

Bible Study Lecture Notes: Week XVII (9/23/26)

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Overview of the Prophet Daniel

Excerpt from *The Book of Daniel*, by Antonio Fuentes:

In both the Greek version of the Septuagint and the Vulgate, the book of Daniel is mentioned as the fourth of the major prophets, after Ezekiel. The Hebrew includes it among the Ketubim (Writings), between Ezra and Esther, but only its protocanonical part (chap. 1-12). Probably prior to the first century B.C. it was located among the Nebiim (Prophets), which is the source the Septuagint would have used.

Everything we know about Daniel (= God is my judge) comes from the book that bears his name. He belonged to the royal family of Zedekiah and was taken, by order of Nebuchadnezzar, in captivity along with other Jewish children, to Babylon in 605 B.C. Like certain other young men, he was later chosen by the king to be brought up and educated at court, where he was given the name of Belteshazzar.

God endowed him with special wisdom which soon led him to enjoy the king's favor; he was so successful in interpreting the king's dreams that he was appointed ruler of the province of Babylon. King Darius wanted to make him prime minister (6:4), but the envy of his other ministers frustrated this plan; they plotted his death, but God saved him in a miraculous way (6:23).

As regards the language of the book, chapters 1-2:4a and 8-12 were written in Hebrew and 2:4b to 7:28 in Aramaic. Some scholars think that the original text was written in Hebrew and that the Aramaic parts were the result of later changes made to fill in for damaged or lost portions. Others think that the original text must have been written in Aramaic but that it was later

translated into Hebrew in order to get it into the canon. In any event, there is no doubt about the canonicity of the “interpreted” passages or about that of the deuterocanonical parts. All this is guaranteed by Jewish Alexandrine tradition and by Christian.

The aim of the book is to show that the God of Israel, the one true God, is greater than the pagan gods. This is proved by Daniel’s personal experiences and by the prophecy, which runs through the book, of the establishment of the kingdom of God, a universal, eternal kingdom, a kingdom of peace and justice for all who prove faithful to him.

Daniel recognizes that human wisdom can never penetrate the mystery communicated to the king in his dreams. It can be explained only by the God of Israel, the lord of heaven and earth. The mystery has to do with the future messianic kingdom, the kingdom of heaven which the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will inaugurate through his incarnation.

There are two quite distinguishable parts in the book: In the first (1-6) Daniel tells of his personal experiences at the royal court, to show that the God of Israel is almighty and is the only God that lives. To do this he interprets the king’s dreams, with the help of a special revelation from God. In his vision of the image or statue (chap. 2) he predicts the four successive kingdoms which will precede the coming of the Messiah.

These four are: the Babylonian kingdom (gold), that of the Medes and the Persians (silver), the Greek (bronze), and that of iron (the Ptolemy kingdom). The main meaning of all this is that the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 4:17) will oppose the various pagan kingdoms, which are the personification of the kingdom of Satan. This kingdom of God, which is the Church, is, Augustine thinks, symbolized by the stone “which was cut out by no human hand... and smote the image” (2:34-35). Beginning in a small, insignificant way, the Church will spread all over the world, thanks to the power of God who sustains it. This, in summary, is the content of Daniel’s interpretation.

The king is so amazed by Daniel's great wisdom, which far exceeds that of all his wise men, that he recognizes the power and justice of Daniel's God. The cryptic words (Mine, Tekel, Parsin: Dan. 5:25) which a mysterious hand writes on the wall are also interpreted by the prophet, and immediately his prediction comes true: Babylon falls to the Persians.

This first part of the book ends with an amazing episode which can only be explained as a special intervention by God: Daniel is saved from a lions' den, without a scratch, just as his three companions were saved from the fiery furnace where they had been put for refusing to worship the golden image.

The second part (chap. 7-12) relates four prophetic, apocalyptic visions which Daniel received. In the first vision (chap. 7), in the first year of King Belshazzar's reign, Daniel sees four great beasts coming out of the sea. They represent four successive kingdoms, from the last of which a king will emerge who will try to exterminate the people of God, but he will be destroyed, and "the people of the saints of the Most High" will be given "an everlasting kingdom" (7:27).

The second vision (chap. 8), in the third year of Belshazzar's reign, symbolizes the downfall of the empire of the Medes and the Persians, the arrival of the empire of Alexander the Great, and the sacrilegious arrogance of its successor, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who will attack the people of God and profane and destroy the Temple.

In the third vision (chap. 9), in the first year of Darius the Mede, while Daniel is meditating on the prophecy of Jeremiah about the seventy years which Israel will spend in exile in Babylonia, the Angel Gabriel reveals to him that the full restoration will come about after seventy weeks of years (490 years), with the coming of the kingdom of God. The opening date of this prophecy is the prophecy of Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 25:12; 29:12) about the return of Israel from exile in Babylon. The end date is the persecution by and death of Antiochus IV Epiphanus. At the end of the seventy weeks, sacrifice and offering will cease until the decreed destruction of the destroyer. Then there will be an end to sin and the kingdom of the Messiah will come.

