

Daniel

Introduction

As Dillard/Longman put it, Daniel is a book of polarities between simple narrative and complex prophecy. It uses two languages, Aramaic and Hebrew. It is a fascinating and a difficult book (IOT 329).

1A. Historical Background

1B. Author

Jesus quotes from Daniel in reference to the "abomination of desolation" (9:2; 11:31; 12:11) ascribing the book to Daniel.

The book, however, has third person sections (1-6) in marked distinction from first person sections (8-9, 11-12). But note how chapters 7 and 10 have third person framing (7:1- 2a; 10:1). Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that Daniel wrote the third person sections of the book as an objective observer. In this view, he wrote the first person sections as first hand recipient of divine revelation through visions.

2B. Historicity

The author's intent is to report accurate historical facts and visions from the sixth century B.C., but many have doubted the accuracy and trustworthiness of the book. IOT cites two reasons: 1) the impossibility of prediction into the future, and 2) historical errors.

The first is unacceptable because it "discounts the power of God to speak predictively and, indeed, without error through sinful human agency" (332).

Regarding the alleged historical errors, admittedly there are difficulties but reasonable explanations are possible (332). Three examples will show that even though all loose ends cannot be tied together, time and research have confirmed the historical accuracy of the book of Daniel.

1C. Belshazzar, the king

An earlier generation of scholars took the references to Belshazzar as king of Babylon when that city fell to the Persians (5:1, 2; 7:1; 8:1) to be clearly erroneous. Ancient documents regarding the fall of Babylon indicate that the king at that time was Nabonidus, a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar (see p 339).

Further research revealed that Nabonidus ruled his empire from Teima in northwest Arabia some one thousand miles from the capital city, Babylon. It was also discovered that he had a son, Belshazzar, who ruled in Babylon. Therefore, it is understandable that Daniel would converse with Belshazzar instead of Nabonidus. This also explains why Daniel would be made third highest ruler in the kingdom of Babylon if he interprets the handwriting on the wall for Belshazzar (5:16).

2C. The third year of Jehoiakim (Dan. 1:1)

It has been difficult to square Daniel 1:1 with Jeremiah 25:1. Daniel's third year of Jehoiakim refers to Jeremiah's fourth year of Jehoiakim. This problem is answered by noting the different systems of dating used within the OT as in the ancient Near East more generally. It is reasonable to assume that Jeremiah used the Judean system and Daniel used the Babylonian since Jeremiah was left in Judea when Jerusalem fell but Daniel was taken to Babylon as a youth.

3C. Darius the Mede

When Belshazzar was slain, Darius the Mede inherited his kingdom (5:30-31). That he was a Mede is credible given that the Persian Empire refers also to the Mede-Persian due to the

fact that the Persians conquered and engulfed the Median kingdom prior to the downfall of the Babylonians.

However, the problem is that the designation, Darius the Mede, is nowhere found outside of the book of Daniel in the documents of the ancient Near East. He is nowhere cited as are Shalmaneser who captured Samaria (722), Nebuchadnezzar who ransacked Jerusalem (586) and his grandson, Belshazzar of Daniel 5.

Also from the extra-biblical sources it is claimed that Darius the Mede is pure confusion.

We have to note that final harmony between Daniel and the Near Eastern sources has not yet been reached. Still, it is an overstatement to conclude that Daniel's reference to Darius the Mede shows the Bible to be in error.

Why so? Here's an overview argument: 1) since research in the extra-biblical documents is an on-going process that has many uncertainties and this includes matters regarding the first year of Cyrus as is acknowledged on all sides, and 2) since analogous problems in the book of Daniel have been ironed out as more data became available, 3) and since there are a number of good attempts at harmonization that have led to advancement in our knowledge of these times (see IOT 335-337), then the identity of Darius the Mede must be considered a puzzle beyond present resolution rather than a bold-faced error.

3B. Broad historical context

Through both the dating of the narrative sections and the implied times of the visions, Daniel covers world events from 605 B.C. to the coming of Christ during the Roman Empire.

A sketch will help us orient to the book.

The weakening of the Assyrian Empire was indicated by the rise of numerous semi-independent political entities within her borders, namely, Babylon, Media, Egypt and Judah.

Egypt allied with Assyria and both were defeated by Babylon in 609 B.C. at the northern Euphrates and Egypt was routed to her homeland in 605 B.C.

