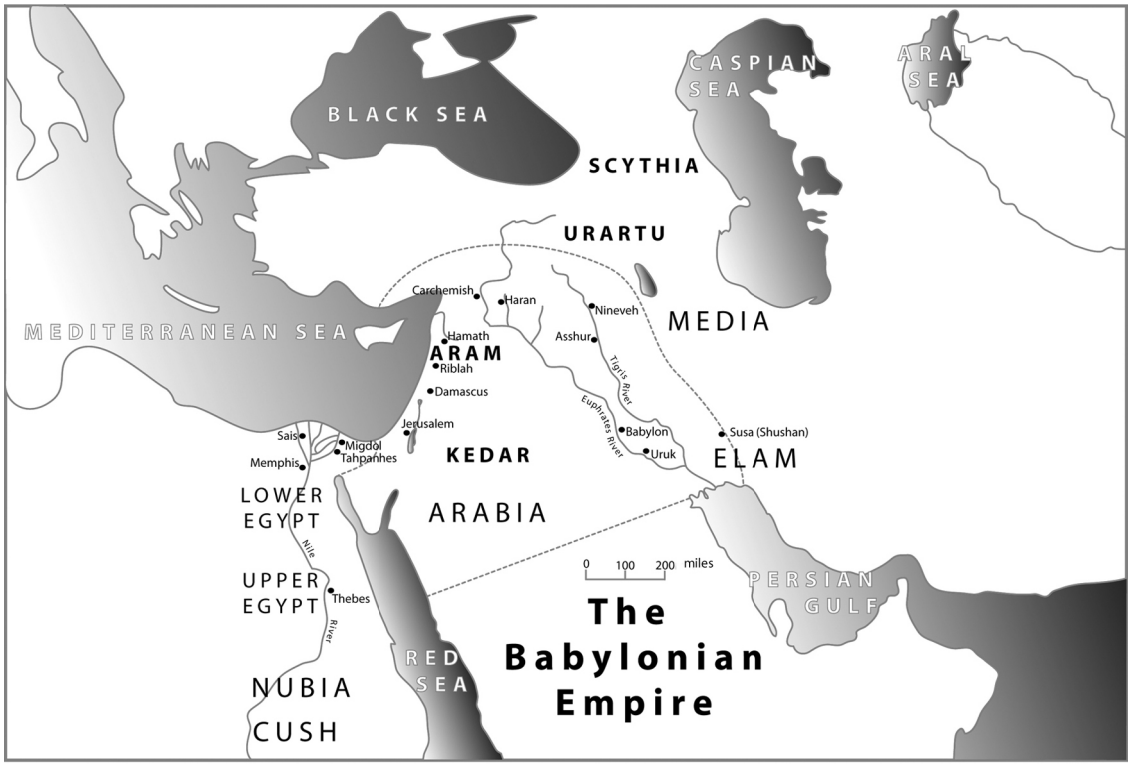
Study Commentary on Daniel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A Study Commentary
on

Daniel

Allan M. Harman

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List of abbreviations

AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
AV	*Authorized (King James) Version*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BDB	Brown, Driver and Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 reprint).
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CHAL	*A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).
DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew,* ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–).
EQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
ESV	*English Standard Version*
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, 2nd ed.,* Gesenius, Kautsch, Cowley, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).
GTJ	*Grace Theological Journal*
IBD	*The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980).
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax,* Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990).
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962).
ISBE	*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia,* 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979)
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
NASB	*New American Standard Bible*
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis,* ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).
NIV	*New International Version*
NKJV	*New King James Version*
NLT	*New Living Translation*
NRSV	*New Revised Standard Version*
Rev. Exp.	*Review and Expositor*
RSV	*Revised Standard Version*
TB	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament,* 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980)
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZPEB	*Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia,* 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975)

Preface

The publication of this book marks the completion of the fourth commentary on major Old Testament books that I have been privileged to write — Psalms, Deuteronomy, Isaiah and Daniel. My method has been to approach the text of Daniel in the original languages (Hebrew, 1:1 – 2:4; 8:1 – 12:13; Aramaic, 2:4 – 7:28) and attempt to understand it before writing. After having the commentary in draft form, I then consulted previous commentaries and specialist contributions in dictionaries and journals, some of which are referred to in the endnotes. The essential task I undertook was to set out my understanding of Daniel rather than entering into discussion with numerous others who have written on it.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to many who have contributed to the interpretation of Daniel. Under the late Professor E. J. Young of Westminster Theological Seminary, himself a notable commentator on Daniel, I first studied the Aramaic sections, though I never had the opportunity to work through the whole book under his guidance. I also did some postgraduate study under Professor N. W. Porteous of the University of Edinburgh, who too wrote on Daniel, but from a very different theological standpoint to that of Professor Young. Again, I never took any courses on Daniel with him, but I have interacted with his written work, though I remain unconvinced by it. Reading what is written from an alternative perspective to

one's own helps to sharpen thought and can often be a stimulus.

My thanks go to Evangelical Press for the privilege of writing for the EP Study Commentary Series, and particularly to my friend and editor of the series, Dr John Currid of Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, for his encouragement. Bernard Secombe and Marvin Hagans have read the manuscript and made valuable comments on it. As always, my wife Mairi has been of the utmost support and assistance. Together we have worked through Daniel in our evening devotions, and the completion of this commentary within a reasonable period of time owes much to her.

