Daniel Commentary

The book of Daniel has two distinct sections. Chapters 1 through 6 are historical narrative of the life and times of Daniel. Chapters 7 through 12 are Daniel’s prophetic visions about events to happen in his future.

The events described by Daniel in the first section take place during the Babylonian empire which spanned the period between 605 BC (the accession of Nebuchadnezzar II) and 530 BC (the death of Cyrus the Persian). Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of Babylon, had besieged Jerusalem and taken many captured Jews back. Daniel was among them. In the text, Daniel mentions his personal interaction with not only Nebuchadnezzar, but also other kings known to have ruled Babylon during this period—including Belshazzar, Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian.

Daniel, a Jew, demonstrates his wisdom and moral integrity as well as God’s protection, and he gains favor with the pagan royalty. Included in the book are the famous biblical stories of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace—and Daniel in the lion’s den. There are several lessons we can glean from Daniel’s account. Among them are:

- The sovereignty of the God and His intervention into history.
- The importance of trusting in the one true God and our faithful allegiance to Him.
- The willingness to witness the truth of the one true God to even pagan rulers and others in authority.
- The willingness of believers to participate in civil government when circumstances allow, bringing biblical truth and values to society.

Daniel’s witness to political rulers, as well as his competent participation in government, is similar to other biblical figures including Joseph (book of Genesis), Mordecai (book of Esther), and Paul (book of Acts). See also Romans 13:1-7 for the biblical view of
government. These examples should give Christians today a message about the importance of influencing civil government with integrity and truth.

The prophetic section of the book is more difficult. Like the book of Revelation, there are many symbols, and Christians have many different interpretations. These interpretations are challenging enough because of the symbolism, but Christians also often read their presuppositions into the text. Our focus will be on what is clearest and most relevant to us today.

The visions include symbolic beasts of various sorts. But some of these are specifically identified for us in the text. The two horns of the ram are revealed as the kings of Media and Persia (8:20). The goat is the kingdom of Greece (8:21). So, although Daniel lived during the Babylonian empire, his visions are about empires future to him. In the case of Greece, most commentators agree that the vision must include Alexander the Great, who lived from 356 to 323 BC.

Alexander ushered in the Greek dynasty—often referred to as the Hellenistic period. This period lasted two to three centuries until the Roman Empire gained ascendancy.

These various empires were very important to the ebb and flow of life for the ancients. But what we are most concerned about are the aspects of Daniel’s visions that influence our theological thinking today. In this regard, there are many clear Messianic references in Daniel chapters 7 to 12 that should be considered.

One thing that makes interpretation difficult is that the Messianic references are mixed in with the pre-Messianic references. But let’s focus on the Messianic references.

One important one is the term “son of man” found in Daniel 7:13 and 8:17. This term is clearly a reference to the Messiah. The term is used eighty-one times in the New Testament gospels, and is the title that Jesus most often used of himself. It also appears in the book of Ezekiel. (Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel.) In Daniel 7:9-27 where we find this term, we note several other things. The Son of
Man would have dominion over all in an everlasting kingdom. But more than this, the Son of Man would come in judgment (7:10) on clouds of heaven (7:13). It is only God who has the power and authority to judge, and only God comes on clouds—so Jesus claimed deity by proclaiming himself to be the Son of Man. (For other instances of God’s cloud comings see: Exodus 19:9; 34:5; Leviticus 16:2; Numbers 11:25; Deuteronomy 5:22; Psalm 18:9-12; 97:2; 104:3; Isaiah 19:1; Joel 2:1-2; Nahum 1:2-3; Zephaniah 1:14-15).

Daniel 7:9-27 clearly ties to the Second Coming predictions made by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24/25; Mark 13; Luke 17/21) in which Jesus promises to return in judgment on clouds. And he promised to do so within a generation while many of those hearing his words were still alive (Matthew 10:23; 16:27-28; 24:34; 26:64-65; Mark 13:30; Luke 21: 22, 32; 23:28-29; John 21:22). The religious leaders of Jesus’ day resented the fact that Jesus claimed to be the divine Messiah by the use of “son of man” and “coming on clouds.” They also clearly understood by his remarks that they themselves would soon be the specific target of his Second Coming judgment (Matthew 13:36-43; 23:29-39; 26:64-65; Mark 14:62-65). They accused him of blasphemy which led to his execution.

Some Christians place the fulfillment of Daniel 7 at Jesus’ First Coming. But that cannot be correct because Jesus’ judgment (Daniel 7:10) was not at the First Coming but at the Second Coming. Other Christians place the fulfillment at the Second Coming but expect it at the end of history. But Jesus promised to return within his own generation; failure to have done so would make Jesus a false prophet. What is often misunderstood is that Jesus’ Second Coming was not to be a visible bodily coming, but rather a metaphoric coming in judgment, just as Yahweh came in judgment on multiple occasions in the Old Testament.

