

Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 21

Daniel, Lecture 1, Introduction

Daniel

A. Introductory Remarks

1. Problems with Date and Authorship

We start a new section today, which is the book of Daniel. A. in the outline is, “Introductory Remarks,” and the first section is, “Problems with Date and Authorship.” So I want to discuss that with you in the first part of our session. Daniel, of course, is one of the prophetic books that is most often challenged as far as authenticity. There’s a general consensus among critical scholars that the book of Daniel is fictional and that it was written shortly before 165 B.C. The reason for that date is, it’s felt by the critical scholars that it reflects the situation of the time when Israel was suffering under the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes from Syria, or what was then called Aram. That is often known as the Maccabean period, when Judas Maccabeus and his brothers instigated the revolt against the oppressions of Antiochus Epiphanes, and it’s that historical context that critical scholars feel provides the background for the book.

Of course, the book itself says that it was written by Daniel, and Daniel lived during the time of the Babylonian captivity. And you read of the transition from the Babylonian to the Persian period in the book of Daniel. Babylon fell to the Persians, to Cyrus, in 539 B.C. So that would place Daniel somewhere a little before, not subsequent, to the date of 539 which is the transition between the Babylonian and Persian period. This is, of course, about 400 years earlier than the critical scholars allege.

a. Reasons for the Late Date

Now, the reasons for that late date are basically three. I’d list them in this way: First, and I think this is really at the heart of it and the most important thing, is: the *a priori* assumption that genuine predictive prophecy does not happen. Then second, alleged historical errors in the Daniel material. If the writer were living back here in 165 B.C. and he’s writing about something 400 years earlier, the theory is that he really didn’t

know his history very well, so he made these historical blunders. Then the third line of argument is alleged late linguistic features. Those are the three central lines of argument for the late date.

1) Assumption that Predictive Prophecy Does Not Happen

Let's look at each of them. So first: the assumption that predictive prophecy does not happen. I think that's a basic question of worldview, whether or not one is open to divine interventions in history, in revelation, and in action. People that are not willing to accept that as a possibility are not able to accept genuine predictive prophecy. There are many who assume that the universe is a closed continuum of cause and effect relationships where there's no room for intervention by the supernatural. They work with that assumption and, therefore, exclude the possibility of revelation ever happening. Now, humanly speaking, it would be impossible for Daniel to know so much about the course of Israel's history future to his own time. I think that's clear. There's no way that a person with normal human faculties could write the material that's in the book of Daniel because so much of it looks so far into the future with such amazing detail that, if you rule out the possibility of revelation, you would have to conclude that this is written after these things happened.

However, that conclusion itself creates some problems, and the main one is the succession of empires that's depicted in several places in the book of Daniel. We'll look at this in more detail as we move into the book. But in Daniel 2, you have that image that Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about that has a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs and feet of iron. There are four parts there--four different materials to that image. Each part is symbolic of an empire. In the context of chapter 2, an interpretation is given, and it is said, "You, Nebuchadnezzar, are the head of gold." So you start with the Babylonian Empire, and it seems that when you follow down the succession, you move from the Babylonians to the Persians. The Persians fell to the Greeks, and the Greeks fell to the Romans. So if you move through that succession of Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, you've already created a problem here because the

Roman is after 165 B.C. In 165 you're still in the Greek period so you've only got Babylon, Persia and Greece. Rome is too late to fit into that critical scheme of dating.

So they see that problem and what they do is then say it's Babylonian, Median, Persian, and Greek Empires. So they get four successive kingdoms in before the date in which they proposed in which Daniel was written. Now the problem with that sequence is the Median Kingdom historically never existed in an interval between the Babylonian and Persian Kingdoms. In other words, we move directly from the Babylonian to the Persian. The Medians had already been incorporated into the Medo-Persian Empire prior to that with the Medo-Persian empire defeating the Babylonians in 539 B.C. There was never any succession from Median to Persian to Greek. The Babylonian Kingdom fell to the Persians. And we have that in Daniel at the end of chapter five. In that night Belshazzar king of the Chaldeans was slain. Darius the Mede took the kingdom. You see you move right from the Babylonian to the Persian. So Darius the Mede took over the Babylonian Kingdom. We'll have to talk about Darius the Mede, but that's one of those alleged historical errors. But historically it's clear, and there's no question among historians: There was no such thing as a Median kingdom.

