

Daniel: God, Humans and Earth

Anne Gardner

Abstract: This article explores the role of "Earth" in Daniel in the light of the hermeneutic of the Earth Bible series. Earth is mentioned in the book of Daniel thirty three times and yet, on a surface reading, Daniel does not appear to be concerned with Earth as an entity. A closer reading though, demonstrates that Earth is part of a trinity of God, Humans and Earth. Certain key passages lead to this conclusion: they are Dan 3:31(4:1); 8:5; 8:18; 10:9,15. Dan 8:5, in particular, is misunderstood by scholars, but recognition of its true import throws light upon the significance of Earth. When humans are not in right relationship with God, Earth suffers but when humans align themselves with Earth, and thus with God, all bounties flow.

THE PRESENT MILLENNIUM, in its few short years, has seen increasing concern over the environment and the earth as a sustainer of life. It has also witnessed the publication of the five volume Earth Bible series¹ which "explores text and tradition from the perspective of Earth,² employing a set of eco-justice principles developed in consultation with ecologists, suspecting that the text and/or its interpreters may be anthropocentric and not geocentric, but searching to retrieve alternate traditions that hear the voice of Earth and value Earth as more than a

1. N. Habel (ed.), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, Earth Bible 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); N. Habel (ed.), *The Earth Story in Genesis*, Earth Bible 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); N. Habel (ed.), *The Earth Story in Wisdom Literature*, Earth Bible 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); N. Habel (ed.), *The Earth Story in Psalms and Prophets*, Earth Bible 4 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); N. Habel (ed.), *The Earth Story in the New Testament*, Earth Bible 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). The present author has contributed two chapters to these volumes, viz. A. E. Gardner, "Ecojustice: A Study of Gen 6:9-11" in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, 117-29; and "Eco or Anthropological Justice: a Study of the New Heavens and the New Earth in Isaiah 65:17", in *The Earth Story In Psalms And Prophets*, 204-18.

2. In keeping with the convention of the Earth Bible series, "Earth" is capitalised in this essay.

human instrument".³ If one were asked at first glance to characterise Daniel as a human centered or earth centered text there would be little argument that the former description would apply. However, careful study of the occasions when Earth is mentioned in the book of Daniel shows that such a view is not entirely accurate. Rather, Earth is part of a trinity, that of God, humans and Earth. As such, it is a partner in the functioning of life as God intended it to be. Earth (*'erets* in the Hebrew chapters and *ar'aa* in the Aramaic chapters) appears thirty three times in the book of Daniel but some of these are of a prosaic nature, indicating national territories⁴ or the realm of human rulers.⁵ Five areas in the book of Daniel are of particular significance with regard to a fuller meaning of Earth:

1. The story of Nebuchadnezzar's transformation in chapter 4.
2. Some of the passages in chapters 7 and 8 where Earth is mentioned in the accounts of various beasts.
3. Daniel's own connection with Earth as described in Dan 8:18; 10:9 and 10:15.
4. The suffering of Earth.
5. Earth as an element of the climax of the book of Daniel.

In all five areas, as I hope to show, an exploration of the biblical passages to which the author(s) of Daniel is alluding reveals the intended meaning.

3. This quotation appears on the Earth Bible website under the heading, "Process" <http://www.webofcreation.org/Earthbible/earthbible.html>, accessed 16/7/07.

4. The land of Shinar (Dan 1:2); the land of Egypt (9:15; 11:42); the land of the king of the north (11:9, 19, 28[x2]). It is used in the plural to indicate the countries the king of the north will pass through (11:40) and dominate (11:42), as well as the countries to which God drove the people of Israel (9:7).

5. In Dan 2:39 it is specifically said of the third kingdom, that of brass, that "it will bear rule over the earth". In 7:17 the four beasts which rose out of the sea in 7:3 are identified as "four kings who will rise out of the earth". "Kings of the earth" appears in six places in the Psalms (2:2; 76:13[12]; 89:27; 102:16[15]; 138:4; 148:11). In four of these, the phrase parallels other titles denoting leadership, suggesting that this is the way the phrase should be understood in Daniel. In three psalms "the kings of the earth" recognise God and praise him (102:16[15]; 138:4; 148:11) but in two (Ps 2:2; 76:13[12]) their arrogant nature is highlighted. "Kings of the earth" then is a neutral phrase; only its context defines whether such rulers are obedient to God or not. Once the biblical basis of the phrase is recognised there is no need to emend it to avoid a perceived clash with Dan 7:3, where the beasts rise out of the sea rather than the earth, as some of the ancient versions (the Peshitta and Theodotion read "on the earth") and some scholars have done. For instance, R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Century Bible; Oxford: Clarendon, 1929) 189-91, on the basis of the LXX reading suggests "destroyed from the earth" rather than "arise from the earth".

