

2. GABRIEL'S EXPLANATION

Daniel 7:15-18

¹⁵ "As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. ¹⁶ I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. ¹⁷ 'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.'

Daniel 7:15

[I Daniel was grieved in my spirit] That is, I was troubled; or my heart was made heavy and sad. This was probably in part because he did not fully understand the meaning of the vision, and partly on account of the fearful and momentous nature of what was indicated by it. So the apostle John (Rev 5:4) says, "And I wept much because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book."

[In the midst of my body] The body is undoubtedly referred to, and is so called as the envelope of the mind, or as that in which the soul is inserted, as the sword is in the sheath, and from which it is drawn out by death.

The meaning here is that Daniel felt sad and troubled in mind, and that this produced a sensible effect on his body.

[And the visions of my head troubled me] The head is here regarded as the seat of the intellect, and he speaks of these visions as if they were seen by the head. That is, they seemed to pass before his eyes.

Daniel 7:16

[I came near unto one of them that stood by]
That is, to one of the angels who appeared to stand near the throne. Dan 7:10.
Compare Dan 8:13; Zech 4:4-5; Rev 7:13.

It was natural for Daniel to suppose that the angels who were seen encircling the throne would be able to give him information on the subject, and the answers which Daniel received show that he was not mistaken in his expectation.

God has often employed angels to communicate important truths to men, or has made them the medium of communicating his will.

Compare Rev 1:1; Acts 7:53; Heb 2:2.

[So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things]

He explained the meaning of the symbols, so that Daniel understood them.

a) Four Kingdoms 7:17-18

¹⁷ 'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.'

The angel is most likely Gabriel.

Daniel 7:17

[These great beasts, which are four, are four kings]

Four kings or four dynasties. There is no reason for supposing that they refer to individual kings, but the obvious meaning is, that they refer to four dominions or empires that would succeed one another on the earth. So the whole representation leads us to suppose, and so the passage has always been interpreted.

[Which shall arise out of the earth] In Dan 7:2 the beasts are represented as coming up from the sea; the emblem of agitated nations. Here the same idea is presented more literally, that they would seem to spring up out of the earth.

This was the general meaning of the vision, and he was satisfied at once as to the explanation, so far as the first three were concerned; but the fourth seemed to indicate more mysterious and important events, and respecting this he was induced to ask a more particular explanation.

Daniel 7:18

[But the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom]

That is, they shall ultimately take possession of the rule over the entire world, and shall control it from that time onward to the end.

This is the grand thing which the vision is designed to disclose, and on this it was evidently the intention to fix the mind. Everything before was preparatory and subordinate to this, and to this all things pointed.

The word rendered saints means the holy, and the reference is undoubtedly to the people of God on the earth, meaning here that they would take possession of the kingdom, or that they would rule.

[And possess the kingdom for ever, even forever and ever]

This is a strong and emphatic declaration, affirming that this dominion will be perpetual. It will not pass away, like the other kingdoms, to be succeeded by another one.

It is not necessary to interpret this as meaning that there would be literally an eternal kingdom on this earth, for it is elsewhere taught in the Scriptures that the present order of things will come to a close.

b) Antichrist

7:19-25

¹⁹ "Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, ²⁰ and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. ²¹ As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

²³ "Thus he said: 'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces.

²⁴ As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings.

²⁵ He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand

The fourth beast is especially ferocious. Rome began two centuries before Jesus' incarnation through the conquest of Egypt. The end of time will see the extension of the Roman Empire into something? Suggested by the 10 horns.

The antichrist? Will there be a literal “Antichrist”?

Some believe there will be.

I believe it is the “spirit of antichrist” 1 John 2:18-26.

Daniel 7:19

[Then I would know the truth of the fourth beast]

I desired to know particularly what was symbolized by that. He appears to have been satisfied with the most general intimations in regard to the first three beasts, for the kingdoms represented by them seemed to have nothing very remarkable. But it was different in regard to the fourth.

The beast itself was so remarkable; so fierce and terrific; the number of the horns was so great; the springing up of the little horn was so surprising; the character of that horn was so unusual; the judgment passed on it was so solemn; and the vision of one like the Son of man coming to take possession of the kingdom; all these things were of so fearful and so uncommon a character, that the mind of Daniel was peculiarly affected in view of them, and he sought earnestly for a further explanation.

