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The Book of Daniel

Chapter 7



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 7

Verse 1. *"In the first year of Belshazzar, King [reading regis for regias] of Babylon, Daniel beheld a dream. And a vision of his head [came to him] upon his bed. And when he wrote the dream down, he comprehended it in a few words and gave a brief summary of it, saying. . ."* This section which we now undertake to explain, and also the subsequent section which we are going to discuss, is historically prior to the two previous sections [i.e., chap. 5 and chap. 6]. For this present section and that which follows it are recorded to have taken place in the first and third years of the reign of King Belshazzar (Jer. 39). [Jerome's citation of Jer. 39 seems quite pointless in this connection.] But the section which we read previously to the one just preceding this [i.e., chap. 5], is recorded to have taken place in the last year, indeed on the final day, of Belshazzar's reign. And we meet this phenomenon not only in Daniel but also in Jeremiah [cf. Jer. 35 and Jer. 34] and Ezekiel (Ezek. 17), as we shall be able to show, if life spares us that long. But in the earlier portion of the book, the historical order has been followed, namely the events which occurred in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar, and Darius or Cyrus. But in the passages now before us an account is

Verse 28. *"Thus far is the end of the word."* That is, "the end of that word and discourse which the Lord revealed to me in this present vision."

"...I, Daniel, was much troubled with my thoughts, and my countenance was altered within me; but I preserved the word in my heart." Up to this point the Book of Daniel was written in the Chaldee and Syriac language. All the rest that follows up to the very end of the volume we read in Hebrew.

End of Chapter 7

conclusion.

Verses 17, 18. *"These four great beasts are the four kingdoms which shall arise from the earth. But the saints of the Most High God shall take the kingdom."* The four kingdoms of which we have spoken above were earthly in character. "For everything which is of the earth shall return to earth" (Eccl. 3:20). But the saints shall never possess an earthly kingdom, but only a heavenly. Away, then, with the fable about a millennium! [*Cesset ergo mille annorum fabula.*]

". . . *And they shall possess the kingdom unto eternity, even forever and ever. . .*" If this be taken to refer to the Maccabees, the advocate of this position should explain how the kingdom of the Maccabees is of a perpetual character.

Verse 25. *"And he shall utter (variant: "he utters") speeches against the Lofty One."* Or else, as Symmachus has rendered it: "He utters speeches like God," so that one who assumes the authority of God will also arrogate to himself the words of divine majesty.

". . . *And he shall crush the saints of the Most High, and will suppose himself to be able to alter times and laws."* The Antichrist will wage war against the saints and will overcome them; and he shall exalt himself to such a height of arrogance as to attempt changing the very laws of God and the sacred rites as well. He will also lift himself up against all that is called God, subjecting all religion to his own authority.

". . . *And they shall be delivered into his hand for a time, and times, and half a time."* "Time" is equivalent to "year." The word "times," according to the idiom of the Hebrews (who also possess the dual number) represents "two years." [The Aramaic original here, according to the Massoretic vowel pointing, has the plural ending ----*i'n*, not the dual ending ----*ayin*. To be sure, the consonantal text could also be pointed as dual.] The half a year signifies "six months." During this period the saints are to be given over to the power of the Antichrist, in order that those Jews might be condemned who did not believe the truth but supported a lie. The Savior also speaks of this period in the Gospel, saying: "Unless those days had been cut short, no flesh would be saved" (Matt. 24:22). In the final vision we shall assert the inappropriateness of this period to Antiochus.

Verse 26. *"And the court will sit in judgment, that (Antichrist's) power may be taken away and be crushed in pieces and utterly perish even unto the end."* This refers to Antichrist, that is, to the little horn which uttered the lofty words, for his kingdom is to be permanently destroyed.

Verse 27. *"But kingdom and power and a vast realm comprising all that is under heaven shall be conferred upon the nation of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an eternal kingdom, and whom all kings shall serve and obey."* Here the reference is to Christ's empire, which is eternal.

given of various visions which were beheld on particular occasions and of which only the prophet himself was aware, and which therefore lacked any importance as signs or revelations so far as the barbarian nations were concerned. But they were written down only that a record of the things beheld might be preserved for posterity.

