

Daniel – A Review

The name *Daniel* means “God is my judge”. He prophesied in Babylon to both Jews and Gentiles during the Babylonian captivity.

Some of the most famous and arresting stories in the Bible are found in this book, including the three young men in Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace (chap. 3), the “handwriting on the wall” written by a disembodied hand, prophesying the sudden doom at King Belshazzar’s feast (chap. 5), and, of course, Daniel in the lions’ den (chap. 6).

Most of the book is made up of visions of the future. These visions have a greater historical sweep than any others in the Old Testament and predict four great world empires: the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Greek, and the Roman.

There is a philosophy of history implied in Daniel’s visions. It is that history is “His story” (God’s). God is the Lord of history, planning and directing it as He plans and directs each life (even, we are told later, the fall of each sparrow and the numbering of each hair).

King Nebuchadnezzar had to go mad and live like an animal to learn this truth: “You shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will” (4:25). “He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings” (2:21).

The Messiah is prophesied in Daniel as a great stone who will crush all the kingdoms of the world, become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth (2:34–35). “And in the days of those kings [the Romans] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom [the Church] which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever” (2:44).

The four kingdoms recur in chapter 7, and so does the Messiah. Here, He is the “Son of Man” who receives from “the Ancient of Days” the Kingdom “which shall not pass away” (7:13–14). Even the death of the “Anointed One” is prophesied in Daniel 9:26, and perhaps even the exact time of this Messiah’s coming, in the vision of “seventy weeks”—symbolically, 490 years—in Daniel 9:25 (though the state of the text is problematic here and shows signs of later revisions).¹

¹ Kreeft, P. (2005). [*You Can Understand the Bible: A Practical Guide to Each Book in the Bible*](#) (pp. 134–135). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Position of the Book of Daniel in the Canon—In the LXX and the Vulgate the book of Daniel ranks fourth among the major prophets, while in MT it is classed among the Hagiographa. St Jerome in the *Prologus galeatus* follows the order of the Jewish Canon (*Praef. in libros Samuel et Malachim*, PL 28, 553 f.). The different position of Daniel in the Greek and the Jewish Canons may be easily explained by assuming that this book received universal recognition when the collection of the prophetic writings had already been closed. The Jews of Alexandria arranged the books of the OT according to criteria of date and literary form, and so Daniel found himself among the prophets.

It is doubtful, however, whether the Jewish order of books is the original one. Josephus seems to include Daniel among the Prophets (*C. Apion.* 1, 8). The oldest Greek lists of books, some of which give the Jewish Canon, enumerate Daniel with the Prophets (*cf.* H. E. Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament*, table facing p 292).

The Deuterocanonical Additions—The Greek version 1 of Daniel and the Vg have some sections which are not in the Hebrew-Aramaic text. They are: the prayer of Azarias (3:24–45); the Song of the three children preceded by a prose interlude (3:46–90); the story of Susanna (chapter 13); the story of Bel and the Dragon (chapter 14). It is generally held by Catholic scholars that these portions were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, but did not form part of the original book (C. Julius, *Die griechischen Danielzusätze und ihre kanonische Geltung*, BS, VI, 3/4, 1901). We may add that they originated in the time of Daniel and belonged to the same cycle of Daniel episodes which have come down to us in a Hebrew and Aramaic form. They were translated into Greek, but when the final redaction of the book was made, the original text of these portions was either lost or for some reason inaccessible to the redactor. Of their canonicity, however, there can be no doubt.

The Language Problem—In the Hebrew Bible the book of Daniel is written in two languages. 1:1–2:4a and chapters 7–12 are in Hebrew; 2:4b–6:28 are in Aramaic. The deuterocanonical portions are in Greek. Various solutions have been proposed to explain the trilingual character of the book. The Greek sections are certainly translations from lost Semitic originals. The change from Hebrew to Aramaic and from Aramaic to Hebrew can hardly be attributed to the original writer. Very probably the several episodes and visions circulated on separate leaves in a

Hebrew and in an Aramaic form, the one being a translation of the other, and the final compiler put together the stories in that linguistic form that came into his hands.

Text and Versions—The Hebrew-Aramaic text of the book of Daniel has been rather badly preserved, as is shown by the numerous discrepancies from the ancient versions which, in many cases, exhibit a better text. This becomes clearly understandable when we consider that MT represents the last stage of a gradual editorial development which had been going on since the book took a definitive shape about the year 168 b.c. Besides these editorial changes there are others which originated in the time when the book was still in the state of a loose collection of separate narratives. Some of the chronological indications at the beginning of the narratives are, most probably, scribal or editorial insertions. But despite its corrupt state the Hebrew-Aramaic text of Daniel represents on the whole the substance of the original. The earliest version is the LXX, which was made during the latter half of the 2nd century b.c. The translator shows signs of incompetence. Compared with the rival Greek version of Theodotion, it looks more like a paraphrase than a translation (A. Bludau, *Die alexandrinische Übersetzung des Buches Daniel und ihr Verhältniss zum Massoretischen Text*, BS, II, 2/3, p 206). On account of its divergencies from the Hebrew text, the LXX version was never received in the Church (St Jerome, *Comm. in Dan. Proph.* PL 25, 514). The divergencies may, however, to some extent, be due to a slightly different Semitic text.

Theodotion. The LXX version of Daniel was from a very early date superseded by that made by Theodotion, a Jewish proselyte, (a convert from) (around) a.d. 180. Theodotion's version is probably a revised edition of an older version made from the Hebrew and independent of the LXX (H. B. Swete, *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, p 48). Theodotion places the story of Susanna at the head of the book, and in the *Chester Beatty Papyri*, published by F. Kenyon, the text of Daniel (fasc. vii, pp 17–38), which contains the LXX version and belongs probably to the early 3rd century a.d., places chapter 5 after chapter 8. But these different arrangements are most likely due to redactors or copyists rather than to a Semitic original.

The Vulgate is made from the Hebrew-Aramaic text current in Jerome's time, a text which was very closely related to MT. Occasionally Jerome follows Theodotion. The deuterocanonical parts are from Theodotion.²

² Saydon, P. P. (1953). [Daniel](#). In B. Orchard & E. F. Sutcliffe (Eds.), *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (pp. 622–623). Toronto; New York; Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson.