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Recommended Citation

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Revelation and Interpretation in Daniel

GERHARD F. HASEL

THE BOOK of Daniel contains aspects of God's revelation that in several ways are unique. Nowhere else among the prophetic words of Scripture do we find such a carefully laid out overview of history beginning with the time of the author and closing with the time of the end (Dan. 2:28ff.; 8:17, 19; 12:4, 9), the establishment of God's eternal kingdom (verse 44ff.), and the resurrection of the righteous "to everlasting life" (chap. 12:2). It is our purpose in this article (1) to investigate the different forms in which God revealed Himself in the book of Daniel and (2) to study the Heavensent interpretations. These considerations throw additional light upon the tie-in between Daniel 8 and 9.

Forms of Revelation

Every student of the book of Daniel will recognize that explicit statements of God's revelation come in a variety of forms and modes in this apocalyptic book. First, there are "dreams." In Daniel 2:1 it is reported that the Neo-Babylonian monarch, Nebuchadnezzar, "dreamed dreams." The plural "dreams" may be intended to "denote an indefinite singular,"¹ a dream experience in which the various parts come to the king. The singular "dream" is employed throughout the remainder of the chapter (verses 3-6ff.) Later Nebuchadnezzar was given another "dream" (chap. 4:5-9, 18, 19), which revealed his future madness. The recipient of the third "dream" was Daniel himself (chap. 7:1). He viewed four monstrous beasts coming out of the sea followed by a session of the divine court.

It is important to note that a "dream" can also be designated as a "night vision" (verses 2, 7, 13), indicating that the time when the dream came was at night, and as "visions of your/my head" (chaps. 2:28; 4:5, 10, 13; 7:1, 15) to which is often

added "as you/I lay in bed" (chaps. 2:28; 4:5, 10, 13; 7:1). These designations and phrases indicate that the dream consisted of visions as is explicitly stated in Daniel 4:9 ("the visions of my dream") and came during the time when the recipient was asleep on his bed.

The next form of divine revelation in Daniel is designated by the term *vision*. This mode of revelation is not at all unrelated to the former (chap. 8:1), but may be properly considered to be an independent form. What is related in the various parts of Daniel 8, 9, 10 and 11 is singularly designated as "vision" without the customary indications as to the manner (viz. "dream"), time (viz. "night"), and location (viz. "bed") of the reception of the vision (chaps. 8:1, 2, 13, 15, 17, 26, 27; 9:21; 10:14; 11:14). Inasmuch as this is so different, the impression is gained that these were day visions rather than visions that came to the recipient in a night dream. This seems to be implied by Daniel's falling upon his face (chap. 8:17) while in vision and by his being so weakened through the content of the vision that he fell into a deep sleep, with his face toward the ground so that he had to be raised to his feet by the interpreter of the vision (verse 18). On one occasion Daniel is described as being in prayer when the interpretation was brought to him by Gabriel (chap. 9:21ff.).

Thus there seem to be two major modes of revelation in the book of Daniel. There is the "dream" that comes with its visions to both the pagan king and the godly servant, and the "vision," which in this book comes only to Daniel himself.

The only other mode or form of revelation in the book of Daniel is the ominous handwriting on the wall when Belshazzar feasted (chap. 5:5-28). As always in the book, only Daniel can solve the problem for only he is endowed with intelligence and wisdom such as only God can bestow.

In the book of Daniel "interpretation" is not gained through human knowledge or wisdom (chap. 2:30) but comes by divine

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Is There Internal Evidence for Relating Daniel 8 to Daniel 9?

revelation. Divinely communicated interpretations take place either through God's direct intervention in a "night vision" (verses 19, 23) or through "the spirit of the holy gods" (chaps. 4:8, 9, 18; 5:11, 12, 14), which resides only in Daniel and enables him "to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems" (chap. 5:12, R.S.V.). From Daniel 8 onward the interpretation is provided through a divinely sent angel or prince who is heard and/or seen in a visionary experience (chaps. 8:15ff.; 9:21ff.; 10:13ff.; 11:2ff.). The ultimate source of every revealed interpretation remains in all cases the only true God, who alone provides the interpretation, for in Him dwells light (chap. 2:22). He is known as the God "who reveals mysteries" (verses 28ff., 47, R.S.V.). It is for this reason that the interpretation is "sure" (verse 45).

Purpose of Interpretation

Having investigated the revelatory nature of the interpretations and their source, we are now in a position to reflect on the purpose of the interpretation of the three modes of revelation in Daniel, namely dreams, visions, and handwriting. A survey of the modes of revelation contained in Daniel indicates two types (Type A and Type B) of interpretations. The first type is provided in the interpretations of the dream of the madness of Nebuchadnezzar (chap. 4) and the mysterious handwriting in Belshazzar's banquet hall (chap. 5). Both interpretations have *immediate historical applications* that pertain to the personal experience of the respective rulers on the throne of Babylon. In these two instances, which must be considered as belonging to Type A interpretations, there is no intended fulfillment of events in the distant future. The emphasis rests solely upon the present, the time of Daniel.

