

Daniel – The Key to Understanding Prophecy

1) *Why is Daniel the key to understanding prophecy?*

A) Among the prophetic books of Scripture (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Revelation), none provides a more comprehensive and chronological overview of the future of the world than the book of Daniel.⁴⁶

B) Consider the following list of important predictions from the book of Daniel:⁴⁷

- The successive rule of four great world empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (chapters 2 and 7).
- The appearance of the Messiah some 483 years after the decree was given to rebuild Jerusalem (9:25). This prophecy was fulfilled when Christ rode into Jerusalem at the Triumphal Entry.
- The violent death of the Messiah (9:26).
- The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (9:26).
- The reuniting of the Roman Empire in the last days under the rule of ten kings or leaders (2:41–44; 7:24).
- The rise of the Antichrist to power (7:8, 20; 8:23).
- The Antichrist’s military conquests (11:38–44).
- The beginning of the Tribulation—the Antichrist’s seven-year covenant with Israel (9:27).
- The Antichrist’s breaking of the covenant at its midpoint (9:27).
- The Antichrist’s claim that he is God (11:36).
- The Antichrist’s persecution of God’s people (7:21).
- The setting up of the “abomination of desolation” in the last days’ Temple by the Antichrist (9:27; 12:11).

⁴⁶ Walvoord, *Daniel*, 8.

⁴⁷ Sourced from Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 71–72.

- The final doom of the Antichrist (7:11, 26; 9:27).
- The second coming of Christ (2:44–45; 7:13).
- The resurrection of the dead (12:2).
- The rewarding of the righteous (12:3, 13).
- The judgment of the wicked (7:9; 12:2).
- The establishment of Christ’s Kingdom (2:44–45; 7:14, 22, 27).

2) Who was Daniel?

- A) Daniel (“God is my judge”) was a Jew who lived around 600 years before the birth of Jesus. He was a descendant of one of Judah’s prominent families, and may have been of royal blood (cf. Dan 1:3). His contemporary, Ezekiel, recorded that God considered him to be one of the godliest men who ever lived (Ezek 14:14, 20).
- B) Daniel was born into a world that was dominated by the Babylonian Empire. In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, the reigning monarch of Babylon, marched on Judah and besieged Jerusalem. Several months later, Jerusalem fell, and young Daniel (probably between 14 and 17 years old) was deported to Babylon in February of 604 BC.
- C) Daniel spent the rest of his life in exile in Babylon (modern Iraq). He lived into his late eighties (through the entire 70 year captivity), and witnessed the decline and fall of the Babylonian Empire, as well as the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire. God blessed Daniel, and he rose in power until he was second only to Nebuchadnezzar himself. God also revealed the future of the world to Daniel, from the Babylonian Empire all the way to the millennial Kingdom of Christ.



3) What are the three key prophetic sections of Daniel?

A. Daniel 2—Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream of a Great Statue.

1. The second chapter of Daniel records a dream that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar. In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a statue of a man. It was large and exceedingly bright, and its appearance was frightening. It was made out of four different metals. As he watched, a stone came and struck the statue on its feet and shattered them. Then the entire statue collapsed into dust and blew away—but the stone became a huge mountain filling the whole earth.
2. Daniel interpreted the dream for Nebuchadnezzar. He told the king that the four metals represented four different empires that would rule the known world,⁴⁸ one after the other.

Part of the Statue	Empire	Reference
Head of gold	Babylon	Dan 2:32a, 37–38
Chest and arms of silver	Medo-Persia	Dan 2:32b, 39a
Belly and thighs of bronze	Greece	Dan 2:32c, 39b
Legs of iron	Rome	Dan 2:33a, 40
Feet and toes of iron and clay	Rome II *	Dan 2:33b, 41–43

3. The stone that destroyed the statue represented Christ at His Second Coming. When Jesus returns to earth with His saints, He will defeat the Antichrist and all those opposed to His rule (Rev 19:11–21). The mountain that filled the earth represented Christ’s worldwide kingdom—it will put an end to the empires of men and will last forever.

⁴⁸ Daniel states that these four empires would rule the world, but this does not mean they controlled the entire surface of the earth. For example, the third empire, Greece, was said to “rule over all the earth” (Dan 2:39), yet we know its sphere of influence was not actually global in scope. Rather, these empires ruled the civilized world of Daniel’s time: parts of Europe, Asia Minor and the Middle East.

*Rome II - The final stage of the Roman empire—the feet and toes of iron and clay—has not yet arisen. Therefore, I have designated it as “Rome II.”

