has been given to the proper translation and interpretation of verse 17. Their use of a conditional statement about God did not imply any question on their part about His existence or power to deliver. Their choice of words seems intentionally made to correspond to the king's own words in verse 15. If there was any question, it was not about God's **power**, but whether or not His rescue of them might suit **His purposes**. They did not know the answer to this question, but they did affirm that God could deliver them should He wish to do so.

3:18. Since they did not know what the LORD might do in their case, they went on to say that even if God would choose not to deliver them, they would remain faithful to Him and not serve Nebuchadnezzar's gods or worship his statue. Their desire to remain faithful to their Lord prompted them to prefer death to saving themselves at the expense of being disloyal to God.

4. *Nebuchadnezzar's wrathful order to throw the three into the furnace (3:19-23)*

These verses describe how the king angrily followed through on having the three Hebrews thrown into a blazing furnace.

a. *The king's furious reaction (3:19-20)*

Nebuchadnezzar, a man prone to anger and often reacting irrationally (recall 2:12-13), now explodes in uncontrolled anger at what he perceives as complete insubordination by the three Hebrew youth. Even his facial expression is altered. Ironically, they would not bow to the king's image (Aram *šēlēm*), and as a result the king's “disposition” or facial image (*šēlēm*) was changed. Consequently the king ordered the furnace heated “seven times hotter” than was customary. Furthermore, “strong soldiers” (literally, valiant warriors) were brought in to carry

out the task of tossing the Hebrews into the furnace. In having the furnace over-heated and having special soldiers to carry out the execution, the king sought to send a message that his will was not to be defied.

b. The three youth cast into the furnace (3:21-23)

Several times the text reminds us that the three Hebrews were “tied up,” assuring us that they were unable to save themselves (vv 20, 21, 23 and 24). In contrast to the helplessness of these Hebrews stands the mighty soldiers specially brought in for this occasion. How ironic then that the fire of the furnace does no harm to the Hebrews who are bound, whereas Babylon’s troops are destroyed by the fire without being bound and without even entering the furnace. This contrast serves to magnify God’s power to deliver His servants.

3:21. Verse 21 calls attention to the fact that the Hebrews went into the blazing furnace fully clothed. Such items of clothing would normally have caught fire immediately. That they did not highlights the miraculous nature of the event.

3:22-23. Although we are not given a description of the furnace involved, it apparently had a door near the top, because verse 23 indicates that the three Hebrew youth fell into the midst of the furnace. This implies that the soldiers themselves had to get near the furnace door in order to be able to push the Hebrews in. Not being accustomed to a furnace heated this hot, they underestimated the danger of the flames and thus were killed in the process. The point of this verse, then, is to demonstrate that this fire--so hot that it would even kill the executioners--would certainly have killed any victims cast into it, and thus only a true miracle can account for the fact that the Hebrews survived.

In the Greek Septuagint translation of Daniel, extra verses are added following verse 23, but these additions were made subsequent to the original writing of Daniel and should not be viewed as Scripture. These verses form part of what is called the Apocrypha.⁴

5. God’s divine protection upon the three in the furnace (3:24-27)

a. Nebuchadnezzar’s horrified response (3:24-26a)

Perhaps the furnace had some type of lower door in addition to an upper one, because the king was able to see inside. As he peered in, instead of seeing three charred bodies, he saw “four men” (instead of three) who were “untied and walking around.” The identity of the fourth individual is not revealed, but he is described as “like that of a god.” Regardless of his true identity, the correct translation is “like a son of the gods” (NASB, NIV). In the Aramaic text the plural form *’ēlāhîn* should be translated “gods,” not “god.” (Although in Hebrew the plural form *’ēlōhîm* can mean either God or gods, the same phenomenon does not hold true in biblical Aramaic. If the singular “god” had been meant, the text would have used a singular form (*’ēlāh*), as in Dan 2:47 and 3:26.)

⁴ There are three lengthy additions to chapter three found in the LXX comprising about 67 verses: (1) The Prayer of Azariah; (2) a prose account of the intervention of the angel; and (3) The Song of the Three Young Men.

Yet who is this fourth individual? In Daniel 3:28 Nebuchadnezzar calls him an “angel” that had been sent by God, though of course his perception was not necessarily correct. This may only mean that he regarded him as some sort of divine being or divine agent. Some would consider the fourth individual to be “the Angel of the Lord,” and possibly a visible appearance of God, i.e., a theophany (cf. Josh 5:13-15). Throughout most of church history, he has been understood as the preincarnate Christ, and this is probably correct. Christ appeared in Daniel 2 as the “stone” that struck the statue in preparation for the kingdom of heaven (cf. Dan 7:13-14), and it makes sense that He would defend these Hebrews who sought to be true to Him in the face of Nebuchadnezzar's distortion of the statue. By calling their God “the most high God” (Dan 3:26), Nebuchadnezzar was not disavowing his own deities but acknowledging the exalted status of the God of the Hebrews.

b. Their emergence from the furnace (3:26b-27)

The text is very careful to point out such details as their hair not being singed, their clothing not being damaged and there not being any smell of smoke as evidence of the miraculous nature of their deliverance. The miracle of their survival was seen, not just by Nebuchadnezzar, but by the highest rulers and officials of the empire. Truly the God of Heaven was glorified by this.

6. Nebuchadnezzar's decree to honor the God of Heaven (3:28-30)

Before making a decree, Nebuchadnezzar personally acknowledged what had taken place.

a. Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgment (3:28)

In his response, Nebuchadnezzar referred to the God of the Hebrews in the singular: “Praised be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.” Although he himself still remained a polytheist, at least he understood that for the Hebrews, there was one and only one God (monotheism). He then credited this God with the miraculous rescue. We also see that their faith had made a deep impression upon the king, for he remarks that they had “trusted in him.” He also took note of their courage and dedication: they were willing to die for the sake of being obedient to their God, and they would not compromise on the matter of their worship for Him.

b. Nebuchadnezzar's decree (3:29)

He did not forbid his subjects to worship their Babylonian deities, but they were not allowed to utter malicious statements (perhaps blasphemies) about “the god of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.” In his decree, he also testified that there was “no other god” who could deliver in the way that this God had done.

c. Exaltation of the three Hebrews (3:30)

Lastly, the three Hebrews were promoted, which would certainly have included a restoration to their former positions (cf. 2:49). This could have included material reward as well. Hence, they continued as prominent officials in the empire.

C. God’s Humbling of Nebuchadnezzar, to Whom Is Revealed the Dream of the Great Tree (4:1-37)

Daniel 4 is one of the Bible’s greatest lessons about pride, particularly for those who look at their own accomplishments and give themselves all the credit. This is also the final chapter within Daniel dealing with King Nebuchadnezzar. God humbles him severely, and yet he recovers to give praise to the God of Heaven. Critical scholars have universally denied the historicity of this chapter, insisting that nothing like this ever happened to Nebuchadnezzar. Yet most of the written records for Nebuchadnezzar’s lengthy reign are missing, so the absence of documentation from extra-biblical sources is not proof to the contrary. Even more astonishing is the fact that a Babylonian king would be so humble as to publicly confess this story. This suggests that his motive was to glorify the true God of Heaven who had dealt so mercifully with him, which strongly implies that he himself had come to true faith in this God. The witness of Daniel to this famous king finally bore fruit!

1. An introduction to Nebuchadnezzar’s decree made after his humbling (4:1-3)

Verses 1-3 are in the form of a decree that Nebuchadnezzar made to his subjects, with verse one being a “standard introductory greeting” (cf. Dan 6:25). Since the latter part of Daniel 4:3 is so strikingly similar to Daniel 4:34, we can conclude that this decree was actually uttered **following** the events of this chapter rather than before (flashback technique).

4:1-2. The words “I am delighted to tell you” suggest that he was personally motivated to reveal his experience, because He had come to appreciate the God who had been merciful to him. The expression “signs and wonders,” though involving miraculous deeds of God, probably has in mind the distressing discipline that God had brought upon Nebuchadnezzar, just as it did when God brought the plagues (also called “signs and wonders”) upon Pharaoh to coerce him into yielding to God’s will (cf. Exod 7:3; Deut 6:22). This is what it took to bring Nebuchadnezzar to his knees and in the final analysis to authentic worship of God.

4:3. Though Nebuchadnezzar had sought to build one of the world’s greatest kingdoms, he had failed to see his kingdom in proper perspective with God’s kingdom. What he says about the eternity of God’s kingdom in verse 3 is strikingly similar to what is recorded in Psalm 145:10-13, perhaps even suggesting that he was familiar with this Davidic psalm. Very possibly Daniel, in an attempt to minister to the ailing king, could have shared this Psalm with him. In any case, Nebuchadnezzar’s comments about “His kingdom” must be seen in light of Daniel 2:44. The LORD had a plan to establish His own kingdom after the Gentile kingdoms had run their course, and history centers on God’s kingdom, not Nebuchadnezzar’s. The king was finally beginning to comprehend this great truth.

2. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and the search for an interpreter (4:4-9)

This paragraph has certain affinities with Daniel 2: the king has a troubling dream and then turns to the wise men of Babylon for help. Yet there are differences: the king relates the content of the dream (only asking for the interpretation), and Daniel is brought in to explain the dream after the other wise men fail to do so.

a. *The reception of the dream (4:4-5)*

The king's initial condition was one of relaxing in his home and living luxuriously. This was probably at a point in his career when he had succeeded in military conquests, his kingdom had become stable, material riches were flowing into his treasury, and he was enjoying the fruits of his many building projects for which he would become famous. All of this only served to give him a false sense of security, and the comment that the dream "frightened" him and was "terrifying" him shows that God was now going to shake up his idyllic world.

b. *The appearance of the Babylonian wise men (4:6-7)*

As noted in chapter two, the Babylonians commonly sought interpretations to their dreams, and the royal court was full of experts who specialized in the interpretation of dreams (for which dream manuals had been carefully composed). Thus it is not surprising that the king (v 6) issued a command for "the wise men of Babylon" to be brought in, though it may seem strange that the king did not immediately call for Daniel.

c. *The appearance of Daniel before the king (4:8-9)*

4:8. Eventually Daniel appeared before the king, and the opening words of verse 8 suggest that there was a delay in his coming (though for what reason we are not told). Possibly he was delayed by God Himself, so as to purposely allow the wise men the first opportunity (thereby exposing how bankrupt the occult system on which they relied was). Their inability to give an interpretation would therefore result in Daniel's interpretation making an even greater impact upon the king.

Verse 8 reminds us that Daniel's pagan name, Belteshazzar, was related to Babylonian deities (namely, the god Bel). Yet the events of this chapter serve to vindicate Daniel, and show that he derives nothing from Bel. Furthermore, the king viewed Daniel as having "a spirit of the holy gods" (the Aramaic term for "god" is correctly translated in the plural). The king appraised Daniel as someone having a sort of divine spirit within him (hence, very spiritual). Nebuchadnezzar could not correctly explain Daniel's unique ability, but he was sure Daniel had divine help.

4:9. In conceding that "no mystery baffles" Daniel, the king deliberately used the same word for "mystery" as Daniel had used in 2:27 when he introduced his interpretation to the king. This suggests that the king did indeed clearly remember the previous experiences of Daniel 2.

3. Nebuchadnezzar's disclosure of the dream to Daniel (4:10-18)

According to verse 7, the king had related the contents of the dream once already to the other wise men. Subsequently he related it to Daniel personally, and it is recorded at this point in the narrative.

a. *The bountiful tree (4:10-12)*

The dream contained two basic aspects. The first was the bountiful tree, and the second was the misfortune that happened to it. The tree represents both Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom (note v 22: “It is you, O King”). However, the leaving of a stump indicates that his kingdom would not be completely cut off (see v 26). Hence, the symbolism is fluid enough to pertain to both the king and the kingdom over which he ruled.

4:10. The idea of a tree being symbolic of a kingdom is attested elsewhere in the OT (cf. Ezek 31:3, 5-6; Isa 2:12-13). The tree thus symbolizes the extensiveness of the kingdom and those who rely on it and benefit from it (cf. Matt 13:31-32). Its central location (“in the middle of the land”) reflects its position of supreme importance to the rest of the earth.

4:11. Hyperbolic language is used to describe the tree’s height (“reached far into the sky”) and visibility (“could be seen far from the borders”). This depicts the kingdom at its greatest expansion during the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s rule.

4:12. In some sense, this kingdom was not only blessed but a blessing to many (i.e., before God’s disciplined Nebuchadnezzar). This is depicted by the “attractive foliage” and “plentiful fruit” that it afforded to many. The shade it provided looks at the protection and security it gave to those who submitted to her authority. In light of Jeremiah 27:6-8, the reference to **wild animals** may refer to the lesser countries and territories that were brought under the Babylonian kingdom.

b. *God’s judgment against “the tree” (4:13-17)*

Beginning in verse 13, the mood of the dream shifts from thoughts of blessing to that of judgment.

4:13. The expression “holy sentinel” (*NASB*: “an angelic watcher, a holy one”) is related to the Hebrew verb *’ir*, meaning to awake or arouse oneself. One who could keep himself awake was suitable to be a watcher or sentinel. In the literature of the intertestamental period (e.g., the Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran cave one) this was a common term for an angel, and that is the meaning it has here. Furthermore verse 13 specifies that the figure “came down from heaven,” and understandably the Old Greek version of the LXX translated the term as “angel.” Since he is “holy,” this is a good angel from God who is used to announce the judgment.

4:14. That he “called out loudly” reflects the divine authority with which he spoke. To “chop down the tree” and harm its branches, leaves, and fruit obviously speaks of judgment, and this is probably what would have frightened the king into thinking that evil was about to befall him. Since we lack sufficient historical records, we do not know for sure what disruption there

might have been to his kingdom when God disciplined him (though the text seems to hint in this direction).

4:15a. That “its taproot” was left in the ground indicates that the divine judgment would not be complete and irreversible. That is, the tree still had the potential to return to its flourishing state once again, allowing a ray of hope for Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom. The purpose of the “band of iron and bronze” is not clear in verse 15, but most likely signified some sort of protection put on the kingdom while the king himself was made unfit to rule.

4:15b-16. The shift of imagery from a tree to that of an animal-like creature pertains to Nebuchadnezzar himself. His mind (literally, heart) would be changed from that of a man to that of an animal. His heart (including his mental reasoning) was the very source of his pride, and it is there that God touched him!

The length of punishment is prescribed in verse 16 as “seven periods of time.” The words “periods of time” is a translation of the one Aramaic word *'iddānîn* (in the plural). Admittedly, *'iddān* can be used in a general sense for “time,” but it can also be used of a definite period of time such as a year, and that is the most likely meaning in verse 16. In fact, the Old Greek version of the LXX even translated this “seven years,” and the Jewish historian Josephus interpreted this as “seven years” (*Ant.*, X.10.6). The same word appears in Daniel 7:25 (“time, times, half a time”), where it undoubtedly refers to a period of three and a half years. Hence, Nebuchadnezzar's time of discipline was to last for seven years.

4:17. The decision to judge Nebuchadnezzar is by “the decree of the sentinels and the holy ones.” Used in parallel construction, these terms are equivalent. These are also the same terms as those in verse 13, though now expressed in the plural. This seems to refer to an angelic council that stood before the LORD God (cf. Gen 1:26; Ps 82:1; 1 Kgs 22:18-23; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). In light of the latter part of verse 17, the decision was apparently God’s (He is the One who bestows kingship), and the angels concurred with the divine decree.

The decision to bring judgment was meant to teach a two-fold lesson. First, “the Most High has authority over human kingdoms, and he bestows them on whomever he wishes.” Hence, Nebuchadnezzar needed to humble himself before the One who granted him the authority to rule. Second, “He establishes over them the lowliest of human beings.” The word “lowliest” in this context does not mean the most unworthy, but the most **humble**, a virtue the Lord cherishes (cf. Ps 138:6). The verb “establishes” (*y^eqîm*) could also be translated “He will establish,” in the English future tense rather than the present. (The Aramaic *imperfect tense* can be translated either way.) Yet the future tense makes better sense. To translate it in the present tense makes the sentence sound like a general principle, but it is not generally true that God sets humble people over kingdoms. Translating it in the future tense indicates that God will establish a ruler over the realm of mankind in the future who is indeed the lowliest of men, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Zech 9:9-10; Mt 11:29; Phil 2:8). Daniel 7:13-14 provides a glimpse ahead to the time when Jesus will be made ruler over all.

c. *Nebuchadnezzar’s instruction to Daniel (4:18)*

The main lesson of the dream in verse 17, which Nebuchadnezzar himself stated, was already apparent and needed no interpretation. The symbolism of the tree and the animal-like behavior, however, did need interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar readily admitted that the Babylonian wise men were unable to help, whereas Daniel could.

4. Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (4:19-27)

This paragraph has three parts: the first (v 19) records Daniel's initial reaction of shock upon hearing the dream; the second (vv 20-26) is the actual interpretation of the dream; and the third (v 27) is Daniel's advice for the king in light of what has been predicted.

a. *Daniel's initial reaction of shock (4:19)*

Initially, Daniel's "thoughts were alarming him." The word translated "alarming" means that Daniel was *frightened* by what he had heard. Daniel personally cared about the king, and thus any misfortune for the king was a real concern to Daniel. Hence, Daniel comforted Nebuchadnezzar in this critical moment by showing him respect. First, Daniel called him "sir," acknowledging his loyalty to him. Second, he told the king that he wished the dream and its interpretation were for the king's **enemies**.

b. *The interpretation part I: Nebuchadnezzar's prior blessedness (4:20-22)*

Verses 20-21 are essentially a repetition of verses 10-12. In verse 22, however, he gives the interpretation of what the tree signifies: "it is you, O king!" God had allowed Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom to expand, so that (figuratively) it "reaches to heaven." This depicts Nebuchadnezzar at the peak of his political power, dominating the world scene. Truly it was a great kingdom to rule over, and Nebuchadnezzar was very blessed. God reminded him of this, so that he would realize what was being taken away from him, and that the Lord was the one who controlled human kingdoms and rulers.

c. *The interpretation part II: seven years of judgment (4:23-25)*

4:23-24. Daniel restates part of the dream in verse 23 (recalling vv 13-14) and then provides interpretation in verses 24-25. Verse 24 indicates that the judgment is a "decision of the Most High." This is not a contradiction with verse 17, where the decision was by the watchers/holy ones (i.e., holy angels). God (the Most High) issued the decree, and the holy angels affirmed and announced it.

4:25. The king had behaved **bestly**, so God's judgment was for him to live like a beast until he learned his lesson. He was to be "driven from human society" and dwell among "the wild animals." (See explanation in Dan 4:33.) He would even behave like a wild animal, being "fed grass" (or perhaps herbage/vegetation). Becoming "damp with the dew of the sky" probably indicates that he would spend his nights out in the fields, and as a result be covered with dew by morning. Though he would remain in this state for seven years (recall v 16), his punishment would continue until he recognized that the Most High exercised rule over human kingdoms and had the right to give it to whomever He wanted.

d. *The interpretation part III: future grace (4:26)*

The fact that the tree is not **completely** removed gives hope of a restoration in the future when the punishment would be over with. This was a word of grace, for his kingdom would endure (i.e., it would stay intact during the time of discipline). Once he recognized that it is heaven (i.e., the Lord God of Heaven) that rules, he would be restored to his kingly position. Perhaps one of his sons ruled over the country during his absence (cf. Jer 52:31-32 concerning Evil-Merodach).

e. *Daniel's advice for the king (4:27)*

Out of compassion, Daniel advised the king to “break away” from his sins. The verb translated “break away” (Aram *p^eruq*) has a counterpart in the Hebrew verb *pāraq*, whose fundamental meaning is separating from (Gen 27:40; Exod 32:2). Daniel is thus urging the king to **cease** from the sins he had been doing (not to atone for his sins, as some scholars have suggested). Furthermore, the king should break from his sins by dealing righteously (i.e., with the subjects of his kingdom). Rather than afflicting the poor (a word also meaning oppressed), he should show mercy to them. Nebuchadnezzar, in all his zeal to build massive structures, had harshly oppressed many people--using them as cheap labor and paying only meager wages--while he himself enjoyed a luxurious palace. Keenly aware of these social injustices, Daniel beckoned the king to change all this by being merciful to his subjects. Though not an absolute guarantee, the final words “perhaps your prosperity will be prolonged” suggested the king could see blessing restored to him (perhaps even averted altogether if he truly repented).

5. Nebuchadnezzar's pride and the fulfillment of the dream (4:28-33)

Twelve months later, the words of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar came true.

a. *Nebuchadnezzar's prideful boasting (4:28-30)*

4:28-29. Daniel had expressed hope for the king, provided that he truly repented (v 27). God had given the king “twelve months” in which to repent and acknowledge the God of the Bible as the true ruler of mankind. Unfortunately, the king did not avail himself of God's grace, and let the opportunity pass him by.

4:30. Babylon was indeed a spectacular architectural achievement, and Nebuchadnezzar had overseen its rise to fame.⁵ Yet his heart evidenced pride in at least three ways. First, he claimed that Babylon was built as “a royal residence,” as though the city was primarily for his own personal benefit and luxury. He should have seen himself as a servant to his people. Second, he claimed to have built it by his “own mighty strength,” when in reality it was built by the painful sweat of his subjects, many of whom were slave labor and foreign captives. Nevertheless he took credit for its accomplishment. Third, he saw the city's purpose as being for his “majestic honor,” as though it was there for his glory.

⁵ For further insight about the historic site of Babylon, see J. Paul Tanner, “Ancient Babylon: From Gradual Demise to Archaeological Rediscovery,” *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin* 47 (2002): 11-20.

b. *God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar (4:31-33)*

4:31. God chose the very moment that Nebuchadnezzar was pridefully singing his own praises to let judgment fall. Before any change in his behavior occurred, God first sent a divine revelation as a “voice came down from heaven.” By so doing, Nebuchadnezzar would clearly understand that Daniel's God did not bluff, and this judgment was his own fault.

4:32-33. For seven years (see notes for v 16), the king was to live and behave like “the wild animals.” There is a mental disorder known as *zoanthropy* in which a patient imagines himself to be a beast and acts like one. More specifically, this could be called *boanthropy*, in which the one afflicted behaves like an ox. In one sense, this state was temporal, but it was also conditional, for it would not be lifted until he recognized that the God “Most High” was the **true** ruler over mankind and was the One to bestow the right of ruling on whomever He wished.

6. Nebuchadnezzar's restoration and humble praise for God (4:34-37)

The king's mental disorder did not last indefinitely, and he was restored after confessing the lesson that God had intended him to learn. This was grace because Belshazzar's pride was judged immediately and he was never restored to office, as we will see in Daniel 5.

a. *Nebuchadnezzar's restoration (4:34-36)*

4:34a. Despite the humiliation he endured and the deranged mind he must have experienced, Nebuchadnezzar still retained a measure of sanity, for the text tells us that he “looked up toward heaven.” The emphasis is not upon the direction of his glance, but upon his change of heart. This would imply that he humbly sought the true God of Heaven and his mercy. That he “extolled,” “praised and glorified” the Most High reflects the newfound joy of heart that now replaced his pride. This is reasonable evidence that he himself became a true believer in Daniel's God and will be found among the saints of heaven.

4:34b-35. These verses evidence that Nebuchadnezzar did meet the stipulations for his restoration laid down in Daniel 4:32, namely, that he acknowledge the Most High as ruler over human governments and the One who decides those who are to rule on earth. When Nebuchadnezzar said, “his authority is an everlasting authority, and his kingdom extends from one generation to the next,” he was confessing how temporal his own kingdom was in light of God's eternal rule over human government. He and all other earth-dwellers were as “nothing” compared to God. Rather, “He does as he wishes,” implying that God can bestow rule on whomever He wishes. The “army of heaven” is in contrast to “those who inhabit the earth,” and thus a reference to the angelic forces that have access to heaven. No one, whether human or angel, has the right to question God in what He does.

4:36. Not only did Nebuchadnezzar gain a joyful heart of praise, but God restored his sanity. For the honor of his kingdom, his majesty and splendor returned to him (v 36). This may look at his kingly dignity and respect in the eyes of others, but not to become an occasion again for prideful self-exaltation. Verse 36 closes by pointing out that Nebuchadnezzar became even

“greater than before.” This seems reminiscent of Job's experience (cf. Job 42:12). This also teaches us something very important about the *grace* and the *goodness of God*. He is incredibly enthusiastic about bestowing grace. Yes, He may discipline us and take us through fiery trials that He deems necessary, but in the end He longs to shower us with tokens of His goodness.

b. *Conclusion (4:37)*

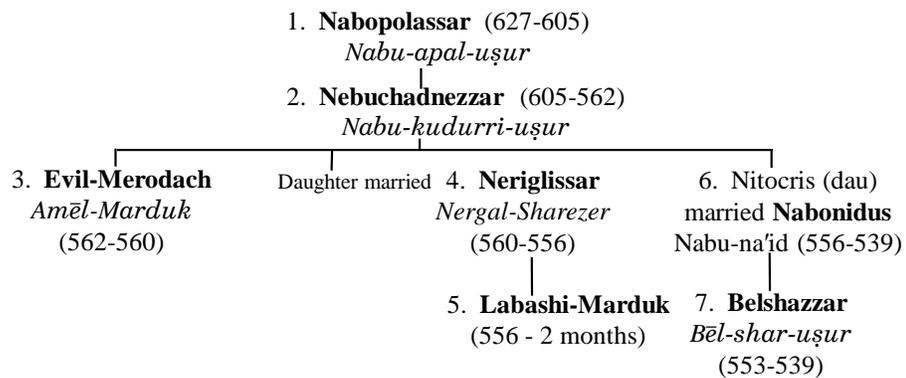
In this touching finale, Nebuchadnezzar praised, exalted, and glorified the King of heaven, making clear that he had learned whom the true King was... the LORD God of heaven! Furthermore, he confessed that he had learned the main lesson: “He is able to bring down those who live in pride,” and He is right in doing so. Notice carefully that this chapter does not simply teach that pride is wrong, but that God **humbles** the proud.

D. God’s Humbling of Belshazzar, to Whom Is Revealed the Handwriting on the Wall (5:1-30)

Daniel 4 revealed the divine humbling of Babylon’s most famous king, Nebuchadnezzar. Correspondingly, chapter five reveals the divine humbling of Babylon’s last king to sit on the throne. In the latter case, however, no grace is given. Belshazzar’s blasphemous insolence was not to be tolerated!

Historically, at least twenty-three years have passed since Nebuchadnezzar’s death in 562 BC and Belshazzar’s feast in 539 BC. Furthermore, we know from extra-biblical sources that Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar and that he was a coruler with his father, Nabonidus. Historical sources also inform us that Nabonidus spent a number of years away from Babylon in both Harran and Taima of Arabia, while Belshazzar ruled in Babylon itself. However, Nabonidus did return to the area, when the Medo-Persian armies under the command of Cyrus began their assault on the kingdom of Babylonia. Shortly before Belshazzar’s feast, the nearby cities of

Sippar and Akkad had already fallen to Cyrus, and Nabonidus had to flee. Belshazzar, however, felt secure behind Babylon’s massive walls, thinking (falsely) that he could outlast any siege against him.



1. Belshazzar’s insolence at the feast (5:1-4)

a. *Belshazzar's feast (5:1)*

In light of the historical comments above, the “great banquet” held by Belshazzar took place while Persian King Cyrus was already in the process of attacking Babylonia. The ancient historians Herodotus and Xenophon both report that the Babylonians were celebrating a festival and drinking wildly this night. Whether they did so in mockery of the Medo-Persians or because this particular night corresponded with one of their regular festival days is not clear. (Herodotus [*Histories*, 1.191] simply indicates that “they were engaged in a festival.”) In light of Cyrus’ victory over the nearby city of Sippar (80 km to the north), it may be that Belshazzar called for the banquet to boost morale and flaunt the threat of the enemy.

b. *The sacrilegious use of the temple vessels (5:2-4)*

5:2. Some 66 years earlier, Belshazzar’s grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had removed a number of precious “gold and silver vessels” from the temple in Jerusalem (see Dan 1:2). Since these were used for drinking purposes, they were probably some type of goblet. Belshazzar obviously knew about these utensils, and no doubt he knew something about the history of the Jewish exile and the worship of the God of these captives. We can probably assume he knew something about Nebuchadnezzar’s public testimony of faith (recall 4:1-3, 37) and about the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter two containing the prediction that Babylon would be overthrown by another kingdom (Dan 2:39). In this light, it seems that he purposely had these sacred vessels brought out to make a point that he personally scoffed at these matters, so as to convey that the attacking Medes and Persians need not be feared.

5:3-4. To have used these vessels for any purpose would have been inappropriate, but that they “drank from them” and praised “the gods of gold and silver” (probably a reference to Babylon’s false deities--which the Bible regards as nothing more than mere elements) in a drunken feast was an unthinkable sacrilege. What Belshazzar did was no innocent mistake. Rather, he was knowingly and openly defying the Most High God. Little did he realize that the LORD had already declared through Isaiah the prophet some 150 years earlier that He would bring Babylon down in judgment (see Isa 46:1-2; 47:1-15).

2. Belshazzar’s perplexity upon seeing the inscription (5:5-9)

a. *The inscription written on the wall (5:5-6)*

Miraculously, God caused a human hand to appear that wrote letters on the wall of the palace. “Opposite the lampstand” indicates *near* the lampstand, i.e., in the illumination of the lampstand. This would allow the best viewing by those in attendance. The king did not merely see the letters on the wall, but also the hand that wrote them. Significantly, this symbolized that the life-breath and ways of the king were **in the hand** of God (note 5:23-24), and thus to Him alone was Belshazzar accountable. Because Belshazzar mocked and derided the true King, the hand spelled out the judgment that awaited him. Seeing this spectacle completely unnerved the king.

b. *The Babylonian wise men summoned (5:7-9)*

5:7. For the third time in this book, a Babylonian king is stupefied by an act of God and turns for help first to the wise men of the court, the practitioners of the Babylonian occult system. A three-fold reward is offered the person who could explain the inscription. Purple was a color of royalty in antiquity, and thus signified great elevation in status. The “golden collar” (or neck ornament) probably represented a special distinction in Babylonian culture. The third aspect, to be “third ruler in the kingdom,” was an offer to be promoted to the third highest position in the kingdom, namely, just after Nabonidus and Belshazzar.

5:8-9. Despite the lure of such a prized reward, none of the wise men were able to make sense of the writing. Why? First, even if these were Aramaic words (which both the Babylonians and the Hebrews understood), we do not know what script they were written in. Second (and more importantly), the real issue was the significance of the words. Seeing isolated words without a context would be extremely difficult to make sense of, as they did not even form a complete sentence. Most likely they did not have the vowel pointing, either, which further complicated one’s ability to make sense of it.

3. *The queen mother’s recommendation to call in Daniel (5:10-12)*

5:10. The **queen** that heard the noise and entered the banquet room is best understood as the *queen mother*. (The Aram term *malkâ* can mean either queen or queen mother.) Yet it is unclear whether this is the wife of Nebuchadnezzar (and thus the grandmother of Belshazzar)--so Josephus--or whether this is a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar named Nitocris who married Nabonidus (and thus the mother of Belshazzar). In either case she was familiar with Daniel and could tell the king about him.

5:11. Apparently Daniel did not appear with the other wise men when the king had summoned them (5:7). This is not surprising, since Daniel would have probably been a man in his eighties by this time (539 BC) and most likely no longer in active service. Yet the queen mother could point out that Daniel had within him “a spirit of the holy gods,” i.e., he was a spiritual man with some special connection to the deities (recall Dan 4:8). She was able to explain to Belshazzar what an importance position this Daniel held during Nebuchadnezzar’s reign and what surpassing abilities he had. (The word “father” can mean either one’s own father or grandfather, and in this context clearly means grandfather, i.e., Nebuchadnezzar.) Her introduction of Daniel may suggest that Belshazzar was not familiar with Daniel or the role that he had previously played at Babylon.

5:12. Once again in verse 12 the queen mother points out the excellent qualities possessed by Daniel that qualified him to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. She ends her counsel with the words, “now summon Daniel,” and in so doing purposely used his original name rather than his Babylonian name.

