

Feature Article: JAF3354

DID DANIEL PROPHECY A SEVEN-YEAR GREAT TRIBULATION?

by Hank Hanegraaff

This article first appeared in the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, volume 35, number 04 (2012). For further information or to subscribe to the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL go to: <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/>

After God provided the prophet Daniel with a panoramic vision of the rise and fall of kings from the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar to the Grecian Alexander the Great,¹ He revealed painstaking details of a terrible seven-year Tribulation that would befall the saints during the beastly reign of the despotic Antiochus IV Epiphanes² (a.k.a. *Epimanes* — “the deluded madman.”³). Seven Syrian kings from Seleucus Nicator to Seleucus IV would precede Antiochus IV to the throne. Three others would be uprooted before the deluded madman solidified his despotic rule.⁴ *Demetrius*, son of Seleucus IV and heir to the Syrian throne, was robbed of his rightful rule as the hostage of Rome; *Heliodorus*, though he succeeded in murdering Seleucus IV, was ousted from royalty within weeks; and *Antiochus*, baby brother of Demetrius, though coregent for a time, was eventually murdered by the Syrian beast Antiochus IV.⁵

Onias III was “prince of the covenant”⁶ when the murderous beast (Antiochus IV) ascended the Syrian throne. He upheld the holy covenant of his God and firmly resisted the Hellenizing ways of the Greco-Syrian despot. However, his brother Joshua, who embraced the Hellenistic moniker Jason, was pleased to sell out his brother for a mess of pottage. He offered Antiochus a large sum of money in exchange for the office of high priest. With Onias in exile, the Jewish nation was rapidly transformed into a microcosm of the Hellenistic culture surrounding it. At the behest of Antiochus, Jason erected a Greek gymnasium, persuaded the Hellenizing populace to swear allegiance to Grecian gods, and effectively transformed Jerusalem into a Greek ghetto. Jason’s treacherous betrayal bought him but three years. For an even larger bribe Antiochus transferred the priesthood to the maniacal Menelaus, who subsequently orchestrated the murder of Onias in 170 BC.⁷ All this, however, was but the beginning of tribulation.

The Antiochian horn “started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land” (Dan. 8:9; cf. 7:8).⁸ In arrogance “it set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the LORD; it took away the daily sacrifice from the LORD, and his sanctuary was thrown down. Because of rebellion, the LORD’s people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground” (Dan. 8:11–12 NIV 2011; cf. 9:27; 11:30–31). Daniel

“heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, ‘how long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and the host that will be trampled underfoot?’ He said to me, ‘it will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated’” (Dan. 8:13–14; cf. 9:24; 12:11–12).⁹

The murder of Onias marked the beginning of the 2,300 evenings and mornings—as the death of Antiochus marked their end. Turmoil in the priesthood precipitated the first major massacre. “In 170/69 BC, when Antiochus was engaged in his campaign against Egypt, [Jason] succeeded in seizing Jerusalem in a surprise attack and obliged his rival to seek refuge in the citadel. It was this success of Jason (according to 2 Maccabees) that was the reason for the king’s direct intervention in Jerusalem. Antiochus saw it as a revolt against his sovereignty and decided to punish the rebellious city.”¹⁰ Thus, in “169 BC, he marched in person with his army against Jerusalem, executed a bloodbath there, and looted the immense treasures of the Jewish Temple, with the help, it is said, of Menelaus himself. All the valuables amongst them, the three great golden vessels from the inner Temple, the altar of incense, the seven-branched candelabrum, and the table of the shew-bread, were taken back by him to Antioch.”¹¹

In AD 168 “Antiochus undertook yet another expedition against Egypt. But this time the Romans confronted him. The Roman general, Popillius Laenas, presented him with a decree of the senate which required him to abandon once and for all his designs upon Egypt if he wished to avoid being regarded as an enemy of Rome. When Antiochus replied that he would like to consider the matter, Popillius gave him the famous brief ultimatum by drawing a circle round him with his staff and ordering him formally *entoutha bouleouou* (make up your mind in here).”¹² Embarrassed and raging as a wild beast, Antiochus purposed to vent his fury on those who remained in covenant with the Jewish God. “He commanded his soldiers to cut down relentlessly everyone they met and to kill those who went into their houses. Then there was massacre of young and old, destruction of boys, women, and children, and slaughter of young girls and infants. Within the total of three days eighty-thousand were destroyed, forty-thousand in hand-to-hand fighting, and as many were sold into slavery as were killed” (2 Macc. 5:12–14).

