

## THE FOUR KINGDOMS OF DANIEL

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A consensus exists today in evangelical circles concerning the identity of the four kingdoms introduced in Daniel 2 and elaborated in Daniel 7. Reference Bibles such as the *NASB* do not hesitate to insert paragraph headings in Daniel 7 identifying the sections as dealing with the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman empires respectively. This is not even a recent consensus, for Luther remarked that "in this interpretation and opinion all the world are agreed, and history and fact abundantly establish it."<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising then that few evangelical scholars would question the *NASB* decision and that most evangelicals would be unaware of any alternatives.

Indeed, the only alternative that has received any degree of scholarly defense is the position that marks the four kingdoms as Babylonian, Median, Persian and Greek. While this view has gained a consensus in nonevangelical circles, it is patently not an evangelical option because it suggests that in lining up these four kingdoms the assumed second-century author of Daniel simply made a mistake.

So the evangelical consensus is easily explained: There is a scarcity of defensible alternatives. At this point, however, one must begin to wonder about method. If there are truly no alternatives, then the conclusion may stand by default if by nothing else. Ideally, though, it is to be preferred that an hypothesis be established as correct by evidence rather than simply accepted as correct by forfeiture. Therefore several questions must be addressed. How has the present strong consensus developed? What positive evidence exists? Are there any viable alternatives?

### I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONSENSUS

H. H. Rowley has done a very thorough study of the history of interpretation of this passage.<sup>2</sup> There is no need to duplicate that work, but making use of his data and adding to it where necessary yields the following summary.

E. J. Young has condensed the argument for the Roman view<sup>3</sup> to two basic points:

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<sup>1</sup>M. Luther, cited in C. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973 reprint) 245.

<sup>2</sup>H. H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1959).

<sup>3</sup>I will use "Roman view" to describe the various positions that posit Rome as the fourth empire and "Greek view" to describe those who identify the fourth empire as Greece.

The real reason why the Roman view came to the ascendancy in New Testament times is due to 2 facts:

1) Our Lord identified Himself as the Son of Man, the heavenly figure of Daniel 7, and connected the "abomination of desolation" with the future destruction of the Temple (e.g., Mt. 24);

2) Paul used the language of Daniel 7 to describe the Antichrist, and the book of Revelation employed the symbolism of Daniel 7 to refer to powers that were then existent and future.<sup>4</sup>

So the NT along with the early Jewish and Christian writings combine to constitute the early evidence for the Roman view and to form the foundation for an early consensus for that position.

1. *NT evidence.* There is no question that Christ identifies himself as the Son of Man, a title introduced in the context of Daniel 7. Some question remains, however, about how that clarifies the identity of the four empires. The Son of Man comes in line for the kingdom after the fourth kingdom. Neither the first or second coming of Christ immediately follows the Roman empire, so any identification of the kingdoms only comes through interpretation of the NT rather than by its explicit statement. The fact that Paul and John use symbolism from Daniel likewise fails to produce a firm identification of the four empires. Revelation 13 describes only one beast, not four. This one is not like any of Daniel's four but borrows from each of them. This demonstrates that Daniel is being used, but it hardly gives reason for thinking that Daniel is being interpreted. Despite Young's statement, then, there is no clear NT evidence for identifying the four kingdoms. The way is open for several interpretations that could take account of the NT development.

2. *Early Jewish literature.* There is no question that the earliest Jewish interpreters favored the Roman view. We must note, however, that they already came from a time when the Roman empire was firmly in place. Our examples begin in the first century A.D.: (1) *Apoc. Bar.* 39:1-8 is interpreted by Charles as referring to Rome, but the text is by no means explicit.<sup>5</sup> Since the connection is vague, little can be learned of the Roman view from this work. (2) In 4 Ezra 12:10-12 there is an eagle with twelve wings that is likened to the fourth beast of Daniel and is identified by cryptic description as Rome. (3) Josephus gives us the first clear statement: "Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them."<sup>6</sup> (4) The Talmud reflects throughout an uncharacteristic consistency in interpretation. In several places R. Johanan is cited as suggesting that the fourth kingdom is Rome,<sup>7</sup> while other portions connect the second beast to the Persians, leaving no doubt

<sup>4</sup>E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 293-294.

