
The Restoration of Israel in the Book of Daniel: Historical Tradition and Modern Approaches

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Abstract.

This article is devoted to the theme of the restoration of Israel in the Book of Daniel. It seems that this issue was of greatest importance to the author of the Book of Daniel. In the history of exegesis of the Book of Daniel, it was reflected in two exegetical traditions: the ancient Syrian Christian tradition (i.e., Maccabean interpretation) and the interpretations proposed by English historicists of the 18th and 19th centuries. In our opinion, the historicist interpretation, which subsequently fell out of favor, is a fairly convincing approach to understanding the Book of Daniel. In this context, Daniel's visions can be interpreted as a prophetic foresight of the restoration of Israel that took place in the 20th century. Thus, Daniel 7 can be interpreted as a prophecy about future Islamic empires that ruled over the Land of Israel for a period of about 1260 years. Daniel 8 can be seen as a prediction of the Six-Day War and the capture of Jerusalem by the Israelis in 1967 (it is particularly noteworthy that the date of the future Six-Day War was calculated by English historicist commentators as early as the 19th century). Finally, the predictions of Daniel 9 and Daniel 12 can be interpreted as a summary of the two thousand years of exile of the Jewish people, from the rebuilding of Jerusalem as a Roman city called Aelia Capitolina to the declaration of independence of the State of Israel in 1948. In general, this interpretation can be characterized as a typological projection of the ancient Maccabean interpretation of the Book of Daniel.

1. Introduction.

The Book of Daniel is one of the most well-known prophetic works. If we put it more precisely, it is the only apocalyptic work included in the canon of the Old Testament. Throughout the long history of Jewish and Christian study of Holy Scripture, many interpretations of the Book of Daniel have been proposed by theologians, scholars, and various students of prophecy. The most popular topic in Christian interpretation of the Book of Daniel is, certainly, the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ, as well as the future events linked to his Second Coming. We can say that Christian exegesis has mainly focused on this theme, very often ignoring another topic that looms large in the Book of Daniel – the restoration of Israel.

2. Pseudepigraphy, divine inspiration and the *sensus plenior*.

The first thing we should do when discussing any work of modern or ancient literature is to identify and understand its original context. The prophetic books of the Bible are certainly not an exception. We should not imagine them as misty visions, devoid of any actual historical sense, which once appeared to the prophets of ancient Israel. This problem is even more important and intricate in the Book of Daniel, whose exact date is the subject of long and heated debate between the scholarly and ecclesiastical parties. While modern scholars think that the 2nd-century date of the Book of Daniel is established ‘beyond reasonable doubt’¹, religiously devout people of various religious affiliations (Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Jews, etc.) usually insist on the traditional 6th-century date, often doing their best to prove this point.

Without delving deeper into this topic, we can say that it is quite possible that the question of the authorship of the Book of Daniel is not directly related to its divine inspiration. A concept

¹ John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 56.

that might resolve the contradiction between the pseudepigraphical character of the Book of Daniel and its divinely inspired nature has long been proposed by Catholic exegetes. It is *sensus plenior*, an additional meaning of Holy Scripture. According to this interpretative approach, *sensus plenior* can be defined as an ‘additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation². Based on the approach described above, we can assume that the author of the Book of Daniel may have written his work keeping in mind the historical realities of the 2nd century BC, while God put into his words another meaning relevant to later historical periods. According to J. Coppens, this type of the *sensus plenior* can be defined as ‘prophético-typique³, the meaning ‘which a prophecy is seen to possess once it has been fulfilled⁴.

With regard to the Book of Daniel, a similar approach was also employed by some evangelical scholars. As R. Gurney points out:

But suppose evangelicals are mistaken about the date of authorship of Daniel. Suppose the book was written in the second century BC. Need this alter our interpretation? I do not believe so. Even if a second-century date were proved (which is highly unlikely), I would still insist that the prophecies point to the coming of Christ. We could concede that the author may have thought that he was not looking beyond the time of Antiochus in 9:24-27; he may have thought that he was predicting the fate of Antiochus in 11 :40-45; he may have

² Raymond E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1955), 92.

³ J. Coppens. *Les Harmonies des deux Testaments* (Tournai-Paris: Casterman, 1949), 58-61.

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1955), 102.

thought that the kingdom of God would be established in its full glory immediately after the death of Antiochus. But guided by the Holy Spirit, he was actually pointing to the coming of Jesus Christ more than a century and a half later⁵.

3. Original understanding of the Book of Daniel.

We will begin our study with the original interpretation of the Book of Daniel. According to most modern scholars, the Book of Daniel was written in the 2nd century BC, at the height of Antiochus's persecution, and certainly aimed to arouse hopes for the future restoration. Its author was not yet aware of the future victory of the Maccabees and probably believed that deliverance would come as a result of direct divine intervention. Therefore, there are certain discrepancies between the original author's understanding of the Book of Daniel and the later Maccabean interpretation, which became widely accepted after the liberation of Jerusalem and the establishment of the Hasmonean dynasty⁶. We will present the original author's understanding of the Book of Daniel, as reconstructed by researchers. Sometimes, we will compare it with its reinterpretation, which arose after the victory of the Maccabees and became part of the later Maccabean interpretation.