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May 2007

Introductory matters

There are several major problems in relation to the book of Daniel that need comment before the detailed exegesis is considered. Other important issues have been taken up at the appropriate places in the text. The book itself makes no mention of its author (though Daniel is said to have written various sections of the second part of it) and no date of composition is recorded. While many regard the book of Daniel as a late composition (second century BC), the evidence does not preclude a sixth-century BC date, as the text would imply (see later discussion on the linguistic and other evidence). Its genre as an apocalyptic book also sets it off from much of the Old Testament, although strong similarities exist to parts of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah in particular. The nature of apocalyptic is discussed later (see pages 155-8).

The place and significance of Daniel in the Old Testament

Half of the book of Daniel is narrative, as is about 40% of the rest of the Old Testament. This is not surprising, as the biblical faith is a historical faith and hence narrative accounts on which belief is predicated could be expected to loom large. The confessions made by believers in the Old Testament period include recitals of past redemptive history (cf. Deut. 26:5-10), while the New Testament also contains communal acknowledgement of the great redemptive facts (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

Clearly the choice made by the writers of the historical books of both testaments is in itself an interpretative act, though rarely is any moral judgement passed on the recorded events. It remains for the reader to assess each story by looking for clues in the plot, and especially in the final speeches within each narrative section. The narratives place redemptive history within the sphere of ordinary human life, and within time as we know it.

Narratives are clearly intended, in the first place, to be a blessing to readers or hearers of the Bible. They enable us to visualize events, and think in concrete terms, rather than being faced with abstract propositions. The appeal to the mind in this way is important, and we should utilize these accounts to the full. The narratives are an integral part of the history of the people of God and hence part of *our* history. They belong to the things that have been

written 'for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope' (Rom. 15:4). The things that occurred showed God's hand at work, and we can take encouragement that he still acts towards his children as he did in Old Testament times.

Secondly, Old Testament narratives are not accounts that need allegorical interpretation, nor do they require us to hunt for hidden meanings. The intent behind them is to set out the way in which God's purposes were brought to fulfilment. In many cases individual narratives are incomplete in themselves, 'and even when we *are* told what He did, we are not always told *how* or *why* He did it'.[1] They teach *implicitly*, not *explicitly*. The reader is left to come to a judgement regarding the point of the story.

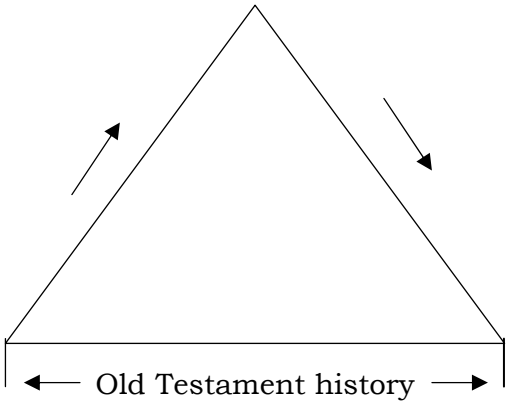
Thirdly, an individual segment of narrative cannot be isolated from its context, for often the point being made is part of a wider context. Interpretation must take place of *units* of text, rather than small isolated portions. An atomistic approach inevitably leads to strained exegesis and often to wild interpretation.

Fourthly, the flow of biblical history in its various stages has to be appreciated. The history of the Old Testament is dominated by the threefold promise made to Abraham — family, land and blessing. The high point occurred in the period of the empire under David and Solomon. The large family existed, the land promised on oath was now occupied and Israel was seen as the place of blessing — see, for example, Solomon's prayer for the foreigners at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:41-43), the coming of the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13) and the statement concerning 'all the earth' coming to learn from Solomon (1 Kings 10:21-25). However, from the death of Solomon onwards it is downhill as far as the earthly kingdom is concerned. As part of God's plan (1 Kings 11:29-39), the kingdom is divided, with the breach

also manifesting a high decree of human sinfulness. Prophetic eschatology takes over as the dominant theme. Whereas the earlier prophets were concerned with the call to repentance, the later prophets turned their attention more to the hope for the future. As Geerhardus Vos put it, 'In the second period [from the eighth century BC onwards] although the call to repentance never ceases, yet it acquires a more or less perfunctory tone. The prophet now knows that, not repair, but regeneration of the present lies in the womb of the future.'[2]

The empire under David and Solomon
and the division of the kingdom

The peak in Old Testament history
Family/land/blessing all partially fulfilled



This basic understanding of Old Testament history needs to be borne in mind when we approach the book of Daniel and seek to understand it. As Graeme Goldsworthy has pointed out, 'Most misuses of the narrative text occur because this point is not appreciated.'[3]

In relation to one of the promises to Abraham (that of the land), another factor has to be considered. Even before Israel occupied Canaan, the warning was given that disregard to covenant obligations would lead to the application of covenant curses. Moses told the people explicitly that exile was in store for disobedient Israel (Lev. 26:27-35; Deut. 28:64-68). When the northern kingdom went into exile, the writer of the biblical history makes it plain that expulsion from Palestine was part of God's judgement (2 Kings 17:7-23). Likewise, the fall of Judah to the Babylonians and the handing over of the people to the invading army is attributed to God's direct actions (2 Chr. 36:15-21). Jeremiah, at the time of the exile, pictured other people coming to devastated Jerusalem and asking the question: 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this great city?' The answer would be: 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and worshipped and served other gods' (Jer. 22:8,9, NIV).