<sup>5</sup>R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2. 501.

<sup>6</sup>*Ant.* 10.11.7.

<sup>7</sup>b. *Šebu.* 20; b. *Abod. Zar.* 2b.

that the fourth would be Rome.<sup>8</sup> (5) *Lev. Rab.* 13:5 likens the four rivers of Eden to the four empires designated Babylon, Media, Greece and Edom.<sup>9</sup>

While the unanimity is startling and even impressive, we must remember that these works all date to the Roman period. They therefore do not necessarily reflect an attempt at discerning the intentions of the book of Daniel but could just as easily represent reinterpretations of that data to suit what was perceived as historical reality.

3. *The Church fathers.* The evidence in the writings of the Church fathers is massive and in unison in favor of the Roman view. Rowley begins with Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Origen and adds a dozen more voices before he has finished even the earlier periods.<sup>10</sup> Again we must note, however, that when these wrote, the Roman empire was still in existence. Therefore, for instance, Irenaeus sees Daniel 2 as predicting the downfall of the Roman empire of his day into ten kingdoms.<sup>11</sup> Their interpretation came from a point in history in which what they considered to be the fourth kingdom was in power.

## II. CURRENT VIEWS

Our present day witnesses no Roman empire. This fact has required a slight shift from the positions enunciated in the early Jewish and Christian writings in that it has led many to postulate the coming of a "restored" Roman empire in some form. Others have tried to suggest ways in which the Roman empire might be considered to have continued in some form beyond the fall of Rome. This includes political models—of which dozens exist<sup>12</sup>—as well as religious models. Such "extended" empire views have changed as history has progressed. The "restored" empire view, on the other hand, has not required the same flexibility.

The "restored" empire view has its roots in early Church history, though the view itself is not early. When Irenaeus spoke of Rome breaking down into ten parts, he did not give any indication that he expected a gap of unknown length to intrude between the fall of Rome and the stage of the ten horns. In fact, we would not expect this gap to become part of the theory until Rome itself had fallen. When do we first see this particular position, and what is its rationale?

Western Rome fell in 476, but interpreters of that period would not feel a mandate to adjust their view because the empire continued in the east and, of course, the Holy Roman Empire was later formed in the west. It would take no

<sup>8</sup>b. *Yoma* 77a; *Meg.* 11a; *Qidd.* 72a.

<sup>9</sup>"Edom" is a typical rabbinic designation for Rome. Similar identifications appear in *Gen. Rab.* 99 n.v. and 99.2.

<sup>10</sup>Rowley, *Darius* 74–75.

<sup>11</sup>*Against Heresies* 26.1.

<sup>12</sup>Rowley, *Darius* 77–78.

great imagination to see the fourth kingdom as still being in existence through that period.

The Eastern Empire fell in 1453, but even then the title of Roman Emperor continued to be used—by the Hapsburgs, for example—until the abdication of Francis II in 1806. Throughout this period any interpretation that saw the ten horns as still future understood that the Roman empire was still in existence.

It is only in the nineteenth century, when the existence of the Roman empire became much more difficult to maintain, that the view arises concerning an indeterminate length of time, a gap in prophecy, after which the Roman empire would be reconstituted as a ten-nation alliance. But this then is not the same view as that which had been held throughout previous Church history. Even in the nineteenth century the “restored” empire view is a difficult one to find.<sup>13</sup> It is more common to find the papacy identified with an “extended” empire view.