The Book of Daniel is unique among other biblical books, as it was written in two languages – Aramaic and Hebrew. In light of this, we can even talk about two books of Daniel – the Aramaic Book of Daniel, which served as the initial point in the creation of the Book of Daniel, and the Hebrew-Aramaic Book of Daniel, which was the final product of a long history of literary development. Scholars usually define the boundaries of the Aramaic Daniel as Daniel 1-7, recognizing that Daniel 1-Daniel

⁵ Robert J.M. Gurney, *God in Control: An Exposition of the Prophecies of the Book of Daniel* (Worthing: H. E. Walter, 2006), 36.

⁶ Maurice Casey, 'Porphyry and the Origin of the Book of Daniel', *Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. XXVII, Pt 1, (April 1976): 30-31.

2:3 is a translation from Aramaic to Hebrew⁷. Researchers suggest various dates for the creation of the Aramaic Daniel, ranging from the 3rd century BC⁸ to the end of the year 167 BC⁹. A key feature of the Aramaic Book of Daniel is its concentric structure, with two climaxes in chapters 2 and 7, where a panorama of world history is presented with its future eschatological consummation.

In chapter 2, the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, as recounted and interpreted by Daniel, is presented. In his dream vision, Nebuchadnezzar saw a statue composed of five different substances – gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay. The end of the dream is the destruction of the statue by the miraculous stone, which ‘struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces’ (Dan 2:34). In the interpretation, every metal is presented as a symbol of a certain kingdom, which is not called by its true name, but whose identification is clear to both the author and his audience. The miraculous stone, which shattered the statue, remains unexplained. We just read that ‘in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people’ (Dan 2:44). In the Maccabean context, the destruction of the statue is certainly the symbol of the restoration of Israel, finally liberated after a long period of

⁷ John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 23.

⁸ Johannes Meinhold, *Die Composition des Buches Daniel. Inaugural diss.* (Greiswald: Julius Abel, 1884), 21; Jürgen-Christian Lebram, *Das Buch Daniel* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984), 21; Rainer Albertz, ‘The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel’ in *The Book of Daniel. Composition and Reception*, edited by John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint. Volume 1 (Boston-Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 187-191.

⁹ Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, INC, 1978), 324; John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 324.

foreign dominion¹⁰. The vision of Daniel 7 has just the same content and message. The prophet saw four monstrous animals coming out of the great sea. The fourth beast is the most terrible and undefinable creature: 'It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns' (Dan 7:7). Suddenly, another horn, a little one, emerges from the midst of the other horns. It is presented as a focus of the forces of evil and the climax of the rebellion against God. But after that, 'thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took seat <...> the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened' (Dan 7:9-10). The fourth beast is killed and the Son of Man appears, who is granted 'dominion and glory and a kingdom' (Dan 7:14).

The interpretation of Daniel 7 is closely related to that of Daniel 2. However, not all of its details are clear enough. While four beasts symbolize four kings (or four kingdoms), the Son of Man is not deciphered in this manner. We just read that 'the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever' (Dan 7:18). This phrase appears twice again in the interpretation – we read that 'the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom' (Dan 7:22) and that 'the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High' (Dan 7:27). In the exegetical history of the Book of Daniel, numerous interpretations of the Son of Man figure were proposed. According to the most popular Jewish and Christian interpretations, the Son of Man is the Messiah, who receives the universal dominion from God after the eschatological tribulations. According to another widespread view, which was the original part of the Maccabean interpretation, the Son of Man is a collective symbol of the Jewish people, who will receive

¹⁰ John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 171; Carol A. Newsom with Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 83.

the kingdom after Antiochus's demise. This interpretation was the standard understanding of Daniel's vision in 19th-century exegesis¹¹. Nowadays, many critical scholars believe that the Son of Man is the archangel Michael, the heavenly protector of the Jewish people¹².

According to the Maccabean interpretation, the stone that 'became a great mountain and filled the whole earth' (Dan 2:35) and the Son of Man are the symbols of Israel, which is to receive the kingdom and world dominion after the end of Antiochus's tyranny. This understanding of the stone and the Son of Man figure may not be the original meaning of these images in the ancient texts, which were used and reworked by the creator of the Aramaic Daniel. Thus, the stone, which destroyed the gigantic statue, may have originally denoted Cyrus and the Persian Empire¹³, and the Son of Man may have been the representation of some divine or angelic entity¹⁴. Thus, we can say that the traditional imagery was profoundly reworked and reinterpreted by the author of the Aramaic Book of Daniel.

The images and symbolic pictures in the Hebrew chapters of the Book of Daniel have radically different character: they were created by their author in order to represent the realities of the Antiochene crisis. For this reason, the meaning of the images of these chapters is not so complicated and elusive as they usually are in the Aramaic ones. Chapter 8 describes the vision of a ram

¹¹ John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 309.