4. *Belshazzar’s offer to reward Daniel for interpreting (5:13-16)*

5:13. God used the queen mother’s testimony to spur Belshazzar to action, for he quickly had Daniel brought in. Interestingly, however, the first thing that Belshazzar comments on is the fact that Daniel had been “one of the captives of Judah,” a fact that she had not made reference to. Perhaps it was the recognition of Daniel’s Hebrew name (which was easily identifiable as a foreign name as well as having a connection with the God of the Hebrews) that enabled Belshazzar to identify him as one of the Jewish captives from Judah. The king was certainly aware--perhaps even anxious--that he was now talking face-to-face with a man (renowned for having a spirit of the gods) who represented the very deity whose temple vessels he had desecrated.

5:14-16. Belshazzar reiterated most of the report that the queen mother had made about Daniel. The king even acknowledged to Daniel that the wise men of the court had seen the inscription but had not been able to declare its interpretation (v 15). He then extended to Daniel the same offer of the three rewards that had previously been offered to the other wise men of Babylon. Although Daniel had received rewards in the past from the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (recall 2:48), the circumstances were now much different. The offer of rewards this time came from the lips of a king who deliberately mocked and ridiculed the God of glory.

5. Daniel’s response to Belshazzar (5:17-28)

The inscription on the wall was a message of judgment that was coming upon the Babylonian Empire at the hands of the Medes and Persians, and Daniel’s main task was to announce this. Yet he did more than unveil the meaning of the inscription. He also confronted Belshazzar’s arrogance. Here was an insolent king who mocked the true God of heaven, and in contrast to his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar, no grace was given him. He should have known of his grandfather’s experience and acted more prudently.

a. *Daniel’s confrontation of Belshazzar’s arrogance (5:17-24)*

5:17. At first glance, Daniel’s tone of voice may be thought of as being rude. Rather than being rude, however, Daniel was probably trying to be **clear** with the king: he was there only to speak the truth and refused the rewards, so that he would not be under any obligation that would interfere with him being less than truthful. The rewards offered him were certainly attractive, but at this stage of his life, Daniel could see the limited value these offered. He was not motivated by such earthly desires, especially as they came from a man who had belittled the God whom he loved and served.

5:18-21. Beginning in verse 18, Daniel turns the king’s attention to the consideration of God’s discipline for Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather. He indeed tasted of what it meant to have earthly greatness, even a kingdom of unrivaled power (cf. Jer 27:5-7). God had allowed Nebuchadnezzar to be an absolute monarch over many “peoples, nations, and language-groups,” doing virtually whatever he wished (v 20). Not surprisingly, Nebuchadnezzar had been carried away with pride in his own accomplishments, until God in His sovereignty stepped in to teach him the lesson that it is the Most High God that “rules over human kingdoms” and “appoints over them whomever he wishes.” In recounting Nebuchadnezzar’s time of insanity when he

lived among the wild animals of the field, verse 21 adds a detail not given in chapter four, namely, that he lived with the wild donkeys. These animals were known as being difficult to tame (cf. Job 39:5-8), which may suggest Nebuchadnezzar himself. As Daniel spoke about Nebuchadnezzar, the implication was apparent that Belshazzar was behaving the same way, and even worse. He had learned very little from history, and thus was foolishly taunting the very God who had the power to give him his kingdom and to remove him.

5:22-24. Daniel confronted Belshazzar with the fact that he knew these things about Nebuchadnezzar, but as his son (i.e., his descendant, here his grandson) he had “not humbled” himself. From historical sources, we know that Belshazzar served as a chief officer during the administration of King Neriglissar in 560 BC. Since this is only two years removed from the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s death in 562 BC, certainly he was at an age to have known about King Nebuchadnezzar. Furthermore, his own father Nabonidus had been an official in Nebuchadnezzar’s administration while living in Babylon. Belshazzar would certainly have remembered many details from this period of his life. He knew enough from Nebuchadnezzar’s experiences, but he did not act accordingly!

Furthermore, Belshazzar did not merely exalt himself, but he did so “against the Lord of heaven” (v 23). The word used for “Lord” in this verse is not the personal name of God, i.e., Yahweh, but the Aramaic word *mārē*, a term indicating both respect and high position of authority. In Daniel 4:21 Nebuchadnezzar had been referred to by this term, yet he was only a lord of the earthly kingdom of Babylon. Daniel’s God, in contrast, was “Lord of heaven.” The use of the phrase underscored the extent to which Belshazzar had overstepped his bounds and the majesty of the One whom he sought to defy. When Daniel confronts Belshazzar about his use of the vessels, he reminds the king that these were “the vessels from his temple.” Belshazzar’s sin was just about as offensive as one could commit. With these vessels, Belshazzar praised the gods made of various earthly materials (cf. Deut 4:28; Ps 115:4-8)--inanimate gods as it were--and in contrast did not glorify the God in whose hand was his breath, that is, the living/breathing God. This Lord of heaven controlled whether Belshazzar lived or died, and he also controlled his destiny. By his sacrilege, Belshazzar had brought upon himself the judgment of God that was about to fall that night.

b. Daniel’s explanation of the meaning of the inscription (5:25-28)

5:25-26. Having first confronted Belshazzar for defying God, Daniel now turns to explaining the inscription on the wall. He first pronounces the four words (v 25), each of which signified an aspect of the judgment about to fall on Belshazzar and his kingdom. The fourth word should be read “Pharsin” (NET Bible), not “Upharsin” as in some Bibles. The initial letter (“U”) is only a conjunction. Each of these four terms is taken up and explained in verses 26-27 by interpreting them in light of their related verb forms. The first term “MENE” is related to the verb *mēnâ*, meaning to number, count. So the interpretation of MENE is that “God has numbered” Belshazzar’s kingdom (i.e., the years of his reign) and has decided to put an end to it. The repetition of the word probably underscores the certainty of the matter (cf. Gen 41:32). Belshazzar would not be granted any additional time.

5:27. The third term, “TEQEL,” is related to the verb form *tēqal*, meaning to weigh. Belshazzar had been “weighed on the balances” of God and had been found **lacking** (or deficient). Consequently the God of justice had rejected him (cf. 1 Sam 2:3).

5:28. The fourth term, “PHARSIN,” is related to the verb form *pāras*, meaning to divide, break in two. However, this word is distinguished from the preceding terms, in that it appears in the plural form in verse 25 but in the singular form in verse 28. The author seems to be making a play-on-words with this term.

Belshazzar’s kingdom was going to be “divided” or broken (i.e., conquered). The conquerors would be “the Medes and Persians.” The word for “Persians,” however, is *pāras*, which also sounds similar to *pāras* (a paronomasia). Hence this final word “PHARSIN” is used to indicate both that Belshazzar’s kingdom would be divided (conquered) and that this would come at the hands of the Persians. (Although Babylon was conquered by the Medes and the Persians, the Persians were clearly the dominant partner, and historically their kingdom became known simply as the Persian Empire.)

6. The outcomes of Belshazzar’s feast (5:29-31)

a. *The end of Belshazzar’s reign (5:29-30)*

Despite Daniel’s refusal of Belshazzar’s rewards (v 17), the king still ordered him to be so honored. This may have been done in mockery of Daniel. Yet ironically Belshazzar was **killed** that very night (v 30). Belshazzar probably thought he was entirely secure behind the massive walls of Babylon, but that night (Oct 12, 539 BC) a general of Cyrus named Ugbaru (or Gobryas) took the city with hardly a battle.

Historically we know that Nabonidus (the father of Belshazzar), who had already been defeated in a previous battle, had sought refuge in the neighboring city of Borsippa. Belshazzar, however, remained in Babylon itself. We have numerous historical accounts of Babylon’s conquest, including (1) the Nabonidus Chronicle (see *ANET*, 305-07); (2) the Cyrus Cylinder (*ANET*, 315-16); (3) Herodotus’ *Histories* (fifth cent. BC); (4) Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* (ca. 434-355 BC); and (5) the writings of Berossus (a third cent. BC Babylonian priest and historian). According to Berossus, Cyrus did not execute Nabonidus but deported him to Carmania (cf. Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.20.153). On the famous Cyrus Cylinder, Cyrus boasts that he took the city of Babylon without a battle, aided by the Babylonian deity, Marduk. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the Persians resorted to a sneak attack through the Euphrates riverbed that ran through the middle of Babylon. Tradition has it that the Persian forces diverted the waters of the Euphrates to an old channel dug by a previous ruler, thereby causing the water level of the river to drop below the river-gates. This enabled the soldiers to wade in at night undetected and clamber up the river-bank walls, catching the guards completely by surprise. Once the invaders were inside the city, they made their way quickly to the palace where they located Belshazzar and put him to death, in fulfillment of Daniel chapter five.

b. *The beginning of Darius’ reign (5:31)*

According to this verse, “Darius the Mede” received the kingdom at age 62. The problem here is that we have no historical authentication of anyone named Darius the Mede. Consequently numerous theories have been put forward in explanation of this verse. For instance, some scholars think that this is but another name for Cyrus. Yet Daniel 9:1 indicates that this Darius was of Median descent and was **appointed king** over the Babylonian Empire. Furthermore, Cyrus’ father was a Persian (though his mother was a Mede), which would identify him primarily as a Persian. He is mentioned at least twenty times in the Bible and is consistently referred to as “Cyrus king of Persia” (e.g., 2 Chr 36:22; Ezra 1:1). In the Nabonidus Chronicle there is a reference to a governor of Gutium as being strongly involved in the invasion of Babylon. This is most interesting, seeing that Gutium was a city of the Medes.

John Whitcomb has suggested that a Mede named Gubaru was appointed to rule over the province of Babylon, while Cyrus himself dwelt in the Persian realm (thus equating Darius the Mede with Gubaru). Others believe a general of Cyrus named Ugbaru was appointed to rule over Babylon. The more likely explanation, however, is that “Darius the Mede” is a throne name for Cyaxares II, the son of the Median king Astyages (mentioned by the Greek historian Xenophon but not by Herodotus).

Although the exact identity of Darius the Mede cannot be identified with absolute certainty at this time, there is no substantial reason for not accepting the biblical testimony of Daniel 5:31, especially since we have historical evidence that Cyrus did appoint Medes to important positions within his empire.

E. God's Deliverance of Daniel Who Refuses to Forego Prayer (6:1-28)

The events of this chapter are not dated, though it is probably safe to assume that they took place in the first year of Darius the Mede as he was organizing the administration of the province of Babylonia. The Darius mentioned in Daniel 6:1 is not the famous Persian king, Darius I Hystaspes (also known as Darius the Great) who ruled 522-486 BC (cf. Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1). Rather, this is Darius the Mede (most likely Cyaxares II) who apparently governed the province of Babylonia for a short time (see notes to Dan 5:31). The Persian King Cyrus was present at Babylon when it fell to the combined armies of the Medes and Persians in 539 BC, but he later relocated back to his primary residence in Ecbatana (in present-day Iran), while Darius administered the affairs of Babylonia.

1. The conspiracy against Daniel (6:1-9)

a. *Daniel's rise in Darius' administration (6:1-3)*

6:1-2. In order to make for an efficient and accountable administration, Darius appointed “satraps” (from Aram *’āḥāšdarpan*), a word that literally meant protector of the kingdom (recall Dan 3:2). (The word “satrap” is simply a transliteration of the Greek word *satrapēs* used by the translators of the LXX.) These satraps were officials placed in charge of a certain region of the empire or having certain official duties, who in turn reported to one of three higher ranking

supervisors (Aram *sārkin*), meaning something like chief ministers.⁶ The fact that Darius appointed **120 satraps** does not have to imply that the province was therefore divided into 120 satrapies (though it may have been). Some of these may have simply functioned as officials without governing geographical territories.

Amazingly for a man his age, Daniel was appointed to be one of the three supervisors. His stand against Belshazzar on the night of Babylon's defeat may have earned him the respect of Darius (not to mention his proven record and character as a Babylonian official). The arrangement of satraps and supervisors was to ensure that the "king's interests might not incur damage." This would have meant a protection of his financial interests (the correct handling of taxes and tribute) as well as territory (in case of uprisings).

6:3. As old as he was, Daniel soon began distinguishing himself above the other two supervisors and the satraps, because he had "an extraordinary spirit" (recall Dan 5:12). Darius and others may not have been able to identify the exact source of this extraordinary spirit. Perhaps they considered that Daniel was in touch with the gods and possessed great wisdom. The real secret was that he had become a godly man with a sensitive spirit to the God of Heaven as a result of many years of walking with God, and the hand of God was upon him. Apparently the king's intention of promoting Daniel became known to others, setting off a political power play.

b. The attempt to defame Daniel (6:4-5)

6:4. Jealous of the favor Daniel had in the eyes of Darius, the other high officials collaborated to find some "pretext against Daniel." At first they looked for some motive or cause (even though falsely alleged) that they could bring against Daniel in regard to his administrative duties. Yet they could not come up with anything, simply because "he was trustworthy." Being a man of integrity who was first and foremost committed to pleasing God, Daniel had neither neglected his duties nor had he done anything corruptly.

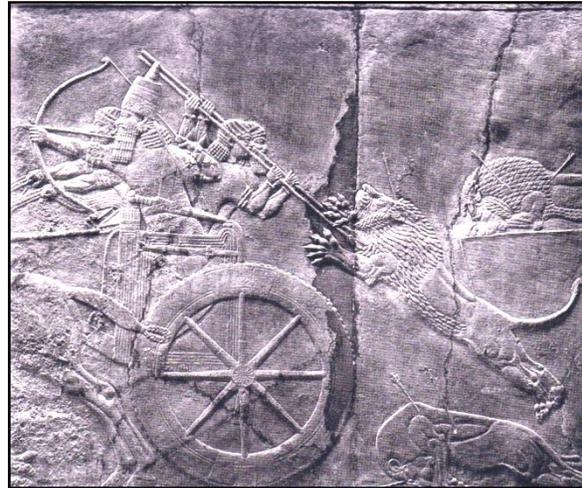
6:5. Having failed to bring a charge against Daniel in regard to his performance as a satrap, the antagonists next sought to find a way to land him in trouble on account of "the law of his God," i.e., on religious grounds. Their determination to remove Daniel from the political scene could have been partly motivated by their dislike for his honesty (which hampered those who operated by graft and corruption), or they may have disliked Daniel because he was a foreigner (and especially that he was Jewish). Yet behind all these factors was Satan's attempt to remove Daniel and the influence he could have upon the kingdom. According to Ezra 1:1-3, it was during Cyrus' first year (probably his first **regnal** year, Mar/Apr 538 - Mar/Apr 537 BC) that he issued a decree permitting the Jews to leave Babylon and return to their land (keeping God's covenant plan moving forward). Daniel may have had an influence upon Cyrus (and/or Darius)

⁶ In the famous Nabonidus-Chronicle that describes the conquest of Babylon, it records that a certain "Gobryas, his governor [i.e., under Cyrus], installed (sub-)governors in Babylon" (*ANET*, 306). Though the exact identity of this Gobryas is uncertain, it nevertheless shows the authority held by the ruler of Babylonia.

that resulted in this decree. If so, all this opposition to eliminate Daniel may have come as a result of Satan's attempt to thwart God's program.

c. The manipulation of Darius to entrap Daniel (6:6-9)

6:6-7. A delegation of the two supervisors and the satraps (probably their representatives) appeared before the king. The words “came by collusion” are a translation of the verb *r^egaš*, which in this context probably means that they came by conspiracy. They proposed that a “royal edict” be issued for a temporary restriction on prayer that carried a death penalty of being fed to lions. Most likely this proposal was portrayed to the king as some kind of test of loyalty to his new government. The limited duration of thirty days would make it seem reasonable to the king, and other citizens would be willing to oblige what may have seemed to them as only a minor inconvenience. Reference to a “den of lions” is not surprising. At that time in history, lions were common to that part of the world and were often captured to be used for sport and hunting purposes.



6:8-9. Once the king signed this “written interdict, the proposal was subject to “the law of the Medes and Persians” (cf. Esth 1:19: 8:8). This was a strict policy that laws, once enacted, could not be changed or annulled, not even by the king himself.

2. Daniel's detection, condemnation and sentencing (6:10-18)

a. The test of Daniel's faith (6:10)

Word of the new decree quickly reached the ears of Daniel, and he knew he had to make a decision. Unlike the situation in chapter three when his three friends were pressured to commit a deed that would have amounted to sin, Daniel's situation was slightly different: would he continue being faithful to pray to the LORD God? He knew the consequences, but he had also learned over the years to be faithful and make hard choices. Hence he opted to continue being a man of prayer. In fact, rather than opting to pray in a more private place, he continued to pray with “the windows opened toward Jerusalem,” in easy view of his enemies. If Daniel was to be persecuted, he chose to bear a good testimony. Furthermore, having the windows open toward Jerusalem was important in light of Solomon's prayer of dedication at the time the temple was first built (1 Kgs 8:27-30; 46-50). If while the Hebrews were in exile they would humble themselves, repent and pray toward the place of God's temple, God would forgive them and restore them from captivity (cf. Deut 30:1-3). Daniel was being faithful to do this, especially since he knew the seventy years of exile had nearly run its course (see Jer 29:10, 14 and compare Dan 9:1-19). His decision to obey was theologically significant!

b. The accusation against Daniel (6:11-15)

6:11. That his enemies “found Daniel praying” was no surprise. Notice Daniel’s exemplary conduct. First, he did not try to retaliate against them with a vindictive spirit. Second, he did not rationalize the situation or attempt to compromise his godly responsibility. His paramount concern was to be a faithful witness to the unsaved.

6:12-13. Once they had the evidence they needed, the enemies rushed off to inform the king. Before reporting their discovery, they first prompted the king to acknowledge his own prohibition (v 12). With that, they accused Daniel of violating the king’s command. Notice that they sought to cast him in the worst possible light. They refer to him as “one of the captives from Judah,” suggesting that he was a foreigner who had been forcibly brought to Babylon against his will and thus implying that he was untrustworthy. They also sought to portray Daniel’s disobedience as a personal affront to the king. He “pays no attention to you, O King,” they charged, hoping to raise the king’s ire all the more.

6:14. The king was very upset upon hearing the report, but not because he was offended by Daniel’s stance. The fact that he wanted to “rescue Daniel” indicates that Darius realized he had been duped into condemning Daniel, when in reality Daniel was one of the most competent and loyal members in his service. In fact “until late afternoon” (literally, “until the goings of the sun,” i.e., sunset) he sought a way to rescue Daniel. This implies that the king was obligated to act that very day.

6:15. In light of verse 14, this meeting of Daniel’s accusers with the king apparently took place late in the day. This time they are there to insist on the implementation of the king’s edict in view of the law of the Medes and Persians. They claim that no edict or decree of the king can now be changed, lest the king thought he could affect Daniel’s rescue by somehow changing the law or its application to Daniel.

c. The sentencing of Daniel to the lions (6:16-18)

6:16. Lions were normally kept on hand for sporting purposes but could also be used for human torture. For a human to be cast into their den to be eaten alive would have been a harrowing thought. Forced by his own laws, the king reluctantly “gave the order” to have Daniel thrown into the den of lions. Before doing so, however, the king consoled Daniel that His God whom he **continually** served would **rescue** him. The word “continually” reflects the king’s acknowledgment that Daniel worshipped this God unceasingly, and no earthly power could deter him from that. Though we have no evidence that Darius had personally come to faith in the God of Heaven, he obviously had come to understand some things about this God (probably from Daniel) and had some degree of respect for Him. (Daniel may very well have told him the story of God’s rescue of his three friends from the fiery furnace.)

6:17-18. Once Daniel was placed in the lion’s den, the opening was secured with a large stone and subsequently sealed by both the king’s official signet ring and that of his nobles. This was to ensure that no one would tamper with things or attempt to free Daniel during the night.

Not until the next morning when the seal was broken would the results be known. In the meantime, the king had no choice but to return and pass the night in his palace. He was so deeply concerned about Daniel that he refrained from his normal evening entertainment, including the royal meal. In fact, he was “unable to sleep.”

3. Daniel’s deliverance and the punishment of his enemies (6:19-24)

a. *Darius’ concern for Daniel (6:19-20)*

The king was obviously anxious to discover what happened to Daniel, for “at the earliest sign of daylight” he rushed back to the lion’s den. The fact that Daniel is held in high esteem by the king is evidenced by (1) his coming to the lion pit at the earliest possible moment; (2) the haste with which he went there; (3) the “worried voice” by which he spoke; and (4) his address to Daniel as the “servant of the living God.” The latter expression is quite remarkable from the lips of Darius in light of the numerous times that the Scriptures refer to the God of the Bible as “the living God” (e.g., Josh 3:10; Deut 5:26; 1 Sam 17:26, 36; Jer 23:36, etc.). Once again we have some evidence that Darius was at least a **respector** of the one true God, though we cannot be certain he personally became a true believer.

b. *Daniel’s deliverance (6:21-23)*

6:21-22. The sound of Daniel’s voice must have brought great relief and joy to King Darius. Daniel attributed his survival to the protecting grace of God’s angel (v 22). This expression, **his angel** (*mal’ākēh*), is the same form as occurred in Daniel 3:28, suggesting that the same one who protected the three youth in the furnace is the one who protected Daniel in the lion’s pit (cf. Ps 34:7). Daniel also explained to the king that his survival was nothing less than a divine declaration that he was **innocent** (v 22). Daniel’s name meant God is my judge, and so his deliverance from the lion’s pit was his vindication that he was innocent of the trumped-up charges against him, especially any insinuation that he had insolently paid no attention to the king’s orders (recall v 13).

6:23. That the king was **delighted** to discover Daniel was safe, which further underscores his high esteem for Daniel. There being “no injury of any kind” was clearly an indication that God had miraculously intervened to rescue him--and hence a miracle obvious to all. The reason for the miracle is also stated: “because he had trusted in his God.” This probably reflects back to the moment that Daniel made a conscious decision by faith to continue his practice of prayer (see Dan 6:10), not just the time while he was in the lion’s pit (cf. Heb 11:33).

c. *The destruction of Daniel’s enemies (6:24)*

If the miracle was a divine vindication of Daniel, it was also a condemnation of those who had “maliciously accused” Daniel. Hence, the king “gave another order” to have Daniel’s enemies thrown to the lions, along with their wives and children. We should not conclude from this that the Bible commends such action. Rather this was Darius’ choice and a reflection of

Persian custom. The graphic description of their fate—“the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones”—is included to further demonstrate the miraculous nature of Daniel’s survival. These were not tame lions that happened not to have been hungry. Apart from God’s intervention, they were hungry vicious killers!

4. Darius’ testimony to God’s sovereignty (6:25-28)

Chapter six ends with a decree made by Darius honoring Daniel’s God. Interestingly, chapters two, three, four and six all end with a statement by a Gentile king honoring the God of the Bible.

a. *Darius’ decree (6:25-27)*

Verse 25 is a rather standard introduction for a decree (virtually equivalent to that in Dan 4:1). Darius’ call for all his subjects to “revere and fear the God of Daniel” had multiple reasons. First, he declares that this God is “the living God” (recall Dan 6:20), unlike the Babylonian idols of wood and stone that can do nothing. Second, Daniel’s God possesses a kingdom that “will not be destroyed” and over which He will have dominion forever (v 26). The words “will not be destroyed” are precisely the same as were used to describe God’s kingdom in Daniel 2:44. This suggests that the kingdom plan revealed in Daniel 2 is in view, whereby history will culminate in the establishment of a kingdom of God. In Daniel 4:4, Nebuchadnezzar used strikingly similar terms to describe God’s kingdom plan (cf. Dan 7:14). Although the emphasis of Daniel 6 has not been upon God’s kingdom, apparently Darius learned something about this from Daniel. The miracle, then, of Daniel’s rescue from the lion’s pit served to convince Darius that this **kingdom teaching** was true (notice Darius’ reference to God’s “signs and wonders” in v 27 and the particular mention of Daniel’s rescue). God sovereignly rules over the affairs of nations now, and He will eventually inaugurate His kingdom on earth. (In light of the total biblical revelation, this will culminate at the second coming of Christ.)

b. *Daniel’s favor in the Medo-Persian period (6:28)*

The chapter ends on the note that Daniel **prospered** during the reign of Darius and Cyrus the Persian. The word translated “prospered” (Aram *haṣlah*) has the meaning of political success in this context (as it did in Dan 3:30). According to Daniel 6:1-3, Darius had already promoted Daniel as one of the three supervisors and was considering him for appointment "over the entire kingdom." Thus, Daniel 6:28 assures us that elderly Daniel continued to enjoy political success in the new administration established by the Medes and Persians. According to Daniel 10:1, Daniel lived on to see at least the third year of Cyrus (ca. 536/35 BC).

F. **Daniel’s Vision of the Four Beasts From the Sea, and the Eventual Establishment of Messiah’s Kingdom (7:1-28)**

This is the final chapter written in Aramaic, the dominant language of the Gentile world in Daniel’s day. With this chapter, Daniel completes his survey of the role, character, and succession of Gentile kingdoms under which Israel is being disciplined prior to Messiah’s

kingdom. Yet, chapter seven is also a *hinge chapter* to the book.⁷ Although it finalizes the Aramaic section (chaps. 2–7) that emphasizes the Gentile kingdoms, at the same time it is the first of four visions given directly to Daniel. This explains why Daniel 7 (written in the first year of Belshazzar) *appears to be* chronologically out of order.

There is a rather obvious paralleling of chapter seven with chapter two, both chapters tracing the successive Gentile kingdoms until the inauguration of Messiah’s kingdom. Yet chapter seven adds crucial details about the fourth kingdom not found in chapter two. For instance, chapter seven provides revelation about the “little horn” that arises out of the fourth kingdom and his persecution of the saints of God. Furthermore, chapter seven provides much greater detail about “a son of man” who is given the eternal kingdom of God.

1. The visions given to Daniel (7:1-14)

The first half of the chapter outlines the visions seen by Daniel, while the remainder of the chapter (verses 15-28) provides interpretation of selected details.

a. *Vision of the four beasts (7:1-8)*

In chapter two, the successive Gentile kingdoms were portrayed by various parts of the statue. Now they are portrayed as four beasts.

7:1-3. This vision is dated to “the first year of King Belshazzar,” about 553 BC. As indicated in the notes to Daniel 5, Belshazzar was a co-ruler with his father, Nabonidus. In an extrabiblical document known as the “Verse Account of Nabonidus,” the king is said to have entrusted the kingship at Babylon to his oldest son in the third year of his rule and to have settled in other parts of his empire. Since Nabonidus is known to have begun ruling in 556 BC, his third year would be about 553 BC, and this would presumably be Belshazzar’s first year. The Lord may have purposely chosen the first year of Belshazzar’s reign to reveal this vision to Daniel, since Belshazzar would be the last king before Babylon fell to Medo-Persia.

According to verse 2, the four winds of heaven were stirring up “the great sea.” Although this could refer to the Mediterranean Sea (cf. Num 34:6; Josh 15:12), in this context it more likely refers to the turmoil going on among the nations (cf. Isa 17:12-13; Jer 46:7ff.). Out of these turbulent waters, “four large beasts” come up. These are explained in Daniel 7:17 as four kings who will arise from the earth. (Notice that this latter verse depicts them as arising from the earth rather than the sea, which confirms that the Mediterranean is not in view.) Each beast, then, represents a certain king. According to verse 23, however, the fourth beast is a fourth kingdom. Hence, each beast represents both a Gentile kingdom on earth and the king who reigns over it.

⁷ Cf. J. Paul Tanner, “The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-Sept 2003): 269-82.

In the following verses, each successive beast is depicted as some type of bizarre hybrid creature. Such imagery may seem unusually strange to modern man, but this was commonplace in the ancient Near East.

7:4. The first beast is said to be “like a lion,” yet having “eagles’ wings.” Just as the head of the statue in chapter two depicted the Neo-Babylonian Empire, so does this first beast here. In chapter two, the head was made of gold, depicting the grandeur of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom. Likewise, the lion (the king of beasts) and the eagle (the king of birds) convey the same grandeur. Interestingly, Babylon is symbolized elsewhere in the OT as a lion (e.g., Jer 4:7) and as an eagle (e.g., Ezek 17:2-3, 12). Furthermore, the famous processional way that led from the Ishtar Gate through the center of Babylon was ornamented with some 120 lions in glazed-brick relief (symbols of the goddess Ishtar).

Nevertheless, its “wings were pulled off” (or plucked). Just as the wings of a bird enable it to fly to great heights, so Nebuchadnezzar soared high among the nations. His military conquests and architectural achievements made him the most famous of all Babylonian kings. Yet all of this only fueled his pride. Hence, God caused his wings to be plucked, humbling him (recall chap. 4). Finally, however, he was “lifted up from the ground” and his humanity restored. This depicts Nebuchadnezzar’s restoration, once he came to recognize that it is Heaven that rules (see especially Dan 4:34). Then he realized that it was God’s kingdom that really mattered, not his own.

7:5. The second beast in the series was “like a bear.” This undoubtedly refers to the Medo-Persian kingdom headed by Cyrus the Great that defeated Babylon. Daniel 5:28 had foretold that Babylon would be given over to the Medes and Persians. Also in Daniel 8:3, 20, Media and Persia are viewed as *one power* under the figure of a two-horned ram. Although the figure of a bear could stress its *ferociousness* and *power*, more likely the figure is meant to highlight its *appetite* in light of the remaining details in verse 5. The Persian Empire could never be content with its huge domain, and its appetite for conquest led her into repeated conflict with Greece. Hence, the **three ribs in its mouth** probably are meant to signify three crucial conquests that helped solidify the power of the Medo-Persian kingdom. Their identity is not stated, but a reasonable suggestion would be (1) Lydia (in western Asia Minor) in 546 BC, Babylon in 539 BC, and Egypt (by Cambyses) in 525 BC.

7:6. The third beast--“like a leopard”-- represents the Grecian Empire founded by Alexander the Great and the resulting Hellenistic kingdoms that derived from this. Beginning as early as 492 BC with Persian expeditions against Greece, there had been a long-standing animosity between Greece and Persia. Under the brave and innovative Alexander, Greece finally achieved its full revenge. The “four bird-like wings on its back” underscored the tremendous speed by which Alexander carried out his conquest of the Persian Empire. In 334 BC at the mere age of twenty three, Alexander set out to conquer Persia. Following an initial defeat of the Persian army at the Battle of Issus in 333 BC, Alexander was able to advance southward and lay claim to Egypt. By 331 BC, he achieved a decisive victory over the Persians at the Battle of Arbela. In the aftermath, he burned Persepolis in retaliation for the burning of Athens by the

Persians in 480 BC. In a mere three to four years, he had conquered all of Persia, an empire that had taken centuries to build.

The four heads of this beast depict the division of Alexander's kingdom into four parts following his untimely death at the age of 33. After his death, there was a long struggle during the years 323-301 BC as to who would reign in his place. Following the Battle of Ipsus in 301 BC, Alexander's kingdom was finally parceled out to four of his generals: (1) Lysimachus took Thrace and Bithynia; (2) Cassander took Macedonia and Greece; (3) Seleucus took Syria, Babylonia and all the lands of the east; and (4) Ptolemy took Egypt, the land of Judah and Arabia Petrea.

Now read the notes for verses 15-18.

7:7-8. The fourth beast is not likened to any particular animal, but is said to be “dreadful, terrible, and very strong.” Conservative evangelicals are virtually unanimous in identifying this fourth beast as the Roman Empire. (Critical scholars contend that the fourth beast is Greece.) In contrast to Alexander of Macedonia, Rome acquired power gradually. Yet it did so decisively by ruthlessly crushing its foes (devouring them with large “iron teeth”). In 63 BC the Roman general Pompey conquered Syria and Palestine, thereby bringing these biblical lands into the Roman Empire. Octavian's (= Augustus) victory over Marc Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium in 31 BC clinched Rome's defeat of Egypt. Just as the fourth part of the image in Daniel 2 was composed of iron, so this fourth beast has iron teeth, further confirming that these are one and the same.

