

SESSION TWENTY

DANIEL

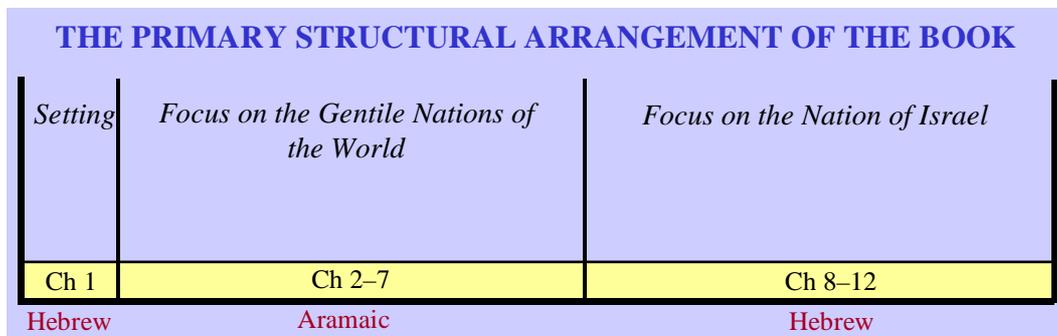
A Synthesis of the Book

THE SETTING

The book of Daniel is one of the most unique books of the Old Testament, containing several bizarre dreams and visions. The book opens in 605 BC following the first invasion of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon into Judah. At that time, several of the young men of Judah (especially from the nobles and aristocracy) were taken away to Babylon to be groomed for service to the Babylonian king. One of these young men was Daniel, and the book tells how he came to be one of the highest officials of the Babylonian empire. He lived to see the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes and Persians in 539 BC, and continued to have an influential position even after that change of government. One of the reasons for the exaltation of Daniel in the Babylonian court was his God-given ability to interpret dreams, though he proved to be a competent and wise administrator of integrity as well.

UNIQUENESS OF LANGUAGE

A distinguishing feature of the book of Daniel is that it was written in two languages, partly in Aramaic and partly in Hebrew. The Aramaic portion is Dan 2:4–7:28. In fact, there is a correspondence between the languages and the thematic structure of the book.



At the time of Daniel, Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the day, being the medium of international communication in the days of the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian empires. Chapters 2–7 focus on the Gentile kingdoms and are appropriately recorded in their representative language. Chapters 1 and 8–12 are primarily concerned with Israel, and hence are recorded in Hebrew. This is directly related to the theology of the book.

To appreciate the linguistic and literary structure of the book, we must see this in relation to the theology of the book. Daniel, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was written during the time of the Babylonian exile. All the prophets who wrote during this period were concerned about the covenant status of the nation. What was the implication of God allowing the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple? Had His covenant program with Israel come to an end? Prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel made it clear that God's covenant program with Israel was not over. After showing that Judah

was clearly deserving of her punishment from God because of her covenant unfaithfulness, they typically would reveal glimpses of the nation's distant future when God would eventually restore her and bless her once again. These prophetic glimpses (salvation oracles) quite naturally focused on the Messiah, for it would be through Him that the nation would eventually be restored and blessed. The unique feature of the book of Daniel is that Israel's future is clarified in relation to the Gentile nations. Eventually, God will establish His kingdom under the rule of Messiah, but until that time Israel is to be made subservient to Gentile powers. The purpose, then, of Dan 2–7 is to highlight the Gentile nations of the world, revealing their role, character, and succession prior to Messiah's kingdom. By God's design, they are to have the right of world sovereignty until God is pleased to establish the Messianic kingdom. Dan 8–12, however, focuses upon Israel, showing her relation to Gentile dominion and her future in the plan of God. [See supplemental chart on the Book of Daniel].

Hence, the purpose of the book of Daniel is to establish that God is sovereignly in control of the nations under whom Israel is being disciplined and that Israel will ultimately be restored and blessed in Messiah's kingdom after she has first undergone tribulation and sufferings imposed by the Antichrist.

CHAPTERS 2–7

Chapters 2–7 form a literary unit, not only because of their common linguistic base (Aramaic), but also because of the *thematic structure* of these chapters [see chart on the "Literary Structure of Daniel 2–7"]. Together, they address the matter of Gentile empires, because at the time of Daniel, Judah had been made a vassal of the Babylonian Empire . . . her sovereignty had been completely taken away. Hence, these chapters focus upon the nation's subjection to Gentile powers. Primarily, they clarify that the future of the nation is secure with God. God is still in sovereign control of history, and He has determined that history will culminate in a kingdom ruled by the Messiah (Dan 2:44-45; 7:13-14). Until that time, however, Israel will be placed in subjection to Gentile powers, and these chapters even reveal (predictively!) what those powers will be. The first will be Babylon, which will be followed by Persia, Greece and then Rome. Out of the Roman Empire will eventually come a confederacy of nations that comes to be dominated by one called "the little horn" (7:23-25). The first four empires belong to the historic past, whereas the "ten-nation confederacy" and "little horn" (= Antichrist) will not appear until the end of the age (shortly before the Second Coming of Christ). This is evident by the way these latter figures are depicted by the book of Revelation.

