

DANIEL

Part Two – Dreams and Visions

Lesson 58

I recently watched a video of R. C. Sproul interviewing D. A. Carson, both noted Biblical scholars. In the interview, Carson commented on the tools that help one expound on Biblical texts. The first tool Carson endorsed was dexterity with the original language in the text. Carson is multi-lingual. In addition to his knowledge of Biblical languages, he was reared in French Canada and is agile in both French and English. Carson gave an *English => French* example of difficulties in translations. Carson explained there is no single French word for “home,” so it is impossible to directly translate “Home, home on the range” into French.

I listened to the interview, thinking about it from several angles. First, any person can confidently approach Scripture and learn the core of God’s redemptive acts in history with most any Bible translation in hand. Knowledge of Greek and/or Hebrew makes no difference. The gospel (the atoning sacrifice of Christ) is presented in the Bible clearly enough that a child can place his or her faith in it. We never want to lose track of the simple truths in Scripture. Of course, that was not the issue that Carson was discussing. His concern was for those wanting to unpack Scripture on levels beyond the simplicity of the gospel and responsive faith.

My second perspective is centered on the role and responsibility of a teacher and a preacher. As one who teaches a class regularly, I thought of the importance of good scholarship, not just in the words of the language of Scripture, but also in the culture and thought behind those words. In many prior lessons, we have seen the need to understand not only the words of Scripture but also the context of those words. As to the verses themselves, the context includes the passage, its surroundings, and the overarching framework of Scripture. For the language, however, there is another layer of context. There is a historical setting that frames what the language likely meant to those who first wrote or received it.

Consider the Catholic Church’s historic battle with Galileo over whether the sun rotated around the earth or vice-versa. In the dispute, which was scientific as well as Scriptural in its contentious points,¹ the Scriptures used by some in the church included:

¹ People should note that a substantial part of the scientific community believed in a flat world for solely scientific reasons, without regard to religion.

- Psalm 93 - “The world is established, it shall never be moved,”
- Psalm 104 - “He set the earth on its foundations...the sun knows its time for setting,” and
- Ecclesiastes 1:5 - “The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises.”

Some of the church believed these passages mandated that the earth was stationary and the sun moving.

Certainly, there were some in the church then, and likely most everyone in the church today, whom recognized Scripture at times records material in a "phenomenological" language, or a “language of appearances.” We speak the same way today when we use language referencing appearance rather than scientific background. If we say, “the sun has gone down,” we do not mean it as a scientific explanation of what is moving in the heavens! It accurately describes and speaks to what appears to our eyes. To a fair reader of these passages, they are not meant to be a primer in astronomy; they are phrases that accurately use the appearance to one’s eyes to convey truths of God’s strength (Ps. 93), his majesty (Ps. 104), and the cycles of history (Eccl. 1:5).

The difficulties with taking the step of dealing with the historical context of language are at least two-fold. First, to do it right mandates a large amount of study into ancient societies, cultures, and even geography! The “homework” is significant, but a second and greater difficulty lies in the heart of the student. This is an area fraught with potential for abuse, and no one is immune from a desire to find things in Scripture that justify personal desires, ideas, and perspectives. We see this on a sin level, as people seek to find what comports with their desires. We also see it on a more seemingly spiritual level as we look into Scripture for the things that support what we believe, as opposed to accepting what Scripture teaches and molding our beliefs to that.

This difficulty is again seen in the Galileo example. Should someone examining that issue half a millennia ago, accept Scripture’s apparent blunt statements as science, or was it okay when scientific evidence indicated otherwise, to see Scripture for its language of appearance, not science? Of course today we say, “appearance,” yet it is always dicey to walk away from the face value of Scripture, and one should carefully examine what is happening and why it is happening.

Scripture does well at indicating literature and language-type in 99 percent of the cases. There is no question, for example, but that Scripture teaches an empty tomb, and not one empty because of trickery or chicanery. Scripture clearly teaches a tomb empty by divine power and physical resurrection. To read

otherwise is to try to make Scripture say something it does not. To read otherwise, is likely more a statement about one's own heart and mind than the culture of Jesus' day. If we do not want to believe there is a God who has power over the grave; if we do not want to believe there was an incarnation of that God; if we do not want to believe there was an atoning sacrifice, which means an acknowledgement that there is sin to be dealt with; then we can look to dismiss the writings of the empty tomb, writing them off to whatever excuse seems most accessible for the moment.

One chore for the serious Bible student is to render Scripture into understandable terms for today by studying the words of Scripture and its context (intra-Biblically and extra-Biblically). It allows one to understand differing views rather than force one particular preset view onto Scripture. This becomes fascinating and fun, as well as edifying, especially with the tools and knowledge available today. We will see some examples of this as we explore the Dreams and visions of Daniel. Daniel involves some spectacular writing in a special style, using ideas and words that carried special meaning in the days of the late Babylonian kingdom. We will explore some of that to see how it might assist us in understanding some rather difficult passages in Daniel.

