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Introducing the Apocalyptic Visions of Daniel 7

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The term "apocalyptic" has come to be used as a broad designation for a particular kind of literature and mode of thinking that was clearly distinguishable by the second century B.C. Rev. 1:1 uses the noun *apokalypsis* to define the hidden revelation communicated to John through special visions. This essay employs the term apocalyptic in the broad sense indicated above. The characteristics of apocalyptic will be defined in general terms below. The purpose of this essay is to introduce the reader to the distinctive apocalyptic thinking of the writer of Daniel 7 whose "one like a son of man" is of interest to all students of the written Word. As background for this introduction, however, we shall give an overview of the nature of apocalyptic thinking and theology. For a more technical analysis of the topic the reader is asked to refer to one of the recent major works on this subject listed in the bibliography.

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF APOCALYPTIC

Scholars are divided on the precise features of apocalyptic which differentiate apocalyptic writings from their prophetic counterparts. That is natural enough. But when one has filtered through the detailed arguments of the men involved, certain characteristic components appear in most

of the apocalyptic texts. In summary fashion we outline these elements below.

Apocalyptic has its deepest roots in prophecy. The apocalyptic writer uses prophetic imagery, tradition, and thought as part of the stuff of his own piece of literature. He is concerned especially with reinterpreting the prophets to speak to the needs of his own day. He sees unfulfilled words of past prophets coming true in his time, the end-time. Thus Dan. 9:24-27 interprets afresh the 70 weeks of Jer. 25:11. This link with the prophets provides some justification for having the book grouped with the prophets in the present English Bibles. The Hebrew text locates Daniel in the Writings toward the end of the Jewish canon.

Apocalyptic writers draw on several other backgrounds besides the canonical prophets. The traditions of wisdom literature also had a profound influence. One cannot read Daniel without meeting the hero as the great wise man. Daniel is the epitome of the way of wisdom, the ideal wise man (1:4, 17; 2:19-23; et passim). Several developments of apocalyptic theology can be best explained in terms of wisdom traditions. For various reasons, many apocalyptic authors revived or modified imagery and concepts from ancient mythology which had been previously rejected or demythologized by the prophets of Israel. The dragon imagery of Revelation, for example, has mythological roots. The extent to which apocalyptic writers were influenced by Persian religions is difficult

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to ascertain. The Jews were under Persian rule, both in exile and also in Palestine for a time. Most scholars tend to see at least an intensification of certain dualistic features as a result of contact with dualistic Persian religions. Our present limitations of knowledge in this area make any dictum on this subject unwise.

Apocalyptic writings are born as literature. The writers are not primarily preachers but teachers. The prophetic materials were first oral sermons and symbolic actions which were later collected, preserved, and read. Apocalyptic texts were usually promulgated as literature from the outset. Moreover, the message of a prophet was announced boldly in the streets or before the temple for one and all to hear. Apocalyptic writings were not normally for the masses but for the "in group," for those who could understand the jargon and secrets to be revealed. This practice was reinforced by the popular idea in the intertestamental era that the spirit of prophecy had departed into heaven and that only with the advent of the new age would a prophet again appear as God's oral messenger.

The written character of apocalyptic material is consistent with its pseudonymous aspect. Anonymity is prevalent throughout the Old Testament. But pseudonymity only becomes important with the apocalyptic orientation toward the past as a guide to reading the course of history in the immediate future. The apocalyptic writer seems to have written in the name, the spirit, and the authority of some great mediator from the past. Moses, Enoch, the Twelve Patriarchs, and Baruch are typical names chosen by apocalypticists. From the vantage point in history of that

great hero, the writer could outline the pattern of past history and in the light of its inner clues delineate the future course of events as they led up to the new aeon of God. In pseudonymity the issue was not the modern concern for deception but for authority. These writers, it seems, were sincere men of God who believed that they could speak in and with the spirit of a departed human being. Centuries before the followers of Moses had received and prophesied with the spirit of Moses (Num. 11:16-30). Through the medium of the vision these apocalypticists were transported into the heavenly realm and saw history through the eyes of the hero with whom they identified. They were his mouthpiece for that generation.

The apocalypticist not only lives in the name of a past great man of God but he moves freely in the heavenly realm through the means of dream and vision. He normally sees the meaning of the past and the future from a celestial perspective. The prophets had spoken of the heavenly council as the court of God from which they were commissioned. For the apocalypticists the visionary mode becomes the normal means of communication. In heaven all mysteries are known, whether past, present, or future. There the course of history can be rerun in symbolic form for the visionary to see. There the interpreting angels stand ready to explain the "filmstrip" of a celestial vision (Dan. 7:16; 8:16). Thus "the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night, and Daniel blessed the God of heaven" (2:19). One only needs to join Enoch on a few of his heavenly tours to catch a glimpse of the strange world of extraterrestrial imagery and beings which are the constant concern

of these writers. In short, apocalyptic writers are generally tied to a transcendental world in one way or another.