The fourth vision (chap. 10-12), in the third year of Cyrus, is a revelation of the course of events involving the rulers of the people of God up to Antiochus IV, whose conquests and last persecution are described very vividly. In spite of this, the people must keep hoping, because the hour of their deliverance is at hand, the predicted messianic era. Is Daniel in chapter 12 referring to the resurrection of all men prior to the Last Judgment? Some commentators think that this text does refer to the resurrection, which Isaiah had already spoken of (cf. Is 26:19). However, it is more likely that the passage refers to the time the departed will spend in Hades (sheol), after which the blessed will go to heaven and the unjust will be condemned, which will take place much later, when Jesus Christ after his Resurrection visits those in "hell," in the bosom of Abraham.

The book closes with an appendix (chap. 13-14) containing the stories of Susanna and of Bel and the Dragon, both of which have a happy outcome thanks to Daniel's prudence and sagacity.

The entire book derives from one main teaching: The God of Israel, the one true, all-knowing, and almighty God, the sovereign Master of human affairs, is the King of kings and the Lord of heaven and earth, who in his infinite wisdom and power governs the course of human history, saving those who are faithful to him and overthrowing kings who try to frustrate his plans. Any resistance offered him ends in war and destruction, whereas obedience and faithfulness to his laws will always, despite any obstacles that may arise, lead to victory and eventual peace.

Without it in any way taking from his transcendence, Daniel teaches, God governs the world and lovingly cares for his creatures. To do this he makes use of angels, whose mission is to protect men. Should God on occasion allow the just man to be persecuted, it is only to test his faithfulness and reward him for his good works. Daniel is distressed to see Israelites suffering in exile, but his sadness is mitigated not so much by the memory of past glory but by the hope of a much more secure future.

“This messianic teaching differs noticeably from that of the other prophets in that it is almost totally wrapped up in the eschatological side of the kingdom of God. Before the coming of the Messiah all hostile powers and particularly the great persecutor of the people of God (Antiochus IV) will be destroyed. The messianic kingdom, imperceptible at first, will in time spread all over the world. It will be a spiritual kingdom based on peace and justice and acknowledgment of the one true God. The messianic king will not conquer the world by the sword; he will be the ‘Son of man’ and will receive royal authority from the hands of God himself, who is the only who has the right to give it to whomever he chooses” (P. P. Saydon, Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture [London, 1953], sec. 503f.).

The prophecy of Daniel marks the culmination of God’s intervention in history prior to that time. Now new horizons are opened up, a future history is predicted in which the kingdom of God (the Church) will spread, during its earthly phase, to all peoples and become in effect the stage prior to the final, definitive, heavenly stage, which will last forever. That is the scenario for the book’s teaching on the resurrection of the dead, when the just receive their reward and the reprobate their punishment—a doctrinal advance compared with what had been revealed in the earlier prophets.

Prophetic Place and Time of the Coming Kingdom

Excerpt from *How Daniel Predicted the Timing of Our Salvation*, by JP Nunez:

The First Vision

Early on in the book, the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, has a strange dream that only Daniel is able to interpret (Daniel 2:31-35). The king dreams about an image with four parts: 1) a head of gold, 2) a chest and arms of silver, 3) a belly and thighs of bronze, and 4) legs of iron with feet made partly from iron and partly from clay. Next, he sees a stone hit the image, shatter it to pieces, and then grow to encompass the entire world.

Daniel explains that this dream foretells a succession of kingdoms that will rule the known world. Each part of the image is a human kingdom, and the stone at the end is the kingdom of God, which will last forever (Daniel 2:36-45). Daniel also tells Nebuchadnezzar that his own kingdom, Babylon, is the first one (Daniel 2:37-38), but he doesn't say what the other three human kingdoms are.

However, if we know our history, we can figure that out by ourselves. After Babylon, the next major empire that ruled the Middle East was Medo-Persia, and then came Greece, and after that came Rome. So according to this prophetic book, God's kingdom was supposed to come when the known world was ruled by the Roman Empire.

But there is a problem here. Most modern scholars believe Daniel was written during the reign of the Greeks, so they split Medo-Persia in two and say that Media and Persia were the second and third kingdoms. That way, they can make Greece the final kingdom and then understand this vision to predict the arrival of God's salvation soon after the book's composition.

So how do we decide between these conflicting interpretations of Nebuchadnezzar's dream? Should we count Media and Persia as two kingdoms or one? As with any difficult passage in Scripture, we have to interpret this one in context, and throughout Daniel, Medo-Persia is always considered a single entity.

So in the context of the entire book, it is clear that Medo-Persia counts as one kingdom. This means that the third kingdom is Greece, and then the fourth is Rome, so we can confidently say that Daniel does in fact foretell the arrival of God's kingdom during the Roman Empire.

The Second Vision

A few chapters later, Daniel himself has a dream, and this one is very similar to the one Nebuchadnezzar had. Daniel dreams about a succession of four beasts, and then he sees God judge them and give rulership of the world over to “one like a son of man” (Daniel 7:1-14). Just like in the first prophecy, these four beasts represent four human kingdoms, and the kingdom ruled by “one like a son of man” is the everlasting kingdom of God and his people (Daniel 7:15-27).

