

Chapter 1: Introduction

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The Role of Christ

References to Christ

The book of Daniel is intensely Christ centered. In all there are no fewer than seventeen verses that make reference to Christ. This is not a small or incidental fact about the book of Daniel. And so it will not be a small or incidental part of the discussion that follows.

Chapter	Verses
1	-
2	34, 45
3	25
4	-
5	-
6	-
7	13
8	11, 25
9	25, 25, 26
10	5, 13, 21
11	22, 37
12	1, 6, 7

In the book of Daniel there are at least twenty occurrences of terms that refer to Christ, but some are used together in the same verse. Here we are listing, not terms, but verses. There are seventeen verses that contain such references, as listed above.

Apocalyptic

The books of Daniel and Revelation are like complete little Bibles with all the white spaces squeezed out. There are a number of factors that feed into this comparison. The apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were primarily conveyed in written rather than spoken form, they deal with heaven and earth, good and evil, great expanses of time – including the distant future. All these things are characteristic of the Bible taken as a whole, but not its parts taken separately. And there is one other consideration.

I submit that one reason why Daniel is so Christ centered is that Scripture taken as a whole is Christ centered. If inspired apocalyptic is like a microcosm of Scripture generally, it should not be surprising when we encounter this very salient characteristic of Scripture as well.

Daniel had many imitators, but they are uniformly deficient in one way – Christ. One can imitate Daniel's use of messianic figures, but not in a way that points to Jesus. It takes the Holy Spirit to do that. Daniel's imitators copied much of what they saw in the prophet's work, but this was something they couldn't be expected to understand. See appendix #.

Repetition

The book of Daniel is written in a repetitive style. The genius of the book lies in its recurring motif of four world empires following each other in history. The story of this succession of powers is told from different points of view in chaps. 2, 7, 8-9, and 10-12.

It is of special interest that the last of Daniel's four world empires is subdivided in each chapter where it is mentioned. In chap. 2 there is iron, and also iron mixed with clay. In chap. 7 there is the fourth beast, and also a little horn. In chap. 8 we have the horn without the beast (and in chap. 9, if one could speak in this way, the beast without the horn). In this last case what I mean is that the second (religious) phase of Rome's power transferred the spiritual focus of God's people from heaven to earth in Dan 8, whereas the first (civil) phase of Rome's power crucified Christ and destroyed Jerusalem in Dan 9. So in chap. 8 we are dealing with the horn and in chap. 9 with the beast, despite the fact that Dan 9 speaks of people directly and does not use animals as symbols.

Daniel's fourth and final prophecy has the same historical scope and takes us through the same list of empires as the earlier three vision reports. There is another reason for saying this, but just on current evidence, confining the prophecy of Dan 10-12 to a few years of time centering on the reign of one king won't work. Such an interpretation is out of step with the earlier visions and is not consistent with what we know about the structure and organization of the book as a whole.

People can try to impose a narrow interpretation on Daniel's final prophecy, but it does not derive naturally from the text. We must allow chap. 11 to cover a wide expanse of time. Doing this requires that we interpret the terms "North" and "South" in the chapter literally at first, but not at last. The meaning of these terms shifts gradually over time. The focus of history does not remain in Judea after God's people have gone elsewhere, scattering from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth within a few years after the cross (see Acts 1:7-8).

Daniel teaches itself if we will only outline it. Its repetitiveness, its parallel structure, are everything to us as we interpret these prophecies. We understand Scripture best when we compare Scripture with Scripture. In Daniel also – in its role as a microcosm of a larger corpus – we must compare one vision report with another to see the similarities among them. The nature of Daniel's writing style both enables and invites us to do this.

Focus

The material covered by Dan 2, 7, 8-9, and 10-12 is not only parallel. There is a progression in it. If we take chaps. 8 and 9 together, as I believe we must, there is a progression also in the length of the vision reports.

Prophecy	Chapters
Dan 2	1
Dan 7	1
Dan 8-9	2
Dan 10-12	3

This much has to do with externals, but when we go inside the text we see the same principle at work. In chap. 2 Daniel identifies Babylon as the first empire. In chap. 7 all of the empires are mentioned, but Daniel especially wants to know about the fourth. In chap. 8 Babylon – still in power – is not mentioned. The second and third empires are identified as Medo-Persia and Greece respectively (vss. 20-21), but the focus again is on the little horn.

I should say, the political focus is on the little horn. Actually the overall focus of the prophecy of Dan 8 is on the One from whom the horn seeks to obscure. This has always been Satan's work. Any alternative will do, just so long as people's attention is not directed to Jesus. Let us not replay the drama portrayed in this prophecy as we seek to interpret it. Let us interpret Dan 8 with Jesus primarily in view. See appendix #.

When we say that Daniel writes repetitively, this does not mean he is saying the same things over again. There is nothing static or thoughtless about any of this. Instead, each prophecy builds on what has gone before. So the twin emphases on repetition and on allowing the discussion to build toward climax are in fact not two emphases but one.

Again, the focus on the end, which takes us to the judgment in chaps. 7 and 8, and to the second coming in chap. 2, must carry over into chap. 11. The only consistent way to approach Daniel's final prophecy is to apply it to history in a way that is just as expansive and broadly based in history as those that lead up to it – and as Christ centered.

The Role of Rome

If the final prophecy brings us to Christ, it brings us to Rome as well, because Rome crucified Christ. The fact is that the power equation shifts over time. That's what the whole four-empire motif is about. Greece gives place to Rome, just as Medo-Persia earlier gave place to Greece, and Babylon to Medo-Persia. Similarly, although there are only four empires in the series, the fourth is subdivided in such a way that the Roman state gives place to the Roman church. Below I refer to these as Rome 1 and Rome 2. Thus, the kings of the North and the South are Greek up to a certain point, but Roman after that, and that if Roman Caesars can be kings of the North, Roman popes can be as well. See appendix #.

There is no fifth empire, so once Rome is introduced we follow it in its different forms all the way to the end of the chapter. Geographic symbolism is used progressively more throughout vs. 5-45, but it refers to different things in different ages of history up to and including the second advent of Christ.

It would a mistake to rule out any use of geographical symbolism in Dan 11 at the outset. Let Jesus have the place He legitimately occupies in the chapter and let the rest of our interpretation develop naturally around what we can learn from His presence there. Other books on the subject do not take this approach. So be it. Here we will talk about Jesus.