As we have already seen in part one of our study of Daniel, the book is divided into two sections, in two different ways. For one, it has a section that is written in Aramaic, the international tongue of commerce during the days of the Babylonian exile. A second way that Daniel is divided seems unrelated to the Aramaic issue.² The first six chapters of Daniel are narrative stories. The last six chapters contain visions that seem to record events that would follow the days of Daniel himself. (We should add that one of the narrative stories, that of the king's dream in chapter two, seems to be a future vision or dream that is closely linked with that of chapter seven.)

As this course is a survey course, it does not allow us to deeply explore each of the visions in Daniel. We will instead hone in on the vision in Chapter seven. Chapter seven is highly acclaimed by many scholars who reckon it as the "most important"³ or "heart of Daniel,"⁴ and even "one of the most important passages"⁵

² Scholars do not come to a consensus on why Daniel is partly in Aramaic. See the first part of this lesson for more in this regard. All lessons in this series are downloadable at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

³ Towner, W. S., *Daniel*, (John Knox, 1984), at 91.

⁴ Porteous, N. W., *Daniel*, (Westminster, 1965), at 95.

⁵ Heaton, E. W., *The Book of Daniel*, (SCM Press, 1956), at 169.

of the Old Testament. Chapter seven also serves as a good exemplar. It opens up many of the basic approaches and issues involved in the other Daniel visions.

DANIEL CHAPTER 7: THE FOUR BEASTS

The Vision:

The visions of Daniel read unlike most anything we have yet come across in our Old Testament survey. There is a hint of such things in the visions of Ezekiel, an early contemporary of Daniel's, but certainly not to the degree of Daniel. Consider the vision in Daniel chapter seven, which Daniel dates to the "first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon" (Dan. 7:1). This dates the vision to around 556BC.⁶ The chapter begins with a vision of four winds stirring up the great sea. Four consecutive beasts come out of the sea. The first beast "was like a lion and had eagles' wings" (Dan. 7:4). The wings were plucked off, the lion was made to stand on the ground like a man, and it was given the mind of a man. The second beast was like a bear "raised up on one side" with "three ribs in its mouth" (Dan. 7:5). This bear was told to devour much flesh. The third beast then emerged and it was like a leopard, but "with four wings and four heads." This beast was "given dominion" (Dan. 7:6). Finally a fourth most "terrifying and dreadful strong" beast came forth (Dan. 7:7). This beast had iron teeth, and it devoured or trampled all that was left. Unlike the other beasts, the fourth one had ten horns. As Daniel considered the horns, another small horn came up with three of the first ten being "plucked up by the roots" (Dan. 7:8). This little horn had human features — eyes like a man and a speaking mouth.

Daniel's vision then shifted from the beasts to the heavens⁷:

As I looked, thrones were placed,
And the Ancient of Days took his seat;
His clothing was white as snow,
And the hair of his head like pure wool;
His throne was fiery flames;
Its wheels were like burning fire.
A stream of fire issued and came out from before him;

⁶ Belshazzar reigned while his father Nabonidus fled Babylon. Babylonian records indicate that Nabonidus entrusted the throne to his son three years into his reign, dating this vision around 553BC. Pritchard, James, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, (Princeton 1969), 3rd ed., at 313.

⁷ Some scholars believe this portion of the vision was also occurring on earth as an earthly judgment scene.

A thousand thousands served him,
And ten thousand times ten thousands stood before him;
The court sat in judgment,
And the books were opened (Dan. 7:9-11).

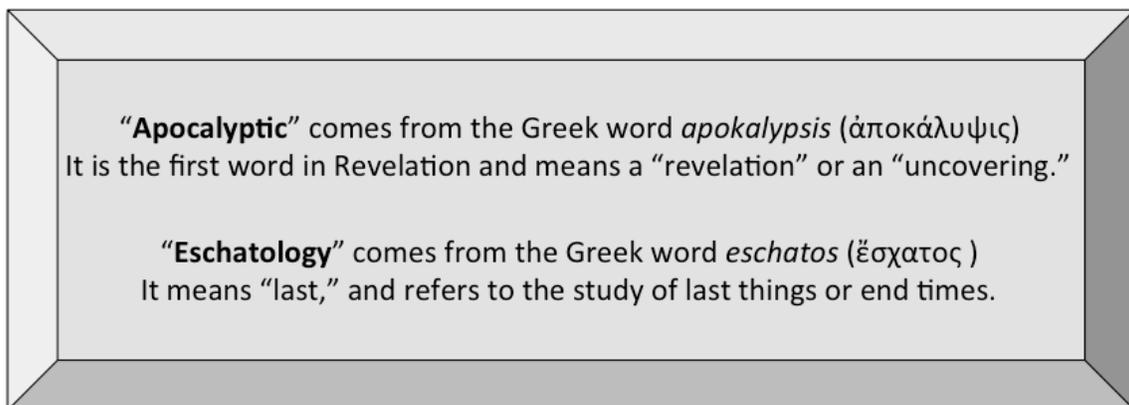
At that point, the fourth great beast was killed, and given to fire for final destruction. The other beasts lost their dominions, but were allowed to live “for a season and a time.”

