

❖INTRODUCTION❖

Importance of the Book of Daniel

Lessons in the stories

The stories in the Book of Daniel offer exotic settings, miraculous escapes from horrible danger, and happy endings. But the book is not just good entertainment. Both in its grand themes and in its finely crafted details, there are valuable spiritual lessons.

Daniel, the central figure, and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego are examples of great godliness and courage. As they did, we too should walk to the precipice of death rather than deny God.

Several stories show God's unfailing care for His people, a care that cannot be thwarted by any foe or circumstance. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were cast into a fiery furnace because they refused to honor the king's gods, the fire could not touch them, or even leave a smell of smoke upon their clothing. When Daniel was cast into a den of lions because he obeyed God rather than the king, the lions could not open their mouths or lift their paws to harm him.

Other stories teach that God will by no means excuse the wicked. Even the proud kings of Babylon could not elude His righteous scrutiny. He made Nebuchadnezzar live like a beast in the field for seven years. And after sending a supernatural hand to place a message of doom on the wall at Belshazzar's feast, He brought down Belshazzar and his strong city in a single night. The certainty of divine judgment is a great comfort to today's believer, assuring him that although he is surrounded by a society in decay, God will not allow the present wickedness to go on much longer. He will soon intervene to set things right.

Scope of the prophecies

The Book of Daniel is divided down the middle into two parts. The first six chapters include all the famous stories. The last six present Daniel's prophetic visions. Many Christians avoid the second part because they think it too difficult. But this commentary will not skimp on its treatment of either the stories or the prophecies.

These prophecies are the most specific and comprehensive to be found anywhere in the Bible outside the Book of Revelation.

1. They tell exactly what will happen to the Jewish nation for the next 370 years after Daniel's time—in other words, from about 535 B.C. to 165 B.C.
2. They tell exactly when the Messiah will come.
3. They give God's program for the rise and fall of nations from Daniel's time until the end of the age in which we live.
4. They give an overview of the key events during the Tribulation, the period at the end of the present age.

Rise and fall of interest in prophecy

Over 150 years ago, as a result of a general feeling among believers that the coming of Christ was drawing near, a new interest in the prophetic Scriptures arose first among the Plymouth Brethren and then spread rapidly to other groups. The new interest did not soon fade, but increasingly preoccupied the body of Christ. In the early part of the twentieth century, the imminence of the final hour seemed confirmed by the great wars and catastrophes then engulfing the world. After the state of Israel was founded in 1948, the interest in prophecy rose to such a pitch of enthusiasm that believers began to talk constantly about Christ's return. Seldom did a month go by at a Bible-believing church without at least one sermon dealing with prophecy. Future events were often discussed on Christian radio programs, in Christian magazines, and at summer Bible conferences.

In the last few years, however, the interest in prophecy has sharply declined. Many pastors have filed away their sermons on this subject, leaving a vacuum of good teaching that is being filled by quirky and unreliable teaching. In the Christian media, prophecy has become the province of televangelists who use sensational claims to reach the viewer's pocketbook. One book recently on the shelves of many respectable Christian bookstores denies that the Bible teaches the bodily return of Christ.

When true doctrine has few spokesmen and error has many, the man in the pew becomes very confused, and he is now very confused about prophecy. Ask him the difference between a premillennialist and a pretribulationist, and he will struggle to find the right answer. Ask him to state his own position and defend it from the Scriptures, and he will be speechless. He may not firmly grasp any prophetic idea except that Christ is coming again.

