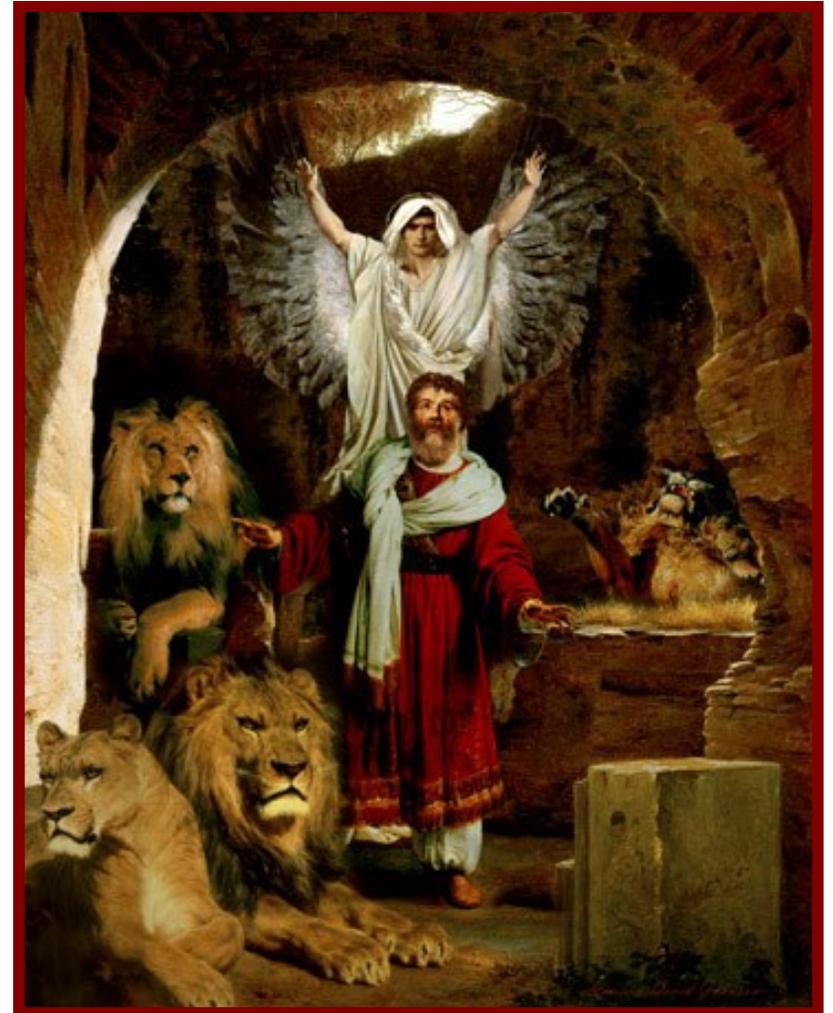


The Book of Daniel

Chapter 8



The Book of Daniel, as it now stands in the ordinary Hebrew Bibles, is generally divided into two main parts. The first includes a series of narratives which are told in the third person and the second, a series of visions which are described in the first person. From its content it readily appears that the Book of Daniel does not have as its objective a summary historical account of the period of the Babylonian Exile, or of the life of Daniel himself. The contents of the Prophecy of Daniel are of a peculiar kind which has no exact parallel in the Bible, except in the Apocalypse of St. John.

Commentary of the Book of Daniel is by Saint Jerome. St. Jerome, who was born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, and is the most learned of the Fathers of the Western Church. The Church regards him as the greatest of all the doctors in clarifying the Divine Word. While at Rome he made a revision of the current Latin New Testament, and of the Psalms. Then he undertook to translate most of the books of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew. The only parts of the Latin Bible, now known as the Vulgate, which were not either translated or worked over by him are the Books of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two Books of the Maccabees. In the sixteenth century the great Council of Trent pronounced Jerome's Vulgate the authentic and authoritative Latin text of the Catholic Church, without, however, thereby implying a preference for it above the original text or above versions in other languages. In 1907 Pope Pius X entrusted to the Benedictine Order the office of restoring as far as possible the correct text of St. Jerome's Vulgate, which during fifteen centuries of use had naturally become altered in many places. The Bible now ordinarily used by English-speaking Catholics is a translation of the Vulgate, made at Rheims and Douay towards the end of the sixteenth century, and revised by Bishop Challoner in the eighteenth century. The Confraternity Edition of the New Testament appearing in 1950 represents a complete revision.

