

Understanding the history of Daniel and the meaning of the prophecies in Daniel 7-12

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Note: the reader is encouraged to have the Bible open and to read the biblical references mentioned in this summary in their context. The ESV will be cited various times in these notes.

The prophetic section of Daniel, Chapters 7-12, is generally recognized as having characteristics of apocalyptic literature. A correct interpretation of the prophetic sections of Daniel requires establishing the historical context and understanding the timeline of the book. The prophetic visions of Daniel 7-12 do not continue the chronological order of Chapters 1-6. Several important historical dates should be kept in mind.

- Various difficulties arise in outlining the book. Chapters 1-6 are a historical narrative of events related to the royal court, (including the king's dream in Chapter 2). Chapters 7-12 contain visions that reveal future events. Chapters 1 and 8-12 are written in Hebrew; Chapters 2-7 in Aramaic.
- The study of Chapters 7-12 as a unit must begin by recognizing that Chapter 7 was written in Aramaic and Chapters 8-12 in Hebrew.
- Daniel 7-12 begins with Daniel's dream in Chapter 7 (in Aramaic) and continues with the interpretation and expansion of that dream (in Hebrew).
- The historical context begins in 609 B.C. when Judah began to be carried into exile after the death of King Josiah.
- Several years before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, Daniel was carried into Babylonian captivity in the early stages of the Exile. Daniel was in Babylon by 605 BC.
- Beginning in 605 BC Daniel wrote the book that bears his name from Babylon.
- Daniel began writing in 605 BC, Daniel 2 is to be dated about 604 BC, with chapters 3 and 4 soon after.
- Approximately sixty years passed before Babylon was conquered by the Medo-Persians in 539 BC. In Daniel 5, we read about the fall of Babylon (539 BC). Daniel 6 is to be dated shortly thereafter.
- Study the dates of the first six chapters of Daniel. The first four chapters belong to the last years of the seventh century BC (approximately 605-600 BC); the next two chapters describe events a little over sixty years later immediately before and after the fall of Babylon.

The student is encouraged to read the book of Daniel with fresh eyes, casting aside insofar as possible past conceptions. The ESV is recommended since it clarifies several translation missteps.

Chapter Seven. The second part of the book begins with Daniel's dream of four beasts and is dated 553 BC (14 years before the fall of Babylon and the events of Chapters 5-6). Notice that the second half of the book of Daniel does not chronologically follow the first six chapters.

The king's dream of **Chapter 2** (about 604 BC) is often assumed to be parallel to Daniel's dream in Chapter 7 (553 BC). The parallel most often mentioned is that both dreams include descriptions of four kingdoms. In the dream of the king, Chapter 2, a single image (statue) is described, with a head of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the middle and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. The sections of the statue represent kingdoms. The fourth kingdom of iron will be a divided kingdom, represented by feet of iron mixed with clay. The statue represents a sequence of political kingdoms which are then conquered by another kingdom, a clear reference to the church. The kingdoms of this world are overcome by a spiritual kingdom (compare Rev. 11:15).

Daniel's dream in **Chapter 7** is of four beasts representing four kingdoms. But instead of a single statue with various parts of different materials, now there are four beasts. While there are similarities when one compares the two dreams, there are also significant differences. If the two dreams are parallel, one must ask why it was necessary to repeat the dream about 50 years later.

The dream of Chapter 7 is interpreted in the biblical text (see vv. 15-28). A close examination of the detailed description of the fourth beast strongly suggests that the reference is to Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Often

overlooked in the description is that the fourth beast is killed and destroyed (vv. 11, 26) prior to the coming of the one like a son of man, a reference to the incarnational coming of Jesus. The interpretation given in Scripture makes it hard to understand how the fourth beast in Daniel's dream can be same as the last kingdom in the king's dream (generally understood as Rome). The reference in Daniel 7 is to Antiochus IV.

7:1-8. The first three beasts of Daniel's vision represent Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar (compare Daniel 4), the Medo-Persians, and Greece (four wings, four heads). The fourth beast was different with a little horn uprooting all others, a boastful horn with the eyes of a man. As is made clear in the interpretation (vv. 15-28), this description refers to Antiochus Epiphanes IV.

