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History and Eschatology in the Book of Daniel

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Daniel is something of a bipolar book. Its first six chapters cluster around the history of the Neo-Babylonian empire and the early Persian rule in Babylon. The last six chapters of the book give an apocalyptic outline that ends with the great eschatological climax. Thus it is appropriate to examine both subjects in a survey of Daniel. That makes our approach here threefold. First, history on its own terms, then the link between history and eschatology, and finally, eschatology on its own terms.

Historical Survey

I begin this study with a brief review of the present status of the historical chapters with regard to their historicity when evaluated by extra-biblical documents.

The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Year of Jehoiakim. The two major historical problems in Daniel 1 were resolved with the publication of the first 13 years of Nebuchadnezzar's Chronicles by D. J. Wiseman in 1956. The last half of the entry for the year 605 states, "at that time Nebuchadnezzar conquered the whole of Hatti-country". The designation Hatti or Hittite country includes all of Syria and Palestine. Even the Philistine city of Ashkelon was located in that region. In 597 Nebuchadnezzar marched to Hatti land and attacked "the city of Judah," i.e., Jerusalem. Thus the kingdom of Judah was included in all of the territory conquered in 605. Jehoiakim's third year, the date given for this conquest in Daniel 1:1, can be reconciled with this date by interpreting it according to the standard Judahite practices of accession year reckoning and their fall to fall calendar.

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The Plain of Dura. Even though we do not have an extra-biblical text which refers directly to the events that took place on the Plain of Dura according to Daniel 3, extra-biblical information has given us a better understanding of the background of that event.

The geographical location has been identified by noting that the Babylonian word for "wall" is dur. An Aramaic article has been added to this word to make it Dura. We do not need to locate a city, river or canal called Dura, for the "plain of the wall" is located right at Babylon itself. Old Babylon was enclosed by a wall about a mile square. Nebuchadnezzar added to this a new eastern quarter that was enclosed by a wall six or seven miles long. The area enclosed between these two walls was only partly built up, and a lot of it was still open space. That is where the great image was erected, in this plain of the wall. It probably was a statue of Marduk, the god of Babylon, rather than of Nebuchadnezzar. On that basis one may suggest approximately where it was located. All of the gates of Babylon were named for gods, and the Marduk gate was located in the middle of the east side of the inner city. The officials listed in Daniel 3 would thus have proceeded out through that gate and stood before the great image that faced west towards that gate. Why would it face west? Because that was where his temple was located, along with his great temple tower or ziggurat. The height of this image has been ridiculed by critics, but in actuality it almost shrinks into insignificance when its 60 cubits or 90 feet are compared with the 300 foot elevation of his temple tower.

Seven Years of Madness. As for Nebuchadnezzar's seven years of insanity, recorded in Daniel 4, there may possibly have been a cuneiform text which recorded it, but unfortunately it is so badly damaged that the connection is not entirely clear. A few years ago A. K. Grayson of the University of Toronto published a text from the British Museum that describes some very strange actions of Nebuchadnezzar. The text says that he paid no attention to the temples of Babylon or even the members of his own family. He went off to some place that is not described in the legible portions of the text. That meant his son Amel-Marduk, the biblical Evil Merodach, had to take over the reins of government. Eventually Nebuchadnezzar came back to the city and lifted up his hands in prayer to his god when he entered the great Ishtar gate. There is a rule of cuneiform studies that the tablet is always broken at the climax of the story, and sad to say, this interesting text that might be related to Daniel 4 follows that rule. Perhaps some day a duplicate of this text may be found that is not so badly damaged.

Belshazzar and Nabonidus. The illumination of Daniel five has taken four progressive steps, each one confirming ever more securely

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the historicity of the narrative about the fall of Babylon and Belshazzar. Knowledge of Belshazzar as a ruler in antiquity was not preserved by the Greek or Roman historians, so prior to 1861 Daniel was the only primary source from antiquity that referred to him. In that year the first text mentioning Belshazzar was published. Since that time there has been a slow but steady publication of a modest corpus mentioning him.