Yet his belief in the Second Coming is not tied to any strong conviction that Christ will return soon. The sentiment he has often heard from pulpits and lecterns is that we cannot know whether Christ will come tomorrow or a thousand years from tomorrow. It is true, of course, that no one should try to predict the date of Christ's return. Yet, as this commentary will show, there are many signs that His return is drawing near, very near. Anyone who ignores these signs places himself in

dubious company—among the Pharisees and Sadducees whom Jesus rebuked when He said,

2 . . . When it is evening, ye say, *It will be fair weather: for the sky is red.*

3 And in the morning, *It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*

Matthew 16:2-3

The teaching that Christ may defer His coming until a time far in the future is doing grave harm to the church. It is undermining and destroying the hope that Christ will return in our lifetimes, and without that hope, the believer has little reason to watch and wait. He turns away from prophetic studies and becomes preoccupied with life as usual. Expectancy fades into apathy. As a result, he may no longer be prepared to meet Christ when He comes.

Value in prophetic studies

The Bible contains prophecies of three kinds: those already fulfilled, those being fulfilled now, and those to be fulfilled in the future. Each kind has its own particular value.

1. Fulfilled prophecies show us that the Bible is true. Why is witnessing so hard today, especially when directed at people with some higher education? Because of unbelief in the Bible. Educated people have been brainwashed to think that anyone who accepts the Bible as literally true is an ignoramus. Why is there so much half-hearted Christianity? And why are so many people in supposedly good churches becoming more liberal in their doctrine and more worldly in their behavior? Again, because of unbelief in the Bible. Many who profess commitment to Christ have written escape clauses into their Christianity. They say to themselves: "If the Bible asks me to do anything that seems unreasonable or fanatical, or that seems like an infringement on my rights, I'm not going to do it. Or if this book teaches anything about history or science that seems foolish in the light of my modern education, I'm not going to believe it."

But God has armed His people with an answer. They can say: "If you doubt that the Bible is true, consider its prophecies. Look at how many have already been fulfilled." Indeed, though we search all of human literature, we find no other book of prophecy that can be compared to the Bible. No other has made specific predictions about events hundreds and thousands of years in the future. And no other has, in each of its predictions already tested by history, proved to be impeccably accurate. The prophecies of a soothsayer like Nostradamus are generally vague or trivial or wrong.

2. Prophecies now being fulfilled show us our place in history. The New Testament teaches that we are living in the Last Days. The Book of Daniel concurs, identifying the present hour of history as the time of the end. Yet few Christians today are aware of their place in history. The church has forgotten the many voices that God raised to warn our fathers and grandfathers that the time of the end had arrived. William L. Pettingill, a leading Bible teacher in the period between the two World Wars, affirmed,

The Book of Daniel . . . is no longer sealed, for The Time of the End is here and the words of our Lord Jesus come to us with great force: "Let him that readeth understand." (Matt. 24:15) He was speaking here of the prophecy of Daniel; and this is the only Book which our Lord has specifically commanded His disciples to understand. May He help us to obey His Word! Let us bring to the study of this Book willing minds and surrendered hearts, eager to know the truth and determined to obey it, in order that by means of our knowledge and obedience the name of our blessed Lord may be exalted.¹

If history has already passed into the time of the end, the final consummation cannot be far distant.

From the beginning of the Church Age until recently, the Lord left His people in the dark as to the time and season of His return (Acts 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:1), but He wants believers of the present generation to know that He is coming soon. Why must we know this? So that we will be alert to the special dangers besetting us.

1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

2 Timothy 3:1-5

If we recognize our place in history, we will be wary, vigilant, slow to mold ourselves after the example of others, quick to turn away from counterfeit godliness, and eager to heed those Scriptural admonitions written especially for our benefit, such as the following:

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Hebrews 10:25

3. Prophecies yet to be fulfilled warn us of a coming judgment. Yet to be fulfilled is the prophecy of Christ's return. Paul tells the impact that this prophecy should have on our lives.

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live
soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;
13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great
God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:11–13

For the believer, the glorious appearing of Christ is a blessed hope, because when He comes to set up His kingdom, He will summarily put an end to the vile wickedness of the present age.

Yet some years earlier He will come to this world not as a glorious conqueror, but as a thief who approaches secretly and strikes without warning (1 Thessalonians 5:2). The prize He will come to steal away is the church. He will instantly catch up living saints to His presence in the sky, and from there He will transport them to a heavenly refuge. When speaking of this approaching event, Christians call it the Rapture, a word with the basic meaning, “a lifting up and carrying away.” All others alive on the earth when the church is removed will see nothing of the thief’s work. They will know only that the saints have suddenly disappeared.