Now, given the prophecies of Daniel, if the succession of kingdoms includes Media, then Daniel is historically erroneous. For the critical scholars, that's no problem. You see that fits into their scheme of things; they will claim the writer, Daniel, who was living in the Macabean period, was confused about the earlier course of Israel's history. This writer living at a later time thought there was an independent existence of a Median kingdom in between the Babylonian and Persian periods. The idea would be: We know better. So this is another example of a historical error on the part of the writer Daniel.

I guess they would claim that we have sources for Persian history, and for Babylonian history for that matter, that Daniel presumably didn't have access to, or the writer didn't have access to. Of course, that's assuming that there's this anonymous, unknown writer representing himself as Daniel, but living 400 years after the time of Daniel about 165 B.C. in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.

All right, so you see the critical view is based on this assumption: Predictive

prophecy doesn't happen. But so much in the book clearly rests on either divine revelation, or you will have to move the date and time to account for the knowledge of these things by the writer. But in moving the date, you still are faced with other problems.

2) Alleged Historical Errors

All right, let's go on to alleged historical errors. One of the major alleged historical errors is the one that we've just been discussing: the existence of this apocryphal Median Kingdom between the Babylonian and the Persian ones. That, of course, is a major factor as far as alleged historical errors. But there are some other alleged errors such as: the reference to Belshazzar as king instead of Nabonidas at a time when the Babylonian kingdom fell to the Persians. That's in those verses we just looked at the end of chapter five of Daniel. "In that night was Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, slain. And Darius the Mede took the kingdom." Critical scholars say that's not accurate because Belshazzar was not the king at the time that the Babylonians fell to the Persians, but Nabonidas was. Now I'll come back to that in a minute.

But a second alleged historical error is the reference to Nebuchadnezzar as the father of Belshazzar. In Daniel 5:2 you read, "Belshazzar, while he tasted wine, commanded to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple, which was in Jerusalem." It is alleged that that is inaccurate because Nebuchadnezzar wasn't his father. Belshazzar was a grandson, not a son.

Third, it is said that no such person as Darius the Mede ever existed. In Daniel 5:31, Darius the Mede took the kingdom. That's the time of the victory of the Persians over the Babylonians. It's claimed that there was no such person as Darius the Mede. Darius the Mede didn't defeat the Babylonians, Cyrus did. So those are three alleged historical errors besides this apocryphal Median Kingdom.

Now, let's look at them. There are reasonable responses to all of them. The first one about Nabonidas and Belshazzar: Babylonian historical sources show that Nabonidas made his son Belshazzar co-regent with him; Nabonidas himself left Babylon and went to Northern Arabia. It's interesting that Daniel 5:29 says, "Then as commanded Belshazzar,

they clothed Daniel with scarlet, put a chain of gold about his neck, made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the *third ruler* in the kingdom.” That reference to Daniel’s being the third ruler in the kingdom is fascinating. Why would he be the third ruler in the kingdom? This fits with what we know about Nabonidas’s making Belshazzar co-regent. That’s Daniel 5:29. So with Belshazzar as a co-regent, Nabonidas was out of the capital city when it fell to the Persians. It’s perfectly reasonable to read that, “In that night was Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, slain when the Persians took the city.

