

Dr. Wendy L. Widder, Daniel, Session 12, Daniel 2, 7 and 8, Views Concerning the Four Empires

© 2024 Wendy Widder and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Wendy Widder and her teaching on the book of Daniel. This is session 12, Daniel 2, 7, and 8, Views Concerning the Four Empires.

In this lecture, I want to back up to Daniel 2 and then pick up Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 and talk about how the empires that are represented in those three chapters might fit together into some sort of system.

So, we're going to be looking at different views concerning the four empires represented in Daniel's visions and Nebuchadnezzar's dream. So that's where we're headed. Before we get too far into that though, I want to do another quick review of this history, this intertestamental history, this second temple history, whichever label you want for it.

Because it's really impossible, first of all, to understand a lot of these visions in Daniel without a general understanding of them. And perhaps even more importantly, for other studies you might have, it's impossible to really interpret the New Testament correctly without a sense of what happened during the second temple period. We often, at least in the environment I grew up in, are unfamiliar with this history, this history that happened between the Testaments.

We have a tendency to get to the end of Malachi and turn the page to Matthew. We just assume we've moved from the end of those events, and now we're ready to start the next one. But there's about 400 years of history in that page that gets turned. When I was growing up, we often called those the 400 silent years, that intertestamental period, 400 silent years, as if there was no voice from God or there was nothing important happening in that time period, which is absolutely not the truth.

So, I don't want to call them the 400 silent years. It is this second temple period, its intertestamental history, and it's crucial for understanding Daniel and for later New Testament studies. So, the Old Testament ends about 420-ish BC.

The New Testament doesn't pick up until the birth of Christ. We'll just put that at about zero and keep it easy. But during these 400 some years, we have a change of world empire, two changes of world empire.

We go from Persia to the Hellenistic period under Greece and then to Rome. And during all three of these periods, while the nation of Israel has been restored to their land and they have a functioning temple, they are not an independent nation. They are always a province of somebody, a subject of some empire, Persia, Greek, or Rome, which is going to shape their history because they're never their own people.

Then, the part that we're most concerned about in terms of the Second Temple and understanding the book of Daniel is this time when Alexander the Great died, and his kingdom was parceled out among his generals. We have two key generals, Seleucus, who has control of Syria, and Ptolemy, who has control of Egypt, and they always want to expand their territory and to do that, they squabble and fight over Palestine, the land of Israel. So, from century to century, you'll find this fluctuation in control.

Sometimes, Seleucus will be in control of Palestine. Sometimes, the Ptolemies will be in control of Palestine. There are at least six wars, the six Syrian wars that happened between these two empires as they squabble over that land.

So, it's a tumultuous time to live in Palestine. There's a lot happening, and you're never quite at ease about who you trust. If we side with the Ptolemies and then the Seleucids take control, then we've got to shift over here.

There are all kinds of factions and disagreements, and it's unsettled. It's a very unsettled time. Keep that in mind while you remember that these people have been waiting for restoration.

They had lost their land and the prophets had told them that was going to happen, but the prophets had also said, God will restore. There's this glorious future ahead. But what they really end up experiencing first is not a very glorious time.

Their temple is rebuilt. But life is difficult. This is tumultuous.

It's hard, and they're awaiting that glorious future foretold by the prophets. The two dates that are specifically important within this are 167, which is when Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Seleucid king, desecrated the temple and rendered it unfit for use.

And then in 164, a group of Jews will rise up under the Maccabees and they will revolt and they will reclaim the temple and rededicate it. And it's open for business again from 164 until 70 AD when it is destroyed by the Romans. So that's our general timeline.

We're going to come back to this in the rest of the visions that Daniel has. So I'll leave it there. When we look at chapter 7, Daniel has this vision of four beasts.

In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a magnificent statue comprised of different kinds of metal. Daniel said it represented kings and kingdoms. So, Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, on either side of that Aramaic chiasm, that structure that held the Aramaic chapters together, we have a dream and a vision of four earthly kingdoms being superseded by a fifth eternal kingdom that will destroy them, surpass them, and endure forever.

