

Preaching Old Testament Apocalyptic to a New Testament Church¹

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Introduction

The organizers of this conference are to be commended for responding to the widespread interest on this continent in things eschatological. Popular fascination with the subject is evident not only from television broadcasts such as the Jack Van Impe program but especially in the face of the phenomenal success of the Left Behind series of fictional writings. To date, more than 60,000,000 copies of these books have been sold, leading the book review editors at *Time* to comment that these are “the best-selling fiction books of our time—right up there with Tom Clancy and Stephen King.”² In a brand new book, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), Catherine Keller argues that American responses to the current national, international, and religious situation represent the deeply fraught legacy of Christian apocalypticism. She observes that although they do not understand the complex legacy of apocalypticism, both left and right religious and political factions interpret the present situation in apocalyptic terms. After analyzing the book of Revelation and wrestling with its conflicting political and religious meanings, as an appropriate response to the current climate Keller advocates a counter-apocalyptic “anti-imperial political theology of love.”

The questions the organizers of this conference have asked us to address are extremely important: How do preachers and teachers address a culture in which the Left Behind books are bestsellers and apocalyptic is associated more with movies than with Scripture? How should pastors interpret and teach the apocalyptic texts of the Bible? I admit that the way I answer these questions today is radically different from the way I would have answered them forty years ago, not only because in 1965 I would not have known much about the subject, but especially because my perspective has changed. I grew up in the home of a

¹ This article was presented as a paper at the third annual Bible and Ministry Conference at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, on June 9-11, 2005. The general theme of the conference was Preaching Apocalyptic Texts.

² As quoted on the Tyndale House Publishers web site, <http://www.tyndale.com/products/details.asp?isbn=14143-0540-0>.

minister who was heavily influenced by the notes in the Scofield Reference Bible and the writings of dispensationalist authors. I will never forget one of the last conversations I had with my father before he passed on to his eternal reward. The conversation concerned the book of Ezekiel, which of course interested him primarily because of this prophet's predictions of future events. He was somewhat disappointed with some of my interpretations but was never anything other than congenial in these conversations. One day, as I was leaving, I said to him, "You know what, Dad? You will know the answers to all of these questions long before I do." I trust that in the presence of God he has found the perfect answers to all our questions about apocalyptic issues.

If one does not buy into this system of interpretation as a whole, how does one preach Old Testament apocalyptic texts to New Testament Christians? In answering these questions, we should first establish what we mean by Old Testament apocalyptic, then decide which texts fit our definitions, and finally wrestle with those that fit. The aim of this article is to address all of these questions, though the last one will represent the center of gravity.

What Do We Mean by Old Testament Apocalyptic?

Scholars have long debated the meaning and scope of the term *apocalyptic*.³ Although the Old Greek version of the Hebrew Bible employs various forms of the verb ἀποκαλύπτειν, "to uncover, to reveal," more than fifty times, the noun ἀποκάλυψις, "revelation," occurs only once.⁴ As an expression for a literary genre, ἀποκάλυψις is found only in the New Testament, and that only once, in Revelation 1:1: "The *revelation* of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John" (ESV). If one uses this verse to define *apocalyptic*, the word refers to "revelatory literature of the same sort as the *Revelation of John*".⁵ According to this understanding, Daniel 7-12 and parts of Zechariah represent the only Old Testament books that might qualify as apocalyptic.

Scholars are seldom satisfied with definitions as simple as this. In 1978, under the leadership of John J. Collins, the foremost academic apocalypticist,⁶ the Apocalypse Group of the SBL Genres Project formulated a comprehensive definition of apocalyptic genre:

³ For a helpful survey of the history of the study of apocalyptic writings see J. N. Oswalt, "Recent Studies in Old Testament Apocalyptic," in *The Face of the Old Testament: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. D. W. Baker and B. T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 369-90.

⁴ In 1 Sam. 20:30 the Old Greek reads Hebrew 'erwā, "nakedness, uncovering," as ἀποκάλυψεως.

⁵ Thus R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 344.

⁶ By *apocalypticist* we mean one who has distinguished himself or herself as an expert in the nature, forms, and intentions of apocalyptic writings. The expression is not used of adherents to apocalypticism, on which see below.

“‘Apocalypse’ is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world.”⁷

This definition may be helpful for understanding intertestamental writings of this genre, but it does not account for all of the book of Daniel, nor the segments of Zechariah that sound suspiciously apocalyptic. Convinced that this definition left out several important elements, David Hellholm suggests the following clause should be added to this definition: “ . . . intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of a divine authority.”⁸

Paul Hanson has argued that apocalypse as a literary genre should be distinguished from apocalyptic eschatology as a religious perspective and apocalypticism as a socioreligious movement.⁹ Israelite *apocalyptic eschatology* has its roots in Israelite prophecy. However, whereas prophecy tended to anticipate the resolution of current social and religious problems in terms of Yahweh’s historical fulfillment of his ancient promises, apocalyptic eschatology looks forward to the direct intervention of a transcendent God in human affairs, who destroys the existing order and creates a new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17).¹⁰ This perspective may be found outside expressly apocalyptic literary genres.¹¹ On the other hand, according to Hanson, *apocalypticism* refers to a social and religious movement in which adherents perceive life through the apocalyptic eschatological lens. In the past, it has been argued that such movements sprout and flourish among groups who feel powerless and alienated

⁷ As cited by J. J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. J. J. Collins, Semeia 14 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 9.

⁸ D. Hellholm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John,” in *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting*, ed. A. Yarbro Collins, Semeia 36 (Decatur, Ga, Scholars Press, 1986), 27.

⁹ P. D. Hanson, “Apocalypticism,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume*, ed. K. Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 28-34. For further discussion of the nature of apocalyptic see *idem*, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 25-43.

¹⁰ This view of apocalyptic is represented especially by W. Schmithals, who summarizes his conclusions in *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation*, trans. J. E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 88, as follows: “Apocalyptic thinks historically in principle, . . . but it despairs of history itself . . . In the apocalypticist’s conviction that he stands at the end of history there is expressed therefore the hopeful, joyous assurance that history is coming to an end—an attitude utterly impossible for the Old Testament.”

¹¹ Hanson (*Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 73-130) treats in order Isaiah 59, 66, 24-25, 34-35, 65:17-25, Zechariah 14, Daniel 7 and 9. In his recent work on the subject, Stephen L. Cook (*The Apocalyptic Literature* Interpreting Biblical Texts [Nashville: Abingdon, 2003], 91-123), discusses apocalyptic texts found in Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel, Isaiah, and Malachi.

from institutional structures. These groups respond to this alienation by constructing alternative symbolic universes in which the deity ensures the ultimate triumph of the group.¹²

However, recently Stephen L. Cook has noted that such movements (which he calls millennialism) may also arise within groups in power and may be spearheaded by influential figures.¹³ He suggests that Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Joel were written by Zadokites, apocalyptic texts in Isaiah originated with Aaronides, and Malachi comes from the Levitical tribe of priests.¹⁴

The truth is it is extremely difficult to define *apocalyptic*. Taking into account the entire book of Daniel, the pseudepigraphic book of 1 Enoch, and the New Testament book of Revelation, Beckwith defines *apocalyptic* simply as “literature containing visions or dreams in which God reveals the secrets of his sovereign purpose for the future of his own people and the whole world, expressed under symbols.”¹⁵ However, this definition is not as helpful as it first appears. On the one hand, this would put the accounts of Pharaoh’s dreams in Genesis 41 within the category of apocalyptic, which few are willing to do. On the other hand, it seems to exclude texts such as those found in Daniel 9-12, which generally lack the symbolism of other apocalyptic texts. Because our attempts to define apocalyptic appear suspiciously circular, perhaps we should give up trying to define the genre and be satisfied with describing it. It is generally agreed that apocalyptic texts tend to share a series of common features:

1. Temporal dualism: the distinction of the present age from the age to come.
2. Pessimism regarding the present and optimism concerning the future. The solution to the problems of the present age is found in the hope of a new future order.
3. The periodization of history. The division of history into eons/segments (usually four, but also seven or twelve) reflects the predetermined divine plan.
4. The imminent arrival of the reign of God. The divine intervention will spell the doom of existing earthly powers.
5. A cosmic perspective. The events of the future are not focused on an individual, or the nation of Israel, or the people of God, but are cosmic in scope.
6. The vindication of the righteous. In the future order, which will involve a restoration of Edenic conditions, the righteous will be vindicated and the wicked condemned.

¹² Hanson, “Apocalyptic,” 30-31.

¹³ *Apocalyptic Literature*, 79-87. For a fuller discussion of the social location of apocalyptic movements see idem, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 19-84.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

7. The involvement of supernatural beings. Angels and demons are involved not only in the revelation of the future, but are actively engaged in eschatological events.
8. A messianic element. God designates a royal figure as a symbol and executor of his rule.¹⁶

These categories may be helpful for a general understanding of apocalyptic as a genre, but when we interpret specific texts, we should be careful not to impose on those compositions perspectives that are foreign to the texts themselves or force them to reveal elements that are not actually there.

How Shall We Preach the Message of Daniel?

Although we could all gain a great deal by exploring how these features are developed in all the Old Testament texts that exhibit apocalyptic features,¹⁷ the remainder of this article will consider only the primary exemplar of Old Testament apocalyptic—the book of Daniel.¹⁸ The specific question we ask here is: How shall we preach the book of Daniel? Perhaps a more important prior question is: How shall we read the book of Daniel? Unless we read it correctly, we can scarcely expect to preach it correctly. I propose to address the question by considering a series of issues we should consider if we would understand this book. When we have established the principles that should govern our interpretation of the book of Daniel, we will be in a better position to understand how to proclaim its message today.

Stephen L. Cook has rightly acknowledged that the process of interpreting the book of Daniel is fraught with the danger of domesticating what is incredibly profound literature and robbing it of its ability to speak on their own terms.¹⁹ This illicit domestication occurs in three dimensions, each of which is expressed in polar opposite forms: (1) through overly symbolic or overly spiri-

¹⁶ This list represents an adaptation of the features cited by D. E. Aune, “Apocalypticism,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 27; idem, “Apocalypticism,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds*, ed. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 48. Compare the features of apocalyptic isolated by K. Koch (*The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, trans. M. Kohl; Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd series 22 [Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1972], 24-28): (1) lengthy discourse cycles, (2) anticipation of spiritual turmoil, (3) paraenetic discourses, (4) pseudonymity, (5) mythical images rich in symbolism, (4) composite and complex literary history.

¹⁷ For helpful discussion of Old Testament apocalyptic texts see Cook, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 91-147. He discusses in order Ezekiel 31, 38-39; Zechariah 1-8, 9-14; Joel; selected texts from Isaiah 40-66; Isaiah 24-27; Malachi.

¹⁸ For a consideration of the Gog and Magog oracle in Ezekiel 38-39 and its relationship to apocalyptic see Daniel I. Block, “Gog and Magog in Ezekiel’s Eschatological Vision,” “The Reader Must Understand”: *Eschatology in Bible and Theology*, ed. K. Brower and M. Elliott (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 85-116.

