

A Commentary on the Book of Daniel

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INTRODUCTION:

This commentary is based upon my personal devotional notes and reflections on the *Book of Daniel*. It is intended to help you better understand some of the background and issues in Daniel's prophecy. It is not a technical commentary designed for academic projects. This material is intended for use by members and friends of Southside Christian Church, especially our Life Group leaders to help you lead your group in a verse by verse study of *Daniel*. However, I do not include discussion questions in the commentary. That I leave up to you as a group leader.

In the commentary there are occasional references to the original Hebrew words Daniel used in a particular passage. Those Hebrew words are always quoted in italics and are transliterated into English from the Hebrew. I go chapter by chapter in the commentary and sometimes individual verses are commented upon, sometimes it is several sentences and sometimes a whole paragraph. This commentary is based on the New International Version and all Scripture quotations are taken from that version of the Bible. Books of the Bible, Scripture references and quotes are also italicized.

KEY HISTORICAL DATES IN THE TIMELINE OF DANIEL:

- *King Jehoiachim of Judah becomes a Babylonian vassal, 605.*
- *Jehoiachim rebels against Nebuchadnezzar who sends troops to raid and punish Jehoiachim, 602.*
- *Nebuchadnezzar deports some Jews to Babylon from Jerusalem including a young man named Daniel, 602 (or 605, see commentary notes below).*
- *Jehoiachim dies and is replaced by his son Jehoiachin; he reigns three months, 598.*
- *Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem after a siege and deports Jehoiachin, his mother, and many of the leading citizens of Jerusalem, including the young priest Ezekiel; he puts Jehoiachin in prison upon arrival in Babylon, 597.*
- *Nebuchadnezzar installs King Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah, son of Josiah as King of Judah and changes his name to Zedekiah, 597.*
- *Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians invade Judah and lay siege to Jerusalem, January 588.*
- *The Babylonians breach the walls of Jerusalem, July 18, 586; Zedekiah flees the city in the night and heads toward Jericho where he is captured and taken to Riblah in Syria, Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters. There his sons are killed before him, his eyes put out and he is taken to Babylon in chains where he dies, July 586.*
- *Nebuzaradan, captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard comes to Jerusalem with orders to burn the city to the ground. This he does, taking all the sacred objects of the temple to Babylon as booty. He burns the temple and tears down Jerusalem's walls. He also*

deports much of the elders and leading officials of the city who are left alive, executing some at Riblah, Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters, August 586.

- *Nebuzaradan returns to Jerusalem and takes another small group of Jews captive to Babylon, 582.*
- *Evil-Merodach, King of Babylon, frees Jehoiachin from prison and gives him a place at the king's table, 561.*
- *Babylon falls to Cyrus the Great of Persia, October 539.*
- *Cyrus decrees that the Jews of Babylon are free to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord, 538.*
- *The second temple is completed and dedicated, March 12, 516, 70 years and 7 months after it was destroyed.*

KINGS OF JUDAH & THEIR REIGNS DURING DANIEL'S LIFETIME:

Josiah (640-609)

Jehoahaz (609 – 3 months)

Jehoiachim (609-598)

Jehoiachin (598-597 – 3 months)

Zedekiah (597-586)

Fall of Jerusalem and Judah – July –August 586

OUTLINE OF DANIEL:

(Note: This outline is modified from the outline in the NIV Study Bible.)

I. Prologue: The Setting (*chapter 1* in Hebrew)

- A. Historical Introduction (*1:1-2*)
- B. Daniel and His Friends are Taken Captive (*1:3-7*)
- C. The Young Men Are Faithful (*1:8-16*)
- D. The Young Men Are Elevated to High Positions (*1:17-21*)

II. The Destinies of the Nations of the World (*chapters 2-7* in Aramaic beginning in *2:4*)

- A. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Large Statue (*chapter 2*)
- B. Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image and His Decree That It Be Worshipped (*chapter 3*)
- C. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of an Enormous Tree (*chapter 4*)
- D. Belshazzar's and Babylon's Downfall (*chapter 5*)
- E. Daniel's Deliverance (*chapter 6*)
- F. Daniel's Dream of Four Beasts and The Kingdom of God (*chapter 7*)

III. The Destiny of the Jewish People (*chapters 8-12* in Hebrew)

- A. Daniel's Vision of a Ram and a Goat (*chapter 8*)
- B. Daniel's Prayer (*9:1-19*)
- C. The 70 "Sevens" (*9:20-27*)
- D. Daniel's Vision of the Man and Angelic Warfare (*10:1-11:1*)
- E. Prophecies Concerning the Kings of the South (Egypt) and North (Syria) (*11:2-35*)
- F. Prophecies Concerning the King Who Exalts Himself (*11:36-45*)
- G. Final Instructions to Daniel about the End Times and the Resurrection (*chapter 12*)

THE COMMENTARY:

Chapter 1:

1:1-2 - The *Book of Daniel* begins with a description of when Daniel was taken captive by the Babylonians in the 3rd year of Jehoiakim, King of Judah. There is some discrepancy in the date. The NLT gives it as 605. I have calculated it in my study Bible notes as 603 and my commentary on *Jeremiah* puts the date at 602, trying to harmonize several biblical and extra-biblical accounts. Jehoiakim came to the throne in 609. The 3rd year of Jehoiakim would have been in 605, the 3rd full year of his reign. I will not attempt to harmonize the various dates but for purposes of this commentary take Daniel at face value and date his time in Babylon from 605. Daniel reports that Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem and took some of the articles from the temple back to Babylon as trophies of his capture of the city. See *2 Kings 24:1*. 605 was the year of the Battle of Carchemish when Nebuchadnezzar's forces crushed Pharaoh Neco in Syria. It is possible Daniel is referring to Nebuchadnezzar moving down through Judah and subjugating the various kingdoms of the Middle East who had been allied with Neco including Judah. He also took some of the young men from the royal family and the nobility to Babylon for training in the royal service. This is described in more detail in *1:3-5*. Daniel was one of the young men taken back to Babylon. He served in the Babylonian court for 67 years and at least 3 years in the court of the Persian king Cyrus the Great. That means his service in Babylon lasted at least 70 years. We do not know when he died but his last vision is given as the 3rd year of Cyrus the Great in *10:1* which would have been in 536.

Daniel is portrayed as a man of extraordinary integrity, wisdom and courage. He would have already been serving in Nebuchadnezzar's court for eight years when the young Ezekiel was taken captive to Babylon. Ezekiel names Daniel as an example of great wisdom in *Ezekiel 14:14 and 14:20*. Some have tried to say this is a Ugaritic hero named Danel but the spelling of the two names is different and there is enough time for Daniel to have gained a great reputation in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, especially if one considers the stories in the *Book of Daniel* in *chapters 1-4*.

The *Book of Daniel* is a difficult book to interpret. It is divided into two main sections. The first section in *chapters 1-6* are stories from Daniel's life or his friends' lives from their time in exile in Babylon. *Chapters 7-12* are visions Daniel was given by God of the future of God's people that reveal God's plan to him. The difficulty is they are given in apocalyptic style with images of beasts, cryptic numbers and symbolism. They deal with the history of Israel from Daniel's time at least through the Maccabean revolt in the 160's all the way to the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mt. of Olives concerning the end times quotes the Prophet *Daniel* in *Matthew 24* and *Mark 13*. Apocalyptic visions by nature are difficult to interpret and often cannot be taken literally. The problem is if you take them symbolically there is often no consensus on what the various symbols mean. This makes interpretation and application of *Daniel* difficult. The other difficulty is various historical discrepancies. The most puzzling is the identification of Darius the Mede in *chapters 6 & 9*. Various possibilities are given and I deal with them in the notes on those passages.

Why does Daniel use the apocalyptic style? The Jews were dealing with the greatest calamity they had ever faced; the destruction of their nation, their city Jerusalem and God's temple. The Davidic line had failed and many thought God had abandoned them and his covenant with them. *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* and the second half of *Isaiah* speak of God's judgment and restoration. Daniel deals with another issue, God's Kingdom. What has happened to God's

plan for his people and his world? Is God still the Lord of history? Is Yahweh still in charge? *Daniel*, through the stories of heroic faith in the first section of his book and the visions of God's sovereignty over history and the ultimate victory of God in the second half of his book answers those questions. God is still in charge. God will triumph and so will his faithful people.

Daniel is also written in two languages Hebrew and Aramaic. The Aramaic sections are from 2:40-7:28 and are bracketed by Hebrew. Aramaic was the main language of the Persian Empire but was also spoken widely in Babylon and across the ancient near east in Daniel's time. *Ezra* also contains sections in Aramaic.

The book was probably edited in the Persian time perhaps in Babylon among the exiles. It has similarities in style with the Joseph narratives in *Genesis* and with *Ezra-Nehemiah*, *Esther* and the Wisdom writings. These similarities lend credence to a final editing in Persia among the Jewish exilic community which would have numbered larger than the Jews who eventually returned to Judea and Jerusalem. See *Ezra-Nehemiah*. Reinforcing that premise is the fact that in the Hebrew Bible *Daniel* was included in the Writings and not the Prophets. The Writings are the latest section of the Old Testament to be written and included into the Hebrew canon.

1:3-7 - Nebuchadnezzar ordered his chief official Ashpenaz to find from among the Jewish nobility or royal family who had been taken captive, young men who showed promise. They were to be handsome and without defect, in other words no physical deformities and they were to be intelligent and quick to learn. Ashpenaz was to train them in the language and literature of Babylon. They were given a daily ration of food and wine from the king's table which meant they received the best food in the land. They were to be trained for three years and then enter the king's service. The narrator notes that Ashpenaz was to choose young men from the Israelites and among them were four from Judah. This suggests that among those taken captive were some from other tribes other than Judah. From the Babylonian perspective they were all Jews, but the reality was there must have been some of the leadership who were exiles from the northern tribes as well and still identified themselves that way. Among the young men chosen were Daniel and three others from Judah, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Ashpenaz gave them Babylonian names. He named Daniel, Beltashazzar; Hananiah, Shadrach; Mishael, Meshach and Azariah, Abednego.

Think of the situation from Daniel's point of view. He is a young man as are his friends. He was of the royal family of Judah or at least from a noble family so he was used to wealth and fine things. He had been taken hostage to Babylon long before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586, and 8 years before Jehoiachin was taken prisoner in 597. He has no chance of going home. He does not know when he is captured what the Babylonians will do with him and his friends. This offer from Ashpenaz is an answer to prayer. Daniel is to be trained as a magi; one of the wise men of Babylon and become an advisor to the king himself. God has placed before him the opportunity of a lifetime. Daniel will be able to live in a lifestyle of which he was accustomed and maybe even greater given the fact that he grew up in Jerusalem, a small capital in a small country. This is Babylon, the greatest city in the world in Daniel's day!

The people to whom *Daniel* is written, the Jews in exile or the few who had gone home are all wrestling with how they shall live. They are no longer a nation. To whom are they loyal? They have no king but God. How will they live in a strange land? Will God continue to watch over them or has he forgotten his covenant and his people? All these early stories in *Daniel* point to remaining faithful to God and his commandments even in a foreign land. God will watch over

his people if they remain faithful. He is still sovereign even though they no longer live in the land of Promise.

1:8-21 - Daniel makes a decision not to defile himself with the food and wine from the king's table. That probably means there were things he was given to eat that were forbidden to him by the Law of Moses, or like the situation Paul's churches faced in the New Testament, the meat had been sacrificed to the gods of Babylon and Daniel did not want to consume meat dedicated to pagan idols. This is the more likely scenario since Daniel asks if he and his friends may only eat vegetables. Daniel is going to try to maintain his personal holiness even in a pagan land.

God gives favor to Daniel and watches over him so that when he asks not to be defiled and to be served only vegetables and water the chief official is not offended but gives him grace. The official is afraid however for himself and does not want Daniel and his three friends to look worse than the others or it might reflect badly on him. Daniel convinces him to test them for ten days and see if the four Jews compare favorably with the other young men eating the royal food. If they are not healthier after ten days, then treat them as he wishes. The official agrees. Of course after ten days Daniel and his three friends look healthier and better nourished than any of the other trainees! So the official continued to give Daniel and the other three Jewish trainees vegetables instead of food from the king's table. Daniel and his fellow Jews did not have to defile themselves with pagan food!

Daniel and his friends stayed faithful to God so God blessed them. God gave them knowledge and understanding of all kinds of Babylonian literature and learning. Daniel was given the gift of understanding dreams and visions. In this he is similar to Joseph and in fact his story is similar to the Joseph narrative in many other ways as well.

When the three year training period was up, the chief official presented them all to Nebuchadnezzar. He is most impressed with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. So they entered the king's service and became magi of Babylon. Whenever the king questioned them and asked for wisdom and understanding he found their insights ten times better than all the other magicians and enchanters in Babylon. These were the magi-astrologers of Babylon of whom the magi of *Matthew 2* are their descendants. Daniel and his three friends now join the ranks of the chief pagan wisemen, philosophers and educated advisors to Nebuchadnezzar. They are not pagan priests but educated in the best literature and science or wisdom of their day. Every other magi is a pagan. Daniel and his three friends are Jews. God has prospered them yet how is this going to play out in their lives? Can they even fulfill their role? How can they stay faithful to God and serve a pagan foreign king? The stories of *Daniel* give the Jews examples of how they can serve God and serve people in a strange land.

Verse 21 says Daniel remained in the service of the king until the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, who conquered Babylon in 539. From 602 to 539 is 63 years. When Cyrus conquered Babylon the court of the kings of Babylon ceased to exist. Daniel was a chief advisor to the kings of Babylon all the rest of his life!

Chapter 2:

2:1-13 - In the second year of his reign, which would have been 606, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that greatly troubles him and that kept him awake in the night. He does what he had probably often done; summons his astrologers, magicians, etc., his magi, seeking an interpretation. This time however he does something he has never done. He tells them to give him the interpretation and they say tell us the dream and we will. He replies he has "*firmly*

decided" that they have to tell him the dream as well as the interpretation. Otherwise he will have them cut to pieces and their houses destroyed. If they tell him the dream and its interpretation they will be richly rewarded. It is possible that Nebuchadnezzar does not trust his magi and wants to see who is truly gifted and who is not or they were beginning to be too powerful and he has come up with this way to lessen their power in the court. The magi once again ask the king to tell them his dream. He refuses saying they are just stalling for time. He accuses them of conspiring to tell him misleading and wicked counsel. The magi reply no one on earth can do what the king is asking! No king has ever asked his magi to do what Nebuchadnezzar is asking. It's too hard and none of them can do it. Only the gods can do what the king is asking and "*they do not live among men.*" That statement sets up Daniel and his ability from God to not only tell the king his dream but also tell him its interpretation. He can do this because Daniel has a personal relationship with the living God, the God of Israel. There is one other thing to note here. The magi are right. Nebuchadnezzar is asking them to do something they cannot do through any power they possess. It is an unrealistic request.

The next scene in *Daniel* is the image of gold and the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance and pride are growing. In *chapter 4* he has the dream in which God tells him he is going to take his kingdom away for a time and remind him that it is the Lord God who is sovereign over the world and not Nebuchadnezzar. The point is this request of the king to his magi is the first clue we see that Nebuchadnezzar's pride is starting to get out of control. It must have been difficult for powerful oriental kings not to have their pride run away with them because the people worshipped them as a god and he had absolute power and control.

Nebuchadnezzar is so incensed by the magi's reply to him that what he is asking them to do is impossible; he gives an order that all the magi be put to death, including Daniel and his friends. No one is able to tell the king that this is not a good thing to do or that it is unjust. His word is absolute law.

Daniel and his three friends are not with the other magi at this point because this would be the last year of their training. They had begun their training in Nebuchadnezzar's first year. This was his second year. According to *1:5* after three years of training they were to enter the king's service. However, it appears from *2:48-49* when Nebuchadnezzar rewards Daniel with authority over all the magi and makes him administrator of the Province of Babylon that Nebuchadnezzar elevated Daniel and his three friends before all their training was finished.

Beginning at *2:4*, the language of Daniel shifts to Aramaic, the language of the Persian Empire. Aramaic was the language of commerce, diplomacy and scholarship all across the Middle East for centuries even into the Roman era. Jesus spoke it in daily speech rather than Hebrew which by his day had become a scholar's language and one used in the synagogues. Daniel gives no explanation why he switches languages from Hebrew. The Aramaic continues until *8:1* and then reverts to Hebrew. As in *2:4*, there is no explanation given for the switch.

2:14-23 - Daniel speaks "*with wisdom and tact*" to Arioch, the commander of the king's guard who was going to carry out the king's orders to execute all the magi of Babylon. Daniel asks him why the king has issued such an order. After Arioch explains what happened to Daniel he asks to be taken to the king. This detail reinforces the fact that Daniel and his three friends were not with the other magi at the time the king told them his dream and demanded the interpretation. Daniel goes to Nebuchadnezzar and asks for time to interpret the dream for him.

Daniel is granted the night to understand the dream. He returns to Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah and asks them to pray, pleading to God for mercy to understand the king's dream so they

are not executed with the rest of the magi. During the night God reveals the dream and its interpretation to Daniel.

Verses 20-23 are Daniel's prayer of praise to "*the God of heaven.*" That title is similar to names and titles given to God in *Ezra*, *Nehemiah* and *Chronicles* which were all written in the Persian period. Daniel praises the name of God. Wisdom and power are his. God is in charge of time and kings, changing and deposing them according to his will. God is Lord of history. This is a theme that will be repeated throughout *Daniel* and is specifically related to Nebuchadnezzar's dream which will be about the kingdoms that will follow the Babylonians. It also speaks to the Jews in exile who are wondering whether God is still in charge after their nation has been destroyed. The Babylonians, Persians and Greeks were three empires that seemed so powerful and so vast compared to Judah was God even big enough to influence them? The answer is a resounding yes! Daniel praises God for giving him the wisdom and insight to understand the king's dream. He acknowledges that it is God who reveals that which human beings cannot know or see. Daniel understands that only God could have fulfilled the king's demand. The magi were entirely correct to protest the king's command to tell him the dream along with its interpretation. No human being alive could look into the king's mind and know that. Daniel affirms the reality of the "*God of heaven.*" The magi had told the king only the gods could answer the king and they do not live among people. God does however and Daniel knows his understanding of the king's dream will be a witness to the might and power of the God of Israel, the one true God of Heaven!

Daniel's prayer is the first of many prayers and songs of praise in the *Book of Daniel*. It is an important clue into how the Jews carried on their faith in a foreign land. Without the temple and the sacrifices which were the center of Jewish worship they needed to find an alternative to worshipping God. Prayer and Scripture became the focus. The synagogue became the center where they gathered to pray. Daniel's prayers are examples for the Jews to follow. Prayer is also emphasized in the other Persian period books like *Ezra*, *Nehemiah* and *Chronicles*.

2:24-30 - After Daniel and his three friends have prayed all night and the Lord has revealed to Daniel the king's dream, he goes to Arioch the commander of the guard and asks him to take him to the king. He pleads with him not to execute the magi because Daniel will interpret the king's dream. God is watching over his people, especially Daniel and his three friends even in Babylon in exile. God is able to take care of and watch over his people, especially when they are faithful.

Arioch takes Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar and tells him he has found a man from among the exiles of Judah who can tell the king about his dream. Nebuchadnezzar asks Daniel if is able to tell the king what he saw. Daniel tells him, no man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain the mystery the king asked about. Daniel reinforces the magi's point with the king. What the king asked them to do is humanly impossible. But, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries and has shown the king what will happen in days to come. Daniel doesn't say Israel's God or the God of my people. Daniel declares that his God is the God of heaven; in other words, the only true God who oversees history and kingdoms!

Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that God has shown the king of things to come and the revealer of mysteries has shown him what is going to happen. He tells him that he is no wiser than any other man and that his ability does not come from himself. Daniel tells the king it has been revealed to him by God. Daniel was in position to raise himself above the other magi by trying to impress Nebuchadnezzar with his ability to interpret dreams. He had an opportunity to leverage his knowledge to help him and his friends gain wealth, power and prestige in the court. He does not. Instead Daniel is more concerned with raising up the Name of the Lord and giving

glory to him. He is more concerned with saving him and his friends and even the pagan magi with whom he works because they were unjustly condemned for something they were unable to do; tell the king what he had dreamed. The result of Daniel seeking God's honor however is the Lord rewards Daniel and raises him higher than the other magi. If we are faithful to God he is faithful to us. We must always put him first.

2:31-45 - Daniel describes Nebuchadnezzar's dream. He sees an enormous dazzling statue. The head was of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze, the legs of iron and the feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. In the king's dream he saw a hand cut out a rock, but it was not a human hand, and it used the rock to strike the feet of iron and clay and smash them. The entire statue was then broken in pieces and became like chaff in the wind. The wind swept the statue away leaving no trace. The rock then became a huge mountain that filled the whole earth.

Daniel then tells Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation of the dream. Nebuchadnezzar is the head of the golden statue. God has given him dominion and power over people and beasts and birds. Wherever they live the king has been given dominion. Daniel implies this is over the entire world but historically it is only within the empire of Babylon. Daniel's point however is that Nebuchadnezzar has been given absolute power over every living thing in his empire. He tells the king that after him will rise another kingdom inferior to Babylon. Then a 3rd kingdom, the one of bronze will rule over the whole earth. Finally will come the 4th kingdom, the kingdom of iron, which will be so strong that it will break into pieces all the rest. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that the iron kingdom will be a divided kingdom, which is the meaning of the feet and toes being partly of iron and partly of baked clay. It will have the strength of iron but the brittleness of clay. That represents the people of this empire who will be a mixture of people and will not remain united any more than iron and clay can mix together.

Daniel says "*in the days of those kings*" probably meaning in the days of the kings of the empire of iron and clay, God will set up his kingdom that will never be destroyed. It will crush all the other kingdoms of the statue and bring them to an end but it will last forever. This is the rock that is cut out by supernatural hands that becomes a great mountain; the rock that smashes the statue and all the kingdoms it represents. The rock that becomes the mountain is a symbol for how the Kingdom of God will grow. It will be a rock, a stone in the beginning, small and even unassuming. But it will grow and grow until it becomes a great mountain the greatest in the world. The rock-mountain is similar to Jesus' parables of the mustard seed and the leaven in the dough. The Kingdom starts small, almost invisibly, but it grows and grows with inevitable power. God has shown this dream to the king and it is true and will take place. He can count on it.

There are many ways to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel's interpretation, especially the statue and what kingdoms they represent. Traditional Dispensationalist interpretation says the gold is Babylon, the silver is Persia, the bronze is Greece, the iron Rome and the feet of iron and clay is the revived Roman Empire of the Antichrist. However, that interpretation has problems. How was Persia inferior to Babylon? Historically, its territory was much greater as was its wealth. By all measures of ancient empires Persia was greater than Babylon. Exactly what then does Daniel mean? Also, the implication of *verse 41*, says the kingdom of iron will be a divided kingdom. Does that mean the iron-clay feet are not separate from the rest of the iron? Historically, Rome was not divided until after Constantine in the 300's when he built Constantinople. After that the empire began to separate into Western and Eastern

empires. The problem is for the Dispensationalist theory to work one must stop history at the time of Christ and not start it up again until the Antichrist appears on the scene. Where in the text or anywhere in Scripture is such an interpretation outlined or given credence? The Dispensationalists answer it is all outlined in the 70 weeks prophecy of *Daniel 9* but I will show later that their interpretation does not fit any possible scenario that emerges from the 70 weeks prophecy. What does Daniel mean by his vision here?

Are there other possibilities that might fit the history of the Jewish people and the rest of *Daniel*? Could Nebuchadnezzar's dream just apply to Babylon and its fall before Cyrus and Persia? Clearly Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest of the kings of Babylon. All the kings who followed him were inferior. Nebuchadnezzar was followed by Amel-Marduk or Evil-Merodach. He reigned two years and was assassinated by Neriglissar or Nergal-Sharezer who campaigned in Lydia and subdued it. His son Labasi-Marduk reigned 9 months before Nabonidus took the throne. Nabonidus was driven from Babylon and his son Belshazzar acted as co-regent for 10 years until Nabonidus returned from his self-imposed exile in 544. By this time however the country was weak and divided. The Persians captured the city in 539, five years later. Does Babylonian history fit Nebuchadnezzar's vision? He would be the gold, Amel-Marduk the silver, Neriglissar the bronze, then Labasi-Marduk the iron, and Nabonidus and Belshazzar the iron and clay. The scenario doesn't exactly fit. A better interpretation would be to skip Labasi-Marduk and take Nabonidus as the iron and Nabonidus-Belshazzar as the iron and clay. That dovetails with history a little better however there are some obvious major problems. First, if one is to take the vision literally then the Babylonian interpretation doesn't work. The iron-clay analogy works for Nabonidus-Belshazzar but when Nabonidus came to the throne did he crush everyone around him like iron? He was driven from Babylon for trying to get rid of the worship of Marduk, the chief god of Babylon. Second, in order to make the chronology work with the vision one must skip Labasi-Marduk. He might have only reigned for 9 months but he did reign as king of Babylon. Third, in order for the Babylonian interpretation to work one must take the statue as relating to Babylon and the kings after Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel says there will be other kingdoms that follow Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold. He does not say other kings. If the dream is about Babylon why does he say kingdoms and not kings? The greatest difficulty however is with the rock that establishes the Kingdom of God. In what way did the Lord establish an eternal kingdom after or during the fall of Babylon? The only interpretation that makes sense is that when Cyrus took Babylon he allowed the Jews to return home and rebuild the temple. The rock that becomes a mountain is God who causes Babylon to fall and the Jews to be granted the right to return and restore Jerusalem and the temple. Does that fit Daniel's description of a kingdom that will never be destroyed, that will bring to an end the kingdoms of the statue but it will endure forever? That is possible but does not seem probable as the correct interpretation.

The bottom line is no matter how one tries to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation, there is always some detail that does not fit and that makes any interpretation flawed. The Dispensationalist interpretation is a good starting point and probably captures at least part of what Daniel is telling the king, but it too has serious flaws and is not to be taken as the definitive answer. At this point I am unsure, except to say that God had shown Nebuchadnezzar that he was Lord of history and that ultimately his Kingdom would prevail over all human kingdoms no matter how great or how powerful. God's will would be accomplished in history and all nations on earth would bow to him one day. His will and plan may seem small at

first but it will grow with power and authority until it is accomplished. No power or king on earth no matter how great will thwart the Kingdom of God!

2:46-49 - When Daniel finishes telling Nebuchadnezzar his dream and what it means, the king is so overwhelmed he falls prostrate before Daniel and pays him honor, ordering an offering of incense be presented to him. This is the posture of worship and though the text does not say it must have embarrassed or disturbed Daniel to receive that kind of praise from the king. Daniel is a faithful Jew and knows one worships God alone. Nebuchadnezzar for his part is acting like a normal pagan. When it is obvious the gods have come down among people you offer them something. He even praises God in his own way saying Daniel's God must be the God of gods and Lord of kings and revealer of mysteries. I think Nebuchadnezzar knew his request of his magi was impossible. His pride got in the way, or there was a power struggle that we are not aware of and he wanted to eliminate some of the magi or God was spurring him on because he knew he wanted to raise up Daniel at the king's court. We don't know. In any case the king is both humbled and awed by what Daniel has done.

He rewards Daniel not just with an offering and incense but with many gifts and a promotion. Daniel is either a trainee to become a magi at this point or just one of many of the king's wise men. Nebuchadnezzar now makes him administrator of the Province of Babylon, the main province of the empire and places Daniel in charge of all the magi! His action echoes the Joseph story in *Genesis*. Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream and is raised up to prime minister of Egypt.

One of the first things Daniel does is ask the king to promote Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as administrators over the Province of Babylon. This Nebuchadnezzar does. *Verse 49* says "*while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.*" The implication is his three friends oversaw the province for Daniel while Daniel stayed close to the king in his court. The Hebrew literally reads while Daniel was at the "*king's gate.*" Nebuchadnezzar had given Daniel two important jobs, administrator over the Province of Babylon and head of all the king's magi. Daniel delegates oversight of the province to his three friends while he remains with the king to oversee the magi. Daniel wants to make sure Nebuchadnezzar receives the best counsel he can give. Plus as *chapter 3* will show, there is great jealousy against Daniel and his three friends. Overseeing the magi places Daniel in a difficult position. He is one of the closest advisors to the king yet he is still a faithful Jew and those he now oversees are pagan sorcerers! How is Daniel going to walk this tightrope? God blesses his people but we still must operate in a fallen and pagan world. We accept his blessings but need to continue the daily struggle to stay faithful to God and not compromise our faith!

Chapter 3:

3:1-6 - Nebuchadnezzar had made an enormous image of gold ninety feet high and nine feet wide. The text does not say what the image represented although it is probable that it was some sort of pagan idol, perhaps Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon. There is no evidence in the text that it was a statue of Nebuchadnezzar himself which some have maintained. It is possible that the king set up the image to reflect the king's dream Daniel had interpreted for him and Nebuchadnezzar is celebrating the supremacy of his kingdom over all the others in his dream. The king set up the image on the plain of Dura, somewhere near the city of Babylon. Many locations have been proposed for Dura but the exact site is unknown. Presumably it was near enough to the city for all the officials to gather for the dedication.

The king summons all the officials of the Province of Babylon to come to the dedication of the golden idol. Officials from every level of provincial government are ordered to appear for the dedication. It is curious that the action concerning the golden image is only centered in Babylon. The empire at this time stretched from Egypt to Persia and all through Asia Minor, yet Nebuchadnezzar only orders the officials of the main province of Babylon to come to the dedication. This sets up the accusations against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego because they were now the chief administrators of the province. Daniel was apparently not at the dedication because he continued to serve at the king's court as head of the magi. This could explain why the accusation in v.8 did not include Daniel.

The orders come down from the king that when the officials hear the sounds of all the instruments playing they are all to bow down and worship the image that the king had set up. If they do not they will be immediately thrown into a blazing furnace. The threat of execution was real but it was also over the top and gives insight into the megalomania of Middle Eastern kings. They were absolute despots and no one could resist whatever they wanted to do. They are not accountable to the law but are a law unto themselves. This served to feed their pride and arrogance. The question on the mind of every Jew was how does one serve a king like this especially if his decrees clash with God's Law? The story of the fiery furnace seeks to answer that question. It is a question for Christians today as we struggle against an increasingly intrusive and anti-Christian government.

3:7-12 - When all the instruments started playing all the officials and advisors who were present in Babylon, officials from many nations and languages, they all fell down and worshipped the golden image as they had been commanded. The description of the horn, flute, lyre, harp and the other instruments gives the impression not of a symphony orchestra making beautiful music together but of a braying, cacophonous noise that assaults the ears. J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Simarillion* describes a scene in heaven where the angels were making music to God. When they focused on God their music was beautiful. But Melkor, the Satanic figure in the story, makes his own music and it was ugly, brash, and full of the braying of trumpets and one note that tried to dominate the rest of the music sung to God. That is the impression I have of Nebuchadnezzar's "orchestra" that played at the dedication of the golden image. The worship of God makes beautiful music. The worship of pagan gods makes an obnoxious noise!

When the music brayed and all the officials bowed down, some of the astrologers came to denounce the Jews before the king. It is difficult to tell if Daniel is making a distinction between the astrologers or the magi in general. Were the astrologers a particular group within the magi or since they all studied astrology is this another word for magi? At any rate they come with typical Middle Eastern flowery language and tell the king that there are some among the officials who are not bowing down to the golden image the king has set up. They disobeyed your command! They remind the king that he said if anyone didn't bow down they were to be tossed immediately into the fiery furnace and burned alive. The astrologers single out the three friends of Daniel whom Nebuchadnezzar put in charge of the affairs of the Province of Babylon at Daniel's request; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They accuse the three of refusing to worship the golden image and of not serving the gods of the king. Both accusations are true. They did not bow down nor do they serve the pagan gods of Babylon. The astrologers are using their refusal to bow down to the image as an excuse to get rid of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They are probably jealous of the three young Jews. It is also possible they want to get rid of Daniel but

they are afraid of him and since it appears Daniel was not at the dedication they don't have enough evidence to accuse him.

Here is the dilemma of the Jews in exile. They are called to stay faithful to God yet that very faithfulness may cost them because they live in a pagan land. The authority over them, namely Nebuchadnezzar, does not recognize God. Do they trust God no matter what? That is the issue. Do they believe God can rescue them if they stay faithful or will they compromise in order to preserve their position and even their lives? These are questions with which we must wrestle today as well.

3:13-18 - Hearing the news that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down to the golden image and have disobeyed his orders; Nebuchadnezzar has the three young Jews brought before him. He asks them point blank if what they are accused of is true, then gives them another chance to bow down to the golden image. He threatens them, telling them if they do not bow down they will be thrown into the fiery furnace. Then he adds, "*Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?*" That is the crux of the matter for the three friends. Who is stronger, the king of Babylon, the most powerful man in their world, or the God of the Jews? What Nebuchadnezzar has not understood is that the God of the Jews is the one true God and the one who gave him his kingdom and has allowed him to reign. He is accountable to the God of heaven just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are. He doesn't know it as yet.