In 167, three years after the murder of Onias, the ultimate sacrilege befell Jerusalem. The armed forces of Antiochus rose up against the temple fortress, abolished the daily sacrifice, and set up an abomination that causes desolation (Dan. 11:31; cf. 9:27; 12:11–12; see 1 Macc. 1:54). With impunity, Antiochus plundered the temple treasury, dedicated the sanctuary to the Olympian Zeus, and sacrificed a pig on the altar. Hellenized Jews en masse took on the mark of the Greco-Syrian beast. “They sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath” (1 Macc. 1:43). Not only so, but “they erected a desolating sacrilege¹³ on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire” (1:54–56).

Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil. For the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the Gentiles, who dallied with prostitutes and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit. The altar was covered with abominable offerings that were forbidden by the laws. People could neither keep the Sabbath, nor observe the festivals of their ancestors, nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews. On the monthly celebration of the king's birthday, the Jews were taken, under bitter constraint, to partake of the sacrifices; and when a festival of Dionysius was celebrated, they were compelled to wear wreaths of ivy and to walk in the procession in honor of Dionysius (2 Macc. 6:3–7).

Hellenized Jews willingly honored the god of libido and self-gratification. Those who revered the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob counted not their lives worthy even unto death. The intertestamental books of Maccabees are replete with accounts of their sacrifice. “Two women were brought in for having circumcised their children. They publicly paraded them around the city, with their babies hanging at their breasts, and then hurled them down headlong from the wall. Others who had assembled in the caves nearby, in order to observe the seventh day secretly, were betrayed to Philip and were all burned together, because their piety kept them from defending themselves in view of their regard for that most holy day” (2 Macc. 6:10–11).

Second Maccabees 7 broaches the ghastly martyrdom of seven brothers and their mother willing to die rather than transgress the laws of their ancestors. By torture with whips and thongs, Antiochus sought to have them partake of unlawful swine's flesh. When they refused, he “fell into a rage, and gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated. . . . He commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on” (2 Macc. 7:3–4). While yet breathing, Antiochus caused him to be fried in a pan.

“After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, ‘Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?’ He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, ‘No.’ Therefore, he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. And when he was at his last breath, he said, ‘You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the king of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws’” (2 Macc. 7:7–9).

Likewise, after the third brother had fallen victim to their sport, he “courageously stretched forth his hands and said nobly, ‘I got these [hands] from heaven and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back from him’” (7:11). The fourth brother, when near death, in like fashion, cried out, “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!” (7:14).

After murdering the fifth and sixth brothers, Antiochus turned a malevolent gaze on the remaining sibling. He “promised with oaths that he would make him rich and

enviable if he would turn from the ways of his ancestors, and that he would take him for his Friend and trust him with public affairs” (7:24). Filled with a noble spirit, the mother cried out, “Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers.’ While she was still speaking, the young man said, ‘What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king’s command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our ancestors through Moses. But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God’” (7:29–31).

After rightly regaling him “an unholy wretch” and the “most defiled of all mortals,” he yet entreated Antiochus saying, “Do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all seeing God. For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of ever-flowing life, under God’s covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation’” (7:34–38). Upon hearing his words, Antiochus fell into a monstrous rage brutalizing the last of the brothers in a fashion that exceeded all the others. Yet despite horrific torture at the hands of the Syrian beast, the young man and his mother died in integrity, putting their “whole trust in the Lord” (7:40).

The dying prayer of the seventh brother found its answer in the Maccabean revolt. Against all odds, savaged Jews purposed to resist the Syrian juggernaut. The Jewish priest Mattathias, together with his five sons—Judas, Jonathan, John, Simon, and Eleazar—initiated resistance by refusing to make sacrifices to the gods of the Greco-Syrian hordes. With valor they implored the Hasidim (“pious ones”) to join them in the battle against Hellenization. When a Hellenizing Jew sacrificed in accordance with the command of Antiochus, “Mattathias and his sons took out broad-bladed knives and cut the man down, also killing the king’s officer and his soldiers. After overturning the pagan altar, Mattathias cried out, ‘Whoever is zealous for the laws of our country and the worship of God, let him follow me!’”¹⁴

Mattathias died in the spring of 166, but not before he appointed his indomitable son Judas Maccabaeus as leader of the fledgling Jewish resistance forces. Judas “was like a lion in his deeds, like a lion’s cub roaring for prey. He searched out and pursued those who broke the law; he burned those who troubled his people. Lawbreakers shrank back for fear of him; all evildoers were confounded; and deliverance prospered by his hand” (1 Macc. 3:4–6). Upheld by the hand of the Almighty, he roared to victory after victory against a vastly superior Syrian superpower. In his first year alone, Judas routed the armies of Apollonius and conquered the mighty Seron, commander-in-chief of the Syrian forces, at Beth-horon.