1. THE TRANSFORMATION OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

The Babylonian kingdom with Nebuchadnezzar as its apex became, according to Daniel 4, too powerful.⁶ The kingdom is symbolised by “a tree in the midst of the earth” (4:7 [10]). In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream

“The tree grew and was strong and its height reached to heaven and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth” (Dan 4:8[11], 17[20]).

When Daniel interprets the dream he identifies the tree with the kingdom whose apex is Nebuchadnezzar, saying,

“O King you have grown and become strong, for your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven and your dominion to the end of the earth” (4:19[22]).

The tree is condemned by a watcher (4:10[13], 20[23]), although the stump of its roots is left in the earth (4:12[15], 20[23]). In a different analogy⁷ the kingdom with Nebuchadnezzar at its apex, is then subject to the following decree,

“let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth” (4:12[15]).

The analogy continues in the following verse where the heart is to be changed from that of a man to that of a beast (4:13[16]). There is a brief reference in the text to the tree (the kingdom) at the height of its glory providing food and shelter for the creatures of the earth and the birds of the air (4:9[12]). As such, the kingdom was usurping the nurturing role of Earth.

However, that this was not the primary rationale behind the condemnation of the tree and the change of its life to that of a beast is clear in the text. The reason is that,

6. Since the discovery of Babylonian texts about Nabonidus, the last king of the Babylonian Empire, specifying that he was absent from Babylon for ten years, scholars have conjectured that the story in Daniel is likely to have been based on that event. The finding among the Dead Sea Scrolls of a text, *The Prayer of Nabonidus* (4QprNab) seems to add weight to such a conjecture. However, E. C. Lucas, *Daniel* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary 20; Leicester UK; Downer’s Grove IL: Apollos; Intervarsity Press, 2002) 106-07, draws attention to two non-Biblical traditions, with some similarities to the story in Daniel 4, which also feature Nebuchadnezzar rather than Nabonidus.

7. For a discussion of the combination of the two analogies based on different mythic strata cf. L.M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends* (HDR 26; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 87-121. Wills also discusses the relationship between the OG and MT in Daniel 4. (In accordance with convention in Danielic studies I use the abbreviation “OG” to refer to the (fragmentary) old Greek version of the book, the version of Daniel included in the Septuagint [LXX] being that of Theodotion.)

“the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever he will” (4:14[17]22[25]).

The sin of the kingdom and its ruler then is that it was attempting to rival God. This is symbolised in the dream by the tree reaching to heaven (4:8[11], 19[22]). It is also referred to by Nebuchadnezzar himself in his account of his eventual restoration when he says,

“At the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up my eyes to heaven and my understanding returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and I praised and honoured him that lives forever. His dominion is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom from generation to generation” (4:31[34]).⁸

That Earth is not truly in view is shown clearly in 4:32[4:35]) when Nebuchadnezzar says,

“All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing... he does according to his will in the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth”.⁹

The story of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4, then, concerns human power going beyond the limits set for it. Signs that this is so bring the human monarch to the understanding that ultimate power lies with God, not human beings. Humans must remain within the realm decreed for them, i.e. Earth. Nevertheless it is through contact with Earth – as the text says, “with the beasts in the grass of the earth” – that Nebuchadnezzar comes to understand the error of his ways. Earth then has an important role to play in bringing people to God and, as such, has a voice. This is reinforced when Nebuchadnezzar comes to a recognition of God as he invokes “peace” (*sh’lam* – the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom*) upon the people of the earth.

