

## Prophetic Interpretation and Daniel

Perhaps the place to begin is here: Did Daniel really exist? Did the stories actually take place? Were the dreams real? Did the prophecies come to pass? Some of these questions are easier than the others.

The Bible says that Daniel was a prophet of God who lived around 600 B.C. I believe it, because I believe in the Bible. But I know that some people do not agree with that sentiment.

I could say that Jesus believed in Daniel the prophet and in his prophecies: The Bible says that is true. That would satisfy some. But not others.

The existence of Daniel has been accepted by Jews, Moslems, and most Christians until fairly recent times. In fact, Daniel was so revered that he was buried in several places, according to tradition. One of those tombs was in Iraq, and was recently blown up by the terrorist group Isis, about the same time they blew up Jonah's tomb.

There is another "tomb" in Iran at Susa. There is an interesting story around this one.

Quoting "Benjamin of Tudela, He "declared that the tomb does not hold Daniel's remains, which were said to have been discovered at Susa about 640 A.D. The remains were supposed to bring good fortune: and bitter quarrels arose because of them between the inhabitants of the two banks of the Choaspes River. All those living on the side on which Daniel's grave was situated were rich and happy, while those on the opposite side were poor and in want; the latter, therefore, wished the bier of Daniel transferred to their side of the river. They finally agreed that the bier should rest alternately one year on each side. This agreement was carried out for many years, until the Persian Shah Sanjar, on visiting the city, stopped the practice, holding that the continual removal of the bier was disrespectful to the prophet. He ordered the bier to be fastened with chains to the bridge, directly in the middle of the structure; and he erected a chapel on the spot for both Jews and non-Jews. The king also forbade fishing in the river within a mile of Daniel's bier."

According to Benjamin, the place is a dangerous one for navigation, since godless persons perish immediately on passing it; and the water under the bier is distinguished by the presence of goldfish.

Another tomb was discovered in Jerusalem in the 1920's by Raymond Weill. This tomb was at the bottom of a stairway cut from rock. Just above the tomb's entrance is carved, "This is the tomb of Daniel the prophet."

To go along with that is the carving that shows a man being thrown into something, and on the other side is a picture of a man climbing out of a round hole. Along the bottom right side are two lions, a large one in the middle, facing away from Daniel, and on the far right of the step a smaller one facing him. Neither seems to be threatening him.

So this tomb seems to be authentic. Whether Daniel traveled back to Jerusalem before he died, or whether they brought his body back for burial is not known.

From the text of Daniel we know that Daniel was in Babylon as late as the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Cyrus (Daniel 10:1). The tomb in Jerusalem is from the early Persian period. So that would fit.

At least 5 other sites claim the burial of Daniel, so he was a well known figure in the near east. Now it is obvious that not all of them could be Daniel's tomb. In spite of the many traditions that put Daniel when and where the Bible says he was, there are those who say Daniel of Nebuchadnezzar's time did not exist.

Now there is a specific reason for doing this. In the 1800s a group of theologians (interesting to call them that because they doubted the existence of God), said that true prophecy could not exist because God does not reach into the affairs of men and act.

When confronted with prophecy that had been fulfilled as the prophets spoke it, they had to come up with an explanation. Since the prophecies were so accurate they had to downplay them some how. They said that prophecy was written after it happened and just "called" prophecy.

In other words, their view that God probably did not exist led to the belief that, since the supernatural did not exist, neither could true predictive prophecy. That was a logical conclusion, since only a God could really tell the future.

So for them, "No God, no real prophets, no prophecy."

At least they were consistent.

By and large they believe that a Jewish writer wrote this around 165 B.C. in the time of Antiochus Epiphanies. They go on to say he looked around him and wrote as if he were living in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., predicting these events.

Now since he did not live in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B. C. he would have made mistakes, but when you examine these "mistakes" in light of the latest scholarship we find that they are not mistakes at all.

Now, as you know, I believe in the Book of Daniel just as it is written, and I take it's proclamations to accurate, including time periods.

