

Session 13

Daniel as a Background to Revelation

Daniel was a young man taken captive to Babylon 1:3, 4, 6. He was part of the first stage of the exile, 2Kings 24:1, nineteen years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, 2Kings 23:36, c.f. 24:18. Nebuchadnezzar reigned from 605 BC – 562 BC. Babylon was conquered by Cyrus in 539 BC so Daniel's story spanned at least 69 years, (see Daniel 10:1).

He was probably a mid teenager in chapter 1 and by chapter 12 he must have been at least in his mid eighties.

Daniel found himself in a very vulnerable position. He was a captive; the dominant culture was pagan and hostile to the monotheism of Israel; his God was had apparently been defeated by the gods of Babylon, and was seen to be weak and discredited; the pressures to conform were enormous. **It appeared that almost absolute power was in the hands of the enemies of truth, but in the face of all this he believed in the God of Israel.**

He was determined to be faithful to this God in the context of that alien culture, 1:5-8, and was prepared to die for his convictions, 6:7-11. The same was true of his companions 3:16-18. Nevertheless he saw no difficulty in serving a succession of Gentile kings and doing what he could for the good of the Empire, c.f. Jeremiah 29:7 "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

It is interesting to compare chapters 1-2 with chapter 12.

The young Daniel is full of conviction and certainty and courage. Events are challenging and even dangerous but essentially straightforward – his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is clear-cut and precise.

The aged Daniel is full of questions and has to be content to live with mysteries. Some would only be revealed in the long distant future, when the appropriate time would come.

Meanwhile he was given understanding about the conflict between truth and power, and the interplay between power politics and God's sovereign hand guiding human history to His appointed end. Daniel was deeply involved in the visible expression of power but he was given to see the larger invisible scenario, a cosmic struggle where God is undisputed King. **The issues would be ultimately be settled not by the exercise of power, but rather by the revelation of truth.**

The forces at work in Daniel's period of history are the same ones that have continued to operate in the subsequent centuries and will continue to the close of the age.

John's situation in Revelation was very similar.

He, too, lived in a hostile pagan empire (Daniel's 4th beast), where the believers were a vulnerable minority and under immense pressure to conform. He was given vivid visual revelations similar to those that Daniel received, revealing the heavenly perspective on human affairs and the appointed end of history when truth will triumph over power.

Much of what Daniel received applied in the first instance to the experience of his people in the period up to the coming of Jesus. From time to time it leaps forward to events in the far distant future.

The symbols and pictures are taken up in the New Testament, particularly in Revelation, and reapplied to events yet future. We have to be careful how to interpret them.

Daniel is not giving us a straightforward prophecy of the end times but the forces and principles are the same throughout history and will intensify as the age come to its conclusion. The symbols, reworked and reapplied in John's visions, help us to understand what is happening beyond the visible political and religious power-based events as interpreted to us by politicians, historians, the media etc.

Increasing conflict between God, and His people, and pagan/ungodly society.

- **The sacred vessels** of the Temple are treated with some respect, even if their significance was not fully appreciated, 1:1-2.
They were subsequently used for a profane purpose 5:1-4.
- **Food and wine** symbolize faithfulness to God. Daniel's position was respected and there was associated blessing 1:5, 8, 11-16. Daniel would not defile himself – c.f. Rev. Food and wine were the occasion for rebellion and judgement 5:1-4, 26-28.
- **World empires were first pictured as a colossal man, glorious in appearance but fatally weak**, 2:31-45.
- **World empires were subsequently pictured as wild beasts, hideous in strength**, chapters 7 – 8.
- **A king was warned about pride**, was judged and then restored, chapter 4.
A king was judged for his pride, and suddenly removed without warning, chapter 5. God “pokes His finger” into human affairs as they are in full flow.
- **Religion as a tool of the state.** A requirement for everyone to worship a god prescribed by the civil/religious power on pain of death, 3:1-7.
There was a requirement, on pain of death, for everyone to worship only the god prescribed by the civil/religious power. The king himself is the god, 6:6-9.
- **A rough stone brings down the human edifice and from it the Kingdom of God grows to fill the earth**, 2:34-35.
- **The Kingdom of God is suddenly inaugurated by an “ideal man” – the Son of Man**, 7:9-14.

Two complementary pictures of human history and society

1) A colossal statue in four sections, 2:27-45.