The second step in this line was taken by Sidney Smith in 1924, when he published the text known as the Verse Account of Nabonidus. It mentions that when Nabonidus went off to spend a prolonged time at Tema in Arabia, he "entrusted the kingship" to Belshazzar. The third step came when C. J. Gadd published the Harran inscriptions of Nabonidus, which mentioned that the senior king spent ten years living in Arabia. Daniel obviously knew of this prolonged absence, since he dated two of his prophecies to the first and third years of Belshazzar.

The fourth and final step in connecting Daniel 5 with Babylonian history was taken when it was noted how close the correlation is between this chapter and the Nabonidus Chronicle that describes the fall of Babylon. If Nabonidus was in the city that night he should have put in an appearance at the banquet, but he is never mentioned there. The Chronicle tells us where he was. He was out in the field fighting Cyrus' other division near the Tigris River. Thus Daniel says that Belshazzar, one coregent with one division of the army, was in the city the night that it fell, while the Chronicle says that Nabonidus, the senior coregent, was out in the field with the other division of his army. The fit is perfect and could only have been known by a contemporary in the 6th century B. C. Any pseudo-Daniel writing in the 2nd century B. C. would never have known details this precise, since they were not preserved in any other source.

Darius the Mede. The final historical chapter in Daniel is chapter 6. It describes the early Persian period in Babylon that involves the obscure ruler named Darius the Mede. His name appears to be a Babylonian throne name for Ugbaru, the general who conquered Babylon for Cyrus. He ruled there briefly and the Nabonidus Chronicle notes, in harmony with Daniel, that he installed governors in Babylon, an action taken by Darius the Mede in the book of Daniel. I have spilled entirely too much ink over this character and what we still lack is a contemporary text identifying him in that post more specifically.

We can summarize this overview of the historical chapters of Daniel by stating that with each discovery of historical documents from the Neo-Babylonian period, more illumination has been shed upon the historical chapters of Daniel, confirming their historicity in so far as they address events that are mentioned in Daniel

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Inaccurate History and Unreal Eschatology

One reason for emphasizing the historicity of the historical chapters of Daniel is to link them with a very real eschatology. If the history of Daniel is accurate, then its eschatology should be real, too. If the history in Daniel is inaccurate, then there are not sound grounds for accepting its eschatology. This is demonstrated clearly in the recent *Hermenia* commentary on Daniel by J. J. Collins. He makes a great effort to invalidate the historical chapters of Daniel because of his adoption of the Maccabean hypothesis. This leads him in the wrong direction for eschatology. One example is his interpretation of the stone kingdom in Daniel 2, on p. 171 of his commentary.

First, he mentions that Josephus avoided identifying the stone for fear of offending his Roman readers. Second, he mentions that Jerome identified the stone as Christ with his not being cut out with hands referring to the virgin birth. He cites Jerome to the effect that Porphyry identified the stone as the Jewish people. The messianic interpretation is also found in the writings of the Rabbis, he observes. NT writers apply the image of the stone to Christ. Others have applied it to the Church. Those are all of the interpretations that Collins mentions. He does not tell us which one he prefers, probably because he does not accept any of them, taking this instead as a misguided application to the destruction of the Seleucid kingdom in the 2nd century B. C. There is a massive amount of literature that Collins does not mention which identifies this stone kingdom as the final eschatological kingdom of glory which Christ will set up at His Second Coming. Froom, in volume 4 of his series on prophetic interpretation, notes forty-five Millerite interpreters between 1831 and 1844 who held the stone to be the establishment of the great final kingdom. Twenty-nine non-millerite interpreters from the same period held the same opinion. In the 17th and 18th centuries the ratio is 13 to 1 in favor of the final kingdom of God over Christ's spiritual kingdom at the Cross. I thought that the historical critical methodology was supposed to lead to a consideration, or at least mention, of all possibilities. What we have here is an illustration of how a false interpretation of history leads to a false conclusion about eschatology. Or perhaps the latter has produced the former.