Obviously, then, these chapters do not portray every single Gentile power that Israel will be subjected to. Daniel gives the first four empires (which take us up to the time of the First Coming of Jesus Christ), but then there is an obvious gap until the eschatological end times of the Tribulation and Second Coming. The reason for this is that after the rule of Rome over Judea, there is not any one single empire that rules Israel until the worldwide empire of the Antichrist. Since the days of the Roman Empire, the world has not seen any one single empire that has risen to rule the world. Furthermore, since the days of the Roman Empire, Israel has not even been a nation in its own land. Following the Bar Kochba revolt in AD 135, Israel has been scattered all over the world, subjected to Gentiles wherever she has gone. Even today most of the Jews are not back in the land of Israel.

Chapters 2–7 also have another purpose, other than revealing the future course of Israel and the Gentile kingdoms. Though Gentile kingdoms will dominate God's covenant people, Israel's God is still supreme and ought to be worshipped by all. Even the Gentiles must learn this! Hence, chapter three deals with idolatry. The refusal to worship the image of gold gives an opportunity for the Lord to *comment* on idolatry and reveal who the true God is. Chapter four (Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great tree) attacks human pride and reveals whose *will* is supreme. Chapter five (Belshazzar's feast at

the fall of Babylon) shows the folly of man's insolence and reveals whose power must be reckoned with. Chapter six (Daniel in the lion's den) demonstrates that only Daniel's God, *Yahweh Elohim*, is worthy of man's worship.

CHAPTERS 8–12

Although Israel will eventually be delivered from the overrule of Gentile kingdoms to experience Messiah's kingdom, much of her history will be one of turmoil and suffering at the hands of Gentiles. Chapter eleven provides a tracing of the political history from the time of the Persian Empire (where Daniel's life concluded) through the Hellenistic period until the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175-164 BC). This Syrian ruler becomes the subject of much of Daniel's material. He is depicted in Dan 8 as the "small horn" and again more directly in Dan 11:21-35. The reason for so much focus on Antiochus Epiphanes is that he serves as a "type" of the Antichrist that will arise in the latter days of Israel's history. The first half of the book had concluded with the revelation that the Antichrist (there called the "little horn") will emerge just prior to the days of Messiah's kingdom to severely persecute the Jewish people (7:21-22). In the second half of the book, he is given extended treatment, first by revelation of his "type" in history (i.e., Antiochus), and then by direct revelation in Dan 11:36-45.

In the midst of this latter section (8–12) with all its gloomy focus upon the Antichrist and his predecessor, Antiochus Epiphanes, an amazing revelation is given about the time of Messiah's coming (see Dan 9:24-27). God has a very definite time-table, and the Messiah will come precisely on time to accomplish all of God's purposes for history.

THE INTERPRETATION OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM (2:31-49)

This section can be divided into three parts:

THE DREAM IS STATED	INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM		NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S RESPONSE
<i>A Statue of a Man Which a Stone Smashes</i>	<i>Gentile Kingdoms</i>	<i>Messiah's Triumph & Kingdom</i>	<i>Esteems Yahweh Above Babylonian Deities</i>
2:31-35	2:36-43	2:44-45	2:46-49

The dream involves a statue of a man composed of various metals and clay, the parts of which symbolize various Gentile kingdoms. Remember: we should be careful of departing from a literal interpretation (i.e., the plain meaning) unless there is good reason to do so. In this case, the statue is meant to be understood *symbolically*, because the text itself reveals the symbolic meaning (see 2:37). Daniel reveals that the head of gold symbolizes the kingdom of Babylon and its first king, Nebuchadnezzar. The point of the vision is to represent (and reveal) the Gentile powers that dominate over Israel until the time that Israel is restored by the Messiah. This period of time is known in Scripture as "the times of the Gentiles" (cf. Lk 21:24). Besides instructing us that the vision has symbolic meaning, the text also instructs us that the statue depicts the succession of world empires (note 2:39 - "after you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you"). Hence, the interpretation of the primary components is:

head of fine gold	Babylon
breast & arms of silver	Medo-Persia
belly & thighs of bronze	Greece
legs of iron	Rome

This interpretation is generally agreed upon by conservative scholars, regardless of their millennial position. Critical scholars, however, view Media and Persia as separate kingdoms, thus making Greece the fourth and final kingdom. Their reason for doing so is to avoid having the Roman Empire in the scheme. Critical scholars typically date the book of Daniel in the 2nd century BC, rather than in the 6th century BC as do conservative evangelicals. For critical scholars, the book is not predictive prophecy at all, but rather a record written after the fact. Since they cannot push the date for the book any later than the 2nd century BC, to acknowledge Rome would be to acknowledge predictive prophecy, for Rome did not emerge as a world empire replacing the Hellenistic empire until the 1st century BC.¹ The critical position, however, is seriously flawed: (1) Dan 5:28 declares that Babylon would be followed by Medo-Persia; and (2) Dan 8:3,20-21 reveals that Greece would be preceded by Medo-Persia (symbolized by the one animal of a ram with two horns).