Then, Daniel saw in the night visions one more thing:

And behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man,
And he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him;
His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,
And his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

Daniel was alarmed at this, and he sought out from “one of those who stood there,” the meaning of the visions. Before we get to the “meaning,” we should note several things about the vision.

As discussed earlier, this vision differs from other writings of the Old Testament, a fact noticeable by even a novice studying the Old Testament for the first time. Its distinguishing characteristics amplify the messages in this passage. Rather than simply say, “Let the world hear the God of history: these things are going to happen in this order, as God brings things to their appointed end,” Daniel has a vision symbolizing events such that even Daniel needed help interpreting it. As scholars write on this, there are two recurrent words used: “apocalyptic” and “eschatological.” Both of these words come from Greek terms.



Scholars debate over the parameters of what is or is not “apocalyptic” literature, but generally scholars agree that in the Bible, the second half of Daniel (the visions) and the book of Revelation are both apocalyptic. There is a host of non-biblical writings from the time between the Old and New Testaments that are also apocalyptic, including writings found among the Qumran community in the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a part of their debates, scholars parse through what features make certain writing apocalyptic.⁸ Among the features commonly assumed a part of apocalyptic literature are visions about the future, often given through an intermediary, using symbols and other means of cloaking the meaning such that it needs uncovering, or interpreting.⁹ Often the vision of the future includes a period of the “last days” or “end times.” As such, that aspect of the apocalyptic material is “eschatological” in nature.

The symbolism in this passage of Daniel is understood in part by the explanation given to Daniel at the end of the chapter. We get further understanding, by examining the meaning of certain words and ideas in the culture of 6th century Babylon. For example, the significance and understanding of numbers was much different in Daniel’s day than in 21st century western culture. Attached as an appendix to this lesson is a brief review of the symbolic usage of numbers possibly relevant to the text. The symbolism of the numbers as well as the remaining portions of the vision are an area that, as we discussed in the introduction, require careful study, lest we impart some meaning to the text that was not intended! With reference to the appendix for more detail and for references, we will incorporate some of our conclusions from there into our understanding of the vision as we consider it in light of the explanation given Daniel.

The Explanation:

The explanation begins by noting that the four beasts were symbolic of four kings that would arise from the earth. Those kings came and went, in contrast to the kingdom of God which would come as an everlasting kingdom and dominion that would not pass away. This explanation was not totally sufficient, and Daniel probed for more information on the fourth “most terrifying beast.” This beast’s teeth of iron and claws of bronze, which had destroyed, devoured, and trampled all others, had the ten horns, and had made quite an impression on Daniel. Daniel repeated to the interpreter what had happened in his vision, especially where the extra horn arose and caused three horns to fall. This was the horn that had “eyes,” a “mouth,” and “spoke great things.” Daniel gave more information about the

⁸ In his overview book, Leon Morris points out that, “‘apocalyptic’ is our term. It is not one which the ancients used, at least in this way.” *Apocalyptic* (Eerdmans 1972), at 21.

⁹ Chisholm, Robert, *Handbook on the Prophets*, (Baker 2002), at 292.

horn waging war against the saints and prevailing over them until the Ancient of Days came to the rescue. The Ancient of Days delivered judgment for “the saints of the Most High” and the saints then possessed the kingdom.

The angel uncovered more information in response to Daniel’s probing of the fourth beast. This beast was a fourth kingdom that was different than the others. It devoured the land, trampled it down, and left it broken. The ten horns were kings due to arise in this kingdom. The alternate horn was another king who would arise and put down the first three kings (horns). This king,

Shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the laws; and they shall be given into his hands for a time, times, and a half-time (Dan. 7:25).

When the time was up, judgment would come and the kingdom would be delivered to the people of the saints of the Most High. This would be the kingdom that never passes away.

Daniel chapter seven ends with Daniel noting his level of concern:

As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart (Dan. 7:28).

This vision of four beasts has echoes of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter two. In chapter two, the image was of a mighty man made up of four distinct parts: a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, a lower torso of bronze, and legs of iron (with clay mixed into the iron feet). Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in chapter two as four coming kingdoms. This is similar to the vision of Daniel in chapter seven, in that the four beasts were four coming kingdoms.

Following this, a brand new vision from a different time begins in Chapter eight. We get no more insight from the direct words and vision of Daniel, but are left to figure out what Daniel’s vision and the interpretation might mean. One tool that helps significantly is simple: history. We have the benefit of looking back at Daniel’s prophetic vision rather than trying to project the future in greater detail by what the revealing angel offered him.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Something amazing happens to the modern readers of this chapter. Daniel has a vision, somewhat bizarre by today’s standards, and then seeks an interpretation to

the vision. The interpretation is given to Daniel and related in the chapter. The interpretation, however, raises as many new questions as it answers. It leaves the reader wondering what on earth (literally) is going on in this chapter. There are innumerable ideas about these verses, set out in more commentaries than the average person will ever read. Some points have a solid consensus among the scholars. Other points represent radically diverse ideas, often built just as firmly around the writer's presuppositions, as from the text. For some scholars, the idea of accurate prophecy is impossible, and so they interpret the vision as one written after the events portrayed. Because the first three beasts are easily identified as one of two possible historical times, it leaves the fourth beast open much to discussion. The cynical scholars place the disputed portion of the vision (the fourth beast) at the time of authorship, allowing the first three beasts to be historical accounts written under the guise of prophecy. To make this fit, it forces the cynics into a specific camp of meaning, as indicated below. For those scholars who believe in God's divine ability to tell the future accurately, the limitations bound to the cynic are options, rather than limitations. Our goal in this paper is to chart out the major points of understanding in the vision, drawing reasonable conclusions where possible, and encouraging the reader to study further. We will bullet point the ideas and opinions:

- **This is a world vision.** Daniel's vision is not one of Israel and Judah. The vision, like the narratives in the earlier chapters, concern the entire world as it was known at the time. In this way, Daniel takes a shape apart from most all other Old Testament scriptures. This is not to suggest that the Bible teaches that God had no control or interest in the world outside the Jews in Old Testament times. Paul had a core Old Testament understanding when he wrote that no governing authority existed unless instituted and appointed by God (Rom. 13:1ff). Daniel's vision begins with "four winds of heaven" stirring up the great sea. Four was representative of the completeness of the world. This is true in Scripture as well as other Ancient Near Eastern writings contemporary to the Old Testament (See the appendix). The subsequent events in the vision bear out the worldwide scope of the vision.
- **The sea.** The four winds stirred up the great sea, bringing forth the four beasts. In Scripture, the sea is frequently portrayed as a place of chaos and trouble. Since Israel had no Mediterranean port, they were not a seafaring people. Prophets used the "sea" as a symbol of "polluted turbulent humanity."¹⁰
- **The four beasts are four kingdoms in one of two schemes.** Daniel saw four beasts and was told they represented four kings (or kingdoms,

¹⁰ Archer, G. L., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, (Moody 1974), at 85.

depending upon the translation). The first beast most every scholar identifies as the Babylonian empire. This beast was like a lion with eagles' wings. The royal Babylonian buildings in Daniel's day consistently portrayed images of lions and winged creatures, and Jeremiah referred to Nebuchadnezzar as a lion and to his army as an eagle (Jer. 4:7; 49:19-22). (Daniel was a reader of Jeremiah – Dan. 9:2). The schemes diverge on the identity of beasts two through four.

- **Scheme One:** Persia/Greece/Rome. In this scheme, which dates back at least to Josephus in the first century,¹¹ the second beast is the Persian Empire, which took over and conquered Babylon. The second beast symbolized Persia who, like a bear, devoured the world after the Babylonians. The bear is “raised up on one side” in the sense of tilted, because it was the “Medo-Persian” empire with the Persian stronger or “higher,” rather than as two equal partners. Cyrus first consolidated Persia with the Medes before conquering the world. The three ribs in the bear's mouth are viewed as the three kingdoms Persia conquered: Lydia (546BC), Babylon (539BC), and Egypt (525BC). Under the scheme, the third beast (the leopard) is viewed as Alexander the Great and the Macedonian/Grecian Empire. The leopard was notorious for its speed (Hab. 1:8) and ferocity. Alexander exhibited a conquering speed never seen before. He had conquered the known world by age 32, reportedly weeping because there were no more lands to conquer. This beast had four wings and four heads. Alexander moved so quickly, one could say he flew to the four corners of the world. The heads are seen to be the four divisions of Alexander's empire divided after his death (discussed later). This scheme then typically views the fourth as the Roman Empire. It was different from all others and devastated all the lands and empires, crushing any who stood in its way.
- **Scheme Two:** Mede/Persia/Greece. In this alternate scheme, the second beast (the lion/eagle tandem) are the Medes. This view breaks the Medes and Persians apart, by a bit of backward engineering. That is not to say that there are not substantial academic reasons for accepting the role of the Medes as the second beast (the bear), but it seems the major reason for identifying it is the need to make the fourth beast the Grecian Empire, thus necessitating finding the Medes as a separate entity from the Persians. Without this separation, the Greeks become the third Empire, thwarting the interpretation of the Greeks as the Fourth beast. This interpretation

¹¹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 10.10.4.

sets out Persia as the third beast, a leopard. Most typically this is the view forced on those who see Daniel as a product of a 2nd Century BC author. Because Rome was not yet an empire, those who see the prophetic writings as written *after the fact* (history in the guise of prophecy), have to end the Empires with the residues of Alexander's.