The reference to Nebuchadnezzar as the father of Belshazzar is simply Semitic usage. The term “father” is often used in the sense of ancestor, just as the term “son” is often used in the sense of descendant in Semitic usage. In Matthew 1:1, “son” means “descendant.” “Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham, the son of David.” So in Daniel 5:2 where it said that Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar’s father and in 5:22 where it says, “And thou his son, O Belshazzar, has not humbled thine heart,” father and son terminology is employed in the sense of ancestor or descendant. It’s interesting in this little study guide on the book of Daniel that’s being published by the JSOT press--Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. They’re putting out these study guides for all the Old testament books. This one came out in 1985 and was reprinted in 1988. On page 31 of that book--I’ve put a statement in your citations, look at page 36 of your citations--the author of this book argues for the late date for Daniel. However, he offers this critique, “Critical commentaries, especially around the turn of the century, made much of the fact that Belshazzar was neither the son of Nebuchadnezzar, nor the king of Babylon. This is still sometimes repeated as the charge against the historicity of Daniel and is resisted by conservative scholars. But it has been clear since 1924, that although Nabonidas was the last king of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty, Belshazzar was effectively ruling Babylon. In this respect then, Daniel is correct. The literal meaning of ‘son’ should not be pressed, even if it might betray a misunderstanding on the part of Daniel. A strong case against Daniel’s historical reliability is not enhanced by the inclusion of weak arguments such as this.”

That’s interesting coming from someone who is still an advocate of the late-date

view. So he goes back more to this whole thing of the possibility of genuine revelation and prediction. And the historical setting has so much about Antiochus Epiphanes in the book of Daniel that you wonder how could anyone have written this unless he were living in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, unless you're willing to accept the possibility of revelation.

There's a Babylonian text that makes it absolutely clear about Nabonidas and Belshazzar. There's a good article on that in the *New ISBE Encyclopedia* if you look up "Belshazzar." I think it's written by Edwin Yamauchi who utilizes some of this Babylonian source material.

The third thing that is alleged that I mentioned is the question of Darius the Mede. Critical scholars will say there never was such a person named Darius the Mede. This is a somewhat more difficult question because of lack of evidence. It's true that we have no reference to an individual by that name, Darius the Mede, outside of Scripture. And it's also true that there's no interval between the Belshazzar-Nabonidas rule of Babylon and the fall of Babylon to Cyrus of Persia. Cyrus is the one historically who defeated Babylon during the time of Nabonidas and Belshazzar. So you see that the succession is Nabonidas and Belshazzar co-reigning, and then by 539 B.C. Cyrus takes over. But I think, having said that, that does not necessarily mean that Daniel was here in error. There are several reasonable suggestions that have been made in attempting to identify this individual, Darius the Mede, who is mentioned there in Daniel 5:31 where it says, "Darius the Mede took the kingdom."

It's possible that Darius the Mede is another name for Cyrus himself. It could perhaps be some sort of throne name or title. You remember with Tiglath Pilezer he was known in Babylon as Pul. Tiglath Pilezer was an Assyrian king. In 1 Chronicles 5:26, Tiglath Pilezer is called Pul. The Babylonian name is used. Maybe this is a throne name of some sort, or a title for Cyrus that otherwise has not been preserved. It's interesting, if you look at 6:28 of Daniel, you have the statements, "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and of the reign of Cyrus the Persian." They're just connected by a *waw* [and]. This could be translated "even in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." You could have

two individuals, or it could be read, “Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, even in the reign of Cyrus the Persian,” which would identify Darius and Cyrus as being the same person with two names. So that’s one possibility.

The other possibility that has been suggested and worked out in some detail is that Darius the Mede is another name for an individual called Gubaru, who was the governor that Cyrus appointed over Babylon. In conquering Babylon, he made Gubaru the governor. And that individual, Gubaru, is mentioned in Babylonian texts. So Darius could be another name for that individual.

So I think the point is, as far as Darius the Mede is, we don’t have enough evidence to completely solve the identity of this individual. But that is no reason to conclude that this is a historical error, a blunder, and to conclude that the book was written late.

You know that principle of the fragmentary character of the archaeological evidence. So to allege that some uncorroborated statement is suspect if you don’t have archaeological corroboration for it--that’s a fallacious idea. Archaeological evidence is so miniscule when you think of all the possible things that could be corroborated that aren’t. To draw the conclusion that because something isn’t corroborated it’s suspect in some way is, methodologically, simply not a good procedure. So, I’d say at this point that there are at least two reasonable explanations as to how we are to understand this name Darius the Mede. At present, we don’t have further confirmation that would make one of these identifications certain. Maybe something else could come up that hasn’t even been thought of, but I don’t think that lack of corroboration is sufficient to warrant the radical conclusion that this was written 400 years later and that it’s a historical error.