The visionary materials of these authors incorporate much of the imagery from the prophets and the past traditions of Israel. This imagery, however, is developed into a complex system of esoteric symbols, which demand explication and identification. In these visions there seems to be a development of the kind of dreams found in the Joseph narrative where the symbols of Pharaoh's dreams were interpreted by Joseph, the great prototype of Daniel (Genesis 41). The symbols of apocalyptic tend to proliferate and become increasingly bizarre or nonnatural. Thus we meet the fourth beast monstrosity of Dan. 7:7-8, the woman seated in the ephah pot and whisked off to Shinar (Zech. 5:5-11), or the fallen stars which have intercourse with cows and produce elephants, camels, and asses (Enoch 86). This imagery is the symbolical celestial counterpart to earthly reality or is linked to earthly activities in some way. The esoteric, mysterious character of the symbols underscores the need for interpretation and the practice of communicating these visions primarily to the initiated or "wise."

Throughout these materials the sovereignty of God is presupposed and the active involvement of His heavenly forces assumed. Unlike the prophets, the apocalypticists are dealing with heavenly beings, both good and evil, known and anonymous, throughout their writings. Activities in the heavenly realm affected life on earth. Heavenly forces, moreover, were virile and powerful in human affairs. Each nation had its heavenly prince (Dan. 10:13). Satan and his cohorts were ram-

pant everywhere. God was watching from a distance, waiting for the time clock of history to sound the alarm He had set. Until that time things were rough for the faithful.

It is this concept of God and history which differs from that of the prophets. Jeremiah could accent the contingency of history with the image of the potter (in Jeremiah 18) and yet preserve the sovereignty of Yahweh. Yahweh was sovereignly free to change his mind if he wished, especially if Israel repented. With the apocalypticists the accent has moved. The time for the end of the age was fixed and predetermined according to God's plan of history. Nothing could change that. It was no longer a matter of either/or, repent or perish. It was a question of when? how long? how soon? The apocalyptic writer was usually preoccupied with this end-time, the era of transition from his own evil age to the glorious age from heaven.

His efforts to discover the time of the end led to an investigation of past and present history for clues and signs. Past history, viewed through the eyes of the pseudonymous mediator with whom the apocalypticist identified, was seen in terms of structure and pattern. The course of earthly events was analyzed according to ages or cycles. For this there is virtually no precedent in the prophets. The genius of the apocalypticist was his ability to discern and interpret the secret inner stages of history. Once the heavenly "blueprint" of history could be read, the last age could be identified and the advent of the new age predicted. In this kind of thinking the prevalence of numbers, both literal and symbolic, is understandable.

Having determined the divinely ordained structure of history as it moved toward the *Endzeit*, the apocalypticist was concerned with pointing up the "obvious" signs of the end, the Messianic birthpangs on the local and world scene, that his readers could discern as confirmation of his expectations about the imminent advent of the kingdom from God. These signs usually involved cosmic and catastrophic upheavals of some kind. The moon may turn to blood and the realm of the underworld be shaken. These special signs of the end are based on the idea that the final stage is the most evil and that with the advent of the end evil will intensify in all realms.

Persecution was one such sign of increasing evil. The apocalypticist's message was usually directed to people of God who were suffering through these final evils. His word was one of encouragement and hope. The end is near. Be vigilant! Watch and pray! The end will come soon and the faithful will be vindicated. Here again the contrast with most prophetic texts is apparent. The prophets stressed the sinfulness of God's people and God's judgment upon them by using the pagan nations as His agents. In apocalyptic the accent lies on the innocent suffering of God's people, who must be vindicated through the direct intervention of God at some eschatological denouement.

Hence many apocalyptic authors spell out the nature of the final judgment and the resolution of the great theodicy question in terms of resurrection and eternal retribution. In the prophets vengeance and blessing were in terms of earthly acts. No heavenly reward is expected in the prophets. The concept of the new age as heaven,

heaven on earth, the earth as a place of ideal happiness or some such idea, becomes the concern of many apocalyptic authors. The new age is no longer the improvement of this world according to covenant ideals as in the prophets, but an otherworldly age prepared by God and introduced at the fixed eschatological moment.

Granting the fact that not all of these features are dominant in each apocalyptic work, and recognizing that many of these characterizations and others demand a much more extensive treatment to do justice to this complex mass of texts, our survey provides us with a general frame of reference within which to analyze the basic import of the visions of Daniel 7. To this task we now direct our attention.

2. THE APOCALYPTIC FRAMEWORK OF DANIEL 7

The Book of Daniel, and Daniel 7 in particular, appear to belong to the general category of apocalyptic literature outlined above. Before proceeding to delineate the distinctive apocalyptic accents of Daniel 7, it might be well to summarize the general characteristics of this chapter in relationship to the Book of Daniel. Despite obvious literary difficulties, we shall operate with the Book of Daniel as a basic unit corresponding to the text as we now have it. Our concern here is with the primary apocalyptic features rather than literary critical considerations that demand a full technical analysis.

Daniel 7 is the pivotal chapter of Daniel. With this chapter the question of apocalyptic perspective and pseudonymity is brought into focus. Chapters 1—6 are a collection of narratives about a hero called Daniel who lived with the people of God

in the Babylonian exile. These stories are reports in the third person which describe Daniel's peculiar ability to interpret dreams and to foretell the future. In chapters 2, 4, and 5 he interprets dreams and visions upon request. In him, say the kings, dwells the "spirit of the holy gods" (4:18; 5:11). None of these dreams, however, is his own. Daniel 1—6 introduces the mighty hero from the past who is blessed with a unique capacity for wisdom and the interpretation of mysteries. He is the ancient mediator, it would seem, with whom the writer of Daniel 7—12 wishes to identify. A second reason why chapters 1—6 are linked to the apocalyptic visions of chapters 7—12 may be to illustrate the direct involvement of heavenly beings in the life of the faithful (chapters 3 and 6) and in the control of history (chapter 4). Those who were faithful to the worship of Yahweh alone could count on immediate protection from heaven by celestial forces.