¹² Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven. The Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 187-189; John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 313-317; Carol A. Newsom with Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 235-237.

¹³ Ida Fröhlich, *Time and Times and Half a Time. Historical Consciousness in the Jewish Literature of the Persian and Hellenistic Eras* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 26-27.

¹⁴ J.A. Emerton, 'The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1958): 239-240; Anne E. Gardner, 'Daniel 7, 2-14: Another Look at its Mythic Pattern', *Biblica*. Vol. 82, No. 2 (2001): 244-252.

and a goat. The key figure of this vision is the little horn of the goat, which 'grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land <...> even to the host of heaven' (Dan 8:9-10). At the end of the vision, the prophet hears the conversation of two holy ones, who mention 2,300 evenings and mornings, after which the sanctuary will be cleansed. The imagery of this vision is pretty clear and is explained already in the interpretation. The subject of the vision is Alexander's campaign against the Persian Empire and later Antiochus's occupation and desecration of the Temple, which is to be finished after 2,300 evenings and mornings (Dan 8:14). Already in antiquity, most Christian commentators believed that this story was about Antiochus's persecution, the Maccabean wars, and the cleansing and rededication of the Temple by Judas Maccabee¹⁵. It is possible that the Maccabean interpretation was not the original intent of the author, who may not have sympathized with the Maccabees¹⁶. Nevertheless, the standard Maccabean interpretation arose immediately after the events described, and was shared by the majority of commentators on the Book of Daniel from antiquity to the 20th and 21st centuries.

Chapter 9 contains the famous prophecy of the 70 weeks, which is given to Daniel after his reflections on Jeremiah's prophecy of the 70 years of exile and penitential prayer on behalf of the people of Israel. The revelation is given to the prophet by the archangel Gabriel, who informs Daniel that the term of 70 years has now turned into a term of the 70 weeks of years (i.e., 490 years). During this time, Jerusalem will be rebuilt and reconstructed, but the last week will see great calamities – the city will be destroyed, the Temple profaned, sacrifice will cease, and the anointed one will be cut off (Dan 9:26). One may say that the end of the 70 weeks is rather gloomy, but six phrases before their description, which speak about the goals of this

¹⁵ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1959), 324.

¹⁶ John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 66-67.

term, can dispose us more optimistically. We read that 70 weeks are decreed to cleanse Israel, expiate her iniquities, and anoint the Holy of Holies (Dan 9:24). Therefore, we can conclude that the end of the last week will see the fulfilment of these promises, expiation of Israel's sins, and new consecration and rededication of the Temple. It is obvious that the author of the Book of Daniel, who wrote immediately after the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus, expected these events to occur in the very near future, and his first readers and commentators believed that these predictions were fulfilled after the cleansing of the Temple by Judas Maccabee.

Chapters 10 and 11 contain the long discourse, which is also addressed to Daniel by the ministering angel. This time, he recounts to Daniel all the future history of Greek dominance of Asia, focusing on the destiny of the Land of Israel and the Jewish people. The better part of a narrative consists of *vaticinia ex eventu* (predictions after the fact), which end at Dan 11:39. The remaining part of the discourse contains real predications, made by the author of the Book of Daniel. The most important events described in chapters 11-12 are the downfall of Antiochus, the rising of the Archangel Michael, the heavenly patron and protector of Israel, the resurrection of the dead, and heavenly glorification of the martyrs, who died during Antiochus's persecution. In reality, these miraculous expectations did not come true; nevertheless, the death of Antiochus, the victory of the Maccabees, the liberation of Jerusalem, and the cleansing of the Temple were perceived as a fulfillment of these prophecies, which were interpreted allegorically.

4. Maccabean interpretation of the Book of Daniel.

As we have already noticed, the original interpretation of the Book of Daniel was largely forgotten in Jewish and Christian exegesis before the development of the historical-critical method. Nonetheless, we can specify two traditions in the history of Christian exegesis that focused on interpretations

that linked the predictions of the Book of Daniel with the restoration of Israel. It is an ancient Syrian tradition, which brought to us the ancient Maccabean interpretation of the Book of Daniel, and the interpretations of British and American historicists of the 18th and 19th centuries, who often saw in Daniel's visions a prediction of the future restoration of Israel.

First, we will focus on the ancient Maccabean interpretations of the Book of Daniel. We can assume that the understanding of the Book of Daniel as a prediction of the Maccabean revolt and the victory over the Seleucids emerged immediately after the canonization of the Book of Daniel and the establishment of the Hasmonean monarchy¹⁷. All the visions of the Book of Daniel were interpreted as belonging to the period of Antiochus's persecution and the Maccabean revolt. The Son of Man in Daniel 7 was identified with the Maccabees, the cleansing of the sanctuary with the liberation of Jerusalem and the Temple by Judas Maccabee, and the resurrection of the dead was interpreted as an allegory of the restoration of Israel, similar to the one used by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 37:1-14). M. Casey believed that the first author to deliver this interpretative tradition to us was the pagan philosopher Porphyry, who may have borrowed his interpretation from the Syrian exegetical tradition¹⁸.

