

Introduction

The books of Daniel and Revelation are the core of all end-times studies in the Bible. Revelation seems to be the most fun, since its symbols let interpreters play with all sorts of sensational speculations. But that book doesn't stand alone. It builds on the prophecies God revealed to a humble captive Jew in Babylon in the sixth century BC.

Now, Daniel isn't the only source Revelation draws from. It uses lots of good stuff from other books in the Old Testament. But Daniel is the most important single source. The good news is that Daniel is the clearest of all the end-times prophecies. The bad news is that it's the clearest. It doesn't leave a lot of room for speculation, *if you let the Bible interpret itself*. Sensational theories based on the New York Times or CNN are ruled out.

You heard me right. The first rule of interpretation is to let the Bible interpret itself. Now, I know that sounds like I'm telling you that you'll learn Hebrew by reading Hebrew, even if you don't know what the letters are. And that's obviously nonsense. So let's explain what it means.

First, we have to be sure we understand what subject is being discussed. Then we have to be sure we understand all the words. Sometimes we'll have to look up the original Hebrew or Aramaic in a dictionary or lexicon. Then we'll look at unfamiliar expressions to see what they'd mean to Daniel. That means we'll have to see how other Bible writers used them. Once we've done all this, we'll have a pretty good idea of what's going on. To illustrate, let me preview one item.

Daniel 11:41 mentions "Edom, Moab, and the foremost of the sons of Ammon." None of those people exist today, so it's easy to speculate that this means the current countries of Jordan, Syria, and so on, since that's where those people lived. That lets interpreters use the daily news to figure out what's next in the story. But the Bible doesn't work that way. Daniel knew what that term meant, because it was part of his heritage. If we look for that term in the Bible, we'll know what he knew, and we can use it to tell us what the verse means.

There are many places where we'll see the Bible interpret itself. If we throw the newspaper away and open God's word, God's message will come through. Now, don't take me as saying that geography and politics are completely unimportant. That wouldn't be true. But what I am saying is that that isn't God's main interest. Those things are in prophecy in a limited way because that's the world man inhabits. They give us concrete pillars to build our understanding on. Just call them "landmarks."

There are some places where technical stuff comes up. I'll try to keep things as simple as possible. Sometimes I'll put technical things in footnotes. Other times I'll put them in boxes or graphics.

Next, there will be a lot of text citations in parentheses. Texts from Daniel will be just numbers – chapter and verse. After all, that's the book we're exploring. Citations outside Daniel will include the book name, using standard abbreviations.

A citation after a scripture quote tells where that scripture was found. Other citations will tell where to find texts that support the point I'm making. Sometimes a citation will begin with "cf." That's the abbreviation for the Latin word *confer*, meaning "compare." Texts beginning with "cf." are there to give a comparison to the text I'm

using to make my point. Occasionally I'll use "ff." after a citation. That means I'm giving you the starting text. If you read on, you'll get the full picture of what I'm talking about.

I don't expect anyone to take my word for anything, because that would be dangerous. After all, God is the authority, not me. I'm trying to be careful to talk about the same things God talks about in the Bible. So if there is ever a question, go back to the Bible. You don't need to stop there. Use all the tools in your library, including lexicons and commentaries. But be careful. Commentaries are the ideas of men, just like this book is. Everything has to be checked against God's word.

This study will treat the Bible as God's word. That is, the Bible's true. I'm not going to go into a lot of the arguments about whether the Bible was written when it says it was, whether it was truly inspired by God, and so on. I am quite capable of discussing them. But those arguments would distract us from Daniel's message. For those who simply must talk about this, I'll mention two items.

Many skeptics argue that the book of Daniel was written in the second century BC in a form called *vaticinia ex eventu*. This means that it looks and sounds like prophecy, but is really history, written as if it was prophecy. This idea runs into big problems in Daniel 5:1 where we find "Belshazzar the king." Nobody in the second century knew about Belshazzar. For a long time, even archeologists thought he was an invented character.

Then the Nabonidas Chronicle was discovered. Nabonidas was the real king, but he wasn't interested in the day-to-day management of Babylon. He'd rather be off on military expeditions against Egypt. So Nabonidas left his son Belshazzar to take care of Babylon. Belshazzar, the crown prince, became *melek*. This word, often translated "king," means "ruler," and can apply to just about any political boss from the local mayor on up, depending on context.

Belshazzar, the ruler nobody knew about in the second century, was real. And this brings us to a second point. In Daniel 5:16, Belshazzar promises Daniel the *third* position in the kingdom if he can read the handwriting on the wall. Daniel, of course, declines the honor. But for a second century writer who "invented" Belshazzar the king to offer Daniel the *third* place in the kingdom would be very strange. The normal offer would be the number *two* spot. The honoree would be second only to the true king. But Belshazzar isn't the true king. His dad is. So Belshazzar can't go any higher with his offer than number three.

The accuracy of this account, both in the names and actions, tells us that the author was exactly who he said he was – a member of the royal court of Babylon in the sixth century BC. Nobody else would have a prayer of getting the story right.

There are lots of other bits to support our conclusion, but we won't bother with them here. The book of Daniel is exactly what it says it is – an accurate account of events and revelations in Babylon in the sixth century BC.

I have to disappoint some of you at the beginning. I'm not going to jump into the juicy parts of prophecy right away. We'll get to them, but I'm going to go through the historical part of the book first. This will set the stage as we go through the prophecies. It will tell us about the things Daniel thought were really important. We'll use that focus

when the prophecies get interesting. And I'll try not to take too much time on history. It's interesting, but we're here for the prophecies.

At times I may say something that sounds different from what you've heard. Before you throw the book away, ask yourself if I supported my comments from scripture. If I did, keep reading. If I didn't, feel free to use the book for firewood.

Ted Noel