After Daniel is introduced in the third person in 7:1, the text continues with Daniel himself speaking. In 7:15-16 there is no return to the third person form of description about Daniel. Likewise throughout Daniel 8—12 the spokesman is Daniel himself (8:1, 15, 27; 9:1-2, 20; 10:2; et passim; but see also 10:1). It would appear, therefore, that the writer of Daniel is speaking in the name of the hero whom he introduced in the first six chapters and that he is expressing the spirit of that great man for his own day. Moreover, it is apparent from a comparison of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 that the writer of the latter chapter is taking over the basic idea of five world empires from his Daniel traditions in chapter 2. Thus this apoc-

alyptic writer seems to be expanding and explicating past visions *for* that Daniel with whom he now identifies as God's interpreter.

The written literary character of Daniel 7—12 is explicitly stated in 7:1. The "in" group for which its secrets were intended are designated as "the wise" (11:33, 35; 12:3, 10). The primary apocalyptic concept of progressive stages of world history is also integral to Daniel. It is typical of apocalyptic that the writer is living during the intense turmoil of the final age. If this is true for the Book of Daniel, then the writer would be living during the fourth age, rather than the first age when Daniel begins his career. But as indicated above, it is typical of apocalyptic that the writer speaks in the name of a past great figure who scans history from his vantage point. Additional evidence that the writer of Daniel is living at the close of the final kingdom as he interprets history can be found in the wealth and precision of detail that the writer includes concerning his own age, and in particular about the last evil king of that age. This comprehensive treatment stands in contrast to the paucity of information and relative haziness of the writer about the first three empires. This writer is concerned, above all, about the needs of God's people suffering under the evil deeds of "the little horn" or "contemptible person." The author's description of the activity of that evil figure suggests a direct involvement and an immediate concern for the outcome of that unbearable situation (as 11:20-45 and 12:1-13). Whoever the writer of this book happened to be, his word was relevant, first and foremost, to the people living immediately

*Thus assuming
Daniel
pseudonymous*

*Assuming
Daniel
is not the
author*

before the end of the fourth kingdom as understood by that writer.

When was that time? Several kingdoms are identified by the writer who thereby designates the historical course of events leading up to his own day. He specifies the kingdoms of Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece as the four great world empires. The little horn is explicitly linked with the Kingdom of Greece. He is the king of bold countenance (8:21-26), the last contemptible king of the north in the divided kingdom of Greece (11:2-45). The rather precise information about the oppression and sacrilegious activity of this king makes the connection with Antiochus Epiphanes (175—163 B. C.) virtually certain. In this the majority of Biblical scholars agree.

The apocalypticist leads the reader to this crucial dramatic moment of history through a series of visions and interpretations from heavenly mediators. In Daniel 8 the archangel Gabriel interprets a vision of a ram and a he-goat with a succession of horns as the Medo-Persian Empire followed by several stages of the Greek Empire, the last ruler being a presumptuous, evil king. In Daniel 9 the 70 years of Jeremiah 25 are reinterpreted to correspond to various stages of history between the fall of Jerusalem and the desecration of the temple (in 167 B. C.). Daniel 10 reports Daniel's relationship to a series of celestial beings who come to his aid. In Daniel 11 the angelic interpreter gives a full résumé of Greek rule in Palestine under the kings of the north (Seleucids) and the kings of the south (Ptolemies). With Daniel 12 further predictions about the eschatological consummation are promoted for the benefit of the faithful. The

survey of history, the direct involvement of celestial beings, the fixation upon the end-time, the deterministic perspective of things, and the intensification of evil during the last days of the earth are all dominant accents of chapters 8—12.

The writer's special concern for the divinely appointed moment of the end can be seen in the progression of predictions of the end beginning with "a time, two times, and half a time" (7:25). Next we meet "2,300 mornings and evenings," or 1,150 days (8:14); then the last half week of the 70 weeks (9:27), then another time, 2 times, and half a time (12:7), or 1,278 days (3½ years), then an extension to 1,290 days (12:11), and finally a second extension to 1,335 days (12:12). Throughout this material there is the presupposition of predetermined times and fixed dates in the divine timetable of history (8:19, 23; 9:2, 26-27; 10:14, 21; 11:24, 27, 29, 35, 36.). The perspective of the writer is summed up in the words of 11:36, "for what is determined shall be done," as the reader waits for the "decreed end," the details of which are inscribed in the heavenly "book of truth."

The evil of the final age is connected primarily with the desecration of the temple of Jerusalem and the insidious form of religious persecution perpetrated by Antiochus Epiphanes. For the Jews he was the epitome of presumptuous pride and the incarnation of evil. He polluted the temple on several occasions, shed innocent blood throughout Jerusalem, and set his mind on the extermination of the Jewish religion. He forbade circumcision, Sabbath observance, sacrifice, and the reading of the Torah on pain of death. Apparently, some Jews were forced to eat swine meat and

participate in pagan orgies. The culminating deed of Antiochus was the introduction of an image of Zeus into the temple of Jerusalem. Such was the "abomination that makes desolate!" By taking the title Epiphanes (god manifest) he probably claimed to be the living expression of Zeus. This move appears to be confirmed by the fact that coins were struck which bore an image of Zeus resembling Antiochus. Antiochus Epiphanes was indeed the "Antichrist" of that day and the prototype of the figures in 2 Thessalonians 2.