They decreased in glory but increased in power (except the feet – it is all built on clay). It represents four successive empires, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, seen from one point of view – human rationality and achievement – e.g. 4:30. The fatal flaw is pride 4:24-37.

Nebuchadnezzar thought that he could change the revealed purposes of God by using manipulation/technology/magic, 3:1, and by coercion of people into a subservient unity, v2-7.

Three faithful Jews refused to worship and were prepared to become martyrs, v16-18.

Jesus, the faithful witness, was the stone. His intervention, the Father's initiative ("without human hands", 2:44-45), in the days of the 4th Empire (Rome) ensured that one day all human empires will be destroyed forever.

2) Four wild beasts. Their importance is not in themselves but rather as they interact with the purposes of God in his chosen people.

Increased power is accompanied by decrease in humanity, 7:1-8, the inevitable outcome of totalitarian power – the glory of great empires is accompanied by ruthlessness and extreme cruelty.

"...I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own", Habakkuk 1: 6,

"This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of, to subdue nations before him ...I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me", Isaiah 45:1-4.

They arise out of the restless sea, stirred by the four winds of Heaven. God is sovereign, 7: 2-3.

"Oh, the raging of many nations - they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples-- they roar like the roaring of great waters!" Isaiah 17:12

"But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud." Isaiah 57:20

For I am the Lord your God, who churns up the sea so that its waves roar- the Lord Almighty is his name. Isaiah 51:15, c.f. Jeremiah 5:22, Jeremiah 31:35.

Each empire is very powerful but eventually comes to an end and is replaced.

The fourth kingdom is initially Rome (as in John's visions in Revelation) but merges with one that is even more terrible and defiant and fierce in its persecution of the saints, 8, 21. Its downfall is accomplished by the sudden and final intervention of the Heavenly Court and the appearance of the Son of Man.

The Ancient of Days delegates judgement to the Son of Man, on the basis of the contents of certain books, 7:7:13-14, 23-27.

John, in his visions, also sees something similar. The wild beasts of Daniel 7 and 8 are similar in nature to the beasts described in Revelation 13 and 17-19. They have more than one application through history.

Daniel sees the process as reaching two climaxes - firstly in the history of his people Israel, and then, on a much greater scale, at the end of time. This comes out of the picture of "the little horn".

Chapters 7 and 8 refer to two different situations.

1). Chapter 8. The Greek empire is ‘the beast’ and a particular_ the king. Antiochus IV “Epiphanes”, is ‘the horn’.

The character and policy and behaviour of this king are described in somewhat pictorial language.

- He starts in a small way, 9.
- He becomes very powerful in relation to the holy people, 9, 24.
- He is fierce and cunning and ruthless, 23, 2.
- Truth is a major casualty, 12.
- His rise is, at least in part, the result of transgression by God’s people, 12.
- He sets out to destroy the people of God and in large measure succeeds 10, 24.
- He is proud and even challenges God himself, 11, 25.
- He bans the worship of God, 11, 13.
- His power is ultimately from God 24 and God will remove him 25 in his own time, 13-14.

11:21-35 describes his career in a more literal way and the actual historical events are described in 1 and 2 Maccabees.

It was a time of severe distress for the people of God, threatening them with total destruction.

They are recalled each year at the feast of **Hanukkah** (Dedication).

“Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter ...” John 10:22

2). Chapter 7 describes a similar situation at the end of time. In this case the “little horn” grows out of the final beast – one that parallels the character of the Roman Empire.

What the “little horn” of chapter 8 became for the Jewish people will now be universal under the power of this “little horn”.

This fierce beast (kingdom) v19, 23-24, similar to the Roman Empire in its strength and ruthlessness, eventually gives rise to a horn (a ruler) with **similar features to the king who arose from the Greek kingdom.**

He is proud and powerful 20, 24-25 and persecuting 21, 25, but his time also is limited, 25.

He is removed by the Heavenly Court, 26, and perishes along with the beast, 11.

The saints receive the eternal kingdom 22, 27, together with the Son of Man, 14.

Daniel linked the career of Antiochus, 11:29 -35, to the end times, 11:36- 12:1.

This will be a time of unparalleled distress.

Jesus used similar language to Daniel.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD foreshadowed events at the end of the age, Luke 21:20-24.

Daniel 8:13 Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled--the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, **the rebellion that causes desolation**, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?"

Daniel 11:31 "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up **the abomination that causes desolation**.