In summary, three positions are commonly held among evangelicals today, all of which posit Rome as the fourth empire: (1) The fourth empire and the ten horns are all in the past, and the kingdom of God is represented and fulfilled in the Church. Fulfillment is viewed as complete. This view is at least as old as Augustine. (2) The fourth kingdom is still in power through the continued influence (political, religious, cultural, etc.) of the Roman empire, but the ten-horns stage is still future. An early proponent of this view is Jerome, and it seems to be the most popular view, historically speaking. But it is held by very few today because of the historical difficulties. (3) The fourth kingdom is over, and we are now in a prophetic gap that will end when a ten-nation confederacy reconstitutes the Roman empire. This view is scarce, if not nonexistent, prior to the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Post-Reformation interpretation has leaned heavily on (a) the premise that earliest interpretation identifies Rome as the fourth empire and (b) the weight of unanimity throughout Church history. Both of these, however, can be misleading guides. Concerning (a), we have seen that the earliest interpretations of Daniel that we possess are all from the period when the Roman empire was already in place. Since we have no example of interpretation of Daniel prior to that time, we cannot tell whether adjustments were made to accommodate history as it unfolded. Concerning (b), while the unanimity cannot be questioned, the weight that that unanimity should carry becomes an issue when we realize that a large majority of the interpreters who were supporting the Roman view wrote in a time when historical reality still clearly favored that view—that is, the Roman empire was still in existence. Many of those interpreters assumed a coming ten-nation conclusion to the Roman empire. By most historical perspectives we could agree that that did not happen. Their interpretation as they understood it would therefore be judged as incorrect by any modern position, thus making the weight of the tradition nil.

Adjustment has taken the form of an ever-increasing dependence on the

<sup>13</sup>See a very comprehensive listing of the history of literature on Daniel in J. P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960 reprint), 7. 50–54.

<sup>14</sup>I have found no examples earlier than the nineteenth century.

restored-empire (after a gap) view. The fact is, however, that that view has every appearance of grasping at straws. Besides, if a gap needs to exist, why could that gap not extend from the end of the Greek empire?

### III. ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES?

If the Roman view, held by sound exegesis throughout Church history, has been deemed inadequate, as our historical situation would suggest, perhaps the time has come to stop plugging the leaks with our fingers and to try to determine whether the dike was built correctly in the first place. We need to go back to the text of Daniel and re-evaluate the identity of the four kingdoms.

Such an approach was partially attempted by Robert Gurney.<sup>15</sup> He tried to identify the four kingdoms as Babylon, Media, Medo-Persia and Greece. The fact that these are the four kingdoms as maintained by current liberal scholarship should not be misleading, for Gurney's position differs from that of present-day critics in two all-important areas.

(1) Gurney defends a sixth-century date for the book of Daniel. We must acknowledge therefore that this identification of the four kingdoms is not a defensive attempt to rid the book of all predictive prophecy or to establish that it is nothing but *vaticinia ex eventu*. Here we find an interpreter who is not afraid to suggest that the Greek view itself might be supportable independent of presuppositions concerning the late dating of the book.

(2) Another reason why the Greek hypothesis has been considered problematic by most conservative interpreters is that if Greece is the fourth empire, then Media is the second empire. This Median empire has been presented by critical scholars as an historical misperception on the part of the author of Daniel. They view the empire as connected with Darius the Mede, whom they consider fictional. Gurney likewise avoids pitfalls here by suggesting that the Median empire that ought to be identified as the second kingdom is not a nonexistent realm ruled by a fictional Darius the Mede. Rather, it is the historically known Median empire that is contemporary to the Neo-Babylonian empire. His contention is that after the death of Nebuchadnezzar the Medes were actually more powerful than the declining Neo-Babylonian kings.<sup>16</sup>

These two points clearly distinguish Gurney's position concerning four kingdoms from the superficially similar position held widely today by critical scholarship. Our question: Does Gurney's position present us a viable alternative? The Roman view has held the field for two millennia because the existence of an identifiable Roman empire for most of the time made other alternatives seem much less likely. Once Rome had fallen, the traditional view was so strongly entrenched that few dared challenge it, and no new alternatives seemed to be available.

It would be untrue, however, to suggest that the Roman view existed only by default. Keil spends over twenty pages in his commentary defending the

<sup>15</sup>R. Gurney, "The Four Kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7," *Themelios* 2 (1977) 39-45.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.