The writer's preoccupation with the evils of his day left little room for any extensive coverage of the actual advent of the new age itself. It was God's kingdom offered to the persecuted faithful. The day was set and soon. Michael would come when that day arrived, and the resurrection would follow. The faithful were to be transformed in some way so that they would shine like the sky or the stars. Perhaps they were to take on the character of angels. The author of Daniel 8—12 encouraged his people to be patient until that day by assuring them that he had the truth of heaven once revealed to Daniel as the guarantee that the evil age would soon end and God's heavenly kingdom come.

3. THE DISTINCTIVE APOCALYPTIC OF DANIEL 7

The apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7 has a form and structure similar to the dream visions of Daniel 2, 4, and 8. For convenience of reference the following outline of Daniel 7 is given. The structural pattern reflects the visionary formulae and literary characteristics found in the present Massoretic text.

Structural Outline of Daniel 7 According to the Visionary Formulae

A. *Introduction* (v. 1)

- a. Historical setting
- b. Claim of visionary experience

B. *Vision One* (vv. 2-6)

- a. Full visionary formula, v. 2a
- b. Description of the vision
 - Scene one: The four creatures from the sea are introduced, the first like a lion, vv. 2b-4a
 - Scene two: The lionlike creature is humanized, v. 4b
 - Scene three: The bearlike creature is commanded to devour, v. 5
 - Scene four: The leopardlike creature is given dominion, v. 6

Vision Two (vv. 7-12)

- a. Full visionary formula, v. 7a
- b. Description of the vision
 - Scene one: A ferocious fourth creature with ten horns, v. 7
 - Scene two: A little horn uproots three horns, v. 8a
 - Scene three: The little horn has eyes and mouth, v. 8b
 - Scene four: The Ancient of Days and his court, vv. 9-10
 - Scene five: The fate of the creatures decided, vv. 11-12

Vision Three (vv. 13-14)

- a. Full visionary formula, v. 13a
- b. Description of the vision
 - Scene one: One like a son of man comes, vv. 13-14

C. *Transition to Interpretation* (vv. 15-16)

- a. Emotional reaction to the vision, v. 15
- b. Request for interpretation from an intermediary, v. 16

D. *Summary Interpretation* (vv. 17-18)

- a. Identification of the four creatures, v. 17
- b. Prediction of the kingdom for the saints, v. 18

*** *Expansion and Reinterpretation of Visions Two and Three* (vv. 19-27)

- a. Request for additional interpretation of the fourth creature, v. 19a
- b. Description of the fourth creature, vv. 19b-20
- c. Description of a new scene: the horn conquers saints who receive the kingdom, vv. 21-22
- d. Identification of the fourth creature and his horns, vv. 23-25
- e. Prediction of coming judgment and dominion in behalf of the people of the saints, vv. 26-27

E. *Conclusion* (v. 28)

- a. Emotional reaction and preservation of the vision

Much of the imagery and many of the symbols employed by the apocalypticist in the visions of Daniel 7 have a long history. In his interpretation of the past, however, they take on new meaning. He opens with an image of the great primordial sea (of Gen. 1:2) stirred up like the waters of chaos at the beginning of time. For this writer the scene is not the original creation in the *Urzeit*, but the point of departure for the last four creatures who represent the kingdoms preceding the *Endzeit*. The portrait of the lion and the leopard may reflect cherubim imagery prevalent in Israel and the ancient Near East (see Ezekiel 1). The descriptions of the bear and the fourth creature may be partly dependent on ancient chaos dragon imagery as preserved in a few passages of the Old Testament (such as Ps. 89:9-10;

74:13-14; Is. 51:9), but none of this traditional imagery is of any great interest to the apocalyptic writer when it comes to the interpretation and development of his theology in the subsequent verses.

The visionary of this chapter sees the four creatures parade across the heavenly scene and finally receive their verdict of judgment before the heavenly council and Judge of heaven. These creatures depict the future course of history in terms of visionary symbols which demand interpretation. The sequence of four creatures reflects the cycles of world empires which will precede the end of the earth. This pattern of ages is dependent on the tradition and vision of Daniel 2. In that chapter the mammoth image of gold, silver, bronze, and iron-clay combination represented the four stages of history which began with the Babylonian Empire as embodied in Nebuchadnezzar and extended to the advent of the kingdom of the God of heaven. Just as Nebuchadnezzar was the gold head standing for Babylon, so the four creatures of Daniel 7 are identified as four kings (v. 17) who are the embodiment of four kingdoms (v. 23).

These four creatures represent the four world empires of Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. In accord with the prophetic imagery of Jer. 4:6-7 and 49:14, Babylon is depicted as "one like a lion," and following the tradition of Daniel 4 he is humanized by receiving the mind and posture of a man. The description of the ravenous bear fits the "destroyer" sent to eliminate Babylon in Jer. 51:1. This destroyer is later identified by Jeremiah as the Medes (51:11, 28; cf. Exod. 12:23). The winged leopard figure is given rapid victory and universal dominion. Most scholars believe

these features correspond to the speedy campaign of Cyrus and the extent of his world empire (cf. Is. 41:2-3; 45:1-3). The final ferocious beast is the Greek empire with its succession of ten kings represented by ten horns (v.24). The identification of these four empires is confirmed by the specific historical references in chapters 8—12.