Only the preterist view honors the numerous imminency passages, restores Jesus’ credibility, is consistent throughout, and is faithful to Scripture. We know that Jesus’ judgment upon the Jewish nation did in fact happen in AD 70 just as he predicted (Matthew 3:7; 21:33-45; 22:1-15; 23:29-24:2; 24:15-30; Luke 13:6-9; 21:20-24; John 12:31; 1
Thessalonians 5:2-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 10:25-31; 1 Peter 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 11:8). It was the norm in biblical history that God would use one group of people to administer His justice against another group. In this case, He used the Romans to administer His judgment upon the apostate Jews. There really is no room for doubt, in our view, that Daniel 7:9-27 includes the Second Coming in judgment in AD 70.

Another important term that we find in Daniel is the multiple mentions of a time when the burnt offering would be taken away (or similarly the end to sacrifice) and the sanctuary overthrown (or similarly the transgression that makes desolate/the abomination of desolation). This terminology appears in these passages: 8:11-14; 9:27; 11:31, and 12:11.

The term abomination of desolation is used by both Daniel and Jesus. It refers to times in history in which the temple was desecrated. This, in fact, happened twice. Many commentators—futurists and preterists—agree that both of these occurrences are referenced in Daniel. Daniel 8:11-14 and 11:31 probably refer to the first time it happened—in the mid-2nd century BC. The preterist view is that Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 refer to the second time it happened—during the Jewish-Roman War from AD 66-70. This is the abomination of desolation to which Jesus specifically refers as he describes the soon future events surrounding his Second Coming (Matthew 24:15-28; Mark 13:14-23).

In the first occurrence, King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (ruler of the Seleucid Kingdom from 175-164 BC) forbade ceremonies and the worship of God in the Jerusalem temple and in the cities of Judah. In around 168 BC Antiochus entered the Most Holy Place and plundered the silver and gold vessels. He erected an altar to the Olympian Zeus on the altar of God in the temple court and sacrificed pigs there. The books of 1 and 2 Maccabees (books in the Roman Catholic Bible but not in the Protestant Bible) mention the abomination of desolation in reference to Antiochus’ actions.

There are some confirming indications within Daniel that the 8:11-14 mention of the abomination of desolation refers to the Antiochus abomination.
First, the context is the pre-Messianic visions. Secondly, verse 8:14 indicates that the temple would be restored. The temple was indeed cleansed and rededicated under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus in 164 BC. The other instances of the burnt offering cessation and the abomination of desolation (Daniel 9:27 and 12:11) are portrayed differently by Daniel than the Antiochus situation. At the end of the AD 66-70 abomination period, instead of being cleansed, the temple would be destroyed (Daniel 9:26) and the Jewish nation would be shattered (Daniel 12:7-11).

There are disagreements, however, over what precise event marked the final abomination of desolation. It could be the destruction of the temple itself in AD 70. Or it could be other events early in the AD 66-70 tribulation period when various radical groups—the Zealots and also the Idumeans—stormed the temple and committed acts of mass murder. But in any case, Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 were fulfilled consistent with the prophecies of Daniel and Jesus—in the 1st century.

It is particularly apparent in Daniel chapter 12 that we find a 1st century AD context. Chapter 12 culminates Daniel’s visions. This chapter is often titled “The Time of the End” in many Bibles. Preterists are confident that the events of this chapter indubitably define the Second Coming events of 66-70 AD. Thus it is not the end of the physical world, but the end of the Old Covenant Mosaic Age. (Previous mentions in Daniel of a “time of the end” refer to the end of a prior secular kingdom rather than the Mosaic age.)

Below are some important references in Daniel 12 that help to confirm the preterist interpretation: *time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation till that time* (12:1). Jesus uses this same phrase in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:21; Mark 13:19) where He emphatically placed these events to occur within this generation (Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:22, 32).

The 1st century Jewish historian Josephus, who was an eye witness to the events of AD 66-70, described them similarly as the worst any city had ever suffered (*The Wars of the Jews* 5.10.5 and 6.9.4). Thus, Josephus described the actual events after-the-fact in identical fashion as Daniel and Jesus did before they happened.
There is broad agreement among both futurists and preterists that this time of trouble refers to the so-called Great Tribulation. In support of the preterist view, Jesus, in Matthew 24:15-22 ties the Great Tribulation with the abomination of desolation, using nearly identical language as does Daniel to describe the coming holocaust, which we know occurred during the Jewish-Roman War of AD 66-70. Indeed, all of these things refer to AD 66-70: the Great Tribulation, the abomination of desolation, the destruction of the temple, the great judgment, the end of the Old Covenant Age, and the Second Coming.