The three young men answer the king. They tell him they aren't going to defend themselves. If they are thrown into the furnace then the God whom they serve is able to save them from it and will rescue them from the king's hand. What they tell the king next is one of the most courageous things spoken in the *Book of Daniel*. It epitomizes the very attitude Daniel is encouraging the Jews to have who now live in exile in Babylon, and if my guess is right about the time of the publishing of *Daniel* it applies just as well to the Jews living in exile in Persia. They say, even if he does not rescue us we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up! They tell Nebuchadnezzar we would rather die a horrible death in your fiery furnace than bow down to a pagan idol and image of gold! This is the highpoint of the story, even greater than their rescue. That attitude is totally different than what was current among the Jews at the time of the exile in Babylon, and especially those who still lived in Jerusalem during Zedekiah's reign. It took another 400 years for that attitude to become strong enough among the Jews to spawn the Maccabean Revolt against the Greeks. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are heroes of the first commandment, no other gods before me! Their story reinforces the point of these early chapters of *Daniel*; if the Jews are faithful to God, he will be faithful to them and deliver them!

3:19-23 - When the three friends tell the king they will not bow down to the golden statue that he made even if it costs them their lives Nebuchadnezzar is furious. The text says his attitude changed toward them. It appears the king liked the three young Jews probably because they were friends of Daniel's and because they had proved capable administrators of the province. When they refuse the king's command, even in a courageous way, the king is angry. One gets the impression that Nebuchadnezzar didn't have many people around him who told him no. He is an oriental despot whose word is the law.

The king orders the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commands some of his strongest troops to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Then they are to throw them into the furnace to die. The three young Jews are tied up, wearing their regular clothes, their robes,

trousers and turbans. That detail is added to emphasize the immediacy of the threat. The soldiers didn't even take time to strip them down. They tied them up as is and threw them into the fire. The king had commanded anyone who didn't bow down would be immediately thrown into the furnace. His orders are carried out literally! No one will disobey the mighty Nebuchadnezzar and get away with it! However, Nebuchadnezzar's anger costs the lives of the soldiers who carry out his orders. The fire is so hot when the soldiers throw the three Jews into the fire they themselves are overcome by the heat and die. This subtle detail is included in the story as a reminder that kings are flawed human beings and when leaders let their tempers get the best of them their mistakes cost people, even their lives. The guards are innocent victims of Nebuchadnezzar's anger and pride. Their sacrifice sets up God's humbling of the king. It will not last however and in *chapter 4* God has to humble him further to remind him that God is the Lord of history and sovereign over kingdoms and not Nebuchadnezzar. The Jews needed to remember that lesson as well as they lived in exile. We in America need to heed it too.

3:24-28 - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are thrown into the fire and should be immediately consumed. But something is wrong. The king sees four men walking around in the fire unbound and unharmed which is impossible. He asks his advisors if they had thrown three men into the furnace. They all say of course. No one wants to say anything that will stir up the king even further for fear they may be thrown into the furnace next. Nebuchadnezzar exclaims that the fourth figure in the furnace is like a son of the gods. The king sees the angel of God whom he sent to rescue Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The King James Bible translated this phrase, "*the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*" That has led some people to believe this was a theophany, an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. However, the Aramaic for God here is plural, so the NIV, NLT and NASB all translate the phrase, son of the gods. This is most likely an angel which is consistent with other accounts in *Daniel* as well. God sends his angels to deliver Daniel and speak to him concerning what is to come. God in *Daniel* is transcendent and interacts with human beings through dreams and visions or intermediaries like angels.

Nebuchadnezzar is so shocked by what he sees that he risks being burnt up himself and shouts into the opening of the furnace for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come out. He calls them, servants of the Most High God, come out, come here. They come out of the furnace and when all the officials who had come to the golden statue's dedication crowd around them they see that they had not suffered any harm, nor were their clothes scorched or their hair singed and there was no smell of fire on them at all. It was a complete miracle. They were saved from the furnace when they should have been consumed. Obviously God intervened and saved them just as they said he could. The Most High God in Nebuchadnezzar's thinking would have been the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon, Marduk. He knows however that this is not Marduk's doing and in fact Marduk could not have done what the God of the Jews has just done. Questions must have been raging in Nebuchadnezzar's mind about whom and what he was dealing with. Those questions are expressed in the song of praise that follows in *verses 28-29*.

3:28-30 - Nebuchadnezzar gives praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the God of the Jews, Yahweh! He had conquered Jerusalem and carried King Jehoiachin into exile. He would destroy the temple in Jerusalem and seem to overcome this God. Yet here he praises him because he knows God has sent his angel to rescue his three servants. He is forced to admit Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had defied his command to bow down to the golden image

but they trusted their God was greater than the king and were willing to die rather than bow down and worship any other god but their God.

Nebuchadnezzar then issues a decree that if anyone says anything bad against the God of the Jews they will be cut to pieces and their houses turned into piles of rubble. He admits no other pagan god can do what God has done. I think Nebuchadnezzar's says what he says to protect his people and appease the Lord. He sees how powerful Yahweh is and he doesn't want to make him mad so he says no one say anything bad about this God! He is not ready to declare that God is the only God. He just knows he is more powerful than his gods and that must have frightened Nebuchadnezzar because all his life Marduk was the most powerful god he knew. He would have believed that the very reason he was able to conquer the Middle East, defeat Assyria and Neco of Egypt and take control of all of Mesopotamia was because Marduk was helping him and was more powerful than all the other gods of the nations. Now he is confronted with direct evidence that the God of the Jews, this little nation that was easily conquered can do what his god cannot. Don't make him mad!! No one insult him! We don't know what he would do!

In *Jeremiah 39:2* Nebuzaradan, captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, tells Jeremiah that the Lord your God decreed disaster over Jerusalem. That is evidence that the Babylonians believed they had God's help in conquering Jerusalem and did not believe they were angering Yahweh but instead fulfilling his wishes to destroy the city and the temple. Jeremiah himself had declared this many times. I wonder whether this incident in Babylon which probably took place before the final fall of Jerusalem influenced the Babylonians understanding of their conquest of Jerusalem. They were successful because Yahweh had given Jerusalem into their hands. They were not afraid of conquering the city. Here in *Daniel 3* Nebuchadnezzar is very afraid of God!

The king promotes the three friends in the province of Babylon. That is a curious phrase because they were already the chief administrators. Maybe it means he restored them to their jobs after they had been stripped of authority for disobeying the king. The result is the king rewards the three young Jews for obeying their God rather than obeying the king! God has rescued his servants and has prospered them because they stayed faithful to him. They were almost killed but God was faithful. The Jews throughout Persia need to stay faithful too!!

Chapter 4:

4:1-3 - This entire chapter is a letter from Nebuchadnezzar to the people who live in all the world, which probably means his empire. It is extraordinary because it is a letter describing God humbling the mighty king because of his pride. It is a letter praising the God of the Jews as the Most High God and telling people everywhere of his greatness. Liberal scholars completely discount the letter and the incidents in *Daniel 4*. They say it is a total fabrication. But, there is a curious gap in the Babylonian chronicles and in them there is very little record of the last thirty years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586. *Daniel 4* is the last chapter in *Daniel* that deals with Nebuchadnezzar and his reign. *Chapter 5* occurs in the reign of Belshazzar, the son of Nabonidus, who reigned in Babylon as co-regent with his father while Nabonidus lived away from the capital for 10 years. It seems reasonable to date this letter from Nebuchadnezzar in the last thirty years of his reign after 586. What little records remain show he devoted the latter part of his rule to great building projects, including the famous Ishtar Gate in Babylon and the so-called hanging gardens and literature. His time of military conquest was at an end. Rather than see this letter from Nebuchadnezzar as completely legendary it is quite possible that it occurred during this 30 year time when Nebuchadnezzar was less active on

the Middle Eastern stage and turned his attention from conquest to more peaceful pursuits. There is no need to reject it as unhistorical.

4:4-18 - Nebuchadnezzar writes that he had a dream that frightened him and that it was during a time when he was contented and prosperous. Things were going very well and the dream scared him. He called all his magi to interpret the dream for him but they could not. This time he doesn't demand they tell him the dream too as in *chapter 2*. He outlines what he experienced and asks them to interpret. None of them could do it. All the pagan magi and those who relied on occult powers failed to tell the king his dream. Finally Daniel is brought to him. Nebuchadnezzar writes that Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar in Babylonian, is named after his god, Bel, another name for Marduk, the god of the air, similar to Baal, in the Babylonian pantheon. Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that the spirit of the gods lives in Daniel. He sees Daniel's abilities to interpret dreams as a pagan would and thinks the gods favor him. He does not understand that God is the only God.

Nebuchadnezzar asks Daniel to interpret his dream for him. He tells Daniel that in his dream he saw an enormous tree that grew up to touch the sky and was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful and it bore abundant fruit that was food for all. Under it the beasts found shelter and the birds of the air lived in its branches. Every creature was fed from the tree. The dream is about Nebuchadnezzar yet the description of the birds and beasts finding shelter in the tree sounds like Jesus' parable of the mustard seed that grows into a great bush that even the birds nest in. In that parable Jesus is describing the Kingdom of God. Nebuchadnezzar dreams his kingdom is like a great tree that gives shelter to the nations. The parallels are striking!

The king tells Daniel he saw a messenger from heaven come down and declare that the tree was to be cut down, its branches trimmed, its leaves stripped and its fruit scattered. However its stump and roots were to be bound with iron and bronze and remain in the ground among the grass of the field. The messenger is almost certainly an angel. In Aramaic, the language with which this section of Daniel is written, the word means a watcher. The "*watcher*" then declares, "*let him be drenched with the dew of heaven.*" The "*him*" is Nebuchadnezzar. It sounds as if the tree is separate from the king but in 4:22 Daniel tells the king he is the tree. The king is to be drenched with the dew and live among the animals and plants away from his palace. His mind is to be changed from that of a man because he will be given the mind of an animal for seven years, or literally until seven "*times*" pass by for him. Seven is a highly symbolic number in *Daniel* and it is difficult to know whether this should be taken as a literal seven years or the seven "*times*" represent the time God has decreed for Nebuchadnezzar to not be in his right mind which may or may not be seven literal years. Drenched with the dew of heaven is a phrase that means the king will sleep outside like an animal and live like an animal. He will not be in his right mind for seven years and live like a beast.

The king tells Daniel he heard the messenger or watcher declare that the verdict has been pronounced by the holy ones in order that the living may know the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives the rule of those kingdoms to whomever he pleases, even the lowliest of men. Nebuchadnezzar almost begs Daniel to tell him what the dream means because none of his other magi have been able to help him. He says the spirit of the holy gods is in you Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that Daniel's wisdom is supernatural. However, being a pagan he cannot fathom that the Lord God is the one and only God. It makes no sense to him that Yahweh; the God of the Jews, a conquered and captive people is the only God. Nevertheless he also knows Daniel has wisdom and insight that none of the other magi have. He is desperate

to understand the dream. He knows it is a message from the gods; he just doesn't know it is a message from the one true God!

4:19-27 - When Daniel hears the dream he is "*greatly perplexed for a time.*" The NASB reads he was appalled for a while. The NLT reads he was overcome for a time. The Aramaic word is used only here in *Daniel 4* and means literally to be appalled. Unfortunately the NIV's translation of perplexed makes it sound like Daniel was confused about what the dream meant. The opposite is true. He knew what it meant when he heard it he just doesn't know how he is going to tell the king because it is a very disturbing dream that pronounces judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar. The king tells Daniel not to be afraid and to tell the king the meaning of the dream.

Daniel tells the king he wished the dream applied to the king's enemies! The great tree Nebuchadnezzar saw is the king. He has become great and strong so that his kingdom reaches to distant parts of the earth. The king saw a holy one, a watcher of heaven, an angel, coming down from heaven to pronounce judgment. The tree was to be cut down and stripped but the stump was to remain. He is to live like the animals until seven times or years has passed.

Daniel then tells the king the interpretation. The Most High God has decreed his judgment against Nebuchadnezzar. He will be driven away from people and live among the wild animals, eating grass like a cow and be drenched with the dew of heaven, meaning he will sleep outside on the ground like a beast and wake drenched in dew. Seven times will pass by for Nebuchadnezzar until he acknowledges that the Most High is sovereign over the kings and kingdoms of men and gives their rule and authority to whomever he wishes. The fact that the roots and stump are left means his kingdom will not be completely stripped from him and will one day be restored to him when he acknowledges that "*Heaven rules*"! Daniel advises the king to renounce his sins, meaning repent, and be kind to the oppressed. It may be that the king's reign and prosperity will continue.

Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar to repent and do what is right and be kind to the oppressed. God's standards for the nations are the same as his standards for Israel! The difference is that Israel was expected to worship the Lord alone which they did not! That is the core reason God used the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem. Their idolatry led to their wickedness and immorality which led to their destruction.

Daniel 4 may also be hinting at something else. If this is later in Nebuchadnezzar's reign after the fall of Jerusalem, the imprisonment of Jehoiachin and the death in prison of Zedekiah, it is possible that God is telling the king to treat the Jews with kindness, including King Jehoiachin. Nebuchadnezzar never freed the young king and he spent 37 years in prison before Evil-Merodach released him from prison and gave him a place at the king's table. He was 18 when he was captured and imprisoned and 55 when he was released. Evil-Merodach was Nebuchadnezzar's son and successor. Could it be that he was afraid of what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar and so freed the now aging Jewish king? Was Nebuchadnezzar's dream God prodding him to treat the Jews with more compassion? He does acknowledge God's sovereignty over him and his kingdom but he never did repent and free Jehoiachin from prison. That was left to his son. The reality is Nebuchadnezzar was frightened by the dream God gave him but he did not take Daniel's advice. His pride continued to grow until his kingdom and his mind were ripped from him for a time. Pride is a spiritually fatal disease!

4:28-33 - A year later everything Daniel had told Nebuchadnezzar about his dream came true. The king is taking a stroll on the roof of his palace and looks out over the city and everything

that he has built. He gives himself credit for building it all because of his power and the glory of his majesty. Whether he had tried to take Daniel's advice and act justly at least for a while we don't know. A year after the dream his pride has grown so much that he forgets that it is the "*Most High God*" who raises up kings and kingdoms. He takes credit for it all and God says enough!

No sooner has Nebuchadnezzar given himself the credit for all his accomplishments than a voice comes from heaven. God decrees Nebuchadnezzar's future and life. His royal authority is taken from him. He will be driven away from his people and live with the animals. Seven "*times*", probably meaning years will pass before he acknowledges that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and it is he who decides who rules and who does not. God is Lord of nations and history. Nebuchadnezzar is not!

Immediately Nebuchadnezzar loses his right mind. He lives among the animals and eats grass like a cow. His hair and nails grow out like some wild animal and he sleeps outdoors among the beasts and not in his palace which is the meaning of his body would be drenched with the dew of heaven. God allows Nebuchadnezzar to lose his mind for seven years. He has some sort of psychotic episode that causes him to withdraw from people and live like a beast. His behavior must have frightened his court and all the magi. That is one reason they drive him out of the palace. Did the court keep it secret from the people at large? Plus no one robs Nebuchadnezzar of his throne. Did Evil-Merodach protect his father or was it someone else? God had told the king that even though he would lose his mind his throne would not be taken away from him and he would recover it. Did Daniel tell the magi the dream and so they anticipated something like this would happen? There are many unanswered questions!

To an oppressed people in exile who have no power over their conquerors, the picture of the mighty Nebuchadnezzar humbled and living like a beast is a reminder that God is still sovereign. God is still in control of kings and governments and has not forgotten his people.

4:34-37 - Finally at the end of seven years of madness, Nebuchadnezzar looks up to heaven and his sanity is restored. Looking up to heaven is symbolic of acknowledging God and his power over him. That becomes the turning point so that God now restores the king. I doubt if the king even knew of the passing of the years because he was not in his right mind.

As a result Nebuchadnezzar, the pagan king who worships the gods of Babylon, praises the God of heaven, the God of the lowly Jews, the one true God! He recognizes that God's Kingdom is eternal and endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are subject to him and he does as he pleases. There is no one greater than God and no one can challenge him or demand to know what he has done. As Paul will say in *Romans 11*, from him and through him and to him are all things. Did the king understand the distinction between Yahweh and Marduk? It is unclear but at least he acknowledges God as God and gives him praise. He was still a pagan but now understands that there is one God who is above all the others.

When Nebuchadnezzar finally acknowledges God the Lord restores his throne and his kingdom to him. In fact he becomes even greater than before. His advisors and nobles seek him out again. He praises the Lord, the King of Heaven for being a just God. Nebuchadnezzar has learned his lesson that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. In his later years Nebuchadnezzar concentrated his efforts on building projects and beautifying his capital, Babylon. He did not set out on many campaigns of conquest as he had in the earlier years of his reign. Could the reason be his humbling by God? It is possible. Certainly *Daniel* implies it.

Daniel wants to encourage his fellow Jews by including this incident from Nebuchadnezzar's life. If I am correct and the book was published during the Persian era the Jews would be questioning whether God was still in control and if he had a future for them. The answer of the *Book of Daniel* is a resounding YES!!!

Chapter 5:

5:1-9 - Belshazzar ruled in Babylon as regent while his father Nabonidus was in exile in Tema, a desert city in Arabia for 10 years from 554-544. Nabonidus tried to lead the country away from the traditional worship of Marduk the chief Babylonian god. The people rebelled and when Nabonidus campaigned in Arabia and left the rule of Babylon to Belshazzar his son, basically political pressure kept the king in Arabia for ten years. Belshazzar was king in reality even if he was only crown prince. He had a co-regency with his father for much of Nabonidus' reign. This split reign and the turmoil that resulted was one of the chief reasons Babylon was weakened and finally vulnerable to the Persians under Cyrus. According to Babylonian records Nabonidus returned to power in 544 but his rule was short-lived and the Persians under General Gobryas took Babylon in 539 and Cyrus entered the city as a conquering hero partly because he restored the worship of Marduk to its central place. That carried favor with the people and Cyrus was celebrated as a liberator that freed the people of Babylon from the heretic Nabonidus. Belshazzar's power and influence in Babylon ceased with his father's fall in 539.

Daniel says the king held a great feast for a 1000 nobles and ate and drank wine with them. As he was drinking wine he ordered the gold and silver vessels of the temple in Jerusalem to be brought from the treasury so that he and his nobles could drink from them. The text declares that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken these from the temple in Jerusalem. The word for father in context can mean ancestor or predecessor. Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar's grandfather. Belshazzar's drunken pride overcomes his better judgment and he insults the Name of Yahweh by using the sacred temple vessels for his dinner party so that his nobles can get drunk. What's worse the king and his nobles use the temple vessels to toast the pagan Babylonian gods. God had judged Nebuchadnezzar for his pride and arrogance now he is about to judge his grandson too. This behavior was crossing a line. It also shows what a weak and foolish king Belshazzar was. The Persians were gaining power rapidly through their alliance with the Medes. They had taken the Kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor and were getting ready to move on Babylon. What does Belshazzar do in response? He throws a banquet so he and his nobles and their wives can get drunk! His banquet is a symptom of both his denial of the reality of the political and military situation and his pride and arrogance in using the temple vessels for his party.

Suddenly as the king, his nobles and their wives are toasting their pagan gods with God's vessels the fingers of a giant hand appear and write words on the plaster walls of the banquet hall. Belshazzar and all his guests watch the hand write on the wall and are terrified. Daniel says he was so afraid his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. Belshazzar is a coward. Of course if anything like this happened at a dinner party at the White House the same reaction might take place!

The king calls all his magi, all those who by their occult arts practice astrology and divination to come and interpret the writing on the wall. In typical Middle Eastern fashion he tells them whoever interprets the writing for him will be rewarded with a purple robe and a gold chain and he will become the third highest ruler in Babylon! All the magi give it a try but none of them can understand what the great fingers of the hand have written. This frightens the king even

more along with all of his nobles. One wonders whether there was a mass stampede of guests making excuses for why they couldn't stay at the king's party any longer. Events are spinning out of control for Belshazzar.

5:10-12 - The queen hears all the commotion and goes into the banquet hall to speak to the king. An alternative text note in the NIV reads the queen mother and the NLT translates the word as the queen mother. The Aramaic word means queen but the context suggests queen mother because she was not in the banquet. If she was the queen why wasn't she there? Was she having some conflict with Belshazzar that kept her away? Whatever the case, she comes to the king and tells him not to be afraid. There is a man who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. He served your father or ancestor Nebuchadnezzar with great insight and wisdom. In fact the king appointed him the chief of the magi. He has a keen mind and the ability to interpret dreams and solve difficult problems. Call for him and he will explain the writing.

Several things need to be noted here. It appears at the time of Belshazzar's reign Daniel is no longer the chief of the magi, otherwise he would have been brought in with the rest. After Nebuchadnezzar there were several kings in short succession one of which came to the throne by assassination. It is quite possible that in the change of regimes Daniel was demoted. Plus, Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father had tried to reform the Babylonian religion raising up another god besides Marduk as the chief god to be worshipped. He was eventually forced out of Babylon which is why Belshazzar was reigning in his place. It is possible that during that turmoil Daniel lost his position as chief of the magi. Whatever the cause Belshazzar does not know Daniel or his abilities. This is also evidence that it was the queen mother who came into the banquet to speak to the king and not his queen and wife. She would have known Daniel from Nebuchadnezzar's reign even though her son did not. Just like in *chapter 2* Daniel is recommended as one who has insight from the gods. Daniel and his readers know his insight comes from the Lord God but the pagan Babylonians still do not understand there is only one God.

5:13-17 - Daniel is brought before the king and he asks if he is one of the exiles Nebuchadnezzar brought from Judah. Belshazzar explains the situation to Daniel and how the wise men or magi could not read the writing and explain it. Belshazzar hopes Daniel will be able to because he has heard that the spirit of the gods is in him and that he has wisdom and insight. Belshazzar speaks to Daniel as if he does not know him. This confirms that Daniel has lost his position as head of the magi which he had under Nebuchadnezzar who died in 562. This is at least as late as 544 and according to 5:30 it must be 539 when Cyrus conquered Babylon. That means this is twenty years after Nebuchadnezzar. Sometime during those intervening years Daniel was no longer head of the magi. There had been at least four kings after Nebuchadnezzar and with the changes in administrations that probably accounts for Daniel's demotion.

Belshazzar tells Daniel if he is able to solve the writing he will dress him in purple, in other words royal robes, give him a gold chain and make him the third highest in the kingdom. Belshazzar obviously does not know Daniel because he would not be impressed with such gifts of wealth and power. In fact he tells the king exactly that. *"You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else."* Daniel is not swayed by money and power. His reply to the king sounds like he holds the king's offer in contempt. If the timeline of 5:30 is correct and is not condensed then Daniel must know that the Persian general Gobryas is even then laying siege to Babylon by damming up the Euphrates River to gain access under the walls through the river culverts. If Daniel is aware of this he may know how empty Belshazzar's *"rewards"* truly are.

Plus Daniel knows the writing and knows Belshazzar's days are numbered along with Babylon's. In fact Babylon's empire only lasts 23 years after Nebuchadnezzar's death. Yet, despite all of that Daniel tells the crown prince and regent he will read the writing and tell the king what it means.

5:18-24 - Daniel begins by reminding Belshazzar that it was God, the Most High who had given sovereignty and power to his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar. All peoples everywhere feared him. God gave Nebuchadnezzar absolute authority so that those he wanted killed were killed, and those he wanted to spare were spared. Those he wanted to promote were promoted (Is Daniel referring to himself here?), and those he wanted to humble he humbled. In other words Nebuchadnezzar had the absolute authority of a despot. His word was the law and he was not accountable to any law other than himself. This was radically different from the kings of Israel and Judah who were subject to God's Law. Nebuchadnezzar forgot however that he was accountable to God Most High who had given him his throne. Therefore when his pride and arrogance grew too great God deposed him from his throne and stripped him of his glory. Daniel then describes the episode of Nebuchadnezzar's mental illness when he became as an animal and was no longer in his right mind. God gave him his glory and God took it away because God is sovereign and sets up kings and kingdoms as he pleases.

Daniel tells Belshazzar that even though the king knows all this history he has not humbled himself before the God of Heaven. Instead he has insulted him and defied him. Daniel details for Belshazzar the insult he has made toward God, bringing the sacred goblets from the temple in Jerusalem to his party and using them for his nobles and his wives to drink from. Then on top of that as they were drinking from God's goblets they were praising the pagan idols of Babylon, gods of metal and wood and stone which are deaf and blind and dumb. Belshazzar did not honor the one true God who is the Creator and holds his life and his ways in his hand. This statement is similar to Paul's statement to the philosophers of Athens in *Acts 17*, "*in him we live and move and have our being.*" We exist because of God who is sovereign and in control. Belshazzar denied this and openly defied God through his actions. What makes it even more pathetic is that politically and militarily he is in no position to declare how great he is. His empire was crumbling around him and it was only a matter of time before the Persians came pouring into Babylon. His pride leads him to live in deep denial of his situation. Belshazzar is a fool; he denies God is even there or that he hears and sees what he is doing. Daniel says that is why the hand was sent and wrote the inscription. Belshazzar is doomed by God!

5:25-28 - Daniel then interprets the inscription for the king and his dinner guests. The words in Aramaic are *mene, mene, tekel, parsin* or literally, *uparsin* which means *and parsin*. *Mene* can mean a mina which was a coin and or it can mean numbered. Belshazzar's days are numbered and his reign is brought to an end. *Tekel* can mean weighed and is related to the word for shekel a coin or unit of money whose value was determined by weight. *Peres* (the singular of *parsin*) can mean divided or Persia or a half mina or a half shekel. Daniel concludes the writing means Belshazzar's rule is at an end because God has weighed him in his scales of justice and righteousness and he has been found wanting. His kingdom will be divided therefore between the Medes and the Persians. For Belshazzar "*the handwriting was on the wall.*" This is where the saying comes from!

It is difficult to know the exact relationship between Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father and his son. Belshazzar was crown prince and heir to the throne. However, he was made regent of the empire and ruled in Babylon as king when Nabonidus was in exile in Arabia for ten years.

Nabonidus returned in 544 and took up his kingship once again. The Persians captured Babylon in 539. It is likely that there was confusion and a power struggle for control of the empire between father and son even as the Persians were besieging the city. However, the walls of Babylon were thought to be impregnable so it is also possible that even though the Persian army is outside the gates Belshazzar and his nobles were celebrating inside because they thought the Persians would never be able to capture the city. What they did not anticipate was the engineering skill of the Persians. They dammed up the River Euphrates upstream from the city, which flowed through the city and entered under the walls through the river culverts. It was ingenious. When the water stopped the Persians poured into Babylon and Belshazzar and Nabonidus were helpless to stop them. The Babylonian Empire had fallen.

5:29-31 - These verses paint a bizarre picture during the king's dinner party after Daniel has explained to Belshazzar what the writing means. Daniel has just told the king that his empire is going to fall yet he still places a gold chain around Daniel's neck and dresses him in purple. He proclaims Daniel the third highest in the Kingdom! Belshazzar is going to keep his promise before his dinner guests because Daniel has successfully interpreted the handwriting on the wall. Daniel must have shaken his head in amazement and disgust. Belshazzar was out of touch with reality! His throne was going to be taken from him and his power stripped because of his arrogance. Now he wants to make Daniel the third highest ruler of a doomed kingdom. The irony is amazing. What a fool! What must his guests have thought or were they too drunk to understand?

Daniel says that very night Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two. Does Daniel mean that Belshazzar was assassinated that very night by some of his nobles or allies of Nabonidus his father? Or does he mean the Persians captured the city that very night and Belshazzar was killed in the battle? It is unclear which is the case. In either case Babylon fell to the Persian general Gobryas in 539.

The larger problem is with the identity of Darius the Mede. The biblically relevant Persian rulers are as follows: Cyrus the Great (559-530), his son Cambyses II (530-522), Darius I (522-486), Xerxes (486-465), and Artaxerxes I (465-424). Daniel cannot be referring to Darius I here because he did not become king of Persia until 522, 17 years later. There is no historical record of Darius the Mede so it is difficult to tell who Daniel means. Three possibilities have been suggested. Daniel mistakenly identifies Cyrus with Darius and simply mixes up the names. That is highly unlikely. Even if *Daniel* was edited later in the Persian period no one living at that time would mistakenly identify the line of succession. Plus every Jew reading *Daniel* would have been confused by the historical confusion. Furthermore it stretches common sense to say Daniel is inspired by God but he still mixes up the names. A second possibility is that Darius the Mede was governor of the Province of Babylon and called a king but was not. This solves some problems and creates others. There is no record of a Darius the Mede who was king of Babylon. The governors of Persian provinces were not called kings but satraps, which basically means governors, however, they were seen as vassal kings and had a great deal of independent authority to govern their satrapy as they saw fit as long as they maintained allegiance to the Persian throne. It is possible that Darius the Mede was the satrap of the province of Babylon and could be called a king and that he ruled during the reign of Cyrus the Great as 6:28 implies. The third possibility is that Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Great are the same person. In 6:28 it says that Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian meaning Cyrus the Great. An alternative reading for the text says, "*Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*" The

problem is there is no extra-biblical record that Cyrus was ever called Darius and there is no explanation given as to why Daniel would call Cyrus, Darius and not simply say King Cyrus as he does in *chapter 10*. The identity of Darius the Mede remains a difficult problem. My best guess is that either Darius is Cyrus and Daniel has transposed the names for some unknown reason or Darius the Mede was satrap of Babylon and Daniel calls him a king.

Chapter 6:

6:1-5 - In the note on *5:30-31* I already addressed the historical problems with the identity of Darius the Mede that Daniel calls a king. Daniel adds another problem in *6:1*. At the height of its power Persia had about 20 satrapies or provinces governed by a satrap or governor and not 120. If Darius is the satrap over Babylon and functioned as a king then *Daniel* is referring to something that Darius did in his province. He appointed 120 district satraps and set up three administrators to rule over them of whom Daniel was one. This makes the most sense of the text and the historical records we have. The satraps were accountable to the king through the administrators. This is a good description of the Persian system. Governors were independent but there were some checks and balances on their power that kept them accountable to the throne and the empire as a whole. It was a much less centralized system of control than either Assyria or Babylon and enabled the Persians to govern a far larger area for a much longer time than the two great empires that preceded them.

Daniel sets himself apart from the other administrators by his integrity. His story is similar to the Joseph account in *Genesis 37-50*. Daniel is so successful as an administrator over a third of the satraps of the province or kingdom that Darius decides to promote him to administrator of the whole kingdom. At this the other administrators and satraps become jealous. They try and find some corruption charge with which they can accuse him before the king but they cannot. Daniel was free of corruption and he was diligent in his duties so that he was never negligent either. They confer together and decide the only way they will be able to bring some charge against him will be through something to do with "*the law of his God.*" This tells us that they were jealous of Daniel not simply because he was successful but because he was a Jew. Daniel had regained his status in the administration of Babylon during Belshazzar's rule because he had interpreted the handwriting on the wall. Darius, looking for capable people to administer his province must have noticed Daniel and seen his character and potential. The Persians were more open toward other peoples than the Babylonians had been and so it would not have been unusual for Darius to give Daniel a high position in his province. We see further evidence of this in the status of Nehemiah as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes.

This whole account of Daniel and the lion's den deals with an issue that the Jews in exile faced all the time. How do you deal with persecution and opposition because you are a Jew and trying to follow Yahweh to the best of your ability? What do you do? You no longer live in Judah where you were free to worship and follow God without opposition. Now you live in a foreign land with different laws and customs. When those new laws and customs clash with the Law of God how should you respond? This was a very real problem for the exiles and the *Book of Daniel* deals with these issues. To a lesser extent the *Book of Esther* does as well along with *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*. That issue is becoming more real for us today as Christians in America as our country moves further and further away from God and our laws and customs become estranged from Christian values and morals. What should we do and how should we respond? *Daniel* can help us!

6:6-9 - The administrators, governors, satraps and other officials come to Darius to get him to issue a decree that they hope will trap Daniel and lead to his downfall. They ask the king to declare that no one in the kingdom may pray to any god or man other than Darius for the next month. They request that the king issue the decree in writing for then it cannot be altered in accordance with the laws of the Medes and the Persians. Darius agrees and puts the prayer ban in writing.

It is curious that Darius agrees to the ban because the Persians were more liberal in their religious policies than the Assyrians or Babylonians. They were more tolerant of different peoples in their empire worshipping their own gods and maintained an open policy that allowed for different worship as long as people were loyal to the Persian throne. That was one of the reasons Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord. We don't know the other circumstances of the request by Daniel's enemies and perhaps there was something else going on in Babylon that led Darius to sign off on such a narrow decree. The decree goes against normal Persian policy and that makes it difficult to understand. However, it would have fueled Darius' pride in being a king, even if he was only the satrap over Babylon. The request by the Persian officials makes more sense if the Darius of this passage is Darius I who followed Cyrus and Cambyses but that makes the timeline of the rest of the *Book of Daniel* very difficult because Darius came to the throne in 522 and Daniel would have been well over 100 years old by then. If Darius is Darius the Mede an unknown satrap of the Province of Babylon then the decree is also difficult to understand because a governor or satrap of a major province of the Persian Empire was setting himself up to be prayed to as a god. That borders on sedition and rebellion. That was an ongoing problem with the provincial satraps in the empire because they had considerable autonomy to rule as they chose and did not have as much centralized control as they would have under the Assyrians or Babylonians.

