

The Message of The Kingdom of God: Studies in Daniel

by David Orton

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The genius of the book of Daniel is its proclamation of the Kingdom of God, its prophecies setting forth the victory of Christ in history over all humanistic/statist pretensions to sovereignty—to ultimate authority. Its message, therefore, has political implications: Christ, the King of kings, is sovereign over the state, commanding all kings and governments to bow the knee to his lordship. While not political in nature, the Kingdom of God is antithetical to the humanistic urge to paradise apart from God—the kingdoms of men. We should, therefore, not be surprised that this book, of the whole canon of Scripture, has become one of the most hotly contested by critical and rationalistic scholarship. Its authorship and dating are the focus of this attack, undermining its predictive power and authority to confront the humanistic state.

Traditionally the book of Daniel has been divided into two sections: chaps 1-6 and 7-12; the former characterized as narrative history and the latter as prophetic visions. This intersects with the problem of dating Daniel. If a date of 6th century BC is indicated by the historical section, it follows that a thematic unity between the two would support a common date for both and, furthermore, the authorial unity of the book (i.e. Daniel's authorship of both sections).

Consequently, the message of Daniel, and, more especially, its unity throughout the book, confounds the rationalist critics who deny Daniel's authorship (6th century BC), claiming a late date between 2nd and 4th centuries BC by unknown authors (in fact, separating the two sections by two centuries with the predictive section being the later). Hence, also denying the book's predictive element based on the claim that Antiochus Epiphanes (reigning mid-2nd century BC) was the fulfilment of chapter 9's prediction of the "abomination of desolation", arguing, therefore, that the writer was "prophesying" after the event.

The unity (or not), therefore, between the two sections is highly significant, as it affirms the divine inspiration of the book and the authenticity of its predictions. This unity comes into especial focus through the prophetic revelations of chapters 2 and 7. Both chapters delineate the course of history from the contemporaneous Babylonian Empire, to the Medo-Persian, Greek, and finally, Roman Empire, which, as the iron and clay feet of the human image, is destroyed by the stone cut out from the mountain without hands (ch. 2); and, as the fourth nondescript beast, is destroyed by the judgement of the "Ancient of Days" to whom the "Son of Man" ascends in the clouds (ch. 7). Both picture the kingdom of God overthrowing the world-kingdoms and remaining forever.

However, as Leupold points out, chapter 2 "touched on the subject without actually bringing the Christ into the picture,"^[1] whereas chapter 7 "offers a very glowing testimony to the eternal nature of the kingdom of the Messiah."^[2] In regard to chapter 7, Calvin comments,

Here Daniel begins to offer instruction peculiar to the Church. For God had formerly appointed an interpreter and instructor to profane kings. But he now appoints him a teacher to the Church, that he may exercise his office within it, and instruct the sons of God in the bosom of the Church. We must notice this first of all, because thus far his predictions extended beyond the limits of the household of faith, but here Daniel's duty is restricted to the Church.^[3]

In other words, chapters 2-6 focus on the kingdoms of men, whereas, chapters 7-12 focus on the kingdom of God.

Admittedly, the above comments are certainly accurate in showing the development of the Messianic nature of the kingdom of Christ in the church, which chapter 2 does not do, however, the division of the book into six chapters of narrative and six of visions can be challenged. Leupold contends that,

The first half of the book, extending from chapter 2 through chapter 7, portrays in a many-sided way how the world power develops. The second half of the book, chapter 8 to chapter 12, portrays how the kingdom of God develops. Yet the development of each is always sketched with reference to the other. We may, then, state the situation more comprehensively by asserting that the first half of the book depicts the development of the world power over against the

kingdom of God.[\[4\]](#)

In this light, then, chapter 7 provides an excellent conclusion to the first section, again reiterating the course of the world-powers, culminating in their final overthrow and the victory of the kingdom of God in time and history through the ascension of Christ and his active government through the church; thus, providing an apt introduction to the second section focusing on the development of the kingdom through the redeemed community. Keil, who concurs with his perspective, comments,

After describing in the first part the development of the world-power and its relation to the people and kingdom of God from the days of Nebuchadnezzar, its founder, down to the time of its final destruction by the perfected kingdom of God, in this second part it is revealed to the prophet how the kingdom of God, in war against the power and enmity of the rulers of the world, and amid severe oppressions, is carried forward to final victory and is perfected.[\[5\]](#)

It is argued that the usual division into six chapters of narrative and six of visions is considered “from the formal angle only: keep all visions together as a unit. It disregards the deeper material consideration: what is the substance of the vision?”[\[6\]](#) Used to substantiate this approach is the fact that chapters 2 through 7 are in Aramaic—a world language, communicating the message designed for the world at large; and, the sacred language, Hebrew, is used for the message to the covenant people as it describes the development of Messiah’s kingdom in and through them in chapters 1, 8-12.[\[7\]](#) However, Harrison and Schultz hold to the popular division of six chapters, history, and six chapters, prophecy[\[8\]](#), Schultz pointing out as noteworthy that, “... in the former, Daniel refers to himself in the third person and acts as the agent of revelation. In the latter, he writes in the first person, recording predictive messages supernaturally revealed to him.”[\[9\]](#) Hence, a delineation between the sections of six chapters each, of narrative versus visions, is evident.