B. Daniel 7—Daniel’s Night Vision of the Four Beasts.⁴⁹

1. The seventh chapter of Daniel records a night vision that God gave to Daniel. In the vision, Daniel saw four great beasts coming up out of the sea. The first was like a lion, the second was like a bear, and the third was like a leopard. Each beast lost its dominion to the next, “but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time” (Dan 7:12).⁵⁰
2. The fourth and last beast was “terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong” (Dan 7:7). It was different from the other beasts, and it had ten horns. As Daniel watched, a little horn came up among the others—it pulled three of the ten horns out by the roots, and took their place. It had eyes like a man and a mouth speaking great things, and it made war with the saints and prevailed over them (Dan 7:8, 21).
3. Then Daniel saw a heavenly courtroom—it was presided over by the “Ancient of Days” (God the Father). The books were opened and judgment was pronounced. The court decreed that the little horn should be destroyed and its dominion given to another. “And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him” (Dan 7:13, ESV; cf. Matt 26:64). The Father gave Him dominion and glory and a kingdom—“his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:14, ESV). Then the fourth beast was killed and its body given over to be burned with fire.
4. Daniel was anxious and alarmed, and he approached one of those standing near the courtroom and “asked him the truth concerning all this” (Dan 7:16). The unnamed individual (likely an angel), explained that the four beasts represented four different empires that would rule the known world, one after the other.

⁴⁹ The events in Daniel’s vision are recorded in mostly chronological order. However, there are certain statements that, for narrative effect, are out of sequence (e.g., Dan 7:11–12). I have placed these events in proper order in my own description of the vision. See John Niemelä, “Sequence in Daniel 7:1–28,” Online: <http://pre-trib.org/articles>.

⁵⁰ The dominance of each empire ceased when it was conquered, but they “were prolonged” in the sense that each was absorbed into the next empire. Rome conquered Greece, but Greece continued to live on as a part of the Roman Empire. In a sense, Rome itself lives on in the fragmented nations of modern times. Sometime before the end, these nations will unite to form the final phase of that empire (Rome II). By contrast, when Christ returns, He will completely destroy Rome II, and it will be replaced by His millennial Kingdom.

Beast	Empire	Reference
Lion with eagle wings*	Babylon	Dan 7:4, 17
Bear raised up on one side**	Medo-Persia	Dan 7:5, 17
Leopard with four heads***	Greece	Dan 7:6, 17
Beast with iron teeth	Rome	Dan 7:7–8, 19–26
Ten horns	Rome II	Dan 7:7, 24

**The lion is the king of beasts, and the eagle is the king of birds. Most scholars understand the beast's human heart as a reference to Nebuchadnezzar's experience in Daniel 4.*

***The bear is raised on one side to show the one-sided union of the Persian and Median Empires—Persia was greater and more powerful, and had absorbed the Medes (cf. Dan 8:3). The three ribs in its mouth may represent Medo-Persia's three major conquests: Babylon (539 BC), Lydia (546 BC), and Egypt (525 BC).*

****The leopard's four wings may signify the speed with which Greece conquered the world (within 10 years), and the four heads likely represent Greece's eventual split into four kingdoms (cf. Dan 8:8): Greece/Macedonia (Antipater), Thrace/Asia Minor (Lysimachus), Syria/Babylon (Seleucus I Nicator), and Egypt/Palestine (Ptolemy I Soter).*

5. The ten horns of the fourth beast represented ten kings that will arise (they will unite to form the final phase of the Roman Empire—Rome II). The little horn represented a king that will come up after them—he will be different from the others and will put down three of the ten kings. He is called, among other names, the “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess 2:3), the “Antichrist” (1 John 2:18), and the “beast” (Rev 13:1ff.). He will blaspheme God and oppress the saints for 3½ years (the last half of the Tribulation). Then the heavenly court will sit in judgment, and his dominion will be taken away and given to Christ (the son of man). Christ will return to earth with His saints, defeat the Antichrist, and establish His everlasting Kingdom (Dan 7:25–27).

C) Daniel 9—Gabriel's Revelation of Israel's Seventy Weeks.

1. The ninth chapter of Daniel, which took place in the first year of Darius, records Daniel's realization (through a study of Jeremiah 25:11–12; 29:10) that the Jews' seventy-year exile in Babylon was drawing to a close⁵¹. This prompted him to turn to the Lord in prayer—he clothed himself with sackcloth, put ashes in his hair and observed a fast. He humbled himself and offered a confession of Israel's sin, asking God for mercy,

⁵¹ Darius was also known as Cyrus the Great. His first year was 538n BC. There are two ways in which Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled: (1) from the first deportation in 605 BC to the beginning of temple reconstruction in 536 BC, (2) from the destruction of the temple in 587 BC to the completion of the temple in 515 BC.

forgiveness and restoration. While Daniel was still praying, the angel Gabriel appeared and said, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding” (Dan 9:22).

