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COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE

Daniel

by Matthew Henry

To the Students of the Words, Works and Ways of God:

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AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET

DANIEL

The book of Ezekiel left the affairs of Jerusalem under a doleful aspect, all in ruins, but with a joyful prospect of all in glory again. This of Daniel fitly follows. Ezekiel told us what was seen, and what was foreseen, by him in the former years of the captivity: Daniel tells us what was seen, and foreseen, in the latter years of the captivity. When God employs different hands, yet it is about the same work. And it was a comfort to the poor captives that they had first one prophet among them and then another, to show them *how long*, and a sign that God had not quite cast them off. Let us enquire,

I. Concerning this prophet His Hebrew name was *Daniel*, which signifies the *judgment of God*; his Chaldean name was *Belteshazzar*. He was of the tribe of Judah, and, as it should seem, of the royal family. He was betimes eminent for wisdom and piety. Ezekiel, his contemporary, but much his senior, speaks of him as an oracle when thus he upbraids the king of Tyre with his conceitedness of himself: *Thou art wiser than Daniel*, ^{38:3}Ezekiel 38:3. He is likewise there celebrated for success in prayer, when Noah, Daniel, and Job are reckoned as three men that had the greatest interest in heaven of any, ^{14:14}Ezekiel 14:14. He began betimes to be famous, and continued long so. Some of the Jewish rabbins are loth to acknowledge him to be a prophet of the higher form, and therefore rank his book among the *Hagiographa*, not among the prophecies, and would not have their disciples pay much regard to it. One reason they pretend is because he did not live such a mean mortified life as Jeremiah and some other of the prophets did, but lived like a prince, and was a prime-minister of state; whereas we find him persecuted as other prophets were (⁶Daniel 6), and mortifying himself as other prophets did, when he *ate no pleasant bread* (10:3), and fainting sick when he was under the power of the Spirit of prophecy, 8:27. Another reason they pretend is because he wrote his book in a heathen country, and *there* had his visions, and not in the land of

Israel; but, for the same reason, Ezekiel also must be expunged out of the roll of prophets. But the true reason is that he speaks so plainly of the time of the Messiah's coming that the Jews cannot avoid the conviction of it and therefore do not care to hear of it. But Josephus calls him one of the *greatest of the prophets*, nay, the angel Gabriel calls him a *man greatly beloved*. He lived long an active life in the courts and councils of some of the greatest monarchs the world ever had, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius; for we mistake if we confine the privilege of an intercourse with heaven to speculative men, or those that spend their time in contemplation; no, who was more intimately acquainted with the mind of God than Daniel, a courtier, a statesman, and a man of business? The Spirit, as the wind, blows where it lists. And, if those that have much to do in the world plead that as an excuse for the infrequency and slightness of their converse with God, Daniel will condemn them. Some have thought that he returned to Jerusalem, and was one of the masters of the Greek synagogue; but nothing of that appears in scripture; it is therefore generally concluded that he died in Persia at Susan, where he lived to be very old.

II. Concerning this book. The first six chapters of it are historical, and are plain and easy; the last six are prophetic, and in them are many things dark, and hard to be understood, which yet would be more intelligible if we had a more complete history of the nations, and especially the Jewish nation, from Daniel's time to the coming of the Messiah. Our Saviour intimates the difficulty of apprehending the sense of Daniel's prophecies when, speaking of them, he says, *Let him that readeth understand*, ⁴²⁴⁵Matthew 24:15. The first chapter, and the first three verses of the second chapter, are in Hebrew; thence to the eighth chapter is in the Chaldee dialect; and thence to the end is in Hebrew. Mr. Broughton observes that, as the Chaldeans were kind to Daniel, and gave cups of cold water to him when he requested it, rather than the king's wine, God would not have them lose their reward, but made that language which they taught him to have honour in his writings through all the world, unto this day. Daniel, according to his computation, continues the holy story from the first surprising of Jerusalem by the Chaldee Babel, when he himself was carried away captive, until the last destruction of it by Rome, the mystical Babel, for so far forward his predictions look, ²¹⁷⁷Daniel 9:27. The fables of Susannah, and of Bel and the Dragon, in both which Daniel is made a party, are apocryphal stories, which we think we have no reason to give any credit to, they being never found in the Hebrew or Chaldee, but only

in the Greek, nor ever admitted by the Jewish church. There are some both of the histories and of the prophecies of this book that bear date in the latter end of the Chaldean monarchy, and others of both that are dated in the beginning of the Persian monarchy. But both Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which Daniel interpreted, and his own visions, point at the Grecian and Roman monarchies, and very particularly at the Jews' troubles under Antiochus, which it would be of great use to them to prepare for; as his fixing the very time for the coming of the Messiah was of use to all those that waited for the consolation of Israel, and is to us, for the confirming of our belief, That this is he who should come, and we are to look for no other.