The authentic Jewish interpretation of the Book of Daniel was almost completely forgotten in most strands of tradition already in the 1st century AD. It was certainly impossible to identify 'an everlasting kingdom', which has dominion over all 'tribes, nations and languages', with the Hasmonean monarchy, a modest state of the ancient Near East, whose authorities were constantly overwhelmed with religious disputes and conflicts. More importantly, after the Roman conquest of the Near East, the possibility of talking of the kingdoms of Diadochi as the last

¹⁷ Maurice Casey, *Son of Man. The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7* (London: SPCK, 1979), 53-55.

¹⁸ Maurice Casey, *Son of Man. The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7* (London: SPCK, 1979), 51.

world power and seeing the victory of the Maccabees as the final redemption disappeared almost completely. Nonetheless, the original interpretation of the Book of Daniel may have survived in some Jewish communities of Syria¹⁹. Later, this interpretation was adopted by Syrian Christian authors. For example, we can find an exposition of these views in the commentary on the Book of Daniel, usually attributed to Ephraem the Syrian. As most Antiochene exegetes, he resorted to the typological interoperation of the Book of Daniel, seeing there both the prophecies of the Maccabees and the prophecies of life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, the Maccabean interpretation of almost all the images and prophecies of the Book of Daniel is the most interesting issue, present in this commentary. The coming and enthronement of the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is interpreted as a prophecy about ‘the sons of the People [i.e., people of Israel]’, who ‘subdued the Greeks and all the surrounding kingdoms’²⁰. More remarkably, the author interprets the resurrection of the dead, described in chapter 12, in a similar way. He thought that it signified the restoration of Israel, which had happened after the victory of the Maccabees. Later on, similar interpretations were also shared by many Syrian Christian authors²¹.

The Maccabean interpretation gained some (very limited) popularity in the medieval Jewish exegesis²², but its true revival happened only in the Modern Age. It began already with Hugo Grotius²³; with the rise of historical criticism, the Maccabean interpretation gradually became a prevalent understanding of

¹⁹ Maurice Casey, *Son of Man. The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7* (London: SPCK, 1979), 58-59.

²⁰ Maurice Casey, *Son of Man. The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7* (London: SPCK, 1979), 64.

²¹ Maurice Casey, *Son of Man. The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7* (London: SPCK, 1979), 66-70.

²² Carol A. Newsom with Brennan W. Breed. *Daniel: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 244.

²³ Hugo Grotius. *The Truth of the Christian Religion in Six Books by Hugo Grotius* (London, 1829), 82.

the Book of Daniel. Unlike the ancient Syriac exegetes, who thought that the prophet Daniel really predicted the fate of Antiochus and the Maccabean wars, modern critical scholars consider the Book of Daniel to be an example of pseudepigraphy, written by an unknown Jewish author in the 2nd century BC.

5. Historicist interpretations of the Book of Daniel.

The tendency to link the Book of Daniel with events in the history of the Jewish people was not limited to references to the Maccabean Revolt and the Hasmonean monarchy. A new approach to the interpretation of the Book of Daniel, connecting its predictions with the future restoration of Israel, arose in the English and American historicist tradition of biblical interpretation. This tradition dates back to Isaac Newton²⁴; later, its proponents included Adam Clarke²⁵, Thomas Newton²⁶, Edward Elliott²⁷, and many other scholars and theologians. The most popular device used to interpret biblical prophecies in their relation to history was the 'day-year principle'. According to it, the periods, calculated in Scripture in days, are considered equivalent to the same number of years²⁸. The analysis of the Book of Daniel generally focused on chapters 2, 7, 8, and 11-12. If Daniel 7 was usually understood

²⁴ Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London, 1733), 122; Stephen Snobelen, 'The Mystery of This Restitution of All Things': Isaac Newton on the Return of the Jews' in *Millenarism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture: The Millenarian Turn*, ed. by J.E. Force and R.H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 95-118.

²⁵ Adam Clarke, *The holy Bible: containing the Old and New Testaments. With a commentary and critical notes by Adam Clarke. Vol. IV: Isaiah to Malachi* (London, 1836), 3235-3236, 3255.

²⁶ Thomas Newton, *Dissertations on the Prophecies* (Philadelphia, 1838), 259-261.

²⁷ Edward Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ; or A Commentary on the Apocalypse, Critical and Historical. Vol. 4* (London, 1862), 112-129.

