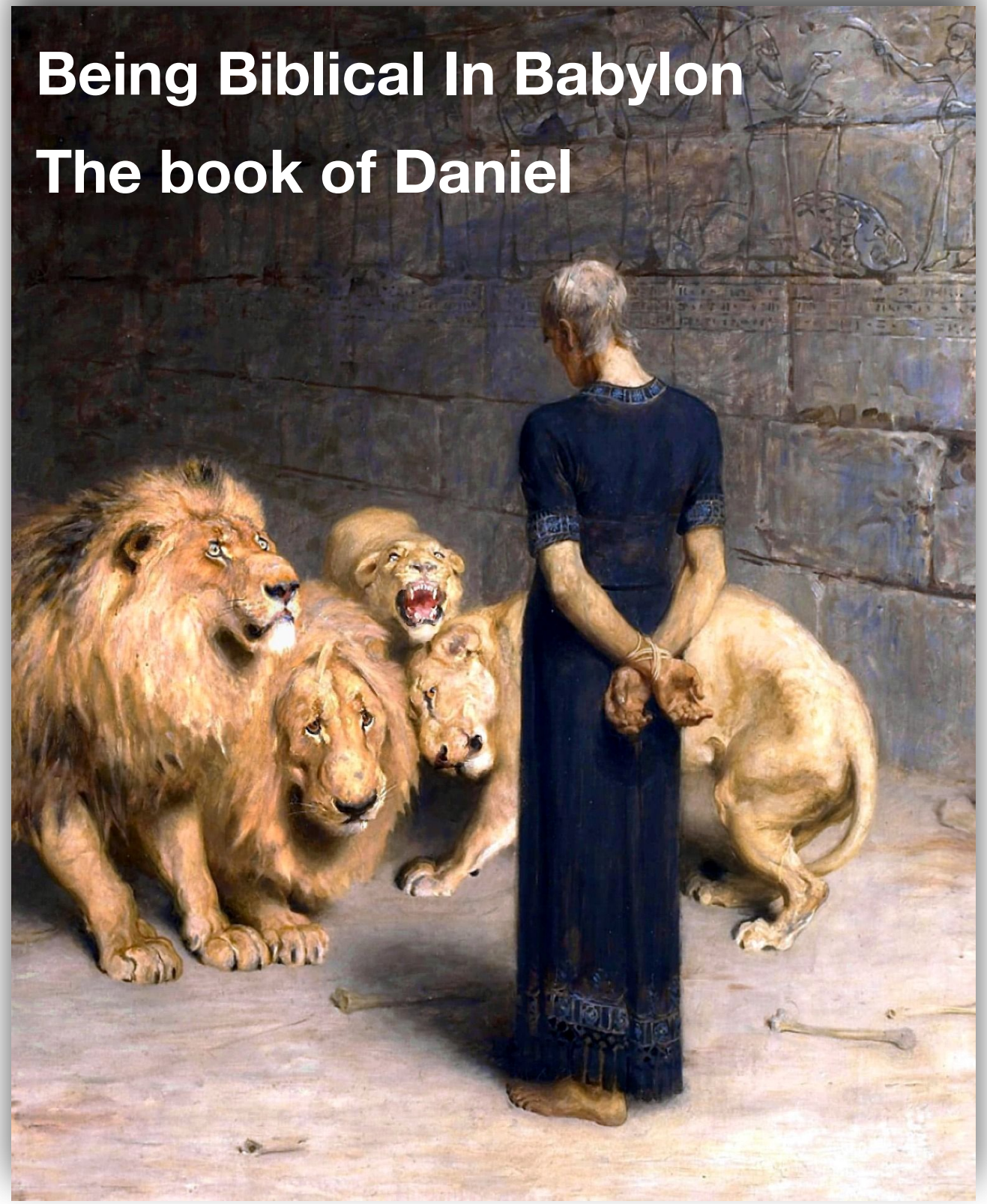
Being Biblical In Babylon

The book of Daniel



Study Notes for individuals and Life groups
St. John's Brunswick West, August 2026.

You will not be able to use all the questions under each chapter in one session of a life group or personal prayer time. My advice is that you can decide to spend more than one session on a chapter or choose which questions are most useful for you or your group to work through.

Michael Flynn
Vicar,
St. John's Brunswick West
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The book of Daniel

→ *And indeed it so came to pass, that our nation suffered these things under Antiochus Epiphanes, according to Daniel's vision, and what he wrote many years before they came to pass. In the very same manner Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them. ... by the forementioned predictions of Daniel, those men seem to me very much to err from the truth, who determine that God exercises no providence over human affairs; for if that were the case, that the world went on by mechanical necessity, we should not see that all things would come to pass according to his prophecy.*

- Flavius Josephus: The antiquities of the Jews (c 93 AD)

We have been given the book of Daniel to teach us how to live in cultures that can be hostile to belief in the God of the Bible. Daniel is set after the warnings of the Old Covenant had come upon God's people (Deuteronomy 28), when the people of God had no land, kingdom, temple, sacrifice or leadership. It was impossible for them to obey the Law God had given through Moses because that law required all the things they no longer had. In exile in Babylon, the question became, how do we live trusting the Lord God, while living through the curses of the law of Moses, in a place where even the pavement stones had prayers to pagan gods inscribed on them.

This is may be one reason why, in the Hebrew Scriptures, Daniel is not grouped with the prophets but with the wisdom writings (with Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Songs). However, while wisdom literature often deals with individual lives and personal lessons Daniel also deals with the large scale rise and fall of empires and the work of God in the broader political world. Daniel teaches us the God of Israel is Lord of all the world not just one nation. It teaches God's people what things, in a hostile culture, they will need to stand against, comment or advise upon, or simply overlook. It teaches us practical lessons in spiritual discernment, wisdom, supernatural experience, and effective prayer, action and thought.

The book of Daniel also picks up and develops apocalyptic ideas from Isaiah (e.g. chapters 27 & 28) and other prophets to teach us about the spiritual realities occurring behind and within our political histories. The fall of Jerusalem (587 BC), the fall of Babylon (539 BC), the fall of Persia, the division of the Greek empire after Alexander's death (333 BC), the rule of Judea by Antioches Epiphanes IV (167-164 BC) the rise of Rome as well as the beginning of the end times and the end of the end times (e.g.7:12, 9:24-27) are featured in this style of writing and prophesy.