Verses 2, 3. *"And during the night I saw in my vision, and behold, the four winds of heaven strove upon the great sea, and four great beasts were coming up out of the sea, differing from one another."* The four winds of heaven I suppose to have been angelic powers to whom the principalities have been committed, in accordance with what we read in Deuteronomy: "When the Most High divided the nations and when He separated the children of Adam, He established the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the angels. [Jerome here follows uncritically the Septuagint, which read *b^enev 'el* ("sons of God") instead of the Massoretic *b^ene^yYisra'el* ("sons of Israel"). Since in his own Vulgate translation Jerome followed the Massoretic text and rendered *filiorum Israel*, he must have written this Commentary before he translated the Pentateuch.] For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the line of His inheritance (Deut. 32:8). But the sea signifies this world and the present age, overwhelmed with salty and bitter waves, in accordance with the Lord's own interpretation of the dragnet cast into the sea (Matt. 13). Hence also the sovereign of all creatures that inhabit the waters is described as a dragon, and his heads, according to David, are smitten in the sea (Ps. 73). And in Amos we read: "If he descends to the very depth of the sea, there will I give him over to the dragon and he shall bite him" (Amos 9:3). But as for the four beasts who came up out of the sea and were differentiated from one another, we may identify them from the angel's discourse. "These four great beasts," he says, "are four kingdoms which shall rise up from the earth." And as for the four winds which strove in the great sea, they are called winds of heaven because each one of the angels does for his realm the duty entrusted to him. This too should be noted, that the fierceness and cruelty of the kingdoms concerned are indicated by the term "beasts."

Verse 4. *"The first beast was like a lioness and possessed the wings of an eagle. I beheld until her wings were torn away, and she was raised upright from the ground and stood on her feet like a human being, and she was given a human heart."* The kingdom of the Babylonians was not called a lion but a lioness, on account of its brutality and cruelty, or else because of its luxurious, lust-serving manner of life. [Actually Jerome errs in rendering *'arye^h* as lioness, for it is the regular masculine form for "lion" in Aramaic, "lioness" being *'aryuta'*. Perhaps Jerome mistook the *he* in the unpointed text before him as the common feminine ending----*a^h*. Or else he simply relied uncritically upon the Septuagint, which commits the same error.] For writers upon the natural history of beasts assert that lionesses are fiercer than lions, especially if they are nursing their cubs, and constantly are passionate in their desire for sexual relations. And as for the

fact that she possessed eagle's wings, this indicates the pride of the all-powerful kingdom, the ruler of which declares in Isaiah: "Above the stars of heaven will I place my throne, and I shall be like unto the Most High" (Isa. 14). Therefore he is told: "Though thou be borne on high like an eagle, thence will I drag thee down" (Obad.). Moreover, just as the lion occupies kingly rank among beasts, so also the eagle among the birds. But it should also be said that the eagle enjoys a long span of life, and that the kingdom of Assyrians had held sway for many generations. And as for the fact that the wings of the lioness or eagle were torn away, this signifies the other kingdoms over which it had ruled and soared about in the world. "And she was raised up," he says, "from the ground"; which means, of course, that the Chaldean empire was overthrown. And as for what follows, "And she stood upon her feet like a human being, and she was given a human heart," if we understand this as applying to Nebuchadnezzar, it is very evident that after he lost his kingdom and his power had been taken away from him, and after he was once more restored to his original state, he not only learned to be a man instead of a lioness but he also received back the heart which he had lost. But if on the other hand this is to be understood as applying in a general way to the kingdom of the Chaldeans, then it signifies that after Belshazzar was slain [reading *interfecto* for the impossible *inperfecto* of the text], and the Medes and Persians succeeded to imperial power, then the men of Babylon realized that theirs was a frail and lowly nature after all. Note the order followed here: the lioness is equivalent to the golden head of the image [in chap. 2].

Verse 5. "*And behold another beast like a bear stood up on one side; and there were three rows in his mouth and in his teeth; and they said to him: 'Arise up and devour flesh in abundance.'*" The second beast resembling a bear is the same as that of which we read in the vision of the statue (2:32): "His chest and arms were of silver." In the former case the comparison was based on the hardness of the metal, in this case on the ferocity of the bear. For the Persian kingdom followed a rigorous and frugal manner of life after the manner of the Spartans, and that too to such an extent that they used to use salt and nasturtium-cress in their relish. Let us consult the record of the childhood of Cyrus the Great (i.e., "The Education or Training" of Cyrus) [Jerome refers here to Xenophon's "Cyropaideia"]. And as for the fact that the bear is said to have "stood up on one side," the Hebrews interpret it by saying that the Persians never perpetrated any cruelty against Israel. Hence they are described in the Prophecy of Zechariah also as white horses (Zech. 1). But as for the three rows or ranks that were in his mouth and between his teeth, one authority has interpreted this to mean that allusion was made to the fact that the Persian kingdom was divided up among three princes, just as we read in the sections dealing with Belshazzar and with Darius that there were three princes who were in charge of the one hundred and twenty satraps. But other commentators affirm that these were three kings of the Persians who were subsequent to Cyrus, and yet they fail to mention them by name. But we know that after Cyrus's reign of thirty years his son Cambyses ruled among the Persians, and his brothers the magi [the plural seems unwarranted, since there was but one brother involved, namely, Smerdis], and then Darius, in the second year of whose reign the rebuilding of the Temple was commenced at Jerusalem. The fifth king was Xerxes, the son of Darius; the sixth was Artabanus [actually only the assassin of Xerxes; he never became king]; the seventh, Artaxerxes who was