This fourth beast (Rome) differed from the first three, not only in its brutal strength, but also in the fact that it possessed “ten horns” on its head. Furthermore, it had “another horn--a small one” that came up among them, so that three of the ten horns were “torn out by the roots.” The fact that the small horn had eyes resembling human eyes and a mouth speaking arrogant things hints that this is symbolic of a powerful individual. As will be seen in the interpretation (note 7:24), the horns are symbolic of rulers, and the small horn plays a particularly important role in the climax of history. This is not surprising, since Scripture uses a “horn” symbolically elsewhere of power (1 Kgs 22:11; Zech 1:18ff.), particularly the power of a reigning ruler (Ps 132:17; Ezek 29:21).

b. Vision of judgment before the Ancient of Days (7:9-14)

The night visions continue with these verses, but the scene shifts to a heavenly setting before the Ancient of Days who renders judgment. The “little horn” is judged and destroyed, and then “one like a son of man” is granted an eternal kingdom.

7:9-10. These verses introduce us to “the Ancient of Days,” a reference to God the Father. His white attire and hair like wool probably stress His eternality (cf. Isa 43:13; 57:15a) or His holiness. The text does not clarify who occupies the thrones around God. They could be angelic beings, but they could also be certain saints of God (cf. Rev 4:4; 20:4). Their role is secondary, however, for it is God the Father who acts in the following verses. The description of

God's throne is strikingly similar to that seen in Ezekiel's vision. It also had wheels (Ezk 1:15-20; 10:9-17), and had fire and lightning associated with it (Ezk 1:13, 27; 10:2, 6).

The purpose of the "river of fire" that streams forth is to bring punishment on those whom He judges (cf. Ps 50:3; 97:3). In particular, the beast with the small horn is cast here and destroyed. This river of fire is described elsewhere as the "lake of fire which burns with brimstone" (cf. Rev 19:20; 20:10). The thousands and myriads who serve the Lord God are a vast array of angelic beings (note the similar wording in Rev 5:11). They are witnesses of the judgment He brings and the opening of "the books." From what is revealed in Revelation 20:12-15, these **books** (plural!) are probably to be understood as the record of the works and ungodly acts of unbelievers, which they will be confronted with at the great white throne judgment. (Believers are judged separately at the "judgment seat of Christ" [cf. 1 Cor 3:10-4:5; 2 Cor 5:10].)

7:11-12. Verse 11 focuses on the "little horn" and his "arrogant words." Contemptuous pride is at the root of his character and actions, by which he magnifies himself and even hurls blasphemies at God (cf. Dan 11:36; Rev 13:5). Yet his assault against God does not succeed. In the end he is judged in the burning fire, and with this the fourth beast itself is slain. (As will be shown in the interpretation, this fourth beast has several manifestations, both in ancient Rome and in the future tribulation period.)

Having depicted the outcome of the fourth beast, verse 12 indicates how "the rest of the beasts" are dealt with. One by one, their "ruling authority" is taken away (as happened to Babylon in 539 BC when it was conquered by the Medes and Persians). Yet they are "permitted to go on living." Although their authority to rule is removed, the people and culture of each kingdom is absorbed into the next empire... at least for some duration of time.

7:13-14. The final two verses of the heavenly court scene reveal the glorious outcome for "one like a son of man." Scholars debate the identity of this figure, some seeing this as a reference to a "human being" in general, a specific human individual (e.g., Judas Maccabeus in the second century BC), collectively as the faithful Jews of Maccabean times in the second century BC, or even an angel (such as Gabriel or Michael). Nevertheless, the earliest interpretation is the Messianic one, embraced by both Jews and Christians. The latter, of course, saw the fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ, especially since Jesus often referred to Himself as *the son of man* (e.g., Mt 16:28).

Of particular importance is the reference in Mark 14:62. When asked at His trial by the Jewish high priest whether or not He was the Messiah, Jesus replied, "I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (*NASB*). His response appears to be a direct allusion to Daniel 7:13-14, especially in light of the reference to the "clouds" (cf. Matt 24:30 and Luke 21:27-31 which associates this scene with the second coming). Also to be observed is the use of the expression in John 12:34, where it is seen that the Jewish people in Jesus' day understood "the Son of Man" to be a reference to Messiah (although they could not make the connection to Jesus' statement about having to "be lifted up"). Some of

the alternative interpretations should be ruled out in light of what Daniel 7:14 says about Him: “All peoples... were serving him.” The word used for “serving” Him (*NIV* uses worshipped) in verse 14 is the verb *p^elah*, which in biblical Aramaic is always used with the idea of service or worship of a deity. It means more than honor, because *p^elah* clearly implied idolatry (when not used of the true God). The reference to “one like a son of man” thus finds its true fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Referring to Jesus Christ as “son of man” does establish his connection with humanity (He truly was a human being). Yet He is more. If anything, Daniel 7:13-14 should have prompted the reader to look for a Messiah who was both human on the one hand, and yet able to receive **worship** on the other hand, i.e., He would need to be both human and divine. That is exactly what the virgin birth of Jesus of Nazareth accomplishes: He was born of a virgin woman and yet conceived by the Holy Spirit. In the consciousness of Jesus, it was an easy transition from “one like a son of man” to “the Son of Man.”

Verses 13-14 are quite clear that Messiah Jesus is destined to have a **kingdom** and an eternal reign (“His authority is eternal”). We can expect the *complete fulfillment* of this to occur at the general time of His second coming, since this honor is bestowed upon Him following the destruction of the “little horn” of the fourth beast (cf. Dan 7:26-27).⁸ (The latter is best interpreted as the Antichrist--see commentary on Dan 7:24.) Furthermore, Daniel 7 is parallel in many ways to Daniel 2, and in this earlier chapter the kingdom that is never destroyed (i.e., the kingdom of God) is established in the days of the ten toes and puts an end to the earlier kingdoms (Dan 2:44). As argued there, this has its fulfillment with the ten-king confederation of the tribulation period. According to Psalm 2:8, Jesus will ask the Father to have the nations as His inheritance. Then He will return in glory, as He defeats the “little horn” and lays hold of what is rightfully His. This will inaugurate His universal rule described in Psalm 72:8-11, when He literally reigns over the earth with all nations serving Him, and establishes justice, righteousness and peace. (Passages like Isa 2:1-4, 9:6-7 and 11:1-10 provide glimpses of the kingdom over which Christ will rule.)

2. The interpretation of the visions given to Daniel (7:15-28)

Following the presentation of the visions in verses 1-14, the remainder of the chapter provides an interpretation of the symbolism by an angelic guide. Most of the details focus on the fourth beast/kingdom and the kings that emerge from it.

a. *Daniel's reaction to the visions and inquiry to understand (7:15-16)*

⁸ Even though the complete fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14 awaits the Second Coming of Christ, there is a sense in which the promise has already *begun to be fulfilled* with the resurrection and ascension of Christ. He does already have (and exercises) kingdom authority as we see in Matt 28:18-20, and yet from another perspective He is waiting for His enemies to be made a footstool for His feet (Heb 10:11-13). Hence His being escorted before the Ancient of Days may find its true fulfillment with His ascension to the Father's right hand. Regarding this, one should consult Jesus' prayer in John 17:5 for the Father to glorify the Son together with Himself, even as they were before the world was.

The figure standing nearby is not specifically said to be an angel, but this is the most likely explanation (cf. Dan 8:16-17; Zech 1:9, 14, 19). In asking to know the exact meaning of the details of the vision, Daniel wanted to know with certainty the proper interpretation. He would have sensed that much of the vision had ominous implications for his people, and the angelic interpretation would have confirmed this.

b. A summary explanation of the visions for Daniel (7:17-18)

7:17. Although in verse 17 the “large beasts” are equated with kings, we are told in verse 23 that the fourth beast represents a kingdom. There is no real discrepancy here, for each kingdom is headed by a king, and these go hand in hand (cf. Dan 2:37, 39). Hence, each beast represents a Gentile kingdom and a king who rules over it.

7:18. The kingdom was previously said to be given to “one like a son of man.” Now it is said that “the holy ones” (NASB uses “saints”) *receive* this kingdom and “take possession of” it. There is no contradiction here, and this is clarified in verse 27. The Lord Jesus (“one like a son of man”) is given the kingdom in which all will serve and obey Him. As with any kingdom, however, He has subjects. In this case, the subjects are the “holy ones of the Most High,” i.e., the people of God who are rightly related to Him. In light of verses 26-27, we can also infer that the focus is on those saints living in the time of the Antichrist (i.e., during the great tribulation). They could be Gentiles who are persecuted for their faith in the Lord Jesus at that time, or they could be those who suffer for being Jews yet who in the final analysis turn in faith to Jesus as their Messiah. Possibly both are in view. They are given the privilege of entering and enjoying **eternally** the blessedness of this ultimate kingdom established by God, which is a fitting inheritance for them. Other scriptural passages indicate that the believers of all ages will also be resurrected in preparation for entering this kingdom (cf. Dan 12:1-2; 1 Thess 4:13ff.).

c. Further elaboration of the fourth beast in response to Daniel’s inquiry (7:19-25)

7:19-20. Having been given a cursory explanation of the vision in verses 17-18, Daniel sought to know more about the fourth beast. In particular, he sought more precise information about the ten horns and the little horn that came up later. Although the latter horn is called “little” in Daniel 7:8, verse 20 describes it as being “more formidable than the others.” From this we see that the adjective “little” is not really indicative of its power, and clearly this ruler emerges as stronger than the other horns.

7:21-22. The so-called “little horn” is not merely a powerful ruler. In what must have been of great concern to Daniel, he also “wages war against the holy ones,” i.e., with God’s people. Thus he is a persecuting tyrant! Furthermore, he is successful in doing so, because verse 21 says that he “was defeating them,” i.e., overpowering them. God, in accordance with His sovereign ways, allows him to do so. In actuality, his hatred of God’s people is satanically motivated (cf. comments for Dan 7:25).

Any defeat of God’s people, however, is only temporary and limited. Verse 22 indicates that the Ancient of Days will intervene at some point to render **judgment** against this tyrannical

ruler. Despite the suffering of His saints, God acts on their behalf such that they “take possession of the kingdom.” This does not mean that they gain control of the little horn’s kingdom, but rather that they are ushered into *the kingdom of God* where they serve and obey the Messiah, the One who received His kingdom from the Ancient of Days (verses 13-14). This is clear from Daniel 7:27. Although they suffer under the oppressive rule of this tyrant, their consolation is that they get to be a part of this final glorious kingdom when Jesus rules over all the nations.

7:23-25. The preceding verses (21-22) indicate what Daniel *saw* in vision about this little horn of the fourth beast. Now the angel provides further revelation about him to Daniel. From what is said in verse 23, this fourth beast is clearly unique in regard to the others--he will “differ from all the other kingdoms.” He is different in the way that he will “devour the whole earth [and] crush it.” Yet he is also very different in his manifestation upon earth. There seems to be an initial manifestation of the kingdom symbolized by the fourth beast with the ancient empire of Rome, for it was Rome that conquered the remaining vestiges of Alexander’s Hellenistic Empire (see notes for Dan 7:6-8). Yet the details presented in Daniel 7:24-25 do not seem to have their fulfillment in ancient Rome (which lasted until AD 476). We notice in verse 24, for instance, that the ten horns are representative of ten kings that “arise from that kingdom” of the fourth beast. Now these kings could theoretically arise out of ancient Rome, either during Rome's time of power (which lasted to AD 476) or immediately following Rome's collapse. Indeed there are some scholars who have attempted to identify them as ten **successive** kings connected with the ancient Roman Empire. However, such an interpretation is faulty. First, they are not successive rulers, but rather contemporaneous (discussion to follow). Furthermore the book of Revelation indicates that these ten horns will arise on the scene of history in the far distant future, namely, in the days of the great tribulation (see esp. Rev 17:12-13). They will be very closely connected with the beast of Revelation 13 (i.e., the beast having ten horns). According to Revelation 17:12, these ten horns (for ten kings) receive authority as kings with the beast for a short period, which also confirms that they are contemporaneous rulers. In light of their role in the book of Revelation, then, it appears that these ten rulers in Daniel 7 do not immediately arise out of ancient Rome. Instead there is a gap of time between the initial appearance of the fourth beast (as it represents ancient Rome) and its latter fulfillment in the great tribulation.

Daniel 7:24 goes on to say that “another king will arise” after the ten kings. This is obviously the little horn first introduced in verse 8, because verse 24 indicates that he will “humiliate three kings,” i.e., he will force them into submission. (Recall v 8, where three of the ten horns were torn out by the roots on account of the “little horn”.) Several reasons substantiate that this “little horn” is the Antichrist, the beast of Revelation 13–17: (1) there is a clear association in both Daniel 7 and Revelation 17 with the ten horns; (2) both Daniel 7:21, 25 and Revelation 13:7 emphasize that he wages war with the saints and overcomes them; and (3) the time that he is allowed to have power is “time, times, and half a time” in Daniel 7:25 (see interpretation to follow), which is mentioned again in Revelation 12:14 and equated with 1,260 days in Revelation 12:6. The latter is three and a half years (based on lunar months of thirty

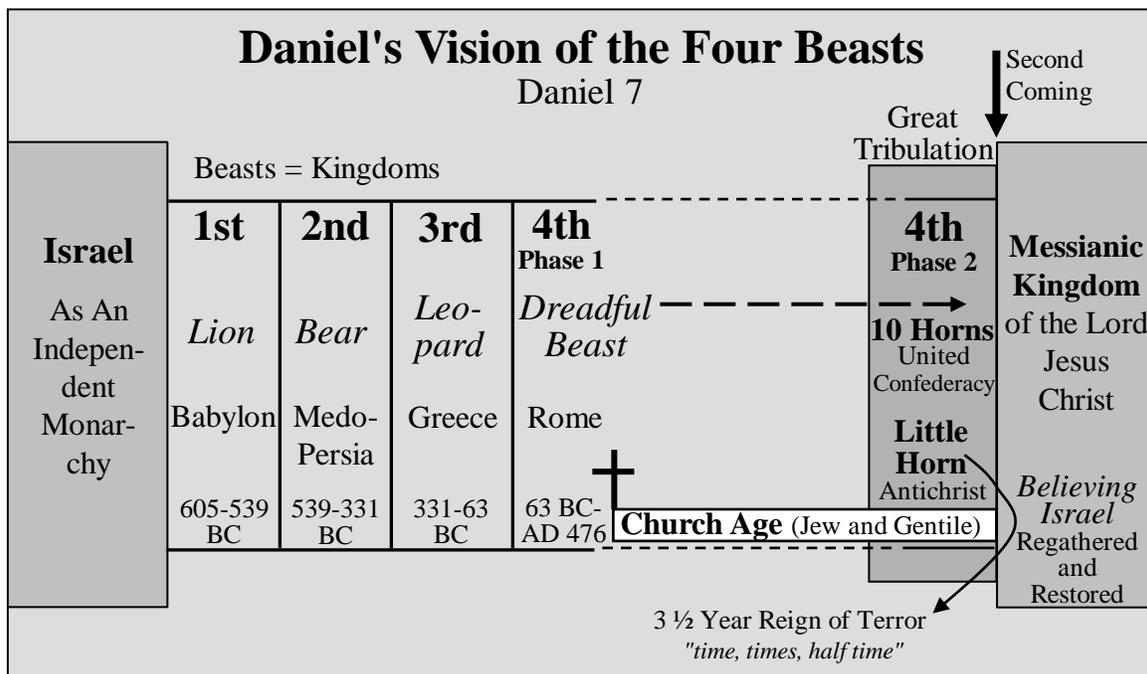
days). Yet the beast of Revelation 13 is said to act for forty two months, which would also be three and a half years.

Thus, the “little horn” in Daniel 7 is the future Antichrist that will arise in the period of the great tribulation just before the second coming of Christ. This is the position of most conservative evangelicals today (whether premillennial or amillennial), and this is the universal position of the early church. The position of this author is that the ten horns will be ten rulers of a confederate empire during the great tribulation, contemporaneous with Antichrist. This view of the ten horns is the standard premillennial position, although some amillennial scholars hold to a different interpretation.⁹ In support of the fact that they are contemporaneous, (1) we notice in Daniel 7:24 that the “little horn” humiliates (subdues) three of the ten horns, not just the tenth and final one in a series; (2) Revelation 17:12 indicates that the “ten horns” have authority with the beast “for one hour;” and (3) Revelation 17:13 indicates that “they” (*plural!*), i.e., the ten horns, give their power and authority to the beast. Daniel 7:25 goes on to reveal more about the little horn (= Antichrist). First, he “speaks words against the Most High,” which indicates his verbal assault in blaspheming the true God of heaven. (Recall Dan 7:8--he has a mouth uttering great boasts--and compare Rev 13:5-6.) Second, he will “harass the holy ones of the Most High.” The verb translated “harass” (Heb *bēlā*) means to wear out or wear down. That is, he will oppress God’s people, and in so doing, will wear them down. Third, he will attempt to “change times established by law.” This could mean that, like Hitler, he will attempt to radically restructure society and the laws governing nations. On the other hand, the context of verse 25 is primarily religious (note his vehement hatred of the true God), which could suggest that the changes he makes are primarily aimed against anything and anyone that interferes with his plan for the whole world to worship him. That is, Antichrist will impose changes upon societies in order to strip away any vestige of worship, celebration or pious act toward the true God.

The final part of verse 25 states that “they will be delivered into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.” This indicates the period of time that Antichrist will oppress the holy ones (the saints) of God. Although the word for “time” (Aram *iddān*) can mean time in general, it can also be used to specify a definite period of time. In Daniel 4:16 it has the meaning of a year, and that is surely the meaning that it has here. The word translated “times” is most likely in what is called the “dual form” (rather than a plural), which would indicate two of these, i.e., two years. “Half a time” would thus be equivalent to half a year. The expression as a whole indicates a period, then, of three and a half years. In support of this, two arguments can be presented: (1) “time, times and half a time” in Daniel 12:7, 11-12 is just short of 1290 days and 1335 days (three and a half years is equal to 1,260 days, based on lunar months of thirty days); and (2) this expression “time, times and half a time” is used interchangeably in the book of

⁹ E. J. Young, in his commentary on Daniel (159-160), does not believe that the number “10” needs to be taken literally (for him, it is symbolic of “completeness”). So, he views the ten horns as a “number” (not necessarily ten) of successive European kingdoms that trace their origin back to Rome. He also holds that these rulers appear throughout church history following Rome’s collapse in AD 476. Notice, then, that he views the “ten horns” as appearing throughout church history after AD 476, but he views the “little horn” as arising in the great tribulation (i.e., for Young, they are not contemporaneous).

Revelation (note Rev 12:14) with the phrase “1,260 days” (Rev 12:6), both meaning three and a half years. This is further confirmed in Revelation 13:5, where the Antichrist is said to have authority for forty-two months. Hence, both the book of Daniel and Revelation are in agreement that Antichrist will have this three and a half years in which God will allow Satan to use Antichrist as the agent of his diabolical plan to turn the world against Him. As will be seen later in discussion about the “abomination of desolation,” this three-and-a-half-year period of time is what the Bible refers to as the “great tribulation” (cf. Mt 24:15-22; Rev 7:14). This period will be climaxed by the second coming of Christ, when He returns to put an end to Antichrist’s evil reign of terror (2 Thess 2:8; Rev 19:19-21). The following chart summarizes the teaching of Daniel 7:



d. *The eventual victory and establishment of Messiah's kingdom (7:26-28)*

7:26. The Antichrist's reign will only last three and a half years, because God will intervene. The heavenly court (over which the Ancient of Days presides) acts in judgment to remove and destroy--decisively and **forever**--the authority (or dominion) of Antichrist.

7:27. With Antichrist out of the way and off the scene, the blessed kingdom predicted in both Daniel 2:44 and 7:13-14 will finally be manifested. What is not said in Daniel, but which we know from Revelation 20, is that Satan himself will be imprisoned in the abyss so that he will not be able to deceive the nations for 1000 years. This kingdom will be given to “one like a son of man” (just as Dan 7:13-14 promised), but in another sense it is “delivered to the people of the holy ones of the Most High.” That is, the kingdom is first and foremost entrusted to the Lord Jesus Christ. Then those who belong to Him are allowed to enter the kingdom and participate in

it. (The NT clarifies that those who are faithful and who endure with Christ will be given the special honor of reigning with Christ [2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:25-28].)

7:28. The vision seen by Daniel and the angelic interpretation made a profound impact upon him. He was so alarmed that his physical countenance changed, yet he cherished in his heart the insights that he had gained.

III. The Revelation of God's Plan to Ultimately Rescue Israel, But Not Until She Has First Suffered At the Hands of Both Antiochus and the Antichrist (8:1–12:13)

Beginning with Daniel 8:1, the language shifts back to Hebrew and remains so to the end of the book. Correspondingly, the theme of the book shifts from concern of God's dealings with the Gentile kingdoms that dominated Israel to the ultimate fate of the nation Israel itself. The vision of chapter seven indicates that Israel will ultimately suffer at the hands of the Antichrist before she will be rescued and Messiah's kingdom will be formally established. The remaining chapters focus on the nation's suffering in preparation for Messiah's rescue. This suffering comes not only at the hands of the Antichrist but also at the hands of a figure who would **typify** him, namely, Antiochus Epiphanes of the second century BC.

A. The Vision of the Ram and the Goat: Anticipated Persecution by Antiochus (8:1-27)

In the second century BC, a despicable ruler named Antiochus IV Epiphanes arose as ruler of the Seleucid dynasty (one of the remnants of the empire of Alexander the Great). During his day, he harshly persecuted the Jewish people and sought to destroy every expression of worship of the biblical God. Because of this, the Bible utilizes him as a **type** of the future Antichrist to come. Chapter eight reveals the rise of Antiochus and his hostility against Israel.

1. The vision given to Daniel at Susa (8:1-14)

Long before Antiochus arose as a persecutor of Israel, God revealed his coming and hostility to Daniel in the sixth century BC by means of a vision from the Lord.

a. *Introduction to the vision (8:1-2)*

8:1. The chapter begins by telling us the date of the vision, namely, “in the third year of King Belshazzar’s reign.” This would be approximately 551-50 BC, two years after the vision that Daniel received in chapter seven (note Dan 7:1). This indicates that Daniel would have had two years to reflect on what had been revealed to him in chapter seven. The vision in Daniel 8 would build upon what he already knew, although the focus in chapter eight would be upon the second and third kingdoms rather than the fourth. The date of this new vision was significant for another reason. It came about the time Cyrus became co-regent of the Persians and the commander of the Medo-Persian armies. In fact, as Nabonidus observed the union of the Median and Persian armies, he vainly attempted to forge an alliance with Egypt and Lydia (a powerful and strategic kingdom in west-central Turkey).¹⁰ As Daniel received this vision in chapter eight, God was about to set in motion the events that would lead to Babylon’s conquest and eventually to Israel's suffering at the hands of Antiochus Epiphanes.

8:2. The first thing that Daniel saw in the vision was himself in Susa.¹¹ This was an historic city (and capital) of the ancient Elamite Empire, located about 350 km to the east of

¹⁰ Cyrus battled and eventually defeated the Lydians during the years 547-46 BC.

¹¹ Scholars debate whether Daniel was literally transported to Susa or whether he simply saw himself there in

Babylon (in present-day southwest Iran). The Hebrew word *bîrâ*, translated “citadel” or “fortress,” can refer to a palace or temple (1 Chr 29:19), a fortress within a city (Neh 2:8), or more commonly to the city itself as a fortress (Neh 1:1; Esth 1:2). The latter is probably the idea, especially since the word *bîrâ* is placed here in apposition to the word Susa. The idea is that Susa was a **fortress-city**. Susa had been a very powerful city during the latter part of the second millennium BC, often domineering over Babylonia and Assyria. About the year 640 BC, however, the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal had conquered Elam and destroyed Susa. Why then did Daniel see himself here in Susa, since it was probably only in a weakened state in Daniel's day? The significance probably has to do with what Susa was about to become in the near future. When the Persian King Darius I came to the throne (r. 522-486 BC), he made Susa one of the capitals of the Persian Empire, along with Persepolis and Ecbatana. Susa then functioned as the diplomatic and administrative capital of the empire, and served as the residence of the royal family during the winter months (it was too hot to live there in the summer).

Daniel also took notice that he was beside “the Ulai Canal.” This was known classically as the Eulaeus River, which passed close to Susa on the northeast. From this position, he had a panoramic view of the fortified city of Susa--soon to be a major stronghold of the Persians. This was a fitting place for Daniel to behold this vision, since Medo-Persia was about to conquer Babylon, an event that would in turn lead to the rise of the Hellenistic empires.

b. The ram with the two horns: Medo-Persia (8:3-4)

8:3. In his vision, Daniel once again sees Gentile kingdoms depicted as animals. This is a similar technique to that in chapter seven, except that different animals are utilized in the imagery. The first animal that Daniel sees is “a ram with two horns” beside the Ulai Canal. This is interpreted for the reader in Daniel 8:20 as representing Medo-Persia. (Recall that Medo-Persia was represented in Dan 7:5 as a bear.) The choice of the ram in this context for Medo-Persia may simply provide a convenient means of illustration, since the horns of the animal represent the two major parts of the empire. On the other hand, there is some evidence that the ram may have had some significance to the Persian realm. Ammianus Marcellinus (a Roman historian of the fourth century AD) indicated that the Persian ruler carried the gold head of a ram when he marched before his army.

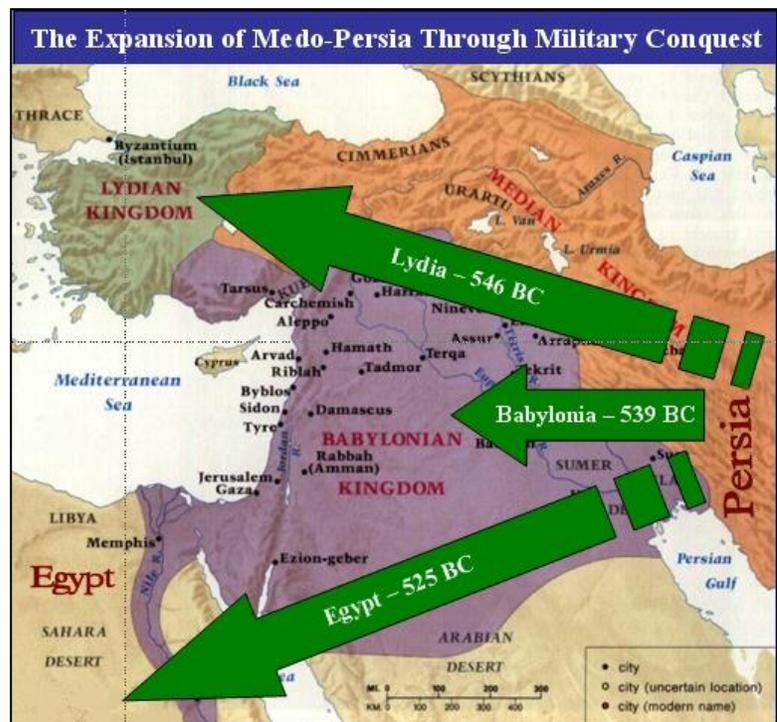
The two horns, however, are not of equal length. One was “longer than the other,” and this longer one came up last. The significance of this is not hard to understand. Early on, the Medes were a stronger power than the Persians, as evidenced by the fact that they joined forces with Babylonia in 612 B.C. to defeat Assyria and destroy the famous city of Nineveh. Later, however, the two empires merged, and eventually came to be ruled by a long line of Persian kings. Hence the longer horn that came up later is meant to signify the dominant role that Persia had in their history. In fact, not long after Cyrus' day, this empire simply became known as the Persian Empire.

the vision. We cannot be conclusive about this, and an answer to this is not essential to the significance of the interpretation of the chapter.

8:4. In verse four, the ram is seen butting in each direction except **eastward**. Since this verse goes on to indicate that “no animal was able to stand before it,” the butting of the ram probably indicates its primary military achievements. In 546 BC, the combined Medo-Persian armies conquered the small but significant kingdom of Lydia (in present-day west-central Turkey)--ruled by the legendary Croesus who was famed for his gold--a **northward** conquest. In 539, the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon to the west. Finally, in 525 BC (during the rule of Cambyses, the son of Cyrus) they overpowered Egypt, a **southward** conquest. There were no major military conquests to the east. With these conquests, the Persian Empire **did as it pleased**, i.e., it came to control more territory than any empire before it in history and thus held unrivaled power.

c. *The male goat: Greece and its division into four parts (8:5-8)*

8:5. The second animal that Daniel sees in this vision is a **male goat**, and this is interpreted in Daniel 8:21 as the kingdom of Greece. The goat had a noticeably “conspicuous horn between its eyes,” which Daniel 8:21 interprets as the first king. This is a clear reference to Greece’s most famous king, Alexander the Great of Macedon (356-323 BC).¹² His father, Philip, had united the Grecian city-states and territories, and upon his death Alexander took up his father’s mantle with the aim of exacting revenge upon the kingdom of Persia. Thus, the remark that the male goat was “coming from the west” reflects Alexander’s advance from Greece in the west toward Persia. He



also moved over the surface of the earth “without touching the ground.” This reflects the incredible speed at which Alexander moved his forces and conquered the Persian Empire (recall Alexander’s description in Dan 7:3 as a leopard with wings). Whereas Medo-Persia took decades to establish her power through conquest, Alexander conquered the known world in three short years (334-331 BC).

¹² Of the many accounts of Alexander's life, I have found the work by Ian Worthington (*Alexander the Great; Man and God* [Great Britain: Pearson Education Ltd, 2004]) to be extremely helpful, being both well-researched and yet readable.

8:6-7. These verses depict Alexander's clash with the Persian armies. Verse 7 notes that he went against Persia in “a fit of rage” (lit., he was infuriated at him). The Greeks had long been embittered against Persia since the early fifth century BC. Both Darius I (522-486 BC) and his son Xerxes I (486-465 BC) had made military assaults on Greece. Even though the far-outnumbered Greeks had been able to repulse the Persian army and navy, Persia managed to loot and destroy Athens, and this was never forgotten by the Greeks. Alexander’s father, Philip II, had stirred up his generation to overthrow the Persian Empire, and upon his unexpected death Alexander readily stepped in to lead the charge. He left Greece in the spring of 334 BC at the mere age of 23 with a relatively small army, vastly inferior in size to the Persians. In some of the most surprising--but yet incredibly brilliant--military maneuvers, he managed to pull off a series of upsets against the Persian forces that vastly outnumbered him.

- 1) May 334 BC - Alexander pushed into Asia Minor and defeated the Persian forces at the Granicus River.
- 2) October 333 BC - Alexander defeated a great Persian army of 600,000 footmen at the battle of Issus near the northeastern tip of the Mediterranean Sea. This time, the Persian army was led by King Darius III himself, though he managed to escape and face Alexander later at Gaugamela.
- 3) 332 BC - Alexander invaded Egypt after a costly victory at Tyre, and was readily welcomed as a liberator (the Egyptians hated the Persians). With his rear position protected, he was now free to attack Darius directly.
- 4) October 331 BC - In a final showdown, Alexander decisively defeated the Persians at Gaugamela (near Arbela) in Assyria (just east of the ancient site of Nineveh). Darius III fled in retreat, but was soon killed. Alexander was then free to march into Babylon, and subsequently into Susa and Persepolis.

Alexander’s final defeat of Persia at Gaugamela is probably what the latter part of Daniel 8:7 depicts: “The goat hurled the ram to the ground and trampled it. No one could deliver the ram from its power.”

8:8. Alexander’s victory over Persia was not the last of his military exploits, but it firmly established him as undisputed ruler of the largest empire yet known to man, an empire that included Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. At this point, Alexander was a mere twenty five years of age. Unfortunately he was not humble, but came to think of himself as divine, and sought to be worshipped as a god while still alive. According to Daniel 8:8a, “The male goat acted even more arrogantly,” which probably reflects his vain aspirations of divinity. Verse 8 goes on to say, “no sooner had the large horn become strong than it was broken.” While he was still in the prime of his power (less than thirty three years of age), he died quite unexpectedly at Babylon. The exact cause of his death is still unknown, though it seems that he may have died as a result of a fever and severe alcohol poisoning (he and a number of his men had been drinking wine in great excess).