“Nebuchadnezzar the king unto all the peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth:
peace be multiplied unto you” (3:31[4:1]).¹⁰

It is tempting to see here an allusion to Ezek 34:25 where God promises,

“I will make with them a covenant of peace (*shalom*)

8. Not in the OG.

9. Not in the OG.

10. Not in the OG. The same sentiments are repeated in 6:26[6:25]) by King Darius, after he has seen proof of the power of God when Daniel emerges unscathed from the lions' den.

and will cause evil beasts to cease out of the land.”

The mention of “evil beasts” calls to mind Dan 7:3 where beasts who represent arrogant kings/kingdoms arise from the sea, but are overcome later in the vision in Daniel 7. Among the blessings which follow from *shalom* in Ezekiel are great fertility of the land as well as security for those who live upon her. If this can be applied to Dan 3:31 (4:1 in ET) a circle is created: Earth instills her wisdom in Nebuchadnezzar, who then recognises both God and his fellow humans, and blessings flow back to Earth who sustains all life in harmony. Even if Ezekiel is not the text Daniel had in mind when representing Nebuchadnezzar as invoking *shelam* upon the people of Earth, it should be noted that *shelam*, and its Hebrew equivalent *shalom*, express so much more than the English word “peace” by which it is so often translated. *Shalom* does not merely indicate the absence of conflict, but the presence of wellbeing, not only of the individual in relation to his fellows and God but with the environment as well.¹¹

2. EARTH AND THE EMPIRES

In Dan 7:18 it is said,

“These great beasts, which are four,
are four kings/kingdoms which shall arise out of the earth”.¹²

11. W. Brueggemann, *Peace* (St Louis MO: Chalice Press, 2001) makes it clear that this is its meaning in both Testaments.

12. This verse identifies the four beasts of the vision with four kings and, on the surface of it, contradicts the vision in that the kings will arise out of the earth rather than the sea. Some ancient versions and commentators have sought to emend “kings” to “kingdoms” on the grounds of common sense. Other commentators claim that such a step is not necessary although they recognise that the kings represent kingdoms and that in fact that Daniel uses “kings” and “kingdoms” interchangeably. Emendations have also been proposed for “arise out of the earth”. This has been suggested on the basis of the LXX reading “destroyed from the earth” and because of the apparent contradiction of rising “from the sea” (7:3) and “from the earth” (7:17). However, once the biblical basis of the phrase “kings of the earth” is recognised the contradiction disappears. The phrase appears in six places in the Psalms (2:2; 76:13 [12]; 89:27; 102:16 [15]; 138:4; 148:11). In four of these the phrase parallels other titles denoting leadership (Pss 2:2; 76:13[12]; 106:16[15]; 148:11). “Kings of the earth” then, is a loose term meaning peoples or leaders of one kind or another, thus in Daniel it need not be taken to refer to four individual kings but rather to four separate groups of peoples or leaders. In three of the above psalms “the kings of the earth” recognise God and praise him (102:16[15]; 138:4; 148:11) but in two (Pss 2:2; 76:13[12]) their arrogant nature is highlighted: in Ps 2:2 they plot against “the Lord and His anointed” and God warns them that He has given to His “son” the nations for an inheritance and if they do not serve God and deal peacefully with His anointed they will perish; in Ps 76:13[12]. God has to deal with the “kings of the earth” in defence of the “meek of the earth” (v. 10[9]). The only other appearance of “kings of the earth” in the Psalms is in 89:28 (27) where it is asserted that God will make His chosen one (v. 20[19]) “the highest of the kings of the earth”.

In view of the descriptions of their progress, particularly that of the fourth beast in Daniel 8, the notion of “rising” in 7:18 should probably receive more stress than is usually placed upon it. The rising is suggestive of being positioned above the earth. Dan 8:5 heralds the appearance of the Hellenistic Empire,

“a he-goat came from the west over the face of the whole earth (*‘erets*) and none touched Earth/the ground (*‘erets*)”.

The phrase “none touched Earth/the ground” is usually translated as “it did not touch the ground”. But this is not an accurate translation, even though the inclusion of “none” in the phrase strikes an odd note. The majority of commentators think that “none touching the ground” alludes to Alexander’s speed of conquest,¹³ but if Alexander were in view, why not just say “he/it did not touch the ground”? Collins¹⁴ is adamant that Alexander himself is not referred to as the he-goat; rather, he is symbolised by the “great horn”, as Dan 8:8, 21 would appear to make clear. Collins maintains that the he-goat represents princely power, but does not further define it. However, it is likely that the he-goat encompasses all the parts of the Hellenistic empires: Alexander (the great horn of Dan 8:5, 8:21), his successors (the four notable ones of Dan 8:8) and Antiochus IV Epiphanes (the little horn of Dan 8:9).

