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Daniel: Historical & Chronological Comments (I)

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This month we begin an extended study of the chronology of the exile and restoration times, from Daniel to Christ. The chronology of the earlier part of the Bible is relative straightforward; that of the period of the kings more difficult to discern; and that of the period of the exile and restoration most problematic. For that reason, a detailed inquiry is necessary. We begin with Daniel. The chronology of Ezra-Nehemiah has already been taken up in these studies (BC 3:2-5, 1991)

In the nature of the case, we shall have to consider the theological purpose of the texts before us, for these play into the chronological and historical information. In particular, the prophecies of future events that God gave to Daniel are given with specific theological intentions, and thus while the focus of our study will be historical and chronological, we must also comment on the meaning of the text of Daniel as we go.

Though we know more about the ancient world now than scholars knew at the time of the Reformation, there is still much more that needs to be known before we **shall have an accurate** picture of the situation of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Empires. As a postmillennialist, I believe that redeemed humanity has a vast future ahead of her before her Husband returns for her, a future measured in thousands of generations (as Exodus 20:6 makes clear). Thus, I expect that 30,000 years from now scholars will be able to do a better job than I shall do in these studies.

I live now, in the late 20th century AD, and you do too. We have to do our best, building on what has gone before, and hopefully setting out insights that future Bible students can build upon, or at least interact with profitably.

It is with such a "light touch" that I enter into these studies in the chronology and history of Daniel. Daniel 7-12 are predictions of events to come in the future, events that are very important to the development of the kingdom of God in her embryonic phase (before Christ), and as such events that we need to consider in our historical/

chronological studies. Virtually all older commentaries are, however, misleading in what they have to say about these chapters. Some of what they say is correct, of course, but much of it is wrong. We may **divide the errorists** into four camps.

1. The Anti-Papal approach. The Reformers, in spite of their greatness, were cultural chauvinists who believed that the history of the human race after the cross **focussed** on Europe, and that Daniel and Revelation were concerned to predict the history of Europe down to their day. Thus, they identified the Papacy as **everything** bad in the **Bible**: the **Little Horn** of Daniel 7, the Abomination of Desolation, the Man of Sin, the Beast, the Great Whore, the Antichrist, etc. Had the Reformers understood Exodus 20:6, that there are thousands of generations ahead for humanity, they might have avoided this kind of subtle, unintentional racism. At any rate, the anti-Papal approach warps most **Calvinistic** and Lutheran commentaries on Daniel down to the 19th century, and some even until our own day. By the way, John Calvin is the great exception **to this approach**. Calvin's approach was **preteristic**, and very sound.

2. The Antichrist Myth approach. Once it was clear that history had moved beyond the Papacy, and that God is interested in more than merely Europe and her troubles, many commentators shifted to a futurist approach to prophecy. They continued to roll all the bad guys in the Bible into one evil personage, this time not the Pope but some "Antichrist" who will appear in the future, just before Christ returns (which is usually thought to be right around the corner). In fact, cultural bigotry has continued to inform most advocates of the futurist approach, in that the **decline** of European civilization is identified as the decline of Christianity and as a sign of the last days. The rest of the world does not count. Events in the Middle East and Europe, like the "Common Market," are identified with Biblical prophecy and accorded status as signs of the

end of the world. That this approach relegates the red, brown, black, and yellow peoples of the world to the status of historical non-entities does not seem to bother this essentially racist approach to predictive prophecy.

At any rate, most recent **Calvinistic** commentaries (such as E. J. Young's, for instance), jump to the "Antichrist" when they get to the Second **Little Horn** of Daniel 7 or the Willful King of Daniel 11 :**36ff**. That this inserts a gap of at least 2000 years into the text does not seem to phase them. Such is the grip of the Antichrist Myth upon 20th century Christians that they are unable to read the text without it. Surely such a fiend as the Second **Little Horn** must be none other than THE Antichrist! How could he be anybody less? Of course, the text does not say that the Second **Little Horn** and the Willful King are the worst people who ever lived, and nothing **requires** that we leap thousands of years to find the fulfillment of these prophecies. The Second Little Horn comes up during the Roman Empire, and the King seems to **be** same as the Second Little Horn. But such is the power of the Antichrist Myth upon the minds of 20th century Christians that it seems weak and inadequate to suggest that these personages were anything **less** than this monster of incarnate evil who is supposed to **appear** at the end of the present age.