Soon after they go to heaven, the raptured saints will be judged.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.

11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

2 Corinthians 5:10–11

Since the prospect put terror in Paul’s heart, we may assume that whereas the good things will bring reward, the bad things will earn at least the Lord’s frowning disapproval and perhaps even His hand of punishment (Luke 12:42–48). It is therefore obvious what lesson we should draw from the clear teaching of Scripture that Christ is coming soon. Our rapidly approaching trial before the Judgment Seat of Christ should motivate us to live, as Paul says in Titus, soberly and righteously.

After Christ comes for His church, the next event for the ungodly will also be judgment. The rapture of saints will usher in the period of world history known as the Tribulation. God will bring upon this world a rain of calamity unprecedented in the entire experience of mankind since the Flood. His purpose will be to try the hearts of men by giving them a clear choice between the rule of God and the rule of Satan. The calamity drowning the world will warn them that the certain consequence of preferring Satan will be their eternal destruction. The clear teaching of Scripture that Christ is coming soon therefore has a lesson for unbelievers as well as believers. The lesson is, if they wish to escape the Tribulation, they had better repent now, before it is too late.

We will have little further occasion in this commentary to speak of the Rapture, because no hint of it appears anywhere in the prophecies of Daniel. Their subject is not the future experience of the church, but of the Jewish nation.

Setting

History of Israel

To uncover the setting of the Book of Daniel, we must go back thousands of years to the very beginnings of the human race. The first man and woman were Adam and his wife, Eve. Although God created them perfect and blameless, Satan, the fallen angel, soon lured them into sin, which in consequence became their natural tendency as well as the tendency of all their descendants. To fulfill justice, God confronted the guilty pair and pronounced judgment upon them. Yet, out of mercy and love for the creatures that He had made in His own image, He also announced that a man would someday be born who would vanquish sin and Satan. This prophecy is known as the *protevangelium*.

And I will put enmity between thee [Satan] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it [literally, "he"] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Genesis 3:15

Much later prophecies refer to the promised conqueror as the Messiah, which means "Anointed One."

As history unfolded, God progressively revealed the Messiah's line of descent. The first ancestor He named was Abraham. Then from Abraham's children He singled out Isaac, and from Isaac's children He chose Jacob. At the proper time He brought the descendants of Jacob, who were called the Israelites, into a special covenant relationship with Himself. Their obligation was to forsake all other gods and to walk according to the laws and ordinances that He prescribed. The obligation that He unconditionally took upon Himself was to make the Israelites into a great nation and to raise the Messiah from their posterity.

The nation of Israel was first constituted in about 1500 B.C. as a loose aggregate of tribes under the leadership of Moses. After entering the land of Canaan (that is, Palestine), the tribes took control of the barren hill country, but failed to oust the Canaanites from the fertile valleys. Thus, lacking productive agriculture or profitable trade, the people of Israel were at first very poor and primitive in their manner of life. Moreover, they had no king or standing army.

Yet from this unpromising beginning developed a great nation. By 1000 B.C., during the reigns of David and Solomon, the king of Israel

was the most powerful man in the Middle East, with a sphere of influence extending all the way from Egypt to Babylon. It seemed that God's plan was going well. Surely, the Messiah would now emerge from the line of David and usher in a kingdom of everlasting righteousness. Though Satan had by innumerable vicious plots sought to destroy the people designated as the Messiah's ancestors, he appeared to be losing and on the verge of defeat.

But history took a surprising turn. The Messiah did not come. The nation of Israel forgot God and lapsed into idolatry. Tribal jealousies divided the nation into two weak kingdoms, which quickly lost much of the wealth and influence acquired by earlier kings. Religious and political decay gradually consumed the northern kingdom until in 721 B.C., as a result of being conquered by Assyria, the kingdom disappeared forever. Most of its people were taken captive to other nations, where, after the passage of generations, few descendants of the captives retained their identity as Israelites. Satan must have felt that he had succeeded in cutting off and eliminating half of God's people.