In the description that Daniel gives of the beast and the horns, he refers in the main to the same circumstances which he had before described; but he adds a few which he had before omitted, all tending to impress the mind more deeply with the fearful character and the momentous import of the vision; as, for instance, the fact that it had nails of brass, and made war with the saints.

[Which was diverse from all the others] Different in its form and character; as different as to attract particular attention and to leave the impression that something very peculiar and remarkable was denoted by it. Cf. Dan 7:7.

[Exceeding dreadful]

[And his nails of brass] This circumstance is not mentioned in the first statement, Dan 7:7. It accords well with the other part of the description, that his teeth were of iron, and is designed to denote the fearful and terrific character of the kingdom, symbolized by the beast.

[Which devoured ...] See Dan 7:7.

Daniel 7:20

[And of the ten horns ...] See Dan 7:7-8.

[Whose look was more stout than his fellows] literally, "whose aspect was greater than that of its companions." This does not mean that its look or aspect was more fierce or severe than that of the others, but that the appearance of the horn was greater.

In Dan 7:8, this is described as a "little horn;" and to understand this, and reconcile the two, we must suppose that Daniel watched this as it grew until it became the largest of the number.

Three fell before it, and it outgrew in size all the others until it became the most prominent. This would clearly denote that the kingdom or the authority referred to by this eleventh horn would be more distinct and prominent than either of the others; would become so conspicuous and important as in fact to concentrate and embody all the power of the beast.

Daniel 7:21

[I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints] I continued to look on this until I saw war made by this horn with the people of God. This circumstance, also, is not referred to in the first description, and the order of time in the description would seem to imply that the war with the saints would be at a considerable period after the first appearance of the horn, or would be only when it had grown to its great size and power.

This "war" might refer to open hostilities, carried on in the usual manner of war; or to persecution, or to any invasion of the rights and privileges of others. As it is a "war with the saints," it would be most natural to refer it to persecution.

[And prevailed against them] That is, he overcame and subdued them, he was stronger than they were, and they were not able to resist him. The same events are evidently referred to and in almost similar language-borrowed probably from Daniel {Rev 13:5-7}: "And there was given him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations."

Daniel 7:22

[Until the Ancient of days came] Cf. Dan 7:9. That is, this was to occur after the horn grew to its full size, and after the war was made with the saints, and they had been overcome.

It does not mean that this would occur immediately, but that at some subsequent period the Ancient of days would come, and would set up a kingdom on the earth, or would make over the kingdom to the saints. There would be as real a transfer and as actual a setting up of a peculiar kingdom, as if God himself should appear on the earth, and should publicly make over the dominion to them.

[And judgment was given to the saints of the Most High] That is, there was a solemn act of judgment in the case by which the kingdom was given to their hands.

[And the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom] The universal prevalence of true religion, in controlling the hearts and lives of men, and disposing them to do what in all circumstances ought to be done, would be a complete fulfillment of all that is here said. Thus far the description of what Daniel saw, of which he was so desirous to obtain an explanation. The explanation follows, and embraces the remainder of the chapter.

c) Victory

7:23-27

The devil and his agents, antichrists, may win many battles, but they lose the war!

Pre-millennialists believe the kingdom is a literal one with Christ ruling on earth before the end of time.

Post-millennialists believe that Christ will return after Christianity has prevailed.

Amillennialists believe that this kingdom is the reign of Christ in the hearts of the saints and that Christ will return to destroy the beast.

GOD WINS in every view!

Dan 7:26-28

²⁶ But the court shall sit in judgment,
and his dominion shall be taken away,
to be consumed and destroyed to the end.

²⁷ And the kingdom and the dominion
and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven
shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;
their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom,
and all dominions shall serve and obey them.'

²⁸ "Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart."

[Thus he said ...] That is, in explanation of the fourth symbol which appeared; the fourth beast, and of the events connected with his appearing.

This explanation embraces the remainder of the chapter; and as the whole subject appeared difficult and momentous to Daniel before the explanation, so it may be said to be in many respects difficult, and in all respects momentous still. It is a question on which expositors of the Scriptures are by no means agreed, to what it refers, and whether it has been already accomplished, or whether it extends still into the future; and it is of importance, therefore, to determine, if possible, what is its true meaning.

The two points of inquiry which are properly before us are, first, What do the words of explanation as used by the angel fairly imply; that is, what, according to the fair interpretation of these words, would be the course of events referred to, or what should we naturally expect to find as actually occurring on the earth in the fulfillment of this?

