

Introduction to Daniel

Summary

- In the Hebrew Bible, Daniel appears in the collection known as “The Writings” and is indicative of the fact that Daniel differs from other prophetic books.
- The book does not contain the typical prophetic introduction and it is not historical in the same sense as other books; rather, it contains a philosophy of history.

Purpose

- The book of Daniel was written in the context of the fall of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jews to Babylonia. Despite decades of warning by numerous prophets, the people’s flagrant apostasy and immorality finally brought to pass the destruction God had warned them about ever since the time of Moses (Deuteronomy 28:64; 29:28; 2 Chronicles 36:16).
- From a human viewpoint, it now seemed that the religion of the Hebrews had been completely discredited. The Lord appeared inferior to the gods of Assyria and Babylon. How could this situation be remedied?
- It was therefore 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 and the sovereign Lord of history. So by a series of miracles He vindicated His position as the only true God over against His detractors and convinced the supreme rulers of Babylon and Persia that He, the Lord, was the greatest power both on earth and in heaven. Moreover, Daniel’s prayer (9:13-14) gives the proper perspective on the recent course of events.

Authorship And Date

- Many today deny that the prophet Daniel wrote this book, particularly the last six chapters. The most common argument is that the remarkably accurate “predictions” in Daniel were the result of a pious fraud, perpetrated by a zealous Jew of the Maccabean movement, who wished to encourage a spirit of heroism among the Jewish patriots resisting Antiochus IV. Many modern scholars claim that every accurate prediction in Daniel was written after it had already been fulfilled, i.e., in the period of the Maccabean revolt (168–65 B.C.).
- The clear testimony of the book itself, however, is that Daniel was the author (cf. 8:1; 9:2, 20; 10:2). There is no question that Jesus also accepted Daniel as the author of this book (Matthew 24:15). Furthermore,

careful linguistic and historical analysis of the book supports a date much earlier than the second century B.C.

- In the third century A.D., Porphyry wrote a 15-volume work entitled *Against the Christians*. In this work, he concluded that the book of Daniel must be history, not prophecy, since predictive prophecy is impossible. He argued for an anonymous author living in the second century B.C. He claimed that the writer, a pious scribe living in the middle of the persecution, is addressing his contemporaries through the medium of an ancient sage, about whom he recounts stories and to whom he ascribes visions.
- On the other hand, the first chapter refers to Daniel's capture in 605 B.C., and Daniel continued his public service until the first year of Cyrus (1:21), i.e., about 537 B.C. Daniel probably completed his writing about 532 B.C., when he was about ninety years old. The appearance of Persian-derived governmental terms in Daniel strongly indicates that not only did Daniel live under Persian rule, but also that the book was given its final form after Persian had become the official language of the government.
- The text of Daniel is actually in two languages: Hebrew (chs. 1:1-2:3, 8:1-12:13) and Aramaic (chs. 2:4-7:28). The Aramaic chapters pertain to the Babylonian and Persian empires, whereas the other six chapters relate to God's special plans for His people. It has been suggested that this ABA pattern is deliberate. The Aramaic section (B) is addressed to the kings of the earth and therefore written in the international language, the *lingua franca*. The remaining chapters are written in Hebrew because they are addressed to Jews. The six chapters within the Aramaic section are organized chiastically (ABCCBA):
 - A. Nebuchadnezzar's vision of four kingdoms (2).
 - B. God delivers His servants from a fiery furnace (3).
 - C. God's judgment upon the pride of Nebuchadnezzar (4).
 - C. God's judgment upon the pride of Belshazzar (5).
 - B. God delivers His servant from a den of lions (6).
 - A. Daniel's vision of four kingdoms (7).

Canonicity

- Daniel should be regarded as having been inherently canonical from the very time it was first written and as having achieved recognition by God's people as the inspired word of God quite soon after its publication.
- It certainly would have found a ready reception among the exiles who returned to Judea under Zerubbabel because of its encouragement for them to trust in God's continuing providence in their behalf during the discouragements of those early years of rebuilding.

- The discovery of several fragments of a second-century manuscript of Daniel in Qumran Cave 1 indicates that Jewish believers considered the book as inspired and authoritative.
- It is interesting to note that the Septuagint inserted a lengthy apocryphal passage after Daniel 3:23, known as the *Song of the Three Young Men*. The apocryphal *Susanna* appeared in the LXX as a thirteenth chapter and the twin narratives *Bel* and *The Dragon* as a fourteenth chapter.

Scriptural Themes

- The principal scriptural theme in Daniel is the absolute sovereignty of the Lord, the God of Israel. The book consistently emphasizes that the fortunes of kings and the affairs of humans are subject to God's decrees, and that He is able to accomplish His will despite the most determined opposition of the mightiest kings on earth. The miracles recorded in the first six chapters clearly demonstrate God's sovereignty on behalf of those faithful to Him.
- A second scriptural theme is the power of persistent prayer. Daniel and his companions were delivered from dangers and dilemmas by prayer. Especially impressive is Daniel's intense prayer on behalf of his nation for God to restore His people to their land at the end of the seventy years (9:2-19; 10:12-14).
- A third scriptural theme is the long-range purview of God's marvelous plan of the ages. Daniel predicts the year of Christ's appearance and the beginning of His ministry in A.D. 27 (9:25-26).
- Lastly, underlying the entire scenario is the invincible grace of God. Even after the sternest warnings of the prophets had been disregarded, the Lord never abandoned His people to the full consequences of their sin but in lovingkindness subjected them to an ordeal that purged them of idolatry. Then He allowed them to return to their homeland, thus setting the stage for the coming of the Messiah.