

Outlines in Bible Prophecy

Daniel's prophecies - An Introduction

- *Their historical & spiritual background*
- *Their nature and focus*
- *Literary structure*
- *Relation to the NT*
- *Daniel in the critic's den*

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Introduction

The prophecies of Daniel occupy a pivotal place in God's prophetic revelation. As with all OT prophecy, Daniel's revelations are about Israel *principally* and about the Gentiles or the "nations" *peripherally*. Although we get specific foreknowledge about the nations and Israel, we soon learn that their future course is intrinsically intertwined according to God's purposes in mercy and unto His glory. God has an unalterable purpose and plan for Israel, His firstborn *nation*. It must be understood that we are not speaking here about God's plan for the individual Jew who, like all men need to come to Christ in faith for eternal salvation. God's plan for the nation of Israel has to do with events on earth. The fulfillment of the unconditional covenant promises he made with Israel as a nation are integral to that plan. These covenants and are still to be fulfilled. They will be fulfilled to Israel under Christ during His millennial reign on earth. It is no surprise then, that Daniel's apocalyptic visions in Chapter 2 and 7 both end with the Millennial Kingdom.

Daniel's prophecies, with ample biblical justification are regarded by many as the "key to Bible prophecy." However, we must bear in mind that the "testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev 19:10). Prophecy has its fulfillment in the Person of Christ and, this being so *He* is rightly the Key to understanding all prophecy. In fact, He is the Key to us understanding all Scripture.

Though they have nothing to do with the Church, Daniel's prophecies serve to enlighten and convict us as to our distinct and blessed hope and calling in Christ. Like other OT prophecies, Daniel's prophecies were *written to* Israel and they are *about Israel*; but they are given *to us* for our learning and faith. As the prophetic program concerning Israel and the nations is unveiled, we see more of God's singular prerogative, providence and almighty power.

Daniel the prophet

Many of us are familiar with Daniel as a devoted prophet of God – the young man who "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (Dan 1:8). This and his trial in the den of lions under Darius are among the magnificent and enduring monuments to his unswerving faithfulness to God. His testimony is even more admirable, given that he lived and wrote at a time when God's judgment fell upon Judah through the hand of a "bitter and hasty nation." Like many of his brethren, Daniel was taken captive in the first wave of the Babylonian exile, which at the time of his writing was now drawing to the end of its 70 years as prophesied (Dan 9:2; Jer 25:12). With the coming of the Medo-Persian Empire, Daniel lived to see aspects of his prophecy fulfilled – and fulfilled literally.

Historical background

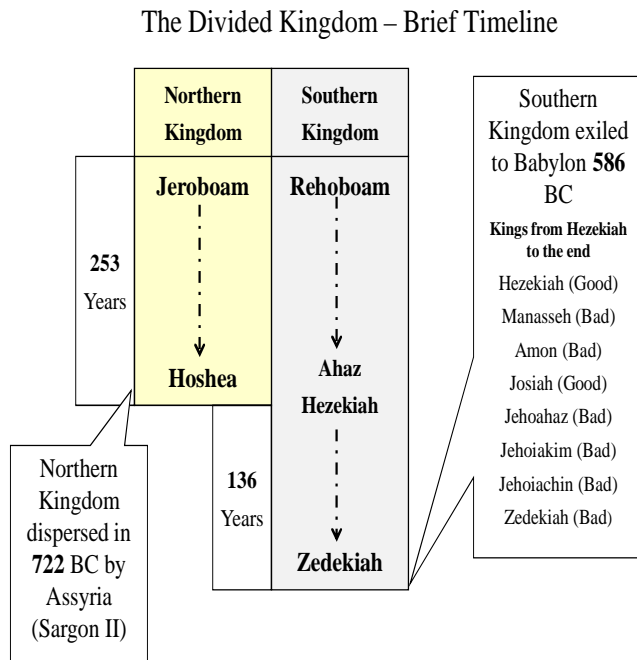
Judah in Exile

After the imperious and prosperous days of Solomon, the once united nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms, as illustrated in the brief timeline below. There was the Northern Kingdom (often called *Israel* or *Samaria* after its capital city) and the Southern Kingdom, usually referred to as Judah, or more contemporarily as the "Jews." Decades before Daniel's prophecy, due to its persistent spiritual unbelief the Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken captive by Assyria (722 BC). Its people were dispersed and they remain so today.