Now we can see how “none” in “none touched the ground” makes sense: it wants to assert that not one of the component parts of the Hellenistic Empires touched the ground. Does it mean that they all made conquests in a speedy fashion? Or does it refer to something else? Since the component parts of the Empires hardly matched Alexander’s achievements, speed of conquest is unlikely to be in view. The descriptions in Daniel 8 of the component parts of the Hellenistic Empires give the clue as to what “none touched Earth/the ground” really means: since none of them was in contact with Earth, none therefore was in right relationship with it, with fellow human beings, or with God. The descriptions in Daniel 8 of the fashion in which they imposed their will on others, together with the biblical allusions that lie behind the descriptions, make this very clear. After hitting the ram and breaking its two horns, the he-goat “cast him to the ground and trampled on him”.

Two separate actions are carried out here and they belong to different biblical themes. The “casting to the ground” alludes to Ezek 28:17,

13. For example, J. A. Montgomery, *The Book of Daniel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927 repr. 1976) 331; J. J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 331; J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas: Word, 1989) 209; C. L. Seow, *Daniel* (Louisville KY; London UK: Westminster Bible Companion, 2003) 120-121.

14. Collins, *Daniel*, 331.

which is close linguistically and contextually to Daniel. In the Ezekiel passage God states, "I have cast you to the ground". The one in Ezekiel who is punished in this way for the sins of unrighteousness and hubris is the King of Tyre (represented as Primeval Man). Tyre was attacked by the Babylonians and again by Alexander the Great,¹⁵ the founder of the Hellenistic Empire, with which Dan 8:21 identifies the he-goat. The next act of the he-goat, trampling on the ram, recalls the imagery of the vineyard. In Isa 63:3, speaking of peoples upon whom he has taken vengeance, God states, "And I trampled them in my fury", employing the same vocabulary as appears in Dan 8:6-7. The he-goat is, then, in this respect as well acting like God.¹⁶

The degree of hubris increases yet again with the appearance of the little horn that grows from one of the four horns which replace the original horn of the he-goat. It is said in 8:10 that the little horn "waxed great even to the host of heaven". "The host of heaven" is a phrase used a number of times in the Hebrew Bible. In the majority of cases it appears in the context of objects of false worship, sometimes in connection with the sun, moon and stars (e.g. Jer 8:2, Deut 4:19, 17:13), sometimes with Baal and/or Asherah (e.g. 2 Kgs 17:16, 21:3) or simply other gods (Jer 19:13). Even in the few passages where it is not stated that the host are objects of false worship they are clearly subordinate to God, standing by him on his right hand and his left in I Kgs 22:19 and 2 Chron 18:18, and worshipping him in Neh 9:6. The little horn then is exalting itself above the gods of the nations. Its action in doing so is couched in terms which allude to Isa 14:13, part of the day star myth, which reads,

"And you said in your heart
I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God..."

It was noted above that the host of heaven was sometimes linked with stars in biblical passages and indeed in the next part of Dan 8:10 this is also the case.

15. The "casting to the ground" calls to mind the fate of the daystar in Isa 14:12. Nevertheless although the daystar is brought to the ground (*la'arets*) the verb used is "cut down" (*gd'a*), which differs from the one employed in Daniel.

16. The he-goat's power is such that in Dan 8:7 it is said "there was none who could deliver the ram out of his hand". As in verse 4, where no one could bring delivery from the ram, the implication here is that it is God's will that the ram fall in his turn, undoubtedly as a punishment for hubris. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that the instrument of punishment, the he-goat with the notable horn, was guilty of hubris to an even greater degree than the ram had ever been, as the biblical passages alluded to in his attack on the ram clearly show.

“Some of the host and the stars he cast down to the ground
and trampled on them.”