²⁸ William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, 1992), 67-111.

as a prediction of the ‘Western apostacy’ (the papacy), Daniel 8 was interpreted as a foresight of the ‘Eastern apostacy’ (i.e., the corruption of the Christian religion by the Byzantine Empire, as well as the later appearance of Islam and the Arabic and Turkish invasions). The promise of the future cleansing of the Temple (Dan 8:14) also gave rise to expectations of the restoration of Israel, which was considered to be another prediction of chapter 8. This view was shared by T. Newton, J. Bicheno, W. Hales, F.A. Cox, etc.²⁹. The exegetes used different dates, connected with Alexander’s campaign against Persia, as a starting point for the beginning of the 2300 evenings and mornings. One of the most popular dates was the Battle of Granicus in 334 BC³⁰. Daniel 12 could also be interpreted similarly. For example, Adam Clarke, speaking about the resurrection of the dead, concludes that ‘this prophecy has been referred to the future restoration of the Jews’³¹.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the historicist interpretation of the biblical prophecy was gradually replaced by the futurist approach, which connected all the prophecies of the Book of Daniel and the Apocalypse with the period of the Antichrist’s dominion and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It is particularly interesting that the historicist methods of prophetic interpretation started to lose popularity at the end of the 19th century and completely fell out of favor at the beginning of the 20th century – just at the moment when its prophecies finally began to come true. 1917-1918 saw the destruction of four great empires, which somehow traced their origins to the ancient Roman Empire, as well as the beginning of the restoration of the Jews with the adoption of the Balfour

²⁹ Samuel Núñez, *The Vision of Daniel 8: Interpretations from 1700 to 1900* (Andrews University, 1987), 104, 236, 238-239, 387.

³⁰ Samuel Núñez, *The Vision of Daniel 8: Interpretations from 1700 to 1900* (Andrews University, 1987), 95, 99, 219-220, 225, 371.

³¹ Adam Clarke, *The holy Bible: containing the Old and New Testaments. With a commentary and critical notes by Adam Clarke. Vol. IV: Isaiah to Malachi* (London, 1836), 3255.

Declaration (1917) – events that historicist commentators had long expected.

6. Possible approaches to modern historicist interpretation of Daniel.

We will try to correlate the history of the 20th century with the prophecies of the Book of Daniel and conclude whether the events related to the restoration of Israel were indeed predicted in this work. In other words, we will attempt to revitalize the historicist interpretation of biblical prophecy by reconstructing it on a new level, taking into account the *sensus plenior* approach and the present-day development of the historical-critical method. The attempt to correlate the historicist interpretation of the Book of Daniel with the events of the 20th century can be considered an attempt to test the reliability of the historicist approach to biblical prophecy.

One of the unspoken problems of the historicist approach is that the idea of accurately predicting the future may seem unscientific and old-fashioned to many biblical scholars. We believe that studying the Bible in this way is entirely possible and can yield positive results. Such an approach can probably be reconciled not only with the traditional historicist approach to biblical interpretation, but also with modern scientific research into precognition and clairvoyance, which has already been a subject of interest in theological thought³².

a. Daniel 7: prediction of the Islamic empires

Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 present two corresponding visions – Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about the great statue, consisting of four metals, and Daniel’s dream vision, in which Daniel saw the coming of four monstrous animals and the enthronement of the Son of Man. The center of the discussion has long been ‘the little horn’ of the fourth beast and the term of its dominion,

³² John J. Heaney, *The Sacred and the Psychic: Parapsychology and Christian Theology* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1984), 85-108.

which is defined as ‘time, times, and half a time’. Historicists usually understood it as a symbol of the Roman papacy³³. They thought that ‘time, times, and half a time’ were equal to 1,260 prophetic days (i.e., 1,260 years), which would be a term of the dominion of the pope. Historicists have proposed many ways to calculate this prophetic period with different dates for the beginning and end of this term. The problem that haunts all these interpretations is the fact that we cannot define both the beginning and the end of the papacy. The rise of the Roman bishops to the heights of political influence in the West and their transformation into one of the leading forces in the Western Christian world was a gradual process, just as was the process of decline of the political role of Roman pontiffs. It is also clear that the period of the papacy’s real political power is limited to the 11th-13th centuries, after which the influence of the papacy gradually diminished, eventually being reduced to internal church matters only.

Moreover, the focus of the predictions of Daniel 7 is the Land of Israel and foreign dominion over the Jewish people. Conceptions suggesting that the vision of Daniel 7 is related to the Christian Church and papal dominion over it can be characterized as an example of allegorization of the biblical narrative. This approach can also be considered an example of the replacement theology, identifying the Christian Church with the biblical Israel. If we do not turn to the replacement theology, we should focus our attention on the fate of the Land of Israel, which was long controlled by the Islamic monarchies.

Therefore, we believe that much more suitable candidates to be identified with the “little horn” are the Islamic empires, starting with the Islamic Caliphate, up to the Ottoman Empire. This

³³ Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London, 1733), 90-114; George Stanley Faber, *The Sacred Calendar of Prophecy*. Vol. 2 (London, 1828), 76-110; Adam Clarke, *The holy Bible: containing the Old and New Testaments. With a commentary and critical notes by Adam Clarke*. Vol. IV: *Isaiah to Malachi* (London, 1836), 3230-3232.

identification was the second most popular in the historicist interpretations of the Book of Daniel. It originated in Spanish Christian exegesis of the 9th-10th centuries, later appeared in the works of medieval Jewish exegetes, and finally emerged in Christian commentaries during the time of Ottoman expansion³⁴.

If we try to verify the identification of the 'little horn' with the Islamic empires, we should first determine the exact duration of Islamic rule in the Near East. The most important dates here are 638, the capture of Jerusalem by the Arabs, and 1917, the capture of Jerusalem by the English. The duration of this period is equal to 1,279 years. We can certainly choose the other dates for calculating this term. The most appropriate second variant would be 661 (the establishment of the first Islamic empire, the Umayyad Caliphate) and 1918 (the capitulation of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War). Using these dates will allow us to get 1,257 years. Both of these terms are strikingly close to 1,260 prophetic days, the term of the dominion of the 'little horn', which historicists continually investigated.

Moreover, we can slightly adjust these dates to make the prophecies look more consistent with historical reality. Thus, we can take as starting points the oaths given to the first Umayyad Caliph, Muawiya, in Damascus (658) and Jerusalem (659), and as end points the British capture of Jerusalem (1917) and the capitulation of the Ottoman Empire (1918). In this case, the term will be practically equal to 1,260 years. In reality, we don't even need to turn to these adjustments. First, the Book of Daniel itself does not mention any specific date; it only speaks about "time, times, and half a time". Commentators would think that they are equal to three and a half solar years (1,260 days), but this opinion is not universally accepted³⁵. Second, it would

³⁴ Carol A. Newsom with Brennan W. Breed. *Daniel: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 280-282.

³⁵ Roger T. Beckwith, 'The Earliest Enoch Literature and Its Calendar: Marks of Their Origin, Date and Motivation', *Revue de Qumrân*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (39), (1981): 365-403; Michael Segal, 'Josephus's Rewriting of the Book of

be strange to think that the term 1,260 days/years is somehow part of the structure of history – it would be similar to numerological conceptions. Rather, we may suppose that the Scripture here gave us the round term most close to the real duration of the Islamic rule in Palestine.

Speaking of 1917, we should note that this was not only the date when Jerusalem was captured by the British army. It was also the date of the adoption of the Balfour Declaration (November 2, 1917). The Land of Israel, after a long period of Islamic dominion, has become “the national home for the Jewish people” again.

b. Daniel 8 and the Sixth-day war

Another important prediction of the Book of Daniel is the vision of a ram and a goat in Daniel 8. The key figure of the vision is the little horn, which ‘became great, even as great as the Prince of the host’, to whom will be given a host ‘with the regular burnt offering’ (Dan 8:11-12). The term of the desolation of the sanctuary is also set in the vision – ‘2,300 evenings and mornings’ after which ‘the sanctuary will be restored to its rightful state’ (Dan 8:13-14). It seems that there is not much point in discussing the identification of the ‘little horn’. It makes much more sense to focus entirely on the term mentioned in the vision – 2,300 evenings and mornings, after which the sanctuary will be cleansed. Although some commentators also turned to replacement theology and spoke about the liberation of the Christian Church from Islamic oppression, the most popular theory was the understanding of the cleansing of the Temple as an event, connected with Jerusalem and the destiny of the Jews³⁶ – the rebuilding of the Temple (W. Hales, F.A. Cox,

Daniel in Antiquities 10.186–281 186’ in *A Vision of the Days. Studies in Early Jewish History and Historiography in Honor of Daniel R. Schwartz*, ed. by René Bloch and Karina Martin Hogan (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014), 176-193.

³⁶ Samuel Núñez, *The Vision of Daniel 8: Interpretations from 1700 to 1900* (Andrews University, 1987), 103-105; 235-239; 382-388.

M. Habershon, J.W. Bosanquet, A. R. Fausset), the restoration of the Jews to their homeland (T. Newton, R. Beere), the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem (J. Bicheno, J. Tanner). It is especially noteworthy that historicists often specified the exact dates when these events were supposed to take place. The dates that were suggested as the starting point for the period mentioned in Dan. 8:14 are particularly remarkable. One of the most important options was the Battle of Granicus, which took place in 334 BC, just after the start of Alexander's invasion of Persia (J.S. Faber, Tomas Newton, S. Osgood, R. Nevin, A. Clarke, J.E. Clarke). If we calculate 2,300 years from 334 BC, taking into account the absence of a 'year zero', it gives us 1967. This was the year of the Six-Day War.