At the time of Daniel's prophecies, Assyria had been conquered by Babylon, which was then ruled by Nebuchadnezzar. The people of the Southern Kingdom – the Jews, were exiled in Babylon. On three occasions Nebuchadnezzar had invaded Jerusalem and taken captives. He pillaged the sanctuary and made away with its sacred vessels. Jerusalem, the beloved and revered city was destroyed. However, although they

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were under the oppressive yoke of Babylonian captivity, God had faithfully preserved the Jews as a people, as celebrated in the Psalms. “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion” (Ps 137:1-3).



This seventy-year period of exile was drawing to a close. God now reveals to Daniel what He has in store for the world, for Judah and the whole nation in a number of prophecies recorded in Chapters 2, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12. Daniel’s times were dark days for the Jews. They needed a fresh divine revelation of their future as a nation among the Gentile nations. There was, within them a faithful remnant through which God would execute His purposes. Daniel’s prophecies, therefore, are essentially about Gentile government and a revelation of the overriding arm of God in the destinies of the nations, chief of which is Israel – His firstborn nation. “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn” (Ex 4:22).

Spiritual background

Spiritual unbelief

“And the LORD hath sent unto you [Judah] all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt” (Jer 25:4-7).

At the time Daniel began writing, the Jews were captives and in exile in Babylon because of their spiritual unbelief, which reached its worst under its last and “profane wicked king,” Zedekiah. He [Zedekiah] did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim [his brother] had done” (Jer 52:2). This exile was prophesied to last 70 years, after which the Babylonians will incur the wrath of God because of their mistreatment of Judah. “And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations” (Jer 25:11-12). The overthrow of Babylon was fulfilled when the Medo-Persian Empire conquered Babylon and brought an end to the exile of Judah – as foretold and experienced by Daniel himself.

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Judah’s exile was also foretold by Isaiah in the days of Hezekiah. It was occasioned by Hezekiah’s indiscretion before the Babylonian envoy when he claimed possessions as his own when in fact they all belonged to God. “Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD” (Isa 39:5-6). As noted, all the holy vessels and implements were carried off to Babylon where they were used sacrilegiously by Belshazzar in that fateful feast (Dan 5). This is another prophecy which was remarkably fulfilled decades later. It is especially significant because at the time it was made Assyria was the major known world power and oppressor of Judah; Babylon was a relatively insignificant nation.

Daniel’s prophecies

We may view the prophecies of Daniel according to their:

- order
- nature
- focus

Their order

Daniel’s prophetic record spans a good many decades, beginning in his early years under Nebuchadnezzar to the days when the Persians under Cyrus gained dominance, as illustrated in the brief timeline below. Daniel, aged 16 years, was among the first wave of captives taken by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC. Among other young captives, he taken aside and schooled in the ways of the Chaldeans. Note the “pivotal” prophecies come first, each covering the same time span yet having a distinct focus, as we note below. The remaining prophecies corroborate and amplify aspects concerning these pivotal prophecies as they relate to Israel and its Messiah.

Date BC	Ruler	Empire	Prophecy	Chapter
605 +	Nebuchadnezzar	Babylonian	The Great Image – successive Gentile empires culminating in the Millennial Empire under Christ.	Daniel 2
553	First year of Belshazzar	Babylonian	The 4 beasts and the “little horn” coming in addition to the 10 horns out of the fourth beast – the Antichrist. The Millennial blessing to the saints under Christ.	Daniel 7
552	Third year of Belshazzar	Babylonian	The ram and the he-goat; the notable horn (Alexander the Great); the little horn (Antiochus Epiphanes).	Daniel 8
539	First year of Darius the Mede	Medo-Persian (Daniel in the lion’s den)	Seventy Weeks – the cutting-off of the Messiah; the 70 th week - the prince that shall come – the Antichrist; confirming of a covenant with Israel; the covenant broken.	Chapter 9
536	Third year of Cyrus	Persian (The faithful remnant were in Jerusalem rebuilding the Temple -Daniel perhaps now too old to return)	The Medo-Persian empire’s defeat by the coming Greek Empire; wars between the Grecian Kings of the North and the Kings of the South; Antiochus Epiphanes; the distant Great Tribulation.	Chapters 10, 11, 12

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Their nature

In regard to their nature, we observe that unlike other OT prophets, Daniel did not conduct a moral campaign against Israel's unbelief. This is not to say that he was unaware of the moral failure of his people; his prayer and confession in Chapter 9 throbs with sadness and moral concern, not just for the transgressions of Judah, but of "all Israel" (Dan 9:3-14). We can rightly regard his prophecies as the chronological framework that enables us to track the *consequences* and *course* of Israel's moral failure and, of God's faithfulness to His firstborn nation. Unbelief brought the nation under a period of chastisement known as the **Times of the Gentiles**. Divine mercy will deliver it from those Times and restore the nation to God.