Matthew 24:15 "So when you see standing in the holy place '**the abomination that causes desolation**,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand--

Daniel 12:1 "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. **There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.** But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered.

Matthew 24:21-22 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again. ²²If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

The Apostles indicated that a larger version of Antiochus, energized by the same spirit and with the same agenda, would arise in the end times – the Antichrist, the man of sin, the lawless one, 2Thess.2:1-12, 1John 2:18-23.

Jesus also warned his disciples to guard against false messiahs and false prophets - as we shall see in Revelation, political power combines with religion. The ultimate manifestation of this situation will be foreshadowed in many smaller versions, each of them servants of the spirit of antichrist.

The prophecy of the 70 weeks – Daniel 9

Daniel's prayer of repentance and intercession was based on the Word of God, 1-2.

"This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, "and will make it desolate forever." Jeremiah 25:11-12.

"This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place". Jeremiah 29:10.

Daniel's concern for the glory of God and the fulfilment of previous promises, 3-19, called forth the vision of God's future purposes, 20-27.

The weeks (literally 'sevens') are generally taken to be seventy weeks of years – 490 years. It is a very difficult prophecy but the outline seems clear (remember that biblical numbers are often approximate and also symbolic – seven implies completeness).

V 24 deals with the whole sweep of history to the end of time

V 25 refers to the first 7 x 69 years i.e. 483 years. There are difficulties over the starting date, but if it refers to the decree of Artaxerxes1 in 458 BC, Ezra 7:11, this period takes us approximately to the time of Jesus, (making it a unique type of prophecy). It tells of the rebuilding of Jerusalem in times of trouble – see Ezra, Zechariah, and Haggai.

V 26 tells of the death of Messiah on behalf of others. This is to be followed by the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, “After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary”, c.f. Matt. 24:15-16. Jesus quotes from Daniel 11:31.

It applied in the first instance to Antiochus Epiphanes but had a second application to AD 70.

This underlines the principle that a historical event can have prophetic significance for the future, often with increased intensity.

Some people interpret v26b-27, in this way, as jumping to the end times. “The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

The exact nature of the fulfillment is difficult to define. It will only be clear to those living at the time, and then only by the wise 10 (wisdom is the counterpart of wickedness). Daniel did not understand either, 12: 4, 6-9, and 11-13.

The final section – chapters 10-12.

Daniel has been fasting and seeking to understand the purposes of God, v14 – the exile is over, but in a very incomplete way, 10:1, c.f. 2Chron, 36:22-23. He has an overwhelming vision of a very exalted person. The message concerns the future of Daniel’s people.

Daniel’s prayer is part of the process in the divine revelation – they are mysteriously intertwined.

There are cosmic battles that lie behind the rise and fall of nations. The visible is only the surface reality.

Daniel 11 describes the future course of history culminating in the career of Antiochus E, v20-35. He appears to be a foreshadowing of the Antichrist, the ultimate ‘little horn’ who will in some fashion seek to abolish the worship of God and set up a false religious system and compel everyone to conform to it.

It is not clear which specific details are included in the time of the end and which only refer to Antiochus.

- He will claim the status of God and abolish all others. His ‘god-character’ will be as an absolute monarch and dedicated to military power 31, 36-38.

- He will reward those who abandon the true Covenant and submit to him .30, 32.
- He will defile the Holy place, 31.
- He will persecute God's faithful people and kill them, 33.
- Those who understand will stand firm and encourage others 32, 33. They will be purified by persecution in preparation for the end 35. There will be increasing contrast between the wise people and the wicked 32, 12:10.
- His activities will have particular focus on the Holy Land 30, 31, 39, 41, 45. Other nearby nations will also be affected, 41-43.
- He has only a limited time, set by God – a time of wrath, 36.
- He will meet his end in the Holy Land, 45.

The final resurrection and judgement 12:1-3

The great trouble will precede the final events.

Michael the Archangel (Israel's heavenly protector) stands guard and ready to intervene 10:13, 21. In the time of their final distress Israel will be delivered 12:7.

The resurrection of the dead is followed by the final judgement.

Daniel himself is not given full understanding.

The river of time will continue till the end and then Daniel will also rise and receive his reward. Meanwhile he can rest, confident that God's purposes will be accomplished.

Jesus and the apostles take up the themes he has seen from a distance and bring them into sharper focus.