Roman view as the only one that fits the details given by the text of Daniel.<sup>17</sup> We will now proceed to examine each of the textual elements usually credited to the strength of the Roman view to see if Gurney's position can meet the challenge. There is no argument concerning the identity of the first empire, so we will begin by looking at the second one.

1. *The second empire.* The symbol of the bear with the three ribs in its mouth is not given a very good explanation by the critics who see the beast as representing the empire of Darius the Mede. This failure is understandable since they consider the very existence of the empire to be an historical misperception on Daniel's part. The Roman view thus claims this as a strength. If the bear is Medo-Persia, they contend, the three ribs can be easily identified as three major conquests: Lydia, Babylon and Egypt.

Gurney, however, has just as convincing an historical case, and one that benefits from contemporary Biblical support. Jer 51:27-29 mentions three nations as coming against Babylon with the Medes: Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz.<sup>18</sup> Gurney does not discuss the historical background of this, but the three represent respectively Urartu, which was subdued by the Medes in 605 B.C.;<sup>19</sup> Mannaea, an ally of Assyria in its final days, which fell to the Medes shortly after the collapse of Assyria;<sup>20</sup> and the Scythians, who were repulsed by the Medes, probably in the reign of Cyaxares II.<sup>21</sup> It may also be noted in passing that the inferiority of the second empire when compared to the first (Dan 2:39) would fit Media much more readily than Medo-Persia.

One of the difficulties here is that we know so little of the Median empire. Its territory was roughly similar to the size of the Neo-Babylonian empire. During the rule of Nebuchadnezzar's successors the Median monarch was Astyages (585-550). There can be little question of Astyages' influence, for he married one of his daughters to Nebuchadnezzar, while the other was married to Cambyses I of Persia and became the mother of Cyrus. Even Nebuchadnezzar's fear of Median power is evidenced in the fortifications he built along the northern frontier.<sup>22</sup> Both Elam and Susa seem to have fallen prey to Astyages' expansion after the death of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>23</sup> All of this would give historical support to the view that Media may have been considered a world empire that succeeded Babylon in power after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, though the city of Babylon had not yet fallen.

<sup>17</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary* 245-268.

<sup>18</sup>Gurney, "Kingdoms" 43.

<sup>19</sup>R. Ghirshman, *Iran* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954) 113; E. Yamauchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 36.

<sup>20</sup>Ghirshman, *Iran* 112; Yamauchi, *Foes* 43.

<sup>21</sup>Ghirshman, *Iran* 106; Yamauchi, *Foes* 64, 80.

<sup>22</sup>Ghirshman, *Iran* 113.

<sup>23</sup>G. Cameron, *History of Early Iran* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1936) 221.

In this connection Gurney would also draw our attention to the fact that in Dan 2:38 Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that “you” (singular) are the head of gold, and to v 39, which says that after “you” another kingdom will arise—thus possibly not including the successors of Nebuchadnezzar. Furthermore, the symbolism in chap. 7 is of a lion whose wings get plucked—again referring to Nebuchadnezzar alone.<sup>24</sup>

2. *The third empire.* The third kingdom is represented as a leopard with four wings and four heads. The Greek view has treated this beast’s characteristics variously as representing either the four points of the compass or four rulers of Persia, though there is dispute over which four. The adherents to the Roman view here claim that they have a much better match in the four generals who divided Alexander’s empire among them.

Gurney views the second and third beasts as providing a fitting contrast between the “ponderous Median empire and the brilliant, swift-moving armies of Cyrus.”<sup>25</sup> The bronze kingdom is one that is characterized by world dominion as over against the inferiority of the silver kingdom. Again, to see Persia as worldwide in comparison to the inferior kingdom of the Medes is logical. The same contrast between Greece and Persia would not be suitable.