With either scheme, the fourth beast is recognized in the text as both cruel and arrogant. His speaking "great things" is considered a haughty bragging or "arrogant speech."¹²

- **The traits of the beasts.** Scholars try to figure out the cultural source for the beasts described by Daniel. Ideas proposed include Mediterranean iconography (which works well for the lion with wings, is a stretch for the bear, and fails with the leopard and beast four), astrology (good for the bear and lion, not so the others), the Netherworld (better for the judging God than the beasts), the *Enuma Elish* (good for the beasts arising from the sea and the fight with God, but inadequate elsewhere), Babylonian birth omens, and more. One reason there are so many opinions is that not one really fits. At best we can note that the first three beasts are all mentioned in Hosea 13:7-8, although without the alterations. These verses, combined with Jeremiah 49:19-22, give a good flavor of what is conveyed in the core meaning of the beasts. The fourth beast is altogether different with its ten plus one horns. In the Ancient Near East, horns represented power and strength and were frequently placed on the headgear of gods and deified kings.¹³
- **The ten horns.** Wallace has correctly pointed out that, "a great deal of imagination has been lavished on deciding which kings or powers these represent."¹⁴ The ten horns are divided into three that are supplanted by the 11th horn that grows up. Over history scholars have opined in many ways. As noted earlier, some have seen the beast as the Greek or Roman empire and then try to construct which kings might be represented by the three horns supplanted by the 11th horn. Others have seen the horns as representing kingdoms that arise out of the fourth beast, or the Roman Empire. When Napoleon was on his rampage, many of the writings that

¹² Collins, John J., *Daniel: A Commentary On the Book of Daniel*, (Augsberg Fortress 1993), at 299.

¹³ Pritchard, James, *Ancient Near East in Pictures Related to the Old Testament* (Princeton 1969), at 513-15, 525-26, 646-47.

¹⁴ Wallace, Ronald, *The Message of Daniel*, (IVP 1979), at 130.

“proved” he was the beast of Revelation, used this passage to compute how he had gathered ten nations of the old Roman Empire together. Others were opining as the European Common Market began, that the ten horns were the ten nations that, early on, appeared to be the member nations.¹⁵ Many scholars who view the fourth kingdom as the Greeks (or even some who view it as the Romans) see the ten horns as a combination of kings. After Alexander the Great (356-323BC) died, his worldwide empire was subdivided into lands ruled by four of his generals. These lands were subsequently ruled by different kings in different regions as the Romans began to conquer outside Italy.

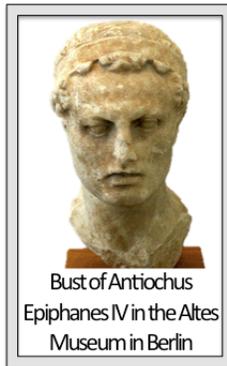
- **The eleventh horn is not one of the ten earthly kings.** To the extent there are ten horns in the vision, there are ten kings of prophesy. Scholars toss back and forth ideas on who these ten kings were like a basketball. “Ten” as a number is a specific amount, but we should also remember that ten is a symbolic number representing an indefinite magnitude. In this sense, ten can be seen as a representative of the whole. As noted in the appendix, this is found both in Scripture as well as contemporary cultures to those of Scripture. The identity of the eleventh horn is similarly subject to a variety of opinions. Most scholars agree that the presence of eyes and mouth on the eleventh horn draw attention to it as an individual, not a kingdom. Eyes and mouth were noteworthy features of a human (Pro. 6:17).
 - **Some view the 11th horn as the Antichrist.** As early as Jerome (347 – 420AD) some scholars, including Jerome, have viewed the extra horn as the Antichrist. Others early on viewed the horn as either the Devil or a demon.¹⁶ Similarly, some identify the 11th horn as the “man of lawlessness” that Paul wrote of in 2 Thess. 2:3-9. Wallace writes that the 11th horn represents “some great anti-Christian persecutor of the true church arising within the Christian

¹⁵ The original membership was six, then four more applied to bring it to ten, but one of those was rejected, so it topped temporarily at nine. Then it grew, and the member countries now number twelve.

¹⁶ Commenting on Daniel 7:8 Jerome wrote, “Let us not follow the opinion of some commentators and suppose him to be either the Devil or some demon, but rather, one of the human race, in whom Satan will wholly take up his residence in bodily form... For this is the man of sin, the son of perdition...making himself out to be like God.” Commenting on later passages, Jerome short hands his identification simply as “the Antichrist.” *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel*, Translated by Gleason Archer, (Baker 1958). More modern commentators sharing Jerome’s view include Miller, Stephen, *Daniel*, (Broadman & Holman 1994); Keil, C. F., *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, (Eerdmans 1973); Walvoord, J. F., *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, (Moody 1971); Leupold, H.C., *Exposition of Daniel*, (Baker reprint 1969).

era and within the civilization created by the Roman Empire [Western civilization].”¹⁷

- **Some view the 11th horn as Antiochus Epiphanes IV.** As Alexander the Great’s empire was subdivided into four regions, the Ptolemy family ruled the area of Egypt. The Seleucids ruled the eastern quadrant, leaving a kingdom of Pergamum in Asia Minor and Macedon in the Greece area. Jerusalem fell into the Seleucid region and was ruled by those kings. In 175BC, Antiochus Epiphanes IV came to the throne of the Seleucid Empire, even though there were three others before him who should have assumed the throne first.¹⁸ Antiochus seemed to feature prominently each characteristic of the 11th horn.



