

4 Daniel 9-11

9:1–27. This time Daniel is given a revelation not through a vision but by reading a passage of prophecy from Jeremiah and having it interpreted for him by an angel. In the first three verses Daniel describes where he was at the time of the episode; the rest of the chapter has to do with his prayer on behalf of the people (vv. 4–19) and the angel’s explanation of the words of Jeremiah (vv. 20–27). The passage in effect shows that to understand Scripture well, a person needs help from God; we can learn this lesson, too, from our Lord’s interpretation of the Scriptures for the disciples he met on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:45).

9:1–3. The fact that this episode supposedly happens after the fall of the Babylonian empire and before the advent of the Persian empire (which will bring about the return of the exiles to their homeland) suggests that the circumstances of the Jews changed half way through the exile. This would make them more eager to know when it was going to end. This is what the author seems to mean by these references to historical events—references that do not correspond exactly with information from historical sources (Darius was not a Mede, but a Persian; he was not the son but, rather, the father of Xerxes that is, Ahasuerus). The passage also follows the artificial chronology set out in the first part of the book (cf. 6:1). This inexactness may be intentional, to have the reader concentrate less on the actual circumstances of the exile and more on what it symbolizes. Once it is set down in writing, a prophecy has permanent validity and one can find in it the answer to one’s questions (cf. 2 Mac 2:1–15), including those that arise after the return from exile, during the Seleucid persecution when this passage was written.

9:4–19. This is a penitential prayer in which Daniel speaks in solidarity with his people and intercedes on their behalf. He acknowledges that God has acted justly in punishing the people by driving them out of the chosen land (vv. 4–8), but he reminds God that he is also forgiving and merciful (v. 9). They have been punished in line with the Law of Moses (v. 13), but God, who delivered them from Egypt (v. 15), will surely listen to his servants when they appeal to him, for his mercy is great (v. 18). If he forgives them, it will redound to the honour of God’s name (vv. 17, 19). Commenting on v. 18, St Jerome observes: “Daniel expresses himself in human terms: when we are listened to, it seems as if God has inclined his ear to us; when he turns to look at us, it seems as if he has opened his eyes; and when he turns his face away, it is as if we are not worthy of being heard or to appear in his sight” (*Commentarii in Daniele*, 9,

18). St Basil, on another point, notes that Daniel's fasting prepares the ground for the revelation that follows: "Daniel would not have seen the vision if he had not first refined his soul by fasting" (*De jejunio*, 1, 9). For penitential prayers similar to this, see Ezra 9:6–15; Neh 9; Ps 51; Bar 1:15–3:8. Although Daniel's prayer is about the ordeal of exile, it is valid at all times. The Church, too, "embracing in her bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal" (Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, 8).

9:20–27. According to the text, this passage is not about a vision but about an angelic message that is delivered on earth—not that there is much difference between the two: they are both ways of making a divine plan known to man. The word delivered by the angel comes from God, who answers Daniel's prayer even before he has finished it. God knows what we need even before we tell him (cf. Mt 6:8).

The seventy years that Jeremiah predicted that the exile would last (cf. Jer 25:11–14) are interpreted here (v. 24) as seventy weeks. Seventy, like seven, is a number symbolizing completeness, that is, the whole period of time involved (cf. 4:23). According to the angel, the seventy weeks refer to seventy weeks of years—the length of time between the start of the exile and the end which will follow the death of Antiochus IV. There is a lot of symbolism going on here. Seventy times seven or seventy weeks symbolizes total and definitive completion—when evil and sin will disappear, divine justice will take over, all the prophecies will come true, and the temple will be consecrated definitively (v. 24). The words "to anoint a most holy place" (v. 24) mark the climax of the passage; they refer to the fact that God will forever dwell in the midst of his people, in the temple. They could have to do with the high priesthood. The eschatological dimension of this passage can be seen from the light shed on it by the redemptive and sanctifying work of Christ "whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (Rom 3:25).

