

# STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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## OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:

The principle theological emphasis in Daniel is the absolute sovereignty of Yahweh, the God of Israel. At a time when it seemed to all the world that his cause was lost and that the gods of the heathen had triumphed, causing his temple to be burned to the ground, it pleased the Lord strikingly and unmistakably to display his omnipotence. The theme running through the whole book is that the fortunes of kings and the affairs of men are subject to God's decrees, and that he is able to accomplish his will despite the most determined opposition of the mightiest potentates on earth.

Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Daniel," in *EBC*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 7:8.

## Daniel

### I. Introduction

Daniel presents one of the great challenges to OT interpretation and theology. It is the shortest of what we call the "Major Prophets." Yet its contents are perhaps the most important words pertaining the OT eschatology. In fact, John Walvoord entitled his commentary *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*. The book's influence over eschatology and other kingdom themes is clearly seen in its use by NT authors. While other books such as Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms are quoted more often by NT writers, no other book is quoted or alluded to more than Daniel in reference to NT prophecy and eschatology.

#### A. *Title and Canonical Placement*

In the Hebrew as well as every ancient and modern version, the book is given the same title—Daniel—after its principle character.<sup>1</sup> In the LXX and Latin version, the book is located as the fifth of the major prophets. This location seems to be ancient, for even Josephus' canonical list (late 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) seems to suggest that the book was considered at that time to be part of the prophets. After all, there is no question that the book is a major source for OT prophetic revelation.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "Daniel," in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 405.

Nevertheless, in the Masoretic tradition, the book appears not among the Prophets but rather in the third and final section of the Jewish canon—the Writings. The reasons for this placement are varied. For one, there appears to be no evidence of any kind of established order to the OT even at that time. The order of the books in the LXX, made some two hundred years *before* Josephus, differs on multiple accounts from the order seen in Josephus' list. In fact, the order of the Masoretic Text does not appear to have been fully established until around 1,000 A.D.

Yet the difference in placement is a compelling issue. The most notable reason is that never in the book is Daniel actually identified as a *neb'im* ("prophet"). Rather, he is given the title of *hozeh* ("seer") and *haklam* ("wise man").<sup>2</sup> This makes sense, as the third section of the Hebrew canon contains those works which the Jews saw as dealing more with the nature and importance of wisdom—in this case, the wisdom that must characterize the faithful Israelite as they await the final kingdom program of Yahweh.

Despite the undeniable prophetic character of the book, its prophetic nature is different than that of the other OT prophets. While the other prophets view Israel's history and actions chiefly through the lens of the Mosaic Covenant, the book of Daniel concerns itself less with uncovering Israel's covenant infidelity and more with reinforcing Israel's covenant hopes in the midst of Gentile domination.

Added to this, it is important to note that in the Jewish mindset, Daniel was regarded more as a statesman than a prophet. This certainly does not discount the prophetic character of the work, but rather reveals a general recognition that the work differed in character and content from what they considered the Prophets.

## B. *Authorship & Date*

Few OT books outside of the Torah have garnered so much scholarly debate as to authorship and date as has Daniel. A full study on the issues and theories related to who authored the book and when it was composed goes far beyond the purpose of our study. However, a brief overview of the major views and their underlying presuppositions will help us to understand just how important the discussion is.

There is strong internal and external evidence suggesting that the book was authored by Daniel himself. The employment of first-person pronouns throughout the book and the contexts of their occurrences forcefully imply Daniel to be the author (7:15; 8:1-8; 9:2-22; 10:2, 7, 10, 12, 15, 18-19; 11:1; 12:5-8). The fact that certain portions of the book are written in third person does not imply a separate author. In fact, such a practice is perfectly fitting with the style of both Hebrew and other ANE prophetic writings.