Gurney would identify the four wings as the four corners of the earth and the four heads as four kings of Persia. The identity of the four kings intended is not important—it would be the same four intended in Dan 11:2, whichever those are. Gurney goes on to point out that the four successors to Alexander, both in history and in Daniel 8, represent diluted strength, whereas in Daniel 7 the four heads seem to represent the strength itself.<sup>26</sup>

3. *The fourth empire.* The fourth kingdom receives the greatest amount of attention in both Daniel 2 and 7. One would therefore expect that a clearer identification may be attainable. The Roman view, of course, sees the fourth empire as Rome. The strongest points presented in defense are as follows: (1) The fourth empire is identified as being different from all of the others (7:23). This better describes Rome. (2) The fourth empire is compared to iron—and this, as well as the subsequent mixture of iron and pottery, most accurately describes Rome. (3) In Daniel 8 the goat (representing Greece) has four horns. This would not allow the ten-horned beast in Daniel 7 to be Greece, because four does not equal ten. (4) Though the ten horns are variously explained by the proponents of the Roman view, it is unanimously maintained that the Greek view can produce no acceptable understanding of them.

Gurney in response gives several reasons why he feels that Greece suits these details much better than Rome does:<sup>27</sup> (1) Alexander’s army was totally invincible, whereas Rome was stopped by Parthia in its attempted expansion

<sup>24</sup>Gurney, “Kingdoms” 42.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

(Dan 2:40; 7:7, 19). (2) The "western" civilization of Greece was very different from the previous oriental empires, whereas Rome in many ways was very similar to Greece. (3) The fourth empire is said to crush the other three. While Greece did conquer all of the area of the other three, Babylon, Media and Persia were all themselves outside of the area of the Roman empire.

This is acceptable logic as far as it goes, though both sides here are guilty of subjective arguments—both can argue that their candidate "fits." Gurney falls short, however, when it comes to offering an explanation of the identification of the ten horns. This has traditionally been a weak point of the Greek view, and here Gurney has nothing better to offer. He suggests that the ten horns be identified as the Seleucid kings from Seleucus Nicator to Antiochus IV Epiphanes. As has always been the problem, there are only seven kings in this line, so the other three kings always end up being identified as ones who might have contested the throne against Antiochus Epiphanes (Alexander, Heliodorus and Demetrius). While Gurney makes no apology and gives no explanation, there is another alternative.

Just as the four horns on the goat in Daniel 8 represent a later development in the Greek empire (Alexander's four successors), so the ten horns are frequently understood in the Roman view to represent a later development in the Roman empire. If the Greek empire is to provide a viable alternative for the fourth empire, we must seek to identify the ten horns as a stage later than the division into four parts (because four does not equal ten), yet earlier than the little-horn stage, for which Antiochus Epiphanes would most readily commend himself. It so happens that such a division does exist in the Greek empire, for Alexander's generals and their successors were not entirely successful in retaining the areas bequeathed to them. By the last part of the third century B.C. there are ten identifiable independent states that together comprise what was once Alexander's empire: Ptolemaic Egypt, Seleucia, Macedon,<sup>28</sup> Pergamum,<sup>29</sup> Pontus,<sup>30</sup> Bithynia,<sup>31</sup> Cappadocia,<sup>32</sup> Armenia,<sup>33</sup> Parthia<sup>34</sup> and Bactria.<sup>35</sup>

While this might make good sense of the ten horns on the fourth beast, it must also give explanation of the three horns that are subdued or defeated by the little horn (7:8, 20). If we seek to connect the little horn to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, we would need to identify the three horns as three of the above-

<sup>28</sup>Macedon was the territory initially under the rule of Cassander. Antigonid rule was consolidated in 276 B.C. and remained in power until being defeated by Rome in 168. Macedon remained independent but was divided into four districts at this time. During the reign of Antiochus the Great, Philip IV (221–179) was on the throne and sided with Antiochus against the Ptolemies. He was succeeded by Perseus (179–168). A good source for this period of history is F. E. Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970). For the data on Macedon see pp. 312–314.

<sup>29</sup>Pergamum kings Attalus I (241–197) and Eumenes II (197–159) were both allies of Rome and allowed Pergamum to serve as a base for pro-Roman activity in Asia Minor; Peters, *Harvest* 314.