In fact, though, Daniel 12 states that the predictions given to Daniel only run down to the coming of Christ, at **which** point the book of prophecy is sealed up, not to be reopened until the seals are broken in Revelation 5-11. Thus, unless our interpretive presumption must be that Daniel's prophecies carry us down to Christ, and do not concern events after that time.

3. The Dispensational approach. Probably most **conservative** commentaries on Daniel, written by devout persons, and authored during the last century have been by dispensationalists. The dispensational approach takes the Antichrist Myth and runs it to **seed**. Everything possible is wrenched from its historical context and tossed into the "end times." This approach has been disproven enough times that it is finally dying away today. We should bury it gently, for many good and godly persons held to it in a time when few stood for the faith.

4. The Skeptical approach. It is safe to say that virtually all scholarly commentaries on Daniel are written from the standpoint of unbelief. These include works by such supposed evangelical as John **Goldingay**, whose 1989 commentary for Word Books gives away the ship at every point. Unbelief **refuses** to accept that Daniel was shown visions by God and wrote down future events in advance. The skeptical viewpoint says that there were no visions, and that Daniel is a work of pious fiction written after the fact. One result of this is that the fourth kingdom, the fourth beast, of Daniel is not identified as the Roman Empire, but with the Greek one of Alexander. This is because the mythical "author of Daniel" lived during the Hellenistic Age, before Rome became a power, was just faking the "prophecies" in the book.

In the past, many devout commentators also held that the fourth empire was that of Alexander, but modern research into the history of the ancient world, bolstered by archaeological discoveries, has shown conclusively that there was no **Median** Empire between the **Neo-Babylonian** and Persian Empires. Moreover, it has become clearer and clearer that Daniel considers the **Medes** and Persians **as** one Empire, not two in succession. Thus the **overwhelming** consensus of opinion among faithful expositors is that the fourth empire is Rome. If you don't **identify** the empires **correctly**, you will be blind to the proper meaning of several key sections of Daniel.

Now, when you remove all the commentaries written from these four erroneous viewpoints, you don't have much left. Of course, many of these commentators (the devout ones anyway) have much of value to say about other aspects of the text. But since our concern is **specifically** with history and chronology, none of these four approaches is of any use to us.

At the same time, I don't have to reinvent the wheel either. There have been a few commentators who have taken a consistent prophetic-historical approach to the text, and I can build upon them. Moreover, new research is settling old problems today, such as the vexing question of who Darius the **Mede** was. Thus, now seems to be a good time to lay out a constructive approach to the history and prophecies of Daniel.

1. Daniel: An Overview

Daniel was brought to Babylon from the Kingdom of Judah in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar. He was probably about 20 years of age, because in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar he was made "ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief of the prefects over all the wise men of Babylon" (Dan. 2:48). It is hard to imagine this happening to anyone younger than 20. Daniel was still alive 68 years later when Cyrus captured Babylon, and his last vision came in the third year of Cyrus. He would have been about 90 at that time.

Daniel is a second Joseph. In God's providence, Joseph went to Egypt, endured slavery, converted Pharaoh, wound up ruling Egypt, and in this way prepared a place for his brothers. In the same way, Daniel went to Babylon, became second only to Nebuchadnezzar, eventually saw him converted, and helped prepare a **place** for the Jews when they were dragged into the fullness of exile 20 years later.

Eventually there arose a Pharaoh who did not recognize Joseph's work, and did not honor the inhabitants of Goshen. The same thing happens in Daniel. The new bad ruler is **Belshazzar**, and we see from Daniel 5 that he did not know who Daniel was. Naturally, when this man assumed rule in Babylon, Daniel was troubled; so Daniel 7 shows us a vision given to him in the first year of **Belshazzar**, a vision showing that eventually, though through much tribulation, the saints will inherit dominion

over all the world. A follow-up vision in Daniel 8, given in the third year of **Belshazzar**, shows Daniel the defeat of Persia by Alexander, and then the rise and career of Antiochus the Fourth, who would persecute the saints. The point of this vision seems to be that the difficulties Daniel is experiencing with **Belshazzar** will be multiplied, at least from time to time, during the era that is to come.

When Cyrus (Darius the **Mede**) took over Babylon, he said that the Jews **could** go home and rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem. During the first year of Cyrus, apparently before the decree was given, Daniel prayed earnestly for the rebuilding of the Holy City. He was given a message that it would indeed be rebuilt, and that there would be 70 weeks of years until the Messiah built the Temple in the fullest sense (Daniel 9).

