



DANIEL



Bob Fyall





To
Carmen and Drummond





DANIEL

A Tale of Two Cities



Bob Fyall

CHRISTIAN FOCUS





Rev. Dr. Bob Fyall is the Director of Rutherford House, Edinburgh, a centre for theological study and research. Prior to that he taught Old Testament in Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham while pastoring a church where a large student ministry developed. His other writings include *Teaching Amos: Unlocking the Prophecy of Amos for the Bible Teacher* (ISBN 978-1-84550-142-6).

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Preface

It is difficult to remember a time when I have not loved the book of Daniel. Childhood memories of the Blazing Furnace and the Lion's Den in a large illustrated book of Bible stories are still vivid. From the same time I remember a book with illustrations of the beasts of Chapter 7 and the ram and goat of Chapter 8. I'm sure that at that time I had no idea of their connection with the earlier stories.

In more recent years Daniel has often been part of my regular preaching and teaching. I have preached through a large part of the book in my ministry at Claypath United Reformed Church in Durham. In lectures and conferences it has been a subject to which I have turned often.

However, I am particularly grateful again to Christian Focus for the invitation to write this commentary and to Malcolm Maclean for his shrewd comments and kindly encouragement. Writing a commentary forces consideration of passages hitherto neglected and gives a deeper perception of the whole book. I have thoroughly enjoyed this project and, I'm glad to say, now love the book of Daniel more than ever.

What I have tried to do in this commentary is to engage with a wide range of Daniel scholarship and make the results of this available to readers. Often I have referred to other commentaries and studies. Readers who do not have access to these nor time to consult them should not be put off. These are simply places where people who want to explore matters further can look. The aim of this commentary is to help people to love and understand this part of the Bible better. I hope it will also help preachers and teachers in their task of expounding Scripture as God's word for today. No one can write a commentary without drawing heavily on





those who have done so before them. In the footnotes and bibliography I have acknowledged those writers who have particularly stimulated my thinking. If I have unwittingly echoed something without acknowledgement I apologise.

Books are not written in a vacuum and I am happy to thank a number of people. I am grateful to David Day, Principal of St. John's College, and the College Council for a term's study leave in the early part of which I finished this project. Once again I am indebted to Marianne Young of the secretarial staff of St. John's College who with characteristic efficiency and cheerful good humour put the whole manuscript on the word processor. To many students of the college who attended a recent series of Bible studies on Daniel, and made many useful comments, my thanks as well.

As always, this book could not have been written without the love and encouragement of my family. My wife Thelma has believed in, prayed for and helped forward this project from the beginning. I want to dedicate the book to my children Carmen and Drummond with the prayer that as they face the bewildering world of early teens they will grow up to be 'people who know their God'.



Selected Bibliography

Many books have been consulted but I have included here only those to which I have referred regularly. I have added a short comment on each; these are simply one person's opinion. Including a book does not necessarily imply approval of its stance:

Baldwin, J. G., *Daniel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, IVP, 1978; perhaps the best conservative commentary; learned, sensitive and theological.

Calvin, J., *Commentaries on the book of the prophet Daniel*; Translated by Thomas Myers. 2 Vols. 1852-53; a classic exposition by the great Reformer.

Collins, J. J., *A Commentary on the book of Daniel*, Augsburg Fortress, 1993; sceptical, but encyclopaedic in its information.

Ferguson, S. B., *Daniel*, The Communicator's Commentary, 1988; a splendidly robust theological commentary.

Goldingay, J., *Daniel*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 1989; accepts 2nd-century date but a great deal of good theological reflection.

Hartmann, L. T. & Di Lella A. A., *The Book of Daniel*, Anchor Bible 23, 1978; useful on historical background.

Montgomery, J. A., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary in the Book of Daniel*, I.C.C. 1927; old, but indispensable for serious study of the Hebrew and Aramaic text.

Philip, J., *By the Rivers of Babylon: Studies in the book of Daniel*, Didasko Press, a fine series of expository sermons by a distinguished pastor.

Porteous, N. W., *Daniel*, Old Testament Library revd. ed. 1979; fine theological work.

Russell, D. S., *Daniel*, Daily Study Bible, 1981; useful, but misses some dimensions by insisting on 2nd-century date.

Wallace, R. S., *The Lord is King: The Message of Daniel*, IVP, 1979; useful exposition.

Young, E. J., *The Prophecy of Daniel*, Eerdmans, 1949; sober conservative exegesis.



Some Important Dates

BABYLON

- 605: Rise of Nebuchadnezzar – Some Jews taken to Babylon (including Daniel, see 1:1).
597: 1st Siege of Jerusalem – Zedekiah made king by Nebuchadnezzar.
587: Fall of Jerusalem – Exile begins.
539: Fall of Babylon.