A theological point

Some of us will have seen the 2026 film 'The Odyssey' about the mythical journey of the Greek General, Odysseus back from his conquest of Troy to his home Ithaca. How, along the way he meets gods like the Cyclops, Polyphemus (the witch), the Sirens, Calypso and Hades. What you may have noticed is how these gods were just like us, they too were creatures with desires and fears. Beings who could be harmed even though their life and power is longer and larger than human beings. This is because Ancient Greek and Babylonian world views were materialistic or naturalistic. That is, the universe was the eternal absolute, chaos was the default, the gods were birthed from the chaos and gave rise to an incomplete order along with the other gods. These gods competed with each other as the personification of natural, material and mental forces so, there is no overarching mind or order in the cosmos to unite it. In our terms, nature is not a universe but a multiverse of competing forces where even the gods are products of nature only made of different stuff to us. That means, for all the temples and spirituality of Babylon, it is at heart, a materialist and relativist culture where political force is what unifies different beliefs and forces.

In contrast, the monotheism we are given in the Bible, that is, a belief in one unifying God who stands outside his creation, is something radically different to the Greek or Babylonian understandings of reali-

ty. It is implausible to say that this evolved from polytheism because monotheism says the meaning of the system lies outside the system and polytheism says there is nothing apart from nature. The Biblical God creates the universe according to his will, the universe does not create itself or give purpose to itself. The Bible reveals a God who stands outside the cosmos and creates it, who makes it possible to think that life has a meaning beyond our material existence, not merely a mythic or even a scientific explanation. The Biblical God gives us a universe and that is itself a creature with a beginning and an end - something the ancient world of the Babylonians and Greeks did not think was true.

Themes in Daniel

There are two themes that run through Daniel. One is that, since the exile and the end of the Old Covenant of Moses, God's people are rescued *through* their trials not *from* them. This is true in the first half of the book (chapters 1-6) where Daniel and his friends were in fear of their lives and, despite their great wisdom, could have died for their loyalty to God except for God rescuing them in the middle of trouble.

This theme is also true for the second half of Daniel (chapters 8-12) where we have described God's people, despite their wisdom, suffering and often dying for their loyalty to God. They are finally rescued and vindicated in the resurrection of the dead in chapter 12. They are rescued *through* the days of trouble, not *from* them.

The other theme is that the powers set against God will be used by God to achieve his purposes. Even the fierce opposition to God's people seen in Antiochus IV and all he foreshadows is used in Daniel 12 to purify and refine the people of God. On the ground we may see defeat. In heaven God sees his people being made spotless by persistent courage and faith that he responds to.

What strikes me about these themes is how they contain the shape of the cross of Jesus. Jesus told us we would be in the world and not of the world, that we are to take up our cross and follow him because Jesus was not rescued from trouble, but through it. More, he won our rescue by going through our deepest trouble - our sin, our alienation from God. Likewise, the powers of evil sought to destroy Jesus. The worst human beings could be in political cowardice, judicial corruption, execution by torture - all designed to belittle and destroy God in Christ Jesus, became the source of our salvation and the source of the final defeat of evil. The end of sin and the death of death. It was from the cross, not a throne, that Jesus declared: "It is finished."

We also see:
The unravelling of the Old Covenant, where all the curses of Deuteronomy 28 have come to pass. Yet the Kingdom of Israel now gives way to the Kingdom of God over all human history. Though God has punished his people He is still working to save and ultimately bless humanity (Genesis 12:3) Even in defeat the promises of the Old Covenant move forward. The confession of sins against the covenant moves God's purposes in history forward (Ch9)

Judgement and vindication occurs in this life (Chapters 1, 3 & 6) but also, through the resurrection of the dead, in the life to come (Chapters 7, 11 & 12)

The Lord God is the God above all gods. The one who controls history and so can interpret and control history. (Ch 2, 4, 6, etc.)

The coming of one 'like a Son of Man' (7:13) is the turning point for God's judgement and for His people's hopes. This is the true divine-human King of God. The other Kings are not divine and when they think they are they become less than human (Ch4/5).

God is sovereign but human actions matter.

The faithful remnant of Jerusalem has the true keys to interpreting history.

For God's people there are many lessons for how to live in a situation where all the institutional supports for belief have been taken away and the environment is hostile to Biblical belief. Living in the world but not of the world is to live in exile.

We are saved through our struggles not from them.

Nevertheless, even the opposition is achieving God's purposes.

Culture is not rejected or something to be escaped from but we are to discern what is good and from God and what opposes God's rule within the culture.

Jesus picks up themes from Daniel:

The appearance of the angel Gabriel to explain the visions given to Daniel links the book of Daniel with the stories surrounding the birth of the final prophet (John the Baptist) and the anointed (Messiah) one [Daniel 9] (Jesus Christ).

Wise and foolish human beings - the difference is those who know and do the word of God [Daniel 1 - 4]

The Kingdom of God/Heaven is like… God's kingdom is not of this world but it rules over this world. {Daniel 7 - 12]

The writing on the wall [Daniel 5] in Luke 11:20

Son of Man [Daniel 7]: Mark 8:31, Luke 9:44 Suffering of the anointed one [Daniel 9], death, resurrection [Daniel 12]. Mark 2:10,28 earthly ministry & authority. Matthew 13:41-43, Mark 14:12 Glory.

The abomination of desolation [Daniel 8 - 9] Matthew 24:15 and parallels forms the basis of Jesus' own warnings of the end times. The destruction of God's values and place in the final days of human history [Daniel 7 - 9]

The book of Revelation, that is given by Jesus. That what happens behind the scenes determines what happens on the earth [Daniel 10 - 12]

Outlines of Daniel

Here is one possible outline of the book of Daniel from John Goldingay that shows us parallels in the book that can help us to get an overview of its meaning.