Finally, in Daniel 10-12 we come to the last vision. It is now three years into **Cyrus's** reign. Daniel sees the Glory of the Lord over the river **Tigris**. The Glory had departed **Jerusalem** and come to Babylon with the people (Ezekiel 8-1 1), and though the exiles had begun to return, the Glory had not returned. Why? because the people were **being** hindered from rebuilding the Temple by the Prince of Persia (**Cambyses**). Daniel is given a message delineating the future history of the Restoration Era from Alexander the Great, through the division of his kingdom and its aftermath, right down to the Messiah. The Glory would indeed return, in the days of **Zerubbabel** (**Zechariah** 1-6), but in the fullest sense in the days of Jesus Christ.

Daniel 1 & 8-12 are written in Hebrew. Daniel 2-7 are written in **Aramaic**. These **Aramaic** chapters tell 6 stories that are arranged **chiastically** y:

2. Prophecies of the Four World Empires
3. Test of Faith: the **Fiery** Furnace
4. Judgment and Conversion of Nebuchadnezzar
5. Judgment and Death of **Belshazzar**
6. Test of Faith: the Lion's Den
7. Prophecies of the Four World Empires

This structure leads me to suggest that chapter 1 is **chiastically** matched **with chapters 8-12**.--**The** theme of chapter 1 is faithful witnessing. Daniel and his friends could not participate in idolatry and evil, but they were courteous and submissive before those God had put over them. They had been captured and almost certainly made eunuchs. Chapters 8-12 describe troubles and difficulties that will befall God's people, and are a call to faithfulness. Yet, the two sections contrast greatly. When Daniel tried to be faithful, he was allowed to forego the king's food, God openly vindicated him, and the king honored him. The prophetic section, however, shows that as the saints go into the world with faithful witness (symbolized as the fourfold Godly winds of heaven stirring up the great Gentile sea), the result is persecution after persecution! Thus, we are told repeatedly that Daniel is troubled by these revelations. The older principle, that faithfulness leads rapidly to blessing, seems to be left behind for a new

principle, that **faithfulness leads** to tribulation after tribulation. I shall suggest that this is indeed a major contrast between the Former Days and the Latter Days, and that one of the main purposes of Daniel's prophecies is to display why this change must take place for God's kingdom to come on earth.

2. Chronological Difficulties Concerning Nebuchadnezzar's Investitures of Jerusalem (Daniel 1:1-2)

In the third year of the reign of **Jehoiakim** king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it; and Yahweh gave **Jehoiakim** king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of **Shinar**, to the house of his gods, and he brought them into the treasury of his gods.

This statement, that Nebuchadnezzar invested Jerusalem in the 3d year of **Jehoiakim**, has been regarded as problematic because of statements we find elsewhere in the Bible. To get a full picture, let us consider all of these. First, 2 Kings 23:36-24:1:

³⁶**Jehoiakim** was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was **Zebidah** the daughter of **Pedaiah** of **Rumah**. ³⁷And he did evil in Yahweh's sight, according to **all** that his fathers had done. ¹**In** his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and **Jehoiakim** became his servant three years; then he turned and rebelled against him.

2 Chronicles 36:6-7 adds more:

⁶**Jehoiakim** was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem; and he did evil in the sight of Yahweh his God. ⁷**Nebuchadnezzar** king of Babylon came up against him and bound him with bronze to take him to Babylon. ⁷**Nebuchadnezzar** also brought of the articles of Yahweh's house to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon.

Neither of these passages tells us when Nebuchadnezzar came up to Jerusalem this first time. Jeremiah 25:1 adds light on the **subject**:

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the 4th year of **Jehoiakim** the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the 1st year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon).

In the oracle Yahweh says that Nebuchadnezzar is "My servant" (**Jer.** 25:9) and that all the "nations shall serve the king of Babylon 70 years" (v. 11).

So, Jeremiah says that Nebuchadnezzar's **1st** year is **Jehoiakim's** 4th, and predicts that Nebuchadnezzar will conquer Judah and all surrounding nations; while Daniel

1:1 says that Nebuchadnezzar, as king, conquered Jerusalem in the 3d year of **Jehoiakim**. Is there a difficulty here?