The Link between True History and Real Eschatology

It is interesting to see how the text of Daniel links the history of his own time to the final eschatological kingdom of God. There are at least four examples of this in the book. The first comes from a comparison of Daniel 2:37-38 with Daniel 7:13-14. The first passage is the beginning

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of Daniel's explanation of the great image to Nebuchadnezzar. There he says, "You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might and the glory, and into whose hand he has given the sons of men, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air."

This can be compared to the conclusion to the heavenly court scene in Daniel 7:14. There the Son of Man receives, "dominion, glory, and kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him." The second, third, and fourth kingdoms in Daniel 2 and 7 are not described in these terms. In Daniel 2 we have the sons of men who are subject to Nebuchadnezzar, whereas it is the Son of Man to whom all peoples are subject in Daniel 7. The words are the same in Aramaic, except that the former is plural and the latter is singular. The kingdom and the glory are common to both kings, but the might and power of the earthly monarch has been replaced by the dominion of the Son of Man. No longer will there be a need for the might and power of earthly armies in that heavenly kingdom.

Both of these kings rule over three things. Nebuchadnezzar's rule is so inclusive that he even rules over the birds and the beasts, along with the sons of men. The Son of Man also rules over three groups, but they are all groups of people, emphasizing the fact that the Son of Man's kingdom goes even beyond that which Nebuchadnezzar possessed. It is interesting to note that Daniel 7 does not use the identification of "sons of men" for those who are ruled. In the singular that title is reserved for the great future ruler, identified in the gospels as Christ.

Thus there is a parallel here between the first kingdom in Daniel 2 and the last kingdom in Daniel 7, except that the latter is much greater and grander than the former. The former has been extended and expanded and glorified in the latter. There is a sense, therefore, in which Nebuchadnezzar is a kind of messianic figure here, even though he is but a faint shadow of the great final kingdom to come.

It is interesting to note that this parallelism is set in a larger parallel which covers the entire Aramaic section of the book of Daniel. In a landmark study the French scholar Lenglet noted the chiasmic construction of Daniel 2-7. Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 are prophecies about world kingdoms. Daniel 3 and Daniel 6 are historical episodes about the persecution of the Jews in Babylon. In the first instance it is Daniel's three friends who are cast into the fiery furnace. In the parallel case it is Daniel who is cast into the lion's den. Daniel 4 and 5 also talk about the same thing, judgments upon individual Babylonian kings, Nebuchadnezzar in the first instance and Belshazzar in the second. Thus the literary construction here is A:B:C::C:B:A. As one who held

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the title of king of Chiasms at the Seminary for fourteen years, I would be delinquent if I did not call at least one of these cases to your attention this evening. Within this larger parallel construction there is a parallel between the kingdom with which Daniel 2 begins and the one with which Daniel 7 ends, and they stand at opposite ends of this overall section of the book.

There is a major contrast between these two kingdoms, however, with respect to time. Daniel goes on to tell Nebuchadnezzar that there would be another kingdom after his in verse 39, the silver kingdom of the Persians. In the parallel position in Daniel 7:14b, the length of the Son of Man's kingdom is described, "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. The Neo-Babylonian empire lasted for a mere 70 years while that of the Son of Man will go on for ever and ever and ever. Daniel related the first to a contemporary king, but he prophesied of the latter in a vision about the great future king.