Verse 11. "*I looked on because of the sound of the lofty words which that horn was uttering.*" The judgment of God descends for the humbling of pride. Hence the Roman Empire also will be destroyed, because [it is] the horn [which] was uttering the lofty words.

". . . *And I saw that the beast was slain and its body perished.*" In the one empire of the Romans, all the kingdoms at once are to be destroyed, because of the blasphemy of the Antichrist. And the [succeeding] empire shall not be an earthly empire at all, but it is simply the abode of the saints which is spoken of here, and the advent of the conquering Son of God.

Verses 13, 14. "*And behold, there came One with the clouds of heaven like unto the Son of man.*" He who was described in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar as a rock cut without hands, which also grew to be a large mountain, and which smashed the earthenware, the iron, the bronze, the silver, and the gold is now introduced as the very person of the Son of man, so as to indicate in the case of the Son of God how He took upon Himself human flesh; according to the statement which we read in the Acts of the Apostles: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up towards heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

". . . *And He arrived unto the Ancient of days, and they brought Him before His presence, and He gave unto Him authority and honor and royal power.*" All that is said here concerning His being brought before Almighty God and receiving authority and honor and royal power is to be understood in the light of the Apostle's statement: "Who, although He was in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and was found in His condition to be as a man: He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8). And if the sect of the Arians were willing to give heed to all this Scripture with a reverent mind, they would never direct against the Son of God the calumny that He is not on an equality with God.

". . . *And He is the one whom all the peoples, tribes, and language-groups shall serve. His authority is an eternal authority which shall not be removed, and His kingdom shall be one that shall never be destroyed...*" Let Porphyry answer the query of whom out of all mankind this language might apply to, or who this person might be who was so powerful as to break and smash to pieces the little horn, whom he interprets to be Antiochus? If he replies that the princes of Antiochus were defeated by Judas Maccabaeus, then he must explain how Judas could be said to come with the clouds of heaven like unto the Son of man, and to be brought unto the Ancient of days, and how it could be said that authority and royal power was bestowed upon him, and that all peoples and tribes and language-groups served him, and that his power is eternal and not terminated by any

says, "Whether thrones or dominions. . ." (Col. 1:16). And in the Gospel we read, "Ye yourselves shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 10:28). And God is called the One who sits and who is the Ancient of days, in order that His character as eternal Judge might be indicated. His garment is shining white like the snow, and the hair of His head is like pure wool. The Savior also, when He was transfigured on the mount and assumed the glory of His divine majesty, appeared in shining white garments (Matt. 17). And as for the fact that His hair is compared to perfectly pure wool, the even-handedness and uprightness of His judgment is shown forth, a judgment which shows no partiality in its exercise. Moreover He is described as an elderly man, in order that the ripeness of His judgment may be established. His throne consists of fiery flames, in order that sinners may tremble before the severity of the torments [of hell], and also that the just may be saved, but so as by fire. The wheels of the throne are set aflame, or else it is the wheels of His chariot which are aflame. In Ezekiel also God is ushered on the scene seated in a four-horse chariot (Ez. 1), and everything pertaining to God is of a fiery consistency. In another place also a statement is made on this subject: "God is a consuming fire" (Deut. 4:24), that we might know that wood, hay and stubble are going to burn up in the day of judgment. And in the Psalms we read: "Fire goeth before Him, and He shall set aflame all His enemies round about Him" (Ps. 96:3). A rushing, fiery stream proceeded from before Him in order that it might carry sinners to hell (Gehenna).