In 165, Antiochus commissioned the royal Lysias, in charge of Syrian affairs from the river Euphrates to the borders of Egypt, to wipe the Jewish race from the face of the

earth. "Lysias chose Ptolemy son of Dorymenes and Nicanor and Gorgias, able men among the Friends of the king, and sent with them forty thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry to go into the land of Judah and destroy it, as the king had commanded" (1 Macc. 3:38–39). However again, against all odds, Judas routed the superior Syrians at Emmaus, causing them to flee to the land of the Philistines. In victory Judas Maccabeus and the Jewish resistance forces offered up hymns and praises extolling the majesty of their mighty God and reveling in the reality that "there is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD. The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD" (Prov. 21:30–31).

In 164, Lysias made yet another ill-fated attempt to subdue the forces of Judas Maccabeus. This time he personally invaded Judea dwarfing ten thousand Jewish resistance fighters with an army of sixty thousand infantry and five thousand cavalry. In the ensuing battle five thousand Syrians succumbed to the sword. "When Lysias saw the rout of his troops and saw the boldness that inspired those of Judas, and how ready they were either to live or to die nobly, he withdrew to Antioch" (1 Macc. 4:35). Judas immediately took control of all Jerusalem save the Seleucid Acra,¹⁵ recaptured Temple Mount, destroyed the pagan altar of the Olympian Zeus, cleansed the sanctuary, and reconsecrated the temple to Yahweh, God of Israel. Thus it was that on December 14, 164, seven years after Onias had been cut off by Antiochus and exactly three years after he had desecrated the temple fortress, abolished the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination that causes desolation, the temple was rededicated and the daily sacrifice restored. "Judas and his men celebrated a great feast which lasted for eight days, and which we continue to observe as the Festival of Lights [Hanukkah]." ¹⁶ As the Jewish prophet Daniel foretold, "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days" (Dan. 12:11).

Upon hearing that the Jews had regained Jerusalem, the Syrian beast vowed in arrogance,

"I will make Jerusalem a cemetery of Jews." But the all-seeing Lord, the God of Israel, struck him with an incurable and invisible blow. As soon as he stopped speaking, he was seized with a pain in his bowels, for which there was no relief, and with sharp internal tortures—and that very justly, for he had tortured the bowels of others with many and strange inflictions. Yet he did not in any way stop his insolence, but was even more filled with arrogance, breathing fire in his rage against the Jews, and giving orders to drive even faster. And so it came about that he fell out of his chariot as it was rushing along, and the fall was so hard as to torture every limb of his body. Thus he who only a little while before had thought in his superhuman arrogance that he could command the waves of the sea, and had imagined that he could weigh the high mountains in a balance, was brought down to earth and carried in a litter, making the power of God manifest to all. And so the ungodly man's body swarmed with worms, and while he was still living in anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of the stench the whole army felt revulsion at his decay (2 Macc. 9:4–9).

As prophesied by Daniel, Antiochus, the antichrist of the Old Testament, was finally dead. “Destroyed—but not by human power” (Dan. 8:25). Destroyed by the power and province of Almighty God. Indeed, the death of the Syrian beast may well be in view when Daniel wrote, “Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days” (12:12). For not only did the death of the abominable Antiochus underscore the sovereign power of God over the nations of the earth, it signaled the soon coming of the Son of Man, whose “dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (7:14).

A FUTURE GREAT TRIBULATION?

So did Daniel prophesy a seven-year Tribulation? The answer is yes. Not only so, but Christ who came in the fullness of time looked back at the “abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel” (Matt. 24:15) as the basis for prophesying that the temple that had been desecrated by the forces of Antiochus would ultimately be destroyed by the forces of Antichrist. “At that time,” Jesus said, “the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). So as to leave no doubt regarding the time of His coming, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, *this generation* will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (vv. 34–35, emphasis added).

Skeptics and infidels have seized upon these words to designate Christ a false prophet. Had they understood the language of the Bible, however, they may not have been as quick to wag their fingers at the Master. While they are correct in dismissing the grammatical gyrations of fundamentalists who routinely attempt to absolve Christ of false prophecy by suggesting that when Jesus said, “*this generation*,” He really meant “*that generation*” (i.e., the generation alive at His second appearing), they are incorrect in assuming that Jesus was predicting the time of His second appearing.