Being still quite young, there was no heir in position to take over Alexander's vast empire. His wife Roxane (despised by many because she was not Macedonian) was pregnant with a son, but both of them were assassinated shortly after Alexander's death. It was now left to his generals (known as the Diadochi or "successors") to settle the matter by war and intrigue. From Alexander's death in 323 BC until the defeat of Antigonos in 301 BC, countless wars and assassinations raged on.¹³ In the final analysis, the empire was carved up into four primary parts, each headed by one of Alexander's generals. This fulfilled the words in Daniel 8:8, "there arose four conspicuous horns in its place" (equivalent with the four heads on the leopard in Dan 7:6). This interpretation is confirmed by Daniel 8:22. These "four horns" (commanders) and their respective territories were:

- (1) Lysimachus - Thrace and Bithynia (much of Asia Minor)
- (2) Cassander - Macedonia and Greece
- (3) Seleucus - Syria, Babylonia, and the lands to the east
- (4) Ptolemy - Egypt, the land of Judah, and Arabia Petrea

d. The "Small Horn" and his hostility against Israel (8:9-14)

8:9. Once again we are introduced to "a small horn." Although this designation sounds similar to the "little horn" of chapter seven, these clearly do not have the same individuals in view. As we saw in the earlier case, the little horn of chapter seven symbolized the future Antichrist who arises out of what had once been the Roman Empire. The "small horn" of Daniel 8, however, is said to come forth from one of the "four conspicuous horns" that emerged from the empire founded by Alexander the Great. Commentators are virtually unanimous in identifying this small horn in Daniel 8:9 as being Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The "conspicuous horn" from whom he comes forth is Seleucus I Nicator, one of Alexander's generals who took control of Syria and Babylonia following Alexander's death. This Seleucus (r. 312-280 BC) was the founder of the Seleucid dynasty (which came to be centered in Syria). The year 312 BC is used for the beginning of the Seleucid Empire, because that is the year that Seleucus regained control of Babylonia. Antiochus IV Epiphanes was a descendant of Seleucus I who ruled from 175-164 BC. He is given considerable attention in Daniel 11 and 11 because of the horrible atrocities he committed against the Jewish people and their religion. In this role as a persecutor, he prefigures the eventual Antichrist.

Daniel 8:9 goes on to say that this "small horn" (Antiochus IV) grew great "toward the south and the east and toward the beautiful land." Antiochus became a powerful ruler in his day, and one of his achievements was his victories over the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt (to the south). He also made successful expeditions against rebellious elements in Armenia and Parthia (to the east). The "beautiful land" (Heb *haššebi*) comes from a word meaning beauty, honor. This is a

¹³ For a helpful account of this period of struggle, see Edouard Will, "The Succession to Alexander," 23-61, in *The Cambridge Ancient History; VII Part 1, The Hellenistic World* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984).

reference to the land of Judah (later known as Palestine), as is clear from the use of this expression in Daniel 11:41 (cf. Ezek 20:6).¹⁴ Antiochus was notorious for his interference in the affairs of Judah and the exertion of his military muscle against the Jews.

8:10. Having mentioned Antiochus's military aggression against the land of Judah in verse 9, his actions are then depicted symbolically in verse 10. The land of Judah, being the homeland of God's covenant people, was special. Hence, his aggression against the land of Judah was as though he made an assault upon "the army of heaven" (literally, the host of heaven). The Hebrew word translated "host" (Heb *šēbā*) is often used of angels in the service of God, sometimes of an army, and at other times of literal stars (Jer 33:22). However, of the seventeen times that the phrase "host of heaven" is used in the OT, it means the celestial bodies in the heavens (an exception is 1 Kgs 22:19 [= 2 Chron 18:18] where it refers to the angelic court). See, for example, Deuteronomy 17:3. Obviously Antiochus did not literally ascend to heaven. Yet in becoming greater militarily, his attempt to subjugate the land of Judah was likened in Daniel's vision to an assault on heaven itself. The reference to "host" (NET: army) and "stars" is best understood as the celestial bodies in the sky, not angels. Antiochus's hurling them down to earth and trampling them is symbolic of what he did to the Jewish people. Although some scholars have understood verse 10 as depicting an assault on the angelic court, this interpretation has problems: (1) the following verses (11-12) clarify that what is in view is his atrocities on the Jewish people and the Jerusalem temple, not angels; and (2) the word for "trampling" in verse 10 (Heb *rāmas*) was used earlier in verse 7 of Alexander's brutality in slaughtering Persian soldiers. When used figuratively, this word "to trample" means to dominate, prevail over, and decisively defeat or persecute severely. Antiochus did that to the Jewish people, but he did not do that to angels. So it is better to understand this in regard to the stars and other celestial objects, with that in turn being symbolic of his harsh persecution of the Jewish people. This is well documented in the books of I and II Maccabees (cf. 1 Macc 1:29-32; 1:52-61). Perhaps the idea of "stars" was appropriate imagery, because God had promised to Abram that his descendants would become as the stars in number (Gen 15:5; cf. Dan 12:3). Also, in Exodus 12:41, the term "host" was used of "the hosts of Yahweh" (i.e., the Hebrews) who went out of the land of Egypt (cf. Exod 7:4; 12:17).

8:11-12. These verses look at some of the more specific acts of Antiochus. We see, for instance, his arrogance against "the Prince of the army" (literally, the Commander of the host - *śar haššābā*). Some have suggested this might be the High Priest, Onias III, who was assassinated under Antiochus' rule about 171-170 BC, or perhaps even the angel Michael (see Dan 12:1 where the term *śar* is used of him). More likely, however, this refers to the LORD Himself in light of the way that the term *śar* is used in Daniel 8:25 (cf. Josh 5:14 where Joshua meets the "commander of the host of the LORD" [Heb *śar šēbā' Adonai*]). Not only did Antiochus exalt himself by having coins minted with the inscription *Theos Epiphanēs* (i.e., god manifest), but he sought to eradicate the biblical faith in Jerusalem and replace it with Hellenistic worship of the Greek gods. Waltke summarizes his actions:

¹⁴ The land of Judah was considered the Beautiful Land, precisely because God had set this land apart for Abraham and his descendants, and it was there that the temple was built in which His *shekinah glory* dwelt.

"Further, the sanctuary in Jerusalem was to be polluted and called 'Jupiter Olympius' (2 Macc. 6:1f.), probably a Syrian deity in Hellenistic garb.... On Chislew 15 Antiochus instituted the pagan festival of 'light,' which celebrated the rebirth of the sun, and had a Greek altar erected upon the old altar in the temple court (Dnl. 11:31; cf. Josephus *Ant.* xii.5.4); the first victim was sacrificed to Jupiter Olympius on the twenty-fifth (Dec 16, 167 B.C.) of the same month. Such an offering to Antiochus was to be made on the twenty-fifth of every month, since that date was celebrated as his birthday."¹⁵

Furthermore by his order "the daily sacrifice was removed." The "daily sacrifice" is just one word in the Hebrew text, *hattāmîd* (meaning "continuously"). This is a technical expression for the daily sacrifices which were offered at the Jewish temple according to Exodus 29:38-42. These sacrifices were to be done "each day regularly" (*lāyyôm tāmîd*). The daily sacrifice consisted of the offering of a lamb along with a grain offering and a drink offering, both in the morning and at twilight, as a soothing aroma to the LORD. In addition to halting the important daily sacrifice, upon Antiochus' orders the "sanctuary was thrown down." The "sanctuary" (Heb *miqdāš*) is a reference to the earthly temple in Jerusalem (Exod 25:8; Dan 9:17). Antiochus did not **destroy** the Jewish temple, but he profaned it and thereby rendered it unfit for use. The first stage of this took place in 169 BC when he himself entered the Holy of Holies and plundered the temple:

After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year [169 BC]. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. Taking them all, he went into his own land. (1 Macc 1:20-24)

Two years later (in Dec 167 BC), he went even further when he committed a most abominable sacrilege and attempted to destroy the biblical faith altogether. This is recorded in 1 Maccabees 1:54-61:

Now on the fifteenth day of Chislew . . . , they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king. They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns. On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering. According to the decree, they put to

¹⁵ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979-1988), s.v. "Antiochus IV Epiphanes," by B. K. Waltke, 1:146.

death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks.

Verse 12 explains that it was on account of transgression that the host (the Jewish people) and the regular sacrifice were given over to Antiochus. The word for “transgression” (rendered “rebellion” in some translations) is the Hebrew word *peša'*, which normally signifies sin in the sense of **revolting** against the authority of God. This transgression could be that of the Jewish people (which brought about divine judgment), or it could be the atrocities of Antiochus himself. The latter seems preferable, seeing that the same word *peša'* is used in the very next verse, apparently of the desolation brought about by Antiochus. Antiochus “hurled truth to the ground,” when he ordered that copies of Scripture were to be burned. At least for a season, Antiochus was able to do what he wanted and accomplish his goals--but only as long as God in His sovereignty permitted him to do so.

8:13-14. By God’s grace, Antiochus’ reign of terror would be limited. A courageous Jewish family known as the Maccabees arose and inspired a successful revolt against Antiochus, though it took a few years for the victory to come. Finally, in December of 164 BC, the temple precinct was secured and the temple itself was cleansed and rededicated to the LORD, thus enabling the sacrificial system to be reinstated. Daniel, writing in the sixth century BC, could only see these events from afar. Yet in the vision, he did hear two “holy ones” (angels) discussing the length of time that this “rebellion” (or transgression) on the part of Antiochus would be allowed to go on in which the “sanctuary” (literally, holy place) and the army (Jewish people) would be **trampled**.

The answer was given in verse 14: it would be for a period of “2,300 evenings and mornings” (cf. v 26). Since the final part of verse 14 indicates that “the sanctuary will be put right again”--which seems to look at the cleansing and rededication of the Jerusalem temple--the concluding time (the *terminus ad quem*) must be in December of 164 BC according to the testimony recorded in 1 Maccabees 4:52-59:¹⁶

Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev [*Nov-Dec*], in the one hundred forty-eighth year [*164 BC*], they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed. Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly

¹⁶ Cf. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.), 103. He defends the Dec 164 BC date, and explains the calendar systems of that period.

of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

This occasion has been commemorated ever since as the feast of Hanukkah, which means "dedication" (cf. Jn 10:22). Thus, the number 2300 apparently refers to a period of time prior to December of 164 BC. How this is to be calculated, however, is unclear, and evangelical scholars differ on this. The text of Daniel 8:14 literally says that this period of time is 2300 "evening morning." Some would understand this to mean 2300 days, which would mean a period of roughly six years and four months.¹⁷ Others, however, would understand this to mean 1150 days (1/2 of 2300), based on the idea that the "regular (or daily) sacrifice" was offered **twice daily** and that the text has in view the number of daily sacrifices that were missed. Also complicating a solution is whether time should be reckoned according to a lunar calendar with months of thirty days (as the Jews were known to have used), or whether a year of 365 ¼ days should be used. The first view (2300 days) would result in a period from roughly July-August of 170 BC to December 164 BC.¹⁸ The second view (1150 days) would result in a period from roughly September-October 167 BC to Dec 164 BC. The latter view would correspond more closely to the time frame that Antiochus actually halted the regular sacrifice. According to 1 Maccabees 1:41-45, Antiochus wrote a letter in which he "forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary *prior to* the sacrilege of Dec 167 BC."¹⁹

Perhaps a final solution to the dates of this period is not possible based on the limited data that we have at this time. Nevertheless, the termination of the period of "2300 evening morning" is certainly in December of 164 BC when the temple in Jerusalem was cleansed and rededicated for use. It is quite unfortunate that some misguided Bible enthusiasts have interpreted the 2300 as being "years," an error that led William Miller, founder of the Seventh Day Adventists, to mistakenly calculate the return of Christ in AD 1843-44. The time period

¹⁷ Some who favor the interpretation of 2300 days point out that the idea of "evening morning" is reminiscent of Genesis 1:5: "and there was evening and there was morning, one day." Those who favor the 1150 day theory would respond, however, that the intention of the author is not to allude to Genesis 1:5 but to underscore the evening and morning daily sacrifices, especially since the text makes a point about the "regular sacrifice" at least three times (in Dan 8:11, 12 and 13).

¹⁸ Those who favor the 2300 day theory often attempt to link the *terminus a quo* of 170 BC with the assassination of the legitimate high priest, Onias III. The passage in 2 Maccabees 4:30-34 which describes the murder of Onias III does not provide any exact date. Waltke gives a general date for Onias' death as 170/69 BC (G. W. Bromiley, ed., *ISBE*, "Antiochus IV Epiphanes," 1:145). A weakness of this view is that the text gives no hint that the *terminus a quo* should even be linked with the murder of Onias III.

¹⁹ It appears from a reading of 1 Maccabees 1:41-64 that Antiochus first wrote a letter demanding that the Jewish people give up their particular customs and forbidding the offerings and sacrifices in the sanctuary. Then subsequently, on Chislev 15 of 167 BC, his men committed the sacrilege of erecting a pagan altar on top of the altar of burnt offering, followed by the offering of a pagan sacrifice on this foreign altar on Chislev 25. An exact date for the letter is not given in 1 Maccabees, but this is apparently shortly before the atrocities in the month Chislev (Nov-Dec). If the 1150 day theory is correct, this theoretically could correspond to the period from the issuance or enforcement of the letter (in which sacrifices were forbidden) until the temple was finally cleansed and rededicated in December of 164 BC.

most certainly pertains to Antiochus IV in the second century BC. Since the book of Daniel uses Antiochus as a type of the latter-day Antichrist, a study of Antiochus and his persecution of God's people gives insight into what can be expected of the Antichrist himself.

2. Gabriel gives Daniel insight about the vision (8:15-27)

Daniel 8:1-14 gives the content of what Daniel had seen in his vision. Now an angel named Gabriel comes to Daniel and offers additional insight about this vision.

a. *The encounter with Gabriel (8:15-19)*

8:15-17. Daniel did not fully grasp the meaning of the vision that he had seen, and thus God sent an angel to give him further insight. Upon first seeing this angel, Daniel's impression was that he "appeared to be a man." The word translated "man" is the Hebrew word *geber*, which normally emphasizes a male at the height of his powers. This is also the base of the angel's name, Gabriel (*geber* plus the word for God, 'ēl), which means "man of God"--perhaps with emphasis upon his strength. Though only mentioned by name four times in Scripture, Gabriel is obviously an important angel, being chosen to announce to Mary that she would bear the virgin-born Son of God (cf. Dan 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). In any case, an *unknown person* calls to Gabriel to give Daniel understanding. Who is he? Though he speaks with **a human voice**, he commands such an angel as Gabriel. This raises the possibility that he may be the preincarnate Lord Jesus Christ. As Gabriel approached, Daniel felt terrified and fell to the ground.

Gabriel's first insight was to reveal that this vision "pertains to the time of the end." This expression "the time of the end" (Heb 'et qēš) appears four other times in the OT, yet all in Daniel (note Dan 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9). It would be hard not to associate the occurrence of this rare expression in Daniel 8 with those in chapters eleven and twelve. Yet when we examine these latter occurrences, they are clearly to be associated with the great time of distress that takes place in the days of the Antichrist of the end time. This suggests that though the vision describes the atrocities of Antiochus IV in the second century BC, it somehow is meant to convey truths related to the days of the Antichrist in the far distant future.

8:18-19. So powerful was Daniel's encounter with the angel Gabriel that it caused him to fall **into a trance** (lit., to fall into a heavy sleep--similar to Abram in Gen 15:12). Yet Gabriel touched him and made him stand upright, because Daniel needed to hear important truths. Gabriel was there to inform Daniel what would occur at "the latter time of wrath" (Heb 'ahārît hazzā'am). This expression does not occur elsewhere in the OT, but the word for wrath does occur one other time in Daniel, namely, Daniel 11:36. In that context, the Antichrist is in view, and the text says that "he will succeed until the time of wrath is completed." This tends to confirm what was said in the previous paragraph about the "time of the end." The wrath exercised by Antiochus IV is **anticipatory** of the latter-day wrath that will come at the hands of the Antichrist. Gabriel ends verse 19 by saying that the vision pertains to "the appointed time of the end" (Heb mô 'ēd qēš). This expression occurs elsewhere only in Daniel 11:27, 35. The latter verse makes clear that the time of the end was not fulfilled with Antiochus, but must wait for the appointed time when it will be fulfilled with the Antichrist.

b. *Gabriel's explanation of the vision (8:20-26)*

8:20-22. The main symbols of Daniel's vision are now clearly interpreted for the reader, and these have already been previously discussed. Worth pointing out is the fact that the kings of Media and Persia are symbolized by one animal, indicating that they are one entity (one kingdom). This is consistent with our interpretation of the bear in Daniel 7:4 as Medo-Persia, and suggests that critical scholars are wrong who want to make the second beast of Daniel 7 to be Media and the third beast to be Persia.

In Daniel 8:22, the four horns that arise in the place of the "large horn" of the male goat represent the four kingdoms that arose from Alexander's massive empire (see comments on Dan 8:8). Verse 22 goes on to say "they will not have his strength." This should not be taken to mean that the four generals who divided up Alexander's empire gained kingdoms that were small or insignificant. Quite the contrary, each one of them held enormous power. Yet when compared with Alexander, they simply did not have the incredible power that he wielded.

8:23-25. In light of verse 22, the expression "their rule" must refer to the four Hellenistic kingdoms that arose from Alexander's empire. Following Alexander's death, Judea (later known as Palestine under Roman rule) was at times under the power of the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt and at other times under the Seleucid Empire of Syria. By the time of the second century BC, however, Judea was primarily under Seleucid rule. The harsh tactics of Antiochus IV (r. 175-164 BC) spawned the Maccabean revolt against Syria, and by 142 BC Simon (the last surviving son of Mattathias Maccabee) gained independence from Syrian control.²⁰ Thus the "rash and deceitful king" must be a reference to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who indeed ruled over Judea "toward the end" of the rule by the Hellenistic powers. By this time the rebellious acts were complete. The NET Bible seems to have in view the sinfulness of the Jewish people. The idea would be that God patiently put up with their rebellious acts for many years, but finally judgment was due, and He used Antiochus to afflict them. (For this concept in Scripture, see Gen 15:16; Mt 23:32; and 1 Thess 2:16.) The *NASB* translation, however, renders this "when the transgressors have run their course" (which could be interpreted in different ways). Both translations are possible, depending on a technical matter in the Hebrew text.²¹

As pointed out above, the "deceitful king" in verse 23 must be Antiochus IV. On the other hand, this passage need not be limited to Antiochus. In light of Daniel 8:17-19, the vision also looks beyond Antiochus to "the appointed time of the end." It seems that Antiochus is used

²⁰ H. W. Hoehner, "Hasmoneans," in *ISBE* 2:621. Cf. Walter C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 477ff. for a helpful chapter on "The Hasmonean Kingdom." Under Simon, the son of Mattathias Maccabee, Judea gained her independence from Syria in 142 BC. Because of his achievements, the Jews in 140 BC conferred upon him the position of leader and high priest (see 1 Macc 14:25-40), and properly speaking this is the beginning of Hasmonean rule. Simon was succeeded by his son named John as high priest and ruler of the people. John took the ruling name of John Hyrcanus I and ruled 135-104 BC.

²¹ The Hebrew MT has "the transgressors," where *happōš'îm* is understood as the substantival use of the participle. The NET Bible, on the other hand, understands this as the plural form of the noun *peša'* (hence, *happōšā'îm*). The latter alternative has the support of the LXX.

in Daniel as a **type** of the future Antichrist, and therefore the description of the king in verses 23-25 refers first to Antiochus but ultimately to the Antichrist himself. Seen in this light, these verses do give us insight into the ways and character of the Antichrist who will arise in the future great tribulation.

Verse 23 points out that the king will be “rash and deceitful.” Regarding the translation “rash,” the Hebrew text has *‘az pānîm*, which literally means “fierce of face.” In light of the use of this expression in Deuteronomy 28:50, it signifies that he will be *without mercy* toward everyone. The translation “deceitful” literally means in the Hebrew text “understanding riddles/enigmas (*mēbîn hîdôt*). The Hebrew lexicon (*BDB*, 295) suggests the idea “skilled in double-dealing,” i.e., he will be a master of political intrigue.

According to verse 24, he will have great power, but **it will not be by his strength alone**. Whether Antiochus or the Antichrist, they will wield great power, but there is another source behind them. The real power behind the throne is Satan who relishes the chance to persecute God's people and uses both of these individuals as his puppet. Regarding the Antichrist, we are told that “the dragon gave the beast his power, his throne, and great authority to rule” (Rev 13:2). As the remainder of Daniel 8:24 points out, he will use this satanic power to bring horrible destruction upon others, and specifically upon God's people. The book of Revelation confirms that the Antichrist will persecute both the Jews and the believers in Jesus, and many will be martyred for their faith (cf. Rev 12:13-17; 13:7; 20:4).

In verse 25, the deceitfulness of the king is emphasized again, as well as his “arrogant attitude” (lit., he will magnify himself in his heart). Like many other cruel despots of history, this king will be a proud self-exalting ruler who has no concern for anyone other than himself. Antiochus had the words *theos epiphanēs* inscribed on the coins he minted, meaning God manifest. This need not be taken to mean that he thought himself to be a god, but that he saw himself as the earthly representative of the Greek gods. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:4, the Antichrist will take his arrogance to the highest level, for “he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God.” His campaigns of destruction and godless arrogance will know no bounds, for he will “rise up against the Prince of princes” (Heb *śar śārîm*--the only occurrence of this expression in the OT). This is undoubtedly a reference to the God of heaven, the One who stands as prince (i.e., with ruling authority) over the rulers of the earth (cf. Dan 4:26, 34-35). Whereas Antiochus defied God and attacked His temple, burned the Word of God and massacred many Jewish people, the Antichrist will personally attack Jesus Christ and all those aligned with him. In both cases, however, it is to no avail. Verse 25 indicates “he will be broken apart – but not by human agency.” Neither Antiochus nor the Antichrist will be stopped by human armies, but rather by divine act. Antiochus did not die in battle, but following a failed attempt to plunder the riches stored in the temple of Nanaea in Elymais (SW Iran), he received word that his forces had been routed by the Jews back in Judea. He then died insane in Persia, full of grief and remorse (1 Macc 6:1-17). The Antichrist will be personally defeated--not by human agency--but by Jesus Christ Himself at our Lord's return in glory (Rev 19:19-21).

8:26. Reference to “the vision of the evenings and mornings” clearly connects the angel's explanation in Daniel 8:20-25 with what had been foretold earlier about Antiochus in verses 9-14. The fulfillment, however, is for “a time many days from now.” Thus Daniel is to “seal up the vision.” The Hebrew word for "seal up" (*s^etōm*) means to stop up or keep closed (most often used of closing up a water well to prevent its use). Some translations (e.g., *NASB*) suggest that the idea is to keep the meaning hidden ("keep the vision secret"). However, the word *s^etōm* is used again in Daniel 12:4, 9 in parallel with the word *hātām*, which means to "seal, seal up," as of a document that is rendered **official** and preserved for the intended recipient (cf. 1 Kgs 21:8; Isa 8:16; Jer 32:10). The usage in Daniel 12 sheds light on the intended nuance of meaning here. Daniel did not personally understand all the vision or its significance, but he was responsible for recording and preserving it, that it might one day benefit those who would experience its reality.

c. Daniel's alarm over the vision (8:27)

Receiving such a frightening vision and encountering Gabriel had a profound impact upon Daniel, even to the point of being physically sick. After some amount of time, however, he was able to return to “the king's business.” We are not told in this verse just what position Daniel now held in Babylonia or what his relationship was with Belshazzar (clearly the vision takes place in his reign). Daniel 5:10-16 seems to imply that Daniel was virtually unknown to Belshazzar by 539 BC. Perhaps Daniel held his current position as a result of appointment by Nabonidus, the father of Belshazzar (the latter was made a coruler). We simply do not know.

B. The Vision of the Seventy “Weeks” Prophecy: God's Time-table for Israel (9:1-27)

This is the third in a series of four visions given to Daniel. Unlike the previous visions Daniel does not see strange beastly creatures, but he does encounter the angel Gabriel who reveals to Daniel details of Israel's prophetic future. This angelic encounter comes in response to a mighty prayer offered by Daniel. In the previous two chapters, Daniel learned that Israel's future was clouded by “dark days.” The nation would continue to be dominated by Gentile powers. Then a ruthless ruler would arise from the Hellenistic kingdoms (namely, Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century BC) who would severely persecute the Jews. Yet he was but a type of an even more oppressive ruler to arise in the far distant future, revealed to Daniel as the little horn of the fourth beast, but known elsewhere in the Bible as the Antichrist. Yet even in Daniel's own day, the nation still remained in exile in Babylon. Daniel's prayer in this chapter focuses upon God's deliverance of the nation from exile. In response, God reveals amazing details of the nation's future, looking beyond the near-term deliverance from exile to the ultimate deliverance under her Messiah.

1. Daniel's observation from Jeremiah's prophecy (9:1-2)

9:1. Chapter nine is dated to “the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus.” This is no doubt the same ruler as seen in Daniel 5:31 and 6, namely, Darius the Mede. His exact identity remains unknown, though his being a Mede need not seem odd. Historical documents from this period show that Cyrus the Great had close association with the Medes and appointed many to high ranking positions within his realm. It is doubtful that this Darius is an alternative name (or

title) for Cyrus himself. The text says that he was “of Median descent,” and although it is true that Cyrus had a Median mother, the historical documents consistently view him as a Persian, since his father (Cambyses I of Anshan) was Persian. Furthermore, the text says that this Darius “had been appointed king,” and the verb in the passive suggests that he was appointed or given this position by another. Though this Darius remains unknown to us (at least by this name), he may have been a descendant or relative of Astyages, the last independent ruler of Media (r. 585-550 BC)--perhaps Astyages’s son, Cyaxares II.²² It is doubtful that Cyrus would have elevated someone to such an esteemed position who would not have been a member of the Median nobility (most likely someone of kingly descent). (See comments at Dan 5:31 for further discussion of Darius’ identity.)

9:2. The **first year** of Darius, then, would have been about the year 538 BC, approximately twelve or thirteen years since the vision recorded in Daniel 8. It was at this time that Daniel (in Babylonia) was studying the writings of the prophet Jeremiah. The latter never went into the Babylonian exile, but rather remained in Jerusalem until after the fall of the city in 586 BC and was later taken to Egypt. That copies of his writings were made and distributed so soon to those in exile evidences their quick recognition as Scripture. Daniel certainly saw them as such, since he describes them as “the word of the LORD disclosed to the prophet Jeremiah.” In studying Jeremiah's writings, Daniel took special notice of Jeremiah 25:8-12 and 29:10. This first passage is particularly significant, for it specified that Nebuchadnezzar (specifically naming him) would attack the land, and the Jews would serve him for seventy years. Daniel indicates that this seventy year period was the time for the “fulfilling of the desolation of Jerusalem.”²³ The word “desolation” (Heb *ḥorbôt* - in the pl) was used three times in Jeremiah 25 (vv 9, 11, 18), and indicates laying waste of something or bringing it to ruin. The beginning of this seventy year period must be no later than 605 BC (the year Nebuchadnezzar first besieged Jerusalem) and not 586 BC, since Jeremiah 25:12 indicated that God would punish the king of Babylon when the seventy years were completed.²⁴ However the seventy years are to be reckoned, Daniel realized

²² The Greek historian Xenophon writes in his work *Cyropaedia* that Astyages had a son named Cyaxares II, the latter being the uncle of Cyrus the Great. Furthermore, Cyrus felt much endeared to this Cyaxares and sought to please him and be on good terms with him. Strangely, however, Cyaxares is not mentioned by the historians Herodotus or Ctesias.

²³ There seems to have been a reason why the Lord chose 70 years for the length of the exile. According to 2 Chr 36:19-21, the land was to “enjoy its sabbaths.” Also, in Lev 26:43, the land was to be abandoned in order to “make up for its sabbaths while it is made desolate without them.” There was the stipulation in Lev 25:2-5 that the land was to rest every seventh year (not used for agriculture), and the people had neglected to keep this command. Apparently they had failed to do so seventy times, and so the Lord made the exile 70 years to allow the land to make up for the *sabbath years* that had been missed.

²⁴ If 70 years are reckoned from 586 BC, the *terminus ad quem* would be about 516 BC (approximately the year that the temple reconstruction was completed). However, the Babylonians had not been in power for some 23 years (since 539 BC). Jeremiah 25:12, however, indicated that the king of Babylon would be punished when the seventy years were completed. So the “completion” of the seventy years must be significantly earlier than 516 BC. The same logic would apply to using 597 BC as the beginning date. An alternative to using the year 605 BC as the *terminus a quo* might be to use the date 609 BC. This would be the year that Nebuchadnezzar made a final and conclusive defeat of the last remnant of the Assyrian armies led by Aššur-uballiṯ II at Harran. This marked the end of the Assyrian Empire and the rise to power of Babylon led by Nebuchadnezzar. In conjunction with this event, Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt killed King Josiah (July 609 BC), and Judah lost her independence and became a vassal

that the period was either completed or just about to be completed. This encouraged him that God's restoration of Judah was possible, which led in turn to his prayer for his homeland.

2. Daniel's prayer: national confession and petition for mercy (9:3-19)

Why after reading the prophecy of the seventy years for the Babylonian exile did Daniel launch into a prayer of humility and confession on behalf of the nation? The subject of Judah's restoration must be understood to fully appreciate Daniel's prayer in chapter nine. The whole experience of going into exile in Babylon was a fulfillment of the discipline that God had promised the nation years earlier under Moses (see Deut 28–29). He promised to shower them with blessings if they obeyed His covenant (see Deut 28:1-14), but He also warned them that He would discipline them for their covenant disobedience (Deut 28:15-68; cf. Lev 26:14-39). The discipline would be progressive, and ultimately it would culminate in their exile from the land of promise (Deut 28:64-68). Yet God also revealed His plan for the nation's restoration to blessing in Deuteronomy 30:1-10. Essentially, this meant that the nation would have to repent and turn back to the Lord whole-heartedly, and then God would regather the nation back to their land and bless them. According to Leviticus 26:40-41, this had to include the confession of their iniquity and covenant unfaithfulness, as well as that of their forefathers. Hence, the prayer that Daniel prays in chapter nine is a prayer of national repentance and confession as a precondition for God regathering His people to the land and restoring them to blessing. What comes as something of a surprise at the end of the chapter (Dan 9:24-27) is that God reveals to Daniel that His plans for national discipline extend far beyond the current seventy years, even though Israel would be allowed to return to the land in Daniel's day.

a. *Daniel's humility before God (9:3-4)*

9:3. "Fasting, sackcloth, and ashes" were the outward indications of one who wished to "lament" in ancient Israel. They also reflect the obvious sincerity and humility behind Daniel's prayer of confession. He wished to supplicate God for something, namely, Israel's restoration to the land, and a humble spirit on his part was essential. I am not trying to suggest that Daniel's prayer alone would have been sufficient for Israel's national confession and repentance, but Daniel was certainly being faithful to do his part and is representative of what was really the obligation of the entire nation.

9:4. Even though this is a prayer of confession about Israel's failure, it was very appropriate to begin with an acknowledgment of God's greatness and faithfulness. Israel's God alone was the "great and awesome God," a reminder of how privileged this nation had been and therefore how responsible they were to Him (cf. Deut 4:7-8). Furthermore, Israel's misfortune and exile were not the result of any failure on His part. Quite the contrary, He is "faithful to his covenant." If Israel had loved Him and kept His commandments, they would have discovered just how true this was and how much more He could have blessed them.

state of Egypt and four years later of Babylon itself. Seventy years after 609 BC would be 539 BC, the year Babylon was overthrown.

b. *Confession of the nation's sin and God's righteous judgment (9:5-14)*

9:5-6. These verses initiate a lengthy confession section, summarizing the basic problem of the nation. Verse 5 is a clear admission that the nation had been disobedient to her God. To underscore the point, Daniel uses five different words or concepts to emphasize this: “sinned,” “done what is wrong,” done what is “wicked,” “rebelled” and “turned away” from God’s commandments. He does not try to minimize their failure by calling it a mere mistake. The nation was as guilty of sin as it possibly could be, and this had to be owned up to.