The first attack against Danielic authorship was mounted by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. Neo-Platonic philosopher Porphyry. This indicates that up to that time, the universal consensus was that Daniel had authored the book.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Matthew 24:15 (cf. Mark 13:14) provides clear evidence that Jesus himself believed that Daniel was the author when he re-

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<sup>2</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

ferred to “‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, if we affirm the authorship of Daniel, then it necessarily implies that the writing of the book dates to sometime around the late 6<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Given the dates supplied in the text, the earliest dated reference refers to Daniel’s capture by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C., while the latest date provided is the third year of the reign of Cyrus in 535 B.C. (10:1). Most likely then, the book was composed at the latest toward the end of Daniel’s life, though earlier chapters may have been written earlier and compiled into the book’s final form. As Merrill summarizes, “The book as a whole...fits well the Babylonian-Persian milieu of the sixth century.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet with the onset of the Enlightenment, the skeptical philosophies first espoused by Porphyry in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century made a decisive comeback. Higher-critical scholars espoused that the book in no way could be the product of a 6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century author. They pointed to the apocalyptic nature of the book as evidence of its late date. They pointed to seeming historical discrepancies, such as Daniel’s wrong dating of the Babylonian invasion of Judah (Dan 1:1; cf. Jer 46:2), or his reference to the non-existent Darius the Mede (Dan 5:30-6:1), as evidence that a writer far removed (by centuries) from the actual events was writings with limited knowledge of history. They pointed to the use of the term *kasdim* (“Chaldean”) as a technical term designating a class of wise men as support that the book originated much later than was thought. They pointed to the Aramaic portions of the book as further proof of a late Palestinian dialect not in use during the exile.

All this, critical scholars claimed, was undeniable proof that the book could not have originated during the exile but was much later. In fact, they suggested that the book was the product of a writer or series of writers living during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. The book of Daniel, they contend, was the result of a “pious fraud, perpetrated by some zealous propagandists of the Maccabean movement, who wished to encourage a spirit of heroism among the Jewish patriots resisting Antiochus IV. The discomfiture of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar as related in Daniel were intended to be prophetic of the defeats and downfall of the hated Epiphanes.”<sup>6</sup>

Of course, all the “proofs” offered up by these scholars have been readily answered. Apocalyptic literature, it turns out, was a genre that had been developing well before the Maccabean period, as Isaiah 24-27 attests. The differences in dating Babylon’s invasion of Judah is clarified by the work of Thiele and others, who discovered that several methods were employed by nations for counting the length of a king’s reign. The identity of Darius the Mede, it was discovered, was most likely a reference to Cyrus himself or the official he placed over Babylon in the early years of his reign. The use of *kasdim* in Daniel is varied, and while some occurrences do refer to a special class of wise men (2:2, 5, 10; 4:7; 5:7, 11), other uses are specifically ethnic (3:8; 5:30) and thus do not reflect an

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<sup>4</sup> Gleason L. Archer Jr., “Daniel,” in *EBC*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 7:4.

<sup>5</sup> Merrill, “Daniel,” 406.

<sup>6</sup> Archer, “Daniel,” 7:13.

exclusively “late” meaning not in use in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. And it is now recognized that the Aramaic used in Daniel reflects an Imperial dialect in use during the Persian period.

Despite this, as Archer wrote in the mid-1980s, “Essentially the same position is maintained even to this day by liberal scholars throughout Christendom. In fact, they consider the Maccabean date of Daniel one of the most assured results of modern scholarship.”<sup>7</sup>

In reality, the desire—the need, in fact—to date the book of Daniel to the Maccabean period really betrays a more serious presupposition—a bias first espoused by Porphyry in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. and reinvigorated by modern scholars after the 17<sup>th</sup> century. What really made them skeptical of dating Daniel earlier than the Maccabean period was the startling accuracy of his prophetic predictions. No individual, they insist, could have been able to accurately predict the rise of the Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. Only someone living *after* the events could have retold these details with such accuracy. Thus, they conclude that the “predictive” portions of Daniel are nothing more than *vaticinia ex eventu*—prophecies after the event, aimed at inspiring patriotic Jews to join the Maccabean revolt. According to their view, the 4<sup>th</sup> kingdom of Daniel 2 could not refer to the Roman empire, for the author would have had no knowledge of such a kingdom. Rather, they insist that these four kingdoms must refer to Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece.