The little horn, then, overthrew some of the gods of others in the way that Alexander had overthrown the Persian Empire. Dan 8:12 continues to delineate the way in which the little horn, who scholars agree should be identified with Antiochus IV Epiphanes, attacks the heavenly sphere. This time it is not the host of heaven but the Deity itself whom he attempts to overthrow. Dan 8:12 reads literally:

And a host will be given upon the Tamid (burnt offering) in
transgression
And truth cast to the ground
And it did and it prospered.

The host in place of the Tamid sacrifice is the worship of another god. 2 Macc 6:2 says that this was Olympian Zeus. “Truth” is an oblique reference to God and the way of life required by God.¹⁷

“None touching the ground (*'erets*)” as a descriptor of the successive parts of the Hellenistic Empire would then refer to their hubris and lack of compassion for fellow human beings. This is significant in view of what was found earlier to be the case in regard to Nebuchadnezzar: being in contact with Earth (*'erets*) brought a human into right relationship with God and other humans. The he-goat was not in contact with Earth and so was in wrong relationship with fellow human beings and with the Deity. Like Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 he aspired to rival God.

3. DANIEL AND EARTH

By way of contrast, Daniel, the antithesis of the human power mongers, aligns himself voluntarily with Earth on occasions of divine revelation. In Dan 8:18, while Gabriel was speaking to him, Daniel was not only in a deep sleep but had his “face towards Earth (*'erets*)”. Similarly Ezekiel, when “the glory of the Lord” was before him, “fell on his face” (Ezek 3:23).¹⁸ Both Ezekiel and Daniel were subsequently restored to a standing position: Ezekiel when the spirit entered into him and caused him to stand on his feet (Ezek 3:24); Daniel when Gabriel

17. Commentators have had great difficulty with Dan 8:12 but, although the phrasing is awkward, it can be understood especially when seen against the background of Isaiah 59. For the linguistic difficulties inherent in Dan 8:12 and the suggested solutions of the ancient versions and commentators cf. Montgomery, *Daniel*, 336-8.

18. A. Lacoque, *Le Livre de Daniel* (CAT XVb; Neuchâtel and Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1976) 125, notes the similarity to Ezekiel.

touched him and caused him to stand in his standing place (Dan 8:18). Again, in 10:9 when an angelic figure comes to make a revelation to Daniel, Daniel falls into a deep sleep with his face towards Earth (*'erets*). He is subsequently lifted into a kneeling position, but set his face to Earth (*'erets*) once more after the revelation (10:15). He is later told that he has nothing to fear (10:19).

What do these passages about Daniel's reaction to divine revelation tell us about the understanding of Earth in the book of Daniel? They tell us that Earth/ground and contact with it is the way to safeguard against hubris. This reinforces the message of Daniel 4 that Earth was instrumental in Nebuchadnezzar's restoration to mental health. It gave him the understanding that he was of Earth and that he stood in equal relation to other humans. It is significant that the first beast in Daniel 7, which is universally recognised as referring to Babylon and is represented by Nebuchadnezzar in the earlier chapters, is "made to stand on two feet like a man" (Dan 7:4) after power is stripped from it. What is meant here can be understood through its similarity to Ezek 3:24 and Dan 8:18 when Ezekiel and Daniel were both caused to stand after they had been in contact with Earth. Notably Babylon/Nebuchadnezzar had also been in contact with Earth as Dan 4:12[15] says "let his portion be with the beasts of the earth in the grass".

4. THE SUFFERING OF EARTH

Is there any suggestion in the book of Daniel that Earth itself suffers or benefits in any way through the actions of humans, in their relationships one with another and with God? I believe that there are two examples of this, one relating to the actions of a foreign power and the other intimating that Israel also deserves to have its land destroyed.

To take first the one relating to the actions of a foreign power: in Daniel 7 the fourth beast, identified as a fourth kingdom upon Earth, is said in the angelic interpretation of Daniel's dream vision to be going to "devour the earth and thresh it and break it in pieces" (7:23).¹⁹ The devouring of the earth may allude to Biblical passages which picture Israel's enemies as wild beasts who devour: e.g., Isa 56:9; Jer 8:16. With the appearance of "thresh" in Dan 7:23, it seems as if an agricultural metaphor is present. However although *dush* (thresh) relates to the agricultural sphere in 1 Chron 21:20; Hos 10:11; Isa 28:27-28, it appears

19. There are some differences here to the way the fourth beast is described in the dream vision. In the latter it is not specified what the beast devours, nor is it said to "thresh the earth" (Dan 7:7). My view is that the identity of the fourth beast in the dream vision is different from its identity in the interpretation. For details see my forthcoming monograph, *Decoding Daniel*.

elsewhere in the context of wanton destruction (Job 39:15) or as a term of punishment of humans by a human (Jud 8:7; Isa 41:25) or by God (Isa 25:10; Hab 3:12).