<sup>30</sup>From the time of Seleucus I's defeat of Lysimachus at Corupedion (281), Pontus technically belonged to the Seleucids but was never brought under control by them. Pontus had its own independent kings from the line of Mithridates. Pharnaces I (185–157) attempted to expand into Galatia and Cappadocia but was prevented from doing so by Pergamum. See Peters, *Harvest* 316.

<sup>31</sup>Bithynia had remained largely independent of Alexander but was then incorporated into Seleucid



mentioned independent states that were defeated or annexed by Antiochus Epiphanes. We might think of his initial success in Egypt indicated by his capture of Ptolemy VI Philometor, or his campaigns in the east against Parthia and Bactria. But these, it must be admitted, are less than convincing. The victories of his father Antiochus the Great, however, seem much more fitting. Two states, Cappadocia and Armenia, were subdued shortly after he took the throne.<sup>36</sup> He was also successful in reducing Parthia to vassalage but was finally frustrated in his attempt to regain control of Bactria.<sup>37</sup> It is also interesting to note that it was Antiochus the Great who successfully incorporated Palestine into the Seleucid realm at the expense of the Ptolemies. While the subduing of the three horns then makes excellent sense in connection with Antiochus the Great, we are faced with the problem that he does not qualify as a convincing little horn with regard to the remainder of the description given in Daniel. That distinction still would seem to suit Antiochus Epiphanes better.

A hypothesis that would take advantage of the strengths of each of these elements is one that would see the incorporation of Palestine into the Seleucid state under Antiochus the Great as the beginning of the kingdom of the little horn, which would then be continued and brought to culmination under An-

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territory. Independence was regained in 278 B.C. followed by two hundred years of rule by the dynasty founded by Nicomedes I. The contemporary of Antiochus the Great was Prusias I (230-183).

<sup>32</sup>Cappadocia established an independent kingdom about 263 B.C.; Peters, *Harvest* 160 n. 4. Antiochus the Great marched through about 215 B.C.; Ghirshman, *Iran* 223.

<sup>33</sup>Seleucus II commissioned his younger brother Antiochus Hierax with the administration of Asia Minor in 245 B.C. (Peters, *Harvest* 163). Hierax tried to rebel against his brother by bringing in Galatian tribes to fight for him, but he was overwhelmed by them himself. He raised an army in Armenia to fight against Seleucus. It came to nothing for Hierax, but it did gain freedom for Armenia from the Seleucids by about 230 B.C. In 212 Antiochus the Great marched through, and Armenian king Xerxes submitted to his sovereignty. See Peters, *Harvest* 242.

<sup>34</sup>Parthia rebelled in the mid-third century B.C. under the leadership of Tiridates. Seleucus II attempted unsuccessfully to contain them. Artabanus I, however, was not able to stand against Antiochus the Great, so he acknowledged Seleucid overlordship in 210. Parthia reasserted its independence in 195 B.C. after the Roman humiliation of Antiochus the Great. See Ghirshman, *Iran* 243-245; see also G. Woodcock, *The Greeks in India* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966).

<sup>35</sup>Bactria revolted from Seleucid rule in the mid-third century B.C. under the leadership of Diodotus. The nation reached its peak during the reign of Euthydemus I (230-189) and his son Demetrius I (189-166). Antiochus the Great conducted an unsuccessful two-year siege against them (208-206). For details see the "Bactria" entry by E. Yamauchi in the *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (ed. Blaiklock and Harrison; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); see also Woodcock, *Greeks* 67. There are several other areas that had periods of independence at various times, so perhaps they deserve brief mention. Media Atropatene and Persis both rebelled when Antiochus the Great came to the throne but were both brought quickly back into line, so they could not be counted among the ten independent kingdoms. Elymais and Characene, along with Media and Persis, gained independence about 195 B.C. when Rome defeated Antiochus the Great. All four apparently retained their independence until annexed by Parthia between 160 and 140 B.C. But none of these were independent at the beginning of the reign of Antiochus the Great.

<sup>36</sup>See nn. 32 and 33 *supra*.