The apocalypticist's primary concern is with the fourth creature and in particular with the final horn erupting from that creature. This horn is the symbol of all that is evil and proud in the last days of the final kingdom. The tradition of a presumptuous rebel who rises against God himself recurs throughout Scripture from Genesis 3 to Isaiah 14 and Daniel 4. With the final horn this hubris of mankind reaches its climax for the last time. The life-span of that horn is limited and his ultimate judgment predetermined. The extinction of this beast is described in terms of slaughter and annihilation by fire (cf. Ezek. 39:1-6). More details about the character of the kingdom represented by the fourth beast and the little horn is given in the expansion and reinterpretation of vv. 19-27 (see below). Here the historical connection with Antiochus Epiphanes seems to be clear.

The prose visions of Daniel 7 are punctuated by two poetic sections (vv. 9-10 and 13-14) which are closely related in terms of language, style, and theological perspective. In the first of these the thrones of the heavenly council are set and God takes His place as the Head of the council and the ancient Judge. His title as "Ancient of Days" appears nowhere else in the Old Testament, and His description as a white-haired old man is likewise unique

in the Old Testament, although obvious analogies can be found in Canaanite texts describing El, the head of the pantheon. God appears on the judgment scene with a vast entourage of heavenly beings as His attendants. The association of this God with overwhelming fire power has considerable precedent in many cultic texts (such as Ps. 97:1-4; 104:4; cf. Ezek. 1:4, 13). In the court records of heaven the deeds of men are recorded and the fate of all things decided (Dan. 7:10). Thus the destiny of the four kingdoms is also decided. The fourth beast is sentenced to immediate death while the other three are granted a period of grace (v. 12).

The involvement of the heavenly beings in these visions deserves special attention. They are not merely extensions of God's glory when he appears on the scene. They are present throughout the vision and play a continuous role. These beings stand before the Ancient of Days at the judgment scene (v. 10) and are still there when Daniel asks one of them for an interpretation of the vision (v. 16). They seem to be the ones who issue the command (given by a plural subject) to the second beast (v. 5) and who present "the one like a son of man" to the Ancient of Days at the end of v. 13. The same figures are called watchers and holy ones in the vision of Daniel 4. In Dan. 8:13 they discuss the vision that has appeared to them and Daniel. In Daniel 10 the seer has several contacts with heavenly beings in human form. These heavenly figures are not simply the abstract symbols of the vision. They are real beings that this apocalypticist sees and that he believes are intimately connected with the life and fate of men. The old prophetic concept of the heavenly

council has been expanded. Regular intercourse between the earthly and the heavenly realms has intensified for this writer. Not only are angels active on the earth but visionaries can be transported into the heavenly council to observe the course of history played out before them in secret symbols whose meaning is known to heavenly watchers.

These considerations bring into focus the identification of the figure "like a son of man." Is he also a heavenly being in human form? It is the contention of this essayist that this interpretation is the most consistent with the total context of Daniel 7 and the entire Book of Daniel. There may be traditions of a royal first man (as in Ezekiel 28) in the background. But the text as it stands presents a heavenly being who appears before the throne of God to receive the final kingdom of God. The evidence to support this position is found in the immediate context. First of all this figure comes accompanied by the clouds of heaven. Clouds are traditionally associated with theophanies. From the appearances of God at Sinai to the visions of Ezekiel the cloud was a symbol of the advent of a being from heaven or in heaven. Yahweh was even called the rider of the clouds (Ps. 68:4; 104:3; Is. 19:1). The Septuagint text of Dan. 7:13 makes this association explicit by reading "on the clouds" instead of "with the clouds."

Throughout the Old Testament Yahweh, the angel of Yahweh, or heavenly mediators appear before men in human form. The "one like a son of man" has his predecessors in "one like a lion" and "one like a leopard," both of whom have cherubim forms with the capacity of flight. Moreover, it is plausible to assume that if the

animal creatures represent earthly kingdoms, this manlike creature may represent the heavenly kingdom under heavenly control.

The most telling piece of evidence in favor of this conclusion is the use of the formulae of comparison ("like," "like the likeness," and "like the appearance") in similar visionary contexts. In passages using these formulae the celestial beings appear in a form *like* that of a man. In particular, Dan. 10:16 uses the related expression "like sons of men" when referring to heavenly beings. The following list of references illustrates the point.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Ezek. 1:5 | "The likeness (<i>demuth</i>) of four creatures and the appearance (<i>mar'eh</i>) of each was the likeness of a man (<i>'adam</i>)." |
| Ezek. 1:26 | ". . . on the likeness of a throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man (<i>'adam</i>)." |
| Ezek. 8:2 | ". . . and behold, a likeness as the appearance of man (<i>'ish</i>). . ." |
| Dan. 8:15 | ". . . and behold, there stood before me one having (like) the appearance of a man (<i>geber</i>). . ." |
| Dan. 9:21 | "while I was speaking in prayer, the man (<i>'ish</i>) Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at first. . ." |
| Dan. 10:5 | "I lifted up my eyes and saw, and behold, a man (<i>'ish</i>) clothed in linen. . ." |
| Dan. 10:16 | "Behold, one like a likeness of sons of man (<i>'adam</i>) touched my lips. . ." |
| Dan. 10:18 | "And again one touched me having (like) the appearance of a man (<i>'adam</i>). . ." |