The anointed prince who comes at the end of the first seven weeks could be Cyrus: in Isaiah 45:1 he is described as the Lord's "anointed", that is, messiah; this would mean that the text is referring to the duration of the exile—forty-nine years from 587 (the year when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem and when Jeremiah would have made his prophecy) to 538, the

year when the exiles would have returned in obedience to Cyrus' edict. This "anointed prince" could also be Zerubbabel, the prince of David's line, who returned to Judah with the repatriates and rebuilt the temple (cf. Ezra 5:2; 6:15). Some Fathers, however, see Jesus Christ in this Prince Messiah, and with good reason, for he was responsible for the liberation of the new people of God.

The sixty-two weeks that follow refer to the time after the return from exile, during which the walls of Jerusalem will be rebuilt (cf. Neh 6:15–16; 12:27–43) and which will see the beginning of the trials that were a feature of the author's own time. The trials include the death of the anointed one who is "cut off" (v. 26), which would fit in with the death of the high priest Onias III in 171 bc (cf. 2 Mac 4:30–38).

After the seven and the sixty-two weeks, only one week remains to make up the seventy. This is the week in which all the grievous damage done by Antiochus IV will cease, for he will die. Antiochus' time is the equivalent of half a week, that is, three and a half days. The passage shows how destructive that king has been: he has led many to adopt Greek ways and, worst of all, he has suppressed Jewish religious worship and installed a statue of Zeus in the temple. The reference to "abominations" in v. 27 is reminiscent of the ancient baals or Canaanite idols, which were regarded as unclean and fatal to their followers. The words "upon the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate", which derive from the Greek version, seem to mean that the "desolating sacrilege" (cf. 1 Mac 1:54) will be placed in the wing of the temple. The New Testament (cf. Mt 24:15 and par.) uses the same wording. There is still a period of suffering ahead, the second half of the last week; but sentence has already been passed on the persecutor. These then are the words of hope that Daniel passes on from reading and scrutiny of Scripture (cf. 9:1). As St Paul will write: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, and reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17).

10:1–12:13. The revelations received by Daniel culminate with this vision which displays all the features of a literary genre known as "angelic announcements"—the context in which the announcement occurred (10:1–4), the seer's reaction (10:5–9), the scene where the divine messenger introduces himself (10:10–11:1), revelation regarding what will happen in the future (11:2–12:4) and when and how it will happen (12:5–13). The emphasis here is on the message

delivered to Daniel. The sole purpose of the vision is to introduce the people who will address Daniel. In chapters 2, 7 and 8, events were described by the use of symbols; now the text refers directly to the protagonists, the various kings who appear on the scene.

10:1–9. The third year of the reign of Cyrus (v. 1) was 536 bc, that is, after the king’s proclamation, in the first year of his reign, allowing the exiles to return to Judah (cf. Ezra 1:1; 6:3; 2 Chron 36:22). So, the vision takes place after the years of exile and at the start of the Persian period, which is the period to which the message will refer (cf. 11:2).

As the author of the book sees it, the time from the third year of Jehoiakim (606 BC; cf. 1:1) to the third of Cyrus would be seventy years, a figure symbolizing that Daniel’s ministry has now being fulfilled. Daniel prepared himself for this vision by prayer and fasting throughout the Passover and the week of the Azymes (that is what the text means when it says that the vision happened on the twenty-fourth day of the first month).

Daniel sees a heavenly being (v. 5), an extraordinary angel, with features reminiscent of those of one seen by Ezekiel. That prophet described the angel commissioned to organize the punishment inflicted on the Israelites as a “man clothed in linen” (cf. Ezek 9:1–7; 10:2) and he uses phrases that Daniel will borrow to describe the creatures who surround the throne of God like burning torches (Ezek 1:13–14, 27). So, what we have here links up with the prophecies of Ezekiel, just as in the previous chapter there was a link with those of Jeremiah.