Verse 10. "*There were millions ministering unto Him, and a billion stood by His side.*" [The Aramaic original is more conservative: "A million were ministering unto Him, and a hundred million were standing (in His presence)."] This was not intended to be a specific number for the servants of God, but only indicates a multitude too great for human computation. These are the thousands and tens of thousands of which we read in the Psalms: "The chariot of God is attended by ten thousands; thousands of them that rejoice. The Lord is among them" (Ps. 67:18). And in another place: "He who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flaming fire" (Ps. 103:4). [The Protestant reader should always add one to the Vulgate Psalm-number in order to arrive at the Psalm-number of the Hebrew Bible or the English Version.] Now the duty of angels is twofold: the duty of one group is to bestow rewards upon just men; the duty of the other is to have charge over individual calamities [i.e., calamities in the lives of individuals? The original is: *qui singulis praesunt cruciatibus*].

". . . *The court was in session, and the books were opened.*" The consciences of men, and the deeds of individuals which partake of either character, whether good or bad, are disclosed to all. One of the books is the good book of which we often read, namely the book of the living. The other is the evil book which is held in the hand of the accuser, who is the fiend and avenger of whom we read in Revelation: "The accuser of our brethren" (Rev. 12:10). This is the earthly book of which the prophet says: "Let them be written on earth" (Jer. 17:13).

surnamed *Makrokheir*, that is *Longimanus* ("Long-handed"); the eighth, Xerxes; the ninth, Sogdianus [the reigns of the last two totaled no more than eight months]; the tenth, Darius surnamed *Nothos* ("Bastard"); the eleventh, the Artaxerxes called *Mnemon*, that is, "The Rememberer"; the twelfth, the other Artaxerxes, who himself received the surname of Ochus; the thirteenth, Arses, the son of Ochus; and the fourteenth, Darius the son of Arsamus, who was conquered by Alexander, the king of the Macedonians. How then can we say that these were three kings of the Persians? Of course we could select some who were especially cruel, but we cannot ascertain them on the basis of the historical accounts. Therefore the three rows in the mouth of the Persian kingdom and between its teeth we must take to be the three kingdoms of the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Persians, all of which were reduced to a single realm. And as for the information, "And thus they spake to him: 'Devour flesh in abundance,' " this refers to the time when in the reign of the Ahasuerus whom the Septuagint calls Artaxerxes, the order was given, at the suggestion of Haman the Agagite, that all the Jews be slaughtered on a single day (Esth. 3). And very properly, instead of saying, "He was devouring them" the account specifies, "Thus they spake unto him...." This shows that the matter was only attempted, and was by no means ever carried out.

Verse 6. "*After this I beheld, and lo, there was another beast like unto a leopard, and it had four wings of a bird all its own* [? the *per se* here is obscure], *and there were four heads to the beast, and power was given to it.*" The third kingdom was that of the Macedonians, of which we read in connection with the image, "The belly and thighs were of bronze." It is compared to a leopard because it is very swift and *hormetikos* [impetuous], and it charges headlong to shed blood, and with a single bound rushes to its death. "And it had four wings...." There was never, after all, any victory won more quickly than Alexander's, for he traversed all the way from Illyricum and the Adriatic Sea to the Indian Ocean and the Ganges River, not merely fighting battles but winning decisive victories; and in six years he subjugated to his rule a portion of Europe and all of Asia. And by the four heads reference is made to his generals who subsequently rose up as successors to his royal power, namely Ptolemy, Seleucus, Philip [i.e., Philip Arrhidaeus, an illegitimate brother of Alexander, who was proclaimed king upon Alexander's death, but never exercised genuine power, and died after seven years], and Antigonus [the precursor of Seleucus in the rule of the Asiatic portion of Alexander's empire]. "And power was given to it" shows that the empire did not result from Alexander's bravery but from the will of God.