In the light of these passages it is difficult not to associate the figure of Dan. 7:13 with similar human forms of celestial beings. The preposition of comparison "like" (*ke*) seems to belong to the visionary terminology of "likeness" (*demuth*), "like the likeness" (*kedemuth*), "appearance" (*mar'eh*), and "like the appearance" (*kemar'eh*). That the term "son of man" as an expression simply means "man" need not be disputed, but in this visionary setting with this formula of comparison and the accompanying heavenly clouds, the human form seems best understood as the image and clothing for a celestial being. If this is the case, a future kingdom of God is transferred into the hands of a heavenly symbol or representative of some kind. How is this heavenly figure understood in the subsequent interpretation?

As the preceding outline indicates, the visions of vv. 2-14 are interpreted first of all in the summary of vv. 17-18. Here the first four creatures are identified as human kings (the embodiment of earthly kingdoms). Logically we might expect that the fifth creature, the one like a son of man, would also be identified with a king, a messiah or a specific known individual of some kind. Strangely enough no mention is actually made of the fifth creature in the summary of vv. 17-18. The recipients of the final kingdom of God are designated "the saints (or holy ones) of the Most High." It is clear, therefore, that the son of man figure is not here considered an earthly messiah of any kind. He is a celestial being who plays the role of the saints on the visionary scene. He receives the kingdom on their behalf, it would seem. Who then are these saints, or holy ones,

who receive the kingdom and whom the one like a son of man represents?

The Old Testament use of the term "holy ones" (*qedoshim*) and its parallel "sons of the Most High" naturally points to the concept of heavenly beings. In intertestamental literature "holy ones" may refer to heavenly or earthly beings whether they be in heaven or on earth, although the former usage seems to predominate. In Enoch, for example, the writer moves freely from one realm and usage to the other. The context of Daniel 7 itself, therefore, must be the deciding factor in the interpretation of this expression. Is the being who appears as a son of man the celestial representative of heavenly beings? A possible analogy can be found in Dan. 4:13-18 where an anonymous holy one (saint) in heaven represents all the holy ones (or watchers) as they deliver their celestial decrees to men. This analogy coupled with Old Testament usage and the writer's interest in the eschatological role of heavenly beings at least suggests the possibility that the saints of the Most High (v. 18) may be or include celestial powers. This possibility is enhanced by the fact that the writer of Daniel always uses the term "saints" as heavenly beings when that term appears in visionary contexts. We must turn to the following development of this theme in the second half of Daniel 7 to test this proposed solution of the problem.

The summary interpretation of the visions of Daniel 7 given in vv. 17-18 is expanded with additional visionary elements and extensive interpretation (vv. 19-27). The corresponding elements of this section are outlined in the following table.

Analysis of Verses 19-27

Visionary Elements

- a. A fourth creature different from the others. It devours, breaks, and tramples the residue, v. 19.
- b. There are ten horns on its head, v. 20.
- c. The other horn arises and fells three horns, v. 20.
- d. This horn has eyes and a mouth speaking great things, v. 20.
- e. This horn makes war with the saints and prevails for a time, v. 21.
- f. The Ancient of Days comes and judgment is given on behalf of the saints of the Most High, v. 22.
- g. The time has come for the saints to receive the kingdom, v. 22.

Interpretation

- A fourth kingdom different from the others. It devours *all the earth*, crushes and tramples, v. 23.
- Ten kings arise out of this kingdom, v. 24.
- Another king different from the others will put down three kings, v. 24.
- This king speaks against the Most High and wants to change His decrees and time-plan. For a time his wishes are granted, v. 25.
- This king "wears out" the saints of the Most High, v. 25.
- Judgment is set and the rule of this king is terminated, v. 26.
- All dominion* under heaven is to be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, v. 27.

Following the progression of this outline we can make certain pertinent observations about the theological thrust and concern of the apocalyptic writer of this chapter. For it is in this expansion that his own perspective is especially apparent. Here he continues to operate with a framework of four eschatological ages followed by the kingdom of God. These ages are to be seen in the historical kingdoms mentioned above. World history as the area of God's purposes is a major concern of this writer. His perspective is cosmic rather than nationalistic. He apparently expects no militant Jewish upheaval or revival of military glory that will guarantee independence and overthrow the political foe (as in Zech. 9:12-13; 12:6-8). God's history is world history for him.

* The believer must wait patiently for that history to run its course under the sovereign dispensation of God. Fortunately the life of the four world empires is almost

spent. World empires as men knew them will soon pass out of existence and God's empire will appear.

The fourth world empire is portrayed as a monstrosity, part animal, part human, part metal, and almost divine. Its characteristics are designed to underscore the intensification of evil and confusion during the final age. This corruption is concentrated in the Greek Empire (primarily as it was known to those in Palestine). In the last throes of that kingdom iniquity is allowed to have its day (see 8:3). The violent operation of the fourth kingdom however does not seem to be a parochial attack on a righteous remnant of some kind, but a consuming oppression of the whole earth. The beast tramples "all the earth." Thus the writer is operating with a corresponding cosmic and international evil at large.