But, as Archer points out, the identification of the 2<sup>nd</sup> kingdom with the Medes alone is serious flawed:

Vital to this theory, then, is the proposition that the Maccabean author, confused and ill-informed as to the historical situation in the sixth century, supposed incorrectly (1) that it was the Medes and the Medes alone who overthrew the Chaldean empire in 539; (2) that Darius the Mede was ruler in his own right and sovereign over the entire Middle East and Near East as well; and (3) that, even though his reign lasted less than two years, his “empire” was put on the same level with the Babylonian Empire, which endured for 67 years, and the Persian Empire, which lasted for over 200 years, and the Greek Empire, which had been going on for over 160 years by the time of the Maccabees. The supposed Median stage could have lasted no more than a year and a half, according to the author of Daniel himself, since he never spoke of a later date than the “first year of Darius sons of Xerxes” (9:1). The extremely brief and ephemeral character of this supposed “empire” is a very telling argument in its disfavor. It looks like a desperate evasion of the obvious inference from the text that the four empires represented the series...Chaldean, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman.<sup>8</sup>

This represents the level of scholarly “desperation” put forth to explain the prophetic predictions of the book of Daniel in a way other than supernatural revelation. So really, the issue of authorship and date is one of epistemology—the nature and source of truth and how we can know it. Liberal scholars are unwilling to concede the possibility of predictive prophecy. “The issue,” Merrill writes, “is thus fundamentally not one about the language, *Weltanschauung*, or historical reliability of Daniel but its extensive incorporation of predictive prophecy. If such a phenomenon has no basis in reality, then clearly no case can be made for authorship by Daniel in the sixth century. However, if allowance can be

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 7:24-25.

made for a prophet of God to see in advance his outworkings in history, there remains no reason to challenge the ancient tradition of Daniel's setting and its early composition."<sup>9</sup>

### C. *Historical Background*

The earliest date provided in the book (1:1) is the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim in Judah, when in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar executed the first of three invasions of Judah. During this time, the Babylonian ruler captured many young Hebrews and brought them back to Babylon. Among them was Daniel, who spent the remaining years of his life witnessing some of the most politically turbulent years of ancient history. He and his friends were recognized early on for their wisdom and quickly gained favor with high level Babylonian officials, including Nebuchadnezzar himself. Despite the numerous political and religious pressures placed on them, their faithfulness to the covenant God of Israel afforded them a supernatural protection that consistently caught the attention of their pagan captors.

During this early period of captivity, Nebuchadnezzar performed two more invasions of Judah, the first in response to Jehoiachin's rebellion in 597 B.C., when thousands of Jews were taken captive and Zedekiah was established by Babylon as a representative over Judah. Then, in response to Zedekiah's treachery, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and destroyed it in 586 B.C., killing or capturing much of the population and deporting them back to Babylon.

As history progressed, the authority of Babylon began to weaken internationally. When Nabonidus took the throne in 556 B.C., he fell into disfavor because of his neglect of Babylon's chief god Marduk. This set the stage for the eventual collapse of the empire. In 553 B.C., he left Babylon to pursue commercial opportunities in the south, leaving his son Belshazzar in charge of the kingdom. His complete disdain for Yahweh led to Daniel's terrifying prediction of Belshazzar's death and the end of the Babylonian empire, an event that would occur under the leadership of an up and coming Persian named Cyrus.

Cyrus came to the throne of the yet small Persian kingdom in 559 B.C., and by 550 B.C. was able to unify the Persian people to rebel against Median domination. He then led his newly-formed Median-Persian amalgamation in a campaign against the Lydian empire in 546 B.C. Following his victory over Lydia and after reinforcing and expanding his territory, he turned to engage Babylon. In 539 B.C., he took Sippar, the city north of Babylon on the Euphrates. Two days later, his armies took Babylon and killed Belshazzar, just as Daniel had prophesied (5:30). On October 29 of that year, Cyrus himself entered the city, greeted by its citizens, not as a conquering enemy, but as a liberator.

The shift from Babylonian to Persian rule brought about immense changes to the empire. Cyrus' Near Eastern policy differed dramatically from that of Babylon. He ended the colonization of foreign lands and the deportation of foreign captives. He allowed captives taken by Babylon to return to their lands with nearly full religious freedom. Thus, under the Persian Empire, the Jews were allowed to return to Palestine after 70 years in captivity, with full blessing by the emperor.

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<sup>9</sup> Merrill, "Daniel," 407.

It was during these transitional years that the events of Daniel 6 transpire. After the fall of Babylon, Cyrus appointed Gubaru II—called Darius the Mede by Daniel—as a satrap (governor) over the whole Fertile Crescent. Darius then established 120 satraps and 3 commissioners under him, one of whom was Daniel (6:1-2). He was, in effect, king over the Babylonian sector of the Persian empire, and reigned powerfully for 14 years.

The final date provided by the book is the third year of the reign of Cyrus (10:1), dating to 537 B.C.