7:9-12. In Daniel's dream, the Ancient of Days takes the throne. This does not suggest that the Ancient of Days did not rule previously. Daniel's dream shows that God remains supreme and in control. Because of the audacity of the horn of the fourth beast, the beast is killed and destroyed. (The other beasts lost their dominion or power but the nations represented were not completely destroyed.) An important detail in these verses is that the fourth beast has already been killed and destroyed (v. 11).

7:13-14. After the demise of the fourth beast, one like a son of man is given dominion, a kingdom that will not pass away and will not be destroyed. The reference is to Jesus Christ. Notice carefully the order of events in the first three sections of the chapter.

7:15-28. Daniel's dream is interpreted. The four beasts are four kings. Then (after the fourth beast) the saints will receive the eternal kingdom. Daniel's desire for more details concerning the fourth beast leads to a more detailed description Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Antiochus warred against the people of God and prevailed for a time. Only after the beast was judged and removed did the saints possess the kingdom.

23-28. The description of the fourth beast shows its power, speaking against God, changing the law, with God's people given into his hands for time, times, and half a time (3 ½ years). But his dominion was taken away, he was consumed and destroyed (brought to an end). (Verse 27 explains what will occur after the end of the beast: then the kingdom and dominion will be given to the saints in the everlasting kingdom in which all dominions will serve and obey.) Daniel's vision and its interpretation are complete.

Chapter 8. Two years later, in 551 BC, Daniel had another dream regarding events yet future in his day. The dream of Chapter 8 gives more detail about things described in the dream of Chapter 7. The dream of Chapter 8 occurred 12 years before the fall of Babylon in 539 BC. This dream is also interpreted in Scripture, referring to the kings of Media and Persia, to the king of Greece, and then to the divided kingdom of Alexander the Great, divided among his four generals after his death.

The king described in 8:23-25 (after the king of Greece) is Antiochus IV, identifying himself as God (Epiphanes). Antiochus Epiphanes IV set himself up against God, pretending to be as strong as God, and caused the daily sacrifices to end. The timing of events in the seven-year reign of Antiochus IV are important (171-164 BC). Of special significance is that in 167 BC, in the middle of his reign, he destroyed Jerusalem, defiled the temple and rendered it unusable for sacrifices. This defilement of the temple was referred to by Jesus in Matthew 24. Antiochus IV will rise up against the Prince of Princes (God) and will be broken and overcome as God acts to intervene.

This vision is for the distant future and is therefore to be sealed up. The conquest by the Greeks would not occur until slightly over 200 years after Daniel. The vision in vv. 9-14, explained in vv. 23-26 concerns Antiochus Epiphanes IV during the last years of his reign (168-164 BC), and was yet 400 years in the future from Daniel's time. The 2300 evenings and mornings of v. 14 refer to the twice-daily sacrifice that was stopped by Antiochus IV (he called himself Epiphanes, "God manifest") with the desecration of the altar. The reconsecration by Judas Maccabeus (in 165 BC) occurred 1150 days, slightly over three years, after the desecration (1150 days x two sacrifices each day = 2300).

It is important to see that Chapter 8 overviews history from the Medo-Persians to the time of the Maccabees. The last part of the vision of Chapter 8 is about events of the Maccabean period.

Chapter Nine. Twelve years pass from Chapter 8 to Chapter 9. In Chapter 9, we learn that in 539 BC, after the fall of Babylon, Daniel was reading Jeremiah the prophet. He was reading the “word” of the Lord to Jeremiah, written by Jeremiah in 604 BC. (See Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10.) The date of Jeremiah’s “word” (604 BC) is important because it is used as a beginning point for numbering the years mentioned in the interpretation.

Daniel understood that the desolation of Jerusalem would last 70 years (609-539 BC). Using the date of the first carrying away into exile, the seventy years of the prophecy of Jeremiah were over with the fall of Babylon. Daniel did not understand why Jerusalem had not yet been restored.

Therefore, he prayed to God. His concern for Jerusalem is obvious in his prayer, especially see vv. 15-19, 20. Daniel thought that perhaps the problem was some continuing sin on the part of God’s people.

9:1-23. As Daniel was praying about the prophetic word of Jeremiah and trying to understand the details of the “word” of Jeremiah (vv. 1-19), Gabriel came to give insight and understanding, to understand the word of Jeremiah (vv. 20-23).