In Daniel's prophecies, therefore, we are given unparalleled insight into God's prophetic program concerning the relationship between Israel and the Gentiles. There are two main prophecies that form the basis of this program – the **Times of the Gentiles** and Daniel's **70 Weeks**, the latter program falling within the Times of the Gentiles (Figure 1). However, we must not lose sight of the glorious terminus to all Daniel's prophecies – the **Second Advent of Christ** and, that through this event, the literal fulfillment of the covenant promises to Israel. The "testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Their focus

Here the prophecies of Daniel fall into two broad categories. The first category answers the question,

"What has God in store for *the world* concerning His program of government (secular and theocratic)?"

The answer to this question is given in the prophecy of the **Great Image** in Daniel Chapter 2. Accordingly, in that prophecy which arose from a dream by a Gentile king, we have the interpretation of the dream directed to that Gentile king, Nebuchadnezzar. It is an interpretation that presents a comprehensive outline of the course of various Gentile governments, culminating in the final government – the theocratic kingdom of God on earth – the "stone" from heaven that fills the earth, which symbolizes Christ in His millennial glory.

The second category answers the question,

"What has God in store for *His people (Israel)* under Gentile and theocratic government?"

The answers to this question are given in Daniel Chapters, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12. These chapters unfold God's plans for His people – what *they* will experience under successive Gentile governments and under the final millennial government of Christ. These two categories are illustrated in Figure 1, the first beginning and ending with Chapter 1, the second beginning with Chapter 7 and ending in Chapter 12.

They are clearly evident from the table above showing the order of Daniel's prophecies. Note how the prophecies from Chapter 7 onwards become increasingly focus on Israel and the Gentile nations that directly impact upon Israel – in a near time, such as the Kings of the North (Syria) and the Kings of the South (Egypt), and in a more distant day, such as the "King of Fierce Countenance."

These two categories regarding focus are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, the latter also presents an overview of Daniel's prophecies.

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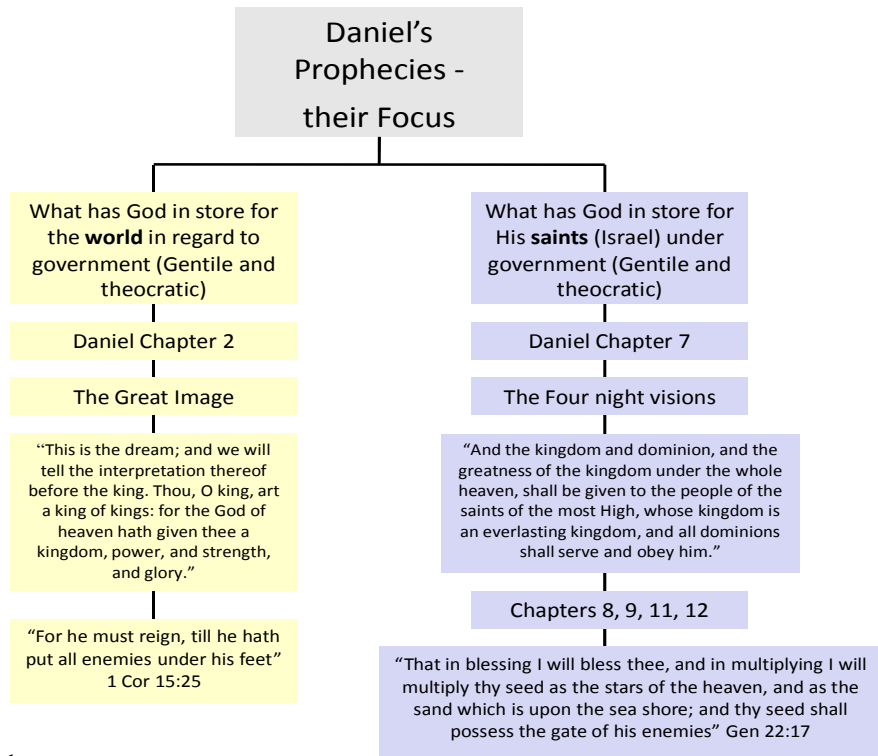
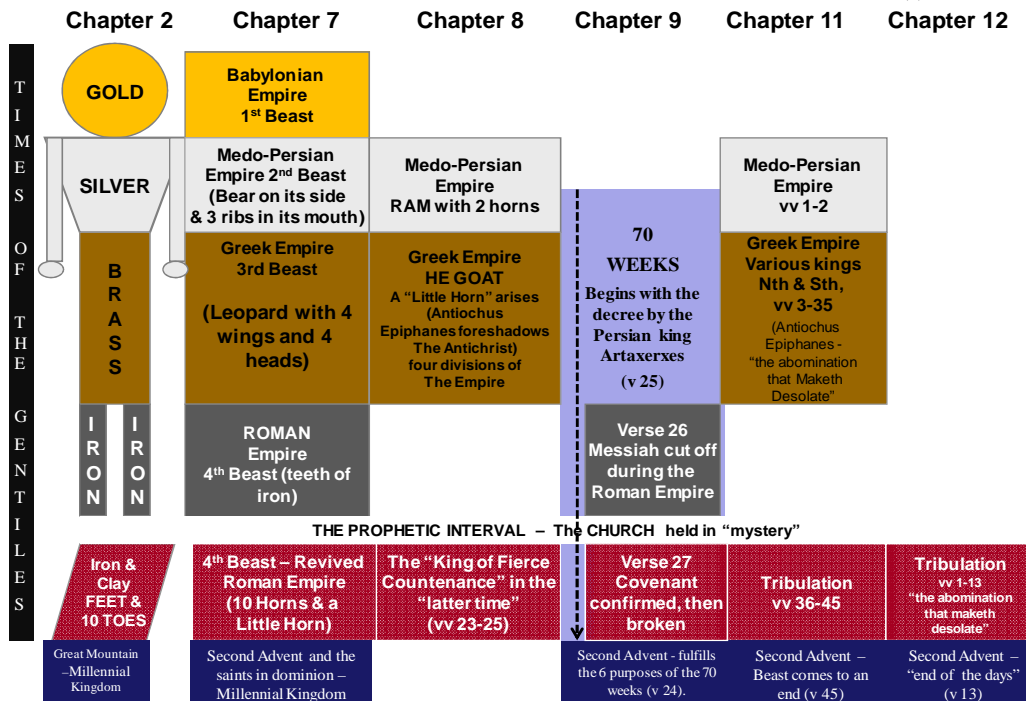