Type A interpretations illustrate the reality that no king or potentate can overstep his divinely appointed limitations and get away with it. The madness of Nebuchadnezzar proves to the living "that the

Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets over it the lowliest of men" (chap. 4:17, R.S.V.). In similar fashion the mysterious handwriting on the wall finds its aim: "You . . . have not humbled your heart, . . . but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven" (chap. 5:22ff., R.S.V.). These immediate historical fulfillments foster the effectiveness and truthfulness of God's sovereign rulership over history when He "silently, patiently [is] working out the counsels of His own will."² It is an outworking of God's prerogatives of removing kings and setting up kings (chap. 2:21).

These immediate historical fulfillments are undoubtedly also intended to provide objective proof that the other events revealed in dreams and visions, and provided with divinely revealed interpretations, will as surely come to pass at their appointed "times and seasons" as those already fulfilled.

The second type of interpretation (Type B) predominates in the book of Daniel. The "dreams" and "visions" of Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9, and 11ff. are explicitly directed toward a future fulfillment. They are long-range prophecies covering the historical period from the time of Daniel to the distant future, in most cases with a special emphasis on the "end-time."³ It is for this reason that the words of Daniel and the entire book are concealed and sealed "until the time of the end" (chap. 12:4).

The dream of the composite image of Daniel 2 explicitly aims and focuses on "what will be in the latter days" (verse 28, R.S.V.). While the historical events until the end-time are presented in large strokes, history is depicted as swiftly moving toward its climax, which is "the end of the days" as the phrase reads here (and in chap. 10:14) literally. This phrase occurs a total of fourteen times in the Old Testament and denotes always "the *closing period* of the future, so far as it falls within the range of view of the writer using it."⁴ In Daniel 2 "the end of the days" is the

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end-time in which God will set up His everlasting kingdom (verse 46ff.). The eschatological aspect receives special emphasis.

The vision of Daniel 8 has also as its focal point "the time of the end" (verse 17), which is the "appointed" time of the end (verse 19). The Hebrew word for "end" here is *qes*, which means the "eschatological end-time"⁵ especially when used in connection with *mô'ed* as in Daniel 8:19 and 11:27 or in connection with the synonym *'eth* as in Daniel 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9.⁶ The same emphasis on the "eschatological end-time" is found in the expression "many days" in Daniel 8:26 which refers to "distant times"⁷ in the future and is but a circumlocution for the expressions in 8:18ff.⁸ Thus we find that the primary emphasis in the book of Daniel is on the "eschatological end-time" and the events in heaven and on earth that usher in the indestructible and everlasting kingdom, which brings the old aeon to an end.

This is made explicit, as we have seen, through the respective phrases of Daniel 2, 8, 11, and 12. Though the emphasis on the future with its focus on the end-time is not expressly stated in Daniel 7 and 9, the context of both chapters indicates that events are described that are to occur in the distant future. This leads us then to the conclusion that in contrast to the revelation and interpretation in Daniel 4 and 5 (Type A), which have their fulfillment in immediate history, the "dreams" and "visions" of Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12 (Type B) have their fulfillment in the distant future, in most cases with a special emphasis on the eschatological end-time.

Span of Time

These observations lead to another important fact: The span of time between the revelation of events predicted to take place and the actual fulfillment of the predicted event varies depending on the events. Some fulfillments took place almost immediately (Daniel 4 and 5), for others some

decades went by (viz. the fall of the Babylonian Empire with the rise of Medo-Persia). A recent writer on Daniel emphasizes that "just as the span of time between the revelation and its fulfillment can be of differing lengths of time, so *the lengths of time between the revelation itself and its interpretation can also differ.*"⁹ This is an important observation that must not be underemphasized.

Critics of the Adventist interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27 have from time to time objected that since Daniel 9:1 refers to the first year of Darius the Mede, which cannot possibly be earlier than 539 B.C., and Daniel 8:1 to the third year of the reign of Belshazzar or most likely 550/49 B.C., the time span of about ten years is of such a length that Daniel 8 and 9 cannot be connected in their interpretations. This is taken as an argument favoring the position that Daniel 9:24-27 must interpret the seventy years of 9:2 rather than the unexplained part of the vision of Daniel 8, namely the time feature of 8:13ff. or the 2300 year-days. Note, however, that those who would argue that Daniel 9:24-27 is an interpretation of the seventy years mentioned in verse 2 of the same chapter gain nothing with regard to the time span between revelation and interpretation. To the contrary, they run into a twofold problem.