Some Christians think that the Great Tribulation is still in our future and will be a global event. Jesus dispels any such ideas. Here is a partial summary of the evidence from Luke 21, a parallel passage to Matthew 24/25 and Mark 13:

▪ Jesus said that the tribulation/wrath/desolation would come when they saw “Jerusalem surrounded by armies,” leaving no room for doubt about a 1st century fulfillment. (Luke 21:20)

▪ Jesus said that the tribulation/wrath/desolation could be escaped by those in Judea by simply fleeing to the mountains, making it clear that it was a local rather than a global event. (Luke 21:21)

▪ Jesus said that “these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” in a clear reference to when Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies in the 1st century. (Luke 21:22)

▪ Jesus said that the wrath would come upon “this people,” a clear reference to the Jews. (Luke 21:23)

▪ Jesus said that the tribulation/wrath/desolation would be marked by the Gentiles trampling Jerusalem, which happened when the Gentile Romans invaded. (Luke 21:24)

▪ Jesus said that not only the Second Coming but all prophecy would be fulfilled in his generation. (Luke 21:22, 32)
The general resurrection and judgment of the dead (12:2). While futurists place this event at the end of history (amillennialists/postmillennialists) or at the beginning of a literal earthly millennium (premillennialists) the New Testament places it as imminent in the 1st century:

- at the end of the Old Covenant Age (Matthew 13:39-43)
- at the Second Coming in the 1st century (Matthew 16:27-28; 25:31-46; 1 Corinthians 15:20-57)
- as imminent to the time of the apostles (John 5:21, 24-29; Acts 17:31; 24:15; Romans 13:11-12; 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5, 17; Revelation 20:12-15; 22:12)

The book sealed until the time of the end (12:4). The “end” was not to be the end of the world but the end of the Old Covenant Age (See the discussions on Matthew and Hebrews.) Revelation 22:10 confirms that the time of the end was soon after John wrote Revelation, which was certainly written prior to AD 70 and refers to AD 70. Revelation 22:10 is a book-end to Daniel’s message and states not to seal up the prophecy of the book for the time was near. (See the discussion on Revelation).

Time, times, and half a time when the shattering of the power of the holy people would come to an end (12:7). The phrase “time, times, and half a time” is usually recognized even by futurists to be a 3 ½ year period (one year, plus two years, plus a half year). This is exactly the time that the Jewish-Roman War lasted—from the invasion by the Romans in February AD 67 until the burning of the temple in August AD 70. Also of note is the mention of 1,290 days in Daniel 12:11, which is also 3 ½ years. (This evidence is somewhat circumstantial and some preterist commentators place the 3 ½ years elsewhere.) Certainly, the power of the holy people ended when Jerusalem was destroyed, Israel ceased as a nation, and the temple was destroyed in AD 70.

Finally, we address a famous passage in Daniel—the Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24-27. Dispensationalists insist that there is a gap of thousands of years between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week.
They think this has to be finally fulfilled in our future. But preterists insist that this idea be rejected. This section in Daniel clearly is Messianic and has unmistakable ties to the 1st century. In it we find the anointed one, the atonement, the time of trouble, the destruction of the city and the sanctuary, the end of sacrifices, sealing up the vision (not the postponing of it), and the abomination of desolation.

The seventy weeks are a unit. There is no indication of any gap in the seventy-year period. The text says nothing about the restoration of Israel to her land. There is no justification for putting any of this beyond AD 70 except for a violently forced presupposition on the part of the interpreter. We also reject any ideas of double fulfillment of the AD 70 time line in Daniel. The idea of double fulfillment is that, yes, it was fulfilled in AD 70, but it will be fulfilled again in the future. This view postulates that the temple will be rebuilt (again) in the future; there will be two Second Comings, two Great Tribulations, and so forth—one in AD 70 and one at the end of history.

The double fulfillment idea is just not in the New Testament. It is true that there are “types and shadows” in the Old Testament. For example, the old covenant was a type or “shadow” of things to come—the new covenant. However, the new covenant is not a shadow of still newer things to come. The prophecies, types, and shadows of the Old Testament have been fulfilled once for all with Jesus’ completed work in the 1st century. Jesus clearly stated that all prophecy would be fulfilled in his generation (Luke 21:22, 32).

The 1st century fulfillment expectations were the correct ones and things happened right on time—no gaps, no gimmicks, no double meanings, no interruptions, no postponements, no delays, no exegetical gymnastics, and no changing the meaning of commonly used and normally understood words. Such manipulative devices have only given liberals and skeptics a foothold to discredit Christ’s deity and the inerrancy of Scripture. What needs adjusting is our understanding of both the time and nature of fulfillment to comport with Holy Scripture, and not manipulation of the time factor to conform to our popular, futuristic, and delayed expectations.