1. Exile and the questions it raises: story. (God's people)
   2. A vision of four empires. (Dreams of the end of human kingdoms)
      3. A trail of faithfulness and the following deliverance. (Living in two kingdoms)
         4. An omen interpreted and a king challenged and chastised.
         5. An omen interpreted and a king challenged then deposed.
      6. A trial of faithfulness and the following deliverance. (Living in two kingdoms)
   7. A vision of four empires. (Dreams of the end of human kingdoms)
   8. Aspects of the vision developed.
9. Exiles and the questions it raises: vision. (God's purpose)
10-12. Aspects of this vision developed. (A final revelation)

Here is another from, John Lennox, that describes the themes in a grid format.

Part A	**Part B**
Chapter 1 Babylonian Court Daniel refuses to eat king's food He and his friends are vindicated	**Chapter 6** Medo-Persian Counrt Daniel refuses to obey the king's command and refrain from praying to God. He is vindicated
Two images **Chapter 2** Nebuchadnezzar's dream image **Chapter 3** Nebuchadnezzar's golden image	**Two visions of beasts** **Chapter 7** Four beasts **Chapter 8** Two beasts.
Two Kings disciplined **Chapter 4** The discipline and restoration of Nebchadnezzar **Chapter 5** The writing on the wall and the destruction of Belshazzar	**Two writings explained** **Chapter 9** The prophecy in the book of Jeremiah about the destruction and restoration of Jerusalem. **Chapters 10-13** The writing of truth and the eventual destruction of 'the King'
The end of Babylonian supremacy	The end of world history.

Daniel 1 | Opportunity in political disaster

For further thought

- Are we well prepared to face living as the Lord's people in an anti-Lord world?
- In what ways do Christians withdraw from the world or go along with it?
- When is confronting the world actually the same as conforming to the world?
- What issues in our world should believers not react to?
- What issues in our world should believers speak up about?
- What issues in our world should believers be prepared to die over?

Daniel 2 | The big picture is too big

For further thought

- What are the marks of competition between the ways of Babylon and the ways of the Lord God in this chapter?
- What is the main point of this chapter (vv11-12, 27-28, 47)?
- How are we to respond to authorities in our world (Jeremiah 27:1-7, Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 13:1-7)?
- How does Daniel respond to authority in this chapter?
- How is the Kingdom of God at work amongst the Kingdoms of this world today?

Daniel 3 | When politics becomes religion

For further thought:

- To discover what our society's idols are, make a list of the priorities people live by and the things we covet (see Colossians 3:5).
- Can you think of recent examples where religion is used to express loyalty to the State?
- Why wouldn't the three men worship the idol and then return to worshipping the Lord God when it could have been such a simple thing to do?
- Discuss the type of trust that the three men have in the Lord God. How does it differ from what we have been taught faith in God should be like?
- Why doesn't God save his servants from going into the fire to begin with?

Daniel 4 | Power, pride and psychosis

For further thought

- Why does it matter what people think of us and what we think of ourselves?
- Is it madness to build God out of his world as Nebuchadnezzar had done?
- Why and how do we do this?
- Why does God first warn Nebuchadnezzar about the judgement he is facing?
- List the graces that Nebuchadnezzar was shown. How is his judgement also a kindness that he is grateful for (4:34)?
- How does our pride shut God out of the responsibilities he has given us until our actions and thoughts become destructive?
- How would you argue with a sceptic that we are made in God's image and not the other way round?

Daniel 5 | God's political graffiti

For further thought

There is an historical context to what appears to be a debauched and self-destructive pagan feast. In the months prior to what Daniel 5 describes, the Babylonian army had been decisively defeated by the Persian-Median forces. The city of Babylon had its own defences but it was facing either a long siege and what looked like an inevitable conquest or some sort of political capitulation. In the end, the attacking army by-passed the need for a destructive siege and used Babylon's famous water engineering against it. They dammed the flow of the Euphrates and entered the city through the aqueducts, tunnels or canals that had kept Babylon watered and a wonder of the ancient world. In this context, Belshazzar's feast reads as an act of defiant arrogance (praising their defences of wood, bronze, iron, stone and their wealth of gold and silver) but also despair (let's indulge in pleasure, for tomorrow we die) as well as foolishness (making the leadership senseless to avoid the confronting work of arranging defensive or diplomatic strategies). We have seen such acts of seemingly mad pride more recently, for example, in the destructive and indulgent defiance of leaders of the third Reich as its defeat became inevitable towards the end of World War 2. Perhaps we also see these things in ourselves; our trust in things that, at a profound level, we know will not save; our need to dull despair with indulgence; our addiction to things that distract or numb our awareness.

- Those who inherit wealth and power often have difficulties managing them. What was the significance of what Belshazzar did with the golden vessels from the temple (see also 1:2)?
- The writing on the wall is about weights, measures and money. In other words, it describes value, something the leaders of Babylon had just been celebrating (5:4). They had been treating the God of the Jews as valueless but God assesses the leadership of Babylon and finds they are the ones who lack value. The blasphemy against the true God that is depicted here is likely the end point of many acts of arrogant disbelief (see 7:1 & 8:1). God had given the leaders historic evidence of his power already (5:18-24) that they were choosing to ignore. What does Daniel 5 teach us about *values*? What does it teach us about honouring God's revelation of himself in history?
- What where Belshazzar's values and what is God's concept of value? (Compare Luke 12:13-24, I Peter 1:18-19; 2:6-7).
- Why was God's judgement of Belshazzar harsher than that of Nebuchadnezzar? (Daniel 5:18-23)
- Are there lessons for us in this?
- In what way can God's servants today bring prophetic insight and even warnings to those with leadership responsibilities?
- Jesus likely references this scene in Luke 11:20 when, after driving a demon from a man, Jesus is accused of doing so by magic or demonic power. He points out that (like Babylon) a kingdom divided against itself is waiting to fall and if Satan drives our Satan then his kingdom will not stand. "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." How is Jesus' ministry of healing also a sign of judgement like the writing on the wall, to those who blaspheme him?

Applying what we have learnt so far.

It is good to pause here, at the fall of the Babylonian empire, and reflect on what we have learnt from this book about how to remain faithful to God while living in a culture that in many ways is set against him.