Chapter 8

Verse 1. *"In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar, a vision appeared to me. I, Daniel, after what I had seen at the first. ..."* This vision came two years after the previous revelation, for the latter was beheld in the first year of Belshazzar, whereas this was beheld in the third year. And so he informs us: ". . .after that which I had seen at the first."

Verse 2. *"I saw in my vision while I was in the castle of Susa, which is in the region of Elam"* (Vulgate: "city of Elam"). Or else we may render, as Symmachus has translated it, ". . .in the city of Elam," from which of course the region took its name, just as the Babylonians were named from Babylon. So also the Elamites were thus named from Elam, in consequence of which the Septuagint translates it: "the region of Elamais." And Susis [that is, "Susa"] is the chief city of the region of the Elamites, and there, according to Josephus' account, Daniel erected a lofty tower fashioned of square blocks of marble, and of such outstanding beauty that it seems newly built even up to the present day. There also the remains of the kings of the Persians and Medes lie

Verses 18, 19. *"And he touched me and stood me upon my feet, and said to me. . . ."* Overcome with terror, the prophet was lying on the ground face downward upon his hands and knees, but at the angel's touch he was raised up to a standing position in order that he might without perturbation attend to and understand what was spoken.

Verse 26. *"Thou therefore seal up the vision, because it shall come to pass after many days."* Having explained the vision which we have examined above to the best of our ability, the angel Gabriel adds at the end: "Thou therefore seal up the vision, because it shall come to pass after many days." By the mention of a seal, he showed that the things spoken were of a hidden character and not accessible to the ears of the multitude, or susceptible of comprehension prior to their actual fulfillment by the events themselves.

Verse 27. *"And I, Daniel, languished and was sick for some days. And when I rose from my bed, I performed the king's tasks."* This is the same thing as we read in Genesis about Abraham, for after he had heard the Lord speaking to him, he averred that he was but dust and ashes (Gen. 18). And so Daniel states that he languished as a reaction to the horror of the vision, and suffered illness. And after he had risen from his sick-bed, he says he performed the tasks assigned to him by the king, rendering to all men all that was due them and bearing in mind the gospel principle: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25).

"And I was amazed at the vision, and there was no one who could interpret it." If there was no one who could interpret it, how was it that the angel interpreted it in the previous passage? What he means is that he had heard mention of kings and did not know what their names were; he learned of things to come, but he was tossed about with uncertainty as to what time they would come to pass. And so he did the only thing he could do: he marveled at the vision, and resigned everything to God's omniscience.

End of Chapter 8

army, he was destroyed without hands, that is to say, he died of grief. As for the mention of evening and morning [in that fourteenth verse], this signifies the succession of day and night.

Verse 15. *"And it came to pass that when I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it."* He beheld the vision by way of a picture or likeness, and he failed to understand it. Consequently, not everyone who sees comprehends what he has seen; it is just as if we read the Holy Scripture with our eyes and do not understand it with our heart,

"... And behold, one stood before me who resembled the appearance of a man." Angels, after all, are not actually men by nature, but they resemble men in appearance. For example, three persons appeared as men to Abraham at the oak of Mamre (Gen. 18), and yet they certainly were not men, for one of them was worshipped as the Lord. And so the Savior also stated in the Gospel: "Abraham beheld My day; he beheld it and rejoiced" (John 8:56).

Verses 16, 17. *"And I heard the voice of a man in the midst of the Ulai, and he cried out and said: 'Gabriel, make this vision intelligible (Vulgate: make this man to understand the vision).' And he came and stood near to where I was standing."* The Jews claim that this man who directed Gabriel to explain the vision to Daniel was Michael [himself]. Quite appropriately it was Gabriel, who has been put in charge of battles, to whom this duty was assigned, inasmuch as the vision had to do with battles and contests between kings and even between kingdoms themselves. For Gabriel is translated into our language as "the strength of, or the mighty one of, God." And so at that time also when the Lord was about to be born and to declare war against the demons and to triumph over the world, Gabriel came to Zacharias and to Mary (Luke 1). And then we read in the Psalms concerning the Lord in His triumph: "Who is this king of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle; He is the King of glory" (Ps. 23:8=24:8). [The point of this quotation seems to be that the Hebrew word for "mighty" *isgibbo^wr*, from the root of which comes the *gabri-* of Gabriel.] But whenever it is medicine or healing that is needed, it is Raphael who is sent, for his name is rendered as "the healing of," or "the medicine of God" ---- that is, if one cares to accept the authority of the Book of Tobias. And then, when favorable promises are made to the people, and *hilasmos*, which we might render as "propitiation" or "expiation," is the thing required, then it is Michael who is directed to go, for his name means, "Who is like God?" Of course the significance of the name indicates the fact that the only true remedy is to be found in God.