The southern kingdom, Judah, managed through God's help to resist Assyria and to exist for another century. But then a new conquering horde, from Babylon on the Euphrates, appeared on the horizon. In 605 B.C., at the great battle of Carchemish, the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians, the only power remaining to contest Babylonian dominance in the region. The Babylonian general was Nebuchadnezzar, son of the reigning king of Babylon. After his victory at Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar moved quickly to gain control of all Syria and Palestine. During the summer of 605, he came to Jerusalem. There, Jehoiakim the king of Judah submitted to the aggressor and met his demand for both treasure and hostages. The hostages included Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael.

Though her choice young men were taken into captivity and her most sacred objects plundered, Israel had not yet seen an end of misfortune. A few years later, prompted by the scheming of Egypt, Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who was now ruler of the Babylonian Empire. So, in 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar marched back into Judah and, after capturing Jerusalem, weakened the rebellious nation by deporting a large number of its leading citizens and skilled craftsmen to Babylon. He then put Zedekiah on the throne. But it was not long before Zedekiah also rebelled, provoking Nebuchadnezzar to decide that Judah did not deserve his mercy. He invaded Judah again, held Jerusalem under a long siege, and finally overcame the determined resistance. Enraged against Zedekiah, he made him watch the slaughter of his sons before putting out his eyes. He punished the nation by leveling Jerusalem to the ground. Zedekiah and most of the other survivors of the conflict were then carried off to captivity in Babylon. This great catastrophe occurred in 586 B.C.

Purpose of the Book of Daniel

Now that Satan had cut off the remaining half of Israel, how could Israel produce the Messiah promised by God? Those few Israelites who still believed in God must have wondered whether God's plans had been derailed and His enemies had gained the upper hand. They must have been sorely tempted to doubt that God's promises would ever be fulfilled. But now, at this moment in history, God speaks. He does not remain silent. He speaks to prevent His people from becoming wholly disheartened.

In the Book of Daniel, He reminds the Jews that the tragedy befalling their nation is simply His judgment upon their sin. Yet He does not leave them without hope. The same book looks into the future and lays out a detailed program for Israel's history. It surveys the coming moments of great national crisis and specifies the succession of empires that Israel would serve. Godly readers of the book must have found special comfort in its often reiterated promise that at the end of Israel's long ordeal, God would bring the nation into an everlasting kingdom under the direct rule of God, where peace and righteousness would prevail.

The Book of Daniel is basically a message of reassurance. By charting the future which God has ordained, it reassures the people of God that He is in control, that nothing can happen apart from His sovereign direction or permission.

Other contemporary prophets

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were contemporaries of Daniel. The former wrote the Book of Jeremiah and the Lamentations of Jeremiah. The latter wrote the Book of Ezekiel.

The eldest of these prophets, Jeremiah, came from a priestly family. His prophetic career spanned a long period, from about 627 (during the reign of good King Josiah) to sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586. He was one of the few survivors of the destruction who was spared from captivity and left behind in the desolated land of Judah. The remnant banded together under Gedaliah, the governor appointed by the Babylonians, but after much strife and bloodshed, leadership passed to Johanan, captain of the residual Judean forces. When Johanan and the other leaders of the people resolved to flee to Egypt, Jeremiah opposed them, sternly warning them not to forsake their homeland. But they ignored his advice and took him against his will to Egypt, where he died.

Ezekiel, also from a priestly family, was in the group of captives taken to Babylon in 597 and resettled along the "river of Chebar" (Ezekiel 1:1). Modern archaeology has found evidence of a Jewish presence in the city of Nippur, about 60 miles southeast of Babylon.² It is likely that this is where Ezekiel lived. Within their settlements, the Jewish captives were

allowed considerable self-government under their elders. Ezekiel's prophetic activity lasted from about 592 to 573.