Daniel is the only one who receives the revelation, though the people with him do sense that they are in the presence of the Divine (v. 7). The text says this to show that the vision is not something subjective, something dreamt up by the prophet: it actually happened; he did see a vision. (Something similar will happen when St Paul has a vision on the road to Damascus: cf. Acts 9:7.) The vision, which only Daniel sees, drains him of energy; it is too much for him (vv. 7–8). He has a reverential fear of the angel, which makes sense because “as purely *spiritual* creatures angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness (cf. Pius XII, *Humani generis*; Lk 20:36; Dan 10:9–12)” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 330).

10:9–11:1. Daniel is called “man greatly loved” (10:11, 19), as he was earlier in 9:23; this is a reference to his prophetic calling and mission. Given that the angel here is the bearer of the

word, we may take it that he is Gabriel, the angel of 9:23. His greeting, “Fear not”, already carries a message (that God is well disposed) and it is typical of the language of angelic announcements (cf. Lk 1:13, 30). The vision that he is going to reveal to Daniel is one for which the ground was being prepared ever since the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem; Habakkuk had already said: “For still the vision awaits its time ... If it is slow, wait for it” (Hab 2:3). If the angel took twenty-one days to come (the equivalent of the three weeks in 10:2), the reason was that the angel protector of Persia held him back, trying to prevent the revelation about the end from reaching Israel. The background to this passage is the belief that every nation has an angel of its own to protect it. In a world that believed in a plurality of gods, this angel would have been a god; for the monotheistic Jew, this protector becomes an angel. As well as conveying an idea of God’s providence towards every nation, this passage allows us to glimpse that what happens on earth is also happening at the same time in the sphere of heaven; or, to put it another way, that it is in heaven that the destinies of nations are decided. Michael, being Israel’s angel protector, is the only one who helps the revelation angel, Gabriel, to carry on with his assignment to announce salvation to the chosen people (10:21). According to Jewish tradition, Michael, whose name means, “Who is like God?”, belongs to the highest rank of angels; he, along with Uriel, Raguel and Gabriel, did battle with the fallen angels and overcame them. In Jude 9, which mentions a dispute between Michael and the devil over the body of Moses, he is called “archangel”; and he is also mentioned in Revelation 12:7. “Michael means ‘Who is like God?’ [...] Therefore, Michael is the angel sent when a mission or task requires special power, for by his name and his actions he reveals that no one else can do what God alone can do” (St Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, 2, 34, 9). The Church, the new people of God, also has the archangel Michael as her protector.

The angel touches Daniel’s lips (10:15–19), rather like what happened to Isaiah (Is 6:7) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:9), except that now the gesture is aimed at enabling Daniel to speak with the angel and receive the revelation, whereas in the other prophets it was to prepare them to speak to the people.

The revelation that Daniel will receive concerns God’s purposes in regard to the tide of human events; these are plans that cannot be altered, for they are written in the book of truth (v. 21). The idea of a book in which God has written down the actions of men, to be read through on

Judgment Day, occurs often in the Old Testament (cf. Ex 32:32–33; Ps 56:8) and is also to be found in the New (cf. Rev 20:12); but here the book has a different purpose: it deals with God’s plans for the future. It is a way of saying that the future is already predetermined in the mind of God.

10:19. The Vulgate Latin translates “man greatly beloved” as “man of desires” (*vir desideriorum*). “The man who prays and mortifies his flesh and fasts because he wants to know what the future holds and the mysteries of God is rightly called a *man of desires*” (St Jerome, *Commentarii in Daniele*, 10, 19). The translation is a little free, but it has given rise to interesting developments in Christian ascetical writing. St Josemaría Escrivá also uses this expression from Daniel, applying it to the apostolic zeal of Christians: “Allow your soul to be consumed by desires for loving, for forgetting yourself, for sanctity, for Heaven. Do not stop to wonder whether the time will come to see them accomplished, as some pseudo-adviser might suggest. Make them more fervent every day, for the Holy Spirit says that he is pleased with ‘men of desires’. Let your desires be operative and put them into practice in your daily tasks” (*Furrow*, 628).