Bust of Antiochus Epiphanes IV in the Altes Museum in Berlin

Actions and traits of the 11th horn:

1. Made war with the saints (7:21)
2. Blasphemed the Most High (7:25)
3. Tried to change “set times” (7:25)
4. Tried to change the “law” (7:25)
5. Dominion over the saints for “time, times, and half a time” (7:25)



The Antiochus coin with the reverse inscribed:
ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ
ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥ ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΥ

Actions and traits of Antiochus Epiphanes IV:

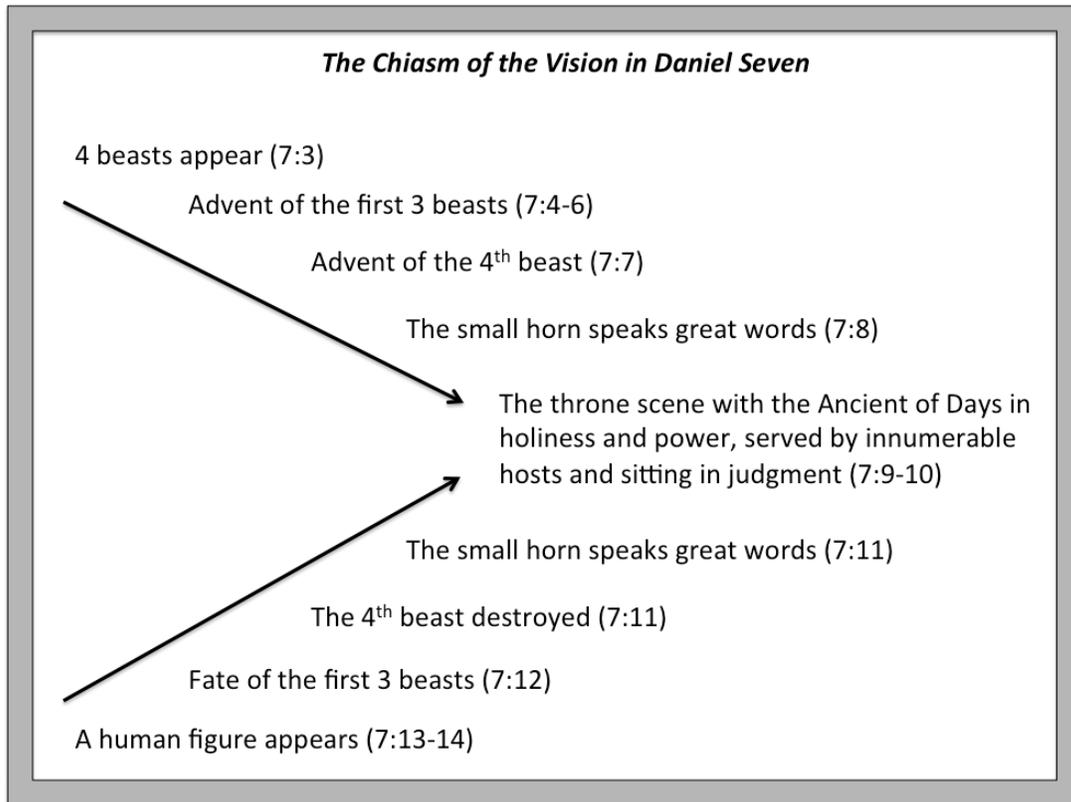
1. Antiochus persecuted faithful Jews severely, killing 80,000 in one campaign, massacring young, old, women, children, and infants (2 Macc. 5:11-14) .
2. On his coinage, Antiochus had inscribed in Greek, King Antiochus, God Manifest, Bearer of Victory.
3. Antiochus outlawed Sabbath worship as well as Old Testament feasts and observances, ordering the worship of Zeus, putting to death Jews who refused (2 Macc. 6:1-12).
4. Antiochus ordered all copies of the *Torah* (“Law”) burned (1 Macc. 1:24)
5. Some understand “time, times, and half a time” as 3 and ½ years. The period that Antiochus desecrated the temple in Jerusalem was 3 years and 8 days.(1 Macc. 1:54; 4:52)

¹⁷ Wallace, at 129.

¹⁸ Collins, at 321.

- **The vision forms a chiasm that focuses and emphasizes YHWH, the “Ancient of Days.”**
 - As **the Ancient of Days**, YHWH has seen all of history. He is the all-knowing presence. His white hair and clothing are symbols of his purity, a symbol both hearkening back to Isaiah 1:18 (“though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow”) and foreshadowing the coming passages in Revelation. (In Rev. 1:13-14 John sees one “like a son of man” with white hair “like white wool, like snow.” See also Rev. 3:4).
 - **The unusual thrones.** Daniel 7:9 notes that the Ancient of Days came and sat among “thrones.” This is most unusual in Jewish thought, which affirmed one God, not multiple (Dt. 6:5). The early church saw a second throne as that of Christ who repeatedly is said to reign seated at the right hand of God (Mt. 26:64; Mk 14:62; Lk 22:69; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 8:1; 12:2; Rev. 5:1, 7). Early Jewish rabbis considered this as one throne for God and one for David. Other rabbis saw it as two thrones for two aspects of the same God, one for his justice and one for his mercy¹⁹
 - **The numbers in the throne scene are symbolic.** Serving God in the throne are “a thousand thousands” and “ten thousand times ten thousands” (Dan. 7:10). These tremendous numbers are not to be taken as precise numbers but are the ancient equivalent of a modern saying of “millions and millions” or even “buku’s” or “gajillions.” They represent the idea of an innumerable amount.
- **The vision emphasizes God reigning on high.** The structure of the vision is a chiasm, a structure we have seen repeatedly in our Old Testament studies. As a chiasm, the emphasis of the passage is apparent – the throne scene of the Ancient of Days:

¹⁹ See the rabbinical cites and discussions in Evans, Craig, *Jesus and his contemporaries: Comparative Studies*, (Brill 1995), at 204ff.



- The judgment of God.** In the vision, God intervenes in the 11th horn's warring against the saints, coming in judgment and taking away the dominion of the fourth beast and the 11th horn. The defeat of the fourth beast implies a defeat of all the other beasts that were subsumed by the fourth beast. From a numerically symbolic perspective, by defeating the ultimate fourth beast, God shows his supremacy and ultimate judgment over all earthly kingdoms. Some see this coming judgment echoed in John 16 as Jesus before his betrayal assured his disciples that the coming Holy Spirit would "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." Jesus added his reasoning behind each noun: "concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father...*concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged*" (Jn 16:8-11).
- Identifying "The son of man."** The son of man in Daniel's vision stands in stark contrast to the 11th horn:

Antithetical Comparison of the 11 th Horn and the Son of Man in Daniel 7	
11 th Horn	Son of Man
An active figure (7:8, 11, 20-21, 24-25)	A passive figure (7:13-14)
Dominion is taken from him (7:26)	Dominion is given to him (7:14)
Comes from the earth (7:26)	Comes with the clouds (7:13)
Has a fleeting dominion (7:26)	Has an everlasting dominion (7:14)
Rebels against God (7:25)	In subjection to God (7:13)
Speaks but is put to shame (7:11-26)	Is silent and is honored (7:13-14)
Not served in the end (7:26)	All serve him in the end (7:14)
Tries to wear out the saints(7:25)	Dominion is given to him (7:14)
Comes from the earth (7:26)	Represents the saints (7:18-27)
Overthrows others coming in (7:8)	Others usher him in (7:13)

20

- Most evangelical scholars identify **the son of man as Jesus Christ**. Jesus promised the coming of the “Son of Man on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Then the four winds will not stir up beasts from the sea but instead, “he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds” (Mt. 24:30-31). Scholars debate over whether the Daniel reference is to the first coming of Christ or the second coming. Regardless, the “Son of Man” is a designation that Jesus self-ascribes repeatedly (see, e.g., Mt 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41, etc.). The writer of Hebrews references Psalm 8:4 (“what is man that you are mindful of him, and the **son of man** that you care for him?”) as Messianic explaining that Jesus is ultimately given full dominion.
- **The “saints” are viewed variously.** Some scholars believe the “saints” are angels, referencing the angel Michael and others from Daniel 10 (Daniel 10:14). Others believe the Holy Ones to be the faithful Jews. Still others view the Holy Ones as the church.

²⁰ This chart is adapted from House, Wayne and Price, Randall, *Charts of Bible Prophecy*, (Zondervan 2003), at 64.

- The relationship of **the saints and the son of man**. There is an interesting relationship in Daniel 7 between the son of man and the saints. In Daniel 7:14 dominion is given to the son of man, yet in the explanation of the vision, the dominion is given to the “saints of the Most High” (an. 7:27). This has led some scholars to believe that the son of man is a designation for the saints of God. This is supported by the many references to Ezekiel, for example as a “son of man.” Yet the difficulty is the son of man as a singular while the saints are clearly plural. Other scholars see this as the same intertwined relationship between Jesus and the church as given in the New Testament. In John 15:5ff, Jesus called himself the vine and the disciples the branches. Jesus did not define himself as the trunk from which the branches shoot forth. Jesus identified himself as the entire vine, with the disciples being a part of him as branches. This is the sense Jesus earlier explained that when the Holy Spirit came the apostles would understand that Jesus was in the Father, that the apostles were in Jesus and that Jesus was in the apostles (Jn. 14:20). Paul used the same relationship idea picturing the church as the body of Christ, with each person having its own part or role in the entire body that is Christ. This was likely a reflection of Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus where Jesus asked Paul why he was persecuting Jesus, even as Paul’s true objects of persecution were the Christians (Acts 9:4).
- **The non-Messianic Jewish view** of the identity of the son of man has varied over time. The Jewish views before Jesus certainly indicate this referred to a coming Messiah (1 Enoch 46:1; 48:10; 2 Esdras 13:1ff; *b. Sanh.* 98a). Later, Jewish tradition rejected the identity as the Messiah preferring alternatives like “Israel” or a heavenly figure like the angel Michael.²¹

CONCLUSION

What conclusions can we draw from these different suggested interpretations of Daniel? How can we take the context, both historically and linguistically and sort through the symbolism doing justice to Scripture? For some, there is a very definite and clear interpretation that fits both the Daniel passage, as well as the overarching context of Scripture. For others, it is not so clear.