<sup>37</sup>See nn. 34 and 35 *supra*.

tiochus Epiphanes. It is true that Dan 7:24 speaks of the little horn as a king rather than a kingdom, but we should notice that even in that context (7:17) the two are seen to be interchangeable.<sup>38</sup>

#### IV. FOUR-EMPIRE SCHEMES OF HISTORY IN NON-BIBLICAL LITERATURE

We noted above that earliest interpretation of Daniel saw Rome as the fourth empire. We need to recognize, however, that a four-empire scheme of history, independent of Daniel though not necessarily unrelated, does exist in pre-Roman and early Roman times.

Most significant is the fourth Sibyl.<sup>39</sup> The Jewish author of this book is dated to about A.D. 80, but his source has been identified convincingly as pre-Roman, dating to about 140 B.C.<sup>40</sup> The four empires are viewed in this source as occupying all of world history and are identified as the Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians and the Macedonians.<sup>41</sup> This scheme is supported in part among Greek historians as early as Herodotus, who sees three successive empires: Assyrians, Medes and Persians.<sup>42</sup>

The Roman historians also utilize this scheme but increase the number to five by adding Rome.<sup>43</sup> Further, Polybius quotes the Roman general Scipio, viewing the destruction of Carthage, as thinking back on the downfalls of Assyria, Media, Persia and Macedonia, and expecting the same eventually for Rome.<sup>44</sup>

These sources confirm the ancient view of a major Median empire to the exclusion and neglect of what we call the Neo-Babylonian empire. Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar are not ignored but are merely treated as a continuation of the Assyrian empire. The city of Babylon, after all, had been a part of the Assyrian empire. So the Babylonian kings could be seen as successors rather than as a new empire.

It is of further interest to note that in the fourth Sibyl's treatment of the empires the Assyrian is seen as long-lasting (covering six of the ten generations that comprise all of history), while the Median kingdom is noted for how much

<sup>38</sup>Compare Isa 45:13-14, where no change of subject is indicated contextually but where v 13 refers to Cyrus and v 14 to his successor Cambyses.

<sup>39</sup>D. Flusser, "The Four Empires in the Fourth Sibyl and in the Book of Daniel," *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972) 148-175. See also G. Hasel, "The Four World Empires of Daniel Against Its Near Eastern Environment," *JSOT* 12 (1979) 17-30.

<sup>40</sup>Flusser, "Four" 152.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>42</sup>1.95.130; see also Ctesias (references from Flusser, "Four" 154).

<sup>43</sup>Flusser, "Four" 159-160, mentions Tacitus (*Historiae* 5.8-9), Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1.2.1-4) and Appianus (*Introduction to Roman History*).

<sup>44</sup>Flusser, "Four" 160-161. He discusses other examples as well.

shorter it is. This would correspond to the comment of inferiority mentioned of the second kingdom in Daniel 2. Of the Persians the fourth Sibyl says: "Their might shall be supreme in all the world" (vv 61–66). Of the Macedonians the Sibyl reports: "The Persians shall experience the yoke of slavery and terror."<sup>45</sup> Both of these comments likewise correspond to the comments concerning the kingdoms in Daniel 2. The possibility then of a scheme with the four empires being identified as Assyria, Media, Medo-Persia and Greece is not only defensible in history but is also confirmed as a common ancient view of the flow of empires through history and therefore is not imaginative in Daniel's mind or in Gurney's.

## V. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Still a concern, of course, is how the kingdom of God is to be understood in this hypothesis. We have already seen that the Roman view is held by evangelicals representing a wide range of disparate views of eschatology. Some would look to the first coming of Christ as initiating the kingdom of God spoken of by Daniel, while others would look to his second coming to usher in the new age.

Gurney himself understands Daniel as having the first coming of Christ in view. He cites the fact that Christ was born within about twenty years of the "final obliteration of the Greek empire in 27 B.C. when Egypt was made a Roman province."<sup>46</sup> Despite Gurney's own preferences, his view as a whole does not dictate which advent of Christ must be referred to. Daniel himself was not necessarily distinguishing between two advents of the Messiah, and therefore an exegetical treatment of Daniel does not force us to decide. What Daniel does indicate is that the kingdom of God will follow the fourth empire.<sup>47</sup> Whether the fourth empire is Greece or Rome, or whether the first or second advent is in mind, every alignment requires either overlapping or gaps between the fourth empire and the kingdom of God, so no view has the clear edge. As it stands, then, eschatology will determine how that part of the interpretation is

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>46</sup>Gurney, "Four" 39. He adds several pages of observations from Daniel and from the NT to support this interpretation.