- Reviewing the first five chapters of the book of Daniel, what things did Daniel and his friends ignore or accept in Babylonian culture (e.g. their names)?
- What things did they resist or comment upon (e.g. clean and unclean foods)? What things were they prepared to die for (e.g. false worship)?
- How can we apply this wisdom to our own lives and culture - (e.g. should Christians refuse to listen to secular music or watch contemporary films at all (that is, withdraw from the culture) or work out how to be in the culture but not owned by it?)

Daniel 6 | When backroom deals backfire

For further thought

- How do laws help our societies? How do they go wrong?
- The lion was an important symbol of Babylonian might. What are nations and empires saying when they represent their power by these kinds of animals? What is humane or inhumane about this?
- How is Darius' law about worship a negative step from Nebuchadnezzar's demand regarding his idol in chapter 3? How is Darius also disempowered by his own law?
- How should the State deal with differences in religious conviction?
- If we are living for God's kingdom while being good citizens of the State, how should we conduct ourselves when the customs or laws around us contradict or insist we stop obeying God's laws?
- By the end of the story Darius issues a decree that creates an exception which cuts across his previous temporary law restricting worship.
- In the Bible we sometimes see faithful people rescued from impossible situations and sometimes not. Peter and Paul, for example, both knew multiple times when God rescued them from their persecutors until, eventually, they were both tried and executed. Hebrews 11 contains a list of people who both triumphed and suffered for their faith by their faith because they were 'looking for a better country, a heavenly one' (Hebrews 11:16). Whether we are rescued from our challenges or need to endure them, how should we live by faith in God as Daniel did?
- What lessons about prayer and faithfulness to God can we learn from Daniel 6?

Aside - You can't seriously be Cyrus!

The archeological and historical evidence (see the Cyrus cylinder - British museum) is that in October 539 BC the Persian King, Cyrus, conquered Babylon. In 522 BC one of his successors was a king named Darius who ruled to 486 BC, that is, for 36 years. Given Darius the Mede in Daniel 5:30 is said to be 62 years old at the time he 'took over the kingdom' the Darius who became king in 522 BC was obviously a different man. Daniel 6:28 states 'So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian.' This may mean that Darius the Mede was Cyrus the Persian (Darius being Cyrus's throne name) or, it is possible Darius the Mede was a royal regent like Belshazzar in chapter 5. The NIV study bible notes that Darius's age of 62 fits with that of Cyrus and that Cyrus's mother was a Mede though his father was Persian so they are plausibly the same man.

Some use this uncertainty to over claim that Darius the Mede is a fiction but unlike mythological writings from Mesopotamia, there is nothing in the text that indicates this is what is intended. It also ignores Daniel itself as part of the historical witness to these events. It is to be hoped that future archeological studies will shed more light on this question, as they have done with Belshazzar in the previous chapter.

Daniel 7 | The final conspiracy theory

For further thought

- This dream is set in the first year of Belshazzar, that is, around ten years before the events of chapter 5 in 539 BC. It is a subtle reminder that the collapse of institutions and kingdoms has a lead time. Collapse may be sudden but the steps leading to it are often long. The dream also shows us that there are other powers at work in our world that are more important to history than the human actors in it.
- What does it mean that Kingdoms are seen as only partially human or even inhuman hybrid beasts (monsters) in Daniel's dream?
- What do we learn when we compare the critique of world empires given in Daniel 7 with that given to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2? How are they similar and what are the differences?
- What does the imagery of verses 9-10 tell us about the nature of God's judgement?
- How do you understand the title *Son of Man* when applied to the Lord Jesus? (First used in Matthew 8:20 and finally in Matthew 26:64 or John 1:15 and 13:31).
- What relevance in the title *Son of Man* to judgement? (see John 5:27, Revelation 1:12-16).
- Do you think that God's future judgement of the human race is a good thing? Why or why not?

Peter writes in his first letter:

- *"Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor."* (1 Peter 2:17). What does it mean to fear God and honour the emperor in our culture?
- Like the people of God in Daniel's day, the New Testament describes Christians as exiles (see James 1:1, 1 Peter 1:1, Ephesians 1:15-18, Hebrews 11:13-16) How does the book of Daniel teach us to live well as exiles?
- How does the prophecy that God will not always deliver his people out of trouble in this world (Daniel 7:21) help us?

Aside - prophecy uses prototypes

In Daniel 2 we are told that the dream of Nebuchadnezzar represents Babylon and the historic empires that would follow it (Daniel 2:44,45). In chapter 7 it is reasonable to try to align the beasts in Daniel's dream with the sections of the statue described in Nebuchadnezzar's. However, this interpretation only partially works because the beasts in Daniel's dream are all operating at the same time and describe the types of nations/kingdoms/empires and their varied degrees of inhumanity at work in history.

To put that another way, historical empires (Chapter 2) are prototypes or expressions of the types of beastly kingdoms that are at work in our history (Chapter 7).

We see this style of prophecy first in Isaiah when he is writing of the pride of Babylon. After a while, Isaiah's prophecy leaves history behind and we are given cosmic descriptions of the powers that were driving Babylonian pride, how they will eventually fall from heaven and be judged.

A much later example is in the book of Revelation 17,18; where Babylon is the great harlot set over kingdoms and empires. Even though the historical Babylon has not existed for half a millennia, the spirit that directed Babylon to use its military and economic power to pursue wealth for wealth's sake (as an act of worship) remains a spiritual theme that tempts all political powers now.

Jesus also speaks these kinds of prophecies. For example, he is asked when the temple would be destroyed and he starts speaking about the signs of the end of history. He treats the coming destruction of the temple as a prototype of what the end of history will be like and jumps from one to the other as if the gap between them is not significant.

In the prophecies of Daniel that follow from chapters 8 to 12, this is why they begin with the details of history we know about but leave that behind to speak of events we have not yet seen. The

history we know about is used as a prototype of events we are still waiting for or as a spring board to describe the cosmic, spiritual themes that drive historical events. This movement from historical prototype to spiritual type is part of this genre of prophesy readers were expected to understand. (see also *The dating of Daniel* below).