¹⁹ Cook, *Apocalyptic Literature*, 39-40.

tual readings; (2) through overly futuristic or overly historicized readings; and (3) through overly credulous or overly suspicious readings.²⁰ These bipolar options are not equally problematic for all. In the context in which I was raised, excessively symbolic, futuristic, and credulous interpretations tended to drown out the message of the book as the original audience might have heard it. The critical scholarly world tends to be plagued by excessive historicism and suspicion, as if specific prediction of distant events is impossible and texts such as Daniel 11 can only be *ex eventu* reports of events that have already transpired.²¹ How then shall we proceed? How can we find that elusive middle way that is neither too spiritual nor too symbolic; neither too futuristic nor too historicistic; neither too credulous nor too suspicious? The following represent what I consider to be key principles in unlocking the message of Old Testament apocalyptic literature, with particular reference to the book of Daniel.

Respect the Genre of the Book

We have already established that if there is any book in the Old Testament that fits scholars' definitions of the apocalyptic genre, this is it. Collins agrees that the book as a whole is an apocalypse, but he subcategorizes it as historical apocalypse because it does not involve otherworldly journeys. He divides Daniel generically into two parts, classifying chapters 1-6 as "tales" and chapters 7-12 as "visions."²² Collins reflects the consensus of modern critical scholarship when he declares suspiciously that "the stories about Daniel and his friends are legendary in character, and the hero himself most probably never existed."²³ John Goldingay adopts a slightly more conservative position when he opines, "The stories reflect historical experiences and events. But they are not historiography."²⁴

Do the facts that the book contains supposedly "legendary" features and that its aim to edify necessarily remove it from the realm of historiography? If they do, and if the book was written in the second century B.C., as critical scholars

²⁰ Ibid, 39-61.

²¹ Michael Fox (*Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* [Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991], 148) gives classic expression to the suspicion that pervades much of critical scholarship when he writes, "Indeed the willingness *not* to take a text at face value is the essence of critical scholarship."

²² J. J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, Forms of Old Testament Literature 20 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 27-39; *idem*, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 38-61.

²³ Ibid., 1.

²⁴ According to John E. Goldingay (*Daniel*, WBC 30 [Dallas: Word, 1989], 320-34), elements such as the portrait of Nebuchadnezzar, the existence of a Median Darius, and the sandwiching of a Median empire between the Babylonian and Persian empires differ from the historical realities as we know them may suggest that these stories may be failed efforts at history. More significantly, the positive romantic and legendary features point to a genre that combines fictional and historical elements with the intention of recounting an edifying story.

insist, it is remarkable how quickly the early readers of this document were duped. While there is clear extrabiblical evidence that the book of Daniel was circulating as a revered text by the second, if not the first, half of the second century,²⁵ there is also strong evidence that in the immediate centuries that followed the book it was accepted as a reliable historical source.²⁶ This early use of the book forces us to inquire concerning the book's self-portraiture.

On first sight, scholars' division of the book into two parts, corresponding to the tales (chapters 1-6) and visions (chapters 7-12) of Daniel, seems to reflect the distinctive way the first half treats the character Daniel and his three friends. Chapters 1-6 are cast as third person biographical accounts, the use of the first person being restricted to embedded speeches of the characters.²⁷ However, this pattern continues in chapter 7, though the bulk of the chapter is taken up with Daniel's first person report of his dream (vv. 2-28). Except for 10:1, which employs the third person, chapters 8-12 are cast entirely in the first person. These chapters should be classified as autobiographical narrative. Like most Hebrew historical narrative, these chapters contain extended speeches not only by Daniel but also by other characters (most notably angelic messengers), as well as embedded dream and vision reports. Furthermore, like chapters 1 and 2, chapters 7-12 all begin with date notices establishing the time of the visionary events described therein.²⁸ In this respect, the book of Daniel resem-

²⁵ This is suggested by apparent allusions to texts in Daniel in the late third- to early second-century B.C. apocryphal book of Tobit and the pseudoecclesiastical "Book of Watchers" embedded in 1 Enoch 1-36, and the early second century apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Ben Sirah), as well as the eight fragments of the book of Daniel (one of which [4QDan^a] dates to the late second century B.C.) found at Qumran. If the book was composed ca. 167-64 B.C., as is commonly believed, it is remarkable that it was accepted as authoritative [canonical?] within four decades of its composition. For a discussion of the evidence for the use of Daniel in pseudoecclesiastical texts see R. Beckwith, "Early Traces of the Book of Daniel," *TynB* 53 (2002), 75-82.

²⁶(1) In 1 Macc. 2:59-60 (late second century B.C.) Mattathias appeals to his sons to take inspiration from Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael in the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel in the den of lions. (2) In Matt. 24:15 Jesus accepted the prediction of the "abomination of desolation" as an utterance by "Daniel the prophet." (3) 3 Macc. 6:6-7 (first century A.D.) refers to the same events as 1 Macc. 2:59-60. (4) Josephus (late first century A.D.) not only relied heavily on the book of Daniel for his account of Daniel's life (*Ant X*), but also referred to him as "one of the greatest prophets," who "was not only wont to prophesy future things, as did the other prophets, but he also fixed the time at which these would come to pass." *Ant X* §§266-68, as translated by R. Marcus in *Josephus VI*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 305-7.

²⁷ This applies to speeches of (1) the chief of the eunuchs (1:10); (2) Arioch (2:25); (3) the Chaldaeans (2:4, 7); (4) Nebuchadnezzar (2:3, 5-9, 26; 3:14-15, 24-25, 28-29; 4:2-18, 30, 34-37); (4) Belshazzar (7, 13-16); (5) Darius (6:26); (6) commissioners and satraps (6:5); (7) Daniel's friends (1:12; 3:16-18); (8) Daniel (1:12; 2:20-24, 30, 36; 5:17; 6:22).

²⁸ Except for chapter 12, all of these chapters begin with precise date notices: chapter 1, third year of Jehoiakim of Judah; chapter 2, second year of Nebuchadnezzar; chapter 7, first year of Belshazzar; chapter 8, third year of Belshazzar; chapter 9, first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus; chapter 10, third year of Cyrus; chapter 11, first year of Darius the Mede. Daniel 12:1 begins with "At that time," linking this chapter to the preceding.

bles the books of Ezra-Nehemiah, in which date notices frequently signal beginnings of subunits.²⁹

These narrative features may explain why the Hebrew Bible locates Daniel among the Writings (*Kētûbîm*), *rather than the Prophets (Nêbî'îm)*.³⁰ The Jews got it right. Daniel did not function as a professional preaching prophet like Isaiah or Amos. His official role bore a closer resemblance to that of Joseph or Nehemiah. Furthermore, the book that bears his name also exhibits striking affinities to Ezra-Nehemiah, recognized by all to be historical narrative. Accordingly, although specific principles of interpretation appropriate to the apocalyptic genre should be applied to the embedded dreams and visions (this applies equally to both halves of the book), as a whole, the book of Daniel calls for a hermeneutic not very different from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Recognize Historical Significance of Daniel

Although critical scholars tend to dismiss the historical and historiographic significance of the book of Daniel, arguing that the character Daniel was a fictional construct, such skepticism is unwarranted. The name *Daniel* is attested in Ezra 8:2, where it identifies a son of Ithamar named Daniel, who served as priest at the time of Ezra and returned to Jerusalem from exile with him. Obviously this is not the character involved in the book that goes by the name. This Daniel's name appears in two contexts in the book of Ezekiel, first as a paragon of righteousness along with Noah and Job (14:14, 20) and later as the epitome of wisdom (28:3). Although many doubt that this was the Daniel of the book of Daniel, the most natural reading identifies this figure with the character in this book.³¹ Having been taken to Babylon as a political hostage on Nebuchadnezzar's first visit to Jerusalem in 604 B.C. (Dan. 1:1), apparently this

²⁹ Ezra 1:1, the first year of Cyrus king of Persia; 3:1, the seventh month; 4:6, in the reign of Artaxerxes; 7:1, "After these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia"; Neh 1:1, "In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year"; 2:1 "In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes"; 9:1, "On the twenty-fourth day of this month"; 13:15, "In those days." Similar notices date many of the oracles in Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah.

³⁰ Contra Collins (*Daniel* [FOTL], 29) and most critical scholars who argue that Daniel had not been written by the time that the prophetic canon consisting of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and The Twelve had been closed. However, their *a priori* late dating of the book demands some such conclusion.

³¹ For a discussion of the issues involved and a defense of the present position see Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 447-50. On Daniel's place in Babylon and the historical value the book of Daniel see D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon*, Schweich Lectures 1983 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 84-115. While questions regarding the date of composition of Daniel remain, many accept a sixth-century date for the stories contained in chapters 1-6. See R. G. Kratz, *Translatio imperii. Untersuchungen zu den aramäischen Daniel-erzählungen und ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Umfeld*, WMANT 63 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1991), 146-47.

young Hebrew quickly distinguished himself as a man of extraordinary virtue and faith.

If the Daniel of the book was indeed a historical figure, it is inconceivable that the exiles in Ezekiel's audience would not have been familiar with him. One may speculate that Daniel's influence in Nebuchadnezzar's court led not only to the king's favorable treatment of Jehoiachin in Babylon,³² but also to the settlement of the exiles in favorable circumstances at Tel Abib on the Kebar Canal (Ezek. 1:1; 3:15).³³ Although the exiles from Judah were shamed and humiliated by the experience of deportation, in exile they flourished so well that when Cyrus issued his decree in 539 B.C. permitting the Judaeans to return to Jerusalem, many apparently preferred not to go.³⁴ Why should the Judaeans have been settled within the vicinity of Babylon (rather than far away), be given

³² Ezekiel refers to Jehoiachin as a snipped off sprig of a cedar who, after a three-month reign, was carried away captive to Babylon, the “city of merchants,” along with his family and the Judaean nobility (Ezek. 17:4-5; cf. v. 12b). In contrast to the deuteronomistic historian (2 Kings 24:6-17), who interpreted the deportation of this eighteen year old as punishment for following in his father’s footsteps and “doing evil in the sight of Yahweh,” Ezekiel presents the event in an entirely favorable light. Nebuchadnezzar is a benevolent king, who ensures the well-being of Jehoiachin by planting him in a well-watered seed bed, an obvious reference to the favorable treatment offered him in Babylon. According to cuneiform documents dated to Nebuchadnezzar’s thirteenth year (592 B.C.), he and his sons were the recipients of generous food rations. *ANET*, 308. He is referred to as [*Ia*]-’ú-*kīnū* *Ia-ku-ú-ki-nu*, “king of the land of Yahud.” For the original publication, see E. Weidner, “Jojachin, König von Juda, in babylonischen Keilschrifttexten,” *Mélanges Syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1939), 2:923-35. Although he would later fall out of favor with his host (cf. 2 Kings 25:27-29), at the time of Ezekiel’s oracle, Jehoiachin appears to have been enjoying the good will of Nebuchadnezzar, a fact of which the prophet was undoubtedly aware. Wiseman (*Nebuchadnezzar*, 81) suggests the Babylonian king was preparing him and his family for an eventual return to Jerusalem as loyal supporters of his regime. See further, D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 541-42.