Significantly for the identification of the fourth beast in Daniel 7,²⁰ which scholars usually link with Greece and its scion, the Seleucid Empire, there are two biblical instances of “threshing” that relate to Syria, the Seleucid power base. They are 2 Kgs 13:7 and Amos 1:3. The former reads, “...for the King of Syria destroyed them and made them like dust in the threshing”. This was during the reign of Jehoahaz when, because of Israel’s sin, “the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael, King of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael”. If this passage is part of the background to the fourth beast of Dan 7:23, the notion in it that Israel is being punished for sin, helps to clarify Daniel’s penitential prayer in chapter 9, something which has long exercised scholars.²¹

The other biblical passage that may be part of the background to Dan 7:23, Amos 1:3-4 reads: “Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Damascus, even for four...because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron (4) I will send fire into the house of Hazael...” Damascus, of course, was the capital of Syria, and Gilead, an area of Israel. If it is correct that 2 Kgs 13:7 and Amos 1:3 are alluded to by Dan 7:23, the threshing carried out by the fourth beast is a metaphor for the destruction caused by the Seleucids. This destruction may have been aimed at the people who lived in Israel, but Earth itself is also likely to have suffered during its course since an army usually devastates the land upon which it is fighting. Further, Amos 1:3, where it is said, “they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron”, implies that Earth itself was harmed.

An intimation that Israel deserves to have its land destroyed appears in Dan 11:16, 41 when Israel is described as “the glorious (*ts’byi*) land”. The phrase “the glorious land” alludes to Ezek 20:6, 15 where God brings the people from Egypt “into a land...flowing with milk and honey which is the glory (*ts’byi*) of all lands”. On several occasions in

20. Rome is seen as the fourth Empire in traditional Christian circles because Jesus lived in Roman times. Some modern scholars still support the identification: e.g., E. J. Young, *Daniel* (Chicago: Moody, 1972) 141-50; J. G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Leicester UK: Apollos; Downer’s Grove IL: Intervarsity Press, 1978) 147, 161-62. However Daniel 8 and 11 clearly have in view the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his persecution of the Jews. My own view is that the Seleucid Empire is referred to in Dan 7:23, though I would not agree that the fourth beast of Daniel’s vision in 7:7 should be restricted to the Seleucids; see my forthcoming monograph, *Decoding Daniel*. On the identification of the fourth beast of the vision in Daniel 7, see for the time being A. E. Gardner, “Decoding Daniel: The Case of Dan 7,5”, *Biblica* 88/2, (2007) 222-33.

21. The unity of Daniel 9 has been doubted as well as the applicability of the prayer to the context. For a discussion of these issues, see Lucas, *Daniel*, 232-34.

this chapter of Ezekiel, God acknowledges that Israel did not deserve such a land because they did not obey the divine statutes and finally gives the order for its destruction. Destruction of “the glorious land” also occurs in Daniel 11. The clear allusion to Ezekiel posits that the people are deserving of this fate. In the same chapter of Ezekiel, though, there is also acknowledgement that God will cause to return to Israel, from the various countries of their exile, a purified people who acknowledges its past sins, a people who do deserve the land which God had given their fathers (Ezek 20:42). It is interesting to note that soon after the destruction of “the glorious land” in Dan 11:41, there is “a time of trouble” (Dan 12:1), and the community is divided into those who “purify themselves and make themselves white, and be refined” and those who “do wickedly” (Dan 12:10). Is the implication that those who “purify themselves” will inherit the land? To answer this question we must turn to another chapter of Daniel.