2. Gabriel told Daniel that seventy ‘weeks’ had been determined “for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place” (Dan 9:24, ESV).
 1. Gabriel’s prophecy concerned the Jews and the city of Jerusalem. This sets it apart from Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 where the focus was on the future world empires of the Gentiles.
 2. The word ‘weeks’ signifies a set of seven years, thus seventy ‘weeks’ = 70 x 7 years = 490 years.⁵²
 3. The six divine goals for Israel have been interpreted in a variety of ways, but it seems best to understand them as signifying the complete scope of God’s dealings with His chosen people, from the post-exile period all the way to the beginning of the Millennium.
3. Gabriel said the 490 years would begin with “the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” From that time to “the coming of an anointed one, a prince” there would be seven ‘weeks’ and sixty-two ‘weeks’ (Dan 9:25).
 1. The decree to rebuild Jerusalem was the fourth of four decrees made by Persian rulers in reference to the Jews.⁵³ It was made by Artaxerxes in Nisan 444 BC and gave the Jews permission to rebuild Jerusalem’s city walls.⁵⁴
 2. The phrase “an anointed one, a prince” refers to the Messiah.⁵⁵ A total of seven ‘weeks’ (7 x 7 years = 49 years) and sixty-two ‘weeks’ (62 x 7 years = 434 years)

⁵² Years is the best interpretation of ‘weeks’ (lit. ‘seven’) since 490 days, weeks or months all lead to chronological dead ends. It is important to note that the ‘weeks’ are not said to be consecutive. Gabriel merely states that the time involved to complete the six goals mentioned in Daniel 9:24 would be a total of 490 years. This means that it is possible for there to be gaps of time between the ‘weeks.’ Daniel 9:25–27 give more detail on the grouping of the ‘weeks,’ but the consecutive nature of some of the ‘weeks’ does not mean that every ‘week’ is consecutive.

⁵³ The four decrees are as follows: 1) the decree of Cyrus in 538n BC (2 Chr 36:20b–23; Ezra 1:1–4), 2) the decree of Darius in c. 519 BC (Ezra 6:1–12), 3) the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra in 457 BC (Ezra 7:11–26), and 4) the decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in Nisan 444 BC (Neh 2:1–8; note that Tishri-based years were used for Artaxerxes’ reign).

⁵⁴ This decree is favored by dispensational evangelicals (e.g., Walvoord, Hitchcock, Showers, Anderson, Pentecost, Newman, and Ice). The reason for this is that the first three decrees did not permit the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s defenses (i.e., the wall and moat; cf. Ezra 4). For a thorough treatment of this issue, see Harold W. Hoehner *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), pp. 115–139.

⁵⁵ Walvoord, *Daniel*, 229. This is the view of the majority of conservative scholars.

would elapse between the decree and the coming of Christ (49 + 434 = 483 years).⁵⁶

1. The first 49 years is likely a reference to the time it took to rebuild Jerusalem. Nehemiah's wall construction project only took 52 days (Neh 6:15), but many more years would have been needed to restore Jerusalem to her former glory. Once Jerusalem was rebuilt, another 434 years would pass until Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem in AD 33.
4. Gabriel then told Daniel that after the sixty-two 'weeks' had passed, the "Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed" (Dan 9:26, NIV).
 1. The "Anointed One" being cut off and having nothing is a reference to Jesus' death. Christ rose from the dead, but His earthly kingdom has not yet been established. He is even now sitting at the right hand of the Father, waiting for His enemies to be put under His feet (Ps 110).
 2. The "ruler who will come" refers to the Antichrist, the little horn of Daniel 7:8. His people, that is, the Romans, "will destroy the city and the sanctuary"—this was fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. Note that this event is said to occur "after the sixty-two weeks"—this indicates that there is a gap of time between the sixty-two 'weeks' and the final 'week' (cf. Dan 9:26).
5. Gabriel's revelation concluded with a description of the final 'week'—"He will make a firm covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and offering. And the abomination of desolation will be on a wing of the temple until the decreed destruction is poured out on the desolator" (Dan 9:27, HCSB).
 1. The "he" refers back to the Antichrist—the "ruler who will come" (Dan 9:26). The Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for one 'week' (7 years). This final

⁵⁶ Given a 360-day year (which is used in this context; cf. Dan 12:11–12), 483 years is $483 \times 360 = 173,880$ days. Are there 173,880 days between the decree in Nisan 444 BC and Christ's triumphal entry on March 29, AD 33? The Julian date for the triumphal entry is 1733198.5. If we subtract 173,880 days from this date, we get a Julian date of 1559318.5. This date is March 8, 444 BC, the same month and year of Artaxerxes' decree (cf. Neh 2:1)! This is an amazing confirmation of the prophetic chronology of Daniel 9. Note: Julian date conversions may be calculated here: <<http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEhelp/julian.html>>.