³³ For discussion of the traditional location of *nār kabari/u* near Nippur, some eighty kilometers southeast of Babylon see Block, *Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, 84. However, the designation *nār kabari* applied to at least three different canals. See R. Zadok, “Notes on Syro-Palestinian History, Toponymy and Anthroponymy,” *UF* 28 (1996): 727. Furthermore, more than thirty recently discovered tablets written at a place called al-Yahūdah (*uwa-ia-a-hu-du*), “the city of Judah,” which was located near Borsippa in the immediate vicinity of Babylon, are now in the process of publication. Three have already been published by F. Joannès and A. Lemaire, “Trois tablettes cunéiformes à onomastique ouest-sémitique,” *Transeuphratène* 17 (1999): 17-34. For a preliminary report of the remainder see L. E. Pearce, “New Evidence for Judaeans in Babylonia,” *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming). D. S. Vanderhooft discusses the significance of these texts for the location of the exiles in “Theological Perspectives on the Book of Ezekiel,” a paper read at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Antonio, Texas, November 21, 2004.

³⁴ For further discussion of Babylonian conditions see P. R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 31-38. The documents from the Murašū Archive from the last half of the fifth century B.C. suggest that Jews quickly got involved in mercantile and banking enterprises. See M. W. Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašū Archive, the Murašū Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylonia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985).

a large tract of fertile land, and granted the level of independence necessary to maintain their own ethnic identity and social cohesion?³⁵ Daniel may have been the answer to this question.

Scholars have long recognized the affinities between the stories of Joseph in Egypt in Genesis 39-50 and the story of Daniel in Babylon. Especially striking are the facts that both Joseph and Daniel were taken into captivity in a foreign land against their wills, both served as courtiers of foreign monarchs, and both distinguished themselves as men of extraordinarily high moral character and as gifted interpreters of dreams.³⁶ Remarkably, during the tenures of both men as officers of the highest positions in the land, their kinsmen joined them in the land of exile in favorable circumstances. Whereas the Genesis narrative explicitly declares that God providentially sent Joseph ahead so he could secure the region of Goshen for them when the crisis of famine would strike (Gen. 45:4-15; 46:28-47:12; 50:15-21), the Daniel narrative makes no such claim for Daniel. Nevertheless, while we may speculate about Nebuchadnezzar's political motivation for taking Daniel and his three friends to Babylon in 604,³⁷ Daniel 1:9 and 17 expressly attribute Daniel's rise in the Babylonian court to the providential hand of God, and the narrative adds, "Daniel continued [in office] until the first year of Cyrus the king" (1:21).³⁸ The reference to "the first year of Cyrus" recalls 2 Chronicles 36:22 and Ezra 1:1, both of which note, "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing."

We may now have solved both the riddle regarding the settling of the Judaeans in a favorable location near Babylon and the means whereby Yahweh "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." In the providence of God, Daniel was sent to Babylon as an advance party to prepare for the coming of the first wave of exiles in 598 B.C. Indeed, Joseph's speech to his brothers in Genesis 45:4-8 could easily have been adapted by Daniel as follows:

³⁵ References to the exiled Jehoiachin as "the king of Judah" (2 Kings 25:27; Jer. 52:31) and the institution of "elders of the people/Israel" (*ziqnē hā'ām yisrā'ēl*) attest to the exiles' community self-consciousness. This sense of ethnic cohesiveness was promoted and/or reflected in the careful keeping of family records (Ezra 2; Neh. 1) and continued communication with Jerusalem, especially before the fall of the city (e.g., Jer. 29). Even though we have no record of a temple for Yahweh in Babylon (which contrasts with the situation in Egypt), it appears that Israelite religious institutions such as circumcision and the Sabbaths were maintained, at least externally. Cf. Isa. 56:2-4; 58:13; Ezekiel 44:46.

³⁶ The points of similarity extend far beyond these broad themes to specific shared expressions and phrases. See the summaries by Collins, *Daniel*, 39-40; L. F. Hartman and A. A. di Lella, *The Book of Daniel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 23; (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 56.

³⁷ The date for Daniel's deportation according to Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 23.

³⁸ Cf. 6:28, which notes that Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

So Daniel said to fellow Judaeans, “Come near to me, please . . . I am your brother, Daniel, whom Nebuchadnezzar took to Babylon . . . , for God sent me before you to preserve life. For our exile from the land will last for a long time. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not Nebuchadnezzar who brought me here, but God. He has made me a father to Nebuchadnezzar, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Babylon.

It seems that in the mind of the narrator, providentially, Daniel continued in office into the reign of Cyrus so that when the time came for the Judaeans to return to Jerusalem, perhaps in response to Daniel’s counsel, he would issue the edict, permitting them to go back home and rebuild the temple.³⁹ Accordingly, far from being a work of fiction, and far from being concerned only about God’s future exercise of sovereignty, the book of Daniel provided hope for the original readers with its written testimony to God’s past and present providential care.

Recognize Form and Structure

The search for the form and structure of the book of Daniel may proceed in several directions. Based on the date notices inserted at the beginning of the respective stories and visions as well as extrabiblical correlations, the literary units incorporated in the book may be examined according to their *chronological placement*. This approach yields the following results:

Table 1: The Chronology of the Literary Units of Daniel⁴⁰

| Date Reference | Date Notice | Modern Dating Equivalent (B.C.) |
|----------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 1:1 | In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim | 605 |
| 2:1 | In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar | 603 |
| 3:1 | — Before death of Nebuchadnezzar | >562 |
| 4:1 | — Before death of Nebuchadnezzar | >562 |
| 5:1 | — (in the year of the fall of Babylon) | 539 |
| 6:1 | — (early in the Persian era) | 539 |

³⁹ My student, Nathan Elliott, has suggested that if Daniel could have had access to prophecies of his contemporary Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2), he probably also had access to the prophecies of Isaiah and could have been inspired by Isaiah 44:24-28 to encourage Cyrus to grant the Judaeans permission to return. Of course, this interpretation assumes that the prophecies in the book of Isaiah all derive from Isaiah ben Amoz, the contemporary of Hezekiah. One might speculate that Daniel’s recommendation to let the Judaeans return may have inspired Cyrus to establish this as a general policy for all the peoples that the Babylonians had conquered as a way to secure the loyalty of the subjects he inherited and the favor of the gods of those subjects. For a translation of Cyrus’ edict see M. Coogan, “Cyrus Cylinder,” *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 2, *Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World*, ed. W. W. Hallo (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 314-16.

⁴⁰ Cf. the scheme proposed by P. Gentry, “The Son of Man in Daniel 7: Individual or Corporate?” in *Acorns to Oaks: The Primacy and Practice of Biblical Theology*, (Toronto: Joshua Press, 2003), 63.

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 7:1 | In the first year of Belshazzar | 554 |
| 8:1 | In the third year of Belshazzar | 552 |
| 9:1 | In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus the Mede | 538 |
| 10:1 | In the third year of Cyrus | 536 |
| 11:1 | In the first year of Darius the Mede | 538 |

The chronological misplacement of chapters 7 and 8, which are located after chapters 5 and 6 even though they occurred earlier, represents the most striking feature.

Second, we may divide the book on the basis of *genre*. We have already noted that although the book as a whole is cast as a continuous narrative, with other genres embedded, it is striking that the first six chapters consist largely of accounts of the experiences of Daniel and his friends in relation to the courts of Mesopotamian monarchs, while chapters 8-12 consist of visions that may involve Mesopotamian rulers, but Daniel himself is operating separately. However, where shall we locate chapter 7? Generically, this chapter seems to serve a transitional role. Because this chapter consists largely of Daniel's own account of a vision, chapter 7 is generally treated as a vision account and attached to the second half. However, as my student, Jenny M. Lowery, has demonstrated, because this chapter exhibits more typical features of dream accounts than of vision reports, it should actually be classified as a dream rather than vision account.⁴¹

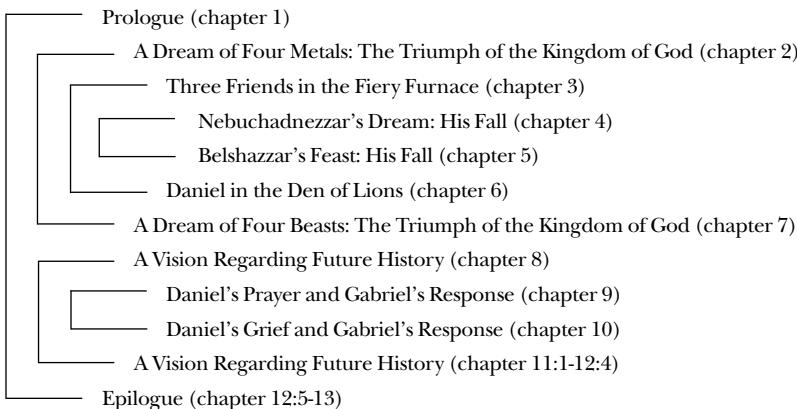
Third, we may divide the book *linguistically*. This yields a slightly different scheme than that suggested by those who divide the book into tales of Daniel (chapters 1-6) and visions of Daniel (chapters 7-12), but the results accord perfectly with the generic scheme proposed above. Linguistically, the book divides into three parts in an uneven ABA arrangement: Hebrew (1:1-2:4a); Aramaic (2:4b-7:28); Hebrew (8:1-12:13).⁴²

The most intriguing structural observations emerge from a consideration of the thematic organization of the book. The chiastic structure of the book of Daniel⁴³ may be portrayed as follows:

⁴¹ J. M. Lowery, "The Form and Function of Symbolic Vision in the Hebrew Bible" (Ph.D. diss.; Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999), 147-56, esp. 149.

⁴² This provides another link to the book of Ezra, which also combines both third- and first-person narratives as well as Aramaic and Hebrew sections. While Ezra contains less Aramaic material, the linguistic picture exhibits a slightly more complicated ABABA pattern: Hebrew (1:1-4:7); Aramaic (4:8-6:18); Hebrew (6:19-7:11); Aramaic (7:12-26); Hebrew (7:27-10:44).

⁴³ The chiastic structure has long been recognized. Cf. the more complex scheme of D. W. Gooding, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel and Its Implications," *TynB* 32 (1981): 43-79.



The cumulative effect of all these approaches is to highlight the pivotal role of chapter 7. Chronologically, the chapter would have fit more naturally before chapter 5, but its location after chapter six forces the reader to read it in the light of the preceding and in anticipation of what follows. With reference to narrative style, formally it is cast in the third-person biographical form, linking it with chapters 1-6, but after the first verse and three words of v. 2, the rest of the chapter is cast in the first person, linking it with the autobiographical style of chapters 8-12. Linguistically and thematically it belongs with the preceding chapters, and as a dream report it belongs with the preceding. Its visionary features are obvious, but their significance should not be exaggerated. Furthermore, the fourfold historical scheme envisioned in the dream links the text more with the preceding stories, especially chapter 2, than with the content of the visions that follow. In any case, the combination of all these features suggests that in the mind of the person responsible for the final form of the book, chapter 7 represents the core.

Recognize Source of Daniel's Revelations

Scholars often speak of the origins of apocalyptic as if this were a merely human phenomenon, with little if any appreciation for the internal evidence of the books attributing all the visions and dreams to divine inspiration. This approach is represented most eloquently by John Collins' work, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*,⁴⁴ but is reflected throughout Stephen Cook's recent monograph, *The Apocalyptic Literature*.⁴⁵ Even as we recognize the divine origin of the revelations in Daniel, we need to acknowledge that these revelations did not occur in a vacuum. They build on a long history of both divine revelation and the record of that revelation in

⁴⁴ Second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁴⁵ Nashville: Abingdon, 2003.

antecedent texts. The influence of the story of Joseph in Genesis on the narratives of Daniel has already been noted. However, the author of Daniel does not intend the first six chapters to serve merely as a sort of midrashic retelling of the Joseph story.⁴⁶ The dream narratives and symbolic vision accounts of Daniel in particular follow long established forms.⁴⁷ However, the style of the entire book may be characterized as allusive and anthological,⁴⁸ as Table 2 below illustrates.