Figure 1 © J W de SILVA

Daniel's Prophecies – An Overview – Israel & the Gentiles

Figure 2

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Note the following observations from Figure 2, which show the clear similarity yet distinction in purpose and focus between Daniel Chapters 2 and 7.

- The prophecies of Chapters 2 and 7 span the same period of time. Both present the entire succession of Gentile rule – the Times of the Gentiles, which begins with the Babylonian captivity of Judah and concludes with the Second Advent of Christ and His millennial kingdom.
- From Chapter 7 onwards, the “saints of the Most High” are in focus, from the time of Babylonian captivity to the time under Christ. We read of their future:
 - Δ Judicial role. “And judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom” (v 22).
 - Δ Oppression under the Antichrist during the time of “Jacob’s Trouble.” “And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time” (v 25).
 - Δ Blessing under Christ. “And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (v 27); “The saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever” (v 18).

These revelations are not given in Daniel Chapter 2.

- In Chapter 7 the successive Gentile empires are symbolized as “beasts” rather than the impersonal “metals” of Daniel Chapter 2, consistent with the oppression and subjugation to be endured by Daniel’s people. Chapters 8-12 of Daniel then take up particular aspects within this panorama, furnishing greater details in regard to them, such as that which relates to the Jews under the Medo-Persian and Grecian empires, revealed in Chapters 8 and 11.
- The focus upon the saints of God continues into the final prophetic chapter of Daniel – Chapter 12, foretelling a time when Michael, the great prince, shall stand up on behalf of “the children of thy people” during “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Dan 12:1).

There is no such thing in Scripture as vain repetition. So when we come to the prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7, which cover the same prophetic span, or to those found in Chapters 8, 9, 11 and 12, we find them declaring unique aspects relating to that prophetic span. Faith does not look for, nor does it see discrepancy, but distinction, amplification and confirmation.

Daniel and the NT

Scripture must interpret itself, and so we find an unmistakable correspondence between the prophecies of the NT concerning Israel with those by Daniel. For example, the prophecy given in Revelation 13 takes up the form of Gentile government associated with the last phase of Gentile government on earth – that of the Antichrist. This empire – the revived Roman Empire, is foretold in the in the 10 horns of fourth beast of Daniel Chapter 7 (and the implicit 10 toes of the Great Image of Daniel Chapter 2). “And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy” (Rev 13:1). “Thus he said, the fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth,

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and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings” (Dan 7:23-24). Then we have the Lord’s reference in Matthew 24:15 to “the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet” standing in the holy place. This again links Daniel’s prophecies not only with the NT, but with a *still future fulfillment* (Dan 12).