If the more popular and formal approach is taken of dividing the narratives from the visions, the major correlation between the two remains in chapters 2 and 7. The most common agreement observed is “in the sequence of the kingdoms referred to.”[\[10\]](#) It is commonly recognized, by the majority of conservative scholars that the prophetic revelations represent, in order: the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman empires.[\[11\]](#) As Leupold comments, “To let one and the same book have two series of four empires in analogous chapters but to have different kingdoms represented is after all, confusing.”[\[12\]](#) He also suggests that the relation between the two chapters is that, “chapter 7 probes deeper into the nature of the two contrasted kingdoms.”[\[13\]](#) The symbol of a “beast” more adequately illustrates the animal nature of the godless power-state.[\[14\]](#) In fact, Revelation chapter 13 reveals that John’s “beast” (a composite of Daniel’s four beasts) is animated by the “dragon”: “... the dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority” (v. 2b). Therefore, chapter 7 of Daniel exposes the inner nature and spiritual dynamic of godless human government in the power-state and more particularly in the pretensions to deity of the Roman emperors, whose empire Daniel represents as the fourth and nondescript beast. The messianic claims of the Roman state to saviourhood were, of the four empires, the most intense and vehement in their persecution of the kingdom of God in the covenant people, the church. Rome’s bestial ferocity against the people of God was demonically inspired and actuated until, “... thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. ... The court was seated and books were opened” (7:9-10). Daniel says, he

... continued to watch ... until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. ... and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven, He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (7:11-14).

Calvin teaches that his dramatic overthrow of the fourth empire is in actuality the ascension of Christ and the preaching of the gospel through the agency of the church:

This form of speech was very appropriate for denoting the coming of Christ. For then God chiefly displayed his supreme power, as Paul cites a passage from the Psalms (68:8, in Eph. 4:8) ‘Thou hast ascended on high.’ When the subject treated is the first coming of Christ, it ought not to be restricted to the thirty three years of his sojourn in the world, but it embraces his ascension, and that preaching of the gospel which ushered in his kingdom ...[\[15\]](#)

Therefore, through the ascension the kingdom of Christ in the church becomes the agency by which the demonically inspired pretensions of the Roman power-state (and all other antichristian orders) are irrevocably destroyed. This same fate of the world-powers is demonstrated and final victory for the church of God is also assured in chapter 2:

In the time of those kings [Roman emperors], the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever (2:44).

The rock, without hands, is cut out of the mountain, is hurled upon the feet of the image destroying it, and itself filling the whole earth. Statist powers which, in the image of man, set themselves up as the focus of divine worship and as the bond between heaven and earth are destined for ultimate destruction as evidenced in the historic demise of Rome and the ascendancy of Christianity. As Rushdoony comments,

This is a political prophecy. The kingdom of God is not depicted as a political kingdom, but its unmistakable sovereignty in the political as in every other sphere is plainly affirmed. To separate that kingdom therefore from the economic, political and educational aspects of world order, and from reference to the messianic pretensions of these and other activities of man, is to do violence to the kingdom and to misunderstand it. While the kingdom is not of this world in that it is primarily and originally an eternal order, its triumph in and over this world is set forth in the resurrection, a historical event, and shall be developed in terms of the whole of history.^[16]

Therefore, the unity between the narratives and visions of Daniel – putting to bed the critical claims – is found in that both set forth the dominion of Christ’s kingdom in history over against the ultimate failure and final defeat of every humanistic/statist pretension to sovereignty. It is “in the time of those kings” and, more specifically, in the days of the Roman Empire when the “Son of Man” ascended to the “Ancient of Days”, receiving “all power in heaven and in earth” which he now actively administers through the church in the discipling of nations (Mat 28:18).

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References

[1]H.C. Leupold, “Exposition of Daniel”, (Grand Rapids: Baker Bookhouse, 1949, 1969), p. 276

[2]*ibid*

[3]J Calvin, “A Commentary on Daniel”, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1561, 1570, 1852, 1966, 1986), p. 9

[4]Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 79

[5]C.F Keil, “Commentary on the OT” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) Vol 9, Ezk & Dan p. 283

[6]Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 277

[7]*op. cit.*

[8]R.K. Harrison, “Introduction to the Old Testament” (Grand Rapids: IVP/Eerdmans, 1969, 1977), p. 1107

[9]S.J. Schultz, “The Old Testament Speaks”, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1960, 1970, 1980), p. 366

[10]Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 277

[11]C.F. Keil, *op. cit.*, p. 265

E.B. Pusey, “Daniel the Prophet”, (Minneapolis, Ma.: Klock & Klock, 1885, 1978), pp. 115-142

Calvin, *op. cit.*, pp 13-25

[12]Leupold, *op. cit.*, p. 278

[13]*op. cit.*

[14]D. Chilton, “Days of Vengeance – An exposition of the Book of Revelation”, (Ft Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 306

[15]Calvin, *op. cit.*, p. 33ff

[16]R.J. Rushdoony, “Thy Kingdom Come – Studies in Daniel and Revelation”, (Fairfax, Va.: Thoburn Press, 1978), p. 57

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