Daniel 8 | Grand, trivial empires

An aside and some questions

Daniel chapter 7 can be seen as a description of real empires that become a projection (prototype) of four different *types* of empires that will rule on the earth until the Son of Man comes to reclaim history. What distinguishes the *types* of government is the level of their acknowledgement of God and his ways. The four beasts are God's view of different types of government.

Daniel chapter 8 is one instance of how these beasts work out in history. We are told that the ram is Persia-Media (two horns) who for 200 years could do as it pleased. That the male goat is Greece and its horn is now known to us as Alexander the great, who, as he lay dying from disease and alcoholism in Babylon, divided his kingdom amongst his four generals (the four horns). The subtle, corrupt horn who opposes God and his people is then Antiochus IV.

What makes Antiochus Epiphanies so significant in history and in the later writings in the Bible (e.g. Matthew 24) is that he becomes a *prototype* of corrupt rulers who would come after him (see 8:9-17 where we are told '… *the vision is for the time of the end.'*). Antiochus took away the daily sacrifice and persecuted and killed those who followed the Lord God.

- What do you think will happen when a political power acts against God's ways and his people?
- What is the relationship of truth to power for such governments (8:12)?
- The struggle against Antiochus IV is recorded in the apocrypha, especially in 1 & 2 Maccabees.. The Jewish festival of Hanukkah (celebrated around our Christmas time each year) commemorates the victory of the Hebrew Maccabean revolt over the Seleucid King Antiochus IV and becomes a prototype of later teaching in the New Testament (Matthew 24:15-28, 1 John 2:18-25). Does this history shed any light on the claims of Jesus to be both Messiah (anointed King of David's line) and Lord (The Lord)?

Daniel 7 tells us some governments can exercise a more noble version of humanity, the winged lion with a face like a man is likely inspired by the experience of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon - see chapter 4. But other types of empires also exist with more animalistic and progressively inhumane characters. Nations like the Bear (strong) and Leopard (fast) through to the utterly destructive, anti-God (and therefore anti-human) empires we had too many examples of in the twentieth century . This final beast, is a hybrid animal-machine like government opposing both God and his image, us. it sinks below the decency of animals by becoming an intelligently deliberate monster (1 John 2:18).

Daniel 7 tells us these beasts will come and go and even exist at the same time in history but that God will stop each type of beast. Daniel 8 tells us that God judges the historical outworking of each of these types of governments *within* history.

Daniel reminds us that it is God's world and he is dealing with the powers we see around us now according to these visions. Governments are judged according to how they treat the knowledge they have of God - to what degree they adopt or oppose the natural knowledge of God we have or accept, tolerate or persecute the special revelation of God we are given through the Bible. The trap for humanity is, the more anti-God the government, the more anti-human it will be.

This is why we are called to support aspects of our governments. In-spite of the monstrous side of political powers, some humanity can remain in them (Jeremiah 29:7). It is also why we are called to oppose other aspects of government. When governments reject or oppose the things of God they are giving up on things that make us human and becoming more like beasts or worse. (e.g. 1 Maccabees 2).

Memorial boards in churches across Australia testify that we have long known there are times when opposition to the beast-like use of power is worth suffering and even dying for if the generations after us are to have any chance of living in a humane society.

Daniel 9 | Prayer's power and final answer

For further thought

- What is significant about the date of this prayer and vision?
- Why did Jeremiah 29:10-14 drive Daniel to prayer?
- What lessons can we draw for ourselves from Daniel's effective prayer?
- How does it compare to the apostle Paul's concerns in Romans 9:1-4?
- Why was the restoration of Israel necessary (Ezekiel 39:25-29)?
- Before Jesus was crucified he talked to his disciples about the temple and the city of Jerusalem (Luke 21:5-6, 20-24). Does this help us to understand Daniel 9:26? Do Acts 1:6-7, 3:14 and 19-21 carry these ideas forward?

$(7 \times 7) + (62 \times 7) = 69 \times 7$

$+ 7$

In chapter 8 we, as readers, were grateful for the angel Gabriel's clarity. His role in Daniel and the gospel stories surrounding Jesus' conception are characterised by plain speaking. This is one reason why it is wise to take his explanation of how Daniel's prayer will be answered in a straight forward way unless the text gives us symbolic markers.

There seem to be two flags that are symbols for undefined times that sandwich a series of events about Jerusalem and the temple from their rebuilding (after their destruction by Nebuchadnezzar) to their second destruction in the first century AD.

The first flag is in verse 24 where Gabriel describes the completion of time as seventy sevens (often translated as weeks, but which in Daniel and elsewhere can be taken as years). He uses the numbers of completion (seven - based on the seven days of the creation story and seventy - symbolic of a human lifetime) to say that at the completion of human time, Daniel's prayer will be more fully answered than he could imagine. At the end of times all wrong will be atoned for, sin will cease, creation and humanity with it will be renewed, righteousness will be permanent, all prophet's visions will be fulfilled and a new Jerusalem will be anointed.