In spite of their guilt, God had made efforts to help the nation back to the pathway of blessing. He did this by raising up prophets (as tokens of His grace) who confronted the disobedient nation and pointed the people back to the Law. From kings to the common “inhabitants of the land,” all had heard from God’s prophets and therefore had been given sufficient opportunity to repent and turn back before God’s judgment fell.

9:7-8. Sin always exacts a price, and in Israel’s case the outcome was in their being thoroughly “humiliated” before all other nations of the world. How could it be that the one nation that knew and served the only true God and had His laws could end up like this? Being chosen and privileged was not to be taken lightly; they were responsible to love Him and be faithful to His covenant. As it was, they reaped what they had sown, and their humiliation and open shame were a direct fulfillment of Deuteronomy 29:22-28.

9:9-10. Was this God of Heaven too exacting? Too strict? No, He is a God who is “compassionate and forgiving.” They could have availed themselves of His gracious and forgiving character at any time. Instead, they “rebelled against him” and neglected to heed “his servants the prophets.”

9:11-14. The common idea of these verses is that God’s Word proves true. The “judgment solemnly threatened in the law of Moses” is a reference to the Deuteronomic principle of curses for disobedience, the ultimate form being the devastation of their cities and fields followed by exile from the land. What God had forewarned them of by His Word indeed came true. This underscores how important it is to obey the Word of God, because the Lord is watching over His Word to confirm it. Verse 13 is an acknowledgment that they had the written Word of God, in the form of what had been “written in the law of Moses,” and this was God’s **reliable** truth. Having failed to heed the Word and having not obeyed, the nation received the calamity they rightly deserved, namely, the devastation that Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians inflicted upon them from 605 BC until Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 586 BC. Israel alone bore the responsibility, for God is “just in all He has done.” No blame or fault could be attributed to Him.

c. *Petition for God's mercies and the restoration of Jerusalem (9:15-19)*

Verses 15-19 of Daniel 9 constitute the **petition section** of Daniel’s prayer. Although elements of confession still surface in this section, the primary emphasis is upon petitioning God for what he wants Him to do, namely, to mercifully forgive the nation of its sin and to restore

Jerusalem and the temple. The key motif of this petition, however, is the concern for God's *name*, i.e., His reputation in the eyes of the entire world. Reference to God's name is mentioned at least three times in the paragraph (vv 15, 18, 19), "for your own sake" is mentioned twice (vv 17, 19), and several times Daniel states that the temple and city of Jerusalem are associated with God's name. Thus, the concern for God's name is the driving motivation for Him to act.

9:15-16. These two verses introduce the topic of God's name. In days past, God "made a name for" Himself (i.e., glorified His name/reputation in the eyes of the nations) when He brought the Hebrew people out of the bondage of Egypt with a mighty display of power. With the words "we have sinned and behaved wickedly," Daniel is quick to add that any *stain* on God's reputation presently was not because of any fault of His or lack of power. Yes, Israel is seemingly disgraced before the nations and many will no doubt discount the validity or power of her God, but Israel bears the blame for that.

God's name was indelibly linked with the city of Jerusalem, because with the construction of the temple by Solomon, God had caused His name to dwell there (cf. 1 Kgs 8:28-29, 43). Thus, restoration of the city and temple would serve to bring honor to God's name once again. Daniel, of course, did not expect God to do this in some unjust way--the discipline of the exile was "according to all Your justice" (and the exercise of His "raging anger" had been appropriate). Yet with the nation still in exile, Jerusalem and God's people were "mocked by all her neighbors." Since God's name was linked with these, then He was mocked, too.

9:17-19. Having introduced the concern for God's name in verses 15-16 and having appealed for God to turn away His raging anger, Daniel now asks God to act favorably (positive emphasis). The words "our God" from the lips of Daniel are significant. Israel had gone into exile primarily because of her history of idolatry--she had turned to other gods. If there was to be a restoration for the nation, then she must once again return to the first commandment: "you shall have no other gods before Me." Yet reversal of the nation's discipline was not for her comfort or ease (much less for what she deserved), but for God's sake. God's interests and God's glory were the main motivation for Him to act. The words "show favor to" are literally cause Your face to shine on, an idiom for God to graciously act in a favorable way. The main object is the "devastated sanctuary," implying Daniel's hope that God will make possible the rebuilding of the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

Using vivid anthropomorphisms--"listen attentively" (lit., incline Your ear) and "open Your eyes"--Daniel acknowledges again the proper basis for God to act. If God chooses to answer this prayer, it is not because of the nation's righteous deeds, but rather because His "compassion is abundant." Whatever favor God might choose to render, it would be grace, for the nation was not deserving of His kindness. Their only hope could be in His compassion (and fortunately for all, His compassion is abundant). Likewise, we today have no right to ask for anything, until we see that we deserve nothing!

In the conclusion to the petition (Dan 9:19), Daniel utilizes five successive imperatives to underscore the sincerity and urgency of his appeal to God. Notice that Daniel did not expect

God to answer favorably without extending forgiveness. Then he repeated the main theme of the petition: God's city and people were linked with His name, and therefore He should act for His own sake.

3. God's response to Daniel's prayer (9:20-27)

The remainder of the chapter records God's answer to Daniel's prayer. God's response brings both good news and bad news. Yes, the present period of exile in Babylon is over. God will soon use Cyrus to issue a decree permitting the return of the Jews to Judea. By the year 516-15 BC, the temple will be rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel (although it is doubtful that Daniel lived to see this). The bad news is that the present seventy-year exile has not been sufficient to complete the desolations upon Jerusalem. A much longer time--seventy times seven years--will be needed for that. The Babylonian exile served to put an end to the nation's besetting sin of idolatry, but the longer time period will be necessary for a complete cleansing of the nation's sins.

a. *Gabriel's appearance to give Daniel insight (9:20-23)*

Once again, Gabriel is used to help communicate and bring understanding to Daniel (recall Dan 8:16). It is possible, though not certain, that Gabriel appeared directly to Daniel rather than in a vision itself. He is called "the man Gabriel" only to indicate that he appeared to Daniel in human form, for certainly he is an angelic being (cf. Luke 1:19, 30). If the translation "my state of extreme weariness" is correct (some translations have "caused to fly swiftly," referring to the angel's speed), this might indicate that Daniel had been praying for quite some time. Although Daniel still dwelt in Babylon and the temple sacrifices were not conducted at this time, verse 21 makes a point that Gabriel came "around the time of the evening offering" (which would be about 3:00-4:00 in the afternoon). During the period of exile, some of the Jews used this as a time of prayer (cf. Ezra 9:5; Ps 141:2). Daniel's prayer was probably much longer than what is recorded in chapter nine, but in any case, Gabriel was dispatched to bring insight to Daniel, not after Daniel had finished praying but at the very **beginning** of his requests. As a personal encouragement to Daniel, Gabriel informed him that he was "of great value in God's sight." The words "great value" are an attempt to translate a single word in Hebrew, *ḥāmûdôt*, meaning something very precious or highly esteemed. To be thought of this highly would be somewhat equivalent to hearing the words of Jesus, "Well done, good and faithful slave" (Mt 25:21).

b. *Revelation of the seventy "weeks" prophecy (9:24-27)*

If Daniel hoped for a complete restoration of the nation in his day and an end to the desolations against her, these final verses of the chapter clarify that a much longer period than seventy years would be needed for that. The present captivity in Babylon did essentially put an end to the sin of idolatry that plagued the nation, but further apostasy lay ahead. Hence a much longer time period awaited the nation for God to completely cleanse her of all sin and fulfill His promised covenant blessings. During this period of history, Messiah would come and be

rejected, the city and temple would again be destroyed, and ultimately the Antichrist would inflict his atrocities upon the nation. All this is outlined in these next four verses.

9:24. “Seventy weeks have been determined,” Gabriel reveals to Daniel, in which God will accomplish six crucial goals in relation to Daniel’s people and holy city. In light of Daniel’s prayer (note especially Dan 9:16), the people in view must be the Jewish people, and the holy city is clearly Jerusalem. The prophecy of these verses pertains primarily to them. Care should be taken not to spiritualize Israel to mean the “church” or for Jerusalem to mean a “heavenly Jerusalem.” Note, for example, that the Jerusalem of this passage is one that is rebuilt and then destroyed again.

The term for “weeks” is the Hebrew word *šābu’im*, which basically means a unit of seven. In this context, it clearly means a period of seven years, and most commentators understand it that way. (Cf. Gen 29:27-28 where this same term clearly means “seven years.”) Daniel had been thinking about the seventy years of captivity (Jer 25:11; 29:10), but God reveals to him that seventy more periods of seven years (i.e., a total of 490 years) are still needed to complete the desolations of Jerusalem that so concerned him (recall 9:17-18).

The remainder of verse 24 specifies the goals to be accomplished by the end of this long period of time. The first three pertain to sin (note the three terms for sin), and the final three look at positive blessings that God will bestow. The first goal is “to put an end to rebellion” (or “transgression,” Heb *peša’*). Israel’s apostasy and rebellion against the LORD had caused the Babylonian exile. Although the present exile was now ending, her rebellion against the LORD would continue (eventually climaxing with her rejection of Messiah Jesus). Nevertheless, one day in the distant future her rebellion will come to a complete end, but not until the seventy weeks have run their course. The second goal is “to bring sin to completion,” a thought very similar to the preceding one. For this to happen, however, Messiah will have to be punished for the sins of the nation (Isa 53). Yet at the time of His second advent He will cleanse the nation and remove her sin—a blessing that will only benefit those who humble themselves and turn to Jesus in faith (Ezek 37:23; Zech 5; Rom 11:20-27). The third goal is “to atone for iniquity.” To “atone” (Heb *kipper*) means to purge iniquity (i.e., wipe it clean) on the basis of sacrifice, and thus to grant forgiveness. The grounds for this is the crucifixion of Christ at Calvary, although the phrase finds its ultimate fulfillment in Israel’s national day of atonement at the second coming (Zech 3:8-9; 13:1).

The final three goals (three positive blessings) will also find their fulfillment at the second coming of Christ. The fourth goal is “to bring in perpetual righteousness.” The idea of Messiah establishing a kingdom of righteousness is a recurrent theme in the OT prophets (Isa 11:2-5; 60:21; Jer 23:5-6). When He reigns as King over a kingdom of regenerated subjects with Satan bound in the abyss (Rev 20:1-3), righteousness will flourish on the earth. The fifth goal is “to seal up the prophetic vision.” To “seal” (Heb *hātam*) can mean (1) to authenticate by sealing (1 Kgs 21:8; Jer 32:10, 11, 44); (2) to conceal something or make inaccessible (Isa 29:11; poss. Dan 12:4, 9); or (3) to secure something or preserve it securely (poss. Dan 12:4, 9; Deut 32:34). If the latter idea is intended, the prophetic vision is sealed up now (for preservation), but will be

ultimately realized in the “end of time“ (cf. Dan 8:26; 12:4, 9). This looks at the full realization of what God said He would do in fulfilling His program with Israel, especially her restoration in preparation for Messiah’s kingdom. (Keep in mind that the vision pertains to Daniel’s people and their holy city, i.e., Jerusalem). The sixth and final goal is “to anoint a most holy place.”²⁵ The word “place” is not in the Hebrew text, though this can be inferred. The words "most holy" (Heb *qōdeš qodāšîm*) usually do not refer to a person--though they do in one case, namely, 1 Chronicles 23:13 in regard to Aaron. (Some early church fathers [e.g., Hippolytus] mistakenly saw this as a reference to Jesus, the Most Holy One.) More commonly, these words describe the altar or furnishings of the tabernacle as being "most holy" (Exod 29:37; 30:29). Significantly, the “sanctuary” (*hammiqdāš*) in Ezekiel’s eschatological vision is called “most holy” in Ezekiel 45:3 (same words), as is the entire top of the mountain for the sanctuary (Ezek 43:10-12; see esp. v 12). Hence, the anointing of a most holy place, though it may have some partial fulfillment with Zerubbabel’s rebuilt temple in 516 BC, most likely looks to the proper inauguration of a millennial temple following Jesus’ return (cf. Isa 2:1-4).

An understanding of these six goals is crucial for the proper interpretation of the remaining three verses. For example, the common viewpoint of critical scholars is that Daniel 9:24-27 finds its complete fulfillment in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean revolt during the years 171-164 BC. However, the above six goals were certainly not fulfilled (and could not be) by this stage of history. Furthermore, they could not even be fulfilled completely in the first coming of Christ, suggesting that the seventy weeks must extend until Christ’s second coming.

9:25. Several interpretative problems immediately arise at verse 25. Who is the "anointed one" (some translations have "Messiah")? Is this figure the same as the "anointed one" in verse 26? What command or decree is in view and what date was it issued? Are the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks meant to be combined, or does the anointed one come after the first seven weeks? Scholars differ greatly on their answers to these questions.

The first crucial question is the matter of “the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” Numerous suggestions have been made,²⁶ but conservative evangelicals usually opt for one of three possibilities as the starting point of the seventy weeks: (1) the decree of Cyrus about 538 BC--see Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5 (so Keil, Leupold, Young, Baldwin, and Calvin); (2) the

²⁵ "Most holy place" is a good translation of the Hebrew *qōdeš qodāšîm*. Whenever the "Holy of Holies" is referred to, this is rendered by the slightly different expression *qōdeš haqqādāšîm*.

²⁶ Critical scholars typically date this "command" (or decree) early in the sixth century. Collins, for example, thinks this must be a divine decree, not that of a Persian king in light of the use of the same word (Heb *dābār*) in Daniel 9:23 (John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermenia [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993], 354). He thus sees this as part of the revelation given to Daniel about the time of the first year of Darius the Mede (note Dan 9:1). Hartman, on the other hand, relates it to the announcement given to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:10, which he would date at 594 BC based on Jeremiah 28:1 (Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. DiLella, *The Book of Daniel*, The Anchor Bible [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1978], 250). The end result for both is the same, as they see the first seven "weeks" depicting the time until the arrival of the "anointed one" in 538 BC, namely, the high priest Joshua. [For them the 7 "weeks" is only approximate].

decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra about 458/57 BC--see Ezra 7:11-26, note esp. verse 21 (so J. B. Payne, G. Archer, L. Wood, and S. Miller); or (3) the authorization of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in 444 BC--see Neh 1--2 (so J. Walvoord, C. Ryrie, R. Anderson, H. Hoehner, P. Feinberg, and J. D. Pentecost).

The first suggestion (Cyrus' decree in 538 BC) is the least likely. First, his decree was primarily to allow the Jews to return and rebuild the temple, and the rebuilding of the city did not come until much later. If the seven weeks (i.e., forty-nine years) refers to the time for the rebuilding of the city, this simply did not happen within forty-nine years of the return in 538 BC. Second, a total of sixty-nine weeks (i.e., 483 years) from 538 BC would result in 55-54 BC, a date irrelevant for any candidate as "the anointed one." The second suggestion, the decree to Ezra in 458-57 BC, is more plausible, yet not without problems. Sixty-nine weeks (i.e., 483 years--assuming solar years of 365 ¼ days) from this date would be AD 26/27, a date which some believe to be the commencement of Jesus' public ministry (assuming the death of Christ occurred in AD 30). Against this view is the fact that (1) there is no mention in the Ezra passage about the rebuilding of the city, but only a return of more Jews to the land and an "adorning" of the temple; and (2) more recent chronological studies suggest that Christ's public ministry began in AD 29, and His crucifixion took place in AD 33.²⁷ The third suggestion, namely the authorization of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in 444 BC is perhaps the best. The main strengths of this view are (1) Nehemiah's request to Artaxerxes was specifically to rebuild the city (Neh 2:5-8); and (2) the book of Nehemiah (and Ezra 4:7-23) indicates that the restoration was done in the most distressing circumstances (note the ending to Dan 9:25). Sometimes this view is criticized, because the calculations of the first sixty-nine weeks are based on a lunar (or prophetic) year of 360 days rather than on solar years. Yet good reasons can be put forth to defend calculations based on lunar/prophetic years.²⁸ Based on this method, the sixty-nine weeks of years would run from 444 BC to AD 33 (details to follow).

The next crucial question is the identity of the "anointed one, a prince." The *NASB* translation has "Messiah the Prince," by which they obviously understand this to be a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. The word "Messiah" is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *māšīah* that means anointed. In the OT, both priests and kings were anointed at the time of their commencement to office, but the title "Messiah" (Gk *Christos*) came to signify above all else that One who was expected to come in fulfillment of the promise to David, a son who would

²⁷ H. Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ; Part II: The Commencement of Christ's Ministry," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (Jan-Mar 1974): 41-54. Cf. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, rev. ed. (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 329-69.

²⁸ Several lines of reasoning could be offered for using prophetic years: (1) several ancient countries had calendar systems based on a 360 day year (12 x 30) with some device to correct the lacking days (cf. P. Van Der Meer, *Chronology of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt* [Leiden: Brill, 1963]); (2) both Daniel and Revelation make use of 360 day prophetic years, and there seems to be a correlation between Daniel 9:27 and the 360 day year in light of Daniel 7:24-25; Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; and 13:5; and (3) a thirty-day month is also used in Genesis (Gen 7:11; 8:4; comp. Gen 7:24; 8:3). On the other hand, those who advocate the prophetic year have to acknowledge that the Jewish calendar was tied to the seasons with methods for correction to the solar year (cf. Kings and Chronicles where OT authors used true solar years).

inherit an eternal throne and kingdom (cf. 2 Sam 7:12-16). The correct identification of the “anointed one” in this verse depends on two things: (1) proper interpretation and dating of the decree itself; and (2) ascertaining the correct period of time from the decree until the arrival of the anointed one. Regarding the latter, some scholars argue on the basis of a punctuation marker in the Hebrew text that the seven weeks should be kept distinct from the sixty-two weeks.²⁹ If this were true, then the text would be saying that it was seven weeks (i.e., forty-nine years) from the decree until the anointed one (and hence the anointed one could not be Messiah Jesus in the first century AD). However, this punctuation marker was **not** part of the original text, but was added centuries after the NT era by Jewish scribes called the Masoretes. Its validity is very doubtful and should be rejected.³⁰ The proper reading, then, is that it will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks (i.e., a total of 483 years) from the issuing of the command of verse 25 until the anointed one. Based on the conclusion that the decree in view is that of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in 444 BC, the “anointed one” must be a figure in the early first century AD, and the only suitable candidate is Messiah Jesus.

Harold Hoehner, working on the basis of prophetic/lunar years of 360 days, has shown that it is 483 years from the month Nisan in 444 BC until Nisan of AD 33.³¹ Daniel 9:25 is an amazing prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah, and this cannot be any other than the Lord Jesus Christ!

In conclusion, the command is that of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in 444 BC. Within seven weeks (i.e., 49 years) of this command, the city of Jerusalem would be properly restored and rebuilt, although the work would be done under very distressing circumstances, just as the book of Nehemiah reflects. After yet another sixty-two weeks, the Lord Jesus would come to the nation in AD 33 to be received as her Messiah.

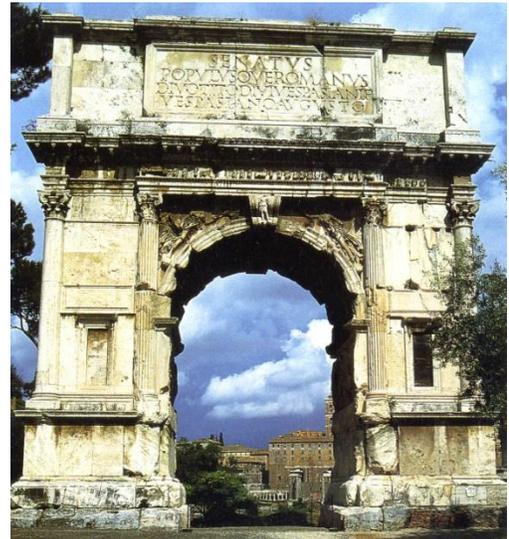
²⁹ This is the typical position of critical scholars, but has even been defended more recently by some evangelicals (e.g., Thomas McComiskey, “The Seventy Weeks of Daniel Against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Literature,” *Westminster Journal* 47 [1985]: 18-45).

³⁰ The Hebrew punctuation marker, called an *’atnāh*, is illogical at this point in the text between the words “seven” and “sixty-two.” Collins (355) argues for it on the basis that there is no other reason for dividing the seven from sixty-two. But this is not true. Since the text has made an explicit point about the rebuilding of the city, the seven “weeks” probably refers to the time for the rebuilding of the city following the activities of Nehemiah. Then it would be another 62 “weeks” from the city’s completion until the Messiah. Otherwise, if it were true that the two numbers were separated by an *’atnāh*, we would be left with a strange statement that it would be 62 “weeks” (434 years) for the city’s restoration and rebuilding, which is far too excessive. I would also point out that the Greek Septuagint translation of Theodotion shows no break between the two numbers.

³¹ H. Hoehner, “Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ; Part VI: Daniel’s Seventy Weeks and New Testament Chronology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (Jan-Mar 1975): 47-65. According to Daniel 9:25, Messiah would come after 69 “weeks” of years, i.e., 483 years. If there are 360 days per year, then it would be 360 x 483 or 173,880 days until Messiah. In order to fit this into our current system based on solar years, we would need to convert this figure by dividing it by 365.242 days per solar year. According to Hoehner, this results in a total of 476 solar years plus 25 days. He then added this figure to March 5, 444 BC (note Neh 2:1), which resulted in a terminal date of March 30, AD 33. [Note that 1 BC to AD 1 is only one year]. Although some flaws in his dates have since been pointed out (perhaps we cannot be so exact), he is essentially correct that there are 476 solar years from Nisan of 444 BC to Nisan of AD 33.

9:26. In light of what was revealed earlier in the OT about Messiah (including Dan 2:44 and 7:13-14), one might think that His coming would be accompanied by the establishment of His glorious kingdom on earth in which He would reign as king over all. Yet the LORD had a different plan and timing of events. The kingdom would eventually come, but first Messiah (an anointed one) would be “cut off” after the second period of sixty-two weeks. This cutting off of Messiah indicates a violent death.³² The fulfillment of this cutting off, then, is the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus in AD 33. As a result, He is said to “have nothing.” The text is not clear to what this refers, but the most logical explanation has to do with what was promised the "Son of Man" in Daniel 7:13-14, namely, His everlasting dominion and a kingdom which would not be destroyed. Ultimately, this kingdom promise will be fully realized, but not immediately after the sixty-two "weeks" when He is "cut off." Otherwise, He does have some important things. For instance, He would ascend to the Father's right hand and be glorified, and He would be head over the church.

Verse 26 goes on to describe the sad fate that would befall the Jewish people that crucified Messiah: “As for the city and the sanctuary, the people of the coming prince will destroy them.” In light of the context of Daniel 9, this can only refer to Jerusalem and her temple. Yet if this follows the sixty-two weeks and Messiah’s death, then this must refer to Jerusalem of the first century AD. This is indeed in keeping with known history. In the year 66 AD during the troubled reign of Emperor Nero, the Jews of Palestine revolted against the Roman Empire. Nero sent one of his commanders named Vespasian to put down the revolt. Before the victory could be clinched, however, Nero committed suicide (AD 68), prompting Vespasian to return to Rome as the new Roman emperor. As a result, Vespasian's son Titus took over the campaign in Judea. On September 26, AD 70, Jerusalem fell, and Herod’s temple was leveled in fulfillment of Christ's prediction (Mt 24:2; Lk 21:20-24). A careful study of this period of the Jewish revolt reveals that Jerusalem’s end came “like a flood,” and massive destruction came upon the nation “until the end of the war.”



The Arch of Titus in Rome commemorating Titus' victory in the Jewish War

Finally, we should observe more carefully who is said to destroy Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70: “the people of the coming prince.” “The people” refers to the Roman soldiers under Titus. The Hebrew term for “prince” is *nāgîd* (the same word that was used for Messiah in v 25). This is a very general term, and simply means a ruler (as in *NIV*). Yet this ruler is not the

³² The Hebrew word for "cut off" (*kārat*) is used elsewhere of making a covenant based on the death of a sacrificial animal (Gen 15:10, 18). The same word is also used of the death penalty (Lev 8:20) and always of an unnatural violent death (cf. Isa 53:8).

Roman commander at the time of the Jewish revolt, but rather one who is still to come. This, then, is the future Antichrist, for Daniel 7 had already revealed that the Antichrist would come out of the fourth beast, the Roman Empire. Verse 27 makes this clear.

9:27. The final verse addresses the seventieth and final week, i.e., the final seven years of the prophecy. Two crucial questions must be addressed: (1) who is the one making the covenant; and (2) does the seventieth week immediately follow the first sixty nine weeks? Critical scholars assume (wrongly) that the one making this covenant is Antiochus IV Epiphanes about 171/70 BC. Their theory is obviously wrong, because the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (recall v 26) did not take place at that time.³³ Some conservative scholars, on the other hand, have suggested that the one making the covenant is Messiah Jesus. But this interpretation cannot be correct either. The text says, “**he** will confirm a covenant with many for one week” (emphasis added). The pronoun “he” of this sentence is best understood in light of its nearest antecedent, namely, “the prince of the people” in verse 26. This means that the one initiating the covenant is the Antichrist, who in some way will arise from what was once the Roman Empire.³⁴ If this is true, however, then the seventieth and final “week” obviously does not (and cannot) immediately follow the first sixty nine (some have objected to this interpretation for this very reason). The events of verse 27 must follow all the details of verse 26, and thus the covenant is made after Jerusalem’s destruction in AD 70. If the first sixty-nine “weeks” took us up to Messiah’s crucifixion in AD 33 and the making of the covenant that begins the seventieth week follows the events of AD 70, then there must be a gap in time before the seventieth week. That this gap extends all the way to the second coming of Messiah Jesus makes sense in light of the six goals that were laid out in verse 24, some of which could not have been accomplished in Christ’s first coming (e.g., sealing up vision and prophecy). Furthermore, the “abomination of desolation” to which this verse apparently alludes (cf. Dan 12:11) is regarded by Christ as a *future event* connected with His second coming (Mt 24:15).

The word translated “covenant” (Heb *b^erît*) can mean a biblical covenant, or (in a more general sense) an alliance, treaty or pact. The text does not tell us the exact nature of this covenant, but apparently Antichrist either coerces or forces Israel (the many in v 27) into a covenant with him. An alternative explanation is that Antichrist poses as a false Messiah who dupes Israel (at least initially) by *enforcing* the Mosaic covenant (a view that I prefer). In any case, Antichrist goes to the extreme of bringing “sacrifices and offerings to a halt” in the middle of the final seven years, i.e., three and a half years following the inception of the covenant/alliance (notice that the text does not go so far as to say he breaks his alliance with the Jews). This verse implies, then, that some sort of Jewish temple will be standing and operational

³³ Collins (357) attempts to escape this dilemma by arguing that the word translated “destroy” in Daniel 9:26 (Heb *šāḥat*) should instead be translated “corrupt,” and that the point is that Antiochus *corrupted* Jerusalem and her priesthood at that time. A careful word study of *šāḥat*, however, reveals that whenever this verb has a tangible object in view, the meaning is not “corrupt” but “destroy.” Obviously, the verb has such a tangible object in this sentence, namely, the city and sanctuary. Hence, “destroy” is the proper translation.

³⁴ It is worth noting that this interpretation is embraced not only by most premillennial scholars, but also by many amillennial ones as well (e.g., C. F. Keil and H. C. Leopold).

at that time. This halting of sacrifices apparently corresponds to Antichrist's horrid atrocity described in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, "He [the man of lawlessness] opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God." This is most likely connected with the "abomination of desolation" that Jesus prophesied of in Matthew 24:15 (the words "standing in the holy place" undoubtedly relate this blasphemous act to the temple). Jesus went on to warn that this event marked the onset of the great tribulation (Mt 24:21), and that those who heed His words should flee Judea at this point. Antichrist then has three and a half years that he will be allowed to terrorize the earth and cause the unbelieving world to worship him (Rev 13:5; Dan 7:25), which corresponds perfectly to the second half of the final "week" in Daniel 9:27. This verse goes on to describe Antichrist as "the one who destroys" (cf. Rev 13:4 - "Who is able to make war against him?").

Nevertheless, Antichrist--the one who destroys--will only be allowed to rule and wage war "until the decreed end is poured out on the one who destroys." In light of such passages as 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 and Revelation 19:19-21, Antichrist will be personally stopped by Christ Himself at His second coming. That's his "decreed end" (cf. Dan 7:26)!

C. The Final Vision: Sufferings from Antiochus and Antichrist, But Then Rescue (10:1–12:13)

Chapters 10–12 comprise the fourth and final vision given to Daniel. Being the last vision given to Daniel, it is not surprisingly the longest. The scope of events covers the atrocities suffered by the Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century BC and those of the Antichrist himself in the latter days (the first being a type of the second). In the final analysis, however, God rescues His covenant people and resurrects the righteous to enjoy Messiah's kingdom.

1. Preparation of Daniel for the vision (10:1–11:1)

Daniel had humbled himself for three weeks while seeking understanding (Dan 10:12). In response God gave him a new vision. First, however, he needed to be prepared for receiving the vision. This preparation included his encounter with "a certain man dressed in linen" (vv 4-9) and then an angel (Dan 10:10–11:1).

a. The occasion of the vision (10:1-3)

10:1. According to verse 1, this final vision came "in the third year of King Cyrus of Persia," i.e., the third year in reference to his reign over Babylon.³⁵ (Cyrus had conquered

³⁵ The fact that Daniel 10 is dated by Cyrus king of Persia whereas Daniel 9 was dated by Darius the Mede may imply that this Darius had died by the time of Daniel 10 and a new "king of Babylon" had not yet been appointed. According to Pierre Briant (*From Cyrus to Alexander; A History of the Persian Empire*, transl. by Peter T. Daniels [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998], 64), sometime in Cyrus' fourth regnal year a certain Gubāru was given the title "governor (*pihatu*) of Babylonia and Trans-Euphrates."

Babylon in October of 539 BC.) If his first regnal year began the following Nisan (Mar/Apr of 538 BC), then his third year would have been from Mar/Apr of 536 to Mar/Apr of 535 BC.³⁶ The vision is also said to have taken place in the "first month" according to Daniel 10:4. The first month would be the month Nisan (Mar/April).³⁷ Therefore, the time of this final vision is during the month Nisan of 536 BC.

This date was extremely important, coming at a time when it gave Daniel a much clearer perspective on current events of his day. The vision to Daniel in chapter nine had come two years earlier. Following that vision, the LORD had moved Cyrus in 538 BC to issue a proclamation permitting the return of the Jewish exiles to their land (Ezra 1:1-4), and Daniel's prayer was thus answered. By Sept/Oct of 538 BC, the returning Jews had rebuilt the altar in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:1-6), and by the late spring of 537 BC they had begun work on the foundation of the temple (Ezra 3:7-13).³⁸ The work quickly stopped, however, on account of hostilities from their enemies living in the land (Ezra 4:1-5). By the following spring of 536 BC, Daniel would have heard of the difficulties facing his people back in Judea. As the "first month" approached (Nisan 536 BC) when Passover was due to be celebrated, Daniel's heart was probably heavy on account of the temple rebuilding being suspended.