9:24. The interpretation involves 70 “sevens.” This is God’s word about Jerusalem and his people. The “sevens” are understood as years. The vision (of seventy sevens) relates to the people of Daniel and the city, the Jews and Jerusalem.

The result (what will happen during the seventy sevens) is (1) “to complete (restrain) the transgression,” (2) “put an end to (close up, stop, seal up) the sin,” (3) “atone for the wickedness (guilt),” (4) “establish everlasting righteousness,” (5) “seal vision and prophecy” (see 8:26), and (6) “anoint the most holy place” (not a person but a place or object, based on Old Testament parallel usages of the same Hebrew word). The phrase refers to the rebuilding of the temple within the designated timeframe.

Here is an explanation of these statements: (1) the transgression of the Jews will be completed in the sense that the 70 years will complete the punishment; (2) the goal of the exile was to encourage the Jews to cease sinning against God as they had been doing before; (3) the guilt had been atoned; (4) the restoration of Judaism was intended to usher in lasting justice, (5) vision and prophecy were sealed (compare 8:26), and (6) the Holy Place was rebuilt and reconsecrated.

The prayer of Daniel (9:4-19) contains numerous references to these matters. The things mentioned in v. 24 are the things Daniel had been praying about.

9:25-26. Beginning in v. 25, the interpretation mentions events and years.

Note the alternative ESV translation of vv. 25-26a. “Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there will be seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks. It shall be built again with squares and moat, but in troubled time. And after sixty-two weeks an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.”

This translation reflects the wording of the original language: seven weeks and sixty-two weeks, representing two different (non-consecutive) time periods. Thus, the seventieth week comes after the sixty-second week (not after the sixty-ninth week). How does this description fit into known historical facts?

From the word of Jeremiah about the restoration of Jerusalem until the coming of God’s chosen ruler (an anointed one, a prince) will be 49 years, 604-555 BC, fulfilled in the coming of Cyrus. Beginning in 604 BC, the date of Jeremiah’s “word” for God’s people and the city, and adding 49 years (seven sevens) yields 555 BC, pointing to Cyrus as an “anointed one” (Isa. 45:1).

9:26. From the word of Jeremiah about the restoration of Jerusalem, 434 years (sixty-two sevens) are to be measured, for rebuilding and for continued troubles, 604-170 BC. Then after the 62 “sevens” – after 434 years, God’s anointed or chosen one (Onias, the high priest) will be killed (murdered) and the official priestly lineage was no more. “Shall have nothing” is literally, “shall be no more like him.” This event occurred in 171-170 BC,

and began the last seven, 171-164 BC, the reign of terror of Antiochus Epiphanes IV. The people of the prince who is to come (Antiochus IV) came and destroyed the city and the sanctuary with wars and desolation.

9:27. Some of the Jews were willing to make a covenant with Antiochus, but in 167 BC he desecrated the temple, bringing in sacrifices of pig's blood, and decreed that the sacrifices and offerings of Judaism should no longer be made. The one who made desolate was active until the decreed end was poured out on the desolator. (Compare the use of "end" in this text with the parallel use in 7:26, 28.)

The final seven is the time period 171-164 BC, ending with a significant date, the date of Antiochus's death. This explanation has in its favor that the desecration of the temple by Antiochus IV is the obvious point of reference of Jesus in Matthew 24 where he cites Daniel 9, anticipating that Titus would also desecrate the temple, in parallel to the description in the text of Daniel 9. Jesus recognized that Daniel 9 was a reference to the desecration of the temple by Antiochus. Jesus used Daniel 9 and its reference to the desecration of the temple by Antiochus to predict the similar activity of Titus in AD 70.

This explanation is further strengthened because Chapter 9 is an explanation of Chapter 8, according to the text of 9:20-23.

Chapter Ten. In 537 BC, Daniel saw a vision of a man who served as a heavenly messenger.

Daniel saw a man dressed as a priest, glorious, but human (v. 16, 18). Daniel's prayer had been heard, but a three-week delay had occurred because of the "prince of the Persian kingdom." This context seems to refer to spiritual warfare in the heavenly realm. Persia has a representative in the heavenly realm, as does Greece in v. 20, and Michael (v. 21) represents Israel. These descriptions may anticipate Paul's description of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 (but see also Isa. 24:21-22). The heavenly messenger brings a vision, apparently the vision of Chapter 11.