3) Alleged Late Linguistic Features

Alleged late linguistic features, that’s the third line of argument against the early date of Daniel. That argument centers on the use of several Greek loan words that are found in Daniel. It’s interesting that those loan words were musical instruments in chapter 3, verse 5, where you have, “At the time you hear the sound of the horn, pipe,

lyre, sackbut, and all kinds of music, fall down.” A number of those terms for musical instruments are Greek loan words. In other words, they’re just transliterated over from the Greek, but they’re really Greek words. And of course, the conclusion is, if you have some Greek loan words, it must be in the Greek period or you wouldn’t have Greek loan words. The other line of argument on this linguistic basis is that there is Aramaic used of what’s called a late type of Aramaic. You know there’s a section in Daniel that is written in Aramaic instead of Hebrew, and it’s alleged that in that section the Aramaic is of a late type.

Now, I don’t think again either of those arguments are convincing arguments. There’s abundant evidence of contacts between the Greeks and the Near East long before the time of Alexander the Great; and particularly in the area of a name for a musical instrument, it’s reasonable to expect that something may have been imported from the west into Babylon and the name came with it, and it’s not surprising because there’s abundant evidence of those kinds of contacts.

As far as the Aramaic question is concerned, you get into a technical discussion. I have a quotation here from Baldwin on that, page 35 of your citations. There is also an article by K.A. Kitchen, “The Aramaic of Daniel.” He looks at: A: Vocabulary; B.: morphology and phonetics, and C.: general. It may be helpful to summarize the conclusion that Kitchen reaches as the result of his closely reasoned, well documented work. “In the first place, the Aramaic of Daniel is shown to be Imperial Aramaic, in itself practically undateable with any conviction within about 600-330 B.C. It is, therefore, irrelevant to make distinctions between Eastern and Western Aramaic which developed later. The only indication of the place of origin rises out of the word order, which betrays an Akkadian influence and proves that the Aramaic of Daniel belongs to the tradition of early Imperial Aramaic, 7-4th century B.C. as opposed to later Palestinian derivations of imperial Aramaic. Much has been made of the appearance of Greek words, and to the non-specialist, the Greek words might seem conclusive that they point to a period after Alexander the Great, until it is made clear that there are only three such words, and that they are all the names of musical instruments. Greek wares were being traded all over the

ancient Near East from the 8th century onward. Greeks were apparently employed in Babylon during the time of Nebuchadnezzar, and there is nothing surprising about there being instruments of Greek origin bearing Greek names in the Babylon of 6th century BC. What is significant is that there are so few Greek loan words in the Aramaic of Daniel.

“According to M. Hengel, from the time of Ptolemy, Jerusalem was a city in which Greek was spoken in increasing degree. It can be demonstrated from Zeno that the Greek language is known in aristocratic and military circles of Judaism in Palestine. It was already widespread at the accession of Antiochus IV in 175 B.C. and would hardly have been suppressed, even by the victorious freedom fight of the Maccabees. From the third century, we find almost exclusively Greek inscriptions in Palestine.”

The fact that no more than three Greek words appear in the Aramaic of Daniel, and those are technical terms, argue against the second century date for the writing of the book. One would on the Greek and Persian evidence prefer to put the Aramaic of Daniel in the 6-4th century BC, not the third or second. The latter is not ruled out, but it is much less realistic and not too favored by the facts.

In the continuing debate, the H. H. Rowley late date is contested by Kitchen's findings. All these arguments have been refuted by the leading Israeli scholar in a major survey of the state of research in early Aramaic and it has been favorably received by other linguists. It is becoming an accepted fact that the date of Daniel cannot be decided on linguistic grounds and that the increasing evidence does not favor the second century position. So that whole linguistic question is a rather technical question, but there are competent people who have analyzed that in detail and have come up with well-argued conclusions that do not support the late date for the book in spite of many allegations to the contrary.