When Jesus said, “They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory,” He was using language that anyone familiar with the Old Testament would readily grasp. Like Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and a host of prophets before Him, Jesus employed the language of “clouds” to warn His disciples of judgment that would befall Jerusalem within a generation.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus took the quintessential Jewish nightmare and extended it to cosmic proportions. In the fullness of time, what Jesus declared desolate was desolated by Roman infidels. They destroyed the temple fortress and ended the daily sacrifice. This time the blood that desolated the sacred altar did not flow from the carcasses of unclean pigs, but from the corpses of unbelieving Pharisees. This time the Holy of Holies was not merely desecrated by the defiling statue of a pagan god, but was manifestly destroyed by the pathetic greed of despoiling soldiers. This time no Judas Maccabaeus intervened. Within a generation, the temple was not just desecrated, it was destroyed!¹⁷ “Not one stone here,” said Jesus, “will be left on another; every one will be thrown down” (Matt. 24:2). A generation later, when the disciples saw “Jerusalem being

surrounded by armies,” they *knew* “its desolation” was near (Luke 21:20). Thus, as Jesus had instructed, they *fled to the mountains* (Matt. 24:16; Luke 21:21). “For then,” Christ had warned, “there will be great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be” (Matt. 24:21 ESV¹⁸).¹⁹

Hank Hanegraaff is president of the Christian Research Institute and host of the *Bible Answer Man* broadcast heard daily throughout the United States and Canada via radio, satellite radio Sirius-XM 131, and the Internet. For a list of stations airing the *Bible Answer Man*, or to listen online, log on to equip.org. Hank is the author of numerous books including *Has God Spoken? Memorable Proofs of the Bible's Divine Inspiration* (Thomas Nelson, 2011) and *The Creation Answer Book* (Thomas Nelson, 2012).

NOTES

- 1 Dan. 2:24–49; 7:1–27; 8:1–8, 19–21.
- 2 Dan. 8:23–26; 9:26–27; 11:21–39; 12:11–12. This seven-year Tribulation (170–164 BC) historically fulfilled Daniel’s seventieth week.
- 3 Gleason L. Archer, Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 136.
- 4 Dan. 7:7, 24.
- 5 See Robert J. M. Gurney, *God in Control: An Exposition of the Prophecies of Daniel* (Worthing, West Sussex, England: H. E. Walter Ltd, 1980, rev. 2006), chap. 3; the 2006 revised version is available online at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_god-incontrol_gurney.html, last accessed February 14, 2011). Historical information concerning the Seleucid kings found in J. C. McCann, Jr., “Seleucus,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 385–86; John Whitehorne, “Seleucus,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1076–77.
- 6 Dan. 11:22. As high priest, Onias III was “an anointed one” (9:26). All Scripture quotations are from the NIV 1984 edition, unless otherwise noted.
- 7 See the account in 2 Macc. 3–4.
- 8 The image of the little horn appears only in Daniel 7 and 8. The temptation is to presuppose that the little horn in chapter 7 refers to someone different than the one depicted in chapter 8, which is almost universally recognized as Antiochus. Exegetically, however, both “little horn” images refer to the same person; and because chapter 8 so clearly refers to Antiochus then so must chapter 7. Indeed, I think the plain and natural reading of the text should lead any rational reader to the same conclusion. What prevents many from embracing this conclusion is the preconception that the Roman Empire (or revived Roman Empire) must be in view (see discussion in Gurney, *God in Control*, chapter 4, <http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/gic/chapter-4.pdf>); cf. John E. Goldingay, “The Book of Daniel: Three Issues,” *Themelios*, 2, 2 [1977], 45–49, http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/2.2_Goldingay.pdf [accessed April 15, 2011], though I disagree with Goldingay’s second-century BC dating for the book of Daniel—I contend it was written in the midst of the sixth-century Babylonian captivity).
- 9 John Goldingay compares Daniel 8:13–14 and Daniel 9:24: “A coherent understanding of [Daniel 9:24] emerges, then, if we take it as a restatement of the visionary promises of chap. 8. Like that vision, it looks forward from the time of Daniel himself to the Antiochene crisis, and promises God’s deliverance. There is no reason to refer it [9:24] exegetically to the first or second coming of Christ” (John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 30 [Dallas: Word, 1989], 260).
- 10 Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, revised by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1973), 150.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 151; see 2 Macc. 5.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 151–52.
- 13 *I.e.*, “abomination of desolation” (see Brenton’s translation in Sir Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, *The Septuagint*

with Apocrypha: Greek and English [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986, originally published by Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., London, 1851]); see Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11.

- 14 Josephus, *Antiquities*, in *Josephus: The Essential Works*, Paul L. Maier, trans. and ed. (Grand Rapids.: Kregel, 1988), 212 (*Antiquities* 12:265).
- 15 The Acra was a fortress erected by Antiochus in 168 BC.
- 16 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 213 (*Antiquities* 12:327).
- 17 Read the dreadful account in Josephus, *Jewish War*.
- 18 “Has not been...and never will be” is hyperbolic, meaning that the events would be truly horrific (cf. Jer. 30:7; Ezek. 5:9; Dan. 9:12; 12:1; Joel 2:2; Rev. 16:18; also compare 2 Kings 18:5 with 23:25).
- 19 This article is largely adapted from Hank Hanegraaff, *Has God Spoken? Memorable Proofs of the Bible’s Divine Inspiration* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 155–62