## II. Major Themes

### A. *The Sovereignty of Yahweh*

Like the book of Esther, which precedes it in the Masoretic tradition, the book of Daniel deals chiefly with the subject of Yahweh's absolute sovereignty. However, while the narrator of Esther purposefully emphasizes the hidden hand of God through his providential yet invisible protection of the Jews, in Daniel, God's sovereignty is on full display. This contrast is intentional.

The fall of Jerusalem and the end of Israel's national sovereignty was a chief turning point in OT history. The author of Kings takes great strides to narrate how Yahweh continually used his prophets to demonstrate his superiority over the gods of the pagans, which vied for Israel's allegiance. When Jerusalem fell, however, it seemed as if Yahweh had lost. Of course, we as OT readers understand, as did God's prophets and faithful remnant, that Jerusalem's fall was orchestrated by God himself. It was the culmination of the covenant curses that Yahweh had warned would come upon the nation for their disobedience. Daniel's prayer (9:1-19) clearly affirms this covenant perspective. He confessed to Israel's sin and rebelliousness (9:5, 8-11), to their recalcitrance towards the warnings of the prophets (9:6), and thus the well-deserved consequence of exile which God himself had brought on them (9:7, 12-14). He recognized that their present condition was a result of "the curse [which] has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses" (9:11).

But "from the viewpoint of a human observer," writes Archer, "it seemed that the religion of the Hebrews had been completely discredited." Archer continues,

Their God, Yahweh, had apparently shown himself inferior in power to the mighty gods of Assyria and Babylon; for he seemed unable to deliver his people from the worshipers of Ashur, Bel, and Nebo. When they leveled Yahweh's temple to the ground and burned its ruins, the Babylonian troops served notice to the world that their gods were mightier than Yahweh, no matter what titles the Hebrews gave him. Ethical monotheism was exposed to universal scorn as an empty fraud. Therefore, it was essential at this time in Israel's history for God to display his power in such a way as to prove that he was the one true God (in contrast to the false gods of the heathens) and the sovereign Lord of history. So he showed his power by a series of miracles that vindicated biblical monotheism over against its detractors and convinced the supreme rulers of Babylon and Persia that Yahweh was the greatest power both on earth and in heaven.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Archer, "Daniel," 7:3-4.

This demonstration of sovereignty appears in several veins throughout the book. First, we see God acting sovereignly on behalf of his people.

- He supernaturally sustains and invigorates the health of Daniel and his friends, though they refrained from eating the king's choice foods (ch. 1).
- He supernaturally protects Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace (ch. 3).
- He supernaturally protects Daniel during his consignment to the lion's den (ch. 6).

Second, we see God acting sovereignly over human rulers.

- He reveals to Daniel the contents of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (ch. 2).
- He brings about the dehumanization of Nebuchadnezzar until the king was willing to recognize the greatness and supremacy of Yahweh (ch. 4).
- He announces and quickly accomplishes the death of Belshazzar and the downfall of the Babylonian Empire (ch. 5).
- He reveals that an eschatological ruler will emerge and challenge God's authority, but will eventually be supplanted by God himself (chs. 7-8, 11).

Third, we see God acting sovereignly in revealing the supremacy of God's kingdom over the kingdoms of men. In chapter 2, God reveals to Nebuchadnezzar—the then-ruler of the known world—that the progression of Gentile kingdoms, from Babylon, to Medo-Persian, to Greece, to Rome—would all eventually fall in submission to God's kingdom (2:36-45). Again, we see this progression announced in chapter 7, where the emphasis falls decisively on the arrival of God's kingdom, ruled by a divine-human individual. As history progresses, the kingdoms of man will continue to exert their arrogant authority, culminating in the arrival of a ruler who will blaspheme God himself and desecrate the temple. Yet in the end, Yahweh will prove himself supreme and he will establish his everlasting kingdom, where his people will be restored (chs. 9-12).

#### **B. *The Time of the Gentiles***

When Babylon first invaded Judah in 605 B.C. and began the eventual deportation of the nation, it began a new era of human history. The function of Israel as revealed in the Mosaic Covenant and most succinctly summarized in Exodus 19:5-6, effectively came to an end. After Judah's exile, they entered into the time of the Gentiles, a time where Israel must now learn to live and operate under Gentile authority. Though God released Israel from captivity and allowed them to return to their land and rebuild their religion, they did so while still subject to Gentile authority. To this day, Israel remains under Gentile authority, and they will continue in this condition until the time of the Gentiles is complete and God returns to establish his promised kingdom.