The spiritual warfare was directed against Persia, then against Greece, both of which had power over God's people, but Israel would survive. The Book of Truth contains God's records of the course of future history. This vision was given to help Daniel understand what would happen to his people in the latter days, even though the vision was still far in the future (10:14).

Note the difficulty of the chapter division. The first verse of Chapter 11 belongs with Chapter 10.

Chapter Eleven. This chapter is a continuation of the storyline of the previous chapter. Two kings, the King of the South and the King of the North, are described.

Daniel mentions three kings who will be followed by a fourth, stirring up conflict against Greece. If this is the Hebraism "3 yet 4" (Amos 1-2), the emphasis is not on the number but on the result. It is not easy to identify three Persian kings, plus a fourth. (Possibly Cambyses, 530-522 BC, Gaumata, 522, and Darius I, 522-486 BC). The fourth would be Xerxes who attempted to conquer Greece in 480 BC.

Verses 3-4 describe the Greek Empire. After the death of Philip III (Alexander's half-brother) and Alexander IV, the kingdom of Alexander the Great would be divided among his generals, "not to his descendants." Two generals became dominant, Seleucus and Ptolemy. Seleucus began as general for Ptolemy (v. 5). The result was the kings of the Seleucids in the north and the kings of the Ptolemies in the south, with Judah in the middle. The two forces forged an alliance with the marriage of Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy II, to Antiochus II. Both were killed by Laodice, former wife of Antiochus (v. 6). Berenice's brother, Ptolemy III killed Laodice and there was battle between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies throughout the latter part of the third century B.C. (vv. 7-10).

In vv. 11-13, the king of the south is Ptolemy IV who defeated Antiochus III at Raphia in 217 BC. Greek history says that Antiochus III lost 10,000 men. By v. 14, we are reading about Ptolemy V, and Antiochus III is successful in his battles, establishing himself with control of the Holy Land in 198 BC. Antiochus gave his daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy V in marriage in 194 BC (v. 17). Antiochus was defeated by the Roman commander Lucius in 190 BC (v. 18) and died in 187 BC (v. 19).

His successor was his son Seleucus IV, brother to Cleopatra. He was killed, victim of a conspiracy against him (v. 20) after which his brother Antiochus IV usurped the throne and began to rule (instead of the son of

Seleucus IV, Demetrius I) (v. 21). Thus, Antiochus IV is described as one not given the honor of royalty. In 170 BC, Onias III the high priest was murdered (reading, “prince of the covenant” in v. 22), so that Antiochus IV was securely in power with the support of only a few people.

The further exploits of Antiochus IV with his battle against Ptolemy VI are described in vv. 24-27, so that in v. 28 he returned to the Holy Land and plundered the temple (169 BC). When Antiochus again invaded the south, he was not successful, and he returned to the Holy Land and desecrated the temple with the “abomination of desolation” (v. 29-31). He led unfaithful Jews away from the covenant while the majority of the Jews resisted him (v. 32). Many Jewish leaders were killed (v. 33) but the resistance continued until the time of the end (the death of Antiochus in 164 BC). His death is described as coming at the appointed time by God’s decree (vv. 34-35). The narrative only describes his future death (the faithful continued to the time of the end), and does not narrate the actual death. That remains to be told until v. 45.

The kings of the Ptolemies and the kings of the Seleucids are the subject of Chapter 11, kings of the south vs. kings of the north in vv. 5-20, and a more focused description of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in vv. 21-45. (That the entire last section of the chapter refers entirely to Antiochus IV must be the case, despite the tendency of many commentators to apply vv. 36-45 to far distant events, including the insertion of the Antichrist into this context, even though there is no such mention or reference in the text.)

To conclude an overview of the chapter, notice how easily the verses in question (vv. 36-45) can be applied to events we know about in the history of Antiochus IV.