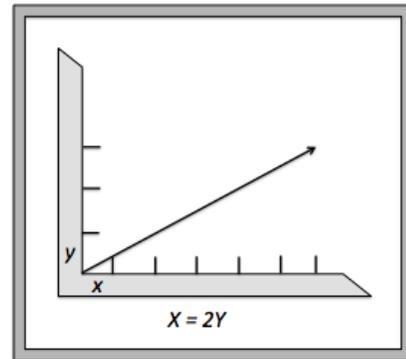
²¹ *Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford 1985), at 1656-7.

I would suggest an image of how Scripture has produced certain prophetic words. The image is that of an underground stream that bubbles to the surface in places, sometimes running for a good length above ground. I suggest that many of Scripture's prophetic words are such a constant stream. We can see their fulfillment in a number of different times and ages manifested in a number of different events and people. Some are clear and we might even see them as the core manifestation of the prophetic word. Others are less clear and significant; yet still bear the fruit of God's prophetic word. In this sense, we can see historical fulfillment as well as historical themes that repeat in the sense that there is nothing new under the sun. Wallace wrote,

We must remember that Daniel in this vision saw these beasts and horns not simply as each having its own historical identity, but also as each being a typical example of the kind of empire and the kind of petty satellite power that can and will arise, here and there, now and then, in the field of human history under different circumstances as time moves on to the fulfillment of God's great purposes with mankind.²²

To use a mathematics analogy, there are times where we can have a specific finding from an equation. For example: $x + 3 = 10$. That equation is quickly reducible to $x = 7$. Additionally, there is set of equations that are represented by multiple numbers. For example: $x = 2y$.

A chart best shows this answer, for the answer varies. When x is 1, then y is 2, but when x is 2, then y is 4. There are prophetic words that speak the constant theme of God into history at different times. To the Jews in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, without a doubt, the prophetic word of Daniel gave assurance that God would send salvation on the clouds and that any dominion of man is temporary and for a set time, whereas the Kingdom of God is eternal and will not be thwarted. The message is just as true today. The four winds brought forth four creatures, and as such brought forth the truth for any and every kingdom of the world. God reigns sovereignly, and history is rushing towards its culmination to God's kingdom and dominion.



POINTS FOR HOME

²² Wallace, at 131.

1. *“Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart”* (Dan. 7:28).

This is the last verse in Daniel chapter seven. It interests me that Daniel, having the vision explained, and understanding the final victory of God and his saints, seems to end the vision experience depressed! Why? What happened to this visionary of God? My suggestion is that even though we know the result, even though we have read the final chapter, and even though we know we live on the side of victory, there is still a tough road ahead. There are challenges, dangers, pain, and difficulties. There are opposing forces that threaten and damage the faithful. We the faithful have the opportunity to turn away and run, finding refuge in the world and its systems, or we have the opportunity to stand, endure, and await the coming of the mighty hand of God. Our assurance as we stand is that we do not stand alone (Mt. 28:20), that even as we endure persecution we are blessed (Mt. 5:10), and that God will never put us through more than we can stand (1 Cor. 10:13).

2. *“As I looked...the Ancient of Days took his seat”* (Dan. 7:9).

This is the point of the vision, the mid-point of the chiasm. It places all emphasis on the Almighty who is older than time itself, the Ancient of Days. Old Testament scholar Ernest Lucas words this emphasis well:

Human kings may seem to be free to rampage at will, but there is a throne in heaven and One on it to whom they are ultimately subject.²³

There is no one or nothing more worthy of our adoration and worship than God Almighty. This includes our leaders, our friends, our families, and often most important, ourselves! No one and nothing is worthy of worship save God alone. This should also drive us to humility in approaching God’s holy word. Surely we and our intellect are not on the level of God. We worship and adore him alone, praying that he will enlighten our minds and hearts, bringing us wisdom and insight in our study of his word.

3. *“The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever”* (Dan. 7:18).

²³ Lucas, Ernest, *Daniel*, (IVP 2002), at 165.

There is a turning point in these visions as Daniel considers the future of the whole world, beyond the concerns of Israel and the Jews. The future world kingdoms with their leaders will come and go. But the assurance of Scripture is a coming kingdom that will contain all God's saints. This is an everlasting kingdom, and we see it in its infancy in the church today. Jesus told us the saints include the "poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3) as well as "those who are persecuted for righteousness sake" (Mt. 5:10). Those who are like children in their faith and trust will enter it (Mt. 18:3). Jesus preached the kingdom of heaven was at hand in his ministry (Mt. 4:17). This was a kingdom in battle even up to the time of Jesus's ministry (Mt. 11:12 – "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force."). The vision of Revelation assures us that the kingdom of heaven does conquer the kingdom of the world (Rev. 11:15), and that blessed assurance is ours! With childlike faith, with the humility that equates to being "poor in spirit," and standing for righteousness, my prayer includes the petition, "May thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!"