

## WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY THE 1 THESSALONIANS SERIES

### COMMENTARY ON MESSAGE #11

April 15, 2018

This section of commentary will focus on Daniel chapters 7 – 12, which is filled with amazing prophetic material. It is a shame that some Christians choose to bypass this section of the Bible because, like the book of Revelation, its many symbols seem hard to understand. I understand the special challenge that literature like Daniel represents but with a little background knowledge of the Bible, and of world history, Daniel becomes both understandable and motivational. Let's begin with some background.

**BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY:** In Daniels' day (625-535 B.C.) the Babylonian Empire dominated that part of the world. The Babylonians, under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, sought to conquer Judah (Israel) and its capital city of Jerusalem.\* By using the prophet Jeremiah, God had repeatedly warned and told the Jews that He (God) was going to use Babylon as His instrument of corrective discipline and punishment against Judah. Jeremiah's message was rejected and the people refused to repent of their sins or believe that they would be conquered. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians attacked Judah and Jerusalem on three separate occasions. The first time was in 605 B.C. when Daniel was a teen. Daniel was among a group of Judah's finest young men who were captured and exiled to Babylon to be trained to serve Babylon's interests. This is how the book of Daniel begins (chapter 1). Jerusalem was finally destroyed in 587 B.C. Daniel remained faithful to the LORD and after a series of challenging circumstances became someone the Babylonians recognized as having God-given insight. Here are the key prophecies/visions of Daniel:

DANIEL 2: Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing dream in which he saw a statue with 1) a head of gold, 2) chest and arms of silver, 3) belly and thighs of bronze, 4) legs of iron. Nebuchadnezzar knew this dream was a message from "the gods" (he did not yet know Daniel's God). Not only could Daniel tell Nebuchadnezzar what he had dreamed (Nebuchadnezzar had been unwilling to reveal details to his astrologers so they could not invent lies), Daniel gave the interpretation.

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**\*NOTE:** Technically, by Daniel's day "Israel" no longer existed. Shortly after the death of King Solomon, 300 years before Daniel's birth, Israel (the 12 tribes) narrowly averted a full-scale civil war. Still, the nation was permanently divided. The 10 northern tribes retained the name "Israel," but their new capital was Samaria. Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and by Daniel's day was only a memory. Judah was the name of the Southern Kingdom and consisted of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Jerusalem was the capital and to it belonged the legacy of the great King David.

The statue represented 4 kingdoms or empires, 3 of which were still in the future:

- A) The gold head was Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon
- B) The chest and arms of silver were the Medo-Persian Empire
- C) The belly and thighs of bronze were Greece and Alexander the Great
- D) The legs of iron were the Roman Empire

**KEY:** The rock that struck the statue and crushed all the kingdoms was a picture of Jesus Christ establishing His eternal kingdom!

DANIEL 7: Many years later Daniel had a dream he knew was from the Lord. By now Nebuchadnezzar had died and Babylon was ruled by Belshazzar. The dream consisted of four beasts, and they have the same meaning as the statue:

- 1) The lion with the wings of an eagle = Babylon
- 2) The bear = Medo-Persia
- 3) The leopard with wings = Greece
- 4) The terrifying beast with iron teeth = Rome. In Daniel 7:23-25 Daniel foresees the future rise of the anti-Christ from a “renewed” Roman empire.

**NOTE:** Daniel 5-6 covers the fall of the Babylonian empire to the Medo-Persians. Therefore, the dreams of chapters 7-8 occurred before the events recorded in chapters 5-6. The final portion of Daniel (chapters 9–12) happened in the final years of Daniel’s life when the Persians had taken control.

DANIEL 8: Daniel had a vision of a ram with two horns and of a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes. The ram was viciously attacked and overpowered by the goat, but at the peak of the goat’s strength its horn was broken off and replaced by four horns. After seeing this vision, Daniel was visited by the angel Gabriel who gave him the interpretation. This is amazing! In 8:15-22 we learn that the ram represented the Medo-Persian Empire. The two horns represented its two allied powers, the Medes and the Persians. The goat with the great horn represented Greece under Alexander the Great. After his death, Alexander’s power was divided between his four generals = the four horns. This prophecy was given 200 years before Alexander’s rise to power! And yes, after he died his empire was divided between four generals, just as Daniel 8 foretold. Now it gets even more interesting. The four generals who received Alexander’s divided empire became rivals. In the many decades to follow those four “kingdoms” (using the term loosely) fought against each other. Guess who was caught in the middle? The Jews. After Daniel’s death the Persians had acted kindly to the Jews and had allowed those who had been exiled in Babylon to return to what was left of Israel and to rebuild it. Nehemiah, who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, was part of this movement.

To the north and east of Israel (by then it was becoming known as Palestine) was the Seleucid Empire. To the south was the Ptolemaic Empire which controlled Egypt. Remember, this time period began with Alexander's death at the age of 32 in 323 B.C., and so we are talking about the history that occurred BETWEEN the Old and New Testaments. The Seleucids and the Ptolemies were bitter enemies with each seeking to dominate the other, with a rebuilt, but weak, Jerusalem and Israel in between them.

In Daniel 8:13-25 a powerful figure arises from one of the four horns which represented Alexander's divided Empire. As you read these verses it almost seems as though this figure is the Anti-Christ! No, he was not the Anti-Christ, but his name was Antiochus Epiphanes, leader of the Seleucids. Antiochus sought to dominate Israel and to force its culture to become "Hellenized" (that meant to adapt Greek language, Greek thought and Greek culture). Antiochus was brutal, and in 168 B.C. he desecrated the Jerusalem temple placing an image of Zeus in the inner court and by sacrificing a pig on the altar. Imagine Daniel's anguish when he learned of his event which would take place nearly 370 years after his death.

#### **READ THIS!**

The precision with which Daniel predicted the future rise and fall of empire and kings is powerful proof that the Bible, including the book of Daniel, is indeed the very Word of God. Daniel's prophecies were so accurate that they almost seem like a history book looking back in time instead of ahead in time. This is exactly what skeptics claim! They claim that Daniel was written during the Maccabean period in the second century B.C., over three centuries after Daniel's death. Their conclusion is not based on evidence, it is based upon their own bias which is rooted in anti-supernaturalism. And remember why they are so desperate to discredit Daniel. If what the Bible teaches is true and if it is the Word of God, then the skeptics/critics are guilty of rejecting God and will one day be called to give an account to the Judge of the universe.

DANIEL 9: Daniel receives another visit/vision from the angel Gabriel. In Daniel 9:20-27 there is given a divine timetable of the seventy "sevens" or 490 years. The first 69 "sevens" were fulfilled by the time of Jesus' death on the cross (Daniel 9:26). Today, we are living in the era between the 69<sup>th</sup> "seven" and the final seven year period – the Tribulation. During the tribulation the Anti-Christ, who was foreshadowed by Antiochus Epiphanes, will rise to power. Initially viewed by Israel to be an ally (he creates a 7 year covenant guaranteeing Israel's security), the Anti-Christ will desecrate the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem with the real "abomination that causes desolation" and demand that he be worshipped as God. Jesus spoke of these events shortly before being arrested in Matthew 24:1-16 and Paul taught about it in II Thessalonians 2:1-12.

As Christians living in America today, we need to understand that at least some of Paul's teaching to the Thessalonians was drawn from Daniel's prophecies. Paul understood that the Christian life can only be lived properly when we recognize that the Lord Jesus can return at any time and we need to live with this joyous expectation. It is central to WALKING OUT GOD'S WORD EACH DAY.