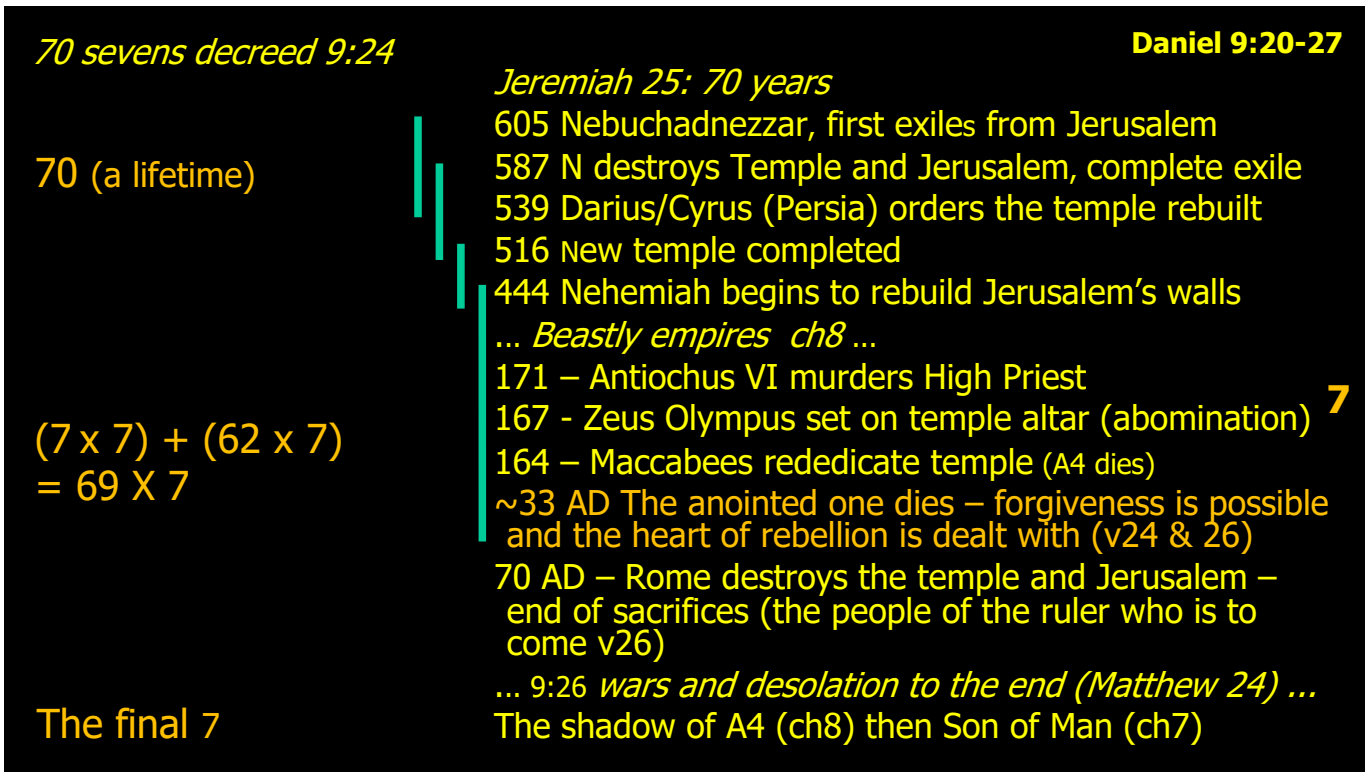
The second symbolic flag seems to grow out of verse 26 where Gabriel references the final time of seven years at the end of human history before everything is completed/fulfilled by God. The end comes like a (world wide) flood, war continues to the end, desolations are decreed and a ruler will arise in the image of the terrible beast of chapter 8. This man will dominate humanity for the final seven (years). In the middle of that time this ruler will set up an abomination that desolates, that is, a false religion that destroys rather than heals or grows. He will ban the worship of God until the desolator himself is desolated - presumably by the arrival in power of the Son of Man (Daniel 7) who will destroy this, the most monstrous of the empires we have been taught about in the previous two chapters.

In between these two undefined times are times that are carefully defined. The image below helps us to visualise the historic time line.

We know preparations to rebuild the temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar began in the year Daniel prayed his prayer. That year was 539 BC and in 516 BC the new temple was completed, close to seventy solar years from the time it was destroyed.

We know the command to restore Jerusalem as a city (that is, with walls) was not given until March/April (the Hebrew month of Nisan) in 444 BC to Nehemiah. Gabriel said both the temple and the city would be restored but this would be a time of trouble, which has already been foreshadowed in 8:23-26.

The next period of time Gabriel mentions (62 X 7 years) seems to land us in the early first century AD where an anointed (Messiah) one dies. After this, both the temple and city will be destroyed again by a Prince who is yet to come. Of course, we think of Titus conquering Jerusalem in 70 AD. A fact commemorated in a victory arch that still stands in Rome today.



By the end of verse 26 we enter another undefined time of wars and desolations until a ruler in the likeness of Antiochus IV (chapters 8 & 10 of Daniel) arises to commit the same sacrilege he did but now on a grand scale.

In other words, the final history of Jerusalem will be glorious, but the journey there is paved with tragedy, desolation and sacrilege. The temple and Jerusalem will be rebuilt but, within five centuries, will both be destroyed again. Wars and desolations will continue after that until they climax in a ruler who, for seven years, fulfils the likeness of the arrogant horn (8:9-14), until that beast is destroyed by the arrival of a fully humane kingdom led by the Son of Man (7:11-14).

Prophecy & dates

At the end of this booklet is a note about the dating of Daniel. Modern commentators often insist the whole book, or at least its apocalyptic half, was written in the second century BC rather than the sixth century BC. This is because its prophecies are too good to be true. But, it is interesting that the prophecies in chapter 9 only become too accurate in hindsight. For example, we know about the death of Jesus and the fall of Jerusalem in the first century AD, things a writer of the second century BC would not know. I suggest that Gabriel's time line looks too good to be true from where we stand simply because we have the benefit of hindsight.

This makes a useful point about the purpose of this prophecy for us. Why are we given such detail? So we will know what we are looking at when we see it. We have not yet seen a world ruler in the style of the terrible beast, Antiochus IV, but now we know what to look for when it occurs. Jesus disciples had not yet seen the fall of Jerusalem when they walked the temple courts before his execution, but he told them to watch for the armies and seeing them, to flee. He said that the end of our inhumane history would be like the second fall of Jerusalem and its temple.

Daniel 10 | The power struggle we don’t see

For further thought

- Daniel was fasting as he prayed in earnest for God’s people. How might this have helped?
- Compare the vision of the man above the river (vv4-8) with that of Revelation 1:12-17. What is the great war to which Daniel 10:1 refers to? Is it related to our warfare in Ephesians 6:12-18?
- What is the nature of our warfare as God’s people today?
- How would you describe the unseen world of good and bad angels to someone who is sceptical of the non-material world?

Daniel 11 | The final enemies

For further thought

- Read the notes after Daniel 12 on the dating of the book of Daniel below. Using a study Bible note the historical events that each prophecy in this passage alludes to. Where are there ambiguities? Where is there a good match? Why do you think somethings are clear and others are obscure in biblical prophecy?
- What would you say to someone who dismissed the Bible on the basis that people's predictions of the end times have proven wrong in the past?
- There is danger in misreading the signs of the time to think that the end has finally come. Why do you think the man of heaven does not want Daniel to think that the reign of Antiochus IV is the final battle of God's people (note: 11:35 onwards cannot be aligned with the history of Antiochus IV)?

Daniel 12 | The peace we are seeking

An aside and some questions

- What encouragement can we draw from the message of Daniel 12?
- What hope does it give to those under pressure for their faith?

Coming to terms with the final vision of Daniel (12:8).

The wise know there are limits to their wisdom. They know that some things are meant for us in our daily lives while other things are beyond us, kept from us, outside our sphere of responsibility.

The final vision given to Daniel begins in Chapter 10. It is an objective experience, rather than a dream, at the edge of the Tigris river (10:4-7). The content of this vision is what will happen to God's people in the days after Daniel. In the days since the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel and the trickle back return from exile that begun under Darius (10:1).

Chapter 11 leads us through hundreds of years of the history of the empires around Judea. The focus here is on the Seleucid (Northern Kingdom) and Ptolemaic (Southern or Egyptian Kingdoms) that are two of the remnant Kingdoms that came out of the four way division of Alexander the Great's empire. These two warring fractions laid competing claims upon Judea until the Roman empire conquered them. The focus of the vision in chapter 11 falls upon the 'contemptible person' who claims the Royal throne of the Northern Kingdom even though he had no right to it. His story runs from 11:21 to 31. We know him as Antiochus IV, who we first met, at least in any recognisable detail, in chapter 8 (see the notes above).

From 11:33 to 35 we have a note from the man of heaven about the importance of being wise, that is, of being committed to the Lord God, even though the days after Daniel will see times when many of the wise will be killed or stumble in their commitment to God. After this literary break we have a description of a King (King, being the name of a human ruler in this final vision. Prince is the name of a spiritual ruler; thus, 10:20, 11:1 and 12:1) who will arise from the area of the Northern Kingdom (modern Iran/Iraq) and sweep through the beautiful land (Judea) to conquer from the North, through Palestine, the Sinai peninsula and most of Northern and North Eastern Africa. We know that this is was *not* Antiochus IV because his rule was frustrated by the Romans. Instead, the man of heaven presents him as a ruler who introduces the final days of history that begin in 12:1.

Michael, the (spiritual) prince of God's people, will arise as open warfare is declared upon the people of God and it will be time of distress that has not been known since the beginning of nations in Genesis 11. Jesus, quotes this part of Daniel as he conflates this time of the end with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Romans (Mark 13, Matthew 24). He describes the terrors of the last days by citing the forthcoming Roman destruction of Jerusalem as foretaste of those final times just as he uses the desolation of the temple by Antiochus IV as a foretaste of the Roman destruction (Mark 13:14). The desolation of the temple by Antiochus IV is also a template, a shadow, or a foretaste of the final warfare against God's people in Daniel 12 (12:7, 11, 12 - Antiochus ended daily sacrifice between 167 and 164 BC for approximately three and a half years or, time [1 year], times [2 years] and half a time [6 months]).

During this final time of great distress (12:1), the power of God's people will be finally broken (12:7) - in other words, open international warfare will be declared against all the things of God. There will be no civil or religious tolerance for Christianity or Hebrew religion. However, the time of this distress will be limited in the same way the distress in the time of Antiochus and Rome was limited (12:5-7, Matthew 24:21,22).

Is is so easy to get confused by how passages like Daniel 12, Matthew 24 and Mark 13 deliberately in-

terweave images from different periods to refer to future events. But once we understand that Jesus, in the gospels, the man of heaven in Daniel, is looking at theological themes and types of beastly powers throughout history, it gets easier to discern that while history does not repeat itself, from God's point of view it often rhymes. In musical terms, history repeats or quotes earlier themes while placing those themes in a different harmonic or key or rhythmic setting. This is why we have seen the anti-Christ in Antiochus IV, we've seen him at certain times in the Roman empire, especially around the destruction of the temple, we've seen evidence of him in the centuries since and too frequently in the 20th century (1 John 2:18,19).

Of course, though the anti-Christ has cast his terrifying shadows upon history, we still await the final revealing of the man of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2) - the mysterious King who rages well beyond the abilities of Antiochus IV in the closing verses of Daniel 11.

At the end we know that the anti-God powers, the subhuman beasts that rule this world (Daniel 7), will be defeated. After the great distress in Daniel 12:1 comes the resurrection and the judging of the living and the dead (12:2,3). Those who have been wise enough to persist in following God and his ways, even through the great distress of the final days, will shine while others will only rise to shame.

Sealed until the end

Daniel seems to understand the final vision (chapters 10 to 12) well enough but, wants to know what the outcome of all this struggle, this spiritual and physical warfare will be. The answer he gets is the application for us of the last two chapters. He is told to go his way because the outcome is sealed until the time of the end. To put that another way, the details, the dates, the personalities, the circumstances are not for us to know. What is for us is that the troubled times of the last days will refine God's people (12:10) who will come from all over - not just from within Israel (12:4), that the time of the final great distress will be limited (12:11) and that the people of God will win as they always have, by grace through their trials and weakness (12:3,4).

As for us, we are to go our way and do the good God has given us to do with the lives, gifts, circumstances, opportunities and challenges he has placed before us. We are to be wise enough to know how to serve where we are and wise enough to recognise the limitations of our knowledge and power. Wise enough to depend upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Somethings belong to God alone (Deuteronomy 29:29). Somethings are sealed. But as for you, woman or man of God... serve the true King in these difficult days and with the wise you will rise to receive your inheritance at the end.

Amen.

An Aside: The dating of Daniel

The book of Daniel sets itself in the sixth century BC and claims to have been written at that time (e.g. 7:1, 9:1-3) but many commentators from the eighteenth century AD onwards claim the book was written in the later half of the second century BC. There are two main reasons given for this: first, that the prophecies in Daniel about the rise and fall of empires between the 6th and 2nd centuries BC are too accurate. Second, that the original Arabic best suits a second century BC setting.

