

The Book of Daniel (Background Study)

INTRODUCTION

The book of Daniel is placed in an odd location in the Hebrew Bible. It is not included among the prophets. Rather, it is nested in the third division of the Hebrew Bible known as the כְּתוּבִים [kəthuvim] (writings). This group of works includes poetry (like Psalms, Job, Proverbs, etc.). Then why should the book of Daniel be located here instead of being with the other prophets (as it is in the English Bible)? I believe that the answer is related to its use in history. Early Christians used this book very effectively in their efforts to demonstrate that Jesus was the Christ or the Messiah. The book of Daniel was so powerful for this purpose that it was considered to be a threat by the Hebrew people. They could not get rid of it. But they could give it a location among books that were not prophetic in nature. In spite of this, it has remained one of the most powerful prophetic books until our time.

Take time to read the whole book of Daniel. It needs to be seen as a whole book before it is seen in its parts. It includes so much encouragement for the serious seeker of truth.

THEOLOGICAL TOOLS

Presuppositions

The book of Daniel is extremely important for the understanding of the work of Jesus in heaven and for a basic outline of history from the time of Daniel until the time of the end. Over the last 2500 years there have been many different interpretations of the prophetic portions of the book. But most of these fall within four basic categories:

1. Historicism, 2. Preterism, 3. Historical Criticism, 4. Futurism / Dispensationalism.¹ Every book will reflect one or two of these schools of thought. Let's take a closer look at each one of them.

1. HISTORICISM

Historicism is the oldest method of understanding the book of Daniel. It was practiced before the time of Christ. It states that there has been an uninterrupted historical chain. There are no gaps between the beginning and the ending of the prophecy. It is a kind of sequence outline of history. Prophecy is seen to be a genuine, long-range

¹Samuel Nuenz' SDA Dissertation on the 300 years of writings on Daniel 8 as quoted in a class by Gerhard F. Hasel, July 1991.

prediction. As Seventh-day Adventists, we stand firmly in this school of thought. As a result, the books of Daniel and Revelation are important for SDA identity.

Historicism sees the prophecy of Daniel 2 (for example) starting in the time of Daniel. From there it moves through a period of four major human kingdoms. Then, the end of the world is ushered in by the second coming of Jesus. After this, the divine eternal kingdom is set up. Those who hold to the futurist point of view believe that we are living in the time after the fourth kingdom, and before the second coming of Jesus.

2. PRETERISM

This is the view which focuses on past fulfillment. Everything has already happened in the past. There is nothing left to be fulfilled. This view was put forward by third century apologists. They viewed the events of the book of Daniel as starting around the sixth century B.C. and continuing through about the first century A.D. They believe that the stone kingdom represents the first coming of Jesus. Like those who adhere to the futurist point of view, they have the perspective of an unbroken prophetic chain. One outgrowth of this teaching includes an amillennialist understanding of our future.

3. HISTORICAL CRITICAL

The Historical Critical view finds its basis in liberalism or modernism. This is a whole mindset which is used to approach the study of the Bible as if it were just like any other form of literature. There is no belief in inspiration. It is believed that the book of Daniel describes a very narrow time period in history (around 167 through 164 B.C.). The whole book is viewed in the light of events related to the work of Antiochus Epiphanies (more on that later). Daniel 11:40-45 is the only prediction in the whole book of Daniel. Everything else was written after the fact..

The modern mind set will not allow prophecy to be of a long-range predictive nature. This is a form of naturalism. More books are written from this point of view than from any of the other views (note that this statement would not apply to most of the evangelical churches).

As a quick overview, we may note that HISTORICISTS begin with Daniel 2, and then move through the book (Daniel 7-12). PRETERISTS also begin with Daniel 2 and move forward through the book. Those following the HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD begin with Daniel 11, and then move backward through the book (through Daniel 10, 9, 8, 7, and 2). This significant difference accounts for a different final outcome in the understanding of the prophecies.