Whatever the historical circumstances were, and it may not be possible to understand them completely, Darius puts the decree in writing and now no one in the kingdom or province may pray to any other god or man except Darius for the next month. The administrators and governors who are opposed to Daniel now believe they have trapped Daniel because they know he will not stop praying to God during the thirty days of the decree. *Daniel's* narrative faces head on the issue of how the Jews should respond to the pagan powers that rule over them when their laws directly conflict with God's Law and his command that the Jews worship the Lord and him only. It was the same issue that John faced with the Roman emperor Domitian when he wrote *Revelation* and it is an issue increasingly real for Christians in America today.

6:10-16 - Daniel is going to stay faithful to God and pray to him alone regardless of the circumstances and Darius' decree. He is the example of what a faithful Jew living in a pagan land is to do. He goes to his home to the upstairs room where he prays with the windows open towards Jerusalem. Even today the front doors of synagogues in Israel are built facing Jerusalem and Temple Mount. Daniel prays three times a day on his knees giving thanks to God not caring who sees him doing it. This is just what his opponents were hoping would happen.

They go to Darius and manipulate him by asking if he had issued the decree about praying to him alone for a month. The king arrogantly agrees saying the decree is in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians which cannot be repealed. The story is worded with dramatic effect yet it is curious because the king was the law and couldn't Darius have revoked his edict if he wanted to? Apparently he could not and once a decree was in writing even the king who decreed it was bound by it. That is how Daniel's opponents have trapped Darius into killing

Daniel, or at least they believe the lions will kill him. Why should they not? What god could save someone from the hungry lions?

When the governors tell Darius that there is one in his kingdom who defies his decree and it is Daniel the king is greatly distressed. He tries to figure out a way to rescue Daniel and realizes he has been played by his officials. He makes every effort till sundown which was the deadline but fails to come up with a way to preserve Daniel from the lions. The officials remind him that his decree cannot be changed. They have backed him into a legal corner and they know it and the king knows it. Darius has no choice. He orders Daniel thrown into the lions' den. Presumably the lions' handlers kept the lions hungry for just such an opportunity. The idea was the lions would devour anyone who was thrown into their den and the prisoner's death would be both terrible and painful. This would serve as a dramatic example of what happens to someone who disobeys the king's edicts and the laws of the Medes and Persians. Darius tells Daniel he hopes the God whom Daniel serves is able to protect him and rescue him. I think at that moment Darius' has little hope that he will ever see Daniel alive again. The gods simply don't rescue people from the lions' den.

Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, the pagans do not believe God is able to do anything to deliver the Jews. Daniel is the one person in the entire account who knows who God is and what he can do! He is an example to the Jews in exile to keep faith with God and trust him even in the worst of circumstances! Daniel trusts God to save him.

6:17-23 - Daniel is thrown into the lions' den and a great stone is placed over the mouth of the den to seal it. Since *verse 23* says Daniel had to be lifted out of the den it is reasonable to assume that the den was cave-like with an opening at the top. When the stone was placed over it to seal it there was no way of escape. Daniel was trapped. On the outside of the den the king puts his seal on the stone in probably clay that sealed the den along with those of his nobles who were with him who opposed Daniel. This signified that Daniel's sentence was by royal decree and was not to be changed. No Persian would violate that seal even if they wanted to save Daniel. Ironically the king wants to save him but can't. He goes back to his palace and spends a sleepless night. The NASB says he fasted during the night but the NIV says he didn't eat. I think the NIV captures Darius' mood the best. He wasn't fasting and praying to his gods for Daniel. He was so worried he couldn't eat. The text adds no entertainment was brought to him. That reinforces Darius' worry. He wasn't in the mood!

At first light the king hurries to the lions' den to see if Daniel is still alive. He calls to Daniel with an anguished voice. That suggests the king knows he has put Daniel in the lions' den unjustly and has been manipulated by his nobles who hated Daniel. He asks Daniel if the God whom he serves continually has been able to rescue him. He names the God of Daniel the living God. Darius has heard the stories of how God has rescued Daniel and other Jews. He is hoping the same will happen again. Miraculously Daniel answers from among the lions. He is alive! God had sent his angel to keep Daniel safe because he was found innocent in God's sight. Daniel adds that he has never done anything wrong while serving the king. Darius gives orders to have Daniel lifted out of the den. The text says no wound was found on him. One can picture Darius and others of the king's servants checking out Daniel to make sure he is ok. All the time Daniel is telling them he is all right. Darius can't believe it even though he had hoped for Daniel's deliverance.

The text adds Daniel had been spared because he had trusted in his God. That is the punchline to the story. Daniel trusted God to save him even though the full might of Persia was

against him. His story and courage in the face of opposition was a call for the Jews to be faithful to God no matter what the circumstances or opposition. The same is true for us today. We need to be faithful to God no matter what and trust him to deliver us!

6:24 - The king commands that those who had falsely accused Daniel be brought to the king and then thrown to the lions, along with their wives and children. Before they even reach the floor the lions overpower them and crush all their bones killing them. This is a brutal retaliation. Even though Daniel is vindicated before God and before Darius, yet surely the children of the nobles were not guilty of any crime. They were related to the nobles and so Darius took vengeance upon their entire families. Daniel simply reports this and does not comment on the injustice of it. This was Darius' way of telling his nobles never trap me in your schemes again or this is what will happen to you. Notice there is no decree, no talk of the law of the Medes and Persians. There is only the whim of an absolute ruler who is angry that he has been manipulated. What Daniel thought of all of this we do not know. We do know he was a righteous man and he was probably conflicted. He had been vindicated before his enemies and God had delivered him. Yet innocents had suffered and he was still at the mercy of the despot he served.

One wonders if the Jews who read the story were disturbed by the execution of the nobles' children or were they simply celebrating Daniel's deliverance and vindication before his enemies? As a Christ-follower we need to remember the apostolic teaching to not seek vengeance and revenge but leave that to God. Like Daniel we live in a godless world and our task is to be faithful to Christ. We need to remember that even being faithful there will be circumstances that we cannot control that cause us grief and pain because not everyone follows Jesus' lordship or lives by his morals. We have no easy task living as followers of the Lord Jesus in a fallen sinful world. As Augustine noted the values of the Kingdom of God often conflict with the values of the kingdoms of this world. We need to continually trust God and stay faithful to him!

6:25-28 - The account of Daniel in the lions' den closes with a letter from Darius to all the people of his kingdom. It is an extraordinary letter because it gives praise to the God of the Hebrews from a pagan Persian king. However, one must remember that Persian policy was to respect the gods of other peoples within their empire and within that context the letter makes sense. Also, Darius does not claim that God is the only God. He declares that all peoples everywhere give reverence to the God of Daniel because he has rescued Daniel from the lions' den.

Darius declares that God is the living God who is eternal. His kingdom will not be destroyed and his dominion will never end. He rescues and saves and performs signs and wonders in heaven and earth. He does not declare what the wonders were in the heavens but the king does declare God has saved Daniel from the lions.

The language is similar to other psalms of praise from post-exilic times like those found in *Nehemiah*, *Ezra* and *Chronicles*. God is transcendent and all powerful. Israel was learning more and more that Yahweh was not just their national God but the only God. As they were scattered in exile to Mesopotamia and elsewhere they came in contact with many pagan peoples who were more powerful than the Jews. However, as they experienced incidents like Daniel and what happened in the *Book of Esther* they began to understand that God was with them everywhere not just in the Promiseland or Jerusalem. Their understanding of God was growing. They also were learning that when they stayed faithful to God they fulfilled their calling by God to be priests to the nations. God had called them to live in such a way that they pointed the pagan

nations of the world to God. Darius' letter is an example of what happens when the Jews are faithful to God and trust him no matter what. A pagan king gives praise and recognition to God!

Verse 28 is a transition verse. It marks the end of the more historical narrative section of *Daniel* where the focus is on incidents in Daniel's life and how he responded to them and the transition to the portion that deals with Daniel's visions of the nations, the end times and the coming Kingdom of God. It also gives us an intriguing alternative to the identity of Darius the Mede. The Hebrew literally reads: "*during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*" If that is the correct translation then Darius must be either Darius the Mede, an unknown satrap of the Persian Province of Babylon who ruled during Cyrus' administration, or King Darius I, who ruled Persia after Cyrus and Cambyses from 522 - 486. Daniel would have been well over 100 years old by the time Darius took the throne. An alternative reading of the Hebrew text is given in the NIV which reads: "*the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus.*" If that is correct, then Daniel has identified Darius the Mede as Cyrus the Great and for an unknown reason given him another name or perhaps a code name. If Darius is Cyrus it would solve many historical problems in *Daniel*. However, the alternative reading is by no means certain and is not a literal translation of the Hebrew. A third possibility is that the Darius the Mede of *chapter 5* was the satrap of Babylon and King Darius in *chapter 6* is Darius I and that Daniel is talking about two different people. That is unlikely but possible. We are still left with confusion concerning the precise identity of Darius the Mede. It is not impossible that Darius the Mede is Darius I. Nor is it impossible that Daniel could have lived into his 100's. The stories in *Daniel chapters 1-6* are not always in chronological order nor are the visions in *chapters 7-12*. Perhaps we must simply accept the difficulties and not let it interfere with trying to discern the meaning of Daniel's prophecy.

Chapter 7:

7:1-8 - *Verse 1* marks the beginning of Daniel's dreams and visions and the apocalyptic section of *Daniel*. The language in this verse is written from a third person perspective, reporting on what Daniel saw and said. This is clearly the mark of a later editor of Daniel's prophecy, most likely an unknown Jewish editor in the Persian period. Liberal scholarship wants to place the editor and even the writing of the book all the way into the later Greek period after the Maccabean Revolt. The problem is the Septuagint contains the *Book of Daniel* and was translated around 200BC, earlier than Judas Maccabaeus who cleansed the temple in 163BC. It makes the most sense that an unknown Jew in the Persian era gathered the stories of Daniel's exploits and visions and edited them into the final form we have today. It should also be noted that *chapter 7* is still written in Aramaic. The Hebrew text of *Daniel* does not begin again until *8:1*.

Verse 1 gives the time of this first vision as the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon. This is probably the first year of his co-regency with his father Nabonidus when Belshazzar governed the empire in Babylon and Nabonidus was campaigning and then in exile in Arabia. That would have been 556, thirty years after the fall of Jerusalem. The editor reports that Daniel had a dream and visions during the night and he wrote down the substance of his dream. The rest of the chapter deals with the dream and its interpretation and is one of the central prophetic passages in *Daniel*. It introduces us to the figure of the Son of Man, the last great prophetic-messianic figure in the Old Testament and one that Jesus would use as a title for himself.

Daniel writes down his dream or vision. He said he saw the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea and four great beasts came up out of the sea in front of him. The first

was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. Daniel saw that its wings were torn off and then it was lifted from the ground to stand on two feet like a man and the heart of a man was given to it. The second beast was like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, meaning one side was higher than the other and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told by a voice in his vision to get up and eat your fill of flesh. The third beast was like a leopard and it had four wings like a bird's wings on its back. It also had four heads and was given authority to rule. Then Daniel looked and there in front of him was a fourth beast that was terrifying to see and very powerful. It had large iron teeth and crushed and devoured its victims and ground underfoot whatever was left. It was different than all the other beasts and it had ten horns. Daniel does not say how it was different only that it was. The obvious difference is he does not tell us that the fourth beast looked like any particular animal only that it had iron feet and ten horns. While Daniel is pondering the horns there was a little horn that appeared before him which came up from among the ten horns. Three of the first horns were uprooted before it. The little horn had the eyes and mouth of a man and spoke boastfully. The NLT reads it was boasting arrogantly.

One thing we need to remember when we begin to try and figure out Daniel's visions is that Daniel has a Jerusalem-Holy Land centric viewpoint throughout his prophecy. The center of the world is Jerusalem not Babylon or Persia. The events of his visions at some point all have to do with what happens to Jerusalem and the Jews. Daniel is not interested in the entire world and its history. He is interested in God's people and their land.

Daniel is given the interpretation of the dream in 7:15-27. However, there are things to note before we look at those verses. The churning sea is an image that reoccurs in *Revelation 13* in describing the Antichrist. The sea represented the forces of chaos in the ancient Hebrew mind. It was also a symbol for the nations. The four beasts come from this chaos. They are not from God even though God is Lord of history. It is unclear how Daniel's vision here in *chapter 7* relates to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in *Daniel 2* of the great image. There were four or five nations represented in the king's dream, depending on how one interprets the feet of iron and clay. Daniel sees four beasts, the lion with wings, the lopsided bear, the four-headed leopard with wings and the fourth beast with iron teeth. The fourth beast is curious because Daniel does not say it looks like any animal. The only characteristics of its appearance he gives are it had iron teeth, was frightening and very powerful and had ten horns. He does not say it had ten heads just ten horns.

Most scholars interpret the beasts as the lion is Babylon, the bear is Persia, the leopard is Greece and the ten-horned beast is Rome. Some say the ten-horned beast is Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid king who persecuted the Jews. Some argue that the little horn is Antiochus. One current prophecy commentator claims that all the beasts have current interpretations. He says the lion with eagle's wings that were torn off is Great Britain and America. The bear is Russia. The leopard is Germany and the ten horned beast is a reprisal of the Holy Roman Empire that will become the empire of the Antichrist or beast of *Revelation 13*. That interpretation is ingenious on one level, as one can match the symbols. On another level it is ludicrous and violates so many principles of sound exegesis, not the least of which is that the dream would have no meaning whatsoever for Daniel or the people of his time! That is not how apocalyptic writings work! His argument is we are in the last days and he then proceeds to prove it by showing how Daniel's vision is now unlocked because we have the key to match the four beasts to four current or soon to be revealed nations. It is a convenient, circular argument! In interpreting apocalyptic visions one must do the best one can to take the text as it stands and try and figure out what the symbols meant in Daniel's time and then apply them to ours. Just because

something is written in the apocalyptic style does not mean we get to suspend all the principles of sound exegesis in order to fit some scenario of the last days that we have invented!

See below in 7:15-18 for a more specific interpretation of the four beasts.

7:9-10 - Daniel looks and sees a different setting that appears to be in heaven. Thrones are set in place and the Ancient of Days or God took his seat. God is ready to sit in judgment on the nations, including the four beasts of Daniel's dream. This is Daniel's picture of the Lord of History!

His clothing is white as snow as is his hair. Daniel does not describe his face. Could he see it? It is unclear. John in *Revelation 1* describes Jesus' hair as white as snow and bright like fire, which is John's way of affirming that Jesus is God! God's throne is like fire and it has wheels that are also on fire. The fiery throne with wheels is similar to Ezekiel's vision of God's throne in *Ezekiel 1 & 10*. A river of fire is flowing from the throne. The fire may represent God's holiness similar to the burning bush in *Exodus 3* or the fire in *Exodus 19* when God appeared on Mt. Sinai to give Israel his covenant. Daniel sees a great multitude standing before God's throne, ten thousand times ten thousand which is literally one hundred million. I don't think Daniel is being literal with the number. He is expressing the fact that there are so many angels before God's throne that they are a number too great to count. Those standing before the throne are almost certainly angels. The other possibility is that they are God's saints, his people who are alive and serving him in heaven. I think the more probable interpretation is that they are angels. The court is seated, meaning God and his most powerful and holy angels who will pass judgment on the nations. Other parts of the Old Testament speak of God and his heavenly court. *Genesis 1* hints at it. Some of the *Psalms* also speak of it. The books are opened. Daniel does not tell us the contents of the books. John in *Revelation 20* in his vision of the last judgment says there are two books that are opened at that time. The first is the book of deeds that God uses to judge the human race by what they have done in this life. The second is given a name, *The Book of Life*, which contains the names of God's saints; all those who have put their faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Daniel is told that the saints will inherit the Kingdom of God in 7:17 it is reasonable to assume that Daniel's books are the same two John describes in *Revelation 20*.

When one is dealing with apocalyptic visions one needs to let Scripture interpret Scripture which is sound exegesis. We need to also understand that visions are fluid. They are not always consistent. Think of dreams. Dreams are rarely consistent in their details even within themselves. They are fluid. It should not surprise us that visions God gives to his prophets in the night are fluid and sometimes inconsistent in their details as well.

7:11-14 - Daniel sees that at the same time the books are opened in heaven and God has sat down on his throne to judge the nations the little horn has continued to boast in its pride. Daniel watches as the fourth beast with the ten horns and the boastful little horn is slain. Its body is thrown into the blazing fire which was probably the river of fire coming from the throne of God, the Ancient of Days. This is Daniel's name for Yahweh, the eternal one, just as John in *Revelation 1* and other places calls Yahweh the one who was, and is and is to come. In *Revelation 19* when the Lord Jesus returns to the earth with his saints, the beast and false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire as punishment. The boastful horn of the fourth beast thinks it is great and powerful when it is not. That is the irony of any human ruler who becomes arrogant in their power. God alone is Lord of History and decides who rules and when. The beast in *Revelation* and the little horn in *Daniel* thought they were in control when all along God was.

They thought they could do whatever they wanted and no one could stop them but had not realized they are accountable to the Creator of the universe, the Lord God Almighty! This prophecy of the boastful horn may be referring to Antiochus Epiphanes who tried to wipe out the Jews and destroy their worship of God in the 2nd century BC. Many prophecy writers contend this is a prophecy of the antichrist which it could be and Antiochus is a type of the antichrist. Certainly when he fell to Rome the Kingdom of God was not fully established and even now awaits the return of the Lord Jesus in the clouds of heaven. See *Acts 1*. God is reminding the Jews and us through Daniel's visions that no power is greater than God and even if circumstances become intolerable God is still in charge and has not forgotten his people. They need to stay faithful to him. That was a lesson the Jews living in the Persian and Greek eras needed to remember. God was preserving his people in the coming centuries so that they would be in the land and he could bring the Messiah into history, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man.

Daniel comments in *verse 12* that the other three beasts had been stripped of their authority but were allowed to live for a period of time. He does not say what that period is nor does he explain how their authority was stripped or what that means. The most logical meaning would be they had their time of empire and then their power and authority waned and another nation took the place of supremacy and domination. However, the previous power or beast still existed they simply were not in control any longer. This is difficult if one holds to the traditional understanding of the four beasts: the lion is Babylon, the bear is Persia, the leopard is Greece and the iron toothed beast is Rome or the Seleucid Empire and the boastful horn is Antiochus. He becomes a type of the antichrist of *Revelation 13*. The interpretation is difficult because Babylon became a province of Persia after Cyrus conquered it. Persia fell to Alexander and became part of his empire. The Seleucids constantly fought the Ptolomies and then succumbed to Rome and were absorbed into the Roman Empire. Once each empire fell they were no longer even a nation and were simply absorbed into the next empire that took its place. The people remained as a people but the empire disappeared. Perhaps one cannot press the details of Daniel's vision too far but one must be careful in doing that because then one is vulnerable to fanciful interpretations like the one prophecy preacher who says the lion is Great Britain and the eagle's wings torn off of it are the United States. The bottom line is that none of these great empires are truly in charge of history and none of them will ultimately reign.

Verse 13 introduces the one who will reign over human history; the Son of Man. Daniel sees one like a Son of Man in his vision, meaning this person looks like a man. But he comes with the clouds of heaven. His origin is heaven and not the earth. He is led into the presence of God, the Ancient of Days and is given authority, glory and sovereignty over all the nations by God. All peoples of every language worship him and his dominion is an everlasting one that will never pass away. His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. One must remember that God's first fundamental commandment to Israel was to worship no one else but God alone. Here the Son of Man is worshipped by all peoples, including Israel. He is given a kingdom and authority by God over the entire world. God does not give his glory or worship to anyone else. Therefore the Son of Man must be God in human form. John, Paul, Peter and the gospel writers would use this prophecy to describe the incarnation of God in human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus himself would use the title Son of Man to describe himself. At times he used it like God uses it in *Ezekiel*, simply as a name for a human being, a man. At other times it is clear he is using it like *Daniel* uses it here, as the ultimate Messianic title, claiming to be God himself. He used it in this way in *Mark 14* before the Sanhedrin when he claimed to be the Son of Man who could come with the clouds of heaven.

Jesus is the Son of Man who brings the Kingdom of God, the rule of God, and his Kingdom is eternal and will have no end! Jesus combined in himself the great prophetic streams of the Old Testament: the king from David's line, the Messiah; the Suffering Servant of *Isaiah* who would die for the sins of the people; the prophet like Moses from *Deuteronomy*, the new lawgiver; and the Son of Man from *Daniel 7*, the heavenly figure who comes from God and is worshipped as God. He is God become man, the incarnate Son. *Daniel* provides us with the last piece of the prophetic puzzle so that the New Testament picture of Jesus can be completed and the gospel can be preached.

Daniel 7 also expresses a central theme in apocalyptic writings. The Son of Man comes from heaven and establishes his Kingdom on the earth. He is not from the earth. History is dominated by powerful empires that God's saints cannot overcome. If history is to be redeemed no human effort can save it. Only a direct ultimate act of God can establish the Kingdom of God. In some respects this is an admission of failure on Israel's part. They were to be God's kingdom of priests and a holy nation so that the world would come to Yahweh and worship him. In apocalyptic writings the only way that happens is by a direct and final intervention in human history by God. God comes and ends human history as we know it to set up his Kingdom that will have no end. Then and only then will the nations worship God alone and turn from their pagan wicked ways. In the earlier prophets the Messiah would come and redeem Israel, set up his earthly kingdom and the Gentiles would come to God. History could be redeemed from within if God's people would repent. Now history cannot be redeemed no matter what God's people do. Only God can save it. God's people must be faithful and wait for God to intervene. History is moving towards the climactic coming of the Kingdom of God which will once and for all usher in God's rule and save his saints. That is the difference between *Daniel's* viewpoint and the other prophets of the Old Testament.

7:15-18 - Daniel is disturbed by the vision so he approaches "*one of those standing there.*" Daniel does not explain who this is or where he comes from or where he was when Daniel questions him. One needs to remember, this is his report of a vision. Things appear and disappear in dreams and are often unconnected. Such is the case here. The person, probably an angel is presumably one of the myriads around God's throne that he saw. Daniel asks for an explanation and the angel gives it to him.

The four beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. Already we can see how Daniel's vision is fluid and not always consistent in its details. He is told the four beasts will rise from the earth but in 7:3 the four beasts come up out of the sea. Why is that significant? Prophecy writers want to take *Daniel* literally and use the details and timing of his images to construct a scenario of the end times. But visions by their nature are not literal or consistent; instead they are highly symbolic and fluid. That is apparent from the contrast between *verse 3* and *verse 17*. Whether the four beasts emerge from the sea or the earth seems like a minor issue and detail but one cannot take both things literally. So how is one to interpret *Daniel*? Why is this particular detail unimportant but other details are critical and must be taken literally as if *Daniel* is giving a precise outline of what is to come? For instance, the angel tells Daniel that the four beasts "*will rise*" from the earth. At face value that indicates that these four kingdoms are all ones who are to come; they are all kingdoms that will occur in the future. The implication being that none of them have come to power as yet. Why is the timing of the beasts in Daniel's vision literal and critical to understand but the inconsistency about whether they come from the sea or the earth is irrelevant? How does one tell what is important and vital to understand and what are

simply details that change due to the fluid nature of visions and dreams? We all want to take the Bible at face value and interpret a passage in its context, beginning with what it meant to its original audience and then apply it to our lives today. That process is more difficult with apocalyptic dreams and visions. It seems to me that many prophecy writers forget the difficulties and declare certainty about what a passage means and how to apply it when they need to be cautious instead!

With that in mind, what does the angel's interpretation of the four beasts mean? The four beasts represent four kingdoms that "*will rise.*" One of the things that can help us to interpret this particular vision is to link the other visions of *Daniel* with this one to see if there are any similarities. In *Daniel 2* Daniel has already told Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of the dream of the great statue. In that dream there were four parts to the statue that represented four kingdoms. The gold was Babylon, the silver was Persia, the bronze was probably Greece and the iron and iron and clay was probably Rome. Most scholars agree on these identities for the four parts of Nebuchadnezzar's statue. In *Daniel 8* Daniel dreams of a ram and a goat. The ram is Persia or Medo-Persia and the goat is Greece. The ram has two horns one larger than the other, the larger of which grew up later than the smaller horn. This describes the ascent of the Medo-Persian Empire. The Kingdom of the Medes was stronger in the beginning and then the Persians absorbed it and became the dominant power in the empire. The goat representing Greece has a large horn that is broken off and replaced by four horns, which represent the four generals that succeeded Alexander the Great. If one uses the other two visions in *Daniel* that speak of four successive empires as a baseline one can apply them to begin to understand Daniel's vision here in *chapter 7*. One must also remember that *Daniel* is always concerned about the Jews and the Holy Land first before anywhere else. Thus his visions will be centered on the Holy Land before he tries to describe events across the Mediterranean world.

The first beast was a lion with eagle's wings that were plucked off. The lion was lifted up like a man and set on two feet and given the heart of a man. The winged lion was a common image used in both Assyria and Babylon. One possible interpretation is that the winged lion represents the Mesopotamian empires of Assyria and Babylon. The wings that were plucked off represent Babylon's conquest of Assyria and Assyria's fall. The lion standing on its feet like a man and the heart of a man given to the beast could represent Nebuchadnezzar. He was the central figure in the Babylonian Empire and after he died the empire began to lose power and influence. The heart of a man could represent Nebuchadnezzar's recognition of God's power and majesty and his humbling before God that Daniel describes in *chapter 4*. This assumes that Daniel's statement that these kingdoms "*will rise*" from the earth is not to be taken literally. It should be noted that Babylon still existed during the first year of Belshazzar's regency when Daniel was given this vision.

The second beast is the bear that was raised up on one of its sides and had three ribs in its mouth and was told to rise up and eat its fill of flesh. Most scholars view the bear as Persia. Daniel emphasized Media and Persia and Persia's superiority to Media in the dream of the ram in *Daniel 8*. That is probably the meaning of the one side of the bear being raised up higher than the other. As for the three ribs in its mouth my best guess is that Persia dominated the Middle East for three centuries. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to the Holy Land in 538. Alexander conquered Persia and Judea in 333. That is approximately three centuries. Persia ruled the region during those centuries and was able to do as it pleased with no one to oppose them.

The third beast is the leopard that had four wings and four heads and it was given authority to rule. The goat of *Daniel 8* has four horns which grow up after the large horn is

broken off. A leopard is quick and powerful similar to how Alexander seized all of Persia in a few short years. He was succeeded by his four generals who split his empire into four parts. It makes historical sense to see the leopard as Greece and it is consistent with Daniel's other visions. Daniel notes this beast was given authority to rule. Alexander may have been a military genius and conquered the whole of Persia in what seemed an almost impossible amount of time but behind his conquests stands the Lord of History and no kingdom in this world comes to power without God allowing them to rule. Even the most powerful of rulers are still accountable to God! The Jews needed to remember that lesson.

The identity of the iron-toothed beast is problematic. Daniel notes that this beast is different than the other three. There is no animal that this beast resembles. The only animal like features it has are ten horns and teeth that are large and made of iron. Iron was the hardest metal known in the ancient world and would defeat all other weapons. Daniel says this beast with its iron teeth crushes and devours its victims and then tramples underfoot what is left. It is powerful and very frightening. Daniel's description here does not imply that this beast will conquer the whole world. However, in the interpretation of Daniel's vision given to him by the angel in 7:23 the angel states this kingdom will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. From the description here in 7:7-8 and the interpretation in 7:23-25 there are many details that fit Antiochus Epiphanes the Seleucid ruler who tried to wipe out the Jews which led to the Maccabean Revolt. However, when Antiochus persecuted the Jews he had just been subdued by Rome and had to pay a massive tribute to the Romans. He stripped the temple of its gold to pay off what he owed and used it as an opportunity to punish the Jews and get rid of them because they continually resisted adopting Greek ways. Antiochus was the king of the Seleucid Empire at the time but Seleucia was weak and in no way had conquered the whole earth. They did however rule Judea.

How should one identify *Daniel's* fourth beast? Many scholars say this is a picture of Rome itself using Nebuchadnezzar's image in *Daniel 2* as a reference. Some say this is a picture of the beast of *Revelation 13*, the antichrist of the last days. Both interpretations have some merit. It is clear from 7:9-10 and the angel's interpretation to Daniel in 7:26-27 that the vision has something to do with the end of history and the final triumph of the Kingdom of God. It seems to me that one can combine all three interpretations. Visions are fluid enough that more than one interpretation can be used to explain a part of the vision. If one takes a Holy-Land centric view then Antiochus Epiphanes was a ruler who crushed and devoured his victims and brought the most terrible persecution to the Jews when the temple was defiled with a pagan altar and he forbade the teaching of the Torah and circumcision. He sought to wipe out the Jewish religion and completely Hellenize the Jews. Yet he did not rule the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world; Rome did. Rome fits the description of the kingdom that subdued the whole earth. But one must relate the final part of Daniel's vision and its description to the end of history and the final establishment of the Kingdom of God and the return of the Lord Jesus to the earth. Perhaps Daniel's vision is flexible enough to allow for all three interpretations.

The ten horns and the little horn that comes up among them is probably a description of Antiochus Epiphanes and his rise to power. Many prophecy writers say that the antichrist will be part of a revived Roman Empire in the last days that will have ten kings. The antichrist will depose three of those other rulers and seize power. If one uses the interpretation that the ten horns and the little horn are Antiochus Epiphanes and that Daniel is describing the time of Greek persecution of the Jews before the Maccabean Revolt some of the details fit. However, many do not. Antiochus was not the tenth in succession of the Seleucid kings, he was the eighth. The

larger problem is that the Seleucid Empire did not have just ten kings. It had thirty-one from its founding until the Roman general Pompeii the Great finally absorbed the kingdom into the Roman Empire in 63 B.C. Antiochus did depose at least two and one could argue three others of the royal family in order to seize the Seleucid throne. Again, some of the details fit Antiochus and his time and some do not. Is Daniel being literal here?

Must the ten horns be ten literal, historical kings or is ten a symbolic number? Often in Hebrew thought ten is a good round number that is simply descriptive of many rather than a literal ten as in Western arithmetic. Ten however is not remotely thirty-one which is the literal number of the Seleucid kings. Yet the details like the four heads and wings of the leopard fit the four generals of Alexander's empire. That seems to be a literal description. The problem is no interpretation fits all the details of the vision. That is the difficulty with apocalyptic visions. The first three beasts dovetail with empires in Daniel's day and can be reasonably interpreted as such. The fourth beast has some similarities with the Greek Seleucid Empire but it does not completely fit. One detail of the vision does fit Antiochus well. He started to mint coins that named him Antiochus Epiphanes, meaning God manifest. He wanted to be identified as the presence of Zeus on earth. He was the god made manifest. This fits the boasting of the little horn and the reason for his judgment and destruction by God. Antiochus becomes a type of the antichrist who will proclaim himself God and demand worship from the people of the world. God will judge him and triumph in the end.

In *verse 18* Daniel is told the most important thing about his vision. God's people, the saints of the Most High, will receive "*THE*" Kingdom and possess it forever and ever. The angel is speaking of the Kingdom of God and God's reign over his world. God's people, in Daniel's case the remnant of Israel, will reign with him when he rules over all. The Kingdom of God is in direct contrast to the kingdoms of this world. They come and go and pass from history. God's Kingdom will never pass away. When God finally rules all evil will be conquered and God's people will live in peace free from their enemies and those who seek to persecute them and rule over them. Daniel is not told when God's Kingdom will come only that it will. Jesus made it clear that God's Kingdom is not about territory and conquest. It is about God's rule in people's hearts. He came to usher in that Kingdom and invite any who would follow him as Lord to join it. Someday he will come like the heavenly Son of Man that Daniel saw and bring his Kingdom in all its fullness. When he does all the forces of this world that oppose God will be defeated and his saints, the church, will be vindicated. The church will be made up of Jews and Gentiles that serve the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man!

7:19-22 - Daniel says he wanted to know about the true meaning of the fourth beast that was different than the other three. Then he re-describes it. It was terrifying with its iron teeth and bronze claws. It crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot what was left. The image he gives here is of a power that none can resist. It was too powerful and if one got in its way it would crush and destroy anyone who opposed it. It is important to remember that *Daniel* has a Holy-Land centric view and wants to focus on God's people, the Jews. He is not as interested in international politics except as it relates to what is happening to the Jewish people and their land. It is possible that his description of the fourth beast as one that was too powerful to resist has more to do with the inability of the Jews to resist this power than it was the most powerful empire ever seen. Persia ruled over Judea when Daniel saw his vision, yet for most of that time the Jews were allowed to worship God as they saw fit and Jerusalem was protected as a temple city. Alexander, when he came through Judea, continued the same policy. It was

Antiochus Epiphanes that totally changed the policy of tolerance and tried to force the Jews to Hellenize. Those that did not he had executed. That led to the Maccabean Revolt. Under the Romans the Jews were free to worship as they chose and Jerusalem returned to the status of a temple city. That continued until the Jewish Revolt in 66 AD. Basically, the powers that controlled the Middle East from the end of the Old Testament to the Jewish Revolt against Rome let the Jews worship and follow God as they chose as long as they obeyed the governing authorities, which most did until the Zealot Revolt against the Romans. The only exception during that time was the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes in the 160's BC. From an historical perspective the only candidates that make sense are Antiochus, the Romans during the Jewish Revolt, and the eschatological government of the antichrist prior to the return of the Lord Jesus. If the fulfillment of *Daniel 7* is eschatological and not historical then none of the empires of history fit. One can only say they are types of the antichrist that is to come but they do not fulfill the vision.