From 609 to 605 Judah was a vassal state to Egypt, then in 605, she became a vassal state to Babylon at which time Daniel was taken to the Babylonian capital.

The Babylonian era extends from 609 to the death of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar in 539 (the Babylonian era began with the elimination of the Assyrian army in 609 and ends with its own demise by the Persians in 539).

539 marked the dominance of a new power on the political scene, the Persians originating from Susa, east of Babylon and east of the Tigris.

Cyrus was the key figure who engulfed the Median power to the north of the Tigris River by 550. Thus, when he took Babylon in 539 he appointed Darius the Mede as king over the former Babylonian portion of the rising Persian Empire.

The head of gold, Babylon, was replaced by the chest and arms of silver (Dan. 2:31-32), the bear raised up on one of its sides (Dan. 7:5, Medo-Persia with Persia as dominant side).

Persia lasted until Alexander the Great raced across the known world like a leopard (Dan. 7:6) defeating the Persians and conquering the world by the time he was 30 years old (327). A united Greek empire did not last but Greek culture and language made gigantic impressions on the land of the Bible.

Alexander died in 323 (age 30) and his kingdom was immediately divided between four generals (the four heads with authority to rule, Dan. 7:6). Four territories emerged:

Thrace

Macedonia

Ptolemaia (Egypt)

Seleucia (Syria north of the sea of Galilee)

Palestine became a political football between the Ptolemaic and the Selucid dynasties.

Egypt dominated Palestine roughly from 301 to 200 B.C. (IOT 340). When Ptolemy took control of Judea, he deported a considerable number of Jews to Alexandria, Egypt. These events explain how it is that the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible comes from Alexandria (the LXX, Septuagint, (roughly completed by 150 B.C.).

Seleucid control (beginning roughly 200) led to the infamous desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 called the abomination of desolation in Daniel 11:31.

This resulted in the Maccabean revolt and a brief period of independence for about 75 years.

Then the beast with large iron teeth trampled the known world entering Jerusalem as the Roman general Pompey in 63 B.C. (Dan. 7:7).

Herod the Great was appointed a ruler over Judea from 37 to 4 B.C. followed by Archelaus, the tetrarch from 4 B.C. to A.D. 6 when the Procurators governed, the fifth Roman Procurator was Pontius Pilatus (26-36 AD).

4B. Daniel in this historical sketch

He was 1) born before the collapse of the Assyrian Empire 2) lived under brief Egyptian domination over the puppet king Jehoiakim in Judah 3) was taken captive to Babylon in 605 when Nebuchadnezzar routed the Egyptians. 4) lived through the Babylonian period witnessing its demise at the time of the handwriting on the wall (Dan. 5), 5) served as a political statesman in the Babylonian province of the Persian Empire, 6) as a prophet Daniel anticipated the fall of Babylon to Persia, and he outlined the rise of Greece, its division into four sections, and he foretold the onslaught of the mighty Roman Empire and the coming of the cut stone made without human hands that crushed the great statue (2:34).

2A. Literary Analysis

1B. Two languages

This is unique in the biblical literature: Hebrew (1:-2:4a and 8:1-12:13) and Aramaic (2:4b-7:28). It has been suggested that the reason for the different languages is found in the direction of the message. The Aramaic section carries a message to the nations in relation to the people of God; it is concerned with the Gentiles and is directed pointedly to them. The Hebrew section interprets the visions of the world kingdoms for the Hebrew people distinctively. Does this hold up? An affirmative answer is argued by the content of each section.

The Gentile section:

- Consider the 2:4-7:28 section where we have:
- Image dream of Nebuchadnezzar (2)
- Nebuchadnezzar and the fiery furnace (3)
- The humbled tree, Nebuchadnezzar (4)
- Writing on the wall (5)
- The lion's den of Darius (6)
- The dream of the four beasts (7)

What distinct message is here for the Gentiles (for all but especially for them, thus spoken in their international language, the *lingua franka*, Aramaic)?

God will smash them (2:44); and smash their idols (3:29); humble their kings (4:30-31; 5:30); judge those who oppose his people (6:24); and hand the kingdoms under the whole heaven over to the saints, the people of the Most High (7:27).