11:2–12:4. The revelation made to Daniel includes past (11:2–20), present (11:21–39) and future (11:40–12:4) in one uninterrupted sequence. It is all couched in the future tense as if it were a prophecy about future events. In this way, the reader, who can see that the prophecy came true in the events before his time, can be confident that the predictions about the future will also be borne out by events. This type of prophecy, known as “prophecy after the event”, shows that there is a unity running through God’s plans for mankind, and that God is faithful to himself and does what he says he will do.

11:2–20. The first thing to be revealed is (v. 2) the line of succession of the kings of Persia (the fourth would be Xerxes the Great who led his army against Greece in 480 bc); then the arrival of Alexander the Great and his successors (vv. 3–4). The “king of the south” or Egypt (v. 5) is Ptolemy I Soter, and the prince who will become stronger than him is Seleucus I Nicator (304–281), who, after carving out his own empire in Syria and Babylon, became Ptolemy’s ally and captain. The alliance mentioned in v. 6 is the one made by the “king of the north” or Syria, the Seleucid Antiochus II Theos, with Ptolemy II Philadelphus in 252 bc. A daughter of Ptolemy’s, Berenice, became Antiochus’ wife, but his previous wife, Laodice, avenged herself; she

poisoned Antiochus and killed Berenice and her child by the king. The branch referred to in v. 7 is Ptolemy III Euergetes, Berenice's brother, who rose up against the king of the north (Seleucus II Callinicus, 247–226 bc, the son of Laodice), invaded Syria and was able to carry off much booty, thereby avenging the death of his sister (vv. 7–8). Seleucus II's counterattack on Egypt in 242–240 bc failed, and he had to withdraw to his own territory (v. 9). His sons, Seleucus III Soter, and Antiochus III the Great, continued to wage war on Egypt (v. 10), but the king of Egypt, Ptolemy IV Philopator defeated Antiochus III at the battle of Raphia in 217 bc (vv. 11–12).

Antiochus III continued to try to defeat Egypt; with the help of allies, (including some Jews), and taking advantage of internal strife in Egypt and possibly the rebellious in Palestine, he attacked the next king of Egypt, Ptolemy V Epiphanes in a war that lasted from 204 to 197 (vv. 13–14). In 204 he conquered Gaza (v. 15), and in 198 Sidon and Palestine, the “glorious land” (v. 16). He also sought to control Egypt by marrying his daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy V; but this did not turn out to his advantage (v. 17). Despite this, he tried to extend his domains by conquering some Greek cities in Asia Minor and others in Egypt, but the Romans, under Lucius Cornelius Scipio, defeated him in the year 189 near Magnesia (v. 18). Revolts in the eastern reaches of his empire (Babylon and Persia) took Antiochus III in that direction and it was during his attempt to sack the temple of Bel in Elymais (Persia) he was killed by the temple's priests (v. 19; cf. 2 Mac 1:11–17, where the temple of Artemis at Nanaea is mentioned). Antiochus III was succeeded by Seleucus IV Philopator, the king who sent his first minister, Heliodorus, to plunder the temple of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Mac 3), only to be assassinated by the latter soon after, in 175. (v. 20).

The sacred writer goes into all this detail about the history of the time because the historical context helps to explain what follows—Antiochus IV's campaign against Egypt and the impossibility, in human terms, of Syria and Egypt ever making peace.