Where, then, does the book of Daniel fit into this biblical scheme? Daniel and his companions were part of the first deportation to Babylon in 605 BC. They are depicted as young Jewish men living far from their own homes and land, and yet conscious of their continuing commitment to the God of Israel. They worship him, and clearly an understanding of the covenant relationship lies at the heart of their religious understanding. Covenant themes pervade Daniel's prayer (9:4-19) and he still worships at the time of the evening sacrifice (9:21). Behind lie failures, while in the present loyalty and trust in the God of Israel are exhibited. Ahead loom days of difficulty and persecution, but this is tempered by the knowledge that God is sovereign and he will ensure the outworking of his purposes till the very end.

Old Testament redemptive revelation is progressive, prospective and preparatory. It is progressive in that God gave his disclosures to man over a long period of time, and the book of Daniel forms part of that progressive disclosure. It is prospective in that each stage of Old Testament revelation contains indications that God is going to disclose more of his purposes and display his saving power to an even greater extent. It is preparatory in that it looks forward and finds its completion in the New Testament. Jesus' own ministry points us in this direction, for he taught that his coming marked a fulfilment (Mark 1:15), and that his disciples needed to search the Old Testament Scriptures, which were witnesses of him (John 5:39). Biblical theology has to focus on the coming of Christ, but to do so it must not neglect salvation history and so make a leap from an Old Testament passage directly to the modern hearer.

The theology of the book of Daniel

No need exists for an extensive discussion of the theology of Daniel here, as various excellent modern studies of it are in print,[4] and the preceding discussion has already pointed towards the way in which we should approach the theological significance of the book of Daniel. However, some comment on covenant and kingdom may help to crystallize the theological emphases of the book.

Clearly 'kingdom' is a major issue in Daniel. The destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of its people brought the Jews into close contact with a powerful kingdom that stretched from the Mediterranean to Iran, and north from the Persian Gulf to central Anatolia. The Babylonian empire was at its peak, and clearly captured wealth enabled its massive building programme to take place. Daniel and his friends, of course, had an insider's view of the empire because of their administrative roles. The Jewish exiles were also faced with all the cultic activities relating to the worship of Marduk and his son Nabu, which were an outward demonstration of great pomp and wealth.

Over against the might of Babylon and the seeming superiority of her gods, two questions faced the exiled Jews: 'Is Israel's God *truly* God (as compared with the Babylonian ones)?', and 'Will God forgive the sin of his people and resume fellowship with them?' The first question is answered in Daniel by his recounting the might of Israel's God as he exercises his sovereignty over all human kingdoms. Contemporary

kingdoms like Babylonia, future kingdoms like that of Greece, or even the kingdom of the Antichrist, will all fall before the might of the great God whose kingdom 'shall never be destroyed' and which 'shall break in pieces and consume all these [other] kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever' (2:44). Human kingdoms will rise and fall and, despite seeming setbacks from time to time, God's kingdom will prevail and he will be acknowledged as the sovereign Ruler over all. The 'kingdom theology' of the book of Daniel is an answer to the exiles' concern over the uniqueness of Israel's God.

The book of Daniel also answers the second question. Not only is the theme of 'kingdom' present, but also that of 'covenant'. 'Kingdom' is the wider of the two concepts, 'covenant' the narrower. 'Covenant' is present implicitly in the narrative sections of the book, with the emphasis on the distinctiveness of Daniel and his companions in their exilic setting. However, in chapters 9 and 11 the covenant theme appears explicitly. Daniel is able to pray, making confession on behalf of the covenant people, and significantly he uses plural forms throughout ('we', 'us', 'our'). He identifies with the covenant people who are in exile because of the application of God's righteous judgement upon them (see especially 9:11, with its reference back to the covenant curses in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28). Daniel, in addition to knowing about the seventy years' exile from Jeremiah's prophecy (9:2), must also have known about the promises of restoration in passages such as Jeremiah 23:1-8; 30:1-24; 31:1-40. Exile did not break the bond between God and Israel, and through Jeremiah God promised to restore the people he calls 'my flock' to Palestine (Jer. 23:3). Assurance of the continuing covenantal relationship undergirds Daniel's prayer in chapter 9. He prays to the 'great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant and mercy with those who

love him, and with those who keep his commandments' (9:4), and the basis of his petitions is the greatness of God's mercy (9:18). Chapter 11 also shows the presence of a covenant people in the period of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (see 11:28,30,32). Just as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all confirmed the continuity of the covenant relationship, so Daniel affirms it as well. The exile did not mark a permanent separation between God and Israel, but a temporary estrangement (cf. Isa. 54:4-8).