At a time of great national calamity for the nation of Israel, the three prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were all used by God to deliver the same message. God is in control. He has not been defeated. His purposes will stand and be accomplished.

Authorship

Traditional view

The title of the book reflects the traditional belief of Jews and Christians that the book was written by Daniel himself. The Jews of antiquity never doubted that the author was Daniel. Josephus, the great Jewish writer and historian who lived in the latter part of the first century A.D., said after reviewing many prophecies in the book,

All these things, as God revealed them to him, he [Daniel] left behind in his writings, so that those who read them and observe how they have come to pass must wonder at Daniel's having been so honoured by God, and learn from these facts how mistaken are the Epicureans, who exclude Providence from human life and refuse to believe that God governs its affairs.³

For all Christians, the highest authority is Christ, and Christ declared that the Book of Daniel contains the words of Daniel the prophet (Matthew 24:15).

Not everyone agrees with Christ, however. All scholars who approach the Bible from a starting assumption that it is merely a human product stoutly deny that the book was written by its central character. These scholars are generally known as the critics.

View of the critics

The critics believe that the Book of Daniel is a piece of propaganda written in about 165 B.C. to encourage the Jews in their struggle against the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus belonged to the Seleucid dynasty of kings, a dynasty founded almost 150 years earlier by one of the generals of Alexander the Great. From their capital city, Antioch in Syria, the Seleucids ruled a wide region of Mesopotamia. Among Syrian domains in Antiochus's day was the land of Palestine. The chief goal in his policy toward the Jews was to assimilate them into the prevailing Greek culture of the empire, but many Jews stubbornly clung to old ways. Therefore, beginning in 169, Antiochus sought to curtail the practice of Jewish religion. He desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem and rededicated it to Zeus. He put many Jews to death for such offenses as

circumcising a baby and observing the Sabbath. Yet all these measures failed. His cruel persecution of the faithful provoked a bloody revolt, which, under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, finally succeeded in liberating the Jews from Syrian control.

The critics allege that while the revolt was still raging, a Jewish patriot conceived and produced the Book of Daniel to provide his countrymen with inspiring examples of successful opposition to the unlawful demands of a heathen king. Neither the stories nor the characters in the book have any basis in history, say the critics. They maintain that the book is at best a work of fiction, at worst a deliberate forgery.

But the critics refuse the Book of Daniel an early date for one reason only: they do not believe in prophecy. Given that the book predicts numerous events between 535 and 165 B.C., they must say that the book was written after rather than before the events it describes. Yet this commentary will present abundant evidence that Daniel was a real person and that the book bearing his name was written not in the second century B.C., but in the sixth century B.C.

Manuscript evidence

Among the Dead Sea scrolls found in the 1940s and 50s were eight fragmentary manuscripts of Daniel.⁴ On the basis of paleography (the study of handwriting), most scholars believe that the two oldest come from the late second or early first century B.C.⁵ Their age does not overturn the theory that the book was written in about 165 B.C., but surely weakens it, because copies of a nonauthentic writing of Daniel would likely have proliferated only after readers were willing to accept it as authentic. Yet it is doubtful that such a book could have gained immediate acceptance. The passage of many years would have been necessary to obscure its true origins.

Antiquity of Daniel's Aramaic

Portions of Daniel are written in Hebrew and portions in Aramaic, a Semitic language closely allied to both Hebrew and Babylonian. Recent studies make it hard to maintain that Daniel's Aramaic comes from the mid second century B.C. Robert I. Vasholz showed that it is distinctly older than the Aramaic in the *Targum to Job*, a writing from the last half of the second century B.C. or possibly earlier.⁶ Also, Zdravko Stefanovic found strong affinities between the Aramaic in Daniel and Old Aramaic, characteristic of writings from 900 to 700 B.C.⁷ He endorsed K. Koch's verdict

that the radical criticism, which holds to a late date for the book of Daniel on the linguistic ground of the chapters in Aramaic, has "lost the game" in the last 150 years.⁸

Testimony of Ezekiel

The man Daniel is expressly mentioned three times in the Book of Ezekiel. The first two texts warn that Jerusalem will not be spared.