May 1967 saw a sharp deterioration in relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors, who threatened to start military operations against the Jewish state. On June 5, 1967, Israel launched a preemptive strike. Jerusalem was captured by the Israelis on June 7. Immediately after the capture of the city by the Israelis, mass prayers were held at the Western Wall. At the same time, regular ascents to the Temple Mount were carried out, which were led by the chief military rabbi of the IDF, Shlomo Goren. We can say safely that after the liberation of Jerusalem by the Maccabees, no historical event is more perfectly consistent with the prediction of the Book of Daniel about the 'cleansing of the Temple' than the capture of the city by the Israelis in 1967. It is especially noteworthy that both the date and the general nature of this event were determined on the basis of the book of Daniel by historicist commentators back in the 19th century. Such accurate predictions based on the interpretation of biblical prophecies are exceptional. As C. Mariottini points out:

I have to give a lot of credit to Adam Clark. It is easy to look at the Six-Day War and the capture of the Temple Mount and then look back and relate these events to the book of Daniel and the Battle of Granicus but it takes a perceptive mind in 1825 to look at an event in 334 B.C. and relate that event to something that

would happen in 1966 (or 1967), one hundred and forty-one years into the future³⁷.

c. Daniel 9: “Seventy weeks” and the restoration of Israel

The next well-known and universally discussed prophecy of the Book of Daniel is the prophecy of the 70 weeks. The prophecies of Daniel 12 (Dan 12:11-12) are also closely related to this prophecy and should be interpreted together with it. According to J. Montgomery, the prophecy of the 70 weeks is ‘the Dismal Swamp of Old Testament criticism’³⁸. Most Jewish and Christian commentators have traditionally associated these prophecies with historical events of the first century, such as the ministry of Jesus Christ or the destruction of the Second Temple. Nevertheless, it is obvious that such interpretations contradict the authentic meaning of the prophecy, which speaks of the restoration of Israel, which will take place after the events described in the prophecy. It is about the future restoration of Israel that we read in Dan 9:24³⁹. 70 weeks are decreed ‘to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place’ (Dan 9:24). All these predictions, including the fulfilment of prophetic visions and the anointment of the Temple⁴⁰, will come true after the completion of the 70 weeks. Thus, the only traditional interpretation that does justice to the authentic meaning of the prophecy is the eschatological one, which sometimes appeared in the works of ancient Christian

³⁷ Claude Mariottini. *The Book of Daniel and the Restoration of the Sanctuary*.

³⁸ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1959), 400.

³⁹ John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 353-354; Carol A. Newsom with Brennan W. Breed. *Daniel: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 302; John Goldingay, *Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 487.

⁴⁰ John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 34.

commentators (for example, Hippolytus of Rome) and is now especially popular among futurists. Nevertheless, the idea of moving the last week to an eschatological future does not do justice to either the authentic meaning of the prophecy or the unity of the 70-week period, and is at best unverifiable and unfalsifiable.

One can say that all the calculation methods for 70 weeks have already been tried. Nevertheless, we can suggest another way to calculate this period, linking the prophecies contained therein with the events that occurred after the destruction of the Second Temple, and not the First. Probably, such an interpretation can be considered an example of a typological approach to the interpretation of biblical prophecies - the events that took place during the time of the First Temple are the 'type' of events that will take place during the time of the Second.

In this case, the only date which could be suitable for the beginning of the 70 weeks is the year 130, the adoption of the decree of Emperor Hadrian on the restoration of Jerusalem as the Roman city of Aelia Capitolina, which can be interpreted as 'the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem' (Dan 9:25). The first part of the term, described in the prophecy, is seven weeks, after which 'an anointed one' will come. Counting seven weeks forward from the year 130 brings us to 179 as the date of the appearance of the first 'anointed one'. The beginning of the reign of Yehuda ha-Nasi, the exilarch, the head of the Jewish community in the Land of Israel, dates back to about this period. Yehuda ha-Nasi became the first head of the Jewish community recognized by the Roman authorities and the editor of the Mishnah (the early part of the Talmud). Historians date Yehuda ha-Nasi's assumption of office to the years 170-180⁴¹. His historical role, as well as the date of his assignment, make it possible to consider him the first 'anointed one'. In this

⁴¹ Binyamin Lau, *The Sages. Vol. 3: The Galilean Period* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2015), 309-310; Peter Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World: The Jews of Palestine from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest* (London-New York: Routledge, 2003), 169.

respect, he can be compared with Jehoshua, the first high priest of the Second Temple, whom the author of the Book of Daniel defined as the anointed one⁴².

The events related to last week are even more interesting. It was the era of the Byzantine-Persian war (602-628). The last week falls on the years 613-620. In 614, the Persian army captured and partially destroyed Jerusalem. Some historians believe that the local Jews initially supported the Persians and got the opportunity to pray on the Temple Mount, and, perhaps, even restored the sacrifices for a very short time⁴³. Nevertheless, the Persians very quickly changed their policy, having leaned on local Christians and expelled Jews from Jerusalem. Some sources suggest that the Messianic leader of the Jewish community was also killed during these events⁴⁴.

We can see an obvious analogy between the events described and the depiction of the last week in the Book of Daniel. The capture and partial destruction of Jerusalem can be put in line with the prediction of the destruction of 'the city and the sanctuary' by 'the people of the prince who is to come' (Dan 9:26). The mention of the alliance between the 'prince who is to come' and the 'many' may correspond to the original union between the Persians and the Jews. The mention of the 'putting an end to sacrifice' may be consistent with the events of 614,

⁴² John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 355.

