

# **Understanding the history of Daniel and the meaning of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel 7-12**

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### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS AND TIMELINES**

#### TIMELINE OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

A first step to analyzing and understanding the prophetic, apocalyptic sections of Daniel is to note the timeline of the book with several important dates.

- Without taking time to address some of the difficulties that are encountered in understanding the divisions of the book of Daniel—especially the Aramaic section in Chapters 2-7 and some structural factors, we can note that the first six chapters are generally historical with descriptions of historical events (including the dream or vision in Chapter 2). The last six chapters are more prophetic, beginning with Daniel's vision in Chapter 7 and continuing with the interpretation and expansion of that vision in subsequent chapters.
- 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 as will be explained.
- Judah began to be carried into exile in 609 BC, after the death of King Josiah.
- Daniel wrote the book that bears his name from Babylon. Babylon was later conquered by the Medo-Persians (in 539 BC).
- The storyline of Daniel begins in 605 BC. Daniel 2 can be specifically dated in 604 BC with chapters 3 and 4 following sequentially very soon after.
- In Daniel 5, we read of the fall of Babylon (539 BC) and Daniel 6 can be dated shortly thereafter.
- Thus, the first six chapters of Daniel are to be dated like this:
  - 605 BC and shortly thereafter: Chapters 1-4. The events of these chapters occurred in the last years of the seventh century BC.
  - 539 BC and after, Chapters 5-6 describe events that occurred a little over 60 years later, immediately before and after the fall of Babylon.
- 553 BC, Daniel's vision of four beasts, in Chapter 7, 14 years before the fall of Babylon
- 551 BC, Daniel's vision of a ram and a goat with interpretation, in Chapter 8
- 539 BC, Daniel's prayer, further explanation of the vision of the ram and the goat, Chapter 9
- 537 BC, Daniel's vision of a man, the kings of the south and the north, Chapters 10-12

Thus, the book of Daniel covers a span of almost 70 years. Daniel's visions of Chapters 7 and 8 are not in chronological order with the rest of the book.

#### RELATED HISTORICAL TIMELINES

The historical timelines of the period are significant in the study of Daniel. (The dates given are traditional dates, some sources may give a specific date that varies by a year, e.g. 587 BC or 586 BC for the fall of Jerusalem.)

Two timelines are given below: the first is a timeline of biblical events, the second is a timeline of historical events extending through the period of the Maccabees and the period of time covered by some of Daniel's prophecies.

See the addendum for a more detailed description of the time period from 930 BC until the time of Christ, specifically as it relates to the experience of the Jews.

#### Selected Biblical Events

640-609 BC, reign of king Josiah in the southern kingdom of Judah

626 BC, beginning of Jeremiah's prophecies (extending until after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC)

612 BC, Nineveh falls to forces of Babylon and the Medes, as prophesied by Nahum

609 BC, death of Josiah in a battle against the Egyptians  
 609 BC, beginning of various puppet kings in Judah (after the three-month reign of Jehoahaz=Shallum, Neco of Egypt installed Jehoiakim as a vassal king; Jerusalem comes under foreign control)  
 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's reign begins  
 605 BC, Egyptians defeated at battle of Carchemish, Babylon extends its control and Jehoiakim becomes subservient to Babylon, Jerusalem is besieged, Daniel is carried to Babylon  
 604 BC, date of the prophecy (word) of Jeremiah (25:11-12) which is referenced in Daniel 9. Jeremiah predicted the 70 years of the domination of Jerusalem (609 – 539 BC).  
 597 BC, Jerusalem overrun after Jehoiakim rebelled, his son Jehoiachin is installed as vassal king. About 10,000 Jews, including Ezekiel, were exiled to Babylon where they joined those who had been exiled in Jehoiakim's third year (that is, 605 BC, see Dan. 1:1). After Jehoiachin's three-month reign, Zedekiah becomes vassal king.)  
 586 BC, fall of Jerusalem  
 539 BC, Babylon captured  
 538 BC, Cyrus's first year of service, King of Persia after capture of Babylon (Darius is either the name of a governor put in charge by Cyrus, or possibly Cyrus's throne name)  
 537 BC, first return of exiles under Sheshbazzar  
 516 BC, temple rebuilding completed  
 486-465 BC, reign of Xerxes (context of book of Esther)  
 458 BC, Ezra departs from Babylon for Jerusalem  
 444 BC, Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city  
 432 BC, Nehemiah recalled

#### Selected Political Events

555 BC, Cyrus unites the Persians and the Medes  
 323 BC, death of Alexander the Great, his kingdom is split into smaller units which vie for power  
 246 BC, beginning in this year, with the killing of Antiochus II, the control of the Seleucid Empire is filled with political intrigue and conflict. Kings include Seleucus II (20 years), Antiochus III (36 years), Seleucus III (3 years), and Seleucus IV (12 years), after which Antiochus IV usurped the throne in 175 BC.  
 175 BC, Antiochus IV becomes king of the Seleucids, reigns over Palestine  
 171/170 BC, Onias the high priest of the Jews is killed  
 171-164 BC, seven-year reign of terror by Antiochus IV, including desecration of temple in 167 BC  
 165 BC, temple reconsecrated (December)  
 164 BC, death of Antiochus  
 63 BC, beginning of Roman Empire