Table 2: Echoes and Allusions to Old Testament Texts in the Book of Daniel

| Chapter | Verbal Echoes | | Thematic Echoes | |
|---------|--|--|--|--|
| | Daniel | Old Testament | Daniel | Old Testament |
| 1 | “land of Shinar” (1:2) | Gen. 10:10; 11:2 | dietary refusal (1:8-13) | Lev. 3:17; 11:1-47; 17:10-14; Deut. 14:1-21 |
| 2 | light and darkness (2:22) “God of Gods” | Isa. 45:7 Deut. 10:17; Ps. 136:2 | dream oracles and specially gifted interpreter; incompetent magi- cians and diviners | Gen. 41 Exod. 6-8 |
| 3 | walking in the fire (3:25) | Isa. 45:2 | impotence of other gods to deliver (v. 15) | Judg. 6:31; Isa. 44:12-20; cf. |
| 4 | people considered “nothing” (4:35) | Isa. 40:17 | character possessing divine spirit [of prophecy] (4:8, 9, 18) “cosmic” tree (4:10-17) | Num. 11:17-29; Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1 Ezek. 31 |
| 5 | “gods of wood and stone that do not see or hear or understand” (5:23) | Deut. 4:28; Ps. 115:4-8; 135:15-17 | incompetent magicians and diviners character possessing divine spirit (5:14) demise of arrogant (5:30) | Exod. 6-8 Num. 11:17-29; Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1 Job 34:16-30 |
| 6 | “signs and wonders” (6:27) | Exod. 7:3; Deut. 6:22; 26:8; Neh. 9:10; Ps. 135:9; Jer. 32:20-21 | danger in the midst of lions praying toward Jerusalem (6:10) | Ps. 57:4-6 1 Kgs. 8:44, 48, 49; Jon. 2:4 |

⁴⁶ So also Collins, *Daniel*, 39-40; contra Di Lella (*Daniel*, 55), who suggest that “religious romance” and “tale[s] of the wise courtier” represent a “specific type of midrash.”

⁴⁷ On the former see Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, trans. J. M. Munro (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), especially 106-22; S. Bar, *A Letter That Has Not Been Read: Dreams in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. L. J. Schramm (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2001), especially 44-107. On the latter, see Lowery, “Form and Function of Symbolic Vision Reports,” especially 147-62.

⁴⁸ Expressions applied to the court stories by J. Gammie, “On the Intention and Sources of Daniel I-VI,” *VT* 31 (1981): 286.

| | | | | |
|----|--|--|---|---|
| 7 | “peoples, nations, and languages” (7:14) “son of man” | Gen. 10:5, 20, 31, 32 Ps. 8:4; Ezek. 2:1, <i>et passim</i> | sea as symbol of forces hostile to God (7:2-3) blazing throne and its burning wheels (7:9) cloud theophany (7:13) interpreting angel (7:16ff.) | Job 26:12; Isa. 27:1 Ezek. 1:13, 26 Ps. 104:3 Ezek. 8; Zech. 1:9, 19 |
| 8 | “son of man” (8:17) | Ezek. 2:1, <i>et passim</i> | interpreting angel (8:16ff.) pride before the fall (8:23-26) | Ezek. 8; Zech. 1:9, 19 Isa. 14:14-21; Ezek. 28 |
| 9 | “seventy years” (9:2) “great and awesome God who keeps covenant and <i>hesed</i> ” (9:4) | Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10; 2 Chron. 36:21; Lev. 26:34-39 Deut. 7:9, 21; etc. | covenant, fidelity, obedience, rebellion overflowing/complete destruction (9:27) | Deuteronomy Isa. 10:22-23 |
| 10 | “man dressed in linen” (10:5) lightning, flaming torches, feet like burnished bronze, sound of tumult (10:6) “latter days” (10:14) | Ezek. 9:2 Ezek. 1:7, 13, 24 | receipt of vision by the river (10:4-5) image of a glorious man (10:5-6) | Ezekiel 1:3 Ezek. 1:28 |
| 11 | “flood” and “rush” of destruction (11:10, 22, 26, 40) “holy mountain” (11:45) | Isa. 10:22-23 Ps. 99:9; Isa. 11:9; 27:13; 56:7; 57:13; 66:20; Ezek. 20:40; Joel 2:1; 3:17; Obad. 1:16; Zeph. 3:11; Zech. 8:3 | foe from the north (11:6-8, 11, 13, 15, 40) | Isa. 41:25; Jer. 1:13; 4:6; 6:22; Ezek. 23:24; 26:7 |
| 12 | “man dressed in linen” (12:7) “raise the hand” as oath (12:7) “have insight” (12:3, 10) | Ezek. 9:2 Ezek. 20:5 Hos. 14:9 | resurrection (12:2) post-death judgment of the wicked (12:2) blessing for those who wait (12:12) | Ezek. 37:12-14 Isa. 66:24 Isa. 30:18 |

These are only representative examples of the book of Daniel’s heavy indebtedness to antecedent scripture.⁴⁹ While Daniel’s use of earlier expressions and

⁴⁹ For discussion of intertextual borrowing in chapters 1-6, see Gammie, “On the Intention and Sources of Daniel I-VI,” 282-92. Gammie recognizes especially the influence of Isaiah 40-55. On chapter 9, see M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 482-91.

ideas is creative and often innovative, the internal evidence of the book suggests that this is less a function of his own imagination, or even the imagination of the person responsible for the book, than of the divine mind behind the revelations. Indeed, if one excludes the embedded visions and their interpretation (which amounts to about 40 percent of the book), the narrator's imagination is no more impressive than that exhibited by the authors of Ezra-Nehemiah or Esther. The author of the book and its characters have drunk deeply from the well of the traditions of the Torah, the prophets, and the poets and sages of Israel. If we would reclaim the message of the book for today, at every turn, we should explore the exegetical roots of the vocabulary and images of the book.

Recognize Major Theme

While some of us are more interested than others in the issues discussed above, in the last analysis, the keys to effective and authoritative preaching of the book of Daniel involve grasping its message, translating it into permanent theological truth, and applying it to the contemporary situation. If the hermeneutical spiral is ever valid, it is surely the case with the book of Daniel. As is the case with the book of Revelation, the best way to begin the study of Daniel is to read the entire book aloud in one sitting or standing. This will assist us in identifying the major threads of the book. Central to this enterprise is identifying the theme of the book. Discerning a theme is a more perceptive undertaking than discovering the subject of a work. Statements of subject and theme may both answer the question, "What is the work about?" Identifying the subject is merely to classify, while discovering its theme is to see "the attitude, the opinion, the insight about the subject that is revealed through a particular handling of it." Theme, of course, arises out of the subject but involves more subjective considerations than does an enquiry about the subject.⁵⁰ In determining the theme or message of a text, the reader should consider its plot and structure, its genre and style, its thematic statements, and its recurring phrases/refrains. An understanding of the literary force of a work and the vitality of its message depends upon arriving at a clear understanding of the theme the author is intending to develop.

When we apply these principles to the book of Daniel, what overarching theme emerges? Most will agree that the sovereignty of God must represent an essential element in any declaration of the theology of the book. This notion is expressed explicitly by a series of characters in the book:

Daniel:

2:20 Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.

⁵⁰ R. and M. Thompson, *Critical Reading and Writing* (New York: Random House, 1969), 15.

21 He changes times and seasons;
 he removes kings and sets up kings;
 he gives wisdom to the wise
 and knowledge to those who have understanding;

22 he reveals deep and hidden things;
 he knows what is in the darkness,
 and the light dwells with him.

23 To you, O God of my fathers,
 I give thanks and praise,
 for you have given me wisdom and might,
 and have now made known to me what we asked of you,
 for you have made known to us the king's matter.

37 You, O king, 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, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold.

44 And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure. (2:20-23, 37-38, 44-45)

13 I saw in the night visions, and see, 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.

14 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. (7:13-14)

Nebuchadnezzar:

Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery. (2:47)

Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way. (3:29; cf. v. 15)

It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me.

How great are his signs,
 How mighty his wonders!
 His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
 And his dominion endures from generation to generation. (4:2-3)

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever,

For his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
 And his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
 All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
 And he does according to his will among the host of heaven
 and among the inhabitants of the earth;

And none can stay his hand
Or say to him, "What have you done?"

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (4:34-35, 37)

Darius:

Peace be multiplied to you.
I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel,
For he is the living God, enduring forever;
His kingdom shall never be destroyed,
And his dominion shall be to the end.
He delivers and rescues;
He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth,
He who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions. (6:26-27)

Heavenly Watcher

Let his mind be changed from a man's,
and let a beast's mind be given to him;
and let seven periods of time pass over him.
The sentence is by the decree of the watchers,
The decision by the word of the holy ones,
to the end that the living may know
that the Most High rules the kingdom of men
and gives it to whom he will
and sets over it the lowliest of men. (4:16-17)

Interpreting Angel

But the court shall sit in judgment,
And his dominion shall be taken away,
to be consumed and destroyed to the end.
And the kingdom and the dominion
And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven
shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;
Their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,
And all dominions shall serve and obey them. (7:26-27)

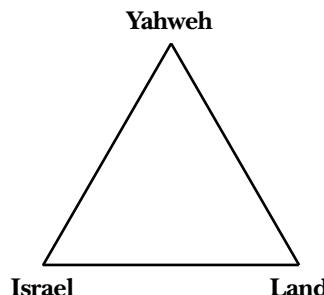
God

O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken:
The kingdom has departed from you,
And you shall be driven from among men,
And your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field.
And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox,
And seven periods of time shall pass over you,
until you know
that the Most High rules the kingdom of men
and gives it to whom he will. (4:31-32)

God's sovereignty is also a key motif outside these explicit statements. In chapter 1, the narrator declares that "The Lord (*Adonai*) gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his [Nebuchadnezzar's] hands" (v. 2); "God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs" (v. 8); and "God gave

them [the four young men] knowledge and skill in every branch of literature and wisdom" (v. 17). Divine sovereignty is also at issue in the destruction of the image by the rock cut out of the quarry without human hands that smashes the image (2:35, 44-45), the preservation of Daniel's friends in the smelter (3:24-27), the chopping down of the tree and changing of the king's mind (4:14-16), the handwriting on the wall in advance of the deliverance of the kingdom into the hands of the Medes and Persians (5:25-31), the preservation of Daniel in the den of lions (6:22), the deliverance of the kingdom into the hands of the Son of Man (7:21-22), the prediction/decree of four future kingdoms (chap. 8), the prediction of the end of the seventy weeks (9:24-27), including the fixing of the duration of specific periods of time (9:26; 12:11-12), and the detailed prediction of major historical developments until the first coming of the Messiah (10:1-12:4).