The ten horns represent the ten rulers of the final kingdom. In this the writer seems

to be employing a concept of totality which corresponds roughly to the number of Greek rulers in Palestine. Daniel 11 explicates the activity of these rulers in some detail. Daniel 7 merely gives a skeletal outline of the course of history to the end-time. According to this plan the final king on earth will overthrow three kings and the stage will be set for the climactic period of anguish, turmoil, and evil.

The big mouth of the last king is no modern colloquialism. This king defies everyone, including God Himself. This final human despot is hubris incarnate. He embodies abnormal power and is granted abnormal control over the very laws of God. He affects more than mankind, for he threatens the domain of God. The influence of this creature is more than terrestrial. In 8:10-13 he fells some of the heavenly host and scorns the God of the host. In the process truth is cast down to the earth and members of the heavenly council are greatly disturbed by the situation. In 11:36-38 this king plays fast and loose with every god and succeeds in his efforts. This interplay between the earthly and heavenly realms may be related to the fact that earthly monarchs have their heavenly counterparts in celestial princes. Dan. 10:13 mentions the prince of the Kingdom of Persia and 10:20 the prince of Greece with whom Michael, one of the chief princes and guardian of the faithful, must do battle. The powers of heaven and earth are interrelated here. In the turmoil of the final kingdom all realms are involved and all realms appear to be affected by the eschatological upheavals associated with the final tyrant.

The destructive inclinations of this final

ruler are directed against "the saints of the Most High." In the vision of v.21 he makes war against the saints (or holy ones) and prevails over them (cf. Rev. 12:7). This king is granted a fixed period of victory. In the interpretation of v.25 he is said to "wear out" the saints. This "verb" suggests some kind of persecution or death. In short, the saints are the victims of his tyrannical pride, at least for a time. But are these victims necessarily the people of God? The oppression of these saints in vv.21 and 25 in no way demands that they are exclusively human figures. Dan.8:10 makes that point obvious (cf. Psalm 82). Nor does the movement from vision to interpretation at a given point necessarily demand that the saints of the vision in vv.21-22 are mere symbols of some earthly reality. Throughout Daniel these visionary figures seem to be living heavenly beings related to God's work on earth.

It would seem, therefore, that the saints of the Most High are first of all God's heavenly saints. Their human counterparts on earth are apparently "the people of the saints of the Most High" (7:27 and 8:24). Some might agree with those scholars who see the term "people" of 7:27 as a later addition, yet it is also possible to incorporate the term into the apocalyptic perspective of Daniel 7. By virtue of the interrelationship of God's heavenly and earthly followers, the saints of the Most High can perhaps be viewed as all of God's faithful beings, incorporating transformed human saints who will one day join the celestial saints in God's kingdom on earth. Michael is later identified as the special heavenly representative of the earthly saints who by means of the resurrection

are changed to shine like the stars above (10:21; 12:1-3). This close relationship and interplay between the heavenly and earthly spheres persists throughout Daniel.

The final kingdom is for all the saints. It is bestowed at the appointed hour when the final judgment has been held. This judgment is first of all in terms of nations rather than individuals. The empire of the last earthly king will be removed and the persecuted saints will be given a new universal dominion superior to anything before. One distinctive feature of the apocalypticist of Daniel 7 is the simplicity and idealism with which he envisions the advent of the final kingdom of the saints. The timetable is set. A limit has been fixed for the evil control of the last tyrant. The heavenly court will pass judgment on the final empire and terminate its life. Thereupon, without further explanation, the angelic saints of God will receive the kingdom of God and take over the earth. Their people are the meek who inherit the earth. The text does not demand that these people be understood exclusively as Jewish believers. Nor is there any indication of a great battle which must be fought on earth to win the kingdom (as in Zechariah 12 and 14 or Ezekiel 38—39). Rather we meet suffering without retaliation on the earthly scene. There is none of the nationalistic fervor of the Maccabean uprisings, no hint of a military messianic king, no sign of a final onslaught of nations against Jerusalem (cf. 11:45), no prophet to usher in the last days, and no new *Heilsgeschichte* as outlined by the prophets. Instead we find a simple assertion that all the evils (happening under Antiochus Epiphanes) were foreseen as happening in the heavenly realm and that

God's mysterious kingdom is very near. The believer is called upon to wait in faith for a dream world, a new world empire from God Himself. Some additional details about the end do appear in chapters 8—12, but essentially the same dream is followed.

The son-of-man figure appears to be an anonymous visionary representative of the angel forces. He plays their role and takes their part in the heavenly court at the final judgment. He is not an earthly Messiah or a human king. His human form is but the visionary mode of his appearance. Dan. 12:1-3 may be an early attempt to understand such a heavenly figure in terms of an identifiable heavenly leader. There the heavenly prince Michael, who guards and espouses the cause of the people of God, arises at the end of time. His advent immediately precedes the deliverance of the persecuted faithful and the resurrection of the slain believers to their new glory "as the stars."