One of the key ways in which this is revealed is through the use of Aramaic and Hebrew portions of the book. Chapter 1 is written in Hebrew. But beginning with chapter 2 and running through chapter 7, the text is written in Aramaic. It then switches back to Hebrew for the last 5 chapters. The significance of this is central to the overall message of the book. Written in Babylon, and existing throughout the years of the Persian Empire, the book was written in such a way that while a Hebrew could pick up and read the book in its entirety, a Gentile could read just over half of it. God had thus revealed even to the

Gentiles the course of events in world history that had to do with the time of the Gentiles. They would read of the progression of Gentile kingdoms and watch as these predictions came to fulfillment. They would observe the supernatural protection of God's people amidst Gentile antagonism. And they would be aware that at the end of history, only one kingdom will stand—Yahweh's kingdom.

As a Gentile read chapters 2-7, they would recognize two truths about themselves. First, Gentiles are arrogant, and each prideful Gentile ruler who arises in history anticipates an ultimate Gentile ruler who will set himself up as God. And second, every human ruler is going to be humbled by God, just as God does to the rulers in Daniel's time.

The rest of Daniel, however, is written in a language inaccessible to these Gentiles. It is as if chapters 1 and 8-12 are written for Israel's benefit. While the Aramaic portions inform the Gentiles of God's plans for human history, the remainder of the book explains to Israel how they fit into what God has planned for the Gentiles. Chapter 1 reveals that as Daniel and his friends are taken to Babylon, they must learn a new language and be subjected to Gentile rulers. Yet they must still remain faithful to Yahweh and to the covenant. And Chapters 8-12 reveal the course of human history as they affect Israel.

### III. Purpose

Thus, the purpose of the book can be summarized as follows: *Yahweh presents the sweep of human history during Gentile domination until the establishment of God's Kingdom upon the earth.*

### IV. Literary Structure

Traditionally, the book has been divided into two parts. Chapters 1-6 constitute historical narratives about Daniel and his ministry in Babylon and Persia. Chapters 7-12 contain the various visions Daniel received:<sup>11</sup>

- I. The Narratives about Daniel and His Ministry (chs. 1-6)
  - A. The Capture and Training of the Exiles (ch. 1)
  - B. Nebuchadnezzar's First Dream (ch. 2)
  - C. The Faithful Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace (ch. 3)
  - D. Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream (ch. 4)
  - E. Belshazzar's Feast and the Fall of Babylon (ch. 5)
  - F. Daniel and the Lion's Den (ch. 6)
- II. The Visions of Daniel (chs. 7-12)
  - A. The Coming Kingdom of God (ch. 7)
  - B. The Conquest of Persia and the Rise of Greece (ch. 8)
  - C. The 70 Weeks (ch. 9)
  - D. Daniel's Prayer (ch. 10)

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<sup>11</sup> Adapted from Merrill, "Daniel," 409.

- E. The History of the Diadochi and Its Aftermath (ch. 11)
- F. Tribulation and Deliverance of God's People (ch. 12)

Baldwin notes, however, that while this is the simplest and most natural division of the book, these two macro-portions are bound together by two literary features. First, she notes the similarity between chapters 2 and 7 in the emphasis on the establishment of the kingdom of God. Second, she identifies the Aramaic portion of the book (2:4b-7:28) as the link between historical narratives and apocalyptic visions.<sup>12</sup>

Within the Aramaic portion of Daniel, Baldwin outlines a "concentric literary pattern" formed around chapters 4-5. In this chiasmic pattern, God's authority is twice defied, and in both, God gives a clear answer:<sup>13</sup>

- A** Four empires and God's coming kingdom (ch. 2)
- B** Trial by fire and God's deliverance (ch. 3)
  - C** A king warned, chastised and delivered (ch. 4)
  - C'** A king warned, defiant and deposed (ch 5)
- B'** Trial in the lion's den and God's deliverance (ch. 6)
- A'** Four empires and God's everlasting kingdom (ch. 7)

She goes on to write, "The presence of a chiasmic pattern in chs. 2-7 strengthens the bonds between the two halves of the book and helps to indicate where the emphasis lies. There are reasons for thinking that ch. 7 is the key to the whole book, even its focal point."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, "Theology of Daniel," in *NIDOTTE*, 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:499.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:500.