Verse 7. "After this, I beheld in the night-vision, and behold, there was a fourth beast, terrible and wonderful and exceedingly strong. He had large iron teeth, devouring and crushing, and everything that was left he stamped to pieces under his feet." The fourth empire is the Roman Empire, which now occupies the entire world, and concerning which it was said in connection with the image, "Its lower legs were of iron, and part of its feet were of iron, and part of clay." And yet from the iron portion itself Daniel calls to mind that its teeth were iron, and solemnly avers that they were large in size. I find it strange that although he had set forth a lioness, a bear and a leopard in the case of the three previous kingdoms, he did not compare the Roman realm to any sort of beast. Perhaps it was in order to render the beast fearsome indeed that he gave it no name, intending thereby that we should understand the Romans to partake of all the more ferocious characteristics we might think of in connection with beasts. The Hebrews believe that the beast which is here not named is the one spoken of in the Psalms: "A boar from the forest laid her waste, and a strange wild animal consumed her" (Ps. 79:14). [This is the citation according to the Septuagint and Vulgate, whose translation of the Septuagint is here quoted; but the citation in the Hebrew text is Ps. 80:14, and in the English Version, 80:13.] Instead of this the Hebrew reads: "All the beasts of the field have torn her." [A more accurate rendering of the Hebrew would be: ". . .and the moving creatures (or "swarms") of the field do feed upon her."] While they are all included in the one Empire of the Romans, we recognize at the same time those kingdoms which were previously separate. And as for the next statement, ". . .devouring and crushing, and pounding all the rest to pieces under his feet," this signifies that all nations have either been slain by the Romans or else have been subjected to tribute and servitude.

". . .But it did not resemble the other beasts which I had previously seen" (Vulgate: "...which I had seen before it"). In the earlier beasts he had seen various symbols of fright-fulness, but they were all concentrated in this one.

". . .and it had ten horns." Porphyry assigned the last two beasts, that of the Macedonians and that of the Romans, to the one realm of the Macedonians and divided them up as follows. He claimed that the leopard was Alexander himself, and that the beast which was dissimilar to the others represented the four successors of Alexander, and then he enumerates ten kings up to the time of Antiochus, surnamed Epiphanes, and who were very cruel. And he did not assign the kings themselves to separate kingdoms, for example Macedon, Syria, Asia, or Egypt, but rather he made out the various kingdoms a single realm consisting of a series. This he did of course in order that the words which were written: ". . .a mouth uttering overweening boasts" [in the last part of verse 8] might be considered as spoken about Antiochus instead of about Antichrist.

Verse 8. "I was looking at the horns, and behold, another small horn rose up out of the midst of them, and three of the earlier horns were torn away before it. And behold, there were in that horn eyes like unto human eyes, and a mouth uttering overweening boasts." Porphyry vainly surmises that the little horn which rose up after the ten horns is Antiochus Epiphanes, and that the three uprooted horns out of the ten are (A) Ptolemy VI (surnamed Philometer), Ptolemy VII (Euergetes), and Artarxias, King of Armenia. The first two of these kings died long before Antiochus was born. Against Artarxias, to be sure, we know that Antiochus indeed waged war, but also we know that Artarxias remained in possession of his original kingly authority. We should therefore concur with the traditional interpretation of all the commentators of the Christian Church, that at the end of the world, when the Roman Empire is to be destroyed, there shall be ten kings who will partition the Roman world amongst themselves. Then an insignificant eleventh king will arise, who will overcome three of the ten kings, that is, the king of Egypt, the king of [North] Africa, and the king of Ethiopia, as we shall show more clearly in our later discussion. Then after they have been slain, the seven other kings also will bow their necks to the victor. "And behold," he continues, "there were eyes like unto human eyes in that horn." Let us not follow the opinion of some commentators and suppose him to be either the Devil or some demon, but rather, one of the human race, in whom Satan will wholly take up his residence in bodily form. ". . .and a mouth uttering overweening boasts..." (cf. II Thess. 2). For this is the man of sin, the son of perdition, and that too to such a degree that he dares to sit in the temple of God, making himself out to be like God.

Verse 9. "I beheld until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of days took His seat. His garment was as white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was composed of fiery flames and its wheels were set on fire. From before His presence there issued forth a rushing, fiery stream." We read something similar in John's *Apocalypse*: (Rev. 4:2 ff.) "After these things I was immediately in the Spirit, and lo, a throne was set up in heaven, and one was seated upon the throne; and He who sat upon it had the likeness of jasper and sardine stone, and there was a rainbow round about the throne like the appearance of emerald. Around the throne there were twenty-four other thrones, and upon the twenty-four thrones there sat twenty-four elders, clothed in shining garments; upon their heads was a golden crown, and lightning flashes issued from the throne, and voices and thunder. And in front of the throne there were seven torches of burning fire, which were the seven spirits of God. And in front of the throne lay a glassy sea like unto crystal." And so the many thrones which Daniel saw seem to me to be what John called the twenty-four thrones. And the Ancient of days is the One who, according to John sits alone upon His throne. Likewise the Son of man, who came unto the Ancient of days, is the same as He who, according to John, is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5), the Root of David, and the titles of that sort. I imagine that these thrones are the ones of which the Apostle Paul