Verse 1 of Daniel 10 is probably an introduction to the whole chapter, and therefore the message is actually that which is revealed in Daniel 11:2ff. The remainder of Daniel 10 informs us of the circumstances that led up to the communication of this message from God. Although this message is said to be concerned about a **great war**, this should not be taken to mean that only one single war is in view. The word translated "war" (Heb *ṣābā*) most often has a military connotation, such as army, war or hosts (organized for war). In some cases, it can refer to hardship or struggles in general (e.g., Job 10:17; 14:14; Isa 40:2). Here, however, it probably refers to a more protracted state of warfare, namely, the warfare and conflicts that bear on Israel as described in Daniel 11–12. In light of Daniel 10:14, these were the conflicts of war that awaited the nation "in the latter days." Although verse one states that Daniel "understood the

³⁶ The reckoning of time in the Ancient Near East and the years of a king's reign are complicated subjects. According to Finegan (*Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, rev. ed., 75), the Babylonians used what is called the "accession-year" method of reckoning a king's reign. According to this system, the time from the point that a new king begins to rule until the next New Year (in the month Nisan of the spring, i.e., Mar/Apr) is called his "accession year." Then the first year following Nisan 1 is called his first "regnal year." For Cyrus, then, his "accession year" was from Oct of 539 BC until Nisan 1 of 538 BC, and the first "regnal year" of his reign was from Nisan of 538 to Nisan 537.

³⁷ Note that Ezekiel who also lived in Babylonia during the exilic period regarded Nisan as the "first month," as did others in the post-exilic period (Ezek 45:21; cf. 2 Chr 35:1; Esth 3:7).

³⁸ We cannot be absolutely certain about these dates. Ezra 1:1 informs us that Cyrus' decree was issued in his first year, and I am assuming here that this means his first regnal year (after Nisan 1 of 538 BC). According to Ezra 3:1, we are told that the people built the altar in the seventh month (Sept/Oct), but we do not know if this is Sept/Oct of 538 or 537. If the decree came early enough in 538, then they could have been back in the land before the seventh month of 538 BC (which I have assumed). According to Ezra 3:8, the foundation for the temple was laid in "the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month." The second month is the month Iyyar (Apr/May), but the "second year" is not clear. The earliest that this could have been was late spring of 537 BC.

message,” this probably only means that he understood the gist of the message. Daniel 12:8 reveals that he did not understand everything fully (certain details still puzzled him).

10:2-3. Prior to the angel revealing the message to Daniel, he had been **mourning for three whole weeks**. During this time, he fasted . . . at least from certain foods and drink, including **meat** and **wine** (which indicates that his diet of vegetables and water in chapter one was probably discontinued after his period of training). Furthermore, he did not **anoint** himself **with oil**. The latter was a practice of anointing one's face with oil to refresh and preserve it from the hot sun (cf. Ps 104:15). In light of Daniel 10:4, Daniel did this during the general season of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Such actions, though appropriate for the festivals in the seventh month, were not done at the season of Passover. In fact, to properly observe these festivals, he normally would eat the Passover meal, and then eat unleavened bread for seven days. The fact that he chose to fast at the time of these festivals suggests that something strongly motivated him to do so. The word translated “mourning” in verse 2 often has a sense of deep sorrow and grief (compare the use of this form of the word *'ābal* in Gen 37:34 and 1 Sam 15:35). In light of the historical context, it is reasonable to assume that Daniel was **deeply troubled** over the sad turn of events happening to the Jews that had returned to the land of Judah that halted the rebuilding of the temple (note Ezra 4:4-5). What had been for a moment a cause of rejoicing (Cyrus' decree in his first year to permit their return) had now turned to disappointment. A closer look at Ezra 4:5 reveals that their enemies in the land “were hiring advisors to oppose them.” This may indicate that the non-Jewish people in the land were paying bribes to the king's counselors at the Persian court to turn the heart of the king against the temple rebuilding program.³⁹ This may have confused Daniel, such that he sought the LORD to gain a proper understanding (note Dan 10:12). Daniel was not the type of man who would *only mourn*. It seems he was also praying, and this is apparent from Daniel 10:12 where the angel says to him, “Your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.”

b. The vision of the “man dressed in linen” (10:4-9)

A question immediately arises as to the identity of this man that Daniel encounters in verse five. Related to this is whether or not we have the same figure beginning in Daniel 10:10. The conclusion presented here is that these are not the same figures. (Explanation will follow at Dan 10:10.) Quite a number of evangelical scholars conclude that the figure in Daniel 10:4-9 is the preincarnate Jesus Christ, and with this I concur. The description of this “man” in Daniel is strikingly similar to the apostle John's encounter with the glorified Christ in Revelation 1, and we can also observe certain parallels with the apostle Paul's encounter with Christ on the Damascus road. The following chart summarizes these parallels:

³⁹ F. Charles Fensham suggests that the “advisors/counselors” were actually the Persian governors who were taking bribes to act against the Jewish returnees (*The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT, [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982], 680). However, the word translated “advisors” (Heb *yô'āšîm*) is a word commonly used of those who acted as counselors or advisors to a king, not those who served as governors (e.g., Isa 19:11; 1 Chr 27:33). They served at the king's court and had direct access to him. The word translated “hiring” (Heb vb root *sākar*)--often meaning to pay someone legitimate wages--can mean to pay someone for evil purposes, and thus the idea of “bribing” is valid (see Deut 23:5; Neh 6:12-13).

Daniel 10:4-9	Revelation 1:12-17 and Acts 9:4, 7; 22:9; 26:14
5 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold,	Rev 1:12 I turned to see whose voice was speaking to me, and when I did so, I saw seven golden lampstands,
I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen;	Rev 1:13 and in the midst of the lampstands was one <i>like a son of man</i> . He was dressed in a robe extending down to his feet
around his waist was a belt made of gold from Uphaz.	and he wore a wide golden belt around his chest.
	Rev 1:14 His head and hair were as white as wool, even as white as snow,
6 His body resembled yellow jasper,	
and his face had an appearance like lightning.	(Rev 1:16b) His face shone like the sun shining at full strength.
His eyes were like blazing torches;	(Rev 1:14) and his eyes were like a fiery flame.
his arms and feet had the gleam of polished bronze.	Rev 1:15 His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace,
His voice thundered forth like the sound of a large crowd.	and his voice was like the roar of many waters.
7 Only I, Daniel, saw the vision; the men who were with me did not see it. On the contrary, they were overcome with fright and ran away to hide.	Acts 9:7 Now the men who were traveling with him stood there speechless, because they heard the voice but saw no one. Acts 22:9 Those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.
8 I alone was left to see this great vision. My strength drained from me, and my vigor disappeared; I was without energy. 9 I listened to his voice, and as I did so I fell into a trance-like sleep with my face to the ground.	Rev 1:17 When I saw him I fell down at his feet as though I were dead, Acts 9:4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Acts 26:14 When we had all fallen to the ground, I

	heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"
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10:4. Daniel's three weeks of mourning during the Passover season came to a halt "on the twenty-fourth day of the first month." Passover itself would have been on the 14th of Nisan (the first month), and the Feast of Unleavened Bread would have run through the 21st of Nisan (Exod 12:18; Lev 23:5-6). The 24th of Nisan, then, would have been three days after Unleavened Bread had ended. There is no known reason why the LORD chose this particular day to bring the "message" to him. Verse 3 put a stress on the fact that Daniel's abstinence continued until the entire three weeks were completed. Perhaps Daniel had purposed in his heart to fast and mourn for three weeks, and thus the final day (the 24th of the month) was an appropriate day for God to grant him understanding. At this time, Daniel was not in Babylon (along the Euphrates), but rather at some location along the bank of "the great river, the Tigris."⁴⁰

10:5-6. In these two verses, we have a succinct description of the preincarnate Christ. Although he is introduced here as **a man**, the exalted portrayal of him in these verses is too majestic for him to be merely a man, or even an angel for that matter. Recall that the one promised an eternal kingdom in Daniel 7:13-14 was called "a Son of Man." Scripture never hesitates to call Jesus a man, because He fully partook of our humanity (though without a sin nature by virtue of His virgin birth), while at the same time presenting Him as "Lord" (cf. 1 Tim 2:5).

His apparel in verse 5 is like that of an OT priest, anticipating His priestly ministry. Daniel, in an attempt to convey His incredible beauty and majesty, described His whole body as resembling "yellow jasper." The glory radiating from His face was as intense as lightning. In a similar manner, three of the apostles saw Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration in radiant glory: "His face shone like the sun" (Mt 17:2). This is how all God's children will see Him one day in the future kingdom. Having "eyes like blazing torches" reflects the incredible piercing vision He has to see the hearts of all, and thus to know and evaluate His church (cf. Rev 2:18). His "arms and feet had the gleam of polished bronze" (cf. Rev 1:15; 2:18), reflecting that his works and walk have been **tested by fire** and proven true and faithful. At the same time, bronze often is used to describe the virtue of strength (cf. Mic 4:13). The final thing highlighted is the words He uttered. The fact that His voice "thundered forth like the sound of a large crowd" is indicative of the authority and power with which He speaks (and acts!). His voice called forth all creation (Jn 1:3), and He upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3). No wonder the Roman

⁴⁰ If Daniel had been at this location along the Tigris river for the entire month of Nisan, he would have missed the huge Babylonian festivities associated with the Babylonian New Year during this same month (the *akītu* festival). During this festival the Babylonian version of the creation epic (*Enuma Elish*) was recited before Marduk. Block further describes this important time in Babylon: "The Babylonian New Year Festival was an elaborate affair, apparently incorporating aspects of several originally separate rituals. The event seems to have had several objectives: (1) to celebrate the supremacy and enthronement of Marduk; (2) to ensure the success of the enterprises of the coming year; (3) to affirm the king's status as high priest of Marduk; (4) to celebrate the enthronement of Nabû; (5) to mark the New Year on the calendar" (Bromiley, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979-1988], s.v. "New Year," by D. I. Block, 3:529).

centurion could say to Him, “Lord . . . just say the word, and my servant will be healed” (Mt 8:8).

The crucial question that should be asked is why Daniel suddenly saw this “man,” the Lord Jesus, on the 24th of Nisan in 536 BC. The angel will reveal God’s message for Daniel later, but the preliminary encounter with Christ does serve an important purpose. If Daniel had been mourning the halting of the temple construction and perplexed that God’s people seemed to be suppressed, his discouragement would be immediately overcome by the glorious spectacle of seeing Messiah Jesus. One sight of the future king of the nations would have boosted Daniel’s morale and given him the confidence that His God was in control of the nations, and His program would ultimately succeed.

10:7-9. The encounter with Messiah Jesus had a powerful effect on Daniel and those with him. The men with him were divinely prevented from seeing the vision, but yet they could sense the divine presence. As they did, they were frightened and “ran away to hide.” Daniel, however, remained there to behold the vision of Christ. In doing so, he was completely depleted of strength (compare the apostle John’s reaction to the vision of Christ on Patmos--“I fell down at his feet as though I were dead” in Rev 1:17). Yet Daniel does record that he “listened to His voice,” though unfortunately we are not told what he heard. Having heard Christ’s voice, however, Daniel “fell into a trance-like sleep” (cf. Dan 8:18). These six words are used to translate a single Hebrew verb (*nirdām*). This word can be used of heavy sleep in general, but it can also be used of a deep sleep induced by God Himself, as God did in the case of Adam (Gen 2:21) and Abraham (Gen 15:12).

c. The visitation of the angel to give Daniel understanding regarding the “latter days” (10:10–11:1)

Beginning in verse 10, we are introduced to a different figure. He cannot be the Lord Jesus Christ, because he has to receive angelic help when fighting according to verse 13. The Lord Jesus would never need angelic help to overcome his opponents (compare the Lamb’s triumph at His return in Rev 19:11-21). This is apparently an angel, because he is in league with Michael (whom Jude 9 calls “the archangel”). He might be Gabriel, since Gabriel had been used to convey the understanding of a vision to Daniel on a previous occasion (see Dan 8:16ff.). Whether Gabriel or another angel, his mission is to convey God’s message to Daniel.

10:10-11. These two verses depict Daniel’s encounter with the angel. Initially, Daniel has great difficulty in getting up from the ground where he had fallen face down (v 9). A touch from the angel enables Daniel to get to his “hands and knees.” The angel, wanting Daniel to be all the way upright, encourages him with the words “you are of great value” (lit., a man highly esteemed). This is quite similar to the way Gabriel had addressed him in Daniel 9:23, and this certainly reflects the high estimation that Daniel had in God’s eyes. The angel also exhorts Daniel to “understand the words” he is about to give him. With this, Daniel stands up, though he is shaking.

10:12-14. Before the angel reveals the message itself to Daniel, he first explains why there was something of a delay in the divine response. The delay really had nothing to do with Daniel or his prayer (as if he had not prayed correctly or fervently enough). When the angel proclaimed “your words were heard,” we realize that Daniel had not only mourned but had also prayed. Although he prayed and fasted for three entire weeks, his prayer was heard “from the very first day.”

The real reason why it had taken three weeks for the angel to come is that he had been extremely occupied in spiritual warfare at the highest levels. He explains, “the prince of the kingdom of Persia was opposing me for twenty-one days.” The word translated “prince” (Heb *śar*) can mean a ruler, leader or high official. Since this same word is used of Michael in verse 21, this “prince of the kingdom of Persia” is most likely an angelic being. Because he was “opposing” God’s angel (note that v 20 says they were engaged in battle), this “prince” must not only be an angel but more precisely a demonic angel. For this reason, “Michael, one of the leading princes,” came to help this holy angel in his fight with the demonic angel. This obviously reveals a lot about the unseen spiritual world. Angelic beings are involved in fierce fighting.

The fact that Michael would be brought in to assist the holy angel is telling. Jude 9 describes Michael as “the archangel,” and Daniel 12:1 refers to him as “the great prince who watches over your [Daniel’s] people.” This high-ranking angel (perhaps the highest!) is given the responsibility of protecting God’s covenant people, the Jews. Obviously something important was at stake in this angelic battle. According to Daniel 10:13, the holy angel had been “left there with the kings of Persia.” The term “kings” (Heb *malkê*) indicates that these are different from the “princes.” Care should be taken to observe that the word for “king” is in the plural. This, then, would most likely refer to Cyrus and his son, Cambyses. Although Cambyses’ accession year was not until 530 BC (when Cyrus was killed in battle), there is a strong possibility that he had a co-regency with his father prior to that. We do know that Cambyses was with Cyrus at the conquest of Babylon in 539 BC and was obviously held in high esteem at that time.⁴¹

If this holy angel had been left with the kings of Persia and was opposed by a demon identified as “the prince of the kingdom of Persia,” then it stands to reason that the angelic struggle focused on their access and influence with these human kings. Scripture elsewhere reveals Satan as the “prince of this world” (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and he has a large contingent of demonic angels who are organized in different ranks for the purpose of opposing the Lord God (Eph 1:21; 6:12; Rev 9:1-2, 11). Hence this “prince of Persia” was a demonic angel assigned to Persia. Care should be taken here, however, not to label this a “territorial spirit,” as though a **geographical assignment** is the issue. More accurately, the stress is on **sociopolitical**

⁴¹ According to the Nabonidus Chronicle (see *ANET*, 306), Cambyses entered Babylon with his father Cyrus, and he made an important appearance at the temple of Marduk. On the famous “Cyrus Cylinder” (*ANET*, 316), Cyrus urges prayer for both himself and his son, Cambyses: “May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me and may they recommend me (to him); to Marduk, my lord, they may say this: ‘Cyrus, the king who worships you, and Cambyses, his son.’”

structure, meaning that this demon was targeting the empire and the human authorities behind that empire.⁴² This demon's purpose was to manipulate and control decisions coming out of the Persian court that affected the whole empire. This was very relevant to Daniel, because the Jewish people at this time were under the authority of Persia. If the demon could turn the hearts of the Persian rulers against Judea and/or influence them to pass laws and commands detrimental to the Jews, then this would serve to thwart God's program. Appropriately, Michael himself (as guardian of the Jewish people) came to assist in this battle.

Having explained the reason for his delay, the angel went on in verse 14 to explain his purpose in coming to Daniel. This vision pertained to future days, and the angel's mission was to help Daniel "understand what will happen" to his "people in the latter days." This expression "the latter days" occurs ten times in the OT.⁴³ It more often has in view the far distant future involving the events just prior to the Messianic era, as well as the days when Messiah rules in His kingdom (see esp. Deut 4:30; Isa 2:2). The message about to be revealed to Daniel is to help provide understanding to him about the future of his people, some of which will unfold in the upcoming centuries and some of which will be in the far distant future at the climax of history when Messiah Jesus returns.

10:15-17. These three verses record Daniel's astonished reaction and his loss of strength. At first Daniel appeared speechless, but he was aided by one that "appeared to be a human being" (apparently the same holy angel). This one touched his lips enabling him to speak. Yet Daniel could only confess how weak he felt and how overwhelming it seemed that an angel would be conversing with him.

10:18-11:1. The angel then brought a second touch, this one not to enable Daniel to speak but to be strengthened and take courage. Once Daniel felt the supernatural strengthening, he was ready to listen to the message being brought by the angel.

In verse 20, the angel informs Daniel that he must return "to engage in battle with the prince of Persia." Spiritual warfare among these angels was not over--this would continue. Satan would continue to assault the Persian courts, seeking to influence the earthly rulers of the empire in ways hostile to God's plans and people (e.g., Haman's attempt to persuade King Ahasuerus [= Xerxes I, r. 486-465 BC] to have the Jews exterminated). The angel also instructs Daniel that "the prince of Greece is coming." This is not a reference to Alexander the Great personally, although this statement does anticipate that the Persian Empire would be followed by the Greek rulers, beginning with Alexander in 331 BC. Once Greece and her rulers rise to overthrow Persia, Satan would appoint another demonic angel (the prince of Greece) to try to control or adversely influence this new political empire.

⁴² Cf. David E. Stevens, "Daniel 10 and the Notion of Territorial Spirits," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157:628 (Oct-Dec 2000): 410-31.

⁴³ Deuteronomy 4:30; 31:29; Isaiah 2:2 (= Mic 4:1); Jeremiah 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Daniel 10:14.

In verse 21 the angel refers to what has been “written in a dependable book” (lit., inscribed in the writing of truth), which he will now make known to Daniel. This is the “message” that he was sent to convey as a response to Daniel’s prayers (recall 10:1), and which is recorded in Daniel 11:2ff. In the latter part of verse 21, the angel affirms that he has “no one who strengthens” him against these other demonic angels (the “princes”) “except Michael.” When he calls Michael “your prince,” he uses the plural form of the word “you”--Michael is not Daniel’s personal protective angel but that of Daniel’s people, the Jews (cf. 12:1).

Most scholars conclude that Daniel 11:1 is actually the last verse of the final paragraph in chapter ten (a better chapter break is **after** 11:1). The angel that had been speaking to Daniel (the “I” of this verse) indicates that he “stood to strengthen” and “provide protection” for him in the first year of Darius the Mede. Since the word “to strengthen” is the same word used in Daniel 10:21 of the angel Michael’s help to his fellow angel, the subject of this verse is the holy angel, not Daniel. That is, from Darius’ first year (539 BC)--when Babylonian rule collapsed and the Jews came under Medo-Persian rule--this holy angel had arisen to encourage and strengthen Michael. Hence, these two angels were a mutual help and strength to one another. At crucial times, they came to one another's aid in their efforts to influence what was taking place at the Persian courts and counter the evil plotting of the demonic angels.

2. Predictions of the near future--now historically fulfilled (11:2-35)

Daniel 11:2–12:4 forms the heart of God's message to Daniel in response to his fasting and prayers. In this message, God will reveal to Daniel a look at the nation's future history in two parts, both of which will be full of warfare and conflicts. Verses 2-35 trace the history of the nation from the time of Daniel (under Cyrus' reign) until the early second century BC. For most of this period, Judah is caught up in a struggle between two larger powers: the Seleucid Empire to the north and the Ptolemaic Empire of Egypt to the south. This struggle culminates when Antiochus IV Epiphanes comes to the Seleucid throne, under whose reign the Jews are severely persecuted (vv 21-35).

a. From the time of the Persian Empire to Antiochus IV (11:2-20)

The angel is very careful to trace the historical background to Antiochus IV, so as to show the developments that brought him to the throne. There is an emphasis during this period on treachery, strife, warfare, greed, hatred, destructiveness, assassinations, vengeance, and vindictiveness. All these evil traits come to characterize Antiochus himself.

(i) Origins of the conflict between the Ptolemies and Seleucids during the Persian period (11:2-4)

These three verses show how certain events during the Persian period set the stage for the long period of struggle between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid rulers.

11:2. Although Cyrus himself served relatively wisely as the first of the Persian kings, the “fourth king,” Xerxes I (485-465 BC), launched a major invasion against Greece. This Xerxes I is the same as King Ahasuerus of the book of Esther. Soon after his accession in 485 BC, Xerxes brutally

crushed revolts in Egypt and Babylonia, which contributed to his riches and power. He was now ready to use this acquired wealth and power against Greece in revenge for their earlier embarrassment of the Persians.⁴⁴ The banquet scene depicted in Esther 1 was not merely a drinking feast, but more so an occasion for Xerxes to bring together the noble officials of the Persian Empire to “stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece” and lay plans for a large-scale invasion. This great expedition against Greece began in the spring of 481 BC, yet it resulted in the humiliating loss of the Persian navy at Salamis to the west of Athens in 480 BC. Furthermore, Xerxes' army was eventually defeated at Plataea (NW of Athens) in 479 BC. The only consolation for the Persians was a brief conquest of Athens itself, in which they destroyed the old Parthenon.



Silver coin of Seleucus. Greek inscription reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΟΥ (of the king Seleucus)

11:3. For the next nearly 150 years, ill feelings between Persia and Greece continued to simmer. At last “a powerful king” arose who aroused the Greeks to invade the Persian Empire, partly on the premise of seeking revenge for Athens but more so for the lust of conquest itself. This was none other than Alexander the Great, who in just three and a half years exercised his “great authority” to conquer the mighty Persian Empire, striking a final victory at Gaugamela in Oct 331 BC.

11:4. Because of his untimely death in 323 BC at age 32, Alexander’s rise to power was short-lived. With no son old enough to inherit his throne, his kingdom fell “not to his posterity” but rather “was broken up,” as his military commanders scrambled to grab what power they could for themselves. In the final analysis, Alexander’s kingdom was “distributed toward the four winds of the sky,” i.e., four of his generals managed to carve up his empire into four primary parts (see notes on Dan 8:5-8). Yet none of his successors came close to having “the authority he exercised.”

(ii) Conflict between the Ptolemies and Seleucids prior to Antiochus III (11:5-9)

Introduction to the conflicts: Two of the successors of Alexander were Ptolemy I Soter and Seleucus I Nicator. Ptolemy became head of Egypt, and he and his descendants are referred to as the “king of the south” throughout Daniel 11. Seleucus and his descendants ruled over northern Syria and various other countries; they are referred to as the “king of the north” in Daniel 11. Knowing the background of their rise to power helps one understand the political tension that ensued. When Alexander arrived in Egypt in 332 BC, the country quickly surrendered to him (thus bringing an end to Persian rule over Egypt). Before marching on to conquer Persia, Alexander left an occupation force of 20,000 men in place (mostly Macedonians and Greeks). Upon Alexander’s death in 323 BC, Ptolemy (who had been one

⁴⁴ The roots of this conflict go back to the reign of Cyrus. Whenever Cyrus conquered Lydia in 547 BC, the Greek cities of Ionia in western Turkey were subjected to the Persians. Later participation by the Athenians in an Ionian revolt during the reign of Darius I led the latter to send Persian forces against Greece in 492 BC. A second Persian expedition in 490 BC resulted in the famous Battle of Marathon in which the much larger Persian force was routed by the Greeks.

of Alexander's most trusted generals) obtained from Perdikkas, the holder of Alexander's seal, the right to administer Egypt. Yet for the next twenty two years until 301 BC, numerous battles (the Wars of the Diadochi, i.e., successors) were fought for control of Alexander's empire. Ptolemy had no problem in holding on to Egypt, but there was dispute over the territories of Judah, Phoenicia and lower Syria. Initially, Ptolemy laid claim to these territories known as "Syria and Phoenicia" (or Coele-Syria) as early as 318 BC.⁴⁵ This area became highly prized for several reasons: (1) it served as an important buffer zone between Egypt and northern Syria; (2) the choice timbers of the Phoenician forests were essential for ship-building and a strong naval presence in the Mediterranean; and (3) the numerous caravan trails through the Middle East had important outlets at the eastern Mediterranean and particularly with Phoenicia.

One of the other rival successors named Antigonus, a Macedonian general and satrap under Alexander, claimed authority over most of Asia, seized the treasures at Susa, and also entered Babylon, where Seleucus was governor. Forced to flee, Seleucus sought refuge with Ptolemy, and the two entered into league with one another in 315 BC (along with Lysimachus and Cassander) against Antigonus. By 314 BC, Antigonus invaded Syria and besieged Tyre, and several years of war followed, during which Ptolemy was forced to withdraw from Coele-Syria. A victory at the Battle of Gaza in 312 BC by Seleucus over Demetrius, the son of Antigonus, allowed Ptolemy to once again occupy Coele-Syria, only to have to pull out again shortly afterwards. By the time peace was established in 311 BC, the government of Asia Minor and Syria was provisionally secured by Antigonus. Yet this was not to last.

In 301 BC, the division of Alexander's empire was finally settled with the battle of Ipsus (in Phrygia of Asia Minor). In this famous battle, the armies of Antigonus and his son Demetrius were pitted against the coalition of Cassander, Lysimachus, and Seleucus (Ptolemy supported the latter coalition but did not appear at the battle). Antigonus was soundly defeated, and in the aftermath Seleucus received the bulk of Antigonus' lands in the east and eastern Asia Minor. Seleucus also claimed the territories of Syria, but Ptolemy challenged him on this by occupying the lower parts of Syria up to the river Eleutherus in Phoenicia. The issue failed to be completely resolved:

The conquerors of Antigonus, suspicious, ordered Ptolemy to surrender this territory to Seleucus, but he refused. Seleucus, invoking the old friendship between himself and Ptolemy, agreed provisionally to let the territory go, but not without making it clear that he was not renouncing his rights over Coele-Syria.⁴⁶

This failure to come to a firm agreement on the rightful ownership of Coele-Syria became the origin of the Syrian Wars between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kings. The following chart shows the two kingly lines:

⁴⁵ The term Coele-Syria means the "hollow" of Syria. Strictly speaking, this refers to the Beqaa Valley of present-day Lebanon and the surrounding areas, including both Damascus and the entire area south of the river Eleutherus of Lebanon, and even Judea. [The river Eleutherus is also known as An Nahr al Kabir (the great river), and once formed the northern part of the border between Lebanon and Syria (flowing into the Mediterranean Sea).

⁴⁶ Edouard Will, *Cambridge Ancient History* VII, Part 1 (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 60. Seleucus probably felt some sense of obligation to Ptolemy, since it was because of Ptolemy's help that Seleucus had been able to reestablish himself as ruler over Babylonia. The latter Seleucid kings were not so sympathetic and understanding toward the Ptolemaic rulers.

Alexander the Great (336-323)	
<i>The Ptolemies</i>	<i>The Seleucids</i>
Ptolemy I Soter, son of Lagi (323-282)	Seleucus I Nicator (312/11-280)
Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282-246)*	Antiochus I (280-261)
	Antiochus II (261-246)
Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221)	Seleucus II (246-226)
	Seleucus III (226-222)
Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-203)	Antiochus III the Great (222-187)
Ptolemy V Epiphanes (203-181)	Seleucus IV (187-175)
Ptolemy VI Philometor (181-146)	Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164)

11:5. Verse five introduces us to the two initial antagonists. Both “the king of the south” (Ptolemy I) and “one of his subordinates”--lit., princes--(Seleucus I) “will grow strong.”⁴⁷ Both grew strong in the sense that they survived the struggle for a piece of Alexander’s empire (the Wars of the Diadochi) and became two of the chief inheritors. Although these two were initially friends (they stood together against Antigonus), their dispute over the territory of Coele-Syria caused Seleucus to “resist” Ptolemy. In fact, Seleucus would “rule a kingdom greater than his.” Following the Battle of Ipsus, Seleucus’ kingdom included all of north Syria, Babylonia, and many lands that once comprised the eastern provinces of Alexander’s empire. Appian in his *History of Rome* reported that “he [Seleucus] acquired Mesopotamia, Armenia, ‘Seleucid’ Cappadocia, Persis, Parthia, Bactria, Arabia, Tapouria, Sogdia, Arachosia, Hyrcania, and other adjacent peoples that had been subdued by Alexander, as far as the river Indus, so that the boundaries of his empire were the most extensive in Asia after that of Alexander.” At the end of his life, he was attempting to take Macedonia and Thrace, but was assassinated by Ptolemy I’s elder son (namely, Ptolemy Keraunos) about 281 BC.⁴⁸

11:6. Following the death of Ptolemy I (282 BC) and Seleucus I just one year later (281 BC), their sons soon found themselves in conflict over the Coele-Syria issue by 275 BC. This led to the First Syrian War (274-271), initiated by Ptolemy II Philadelphus. By the time that a new Seleucid king came to the throne in 261 BC (Antiochus II), hostilities flared up again that led to the Second Syrian War (260-253). When peace was finally concluded in 253 BC, this was strengthened by a marriage alliance between the two kingdoms. The “daughter of the king of the south” is a reference to Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II, who was brought to “the king of the north” (Antiochus II) in the spring of 252 BC.⁴⁹ Supposedly her son would become the next king upon Antiochus’ death. Ptolemy II Philadelphus accompanied his daughter to the border-fortress city of Pelusion in the eastern Delta, along with vast quantities of silver and gold. Then the bride was brought to Antiochus as far away as the border of the

⁴⁷ At one point Seleucus had the opportunity to directly aid Ptolemy, as he commanded Egyptian squadrons in the Aegean Sea against Antigonus.

⁴⁸ Upon regaining control of Babylonia, Seleucus established his capital there at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris (near modern Baghdad) in 305 BC. Later he moved his main capital to Antioch in northern Syria, but in 293 BC he placed his son Antiochus as viceroy at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris to rule over the eastern provinces.

⁴⁹ This is the date given in Günther Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (London: Routledge Ltd, 2001), 44. Some historians, however, date this marriage at 250 BC.

empire north of Sidon (it seems that the boundary between the two empires remained at the Eleutherus River).

This attempt to resolve the international dispute between Ptolemaic Egypt and the Seleucid Empire, however, did not succeed. Antiochus II already had another wife, Laodice--whom he divorced--and children by her. Antiochus died rather unexpectedly in 246 BC (allegedly by poisoning in the home of Laodice at Ephesus), and thus did not “continue in his strength.” Furthermore, Berenice did not “retain her power.” Laodice, the former queen, asserted that Antiochus on his deathbed had proclaimed that one of her sons, Seleucus II, would be the new king. Berenice, who was living in the palace at Antioch, tried to protest and appealed to Egypt for help.⁵⁰ Laodice's partisans at Antioch quickly murdered Berenice and her son. Hence Berenice, “together with the one who brought her [Antiochus II?], her child, and her benefactor” were all “delivered over at that time” (i.e., put to death; cf. 2 Sam 20:21).⁵¹

11:7. These atrocities against Berenice (and thus against Ptolemaic Egypt) inaugurated the Third Syrian War (246-41 BC). “One from her family line” (namely, Berenice’s brother and the new Egyptian Pharaoh Ptolemy III) travelled to Syria to “come against their [the Seleucid] army,” only to discover that Berenice and her son had been murdered. Ptolemy III even entered “the stronghold of the king of the north,” i.e., the Seleucid fortified palace at Antioch, which was still controlled by those loyal to Berenice.⁵² Having been favorably received at Antioch, Ptolemy III went on to lead a campaign through Syria. He met little resistance and was thus able to “move against them successfully.” Sources claim that this was one of the most successful campaigns in Ptolemaic history, as Ptolemy III marched all the way to Mesopotamia.

11:8. Ptolemy’s triumphant campaign through the Seleucid Empire as far as Mesopotamia was not so much one of warfare as it was of plundering and pillaging. He confiscated numerous objects of value, even taking “their gods [idols] into captivity to Egypt, along with their cast images and prized utensils of silver and gold.” (The capture of a nation’s gods was also a sign of their subjugation.) Then in early 245 BC, Ptolemy III made a sudden return to Egypt on account of an uprising of local Egyptians. His relocation to Egypt finally allowed Seleucus II (r. 246-226 BC) to assert himself and gain control over the Seleucid Empire. Though minor skirmishes continued between the two, Ptolemy apparently did not muster another large invasion against Seleucus but rather “withdrew for some years from the king of the north.”