Daniel is also curious about the ten horns on the head of the beast and the other horn that comes up before whom three fell. This horn he describes as more imposing than the others that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. Eyes in the prophets often symbolize wisdom and intelligence. In *Ezekiel* the cherubim around God's throne have eyes all around symbolizing their knowledge of God's ways and their understanding of events on the earth. In *Revelation 5* Jesus the Lamb has seven eyes which stand for the seven-fold Spirit of God and his all-knowing nature. The "*other horn*" spoke boastfully, meaning in its pride it spoke of its own power and glory, making itself out to be God.

Daniel sees in his vision that the "*other horn*" makes war on God's people, his saints or holy ones. This is a reference to the Jews. Not only does the horn make war on the Jews he defeats them. In fact the implication is that unless God intervened the Jews would be wiped out. But in *verse 22* Daniel says the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of his people and the time came when they possessed the Kingdom. God will intervene and though the persecution will be terrible and the Jews will be threatened, they are not to give up hope. God himself will come and put a stop to the "*other horn's*" war against his people.

This is classic apocalyptic imagery. In *Isaiah 44* he prophesies that God will use Cyrus the Great to free his people from exile and rebuild Jerusalem. God will use a ruler from within history to bring his people back to their land. Here in *Daniel 7* God himself will intervene from outside history to save his people and when that occurs his people will possess the kingdom. I do not believe *Daniel* is referring to the Hasmonean kingdom that followed the Maccabean Revolt against the Greeks. That kingdom, which began with great expectations for the Jews, quickly degenerated into corruption and petty squabbling that led to the Romans putting an end to it and absorbing Judea into their empire. The Kingdom that *Daniel* speaks of here is the Kingdom of God. God will pronounce his judgment in favor of his people and they will possess the Kingdom. *Daniel's* readers would look forward to that time when God would intervene and vindicate them. They thought God would pronounce judgment upon the nations that opposed the Jews and God. They did not understand or see that God was going to pronounce judgment upon a sinful human race by placing his entire wrath upon his Son, the Son of Man, upon the cross. Only then would God give the Kingdom to those of his saints who followed the Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. The Kingdom of God would not be the territory of Judea or the Land of Promise. It would reign in people's hearts that followed and served the Messiah. Daniel's vision hints at this reality but the Jews did not understand it. Only a handful did who followed Jesus and who received the Holy Spirit. The Jews were looking for the Kingdom of God but even as they read

Daniel and believed his vision, they misunderstood it. When it finally came the majority rejected it because they could not understand it. They did not see two comings of the Messiah and Son of Man; one to deal with sin and invite people into his Kingdom and the second to deal with the powers of this world once and for all and bring the reign of God forever.

7:23-25 - The angel gives Daniel an explanation of the fourth beast which had ten horns and the little horn that grew up out of the ten horns. The basis of the interpretation is from 7:7-8 and Daniel's description of the fourth beast from his dream. The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth, in other words it will emerge out of the other nations and kingdoms of the world. This kingdom will be different from other kingdoms in that it will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it.

This is a very difficult verse to interpret and relate to the other three kingdoms and to the history of the Middle East and Judea in Daniel's day. Many scholars say Daniel is describing the Seleucid Empire and the little horn that boasts and attacks the Jews is Antiochus Epiphanes. Many Dispensational scholars say Daniel is speaking of the eschatological kingdom of the antichrist here and he is speaking about the Great Tribulation period right before the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. The difficulty with bringing Daniel's vision in synch with Middle Eastern history is the phrase "*will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it.*" From a military-political standpoint it is very difficult to see the Seleucid Empire as devouring the whole earth. It had influence and power in the eastern Mediterranean and the Mesopotamian Valley. However, during the time the Seleucids are exercising power in the east Carthage and Rome are fighting the Punic Wars in the west for supremacy of the Western Mediterranean. Furthermore, also during this time the Seleucids were constantly in conflict with the Greek Ptolemies in Egypt for supremacy in the east. From an historical point of view Daniel's vision cannot be literally true because the Greek Seleucids did not devour the whole earth. That leaves the eschatological interpretation as the only reasonable one. However there are enough similarities with the Seleucids, Antiochus Epiphanes and the crisis that led to the Maccabean Revolt that it seems unlikely that Daniel is ignoring it in his vision of the fourth beast. Plus the previous three beasts have logical interpretations which coincide to historical references to the empires in Daniel's day. It seems likely that the fourth beast somehow also refers at least in part to a kingdom in Daniel's day.

There is another possibility to explain the idea that the fourth beast devours the whole earth. One must remember *Daniel* has a Holy Land centric viewpoint. The fourth beast may indeed represent the Seleucid Empire. It is the personification of Greek civilization and culture. The Seleucids carried on Alexander's policy of Hellenization all across their territory and even when they were not the strongest militarily the process of Hellenization was inexorable throughout the Middle Eastern world. It was the threat of forced Hellenization from Antiochus Epiphanes that finally led to the Maccabean Revolt and allowed the Jews to gain their freedom from the Greeks and found the independent Jewish Hasmonean state that lasted a century. If one interprets the process of Hellenization as the way the fourth beast devoured the whole world the Seleucid Empire could be Daniel's fourth beast.

That however, leads to another problem. Daniel says the ten horns are ten kings from this fourth kingdom and after the ten kings another king will arise. Many scholars interpret this to describe the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes who persecuted the Jews. The difficulty is how to reconcile Daniel's statement the ten horns are ten kings with the historical record and still say that the boastful horn is Antiochus. Antiochus IV who became known as Antiochus Epiphanes

was the eighth king in the Seleucid succession. There were not ten kings before Antiochus but seven. There are only three possibilities. First, Daniel's ten horns and ten kings are not to be taken literally meaning the number is simply symbolic and not a literal ten, or second Antiochus must be eliminated as a possibility. The third possibility is that the true meaning of the little horn is an eschatological one probably referring to the antichrist but Antiochus Epiphanes is a type of the antichrist and so Daniel's vision fits some of his reign but not all of it. That seems to me to be the most likely interpretation especially given 7:26-27 and the triumph of the Kingdom of God and his saints.

Daniel says after ten kings of the fourth kingdom another will arise. He will subdue three kings. I take that to mean he will subdue or kill three rivals for the throne in order to seize power. Antiochus' brother succeeded their father on the Seleucid throne but he was assassinated by a usurper named Heliodorus. Antiochus in turn assassinated Heliodorus and seized the throne. A few years after he gained the throne he had his nephew killed, the heir of his older brother Seleucus who had ascended the throne and had been assassinated as well. That convoluted history may be what Daniel is speaking of when he says the little horn subdued three other horns to take power.

The most significant detail Daniel tells us is that the "other horn" would speak against the Most High and oppress the saints, the Jewish people living in the Holy Land. He would try to change the set times and laws and this persecution would last for a time, times and half a time. That is a vague timeframe but most scholars agree it stands for three and one half years. These details fit Antiochus' persecution and his forced Hellenization of the Jews. Below is an edited excerpt from my class syllabus for *The Bible* dealing with the events leading up to the Maccabean Revolt and the persecution of Antiochus.

Antiochus, after invading Egypt and defeating the Ptolemy king was ordered to leave Egypt and pay a heavy tribute to Rome in 168 B.C. On his way through Jerusalem he stripped the temple of its gold in order to pay the tribute he owed to Rome. The Jews protested and Antiochus in retaliation forbid the Jews to keep the Sabbath, ordered the destruction of copies of the Torah, suspended the sacrifices in the temple and forbid the Jews to circumcise their children. Antiochus had decided he was going to force the Jews to adapt Greek ways. Many Jews resisted Antiochus nonviolently and died as a result. They were called the Hasidim or "pious ones."

Things came to a head in December of 167. Antiochus set up a pagan altar to the Greek god Zeus on top of the altar of God in the temple. He then sacrificed a pig on that altar to Zeus defiling the temple. This is the "abomination of desolation" that Daniel speaks about in Daniel 9:27 and 11:31. Jesus also references it in Matthew 24:15. Many Jews took up armed resistance against Antiochus and the Greeks. They were led by a priest named Judas Maccabeus, or "the hammer." Judas led the Jews in a guerilla war against the Greeks and in December of 164 B.C., his forces succeeded in recapturing Jerusalem and rededicating the temple. The menorah of the temple was relit and the feast celebrating that event came to be known as Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights. Jesus spoke in the temple during Hanukkah in John 10:22-24. The Jews still celebrate Hanukkah today in December of each year.

The duration of Antiochus' forced Hellenization of the Jews was three and a half years. I do not believe that timeframe is coincidental. If Daniel's vision is ultimately about the rise of the antichrist right before the return of the Lord Jesus then Antiochus and his persecution of the "saints", meaning God's people, is a type of that great persecution in the last days. God will

allow his people to be persecuted by their enemy just as he did in the days of the Seleucid Empire that almost saw their destruction in the Holy Land.

7:26-28 - The "*other horn*" would persecute and oppress the Jews for three and a half years. But God would intervene and judge this last king of the fourth beast. "*The court will sit*" is the angel's description of 7:9-10 meaning the Ancient of Days taking his seat for judgment. The image is of the elders of a city coming to the city gate and sitting down to render judgment. It is very Middle Eastern. We tend to picture it as a judge mounting the bench and sitting down while the bailiff calls for all to rise. Here *Daniel* pictures God along with his most powerful angels sitting in the place where the elders would sit at the main gate of a city to render judgment. Only the judgment does not take place at a city gate but in heaven itself.

God will take away the power of the little horn and completely destroy it forever. In *Revelation 19* the Lord Jesus Christ defeats the beast, the antichrist, and his army and throws the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire. Their power and rule are completely destroyed and they are eternally judged. *Daniel* says the same thing here. If the "*other horn*" is an eschatological picture of the antichrist then *Daniel* declares he is totally defeated by God himself through a direct intervention of God in history. If this is Antiochus Epiphanes *Daniel* still declares that God will intervene in history and bring his reign of terror over the Jews to an end. He will be destroyed. Antiochus died sometime in 164 BC, probably on a campaign against the Parthians in Mesopotamia. The Seleucid Empire survived another century until Pompeii annexed it and made it the Roman Province of Syria. Following the Maccabean Revolt the Jews gained their independence for the next century under the Hasmonean Kingdom. The Greek persecution of the Jews was halted. It seems best to take Daniel's description of the "*other horn*" and its judgment as a combination of Antiochus Epiphanes and the eschatological enemy of God's people, the beast of *Revelation 13*, the antichrist.

The angel tells Daniel that at the time of the little horn's judgment and destruction all the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms of the world will be handed over to God's people and God will reign in his Kingdom forever. All rulers and peoples will worship him and obey him. The Kingdom of God will be established. This detail is one of the reasons Daniel's prophecy has to be about more than just the defeat of Antiochus. No one reviewing the historical records or the apocryphal books of the Maccabees that detail the story could see the Maccabean Revolt and the establishment of the Hasmonean Kingdom in Judea as the establishment of the Kingdom of God. *Daniel* must be talking about the eschatological victory of God over all his enemies. As John says in *Revelation 11*, "*the kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign forever and ever.*" God will one day bring his total rule and reign over his world. The New Testament tells us that will occur when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth. The Son of Man will come with the clouds in great power and glory and establish his Kingdom.

Verse 28 closes the vision. Daniel comments that he was greatly troubled by it and he kept the matter to himself. God showed Daniel that before God's ultimate victory many kingdoms would rise and fall and his people would have to undergo persecution and oppression once again. Even though God showed him his ultimate victory, I don't think Daniel, living in exile in Babylon under Belshazzar's rule, was comforted. I think he realized there was a long time to come before God would bring his Kingdom and deliver the Jews. His people had much yet to suffer.

Chapter 8:

8:1-4 - Two years after Daniel's vision of the four beasts he has another vision. This is during the third year of Belshazzar's reign or regency for his father Nabonidus and would have been 554 BC. This vision also marks the point in the *Book of Daniel* where the Aramaic text stops and *Daniel* reverts back to Hebrew for the rest of the book.

Daniel says he saw himself in the citadel of Susa in Elam by the Ulai Canal. Susa was the capital of Elam the kingdom to the east of Babylon in the plain up against the southern Zagros Mountains of Persia, modern day Iran. The Elamites controlled the trade routes from the Iranian Plateau to the Persian Gulf. The Assyrians had taken Susa and subjugated Elam and Nebuchadnezzar had as well. When Cyrus the Great captured Babylon and took its territory he also annexed Elam. He made Susa one of his three capitals: Persepolis in Iran-Persia, Ecbatana in Media and Susa in Elam. Susa became the winter palace of the Persian kings because it was warm in the winter, unlike Persepolis or Ecbatana which were in higher country and were colder. The city is one of the main settings for the books of *Nehemiah* and *Esther*. The Ulai Canal is probably the Ulai River which was just east of Susa and flowed into the Persian Gulf near the Tigris-Euphrates Delta.

Daniel's reference to Susa is curious. He does not say he was in Susa but saw himself there. At the time of his vision Belshazzar was reigning for his father in Babylon but the empire was weakening. Elam may have already rebelled and separated itself from Babylon or it was about to. The Elamites took advantage of the growing power of Cyrus who already ruled Media, Lydia in Asia Minor, and Persia. Cyrus was threatening Babylon when Daniel had his vision. In October of 539 Cyrus entered Babylon after his troops under General Gobryas had captured the city. That was only 15 years later than Daniel's vision. Babylon's days were numbered and new empires were about to come power in Mesopotamia and Judea. That is the focus of this vision of Daniel.

He looks up and sees a ram with two long or large horns standing beside the canal. One of the horns was longer and it grew up later than the shorter one. Daniel says he watched as the ram charged to the west, north and south and no animal could stand against it and it did as it pleased. The ram became great. In 8:20 Daniel is told the ram is the kings of Media and Persia. It represents the Medo-Persian Empire of the Achamaenids who were descended from Cyrus the Great. The Medes were a people and kingdom to the east of Assyria south of the Caspian Sea in the Zagros Mountains of Iran. Their kingdom included the country of Armenia and they allied themselves with Nabopolassar to destroy Nineveh in 612 BC. Cyrus the Great was king of Persia and in 549 he conquered his grandfather Astyages' kingdom of Media, founding the Persian Empire, taking the title of king of the Medes and king of Elam. In 547 he conquered Lydia in Asia Minor and during the same year overran Assyria. In a few short years Cyrus had taken all the northern territory of Babylon and expanded his empire from the Iranian Plateau to the Aegean Sea. Nabonidus in Babylon was too weak to withstand him. The two horns of the ram are a description of Media which gained influence in Mesopotamia first and later Persia which would overshadow Media in power and influence taking it over and expanding the empire. The Persian Empire would be the largest empire the Jews had ever known up to that time, much larger in territory than either Assyria or Babylon.

In *verse 4* Daniel saw the ram moving west, north and south. This is a curious phrase and difficult to interpret. Here is another place where visions are fluid and we have to be careful about taking every detail too literally. Persia moving west makes sense because they expanded their territory to include all of Syria, Asia Minor, the Holy Land and eventually parts of

Macedonia and Greece. Persia moving north also fits this description since the Medo-Persian kings conquered territory all the way to the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Persia moving south is difficult. It depends on where one is standing when the description of the directions is given. If the vision is to be centered geographically in Susa the Persians didn't move south at all because they would have run into the Persian Gulf. If one stands in Ecbatana, the Median northern capital of Persia, then moving south makes sense. If one stands in Jerusalem moving south works because Persia eventually captured and subjugated Egypt. However west becomes difficult but even that would work because Greece is northwest of Jerusalem. From where does Daniel take his directions? Susa or Jerusalem seems to make the most sense. There is nothing in Daniel's vision to suggest he suddenly shifts perspectives to Ecbatana. Plus he does not mention the Median capital at all. Daniel does not mention Jerusalem either but his visions are always centered on the Holy Land and God's city. The problem is puzzling and has no apparent solution. I lean toward Jerusalem because it makes the most sense of the geography and the later parts of the vision focus on the Holy Land and not on Susa, the Elamite capital.

8:5-8 - As Daniel was contemplating the ram that was Persia he saw a goat with a huge horn between its eyes. It came from the west, flying across the ground without even touching it. He charged the ram in a great rage and struck it. When the goat struck the ram it shattered its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against the goat and it knocked the ram to the ground and trampled on it. There was no one who could stop the goat from destroying the ram. The goat became very great but at the height of its power its great horn was broken off and in its place four prominent horns grew up each pointing to a different direction.

In this remarkable vision Daniel is given a picture of Alexander the Great of Macedon and his whirlwind campaign to conquer the Persian Empire. Liberal scholars skeptical about Daniel's ability to see into the future so accurately dispute Daniel's vision and place the writing of *Daniel* in the Greek period of Israel's history after Antiochus Epiphanes. They claim *Daniel* is merely putting the history everyone knew into the form of apocalyptic visions. He is not a prophet but merely a heroic and convenient pseudonym for a later Jewish writer. The problem is the *Book of Daniel* gives no hint that it is anything other than what it says it is; Daniel's visions and stories of his exploits. Plus if God is God why is it so hard to believe God could give one of his prophets insights into the future for the sake of his people? Other prophets had futuristic visions and insights. Daniel simply writes his down in apocalyptic style which is different from the other prophets. There is an anti-supernatural bias among liberal scholarship that seems to think the universe is a closed system and God is not allowed to intervene in his own creation. Therefore anything remotely miraculous cannot happen. That denies everything the Bible was written to declare!

Daniel is shown a vision of Alexander and his conquests. The details are amazing! Alexander comes upon the historical scene very suddenly in 336 BC. He had united all of Greece under Macedonian rule and now set his sights on liberating the Greeks of Asia Minor. That was accomplished so quickly that Alexander moved ahead with plans to conquer and subjugate the entire Persian Empire. Even more remarkable he did this in only three years! Daniel describes the goat which is Greece almost flying over the land! He took Egypt and all of the coast of Canaan including Judea, then moved into Mesopotamia. He then took the Iranian Plateau and moved east all the way to the Indus River in India. Alexander campaigned in Afghanistan and up into the area around the Caspian Sea. When he died in 323 in Babylon, probably of malaria, he had established the largest empire the world had ever seen. It stretched from Greece to India and

even made the Persian Empire seem small by comparison. Persia had grown weaker by the time Alexander began his military campaigns. Plus Alexander brought with him new military tactics, including the Greek battle formation called the phalanx and a more strategic use of cavalry. Alexander is viewed as one of the greatest military strategists in history. He was often outnumbered but the larger Persian forces could not overcome his superior tactics. Daniel expresses this by saying the goat in his vision charged the ram, Persia, and smashed it. No other animal could stand against the goat, meaning Alexander. Yet he died prematurely at the young age of 33. His empire was split between his four generals because he did not leave a strong enough heir to the Macedonian throne. The four generals eventually split the empire into four parts, Macedonia and Greece, Egypt and Canaan, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia and Persia. Two kingdoms would eventually dominate Alexander's former empire, the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. Macedonia did not stay united very long. It fragmented and quickly succumbed to Roman influence and finally conquest.

8:9-12 - Daniel says out of one of the four horns came another horn which started small but grew in power to the south, the east and toward the Beautiful Land, or the Holy Land, Israel. Most scholars agree Daniel is describing the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and his persecution of the Jews in the 160's BC. Antiochus was the eighth Seleucid king and ruled over Syria, Israel, parts of Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia. Daniel says he grew in power to the south. Antiochus subdued the Ptolemies in Egypt and defeated them. However, he was forced to withdraw when Rome intervened and told him to pull out. The Ptolemies and Seleucids had fought over control of Canaan for most of their history. After Antiochus defeated the Ptolemies he exerted greater and more oppressive control over Judea. That is what Daniel means by him growing stronger toward the Beautiful Land. He also tried to hold on to his power in the eastern part of his empire where he fought a new power that had arisen in Persia, the Parthians. They would eventually wrest control of Persia and Mesopotamia from Seleucid rule. It is important to remember as we interpret Daniel's visions that he maintains a Holy Land centric viewpoint. His visions always need to be understood in that light.

Daniel saw that the other horn grew until it reached the host of heaven and it even threw down to the earth some of the starry host and trampled on them. The horn set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host. It took away the daily sacrifice from him and the sanctuary was brought low. The NLT reads it destroyed the temple and the NASB reads the place of his sanctuary was thrown down. *Verses 10-11* are difficult verses. We need to remember that Daniel is speaking in apocalyptic language, the language of visions and symbols. His images are not necessarily literal. It sounds as if the little horn grew so great that it attacked heaven itself and was able to defeat and throw down some of the angelic host and destroy them. Taken literally the vision makes no sense. However, *Daniel* consistently shows how God and his angels are stronger than any king or earthly empire. Plus, in 8:23-25 the angel Gabriel is sent to Daniel to tell him the meaning of his vision. He tells Daniel that the little horn is a king, who will grow in power over God's people and his land. That means that the little horn is not an angelic power and that the starry hosts are not angels nor is the Prince of the host God or Christ or a powerful angel. Therefore the images in the vision must relate to earthly circumstances. The insight Daniel gives us in these verses, which he will expand upon in the visions to follow, is that there is an unseen angelic, spiritual world, where conflict is also taking place. God's angels fight against Satan's demons and what happens in the heavenly realms often reflects what happens upon the earth.

If the little horn is an earthly king what does Daniel mean in these verses? Once again Antiochus Epiphanes and the circumstances surrounding his persecution of the Jews most closely relates to Daniel's vision. Antiochus defiled the temple and made it unusable according to the Law of Moses. He set up an altar of Zeus on top of the main altar in the temple and sacrificed a pig upon it. Daniel will call that sacrifice the abomination of desolation in *Daniel 9:27*. Jesus refers to it in *Matthew 24:15*. Antiochus did not literally destroy the temple or bring it down but he did make it unusable and defiled. He killed some of God's priests and stopped the daily sacrifices in the temple. He also destroyed copies of the Torah, forbid keeping the Sabbath and circumcision. He was trying to stamp out the religion of Israel and Hellenize the Jews at the same time. The starry host mentioned in *8:10* is probably some of the priests of God. The Prince of the host would then be the High Priest. Daniel says the horn took away the daily sacrifice from him when he brought low or destroyed "*his sanctuary*." None of Israel or Judah's kings was in charge of the daily sacrifice nor did the temple of God belong to them. This is most likely the High Priest. If the starry host is priests then it makes sense to see the Prince of the host as the High Priest.

God shows Daniel that because of rebellion God allowed the little horn to oppress his people and the host of the saints or simply the armies were given over to the horn. The host of the saints could be the priests but it is more likely here simply referring to God's people, the Jews, living in Judea. The daily sacrifice was handed over to the little horn as well and it was able to do whatever it wanted. Truth was thrown down to the ground. *Daniel* sees a time to come when a king will oppress his people and will spew lies and defy God's truth. That oppression will include a halt to the worship of God and the killing of at least some of God's priests. This coming king God will allow to control his people and persecute them. He will triumph because God's people have rebelled against him once again. *Daniel* shows us that behind the little horn's success are Satan and his lies. Antiochus set himself up as Zeus on earth, the king of the Greek gods. He defiled God's temple and forbid the daily worship of God. He demanded that the Jews begin to worship the gods of the Greeks and sacrifice to them. There were Jews who supported Antiochus and wanted to completely adopt Greek ways. Many however resisted and it cost them their lives. The time of Antiochus' persecution was another of those times in Jewish history when the Jews were tempted to abandon the worship of God altogether. Their very existence as God's people was threatened. The circumstances of Antiochus' oppression fit Daniel's vision. But they can also be seen as referring to the time of the end. In that case the temporary triumph of the little horn is a type of the greater persecution and triumph of the antichrist before the Lord Jesus returns.

8:13-14 - Daniel then hears one "*holy one*" speaking to another. These are probably angels. One angel asks another how long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled. He clarifies his question by describing the circumstances of the vision; the cessation of the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary or temple and the host that will be trampled underfoot, meaning the Jewish people. The first angel answers Daniel, which is curious since Daniel never asked a question. It was the other angel who asked the question, how long. He tells Daniel it will take 2300 evenings and mornings until the sanctuary is re-consecrated. 2300 could refer to 2300 days. It is similar language to *Genesis 1*, and there was evening and there was morning one day. If that is the case then the angel tells Daniel it will take about 6.33 years for the vision to be completed from the time when the sacrifices are halted to the time when the temple is re-consecrated. 6 and one third years could refer to the time from Antiochus' first incursion

into the temple in 170 to Judas Maccabaeus' rededication of the temple in December of 164. The problem is Antiochus did not stop the sacrifices in 170 and it does not fit the details of Daniel's vision very well. However, there is another interpretation that makes more sense. If one takes the 2300 evenings and mornings to refer to the daily sacrifices, two each day, which Antiochus halted in his persecution then you have 1150 days. That gives you three years plus 55 days. That is close to the time from Antiochus' desecration of the temple in December of 167 to Judas' cleansing of the temple in December of 164 which became the Jewish Feast of Hanukkah. This interpretation seems to make the most sense of the passage and the historical details of Antiochus' persecution of the Jews. 2300 is an approximate, symbolic number that describes Antiochus' halting of the temple sacrifices.

Daniel has been given a vision during the Babylonian exile of a time three and a half centuries in the future when the Jews once again will face great persecution and their very survival will be at stake. One has to remember that a part of Daniel's vision would have thrilled him. God's temple was going to be rebuilt! The sacrifices would be re-established! In the third year of Belshazzar when Daniel receives this vision the temple was a smoldering ruin in Jerusalem! The Jews would be going home and live again in the Promiseland!

8:15-17 - Daniel is trying to understand his vision and what he sees when suddenly someone who looks like a man stands before him. He heard a voice speaking "*from the Ulai*". The Ulai is the canal or river just to the east of Susa where Daniel's vision takes place. Daniel's description means a voice either came from the river or the direction of the river, which would have been to the east. The voice names the figure next to Daniel. He is Gabriel and he is told to tell Daniel the meaning of the vision. Gabriel is an angel and is often referred to as an archangel or one of the highest of angels. In Jewish thought by New Testament times there were seven archangels, two of which are named here in *Daniel*; Gabriel and Michael. The others are Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Sariel and Remiel who are not named in the Scriptures but occur in Jewish apocalyptic writings of the Intertestamental Period. The archangels were believed to be the angels of the presence, or those who stand before the throne of God praising him and interceding for people. Are they the cherubim or separate from them? I do not know. Jewish apocalyptic literature in intertestamental times often used angels and the archangels to explain various visions. Liberal scholars have used that fact to conclude that *Daniel* must have been written later than the Old Testament in the Intertestamental Period because it uses angels to interpret dreams. Of course the opposite is far more probable. Intertestamental apocalyptic literature imitates many of the features of *Daniel* because it is Scripture and his book is the earlier work! In *Luke*, Gabriel is sent to announce John's birth to Zechariah his father and he is sent to Mary in Nazareth to announce that she will bear the Messiah, Jesus. In *Luke 1:19* Gabriel identifies himself to Mary as the one, "*who stands in the presence of God.*" That language points to him as an archangel. The fact that Gabriel himself was sent to Daniel to explain his vision points to how greatly Daniel is loved by God and how important his vision is to the Jews. God sends one of his chief angelic lieutenants to explain Daniel's dream so there will be no mistaking its meaning. It is critical for Daniel and his people that they understand his vision.

Daniel is terrified when he sees Gabriel standing next to him and he falls to the ground. Whenever angels appear to people in the Bible they often have that same effect. People are terrified! Angels are not cute, cuddly little creatures but powerful spiritual beings whose holiness and often sudden appearances elicit fear. Daniel implies that is how Gabriel appeared before him.

He did not slowly walk towards Daniel from a distance. One moment he was not there and the next moment he appears in front of him. No wonder Daniel is scared out of his wits!

Gabriel tells Daniel that his vision concerns the time of the end. That phrase causes difficulty. From the details of the vision it appears Daniel is seeing the time of Antiochus Epiphanes some four centuries in the future. It will be a time of great persecution and oppression of the Jews. However, it is not literally "*the time of the end*." Either Gabriel is not being literal in his description and "*the time of the end*" simply means a long way in the future or the details of Daniel's vision do concern the time of Antiochus Epiphanes but they become a type of a much later time in history which will literally be the "*time of the end*". Daniel is given a picture of what it will be like when the Lord Jesus returns to earth and establishes the Kingdom of God. That makes the most sense to me otherwise Gabriel's statement cannot be taken at face value. One needs to remember that apocalyptic visions are fluid and details shift and change and are not always consistent. That does not mean they are untrue. It simply means we need to be cautious in interpreting the vision because it is a vision and not historical reporting. Daniel had to have Gabriel come and interpret what he saw because he didn't understand it. And he tells us in 8:27 even after Gabriel's interpretation that the vision was still beyond his understanding! Why do we think we'll be able to easily figure it out in our day and will have the definitive understanding and interpretation?! Humility and caution are needed as we interpret Daniel's visions!

8:18-22 - Gabriel explains to Daniel the meaning of his dream or vision. *Verse 18* is curious. *Verses 15-17* seem to indicate Daniel was in a waking state when he saw his vision. He was standing up and looking at the ram and the goat and heard the voice from the Uhai tell Gabriel to explain the dream. As Gabriel approached Daniel he fell terrified to the ground and heard Gabriel tell him the vision concerned the time of the end. In *verse 18* however, Daniel says he was in a deep sleep with his face to the ground. Gabriel touches Daniel and stands him on his feet. The implication is Daniel then woke up while Gabriel talked to him. But if Daniel was in a deep sleep how did he hear Gabriel speaking to him at all? As I said, curious. It points out again that dreams and visions in apocalyptic literature often have details that don't always make sense and that seem to contradict other parts of the vision. It is possible that when Daniel says he was still in a deep sleep he describes his body in the waking world and tells us that in his vision or dream Gabriel stood him on his feet. That would mean the entire vision is Daniel recollecting his dream which is logical and would explain the odd details. Dreams are not consistent and have their own reality that is different from our waking minds. In our dreams that reality seems perfectly logical but once we wake we are confused by what we remember because it doesn't always make sense.

Gabriel tells Daniel that his vision concerns the appointed time of the end that will occur later which he also calls "*the time of wrath*." In apocalyptic writings visions often concern the end times as they are called and describe God intervening from outside of history to bring justice against his enemies and deliverance for his people. God brings history to a close and establishes his rule and Kingdom forever. When God intervenes there will be a time of wrath or judgment before his Kingdom is finally established. That time of wrath will also be a time of persecution and suffering for God's people before the Kingdom comes. Many scholars including Dispensational ones name that time of wrath and persecution the Great Tribulation. Gabriel says Daniel's vision concerns this time of wrath and the end times.

Gabriel explains the two-horned ram and the goat with the large horn between its eyes. The two-horned ram is Media and Persia and the shaggy goat that attacks and defeats the ram is

the king of Greece. Daniel's vision comes to him in the third year of Belshazzar regent of Babylon in 554 BC. The Medo-Persian Empire was growing in power to Babylon's north but would not conquer Babylon until 539, some 15 years in the future. The shaggy goat with the large horn between its eyes who is the King of Greece is Alexander the Great. He would conquer the Persian Empire in a series of battles and brilliant military campaigns between 336 and 331. Alexander died in 323 in Babylon from malaria. His empire was split between his four strongest generals, two of which dominated the rest; the Seleucids in Syria-Mesopotamia and the Ptolomies in Egypt. None of the four succeeded in pulling together Alexander's empire and ruling it. They were never as strong as Alexander. Daniel's vision describes the historical situation remarkably well.

The difficulty is that even though Daniel's vision concerns the Persian and Greek empires and events up to two centuries and beyond in the future they cannot literally be the time of the end because we still exist today, some 25 centuries later! In what way then does Daniel's vision describe the "*end times*"? There are two possibilities. First, his vision, which describes the future events of the Persian and Greek empires and the Jewish people within them, is a type of the end. It foreshadows the literal end times by detailing historical events that will be very similar to the ultimate end time. The other interpretation is more subtle and harder to understand. The "*end times*" describes what happens when God brings his Kingdom to his world. There will be wrath to his enemies, persecution to his people and most importantly God's rule will come into the world. In that sense the end times are not a short period of time like a seven year Great Tribulation, but an unfolding in history of God's plan. That would mean we are now in the end times because God has been bringing his Kingdom even from the time of Daniel's vision. In many ways this is the already-not yet perspective of the New Testament. At Jesus' first coming into the world the New Testament says the end times have begun because the Messiah has come and the Kingdom of God is being established. God's Kingdom is breaking into the world. The New Testament sees the cross of Jesus as expressing the time of wrath and judgment upon God's enemies and Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit as the revealing of the Age to Come. In this interpretation there may be a literal Great Tribulation of seven years but the ongoing work of God to bring his Kingdom is the end times. God's plan will be accomplished in his world. Sin will be judged and his people will be vindicated. Daniel's visions therefore express a part of that process. I lean towards the second interpretation because I think it makes the most sense of Daniel's visions and the rest of Scripture.