Son of the Gods and Son of Man. An element in Daniel 3 can also be compared with Daniel 7. Daniel 3 is the narrative which describes how the three Hebrew worthies were cast into the fiery furnace. In order to see if the fired up brick kiln was doing its job, Nebuchadnezzar bent down to sight into the mouth of the kiln. While he had his soldiers throw three men into the fire, when he looked in he saw a fourth, and the fourth he describes as "a son of the gods". This is an accurate translation of the original Aramaic, and we need not expect that Nebuchadnezzar recognized the fourth as the Messiah, for he was still in his unconverted state at this time. What he did recognize was that the fourth figure was different from those of the normal men and that it was a divine-like being.

For comparison, we come back to Daniel 7:9-14. When Daniel first looked in vision into the heavenly court he saw the Ancient of Days, God the Father, sitting upon his throne, and he was surrounded by all the host of the angels. This was normal and to be expected, for heaven is where God dwells, and the angels join Him there. In the second scene of this view, however, Daniel sees "one like a son of man." That too is the accurate translation of the original. This is a description, whereas in the New Testament it is used as a title. What does this description mean? It means that when Daniel looked into heaven he saw God and the angels whom he would normally expect to see there, but then he saw another being that looked like a man. He was a special Son of Man, but nonetheless he looked like a man.

In the former case Nebuchadnezzar saw a divine-like being who would normally belong to the realms of God present in the realms of man. In the latter case Daniel saw a human-like being that would

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normally belong to the realms of this earth in heaven. The two pictures are inter-related. In the former case a divine-like being came from heaven to rescue the three Hebrew worthies from the fire. In the latter case a human like being who once walked upon the dusty trails of Galilee now stands before the throne of God in heaven to rescue all of the earthly saints of the Most High from this earth by receiving them and transporting them to His kingdom.

Belshazzar and Christ as Coregents. A third case of a connection between history and eschatology may be suggested by relating the dateline of Daniel 7 to the contents of that vision. This vision was given in the first year of Belshazzar. Why would God pick out that specific year in which to make known the future history of the world and the kingdom of God? What happened in the first year of Belshazzar? That was the year in which Belshazzar was established as coregent with his father Nabonidus. What does that have to do with the contents of the vision? While coregencies were well known and used in Egypt, they were extraordinarily uncommon in the kingdoms of Mesopotamia. Thus God chose the year in which a rare and unusual coregency was established here on earth to talk about a coregency in heaven. That is what we have in Daniel 7:9-14. The Ancient of Days sits upon his throne conducting the court scene as an earthly monarch would. But then the Son of Man is brought to Him, and He is awarded the kingdom as the result of the judgment. Thus, in essence, the heavenly king has placed another king and coregent, the Son of Man, on the throne with him. Thus the faint shadow of the establishment of an earthly coregency becomes the occasion upon which the heavenly coregency is spelled out in a way never done before. The earthly example before the people provided them with some further explanation of what was to happen in the divine realm.

I have suspended a discussion of the fourth case of this kind of relationship between history and eschatology until a more general description of the place of the Messiah in apocalyptic can be given.

Classical Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and Apocalyptic Eschatology

There are some narratives in the book of Daniel that are better defined as classical prophecy rather than apocalyptic. Chapter 4 is an example of this. There Daniel delivers a prophecy, an interpretation of the king's dream, to the king. In that interpretation Daniel tells the king about a judgment that is going to fall upon him unless he repents. Nebuchadnezzar ignores the exhortation and continues on his willful way. A year later the judgment falls upon him, and he is exiled to live among the animals of the desert as a mad man. This is similar in basic

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nature to the messages that Isaiah and Jeremiah and other prophets gave to the rulers and people of their own times.

Messiah as Sacrifice. The prophecy of Daniel 9 bears some of these same characteristics. There are no symbols involved in this prophecy; it is a straight-forward didactic teaching about the future. The only vision with which it can be connected is one that was given ten years earlier. The prophecy not only answers the petitions in Daniel's prayer, but it reveals more of the future of God's people on their land. This prophecy does not carry the basic characteristics that have been identified with apocalyptic. If there is any eschatology here, it is an eschatology of the nation of Judea, not a final eschatology of the world. As all historicist and futurist interpreters agree, this prophecy focuses upon the coming of the Messiah and his fate once he was to come. He was to be cut off or killed, and that death was to provide an atonement and an everlasting righteousness that would stem from it. The central picture of the prophecy of Daniel 9 is, therefore, that of the suffering and dying Messiah. The Messiah as Sacrifice.