### **ADDENDUM**

In 930 BC, Israel divided into northern and southern kingdoms (until the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BC), and Assyria was on the move against its neighbors. Assyrian conquests in the west and south were delayed for a time by a confederation organized in the days of Shalmaneser III (859–824 BC) but by 805 BC, the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III claimed to rule all of Syria, Phoenicia, Israel, Edom, Philistia, Babylonia, Media, Persia, and the Hittite area, with only Urartu and Elam holding out and Egypt not yet endangered. During the years when the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were overshadowed by Assyrian rule, there were many revolts. Numerous Assyrian campaigns into the heart of the land crushed all but the later ones. In 722 BC, Israel was taken and many of its people deported. Judah was virtually subdued in 701 B.C. (only Jerusalem remained unconquered), Babylon fell in 689, and in 668 BC Assyria placed a pro-Assyrian king on the throne of Egypt. In the east, Elam was devastated by the Assyrian army in 639 BC.

In 615 BC, the Medes, along with their vassals, the Scythians, Urartu, and Phrygia (all located in what is today Turkey), united with Babylon in a war destined to end Assyrian rule. The end came at the battle of

Carchemish in 605 BC, the same year in which Nebuchadnezzar II (who had assisted the Medes) became king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar thought of himself as king of the world, controlling all of Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine. But he was never fully accepted as king in the area controlled by the Medes or in Egypt. The Egyptians tried to stir up some of their neighbors against Babylon; and one of the results of this action was a Babylonian invasion that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jews in 586 BC.

In 555 BC, the Persian king Cyrus the Great united the Persians and the Medes; and over the years, as his strength and reputation grew, he expanded his empire until finally, in 539 BC, he took Babylon and established Persia as the dominant force in the Near East. It was Cyrus whose decree permitted the return of the exiles of Judah to their homeland to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. His son Cambyses took Egypt in 525 BC, making the Persian Empire the largest the world had known. The Persians controlled Judah, but the attitude was one of religion non-interference.

During the years 499–400 BC, the Greek-speaking Ionians of western Anatolia (Turkey) revolted against Persia and received aid from the Greek city of Athens. The next 170 years saw Persians pitted against Greeks in famous battles such as those of Marathon, Thermopylae, and Salamis. Finally, Philip II of Macedonia united the Greek states and began the final thrust against Persia. Assassinated in 337 BC, he was succeeded by his young son Alexander, who in 334 BC launched his own campaign against the Persians. The Persian armies stationed in Macedonia were conquered in 333 BC by Alexander. Alexander conquered all of Anatolia, Syro-Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia proper, moving east as far as the border of India, part of Afghanistan, and central Asia. His empire exceeded the Persian Empire in geographical area. His intent was to unite the world through the influence of Greek culture. Alexander permitted the Jews to observe their laws and even granted them exemption from tribute or tax during their Sabbath years. When he built Alexandria in Egypt, he encouraged the Jews to live there and gave them some of the same privileges he gave his Greek subjects.

Alexander's death in 323 BC split his kingdom into smaller parts which vied for power. After numerous battles and shifts of allegiance, about 303 BC, the empire was divided among five of his generals: Seleucus received Mesopotamia, from the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates eastward. Ptolemy received Egypt. Antigonus received the area of Syro-Palestine and Asia Minor bridging east to touch Mesopotamia. Lysimachus received the area directly north of the Aegean Sea, and Cassander received a small area in the north of the Achaian peninsula.

The struggles for power continued and after the defeat of Antigonus at the Battle of Ipsus in 301 BC, there were four kingdoms—Mesopotamia (including Syro-Palestine and Asia Minor), Egypt, and two smaller western kingdoms nearer the area eventually strongly influenced by Rome. The wars lasted until 281 BC and resulted in the establishment of three main kingdoms: Egypt, Asia Minor, and Macedonia. The unity of the empire was gone but Greek civilization continued to spread throughout this region. The Hellenistic period (330-166 BC) and the influence of Greek culture prepared the way for the translation the Hebrew OT into Greek about 250 BC.

The Jewish period from 166-63 BC is called the Hasmonean period. The Jews were being greatly oppressed. The Ptolemies had been tolerant of the Jews, but the Seleucid rulers were determined to force Hellenism on the Jews. Scripture was destroyed, laws enforced with extreme cruelty, and the oppressed Jews revolted under the leadership of Judas the Maccabee. The ever-weakening Seleucids were technically in control, but the Hasmoneans (Simon, the younger brother of Judas, about 20 years later) were semi-autonomous.

In 66–63 B.C., the Roman general Pompey conquered much of the Near East, captured Jerusalem, and Palestine became subject to Rome. This set the stage for that which was to follow: in all the ancient world of ever-larger empires in succession, there would be no empire covering more territory than that of Rome, and never would there be more commerce and contact among the nations of the Old World. Rome was to rule for more than five hundred years after Pompey.