It is not hard to be sympathetic with this recent critical view, especially because we live at large distance to the writing of Daniel, the prophecies in the last part of Daniel read like a history book, and scepticism about experiences like prophecy and visions is part of our modern assumptions. However, sometimes it is wiser to doubt our doubts and hold them over for better evidence to emerge and this is often the case

so when it comes to dating biblical writings. In the recent past we have found it takes just one piece of archeological evidence to collapse influential and widely accepted theories about biblical books. For example, there was no independent record of King Belshazzar (Daniel 5) and it was assumed the chapter did not have historical substance until the discovery of the Nabonidus cylinders at the Ziggurat of Ur (South of Babylon). These cuneiform inscribed cylinders where produced to celebrate the rebuilding of the Ziggurat between 555 and 539 BC. The cylinders include a prayer for Belshazzar to honour the highest divinity and commit no sin (irreverence) - it seems someone knew Belshazzar's fatal inclinations well. The writing also lists Belshazzar as second in the Kingdom after his father, which makes helps us to make sense of Daniel 5:15.

Another example, concerning the Old Testament, is about the domesticated Camels, mentioned in Genesis, Leviticus and Job. It is still sometimes claimed this is evidence these books reflect the farming practices of a much later period, however, we now know domesticated camels appeared in the Middle East from at least the third millennium BC. Likewise, if fragments of the later parts of Daniel were to emerge that pre-date the second century BC then a lot of carefully constructed theories about how and why the book was written would fall. That does not mean, of course, that the critics would have to accept Daniel as a true report of historical events. Even so, with the evidence we currently have, there are some doubts we can raise about our modern desire to create myths from a book that claims to be reporting actual events.

- There is no record before the Roman writer, Porphyry in the 4th century AD, of anyone suggesting a second century BC date for writing of the book of Daniel. In other words, the Hebrew people, including Jesus and his disciples, accepted Daniel as an historic and prophetic work.

- More recent discoveries suggest that the Arabic of Daniel is more in keeping with what we now know about sixth century usage than with the second century BC. (See more recent commentaries for details).

- In the 1940's the discovery of the dead sea scrolls brought to light copies and fragments of the book of Daniel that had been copied out late in the second century BC, suggesting that what they copied was produced significantly earlier in that century. We also know that for a writing to become accepted as scripture took time. Therefore, given the earliest copies we have of Daniel are already from the second century BC, it is unlikely the book would have been accepted as scripture and interpreted as factual and prophetic by the people who complied the dead sea scrolls if the book was actually composed as a myth after the fall of Antiochus Epiphanes IV in 164 BC.

- There are prophecies in Daniel that go past a second century date. See, for example, see the aside on chapter 9 above or the prediction of the coming of the Kingdom of God during the reign of the empire that will supplant the Greek based empires. A first century writer like Luke underlines this when he sets the birth of Jesus in the early years of Augustus, the first Roman Emperor.

- Daniel is not the only Old Testament book to provide accurate prophesy. The New Testament writers often wrote of prophesies fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus (e.g Isaiah 8-9, 53, Psalm 22, Zechariah 9). Perhaps, we should at least allow for the biblical subtleties between true and false prophecy to have a place in our understanding of ancient writings.

- The prophecies of Daniel are not as historically precise as is claimed. For example, if the prophesy from 11:31 to 12:3 is meant to encourage the Hebrew people living in the second century BC by giving them a time frame for the end of Seleucid (Persian) persecution under Antiochus IV, and the coming of the resurrection of the dead, then it was obviously wrong. If that section is meant to be about Antiochus IV, then the time frame of three and a half years was not kept and the details of his life are incorrect according to other records. But, according to Daniel 12, this obscuring of history is deliberate. As Jesus later points out (Matthew 24), the prophecies in Daniel do not relate *only* to the Kingdoms that arose between the exile and the coming of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ (Daniel 9:24-27). Those empires were also signs of the *types* of empires

that will rule before the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:2-8, Matthew 26:64, Revelation 18 & 19).

- The circumstances of the Hebrews in the sixth century BC were very different to Hebrew lives in the second century BC. In Daniel the people had no homeland, Jerusalem was a pile of rubble, the prophets had encouraged them to seek the good of the empire to which they have been exiled (Jeremiah 27). The Hebrew leadership that remained set examples of loyalty to the Babylonian and Persian Empires. Likewise, the stories of the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar and the legal status of Judaism under Darius/Cyrus is the opposite of the Maccabean experience of Antiochus IV in the second century BC.

- Theologically and pastorally it is claimed the book of Daniel is a parable constructed to comfort the Hebrews who were traumatised by the persecutions under Antiochus IV when he ruled over Judea from 171 to 164 BC. This idea is sometimes then applied by recommending that believers today copy this style of creative story telling, weaving God into the history of our lives to help us be comforted in our hardships. I think there are are two basic pastoral problems with this idea:

    - First, once we give ourselves permission to create our own revelation, without attachment to historical events, we either end up with traditions that only specialists can tell us are acceptable, or, we end up in confusion where any idea about God is as good as another. Thoughtful people want to avoid overstating the comprehensiveness of relativism. Practical people want to avoid being gullible and believing myths. Neither would recognise this as what the Bible teaches about what faith in the Lord means, which is, trusting reliable evidence.

    - Second, there is no evidence that ordinary people from ancient times, who were in extreme circumstances, were anymore likely to be encouraged by made-up stories than we are. Stories that offer false hope for our sufferings could be read as mockery of our pain. We want justice for wrongs done to us, not wishful thinking - and so did they. The myth theory goes against what Daniel teaches, that under the rule of empires that used mythology (Babylon, Persia, Greece) the God of Daniel is praised by two Kings (Nebuchadnezzar and Darius/Cyrus) precisely because he acts and saves in history, in fact, not in myth. This is what makes the Lord unusual amongst the gods of the ancient near east. He is not a myth to explain natural or mental forces or to justify royal powers, or to put a superhero gloss on royal histories - he is the living God who is beyond the created order (see the hymns in Daniel 4 & 6 and the theological note at the beginning of these studies).

- For more thoughts from the text of Daniel on this topic, see under chapters 9 & 12 above.