PERSIA

- 539: Cyrus allows Jews to return.
486: Xerxes 1 (Ahasuerus of 'Esther').
331: Darius III.

GREECE

- 334-331: Alexander the Great conquers the Persian Empire.
323: Death of Alexander – empire divided into 4 – The Ptolemies in Egypt ('the kings of the South' Ch. 11) and The Seleucids in Syria ('the kings of the North') predominant.
175-164: Antiochus Epiphanes.
167: The Abomination of Desolation' – i.e. altar to Zeus in the Temple.
165-164: Victories of Judas Maccabaeus and cleansing of Temple.

For further dates and details of this period see commentary on Chapter 11. One other significant factor is the rise of Rome – in 168 Antiochus was expelled from Egypt by Roman consul (see Dan. 11:30).





Introduction

The book of Daniel is usually either loved or loathed. The very qualities which make it so exciting to some, its vivid stories, dreams and visions, the colourful imagery and its apocalyptic messages prove uncongenial to others. A number of questions have to be examined so that we can be in a position to approach the book responsibly.

1. The Significance of the Exile

The book is set during that great disaster and watershed in Israel's history known as the Exile. A few words on the historical events will set this in perspective. After the death of Solomon his kingdom was torn apart, with the northern tribes (usually simply called Israel) eventually having Samaria as their capital. A rapid departure from obeying the Law of Moses followed and the kingdom was eventually destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 BC and many of the people deported to Assyria. The southern kingdom, centred on Jerusalem, remained. Much of the time apostasy prevailed there as well, although two great reforming kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, made valiant attempts to stop the rot.

Meanwhile the world scene was changing. The great Assyrian Empire was crumbling and in 612 its capital city Nineveh fell to the new and vigorous Babylonian state (an event celebrated by the prophet Nahum). In 605, Nebuchadnezzar came to the throne of Babylon, having smashed the power of Egypt. Jehoiakim, king of Judah (Dan. 1:1; 2 Kings. 24:1) became his vassal. At this time there was probably no major devastation of the city, but some of the Temple vessels were taken, as well as some of the aristocracy, including Daniel and his friends. What happened next is not entirely clear, but

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Jehoiakim rebelled in 597 (2 Kings 24:1) and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin who reigned a mere three months. Nebuchadnezzar returned and took the king and most of the leaders and professional class¹ to Babylon (2 Kings 24:1 ff.). He then installed Zedekiah as a puppet king; he rebelled towards the end of 598; then in 587 Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar and there was mass deportation and the Exile proper had begun.²

This shattering event called into question the whole basis of Israel's faith. The very centre of their belief was that Yahweh their God was the Creator and the Lord of history who had shown his power at the Exodus. Indeed that had not just been the defeat of Pharaoh and the Egyptian Empire. Rather Exodus saw it as the God of Israel defeating and destroying the gods of Egypt: 'I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord' (Exod. 12:12). He had defeated Osiris and Amun-Ra; did the Exile mean that he was weaker than Bel and Nebo (see Isa. 46:1)?

What had happened to the Covenant? That bond made with Moses and then with David in such words as 'my love will never be taken away from him' (2 Sam. 7:15); where was that now?

What about the land 'that the Lord swore he would give to your fathers' (Deut. 1:8)? Jerusalem, 'Zion, the city of the Great King' (Ps. 48:2), that had gone as well. In any case in contrast with the brilliant culture of Babylon, Jerusalem must have seemed an insignificant backwater. 'How like a widow is she, who was once great among the nations' (Lam. 1:1) and 'How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?' (Ps. 137:4) are only two of the questions which echo through the later books of the Old Testament.

These are the huge questions which the book of Daniel grapples with and often we will return to these in the course of the exposition. Since Daniel's story starts at the very beginning of the Exile and goes on to its end and indeed a few years

1. One of those deported was Ezekiel and chapters 1-24 of his prophecy warn that Jerusalem is doomed. Only after the final fall of the city can he begin to preach a message of hope beyond the desolation.

2. For further details on history see *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*, D. J. Wiseman (Tyndale 1965); see also Baldwin pp. 17-21.



beyond that, the book gives a unique window into the entire period from an insider's point of view.