Although we can say with confidence that the book of Daniel declares the sovereignty of God from beginning to end, we have not yet established the theme of the book, for the book is not about divine sovereignty in the abstract, nor even primarily about divine sovereignty over the affairs of the nations. The particular question the book asks is: Will Yahweh exercise his sovereignty over the nations in Israel's interests? Specifically, will he fulfill his ancient promises to Abraham, granting to him and his descendants eternal title to the land of Canaan (Gen. 17:1-8, *et passim*)? Will he fulfill his promises to Israel, by which he entered into an eternal and irrevocable covenant (Lev. 26:45; Deut. 4:31; Judg. 2:2)? Will he fulfill his covenant to David, guaranteeing his house eternal title to the throne of Israel (2 Sam. 7:13; Ps. 89:3-4, 28-29, 36-37; 132:12)? Will he fulfill his commitment to Jerusalem/Zion as the place chosen for his eternal residence (Ps 68:16[English 15]; 78:68-69; 87:3[English 2]; 132:13-18; cf. Dan. 9:16-19)? The events that Daniel and his generation witnessed threw into question all the covenantal commitments on which the people had staked their security and that were supposed to guarantee the endurance of the tripartite covenantal triangle involving Yahweh, Israel, and the land of Canaan.



Through the agency of Nebuchadnezzar, the covenantal triangle had been dismantled: Yahweh had left his temple and abandoned his people; Israel had been expelled from the land; and the land itself had been devastated and occupied by foreigners.⁵¹ Added to this, the Davidic king, Yahweh's symbol of rule, had been removed from the throne. This had resulted not only in a severe crisis of faith for the Israelites, but it also jeopardized Yahweh's reputation, casting doubt on the veracity of his word and on his ability to keep his promises (cf. Ezek. 36:16-38).

Taken at face value, like Ezekiel's oracles of restoration in Ezekiel 34-48, the purpose of the revelations in Daniel was to assure the generation of exiles that their experience did not mean the abdication of his throne. Daniel will declare emphatically that the opposite is the case; Israel's fate had been written into the terms of the original covenant. Long ago, Yahweh had said that if the people would persist in their apostasy, he would drive them from the land (Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 4:25-28; 28:20-68). Yahweh had also declared emphatically that this judgment would not be the last word; because of the eternality of his covenantal commitments, he would reestablish the covenant with himself and bring his people back to the land (Lev. 26:40-45; Deut. 4:29-31; 30:1-10; cf. Jer. 29:10-14).

If the purpose of the revelations recorded in Daniel was to reassure the generation of exiles that their story was not over, this was also the purpose behind the composition of the book. Although the exact date and circumstance of composition are impossible to determine, the message of the book would fit perfectly in the late sixth or fifth century B.C. The first group of exiles had returned in response to the permission granted by Cyrus in 538, but the ancient covenantal promises had been fulfilled only in small measure (*mē'at*, Ezek. 11:16). To be sure, a considerable number of exiles had returned, but their number was less than fifty thousand (Ezra 2:64), and they represented only a minority of the original twelve tribes (cf. Ezek. 37:15-28). To be sure, they were back in the land, but they occupied only a small enclave around Jerusalem—a far cry from Ezekiel's prediction of full occupancy of the original Promised Land (Ezek. 47-48). To be sure, the temple had been reconstructed, but it was a mere shadow of the original structure built by Solomon, and, in any case, the glory of Yahweh had not returned (Hag. 1:7-11; 2:1-8). To be sure, a Davidide (Zerubbabel) was exercising political power in Jerusalem, but he was nothing more than a governor of an outpost of the Persian empire and never occupied the throne of David (Ezra 2-5; Hag. 1:12-15). No doubt many Jews in

⁵¹ For discussion of the apparent termination of Yahweh's relationship with the land and the people in its ancient Near Eastern context see D. I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, rev. ed. ETS Monograph (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 113-47; idem, "Divine Abandonment: Ezekiel's Adaptation of an Ancient Near Eastern Motif," in *Perspectives on Ezekiel: Theology and Anthropology*, ed. M. S. Odell and J. T. Strong, SBL Symposium Series 9 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2000), 15-42.

Palestine and especially those in exile wondered how the present realities fit into the divine scheme of history and questioned whether or not Yahweh would ever fulfill his promises as given. The revelations recounted in the book were given for Daniel's generation, but the book was written for those who would follow as a permanent written reminder of God's faithfulness.

With this statement, we may have established the theme of the book: the overruling sovereignty of Yahweh, the one true God, demonstrated in the judgment of rebellious world powers and the vindication of the faithful in fulfillment of his covenantal commitments to Israel. Every chapter of the book makes a significant contribution to this theme. If we treat the Scriptures as the Word of God and an authoritative record of his revelation, it is imperative that we determine the theme intended by the author. Otherwise we are left in a sea of subjective responses, with no firm grounding in the message of the text.

Recognize Theological Message

Having established the theme of the book of Daniel, another key to effective and authoritative preaching of the book is to grasp its theology. Theme and theology should not be confused. Whereas *theme* answers the question: What is a text about? or Why was this composition written in the first place? the theology of a biblical text answers the question: What drives the document?⁵² There is no simple formula for determining the theology of a book, but it is often helpful to begin by asking certain leading questions, the answers to which help shape the theology of the document. The following represent a sample of questions that may be asked of the book of Daniel.

What does the book of Daniel teach about God?

This is the most explicitly theological question of all. Within our declaration of the theme, we have already noted that the book is essentially an essay on divine sovereignty over the affairs of humankind. However, this supremacy over the entire cosmos is reflected in many features, even beyond the explicit statements noted above. First, it is expressly declared in the titles and epithets attributed to him: "God of gods" (Aramaic *’elāh ’elāhîn*, 2:47; Hebrew, *’el ’elîm*, 11:36); "Lord of kings" *mārē’ malkîn*, 2:47); "God in heaven" (Aramaic, *’elāh bišmayyā’*, 2:28); "God of heaven" (Aramaic, *’elāh šēmayyā’*, 2:18-19, 37, 2:44); "King of heaven" (Aramaic, *melek šēmayyā’*, 4:37[Heb 34]); "Lord of heaven" (Aramaic, *mārē’ šēmayyā’*, 5:23); "Most High (Aramaic, *illāyā’*, [Qere, *illā’â*]).⁵³ Borrowing a traditional phrase apparently originating with Moses (Deut. 7:21), in 9:4 Darius refers to Daniel's God as "the living God" (*’elāhā’hayyā’*, 6:20, 26). Daniel

⁵² Elmer A. Martens, "Accessing Theological Readings of a Biblical Book," *AUSS* 34 (1996): 223-24.

⁵³ Dan. 3:26; 4:2, 17, 24-25, 32, 34; 5:18, 21; 7:18, 22, 25, 7:27.

himself addresses Yahweh as the “great and awesome God” (*’ēl ’gādōl wěnōrā*, 9:4).⁵⁴ Elsewhere wisdom (*hokmētā*) and might *gēbūrētā*, 2:18) are ascribed to Yahweh.

Second, in his exercise of sovereignty, God employs myriads of heavenly aids, “the host of heaven” (Hebrew, (*šēbā’ haššāmayim*, 8:10; Aramaic, (*hēl šēmayyā’*, 4:35 [Hebrews 32]), some of whom are identified by name. Michael is characterized as “one of the chief princes” (*’āhad haššārīm hārīšōnīm*, 10:13) and “the great prince” (*haššār haggādōl*, 12:1). However, the following explanatory comment, “who stands over the sons of your people” (*hā’ōmēd ’al bēnē ’amēkā*, and the designation, “your prince” (*śarēkem*) in 10:21, suggest he had particular jurisdiction over Israel.⁵⁵ It is generally thought that this sophisticated understanding of the operation of divine providence through heavenly intermediaries is a mark of a late apocalyptic development. However, this is not the only possible interpretation of this phenomenon in the book of Daniel. On the one hand, Daniel lived among Babylonians for whom this heaven-earth dualism was commonplace and according to whom events on earth mirrored events among divine and semidivine beings in the heavens. On the other hand, the seeds of this theology in Israelite thought were planted centuries earlier in Deut. 32:8-9, which not only recognizes that God Most High (*’elyōn*) divided the human population of the earth according to the number of heavenly beings (*bny ’lym*) available to serve as their patrons but also that Israel’s status was special.⁵⁶ This nation was under God’s direct jurisdiction, without angelic mediator.⁵⁷

However, just because God is the great and awesome God of gods, who reigns from heaven, and who exercises sovereignty through intermediaries, he is neither distant nor aloof. On the contrary, his communication with humankind is reflected in the epithet, “revealer of mysteries” (*gālēē rāzīn*, 2:28-29), given to him by Daniel. More importantly, he is the personal God of Israel, who keeps his “gracious covenant” with his people.⁵⁸ However, contrary to the peoples’ expectations, this does not mean only that he lavishes on them the benefactions promised within the covenant (Lev. 26:1-13; Deut. 28:1-14). As Daniel declares so eloquently in his prayer in chapter 9, it also means that if the Israelites persist in rebellion against their divine Suzerain, he must impose

⁵⁴ Cf. Neh. 1:5; 4:14; Ps. 99:3; but also 2 Sam. 7:23; 1 Chron. 17:21.

⁵⁵ In 10:13 “the prince of the kingdom of Persia ((*ar malk(t p(tm)ras*) represents a hostile counterpart.

⁵⁶ This interpretation assumes the originality of the reading reflected in LXX and two Qumran fragments. For discussion see Block, *Gods of the Nations*, 25-32.

⁵⁷ This perspective seems also to lie behind Isa. 24:21.

⁵⁸ The expression (*śōmēr habbērīt wěhahēsēd*, literally, “who keeps the covenant and the lovingkindness,” functions as an hendiadys for “who keeps the gracious covenant.” The expression is traditional, rooted in Deut. 7:9. Cf. also 1 Kings 8:23; 2 Chron. 6:14; Neh. 9:32. See further Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming) on Deut. 7:9.

upon them the curses written into the covenant (Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 28:15-68). Furthermore, he had indeed demonstrated his righteousness (*sĕdāqâ*, 9:7) in the events of 586 B.C., for he is righteous (*saddîq*, 9:14) in all he does. In imposing on his people the calamity (*rā'â*) he had confirmed his covenantal warnings (9:12), and the people had experienced precisely the fate written into the Torah of Moses (9:13). Now Daniel can seek forgiveness only by appealing to Yahweh's compassion (*harahămîm*, 9:8).

On the basis of Yahweh's covenant with his people, Daniel can refer to him as the "God of my ancestors" (2:23), and identify him frequently as "our God," "my God," "your God," "his God," "their God.⁵⁹ Even more personally, others will recognize God as "the God of Daniel" (6:26), and "the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego" (3:28-29). It is by virtue of Israel's covenant relations with Yahweh that he speaks to his people through his servants the prophets (9:6, 10), and has appointed Michael to stand by Daniel (10:13, 21) and take on the hostile heavenly forces on behalf of the Israelites (12:1).

This message of Yahweh's fidelity to the covenant is fundamental to the book of Daniel. To a people who have been disillusioned and angered by Yahweh's failure to defend them in the face of the Babylonians, the revelations to and through Daniel offer hope that Yahweh is indeed the living God who remains true to his word. He and his heavenly host have not been defeated by Marduk and his minions, the Babylonians. On the contrary, the Babylonians have been Yahweh's agents; through them he has kept his word. Therefore, now it is time for the people to move on, to put their trust in Yahweh, and to commit their fate to him. The revelations recounted in the book and the book itself declare that Israel's future is as certain as the covenant commitments of God.

What does the book of Daniel teach about human history?