8:23-29 - Gabriel continues to explain the vision to Daniel. He says in the latter part of the reign of the four kingdoms when rebels have become completely wicked a new king will arise, a stern-faced master of intrigue. The Hebrew of this sentence is difficult. The NLT says, "*when their sin is at its height, a fierce king, a master of intrigue will rise to power.*" The NASB says, "*When the transgressors have run their course (or finished their course), a king will arise, insolent and skilled in intrigue.*" Literally, insolent means strong of face. Intrigue can also mean ambiguous speech. If one takes all three translations together the picture emerges of a time in the latter reign of the Seleucids and Ptolemies along with the other Greek kingdoms left over from Alexander's empire, when sin, corruption and evil dominate the Greek kingdoms. Since Judea will be under their rule, sin and corruption will be greatly affecting the Jews as well. In that time a new king will come to power who is fierce and insolent in bearing and who is a master of political maneuvering who twists the truth to his advantage.

Gabriel tells Daniel this king will become very strong but not by his power. Gabriel gives Daniel an insight into worldly powers. God ultimately governs kings and empires but often their power, especially to do evil, does not come from them. Gabriel does not directly say it but he points to Satan and the demonic as the origin of evil power in the world. Later in *chapter 10* Daniel is told by another angel that the Prince of Persia hindered him from coming to Daniel but Michael, the Prince of the Jews came and fought alongside him so he could come to Daniel. The picture of the demonic is not as clear as it is in the New Testament but one can see the beginnings of the full doctrine of Satan and the demonic taking shape here in *Daniel*. There is an unseen world, a spiritual world, where angelic and demonic forces battle one another. The angelic on behalf of God's people fight to build God's Kingdom and the demonic oppose them to thwart God's will and hurt or destroy God's people. Jesus, Paul and John in the New Testament fully develop this concept into the antichrist and the last days before Jesus' return to fully establish God's Kingdom on earth.

This new king of the Greeks with the help of demonic power not his own will cause great devastation. The implication being the devastation will be against the Jews as God's people. The NASB reads, "*he will destroy to an extraordinary degree.*" It has a textual note that says destroy can also mean corrupt. If this relates to Antiochus Epiphanes this makes sense because he exerted all his power to forcibly Hellenize the Jews and corrupt them. He wanted to stamp out the religion of Israel and force them all to become Greeks. Many Jews were willing to go along and convert to become civilized. Gabriel says this king will succeed in whatever he does. Antiochus succeeded in stopping the temple sacrifices for three and a half years and defiling the temple with an altar to Zeus. He persecuted and executed many Jews during this time. From the standpoint of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern politics he was a strong ruler but had enemies who kept him in check and even shrank his empire; the Parthians in the east and the Romans in the west. Yet from the standpoint of God's people who lived in Judea his reign was devastating and was one of the worst times of persecution the Jews ever experienced. Their very existence was threatened.

Gabriel tells Daniel this king will destroy or corrupt the mighty men and the holy people. It is not clear who the mighty men are although Daniel in his visions seems to focus on the temple and the priests so it could be the priests and elders of the Jews. There was no Jewish king at this time or ruler. Judea was simply a smaller province of the Seleucid Empire in many ways similar to what it had been under the Persians. They had a governor but I don't think Daniel is naming the Seleucid governor of Judea one of the mighty men. The holy people or the saints are the Jews. Antiochus put many of the priests to death because they refused to sacrifice to Zeus on the pagan altar he had set up in the temple. He also killed many Jews who would not submit to him.

Gabriel says this king will cause deceit to prosper and will consider himself superior. The NASB reads, "*He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence and he will magnify himself in his heart.*" Antiochus tried to forcibly Hellenize the Jews to give up their Jewish ways and convert to being Greeks. This is the deceit or lie that he promoted. Many Jews did convert even mutilating themselves trying to hide the fact they had been circumcised because when they went to the gymnasiums by Greek custom they would exercise naked. Further Antiochus took the title Epiphanes which meant god manifest. He saw himself as Zeus incarnate on earth. He tried to deify himself.

The next sentence is difficult. "*When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes.*" The difficulty is in identifying who "*they*" are and who is

the "*Prince of princes*." If this vision is similar to the other visions of Daniel then he is still focused on the Holy Land and the Jewish people. "*They*" probably refers to the Jews. The problem is in understanding what Daniel means by "*when they felt secure*." Throughout the Persian period and all throughout the Greek period up to Antiochus Epiphanes the Jews were allowed to practice their faith in Yahweh and live out their lives as long as they obeyed the ruling empire. Jerusalem even had the status of a temple city under the Persians and the Greeks. Tolerance was the policy of both empires. That all changed under Antiochus. His persecution and forced Hellenization came suddenly after he had subdued the Ptolemies in Egypt but Rome told him to withdraw and pay a heavy tribute. It was at that time that Antiochus began his persecution of the Jews. I think this is what Daniel is referring to when he says "*they will feel secure*." The Jews did not anticipate that Antiochus would begin a terrible persecution and execute many for worshipping God as they had always worshipped him.

That still leaves the phrase, "*take his stand against the Prince of princes*" to try and understand. There are two likely possibilities. First, this is a reference to the Messiah and Daniel is using the context of his vision about future persecution of the Jews by the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes to paint a picture of the ultimate enemy of God's people, the antichrist. The vision would then mean the antichrist would take his stand or meet in battle the Messiah, the Prince of princes, Jesus Christ. The problem is the context speaks strongly against this interpretation. There is no indication in the vision that it has suddenly shifted away from describing the time of the persecution of Antiochus to the ultimate time of the end and the Messiah's coming. Visions are fluid but Daniel would have to shift his focus without giving any clue he was doing so. Plus the details of the vision do fit the time of Antiochus. There is nothing that prevents us from seeing that time as a type of the time of the antichrist but the immediate context indicates that the Prince of princes is describing some ruler or figure of authority that will be present in Antiochus' day. The second possibility is the Prince of princes indicates someone in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. The question is who? The Jews had no king until after the Greeks were defeated in the Maccabean Revolt by Judas Maccabaeus. The Hasmonean dynasty was founded and the kings who ruled were also the High Priests because Judas and his descendants were priests. The most likely explanation is that the Prince of princes is the High Priest serving at the time of Antiochus. There were two competing High Priests at the time of Antiochus' persecution of the Jews, Jason and Menelaus. They were both Hellenized Jews who were involved in a scheme to outbid each other with Antiochus for the position of High Priest. Jason had been installed as such and Menelaus bribed Antiochus to depose Jason and put Menelaus in his place. This could be what Daniel is referring to in *verse 25*. It could also be a reference to the fact that neither of Antiochus' men who were High Priests was worthy to serve in the office.

Gabriel tells Daniel however that Antiochus will fall. His destruction will come not by any human power. Antiochus died suddenly of disease in 164 during or shortly after a campaign against the Parthians in Armenia. He was not killed in battle or assassinated. Clearly Gabriel sees his death as God's vengeance upon him for persecuting his people. Furthermore the Maccabean Revolt helped free the Jews from Greek oppression and Judea was a free kingdom for a century. The persecution would come to an end and the persecutor would die. That is probably the best interpretation of Gabriel's explanation of Daniel's vision.

Gabriel tells Daniel that the vision is true but he is to seal it up because it describes events in the "*distant future*". Sealing up the vision means to keep it secret and tell no one what he saw. Historically if Daniel's vision is about the time of Antiochus then Daniel was shown events some

380 years in the future which would have been the distant future to Daniel. Literally this vision is not the end times but a type of the persecution of the antichrist in the end. Daniel's vision of the little horn informs the visions that follow, including the 70 weeks vision in *Daniel 9*.

When Gabriel was finished explaining Daniel's vision Daniel was ill for several days. The vision was so troubling to him he was overwhelmed. From Daniel's perspective it meant his people would have to suffer another time of great persecution that seemed almost worse than the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. At least the Babylonians had not forced the Jews to abandon the worship of Yahweh. They had destroyed his temple but had not wiped out the peoples' faith. This coming time of persecution threatened to wipe out the Jews all together! Daniel comments that he was appalled by his vision and that it was beyond understanding. Gabriel had been sent to explain it to him and yet he says he couldn't understand it. Perhaps he means he could not understand how God could allow his people to undergo another and even worse time of persecution in the days to come than what they were experiencing in Daniel's lifetime. It also points out the fact that receiving visions from God was a difficult and traumatic event. It wasn't a pleasant experience for Daniel!

Chapter 9:

9:1 - *Daniel 9* begins with another difficult historical reference. Daniel says, in the first year of Darius son of Xerxes a Mede by descent who was made ruler over the kingdom of Babylon. Once again scholars are unsure of the identity of Darius. This sounds like a reference to Darius the Mede from *chapter 6*, an otherwise unknown Persian ruler or satrap of the Province of Babylon whom Daniel calls a king. *Daniel 6:28* seems to indicate that Darius the Mede could also be a name for Cyrus the Great. This cannot be Darius I who came to be known as Darius the Great. His father was Hystaspes not Xerxes. The first Xerxes was the son of Darius I and ruled from 486-465, a century later than Daniel. He was known in Hebrew as Ahasuerus and is the Persian king mentioned in the *Book of Esther*. If Daniel is using the name Darius the Mede for Cyrus the Great the problem becomes the phrase, "*who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom.*" Cyrus conquered Babylon he was not made ruler over Babylon. One possibility is that Daniel is referring to the sovereign choice of God over who rules what kingdoms on the earth. In that case Cyrus was made king over Babylon; by God! In any case if Darius the Mede is an otherwise unknown satrap of Babylon or if he is a code name for Cyrus the time of this chapter would be 539 BC, the first year the Persians ruled over Babylon. This is 15 years after Daniel's vision of the ram and the goat in *chapter 8*.

9:2-3 - In 539 BC Daniel had already been living in exile in Babylon for at least 66 years. Daniel says he understood from the Scriptures according to the Word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. This is a remarkable statement by Daniel about Jeremiah's words. It is difficult to know whether the *Book of Jeremiah* as we know it today had already been put together and circulated among the exiles in Babylon by the time of the Persian conquest of the city. It is possible but unlikely. However, parts of Jeremiah's writings almost certainly existed and were seen as valid Scripture, not the least of which would have been his letter to the exiles which is recorded in *Jeremiah 29:4-23*. In that letter in *Jeremiah 29:10* God says when seventy years are completed the Lord will come back to the exiles and fulfill his gracious promise to them and bring them back to the land. Daniel records his prayer at least 47 years after Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Everything that *Jeremiah* had prophesied about the judgment of God and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians

had come true. Daniel's statement here confirms that the exiles already considered Jeremiah a true prophet of the Lord and considered his words to be God's Word.

Daniel says he had been reading Jeremiah's words and realized that according to what Jeremiah had told the exiles 70 years were decreed for the desolation of Jerusalem. In other words the exile of the Jews and the desolation of God's temple in his city were to last at least 70 years. I have stated in my commentary on *Jeremiah* that the seventy years is a symbolic number. The historical facts are that the Babylonians destroyed God's temple in 586 and Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews under Zerubbabel to return home to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple in 538. That is only 48 years. The closest time frame to 70 years is from the destruction of the temple in August of 586 to the dedication of the second temple on March 12, 515. That is 70 years plus 7 months.

Daniel says when he read Jeremiah's words he realized that the time of the seventy years was getting shorter and yet nothing as yet had happened to allow the Jews to go home and rebuild Jerusalem and the Lord's temple. Daniel concluded that he needed to pray and confess to the Lord about his people's situation. He fasted and put on sackcloth and ashes symbolic of mourning and pleaded with the Lord on behalf of the Jews and Jerusalem. What follows in *Daniel 9:4-19* is one of the great prayers in the Bible and one of the greatest examples of vicarious repentance in Scripture.

9:4-6 - Daniel's prayer expresses a change in the way Israel addresses God. When Solomon dedicated the temple he prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel. Here Daniel prays to the great and awesome God and calls him Lord or Adonai not Yahweh as Solomon had done. Nehemiah prays to the God of heaven. During the exile Israel's faith gained the insight that God is even more transcendent than they had understood. He is more universal because they had to figure out how they could worship Yahweh in a foreign land and not in the Promiseland. Daniel shows that shift in Israel's perception of God in his prayer.

Daniel addresses God as Adonai, the great and awesome God. He keeps his covenant of love with all who love him. The word for covenant love here is *hesed* in Hebrew, God's lovingkindness or covenant love. God keeps his covenant not with Israel as a nation but with all who love the Lord and obey him. The people of God are no longer Israelites by birth and circumcision, now they are made up of those who love the Lord and obey his commands. That too is an exilic insight into what it means to be a Jew and will be cemented under Ezra. It was a key question with which the Jews struggled as they tried to make sense of what had happened to them after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. What did it mean to be a Jew and what does it mean that God has made a covenant with us? Are we still his people? Daniel shows he had already understood the implications of those questions and had seen that true Jews are those who love God and obey him, who have a relationship of love and faith with the Lord. That insight paves the way for the new people of God, the church of Jesus the Messiah, in the New Testament.

As noted above, Daniel confesses his people's sin. "We" have done wrong even though the *Book of Daniel* consistently shows he is a righteous man before God. Daniel does not worship idols. He obeys God's Law. Yet he stands with his people and confesses their sin as if he too were disobedient. He says *WE* have been wicked and rebelled. *WE* have turned away from the Lord's commands and laws. *WE* have not listened to the prophets the Lord sent among us to turn us back to God. The kings, princes, and elders or fathers have all disobeyed God and all the people of the land have followed their leadership. This was the conclusion of *Jeremiah* and

Ezekiel and their message to the Jews in Jerusalem and those in exile in Babylon. Daniel had heard their preaching and read at least part of their writings. He understood the gravity of their sin and the reasons God had punished them and sent them into exile. Daniel knew Israel deserved what they had received from God's hand. They deserved to be punished for their disobedience, idolatry and rebellion against Yahweh. Daniel stands in the gap for his people. He represents them before God like a priest and confesses his people's sin, standing with them. It is a profound example of vicarious repentance and one sees it again in the exilic and post-exilic books like *Ezra-Nehemiah*.

9:7-11 - Daniel once again addresses Yahweh as Adonai. This reflects later rabbinic usage of substituting God's name, Yahweh, with the Hebrew word for Lord, Adonai. Our English Bibles follow this practice today in translating God's proper name, Yahweh. They substitute Lord for Yahweh. This became common practice in Jesus' day as well, which was why the New Testament confession of "*Jesus is Lord*" was understood as declaring Jesus is God!

Daniel affirms the Lord is righteous in all he does but the Jews are covered with shame before him because of their sin and rebellion against him. All of the Jews, the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem and all Israel both near and far, in all the places where the Lord has scattered them; they are all guilty before God. In the shame-honor based culture of the Middle East their shame before God was a burden they could not get rid of and was heavy to bear. They had broken the covenant God made with his people. Daniel affirms that even though the nation Israel and the ten northern tribes had been dispersed throughout the Assyrian Empire a century and half earlier at least some of the northern tribes still preserved their identities. Refugees from the fall of Samaria had fled south to Judah and been included into the Jews. At least some of them had maintained their tribal identity even though they had become citizens of Judah. The point is wherever the Jews were living at the time of Daniel's prayer all the Jews bore their shame before God because of their people's sin.

Daniel acknowledges that Judah's kings are guilty before God. Her princes and elders, those who had advised the kings, are covered with shame because of their sin. The people are sinful but God is merciful. He is forgiving even though all of Israel has rebelled against the Lord. Once again Daniel in *verse 10* uses "we" language. We have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept his laws he gave us through the prophets. This is the first time Daniel uses God's name, Yahweh, in his prayer. It reinforces Israel's sin and rebellion. He is not only Adonai, the great and awesome God; he is Yahweh *OUR* God. He made a covenant with us and all of us have broken it. All Israel has transgressed God's law and turned away from him, refusing to obey him.

Daniel's whole life has been spent in obeying God in a foreign, pagan nation. He even obeyed God when his life was threatened as the story of the lion's den portrays. That was as yet some years in the future when Daniel prays this prayer but it shows how faithful he was to God and his commandments. Yet despite Daniel's character and faithfulness he includes himself in his people's sins. He too is an Israelite. He too is a Jew. He too has sinned before God. In that, Daniel is a Christ-like character in his prayer. He takes on himself the sins of his people and intercedes for them. He includes himself in their sins. As Isaiah said his Servant would do in *Isaiah 53*, he numbers himself among the transgressors. That same spirit of humility and love for God's people is needed among Christian leaders today; not only for our country but for the Lord's church. Christian leaders can vicariously confess the sins of our churches and our country just as Daniel did.

9:11-14 - Daniel acknowledges that God had warned the Jews what he would do if they disobeyed him. He had laid it out in the covenant curses in the Law of Moses. Everything that had happened to them God had already told them. They sinned and did what God told them not to do, especially worship idols. Therefore God brought upon them the judgments he had declared in his Law through Moses.

He calls Moses the servant of God. He does not name him the prophet of God but God's servant which is curious. Moses is also called the servant of God in *1 & 2 Chronicles* and *Nehemiah*. Since those books were written in the Persian period that lends credence to the theory that Daniel was also put together by an unknown editor in the Persian period.

Daniel says God has fulfilled all that he had said he would do when he destroyed Jerusalem. In fact, he says nothing has ever been done like what had been done to Jerusalem. That is a difficult phrase because other cities had been destroyed not only by the Babylonians but also the Assyrians and others before them. How is Jerusalem different? Perhaps it is because Nebuchadnezzar captured the city and exiled many of its chief inhabitants in 597. Then he came back and finished the job in 586. It could also be because Jerusalem has been left desolate and uninhabitable for so long, which is part of the point of Daniel's prayer. He is praying for the Jews to go home and Jerusalem to be restored.

Daniel says all this disaster has come upon the Jews because they sinned against the Lord and did not turn and seek the Lord their God. They did not give attention to the truth. Is this a subtle reference to the official theology and its false premises that because Jerusalem had God's temple and a king from David's line reigned on David's throne the city was protected by God no matter what? It is possible. It is the very idea that kept the people from seeing their own sinfulness and God's righteous anger towards them. When Jerusalem was destroyed and the nation obliterated the official theology had nothing with which to explain what happened to the Jews and why God had allowed Jerusalem to be burned and its walls torn down. Daniel restates the answers of *Ezekiel* and *Jeremiah* in his prayer. The Jews had sinned and God was fulfilling his righteous warning he had given the people through his prophets. God was just in punishing them and their sins had brought all this disaster upon them. *Daniel* affirms *Jeremiah's* and *Ezekiel's* message to the Jewish people.

9:15-16 - Daniel affirms who God is. He is Adonai, Lord, their Elohim, God. He does not use God's personal name of Yahweh here. He affirms that it is God who brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and made a name for himself which endures to this day. Daniel says, *WE* have sinned and *WE* have done wrong. He appeals to God to turn away from his righteous wrath over their sin. He asks God to turn from his anger and wrath over Jerusalem, calling it your city and your holy hill, meaning the temple mount or Mt. Moriah. The sins of the Jews who are alive now and the sins of their ancestors have together made Jerusalem and the Jewish people an object of scorn among the nations around them.

Daniel moves to the climax of his prayer. He intimates that because his people's sin and Jerusalem's destruction have made them an object of scorn among the nations that God's Name has also been profaned. Daniel will use that appeal in the conclusion to his prayer asking God to honor his Name, forgive his people and save his city.

9:17-19 - Daniel brings his prayer to a climax in some of the most moving words in the entire Old Testament. He is still praying on behalf of his people. He appeals to "*our God*" and he begs God to hear the prayers and petitions of "*your servant*." The startling thing about Daniel's prayer

is that he does not appeal for God's mercy for his people's sake but for God's sake. He says, "*For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.*" This goes back to his statement in 9:16 that the sins of the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem have become an object of scorn to the nations. Daniel appeals here to God's honor, the glory of his Name and his temple which still lies in ruins.

He begs God to open his eyes and see how desolate Jerusalem now is. This is obviously poetic language because God knows the status of his city! Then Daniel appeals to God to act for his city and his people not on the basis of their righteousness but because of God's great mercy and character. This is one of the most profound insights in Daniel's prayer. It expresses a fundamental tenet of Old Testament faith and it is what separates Israel's religion from the pagan nations around them. Pagan religion was based on a quid pro quo. You met certain conditions with the gods and they were obligated to give you what you wanted. Israel was constantly tempted to treat the religion of Yahweh in the same way. Daniel here truthfully declares that his people have no hold upon God whatsoever. He owes them nothing because they are sinful. There are no righteous deeds or faithful actions that he can bring to God and say because of these things you now owe us to save our city and your city. Daniel acknowledges his sin and the sin of his people honestly before God. He appeals to God not on the basis of their righteousness but on the basis of God's mercy. When we confess our sins to God we are always in the same position as Daniel. We are sinners and God is righteous. His forgiveness is based not on our worthiness but on his mercy to the sinner. We pray, confess our sins to God and ask that he respond solely on the basis of his character and grace!

Verse 19 is the climax of Daniel's prayer. It is simple, direct and full of passion and pleading for God to respond. "*O Lord listen! O Lord forgive! O Lord, hear and act!*" Daniel uses Adonai here and not Yahweh. By using Adonai or Lord in Hebrew he emphasizes that God is Lord and they are his servants. He is in charge and they have no hold on God to obligate him to do anything on their behalf. He is appealing to God's mercy alone. Daniel asks God to act and not delay for his own sake because the city and his people bear the Lord's name. Even though they have sinned and have deserved the Lord's punishment they are still his people, and Jerusalem is still his city. Daniel begs God to act based on his honor and for his Name's sake that he might be exalted and glorified. In this his prayer is like the Lord's Prayer of Jesus. "*Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" Jesus teaches us to pray first and foremost that God's Name would be honored and his Kingdom would come in the world. Daniel knows that if there is any hope for the restoration of his people and Jerusalem it is based solely in the honor and glory of the Lord's Name and not in any worthiness or penitence the Jews might have. Daniel throws himself and the future of his people completely upon the mercy of his God! It is an extraordinary prayer and an extraordinary moment in the Old Testament!

9:20-23 - Daniel says that while he was still praying and confessing the sins of his people and pleading with God for Jerusalem or God's holy hill, Gabriel came to him as he had before in *chapter 8*. Daniel's description of Gabriel's coming to him is curious. The NIV reads, "*came to me in swift flight.*" The NLT reads, "*came swiftly to me.*" The NASB reads, "*came to me in my extreme weariness.*" Two textual notes give alternative readings and provide further insight. "*Came to me*" can mean reaching or touching. And "*in my extreme weariness*" literally means "*wearied with weariness.*" BDB says the word translated swift in Hebrew literally means weary, however the phrase here in *Daniel 9:21* is an Aramaism that means wearied from exertion, meaning Gabriel was tired or weary from coming swiftly to Daniel. The NASB therefore

wrongly interprets whose weariness Daniel is describing. He is describing Gabriel's not Daniel's as the NASB implies. The image is fascinating. Gabriel is sent to Daniel while he is praying and he comes with such effort that he is weary with weariness when he arrives. The NLT and the NIV therefore translate the phrase he came swiftly to Daniel. He comes at the time of the evening sacrifice which would have been around 3pm.

God answers Daniel's prayer by sending one of his great angels who stands in the presence of God. That shows how important Daniel is to God and how important his prayer was! Gabriel tells him he has come to give him insight and understanding. That is a curious phrase because Daniel's prayer is a prayer of confession, asking God to restore Jerusalem and forgive his people. It was precipitated by Daniel's understanding of *Jeremiah's* prophecy of the seventy years of captivity for his people, or as Daniel puts it in 9:2; "*the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.*"

The seventy years *Jeremiah* mentions is a clue as to the nature of Gabriel's message to Daniel. As I have shown in 9:2-3 and in my *Jeremiah* commentary Jeremiah's usage of seventy years to describe the exile of the Jews in Babylon is a symbolic number. The only historical date that comes close enough to match is the time between the destruction of the temple in August 586 and the dedication of the second temple in March of 515. That works out to 70 years and 7 months. I do not think the time between the destruction of Solomon's temple and the dedication of the second temple is coincidental but it does not literally describe the time of the captivity of the Jews which is what Jeremiah was describing when he said 70 years. The historical time of the Jewish captivity was from 586 to 538, from the destruction of Jerusalem to Cyrus' decree that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. That is 48 years. Even if one starts the captivity clock eleven years earlier with the capture and captivity of King Jehoiachin in 597 the time of captivity is still only 59 years! Gabriel is sent to explain to Daniel an already symbolic time frame that Daniel read in *Jeremiah's* prophecy. It seems reasonable to assume that any explanation Gabriel gives of the 70 years to Daniel would also be in symbolic and not literal time. One needs to approach Gabriel's explanation to Daniel with caution and not try and force a too literal interpretation upon Gabriel's words.

In *verse 23* Gabriel tells Daniel that he was dispatched as soon as Daniel began to pray and God answered Daniel's prayer. That is why the Lord sent Gabriel to tell Daniel God's answer. God knows our prayers even as we are praying them and moves to answer them. In fact God moves swiftly to answer. He does not always send one of his angels to tell us a message directly but we can trust God is answering even as we are praying. We need to also remember this is prior to the cross and resurrection of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit. Today we have the Holy Spirit living in us who can communicate with us directly. God may still send angels to tell us things as he did in the *Gospels*, the *Book of Acts*, and *Revelation* but those are extraordinary circumstances and not the normal way God answers prayer or communicates his answers to us. Gabriel tells Daniel he is highly esteemed and since Daniel is being inspired by the Spirit to write down his visions God sends Gabriel to answer him. This was an extraordinary circumstance and the Lord wanted to make sure his prophet understood what God wanted communicated. As terrible as the exile was God's people would have to go through another time of great trouble and another and another. The end they were looking for and the founding of the Kingdom of God was not yet but many years in the future. In fact it would be far more than seventy!

Gabriel tells Daniel to consider the message and understand the vision. Gabriel then describes in *verses 24-27* a vision about Jerusalem and God's plan that answers Daniel's prayer

about the seventy years of Jerusalem's desolation. The two ideas are connected. Daniel prays for God to forgive his people's rebellion and sin and restore his city. Gabriel's answer speaks to when atonement will come and when Jerusalem will be restored.

9:24 - Gabriel begins his answer to Daniel's prayer. He summarizes God's plan concerning the Jews and Jerusalem. He says seventy sevens, or weeks, are decreed to complete God's plan. Most scholars, including Dispensational scholars, interpret the seventy weeks as years and say Gabriel is telling Daniel that in 490 "*years*" God will bring his plan for his people and Jerusalem to fruition. I tend to agree with the seventy sevens as 490 years but I see them as symbolic and not literal. However, even though seeing the seventy sevens as 490 years it should be noted that the words do not literally mean years and there is nothing in the text that specifically says they are to be taken as years. From a practical standpoint literal weeks makes no historical sense and years works much better, but even this simple problem points out the complexities of this passage.

This is a passage that prophecy scholars and most Dispensational scholars view as *THE* key passage to interpret biblical prophecy. I hear and read a lot of scholars talking with great certainty about the meaning of Gabriel's words to Daniel and very little caution and humility about exactly what this passage means. If a cardinal principle of biblical interpretation is we use the plain passages to interpret the obscure or difficult then why do so many prophecy scholars use this difficult passage as the center of their interpretations? I have great difficulty with the seemingly forced interpretations that many scholars find in *Daniel 9:24-27*. The most difficult is the Dispensational contention that the seventieth week is completely separate historically from the first 69 and that God's time clock for Israel stops when the church is born and finally starts again when the Rapture occurs because the church and Israel are completely separate. Dispensational interpretation teaches that separation based on *Daniel 9*. However, there is nothing in the text that suggests in any way that the 70th week is separated from the other 69 or the gap between the 69th and 70th is hidden in the New Testament. In my opinion the Dispensational view is artificial in nature and imposes a viewpoint upon the text that is not supported by the text itself or the rest of Scripture. It is important therefore to carefully examine what Daniel does say and try and understand it in his context before we bridge to our day and the larger prophetic plan of God as he reveals it in Scripture. In other words we interpret Daniel's vision in exactly the same way we interpret all the rest of Scripture!

Gabriel tells Daniel seventy sevens or 490 years are decreed for your people and your holy city, meaning the Jews and Jerusalem. They were the focuses of Daniel's prayer to God and Gabriel is now going to explain God's answer to Daniel's prayer. The root of the word for decreed means to cut. It can mean marked out, determined or decreed. The sense of the word is of something cut out or marked out. The shape is determined by someone cutting it out. When that is applied to time or a plan it means it is fixed by God. Gabriel is telling Daniel God has cut out his plan for the Jews and Jerusalem. The shape of that plan is seventy sevens, 490 years. Heaven has determined the plan not any earthly power. The Jews and Jerusalem have been at the mercy of the Babylonians and now the Persians, and as Daniel has seen in *chapter 8* someday the Greeks. It is God however who truly sets out what will happen to his people. It is cut out, determined or decreed by God and no power on earth can alter the plan or stop God from carrying it out on behalf of his people.

What is the nature of that plan? Gabriel tells Daniel. He says seventy sevens are decreed to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting

righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. We need to examine each of these phrases in order to gain more clarity as to what Gabriel is telling Daniel.

Finish transgression can also be read as restrain transgression. The NLT reads "*to put down rebellion*" and the NASB reads "*to finish the transgression*", adding a definite article making transgression more specific rather than general as the NIV reads. The Hebrew verb means to shut up, restrain or withhold. The noun form of the word means confinement or imprisonment. The basic meaning of the root is to restrict the flow or movement of a thing or person. It indicates the interruption of what is in progress or would naturally be in progress. Here in context it would mean to interrupt or restrain transgression or sin. Another pointing of the Hebrew vowels yields a different word which means to complete, finish or bring to an end. That is why one gets the different translations of the word in the various versions. The word for transgression does have the Hebrew definite article so the NASB reads literally "*finish THE transgression.*" It is most often translated transgression but it can also mean rebellion against authority or rebellion as a breach in a relationship. That meaning often refers to Israel rebelling against God. How does one take the entire phrase? It seems to me there are two possibilities. First, this refers to God intending to stop the transgression against his people, meaning their persecution. This could refer to the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes as Daniel saw in his vision in *chapter 8* or some future ultimate persecution of God's people by the antichrist in the last days. A second possibility is that Gabriel is referring to God once and for all putting a stop to his people's rebellion against him. Daniel had specifically confessed his people's rebellion against God in his prayer; however the word for rebellion in his prayer is different than here in *9:24*. In *Daniel 8:13* in his vision of the persecution of Antiochus the phrase "*the rebellion that causes desolation*" uses the same Hebrew word with the definite article for "*the rebellion*" which is translated simply "*transgression*" here in *9:24* or "*the transgression*" in the NASB. The reality is both interpretations are valid and Gabriel's answer to Daniel may be deliberately ambiguous so as to encompass both ideas. It is impossible to tell which is correct.

The next phrase is to put an end to sin. The NLT reads "*to bring an end to sin*" and the NASB reads "*to make an end of sin*". An alternative reading in the NASB reads "*seal up sins*". The Hebrew word for bring an end to means seal up or seal like putting a seal on a document. The picture is of an official document being sealed so that it is securely closed. The noun form means a seal like a king sealing a document. The translation to put an end to sin is an interpretation of the word. It means sin has been put under a seal, presumably God's seal symbolizing a covenant. The phrase points to the New Covenant established in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word for sin is the most common word used for sin in the Old Testament. Its root means to miss the mark. It is the same root word Daniel uses for sin in his prayer of confession in the first part of *Daniel 9*. The feminine form of the noun can mean sin or sin offering, the sacrifice in the temple that was used to atone for a specific known offense or sin. In the context here it probably refers to sin or sins since the noun is in the plural form. This phrase points to God redeeming and forgiving his people which is what Daniel was specifically asking for in his prayer. I think it points to the New Covenant God will establish when he offers the once for all sacrifice of his Son on the cross. That idea is reinforced when one considers Daniel uses the idea of sealing up sin, which points to a document sealed with the king's seal, in this case God himself. I don't know of any historical information that links sealing away sin with the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. The closest thing would be the rededication of the temple in *164* but that seems a stretch given the language of this phrase in *Daniel 9*.

The interpretation of sealing up sin as the New Covenant is reinforced in the next phrase which is parallel with it; *"to atone for wickedness."* The word for atone is the normal word used many times in *Leviticus* and means to make atonement for, to appease or propitiate sin. Animal sacrifice was God's way of granting the Hebrews forgiveness through the substitution of the life of an animal for the sin of a person or family. Sin brought death and demanded life in payment. The sacrifice substituted for the sinner and accomplished atonement for the sin. God accepted the sacrifice and the person was forgiven. The word translated wickedness in the NIV is the common noun in Hebrew that means iniquity. The root means to be twisted, distorted or crooked. It gives the picture of sin as distorting or twisting that which God designed us to be. The NLT translates this phrase *"to atone for guilt"* and the NASB translates it *"to make atonement for iniquity."* The NIV translation of wickedness is slightly misleading. The word associates the twisting or distorting of iniquity with guilt so the NLT and NASB translations more accurately reflect the precise meaning of the Hebrew terms. The word for iniquity or guilt is singular which implies in context a broad atonement for sin rather than a specific sin or set of sins. This is parallel with the idea of sealing up the sins of the people and once again points to the New Covenant and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The implication of these two phrases is that God is going to forgive sin and atone for it not in the once a year ritual of the Day of Atonement but once and for all. Daniel had asked God to forgive his people. Gabriel is telling Daniel God will deal with sin once and for all. He will make atonement for it. This is a remarkable prophecy of the Servant-Messiah's mission to the world and points to the first coming of the Lord Jesus rather than to his second coming and the end of history.