However, much of the book, especially chapters 8-12, focuses on a later period i.e. the years following 175 BC when the Syrian king Antiochus IV intervened in the affairs of Palestine. Once again a brief summary of events will be useful. By the end of Daniel, the Babylonian empire had already been replaced by the Persian in 539. This in turn fell to Alexander the Great in 331 and he established a Greek empire. Upon his death however in 323, the empire split into four, each part seized by one of his generals. The predominant kingdoms were the Egyptian (the Ptolemies) and the Syrian (Seleucids). The Seleucid ruler who was most significant for the Jewish nation was Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) (175-164). He introduced a vigorous policy of Hellenisation. The whole culture, lifestyle and customs were to conform to Greek models. He had his nominee, Joshua, appointed as High Priest and given the name Jason. A Greek school was established in Jerusalem. Furious intrigues and infighting resulted in the establishment of Syrian troops in the city and the death penalty for practising the Jewish religion. The ultimate sacrilege ('the abomination that causes desolation', 9:27 etc.) occurred in 167. Antiochus erected an altar to Zeus on the altar of burnt offering and sacrificed pig's flesh on it. A new and worse exile had happened; not Jerusalem defeated by Babylon, but Babylon infiltrating Jerusalem.

However, at this moment determined resistance broke out under the great Judas Maccabaeus who, in a series of guerrilla campaigns and smashing victories, routed the Syrian armies and in 165-164 entered Jerusalem. The Temple was purified and dedicated, an event celebrated in the Hanukkah festival. See the commentary on Chapters 8-11 for further details on this period. Readers of Daniel should also read 1 and 2 Maccabees for essential background.

The book's perspective, then, stretches from 605 to 164, with a heavy emphasis on the later period in the second part of the book. The reasons for this will be examined in the relevant chapters of the commentary, but they give rise to some problems to which we now turn.

2. When and why the book was written?

The concentration on the Maccabean period as well as historical difficulties in the first part of the book has led most modern scholars to dispute the traditional view that Daniel was written in the Exile and to see it instead as originating in Palestine in Maccabean times. There are three main issues:

a. Historical

i. Daniel 1:1 It is argued that no siege of Jerusalem took place in the third year of Jehoiakim. However the verb 'besieged' may simply mean a show of strength and this fits well with 2 Kings 24:1 that Jehoiakim became Nebuchadnezzar's vassal. Moreover we know of Nebuchadnezzar's wars with Neco, the Pharaoh, who had put Jehoiakim on the throne of Judah.

ii. Belshazzar (Chapter 5): This account is held to be fictitious because Belshazzar (Bel-šar-usur in the Babylonian texts) is not listed as king but only as crown prince, son of Nabonidus, last king of Babylon. However, Nabonidus was absent from Babylon for a decade during which he 'entrusted the kingship' to Belshazzar. Thus to argue that our author is inaccurate in calling him 'king' is splitting hairs. Moreover, the fascinating little detail of how the interpreter of the writing on the wall would become 'third ruler' (5:7, 16, 29) shows an understanding that Belshazzar was second to Nabonidus. Similarly he was not strictly 'son' of Nebuchadnezzar, but frequently in the Old Testament 'son' is used in a broader sense – e.g. 2 Kings 2:12 Elisha calls Elijah 'father'.

iii. Darius the Mede (5:30 and 6:28): It is well known that Cyrus was the first ruler of the Persian empire and indeed the agent for the ending of the Jewish exile (see 2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezra 1; and Isaiah 45:1). However we meet the mysterious figure of Darius the Mede in Chapters 5 and 6, and again in 9. The author is, of course, well aware of Cyrus (1:21; 10:1). Two considerations have been advanced. Darius has been identified with one Gubaru or Gobyras who was temporary governor of Babylon for Cyrus. The other is that Darius is, in fact, an alternative name for Cyrus himself. This would mean

that 'and' in 6:28 would be an explanatory particle – 'the reign of Darius, that is, 'the reign of Cyrus'. A close parallel can be found in 1 Chronicles 5:26: 'So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria (that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria).' 'Pul' was the personal name of the army officer who on seizing the Assyrian crown took the throne name of Tiglath Pileser. This does not prove the identification of Cyrus and Darius but it does show that it is a consideration which should not be dismissed.

Readers who want to follow these matters further should consult the works by Wiseman and Baldwin already mentioned.

b. Linguistic

The book is written in two languages: Hebrew (1:1-2:4a; 8:1-12:13) and Aramaic (2:4b-7:28). The Aramaic section may (although this cannot be proved) have been circulated separately because of its more universal focus. Much controversy has centred around the Aramaic section and what it reveals about the probable dating of the book. Detailed discussion is not appropriate in a commentary of this kind,³ but it should be remembered that since Aramaic became the international language in the Ancient Near East it exists in many regional, dialectical and cultural forms. Moreover, even the existence of Greek loan words is indecisive because Greek trading and cultural links with the eastern Empires are known from as early as the eighth century BC. There are no grounds for dating the book early on linguistics alone.

c. Theological

This is the main issue. The historical and linguistic matters have been and continue to be debated with impressive scholarship on both sides.