And, secondly, To what events the prophecy is actually to be applied; whether to what has already occurred, or what is yet to occur; whether we can find anything in what is now past which would be an accomplishment of this, or whether it is to be applied to events a part of which are yet future?

What is fairly implied in the explanation of the angel?

This would include the following points:

(1) There was to be a fourth kingdom on the earth: "the fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth," Dan 7:23. This was to succeed the other three, symbolized by the lion, the bear, and the leopard. No further reference is made to them, but the characteristics of this are stated.

Those characteristics, at Dan 7:7, are, here repeated,

(a) That it would be in important aspects different from the others;

(b) That it would devour, or subdue the whole earth;

(c) That it would tread it down and break it in pieces; that is, it would be a universal dynasty, of a fierce and warlike character, that would keep the whole world subdued and subject by power.

(2) Out of this sovereignty or dominion, ten powers would arise (Dan 7:24): "and the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise." Compare Dan 7:7.

That is, they would spring out of this one dominion, or it would be broken up into these minor sovereignties, yet all manifestly springing from the one kingdom, and wielding the same power.

(3) From the midst of these sovereignties or kingdoms there was to spring up another one of peculiar characteristics, Dan 7:24-25. These characteristics are the following:

(a) That it would spring out of the others, or be, as it were, one form of the administration of the same power; as the eleventh horn sprang from the same source as the ten, and we are, therefore, to look for the exercise of this power somehow in connection with the same kingdom or dynasty.

(b) This would not spring up contemporaneously with the ten, but would arise "after them" - and we are to look for the power as in some sense succeeding them.

(c) It would be small at first-as was the horn (Dan 7:8), and we are to look for the fulfillment in some power that would be feeble at first.

(d) It would grow to be a mighty power for the little horn became so powerful as to pluck up three of the others (Dan 7:8), and it is said in the explanation (Dan 7:24), that he would subdue three of the kings.

(e) It would subdue "three kings;" that is, three of the ten, and we are to look for the fulfillment in some manifestation of that power by which, either literally three of them were overthrown, or by which about one-third of their power was taken away.

(f) It would be proud, and ambitious, and particularly arrogant against God: "and he shall speak great words against the Most High," Dan 7:25.

This would be fulfilled in one who would blaspheme God directly; or who would be rebellious against his government and authority; or who would complain of his administration and laws; or who would give utterance to harsh and reproachful words against his real claims. It would find a fulfillment obviously in open opposition of the claims and the authority of the true God.

(g) This would be a persecuting power: "and shall wear out the saints of the Most High," Dan 7:25. That is, it would be characterized by a persecution of the real saints; of those who were truly the friends of God, and who served him.

(h) It would claim legislative power, the power of changing established customs and laws: "and think to change times and laws," Dan 7:25. The word rendered "think" means, more properly, to hope; and the idea here is, that he hopes and trusts to be able to change times and laws.

The state of mind here referred to would be that of one who would desire to produce changes in regard to the times and laws referred to, and who would hope that he would be able to effect it.

There would be the exercise of some kind of authority in regard to existing times.

The allusion is, undoubtedly, to such periods set apart as festivals or fasts; seasons consecrated to the services of religion and the kind of jurisdiction which the power here referred to would hope and desire to set up would be to have control of these periods, and so to change and alter them as to accomplish his own purposes; either by abolishing those in existence, or by substituting others in their place.

The word rendered "laws" here - while it might refer to any law, would more properly designate laws pertaining to religion. See Dan 6:5, 7, 12 (6, 9, 13); Ezra 7:12, 21. The kind of jurisdiction, therefore, referred to in this place would be what would pertain to the laws and institutions of religion; it would be a purpose to obtain the control of these; it would be a claim of right to abolish such as existed, and to institute new ones; it would be a determination to exert this power in such a way as to promote its own ends.

(i) It would continue for a definite period: "and they shall be given into his hands until a time and times and the dividing of time," Dan 7:25. They; that is, either those laws, or the people, the powers referred to.

Though this is not designated expressly, yet perhaps it is the most natural construction, as meaning that he would have jurisdiction over the saints during this period; and if so, then the meaning is, that he would have absolute control over them, or set up a dominion over them, for the time specified the time, and times, etc.

In regard to this expression "a time and times, etc.," there has been great diversity of opinion among expositors, and that many of the controversies in respect to future events turn on the sense attached to this and to the similar expressions which occur in the book of Revelation.