14 Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it [Jerusalem], they should deliver *but* their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD.

...

20 Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, *were* in it, *as* I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall *but* deliver their own souls by their righteousness.

Ezekiel 14:14, 20

The last text offers the prophet's sarcastic praise of the prince of Tyre.

Behold, thou *art* wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee.

Ezekiel 28:3

Notice the laudable traits that Ezekiel ascribes to Daniel. In chapter 14, he holds up Daniel as a man of outstanding righteousness, which enabled him to intercede successfully for the lives of others. In chapter 28, Ezekiel points to Daniel as a man of great wisdom.

The references in the Book of Ezekiel to a certain Daniel cause a serious problem for the critics, because, for reasons that cannot be discussed here, many of them regard the Book of Ezekiel as authentic, and the rest acknowledge that these references must somewhat antedate 165.⁹ It seems that the evidence in Ezekiel would force the critics to admit that Daniel is a historical figure. But they do not, instead offering three excuses for dismissing this evidence.

1. Those critics who regard the Book of Ezekiel as authentic argue that at the time Ezekiel was writing, Daniel would have been too young to have attained the status of a great national hero. But the context of Ezekiel's earliest reference to Daniel shows that it dates from about 591, when Daniel was already twenty-five to thirty years old.¹⁰ By then the king had found him to be the wisest man in the kingdom and had raised him to a position of high authority. He was chief of the wise men, governor of the whole province of Babylon (an office he immediately relinquished to others), and personal counselor to the king. Thus, it is not surprising that the youthful Daniel was a hero to other Jewish exiles, including Ezekiel, and that Ezekiel regarded him as worthy to be classed with Job and Noah.

2. The critics argue that since the name Ezekiel uses is not Daniel but Dan'el, the reference must be to someone other than the Biblical Daniel. But the difference in spelling is insignificant. The difference merely proves that Ezekiel had never seen Daniel's Hebrew name in writing. After all, the Book of Daniel was written many years later, at the end of Daniel's life. Moreover, Daniel's official Babylonian name was

Belteshazzar. It is likely that his Hebrew name was known to the exiles only by word of mouth, perhaps from Babylonian sources.

The eminent archaeologist William F. Albright noted that Daniel (or some variant) was a common name in several Semitic languages besides Hebrew, and that in Babylonian, the name was pronounced “Danil.”¹¹ The virtual equivalence of “Danil” and “Dan’el” indicates that Ezekiel gives the name as he heard it in spoken usage.

3. Many critics dogmatically identify Ezekiel’s Daniel with the Daniel mentioned in tablets from the Phoenician city of Ugarit. In one of the myths retold in these tablets, a certain Daniel appears who is a devoted worshiper of Baal.¹² The critics say that Ezekiel somehow knew of this Daniel and revered him to the extent of grouping him with Job and Noah. But this is foolishness, for three reasons.

a) It is extremely improbable that Ezekiel was familiar with a myth current many centuries before his time and indigenous to a place well north of Judah, his homeland.

b) Ezekiel would never have treated a mythological character as the equal of the Biblical heroes Job and Noah. That would be rather like a preacher today urging his congregation to follow the examples of Peter, Paul, and Robin Hood. A devout Jew had such a horror of idolatry that he would never speak of, much less exalt, a figure of pagan religion.

Just before God stated that a righteous intercessor could not turn aside His intention to punish Israel (Ezekiel 14:14, 20), He instructed Ezekiel,

6 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn *yourselves* from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.

7 For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, . . . :

8 . . . I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.