In your bibliography, I've listed a number of articles on this issue. Notice on page six, the third entry is this article by Kitchen, "The Aramaic of Daniel" in *The Book of Daniel* edited by D. J. Wiseman. Then, Wiseman's article shows some historical problems in the book of Daniel. And then three articles by Yamauchi, all of which are useful: "The Archaeological Background of Daniel," "Daniel in Context between the

Aegean and the Near East before Alexander,” and “The Greek Words in Daniel.” Now particularly there, Kitchen, Wiseman, and Yamauchi’s articles are helpful if you’re interested in the this whole question of the date of Daniel, and they give solid responses to the critical arguments.

4) Conclusion

So, by way of conclusion, it seems to me that there are no compelling reasons for dating Daniel late. There are adequate answers for each of the historical and linguistic arguments for late dating the book. I think the underlying question is whether or not one is willing to accept the possibility of genuine predictive prophecy. And if you are convinced that Daniel could not have spoken so clearly about the future or especially what the time of Antiochus Epiphanes in detail, then you must seek a date subsequent to that time or in that time. For those who accept the possibility of genuine prediction, this material then is viewed as many other sections of Scripture as evidence that there is a God who does speak, and a God who is sovereign over history, and controls history, and can tell in advance what is going to come to pass.

Daniel 1-6 The Historical Section

Let’s go to 2., under “Introductory Remarks,” “Some General Remarks on the Content of the Book in Relation to its Purpose.” The book of Daniel is generally divided into two main sections: chapters 1-6, a historical section, and then chapters 7-12, a prophetic section, prophetic there in a sense of predictive. In chapters 1-6 you have narrative, and in chapters 1-6 the material is divided quite well. There are six separate narratives, six stories about various individuals: Daniel, his friends, and various kings.

In the prophetic section, instead of narratives there are visions, and you really have four visions. There’s a vision in chapter 7, a vision in chapter 8, vision in chapter 9, and then 10, 11, and 12 are the fourth one. Those chapters really can be grouped together, 10, 11, and 12. So you have four visions in chapters 7-12. That second section, 7-12, is almost exclusively predictive. History there is pretty much incidental. The material is

predictive discourse, and it's predictive material. In the first section, five out of the six chapters are narrative material. But one chapter, while being in a narrative context, is largely predictive, and that's chapter 2. Chapter 2 is a vision of that image given to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel's interpretation of that vision. So chapter 2 in that first section bears some similarity to the material in chapters 7-12, although it's put in a narrative context. So that means there are really seven chapters in the book that are largely predictive and five that are narrative out of the twelve.

Now, when you look at that first section, the historical section, I think when you read through those chapters and reflect a bit on it, it's not historical narrative in the normal sense of historical narrative as you have in Kings, for example where you have a connected presentation of history. What I mean by that is you don't have a history of Babylon; you don't have a history of Persia. You learn something about Babylon and something about Nebuchadnezzar; you learn something about the Persian period, but you don't have any connected presentation of it. Neither is it a biographical sketch of the life of Daniel. There's no connected presentation of the life of Daniel, so it's not a history of the life of Daniel. You learn something about certain incidents in his life, but no connected presentation about his life or activity. So the first six chapters are not historical narrative in the sense of giving a connected discourse on some period of history connected with Babylon, or Persia, or even Daniel with any unifying principle.

Summary of the Content of Daniel 1-6

Daniel 1

So you might ask what is the organizational principle? Why is this material placed in the first part of this book in the way in which we find it? I'd like to run through it quickly with you. It's not a history of Babylon, or Israel, or of Daniel. But when you look at the chapters one by one, you notice in chapter 1 you have that story of Daniel and his friends refusing to meet the king's demands and then God blesses them for their faithfulness. I think what you find in chapter 1 is God blesses Daniel and his friends for faithfulness. They're put in a situation where it would be very difficult to be faithful to

the Lord. But they are faithful to the Lord, and they're blessed for it.

Daniel 2

In chapter 2, Daniel interprets the king's vision, but when you read the entire chapter, you find that the great idea in the chapter is that even though Nebuchadnezzar may be a powerful king, God is more powerful. God is supreme over Nebuchadnezzar and over all such rulers. Look at verse 47, towards the end of the chapter: "The king answered unto Daniel and said, 'Of a truth it is that your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal the secret.'" That's out of the mouth of Nebuchadnezzar himself. "Your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings." So you have the confession of the sovereignty of the God of Israel, the God of Daniel. God is supreme over Nebuchadnezzar and over all such rulers.

