

Biblical Interpretation

Daniel 7:27-28

From John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. II, 78-79, 242, emphasis added; English updated.

Daniel 7:27-28 “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. His kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him. This *is* the end of the account. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my countenance changed; but I kept the matter in my heart.”

The correct interpretation of universal words used in Scripture explained

As, however, it is certain that many have perseveringly rebelled against God and the teaching of His gospel, it may seem absurd for the angel to pronounce all the powers of the world obedient and submissive. But it is worthwhile to study the customary methods of scriptural expression.

For instance, **by the phrase “all people,” the Spirit does not mean every single person, but simply some out of every nation** who should submit to Christ’s yoke, acknowledge Him to be King, and obediently obey His Church.

How often do these sentiments occur in the prophets? All nations shall come—all kings shall serve. At that time no king existed who was not professedly an enemy of true piety, and who did not desire the abolition of the very name of His law. The prophets enlarge thus magnificently on the future restoration of this kingdom, as we have stated before, in consequence of the event being so utterly incredible. So, also, in this place *all powers*, says he, *shall serve and obey Him*; that is, no power shall so boast in its loftiness, as not willingly to become subject to the Church, although at present all so fully despise it. No, while they rage with all their might, against the most wretched Church, and while they tread it most ignominiously under foot, even then they shall be subject to it. This we know to have been amply fulfilled.

Some persons foolishly press beyond their meaning words of universal signification, as when Paul says, God wishes all to be saved. Hence, they say, no one is predetermined for destruction, but all are elect, that is, God is not God (1 Timothy 2:4). (Compare Paul’s teaching on election and reprobation in Romans 9 and God’s declaration, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated” [Malachi 1:2-3; Romans 9:13].) But we are not surprised at such madness as this, corrupting the impious and profane, who desire by their cavils to promote disbelief in all the oracles of the Spirit.

Let us clearly comprehend the frequency of this figure of speech; **when the Holy Spirit names “all,” He means some out of all nations, and not every one universally.**

Do not embellish the word of God or add conjectures. God’s Word is sufficient, and God has told us all that we need to know. We don’t need to add our own conjectures to Scripture.

In this verse Daniel first says the vision was concluded, and thus the faithful might rest satisfied in looking for nothing beyond it. For we know how restless are the fancies of mankind, and how insane a disease is a vain curiosity.

God is aware of what is useful for our information, and so He adapts His method of teaching to our capacity and profit,. Yet we are volatile and insatiable, saying, Why is not this added? Why does God stop here? Why does He not proceed further? As, therefore, human ingenuity is so inflamed and intemperate, Daniel here deservedly says, *an end was put to the vision*, to cause all the elect to acquiesce in it and be contented with this partial knowledge. . . .

Beware of allegorical interpretation. Look for the true sense of each passage of Scripture.

I am aware of the plausible nature of allegories, but when we reverently weigh the teachings of the Holy Spirit, those speculations which at first sight pleased us exceedingly, vanish from our view. I am not captivated by these enticements myself, and I wish all my hearers to be persuaded of this—nothing can be better than a sober treatment of Scripture. We ought never to fetch from a distance subtle explanations, for the true sense will, as I have previously expressed it, flow naturally from a passage when it is weighed with mature deliberation.