Ezekiel 14:6–8

The great sin of Israel that even a Noah, Daniel, or Job could not persuade God to overlook was idolatry. The man God chose to warn the nation against this sin was Ezekiel. As Harold H. P. Dressler observed,

Is it conceivable that the same prophet would choose a Phoenician-Canaanite devotee of Baal as his outstanding example of righteousness?¹³

c) In his first mention of Daniel, Ezekiel implies that he has saved the lives of others. The surviving stories of the Phoenician Daniel mention no exploit of this kind,¹⁴ but Ezekiel’s tribute fits the Biblical Daniel perfectly. When Daniel correctly interpreted the great image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he saved not only his own life and the lives of

his three friends, but also the lives of all the other wise men in Babylon (Daniel 2).

Ezekiel's other reference to Daniel spotlights him as a man of great wisdom. Again, this tribute does not match anything recorded about the Phoenician Daniel,¹⁵ but the wisdom of the Biblical Daniel was one of his notable virtues. When he and his friends completed their apprenticeship as government officials, the king himself examined them and found them to be exceptionally wise. Subsequently, probably within a short time, they became known as the wisest men in the kingdom (Daniel 1:18–20).

Outline

Division into equal halves

Many students of the Book of Daniel prefer to divide it into two equal sections: six chapters that are mainly history and six chapters that are mainly prophecy. Altogether there are twelve chapters in the book.

Poetic structure

The outline in Daniel's own mind was probably this:

- I. Daniel's personal background (chapter 1)
- II. God's sovereignty over gentile nations (chapters 2–7)
 - A. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great image (chapter 2)
 - B. Three Hebrews in the fiery furnace (chapter 3)
 - C. Nebuchadnezzar's madness (chapter 4)
 - C'. Belshazzar's feast (chapter 5)
 - B'. Daniel in the lions' den (chapter 6)
 - A'. Daniel's vision of the four beasts (chapter 7)
- II'. God's loving purpose for Israel (chapters 8–12)
 - A. Daniel's vision of the ram and the goat (chapter 8)
 - B. The prophecy of the seventy weeks (chapter 9)
 - A'. The prophecy of the two kings (10:1–12:12)
- I'. Daniel's personal future (12:13)

The passages falling in parallel branches of the outline have similar content and convey the same message. Within section II, for example, the passages labeled A and A' both describe a succession of four empires, and both teach that the empires of this world will be superseded by the Kingdom of God.¹⁶ B and B' agree in showing how God delivered Hebrew captives from great peril, the lesson being that God preserves His own people.¹⁷ By recounting God's judgment on a wicked ruler, C and C' both illustrate the message that God will humble the proud rulers of this world.¹⁸ Within section II', A and A' mainly concern the future world

ruler known as the Antichrist, who will be the very embodiment of evil, whereas B mainly concerns Christ. The larger divisions of the book also exhibit parallelism. Sections I and I' deal with the life of an individual, Daniel. Sections II and II' deal with the history of nations.

In sections I, I', and II' of the book, Daniel uses Hebrew, his native language. These sections deal primarily with his own life and the future of his own people. But in section II, except for a few transitional verses at the beginning, he uses Aramaic. In Daniel's day, Aramaic was a lingua franca throughout much of the Middle East.¹⁹ It was therefore an appropriate choice for the section of his book that sets forth the future history of the gentile nations.

Structures such as I-II-II'-I', ABCC'B'A', and ABA' illustrate inversion, or chiasmus. Inversion is common throughout the Bible in both poetry and prose, especially in the Psalms, Isaiah, and the writings of Luke.²⁰

Some critics have argued that the Book of Daniel consists of fragments composed by different hands. The obvious design of the book establishes, however, that it is not a pastiche, but the work of a single author.²¹

Notes

Introduction

¹William L. Pettingill, *Simple Studies in Daniel*, 6th ed. (Findlay, Ohio: Fundamental Truth Publishers, [5th ed., ca. 1933]), 8.

²J. A. Thompson, *The Bible and Archaeology*, 3d ed., revised (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 188–189; G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, a vol. of *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, [1936]), 4–5.

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¹⁴*Ibid.*, 155.

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