"And he said to me: 'Son of man, understand that in the time of the end the vision shall be fulfilled.'" Inasmuch as Ezekiel and Daniel and Zechariah behold themselves to be often in the company of angels, they were reminded of their frailty, lest they should be lifted up in pride and imagine themselves to partake of the nature or dignity of angels. Therefore they are addressed as sons of men, in order that they might realize that they are but human beings.

buried, and the custodian or sacristan and priest of that locality is a Jew. "While I was in the castle at Susa. ..." Not that the city itself is a castle, for as we have stated, it is a chief city of great power; but rather that the city is so solidly built that it looks like a castle.

"And I saw in the vision that I was over the gate of Ulai." Instead of this Aquila translated: ". . . over the Ubal of Ulai"; Theodotion rendered: "above Ubal"; Symmachus: "above the swamp of Ulai"; the Septuagint: "above the gate of Ulai." But it should be understood that Ulai is the name of a place, or else of a gate, just as there was in Troy a gate called the *Skaia* ["Western"], and among the Romans there is one called *Carmentalis*. In each case the name has originated from special circumstances. [Actually the Hebrew word " *'u^wbal*" is a common noun meaning "canal"; the proper translation would be: "I was by the Ulai Canal."]

Verse 3. *"And I lifted up my eyes and saw."* Yet of course one only sees in dreams things which appear as shadowy representations, naturally, and as mere likenesses, rather than our being able to behold the reality of the objects themselves.

"And behold, a ram stood in front of the swamp (or: in front of the gate ---- the word being UBAL in the Hebrew), having lofty horns, one of which was higher than the other and growing yet larger." He calls Darius, Cyrus's uncle, a ram. He reigned over the Medes after his father, Astyages. And the one horn which was higher than the other, and growing still larger, signified Cyrus himself, who succeeded his maternal grandfather, Astyages, and reigned over the Medes and Persians along with his uncle, Darius, whom the Greeks called Cyaxeres.

Verse 4. *"After this I saw the ram pushing with its horns westward and northward and southward..."* Not that he saw the ram itself, that is, the ram of Cyrus or Darius, but rather the ram of the same kingdom as theirs, that is, the second Darius, who was the last king of the Persian power, and who was overcome by the king of the Macedonians, Alexander the son of Philip. And as to the fact that Darius was a very powerful and wealthy king, both the Greek and the Latin and the barbarian historical accounts so relate.

Verse 5. *"And I myself understood. ..."* On the basis of the previous visions which had symbolized the second kingdom by the ram and the he-goat, Daniel now also understood that he was looking at the empire of the Medes and Persians.

"And behold, there was a he-goat which was coming from the West above the surface of the whole earth, and yet without touching the ground. ..." So that no one will think that I am attaching a private interpretation to this, let us simply repeat the words of Gabriel as he explained the prophet's vision. He said, "The ram whom thou sawest to possess two horns is the king of the Medes and Persians." This was, of course, Darius the son of Arsames, in whose reign the kingdom of the Medes and Persians was destroyed. "There was in addition a he-goat, who was coming from the west," and because of his extraordinary speed he appeared not to touch the ground. This was Alexander, the king of the Greeks, who after the overthrow of Thebes took up arms against the Persians. Commencing the conflict at the Granicus River, he conquered the generals of Darius and finally smashed against the ram himself and broke in pieces his two horns, the Medes and the Persians. Casting him beneath his feet, he subjected both horns to his own authority.