Now we will look at 5 of those supposed mistakes and analyze them. And as we go through them, I believe that you will see why I believe Daniel is historically accurate:

The first problem is the date in Daniel 1:1. The critics argue that the date needs to be the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiakim instead of the 3<sup>rd</sup> to coordinate with the date described in Nebuchadnezzar's own records.

However, they do not take into account that Jews did not count the first year of a kings reign. That year was the accession year.

Taking this into account, the dates given by the Bible and Nebuchadnezzar's scribes align just fine.

Second is the topic of Belshazzar as king of Babylon. Before 1861 Belshazzar was known primarily from the Bible. In that year one of the first clay tablets from Babylon was translated, and behold, there was the name Belshazzar.

Twenty years later the Nabonidus chronicles were translated. It told of Belshazzar taking care of governmental affairs in Babylon while his father, Nabonidus was in Temna, Arabia. It describes how Nabonidus "entrusted his kingship" to Belshazzar in charge of his affairs in Babylon. Other tablets have been discovered that fill out many more of the details of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. most interestingly.

After these discoveries one of Daniel's history wrote, "Presumably we shall never know how the author of Daniel know of these events."

Well, I think I know.

It is not hard to figure out if Daniel were watching and recording things as they happened.

There is another detail that is strong evidence for Daniel as written: On the night king Belshazzar was killed, Nabonidus was not there. This was something that would be known to an eyewitness. A writer in the second century, with his available sources would not have known this.

So, Nabonidus, who was the king and Belshazzar's father, was not mentioned because he was not there at that banquet.

Next is the connections between the Medes and Persians. Since Daniel mentions Dairus the Mede, critical scholars have said that there was a separate Median kingdom after Babylon fell.

Using that logic, those who do not see Daniel as what it claims to be, use the kingdom sequence as Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. This is convenient for them as it makes it look better to use Antiochus Epiphanies as the little horn power. They say that is what a 2<sup>nd</sup> century author would write.

In answer to that objection, there *was* a separate Median kingdom, but that was 200-300 years before Babylon fell.

However, a careful reading of Daniel does away with this easily. Daniel speaks of the Medes AND Persians in Daniel 8.

In Daniel 6 it speaks of the laws of the Medes AND Persians which cannot be repealed.

So there is no basis for dividing the Medes and Persians.

Next some question the existence of Dairus the Mede. Frankly, it is not clear who he was. We do know that there was a co-ruler during the first year of Persian control of Babylon. We also know that Cyrus did not take the title of King of Babylon.

It is quite likely that Darius the Mede was a throne name. This happened several times among the Israelite kings, so it was not an unknown occurrence. In the last century when the Shah of Iran took the throne, he took a throne name along with his others.

Then, some say that the Aramaic in Daniel is more like the 2<sup>nd</sup> century than the 6<sup>th</sup>. As more ancient Aramaic documents have been discovered this theory has been discounted. I will not bore you with the details.

So I believe that there is external evidence to support my belief that the Book of Daniel is exactly what it claims to be.

There were some other factors that were in play, but we will see more of them when we look at the prophetic interpretation used by the reformation and its consequences.

Now I want to shift gears somewhat and talk of Biblical prophetic interpretation in general.

There are basically 3 views of prophetic interpretation in the Bible.

And the question to be asked is, "Just how do we carry out the interpretation of Biblical prophecy.

To do that we need to recognize that there are several types of prophecy in the Bible.

First, is just straight out **prediction or classical prophecy**. "In X many days Y is going to happen." Elijah's prophecy that Israel would be in drought for 3 ½ is such a prophecy. Pretty straightforward. But the 3 ½ has some interesting parallels in the Bible. We will see that as we go along.

Then we have **symbolic prophecy**.

This can be spoken or acted out. Ezekiel was instructed to lie on his side for a period of time to represent the number of years that would be involved with that prophecy.

The most catching prophecy is **apocalyptic** prophecy, which is a type of symbolic prophecy. This is most easily noted in Revelation, but also in Daniel chapters 2,7, and 8.

This kind of prophecy has some special characteristics. It too uses symbolism. But often it is bizarre. The figures are larger than life. They obviously do not exist in nature as we know it. Multi-headed beasts, winged mammals, creatures crawling out of the sea, and a mixed up metal man.