The great evangelical Lutheran scholar of the nineteenth century, E. W. Hengstenberg, summed up the theological perspective of Daniel in these words: 'The prophecies of Daniel must likewise be regarded as a sign of the continued election of Israel. Their great significance already appears, from the fact that New Testament prophecy, from the prophetic revelations of the Lord to the Apocalypse, attaches so much importance to them. Their fundamental idea is the final victory of the kingdom of God, predicted with absolute confidence. Kingdoms fall, and new kingdoms rise up in their place; the people of God have much to suffer; but let them take comfort, for their God will overcome the world, and on the ruins of the kingdoms of the world the eternal kingdom shall finally be established. By these prophecies, the people of God were set as it were on a high mountain, from which they could see the confusion on the plains far below their feet.'[5]

The date of the book of Daniel

Two major considerations have dominated discussion regarding the date of the book of Daniel. The first of these is a linguistic argument. The classic statement favouring a late date (the second century BC) is that by S. R. Driver: 'The verdict of the language of Daniel is thus clear. The *Persian* words presuppose a period after the Persian empire had been well established: the Greek words *demand*, the Hebrew *supports*, and the Aramaic *permits*, a date *after the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great* (BC 332).'[6]

This verdict cannot be sustained in reference to any of the four languages — Persian, Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic. Much new linguistic evidence has emerged since the end of the nineteenth century, and the arguments and counter-arguments of scholars such as Robert Dick Wilson and H. H. Rowley are now dated.[7] More recent study has shown that a sixth-century BC date for the book of Daniel is not excluded from consideration on linguistic grounds.

Most of the Persian words come from the political sphere and include words relating to written communication. Cultural terms relate mainly to dress. Significantly, 'The Persian words in Daniel are specifically Old Persian words.'[8] Because of the paucity of texts, comparison between the Persian words in Daniel and those in other early Aramaic texts cannot yield definitive evidence to enable the Aramaic of Daniel to be dated with precision. It could come from any period between the sixth and second centuries BC.[9]

When S. R. Driver, at the end of the nineteenth century, made his comment on the linguistic situation in Daniel, it was assumed that the Greek words in Aramaic had to be dated later than the conquests of Alexander the Great. Now, however, much more evidence is available to show that Greek influence came very much earlier, a fact that J. A. Montgomery acknowledged in his commentary published as long ago as 1927: 'The rebuttal of this evidence for a low date lies in the stressing of the potentialities of [Greek] influence in the Orient from the 6th [century] and on.'[10] Much more evidence is now available to show that Greek influence in the Middle East was widespread, stemming from contacts prior even to 1000 BC.[11] This leads to the conclusion that 'The presence of Greek words in an Old Testament book is not a proof of Hellenistic date, in view of the abundant opportunities for contacts between the Aegean and the Near East before Alexander.'[12] The few Greek words that appear are all musical terms that may well have been in currency in several languages.

The Hebrew of Daniel resembles that of Old Testament books such as Ezekiel, Haggai, Ezra and Chronicles, though it has a greater affinity to these than to the later Qumran scrolls. J. E. Goldingay has referred to the language of chapter 8 as being 'poor Hebrew' and suggests that 'the syntactical differences may point to a different author from chap. 7'.[13] Regarding Daniel 8; 9:1-3; 9:20-27 and chapters 10 – 12, he notes that these passages are 'characterized by jerkiness, Aramaisms, and complex resumptive sentences'.[14] It has to be admitted that the Hebrew of Daniel does show changes from earlier Old Testament books, especially in the areas of vocabulary and syntax. While S. R. Driver listed some twenty-five expressions that never occur, or only do so extremely rarely, in earlier Hebrew,[15] W. J. Martin has commented on the vocabulary in this way: 'There is no

intrinsic probability that any of the terms listed could not have been used much earlier. In fact, one must proceed with the utmost caution in making pronouncements on the extent of a given vocabulary… There is nothing about the Hebrew of Daniel that could be considered extraordinary for a bilingual or, perhaps, in this case, a trilingual speaker of the language in the sixth century BC.'[16] The occurrence and repetition of Hebrew terms is closely related to the subject matter, and in chapters 10 – 12 words related to royal authority and power, kings and their empires, military matters and family alliances predominate.[17]

Another aspect regarding assessment of the Hebrew of Daniel relates to the comparison between it and the language of the Qumran documents. These documents from the second century BC contain Hebrew that differs markedly in vocabulary and syntax from that of Daniel. After studying the differences Gleason Archer came to the conclusion that '… it seems abundantly clear that a second-century date for the Hebrew chapters of Daniel is no longer tenable on linguistic grounds. In view of the markedly later development exhibited by these second-century documents in the areas of syntax, word order, morphology, vocabulary, spelling, and word-usage, there is absolutely no possibility of regarding Daniel as contemporary.'[18]

A similar finding was reached by Robert Vasholz, who examined two Aramaic documents from Qumran (*11QtgJob* and *1QapGen*). His conclusion was that *1QapGen* comes from about the first-century BC, while *11QtgJob* was still earlier. If, as he argues, Biblical Aramaic is older than *11QtgJob*, then the evidence points to a pre-second-century date for the Aramaic parts of Daniel.[19]

The second major reason why many scholars place Daniel in the second century BC relates to the content of the prophecies, especially those in chapter 11.