More fundamentally, could God reveal to a sixth century prophet events four centuries distant and, if so, why should he do so? The issues at stake are the trustworthiness of Scripture, the nature of God and the place of revelation.

3. Readers who know Aramaic should study 'The Aramaic of Daniel' by K. A. Kitchen in the symposium, ed. Wiseman mentioned above (pp. 31-79).



The trustworthiness of Scripture is particularly emphasised in Chapter 9 where the ending of the Exile is specifically related to Scripture, especially Jeremiah in this case. Moreover, as we shall see in the exposition of that chapter, the prayer of Daniel draws heavily on earlier Scriptures. The book is not a freak intruder in the canon; it has its distinctive emphases, but is also integrated with the whole unfolding message of the Bible.

The God of Daniel is the God 'who reveals mysteries' and shows 'what will happen in the days to come' (2:28). This is so fundamental to the message of the book that to regard it as essentially a pseudonymous work of the second century tends to destroy the reader's confidence in the power of this God. If this God chooses to reveal part of the future to his servants then 'No-one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"' (4:35). Indeed an essential part of God's power is that he does know 'the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come' (Isa. 46:10). I have argued especially in the commentary on Chapter 11 that this in no way reduces humans to puppets because the multiplicity of human choices and events make genuine decisions possible at every stage.

At root the question is one of revelation. Has God spoken and has he made himself and his unfolding purposes known? The stance taken in this commentary is that the book is a genuine sixth century product which not only unfolds the inner meaning of the Exile but prepares believers for the time of the End, foreshadowed in the régime of Antiochus Epiphanes but relevant for all who live in the 'Last Days'. This theme is developed further in the commentary proper.

3. What kind of a book is it?

Daniel is usually described as an example of apocalyptic literature but that is far too narrow a definition, and as the commentary shows many different kinds of genre are employed.

There is first of all a strong story line in the book; not just in the sense of the series of stories in Chapters 1–6 but in the unfolding narrative sequences in Chapters 7–12. This reminds



us that Daniel is an important part of the Bible's plot-line, the story from Creation to Consummation. The term often used for this is 'meta-narrative', i.e. the story of God's purposes into which individual narratives must be fitted. Moreover, the story-telling in the book shows considerable skill in plot, characterisation, setting and literary techniques. I have particularly explored this in the commentary on Chapter 3, the story of the Blazing Furnace, perhaps the most exciting episode in the book.

There are also strong links with Wisdom Literature. Daniel and his friends are the wise (see e.g. 1:17 and 12:3). They live their lives according to the fear of the Lord (see Proverbs) and, like Job and Ecclesiastes, the book is much concerned with the providence of God and the meaning of life.

Nevertheless Daniel does have many Apocalyptic features both in style and substance. Apocalyptic characteristically employs visions, dreams, symbols, heavenly messengers and a preoccupation with the End. The battle between light and darkness is sharp, and earthly events are shown to be echoes of greater cosmic events. It should not be too sharply distinguished from prophecy, not least because of the Apocalyptic sections in other books (e.g. Isaiah 24–27 and Zechariah 1–8).

The Exile raised acutely the nature of God's kingdom and divine intervention in history. However, it did not exhaust the meaning of these, and taking particularly the time of Antiochus, the author shows how history is working to an end which will not be achieved by political evolution or revolution but by divine intervention.

It is in Christ that all the many hopes and visions of Daniel are to be fulfilled. By his coming 'for us and for our salvation' he suffers like Daniel and his friends, but by dying he also makes possible the eternal life anticipated in 12:2. By his coming again he will finally establish the kingdom that will never be destroyed and thus cause the wise to 'shine like the brightness of the heavens' (12:3).

Apocalyptic is a wide term, and concerns both the 'now' and 'not yet' of the kingdom. Both are important in Daniel because while God's people must live in Babylon their



strength to live there comes from their citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem.

4. The Structure of the Book

Readers will gain most from the book of Daniel if they read it as a whole and get a sense of its flow and direction. Chapter 7 is the hinge of the book, providing both a basis for the stories and an overview for the visions. Chapters 8–12 deal in more detail with certain parts of the picture but the scope of Chapter 7 is the whole of human history.

Chapter 1 corresponds to Chapter 12 in its portrait of Daniel the wise man, and his continuing anticipation of the eternal glory of the wise in the latter chapter.

Chapters 2 and 7 give an overview of human power in history and both of these are followed by chapters which give us selected glimpses of that power and how it relates to God's power (in story in 3–6 and in vision in 8–12:3).

The whole book bears the hallmarks of careful planning and selection which underlines its main theme: God will be God and the world will know it.