- v. 36, reveals Antiochus’s disdain for religion, especially Judaism, and his use of the title “God” even on coins. He suppressed other religions, conflicting with the “God of gods, the God of Israel” (1 Macc. 1:24). He will continue until God’s wrath is complete and the time has come, as God has decreed.
- v. 37, Antiochus replaced Apollo with Zeus, disregarding the religious practice of his father. All other gods were either removed or slighted. He himself was to be recognized as supreme.
- v. 38, he honored strength and might, defenses and military conquest. He inserted new gods and insisted on their worship in the pantheon below him.
- v. 39, the reference to fortresses in this verse has a parallel in 1 Macc. 1:33-34. He fortified the city of Jerusalem, not to protect the interests of the Jews but to honor foreign gods. His governance was highly politicized so that he promoted those who supported him, with offices for sale.
- v. 40, this success was permitted until the time of wrath (v. 36), until the time of the end. The same expression was used in v. 35 to describe the end of the reign of Antiochus. It is repeated here. The rest of the chapter summarizes the career and end of Antiochus. Nothing in the text indicates a change of subjects, and the repeated reference to the king of the south suggests just the opposite, the continuation of the narrative.
- vv. 40-43, after the attack of the king of the south, Antiochus had success. He was in control of the Holy Land and also of Edom, Moab, and much of the territory of the Ammonites. In his desire to conquer nations, Egypt did not escape.
- vv. 44-45, it is possible to understand these verses as a reference to the time when, shortly after his triumph over Egypt, Antiochus was called home where he sought to destroy Judaism with a fury. Alternatively, these verses may refer to the threat from the Parthians. Even though he inhabited the area that God has promised to his people (between the sea and Mount Zion), he did not die there. He met his end in Persia, right on schedule with the timetable of God’s wrath and the decreed end of the time.

The vision of Chapters 10-12 is the fourth prophetic vision related to the same general time period—Chapter 7 in 553 BC, Chapter 8 in 551 BC recounts and expands the vision of Chapter 7, Chapter 9 in 539 BC is an explanation of Chapter 8 events, and Chapters 10-12 in 537 BC belong in the same time frame.

Chapter Twelve. This short chapter concludes the prophetic, apocalyptic section and also concludes the book of Daniel. It can be summarized as follows.

→Vv. 1-4, in the time of Antiochus IV, Michael will fight for God's people and deliver them in the midst of suffering. This reference returns to the heavenly warfare picture of Chapter 10.

In the midst of distress, deliverance will come. This vision is also to be sealed until the end of THE time (the time of Antiochus IV, not the time of the end of the world, see 7:26, 28; 9:27).

→Vv. 5-13, two others appear and speak to the messenger of Chapter 10 who is still present. The distress will be for "time, times, and half a time" (it will end, it will not be forever). Looking at the historical facts, in this case the time period was very near 3 ½ years. The numbers involved are 1150 (2300 divided by 2), 1290, and 1335. A suggested timetable that reconciles the numbers is explained below.

→Verse 13 instructs Daniel to live his life. He will not live to see all of these things.

The daily sacrifice was commanded to be abolished, and then was restored; the time involved was a period of 1290 days, approximately 3 ½ years. The re-consecration occurred in December 165 BC, before the death of Antiochus IV in 164 BC. Perhaps the difference in the two numbers, 45 days (the difference between 1290 and 1335), represents the time after the re-consecration until the death of Antiochus.

- In Chapter 8, 1150 is the number of days without the daily sacrifices, from the desecration of the altar to the re-consecration in December 165 BC. Calculating two daily sacrifices for 1150 days yields the number 2300 which is used in Chapter 8.
- If Antiochus IV commanded the abolishing of the daily sacrifice before he destroyed the altar, that would explain the 140 days difference (1290 and 1150). The command to cease the daily sacrifice would have occurred 140 days before the actual desecration of the altar.
- Since Antiochus died in 164 BC, the additional 45 days (1290 and 1335) is thus explained.

A summary of the suggested order and timeline of the events follows:

- *Daily sacrifices commanded to be abolished, begin measuring the 1290 days (approx. 3 ½ years)
- *140 days later, the destruction of the altar, no sacrifices for 1150 days, 2300 morning and evening sacrifices
- *Altar reconsecrated and sacrifices resumed, ending the 1290 days (December 165 BC)
- *45 days later, Antiochus died (164 BC), 1335 days after the command to abolish the daily sacrifices