The claim is made that this chapter concerns the period 168–164 BC. Thus, E. W. Heaton wrote that the author was 'a pious Jew living in the middle of the persecution', but 'addressing his contemporaries through the medium of an ancient sage, about whom he recounts stories and to whom he ascribes visions'.[20] This claim involves acceptance of the view that pseudonymous writing was an intrinsic component of the apocalyptic movement and that the descriptions in chapter 11 were actually written after the events took place. There are various difficulties inherent in this view. It is based on the premise that prophetic foretelling cannot explain the accuracy of the description of future events, even though elsewhere the Old Testament has prophecies that contain detailed information (cf. 1 Kings 13:2; Isa. 44:28). If Daniel 11 is a *vaticinium ex eventu* (a prophecy after the event), it is surprising that it does not contain even greater detail than it does. Objections to Daniel's being the author of the predictions contained in the book are, in essence, based on the presupposition of the impossibility of predictive prophecy.

Another way in which this question can be tackled is to look at the acceptance of the book of Daniel. The Qumran community had at least eight manuscripts of parts of Daniel, covering every chapter except the last (ch. 12). It is hard to see, on a Maccabean view of its authorship, how such intense use could have been made of Daniel if the book only came from the second century BC. By 100 BC Daniel clearly held canonical status at Qumran, and this date makes it most probable that Daniel must have been composed earlier than around 150 BC.

Gerhard Hasel has expressed this conclusion in this manner: 'While we do not know exactly how long it took for books to become canonical, it may be surmised that insofar as Daniel was reckoned to

belong to the canonical books, it had a longer existence than a mere five decades, as the Maccabean dating hypothesis suggests. Both the canonical status and the fact that Daniel was considered as a "prophet" speak for the antiquity of the book of Daniel. An existence of a mere five decades between the production of a biblical book in its final form and canonization does not seem reasonable.'[21]

Like many biblical books, Daniel contains no indication of who put the book together in its final form, nor of the precise date of its appearance. It may well be that Daniel himself brought together the whole work, though the use of the third person in the first six chapters has suggested to many that another inspired writer integrated those chapters with the first-person narrative in chapters 7 – 12. No precise date can be given for the composition, but it must be later than the third year of Cyrus the Persian (see 10:1) which puts it after 539 BC. Neither the contents nor linguistic considerations preclude a sixth-century BC date of composition.

The structure of the book

The question of the structure of Daniel has to be tackled on two levels, linguistic and literary. First of all, on the linguistic level, we have in our hands a biblical book that uses two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic. The book commences in Hebrew, and then in 2:4 the words appear: 'Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king Aramaic.' Rather than taking the last word to mean 'in Aramaic' (as in the NKJV) it is better to assume that this is a transition marker, noting that Aramaic is now the language used right through to the end of chapter 7.

The only other places in the Old Testament where Aramaic is used are Ezra 4:8 – 6:18; 7:12-26 (documents relating to the rebuilding of the temple) and Genesis 31:47 (two words translating a place name into Aramaic). Various explanations have been given as to the use of Aramaic in Daniel, and quite a few of these are linked to views concerning the origin of the material.[22] Certainly Aramaic fits in with the general period covered by the book of Daniel, as it is a Semitic language used from the ninth century BC onwards. It is used in epigraphs on the bricks utilized in the building of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, and later became the official medium of communication in the polyglot Persian empire.

With present knowledge no definitive answer can be given concerning the use of Aramaic in Daniel. It commences in 2:4, but reversion is made to Hebrew at the start of chapter 8 without any marker or explanation. Moreover, its use also overlaps the

literary structure, for while up to the end of chapter 6 we are dealing with historical narratives, chapter 7 commences a new section, containing visions and interpretations, that runs through to the end of the book in chapter 12.[23]

From a literary point of view, we as readers have to ask the same questions of Daniel that must be asked of any ancient writing. First, we have to ask the meaning of the text, and secondly, we have to ask why the writer wrote as he/she did. To answer the second question may require examination not only of internal matters, but also of external matters that relate to the readership to whom the writing is addressed. In the case of Daniel, no direct clues are given as to the way in which the various parts of the book are connected to one another (as opposed, for example, to the way in which the book of Genesis is structured around the recurring phrase 'these are the generations of…').

A certain parallelism operates in chapters 2 – 7, and any linking together of these chapters does place in the one group those sections of the book written in Aramaic. However, it is possible to recognize this and yet to suggest that the main break in the book comes following chapter 6. Clearly chapter 7 is pivotal, not only as the climax to chapters 1 – 6, but also as the key to the eschatological visions of chapters 7 – 12.[24] Even though chapter 7 is in Aramaic (and therefore has a linguistic affinity with chapters 2:4 – 6:28), yet the distinction between the narratives of life in the Babylonian court in chapters 1 – 6 (the so-called 'court tales') and the visions of chapters 7 – 12 seems to demand that the reader understand the basic bifocal structure of the book. In Part 1 Daniel and his companions operate as loyal Jews in the court of a foreign king, and the power of their God is demonstrated in the events that are related. In Part 2, although the introduction in 7:1-2 is in the third

person, what follows consists of first-person accounts of dreams and visions that Daniel had. There is a link between chapter 7 and the previous chapters in that both record court scenes, but whereas in the earlier chapters the sovereigns are earthly rulers, in Daniel 7:9-10,13-14,26-27 the Sovereign is divine. While chapter 7 forms a bridge between the two sections of the book, it seems best to accept that there are two main sections, chapters 1 – 6 and 7 – 12. Others have argued strongly for the division coming at the end of chapter 7,[25] or for a more elaborate parallelism between chapters 1 – 5 and 6 – 12,[26] but on balance the arguments in their favour do not seem as cogent.