4. FUTURISM

Futurism moves outside actual prophecy. It creates a kind of gap theory. It starts the same as the view of preterism. It teaches that Daniel 2 covers the time from the sixth century B.C. and then moves on to the first century A.D. Then, suddenly, there is a gap.

It is a kind of parenthesis of history. From this time until the time of the end, it is believed that the prophecies of Daniel are put on hold. During the time of the gap is a period known to these people as the Church Age. This age ends suddenly at the time of tribulation when the saints are suddenly raptured away. Then the gap ends and the prophecy continues. In Daniel 9, the last week of the 70 week prophecy is separated from the others. The first 69 weeks are fulfilled by the time of Jesus. The last week waits until the end of the gap. Then, at the time of the tribulation, there are another seven years of bad news for all of those who were not raptured. But these poor souls will have one more chance to be saved.

Groups 1, 2, and 4 (Historicism, Preterism, and Futurism) believe that God reveals Himself in history. Group 3 (the Historical Critical Method) teaches that God does not reveal Himself through history. These are the basic presuppositions of these three groups.

Literary details

The book of Daniel can be divided into sections in a number of ways. The most obvious division for the bi-lingual person is the linguistic division. This forms a kind of ABA pattern.

A	Daniel 1:1 through Daniel 2:4a	Hebrew
B	Daniel 2:4b through Daniel 7:28	Aramaic
A	Daniel 8:1 through Daniel 12:13	Hebrew

This ABA pattern is not even visible in translated Bibles. But it is extremely obvious in reading Daniel in its original languages. We will look at this a little closer in following sections. But for the moment, suffice it to say that Daniel switched from Hebrew to Aramaic when he was quoting the actual words of people using Aramaic. He continued to write in the Aramaic language until he needed to use Hebrew to make his point clear.

This ABA structure resembles the book of Job where it is not the language which changes, but the style.

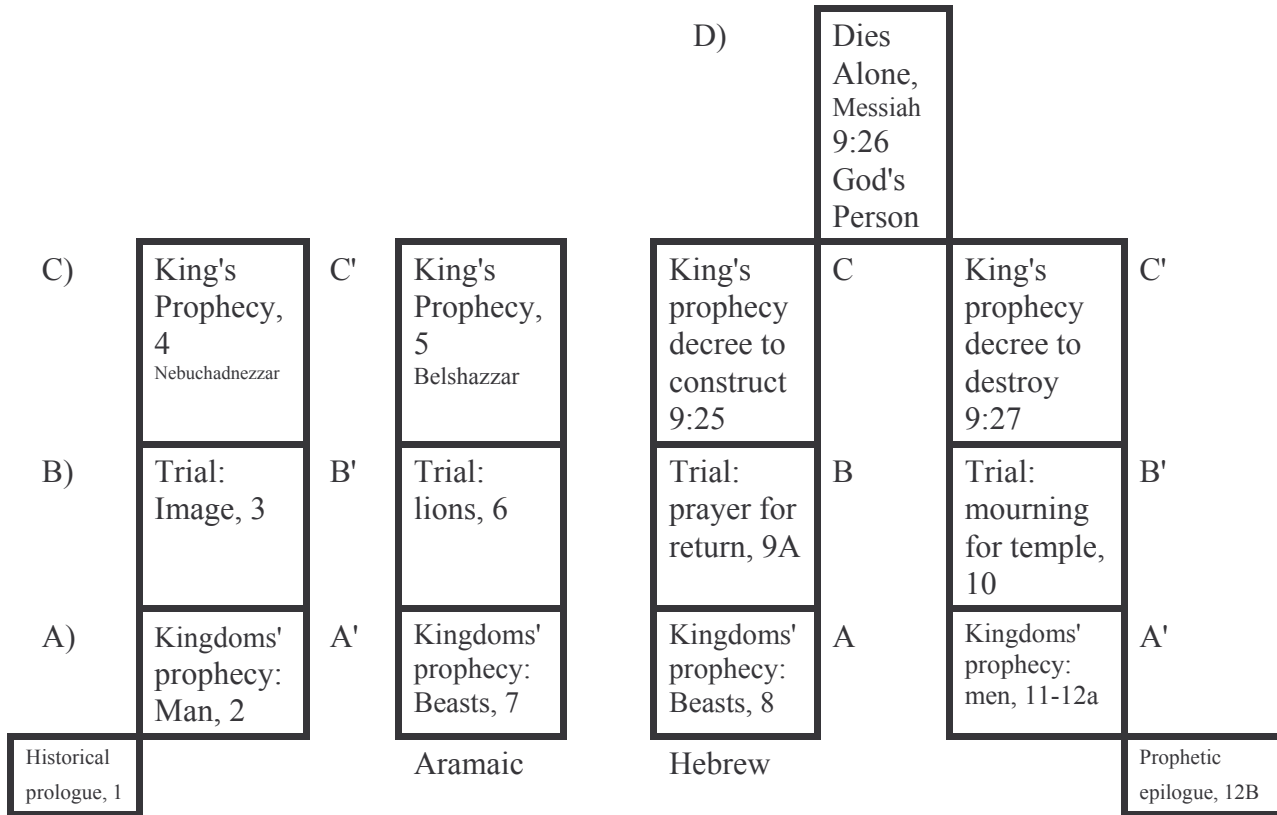
A	Job 1-2	Prose
B	Job 3-42:9	Poetry
A	Job 42:10-17	Prose