Much prophecy uses symbols, but apocalyptic prophecy uses them much more than the rest. Winds, waters, women, beasts, and earth figure prominently in apocalyptic prophecy.

Symbols may be confusing at first but as you search the Bible, you will find that almost all symbols are explained clearly.

**There is a handout tonight on symbols that you may want to look over before we get to Daniel 2 and 7.**

In Daniel 2,7, and 8, you have symbolism, but also, in each there is explanation. The explanation is always literal. After Daniel 8, there are no apocalyptic symbols, just interpretation and explanation.

Having said that, in the symbolic parts there is sometimes a literal portion. In Daniel 7, the court scene, though it cannot fully be described, is a literal vision into heaven.

Now there is another factor in dealing with Bible prophecy. There are 3 basic paradigms when interpreting prophecy. I will mention them briefly. One was pretty much standard prophetic interpretation until the reformation came along. We will develop that more when we look at Daniel and the Reformation.

The first is *preterism*. Notice the prefix, "pre", or "preter" meaning before. This is the school of thought in most ivy league theology departments, such as Harvard and Yale. As taught now, the tendency among this thought group is to deny the miraculous and divine in the Bible and explain it as human methods, or just deny it as fables.

This group looking at the story of Jesus feeding the 5 thousand as just a slight of hand, or exaggeration. Which makes no difference, as many of them would deny that Jesus was the Son of God, and some would say that he never even existed.

This group teaches that Daniel was written in the second century about events occurring at that time, and the little horn / Antichrist was a power during that time. We will deal with this more later when we study Daniel 7 next Saturday night.

This view essentially puts all of Daniel in the past. Pre-vious. Finished. Done.

The next group would *futurism*. Now from the name futurism, what would you expect?

Speaking of the book of Daniel, futurists say that some of Daniel's prophecies were in the past but there is a lot yet to come, in the future. This is particularly true when dealing with Daniel 8 and 9. This view puts the antichrist in the future, just before the coming of Jesus.

There are many variations of this theme, and most evangelical Christians take this view to some extent. Needless to say, because of the many interpretations of those who believe this way, there are dozens if not hundreds of different variations of futurism.

I want to quickly introduce you to the gentlemen who developed these theories. We will learn more about them as we go along.

Ribera was the one who developed the preterist doctrine.

Alcazar was the one who developed this doctrine. Note the S.J. initials after the names of each.

We will spend some time studying the where and why of these interpretations on another night. I will say that they originated in a deliberate attempt to overthrow the next type of interpretation.

The third major group of Biblical interpretations would describe themselves as **historicists**, which comes from the word history.

This view teaches that the major time prophecies are linear. For instance, Daniel 2 begins in the time of Nebuchadnezzar and moves in a continuous line to the time Jesus sets up his eternal kingdom.

Likewise in Daniel 7, 8, and 11.

That is the method of interpretation that I believe in. That is the method of interpretation that the early Christians used. That is the method that the great leaders in the Reformation used. And that is the method that most Protestants used until the last 150 years or so.

The real questions in all of this are "Does God exist and he interact with human beings? Has he done it historically, and does he do it today?"

Does God know what he is doing? Does he know the future?

There is much more in Daniel than just stories and prophecy. Daniel presents a world view that there is a God in Heaven. This God is real, He is powerful, He knows all things, past, present, and future. And he cares about his people.

He permitted the destruction of Jerusalem because his people rejected them, but he protects the faithful ones in captivity.

Just as he intervened in the affairs of nations, he intervenes for those who are faithful to him.

He cares for the pagan kings, too. When they respond to him, he honors them.

This view of God is not compatible with modern philosophical thought. Humanism has left very little room for God, and mankind is the worse off because of that.

But God has left us footprints in the prophecies that can guide us to him and his plans for us.

No wonder this world wants to destroy prophecy. Put it in the past, put it off, deny it, or whatever. We "get rid" of God that way.

Only it is not so easy. Truth comes out for those willing to look for it.

Our Gospel text for this session is:

**2 Peter 1:19 (KJV)**

<sup>19</sup> We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

The light and understanding are available. Are you interested?