The New Covenant interpretation is further reinforced by the next phrase: to bring in everlasting righteousness. Both the NLT and NASB translate the phrase the same way. The verb to bring in is one of the most common verbs used in the Hebrew Bible and means simply to go or come. The form here uses a special Hebrew causal form that is often associated with Yahweh's Word and him guiding the events of history to fulfill his will in the world and for his people. Righteousness is the common word for righteousness and means right living and conduct as well as expressing a right relationship to God. Everlasting is used over 300 times in the Old Testament and most often means an indeterminate continuation of something into the distant future; thus everlasting or eternal. The question is what these common words strung together mean here in the context of Gabriel's explanation to Daniel. Given Gabriel's references to atonement and putting an end to sin which point to the New Covenant God wants to establish with Israel, bringing in everlasting righteousness is also related to the New Covenant. If atonement for sin is the negative side of the covenant then everlasting righteousness is the positive side. Both *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* declare that in the New Covenant God will make with his people he will forgive their sins. He will take out of them their heart of stone and put his Law or will within them and give them a heart of flesh when he gives them his Spirit. Gabriel tells Daniel when God makes atonement for sin he will also cause everlasting righteousness to be brought to God's people and to his world. This points to not only the justification of the sinner but the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. The phrase is general in nature but looking at Daniel's prophecy through New Testament eyes we can see how Jesus' work through his cross, resurrection and sending of the Holy Spirit accomplishes what Gabriel tells Daniel God is going to do in the future. Gabriel says God is not going to bring a period of righteousness but everlasting righteousness. There is no other event in the Bible or in history that even comes close to fulfilling Gabriel's declaration here except the saving work of our Lord Jesus.

Gabriel tells Daniel that the seventy sevens are to "*seal up vision and prophecy.*" The NLT reads "*to confirm prophetic vision.*" The NASB reads, "*to seal up vision and prophecy*" or literally prophet. The Hebrew word for seal up is the same word Gabriel uses in the phrase "*to put an end to sin*", which means sin will be sealed in the New Covenant God is going to make with Israel. Here the word is used in its more common form to refer to someone sealing an official document. Some have taken the phrase to mean God is going to keep secret and not reveal the meaning of the prophecy. Some Dispensational scholars use that interpretation to teach that only in the generation of the last days (meaning our own of course) will *Daniel's* prophecy become clear. However, a better translation of the phrase in context is the NLT's; to confirm prophetic vision. The word for seal or seal up carries the sense of confirming a message because it now has the king's seal upon it. It is genuine and authentic. I believe that is what Gabriel is telling Daniel here. The ESV translates the phrase "*to seal both vision and prophet.*" It uses the literal translation of the word the NIV translates prophecy. What does Gabriel mean when he says the seventy weeks will seal vision and prophet, or vision and prophecy? I think he means God will confirm his prophets and their visions of God's plan in history. He will bring their prophecies to fulfillment. God will put his seal on all his prophets' messages and fulfill them, showing the Jews and the world that they were true prophets of God.

The final phrase in *verse 24* is also a difficult one. The NIV reads, "*to anoint the most holy.*" The NLT reads, "*to anoint the Most Holy Place*" or Most Holy One. The NASB reads, "*to anoint the most holy place.*" The ESV reads, "*to anoint a most holy place*" or thing or one. There is some discrepancy in the translations and ambiguity in their meaning. That makes it difficult to translate the phrase with any certainty and thereby know how to interpret it. The word for anoint is the normal word to describe the anointing of a priest, king or object. Its noun form is Messiah or anointed one. That's the easy part of the phrase. The difficult part is what follows. In Hebrew the phrase literally reads "*to anoint holy the holy ones.*" The word holy is repeated and what's more the second holy is plural and not singular like the first. In other places in the Old Testament both in the *Pentateuch* and in *Ezra* and *Chronicles* this construction stands for the holy of holies or most holy place. That is the most likely translation here. However, it can also mean the most holy things or altar like some of the articles used in the temple. Given the context of *9:24* and Daniel's other reference to God's plan to make atonement for sin once and for all it seems best to translate the reference here as the most holy place or simply the most holy as the NIV does. The problem is what does that mean and to what is Gabriel referring? If it is to the most holy place or the holy of holies then it sounds as if he is referring to the temple which in Daniel's day lay in ruins. Is this a prophecy of the rebuilding of the temple? Gabriel has already referred to God's final plan to deal with sin once and for all through an atoning sacrifice. We know from the gospels that sacrifice was the Lord Jesus' death on the cross when the veil of the temple was torn in two exposing "*the most holy place!*" The rest of Gabriel's summary in *9:24* points to God's plan that will be carried out apart from the temple and the animal sacrifices that had been halted in Daniel's day and would cease their efficacy after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore I do not believe the anointing of the most holy here in *9:24* is speaking of the temple. I think it is referring to Christ. He is the Messiah, the anointed one of God, who will make atonement for the sins of the world and by his resurrection be declared the "*Holy One of God.*" That is what the demon called Jesus in *Mark 1*. It is the title Peter gives Jesus in *John 6* and what Stephen called him in *Acts 3*. It was a title for the Messiah. I believe that is what Gabriel is telling Daniel here. The seventy weeks will bring about the revealing of the Messiah and the salvation and forgiveness he will bring to his people the Jews and the whole world.

Taken together, Gabriel's description of God's answer to Daniel lays out God's plan to save his people from their sins by making a New Covenant with them that will be accomplished through the work of the anointed Holy One, the Messiah. This is a remarkable prophecy of God's plan and one that the Jews did not readily apply to the Lord Jesus and his work. In fact, the New Testament does not quote *Daniel's* prophecy of the seventy weeks as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus quotes the "*abomination of desolation*" in 9:27 but not the seventy weeks and Gabriel's outline of God's plan. If I am correct in my interpretation it is curious that New Testament writers did not use the seventy weeks prophecy as proof that Jesus is the Messiah and fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. *Daniel's* prophecy is only included in a general way in New Testament passages like *Romans 1* and *Hebrews 1* that speak of Jesus and his death and resurrection fulfilling what the prophets had said.

One more comment is worth noting about *verse 24*. The seventy sevens can be broken down in several ways. The most obvious way is to see them as 490 years. However, the number 70 is an important symbolic number in the prophets, especially in *Daniel*. In the introduction to his prayer in 9:2 Daniel says he had been reading the prophet *Jeremiah* and understood that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. This is based on Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in *Jeremiah 29*. He had said their exile and captivity would last 70 years. Historically that is a symbolic number because it was only 59 years from the exile of Jehoiachin in 597 to Cyrus' decree to rebuild the temple in 538. However, if one takes 70 years as a starting point or seventy weeks as Gabriel says, then there are 7 seventies that make up the 490 years or weeks. That could possibly correspond to a normal solar week which would make the last 70 a Sabbath seventy, which seems to indicate that the final seventy would be the most important. This is only speculation about the numbers and their symbolism however and may not relate in any way to the actual meaning of Gabriel's answer to Daniel. Yet it does indicate that many fanciful and intriguing possibilities exist as we try and understand the answer to Daniel's prayer and the interpretation of the 70 sevens.

Various sources confirm that the normal Hebrew year of twelve lunar months had from 353 to 355 days depending on the particular year. It was 11 days short of the standard solar year of 365. In post-exilic times a leap month was added based on a complicated formula about every 19 years in order to bring the lunar monthly calendar in line with the solar calendar to keep the Hebrew feasts at the right time of year, especially Passover. There is no evidence whatsoever after consulting multiple sources that the ancient Hebrews calculated their years using 360 days. Some Dispensational prophecy scholars use that calculation in order to try and precisely align *Daniel's* seventy weeks or 490 years with the dates of Jesus' death and resurrection. The reality is it is impossible to align the dates and make the 490 years a precise, literal prophecy because of the fluid nature of the Hebrew calendar. Furthermore the practice of leap months to align the lunar and solar calendars was not adapted until post-exilic times far later than the first year of Cyrus' rule in Babylon or 539 BC when Daniel is given the prophecy of the seventy sevens. That leads me to conclude that the numbers must be symbolic and not literal in nature.

Furthermore the Hebrews most often dated something by an event like the number of years in a king's reign and not a date on the calendar. Thus Daniel says his prayer and Gabriel's answer to it came in the first year of Darius the Mede or Cyrus' rule over Babylon which would have been 539 BC. That is why even if Daniel would have known how to use our modern calendars he would not have said in 539 BC but in the first year of Darius the Mede. That Hebrew way of dating things makes it even more difficult to make the seventy sevens perfectly fit an exact set of dates. This is further complicated by the approximate date of Jesus' birth and

death. It is very difficult to pin down the precise dates when both events occurred. We know he was born before Herod the Great died in 4 BC but we do not know how long before. We know he was "about 30 years of age" according to *Luke* when he began his ministry but we do not know whether he was 28, 29, 30, 31 or even 32 or 33. The dates are all approximate. Taken all together it seems to me the best way to interpret Daniel's prophecy of the seventy sevens is symbolically because we cannot interpret it literally with any kind of certainty.

9:25-27 - According to my Study Bible notes there are three main interpretations of this prophecy. The first is the Historical. Gabriel is outlining the period from *Jeremiah* and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 to Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 BC. The anointed one is Cyrus, Zerubbabel, or Joshua the High Priest. The first 7 weeks end with the return of the exiles in 538. The intervening period of the 62 weeks ended with the murder of Onnias, the High Priest, around 170. The last week was from 171-164 when Antiochus desecrated the temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar. The second interpretation is the Messianic. The period in view is from 538 BC to 70 AD. The anointed one is Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The numbers are symbolic and not mathematical or historical. The first 7 weeks are from 538 to *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*. The 62 weeks were from *Ezra* to Christ. The last week was Jesus' life climaxing in the tearing of the veil of the temple. *Verse 26* refers to the destruction of the temple by Titus in 70. The third interpretation is the Dispensational Premillennial. The starting point is Cyrus' decree to restore the temple in 538 or from the decree of Artaxerxes to restore Jerusalem in 444 BC. 69 weeks were completed at the time of Christ's death. The 70th week is seen as the Great Tribulation period of 7 years or a week of years. The present church age is a gap or parenthesis between the 69th and 70th weeks which God did not reveal through his inspired prophets. In this view the future seven year Tribulation period will be divided at its midpoint. The focal point of the Tribulation is seen by many Dispensational scholars to be the Jews in Jerusalem with a restored temple. Covenant protection will be given them by the antichrist for the first 3 and a half years. The Jews will be favored by the world ruler named the antichrist or the beast of *Revelation 13*. However, the latter three and a half years will see the antichrist break his covenant with the Jews and usher in a time of unprecedented tribulation and persecution of them. All three views understand that the ultimate fulfillment of *Daniel's* vision is found in Jesus Christ. That ultimate fulfillment has not yet occurred and waits the Lord Jesus' final return.

Like the introduction and setting of the prophecy in *verse 24* we need to examine each phrase of these verses to best determine what Gabriel is telling Daniel about the fulfillment of God's plan in history for his people. That is necessary because there are so many interpretations of this prophecy and it has often been used as the key passage to interpret biblical prophecy, especially the apocalyptic visions of *Daniel* and *Revelation*.

Daniel is told to know and understand or to comprehend what Gabriel is telling him. Then he is told, "from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem..." The NASB reads, "from the issuing of the decree (or word) to restore and rebuild Jerusalem..." The NLT reads, "from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem..." The first question to answer is: to what is Gabriel referring about a decree to restore Jerusalem? The word for issuing or going forth is a rich word in Hebrew. It is often related to the exodus and God leading his people out of slavery like the going forth from Egypt. It can be used of God's Word as in *Isaiah*, going forth from God to accomplish his purposes in history. Thus even if Gabriel is using it to describe the decree of a Persian king behind that decree stands God who is using the Persians to accomplish his purposes for his people. There are two possible historical references that make

sense. The first is Cyrus the Great's decree in 538 BC that the Jews could return to Jerusalem from exile and rebuild God's temple. The second is Artaxerxes granting permission for Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem with the king's assistance in 444 BC. Dispensational scholars prefer the latter date as it more closely fits what they view as a precise timeline and a literal interpretation of the prophecy. Cyrus' decree makes the most sense from the standpoint of the language of the text and of history. The return under Zerubbabel in 538 was viewed as a second exodus (see *Isaiah 40 and ff.*) and was sanctioned by a royal decree from Cyrus as King of Persia. That matches the language of the text. The problem is it was not strictly a decree to rebuild Jerusalem but to rebuild the Lord's temple. Nehemiah's commission as governor of Judea and the king's permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem more closely matches the language of the text to rebuild Jerusalem. However, Artaxerxes' permission to Nehemiah can hardly be called a royal decree proclaimed throughout the Persian Empire like Cyrus' decree. Plus, Zerubbabel's return was viewed by the Jews with much greater significance than Nehemiah's. I tend to see Cyrus' decree as the starting point of Daniel's seventy sevens or 490 years. However, if we start there then there is no chance Daniel's prophecy is a literal prophecy of the Messiah and the end times. The math simply does not work out.

The next phrase in the NIV is, "*until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens.*" The NASB reads, "*until Messiah (or an anointed one) the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.*" The NLT puts seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven before the phrase about Jerusalem and then reads, "*until the Anointed One comes.*" The ESV ends the sentence at seven weeks and puts the sixty-two weeks at the beginning of the next sentence about Jerusalem being rebuilt. Those are four separate versions with four significantly different translations of the text. That shows the difficulty in understanding what Daniel is being told. The Hebrew literally reads "*an anointed one a prince seven sevens.*" The difficulty is what does Daniel mean by an anointed one, a prince? Should one translate this: the Anointed One, the ruler, or the Anointed One, the Prince or the Anointed Prince or even an anointed ruler? All are possible, although, there are no definite articles in Hebrew so properly the phrase should read an anointed one rather than the anointed one. But the Hebrew word for anointed one is Messiah. From a New Testament standpoint it makes the most sense to take the Anointed One, the Prince, as the Lord Jesus but that is by no means the only valid interpretation of the phrase. *Haggai* and *Zechariah* both name Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest, the leaders of the exiles who returned following Cyrus' decree, as anointed ones. That is one possibility. *Isaiah* names Cyrus the Great as the Lord's anointed one! That is another possibility. Some, trying to tie Daniel's entire prophecy to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, have said the anointed one here is Onnias the High Priest who was killed right before Antiochus' persecution broke out. The problem with that view is high priests are rarely if ever called princes, and the word means ruler. The High Priest during the Greek period was not a ruler but a religious figure. Given the context of Gabriel's overview of God's plan in *verse 24* it seems to me that Anointed One, the ruler or prince is most likely the Lord Jesus and the prophecy is describing his full Messianic work of securing atonement for God's people and the restoring of Jerusalem. Gabriel says that is what his answer to Daniel's prayer is about. After all is considered this is a prophecy of the Messiah and the events surrounding his mission.

The next difficulty to unravel is the seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. There is a connective particle in Hebrew between the seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. It does literally read seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. So the NIV reading, supported by the NASB and the NLT, is probably correct even though the ESV separates them. The question is why doesn't

Gabriel just say 69 sevens rather than separating the two numbers? The most likely reason is he is telling Daniel that there will be two distinct times within the 69 weeks, namely seven and then 62. The probable meaning is that the rebuilding of Jerusalem will be within the seven sevens and the coming of the Anointed One, the ruler, will be 62 sevens after that. This makes the most sense of the text and is the way the NIV translates the phrase. It should be noted that even though the ESV differs from the other three translations its ultimate meaning is still the same.

Gabriel tells Daniel that Jerusalem will be rebuilt during the time of the 69 weeks until the coming of the Messiah, most likely in the first seven weeks or seven sevens. It will be rebuilt *"with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble."* The NLT reads, *"with streets and strong defenses (a textual note reads and a moat or trenches) despite perilous times."* The NASB reads, *"it will be built again, with plaza (or streets) and moat, even in times of distress."* The ESV reads, *"it shall be built again with squares and moat but in a troubled time."* The word for build can also mean rebuild which fits the historical context of Jerusalem in Daniel's day. The city needed to be rebuilt if it was to be inhabited again. The word translated streets in the NIV literally means a broad open place which is why some translations read plaza or squares. The picture the word paints is of wide and broad plazas or streets within the city. When Jerusalem is rebuilt it will not have narrow closed in streets where people cannot congregate but wide open plazas and boulevards where many people and animals can walk. The implication is it will be a beautiful and open city like Babylon where the exiles lived during Daniel's lifetime. The word for trench is a difficult word and means literally to cut or decide. The idea is of a ditch or moat dug around the city as a defensive measure. It is used in this way only here in *Daniel 9:25* which makes it difficult to interpret precisely. That is why the NLT softens the phrase and makes it general in nature rendering it as strong defenses. The historical problem is Jerusalem never had a moat. It had a strong wall but not a ditch built around it. *Nehemiah* never refers to digging a moat around the base of the wall when the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt during his tenure as governor in Jerusalem. During New Testament times there was no moat around the walls of the city. It is impossible to know to what Gabriel is referring unless the word is to be taken more generally as the NLT does and simply refer to the strengthening of the city's defenses, especially the walls.

If there are two distinct periods in the 69 weeks, a shorter one of seven sevens and a longer one of sixty-two sevens before Messiah comes then Gabriel is most likely referring to the rebuilding of Jerusalem during the time of *Nehemiah* around 444 BC. *Nehemiah* successfully led the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days all the time facing stiff opposition from the Samaritans and other enemies of the Jews around Jerusalem. The seven sevens should be read as a symbolic number expressing God's plan to use *Nehemiah* to restore and rebuild Jerusalem soon after Cyrus' decree to allow the Jews to return. Further during those seven sevens the temple was rebuilt before the walls, also during difficult times. Daniel is being told within a short time after the Jews are allowed to return to Jerusalem the temple and the city will be restored and rebuilt and the people will once again be able to live in the city in safety. All of that was accomplished within 94 years of Cyrus' decree. The 49 years of the seven sevens is therefore symbolic and not literal in an historical sense.

Verse 26 starts with another difficult phrase. The NIV reads, *"After the sixty-two sevens, the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing."* The NLT reads, *"After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing..."* The NASB reads, *"Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah (or anointed one) will be cut off and have nothing (or no one)."* The ESV reads, *"And after the sixty-two weeks, an*

anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing." The fact that there are significant differences in the translations of this verse shows there is uncertainty about exactly what the words mean in context. That means we should be cautious in any interpretation we give taking into account the uncertainty involved.

Anointed One literally in Hebrew reads an anointed one, but it seems the meaning is clear that Gabriel is speaking of the Messiah. The verb for cut off is a rich word. It can mean literally killed or figuratively excommunicated, meaning someone is "*cut off*" from the covenant or the community of Israel. The verb form is used in the phrase "*to cut a covenant.*" Gabriel has already told Daniel in his introduction to this prophecy in *verse 24* about God's plan to secure permanent atonement for his people through a New Covenant sacrifice. Given the rich Hebrew meaning of this verb this becomes a remarkable prophecy of Jesus' mission in his first coming. Jesus is the Messiah but he will be cut off, meaning killed, but also meaning he will be cut off from his community, Israel. When Christ was nailed to the cross according to the Law in *Deuteronomy 21* he became cursed of God and was excluded from the covenant community. Plus, he himself became the sacrifice that established a New Covenant through his blood. He himself was "*cut*" in order to redeem God's people and open the way for God to justify the sinner based on Jesus' sacrifice of himself. Gabriel is telling Daniel the plan of the New Testament! He is giving him the reason for the Messiah's first coming that the Jews did not understand. In fact they rejected his mission and rejected him as Messiah because they could not reconcile their understanding of the prophecies of the Messiah's mission with the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The best evidence of this is Saul of Tarsus' opposition to Christians and Jesus as Messiah! If I am correct this sentence becomes one of the greatest prophecies in the Old Testament of the plan of God for the salvation of the human race. The curious part is the apostles and gospel writers do not use it at all! It is possible they ignore it because of its apocalyptic nature and the difficulty in translating the prophecy. However, they are not shy in applying many other equally difficult passages to Jesus, his life and ministry.

It is clear that when Messiah is "*cut off*" he will have nothing. The disciples were completely defeated after the crucifixion. Jesus could not be the Messiah. He was dead. He had nothing. He literally could not be the Messiah because now he was cursed of God and cut off from his people. What Gabriel does not reveal to Daniel here is anything about Jesus' resurrection that would prove he was in fact the Messiah even though he had been cursed of God because of his crucifixion. Paul put it all together and understood what the resurrection declared about Jesus and his death. Did he examine this prophecy? We do not know but it is possible. We do know he does not quote it directly nor does he allude to it in any of his letters. Despite no clear references to this prophecy by the apostles in the New Testament it still remains one of the most remarkable and important prophecies of God's plan of redemption in the Old Testament. Gabriel told Daniel what was going to happen! Jesus the Messiah would come not to take up his kingly reign but to be "*cut off*" to secure atonement and bring in everlasting righteousness.

The next phrase in the NIV reads, "*The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.*" The NLT reads, "*and a ruler will arise whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple.*" The NASB reads, "*and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.*" Gabriel tells Daniel that the people of the ruler or prince who will arise in the future will attack and destroy the city after the sixty-two sevens and the death of the Messiah. The word for sanctuary means literally the holy place or holy one. Here in context it is describing the temple. This cannot be a reference to Antiochus Epiphanes because he only stopped the sacrifices in the temple and defiled it; he did not destroy it nor did he destroy

Jerusalem. Plus in Gabriel's timeline the destruction of Jerusalem takes place after the death of the Messiah and the sixty-two sevens. The best interpretation of this phrase is the Romans under Titus who destroyed the city and the temple in the first Jewish Revolt in 70 AD. If that is correct then the ruler who will come emerges out of the Romans or Rome. The language of the text is clear however in that the city and temple will be destroyed once again by the people of the ruler who will come and not by the ruler himself. He will emerge later in history. John in *Revelation 13* says the antichrist or beast will come from Rome. Gabriel is giving Daniel a prophetic-symbolic picture of the events surrounding the first coming of the Messiah in these verses. He is also telling Daniel that even though Jerusalem will be rebuilt and resettled after the seven sevens, after the sixty-two sevens and the first coming of the Messiah the city and the temple will once again be destroyed. Remember Gabriel tells Daniel in *verse 24* that the seventy sevens will finish transgression and bring in everlasting righteousness. The completion of God's plan for his people and his city is still a long ways into the future. That must have been difficult for Daniel to hear just as it looked as if history was going to turn for the Jews and there was hope they would be able to go home again. Daniel is told they will go home and Jerusalem will be rebuilt but it won't last. The same thing will happen again. All this must take place before God finishes his plan. It's as if Daniel is asking God when will all this be finished and God replies through Gabriel, "*Not yet, not yet.*"

Jerusalem will be destroyed again. The NIV reads, "*The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.*" The NLT reads, "*The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end.*" The NASB reads, "*And its (or his) end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined (or, war will be decreed for desolations).*" Once again this is a phrase in this prophecy about which there is some disagreement as to how to precisely translate it. The ESV reads, "*Its (or his) end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.*"

There is some question as to the pronoun at the beginning of this phrase. Is it he or it? "*He*" would refer to the ruler who is to come in the previous phrase. "*It*" would refer to Jerusalem and the temple. In the context of the phrase it makes the most sense to see this as still referring to the city and temple. Jerusalem's end or destruction will come like a flood or with a flood. Flood here is metaphoric. Gabriel is not saying there will be a literal flood that will destroy the city. That is clear from the phrase that immediately follows that says war will continue until the end. A flood is a powerful, inexorable force that cannot be stopped. Gabriel is describing the Roman armies as they breached the walls of Jerusalem and poured into the city in 70 AD. The root verb of this noun for flood means to overflow or engulf. That describes the invading Romans quite literally. Josephus reports the legions poured into the city, slaying, raping and pillaging everything they could find. The Jews were overwhelmed! The Hebrew that follows literally reads, "*and to the end war.*" The various translations add the understood future verb. From an historical standpoint Gabriel's language makes sense. The Romans destroyed the city and burned the temple in 70. Less than a century later they once again attacked the city in the Second Jewish Revolt. Jerusalem was largely deserted for a time after that, though Jews still came to the Western Wall to grieve. Over the next 2000 years Jerusalem has known some times of relative calm but always those times of peace have been interrupted by battle and war all the way up to the present. The threat of war always hangs over Jerusalem. Gabriel tells Daniel the city will be destroyed by the Romans but even after that it will always live under the threat of

war. The second half of the phrase casts the finish of this prophecy far into the future after Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans.

Desolations are decreed is also a difficult phrase. Desolation means devastated, abandoned, deserted, which is exactly what happened to Jerusalem after the Romans destroyed it. The word in the Old Testament is most often used in connection with God's judgments in history. A city, country or people are left desolate because of God's wrath and justice. Today Jerusalem is resettled. However, the word is used in *verse 27* to describe the abomination that causes desolation, a type of which is Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificing a pig on the temple altar to Zeus. Titus also defiled the temple in 70. If the desolations Gabriel describes are spiritual in nature then he is saying the temple will be physically destroyed but also spiritually devastated and abandoned. Today the Jews pray at the Western Wall but there are no more sacrifices made to God on Temple Mount. The temple itself is desolate and abandoned.

The word for decreed means to cut, sharpen or decide. The sense here is that desolations for Jerusalem have been firmly decided. A related word is used in the phrase about Jerusalem being rebuilt with a trench or moat in *verse 25*, meaning something that is dug or cut. The sense of the decision or decree here is that it cannot be altered. It is firm, like Daniel's earlier descriptions of the Laws of the Medes and Persians that cannot be altered. The question is who is making the decree? Given the context I think this is a reference to God sovereignly deciding Jerusalem's future. It will be rebuilt, destroyed and made desolate before the end finally comes. If desolate is not only physical in nature but also spiritual it could mean that the temple and its altar will remain desolate until the end. The end is not only the end of Jerusalem or its destruction but also the end of history, the finishing of God's plan for his people. This would suggest that Gabriel in this last phrase of *verse 26* is telling Daniel what will occur in the 70th week or seven. War will continue and desolations will occur. Jerusalem will be destroyed but that is not the end. More war and desolation will follow.

Verse 27 begins in the NIV, "*He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven.*" The NLT reads, "*He will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven.*" The NASB reads, "*And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week.*" The ESV reads, "*And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week.*"

There are several questions to answer in this phrase. First, who is "*he*"? From the context it seems likely that Gabriel is referring to the ruler who will come whose people will destroy Jerusalem. The best historical interpretation of the people of the ruler who will come is the Romans. That means the ruler who will come is somehow related to Rome. Many scholars including most Evangelical and Dispensationalist scholars see this as a reference to the Antichrist or the Beast of *Revelation 13*.

He makes a covenant with "*many*". The word in Hebrew is the noun without the definite article of the word for many or much or great. Some prophecy scholars see this as the Antichrist making a covenant with Israel in the last days. The problem is the word for "*many*" often refers to the nations and the Gentiles. It would be a stretch to interpret it as meaning just the Jews in this context. It more likely refers to the ruler who is to come making a covenant or a treaty with many peoples and nations, including the Jews, for one seven. Covenant is the normal word for covenant which can describe the relationship and agreement God has with his people but in this context it means some sort of treaty or agreement between nations. The verb to make means to make strong or confirm, to demonstrate strength. The implication of the verb form in this sentence is that the ruler who will come will make a covenant or confirm a treaty with many nations and peoples and that treaty will come about because of his strength. One gets the

impression that he will impose his will on the nations in this covenant. He is the stronger party to the treaty and gets what he wants. There is no sense here of a treaty of peace that came about through mutual good will between equals but a treaty the ruler has imposed on many nations. Since Gabriel has already said war and desolations will come and will be related to Jerusalem, this phrase means at some point the ruler will force an end to conflict on his terms. The text implies people will be relieved the fighting has stopped but not with the terms of the treaty. Conquerors in history have often brought peace through conquest but the result is often oppression and not freedom. Given the rest of *Daniel 9:27* that appears to be the case here as well.

Another difficult question to answer from this first phrase is the time-frame of the seven in which the ruler to come makes his treaty with many nations. Is this following the sixty-two sevens, or sixty-nine sevens or is it during the same period? It appears this final seven Gabriel mentions is the 70th seven and not a time during the 69 sevens, although that is by no means certain. When does this seven that Gabriel talks about in *verse 27* occur? The 69 sevens between Cyrus' decree to rebuild the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus in 70 AD appear to happen in sequence. The numbers may be symbolic but the fulfillment dovetails with history and is in chronological order. Dispensational scholars teach that the seven in *verse 27* is the 70th week and is completely separate from the rest of the 69 week chronology of *Daniel 9*. They teach there is a large gap between the 69th and 70th sevens because the 70 sevens or weeks are part of the age or dispensation of Israel and not the church. The two dispensations are completely separate and do not relate. Further the church age was kept hidden in the Old Testament and so was not understood by the prophets. Therefore the prophetic time clock stopped when Jesus was crucified and resurrected or soon after when the Jews as a people rejected their Messiah. It will not start up again until the church is taken out or raptured and then the final 70th week will occur.

This interpretation tries to explain the obvious time gap between the historical fulfillment of the 69 weeks and the unfulfilled 70th week of Daniel's prophecy. The problem is it has several major flaws. First, there is nothing in the text that says there is a 2000 plus year gap between the 69th week and the 70th week that is hidden from Daniel and awaits the rapture of the church. People conclude that because of historical events and their partial fulfillment of the prophecy but the prophecy itself does not say this. Second, the Old Testament prophets, especially *Isaiah*, argued that when Messiah came God would invite the Gentiles into his people Israel. Paul saw his mission as a fulfillment of those prophecies. See *Romans 15*. Since one of the first tenets of good exegesis is that Scripture interprets Scripture, the apostles confirm that God's plan through his Messiah is being fulfilled with the conversion of the Gentiles and their inclusion into Israel as God's people. See *Romans 9-11*. The church is one people under the Messiah made up of both Jews and Gentiles just as God had declared through his prophets. That can hardly be said to be something hidden in prophecy and that the prophetic time clock stopped after Jesus' resurrection. Plus, that view completely ignores God sending his Holy Spirit upon all who believe in the Messiah, both Jew and Gentile, as prophesied by *Joel* and *Ezekiel*. That was fulfilled at Pentecost in *Acts 2* and in *Acts 10*!

Is the seven Gabriel refers to in *verse 27* the 70th seven or can it be understood to occur during the 69 weeks or sevens of *verses 25-26*? Most scholars infer that the seven Gabriel speaks of in *verse 27* is the 70th seven because it follows *verse 26* and the events of the 69 sevens. There is however another possibility. In *verse 26* Gabriel describes the destruction of Jerusalem by the people of the ruler who will come. That is most likely the destruction of the city by the

Romans in 70 AD. He then tells Daniel that war will continue until the end. Either that means the end of the 69 sevens or the end of the entire 70 sevens. It is possible it means the end of the 70 sevens because he has already said the Messiah will be killed and Jerusalem and the temple destroyed at the end of the 69 sevens. If that is the case then it is possible that the seven of *verse 27* is not the 70th seven but a seven or week within the 69. If Gabriel is backtracking in *verse 27* then the events of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes closely fulfill the description of the abomination that causes desolation. There are still problems with this view however. What does Gabriel mean by a covenant or treaty with many for seven years or one seven? There is no historical evidence that Antiochus made a treaty with many nations three and a half years before he halted all sacrifice in the temple and persecuted the Jews. Even if the seven is a symbolic number the treaty with many does not fit the historical data. He did forbid the worship of Yahweh and halted the temple sacrifices trying to force the Jews to Hellenize beginning in 167 BC. That was halted when Judas Maccabaeus led his forces into Jerusalem and cleansed the temple in December of 164, three and a half years later. That part does fit the historical record. As attractive as it is to see *verse 27* as referring to a seven within the 69 sevens and prophesying the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes there are too many problems with this view to conclude that this is what Gabriel is telling Daniel. That means we are left with the more traditional view that the seven in *verse 27* is the 70th seven. That view however also has problems.

How then does one explain the obvious time gap between *Daniel's* 69th and 70th weeks? We have already shown that the 69 weeks are not 483 literal years from Cyrus' decree in 538 BC to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The math simply does not work out. The problem with the gap is often related to trying to make the 70 sevens out to be a literal 490 years. No matter which reasonable starting place one uses historically for the 70 weeks one cannot make the chronology fit in a precise manner. In a general way it does but not literally. Given that fact, I conclude that the gap between the historical fulfillment of the 69 weeks and the eventual fulfillment of the 70th week is also meant to be taken symbolically and not literally. This view allows for the gap without having to agree with the Dispensational view of prophecy which I believe is a forced and artificial interpretation of Scripture and does not deal with the text as it stands. If that is the case then the 70th week and the fulfillment of God's plan will happen in God's timing and not human historical time. This is further reinforced by the final description of the 70th week which points to the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes but which the Lord Jesus said would be ultimately fulfilled at his Second Coming. See *Matthew 24* and *Mark 13*.

Gabriel tells Daniel that in the middle of the final, 70th seven, the ruler who will come will put an end to sacrifice and offering. That is, after 3 and one half years the ruler will stop the sacrifices and worship of the temple. The NLT reads, "*but after half this time he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings.*" The NASB reads, "*but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering.*" The ESV reads, "*and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering.*" The different versions essentially agree on this phrase. The difficulty is in understanding the meaning and timing of the phrase.