The Book of Daniel also follows a another literary division. It is written in two main styles. One part is primarily NARRATIVE in nature. Another part is primarily PROPHETIC in nature (focusing on Visions and Dreams). These divisions could be depicted as:

NARRATIVE:	Daniel 1, 3, 4,5,6
PROPHETIC:	Daniel 2, 7, 8-9, 10-12 (note that there are four basic visions)

Another literary device which is used by Daniel is a special kind of parallelism. This is called a chiasm. This name comes from the Greek character X or χ [chi]. This letter resembles the shape of the English letter X. The idea is that the left side looks like the right side, only in reverse (see explanation below).

Literary structure of the book of Daniel Diagramed²



A simpler way to think about this is like climbing a mountain. When you climb a mountain, what you see when you go up one side resembles what you see when you go down the opposite side--only in reverse. Imagine that you are climbing from the desert below. The land is dry and has some cactus plants. As you get higher up the mountain, there are deciduous trees. Higher up, there are pine trees. And still higher, there are no trees at all--only rocks and snow. As you go down the other side, you see all of the same things in reverse: rocks and snow, pine trees, deciduous trees, and finally the cactus plants again.

²William H. Shea, "Unity of Daniel," in *Symposium on Daniel, Daniel and Revelation* Committee series, vol. 2, Frank B. Holbrook, ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of SDA, 1986), 248.

If you look at the book of Daniel, it is divided into a kind of double chiasm. The first part of this chiasm has been very well known for many years. It focuses on the Aramaic part of the book. Many people have known about this part. More recently, another, similar chiasm was shown to exist in the Hebrew section of the book. The second part will be explained better when we get to Daniel 9.

This structure is an attempt to create a chiasm of the whole book of Daniel. Please overlook the awkward appearance due to a limitation in the software in use.

Historical Background

The historical background to the book of Daniel is a little complicated, but here are some of the main features.

Daniel was probably born around 623 B.C.³ He lived during times of great change. Nabopolassar, a Chaldean general employed by the Assyrians, revolted in 626 B.C. making himself the king of Babylon. The Chaldeans were the Aramaic-speaking inhabitants of Babylonia. Cyaxares I (also called Cyaxares II by some) became the king of Media.

By 614 B.C. Asshur fell to the Medes. Nabopolassar (the Babylonian king) made a treaty with Cyaxares (the king of the Medes). The treaty was sealed when Nebuchadnezzar (the Babylonian crown prince who was about 8 years old at the time) was married to Amuhean (a Median princess). In 612 B.C. the united armies of Babylonia and Media took Nineveh, the capital of Assyria (fulfilling the prophecy of Nahum). The king of Nineveh was trapped inside a burning building where he died.