5. DOES EARTH DISAPPEAR AT THE CLIMAX OF HUMAN/DIVINE RELATIONS IN DANIEL?

The climax of human/divine relations in Daniel appears in Dan 7:13-14, 27, the later chapters being in essence a commentary upon the activity of the fourth beast and the reaction of Israel to it. In Dan 7:13-14 one like a son of man is presented to the Ancient of Days:

“And there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom that all the peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

Daniel himself is addressed as “son of man” in 8:17. “One like a son of man” must, therefore, bear some resemblance to Daniel himself. Daniel’s outstanding quality is his humility before God, in that he aligns himself with Earth for he alone puts his face upon it. Such humility is underlined elsewhere in the early chapters of the narrative when Daniel refused the king’s food (1:8), recognised that only God could tell him the contents of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (2:18), and thanked God, as always, even when he appeared to be facing certain death in the lions’ den (6:10).

In Dan 7:27 “One like a son of man” designates a corporate entity: “the people of the holy ones of the Most High”. There has been some scholarly debate as to whether this corporate entity is human or

angelic.²² However the link with Daniel himself indicates that this entity is composed, at least partly, of humans. The use of *'am* (people) in this verse calls to mind those passages in Deuteronomy where *'am qodesh* (holy people) indicates Israel (Deut 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9). All the occurrences in Deuteronomy link the notion of a holy people to the keeping of God's commandments in some way, while texts such as Deut 7: 12-15, 28:3-13 assert that if this happens the people will be the recipients of great fertility of all kinds, including that of Earth. That Deuteronomy is the likely background for the expression "people of holy ones" in Dan 7:27 is reinforced by the assertion in Deut 26:19; 28:1 that if the holy people keep God's commandments they will be set above the nations, which is what Dan 7:27 promises for "the people of holy ones".²³ It may well be that Daniel has deliberately changed the Deuteronomic expression "holy people", meaning Israel, to "people of holy ones" because he recognises that not everyone in Israel is holy or keeps the commandments, as the prelude to the Maccabean Crisis showed (cf. 1 Macc. 1:11-15, 52-52; and 2 Maccabees 4-5).

Taken together, then, Dan 7:13 and Dan 7:27 assert that all dominions will serve "one like a son of man", that is, "the people of the holy ones of the Most High". The people who will be privileged in this way are those who live their lives in accordance with God's wishes, which includes recognising that they are of Earth. As the allusions to Deuteronomy indicate, when they do so, all blessings will flow to them and to Earth.

To be sure, Earth is not named specifically in the climax of history described in 7:27, as "the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High". Does this mean that Earth as the sustainer of life is thereby devalued? No. "The people of the holy ones of the Most High" are the people who have not lost touch with Earth. They are the ones who recognise that Earth is the appropriate realm for them, who know that contact with Earth is the way to God and who understand that the Earth sustains them. By contrast, to rise above the Earth means setting oneself in opposition to Earth, to fellow humans and to the Deity. This is seen in varying degrees in the succession of

22. Cf. Collins, *Daniel*, 304-10, 322; Lucas, *Daniel*, 184-187; 191-93.

23. Collins, *Daniel*, 310, maintains that the solution of the issue as to whether "the people of holy ones" has a human or angelic reference lies in understanding "the people" as a different entity to the "holy ones": i.e., the reference is to humans under the protection of angelic beings. However, this is unnecessary if Deuteronomy is recognised as the background to the expression used in Daniel. *'am qodesh* ("holy people") indicated Israel as a whole in Deuteronomy, whereas the Maccabean Crisis, amongst other incidents, had shown that Israel as a whole was unlikely to follow the commandments. Those who would be rewarded by God in the future would be those out of Israel who had proved that they were holy, hence the change in the expression to "a people of holy ones".

Empires in Daniel, with Antiochus, the ultimate “bad boy”, even attempting to cast God himself to Earth!

CONCLUSION

Analysis of key passages in Daniel leads to the conclusion that God, humans and Earth are intertwined. The upshot is that when relationships between the three are distorted, conflict and disaster ensue: humans are in conflict with one another and some of them attempt to rival God. In the process, Earth suffers unjustly; wars are fought upon it and it is damaged. Daniel gives an assurance that this will be overturned (Dan 7:13-14, 23) and that the people of the holy ones of the Most High who understand the importance of Earth will be given eternal dominion. Earth then is an essential element in Daniel; when it is not given due recognition by humans, the result is chaos. Such a message is as appropriate today as when it was communicated in the book of Daniel over two thousand years ago.