Daniel declares the fundamental stance of the book in 2:21: "He (God) is the one who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and sets up kings." These two principles are reflected most dramatically in the schematic division of history into discreet periods in the dreams and visions, particularly chapters 2, 7, and 8.⁶⁰ While interpreters, including preachers, tend to spend a lot of time trying to identify the kingdoms represented by the elements in these visions⁶¹ with apocalyptic, it is often helpful to stand back and reflect on what the big picture might represent. These chapters offer three fascinating and largely

⁵⁹ "Our God," 3:17; 9:9-10, 13-15, 17; "my God," 4:8; 6:22; 9:4, 18-20; "your God," 2:47; 6:16, 20; 10:12; "his God," 1:2; 6:5, 10-11, 23; "their God," 3:28; 11:32.

⁶⁰ According to Collins (*Daniel*, FOTL 20, 11), the periodization of history "is the most characteristic form of *ex eventu* prophecy in the apocalypses." Cf. 2 *Baruch* 36-39, *Sibylline Oracles*, 1-2, *Apocalypse of Weeks in I Enoch* 93).

⁶¹ See the accompanying chart.

overlapping perspectives on the same periods of human history. In chapter 2, the colossus of Nebuchadnezzar's dream looks at the flow of history from an earthly vantage. The succession of empires represents a series of noble political accomplishments. To be sure, the quality of the respective empires deteriorates as one's gaze moves downward from the head of gold (Babylon) to the chest of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze, the legs of iron, and finally the feet of a mixture of iron and clay, but the picture as a whole is as impressive as the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. This is a glorious monument to human political achievement. However, the feet of iron and clay imply a fundamental instability to the colossus. This reality is explicitly demonstrated by a stone, which appears to separate spontaneously ("without hands") from the mountain, rolls down and strikes the feet of the colossus, and causes it to disappear without a trace.

In chapter 7, symbols for the very same succession of empires reappear, though this time the kingdoms are portrayed as a series of monsters that emerge from the sea, each more brutal and haughty in temperament and bizarre in form than the last. These images portray human political accomplishments from the divine vantage; they are ugly creatures that exercise overweening power, but they do so only because it has been granted to them (v. 12), and when their times are up, they are removed and replaced. As was the case with the colossus, the succession is abruptly terminated and replaced by a divine kingdom. In chapter 8, the animal imagery continues, though this time the animals are domestic. The sequence begins with the Medo-Persian empire (ram with two horns), but the focus moves quickly to a male goat that experiences its own monstrous evolution, as it moves from Alexander the Great to his successors (four horns representing four Greek kingdoms), culminating in a boastful little horn (Antiochus IV). The focus of this vision is not the climactic divine kingdom, but the penultimate kingdom, whose arrogance knows no bounds, but whose end is described in a single cryptic sentence of three words, (*ûbē'epes yād yîssâbēr*, "But without a hand he will be broken" (v. 25).⁶²

The series of visions declaring Yahweh's absolute sovereignty over human kings and kingdoms climaxes in chapter 11. This vision does not divide human history into imperial epochs, but depicts a turbulent climax of history that ends with the intervention of Michael on behalf of his people and the vindication of the righteous (12:1-3).

These visions are remarkable not only for their periodization of history, but also for the intervisionary links among them. Each builds on the preceding dreams/visions, but in successive visions the primary concerns are brought into ever clearer focus. The first two are especially significant because of the way they develop the motif of divine intervention to bring down the kingdoms built by human beings. Even more striking is the way the final phases of these kingdoms are developed. Chapter 2 declares the fundamental instability of human

⁶² Table 3 summarizes the ways scholars have interpreted the successive empires.

THE SUCCESSIVE EMPIRES IN DANIEL'S PROPHECIES
ACCORDING TO MODERN INTERPRETIVE SYSTEMS*

| | CHAPTER 2 | | | | CHAPTER 7 | | | | CHAPTER 8 | | | |
|--------------|-----------|--------|--------|------|-----------|------|---------|--------------|-----------|------|------------|-------------|
| | Gold | Silver | Bronze | Iron | Lion | Bear | Leopard | Fourth Beast | Rams | Goat | Four Horns | Little Horn |
| BABYLON | TMDA | | | | TMDA | | | | | | | |
| MEDIA | | M | | | | M | | | | | TMDA | |
| PERSIA | | TDA | M | | | TAD | | | | | TMDA | |
| ALEXANDER | | | A | | | | A | | | | TMDA | |
| GREEK KINGS | | | TD | MA | | | TD | MA | | | TMDA | |
| ANTIOCHUS IV | | | | | | | | | MA | | TMDA | |
| ROME | | | | TD | | | | | TD | | | |
| ANTI-CHRIST | | | | D | | | | | (T)D | | D | |

T = TRADITIONAL VIEW M = MACCABAEAN VIEW

A = ALEXANDER VIEW D = DISPENSATIONAL VIEW

*Adapted from A. R. Millard, "Daniel," *International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 850.

rule by having the colossus' feet made of a mixture of clay and iron (cf. 2:41-43), but the end comes with the smashing of the image by the Rock from the mountain. Like a blow-up map in your morning newspaper, chapter 7 zeroes in on the final period, declaring the end of the final kingdom (little horn) and focusing on those who triumph. Chapter 8 functions like another blow-up map, zeroing in on the little horn and his overweening pride (8:20-25). The picture is completed with incredible detail in chapter 11, Daniel's vision of the historical events at the end of the era of human rule. The consistent message of all these dreams and visions is that history is not cyclical but moving forward to a climactic moment in time.⁶³

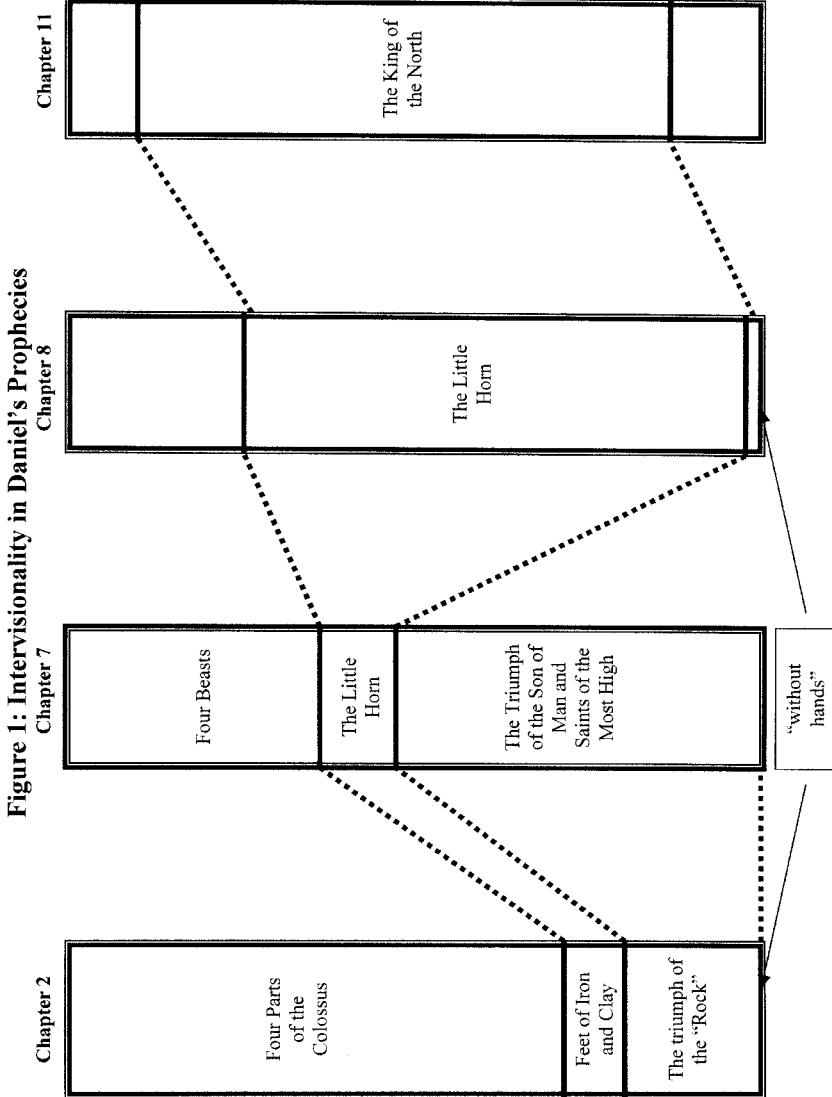
From an earthly perspective, the kingdoms may appear to be progressing, especially with respect to the power that human monarchs exercise. However, from the heavenly perspective, they actually degenerate, climaxing in the arrogance of the little horn, who dares to challenge the authority of heaven itself (7:20-25; 8:23-25; 11:36-39). However, just when he appears to triumph, the Rock will crash down on the image, the kingdom will be delivered to the Son of Man and the saints, and the righteous will be vindicated. As Daniel sees it, human history is moving forward to that climactic day when the kingdoms of this world will be turned over to the kingdom of God and of his Messiah. This will represent the climax of history.

What does the book of Daniel teach about the Messiah?

Some scholars, even those who find ample evidence of an anticipated Messiah in other apocalyptic writings from the Maccabean period, say Daniel teaches nothing about the Messiah. With respect to this book, J. C. VanderKam concludes, "Thus the viewpoint expressed in all the apocalyptic visions in the second half of the book of Daniel is that there is no messianic king or the like at the last times. The only leader of God's people in those tumultuous and fateful days is an angel through whom God himself works."⁶⁴ Need we be so pessimistic, though? If we must, then the frequent appeals in the New Testament to the book of Daniel to account for the mission and ministry of Jesus simply provide further illustrations of a fertile apocalyptic imagination and have no basis in the text of Daniel itself. However, those who recognize a messianic hope in the book may appeal to a long history of messianic interpretation of three key texts in the book.

⁶³ See Figure 1: Intervisuality in Daniel's Prophecies.

⁶⁴ J. C. VanderKam, "Messianism and Apocalypticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. J. Collins (New York: Continuum, 1998), 202. Collins statement (*Apocalyptic Imagination*, 103) with reference to the "rock" in chapter 2, "... there is no clear reference to the messiah elsewhere in Daniel," is remarkable, given his readiness to find allusions to the Messiah in other apocalyptic literature, which actually derives from the time when he would date Daniel.



The Rock in Daniel 2

The reference to the rock in Daniel 2 is admittedly vague, and may simply allude to the reign of God in general,⁶⁵ or the kingdom of Jewish people in particular. However, it is certainly capable of a more specific anticipation of a Messianic figure, especially in the face of what is to come in chapters 7 and 9.⁶⁶ Jesus seems to have interpreted the rock messianically. Following his parable of the vineyard and the tenants who impiously killed the son of the owner (Luke 20:9-18), he identified himself with the son and his audience with the wicked tenants. In a surprise move, Jesus referred first to the stone that the builders rejected in Psalm 118:22, and then, with a clear allusion to Daniel 2:35 and 45, he added, “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”⁶⁷ This interpretation is not so farfetched if one recalls another event when a rock struck down a colossal figure, *viz.* David’s defeat of Goliath (1 Sam. 17:41-51).⁶⁸ The cosmic significance of this event is suggested by David’s taunt of the Philistine:

You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of Yahweh of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day Yahweh will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, *that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel*, and that all this assembly may know that Yahweh saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is Yahweh’s, and he will give you into our hand.⁶⁹

Just as the colossal Philistine was defeated by David as a representative of the kingdom of Israel, so this Rock represents the kingdom of God in demolishing the colossus of human kingship.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Thus Goldingay, *Daniel*, 61.