Messiah as High Priest. The symbolism of Daniel 8 is apocalyptic, but that apocalyptic is incomplete, in that it does not provide a final eschatology. The length of the struggle of the prophecy extends to the end of the 2300 days. During that period of time come the Persian ram, the Greek goat, the four horns of the divided Greece, and the conquests of Rome to the south and the east and the glorious land. Then the prophecy makes a transition that we refer to as the vertical dimension of apocalyptic, for it takes us into the sanctuary in heaven. There we see the prince carrying out the daily ministry for his people here on earth. In other words, he has been ministering the benefits of his atoning sacrifice to the people on earth who have responded to his call. The picture here at the climax of Daniel 8 focuses upon Christ as our great high priest.

Messiah as King. With Daniel 7 we come to apocalyptic that ends with a great eschatological climax. The rise and fall of nations are reviewed then God's answer to these transitory earthly governments is given in the heavenly court scene that I have described above. There the Son of Man is confirmed as the eternal king over all of the saved of all ages, the Saints of the Most High, as they are described at the end of the chapter. The picture given of Christ here is that of King.

There are thus three interrelated pictures of Christ in these three prophecies in the heart of the book of Daniel. In Daniel 9 the picture is Christ as sacrifice. In Daniel 8 the picture is Christ as priest, and in Daniel 7 the picture is Christ as king. There is something wrong with this order, however, and that is that they are reversed according to our modern way of thinking. We would have written them in chronological

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order with the sacrifice first, the priest second, and the king third. But Daniel didn't write in English in the 20th century A. D. He wrote in Hebrew and Aramaic in the 6th century B. C. A common way of thinking at that time was to reason from effect back to cause. We reason from cause to effect. We need to put ourselves in Daniel's sandals to see how people of his time thought and how God spoke to them.

A simple illustration of this type of thinking can be illustrated in Jesus saying, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." There is nothing wrong with this statement except that from our point of view it is inverted. Our heart, our motives, is the source from which our laying up treasure in heaven comes. But Jesus said it the other way around; he reasoned, for his audience, from effect back to cause. That type of approach is common in the Old Testament, though not exclusive. That happens to be what we have here in Daniel 7, 8, and 9.

Let us review the pictures: Daniel 9 is in the past tense; that was when Jesus died. Daniel 8 is in the present tense, for now is when Jesus sends to us all the aid of heaven from his sanctuary. Daniel 7 climaxes in the future, when He will reign over his glorious, future, literal, and physical kingdom. We wait for that day. From these pictures of Jesus we draw out spiritual experience. From Daniel 9 we get atonement and justification. From Daniel 8 we get intercession and sanctification. From Daniel 7 we receive the final glorification.

Three prophecies, three pictures of Jesus, three tenses to salvation, and different types of prophecies. Daniel 9 is most like classical prophecy. Daniel 8 is true apocalyptic but without the final eschaton. Daniel 7 is apocalyptic throughout, climaxing in the final eschatological kingdom God.

The Final Case Linking History and Eschatology: Daniel 10-12

The final major prophecy of the book of Daniel covers the final three chapters of the book. The body of the prophecy is found in Daniel 11. The introduction or prologue to the prophecy is found in chapter 10. The epilogue to the prophecy is found in chapter 12. Chapter 12 is not a separate prophecy split off, as some would like to see it; it is well integrated with what is given in Daniel 11. Daniel simply follows the standard approach of giving the prophetic description of events first and then the dates that are connected with them. The same order is followed, for example, in Daniel 7 and 8, where the dates come last, as they do in Daniel 12.