The first and main inquiry pertains, of course, to its literal and proper signification. The word used here rendered "time, times, time" - is a word which in itself would no more designate any definite and fixed period than our word time does. See Dan 2:8-9, 21; 3:5, 15; 4:16, 23, 25, 32; 7:12.

So far as the word is concerned, it would denote a day, a week, a month, a year, or a larger or smaller division of time, and the period actually intended to be designated must be determined from the context.

The phrase "for a time" expresses accurately the meaning of the original word. The word rendered "times" is the same word in the plural, though evidently with a dual meaning. The obvious meaning is two such times as is designated by the former "time."

The phrase "and the dividing of a time" means clearly half of such a period. Thus, if the period denoted by a "time," here be a year, the whole period would be three years and a half.

Designations of time like this, or of this same period, occur several times in the prophecies (Daniel and Revelation), and on their meaning much depends in regard to the interpretation of the prophecies pertaining to the future. This period of three years and a half equals forty-two months, or twelve hundred and sixty days; the periods mentioned in Rev 11:2; 12:6, and on which so much depends in the interpretation of that book.

The only question of importance in regard to the period of time here designated is, whether this is to be taken literally to denote three years and a half, or whether a symbolic method is to be adopted, by making each one of the days represent a year, thus making the time referred to, in fact, twelve hundred and sixty years.

On this question expositors are divided, and probably will continue to be, and according as one or the other view is adopted, they refer the events here to Antiochus Epiphanes, or to the Papal power?

This designation of time occurs in the midst of symbols; where all is symbol, the beasts, the horns, the little horn, etc.; and it would seem to be much more probable that such method would be adopted as designating the time referred to than a literal method.

It is apparent that the events do actually extend far into the future; far beyond what would be denoted by the brief period of three and a half years.

A fourth point in the explanation given by the interpreter to Daniel is, that there would be a solemn judgment in regard to this power, and that the dominion conceded to it over the saints for a time would be utterly taken away, and the power itself destroyed: "but the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume, and to destroy it unto the end," Dan 7:26. That is, it shall be taken away; it shall come entirely to an end.

The interpreter does not say by whom this would be done, but he asserts the fact, and that the destruction of the dominion would be final. That is, it would entirely and forever cease. This would be done by an act of Divine judgment. It would be as manifestly an act of God as if he should sit as a judge, and pronounce sentence. See the notes at Dan 7:9-11.

And a fifth point in the explanation of the interpreter is, that the dominion under the whole heaven would be given to the saints of the Most High, and that all nations should serve him; that is, and that God would reign in the hearts and lives of men, Dan 7:27. See Dan 7:13-14.

Daniel 7:28

Hitherto is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart.

[Hitherto is the end of the matter] That is, the end of what I saw and heard. This is the sum of what was disclosed to the prophet, but he still says that he meditated on it with profound interest, and that he had much solicitude in regard to these great events. The words rendered hitherto, mean, so far, or thus far. The phrase "end of the matter," means "the close of the saying a thing;" that is, this was all the revelation which was made to him, and he was left to his own meditations respecting it.

[As for me Daniel] So far as I was concerned; or so far as this had any effect on me. It was not unnatural, at the close of this remarkable vision, to state the effect that it had on himself.

[My cogitations much troubled me] It was a subject which he could not avoid reflecting on, and which could not but produce deep solicitude in regard to the events which were to occur.

Who could look into the future without anxious and agitating thought? These events were such as to engage the profoundest attention; such as to fix the mind in solemn thought. Compare Rev 5:4.

[And my countenance changed in me] The effect of these revelations depicted themselves on my countenance. The prophet does not say in what way; whether by making him pale, or careworn, or anxious, but merely that it produced a change in his appearance. The Chaldee is "brightness" - and the meaning would seem to be, that his bright and cheerful countenance was changed; that is, that his bright looks were changed; either by becoming pale, or by becoming serious and thoughtful.

[But I kept the matter in my heart] I communicated to no one the cause of my deep and anxious thoughts. He hid the whole subject in his own mind, until he thought proper to make this record of what he had seen and heard.

Perhaps there was no one to whom he could communicate the matter, perhaps there was no one at court who would sympathize with him; perhaps he thought that it might savor of vanity if it were known; perhaps he felt that as no one could throw any new light on the subject, there would be no use in making it a subject of conversation; perhaps he felt so overpowered that he could not readily converse on it.

So I am left where Daniel was.

Having the explanation and yet not at all sure of its meaning!