Kingdom of God. Most commentators think that the kingdoms represented in Daniel 2 are the same ones represented in Daniel 7. So, there's agreement that they're talking about the same kingdoms, for the most part. There are a few variations on that, but generally speaking, there's consensus that the four kingdoms in Daniel 2 are the same four kingdoms in Daniel 7. But then we get to Daniel 8. Daniel 8 represents some kingdoms as well.

So, trying to understand the kingdoms, I think, requires putting all three of these chapters together, trying to put this puzzle together. What I want to do first is review Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue. And alongside that, I'm going to put Daniel's vision of the beasts.

And then I'm going to talk through three primary views of what those kingdoms represent. And before I do that, let me recommend a resource for you. Sometimes just trying to sort it all out is difficult.

I find charts incredibly helpful for me. I have this chart for talking through the kingdoms. I have a chart when we get to chapter 9 for talking through Daniel's 70 weeks.

And they came out of a book that I hope is still in print because it's really valuable. I'm sure it has a new cover by now. This is kind of old.

Zondervan publishes charts of the Old Testament. They have a whole series of these, and this is my most dog-eared copy.

But it has fabulous charts that just help organize views and perspectives on things. So, I'd recommend that very highly. Okay, so let's dive in.

We've got Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue. This is Daniel 2. And he sees a head of gold. And he sees a silver torso.

And he sees a bronze. Oops, sorry, actually torso midsection, whatever you want to call it. And then he has iron legs and feet and toes that are iron and clay.

So that's the statue that he saw in his dream. Then, in Daniel 7, Daniel has a vision of four beasts that arise out of the tumultuous sea. So, he sees four beasts.

The first beast is a lion with an eagle's wings. And he sees a bear. And that bear has three ribs in its mouth.

And then he sees a leopard. And that leopard has four heads and four wings. And he sees a fourth beast, which is terrifying.

He doesn't compare it to anything. It's an unnamed beast. And this beast has ten horns.

And one of those horns has a little horn. We'll come back to the little horn discussion later. That's sort of separate.

So, as I said, scholars generally agree that they have the same referent. So, whatever the head of gold represents, the lion with eagle's wings also represents. The first position, let me change color, is the view of critical scholarship.

So basically, any commentary you pick up that's not evangelical, for sure, would have this in it. Although some evangelicals will hold this view, too. So, I don't want to make that distinction that clear.

This is called the Greek view. Oops, I didn't change the color. That's still black.

And I'm actually going to call this Greek 1. Because there's a variation of it. It's Greek 2. And it's called the Greek view for its identification of the fourth kingdom. So, we can fill that spot in right away.

The fourth kingdom, one, two, three, four, is Greece. And then from there, we work our way backwards. So the bronze section is Persia.

These four heads and four wings could represent four Persian kings or four different directions that the Persian empire went. Or it could just be a number of totality. It depends on who you read.

So, number of kings, maybe, just to show the expansive nature of the empire. The bear is considered to be Media. And I'm going to leave that off.

The lion and the head of gold are in Babylon. By the way, everybody agrees on this first one. Daniel himself told Nebuchadnezzar he was the head of gold, right? This portrayal in Daniel 7 of a lion having wings that are plucked, and then the lion is set on its feet like a man, and a human mind is given to it, for most scholars, brings up images of Daniel 4 and Nebuchadnezzar's humbling experience, and how God took his mind from him and then restored him.

Whether you interpret that positively or negatively, some people just see it as pure judgment. Some people see it as restoration. So that's the first Greek view.

The second view is the Roman view. And this is the traditional view. It's very common.

It's been around for a long time. It's reflected in the NASB and some other Bibles that include subheadings, like to label sections of what you're reading. If you pick up an NASB, unless they've changed this in their newer versions, I have one from 1995, I think, they have in the interpretation of Daniel 7, as the angels talking, they split it up with subheads, and they identify the head of gold, or yeah, they identify this as Babylon.