Note that the prisoners of Assyria were no longer under Assyrian rule after 612 B.C. This makes for some problems in the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-day Saints (Mormons) who insist on 10 lost tribes of Israel having traveled to the Americas. The 10 tribes were not lost. People from these tribes are even named in later parts of scripture (cf. Luke 2:36 where Anna was from the tribe of Asher--one of the 10 tribes which had been in Assyrian captivity).

The people of the northern kingdom--Israel, had been taken captive by the Assyrians around 722 B.C. They were now free from Assyrian rule. The last years of history for Judah--the southern kingdom--were marked by a rapid succession of rulers.

After the death of King Josiah (the great reformer who died fighting the wrong battle--2 Kings 23:28-30) there was a succession of four kings in Judah. They each ruled for a short period of time. In short they went like this:

³This and the following historical information was gleaned from the class syllabus used by Dr. Douglas Waterhouse for his class on Daniel at Andrews University, 1983.

<u>Name of king</u>	<u>Period of rule</u>	<u>Recorded in:</u>
Jehoahaz	3 months	2 Kings 23:31-34
Eliakim/Jehoiakim	11 years	2 Kings 23:34-37; 24:1-7
Jehoiachin	3 months	2 Kings 24:8-16
Mattaniah/Zedekiah	11 years	2 Kings 24:17-20; 25:1-7

Jehoahaz, Eliakim, and Mattaniah were brothers. They were all sons of the reformer--King Josiah. Jehoiachin was the son of Eliakim (Jehoiakim). All four of these kings did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Josiah had reigned from 640 through 609 B.C.⁴ Jehoahaz reigned in 609 B.C. Jehoiakim reigned from 609 through 598 B.C. Jehoachin reigned in 597 B.C. And Zedekiah reigned from 597 through 586 B.C.

Seen from another perspective, Jerusalem faced three successive captivities from the Babylonians. The first king, Jehoahaz, was taken as a prisoner into Egypt. The other three kings of Judah were attacked by Babylon.

THE FIRST CAPTIVITY OF JERUSALEM

Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish (by the Euphrates river) in 605 B.C. At that time, he also conquered Judah. Jehoiakim submitted to Nebuchadnezzar and became his vassal (cf. Daniel 1:1). At this time, King Nebuchadnezzar took prisoners from the royal household as a kind of guarantee against future insubordination or rebellion. Daniel was among the members of the royal family who were taken. He was about 18 years old at the time (see 4T 570).

At the time of this attack, Nebuchadnezzar suddenly got word from a runner that his father, King Nabopolassar, had died on August 15. It had taken ten days for this message to reach Nebuchadnezzar. He made a quick decision. He sent the prisoners on a very long journey staying on the major highways. This was a trip of about 1500 kilometers or nearly 1000 miles. Nebuchadnezzar made a mad dash across the desert with a few of his soldiers as a body guard. They completed the trip in record time (covering about fifty miles a day or about eighty kilometers a day). At this fast pace, they were able to reach Babylon by 7 September 605 B.C. He managed to get to the capital city in time to secure the throne for himself.

⁴One of the best sources for the dates of the reigns of these kings is the book by Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983).

THE SECOND CAPTIVITY OF JERUSALEM

On 16 March 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem for the second time. Jehoiachin was removed from the throne and was taken as a prisoner to Babylon along with Ezekiel and others. Mattaniah was made the new king of Judah, but Nebuchadnezzar changed his name to Zedekiah.

Zedekiah made an alliance with Egypt against Babylon. In 588 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem again. The desperate situation can be seen in letters from other towns of the area: Lachish and Azekah. In July 586 B.C., after a long siege, Jerusalem was captured. All of the food had run out.

The last thing that Zedekiah would see was the death of his own sons. They were killed in front of his eyes, and then he was blinded (2 Kings 25:6,7). This time the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (2 Kings 25:9). He had the walls of the city destroyed (2 Kings 25:10). The city was burned in August of 586 B.C.

It could be said that there were three different captivities which would later lead to three different restorations.⁵ The captivity for the kingship went from 609 through 539 B.C. The captivity of the people went from 605 through 536 B.C. The captivity of the temple went from 586 through 515 B.C. This syllabus will not seek to confirm or refute this concept. It is merely mentioned to give some food for thought.