Daniel and the New Testament

New Testament teaching, both that of Jesus himself and that of the apostolic writers, is built upon Old Testament passages, or, to put it another way, Old Testament passages form the 'building blocks' of New Testament doctrinal teaching. Jesus' pattern of exposition of the Old Testament (Luke 24:44) was followed by his disciples in their preaching and writing, as the Holy Spirit brought to their remembrance all that Jesus had taught (John 14:26).

Because of its instruction concerning future events, it is not surprising that Daniel features prominently in New Testament eschatology. The topic of the kingdom of heaven becomes significant in Jesus' teaching (Matt. 5:3,19; 13:1-58; cf. Dan. 2:44), and he takes up the theme of 'the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet' (Matt. 24:15; cf. Dan. 9:27; 12:11). While Paul knew that the saints will judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2; cf. Dan. 7:18,22,27), he was also well aware that prior to the second advent of Jesus 'the man of sin' will be revealed, 'the son of perdition' (2 Thess. 2:3; cf. Dan. 7:25).

It should come as no surprise that the book of Daniel is drawn on to such a large extent in the book of Revelation.[27] Both are apocalyptic writings and they share the same view of the end times. The main difference between them is that John develops more fully the themes of Daniel. Descriptions of the risen, glorified and triumphant Jesus, such as in Revelation 1:12-16, reflect the language of Daniel 7:9-14.

Revelation 12:1-11 presents a picture of war even in heaven itself (cf. Dan. 12:1-4), while the description of the final resurrection and the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 20 – 22) is foreshadowed in Daniel's passage concerning the resurrection of the dead (Dan. 12:9-13).

Expectant waiting for the end is encouraged in both Daniel and Revelation (Dan. 12:13; Rev. 22:1-7). Human history will run its course, with believers being called upon to pass through many trials as they wait for the final revelation of God's glory and kingdom (Acts 14:22). Both books assert that the end is certain. Believers long to hear the voice of angels saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever' (Rev. 11:15).

Part I:
Daniel's ministry in Babylon (1:1 – 6:28)

1. The setting in Babylon

(Daniel 1:1-21)

Setting the scene (Daniel 1:1-7)

Historical introduction (1:1-2)

The book of Daniel does not contain the normal opening of prophetical books. The fifteen books in the section of the Jewish canon known as 'the Latter Prophets' (Isaiah – Malachi) all commence with some identification of their authorship. However, Daniel does not begin in that way. For this reason, and also because Daniel did not hold a prophetic office, Jewish scholars placed the book of Daniel among 'the Writings', the third section of the Jewish canon, which included other books such as Psalms, Proverbs, Job and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

1:1. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

The book opens with mention of two kings, one Judean and the other Babylonian.

There are two passages in the historical books that record details concerning Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34 –

24:7; 2 Chr. 36:4-8), both of which mention Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Jerusalem. Though Jehoiakim was Josiah's son, he acted in an ungodly manner, as many of his predecessors had done (2 Kings 23:37). Jeremiah 36:20-26 recounts how Jehoiakim burned Jeremiah's scroll, on which he had written the Lord's words against Israel and Judah. At first Jehoiakim became a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar for three years before he rebelled against him, with disastrous consequences. Jeremiah 22:18-23 records a prophecy against Jehoiakim, depicting his ignominious death and burial. The same judgement is pronounced against him (Jer. 36:30) as was pronounced against Jehoiachin (Jer. 22:30).

Nebuchadnezzar succeeded to the Babylonian throne on the death of his father, Nabopolassar, in 605 BC, and his long reign concluded in 562 BC. The spelling of **'Nebuchadnezzar'** in the Hebrew Bible varies. It occurs with an 'r' (Nebuchadrezzar) in Jeremiah 21:2,7; 32:1; 35:11; 39:11; Ezekiel 26:7; 29:18; 30:10. The spelling here with an 'n' may be an Aramaic form of the name (cf. the Greek form, Nabochodonsor). It means 'O Nabu, protect my progeny.'[1]

On the face of it, the date given here — **'in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah'** — stands in opposition to the statements in Jeremiah 25:1 and 46:2 that the first year of Nebuchadnezzar was the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim. Various proposals have been made to solve the inconsistency, including textual emendation and the suggestion that in this verse the verb **'came'** (Heb. *bâ'*) means only 'set out', not necessarily that Nebuchadnezzar and his forces arrived at Jerusalem in that year. The best solution is to accept that both Daniel and Jeremiah were employing the accession-year dating system, even though Daniel was using the Babylonian (*Tishri*/October) system and Jeremiah the Judean (*Nisan*/April) calendar. If this is correct, then the

invasion of Judah will be dated at around May/June 605 BC, immediately following the Battle of Carchemish. At that battle the Babylonians summarily defeated the Egyptians.[2]

A second difficulty is that the Babylonian Chronicle does not record any attack on Jerusalem before 597 BC. However, there is a reference in it to the fact that 'Nebuchadnezzar conquered the whole area of Hatti.' That may well include Judah, as 'Hatti' normally meant 'Syria and Palestine'.