Michael and Cambyses. Our concentration here is not on Daniel 11, a very difficult prophecy at best, but upon the historical

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introduction to the prophecy in Daniel 10 and its links with the eschatology of the prophecy which is found in the first four verses of Daniel 12, which actually form the conclusion of Daniel 11. Our concentration here is upon the figure of Michael, because Michael is involved in history in Daniel 10 and He is involved in eschatology in chapter 12. Chapter 10 begins with Daniel praying, mourning, and fasting for three weeks. He does not state what the problem is, but by connecting the date on the chapter, the 3rd year of Cyrus, with Ezra chapter 4, it is possible to estimate that the problem is that the Samaritans had stymied the rebuilding of the temple. The Samaritans had sued at court, and the court that they probably sued at was Babylon, since this province was known at this time as "Babylon and Beyond the River." It was not until the imperial reorganization of 520 that the two parts of this province were separated. In Babylon they found an ear ready to cooperate with them, for the prince of the kingdom of Persia was the power assisting the throne there. This prince was Cambyses. Both Daniel and Ezra avoid mentioning him by name. He was hated in the ancient world because of his intolerance for religions other than his own Zoroastrianism. He was hated in Persia, where an imitator of the brother he had murdered tried to take over. He was hated in Egypt, where he burnt temples and killed the Apis bull. He probably died a suicide. Modern historians of ancient Iran have tried to refurbish his image, but it does not refurbish very well.

I take the minority view that the prince of the kingdom of Persia is not a demon but Cambyses. He was the prince of the kingdom of Persia in the third year of Cyrus, and he acted like a demon, whether he was motivated by one or not. Gabriel tells Daniel that he had teamed up with Michael to work on Cambyses to bring about a resolution of the affair, but to no avail. They had struggled with him for three weeks, but still the crown prince had not changed his mind in acceding to the request of the Samaritans to put a permanent halt to the rebuilding of the temple. After Gabriel gave Daniel the prophecy that follows, he said that he was going back to join Michael in continuing to work on the prince of Persia. Unfortunately, they had a madman to work with, and the outcome still was not favorable to the Jews. As we eventually find out in Jude 9 and Revelation 12, Michael is identified with Christ. Here in Daniel we are only told that he is the chief of the angels who has charge over the people of God in that time. The name Michael is used especially in passages of the Bible where some controversy is involved, either local and historical or eschatological, and Michael leads the forces of God in the controversy. So he did here in the time of Daniel under the Persian kingdom.

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At the other end of the pole, Michael reappears in the eschaton. After all the earthly review of kings has passed by, Michael will finally stand up during the final time of trouble and he will defend his people through that final time . Once again, for one final time, Michael will do battle with the demons of this earth, as he did originally with Satan and his angels in heaven, according to Revelation 12.

Michael Stands Up. There is a chronological spectrum here. There is protology going back even before the creation, when Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and his angels and they were cast out of heaven. Then there are the intervening historical cases, in the time of Moses and in the time of Daniel, when Michael did battle again in local historical settings. Then there is the final eschatological battle that will take place when Michael stands up.

The verb “to stand up” here has a dual meaning. Michael stands up in Daniel 12:1 because the various aspects of his ministry in heaven are finished. That phase of his work is complete. But more specifically the verb to stand up is used through the course of Daniel 11 to signify when new rulers arise, when they ascend to the throne, when they take over the rule. Each one of them had their chance, but now it is the turn for Michael to stand up and take rule over the final kingdom of the saints of the Most High. The citizens of that kingdom of Michael come from two great groups, those who are living in the time of trouble and are delivered from it, and those who sleep in the dust of the earth until they awake to meet Michael their king, the Son of Man who will rule over them for ever and ever.

At that time the righteous will shine like the stars forever, and the brightest star of all will be Michael, the Son of Man, king over all, without end.