‘week’ is commonly called the “Tribulation,” and the last half of the ‘week’ (3••• years) is called the “Great Tribulation” (cf. Matt 24:21; Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 11:3).⁵⁷

2. At the mid-point of the last ‘week,’ the Antichrist will reveal his true nature to the Jews—he will put a stop to the daily sacrifices and offerings, and he will erect an “abomination of desolation” (an idol) within the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. Dan 11:31; 12:11; Matt 24:15).
 1. The Antichrist’s treachery at the mid-point of the Tribulation will not be the first desecration of the Temple—Daniel also predicted that a desecration would occur prior to the end times (Dan 11:31).⁵⁸ This prophecy was fulfilled by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 168 BC, and his actions serve as a type for the Antichrist’s future desecration of the Tribulation Temple.
 1. On December 16, 168 BC, Antiochus ordered his general, Apollonius, and a contingent of 22,000 soldiers, into Jerusalem on what he claimed was a peaceful mission. However, when they were inside the city, they attacked the Jews on a Sabbath, when the people were resting. Apollonius killed many Jews, took women and children captive as slaves, plundered the temple, and burned the city. Antiochus’ objective was to exterminate Judaism and to Hellenize Palestine. Consequently he prohibited the Jews from following the Mosaic Law and did away with the Jewish sacrifices, festivals, and circumcision (1 Macc 1:44–54). He even burned copies of their law.
 2. As a final measure, he installed an image of Zeus, the Greek god, in the temple and erected an altar to Zeus on the altar of burnt offerings (cf. 2 Macc 6:2). Then Antiochus sacrificed a pig, an unclean animal, on the altar, and ordered the Jews to sacrifice swine’s flesh on the altar. The Jews referred to this act as “the abomination that caused desolation” (cf. 12:11; Matt 24:15), since it polluted their altar and made offering sacrifices to Yahweh on it impossible (cf. 8:23–25).

⁵⁷ There are 1,260 days in 3••• years (42 months x 30 days/month = 1,260 days)—so what are we to make of the 1,290 days of Daniel 12:11 and the 1,335 days of Daniel 12:12? I understand these to also be references to the last 3••• years of the Tribulation (the “great tribulation”)—the extra 30 and 75 days will most likely taken up with the judgments and other events that immediately follow the Second Coming (e.g., Matt 25:31–46).

⁵⁸ Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Daniel,” (2014 Edition), p. 133. Online: <<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/daniel.pdf>>.

2. Many years later, when Jesus was giving His “Olivet Discourse,” He cited the Greek translation of Daniel 12:11 (LXX) as the sign of the beginning of the “great tribulation”—the last 3••• years of the Tribulation. Thus Antiochus’ actions (11:31) are a preview of atrocities that will someday befall the Jews (9:27; 12:11).
 3. The Antichrist will continue to have his wicked way in the world until the destruction that is decreed for him is poured out (cf. Rev 19:11–21).
6. In conclusion, Daniel 9 is a comprehensive overview of Israel’s history from the time of Nehemiah in 444 BC, until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The events that are revealed take place over a total of 490 years (70 ‘weeks’).
1. In the first period of seven ‘weeks’ (49 years), the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt (9:25).
 2. (b) In the second period of sixty-two ‘weeks’ (434 years) which followed, the Messiah appeared and made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (9:25).
 3. In the gap between the sixty-ninth ‘week’ and the seventieth ‘week,’ two major events took place: the cutting off of the Messiah (the death of Christ) and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (9:26).
 4. The final ‘week’ (the 70th ‘week’) will begin with the introduction of a covenant between the Antichrist and the Jews. This covenant will be observed for the first half of the 70th ‘week’ (3••• years). At the mid-point of the 70th ‘week,’ the Antichrist will reveal himself and desecrate the Tribulation Temple. This will signify that Israel has begun a time of “great tribulation” (9:27).
 5. The culmination of the prophecy of the 70 ‘weeks’ is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ—His return marks the end of Israel’s 490 years, as well as the end of the world empires of the Gentiles foretold in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. For most of the intervening period, the two great lines of prophecy relating to the Gentiles and to Israel have/will run concurrently, and both will end with the same climactic event—the return of Jesus Christ.