The Hebrew text simply says that Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon **'came to Jerusalem**[3] **and besieged it'**. There is no express mention of a successful siege, but the note in the next verse that various items were taken from the temple implies it. Nebuchadnezzar was not king until the death of his father, Nabopolassar, but this proleptic usage is quite common both in the Bible and outside (cf. Matt. 1:6, which says that 'David the king' was born to Jesse).

1:2. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

Jehoiakim's defeat at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar was not simply because of military superiority. Just as God's hand was seen in the earlier deportation from the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC (see 2 Kings 17:18-20), so was Jehoiakim's capture a case of divine intervention. The divine name is given as **'Lord'** (*'âdônay*, not *yhwh*). Isaiah had told Hezekiah that some of his descendants would be taken away and become eunuchs in Babylon (2 Kings 20:18), and now that has been fulfilled. The record in 2 Kings 24:1 says that Jehoiakim became Nebuchadnezzar's 'vassal', or servant, while 2 Chronicles 36:6 adds the detail that Jehoiakim was bound with fetters.

In God's plan the temple also fell to the Babylonians, and some of the temple vessels were taken.[4] Many in Jerusalem had thought that the Lord's temple would stand inviolate in the face of any attack (Jer. 7:4), but both king and temple were delivered to the Babylonians. The Hebrew text does not make it clear whether *both* Jehoiakim *and* some of the vessels were taken to Babylon, or only the vessels. The Masoretic Text[5] simply says that **'they'** were taken, which could include Jehoiakim along with the vessels. Their destination was **'the treasure house of his god'**. The Hebrew expression can also be translated as 'the house of his *gods*', as it is only when this word (*'elôhîm*) is used of Israel's God that the singular is definitely implied. Nebuchadnezzar was a polytheist, and hence could easily have placed the Jewish temple vessels in more than one sanctuary. The interconnection between a king and the sanctuary of his god(s) was very important in the ancient Near East. **'Shinar'** was the place in the east to which men had migrated long before (Gen. 11:2), and presumably it signifies Mesopotamia. The origin of the word is debated, but the Septuagint[6] translated it as 'Babylonia', and this is, on the basis of present knowledge, probably a reasonable interpretation.

The transition from Judah to Babylonia must have been traumatic. While the Jews esteemed Jerusalem and the temple, Babylon was far bigger and had grandiose buildings, as archaeology has demonstrated. While there has not as yet been full investigation of the site, it appears that doubly-thick walls, broad enough to allow chariots to drive along them and about seventeen miles in length (twenty-seven kilometres), surrounded the city. Various mounds have been excavated, and it is known that there were numerous temples within the old city.

The Jewish captives (1:3-7)

1:3. Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles…

The king directed Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelite youths to serve in the royal palace. No mention is made anywhere in the biblical text of those taken into exile in 605 BC, other than the fact that here we are confronted with an undesignated number of youths from Judah living in Babylon. No satisfactory derivation of the personal name **'Ashpenaz'** has been proposed. The request is made for noble youths, and specifically those from the royal family. The word for **'nobles'** is borrowed from Persian, and it only occurs here and in Esther 1:3 and 6:9.[7] Josephus says that Daniel was 'from the family of Zedekiah' (*ek tou Zedekiou genou*), but this may just be an assumption from this verse on the basis of Isaiah's prophecy in 2 Kings 20:17-18 and Isaiah 39:8.

1:4 … young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

The selection criteria are specified. They are called **'young men'** (*yᵉlâdîm*), a term that can designate a wide age range, though here the youths were probably between fifteen and twenty years old. They had to have a suitable physical appearance and to be without any defect (*mᵉ'um*), a term used to define one of the required qualifications for Israelite priests before they were allowed to perform their work (Lev. 21:17-23) and one of the conditions which applied to

the sacrificial animal (Lev. 22:18-25). Moreover, they had to have the appropriate mental capacity to be trained for service, for the ultimate aim was that they should perform duties in the king's palace. Physical appearance and intellectual aptitude were absolutely necessary. Ashpenaz was to teach them **'the language and literature of the Chaldeans'**. The name given for the Babylonians is *kas^{e}dîm*. This name (always in the plural) is given to the inhabitants of the Babylonian kingdom founded by Nabopolassar. They were Semitic-speaking people who infiltrated into Babylonia from 'the sea lands' (the Persian Gulf). In chapters 2-5 the name also designates the Babylonian priests or astrologers (see the comments on 2:2).

1:5. And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.

The king assigned them a daily portion of food for a three-year period, which seems to have been the Persian custom. Plato says that the education of chosen youths under royal teachers began in the fourteenth year,[8] and Xenophon says that they were capable in their seventeenth year of entering the king's service.[9] The expression for the daily portion (*d^{e}var-yôm-b^{e}yômô* — literally, 'the matter of the day in its day') is unusual, but it also occurs in 2 Kings 25:30 and Jeremiah 52:34. The provision for them is called *'patbag'*, the first of several Old Persian words used in this book.[10] In the biblical text the Jewish Masoretes artificially divided this word into *pat-bag*, since *'pat'* in Hebrew means 'a morsel'.[11] The end in view is that they might enter the king's service (literally, 'stand before the king').