The Date for the Book

Some have seen difficulty in what seems to be a discrepancy between Daniel 1:1 and Jeremiah 25:1. Daniel 1:1 states that Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jehoiakim in the third year of Jehoiakim's reign. But Jeremiah 25:1 speaks of things happening in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign. Some people have tried to use this to discredit the authenticity of the Bible. But it is based on a misunderstanding of ancient numbering systems.

Different kingdoms used different systems for numbering the years of the reign of a king. And sometimes, one kingdom would use one system, while at other times the same kingdom would use another system for numbering the years of the king's reign.⁶ In Babylon, they used the accession year method of dating the years of a king's reign. This

⁵Though this could be debated, Dr. Douglas Waterhouse (mentioned above) sees the captivity as taking place in three phases. Each phase has an effect on one thing in particular. And each one ends about 70 years later (class notes, 1983).

⁶Once again, one of the best sources for the dates of the reigns of these kings is the book by Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983).

means that when a new person became king, the rest of that calendar year was considered to be his accession year. It was not given a number. Daniel lived in Babylon at the time of writing his book. It would have been normal for him to use this system.

In Judah, on the other hand, the non-accession year system of numbering the years of a king's reign was in use during the time of the writing of the prophet Jeremiah. He naturally followed the system in use in his own area. The following chart compares three systems for giving dates. At the top is the accession year system (used by Daniel in Babylon). At the bottom is the non-accession year system (used by Jeremiah in Judah). In the middle are the dates according to the Julian calendar (all B.C. dates of course).

Notice how the third year of the king's reign according to the accession year method lines up with the fourth year of the king's reign according to the non-accession year method. And both of these correspond with the year 605 B.C. according to the Julian calendar.

Acc	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	608	607	606	605	604	603	602	601
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

| (The line on the left points to the date of reign)

A Comparison of Similarities Between Chapters in Daniel

Chapter:	1	3	4	5	6
Date (B.C.)	605	602-562 (?)	602- 562 (?)	13 October 539	539/538
Age:	Daniel: 18 yrs.	His friends, perhaps in Midlife	Daniel: perhaps in Midlife	83	Daniel: 84 Darius: 62
Number:	4 Hebrews	3 Hebrews	1 Hebrew	1 Hebrew	1 Hebrew
King:	Nebuchadnezzar	Nebuchadnezzar	Nebuchadnezzar	Belshazzar	Darius the Mede
Type of Crisis:	Lifestyle: food, vessels taken	Worship	Remnant Provides Solutions	Solution to the vessels that had been misused	Worship
Kingdom:	Babylon	Babylon	Babylon	Babylon	Medo-Persia

Please study the chart above.⁷ It becomes clear that the narratives are in historical sequence. This chart provides the basis for the spiritual insights and practical applications which follow.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHT / PRACTICAL APPLICATION

I can learn many things from the life of Daniel. Among the practical lessons learned are the following:

1. Crisis can come at any age (18-84).
2. These men become a type of the end-time remnant which is discussed in the prophetic portions. What happens to these men shows the kinds of things that the remnant will have to face.

Microcosm (type) = Daniel and his friends

Macrocosm (antitype) = God's remnant

3. Sometimes God's people are tested together. Sometimes they are tested separated. Sometimes they are tested alone.
4. During the ministry of the prophet Daniel, three kings are mentioned. Therefore, don't put your hope for life in earthly rulers.
5. In issues of worship, pragmatism creeps into the church (even though the church purports to be built up on absolutes).
6. Worship on one day should influence our lives on the other days.
7. Notice how in each case there were church and state entanglements. Yet each crisis ends in a decree which protects the remnant.
8. Look at the chart again. This is a lifelong process. That is the way sanctification works. It never ends. It is never completed as long as we live.
9. In every case, the remnant are people who will stand.

⁷The chart and accompanying comments are taken from a Daniel class taught by Gerhard Hasel in 1991.