"And (he had) a large horn. ..." refers to the first king, Alexander himself. When he died in Babylon at the age of thirty-two, his four generals rose up in his place and divided his empire among themselves. For Ptolemy, the son of Lagos, seized Egypt; the Philip who was also called Aridaeus (var.: Arius), the (half-) brother of Alexander took over Macedonia; Seleucus Nicanor took over Syria, Babylonia, and all the kingdoms of the East; and Antigonus ruled over Asia Minor. "But (they shall not rise up) with his power" (chap. 8:22), since no one was able to equal the greatness of Alexander himself. "And a long time afterward" there shall arise "a king of Syria who shall be of shameless countenance and shall understand (evil) counsels," and even Antiochus Epiphanes, the son of Seleucus, who was also called Philopator.

Verse 9. After he had been a hostage to Rome, and had without the knowledge of the Senate obtained rule by treachery, Antiochus fought with Ptolemy Philometor, that is, "against the South" and against Egypt; and then again "against the East," and against those who were fomenting revolution in Persia. At the last he fought against the Jews and captured Judea, entering into Jerusalem and setting up in the Temple of God the statue of Jupiter Olympius. "...and against the power of heaven," that is, against the children of Israel, who were protected by the assistance of angels. He pushed his arrogance to such an extreme that he subjected the majority of the saints to the worship of idols, as if he would tread the very stars beneath his feet. And thus it came to pass that he held the South and the East, that is, Egypt and Persia, under his sway.

Verses 11, 12. And as for the statement, "And he glorified himself even against the Prince of Power," this means that he lifted himself up against God and persecuted His saints. He even took away the *endelekhismos* or "continual offering" which was customarily sacrificed in the morning and in the evening, and he prevailed to the casting down of the "place of His sanctuary." And he did not do this by his own prowess, but only "on account of the sins of the people." And thus it came to pass that truth was prostrated upon the ground, and as the worship of idols flourished, the religion of God suffered an eclipse.

Verse 13. "And I heard one of the saints speaking, and one saint said to another saint (I do not know which one), who was conversing with him." Instead of "another one which one I do not know" ---- the rendering of Symmachus (*tini pote*) which I too have followed ---- Aquila and Theodotion, and the Septuagint as well, have simply put the Hebrew word (*p-l-m-n-y*) *phelmoni* itself. Without specifying the angel's name, I should say that the author indicated some one of the angels or other in a general way.

"How long shall be the vision concerning the continual sacrifice and the sin of the desolation that is made, and the sanctuary and the strength be trodden under foot?" One angel asks another angel for how long a period the Temple is by the judgment of God to be desolated under the rule of Antiochus, King of Syria, and how long the image of Jupiter is to stand in God's Temple (according to his additional statement: "... and the sanctuary and the strength be trodden under foot?").

Verse 14. And he answered him, "Until the evening and the morning, until two thousand three hundred days; and then the sanctuary shall be cleansed." If we read the Books of Maccabees and the history of Josephus, we shall find it there recorded that in the one hundred and forty-third year after the Seleucus who first reigned in Syria after the decease of Alexander, Antiochus entered Jerusalem, and after wreaking a general devastation he returned again in the third year and set up the statue of Jupiter in the Temple. Up until the time of Judas Maccabaeus, that is, up until the one hundred and eighth year, Jerusalem lay waste over a period of six years, and for three [of those] years the Temple lay defiled; making up a total of two thousand three hundred days plus three months. [At least that is what the text seems to say, following the present word-order. Actually the three months should be added to the six years in order to come out to a total of approximately 2300 days.] At the end of the period the Temple was purged. Some authorities read two hundred instead of two thousand three hundred, in order to avoid the apparent excess involved in six years and three months. [Actually, however, 2200 days would come out to only six years and nine days; the reasoning here seems obscure.] Most of our commentators refer this passage to the Antichrist, and hold that that which occurred under Antiochus was only by way of a type which shall be fulfilled under Antichrist. And as for the statement, "The sanctuary shall be cleansed," this refers to the time of Judas Maccabaeus, who came from the village of Modin, and who being aided by the efforts of his brothers and relatives and many of the Jewish people [defeated?] [the verb is left out] the generals of Antiochus not far above Emmaus (which is now called Nicopolis). And hearing of this, Antiochus, who had risen up against the Prince of princes, that is, against the Lord of lords and King of kings, was earnestly desirous of despoiling the temple of Diana which was located in Elimais, in the Persian district, because it possessed valuable votive offerings. And when he there lost his