1:6. Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

It is specified that some of the youths were **'from ... the sons of Judah'**, whereas in verse 3 the expression 'from the sons of Israel' has occurred. The names of the four are listed, and the meaning of them is:

Daniel	God is [my] Judge
Hananiah	Yah shows grace
Mishael	Who is what God is?
Azariah	Yah helps

1:7. To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

New names were assigned by Ashpenaz, just as the kings Eliakim and Mattaniah were given new names (by Necho and Nabopolassar respectively) when they became vassals (2 Kings 23:34; 24:17). These new names and their meanings were:[12]

Daniel	=	Belteshazzar	=	'Belet,[13] protect the king', probably from the Babylonian *bêlet sar-usur*
Hananiah	=	Shadrach	=	'I am very fearful [of God]'
Mishael	=	Meshach	=	'I am of little account'
Azariah	=	Abed-Nego	=	'slave of Nego, or Nebo' (the shining one)

Daniel's original name still persisted, however, for in 5:12 he is clearly still known by it when the queen suggests calling for 'Daniel'.

Application

The opening verses of the book give us a perspective on Old Testament history. We are not merely reading a journal depicting various events involving nations in the Near East. Rather; we are presented with an account from the viewpoint of God's covenant with his people Israel. The attack on Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar was not only an exhibition of Babylonian power (1:1), but it was also occasioned by God: 'The Lord gave Jehoiakim … into his hand' (1:2). This is covenant history, showing how God fulfilled the curse pronounced long before of exile for a disobedient people (Lev. 26:27-45; Deut. 28:38-68). What follows in the book of Daniel teaches what the prophetical books so often asserted, that God is in control of human affairs, and he will work out his covenant and kingdom purposes. The believer's song can indeed be:

> Rejoice, the Lord is King!
> Your Lord and King adore:
> Mortals give thanks and sing,
> And triumph evermore.
> Lift up your heart, lift up your voice:
> Rejoice! Again I say: Rejoice!
>
> (Charles Wesley, 1707-1788)

Daniel and his friends tested (Daniel 1:8-16)

1:8-9. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into the favour and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.

'Daniel purposed in his heart' (literally, 'set on his heart') that he did not want to partake of the daily food supply being provided by the king, neither did he want to drink the wine. In order to avoid participation in this part of the training programme, he went and sought out the chief official, for he did not want to **'defile himself'**. No further explanation is given of the way in which Daniel and his companions would have been defiled had they accepted this royal provision. Their decision does not seem to have been based on the fact that the food was contrary to Mosaic dietary laws, for certainly wine was permitted. Most probably the food was offered up in sacrifice to an idol, and hence the refusal was based on religious grounds. The acceptance of the food and drink may also have been seen as a sign of subjection to the Babylonian king. God's control of the whole situation was apparent, as Daniel was looked on favourably by the chief official. The Masoretic Text says that God gave Daniel 'steadfast love and mercies' (*l^{e}chesed ûl^{e}rach^{a}mîm*) before his superior, a regular expression

to convey the idea of giving a person acceptance and favour in the eyes of someone else.

1:10. And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, 'I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king.'

The official is naturally alarmed at Daniel's request, for he stands in awe of his master. He knows that he could easily lose his head if the projected trial fails.[14] His fear is that in rejecting the king's provision of food and drink, Daniel and his friends will look in very poor condition compared with the other youths.

1:11-13. So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 'Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.'

Daniel perseveres with his request and asks the officer delegated to look after them to make available the food they had asked for. The Hebrew word for **'the steward'** (*meltsar*) only occurs here and in verse 16. In place of the rich food, they wanted only **'vegetables'** and **'water'** for ten days. What Daniel proposes is that a test be conducted, so that rather than an outright refusal a means of arriving at a decision is put in place. The word for **'vegetables'** (*zêroʿîm*) occurs only here in the Old Testament, but it is clearly cognate to the word for 'seed' (*zeraʿ*). At the end of the ten days, Daniel proposes that his appearance and that of his companions should be compared with the appearance of those who were still on the

allotted diet. He is confident that the overseer will act appropriately when he sees the disparity between the two groups of youths. So sure is Daniel that he puts himself and his companions in the hands of the official, trusting that their appearance at the end of the period will confirm their wisdom in seeking this test.

1:14. So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

The official listened and acted upon Daniel's suggestion, and he **'tested them ten days'**. Some have proposed that the number **'ten'** carries the idea of completion, but within this passage there is no indication that the choice of ten had any significance other than as a suitable period for the test to be effective.

1:15-16. And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

When the appointed period came to an end, the appearance of the Jewish youths was indeed better than that of those eating the king's provisions. Their general appearance was 'good' and their flesh **'fatter'** (NIV, 'better nourished'). In no way had they suffered by the change of diet. On the contrary, their physical condition had improved over the ten days. The test having been passed, the official removed from them the appointed provisions and substituted the **'vegetables'** they had requested.

Application

The theme of these verses is covenant distinctiveness. Daniel and his companions, in spite of attempts to disturb their trust in Israel's God (by indoctrination, provision of food connected with Babylonian worship and alteration of their Hebrew names) remained committed to him. As Christians we live as aliens in this world, 'for our citizenship is in heaven' (Phil. 3:20). Whatever the era, or the geographical location, or the political situation, pressure to conform to the world's standards is ever present. The call is to operate within a given cultural framework without compromising one's faith, and to live a Christian lifestyle so that unbelievers 'may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us' (1 Peter 2:12, NIV).