They call this Medo-Persia, and they clearly identify this as Rome. So, this view is enshrined in several places. So, I'm going to put this is largely an evangelical view, not exclusively, though.

It's not the only view evangelicals have. It's also in NASB, the New American Standard Bible, and it's the traditional view. So, Babylon, yay, we can all agree.

The second empire, the silver torso, the bear, is Medo-Persia. So, the joint empire, not two distinct ones, Medo-Persia. And depending on how carefully or how closely a commentator wants to deal with the details, these three ribs could represent three conquests of Medo-Persia, and then commentators will try to say which conquest they are.

Lydia, Babylon, Egypt, and other commentators might say other things. And some commentators won't say, won't assign significance to it at all, other than to say, this is a ravenous beast. He's conquered things already, and he's being told to go conquer more.

The third kingdom is Greece. All right, and when you go to try to explain the four heads and the four wings, the typical response is that those are Alexander's four generals who each received part of his massive kingdom. So, the four generals of Alexander.

The fourth kingdom is Rome. What I didn't do over here, let me back up to Greece, how people with this view explain these ten horns, if they choose to explain them.

So, they might just say it's representative of expansive power, like five times more power than a normal beast would have. They might explain them by saying they are Seleucid kings. So, ten Seleucid kings between the time of Alexander and the coming of the little horn.

The little horn for this interpretation is Antiochus the fourth. We'll come back to that later. The Roman view will say, well, first, let me give a qualifier here.

All the views that I describe have issues, okay? None of them is airtight. They all have to explain certain things and I had a professor once who called that hand waving. When you're trying to explain something, and you want the person to believe you, you just sort of wave your hands, and it sounds like you know what you're talking about.

So, everybody has to wave their hands a little bit. There are gaps that everybody has to explain, gaps in the chronology that don't quite work. And the issue with the Roman view, here's one of the things they have to try to explain. Well, let me hold off on that. Sorry.

So, when you get to this Roman view, there are different ways people go from there. Some people will say all of the events described in this vision are fulfilled. They're past.

They're over. They're historical. So, you can say there was a past fulfillment, all done.

By 70 AD, it was all done when the Romans destroyed the temple. Another direction people will go is they'll say, well, there's a future fulfillment for this vision. And it's going to be fulfilled in some way through an extended Roman Empire.

So, the Roman Empire does not exist anymore. So, if you think there's a future fulfillment for this vision, you have to somehow explain how a Roman Empire still exists. So, people will say, well, there's an extended empire.

And sometimes that goes the way of saying the influence of Rome is still seen, like in Europe. There's a lot of Romance languages, right? There's still a lot of influence of that Roman Empire. Even though Rome itself is not an empire, its influences are still clearly seen.

So that would be, I believe, the extended. Or you can say it's restored or revived in some way, shape, or form. What usually happens with this restored or revived view is you say, well, at some future time, there's going to be a coalition of leaders, perhaps 10, that join together.

And the little horn is going to be the Antichrist. OK, so for the Roman view, if there's a future fulfillment, the little horn is Antichrist. From the Greek view, the little horn is Antiochus IV.

This has been fulfilled in history, Antiochus IV. Roman view, most people will say there's still fulfillment to come. The little horn that comes out of some coalition of restored or revived Roman Empire, that little horn is Antichrist.

And so, then, the end of this vision takes us to the end, the end of current history, present history. OK, so these are the two main views. A third view that has developed that actually is, I believe, developed among evangelical scholars.

This is also a Greek view, but I call it Greek view number two. OK, this position is represented in an article by Robert Gurney. I forget what journal it's in.

And then John Walton has an article responding to it. And it is also held by some other evangelical scholars. All right, so in this view, the head of gold, it's Babylon, but specifically, it's Nebuchadnezzar.

I mean, after all, that is what Daniel said: you are the head of gold. And this lion is a representation of Nebuchadnezzar. So it's Nebuchadnezzar.

The silver torso is media, specifically media, as it existed alongside Nebuchadnezzar. So could be some contemporaneous rulers to Nebuchadnezzar. And then you may or may not decide to explain who the three ribs are, three conquests.

I'm not going to bother trying to include all that. The third kingdom is Persia. And you could say the four kings, might say expansive.

And the fourth kingdom is Greece. The ten horns, in this view, are ten sovereign states that grew out of Alexander's empire by the second century BC. Okay, I'm not going to explain all that.

But let me tell you why they go a slightly different direction than say ten Seleucid kings. Ten Seleucid kings, unless you take it symbolically as some number of completeness, it's not the right number. There's more like 14 or 17.

There were more than ten Seleucid kings between Alexander and Antiochus. So, the number doesn't work. Another problem is that when we get to the ram and the goat, the goat has a single horn that splits into how many? Four.

Well, that represents Alexander's kingdom, which is split into four parts. So why would you suddenly be... Why does one vision talk about ten? One vision talks about four. And commentators like to say four doesn't equal ten.

Well, obviously. But everybody has to explain something. And the numbers make it a little tricky.

In this view, the little horn is also Antiochus the fourth. There are different ways that people explain the uprooting of the three horns. Remember when this little horn arose? It uproots three horns.

This all gets very detailed and complicated. And any commentator you read on it may or may not take a view on it. Some commentaries do a great job of detailing the different views, which is also very helpful.

So, these are the three main views on how to identify the four kingdoms. I'll show my hand. I hold this one, generally speaking, a Greek view.

And I see it all the way up through here. I don't get terribly detailed about the ten horns and the three ribs and all of that. And I will continue to explain to you why I find this one more convincing.

Let me also say that if someone holds this view, it doesn't mean that there can't be more significance to the vision than just this fulfillment. So, in biblical prophecy, at least, there's often this telescoping, right? Where you see something, or actually a better example that I like, is when you look at mountain ranges from a distance, you think they all look like they're at the same distance. It's only as you get into them that you realize, oh, well, this mountain's like 50 miles from that mountain and 100 miles from that mountain.

So, the range looks the same when you're driving up to it. But as you get into it, you realize there's actual distance there. So sometimes, in biblical prophecy, we see that same thing.

We can't quite tell from our perspective on it, the distances between some events. Sometimes they're collapsed, so they look like it's all happening at one time. It's difficult.

Prophecy is difficult. Apocalyptic and the symbolism makes it even more difficult. But I think what we can say, or what commentators and I agree with, is just because something has fulfilled doesn't mean it can't have future significance.

So, this can serve as a pattern for events that would continue to happen for God's people. God's people continue to suffer, maybe not under Antiochus IV, but there will be successors of Antiochus IV who inflict suffering on God's people until the end, the end when God brings all that to his victorious conclusion. So, I'll hold it right there for now.

Let's see what Chapter 8 has to do with this. Because remember, Chapter 8, the angel is very helpful and gives us some very specific identifications. So, in Chapter 8, what color should I use? Let's go back to blue.

No, let's go back. The angels, there's a ram and a goat. And the ram is said to be Medo-Persia.

This is the two-horned ram. The goat is said to be from Greece. And it's from the goat that the little horn comes.

Okay, so this is Chapter 8's vision, the ram and the goat, or the evenings and the mornings. So, when you look at all of these visions together, in two of them, we have a little horn, right? We have a little horn, sorry, let me, we have a little horn in this vision of the beasts. And we have a little horn in the vision; I'm going to say the vision of the ram and the goat because it's shorter and faster to say.

And it'll help you remember the animals at this point. We have two little horns. In Daniel's vision of the four beasts, it comes out of the fourth beast.

The ten horns of the fourth beast. In Daniel's vision that has a ram and a goat in it, it comes out of the goat. And the angel tells us this represents Greece.

So, if you hold a Roman view, the Roman view of the empires, you have two different little horns. In Daniel's vision of Chapter 7, your little horn is Antichrist. In the Roman view.

In Daniel's view, which had the ram and the goat in it, the little horn is Antiochus the fourth. Everybody agrees on that because the angel basically said so. Okay, so everybody, regardless of the view they have on the four empires in those two chapters, everybody agrees that the little horn in Chapter 8 is Antiochus the fourth.

Okay, if you hold the Roman view, your little horn in Chapter 7 is Antichrist. So, you have a little horn Antichrist in one vision, and you have a little horn Antiochus the fourth in another vision. Okay, if you hold the Greek view, either of the Greek views, in Daniel's vision of the four beasts, your little horn is Antichrist.

And your little... Sorry, sorry, I said that wrong. Whoa, back up. If you hold the Greek view, your little horn is Antiochus the fourth.

Their names are so close: Antiochus the fourth. In chapter 8, everybody agrees that the little horn is Antiochus the fourth.

You have the same referent for the little horn. The Greek view has the same referent for both little horns, while the Roman view has different referents.

Now, commentators will defend both views. So, the little horns are not described exactly the same. There are some differences, right? This one comes out of 10 horns.

This one comes off one of four. Well, they are different, right? There are differences in the descriptions. There are also a lot of similarities in the descriptions.

They're both described as coming... Being the second stage in an empire. Having great power, arrogance, unprecedented power. So, commentators will list similarities between the horns, differences between the horns.

And really, a scholar has to decide which view is most convincing in terms of... For me, in terms of the literature and the text, that's what it comes down to for me. It makes better sense to me to see one referent for this repeated image. Others will say, no, it makes better sense to... This view in Daniel 7 is cosmic.

The view in Daniel 8 is very focused. True. So, they'll defend a view of two different ones.

I just think it makes better literary sense to see one referent. However, I think the significance goes beyond. So, the book of Daniel starts in chapter 5, telling us about this Belshazzar, who is this prototype of a wretched, defiant, arrogant, blasphemous king who defied God.

He is bad. When we get to Daniel's visions in the years of Belshazzar's reign, we get these visions of this horrible ruler. He's defiant.

He's blasphemous. He speaks great things. He pulls down stars from the heavenly host, and he throws down the sanctuary.

He's horrible. You think Belshazzar was bad. My goodness, Antiochus IV, chapter 8, for sure, is worse.

Beyond that, we can get worse. If you go to the New Testament, the New Testament will pick up Daniel language, right? And we will have this man of lawlessness. The book of Revelation will clearly show us that things get far worse before they get better.

So, you have this pattern of things being bad, getting worse, getting worse, until God brings them to an end. So, I think we have a pattern, and we have a prophecy. I want to have it both ways.

I'm not the only one who does that. But I think it's, for me, it's more faithful to the literature, to the text. But it also allows a future application.

So that's how I put together Daniel 7, Daniel 2, and then factor in Daniel 8. I don't want to forget the significance of Belshazzar in these two visions, okay? Because I

think he helps us see this pattern. He reminds us that chapter 5 gave us this prototype for this defiant king. It's only going to get worse.

God's people will continue to suffer. I mean, you can read world history to find despot after despot after despot. Antiochus the fourth was wretched, but he is not the last one.

History keeps going. This march of arrogant, defiant, blasphemous rulers will culminate in a figure the New Testament shows us and will end with God's glorious victory. So that's what I do with the four kingdoms.

I can kind of break down for you what some commentaries do. First of all, let me also remind you of this book for this intertestamental history. Again, I hope it's still in print.

If it's not, somebody on Amazon has to be selling it. This is *Judaism Before Jesus, The Events and Ideas That Shaped the New Testament World* by Anthony Tomasino. A fabulous, fairly easy to read telling of this history.

I will come to the commentaries when we get to Daniel 9. I'm going to hold off on that. Thanks.

This is Dr. Wendy Widder and her teaching on the book of Daniel. This is session 12, Daniel 2, 7, and 8, Views Concerning the Four Empires.