⁴³ Hagith Sivan, 'From Byzantine to Persian Jerusalem: Jewish Perspectives and Jewish/Christian Polemics, Greek', *Roman and Byzantine Studies* 41, (2000): 291; Martha Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire: A History of the Book of Zerubbabel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 27-31.

⁴⁴ Hagith Sivan, 'From Byzantine to Persian Jerusalem: Jewish Perspectives and Jewish/Christian Polemics, Greek', *Roman and Byzantine Studies* 41, (2000): 292; Gilbert Dagron et Vincent Déroche, *Juifs et Chrétiens en Orient byzantin* (Paris: ACHCByz, 2010), 27; Martha Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire: A History of the Book of Zerubbabel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 29.

when the Persians stopped Jewish attempts to resume sacrifices on the Temple Mount.

The second half of the last week, which will be a time of complete desolation, will see the end of trials for the Jewish people and the restoration of the sanctuary, which the author of the Book of Daniel calls 'the anointing of the Holy of Holies'. How can this be understood according to our typological interpretation? If we understood the second half of the last week literally as the period from 617 to 620, we would not see any remarkable events there, let alone the restoration of Jerusalem and the Jewish people. However, the principle of the historicist interpretation of the Book of Daniel indicates that these dates should be interpreted symbolically. In chapter 12, we read: 'And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days' (Dan 12:11-12). Here, the author is speaking specifically about the second half of the last week, but he determines its duration in days, defining it more precisely as 1,290/1,335 days. According to the historicist 'day-year principle', these terms should also be calculated in years. As a result, the second half of the last week becomes a symbolic period. This approach is similar to both the original way of calculating symbolic weeks, which is, for example, found in the 'Apocalypse of Weeks'⁴⁵, and to the symbolic interpretation of the 70 weeks, which can be found in some Christian commentaries⁴⁶. It can be illustrated by T. Nass's reasoning. He believes that the second half of the last week relates to the entire history of mankind between the destruction of the Second Temple and the millennium:

⁴⁵ John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 353.

⁴⁶ C.F. Keil and F. Delitsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament. Volume IX: Ezekiel, Daniel* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 758-760; Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 176-178.

Perhaps one could take the 70 weeks as symbolic. The cutting off of the Messiah after 69 weeks could refer to his crucifixion. By his crucifixion the Messiah confirmed the new covenant of grace which will be in effect for many throughout the NT era (the last week). In the midst of the last week of human history, the temple sacrifices were ended as the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. From 70 AD until Judgment Day, we are in the last “3,5 years” when the antichrist will be active persecuting the church⁴⁷.

Thus, we can assume that the second half of the last week includes the entire history of the Jewish people from the events of 614 to the accomplishment of six prophetic goals (Dan 9:24) and the fulfillment of the 70-week prophecy. Counting 1,290 years from the year 614 brings us to 1904, which marked the beginning of the Zionist movement's intense activity in Palestine, and the First Russian Revolution of 1905, which signaled the start of the collapse of the Russian Empire. We get even more remarkable dates when counting 1,335 years from 614. This is 1949. As we know, in 1947 the United Nations decided to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, in 1948 the independence of the State of Israel was proclaimed, and in 1949 Israel won the final victory in the first Arab-Israeli war.

As we can see, the year 1949 can indeed be defined as the end of the 70-week term, initially decreed ‘about your people and your holy city’ (Dan 9:24). The events that took place at that time were indeed the fulfillment of the promises contained in Dan 9:24 – the sealing of the vision and the prophet (fulfillment of Messianic prophecies about the restoration of Israel) and the anointing of a most holy place (liberation of Jerusalem). It is noteworthy not only that the prediction contained in the book of Daniel is here strikingly accurate, but also that the term ‘1,335 days’ has no special symbolic meaning in Jewish

⁴⁷ Thomas P. Nass, *The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:20–27*. Milwaukee Metro-South Pastoral Conference (St. John's Lutheran Church: 6802 W. Forest Home Ave. September 19, 1994).

tradition. Therefore, it was not borrowed by the author from traditional sources and may only be a manifestation of the prophetic intuition of the author of the Book of Daniel.

7. Conclusion.

Thus, we can conclude that the historicist interpretation of the Book of Daniel is quite reliable if we link it with the predictions of the restorations of Israel. Other prophetic dreams and predictions of the Book of Daniel (the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 and the prophecy of the resurrection of the dead) might also be interpreted in this way. Of course, we do not limit our understanding of the Book of Daniel to this topic only. Still, its understanding as a prediction of the restoration of Israel that took place in the 20th century is a well-founded typological projection of the original understanding of the Book of Daniel related to the Antiochene crisis and the Maccabean wars. In this context, modern Israel can also be perceived as a typological projection of the Hasmonean kingdom, founded by the Maccabees. This idea could certainly provide fertile ground for further reflection on the history and religious significance of the Zionist project and the Jewish state.

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