Consider the Israelite section: Regarding God's people, they will be exalted over their enemies tenfold (1:20), Mede-Persia and Greece will be destroyed (8:25), final atonement will be made for your people and city (9:24) through the Son of man (10), in spite of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid oppression (11) for there is hope beyond distress (12:1-3, for those written in the book, there will be resurrection and shining like the brightness of the expanse of heaven).

2B. Outline

Introduction 1:-2:3

The kingdoms of this world will be humbled 2:4-7:28

God's people will be exalted 8-12

3B. Genre

Apocalyptic Prophecy rooted in court narrative (even the visions are dated and thus historically framed).

What distinguishes apocalyptic within the larger class of prophecy? Some key elements are heightened use of imagery bordering on the bizarre (cf. how evil is pictured in grotesque terms with hybrid beasts and mixing of species, IOT 343).

Of course, Daniel's bizarre visions are rooted in the practical wisdom of everyday devotion to God as sovereign king. The narratives and the visions are not antithetic to one another; indeed, they are complimentary.

3A. Message

1) God overrules and will eventually overcome human evil (IOT 348). God gives young men knowledge and understanding (1:17), gives interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar's dreams displaying the future (2:45), quenches the fire, stops the mouths of lions, weighs the conduct of all including kings and numbers our days on earth to the very last day (5:26). The enemies will be destroyed and the saints exalted (7:26-27).

2) Belief in God's sovereignty is what gave Daniel and his friends their strength for living in the face of oppression and even the threat of death (3:17-18; God is able, but sovereignly free, and to that we submit). Belief in sovereignty gave Daniel strength of character for wise leadership (Note Daniel's firm conviction that God will set up his kingdom, 2:44; 2:20-21).

3) A tenfold jubilee of Sabbath redemption is foretold in the 70 weeks prophecy.

Now instead of tenfold judgment (the 70 years of captivity, 2 Chron. 36:21, there will be a tenfold jubilee that will be realized through 70 sevens or 490 years. This takes us from the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the time of Christ with a half-week left floating in prophetic telescoping.

Note how this unfolds in Daniel 9. From v. 24, we know that the seventy sevens take us to the atonement, and the end of OT prophecy (John the last prophet, Matt. 11:13).

God's covenant is confirmed in the middle of the last seven (v. 27) by the death of Christ when the OT sacrificial system is ended.

For these two reasons, the seventy weeks are seen as bringing in the kingdom of Christ, the church. The first half of the seventieth week takes us to the cross and the last half is left without elaboration.

Why is God's covenant in view and not a covenant of the antichrist? It is God's covenant because of the covenant context (9:4, 19).

Why is "confirm" (9:27) a reference to sacrifice? 1) Its usage is "to cause to triumph" (Ps. 12:4). 2) When tied with the notion of "cut off" in 9:26, it is evident that the cutting off of Messiah is how the covenant is confirmed.

Thus we have the three years of Christ causing the covenant to triumph, his death in the midst of the week ending OT sacrifice, followed by the desolation of 70 AD by the Romans (v. 27b).

What happened to the last $\frac{1}{2}$ of the week? It is part of the now and not yet; it refers to future judgment and desolation that issues in the kingdom of God across the globe in a degree not yet seen in history.

Note that the text makes no specific comment regarding the last half of the 70th week; it is left floating in an undefined prophetic perspective (the first half brings in the now of the kingdom, the church; and the second half is associated with the not yet that speaks to coming judgment in 70 A.D. *and* in the eschatological future).

4A. Theme

God will crush all evil world powers and establish His worldwide/global kingdom through the cutting off of the Messiah.

5A. Message for us

1) Jesus will bring in the kingdom of the Ancient of days (Dan. 7:9-10) by being cut off for the sins of his people (Dan. 9:24). Daniel looks to the sacrifice of Christ and beyond to His second coming when He will defeat the powers of evil (executing that which He accomplished on the cross).

It is the ancient of Days in the Book of Revelation (1:7) that will make war on the dragon, beast and false prophet (Rev. 19:11-20:3).

This kingdom that encompasses the whole earth telescopes the present international kingdom with the kingdom of universal scope established by Christ at his second coming.

2) God is at war with evil and without doubt will overcome evil. This message brought comfort to the faithful in Israel in Daniel's day and does so today as well (IOT 351).

It is our comfort to know that even horrifying evil in this fallen world is under God's controlling hand to serve its purpose until the time He has appointed to deliver us, and history itself, from its clutches.