Daniel 3

Chapter 3 is the chapter where Nebuchadnezzar gives a command that requires idolatry. Bow down to this image. Three men refused to obey him. Because they refuse, they're put in that burning, fiery furnace, but God delivers those men. Again you find a demonstration of the power and the sovereignty of God, which Nebuchadnezzar himself admits. Notice verses 17 and 18, this is the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to Nebuchadnezzar. They say, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter." That's the end of verse 16. "If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Notice the idea there. The idea is not that God will protect you no matter what in difficult situations. That's not it. The idea is regardless of the result, we should follow the Lord because he is greater than Nebuchadnezzar and more powerful than any other force in all the earth. If he desires, he is able to deliver, and God is able to do that. So we should follow the Lord and his will because he is greater than Nebuchadnezzar and more

powerful than the forces of the earth. Notice at the end of the chapter, after they were preserved alive and delivered, in verse 28, Nebuchadnezzar speaks and says, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and have yielded their bodies that they might not serve nor worship any god except their own God.”

Daniel 4

Chapter 4: I want to just quickly run through these chapters before we look at some of them in more detail. In chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar declares his greatness and then God strikes him with madness and tells him he will live among the animals of the field, and that happens. Then when Nebuchadnezzar confesses the greatness of God, he is restored to normal. Notice verse 25, “They shall drive thee from men, thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make thee eat grass like oxen. They shall wet thee with the dew of heaven. Seven times shall pass over thee till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever He will.” You read in verse 28, “All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked the halls in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spoke and said, ‘Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power for the honor of my majesty?’” He’s exalting himself. “While the word was in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven saying, ‘O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; they shall make thee eat grass like oxen. Seven times shall pass over thee till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.’ The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar; and he did eat grass like oxen.” Verse 34, “At the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven. Mine understanding returned unto me. I blessed the Most High; and I praised and honored him who liveth forever. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, and he doeth according to his will in the

army of heaven.” And so forth. Verse 37, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of Heaven.” So, “God’s supremacy over earthly rulers,” chapter 4. Specifically over Nebuchadnezzar.

Whether it’s seven years or not, you have that phrase “seven times.” That’s undefined. It may be seven smaller periods of time than seven years. It could possibly be seven weeks, or it could have been seven days. It’s hard to say. I wouldn’t assume that it’s seven years. But apparently, however long the period was, Nebuchadnezzar was able to come back into power. So that’d make it very unlikely that it’s seven years. See verse 34 says, “At the end of the *days*, I Nebuchadnezzar lift up mine eyes.”

There’s apparently an illness that has been documented that is similar to that. There’s a term for it; it’s called lycanthropy. A similar thing afflicted King George III of England as well as Otto of Bavaria in modern times. So it seems like a strange condition that someone would exhibit that kind of a form of mental illness, but apparently it’s something that’s not unique. It’s something that’s known from other examples of a similar thing happening. It does say there that till his hairs were grown like eagles feathers, his nails like bird’s claws. It does sound longer than seven days or seven weeks, but I think it’s hard to know what “the seven times” means exactly.

Daniel 6

Chapter 6 is “God’s supremacy over earthly rulers and nature.” Chapter 6 is the chapter where Darius the Mede is now the ruler. He made, at the persuasion of some of his officials, the law that nobody would worship anybody but himself. And Daniel, of course, refused to do that. He continued to worship the Lord and to pray towards Jerusalem three times each day; and because of that, he’s put in the lion’s den, but God protected him. And at the end of that chapter, chapter 6, notice what King Darius says, verse 25: “King Darius wrote unto the people, all people, nations, languages that dwell in all the earth, ‘Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel for he is the living God and steadfast forever in his kingdom, that which shall not be destroyed. And his dominion

shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth and worketh signs and wonders in heaven and earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.’ So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and (or even) to the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” So it’s the same theme, you see: “God’s supremacy over earthly rulers and nature,” over Darius and lions.