11:9. Toward the end of the Third Syrian War (242/41 BC), there was fighting that took place near Damascus. The Roman historian Justinus even records that Seleucus II attempted an attack on Egypt

⁵⁰ One of the strange facts in the case is that both Ptolemy II Philadelphus and Antiochus II died in the same year, 246 BC. Thereupon, Ptolemy III Euergetes, the brother of Berenice, became the new ruler of Egypt.

⁵¹ It is not altogether clear whom the text refers to in the final part of Daniel 11:6. If the word translated “the one who brought her” is indeed singular in the original Heb text, then this could refer to Antiochus II. Some mss, however, have a plural form (“those who brought her”), which could then be a reference to her Egyptian attendants. The word “benefactor” (lit., the one strengthening her) is likewise unclear, but may be a reference to Berenice’s father, Ptolemy II, who died the same year.

⁵² The rival claimant to the throne, Seleucus II, was recognized in large parts of Seleucid Asia Minor, but not elsewhere at this time.

about this time (though we have very little historical data about this). This may be the invasion by the king of the north referred to in verse 9, though it must have been brief. In any case, the Seleucid king had to soon “withdraw to his own land.” By 241 BC, peace was agreed upon, one that was quite favorable to the Ptolemies. One of the more important outcomes of this conflict was the acquisition by Egypt of Seleucia Pieria, the port city on the Orontes River of the western Seleucid capital of Antioch. This must attest to the strength of the Ptolemaic navy in the eastern Mediterranean.

(iii) Seleucia’s eventual domination under Antiochus III (11:10-20)

11:10. The Seleucid Empire under Seleucus II (246-226) and Seleucus III (226-222) was a time of weakening and loss of territorial control as a result of war on two fronts, in the east by the Parthians and in Anatolia against the Galatians and Pergamum (supported by Ptolemy III). When Antiochus III (a younger brother of Seleucus III) came to the throne in 222 BC, he aimed to restore the empire to its original size under Seleucus I, and he sought to reclaim the disputed territories of Coele-Syria. This is the one that (according to Dan 11:10) mustered “a large army” and advanced “like an overflowing river.”

The rule of Ptolemaic Egypt changed in 221 BC, and Antiochus III wasted no time in attempting an assault upon the Ptolemaic forces occupying strongholds in the Beqaa Valley of Phoenicia. Yet he was unsuccessful and had to withdraw. At the same time, Antiochus was side-tracked in putting down a usurper named Molon in the eastern satrapies, which he managed to do in 220 BC.⁵³ Antiochus’ next step was to seize the naval stronghold of Seleucia Pieria, which was still under Egyptian control. This he did in 219 BC, thereby initiating the Fourth Syrian War (219-217 BC). He was further aided by the betrayal of the Ptolemaic strategos, Theodotos, who delivered the province of Coele-Syria to Antiochus. By this Antiochus quickly took control of Tyre and Ptolemais, gaining forty naval ships in the process. It seems the Egyptian strategy was to allow Antiochus to make small gains, while secretly mobilizing a large army in preparation for war.

11:11-12. By 217 BC, the Egyptians were ready to counter Antiochus’ assault. “The king of the south” (Ptolemy IV) was “enraged” and marched “out to fight” Antiochus at the Battle of Raphia (southwest of present-day Gaza). This took place on June 22, 217 BC. In this huge battle, Ptolemy had 70,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry, and 73 African war elephants. Antiochus had 62,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry, and 103 elephants (but the larger Asian type). Antiochus was also joined by 10,000 Nabataeans and other Arab tribes. In the end, the army of Antiochus was “delivered into his [Ptolemy’s] hand,” such that Ptolemy regained the important territory of Coele-Syria, while Antiochus retreated to Antioch. History records that Ptolemy, “the king of the south,” became quite “arrogant.” Though he was “responsible for the death of thousands,” he did not “continue to prevail.” The remainder of his reign was characterized by licentious living and an insatiable appetite for festivities and neglect of duties. Although Antiochus was unable to mount another war against him, by the end of Ptolemy’s reign in 204 BC, his kingdom was in decline and revolt had broken out among his Egyptian subjects.⁵⁴

⁵³ Prior to defeat by Antiochus, Molon had managed to defeat the generals that Antiochus had sent against him. He also occupied the important city of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, and he had coins minted depicting him as king.

⁵⁴ Although the Ptolemaic dynasty was never seriously endangered by opposition from the native population, it is a fact that Upper Egypt rose against Alexandria (the heart of Ptolemaic rule) in 207/06 BC, and was ruled by a

11:13-16. In the years following the battle of Raphia, Antiochus not only recovered from defeat but actually gained power in the outer portions of his empire. During the years 216 to 213, he successfully put down a certain Achaïos in Asia Minor (who was backed by the Ptolemaic government). Turning his attention to the eastern satrapies, he had spectacular success from 212 to 205, as a result of which he assumed the title of "Great King" and was named "Antiochus the Great" (reminiscent of Alexander). Following the death of Ptolemy IV in 204 BC, Antiochus III (the Great) saw his opportunity to finally strike back at Egypt. The new Egyptian king, Ptolemy V Epiphanes, was but six years of age, and there was much turmoil in Alexandria due to fighting over the regency. Early in 202 BC, Antiochus began what has become known as the Fifth Syrian War (202-195? BC), when he "again mustered an army, one larger than before" (11:13). In this he was aided by his alliance with Philip V of Macedonia-- "in those times many will oppose the king of the south."⁵⁵ Rising up with them were some pro-Seleucid Jewish revolutionaries discontent with Egypt's rule over Judea, termed "those who are violent among your own people" (Dan 11:14).

Antiochus first conquered Damascus (202 BC) and then proceeded to occupy large parts of the land of Judah throughout the course of 201, while the coastal cities of Phoenicia remained in the hands of the Ptolemaic kingdom. Fortunately for Antiochus, the Ptolemaic governor (named Ptolemaios) defected to Antiochus, for which he was rewarded with the title of strategos of the Seleucid province of "Coele Syria and Phoenicia." In 200 BC Antiochus launched his second offensive, defeating the Ptolemaic general Skopas at Panion (later known as Caesarea Philippi). This forced Skopas to retreat with 10,000 men to Sidon, only to be besieged by Antiochus--"the king of the north will advance and will build siege mounds and capture a well-fortified city" (Dan 11:15). Yet "the forces of the south... will have no strength to prevail" against Antiochus III. Since the Ptolemaic government was not able to send relief-troops to his assistance, Skopas was forced to capitulate in 199 BC, and the important port-city of Sidon fell to Seleucid control.

With Egypt too weak to mount another offensive, Antiochus could "do as he pleases," with "no one able to stand before him" (verse 16). Rather than making a direct attack upon Egypt proper, Antiochus spent the first half of 198 BC extending his control over the rest of the former province of Coele-Syria, gaining control over Judea and Jerusalem. Hence, he could "prevail in the beautiful land," i.e., Judea, with the capability of "annihilation within his power." At this point, Antiochus now had complete domination of Coele-Syria, the prize that the Seleucid kings had long sought for (and felt was their rightful possession) since the battle of Ipsus in 301 BC.

11:17. Theoretically Antiochus could have attempted a direct assault on Egypt, though he did not. Instead Antiochus used this time to extend his power in Asia Minor, initiating a great campaign there in 197 BC in which a number of previously Ptolemaic cities came under Seleucid control. The capstone to this was Antiochus' conquest of Ephesus in the autumn of 197, which had been a powerful and well-garrisoned Ptolemaic base. By the close of 197 BC, the Alexandrian government had lodged its complaints in Rome against Antiochus' conquests (especially in Asia Minor), and the Roman senate sent a

rebel-king from 205/04 onwards.

⁵⁵ In the winter of 203/02 BC, Antiochus and Philip V of Macedonia came to a secret agreement to divide up the Ptolemaic Empire and to eliminate the Ptolemaic hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean.

man of consular rank, L. Cornelius Lentulus, to help resolve the tensions. With this, Rome was clearly extending its influence into the eastern Mediterranean (which would lead in the course of time to her conquest of all these territories).

In 196 BC, Rome attempted to exert pressure on Antiochus to come to peace with Ptolemaic Egypt and return the captured territories. This prompted Antiochus to make a diplomatic maneuver by means of a political marriage. In the winter of 194/93 BC, Antiochus' daughter Cleopatra I (though only about ten years old) was wed to the sixteen-year-old Egyptian king, Ptolemy V Epiphanes (r. 204-180 BC). Yet, Antiochus did this with treachery in mind: “He will give the king of the south a daughter in marriage in order to destroy the kingdom” (Dan 11:17). In the ensuing years, however, this tactic did “not turn out to his advantage.” Hölbl writes,

In spite of the dynastic union, Antiochus III did not succeed in persuading the Ptolemaic court to maintain a neutral position regarding events in Asia Minor. The Ptolemies, for their part, had failed for a second time in their efforts to preserve their own interests in Asia by associating themselves with Rome in the war against Antiochus.⁵⁶

11:18-20. Despite his success in confiscating Coele-Syria for the Seleucids, Antiochus the Great's career had a rather dismal end. Following the marriage alliance, Antiochus “turned his attention to the coastal regions” of Asia Minor where he “captured many of them,” which eventually brought him into conflict with Rome, the emerging new power in the Mediterranean region. Antiochus invaded Greece in 192 BC with a 10,000 man army, and was even elected the commander in chief of the Aetolians (in their opposition to Rome). Yet the Romans prevailed against Antiochus. In 191 BC, the Romans under the command of Manius Acilius Glabrio routed Antiochus at Thermopylae, forcing him to withdraw to Asia. Then in 190 BC, a decisive Roman victory was achieved by Scipio Asiaticus at the battle of Magnesia (eastern province of central Greece), thereby giving Asia Minor into Roman hands. This is the Roman commander that would “bring his shameful conduct to a halt.” Antiochus was made to “pay for his shameful conduct” by signing the Treaty of Apameia in 188 BC, thereby abandoning all the country north of the Taurus Mountains, which Rome distributed amongst her friends.⁵⁷

A part of this treaty called for the taking of twenty hostages to Rome, one of whom happened to be the son of Antiochus III, Mithridates, who would later be renamed Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Another result of this treaty was a growing assertion of independence by the outlying provinces of the empire. This prompted Antiochus III to make yet another expedition to the eastern provinces, or as verse 19 states, “he will then turn his attention to the fortresses of his own land.” In doing so, he came to Elymaïs, close to the ancient Persian capital of Susa, but more recently having come under Parthian control. There in the middle of 187 BC, Antiochus and his soldiers were killed while plundering the temple of Bel by the outraged inhabitants of the area. Daniel 11:19 summarizes the death of Antiochus the Great: “he will stumble and fall, not to be found again.”

⁵⁶ G. Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, 141.

⁵⁷ Apameia (present-day Dinar located in west-central Turkey) was an ancient city of Phrygia that had been founded by Antiochus I and came to be a seat of Seleucid power. At this city Antiochus the Great collected his army and then encountered the Romans at Magnesia.

The next in line to Antiochus III (the Great) was Seleucus IV Philopator (r. 187-175 BC). He is the one that verse 20 says will arise after Antiochus III “who will send out an exactor of tribute to enhance the splendor of the kingdom.” Seleucus IV unfortunately was strapped with a heavy war-indemnity exacted by Rome, and was forced to secure more financial resources by heavy taxation. His ambitious policies put him at disfavor with many, and consequently one of his own ministers, Heliodorus, assassinated him. Thus Seleucus IV was “destroyed, though not in anger or battle.”

b. During the reign of Antiochus IV (11:21-35)

(i) Antiochus' rise in power (11:21-24)

11:21. Replacing Seleucus IV was one simply described as “a despicable person.” This was Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who came to rule in the autumn of 175 BC. Among the ancients, he was the most brutal oppressor of the Jewish people. Although he was a son of Antiochus III (brother to Seleucus IV), he was not next in line to the throne. The true heir was Seleucus’ son, Demetrius I Soter, but he was being retained as a hostage in Rome. Taking advantage of Demetrius' absence, Antiochus seized the throne for himself. Hence, “the royal honor has not been rightfully conferred” upon him. Rather, he seized “the kingdom through deceit.”⁵⁸

Antiochus’ relationship with Egypt was complicated by the fact that he was the uncle to Egypt’s ruler, Ptolemy VI. [Antiochus IV's sister, Cleopatra I, had been given in marriage to Ptolemy V, and Ptolemy VI was the resulting son]. When Ptolemy V died in 180 BC, however, Ptolemy VI was only six years old and too young to rule. Hence Cleopatra I (Antiochus' sister) ruled on his behalf during the years 180-176 BC, and she had pro-Seleucid sympathies. Her death in 176, however, set the empire on a different course. Two court members (Lenaios and Eulaios) became the effective guardians and leaders for Ptolemy VI (now age 10). One of their top foreign policies was the reconquest of Coele-Syria, and thus they set out to achieve this goal. Shortly thereafter in 175 BC, Antiochus IV came to rule the Seleucid Empire. Sometime between 174 and 172 BC, a great festival was held in Alexandria, and Antiochus sent an envoy to represent him. While there, this envoy observed the new hostile attitude toward the Seleucids. Antiochus IV then began taking precautionary measures for what became known as the Sixth Syrian War (170/69 -168 BC).

11:22-24. Due to the lack of information about precise dates and events leading up to the Sixth Syrian War, it is difficult to ascertain the exact meaning of these verses. What we do know is that at the time of the buildup to war between the Seleucid Empire and Egypt, there were also complicating developments occurring in Judea. Prior to Antiochus IV coming to rule, the primary leader in Judea was the high priest, Onias III. Onias, however, held Egyptian sympathies and took a pro-Ptolemaic stance. There was also a movement taking place among some of the Jewish population in favor of Hellenization (promoting Greek culture and thinking--often at odds with Torah), and this had the backing of the powerful Tobiad family of Jerusalem. Hence, upon Antiochus' ascension, the aristocratic Tobiad family helped to replace Onias III by his brother, Jason, who was both pro-Seleucid and pro-Hellenistic. This was accomplished by the payment of more tribute money to Antiochus. Sometime about 172 BC,

⁵⁸ In addition to Demetrius, Seleucus IV had an infant son, also named Antiochus. At first Antiochus IV served as co-regent with him, but later had him murdered.

however, the Tobiads sought to oust Jason for a man even more loyal to themselves, namely, Menelaus who was not in the priestly line and had no legitimate claim to the High Priesthood. Menelaus arranged for the murder of Onias III and paid even higher tribute money to Antiochus, by which he became the new high priest. This, however, sparked a civil war within Judea, a troublesome matter for Antiochus at a time that he needed stability within his kingdom. The reference to the “covenant leader” (lit., prince of the covenant) in verse 22 could be a reference to the Jewish high priest, Onias III. According to verses 23-24, Antiochus IV used deception and bribery to accomplish his schemes for rallying the empire around him.

(ii) Antiochus’ rivalry with Egypt (11:25-28)

11:25. Scholars debate the exact course of events by which Antiochus IV engaged Egypt, but there is some consensus that Antiochus carried out two primary campaigns against Egypt. The first of these took place in 169 BC when Antiochus mobilized his forces “against the king of the south with a large army.” Prior to the invasion, the guardians of the young king stirred up the hearts of the people for a swift acquisition of Coele-Syria, and in the late fall of 170 BC they rearranged the rule of Egypt. In place of the sole reign of Ptolemy VI, they established a **triumvirate** joint rule of the three Ptolemaic siblings, i.e., Ptolemy VI, his sister-wife Cleopatra II, and their younger brother Ptolemy VIII Physcon. Antiochus was quite successful against the Ptolemaic forces, defeating them first between Pelusion and Mount Casius (near Gaza), then seizing the fortress-city of Pelusion on the Egyptian border, occupying a large part of Lower Egypt, and finally moving upon the capital area at Alexandria. Hence the king of the south (Ptolemy VI) was not “able to prevail.” One thing in Antiochus’ favor was the fact that Rome was engaged in the Third Macedonian War (171-168 BC) against King Perseus of Macedonia, and therefore could not interfere with his invasion of Egypt.⁵⁹ The reference to “the plans devised against him” may refer to the treachery of Ptolemy’s guardians in undermining his rule, or it may refer to Antiochus’ plans against Ptolemy. Verse 26 seems to support the former.

11:26. “Those who share the king’s fine food” appear to be the leading figures at the Egyptian court of Alexandria, the real power wielders behind the throne. (By 170 BC, Ptolemy VI was still only about sixteen years of age.) As a result of their counsel and leadership, the Egyptian army was thrust into war against Antiochus, in which Ptolemy’s army was “swept away” and many [were] killed in battle.”

11:27. Before Antiochus stormed Alexandria, a meeting was arranged between him and his nephew, Ptolemy VI. This meeting was held in Antiochus’ camp, at which “these two kings, their minds filled with evil intentions, [traded] lies with one another at the same table.” The two managed to reach some kind of agreement, although the exact details are not known. It seems that Antiochus deceptively posed as the protector of young Ptolemy VI, whereby all Egypt would be subjugated to Antiochus in order for him to preserve it for Ptolemy. Yet the latter seems to have acted just as treacherously. Whatever scheme they each sought to achieve, it did “not succeed,” for the end was still to come “at the

⁵⁹ Regardless of who might be the victor (whether Ptolemaic Egypt or the Seleucid king), it would not have been in Rome’s best interest for Egypt and the Seleucid Empire to merge and unite. Rome was not powerful enough to counter their combined forces. Rome’s tactic, then, was to remain neutral but to try and keep Egypt and the Seleucid Empire separate.

appointed time.” Their conflict was not meant to be resolved so soon, and it must run its predetermined course.

11:28. The powers in Alexandria rejected the agreements of the two kings and acclaimed Ptolemy's younger brother as king (i.e., Ptolemy VIII). At that Antiochus attacked Alexandria. The Alexandrians were able to mount a good defense of the city, and domestic troubles back in Syria or Judea caused Antiochus to return to Syria in the autumn of 169 BC. The “king of the north” (Antiochus IV) returned “to his own land with much property.” Before leaving, however, Antiochus left Ptolemy VI in Memphis for his protection, and Pelusion was kept under siege.

On his return trip to Syria, Antiochus passed through Jerusalem. For an undisclosed reason, Antiochus’ was “set against the holy covenant.”⁶⁰ The “holy covenant” refers to that special covenant relationship that the Jews had with God, and Antiochus acted hostilely by plundering the Jewish temple. Having taken such action, he then returned “to his own land” of Syria. The following report is given in I Maccabees 1:20-24:

²⁰ After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year [i.e., 169 BC]. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. ²¹ He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. ²² He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. ²³ He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. ²⁴ Taking them all, he went into his own land.

(iii) Antiochus’ persecution of the Jews after the second Egyptian campaign (11:29-31)

11:29. During Antiochus’ absence from Egypt, the two Ptolemaic brothers reconciled, and joint rule was re-established. Antiochus interpreted this as a breach of the agreement that he had with Ptolemy VI, and therefore quickly mounted a new invasion of Egypt in the spring of 168 BC (“the appointed time” at which “he will again invade the south”). He moved into Memphis without a battle and was all prepared to assault Alexandria again. According to verse 29, however, “this latter visit will not turn out the way the former one did.” That is, Antiochus was not to be so successful this time as he had in the invasion of 169 BC.

11:30. The problem for Antiochus is that “the ships of Kittim will come against him.” Kittim in Jewish literature was a designation for Mediterranean people in general and often specifically for Rome (so the Qumrân scrolls). Rome had concluded its war with Macedonia with a victory over King Perseus of Macedonia in June of 168 BC, and hearing of Antiochus’ march on Alexandria quickly sent a Roman fleet to intervene. The Roman consul, Gaius Popillius Laenas moved to confront Antiochus. The latter was handed a letter from the Roman Senate ordering him not to fight against Egypt. Hölbl records their confrontation:

⁶⁰ It is certainly very possible that the heavy financial demands of this first Egyptian campaign prompted Antiochus IV to plunder the Jerusalem temple. One must also remember that Antiochus was still paying tribute to Rome as part of the agreement of the Treaty of Apameia in 188 BC.

Popillius refused to acknowledge Antiochus' greeting and presented him with the Roman ultimatum which was very straightforward in its demand: the immediate cessation of the war and complete withdrawal from Egypt in the shortest time possible. When Antiochus asked for time to consider, Popillius drew a circle with a stick around the king and 'bade him to give his answer to the note within the circle' (Plb. XXIX.27.5). The humiliated Seleucid king agreed to the ultimatum and acted accordingly.⁶¹

Antiochus departed from Egypt in late July of 168 for Syria ("He will turn back"), but he was not in a pleasant mood at all. Returning through Jerusalem once again, he chose to "direct his indignation against the holy covenant." During the time of Antiochus' second Egyptian campaign, there had been a rebellion in Jerusalem, as Jason (the former high priest) made an attempt to overthrow Menelaus and retake Jerusalem.⁶² In light of recent events, perhaps Antiochus felt compelled to communicate a message that insurrection would not be tolerated. Such opposition to Hellenization and Seleucid authority could only be interpreted as sympathy for Egypt, for only from Egypt could the rebels hope to receive support for the liberation movement. Therefore, upon reaching Jerusalem, he had the walls of the city torn down, slaughtered thousands of Jews, and sold many more into slavery (2 Macc 5:11ff.). In addition, he himself entered the Holy of Holies with Menelaus as his guide. Antiochus' policy was to "honor those who forsake the holy covenant," i.e., he would act favorably to those Jews willing to turn from the biblical faith and embrace Hellenization.

11:31. To make sure that the rebellious Jews (i.e., those who opposed him) presented no danger to his kingdom, Antiochus left one of his soldiers named Apollonius behind in Jerusalem with the task of putting down any attempt at insurrection. In the aftermath, Apollonius's stay in Jerusalem only made things worse. For instance, there was the pollution of the temple by Gentiles worshipping other deities and sacred prostitution. Eventually Antiochus began to see the Jewish faith as detrimental to the unification of his realm, and so issued orders for a further religious persecution to take place in December of 167 BC. Antiochus' forces rose up to "profane the fortified sanctuary, stopping the daily sacrifice." The two daily sacrifices (morning and evening) were halted, the whole temple sanctuary was polluted, and Jews attempting to follow the biblical faith were severely persecuted. Some of Antiochus' policies included:

- (a) A special emissary was sent to Judea to force the Jews to transgress the laws of their religion.
- (b) Jewish ritual was prohibited (1 Macc 1:45-6).
- (c) The sacred precincts were formally given over to the worship of Zeus Olympias (1 Macc 1:54; 2 Macc 6:2).
- (d) Copies of the Torah were burned.

⁶¹ Hölbl, 147-48.

⁶² This may have been spurred by a false report that Antiochus had been killed in Egypt. Cf. 2 Macc 5:5.

(e) Sabbath keeping and circumcision were forbidden.

(f) Jews were forced to celebrate the king's birthday every month and to participate in the festal procession of Dionysus.

(g) High places and altars on which swine and other animals were to be sacrificed were erected throughout Judea. Inspectors were appointed to enforce this.

Perhaps the most grievous offense was the setting up of **the abomination that causes desolation**. Apparently a small pagan altar was erected on top of the altar of burnt offering (1 Macc 1:59; 4:44), an abomination to the worship of the LORD God.⁶³

(iv) *The Jewish uprising against Antiochus: The Maccabean revolt (11:32-35)*

11:32. To those Jews who sought to be faithful to the LORD God, Antiochus' assault on their faith (and the killing of many of their people) was an unimaginable horror. Yet there were some unfaithful Jews who followed Antiochus' "smooth words," forsook the LORD and His Word, and fully embraced Hellenism. As they "rejected the covenant," Antiochus was able to "defile" them, as it were. Opposite them were "the people who are loyal to their God" and acted "valiantly." That is, they resisted all the efforts of Antiochus to snuff out the biblical faith and took action against him (1 Macc 1:62-63). Leading the effort to "act valiantly" was a certain priest named Mattathias (father of Judas Maccabeus) who had moved to the village of Modein. When Antiochus' officials came to Modein to force the villagers to commit apostasy and sacrifice on the pagan altar, Mattathias resisted. The following account is found in 1 Maccabees 2:22-28:

"We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left." When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him on the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu.

With this bold step, the rebellion against Antiochus IV Epiphanes was launched, which came to be known as the Maccabean revolt. (The initial commander of the rebellion army was Judas Maccabeus.)

11:33-35. The Maccabean revolt against Antiochus was a long and bloody feud that extended over several years. During this difficult period, there were those "wise [Jews] among the people [who could] teach the masses" (v 33). These would have been the ones wise in the knowledge of the Scriptures (true believers!), who could exhort the masses of common people to

⁶³ The following report is given in 1 Macc 1:54 and 59: "Now on the fifteenth day of Chislew, in the one hundred forty-fifty year [i.e., Dec 167 BC], they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. . . . On the twenty-fifty day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering."

remain faithful to God and obey Him. Yet there would be a price to pay in remaining faithful to God. Some would “fall by the sword,” meaning they would be killed in battle. Others would be tortured “by the flame,” while still others would be caught and “imprisoned,” or have their homes “plundered.” They would experience victories at times, but also stumble in death and defeat on other occasions. Not all would join the Maccabees because of pure motive. According to verse 34, some would even “unite with them deceitfully,” probably meaning that their motivation was not for purely spiritual reasons but more so for their hatred of the Seleucid intruders. Yet even those who do have pure motives and are spiritually “wise will stumble,” meaning that they will die in the course of the revolt. Yet from God’s perspective, this will serve a good purpose, for the result will be “refinement, purification, and cleansing” of the nation (v 35).

As difficult as this period of persecution was under Antiochus, however, this would not be the greatest trial and testing that the Jewish people would have to go through. That would be reserved for “the time of the end,” which will come in God’s “appointed time” (v 35).

Summary of the Outcome of the Maccabean Revolt: Mattathias encouraged all the Jews to join in the struggle against Seleucid rule and their attempt to impose the numerous ungodly aspects of Hellenism upon Judea (e.g., pagan altars and sacrifice). Joining Mattathias and his sons in the revolt were the Hasidim, those faithful to Torah. Following Mattathias's death in 166 BC, his son Judas took up the leadership and was able to defeat the Syrian governors Apollonius and Seron in his first year (1 Macc 3:10-26; Josephus *Ant.* xii.7.1). One thing in Judas's favor was the fact that Antiochus had to give much of his attention to troubles in the eastern part of the empire. Leaving a trusted commander named Lysias in charge of the Judean campaign, Antiochus IV led an expedition into various territories of Parthia in an effort to raise funds. He is believed to have been killed in 164 BC (fighting in the east against Parthia), although the Jewish struggle against the Seleucids for political freedom continued. In 164 BC, Judas was able to hold off the Seleucid commander, Lysias, as the latter led a large army to attack Jerusalem. Judas was then able to regain control of all of Jerusalem, except for a Seleucid fortress known as the Akra, which had long been a thorn in their side (1 Macc 1:33-36). Yet Judas and his followers did regain the temple mount, destroyed the Olympian Zeus, built a new altar, rebuilt the temple, and selected a faithful priest. Then on December 14 of 164 BC, they rededicated the Jerusalem temple, and the daily sacrifices were restored (1 Macc 4:36-59; 2 Macc 10:1-8; Josephus *Ant.* xii.7.6f). On account of this, the Feast of Dedication or Lights (Hanukkah) was instituted to remember the occasion (cf. John 10:22).

After Judas was killed in battle in 160 BC (1 Macc 9:3, 15-18), his brother Jonathan (already serving as high priest) continued the struggle. He, in turn, was succeeded by another brother, Simon, who was finally able to win political independence for Judea about 142 BC (1 Macc 13:10-53). With this, the Jews were freed of the burden of paying tribute, and the Seleucid garrison stationed at the Akra citadel in Jerusalem was removed. The Hasmonean dynasty inaugurated by Simon lasted until 37/36 BC, when the Roman general Pompey captured Syria and Palestine for Rome.

3. Predictions of the distant future--reserved for the “end times” (11:36–12:4)

Up to this point, the message revealed to Daniel has surveyed the historic struggles between the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt and the Seleucid rulers of Syria, culminating in the atrocities of Antiochus IV. While critical scholars assume that Antiochus continues to be described in the remainder of the chapter, most evangelical scholars (both in the early church and in modern times) have rightly concluded that there is a change of time period beginning in verse 36 and a different ruler in view. This new ruler is simply called “the king.” Yet a careful study of the context reveals that he must be a ruler in the far distant future, not in the second century BC. Verse 35 concluded the discussion of Antiochus by anticipating “the end time,” and verse 40 indicates that this new ruler is operating in “the end time.” Furthermore, Daniel 12:1-4, which begins with the words “Now at that time” (linking the opening of chapter twelve with the end of chapter eleven) goes on to describe a terrible time of distress, using words similar to those used by Jesus in Matthew 24:21 to describe the great tribulation, and then stipulates that the time of resurrection for OT saints will shortly follow. Thus the time setting for Daniel 11:36–12:4 must be in that critical period of time preceding Christ’s return known as the great tribulation. “The king” introduced in 11:36 must then be the future Antichrist, the one already revealed in chapter seven as “the little horn” and in Daniel 9:27 as the one making a covenant with Israel. That this ruler cannot be Antiochus is evident from Daniel 11:45. Antiochus is known to have died in Persia (after attacking a city in present-day SW Iran in a foiled attempt to pillage a temple), but this new king will come to his end in Israel. Finally, the descriptions of “the king” in 11:36-39 are strikingly similar to things said elsewhere of the Antichrist, especially 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 and Revelation 13:1-10.

a. *The Antichrist of the “end times” (11:36-45)*

It is not surprising that the text would suddenly shift from Antiochus to the Antichrist, seeing that the former is a type of the Antichrist in the book of Daniel. We are given a general description of him (vv 36-39), followed by a brief account of his military maneuvers (vv 40-45).

(i) A description of the Antichrist (11:36-39)

11:36. The first thing we are told is that this future king will “do as he pleases,” i.e., he will be in a position of incredible authority, facing little effective opposition. The same was said of Cyrus in Daniel 8:4 and Alexander the Great in Daniel 11:3. Initially he does not have absolute authority but shares power with the “ten king” confederacy, but following his subduing of three of the “ten kings” he gains virtual world dominion (recall Dan 7:24 and compare Rev 17:11-13).

Rather than promoting the deities of the Greek pantheon (as Antiochus did), this future king “will exalt and magnify himself above every deity.” This would suggest that the “abomination of desolation” will have already occurred--that moment when he enters the Jewish temple and proclaims himself to be God (see notes on Dan 9:27). At this point, he is clearly revealed as the “man of lawlessness” who “opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship and as a result he takes his seat in God’s temple, displaying himself as God”

(2 Thess 2:4). While exalting himself, he also utters “presumptuous things against the God of gods.” He obviously hates the true God of heaven and thus blasphemes His name (Rev 13:6). For a season of time (the three and a half years foretold in Dan 7:25), God allows the Antichrist to succeed, but only “until the time of wrath is completed.” This probably refers to God’s wrath, as the Hebrew word translated “wrath” (Heb *za’am*) normally denotes God’s wrath, rarely that of man (e.g., Jer 10:10; Zeph 3:8). The time of the great tribulation is a time that Antichrist is allowed to prosper, but this is also a time known as the “day of the Lord” when God punishes the evil unbelieving world that has rebelled against Him (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; Rev 6:17). Yet when this period has run its course, the Antichrist will be judged and removed by the personal appearance of Jesus Christ (2 Thess 2:8; Rev 19:20-21).