⁶⁶ So also T. Longman, III, *Daniel*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 92-93.

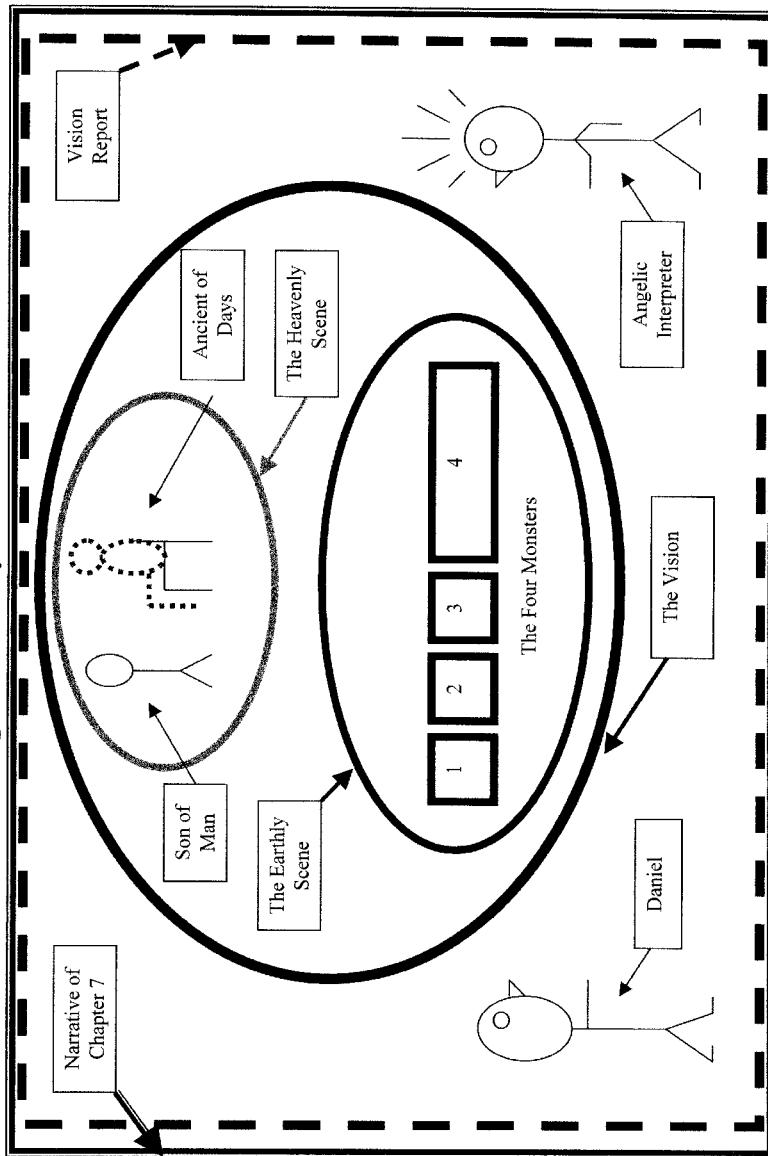
⁶⁷ The messianic interpretation of the rock is also attested in rabbinic writings. See T. L. Ginsburg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1910-1938), 6:425, n. 80.

⁶⁸ Similarly S. G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 214.

⁶⁹ This is one of only five events recounted in Old Testament narratives explicitly declared to have this kind of cosmic significance. Cf. the Exodus (Ex. 7:5; 14:4, 18); the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 4:21-24), the construction of the temple (1 Kings 8:43, 60), and Hezekiah’s victory over the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:19). For discussion see Daniel I. Block, “God,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming).

⁷⁰ The expression, “cut out without hands” suggests a supernatural figure.

A Graphic Portrayal of Daniel 7



The Son of Man in Daniel 7⁷¹

The dream/vision of the Ancient of Days' presentation of eternal dominion, glory, and a kingdom into the hands of a humanlike figure (*kēbar ʼenāš*, “one like a son of man,” 7:13-14) and the triumph of the saints of the Most High (7:27) functions as a commentary on the image of the Rock in chapter 2. Scholars are not agreed on the identity of the son of man. Because the interpreter of the vision explicitly declares that the *kingdom will be given to “the people of the saints of the Most High”* (*‘am qaddîšē ‘elyōnîn*, v. 27), critical scholars tend to interpret the humanlike figure either as a symbolic abstraction for the people,⁷² or as a reference to an angelic figure, perhaps Michael.⁷³ The description of this figure coming with the clouds of heaven seems to point to a divine figure.⁷⁴ However, the quasititular comparison with human beings suggests otherwise. Perhaps the answer lies in the association of this person with the four creatures that have preceded him. Far from demonstrating the glory and majesty of the God they represent (Gen. 1:26-28; Psalm 8), when human beings are driven by arrogance and ambition to be like God, they are viewed by God as monstrous representatives of the animal world.

By contrast, the one “like a son of man,” exhibits the glory with which the race was originally endowed. As a true son of Adam, this person is both dependent upon God and a glorious representative of him.⁷⁵ As a divine being, he comes with the clouds of heaven (v. 13), he is designated *‘elyōnîn* (vv. 18, 22, 25, 27), and he is granted an eternal and universal reign (v. 27).

The expression *‘elyōnîn* is striking on two counts. First, the form *‘elyōnîn* may be analyzed as a Hebrew noun *‘elyōn*, “exalted one,” to which has been attached the normal Aramaic plural ending, *-în*. Although referring to an individual, the plural form should be understood as a plural of majesty or honorific plural. When associated with the saints (*qaddîšîn*), the preference for this form seems to be intentional, perhaps to distinguish this person from *‘illāyā*, “Most High,” that is Yahweh. Second, the epithet *‘elyōnîn* departs from *‘illāyā*, used elsewhere of “the Most High,” in the Aramaic parts of the book.⁷⁶ This figure is apparently not to be equated either with the saints in some corporate personality sense,

⁷¹ See Figure 2 for a graphic portrayal of the form and substance of Daniel 7.

⁷² C. K. Barrett, “The Background of Mark 10:45,” in *New Testament Essays*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 17.

⁷³ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 103-4; idem, *Daniel*, 304-10; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 172.

⁷⁴ See the discussion in Collins, *Daniel*, 289-91.

⁷⁵ Cf. the discussion of the notion of “imageness” and “likeness” in Gen. 1:26-28 based on the use of cognate expressions in the Tell Fakhariyah inscription by W. R. Garr, “Image’ and ‘Likeness’ in the Inscription from Tell Fakhariyah,” *IEJ* 50/3-4 (2000): 227-34.

⁷⁶ Cf. 3:26, 32; 5:18, 21; 4:14, 21, 22, 29, 31.

since the latter belong to the former,⁷⁷ or with the high God himself. Rather, just as a king may be distinct from and represent his subjects at the same time, so this person is distinct from and representative of the saints at the same time. In so doing, he bears both human and divine characteristics and may be understood as the embodiment of the Rock in chapter 2.

The Anointed One in Daniel 9

The final text to be considered in this context, Daniel 9:25-26, poses special hermeneutical difficulties. Most modern scholars identify “an anointed ruler/anointed one” in Daniel 9:25-26 as Onias III, the high priest, whose murder in 171 B.C. is reported in 2 Maccabees 4:23-28.⁷⁸ However, this interpretation is unlikely for at least four reasons. First, it depends upon dating the composition of the book in the second century B.C., the arguments for which we find unconvincing. Second, while the anarthrous form *māšiāh* in both verse 25 and verse 26 creates a certain ambiguity, the association of a person’s arrival with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and of the term itself with *nāgīd* in verse 26 points most naturally to a Davidic figure.⁷⁹ Third, although *nāgīd*, “leader, ruler,” is used elsewhere of cultic officials,⁸⁰ *nāgīd* and *māšiāh* are conjoined elsewhere only with reference to an anointed king (1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1; 1 Chron. 29:22). Fourth, despite a common misperception, the Old Testament consistently distinguishes the Aaronic/Zadokite priesthood from Davidic royalty. Indeed the Old Testament never views the Israelite priesthood messianically. In view of these considerations, John Oswalt is correct in his assessment that this is the only unambiguous reference to the Messiah, the eschatological Anointed One, in the entire Old Testament.⁸¹

The last Davidide had been removed from the throne of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. However, based on Yahweh’s eternal and irrevocable promises to David, the faithful in Israel continued to look to a future restoration of the dynasty.

⁷⁷ Cf. the expression [‘am] *qaddišē ‘elyōnîn*, “[people] of the saints of Elyōnîn,” in vv. 18, 22, 25, 27. For a more detailed defense of this interpretation see P. Gentry, “The Son of Man in Daniel 7,” 72-74.

⁷⁸ See John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 355; John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 262; Rex Mason, “The Messiah in the Postexilic Old Testament Literature,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 27 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 358.

⁷⁹ So also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S. J., *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 80.

⁸⁰ E.g., Pashur the priest, in Jer 20:1, but especially in postexilic writings: 1 Chron. 9:11,20; 2 Chron. 31:12,13; Neh. 11:11. The plural occurs in 2 Chron. 35:8.

⁸¹ J. Oswalt, “מָשִׁיחַ,” NIDOTTE 2,1126. For additional defenses of the traditional interpretation see W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 204; J. Doukhan, “The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9,” AUSS 17 (1979): 1-22.

Gabriel's message to Daniel envisions him returning in a time of great stress and with great personal tragedy: he will be cut off. By whom and for what end the text does not say, but it locates the moment within the climactic context of the fulfillment of six salvation-historical goals (v. 24):

- (1) to end the rebellion (*lēkallē' h̄appw̄ša'*)
- (2) to do away with sin (*lēhātēm h̄attā' t*, *Qere*);
- (3) to make atonement for iniquity (*lēkappēr 'āwōn*);
- (4) to bring in everlasting righteousness (*lēhābī' šepeq 'olāmīm*);
- (5) to seal the prophetic vision (*lahtōm h̄azōn wēnābī'*);
- (6) to anoint what/who is most holy (*limšōah. qōdeš qodāšīm*).

It is evident from the first clause of verse 24 that the event of which Gabriel speaks is deemed the climactic moment in Israel's history: "A period of seventy sevens [of years] has been decreed for Daniel's people and for the holy city" *šābu ̄im sib ̄im nehtak 'al 'ammēkā 'ir qodšekā*. In apocalyptic literature, expressions such as "seventy weeks" should not be interpreted as precise chronological markers by which a future event can be dated, but as chronographic affirmations of the course of events within a divinely prescribed time frame.⁸² The figure obviously builds on the number Daniel found in the prophecy of Jeremiah that he was reading, that is, the seventy years that had been prescribed for the duration of the exile (v. 2).⁸³ However, it should also be linked to the Chronicler's rationale for the duration of the exile as declared in 2 Chronicles 36:21: "until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years." The Chronicler sees in this moment the fulfillment of the word of Jeremiah, even though Jeremiah had made no reference to the sabbatical years. The ultimate source for the notion derives from the ancient covenant curses: "Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it" (Lev. 26:34-35).

Gabriel's statement has profound implications for Daniel's theology of history. Assuming the extent to which Israel observed the Sabbatical years served as a barometer of the people's disposition toward their covenant Suzerain (Leviticus 25), the time Yahweh will take to solve the problem that necessitated the exile in the first place will correspond perfectly to the period during which

⁸² So also E. C. Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 245-48.