The literary structure of Daniel

It is fitting to note something of the inspired literary structure of Daniel. The section from 1:1 to 2:4 (the first part of the verse) is written in Hebrew; Chapter 2:4 (the second part of the verse) to Chapter 7 (inclusive) is written in Chaldee (Aramaic); Chapters 8 to 12 are in Hebrew. This later section is suited to the understanding of the Babylonians and the Jews who were under *Babylonian* captivity. It is thus written in Chaldee – the language of the Babylonians and spoken by the exiled Jews. The literary change in Chapter 8 corresponds to the changing of the guard and its impact upon Daniel’s people. The Babylonians would soon be vanquished and the Jews would face upheaval and uncertainty under their new overlords – the *Medes* and the *Persians*, who are the focus in Chapter 8 – the ram and the he-goat respectively. It is most appropriate then, that Daniel’s people receive sure and sobering prophecies in their covenant language – not only for the immediate future, but also for a more distant day, the events during which will also cause great uncertainty for Israel. The literary change to Hebrew is entirely in keeping with the intimate subjects and sensitivities pertaining to Israel as the *saints* of God and the sacred things that concern them, such as the *sanctuary* and its *services*, all of which are featured in the latter passages.

Daniel in the “critic’s den”

Given the accuracy of Daniel’s prophecies it is not surprising that critics have sought to discredit his book along the following lines or argument.

1. It is claimed that the book of Daniel was not written in the 6th century BC (c. 534 BC) but in the 2nd century BC during the Maccabean period, after the events spoken of had taken place (c. 165 BC). This would mean the book of Daniel is *historical* not prophetic. However, a **copy** of Daniel dated to the Maccabean period was found in the Qumran Caves which means the original predated it. Moreover, Daniel declares he was personally involved in the affairs of Babylon at the time of Nebuchadnezzar – the time he interpreted the king’s dream, which was prior to the emergence of the three other empires. This is reflected in the two languages used in the Book, Babylonian-Chaldee and Hebrew. Daniel was among many young men taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar for the purpose of schooling them in Chaldean words and ways. A good part of the Chaldee section (Chapter 2:4 – Chapter 7) was of particular relevance to the Babylonians.
2. It argued that the use of Persian and Greek words prove that Daniel has a later date of writing. Greek musical instruments are mentioned in Daniel 3. These are hardly serious arguments. To begin with, Daniel was not predicting the coming of the Persian or Greek *people* – they existed at the time of the Babylonian Empire. He was predicting the emergence of their successive *world-dominating empires*. Given the numerous trade routes, multicultural armies and regional skirmishes in those days, it would be extremely unusual for the Babylonians not to possess instruments and literary knowledge belonging to other cultures. In fact the existence of such elements in the record actually authenticates Daniel’s date and context.
3. Critics correctly point out that Daniel is not placed in the *Nebiyim* or “prophetic books” within the Hebrew canon. It is found in the later *Kethubim* or the “Writings.” Given that Malachi, the last of the prophetic books, was written in the 5th century BC, then had Daniel been written earlier in the 6th century BC, it would have been included as part of the *Nebiyim* – the books of prophecy. But this is a mere hypothesis! For the reasons noted above, Daniel was not considered to be a book similar to

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those written by the other prophets. He presents comparatively little of the weighty moral argument behind divine prophecy. His prophecies focus on the *course* and *character* of *Gentile government* - the Times of the Gentiles, at the end of which there will be righteous and glorious government under Christ. From Chapter 7 Daniel's prophecies present a panorama of God's judicial dealing with His unbelieving people through the agency of Gentile powers – they were the instrument of God's judgment upon them. The Gentiles subjugate Israel and take the pre-eminent place in government, the place that Israel forfeited. This Gentile subjection will end with the Second Advent of the Messiah – the “Stone cut out without hands.” He will then establish the Millennial Kingdom on earth – the stone that fills the earth. “The place occupied by this book [Daniel] in the Hebrew canon perfectly corresponds with the place of Daniel in the theocracy. Daniel did not labour as the rest of the prophets labored whose writings form the class of the *Nebiyim*. He was a not a moralizing prophet among the congregation of Israel, but a minister of state under the Chaldean and Medo-Persian world-rulers.”¹

Finally, and conclusively, we have the unquestionable accreditation given to the book of Daniel in that the Lord Himself corroborates and amplifies Daniel's prophecy relating to the *still future* abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15). “God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar” (Rom 3:4).

¹ Keil & Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament – Daniel* p 505. Hendrikson