11:21–39. Seleucus IV was succeeded by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the “contemptible person” of v. 21, who usurped the throne of Demetrius, Seleucus' son. Antiochus asserted his control by a mixture of force and intrigue; he even orchestrated the death of Onias III, who may be the “prince of the covenant” mentioned in v. 22. He soon locked horns with the king of Egypt, Ptolemy VI. In the years 170–169 he organized a campaign against Egypt that resulted in the

capture of Ptolemy (in this he was apparently helped by the treachery of Egyptian ministers: cf. vv. 25–26). Although he pretended to treat Ptolemy in a kindly way (he was, after all, Antiochus’ nephew), he plundered Egypt and made no effort to bring about peace, which can come about only at the time foreseen by God, that is, “the end” (v. 27). It was on Antiochus’ return from that first campaign in Egypt that he took Jerusalem by storm and sacked the temple (cf. 2 Mac 5:1–21), perhaps on the excuse of imposing order when Jason and Menelaus were fighting over the high priesthood. After that, he returned to the city of Antioch. In 168 he set out on his second Egyptian campaign; although he was initially successful, he had to withdraw due to the intervention of the Romans (called in the text “Kittim”: v. 30; cf. the note on Is 23:1–18). Enraged by this, he fell on Jerusalem again on his way back, plundered whatever was left in the temple, banned the daily sacrifices and erected an altar to Zeus (vv. 30–31). Some Jews collaborated with him, attracted by the splendor of Greek culture and by the king’s bribes (v. 32); some stayed true to their religion and encouraged others to do the same, even at the cost of martyrdom and persecution (v. 33); others, like the Maccabees, revolted (v. 34). Martyrdom suffered out of fidelity to the Law does make sense: it serves as a form of purification in preparation for “the time of the end” (v. 35), which is predetermined. As the book sees it, the prospect of that moment, and not the force of armed struggle, is the reason why people should be hopeful and courageous.

Antiochus IV’s impiety reached its zenith when he put himself forward as a god (hence his nickname Epiphanes, which is linked to the “epiphany” or manifestation of a god), and coined money which depicted him as having the features of Zeus. The author reads such irreligion as a sign that the end is near, for God will not be able to tolerate it any longer (v. 36). Also, Antiochus gave up the cult of Apollo, a deity revered by his ancestors, replacing it with that of Jupiter Capitolinus, or the god of fortresses. He respected neither the true God nor the traditional gods of his people (vv. 37–39).

11:40–12:4. Up to 11:40 the revelation made to Daniel has considered historical events; it now moves on to describe the time of the End, which will come when the persecutor has fallen (11:40–45) and the people are raised up, when those who have been faithful are delivered (12:1–4). This is what the prophecy is primarily about, because it refers to a period after the sacred author’s own time. To grasp the message here, one needs to focus not so much on the

detail of what will happen as on the fact that it will happen. How it will come about can be seen by projecting on to the end time what happened in the past and what is happening now.

11:40–45. The time of the End will come when the power of evil (symbolized here by Antiochus IV) disappears. The death of the king is described in a continuation of the earlier narrative that reports another campaign against Egypt in which he has great success (vv. 40–42); but he has to turn and withdraw (not for the first time) because of news reaching him from his own country; as he makes his way back, he will have to pass through the land of Israel and there he will meet his end (vv. 44–45). What will happen is similar to what had happened before, but it happens for the last time. As he makes his way south towards Egypt, Antiochus IV will attack Judea again, but her neighbouring countries will not be touched, perhaps because these traditional enemies of the Jews are Antiochus’ allies (v. 41). When he is established in Egypt, Libyans and Ethiopians, that is, peoples from east and south of Egypt, will flock to him (v. 43). On his homeward journey he will flaunt his power by pitching his tents in front of the temple. Death will overtake him there (v. 45). When evaluating the prophecy, it is not very relevant that Antiochus IV in fact died elsewhere (in Persia) of a terrible disease (cf. 1 Mac 6:1–16; 2 Mac 9:1–29), because what we are really being told about here is the connection between the death of the persecutor and the salvation God grants to his people. The setting for Antiochus’ death here is symbolic: death claims him in the land of Israel, from where God is going to rule the everlasting kingdom that he will soon establish.¹

¹ Gavigan, J., McCarthy, B., & McGovern, T. (Eds.). (2005). *Major Prophets* (pp. 851–868). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.