<sup>47</sup>The exact timing between the fourth kingdom and the kingdom of God is not clear in the text. Dan 7:11 has the fourth beast (including, presumably, the little horn) slain, then the Son of Man comes forward (7:13). No further explanation comes in 7:22–27. Dan 2:44, however, has been used to suggest that the kingdom of God must be set up "in the days of" the ten kings. If this is required by the text, then the hypothesis that I am considering here would fall short. It should be noted, however, that nowhere in chap. 2 of Daniel is there mention of a ten-kingdom stage. The toes are mentioned as being of iron and pottery along with the feet, but no symbolic value is given to the toes. The kings spoken of in 2:44 would be the kings of the kingdoms of this world (notice "all these kingdoms" toward the end of the verse). No definite chronological information is given.

put together, rather than the interpretation dictating the terms of our eschatology.<sup>48</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSION

In regard to the Roman view, the present state of history does not commend it as uniquely suited to the details of Daniel's prophecy. On the other hand, it is by no means completely incompatible with the Biblical data.

Using Gurney's article as a foundation I have tried to frame an alternative that would be compatible with the material of Daniel as well as being concerned about Biblical authority. The result is the suggestion that Daniel's four kingdoms may be identified as the Assyrian, Median, Medo-Persian and Greek empires. Nebuchadnezzar would be seen as a continuation and culmination of the Assyrian empire. That would be succeeded (as well as overlapped) by the Medes during the time of Nebuchadnezzar's successors. This would then be followed by the Medo-Persians and the Greeks. The ten horns of the fourth empire would be the ten independent states that had arisen from Alexander's empire by the last quarter of the third century B.C. The little horn would represent the Seleucid overlords of Palestine, dating from the reign of Antiochus the Great and continuing during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. The three displaced horns would represent the conquests of Antiochus the Great. The kingdom of God is left open to be interpreted in any number of different ways.

Besides being compatible with the ancient secular view of the flow of empires, this view is compatible with the comments on the kingdoms made in Daniel as well as with the focus of Daniel as seen in other sections of the book. In Daniel 8 the two beasts are said to concern the "final indignation" and the "time of the end" (8:19), which would suggest that it is dealing with the third and fourth empires rather than the second and third as must be assumed in the Roman view. Daniel 11 also focuses its attention on the Greek empire, while reference to Rome is nothing more than incidental. There also the time of the end is the focus.

While this new hypothesis is not without uncertainties, I feel that it offers a viable alternative to the Roman view and could profit from further research and consideration.

<sup>48</sup>The view considered in this paper is not one that I presently espouse but is one that I believe is worthy of further consideration. The purpose of the paper is to initiate discussion over this particular interpretation to see if the strengths outweigh the weaknesses. It is outside of the purview of the paper to conduct a study of the eschatological options or implications connected with this view. While it would seem to me that amillennial eschatology would stand to gain the most, I do not see that this view of the four kingdoms impedes or prevents any of the current major eschatological models. My own premillennial, pretribulational position perhaps would stand to lose the use of these passages in Daniel in support of its view, but that does not disqualify the model. If accepted, this view of the fourth beast could then be understood as a sort of antetype to the beast of Revelation 12-13. The first coming of Christ could be viewed as the beginning of the kingdom of the Son of Man, which would have its culmination in the physical return of Christ to establish his kingdom. This is just one possible suggestion. This study has only been preliminary and needs more examination from the theological perspective. Certainly it would be important to correlate these findings with Daniel 9 and, in turn, Christ's comments in the Olivet discourse. While my cursory examination of these indicated that there were no serious roadblocks, the details still need to be explored.