Not yet. At this point the problem can easily be resolved. Sometime during the 3d year of **Jehoiakim**, **Nabopolassar** King of Babylon died and his son Nebuchadnezzar became king. This is Nebuchadnezzar's Year 0, for the year is given to **Nabopolassar** as his last. During this year, Nebuchadnezzar invested and took Jerusalem. He brought **Jehoiakim** and some of the golden vessels of the Temple back to Babylon. Equivalent to the golden vessels were some of the nobility of Judah, which they symbolized, **including** Daniel and **his** friends; thus a party of the **Judahite** nobility's youths was also brought to Babylon. Then **Jehoiakim** was sent back to **rule** Judah as Nebuchadnezzar's vassal.

After **Jehoiakim** returned to Jerusalem, Jeremiah was given the prophecy recorded in Jeremiah 25, which was that from now on Nebuchadnezzar was going to rule the world. **Keil** in his commentary goes to great lengths to insist that this prophecy had to come before Nebuchadnezzar's first investiture of Jerusalem, thus creating a conflict with Daniel 1:1. But **Keil** is simply being perverse. The prophecy of Jeremiah 25 says that Nebuchadnezzar is going to rule from now on, and that he will in time utterly destroy Jerusalem. Nothing in the prophecy conflicts with the notion that Nebuchadnezzar had already taken Jerusalem once.

In fact, the prediction in Jeremiah 25:9-11 certainly did not take place until the final **destruction** of **Jerusalem**:

"Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north," says Yahweh, "even to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, even against its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about; and I will put them under the ban and make them a horror and a hissing and an everlasting desolation. "Moreover, I will cause to perish from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹**And** this whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. "

If, however, someone still wants to insist that Jeremiah 25 was prophesied before Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem the **first** time, the matter is still easy to explain. **Daniel** 1:1 simply says that Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in the 3rd year of **Jehoiakim**. Perhaps the siege was not completed until the 4th year of **Jehoiakim**. On the basis of Daniel 1-2, however, we must reject this possibility. (See discussion of Daniel 2 later in this series.)

In 605 **BC** (using our **present** current consensus chronological datings system), Crown Prince Nebuchadnezzar was sent by **his** ailing father **Nabopolassar** to fight the Egyptians, who had three years previous] y invaded Babylonian territory and established themselves at **Carchemish**. In the spring of that year Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians at **Carchemish**, and then pursued them to Egypt. **Thereafter** he conquered Syria and Palestine. He probably took **Jerusalem** at this time, and probably without a fight. Pharaoh Neco had killed King Josiah at Megiddo three years earlier when he was advancing into Babylonian territory. Pharaoh had put **Jehoiakim** on the throne. Now that Pharaoh had been defeated, **Jehoiakim** could see the handwriting on the wall, and submitted to Nebuchadnezzar (see 2 **Ki.** 23:29-37).

Then, on August 15, 605 **BC**, **Nabopolassar** King of Babylon died. Nebuchadnezzar immediately dropped everything and rushed to Babylon to take control before anarchy and conspiracy could get a foothold. He ascended the throne on September 7. This was still in the 3rd year of **Jehoiakim**.

The 4th year of **Jehoiakim** began in the fall, and thus shortly after Nebuchadnezzar became King of Babylon. After becoming king, Nebuchadnezzar quickly returned to Palestine and Syria and completed his conquests. He returned to Babylon with much spoil in late February of 604 **BC**. The Babylonians counted their kings' **regnal** years from spring to spring, not from fall to **fall**; and Nebuchadnezzar shook hands with the statues of the gods **Bel** and **Bel's** son on the first day of **Nisan** (April 2, 604 **BC**). This began his first year of reign, by Babylonian reckoning, midway through the 4th year of **Jehoiakim**.

Putting it all together: In the summer of 605 **BC** Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and shipped back to Babylon some gold from the Temple, some of the youth of the nobility, and King **Jehoiakim**. Nebuchadnezzar himself went to Babylon to become **king** shortly thereafter. Nebuchadnezzar is called King of Babylon in Daniel 1:1 because that is how he is known to history, even though he had not yet officially become king. A few months later, after **Jehoiakim** returned to **Jerusalem**, God told Jeremiah to inform him and the people that from now on Nebuchadnezzar was His servant, and all nations would need to submit to him. The message to **Jehoiakim** was: "Don't even think about rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar. "

(chapter 2 to be concluded next month)