Summary of Daniel 1-6

So when you look through it quickly, through the first six chapters, the thing that’s central to all those chapters is that God is supreme over nature, over history, and over human rulers. So it’s not really so much a history in the technical sense of some sort of connected discourse about some particular kingdom, or king, or individual. Rather, there’s a theme that runs through these narratives: God is supreme. Jerusalem might be destroyed; the temple may perish; it may seem that wicked rulers are in control; but in spite of all that, God is supreme. God’s people may be faced with terrible difficulties and persecutions, but God is able, if he chooses, and that “if he chooses” is important. It’s made explicit there in the case of the fiery furnace. God is able, if he chooses, to deliver them out of the difficulties no matter how great they might be.

So I think Daniel 1-6 is almost what you might call a sermon that presents that theme of God’s sovereignty with a series of illustrations from the life of Daniel and the lives of his friends and some from the lives of these kings with whom they came in contact. So it’s not Daniel that’s the primary subject; it’s not Nebuchadnezzar or Cyrus-- but God is the focus. And the point is to show that he’s supreme over the nations of the earth, and that because of that, man should be true to God in whatever situation he finds himself because he can know that God is sovereign.

Now that truth is certainly an important truth for all of us, but I think a truth of particular importance for God’s people at particular times in their history. That idea is particularly needed for people who undergo persecution for loyalty to God: awareness and confidence in God’s sovereignty. That’s the specific purpose behind these six chapters.

Historical Context of Empires and Jewish Persecution

Remember the context: the people are in Babylon. From what we know of the time, Israel was in captivity in Babylon. There wasn't any great amount of persecution, but there was some. It seems that it was more sporadic than systematic. We have several incidents of persecution here, but there doesn't seem to be any widespread persecution during the Babylonian exile. You move to the Persian period and it seems to be very similar. There is no systematic persecution, but there was some during Persian times. You remember the story of Esther, and there was an attempt there to wipe out the Jewish people; but it didn't succeed, and that seems to be more isolated than something that's characteristic of the period. The Persian Empire was destroyed by Alexander the Great and then after his death, which happened rather quickly, Palestine came under the rule of the Ptolemies. He was the general of Alexander who seized the section of Alexander's kingdom in the Egyptian area, and he controlled Palestine as well for over 100 years. And there wasn't any great persecution under the Ptolemaic rule of Palestine.

But war developed between the Ptolemies, down there in Egypt and the Seleucids in the area of Damascus and Syria, for control of Palestine. They struggled back and forth. Eventually the Seleucids were able to take control of Palestine. And again, there wasn't a great deal of difficulty as far as persecution in the early part of that Seleucid control until this man, named Antiochus Epiphanes, who is dated 175 and 164 B.C. come to power. He decided to put an end to Jewish religion. He wanted to integrate the Jews into Hellenistic culture. He was a promoter of Hellenistic culture. He wanted them to participate in naked exercises, to eat pork, to do other things contrary to the law of Moses. Some of the Jews followed him, but many of them resisted. The books of First and Second Maccabees give accounts of the persecution that arose under Antiochus Epiphanes on all those who wouldn't obey his commands. So all through subsequent Jewish history Antiochus is looked at as a great persecutor of the Jewish people, a terrible enemy of the Jews. 1 Maccabees tells how a group of Jewish people rose up. Mattathias, who was a priest, and his five sons--John, Simon, Judas, Eliezer, and Jonathon--resisted Antiochus. They waged a guerilla war against this terrible persecutor. By 164 B.C.,

worship was restored in the temple after it had been desecrated by Antiochus.

Now, that's just a long brief sketch of history with respect to this matter of persecution. It seems logical, I think, in light of that history, and in light of the content of the book of Daniel, to conclude that one of the reasons for the writing the book is to prepare the Jews for the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and to give them encouragement during this period of persecution and difficulty that was to come. In fact, what you find is one of the greatest persecutions in the whole history of God's people occurred under this ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes. That period is the first great period of persecution after the writing of the book. In other words, it doesn't seem like there was systematic persecution under the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, until the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. So it seems that that's one of the primary purposes for the writing of the book.

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