⁸³ The prophecy in question is preserved in Jer. 29:1-14, according to which the Babylonian exile would last seventy years. The tradition of a seventy-year exile for a deity is attested in the Neo-Assyrian annals as well. According to the annals of Esarhaddon, Marduk determined to be absent from Babylon for seventy years, but in a sentimental moment of homesickness he reversed the ciphers to create the number "eleven" years. For discussion, see Block, *Gods of the Nations*, 128; *idem*, "Divine Abandonment," 28-29.

the Israelites had rebelled against Yahweh. The formula may be portrayed graphically as follows:

| Seventy Weeks of Years | Seventy Years of | Seventy Weeks of Years |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Chronographic Portrayal of the Causes of Israel's Exile (490 years) | Seventy Years of Israel's Exile | Chronographic Portrayal of the Solution to Israel's Exile (490 years) |

It is as impossible to determine the precise *terminus ad quem* for the seventy weeks of years announced by Gabriel as it is to establish the precise *terminus a quo* for the seventy weeks of years of Israel's rebellion that had precipitated the present crisis.⁸⁴ At issue is the solution to the problem that caused the exile in the first place: the end of rebellion, sin, and perversion. In Daniel 9, the appearance of the Messiah is associated with that event.

According to verses 25-27, the seventy weeks of years are divided into three parts: seven weeks of years (which refers generally to the postexilic period when Jerusalem was rebuilt, v. 25), sixty-two weeks of years (about which nothing is said), and the climactic seventieth week (when Jerusalem will be destroyed once more, v. 27b). Despite the textual problems raised by these verses, the focus of attention in this seventieth week of years is on an Anointed One, who is "cut off, but not for himself."⁸⁵ Ironically, within the very week that the root problem of Israel's exile (sin) is solved through the death of the Messiah, the city of Jerusalem is destroyed.⁸⁶

Although the Messiah is not mentioned in subsequent chapters of Daniel, like the earlier visions and dreams, the last one is concerned with the historical events associated with the end of the seventy weeks. This is especially the case in chapter 11, which recounts in great detail the events associated with the "time of the end."⁸⁷ The numerous links with 9:24-27 suggest that chapter 11 functions as a kind of resumptive exposition of the earlier text, with Daniel's attention being fixed on the historical events that will surround the coming of the Messiah.

We have witnessed this interest earlier in the special interest of the dreams and visions in the feet of the image destroyed by the rock from the mountain

⁸⁴ If one treats the numbers as chronologically precise, then the *terminus a quo* of the period of rebellion should be 1076 B.C., shortly before the establishment of the monarchy (586-490), and the *terminus ad quem* of the period leading up to the solution envisaged by Gabriel is 48 B.C. (538-480), shortly before the actual cutting off of the Messiah.

⁸⁵ The clauses *yîkkârēt māšîah yēn lō* in v. 26 are usually translated "A Messiah will be cut off and have nothing," i.e., die destitute (cf. HALOT, 42, "no successor"). However, following Dempster (*Dominion and Dynasty*, 218), it seems preferable to interpret *yēn* in this context as a Late Hebrew negative particle, equivalent to *lō*, hence, "but not for himself," i.e., vicariously. On the use of *yēn* for simple negation see HALOT, 42.

⁸⁶ Assuming that the destruction of v. 27 refers to Titus' destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

⁸⁷ The phrase *‘ēl qēs*, "time of the end," occurs in Dan. 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9. For related expressions see 11:18, 27, and 12:6-7, 13.

(2:40-45), the ten horns and the blasphemous horn from whom the kingdom is taken and given to the saints (7:18-28), and the arrogant little horn (8:9-14, 22-27). The final events envisioned in all these texts correlate with the destruction of the one responsible for the abomination of desolation in 9:27. They also correlate with the events described in even greater detail in chapter 11. Although this chapter makes no reference to the Messiah, the events with which it is most concerned involve an arrogant king who does as he pleases (11:36-39) and who ultimately meets his end without any aid (11:40-45).

Scholars universally acknowledge verses 36-39 to be a prediction of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but they diverge widely in their understanding of vv. 40-45, primarily because it is difficult to reconcile the details of this paragraph with literary accounts of the end of Antiochus.⁸⁸ A long history of interpretation, dating back as far as Jerome, sees a large chronological gap between verses 39 and 40 and a shift in focus from the historical circumstances of Antiochus Epiphanes to an eschatological Antichrist.⁸⁹ The major problem with this approach is that the text provides no hints of such a transition comparable to the signals found in verses 2, 7, and 20-21. Modern critical scholars, who interpret verses 2-39 as pseudoprophecy⁹⁰ (*ex eventu* accounts cast as predictions of future events) understand verses 40-45 as one of the few true predictions in the book, evidenced by the obvious errors in the prediction, which enables the precise dating of the book to 164 B.C. Lucas argues that because the borrowed phrases in this paragraph exhibit greater dependence on earlier prophets than the preceding, the intention is not necessarily to predict exactly how Antiochus will die. Rather, the author's aim is to offer a theological affirmation of Antiochus' certain end by adapting earlier paradigms of the demise of arrogant rulers.⁹¹

However, apart from a greater dependence on earlier prophecies, there is nothing about the literary style of verses 40-45 that would call for a more theological interpretation than applies to verses 36-39. Lucas' interpretation seems forced and raises questions about the veracity and integrity of the author. Despite his objections, a more natural reading would see in the opening expression, *ûbè‘et qēs*, “And at the time of the end,” in verse 40, a signal of a shift in focus from Antiochus Epiphanes (175-64 B.C.), who was notorious for his desecration of the temple, to the last king of the Seleucid line, Antiochus

⁸⁸ Four separate accounts report his death: 1 Macc. 6:1-17; 2 Macc. 1:11-17; 2 Macc. 9:1-29; Polybius, *Histories* 31.9. These accounts diverge in the details, but all agree that Antiochus died in Persia in the aftermath of robbing a temple at Elymais.

⁸⁹ See, for example, G. L. Archer, “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 7:146-49.

⁹⁰ Lucas (*Daniel*, 291, 301) prefers the word *quasi-prophecy*, but *pseudoprophecy* accords better with those interpretations that view Daniel as a pseudopigraph.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 292-93.

Asiaticus (69-64 B.C.).⁹² But *ûbē'ēt qēṣ* applies not only to the end of the Seleucid reign and the commencement of Roman rule, but also to the end of the seventy weeks of years, when the problem of sin would finally be dealt with and the Messiah would be cut off. Daniel's gaze here is not into the ultimate eschatological future (from our perspective), that is, the abomination of desolation of the Antichrist spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14 and associated with his second coming. Rather, here he envisions the events surrounding the first coming of Christ.

All this is to say that, contrary to those who see no anticipation of a Davidic Messiah in the book of Daniel, the book actually views the coming of the Messiah and the events associated with this event as the climactic moment in history. At that time, Yahweh will demonstrate his supremacy over history and the nations, resolve the problem of Israel's sin and exile,⁹³ and establish his kingdom through the Messiah.

Conclusion

We must bring this excursion into the world of Old Testament apocalyptic in general and the book of Daniel in particular to a close. I conclude with a series of basic principles that might guide us as we study the apocalyptic literature for ourselves and as we seek to relay its message to God's people with all the color and the force with which the original readers might have heard it.

First, as is the case with any other type of literature, the study and preaching of the message of apocalyptic literature demands that we begin by trying to understand any specific apocalyptic pericope within the context of the entire composition. This requires examining the flow of the entire book, exploring how motifs and themes are developed elsewhere, and then interpreting the particular text in the light of the broader context, noting especially its contribution to the overarching theme of the book. Authoritative preaching of the message of apocalyptic literature demands that we major on the major themes, and be less concerned about the meaning and significance of fine details. The book of Daniel declares that God has planned all of history, and it will play out according to that plan; in Zechariah 12-14 the emphasis is on the final triumph and vindication of Jerusalem.

⁹² For a correlation of vv. 40-45 with the events surrounding the Roman replacement of the Greek Seleucids see R. M. Gurney, *God in Control: An Exposition of the Prophecies of Daniel* (Worthing: H. E. Walter, 1980), 146-55. This discussion advances his earlier treatment of the subject, "A Note on Daniel 11:40-45," *TSF Bulletin* (spring, 1967): 10-12.

⁹³ Dan. 9:24-27 appears to view the seventy weeks of years as a metaphorical extension of seventy-year exile envisaged by Jeremiah. On the intertestamental understanding of the relationship between the coming of the Messiah and the end of the exile see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 299-329. On the New Testament perspective see C. A. Evans, "Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel," in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel*, ed. C. C. Newman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 77-100. The fact that Daniel and later writers interpreted the exile metaphorically does not mean that the more natural reading of prophetic anticipations of the restoration of Israel are canceled or suspended.

Second, we are advised to adopt a humble stance toward our own interpretations, admitting that we do not understand everything. Even Daniel expressed frustration over the inscrutability of his visions: “And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king’s business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it” (Dan. 8:27).

Third, authoritative preaching of the message of apocalyptic demands that even as we insist on a literal interpretation of Scripture (which means we interpret them as they were intended to be interpreted) this does not mean that everything is interpreted literally. Symbolism is an effective rhetorical device. However, the symbols should be interpreted in the light of the author’s and the original audience’s cultural context. The meaning of apocalyptic may be uncertain to us, but biblical texts were written to make sense to the immediate audience.

Fourth, authoritative preaching of apocalyptic literature demands that we examine how apocalyptic motifs and images are picked up and used in later texts. This assumes an organic and historical progression, say from Daniel to Zechariah to Matthew 24 to Revelation. Sometimes later prophecies indicate fulfillment; in other instances, they use old motifs in new ways. Jesus’ reference to “the abomination of desolation” (Matt. 24:15 and Mark 13:14) offers an excellent illustration. According to our interpretation, Daniel’s prediction of “the abomination of desolation” and the events associated with it occurred at the first coming of Christ. However, this did not prevent Jesus from using the motif metaphorically of the convulsions that would be associated with his second coming.⁹⁴

Fifth, authoritative preaching of the message of apocalyptic texts calls for sensitive attention to the biblical author’s pastoral concern for his immediate audience. Most apocalyptic writings arose in contexts of great spiritual crisis, when God’s people were tempted to despair and wonder who was in control of history or if they would survive the present distress. The intention of apocalyptic is not to chart out God’s plan for the future so future generations may draw up calendars but to assure the present generation that—perhaps contrary to appearance—God is still on the throne (cf. Dan. 7:18,21-22, 27; 8:25; 12:1-4), and that the future is firmly in his hands.

Sixth, as with any other type of literature, the authoritative preaching of the message of apocalyptic texts requires on the one hand, that we draw the applications for the present from the main points—rather than engaging in endless speculation about the spiritual significance of details—and on the other, that preachers make the message their own before they declare them to the people. Those who would dare to speak for God his eternal truth must be scribes in the order of Ezra: “Ezra set his heart to study the Torah of Yahweh, to apply it, and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). May the Lord bless his people with faithful heralds of his glory and grace as revealed through his word.

⁹⁴ Both Matthew and Mark interrupt the report of Jesus’ words with the parenthetical comment, “Let the reader understand.” The comment may signal a special adaptation of an earlier text.