

DANIEL

Introduction

Author. Daniel, whose name means "God is my Judge," was a young prince in Judah. He was therefore carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar in the first stage of the deportation of Judah in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's intentions were to use promising young men as hostages to discourage Jehoiakim from rebellion, and train them to make a contribution to the Babylonian court. Among other of the divine purposes for Daniel, He seems to have been used to smooth the way for the arrival of the multitudes of captives brought from Judah in the ensuing years. He survived the Babylonian kingdom and served in the Persian empire. His entire career was lived out in Babylon. He functioned primarily as a statesman in the foreign court, but was used by God as a prophet throughout his career.

Date. Daniel was carried captive to Babylon in 605 B. C. along with other young members of the royal household. He was there when Nebuchadnezzar ascended the throne and was there when the kingdom fell to the Medes and the Persians. The writing of the book must have occurred after 535 B. C.

Structure. The book of Daniel contains the most extensive section of Aramaic in the Old Testament (2:4b--7:28). This duality of language not only suggests two distinct audiences in Daniel's mind, but also serves to divide the book into three sections: a personal section concerning Daniel, (chapter 1); a section dealing with God's sovereignty over the nations, (2-7); and God's future plans for His nation, Israel, (8-12).

Occasion. Given the theological climate of the times, the reputation of YHWH was in serious danger of being discredited by pagan nations. Ascribing to the theology that only an ineffective god could allow his people to be defeated, the surrounding nations would consider Israel's god to be weak in his own strength and, at best, unfaithful to his people. The solution to this situation was the message of the book of Daniel.

Message Statement. The book of Daniel provides a powerful apologetic against the feeling that YHWH was impotent in the face of foreign gods and that he had forsaken his people. The message may be expressed: *God is sovereign over all nations along with their gods and will defeat them, and He still has a future for the nation of Israel.*

Argument

- 1A THE PREPARATION OF THE PROPHET 1:1-21
The first major section of the book delineates the circumstances of Daniel's rise to prominence in Babylon. It provides a cameo of the whole book as God works providentially on behalf of his people who trust Him to give them success over other nations. In a microcosm, Daniel's story is the story of the remnant of Israel, exiled, but not forgotten in the plan of God. Thus this section sets the scene for all that is to come after it, and provides a necessary and effective introduction to the book as a whole.
- 1B The Deportation and Selection of Daniel 1:1-7
The book begins apologetically, with the disclaimer that the LORD, rather than a Babylonian god, was responsible for the exile "And the LORD delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, . . ." (1:2). Daniel was taught the language of the Babylonians with the result that he could later write this book in the *lingua franca* of the day. Daniel and his friends were given pagan names, showing their foreign domination.
- 2B The Decision of Daniel 1:8-16
In spite of his foreign domination, Daniel's decision was to remain true to the laws of Israel. God's sovereign hand was at work in the heart of the royal official to allow Daniel this prerogative.
- 3B The Success of Daniel 1:17-21
The text clearly states that these young men were specially and directly blessed with knowledge given by God. They thus were elevated to positions of prominence. Daniel particularly received the covenantal blessing of long life (1:21).
- 2A YHWH'S SUPERIORITY OVER THE NATIONS 2:1-7:28
This section essentially comprises the Aramaic portion of the book. The reason for the use of the Aramaic language most likely implies that the message recorded in this portion of the book is particularly necessary for those people able to understand the language. Since Aramaic was the trade language of the day, the writer evidently intended that surrounding pagan nations, and the Babylonian nation specifically, should understand the message of this section. In a series of five historical vignettes and one prophetic utterance, Daniel establishes the pivotal principle: although it seems that the God of Israel has been bested in battle by the god of Babylon, in fact there is but one God, whose name is YHWH, who even in the defeat of His people, is accomplishing His purposes and showing himself to be superior to all others.
- 1B Demonstrated in the Dream of Nebuchadnezzar 2:1-49
YHWH's superiority over the nations is first demonstrated in the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. As Daniel recounts the story he spares little of the dramatic intrigue of the situation. The peril of the Babylonian wise men and their families serves to highlight the ability of YHWH to save. Their response to Nebuchadnezzar's request "No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men" (2:11) is a typically dramatic effect

included by Daniel.

The interpretation of the dream clearly shows that although a series of secular world powers will come, the ultimate kingdom will be established by God Himself. At the end of this section Daniel records the "moral" of the story in the words of a pagan participant, rendering the message that much more effective, "The king said to Daniel, 'Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery' (2:47).

2B Demonstrated in the Golden Image Erected by Nebuchadnezzar 3:1-30

While the first section (1B above) involved the king and his wise men, this section involves the rest of the administrative officials from the government, who serve as the foil for the faith of the three Hebrew men. Daniel records that "satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials [had] come to the dedication of the image he [Nebuchadnezzar] had set up" (3:2). Thus, God is showing Himself to be more powerful than every sector of power in Babylon. Again, Daniel shows a flare for the dramatic as he includes the leading question of the king, "But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. *Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?*" (3:15). As with the other episodes, this one ends with praise to the God of Heaven from the lips of a Babylonian (Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! . . . for no other God can save in this way" (3:28, 29).

3B Demonstrated in the Pride and Punishment of Nebuchadnezzar 4:1-37

This vignette may be the most explicit in its message. At the outset Nebuchadnezzar speaks to "the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in the world:" (4:1). Thus, this message is directed to all men who would doubt the sufficiency of Israel's God. His theme is simply the omnipotence of God. He may summarize it best in 4:35 "All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'"

The content of the story involves God's elevation and then humbling of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar's dream pictured the king as a great tree which provided protection and nourishment for the whole world. The tree however was subsequently cut down, symbolizing the king's period of humiliation and insanity. When his senses returned he quickly acknowledged that whatever happened, YHWH was in control. The point of this message with reference to the exile would be quickly understood by all.

4B Demonstrated in the Feast of Belshazzar and the Fall of Babylon 5:1-31

Once again, with dramatic effect, Daniel narrates a story which demonstrates YHWH's superiority over the gods of Babylon. As Belshazzar is toasting the gods of gold and silver with golden goblets from the Jerusalem temple, he sees the handwriting on the wall. As he sees, his knees "knock together" (5:6) and his legs "gave way." Just as surely as God's hand wrote the message of judgment on Belshazzar and his kingdom, the prophecy was fulfilled that very night.

5B Demonstrated in Daniel's Victory Over the Satraps 6:1-28

Once under Persian rule Daniel was made to administrate over much of the government of Babylon. Certain wicked subordinates chafed under the, no doubt righteous, rule of Daniel and conspired to discredit and destroy him. Through the providence of God Daniel is spared with the result that once again he gains superiority over his enemies and God is praised from the mouth of a pagan king, namely, Darius, "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he

endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end" (6:26).

6B Demonstrated in Daniel's Vision of Future World History 7:1-28

In a prophetic vision which answers the first dream of Nebuchadnezzar in its sweeping portrayal of future world history, the eventual and eternal triumph of God's kingdom is powerfully depicted. The animals in the dream symbolize the rule of the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The emphasis of the interpretation, however, rests upon the fourth kingdom and the end time manifestation of the little horn. Although many kingdoms were to arise, one thing was certain, the last would belong to YHWH.

3A YHWH'S PLANS FOR THE NATION 8:1-12:13

In Daniel 8:1, the writer turns again to the Hebrew language, demonstrating that at this point he addresses the Hebrew nation. In a series of prophetic experiences Daniel is the vehicle by which God outlines the history of the Jewish people from his day until the advent of the Messianic kingdom. The message is much more than simply an outline of the future but also of God's continued care for Israel and his faithfulness to the patriarchal promises. Far from abandoning his people to Babylon, YHWH had definite and specific plans for his people in the future.

1B The Vision of the Second and Third Kingdoms 8:1-27

This section deals with the kingdoms of Persia and Greece. After Alexander conquered the Persians his kingdom was soon divided into four others. Out of these four kings one more prominent arose, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Toward the end of his reign he made a determined effort to destroy the Jewish faith. He thus served as a type of the even more ruthless beast of the last days, who is also referred to in 7:8 as a "little" horn. The events prophesied here involve the destruction of Israel by Antiochus and his opposition from the Hasmoneans (approximately 168-164 B. C.). The specificity of this section has caused many detractors to assume a late date of writing, but the aspect of prediction is no problem for those with a high view of scripture.

2B The Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks 9:1-27

As Daniel understood from the scriptures what the length of the exile would be he began to pray and ask God to restore His people. The answer which came through a heavenly messenger was that the renewal of the people would only be accomplished after a series of seventy "sevens" or weeks of years. The time frame is clearly broken into sixty-nine weeks and a seventieth week. The Messiah will be "cut off" after the sixty-ninth week and the seventieth week will be one of war and desolations until God finally vanquishes his enemies.

3B The Final Vision of End-time Warfare 10:1-12:13

The last three chapters of the book comprise one vision, but that vision has two prophetic foci. First, the focus is upon the horrors to be suffered by the Jews at the hands of a wicked king of the third Gentile empire, that is, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Seleucid ruler from the Greek period. The second focus is more distant in time period and points to the horrors to be endured under the end-time ruler, the little horn of Daniel 7. This incarnation of evil is known as the Man of Sin or the Antichrist. The greatest difficulty in this vision is determining the point at which the transition from the (now) historical figure (Antiochus) to the future figure (Antichrist) is made. The suggestion here for that transition is 11:36.

1C The preparation of the prophet 10:1-11:1

Daniel is prepared to receive the vision by a heavenly messenger. It is clear from the weakness of Daniel and the delay of the angel that the resources of men and of angels are insufficient to wage the battles of the world. Only in dependence upon God's power can the plans discussed in this vision come to fruition.

- 2C The revelation to the prophet 11:2-12:3
The content of the revelation to Daniel involves a prediction of events spanning from his present time to the dawn of the millennial age. The jump from the fulfilled to the unfulfilled seems to occur at 11:36.
- 1D The sixty-nine weeks: Darius to the end time 11:2-35
In a marvelously detailed description of political history, this section traces the history of basically the Grecian empire from the rise of Alexander to his fall, the division of his kingdom and up to the terrorizing reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Due to the specific fulfillment of this chapter in particular, many with a low view of scripture have doubted its authenticity.
1G The seventieth week 11:36--12:3
At this point the reference to the willful king seems to involve the end-time manifestation of evil, the Antichrist. His person is first described and then his wars. Finally, the welfare of the nation of Israel is discussed and the prophecy is made that at the end of the seventieth week they will be delivered.
- 2D The conclusion to Daniel's prophecy 12:4-13
In this final section of the last vision Daniel receives instruction and asks two important questions. The first question involves how long the terrible tribulation will endure. The answer given from heaven is three and one half years, evidently referring to the second half of the seventieth week. Perhaps a more pressing question is next, "What will the outcome be?" The answer once again involves the purification of the righteous, the destruction of the wicked and blessing for those who survive the judgments of the tribulation period. Finally, Daniel is comforted with the fact that at the dawn of the millennial age he too will be resurrected to a life of reward. Thus, the last words of the book involve God's promises to yet bless his faithful. Even in light of the exile, God will be faithful to his people.

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