In the very next chapter, Daniel sees a vision of a ram and a goat running into each other (Daniel 8:1-14), and the angel Gabriel tells him what it means. Gabriel explains that the ram represents “the kings of Media and Persia” (Daniel 8:20), and the goat is “the king of Greece” (Daniel 8:21). Interestingly, these two animals have some striking similarities to the second and third beasts from the previous chapter:

- *The second beast is “raised up on one side” (Daniel 7:5), and the ram in this chapter “had two horns; and both horns were high, but one was higher than the other” (Daniel 8:3).*
- *The third beast had “four wings of a bird” (presumably so it could fly) and “four heads” (Daniel 7:6), and the goat in this vision flies and has four horns (Daniel 8:5, 8).*

The ram in this chapter is Medo-Persia, so the second beast in Daniel’s dream must also be Medo-Persia. Likewise, since the goat in this chapter is Greece, the third beast in Daniel’s dream must be Greece as well. This confirms for us that the fourth best really is Rome, and as we saw before, Jesus was born, died, and rose again during the reign of the Roman Empire.

The Son of Man

And in case there is any doubt that the kingdom Jesus preached really is the one Daniel foretold, we can look at one final point of contact between Daniel and the Gospels. Throughout his

ministry, Jesus often referred to himself as “son of man” (for example, Matthew 9:6, Mark 2:28, Luke 9:22, John 3:14), and many modern readers are puzzled by this title.

But if we know Daniel, it makes perfect sense. Remember, in Daniel’s prophetic dream, the kingdom of God is ruled by “one like a son of man,” so when Jesus applied that phrase to himself, he was subtly telling us that he really did come to bring the kingdom prophesied by Daniel. What’s more, there are even some passages where Jesus identifies himself this way and incorporates other elements of Daniel’s dream as well.

Daniel 7:13-14: I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

Mark 13:26: And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

God will deliver the faithful

Daniel 3:25: He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

From Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary: The king, who sat watching the issue of the matter, looked through the door into the furnace, and observed that the three who had been cast into it bound, walked about freed from their bonds and unhurt; and, in truth, he saw not the three only, but also a fourth, "like to a son of the gods," beside them. At this sight he was astonished and terrified. He hastily stood up; and having assured himself by a consultation with his counsellors that three men had indeed been cast bound into the furnace, while he saw four

walking in the midst of it, he approached the mouth of the furnace and cried to the three to come forth. They immediately came out, and were inspected by the assembled officers of state, and found to be wholly uninjured as to their bodies, their clothes being unharmed also, and without even the smell of fire upon them.

Nebuchadnezzar approached the door of the furnace and cried to the three men to come out, addressing them as the servants (worshippers) of the most high God. This address does not go beyond the circle of heathen ideas. He does not call the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego the only true God, but only the most high God, the chief of the gods, just as the Greeks called their Zeus.

It is important to note that God delivers the faithful completely. There is no hint that the three men had been bound and cast into the furnace after they are freed from it. God does not just rescue. He envelopes the faithful like a hen her eggs (Matthew 23:37).

This is similar conceptually to the Spirit of God hovering over “the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2), Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:19-31), and the faithful being as One with the Father and the Son (John 17:21). Salvation is being in a protective womb, hence the reference to the faithful being “born again” (John 3:3). The endpoint is not simply to stay inside this protective womb, but to be born anew to do God’s work while in His likeness and in a future world freed from sin and death (1 John 3:9, Romans 8:1-2, and Revelation 21:4).

Indeed, the three men coming out of the furnace is like coming out of a womb. Remember that hellfire is God’s love as experienced by those who reject Him. With that in mind, and when we remember that an angelic presence (*“the fourth is like the Son of God”*) is in the furnace at that time with them, we can see the furnace fire as God’s love – deadly terror to the unbelievers but salvation to the believers. God protects this kinetic energy with His Angel like how the Spirit of God hovers over “the face of the waters,” so that a new creation may emerge out from the fire womb.

Remember how Creation=Salvation=Revelation. So, here the three men delivered out from the furnace are new creatures like unto God. King Nebuchadnezzar recognizes this godlike aspect to them and how they are favored of “the most high god.” He recognizes this only in a partial way because of his heathen religion, but still a connection has been made between the salvation of the three men in the furnace and them being a new creation. Then, there is revelation: Though in a partial way, King Nebuchadnezzar has come to understand that the salvific power and glory of “the most high god” is on display here. Nebuchadnezzar responds to this revelation by giving much greater protection going forward to the religion of the Jews. At least for the Jews who live in his court and occupy important roles in the Babylonian world, Judaism will be tolerated more so, and this will lead eventually to the Babylonians favoring Jewish remigration to Jerusalem. In other words, Creation=Salvation=Revelation has a *prophetic power*, for the world is changed by the deliverance of the three men from the furnace in a way that sets the stage for the return to Jerusalem and the construction of the Second Temple.