Sacrifice and offering relate to the temple and its rituals and worship. The word for sacrifice is the common word used to describe the animal sacrifices for the feasts and the daily morning and evening sacrifices of the temple. Offering can be used in a general way to describe grain and animal offerings but is also the word used for the grain offerings of the daily sacrifices in the temple ritual. The difficulty in interpreting this phrase is that Gabriel is saying the temple rituals were suspended by the ruler who will come half way through the covenant he had made with the many or the nations. The obvious conclusion is that the temple is standing and

functioning. From an historical standpoint this produces many problems. Gabriel has already shown Daniel the temple will be rebuilt, which it was by the returning exiles under Zerubbabel. He has also shown that the rebuilt temple will be destroyed after the death of the Messiah, which it was by Titus and the Romans in 70 AD. Is Gabriel telling Daniel that the temple will be rebuilt again in or before the 70th week? It appears so. One reaches that conclusion if one takes the seven with the covenant as the final seven. Three and a half years into that final covenant the ruler who will come will suspend the worship in the temple and then defile it with "*the abomination of desolation.*" Historically Antiochus Epiphanes suspended temple worship during the roughly three and a half year period between 167 and 164 BC until the Jews under Judas Maccabaeus recaptured the temple and cleansed it. This is the origin of the Jewish feast of Hanukkah. The historical events surrounding Antiochus are too coincidental to be an accident. The problem is how to relate those events in the 160's BC to Daniel's prophecy here? It appears that the persecution of Antiochus is a type of the final persecution of the "*ruler who will come.*" If it is a type then the temple must be rebuilt in the final days of history before the return of the Lord Jesus. Jesus' description in *Mark 13* can be applied to Titus and the Roman destruction of the temple in 70 but it can also refer to conditions when he returns. It can be both, like many other prophecies which have an immediate historical meaning and a final fulfillment in the end times. Perhaps we should apply that usage here. If Jesus applies the abomination of desolation in *Daniel 9:27* to both Titus and the Antichrist then since Scripture interprets Scripture it makes sense to apply this sentence to both Antiochus and a future world ruler who will come.

If we do that however, then we are led to the conclusion that the Jewish temple will once again be rebuilt before the rise of the Antichrist. That conclusion presents many difficulties theologically. The *Book of Hebrews* argues that there is no other sacrifice available for making atonement other than the cross of Jesus Christ and that to go back to the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant is useless and in fact holds up the Son of God and his work to ridicule! Why would God allow such a thing to occur? I have great difficulty with the interpretation of many Evangelical and Dispensational scholars who teach that the temple must be rebuilt during the Great Tribulation and the final seven years of Daniel's prophecy, yet I cannot escape that conclusion here in *Daniel 9:27*. If the temple is rebuilt during or right before the final "*seven*" whenever that takes place, given New Testament teaching, I am led to the conclusion that God allows it to happen but he does not sanction it. Meaning, it may be the focal point of worship for the Jews during the final seven but it will be an insult to their Messiah and demeaning to his sacrifice on the cross. God will not approve of it except as a fulfillment of prophecy and so the rebuilt temple will not have his protection. It will be a product of the rebellion of God's ancient people who have rejected their Messiah. However, the *Book of Revelation* teaches that when the final persecution of the Antichrist comes against the Jews they will finally see the error of their ways and recognize the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. *Zechariah 12* will then be fulfilled. They will look on him whom they have pierced and mourn what they have done.

There is still the final phrase of *verse 27* to understand and apply before we finish this more detailed examination of *Daniel's* prophecy of the 70 weeks. Gabriel tells Daniel that during the final three and a half years of the 70th week, after the ruler who will come has stopped the temple sacrifices, the ruler will do something terrible. The NIV reads, "*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 NLT reads, "*Then as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the end that has been decreed is poured out on this ruler.*" The NASB reads, "*And on the wing of abominations (or detestable things) will come*

one who makes desolate (or causes horror), even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." The ESV reads, "And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator." As you can see there are significant differences between versions due to the fact that the meaning of the Hebrew words in this final phrase of *verse 27* is uncertain.

Literally the Hebrew words read "*the wing or extremity or corner of detested things.*" What does Gabriel mean by wing? The NIV interprets it as referring to the temple in some way. The NASB tries to take it literally as, the wing of abominations, but that makes no sense. I think the NIV is closer to the meaning. It makes the most sense to understand the phrase as the extremity or corner of something which in context probably refers to the temple or the altar. It could refer to the corner of the altar which then would mean one of the horns of the altar where the priests would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifices. It appears the picture Gabriel is painting is that the ruler that will come will sacrifice something on the altar, sprinkling its blood on the horns of the altar that will be detestable. Since abomination is plural that seems to imply it will happen more than once, abominations or detestable things. From an historical perspective Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 set up a statue of Zeus in the temple and instituted pagan sacrifices to it along with temple prostitution. These actions defiled the temple in the eyes of faithful Jews and according to the Law of Moses. This is the first historical instance of abominations that cause desolations or desertion of the temple. The Roman general Titus would be the next historical example in that he sacrificed a pig on the altar after the sack of Jerusalem before he destroyed the temple in 70 AD. It should also be noted that in *Daniel 11:31* Daniel writes about the abomination of desolation and the reference is in the middle of a prophetic passage that deals with the time of the Seleucids and the Ptolemies and specifically Antiochus Epiphanes. That is a specific reference to the time of Antiochus. This appears to be a reference to either the ultimate abomination of desolation or one who will bring that sacrilege to the temple, as Jesus refers to it in *Matthew 24* and *Mark 13*. This passage then describes the ultimate climax of evil against God's people in history and Antiochus and Titus and their defiling actions become a type of the actions of the one who brings desolation. The word can also mean horror, appalled or stunned. The picture is of such evil and sacrilege that God's people are stunned and appalled at it and the temple is left desolate and deserted because of it.

Gabriel says God's temple will be defiled by the ruler who will come but he will not triumph; God will. His future and end are already determined by God. The word for "*end*" in Hebrew means completion, and even more specifically, complete destruction or annihilation. God will pour out destruction upon the desolator. It is possible to take the word for desolator as "*the desolated one*" and apply it to the temple or Jerusalem but every major version translates the Hebrew participle as meaning the one who makes desolate, meaning the ruler who will come. It is "*decreed*" which is the same word Gabriel used at the end of *verse 26* to say that desolations are decreed upon Jerusalem. The word literally means to cut. Future events concerning the ruler who will come are already cut; they are already decided by God. The word for poured out describes molten metal being poured out of the furnace and is often used to describe God's wrath. In other words God has decided that his wrath will be poured out on the one who brings this appalling desolation. Even though the Jews may be shocked and appalled by what occurs and think things are completely beyond redemption, yet God has already decreed this future ruler's fate. He will face the righteous and jealous wrath of God for his people. He cannot win. Gabriel is telling Daniel that even when things look as bad as they can be for his people and for Jerusalem do not despair. God will triumph and the enemies of the Jews will face God's

judgment. He will save them. That same message John uses to comfort the seven churches in the *Book of Revelation*. Even though God's people may face unprecedented opposition and persecution they are not to give up hope and faith. God will triumph in the end and those who persecute God's people will be judged. As the bumper sticker in Prague said during the Czech revolution at the fall of communism, "*The Lamb wins!*"

Finally, if Scripture interprets Scripture then one must note that John in *Revelation* uses this prophecy in *Daniel* as a reference point to describe what scholars have called the Great Tribulation. John uses the symbol of seven years and especially three and a half years as the time of the Great Tribulation. Whether that is a literal or symbolic three and a half years is open for debate. The point is the final New Testament book picks up *Daniel's* time frame as a reference point to describe the final battle between God and the forces of Satan in the world, including the rise of the Antichrist or the Beast. John's interpretation needs to inform any interpretation we give of Daniel's prophecy here in *Daniel 9*. Daniel may be looking ahead specifically to the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes but the ultimate meaning of the 70 weeks prophecy is found in the events surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth. There is a gap between the 69 sevens and the fulfillment of the final 70th seven. However, it is not because the church age is hidden in the prophets as Dispensational scholars teach. Daniel gives us a hint of the already-not yet eschatology of the New Testament. There would be an historical gap between the first coming of the Messiah when he would secure atonement for the human race through the sacrifice of himself and his ultimate return when he would be acknowledged as Lord of all and finally defeat all of his enemies, including the antichrist. When he returns he will rescue his people from persecution and they will be with him forever.

Chapter 10:

10:1-6 - The third year of Cyrus king of Persia probably refers to 536 BC, the third year after Cyrus and the Persians had taken Babylon. The third literal year of the reign of Cyrus as King of Persia would have been 546; three years after Cyrus united the Medes and Persians into one kingdom. 546 seems unlikely because of the chronology of *Daniel*. Daniel's prayer and vision of the 70 weeks occurred in 539. Given that some of the material of *Daniel chapters 10-12* is based on the 70 weeks prophecy it only makes sense to see *chapter 10* as following *chapter 9* in time as well as its position in Daniel's prophecy. By 536 Daniel would have been living and perhaps still serving in Cyrus' court in Babylon for three years.

Verse 1, written in the 3rd person, was probably supplied by the editor of Daniel's prophecy. *Verse 2* reverts to the first person with Daniel telling about his vision. *Verse 1* says a revelation was given to Daniel, whose Babylonian name was Belteshazzar. Literally the Hebrew words read, "*a word was revealed or uncovered.*" The editor comments that Daniel knew the "*word*" was true and he understood it. The message concerned a "*great war*". *Chapters 10-12* detail that "*war*" which historically goes on for centuries. Much of this section of *Daniel* outlines the conflict or war between the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt with the land of Israel and the Jews who lived there caught in between.

Daniel reports he mourned for three weeks, 21 days, eating no choice food. Daniel ate no meat during that time nor did he drink any wine. He did not use any lotions on his skin until the three weeks was over. In other words, Daniel ate and drank only the bare minimum and he did not indulge himself in the luxuries available to him in the court of Cyrus in Babylon. It appears he was in mourning because of his vision and the understanding that came to him from that vision. In *Daniel 8* he had a vision related to the Persians and the Greek empires that would

follow them. That occurred in 554. He said at that time that he could not understand it. Here in 536 Daniel was given another vision of the same empires only this time he does understand. He is shown in the vision that in the future his people would face a terrible persecution once again at the hands of a brutal enemy who would try and destroy them. It grieved Daniel because he was living through the results of the calamity of the exile and the destruction of Jerusalem. It is also possible that Daniel is grieving because this is two years after Cyrus has given permission for the Jews under Zerubbabel to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Daniel's vision of persecution and war that lay ahead for his people must have seemed a body blow to Jewish hopes. Tribulation was going to happen again! That may be what sent him into grief and mourning.

In *verse 4* Daniel identifies the very day an angel came to him who would further interpret his vision. The date is the 24th day of the first month of Nisan, which the NLT identifies as April 23, 536. One commentary suggests that Daniel had been fasting and mourning during the Passover-Unleavened Bread feast and beyond it, wrestling in prayer for the plight of his people in Jerusalem trying to rebuild the temple. It is during this time that his vision comes to him. Then on the 24th of Nisan he has another vision of an angel standing before him.

Daniel says he was standing on the banks of the Tigris River, which ran to the east of the city of Babylon, in between Babylon and Susa in Elam. In *Daniel 8* his vision takes place in the citadel of Susa. Here he is closer to Babylon but not in the city. Daniel looks up and sees a man dressed in linen with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. The garments the "man" was wearing are similar to the garments the priests would wear. He looks like a man yet his appearance says he is more than a man. His body was like chrysolite, an ancient term for yellow topaz. The NASB reads beryl, which in this context means a gold topaz. The image means that his body was golden in appearance. The angel's face was like lightning, so bright one cannot look at it and his eyes were flaming torches. His eyes were fire. His arms and legs were like polished bronze and his voice was like the sound of a multitude. Think of the 12th Man at Century Link Stadium when the Seahawks play! In *chapter 8* Gabriel is described as being like a man. Here in *chapter 10* Daniel describes the angel as a man in form but his appearance is far from human. This is similar to the appearance of the Lord Jesus to John in *Revelation 1*. From later in this chapter it is clear that this is not a theophany of Christ but an angelic figure who is at war with demonic powers that resist him. Demons might try and resist the Lord Jesus but they have no power to hinder him, unlike an angel. Is this Gabriel once again, only this time shown in heavenly splendor? It is difficult to tell though that is possible.

10:7-11 - Daniel says he was the only one of the men he was with who saw the vision of the angel. However, even though the men didn't see anything they were overwhelmed with terror and so fled the scene and hid. Here is another instance in the Scriptures where the appearance of an angel causes fear and panic in people. People today romanticize about seeing an angel but the reports in the Bible lead me to conclude that most of the time it is not a pleasant experience! It is terrifying! I think it is because of their holiness. Our sin causes us to recoil from a being whose presence is so pure and holy. The same thing only worse happens when people in the Old Testament see God in some kind of theophany. They are terrified of his holiness and glory. That is why God became a man in Jesus so that he could communicate with us and show us who he is without us running away from him. Yet in the Gospels, when the disciples recognize Jesus as divine after a miracle or on the Mount of Transfiguration, their first response is fear and awe.

After his companions fled Daniel is left alone to face the angel. It affects him too. He said he felt weak and helpless and his face turned deathly pale. When he heard the angel speaking, he fell into a deep sleep with his face to the ground. That sounds like he collapsed and fainted which is how the NLT translates it. The angel touched Daniel and pulled him up to his hands and knees. Daniel reports he was trembling whether from fear or shock or both we don't know.

The angel spoke to him. He told Daniel that he was highly esteemed. The Hebrew word used here means desirable, precious, treasured, or valuable. The NLT and the ESV render the word as "*man greatly loved*." The angel tells Daniel he is precious and treasured in God's sight! What a wonderful thing for God to tell you! Daniel is told to pay attention to what the angel is about to tell him. He is told to stand up on his feet because the angel has been sent to Daniel to tell him about his vision. Daniel stands up but says he was still trembling. The word for trembling in *verse 11* means quaking or shaking and in *verse 10* the word translated trembling means to cause to shake or totter. The words translated as trembling in English in both verses are different words in Hebrew but they appear to be synonyms. I don't think there is any significant difference between the two words. Daniel was shaking when the angel touched him and set him on his hands and knees and when he finally stood up he was still shaking. The implication is this was a very fearful and overwhelming encounter with the angel for Daniel. He is not filled with waves of love and peace. He is quaking in his sandals!!!

10:12-14 - The angel tells Daniel not to be afraid. Daniel's prayers have been heard and the angel has come to answer them. In fact from the first day he began to fast and mourn after his vision in an attempt to understand it his prayers have been heard. That is a comfort for us. God hears our prayers! Daniel is told his prayers were heard at once in heaven. Here on earth however there was a 21 day delay with the answer. The reason the angel gives Daniel opens the curtain on the unseen spiritual world of the angelic and demonic that few other passages in Scripture describe.

Like the rest of Daniel's apocalyptic visions we need to be careful how we interpret what the angel tells Daniel here but this does give us insight into the spiritual warfare between God's angels and Satan's demons that is going on all the time of which we are mostly unaware. The angel tells Daniel that he was sent from God twenty-one days ago to answer Daniel's prayer because God cares for Daniel and honors his humble heart and his desire to understand the vision God gave him. He was delayed in coming because he was resisted by the prince of the Persian kingdom. The verb form of the Hebrew word for prince means to rule or hold dominion over. The noun means prince, chief, captain, ruler or governor and is used frequently in the Old Testament and in *Daniel*. Here it refers to an angelic or demonic power that rules or holds dominion over Persia. God may be in charge of history as we have seen frequently in *Daniel*, but we learn that there are demonic powers that oversee nations to thwart God's plan and will. Some scholars conclude this passage teaches that demonic powers are territorial. That idea is reinforced by the fact that pagan gods were seen as territorial and Paul tells the Corinthians that behind all pagan idols stand demons. Paul says in *Ephesians 6* that our fight is not against human beings but against demonic powers. There is a spiritual battle going on of which for most of our lives we are unaware. There are times we humans are pulled into that battle like Daniel was here. But most of the time we don't think about it or know what is happening in it. Perhaps it is part of the demonic strategy to keep us ignorant of the true spiritual reality of the universe so that we don't pray which was what led to the angel's visit to Daniel to give him reassurance that his vision was true. God was telling Daniel about what was going to happen to Daniel's people, God's people, in the future. The demonic prince of Persia resisted because he did not want Daniel and the Jews to

gain insight about the future or to find out that its power was going to wane and be taken from it. Keep us ignorant and believing that God is unable to carry out his plan; that appears to be the demonic strategy. The angel is sent to Daniel because Daniel is on the other side of the cross-resurrection and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Even though he clearly received visions from God we are never told that Daniel is filled with the Spirit like some of the other prophets. Thus he needs help from the angel to understand what God is showing him.

The angel tells Daniel that for twenty-one days, the whole time of Daniel's fasting, he was hindered or opposed by the demonic power over Persia. What that resistance and opposition looked like we are not told. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, or head or first princes of the angels, came to help him. In later Jewish writings Michael is named one of the archangels or angels of the presence along with Gabriel. These are the only two angels mentioned by name in the Bible. Some of the other archangels are given names in the apocryphal and pseudopigraphal writings in the intertestamental time such as Raphael and Uriel. In *10:21* and *12:1* Daniel is told that Michael is "*your prince*" meaning the archangel who fights on behalf of God's people the Jews. The implication is that Michael, one of the chief angels or most powerful angels, fights spiritual battles on behalf of the Jewish people against demonic powers trying to harm them. *Revelation 12* describes war in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his demons. In *Revelation* Michael seems to be the commander or general of God's angelic forces. Daniel is told that God thought Daniel's prayer and the angel's mission to answer it was so important that he sent Michael to help the angel resist the demonic prince over Persia in order to come to Daniel. Daniel's description suggests that once Michael came he took over wrestling or fighting against the demonic spirit that had resisted the angel so that he could come to Daniel.

The angel tells Daniel that he has come to explain what will happen to his people in the future because the vision concerns the time that is yet to come. That is a curious phrase because in *10:1* the editor of *Daniel* says Daniel had a vision of a great war or conflict and the understanding of the word God gave him came to him in a vision. Perhaps what *10:1* means is that Daniel's understanding came to him through the angelic message in the vision that came to him after his twenty-one day fast when he was mourning for his people. The angel says he has come to explain what will happen in the future, which is how the NIV translates the phrase. The NASB and ESV translate it, "*in the latter days.*" Literally the Hebrew means in the last days. This is a code phrase in apocalyptic literature for the end times or the end of history. The angel tells Daniel his vision is about his people and what will happen to them in the end times. From a New Testament perspective we can apply this vision to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ the Messiah.

10:15-11:1 - When the angel is speaking to Daniel he bows down to the ground and is speechless. The angel lifts Daniel up onto his knees and then tells him to stand up, which he does but he is still trembling with fear. Now Daniel falls back on his knees in a worship posture before the angel and doesn't say a thing. The angel reaches down and touches Daniel's lips and Daniel is enabled to speak. He tells the angel that he is in anguish because of his vision and feels helpless. The vision was so overwhelming Daniel couldn't function and he felt pain. The Hebrew word is literally pangs, like the pangs or pain of childbirth. It implies intense cramping and pain that makes one cry out and double over. The vision of future empires and kings who would conquer the world and oppress Daniel's people brought him great mental pain and anguish. Think of it in his timeframe. Persia had just replaced Babylon as the power in the Middle East. Its empire was far larger and more powerful than Nebuchadnezzar's. In the future Alexander of Macedon would

conquer Persia and found an empire even larger than Persia. It must have been unimaginable for Daniel. Out of that Greek empire would come the time of Antiochus, a time of severe suffering and persecution for his people. It was going to happen again!!! Wasn't the exile bad enough? How could God allow this to his people that he loves? No wonder Daniel was doubled over in pain and confusion over what he had seen.

Daniel asks the angel how he is going to be able to talk with him because he can hardly breathe and he has no strength left. The fact that Daniel has difficulty breathing sounds like the symptoms of a panic attack or some similar response to his vision and the angel's presence. He tells the angel he is helpless because he feels that way! The angel touches Daniel again and strength flows into Daniel. He is told not to be afraid and to be strong. The angel tells him peace, or shalom. He calls him "*man highly esteemed*", meaning desirable or precious. The ESV translates it greatly loved. It is the same title the angel uses for Daniel in *verse 11*. God values Daniel. He loves him. Daniel is precious to the Lord! The combination of the strength the angel gives Daniel through his touch and his affirmation of Daniel gives Daniel the strength he needs to calm down and helps him listen to what the angel has to say to him. Daniel tells the angel he can speak now because Daniel is able to hear. We don't know how the angel gave Daniel strength and calmed him down. His touch carried some supernatural power to slow down Daniel's breathing and lower his blood pressure along with relieving his pain. Obviously Daniel did not calm down himself; he couldn't. The angel had to do it.

Once again the angel pulls back the curtain to give Daniel a brief picture of the cosmic spiritual battle that goes on in the angelic world of which we humans do not see and are rarely aware. He asks Daniel if he knows why the angel has come to Daniel and then proceeds to answer his own question without giving Daniel a chance to respond. He says he will return soon to fight against the prince of Persia, meaning the demonic spirit with dominion over Persia, or the demonic spirit who wants dominion over Persia. It is unclear from this passage which is the truth. When the angel returns to the fight then the demonic prince or power of Greece will come and battle with him. The word for fight means to do battle or struggle. What that fight is actually like we have no idea. Paul talks in *2 Corinthians* of spiritual weapons like prayer and God's Word with which we fight spiritual battles but what weapons angels use against the demons and vice versa the Bible never says. What the angel tells Daniel here is remarkable. God's angels fight against Satan's demons in order to carry out God's plan and will in the world. God has chosen to work through his angels to thwart Satan's rebellion just like he has chosen to work through believers to carry out Christ's mission to save the human race and bring about God's Kingdom. The spiritual war that is taking place in the heavenly realms as *Ephesians 6* says is related to us as human beings on Planet Earth. Powerful, pure spirits like Gabriel and Michael, and millions of others who are never named in the Bible fight on our behalf because like Daniel we are precious to God. The center of that warfare on God's behalf appears to be this little out of the way planet orbiting an ordinary star populated by creatures made of dust and water that God loves and wants to save so they can live with him eternally! Their fate is tied up with ours; incredible!!!

The angel tells Daniel that no one supports him in his battle with the demons of Persia and Greece except Michael, your prince. Michael is the angel or archangel who fights on behalf of the Jews, God's chosen people. In *Revelation 13* he is the leader of the angelic forces who fight against Satan and his rebellious angels when Satan is cast down from heaven to the earth. *Isaiah* mentions the seraphim who surround God's throne and give him praise in *Isaiah 6*. *Ezekiel* mentions the cherubim who surround God's throne in *Ezekiel 10* and who were also the angels

with wings carved on the mercy seat, the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. These appear to be great angels who serve God around his throne. Whether there is any actual distinction between cherubim and seraphim is unclear. Is Michael a cherubim or seraphim or is he an angel of a different order? It appears he is a general who commands a host of angels who fight against Satan's demons to thwart their rebellion and carry out God's will on the earth. That is supposition based on this passage in *Daniel 10* and also *Revelation 13*. Those passages are in highly symbolic books so any conclusions we reach must be tentative and not certain. The Bible simply does not speak plainly enough about this subject perhaps because the angelic world is so far from our frame of reference. Any description in terms humans can understand falls far short of the reality.

The great angel tells Daniel that before he returns to join Michael and fight against the prince of Persia and then the prince of Greece he will tell Daniel what is written in the *Book of Truth*. This is the only time in Scripture the *Book of Truth* is mentioned. What is it? It could be Scripture itself though that seems unlikely. A better guess is that the *Book of Truth* here is related to the scroll in the hand of God that the Lamb, or the Lord Jesus Christ, is able to open in *Revelation 5*. The scroll represents God's will and plan for his people and the world. That appears to be what the *Book of Truth* represents here in *Daniel 10* because what follows in *chapters 10 and 11* is an explanation of Daniel's vision that details historical circumstances that are to come for the Jews and a prophecy of the end times about the resurrection of the righteous. The *Book of Truth* is separate from the *Book of Life* which contains the names of all of God's saints, those who follow Christ and are God's people. It is also different from "*the books*" in *Revelation 20* at the last judgment which John says contain all the deeds of everyone who has ever lived so that God may judge every human being according to their deeds done in this life.

Daniel is told that no one supports the angel against the demonic powers of Persia and Greece except Michael, your prince, meaning the angelic prince or protector of the Jews. Does that mean that all the other angels refuse to come to the angel's help or that no other angels are able to come to his help because the demonic powers are so strong? I have to believe the answer is the latter. Michael is one of the greatest of angels and it appears he is the only one who is strong enough to do battle with the demonic principalities over Persia and Greece. Otherwise it sounds like a division among the angels who are trying to protect and defend God's people. The rest of Scripture gives no indication that is the case at all. The angel says in the first year of Darius the Mede he took his stand with Michael to support and protect him. The identity of Darius the Mede I have dealt with earlier in this commentary, especially in *chapters 5 and 6*. He is either a code name for Cyrus the Great or an otherwise unknown Persian satrap or governor of the Province of Babylon whom Daniel calls a king. His first year would have been the first year of Cyrus in Babylon, namely 539 BC. Not coincidentally that is also the year that Daniel, perceiving *Jeremiah's* prophecy of the 70 years of Jewish exile, began confessing his people's sins and praying for God to intervene to save his people from captivity and exile. That is also the time Gabriel comes to Daniel to give him the vision of the 70 weeks of years and God's plan for the salvation of his people and the deliverance of Jerusalem. Daniel's prayer starts a cosmic conflict among the great angels and powerful demons in order to answer Daniel's prayer. That implies our prayers have more far reaching effects in the spiritual realm than we can possibly imagine. God uses them to set in motion great battles that thwart Satan's attempts to hinder God's will and plan on earth.

The phrase "*to support and protect him*" means to make strong, make hard, seize or prevail. The word for protect means a place of refuge or protection and is sometimes used to

describe a helmet worn in battle. The picture is of the angel coming alongside Michael to aid him in battle, to strengthen and encourage him. He is a fellow soldier who now has Michael's back and can protect him from attack. What that support actually is we have no idea, just as we have no idea what an angelic battle looks like or what weapons they use in the fight. Daniel is told simply that the battle has taken place, is now going on and when the angel is finished speaking to Daniel he will return to that battle and support his comrade Michael. Perhaps the best that we can do is thank God that his powerful angels fight on our behalf.

Chapter 11:

11:2-6 - Chapter 11 from verse 2 all the way to verse 32 outlines the conflict between the two Greek empires, the Seleucid Empire centered in Syria and the Ptolemaic Empire centered in Egypt with Israel in between them. The first paragraph from verses 2-4 takes us from the Persians to Alexander to the Greek empires. The angel is laying out for Daniel what will happen to his people and the nations of the Middle East for the next three centuries. Some liberal scholars teach that because the angel gives Daniel great detail about the Seleucid-Ptolemy conflict this cannot possibly be prophecy but must have been written after the fact and put into apocalyptic form as a way to make it sound like an authentic vision. They claim Daniel never had these visions and was written sometime after Judas Maccabaeus had captured Jerusalem and cleansed the temple in the 160's BC. That viewpoint carries with it such an anti-supernatural bias that any miraculous occurrence or prophetic message in Scripture is discounted and denied, including the resurrection of Christ. It is laying over Scripture an outside viewpoint and philosophy to which liberal scholars make the Bible subject rather than their philosophy and worldview subject to the Scriptures as the Word of God. One needs to take the text at face value and start one's interpretation from the text!

The angel begins to give Daniel a detailed understanding of his vision. He tells him the truth about what he saw. Three more kings of Persia will rise after Cyrus. The fourth will be richer than the others and will stir up Persia to attack Greece. Cyrus was succeeded by his son, Cambyses II, who annexed Egypt. He was succeeded by the usurper Gaumata who lasted less than a year in 522. Darius I, the Great, took the throne after Gaumata, and consolidated the empire, establishing roads, a postal service, and solidifying the provinces by making Aramaic the official language. He also began to campaign against Greece. His son, Xerxes I, the fourth in line, is the king the angel mentions to Daniel as the one who attacked Greece. Xerxes won a land victory at Thermopylae but suffered a naval defeat at Salamis and withdrew from Greece, having failed to defeat the Greeks.

The mighty king the angel describes is Alexander the Great, son of Philip of Macedon who had united the Greek city states under one ruler. Alexander, tutored by Aristotle, loved all things Greek and sought to free the Greek population of Asia Minor from Persian control. That expanded to his desire to conquer all of Persia which he accomplished by his death in 323 BC. Alexander founded an empire that was larger than even Persia and by doing so spread Greek ideals, culture, philosophy and language all across the ancient Near East. This was the process known as Hellenization and it greatly affected the Jews in Israel. Alexander's son was too young to seize control of his vast empire and it was split up between his four strongest generals; thus the angel's statement "*parceled out toward the four winds of heaven.*" The two strongest of those generals were Seleucus who took Asia Minor, Syria and Mesopotamia, and Ptolemy who took Egypt. In the beginning the Ptolemies controlled the land of Israel. Most of *chapter 11* details the conflict between the Ptolemies and Seleucids.

The stronger prince of the king of the South is Ptolemy II, who defeated the Seleucid navy and gained control over Judea and Phoenicia. He married his daughter Bernice to Antiochus II of Syria to forge an alliance between the two kingdoms around 250 BC. The plan was for Bernice's son to inherit the Ptolemaic kingdom. However, Antiochus II's first wife, whom he had divorced to marry Bernice, murdered Bernice and her infant son. Ptolemy III, brother of Bernice took the throne.

11:7-10 - Ptolemy III invaded Syria in order to secure Egypt and keep Seleucis II from taking it. He succeeded, even capturing lands as far away as Babylon in the east and some of the Aegean islands Ptolemy II had lost. The Ptolemy Empire of Egypt now reached its greatest height. Ptolemy III made a treaty with Seleucis II in 224 BC which led to peace between their two empires for some decades. Israel stayed under the rule of the Ptolemies. *Verse 8* describes Ptolemy III's defeat of Syria and the booty he captured and brought back to Alexandria, his Egyptian capital and now one of the great cities of the world. It had a large Greek-speaking Jewish population. The Septuagint was being translated at this time.

Verses 9-10 are confusing. The king of the North will invade the realm of the king of the South, meaning the Seleucid king will invade Egypt and the Ptolemies. But the Seleucid king will retreat to the north. His sons, meaning the Seleucid king's sons, will prepare a great army which will sweep south like a flood all the way to the enemy's fortress, a fortress of the Ptolemies. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary reports that Ptolemy IV halted the advance of Antiochus III of Syria at the battle of Raphia and solidified Ptolemaic control over the territory of Israel in 217 BC. However, in 198 BC Antiochus III and Philip V of Macedonia formed an alliance and attacked Ptolemy V when he was still very young and several regents ruled Egypt in his name. They took Israel and many of Ptolemy's holdings in Asia Minor and Lebanon defeating the Ptolemy army at Baniyas or the future Caesarea Philippi.

These events seem to be what the angel is telling Daniel here. However, in the paragraphs ahead the angel seems to repeat himself or describe an event and then describe it again with more detail, especially those events that concern the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. That makes this section of *Daniel* very difficult to interpret and match with the known history of the time. The angel will describe things with some detail yet still speak in symbolic or vague language at times. Other than north and south or beautiful land he gives very little geographical details. It is a remarkable prophecy but it is not history or reporting so it is vague enough that some details are difficult to pinpoint and understand.

11:11-13 - This paragraph repeats some of the details of *verses 7-10*. The history of the timeframe of these verses is chaotic. Antiochus III was defeated by Ptolemy IV and had to withdraw from Judea and return to Syria. However, he wrested control of Judea from the Ptolemies during the early reign of Ptolemy V who was a young boy when Antiochus attacked Egypt once again. *Verses 14-19* expand upon these details.

11:14-19 - The angel outlines the history of the events surrounding the reign of the Seleucid king Antiochus III or Antiochus the Great (the title given him because of his defeat of the Parthians from Persia). During the time when Ptolemy V was a young boy Egypt was ruled by regents in Ptolemy's name. Perceiving a weakness in the Ptolemy's rule Antiochus attacked south once again while Philip V of Macedonia attacked Ptolemaic holdings around Asia Minor. Antiochus was successful in capturing Judea and the Lebanese coast from the Egyptian armies, giving the

Seleucids control of the Holy Land. After his victory as a gesture of peace Antiochus offered his daughter Cleopatra in marriage to Ptolemy V to seal the peace treaty. Ptolemy accepted. She was the first of many Cleopatras in the Ptolemaic line all the way up to the last, the Cleopatra who was queen of Egypt during the time of Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony.

Verses 18-19 describe Antiochus III's unsuccessful campaigns against Rome. Twice the Romans defeated him, the last in 189 BC. He was forced to cede territory to Rome in Asia Minor west of the mountains above Tarsus in Cilicia. Antiochus III was killed two years later in 187 in Armenia trying to put down a rebellion. The angel tells Daniel he will stumble and fall to be seen no more.

The angel gives Daniel great detail of events to come concerning the Ptolemy and Seleucid Empires, almost reciting them like he is reporting history even though at the time these events of Antiochus the Great's reign are still almost 350 years in the future. From Daniel's perspective it would be like Daniel living soon after the death of Solomon and the division of Israel into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah and an angel coming to him and telling him a detailed history of the destruction of Jerusalem, the exile and the return, 350 years in the future. Daniel's vision was written down but the people of his day would not have understood it or perceived what it was about until three centuries later.

Things were still very fluid for the Jews in Daniel's day. They were just beginning to ask questions about what it meant to be a Jew without a nation and a temple. The second temple was not even built as yet when Daniel received this prophecy. Zerubbabel had barely returned to Jerusalem. Ezra and the redefining of the Jewish people around the Law of Moses were still 80 years in the future. Daniel is being told of the great threat to his people that will come three and a half centuries from his time, a century before Ezra and Nehemiah's reforms even take place. No wonder people of his day did not understand *Daniel's* prophecies because not only were the events he speaks of far off into the future but the issues with which the Jews would have to deal were not completely formed as yet when Daniel received his visions! The only obvious details of *Daniel's* visions that the Jews would have understood and rejoiced over were the Jews would be back in the land and the temple would be rebuilt. In Daniel's time they could not even fathom that an empire would come that would be greater than Babylon who had conquered them and greater than even Persia who had allowed them to go home! Perhaps Daniel is given such details so that it proves to the people who would be alive in Antiochus' day that God knows what will happen and he is still in charge. Their faith in God was not strong in the time of Daniel. They were in shock and wondered whether God had abandoned them. By Antiochus' day their faith was centered on the Law which Antiochus tried to eliminate by Hellenizing the Jews. Prophecy had ceased; *Malachi* being the last prophet to have spoken to Israel over two centuries earlier. *Daniel's* detailed prophecy and holy history would have been a comfort and reminder to the Jews not to give up because God knew what would happen to his people and he would deliver them again.

The fact remains however that *Daniel* was one of the last books to be accepted into the canon of the Old Testament and that the rabbis put it in the *Writings* and not the *Prophets* because they did not know how to classify it or deal with it. Liberal scholarship totally discounts it and claims it was written during or shortly after the time of the Maccabees because no one three and a half centuries before the time could give such great detail about events that hadn't happened as yet. The anti-supernatural bias of this view is plain to see and therefore can be rejected out of hand. Despite its difficulties *Daniel's* book is what it says it is; the events and

writings of this faithful Jew of the late Babylonian and early Persian periods who lived in Babylon and to whom God gave his visions.

11:20-24 - Verse 20 is about Seleucus IV. Rome had laid heavy tribute on Antiochus III after they had defeated him and his son who succeeded him was left with the burden of paying off the Romans. Seleucus IV sent his chief minister Heliodorus to Jerusalem who stripped the temple of its gold and silver in order to pay the tribute. Seleucus was later assassinated by Heliodorus and because his son Demetrius was held hostage in Rome, his brother Antiochus IV succeeded him as king of the Seleucid Empire. The angel says Seleucus IV would not be destroyed by anger or in battle. That is a cryptic way of saying he will be assassinated which is exactly what happened.

The angel tells Daniel that Antiochus came to the throne through intrigue. Antiochus shared the throne with his infant nephew Antiochus, son of Seleucus IV, who was conveniently murdered in Antiochus' absence along with the illegally deposed high priest Onias III in Judea. Thereupon Antiochus IV seized the throne for himself. This is probably what the angel means by intrigue. Intrigue could also describe the way Antiochus rewarded the high priesthood to a priest named Jason who bribed Antiochus in order to secure the priesthood. Jason was a Hellenist and wanted the Jews to become Greeks even building a gymnasium next to the temple. He abandoned the sacrifices to Yahweh and wanted the people to worship the Greek gods and goddesses.

This whole paragraph is difficult and there are several phrases that are hard to interpret and understand. It appears *verses 25-28* and *verses 29-32* repeat ideas or themes that are introduced in *verses 21-24*. *Verses 21-24* describe the initial ascendance to the throne of Antiochus IV. He did it through assassination and bribery, what the angel calls intrigue. He invaded Egypt through Judea and seized it which appears to be what the angel describes as an invasion of the kingdom when the people felt secure. It is difficult to know what the overwhelming army of *verse 24* means unless it describes Antiochus' invasion of Egypt. The prince of the covenant is probably the high priest. The same word is used of the Messiah in *Daniel's* seventy weeks prophecy but it can mean prince, captain or even leader. Here in context it indicates the high priest because of the title prince of the covenant and the fact that Judea at this time had no ruler. It was a province of the Seleucid Empire and not a free nation.

God does not have a very good opinion of Antiochus IV. The angel describes him as a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. The Hebrew word means vile, despised or worthless. This paragraph describes Antiochus as a ruler who used bribery, corruption, ruthlessness and force to gain power and keep it. That is an accurate historical description of Antiochus IV. He later took the name Epiphanes, god manifest, and wanted to be worshipped as Zeus incarnate. Behind his back his people gave him the name, Epimanes, madman, which is a play on words with Epiphanes. He was notorious for his corruption and cruelty. The angel describes that kind of a king to Daniel in these verses.

11:25-28 - The angel continues to describe events of the reign of Antiochus IV or Antiochus Epiphanes. Some of those appear to repeat things he told Daniel in *verses 21-24*. Antiochus would invade Egypt and take most of it in 170-169 BC. However, conflict for the high priesthood between Jason and Menelaus erupted while Antiochus was in Egypt and those who opposed him had taken Jerusalem. He was forced to withdraw from Egypt and retake Jerusalem which he did. According to 2 Maccabees he did so with great slaughter in the city. He also looted

the temple taking the altar of incense, the lampstand and many of the other items of gold and silver, defiling the holy place.

Verse 27 may describe events surrounding the capture of Ptolemy VI, who was king of Egypt when Antiochus invaded. Neither king trusted the other and Antiochus took Ptolemy hostage, taking him back to Antioch as prisoner. The Greek Egyptians installed his younger brother Ptolemy VII in Alexandria who ruled along with his sister Cleopatra. However, the Ptolemies had now lost Judea and Lebanon to the Seleucids and Antiochus. After having put down the revolt in Judea Antiochus returned to Antioch with "*great wealth*" from Egypt and Jerusalem.

11:29-32 - Antiochus sought to invade Egypt again in 168 but an envoy from the Roman Senate demanded that Antiochus withdraw and leave Egypt alone. Antiochus was forced to comply and turned back to Syria. It appears he took his frustration and embarrassment at losing face out on the Jews. He was tired of the rebellious stubborn Jews who refused to adopt Greek ways and wanted to support his allies among the Jews who championed Hellenism. Antiochus decided to institute a policy of forced Hellenization upon the Jews and forbid them to practice circumcision, keep the Sabbath and follow the Law of Moses. This attacked their very identity as a people because Ezra in the 400's BC had reorganized the Jews around keeping the Mosaic Law. Antiochus also demanded the Jews worship the Greek gods and set up a Greek altar on the site of the temple altar of burnt offering. In the context of *Daniel 11* this is what the angel means by the abomination of desolation in *11:31*. Jesus spoke of another abomination of desolation in *Mark 13:14* which can be applied to either Titus sacrificing a pig on the temple altar in 70 AD or an event during the last part of the reign of the Antichrist before the return of the Lord Jesus. Both interpretations are possible. In that case, the abomination of desolation here in *Daniel 11:31* is a type of the ultimate abomination performed by Antichrist at the time of the end. Not only did Antiochus try and force Greek ways upon the Jews but those who resisted him were slaughtered. Many Jews lost their lives by passively resisting his efforts. They simply refused and died. This is the origin of the "pious ones" or Hasidim that were the forerunners of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes of New Testament times. Antiochus' strategy worked to divide the Jews into those who complied and abandon their Jewish heritage to become Greeks and those who resisted and stayed faithful to the Law. Ultimately the strategy backfired because it led to the Maccabean Revolt and the Hasmonean Kingdom of an independent Judea.

11:33-25 - *Verse 33* describes the persecution of faithful Jews by the forces of Antiochus. Faithful leaders of the Jews called the people to resist the Greeks and continue to follow the Law of Moses. Many were tortured and killed for their courage to take a stand for God. *Verse 34* says during this time they will receive "*a little help*" which many scholars believe refers to Judas Maccabeus and his forces who led the Maccabean Revolt. The angel says many who are not sincere will join the "*little help*". This is a commentary on the Maccabean forces and the subsequent Hasmonean rulers who were plagued by the same kind of corruption and lust for power that the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kings exhibited around them. Many faithful Jews joined with Judas while many other Jews who were not faithful to the Mosaic Law saw in Judas a chance to throw off the Greek yoke and so joined his rebellion.

Verse 35 says some of the wise will stumble so that they may be refined until the time of the end. The angel uses the term "*wise*" to describe those who will resist Antiochus. These are probably what will later be called the Hasidim. It is possible because the angel uses the title wise

that *Daniel* may have been edited by later wisdom teachers. Remember, Daniel functioned as a magi or "wise man" in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus of Persia. It is quite possible that the Wisdom Teachers saw Daniel as one of their own.

The angel describes to Daniel a process of refining by God of his people just like the exile had been. This process will go on until the time of the end, coming at its appointed time in the future. The phrase can have a double meaning. It can point to the persecution of Antiochus and the appointed time of his rise and fall or it can point to the literal end of time and the final events of the coming of the Messiah as *Daniel 9* and the 70 weeks prophecy outlines. Both ideas may be included here. The angel in *chapter 12* refers to this time of great persecution and also of the day of resurrection which can only refer to the end of history. The bottom line is this time of suffering for Daniel's people about which the angel speaks is in the future and is yet to come.

11:36-39 - This paragraph is also about Antiochus Epiphanes. The angel tells Daniel that he will magnify himself above every god and say unheard of things against the Lord God. This is probably related to the little horn saying boastful things against God in *Daniel 7:8*. Antiochus declared himself Zeus incarnate and took the name Epiphanes, meaning manifest. He demanded to be worshipped as a god like some other oriental kings. The angel says he will get away with this until the time of wrath is completed. The time of wrath in *verse 36* is probably not the final Tribulation before the Lord Jesus returns. The time of wrath can either mean Antiochus' wrath towards the Jews or God's wrath towards Antiochus. Both may be true and historically both did occur. Antiochus persecuted the Jews for a time and yet his reign came to an end during fighting against the Armenian king who had rebelled against him. His days, like the days of all tyrants, were numbered by God.

Daniel is told Antiochus will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the goddess most worshipped by women. Instead he will exalt himself above all gods. This is most likely a reference to his proclaiming himself Zeus incarnate. However, Zeus was one of the gods of his fathers because he was Greek. The "*one worshipped by women*" could refer to an attack on the temple of the Syrian Venus around this time. That is possible but by no means certain.

The next phrase is difficult to pinpoint historically. The angel says Antiochus will honor or worship a god of fortresses, a god unknown to his fathers. The implication is he will worship a pagan god that is not Greek but from another nation or people who the Greeks do not worship. There is evidence that late in his reign, which is the timeframe of his persecution of the Jews and shortly after, Antiochus was building a temple in Antioch to Jupiter Capitolinus, the chief Roman god. The Romans had forced Antiochus to leave Egypt and pay tribute to Rome. After subduing Judea he had left it and moved his armies north in order to put down a rebellion by the king of Armenia who was his vassal. On his way through upper Mesopotamia to subdue that rebellion he was sacking cities and temples to gather wealth to finance his wars and pay off Rome. It was during this time that Judas Maccabaeus gathered a guerilla army and revolted against the Seleucid Greeks. Historical records also show that Antiochus became increasingly mentally unstable near the end of his life. He died on the campaign to subdue the Armenians. The description of his attacking many fortresses with the help of a foreign god probably refers to this time, including paying off allies with bribes. However, the details of *verses 38-39* are difficult to precisely relate to the latter stages of Antiochus' reign. If the angel is talking about someone else other than Antiochus however, the difficulty in interpreting these verses increases exponentially. Some have said this is the Antichrist but that seems both too easy to say and even more difficult to relate to what the New Testament says about the "*man of lawlessness*" as Paul describes him

in 2 *Thessalonians* 2. The simplest interpretation, which is therefore the most likely, is that this paragraph applies to the reign and actions of Antiochus and there are details here which occurred in history to fulfill this prophecy but for which as yet we have no historical record to corroborate.

11:40-45 - This appears to be a final paragraph recapitulating the events surrounding Antiochus' reign and his attack on the Holy Land. The difficulty is the phrase at the beginning of *verse 40*, "*at the time of the end.*" Prophecy scholars usually take this phrase to refer to the "*end times*" or events surrounding the end of history at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The details of the paragraph do not correspond to any of the other prophetic passages that describe the return of Christ or the reign of the Antichrist so this does not appear to be a prophecy about the final Tribulation time. However, the Hebrew words can mean the end of a specific duration of time. That seems the most likely translation here. If that is the case then the angel is telling Daniel of events at the end of Antiochus' time of persecution of the Jews or at the end of his reign. This paragraph then does become a recapitulation of events he has already described to Daniel.

Antiochus would invade Egypt in 169-168 moving through Judea on the way. The Romans issued him an edict to leave Egypt alone and he withdrew back to Syria. On his way back through Judea he decided to settle the problem of the Jews once and for all, initiating his policy of forced Hellenization. However, during his persecution of the Jews he received news of the rebellion of Artaxias, king of Armenia, his vassal, and an attack on his territory in Mesopotamia by Arsaces, king of the Parthians. This forced Antiochus to leave Judea and head north to put down the rebellion and repel the Parthians. During this campaign he died.

Daniel is told that Edom, Moab and Ammon will escape Antiochus' wrath. There is nothing in the historical record to indicate that Antiochus paid any attention to the kingdoms to the east of Judea. He was focused on the Jews. The angel's description of Antiochus' conquest of Egypt indicates that Libya and the Nubians of South Sudan were allied with Antiochus against the Ptolemies. That is quite possible. The Romans interfered in order to check Antiochus' power in the east and to secure the grain trade with Egypt for Rome. Antiochus' army did camp before Jerusalem and it was at this time that he entered the temple raiding its treasuries to gain wealth to pay off his tribute to Rome. This is also when he set up the pagan altar of Zeus in the temple which is the abomination of desolation Daniel mentions in *11:31* and *12:11*.

The angel tells Daniel despite all of Antiochus' power, his invasion of Judea and persecution of the Jews his end will come and there will be no one to help him. No allies came to his aid and Antiochus died in Mesopotamia in 164 BC. The Seleucid kingdom continued to lose power and influence after his death, eventually being absorbed into the Roman Empire in the middle 60's BC.

This final description of the reign and persecution of Antiochus is given to Daniel to encourage his faith. There will come a time of great trouble and persecution of the Jews four centuries in the future. But like the exile that time has an end. God will allow his people to go through this time of testing but he will not allow them to be wiped out altogether. They must keep faith because the tyrant who seeks to destroy them will himself be destroyed. God will finally protect his people and they will survive. When things look their worst Daniel and the Jews are told to keep hope alive. The end will come and they will triumph because of God's care and protection.

Chapter 12:

12:1-4 - The angel has given Daniel great detail about the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and his persecution of the Jews in *chapter 11*. Now however the time frame shifts to a period even further into the future and the final days of human history as we know it. This is clear because Daniel is told about the resurrection of the righteous which has not yet taken place and did not take place in the 160's BC and the days of Antiochus. However, certain details of this chapter do refer to the time of Antiochus. Daniel is doing what many of the prophets do and what the Lord Jesus did in his sermon on the Mount of Olives about the time of the end. He telescopes events, now speaking of something that is about to happen now talking about something that will happen far into the future. Daniel does that here with the persecution of Antiochus. The time of "*distress*" is a type of the time of the greatest distress that will come before the Lord Jesus returns. The angel is referring back to the 70th week of Daniel's vision in *Daniel 9*. Whether that is a literal seven years is debatable but Daniel is given in *chapter 12* a glimpse of the final chapter of history before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the resurrection of his saints.

Daniel is told "*at that time*". One would assume that the time frame is the days of the persecution of Antiochus. However, the angel describes the "*time*" as a time of distress such has not occurred from the beginning until now; meaning this is the worst time in history, never to be repeated. The persecution of Antiochus was a time of great distress, but it was not the worst time of all. The Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was worse. Far more Jews were slaughtered or enslaved by the Romans than during the time of Antiochus. Plus, Antiochus defiled the temple but he did not destroy it. Titus did both. Therefore, from an historical and biblical perspective the time of Antiochus cannot be called the Great Tribulation. There is a worse time coming of which Antiochus' time is a type or pre-figuring. We need to also note that the angel's explanation to Daniel means that God's people are not exempt from times of great distress and persecution. They are not protected from them but they are delivered out of them and saved. Times of distress do not threaten to destroy our salvation. They are times of testing so that we may learn to be faithful. God who is always faithful will preserve us and save us! He did during the exile of the Jews. He did during the persecution of Antiochus and the Roman destruction of the temple and he will do it again during the reign of the Antichrist.

The angel tells Daniel that at this time of great distress Michael, the archangel who fights for the Jews, will arise to defend Daniel's people. There will be human war and trouble on earth that will be mirrored by angelic battle and war in the heavenly places. See *Ephesians 6* and the armor of God. The Jews will be delivered, every one whose name is found written in the book. The reference is probably to the *Book of Life* which John refers to in *Revelation 20 & 21*. *Verse 2* describes the resurrection and eternal life. Here in *Daniel 12* is the only time it is specifically mentioned in the Old Testament (see also *Daniel 12:13*). It is alluded to many times but this is the only specific time. The difficulty is the phrase "*multitudes who sleep*". Other translations read many who sleep. The reference is to those who have died. The problem is multitudes or many are not all. This appears to refer to the general resurrection at the end when Christ returns but the literal words say only some, granted a huge sum, will rise again. What does *Daniel* mean? In *Revelation 20* John writes of the first resurrection, meaning the resurrection of Jesus' saints when he returns. They are exempt from the Second Death which is the complete resurrection of all human beings for judgment before God's throne; some to eternal life and some to eternal punishment in hell. John's Second Death is hell, or the lake of fire. Given John's interpretation in *Revelation 20* we can apply that here and take *Daniel* to mean both the resurrection of God's saints to eternal life and the resurrection of the damned to eternal punishment and shame for their

sins. Here is one of those places where Scripture needs to interpret Scripture. *Revelation 20* can help clarify and interpret what Daniel means here by multitudes will awake.

Daniel is told that the wise, meaning those who are faithful to God and do not give up their faith, will shine like the stars. They will shine because they lead many to righteousness. This refers both to those Jews alive at the time of the end but also to faithful Jews who will lead others to follow the Lord and not lose their faith during the persecution of Antiochus. Daniel is told no matter whether one lives in the exile in Babylon, during the persecution that will come during Antiochus' day, or the ultimate persecution at the end, the task of every believer is to stay faithful to God and lead others to righteousness. If we do that we will shine like the stars in the heavens for ever and ever!

Daniel is commanded to close up and seal the words of the vision until the time of the end. What does this mean? Does it mean the scroll was not to be released until a later time? Does it mean that when the time of the visions drew near God's people would understand them? This is often the Dispensational argument and therefore since modern prophecy writers understand Daniel (a dubious proposition) we must be near the time of the Great Tribulation and Jesus' return. *Isaiah* told his disciples to seal up his prophecy. In *Isaiah's* case it is obvious *chapters 40-66* apply during and after the exile a century and a half after *Isaiah* wrote them. John in *Revelation 22* is told not to seal up the words of his prophecy and visions because the time is near. Scripture interprets Scripture so *Daniel's* vision is better understood or unsealed because of John's visions in *Revelation*. That would mean that John's time was the time of the end and that the church has always existed in the "last days." Here Daniel is told to seal up the vision until the time of the end. The word for seal in Hebrew means to hide, stop up, or shut up and carries the idea of hiding the vision and not letting it be known. Keep it secret. The time of the end has to be a prophetic phrase that refers to both the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes and the ultimate time of the end right before and during the return of the Lord Jesus. That will be the Great Tribulation, the time of distress such has not happened in history. That means that the time of Antiochus is a type of the persecution of the Antichrist against God's saints. Otherwise the angel's instructions to Daniel here make no sense. In that case four centuries in the future after *Daniel* when the persecution of Antiochus begins the Jews of that day will understand some of Daniel's vision and take strength and comfort from it. It will take John's visions in *Revelation* and finally the coming of the Lord Jesus and his ultimate return to unlock all of *Daniel's* vision that he was told to seal.

The final phrase about many will go here and there to increase knowledge is difficult. The word for knowledge is the normal Hebrew word *yada*. The angel implies that general knowledge will grow as people travel, learn and interact with others. The Greeks especially prized knowledge and philosophy. However, that knowledge will not be able to reveal to people God's plan for his people and for his Kingdom. That is sealed up in *Daniel's* vision that will only be revealed at the proper time to those who need to know it. Human earthly knowledge will increase but all the knowledge people will gain will not bring them any closer to God. Only he can reveal himself to people. They cannot discover him on their own. Understanding how to do things and how things work is important but only the knowledge of the Creator can bring eternal life. For all our science and technological knowledge today we are further away from the God who made us than ever before. Human knowledge, science and philosophy cannot save us. Only the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ can rightly relate us to God and give us eternal life!

12:5-7 - The angel has been speaking to Daniel telling him the meaning of his vision and revealing to him the future of his people. Daniel looks and sees two other angels standing on either side of the river. The river is the Tigris according to *10:4* and the beginning of Daniel's final vision. One of the angels on the bank of the Tigris speaks to the "*man clothed in linen*" who was above the waters of the river. The man clothed in linen is the angel who has been speaking to Daniel. It is possible that this is Gabriel who had spoken to Daniel about the vision of the 70 weeks in *Daniel 9*, but it is not certain. In *10:5-6* Daniel describes the man in linen. He was bright and shone like lightning and molten metal. It seems from his description that he is standing on the bank of the Tigris River. Here Daniel says he is in the air above the waters of the river. The NLT translates the phrase, "*who was now standing above the river,*" to clarify the apparent change in position from *10:4-5*. The fact that the angel is now standing in the air also confirms that this is no human being, but an angel who has come to Daniel.

One of the angels on the bank of the river asks the angel dressed in linen and floating in the air how long it will be before all these astonishing things are fulfilled. The Hebrew word translated astonishing means wonder and is most often related to God's actions that are beyond human comprehension, thus miracles. It is clear when God acts in a "*wonderful*" way that the event is something in which God himself is working and so it elicits awe in people. The angel's question implies that all the vision of the future of God's people that Daniel has been given is wonderful, miraculous and awe-inspiring because it is all a product of God acting on behalf of his people in history to work out his plan for them and for his Kingdom. This includes the statements about resurrection, which occur here plainly in the Old Testament for the first time.

The angel in linen above the waters lifted up both his hands toward heaven. This was the common posture of prayer among the Jews. Here he lifts up both his hands and swears by him who lives forever, namely God, that it will be a time, times and half a time. In *Revelation 10:5* the angel speaking to John lifts up just his right hand and swears by God. The Hebrew word for time or times means an appointed time. Literally the words read, for a set time, times and one half; meaning three and one half appointed times. This is one half of the prophetic week of years in *Daniel 9*. Most prophecy scholars immediately jump to the interpretation that the angel is meaning three and one half years. However, most versions translate the phrase as times, including the NLT, to show the ambiguity of the Hebrew words. It is probable the angel means three and one half years. But it is also possible that he is literally saying three and one half appointed times, leaving it deliberately cryptic as often happens in apocalyptic literature. This phrase of the three and one half times relates *Daniel's* vision of the 70 weeks to his vision here in *chapters 10-12*. The statement about the three and one half times in *12:7* indicates that this longer vision of Daniel's vision specifically relates to the one half week, or three and one half times of the final seven "*times*" in *Daniel 9*. The vision in *chapters 10-12* mostly speaks of the time of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes that was coming four centuries in the future from *Daniel*. The details of the final half week in *Daniel 9* however are difficult to tie directly to the persecution of Antiochus. If the final half week in *Daniel 9* is about Antiochus' persecution then it would be after the mission of the Messiah to bring atonement. That puts the final seventh week in *Daniel 9* after the coming of Christ. Almost all of the visions of *chapters 10-12* deal with events prior to the coming of Jesus of Nazareth focusing on the history of the Jews during the competing Greek empires of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. Only the final part of the vision in *Daniel 12* fast forwards to events of the final end times and the resurrection of the righteous when the Lord Jesus returns. Perhaps the best that can be concluded here is that like many other prophetic passages there is an immediate historical meaning and an ultimate meaning of the

passage that relates to the events of the end time and the final return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The meaning of the angel's words is deliberately cryptic and ambiguous.

The angel clothed in linen hovering above the waters of the river further defines the time of fulfillment of Daniel's vision by saying it will come when the power of the holy people, meaning the Jews, has been finally broken. When that happens, all these things will be completed. The NLT translates the phrase, "*when the shattering of the holy people has finally come to an end.*" The NASB translates, "*as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people all these events will be completed.*" The ESV translates the phrase, "*when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.*" Literally the Hebrew words read, when the shattering of the hand of the holy people is accomplished or comes to an end or is finished. The words remind one of Jesus' cry on the cross that it is accomplished or it is finished. The question is, when in the events of the history of the Jews has their hand, or power or strength, been finished or come to an end? The word for "*has been finally broken*" and "*will be completed*" is the same word; meaning accomplished, finished or come to an end. Is this somehow a reference to Jesus on the cross? The power of the Jews to supposedly affect their own salvation through the Law came to an end on the cross. The veil of the temple was torn in two at that time. The Old Covenant was set aside and the New Covenant begun. However, *Daniel* has not been talking about the events of Jesus' life and death in *chapters 10-12* at all. Furthermore at the close of Antiochus' reign Judas Maccabaeus led a revolt against the Greek kingdom and regained the temple and Jerusalem. The power or strength of the Jews was hardly broken at that time. From an historical standpoint their power was almost completely shattered at the end of the Jewish Revolt in 70 AD when Titus and the Romans destroyed the temple and killed, enslaved or scattered the Jews. Yet they survived and exist to this day, many having returned to the land once again. One is forced to conclude that the ultimate fulfillment of the angel's words has yet to occur. Spiritually Jesus' death on the cross accomplished the end of their ability to obtain salvation under the Old Covenant. Historically the Romans almost accomplished their destruction. We are still looking for the angel's words to be completely fulfilled. That means the time, times and half a time have not yet come about.

The final seventh "*appointed time*" of the 70 weeks vision is yet to occur. It also means that the interpretation of "*year*" for "*appointed time*" is most likely mistaken. It is not literal but symbolic! The first coming of the Messiah shattered the Jews ability to save themselves. The events leading up to the second coming of the Messiah Jesus will shatter their ability politically and militarily to defend themselves. They will be totally dependent upon their Messiah to save them!!!

12:8-13 - Daniel hears the angel's explanation about the three and one half "*times*" and is still confused. One of the angels on the bank of the Tigris had asked the angel in linen when all these things would be fulfilled. The angel in linen told him. Daniel hears his answer but doesn't understand at all. He asks the angel in linen basically the same question the angel on the bank of the river asked him. What will the outcome of all this be, meaning what is going to happen to my people?

Daniel is told to go his way. He is given the same command in *verse 13*. The Hebrew word for go means simply go, walk, travel, or take a journey and is the common word for go or walk. The words "*your way*" are not in Hebrew but are added by many translations being understood from the context. Basically the angel tells Daniel to go on about his life because the

words are sealed until the time of the end and therefore he will not be told specifically what they mean at the present time.

The words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. In *12:4* Daniel was told to close up and seal the words of the vision. Here the angel tells Daniel the words have been closed up and sealed until the time of the end. The words used in both verses are the same. *12:4* is a command to Daniel and *12: 9* is a statement of accomplished fact. It sounds as if the angel tells Daniel that the words are already sealed by God or by the angel yet Daniel is told to seal them in *12:4*. The two verses take place at the same time so the command to Daniel and the statement to Daniel about sealing the words are confusing. Perhaps as George Ladd of Fuller Seminary observed, apocalyptic literature is often inconsistent in its details. The word for closed up and for sealed is the same word in Hebrew, here repeated in order to emphasize the action. See the comments above in *12:4* for possible explanations for what the sealing means in this context.

The angel tells Daniel many will be purified and refined but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand the meaning of the vision but the wise will understand. The angel implies that as Daniel "*goes his way*" there will be times to come outlined in the vision where the righteous will be refined and purified by the persecutions to come. The wicked however will not repent and change. They will continue to do evil. They will not understand what is happening to them and to the Jews or why. The wise will understand as the time of the end nears and the meaning of the vision is unlocked. They will gain insight and take strength from it. The Hebrew verb forms in *verse 10* for purify and made spotless mean to purify oneself and to make oneself white. They are reflexive. The verb form for refined is a passive verb, meaning the righteous will be put through a refining process. The angel implies the righteous will take action themselves to purify themselves and at the same time God will be putting them through a process of refinement to become pure and holy. The word for purify means to smelt metal and refine it in a furnace. Daniel is told that the future of his people from his time until the time of the end will be a process of refining the righteous and confirming the wicked in their wickedness. History and life itself will confirm what is in the hearts of his people.

Verses 11-12 are once again references to the three and one half "*times*" but here are put in literal days and related to the time of Antiochus and/or the ultimate time of the Antichrist. The angel says from the time the daily sacrifice is abolished to the abomination of desolation will be 1290 days or 3.53 years, approximately three and one half years. The description of the beginning and ending of the 1290 days is difficult because the historical records are not clear as to the elapsed time between Antiochus' cessation of the temple sacrifices which coincided with his plan to Hellenize the Jews and his erecting the pagan altar to Zeus in the temple, the first type of the abomination of desolation. It was approximately three and one half years from the time of Antiochus' defilement of the temple in 168 to Judas Maccabaeus' capture of Jerusalem and cleansing of the temple in December of 164 BC. That time frame is hardly coincidental and at the very least the 1290 days or three and one half years refers to the time of the temple being defiled under Antiochus as a pre-figuring of the ultimate defilement under the Antichrist before the return of the Lord Jesus. Some scholars have linked the 1290 days to the capture of Jerusalem and defilement by the Romans under Titus in 70 AD. The invasion of Judea, siege of Jerusalem and defilement of the temple by Vespasian and Titus took approximately three and one half years. It is possible they are a second "type" or foreshadowing of the time of the Antichrist. The Lord Jesus declared that the abomination of desolation that *Daniel* spoke of is a future event

related to the end times in *Mark 13* and *Matthew 24*. The abomination of Antiochus' must therefore be a type of the ultimate abomination of desolation.

1290 is three and one half years plus 30 days if one uses 360 days for a year. As I have shown earlier in this commentary using 360 days as a standard Hebrew year to compute the prophetic timeline is a futile effort because of the periodic additions of days to the Hebrew calendar by the Jewish elders and rabbis in the Persian and Greek periods. Plus there is no reliable evidence that Jewish rabbis ever used 360 days as a standard year. 360 days for a year does work in this circumstance but that does not mean that it should be the standard throughout *Daniel* and the prophets for calculating the number of days in a Hebrew year and applying them to prophetic predictions. Even if one assumes the prophecy of the 70 weeks in *Daniel 9* must be taken literally, using 360 days for a year cannot make the math fit the historical record. The numbers simply do not add up. 360 days in a year do not fit the Dispensational interpretation of *Daniel's* symbolic numbers!

The angel then tells Daniel that blessing awaits the one who waits for and reaches the 1335 days. This is three and one half years or 1290 days plus 45 days. Some scholars maintain the extra time could refer to the time between the defiling of the temple by Antiochus and the death of Antiochus. The difficulty is Antiochus died sometime in 164 campaigning against the Parthians and the king of Armenia. Judas Maccabaeus re-dedicated the temple in December of 164. There are not enough days in December to accommodate that theory. The 1335 days are probably related to the time of Antiochus' persecution but ultimately related to the time of the Antichrist. A precise understanding of what the angel means here cannot be determined. Presumably "*the wise*" will understand when the timing is right.

Daniel is once again told to "*go his way*" until the end. The angel promises Daniel he will rest and then at the end of days he will rise again and receive his inheritance or reward. The angel tells Daniel to live out his life. He will die someday but when he does he will enter into God's rest. Then when the end finally does come about which Daniel's visions refer he will rise again and receive his inheritance from the Lord. The Hebrew words literally read "*you shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.*" This is one of the most explicit promises of rest and resurrection in the Old Testament. This pre-figures the New Testament understanding of death as rest for God's saints and resurrection as the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises to his people. Resurrection day will not come when Daniel dies. It will come at the time of the end when God's Messiah will fulfill all of God's promises and evil will be finally and completely beaten and eradicated. In the meantime Daniel will rest in God's care. The details of that rest are not fleshed out here. That is left for the New Testament to do.

At the end of Daniel's remarkable and detailed visions of the time following the exile of the Jews and the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, four centuries from his own time, the *Book of Daniel* ends with the promise of the resurrection and the life to come. Ultimately that is the greatest gift Daniel gives his people. Prophecy scholars can debate the details of Daniel's visions and build their scenarios about what will happen during the 70 weeks and what the abomination of desolation actually means, but Daniel ends his book with a promise. As Paul will write to the Romans 594 years in the future, "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*" Daniel's counsel to his people and to us as God's people today is to go our way, live our lives. Harsh times may come during our lifetimes but take heart. God triumphs in the end and in his triumph we will be victorious as well. Nothing will ever separate us from God's love and purpose for us.