In the oracle of Jeremiah 25:11ff., which is dated to about 605/4 B.C.,¹⁰ and mentioned again in Jeremiah 29:10 after about ten years had passed, the interval of time between the revelation (to Jeremiah) and its interpretation (to Daniel) by Gabriel in Daniel 9:21ff. would be almost sixty or seventy years respectively. In other words, the time span between the revelation in Daniel 9:2 and its supposed interpretation would be six to seven times as long as the one those interpreters opt for, who see in Daniel 9:24-27 the interpretation of "the vision of the evenings and mornings" (8:26; cf. verse 13ff.) which was not explained in the previous chapter. In the light of this fact the argument against the linking of

Internal considerations support the soundness of the interpretation that the seventy weeks in Daniel 9 explain the unexplained aspects of the symbolic vision of Daniel 8.

Daniel 9:24-27 with 8:12ff., 26, based upon the dates provided in 8:1 and 9:1, is without force because the time span between the revelation of the seventy years of captivity and its supposed interpretation is many times what it is when Daniel 8 and 9 are connected.


Another Evidence

There is no instance in the book of Daniel where an interpretation is provided for a revelation that has come to another Old Testament prophet. This consideration has considerable importance for giving additional support to the position that Daniel 9:24-27 is actually the interpretation of the unexplained time element of the vision of Daniel 8. Each interpretation provided in the book of Daniel is given in order to explain "dreams" or "visions" or the "handwriting" (Daniel 5), which was revealed to Daniel or to the respective kings. In other words, if Daniel 9:24-27 were to interpret a revelation given to Jeremiah, it would be the *only* place in the entire book where an interpretation of another prophet's prediction is provided.

This does not mean that such an anomaly and exception is impossible, but at the same time in view of the unique nature of the revelation in this book in terms of "dreams," "visions," and "handwriting," it seems highly unlikely that a revelation to another prophet would be thrown in so haphazardly. Therefore, one may maintain, on grounds of internal evidence, that Daniel 9:24-27 does indeed interpret a "vision" revealed for the first time in the book itself (Dan. 8) as is consistent with the general nature of revelation in the book of Daniel.

This consideration, together with other arguments¹¹ that strongly support the tie-in between Daniel 8 and 9, can be further strengthened by the unusual Hebrew term for "vision," used in crucial sections in both of these chapters in contrast to the regular term *chazôn* (vision). In Daniel 9:23 Gabriel states "understand the vision (*mar'eh*)."¹² The Hebrew term *mar'eh*¹² is

identical with the one used in Daniel 8:16, 26ff. In verse 26 Gabriel explicitly refers to "the vision [*mar'eh*] of the evening and morning," which is not interpreted because Daniel fell ill by what he had already heard. It is this *mar'eh* that the very same angel Gabriel again mentions in 9:23. This connection is recognized also by various critical scholars. The noted German commentator O. Plöger points out that *mar'eh* in 9:23 shows that this term "is formulated by depending on 8:16."¹³ S. R. Driver¹⁴ and more recently A. Bentzen¹⁵ maintain correctly that the words "as at first" in the phrase "in the vision as at first" (9:21) refer back to 8:16.

The closeness of the connection between chapters 8 and 9 is further supported by the reference to the identical angel-interpreter Gabriel mentioned in both chapters. Plöger writes on this point, "The connection with Daniel 8 is also established in that Daniel recognizes in the messenger (of ch. 9) the very Gabriel mentioned in ch. 8."¹⁶ These internal considerations give additional support to the soundness of the interpretation that the seventy weeks in Daniel 9 explain the only unexplained aspect of the symbolic vision of Daniel 8, namely the 2300 days-years aspect. 

¹ So Gesenius-Kautzsch, *Hebrew Grammar* (2nd ed.; Oxford, 1910), p. 400 #1240.

² *Prophets and Kings*, p. 500.

³ J. A. Montgomery, *The Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh, 1959), p. 346.

⁴ S. R. Driver, *Daniel* (London, 1900), p. 26. (Italics his.)

⁵ W. L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, 1971), p. 321.

⁶ A. Mertens, *Das Buch Daniel in Lichte der Texte von Toten Meer* (Stuttgart, 1971), p. 147.

⁷ O. Plöger, *Das Buch Daniel* (Gütersloh, 1965), p. 129.

⁸ The word "end" (*qes*) is used in Daniel 9:26 apparently for the death of the Messiah, but in 12:13a it may possibly refer to Daniel's death.

⁹ Mertens, *Das Buch Daniel*, p. 116. (Italics his.)

¹⁰ J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (Anchor Bible, 21; Garden City, N.J., 1965), p. 160.

¹¹ See especially *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 850ff., and *Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, 1957), p. 268ff.

¹² The regular Hebrew term for "vision" is *chazôn*.

¹³ Plöger, *Daniel*, p. 134.

¹⁴ Driver, *Daniel*, p. 133.

¹⁵ A. Bentzen, *Daniel* (Tübingen, 1953), p. 66.

¹⁶ Plöger, *Daniel*, p. 139.