But the interpretation does not end with the identity of the fourth kingdom as Rome (the legs of iron). The statue is also said to have "feet" partly of iron and partly of clay (2:33). Is this just an elaboration of Rome, or is this another kingdom which follows the Roman Empire? The question is significant, in light of Dan 2:44,

"And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever."

Conservative scholars are generally agreed that the kingdom in 2:44 (which will never be destroyed) refers to the kingdom of Messiah. Since *this kingdom* is said to come about "in the days of those kings," how we understand the symbolism of the "feet partly of iron and partly of clay" is crucial in regard to the *timing* of Messiah's kingdom. If we see the "feet" as one and the same with the historic Roman Empire, then Dan 2:44 is saying that Messiah's kingdom comes about in the days of Rome. Hence, the Messianic Kingdom would have begun long ago. This is the general amillennial position which equates the Messianic Kingdom with the *church* (a kingdom which is "now"). Their view is in contrast with premillennialists who regard the kingdom as future (following the Second Coming).

There are problems, however, for the amillennial interpretation: (1) Dan 2:44 says that Messiah's kingdom "will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms," but that did not happen in the case of ancient Rome. The *church* was founded early in Rome's rule (AD 33), but the church did not put an end to the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire continued well into the 5th century AD, and Gentile kingdoms have followed the Roman Empire. (2) Dan 2:44 specifies that Messiah's kingdom will come about in the days of "those kings" (plural!), implying that the final form of Gentile rule must be a confederacy, not just a single king or Caesar (comp. 7:23-24). (3) The specification of the feet as "partly of iron and partly of clay" suggests a distinction from the Roman Empire (represented by legs of iron). Since the feet are "partly of iron," there is probably some connection to the Roman Empire.

¹Critical scholars generally do not date Daniel later than 165 BC in light of their interpretation of Dan 11:45. They view Dan 11:45 (*mistakenly!*) as a reference to the death of Antiochus Epiphanes. However, Antiochus did not die the way Dan 11:45 describes, and they conclude from this that the author of the book wrote before the time of Antiochus's death (supposedly, the author thought Antiochus would die this way). Personally, I would understand Dan 11:45 to be referring to the death of the Antichrist, not Antiochus.

As we will see in our study of Daniel 7, Nebuchadnezzar's dream in ch 2 and Daniel's vision in ch 7 are parallel revelations from God. Each traces the course of Gentile powers prior to Messiah's kingdom. With the vision in ch 7, however, there is some confederacy of 10 nations that *comes out of* the fourth kingdom (see 7:23-24). Since the book of Revelation interprets this ten-nation confederacy as a development to occur in the Tribulation (see Rev 17:12), this would suggest that the final phase of Gentile powers in both Dan 2 and Dan 7 represents a confederacy that will develop in the Tribulation. Since the feet are "partly of iron," there is probably some connection between the last-days confederacy of ten nations and the historic Roman Empire (and Dan 7:24 specifically says that it will come out of the 4th beast, i.e., Rome).

Although Dan 2 says nothing about the confederacy being composed of ten nations, the fact that the feet would have ten toes certainly lends itself to such an interpretation. Since there is no historic ten-nation confederacy coming out of the Roman Empire that would satisfactorily fit the details, and since the book of Revelation interprets the ten-nation confederacy of Dan 7 as belonging to the Tribulation period, the best interpretation of Dan 2:41-43 is to interpret this as a future ten-nation confederacy that will arise in the Tribulation period and have some kind of connection to the historic Roman Empire. This would imply that there is a basic *gap of time* involved in the successive empires. The other implication is that Messiah's kingdom has not yet been established (at least not in its full and final form), and thus should not be understood as equivalent to the founding of the *church*. Messiah's kingdom awaits the days of this future ten-nation confederacy. The Messiah Himself will destroy Gentile rule, and establish His own kingdom as the perfect replacement. Remember that Isaiah had predicted that Messiah's kingdom would be one of peace (no more warfare!), and hence a symbolic interpretation of Messiah's kingdom as the *church* cannot satisfy other biblical details (see Isa 2:1-4).

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

How do you react when bad news comes your way? Do you grumble and complain? Do you blame God for your circumstances? Daniel received the "bad news" that his life would be taken along with the *wise men* of Babylon, because no one had interpreted the king's dream (2:13). But notice the maturity and wisdom with which he handled the situation: "Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends . . . about the matter, in order that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery." Daniel did not go to the house of his friends so that they could cry on one another's shoulder. He went to their house for the purpose of praying together. They handled the crisis by going immediately to God in prayer! Often times, God allows trials into our lives just to see how we react. Have we learned the lesson that God wants us to handle trials by gathering with fellow believers to pray and ask for God's intervening grace? Notice that God did not let Daniel and his friends down. They prayed . . . He answered. And their faith was strengthened as a result!