A summary of our findings is appropriate at this point. In the apocalypticist of Daniel 7 (and to a large extent the circle of ideas in the rest of Daniel) we seem to have an inspired writer who offers us a simple but distinctive apocalyptic perspective. The supernatural kingdom of God is about to invade the world as an unprecedented work of God. That kingdom includes dominions and beings from every realm. How the dramatic transition from the fourth kingdom to the kingdom of God will be effected is left unanswered. But with the irruption of that kingdom the barrier between the visionary and the historical and between the transcendent and the earthly realms will have vanished completely. Before that day the interrelation-

ship between these realms will become more and more evident. The interplay between the earthly and the celestial will intensify. The apocalyptic visionary sees the activity of both realms and recognizes a connection between the two. He speaks with the authority of Daniel, in whom the spirit of the holy gods resides (4:18). He preserves those hero narratives that underscore Daniel's peculiar capacity to interpret esoteric visions of the course of future history (chapters 1—2, 4—5) and that illustrate the direct involvement of heavenly figures in the life of the faithful (chapters 3 and 6) or in the control of history (chapter 4). He is Daniel for that generation. He incorporates those traditions which emphasize celestial, cosmic, and symbolical ties with earthly reality, as he knows it. But he also develops his own bizarre and gruesome imagery to depict that closing eschatological era when "all hell will break loose." In the last tyrant of the final earthly kingdom will be concentrated the fullness of hubris and the ultimate in world evil. For a short but predetermined period that being (and what he represents) will devastate the earth, overwhelm God's people, and even invade the heavenly realm. Holy ones will be overcome and hosts from heaven will fall. In the heavenly council God will then execute judgment on nations and empires, consummate the last age, and usher in the kingdom from God. This kingdom is represented in the visionary realm by a celestial being appearing in human form. Then finally and effortlessly the angel saints of the Most High will be in complete control and the people of these saints will live in this kingdom with all the greatness of past kingdoms under the domain of heaven

now at their disposal. No prophet, no earthly messianic hero, no nationalistic wars from Zion, no new *Heilsgeschichte* are expected in this hope theology. At the appointed time God and his celestial forces will simply take over the universe. No one can imagine what that will be like. Such is the simple faith of the apocalypticist of Daniel 7, and such is his dream.

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DANIEL 7

The significance of Daniel 7 is far from exhausted by a study of the distinctive apocalyptic perspective of its writer, in his time. In fact, the importance of this chapter is so great that we can merely touch on a few aspects which deserve immediate attention and suggest further avenues of study for the church.

First, Daniel forces us to see the way in which prophetic theology was expanded and interpreted by apocalyptic writers. Through the apocalypticist God takes the old prophetic voice and speaks a new message in a new form. The prophets differ from the apocalypticists, but the same Lord speaks through them both. The many and varied theologies of the Word described in Heb. 1:1 are forcefully illustrated by these two movements of God's men.

Second, Daniel focuses our attention on what God was saying and doing among His people in the period between Ezra and John the Baptist. For so many in the church this so-called intertestamental period is a wilderness of history where God's voice was silent. Daniel 7 makes us aware of a major word of revelation spoken in those days, a word which has many parallels in the literature of the two centuries before Christ. Moreover, this message of

God from Daniel demonstrates how God used a form of writing from that era to communicate in a meaningful way to the persecuted people of the time. God employed apocalyptic language and thought to communicate new messages to His people. We cannot read the inspired proclamations of Daniel without recognizing the cumulative character of God's revelation through the apocalyptists. For God spoke of things not made explicit in the prophets or their predecessors.

3) Third, Daniel 7 challenges us to face the relevance of apocalyptic literature in general. The apocalypticist demands an unwavering faith in the Lord of history. The fate of all nations is in His hands, and come what may, He has a plan for the empires of the world as well as for His people. Even more difficult to relate to the thinking of our 20th-century world are the concepts of a heavenly vision, a hierarchy of heavenly forces (good and evil), a deterministic view of life, or portraits of a celestial empire and a pit of fire called hell. Many Christians within the Lutheran fold do not think in apocalyptic terms or operate with many of these features as viable concepts of life today. Should we therefore be urging a return to the language of apocalyptic preaching? How do we relate apocalyptic thought today?

4) Fourth, the preceding concerns lead us to make clear our Lutheran perspective and the Gospel center of Scripture from which we view the importance, significance, and relevance of preaching apocalyptic materials. Thus we might do well to

search the New Testament to ascertain how the New Testament prophets understood the apocalyptic word of God in the light of the fullness of God's revelation in the incarnation and Passion of His Son. In this connection Daniel 7 plays a major role as the *magna carta* for the interpretation of the son-of-man concept.

5) Fifth, the son of man of Daniel 7 becomes the focus of attention by near contemporaries such as the author of the Similitudes of Enoch and the writer of Fourth Ezra. But the New Testament gospels in particular employ the term "son of man" many times and in several senses. A full treatment of this topic requires several articles. Daniel 7, however, is one of the sources of the concept of the son of man which was at Jesus' disposal. The picture of the son of man as a heavenly figure appearing before God or His angels (as in Daniel 7) can be found in passages such as Luke 12:8; Matt. 25:31-32; 26:64; and Mark 13:26-27. Here the mysterious son-of-man figure of Daniel 7 is identified as none other than the exalted Christ whose angels gather His saints (elect) from the ends of the earth and the ends of heaven at the end-time. In the glorified Jesus Christ the visionary hope of Daniel 7 will come true according to the gospels. In short, Jesus Christ is the answer to even the most esoteric dreams of Daniel. In Him all hopes are fulfilled and clarified. He is our exalted King whose kingdom has come and is yet to come among His saints. "Thy kingdom come!"

St. Louis, Mo.

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