11:37. Continuing the Antichrist’s description, the reader is told that he “will not respect the gods of his fathers.” The word translated “gods” is the Hebrew word *’ēlohîm*, which can be translated “gods” (pagan deities) or “God,” i.e., the true God of the Bible. Context determines the correct translation. Of greater significance, however, is the phrase “the *’ēlohîm* of his fathers.” This is a common expression in the OT (used at least forty five times), and always for the LORD God of the Bible (e.g., Gen 32:9; Exod 3:6; 3:13; Deut 29:25; and Ezra 10:11; cf. Acts 3:13; 5:30; 7:32; 22:14; and 24:14). Amon, an evil king of Judah, was reprimanded because he “forsook the LORD God of his fathers” (2 Kgs 21:22). If the phrase in Daniel 11:37 is translated “the God of his fathers,” this would imply that the Antichrist will be ethnically Jewish. Some have objected to such a conclusion, since Daniel 7 indicates that the Antichrist (“the little horn”) is from the fourth beast, the Roman Empire. Yet this need not demand that he be a gentile. He could be ethnically Jewish and yet politically part of the revived Roman Empire of the future.

Verse 37 goes on to say that he does not respect “the god loved by women.” In this translation the word “god” is supplied, though it is not in the Hebrew text. Literally the text says “nor for the desire of women.” This is certainly not a comment about his sexual preferences, because both the preceding and following statements say something about his attitude toward God (or gods). Some commentators have understood this obscure phrase to mean “the one desired *by* women,” taking this as a reference to the Messiah whom many Jewish women would have desired to be the mother of. If that is the case, then this is saying that the Antichrist will have no respect for the true Messiah. However, this particular statement is understood, the point of verse 37 is that the Antichrist will so exalt himself that he will tolerate no rival being worshipped. This is consistent with Revelation 13:4 that says the people of the earth in those days will worship both the dragon (Satan) and the beast (the Antichrist). Also the latter will oppose every so-called god or object of worship (2 Thess 2:4). Not surprisingly, he will hate true believers and Jewish people who seek to worship the LORD God.

11:38. Rather than relying on the power of the LORD (or any god), the Antichrist will honor “a god of fortresses,” that is, he will put his stock in military might. The word “fortress” is commonly used in the OT (and even Dan 11:7, 10, 19, 31, 39) of a fortified military defense. The same word (Heb *mā’ōz*) is used metaphorically of the Lord God. David proclaimed, “God is my strong fortress” (2 Sam 22:33; cf. Ps 37:39). For the Jewish kings of old, their trust was to be

first and foremost in the LORD God, not military might. The Antichrist, however, will rely exclusively on military might. This is “a god his fathers did not acknowledge,” not that they did not have or utilize military armies and hardware, but that their trust was not in this alone. (This phrase is supportive of the theory that the Antichrist will be Jewish.) Precious resources like “gold, silver, valuable stones, and treasured commodities” will mean nothing to this tyrant. He will readily pour them into procuring whatever military goods he can obtain, for he assumes that having a superior military machine will enable him to take over the world and rule it. From the human standpoint, he will be successful in this quest (until Christ puts a stop to his madness). Revelation 13:4 states, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” Many will suffer at the hands of this godless man when such massive military resources are placed in his hands.

11:39. In his quest to rule the world, the Antichrist will out of necessity need to launch a number of military invasions against “mighty fortresses.” This he will do, “aided by a foreign deity” (lit., a foreign god). This latter expression is commonly used in the OT of foreign gods or idols associated with them (Gen 35:2). Psalm 81:9 declares, “There must be no other god among you. You must not worship a foreign god.” This aid to the Antichrist could look at that from Satan himself, for he is ultimately the one propagating false deities, and Revelation 13:4 indicates that Satan gives his authority to the beast (cf. 2 Thess 2:9).

In addition to military force, the Antichrist will use other tactics to create a loyal following. To those who recognize him, “he will grant considerable honor.” That is, he will dole out favors on those who back him and join his crusade. These favors will take the form of granting political positions (“authority over many people”) and the allocation of key territories (“parcel out land for a price”). The word “land” (Heb *’ādāmâ*) can also mean “territories” or “countries” (e.g., Gen 47:20), and the word “price” (Heb *m^ehîr*) can have the connotation of a “present” or “payoff” (note its use in Isa 45:13 in parallel with *šōhar*, a “bribe”).

(ii) *The military campaigns of the Antichrist leading up to Armageddon (11:40-45)*

The temporal indication at the beginning of verse 40, “at the time of the end,” clearly marks this passage as eschatological, especially when viewed in light of the further temporal notice in Daniel 12:1 with its reference to the great tribulation and resurrection. However, it is very difficult to know whether these military campaigns will occur in the first half of Daniel’s seventieth week, or towards the end of the second half. The reference to the Antichrist coming to his end in Daniel 11:45 might suggest a time late in the great tribulation. However, the opening verse to Daniel 12 announces a “time of distress unlike any other,” as though we are just coming to the great tribulation (the final three and a half years of Daniel’s seventieth week). It is possible, therefore, that Daniel 11:45 is not meant to convey that the Antichrist actually dies at this point, but only that the setting up of his royal tents at (or near) Jerusalem does not mean an ultimate victory for him. In due time, he will come to his end here. So we must exercise caution about the exact chronology concerning the details recorded in Daniel 11:36–12:4.

11:40. Sometime during Daniel's seventieth week, the Antichrist will be drawn into military conflict with other countries of the Middle East. Daniel is obviously not shown all the details of this period of history, but he is provided a brief sketch of some important developments. We learn, first of all, that "the king of the south will attack him." Throughout this chapter, the king of the south has consistently referred to Egypt, and that is the meaning it should have here. Hence, Egypt (and possibly certain North African countries allied with her) will launch an attack against the Antichrist.

The identity of "the king of the north" in this verse, however, is not quite so apparent. Two key interpretative questions lay before us. First, is the king of the north distinct from the Antichrist, or are the two one and the same? Evangelicals differ on this, and admittedly the use of the pronouns in the verse does cause confusion. Elsewhere I have taken the position that the Antichrist is distinct from both the king of the south and the king of the north, and therefore he comes into conflict with both of them.⁶⁴ Upon further reflection, however, the arguments in favor of the two-king theory probably have more in their favor, especially the emphasis in the text upon the pursuit and defeat of the king of the South. Daniel 11:40-45 would then be the final war between the kings of the north and south, a struggle traced throughout the chapter but now climaxed with the Antichrist himself as the final "king of the north."

A second question has to do with the political background of the king of the north. A number of evangelicals have argued that the king of the north in Daniel 11:40-45 represents Russia to the far north of Israel. I have argued elsewhere that this is certainly not the case.⁶⁵ To be consistent with the chapter, the king of the north should be related to the countries that once composed the ancient Seleucid Empire (e.g., Syria, Iraq, Turkey... and even Israel). If this is true and the Antichrist is the "king of the north," then this would need to be reconciled with Daniel 7:23-24 that somehow connects him with the Roman Empire. This is not necessarily a contradiction, since most of the countries that comprised the ancient Seleucid Empire were also a part of the Roman Empire.

In conclusion, Daniel 11:40 seems to portray the rise of Egypt as a Middle Eastern power in the period of the great tribulation that will initiate an attack upon the Antichrist, the king of the north. In response, the Antichrist will set out on an expedition to retaliate against the king of the south, and his attack will resemble a raging storm bringing catastrophic destruction to everything in its path. The implements of their warfare are expressed in ancient terms ("chariots" and "horsemen"), but the fulfillment will undoubtedly be in more modern forms.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ J. Paul Tanner, "Daniel's 'King of the North': Do We Owe Russia An Apology?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35:3 (Sept 1992): 315-28. I would also add that the way the kings of the north and south are introduced in Daniel 11:11 when in conflict with one another is distinct from the way they are associated in Daniel 11:40. In the earlier verse, the wording is clear that they are fighting each other (without the kind of ambiguity that we find in Dan 11:40).

⁶⁵ See the article cited above, and compare J. Paul Tanner, "Rethinking Ezekiel's Invasion by Gog," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:1 (Mar 1996): 29-46.

⁶⁶ Other eschatological passages employ similar archaic terms in describing instruments of war, e.g., Isa

11:41. The military conflict by these Middle Eastern powers will also result in the Antichrist and his forces entering “the beautiful land,” i.e., Israel (compare Dan 8:9). In the process of these movements and battles, some countries “will fall” (to the Antichrist). In the providence of God, however, “Edom, Moab, and the Ammonite leadership will escape” (countries that now comprise the modern-day nation of Jordan). No reason is stated for this, but it could be due to the fact that many will heed the warning of Jesus in Matthew 24:16 to “flee Jerusalem” and find places of safety in the wilderness of those regions (cf. Rev 12:13-17).⁶⁷

11:42-43. In the course of events, the Antichrist will make a successful invasion of “the land of Egypt.” This victory will yield great riches for him . . . “hidden stores of gold and silver, as well as all the treasures of Egypt.” The Antichrist’s victorious campaign into Egypt will then extend to neighboring countries of North Africa, resulting in the forced submission of the “Libyans and Ethiopians.” The term “Ethiopians” is a translation of the Hebrew word *kušîm*, a people more accurately linked with ancient Nubia, which encompassed what we think of today as southern Egypt and northern Sudan.

11:44-45. The final glimpse of the Antichrist revealed to Daniel has him drawing back to the land of Israel, on account of reports that “trouble him from the east and north.” The geographical references here are vague, but most likely have to do with regions of the Middle East (not the Far East such as China). (Compare the sixth bowl judgment of Rev 16:12, in which the Euphrates is dried up so as to prepare a way for the “kings of the east.”) This probably means regions to the east of Israel, in keeping with biblical usage (cf. Isa 41:2, 25; Mt 2:1-2, 9). Whether or not there is a connection to Revelation 16:12, Daniel 11:44 seems to imply that the Antichrist hears reports of hostile troop movements that alarm him. As a result he feels obligated to move back northward to Israel in preparation for battle. He is intent on waging war, for he sets out **in a tremendous rage to destroy and wipe out many.**



Verse 45 depicts him back in the land of Israel, where he has pitched “his royal tents between the seas toward the beautiful holy mountain.” The exact location is slightly vague. The Hebrew text may be translated as the preceding NET Bible has done, in which case “between the seas” would presumably mean between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea at the beautiful holy mountain. On the other hand, verse 45 could be translated “between the Sea [i.e., the

66:20 and Ezek 39:20.

⁶⁷ Interestingly, a precedent for this is found in the events preceding Jerusalem’s destruction in AD 70. The city of Pella in present-day northern Jordan was a refuge for Jewish Christians fleeing Jerusalem ca. AD 67 during the First Jewish Revolt.

Mediterranean] *and* the beautiful holy mountain.”⁶⁸ In the latter case, the plural “seas” refers to the Mediterranean itself (as in Jud 5:17; Ezek 27:4; Jon 2:3). In either case, the “beautiful holy mountain” refers to Mt. Zion, i.e., Jerusalem (Dan 9:16, 20; and note Dan 11:16, 41). No details of final battles or catastrophes are recorded here, although other portions of Scripture give us a fuller account (see esp. Zech 12–14; Rev 16:13–18:24). Near the end, many nations will go up against Jerusalem to destroy it (Zech 12:3; 14:2). The emphasis here in Daniel is on the fact that the Antichrist will meet his final fate here: “he will come to his end, with no one to help him.” Whatever battles he might be engaged in, this is not what brings about his end. The NT is quite clear that he is slain by the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess 2:8; Rev 19:19–21; cf. Dan 7:11, 26). With the Antichrist slain, the time has now come for the Lord Jesus to take up his kingdom rule in fulfillment of Daniel 7:13–14, 27. “The LORD will then be king over all the earth” (Zech 14:9).

b. Implications for the Jewish remnant living in the days of the Antichrist (12:1–4)

Daniel 11:36 began a temporal shift from Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the past to the Antichrist of the future. The words “at the end time” in Daniel 11:40 confirm that this king is one who comes in the final stages of history. The opening words of chapter twelve, “at that time,” indicate that the things mentioned in this chapter pertain to that same general time period. Hence, Daniel 11:36–45 described the character of the Antichrist, highlighted some of his final military incursions that drew him into conflict in and around Israel, and noted his defeat and death. Daniel 12 provides further insight into this special period of history known as the great tribulation by showing what the implications will be for Daniel’s people, the Jews.

12:1. The angel Michael had already been introduced back in Daniel 10:13 (see comments there). He is the archangel who has special responsibility for overseeing and protecting the Jewish people (cf. Jude 9). He is said to “arise,” which suggests that he steps into action at this time. The Hebrew word translated “arise” (*ya ʾāmōd*)--normally translated “stand”--can be used in the sense of confronting another in hostile fashion (cf. 2 Kgs 18:28; Isa 50:8). This may have reference to Revelation 12:7–12 involving a colossal battle scene in heaven between Michael and his angels on the one hand and Satan and the evil angels on the other. The victory of Michael and his angels results in the expulsion of Satan and his angels from heaven. Revelation 12:12 indicates that it is this defeat of Satan that propels him to unleash his wrath on the earth: “He is filled with terrible anger, for he knows that he only has a little time.” A careful study of the context of Revelation 12 (note esp. vv 13–14) suggests that Satan’s expulsion from heaven occurs at the beginning of the great tribulation (the latter half of Daniel’s seventieth “week”), and that he has 1,260 days (= time, times and half a time) remaining.

That the great tribulation is in view is confirmed by the reference in Daniel 12:1 to the “time of distress.” The Jewish people have experienced many **distressful times** in their long history, but this will be unlike any other. In fact verse 1 further stipulates that it will be “unlike any other from the nation’s beginning up to that time.” Scholars have observed that the Greek Septuagint translation of this verse in

⁶⁸ Regarding the Hebrew syntactical construction *bēn . . . lʰ* as meaning between this *and* this, there are numerous examples in the OT. See, for example, Neh 3:32.

Daniel is so strikingly similar to Jesus' prediction of the great tribulation in Matthew 24:21 that He must assuredly have had Daniel 12:1 in mind when He predicted the great tribulation that would precede His second coming. During this time, Satan's special hatred of both Christians and Jews will be unleashed. The Bible has much to say about Israel's sufferings at this time, known elsewhere as "the time of Jacob's distress" (Jer 30:7; cf. Deut 4:25-31; Zech 13:7-9). One thing is clear from a study of these passages and the book of Revelation is that many will be martyred. From the divine perspective, however, this suffering of Israel serves a good purpose . . . to bring the nation that has long rejected her Messiah to her knees, until finally she looks (in faith) to the One whom she had pierced and embraces Him as Messiah (cf. Zech 12:10).

After undergoing this deep time of distress . . . the great tribulation . . . she will finally experience God's deliverance: "at that time your own people... will escape." The word translated "escape" (Heb *yimmālēf*) is a word that means to be delivered in the passive voice (as here). This is the same word used to speak of the nation's eschatological deliverance in Joel 2:32. Daniel 12 does not indicate the precondition for this, i.e., Israel's embrace of Jesus as her Messiah, yet Zechariah 12-14 has more to say about both the national repentance and the deliverance (cf. Joel 2:28-32). Zechariah 14:2-4 indicates that this divine deliverance occurs when the nation is at the brink of annihilation. This is the national salvation of Israel referred to in Romans 11:25-27, when at long last the nation's hardening of heart is lifted and she is brought into the bond of the new covenant.

This "escape" or national deliverance, however, is not for the benefit of every single member of the nation who remains alive until the end of the tribulation. Rather it is for those "whose names are found written in the book." This is apparently a reference to the "book of life" which contains a list of the names of all the righteous belonging to God (cf. Exod 32:32-33; Ps 69:28; Lk 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 20:12, 15).

12:2. Not all will live to see God's great deliverance at the end of the tribulation. Many of the righteous will perish in this tribulation, and scores of others will have died in preceding ages. Yet for all Daniel's people who were truly "of the righteous" (having a faith like unto Abraham in Gen 15:6), God will resurrect them. The term "sleep" is used frequently in Scripture as a figure of speech for "death" (cf. Jn 11:11-14; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thess 4:13). Correspondingly the term "awake" is used figuratively of resurrection, just as in Isaiah 26:19: "Your dead will come back to life; your corpses will rise up. Wake up and shout joyfully, you who live in the ground." This verse in Daniel is perhaps the clearest reference in all the OT to the doctrine of resurrection (cf. Job 19:26; Ps 17:15).

Daniel 12:1-2 suggests that at the end of the great tribulation, God will bring about deliverance for Israel, following which there will be a resurrection of the dead. Yet this verse is not intended to provide a detailed report about resurrection. A careful study of the NT (esp. Rev 20) indicates that not all are resurrected at the same time. The righteous are resurrected after the great tribulation but preceding the millennial kingdom, whereas the unrighteous of all ages are resurrected following the millennial kingdom at the great white throne judgment. Daniel 12:2 is just declaring the fact of resurrection. Those who are resurrected to "everlasting life" are obviously the righteous, and they are the ones who are resurrected at

this time, i.e., at the conclusion of the great tribulation.⁶⁹ But for others, their resurrection will be one of “shame and everlasting abhorrence.” This latter resurrection is for the unrighteous dead, and according to Revelation 20:5 does not occur until after the millennium. The point in raising the righteous dead at this time (but not the unrighteous) is to allow the righteous dead of all ages to be present for and to participate in the millennial reign of Christ.

12:3. A special promise is held out for “the wise” and “those bringing many to righteousness.” The parallelism of this verse suggests that these commendations refer to the same people. The word translated “wise” (Heb *maskilim*) means to have insight or comprehension, and was used in Daniel 9:22 of the **spiritual insight** that the angel Gabriel brought to Daniel. The same word was used in Daniel 11:33 of the spiritual insight that some living during the time of the Maccabean persecution were able to offer to others in the nation, thereby encouraging and strengthening them. Hence, they are “wise” because they have set their minds on the Word of God and have learned to apply it to life’s situations, especially in times of crisis. By their instruction they help bring many to righteousness, i.e., they instruct them about God’s way of being righteous and point them to Messiah Jesus in whom one is made righteous by faith. In light of the contextual focus on the great tribulation, this may primarily have the 144,000 Jewish believers in view (cf. Rev 7:4; 14:1ff.). As a result of these commendable actions, these believers will shine like the starry hosts of heaven. This looks at their state of elevation in the Lord’s kingdom after the present age. Notice that this verse is clearly alluded to in Matthew 13:43 in the parable of the wheat and tares that the Lord Jesus gave about the fate of the wicked and the righteous at the end of the age. Shining “like the stars” probably looks at the glory that these resurrected righteous will have in the Lord’s kingdom (cf. 1 Cor 15:40-42).

12:4. At this point, the revelation of what awaits Daniel’s people in the “end time” stops. Daniel is told to “close up these words” and “seal the book until the time of the end.” In light of the way the angel introduced his revelation to Daniel in the final vision (see Dan 10:11--“Understand **the words** that I am about to speak to you” and Dan 10:21--“I will tell you what is inscribed in **the writing** of truth,” emphasis added), verse four seems to apply primarily to these matters affecting Daniel’s people at the time of the end, that is, in the great tribulation. The closing up and sealing could mean one of two things. This verse may simply be saying that the words of this book are to be **preserved** until the time of the end, just as ancient scrolls were “sealed” for the purpose of making a preserved record (cf. Jer 32:9-12). This interpretation is favored by some evangelical commentators. On the other hand, since the words “close up” (Heb *sātam*) are sometimes used in the sense to close up something and thereby cut off access to its contents (as in 2 Kgs 3:19), this verse may be saying that understanding of much of the prophetic revelation of this book is going to be withheld until the time of the end. The idea of a sealed up book may also convey a similar thought of being out of reach (note Isa 29:11).

The first meaning (that of withholding full comprehension until the “end time”) has two points in its favor: (1) first, the repetition of this idea in Daniel 12:8-9 in response to Daniel’s struggle to understand and his pleading to know more; and (2) the statement of an opposite command at the end of Revelation. In Revelation 22:10, the apostle John is told, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of

⁶⁹ Interestingly the LXX translation (by Theodotion) of “everlasting life” is *zōēn aiōnion*, the same Greek phrase used for eternal life in John 3:16.

this book, for the time is near.” In this case, *preservation* is not the idea behind the words “seal up.” However, the two meanings are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The revelation contained in this final vision is being preserved, and yet it will not be fully comprehended until the end. During the great tribulation, especially as events with the Antichrist begin to unfold, this revelation will begin to make greater sense to those who know the Lord Jesus Christ and seek to faithfully follow Him and His Word.

The latter part of verse 4 is somewhat obscure. The words translated “dash about” (Heb *yéšōṭētū*) have to do with the “movement of one’s body to and fro, in search of something, especially information (cf. 2 Chron. 16:9; Jer. 5:1; 49:3; Amos 8:12; Zech. 4:10).”⁷⁰ If the knowledge mentioned here is the fuller comprehension of the prophetic knowledge connected with this final vision, then this is what people are in search of and what will become more discernible during the time of the great tribulation.

4. The question about the duration of the "distress" (12:5-7)

12:5-6. The setting beside the banks of the Tigris River now comes back in view (recall Dan 10:4ff.). Two unidentified individuals are seen standing on each side of the bank. One of them poses a question to “the man clothed in linen,” the same glorious One whom Daniel had seen in Daniel 10:4-6 and most likely the Lord Jesus Christ. The question has to do with the end of “these wondrous events.” In the Hebrew text, this is just one word (*happēlā’ōt*), which means “things which are incredible, hard to imagine or believe.” In this context, it refers to the astonishing things that were announced for Israel in the future tribulation when Antichrist will have authority to afflict Daniel’s people. The question is not **when** they will take place, but **how long** they will last.

12:7. Before giving the answer, the man dressed in linen raises both his hands to heaven in a gesture of making an oath (cf. Gen 14:22; Deut 32:40). In doing so, He swears on oath to “the one who lives forever.” In the OT God is “the living God” (Josh 3:10) and “the living LORD” (Ps 18:46). (Compare divine oath-making in Gen 22:15-18 and Ps 110:4.) Making the statement with an oath adds certainty to the truth of what he is about to say.

His answer is that the duration of these astonishing events (i.e., the great tribulation) will be for “a time, times, and half a time,” the same time that was specified for the saints to be given into the power of the “little horn” in Daniel 7:25. These obviously refer to the same period, because the “little horn” is Antichrist who will severely persecute the Jewish people in the great tribulation. Not surprisingly the same reference is found in Revelation 12:14 and is equivalent to the 1,260 days or forty two months that “the beast”--the Antichrist--is given (cf. Rev 11:2-3; 12:6; 13:5). During this time, “the holy people” will be shattered by his power. In this context, “the holy people” refers to the Jewish people (cf. Isa 63:18), although we know from the book of Revelation that many believing Gentiles will also be persecuted and martyred. The positive side of this verse (and the probable reason for the oath) is that this horrible time of persecution at the hands of the Antichrist will be limited to three and a half years (cf. Rev 11:2).

5. Daniel's concern about the final outcome (12:8-12)

⁷⁰ Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1973), 321.

12:8. Despite hearing the conversation in his vision, Daniel did not fully grasp the meaning of all that he saw and heard. In particular he wanted to know what would happen “after these things.” This may have the idea of wanting to know the **outcome** of the sufferings that his people would go through in the distant future.

12:9. The response to Daniel in verse 9 (“Go, Daniel”) seems to suggest that he is not to ask further questions but be content with what has been revealed to him. The remainder of the verse recalls verse 4. If verse 4 implies the protection and preservation of what had been revealed to Daniel, then the point in verse 9 is that Daniel did not need to be worried about the information being preserved for the future generations that would be affected by it, as God would see to that. They would have what they needed to know.

12:10. In this future time of distress, Daniel’s people will surely be shattered at the hands of the Antichrist, yet the great tribulation will serve to purify, clean, and refine the nation. Through all the sufferings that they will have to undergo, this will cause the people to seek God and His Word. This, together with the witness of faithful believers, will result in many coming to faith in the Lord Jesus, gaining true righteousness, and being prepared to be a part of His wonderful kingdom.

Not everyone among the Jewish people will respond positively, however. There will be certain “wicked” ones who “will go on being wicked.” These are the ones who will refuse to repent and turn in faith to Messiah Jesus. Remaining unregenerate, then, they will not understand the things that are happening in the world in the days of the great tribulation. They will also remain deceived by the Antichrist and fail to perceive his diabolical agenda until it is too late. In contrast to these will be “the wise [who] will understand.” They understand, because they will have turned in faith to Christ, been born again, received the Holy Spirit, and gained spiritual insight from the Word of God. From this verse we see that there will be Jews prepared for the return of Christ and others who will not be prepared. For those among the wicked that remain alive until the Lord returns, they will face His severe judgment and not be allowed to enter His kingdom (cf. Ezek 20:33-38; Zech 13:1-6; Mt 13:36-43, 47-50).

12:11. Verses 11-12 provide some chronological details to augment what had just been revealed in verse 7. By way of review, the time that is allotted to the Antichrist to have his reign of terror is three and a half years. This would be equivalent to forty two months, which is the figure given for him to “exercise ruling authority” in Revelation 13:5. In the Bible, time spans are sometimes reckoned according to lunar months of thirty days, though the Jewish system had a means of correcting the calendar to bring it in line with solar years of 365 ¼ days (compare Gen 7:11, 24 and 8:2-4). Thus forty two months having thirty days each would amount to 1,260 days, and this latter figure is used interchangeably with forty two months and “time, times and half a time” in Revelation 11:2-3 and 12:6, 14. In Daniel 12:11, however, a figure of 1,290 days is now introduced, which is thirty days **longer** than the 1,260. Yet all we are told is that there are 1,290 days following the removal of “the daily sacrifice” and setting up of “the abomination that causes desolation” in its place. The daily sacrifice is a reference to the sacrifice that was made each day, once in the morning and once at twilight, in the temple (see comments at Dan 8:11-12). According to Daniel 12:11 this sacrifice will be removed, presumably by the Antichrist or his agents. This would imply, then, that there must be some kind of Jewish temple standing and in operation

during the years leading up to the second coming of Christ (cf. Dan 9:27; 2 Thess 2:4; Rev 11:1-3).⁷¹ The daily sacrifice of the temple (once sanctioned by God under the old covenant) is removed so that “the abomination that causes desolation” can replace it. Something similar had taken place in history past in the days of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (note Dan 11:31), which is but a foreshadowing of what the Antichrist will do in the future great tribulation. Apparently this corresponds to the halting of “sacrifice and offerings” mentioned in Daniel 9:27 (which takes place at the midpoint of the final “week” of seven years). So significant is this act that Jesus even prophesied of it in Matthew 24:15, viewing this event as the primary sign inaugurating the great tribulation (note Mt 24:21). When the Jews of that day see this happen--and note that Jesus indicates it will take place in the “holy place,” i.e., the Jewish temple--Christ instructs them to flee Judea for the mountains.⁷² In fact Jesus’ reference to this “abomination” (and He clearly links it to Daniel’s prophecy) proves that this sacrilege cannot have been fulfilled in the days of Antiochus IV, since Jesus utters this in the first century AD, long after the time of Antiochus.

What then is “the abomination that causes desolation” that the Antichrist shall set up in the Jewish temple? We are not clearly told what it is, though it is apparently a fulfillment of the desolating sacrilege mentioned in Daniel 9:27. There is very good reason to think, however, that it must be connected somehow to the prediction of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, when “the man of lawlessness” (another title for the Antichrist) “takes his seat in God’s temple, displaying himself as God.” We know from Revelation 13:3-4 that the whole earth will follow after the beast and even worship him during the period of the great tribulation. Furthermore, the False Prophet has an image made of the beast that all are commanded to worship (Rev 13:15). Is this image of the beast placed in the rebuilt Jewish temple? And if so, could this be the “abomination” mentioned in Daniel 12:11?

Whatever the “abomination” may be, we still are not told why there are 1,290 days that follow this, i.e., thirty days longer than Antichrist’s reign of 1,260 days. Apparently Jesus returns in glory at the end of 1,260 days, because it is His personal return in Revelation 19 that puts an end to the Antichrist. So the extra thirty days seem to follow the second coming, and we can only speculate as to what they are used for.⁷³ They could be used for the Lord Jesus to carry out certain judgments on those who remain alive, clearing the world of the wicked who remained alive at His second coming (note Ezek 20:33-38; Mt 13:24-30, 36-43; 25:31-46).

⁷¹ The idea of a Jewish temple standing at the “time of the end” may seem strange at first thought, for this would imply that the Jews will rebuild their temple prior to the return of Christ. This does not mean, however, that God has sanctioned the rebuilding of the temple. Since the temple and its sacrifices have been fulfilled by Christ (see Heb 9), we can presume that the initiative to rebuild a temple comes at the hands of apostate Jews who stand outside the new covenant.

⁷² Apparently only a minority of the Jews living at the time of the great tribulation will heed Christ’s warning (at that point in time, most of the nation is still in unbelief). Nevertheless some do, and this is probably the background for the events recorded in Revelation 12:6, 13-17.

⁷³ J. Dwight Pentecost mentions an alternative interpretation: “Another possibility is that the 1,290 days will begin 30 days before the middle of the 70th ‘seven’ of years when the world ruler will set up ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ (Matt. 24:15). The 1,290 days could begin with an announcement (about the abomination) made 30 days before the abomination is introduced” (“Daniel,” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary, OT*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985], 1374).

12:12. One final numerical figure is provided in this verse, as a special blessing is announced for those “who wait and attain to the 1,335 days.” This would be forty five days beyond the previously mentioned 1,290 days. Not all will attain (or reach) this point, but those who do are “blessed.” So obviously this is only for “the righteous.” A very plausible suggestion is that this date marks the wedding celebration of the Lamb mentioned in Revelation 19:9, a verse where we also find the word “blessed” used for those invited to this glorious event: “Blessed are those who are invited to the banquet at the wedding celebration of the Lamb!” This is the grand inaugural festive banquet at the onset of Christ’s millennial kingdom on earth (cf. Isa 25:6; Lk 14:15-24; Rev 3:20). If the “judgment seat of Christ” takes place following the second coming of Christ as I have argued for elsewhere, then it may be that the forty five days preceding the banquet are used for the Lord Jesus to judge/evaluate His children and give them their rewards.⁷⁴ This time may also be used for other preparations that need to be made before the kingdom is formally ushered in.

6. God's special promise for Daniel in the resurrection (12:13)

The final verse of the book is reserved for Daniel himself. Given the date for this final vision mentioned in Daniel 10:1, Daniel would most likely be a man over eighty years of age at this point and not far from death. He would die soon and would not live to see the kingdom given to “One like a Son of Man” in his own lifetime (Dan 7:13-14). His only hope was to be resurrected in the distant future and enter Messiah’s kingdom at that time. For now, he is told to “go [his] way until the end,” i.e., the end of his physical life when he would be placed in the grave and enter rest. In the OT, entering one’s rest was a picture of believers who physically died and then found peace and rest from their struggles of life (cf. Job 3:17; Isa 57:2). Yet this would not be the end to his existence, for God promised him that “at the end of the days you will arise,” i.e., be resurrected in the distant future. He will awake to everlasting life, just as was promised the righteous in Daniel 12:2, and we can safely conclude that he too will “shine like the brightness of the heavenly expanse.” His resurrection will not simply be an awakening from the grave, but that he might “receive what [he has] been allotted.” His “allotted portion” (a noun in the Hebrew text – *gôrāl*) is a word meaning a lot that is cast for determining a decision, from which it has the derived meaning of that which is obtained by a lot cast. The same word was used for the land inheritance that the tribes received upon entering the Promised Land (e.g., Josh 15:1). Hence, the word is used here for the inheritance that is in store for Daniel in the resurrection as his reward for a life of faithful service. This is what he will have to enjoy forever and ever in Messiah’s kingdom! Such reward in the resurrection sets the stage and anticipates the doctrine of rewards that is developed more fully in the NT. Believers today can also hope to receive a future reward and inheritance, provided, that is, that they endure in a life of faithfulness with the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Heb 10:35-36). For this, we have no greater model than Daniel. Amen.

⁷⁴ J. Paul Tanner, “The ‘Marriage Supper of the Lamb’ in Rev 19:6-10; Implications for the Judgment Seat of Christ,” *Trinity Journal* 26:1 (Spring 2005): 47-68. Regarding the judgment seat of Christ (for believers only), see 2 Cor 5:9-10 and 1 Cor 3:10-17.