

Daniel

1. Introduction – The book of Daniel appears to be a split personality. The first half of the book is the beloved stuff of children’s Bible stories, while the second half is in many respects a mystery even to serious students of prophecy. Furthermore, the book was written in two different languages, Aramaic and Hebrew. The basic message of Daniel is that God is sovereign even in hostile territory; he turns evil for his own purposes and will eventually crush it completely.
2. Author, date, historical setting – Until the beginning of the 20th century, the consensus among Christian and Jewish scholars was that the book was written by Daniel, an exiled Jew who served in the government of Babylon. Not surprisingly, this perspective has been questioned, in part because unbelieving scholars cannot accept the clarity of some of his prophecies before the fact. The internal evidence indicates that Daniel wrote at least the latter half (7-12). Daniel refers to himself in the first person throughout this prophetic section (e.g. 7:2). The New Testament names Daniel as the author in Matt. 24:15-16; however, this reference only cites portions from the prophetic second half of the book. One option open to conservative Bible believers is that Daniel wrote most of 7-12, with third-person introductions (e.g. 7:1) and other framing provided by a later editor under inspiration. It is conceivable that the earlier chapters were written by a later author *about* Daniel as an introduction to his prophecy. The internal evidence doesn’t allow us to be dogmatic either way. The traditional view is certainly consistent with the evidence, and Daniel would have had access to the events recorded in the first part, since he himself was a central part of those events. Daniel was among those who were carried into exile in 605 B.C., about 18 years before the final destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. Daniel’s service in Babylon lasted through several kings and two separate empires. His prophecy concerns the rise and fall of future empires and God’s sovereignty in the midst of these upheavals.
3. Literary character and language – Daniel is not considered to be one of the more outstanding examples of literary style among the books of the OT. The characters are flat and idealized; the stories are simple; questions about the Gentile kings’ attitude toward God are left unanswered. Yet even these characteristics point us past the form to the purpose of the book. Daniel is roughly divided into two genres – court narrative and apocalyptic prophecy. Apocalyptic prophecy is generally characterized by a long-distance view of the end times, a revelation given by a mediator (an angel in this case), bizarre imagery, and a context in which God’s people are oppressed. Daniel is written in two languages, 1:1-2:4a and 8:1-12:13 in Hebrew and 2:4b-7:28 in Aramaic. Oddly, these two sections do not coincide with the two different genres. Some of each genre (story, apocalypse) is written in each of the two languages. While speculation abounds to explain this, no compelling explanation exists. Nor is our understanding of the book affected by the lack of an explanation.
4. Message:
 - a. Daniel and his friends are a model of Jeremiah’s exhortation (Jer. 29:4-7) – “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (v. 7). They work respectfully within the pagan system but with faithfulness to God as their ultimate principle. As such, they serve as an example for all believers who are in spiritual exile from their heavenly country (the new heavens and new earth).
 - b. Faithfulness to God inevitably brings conflict with prideful idolaters. God sometimes chooses to rescue his people in dramatic ways; he demonstrates his power and commitment to rescue us from our final enemies—sin and death.
 - c. All the nations are in God’s hands and are working out his purposes, even in the midst of pride, ignorance, and rebellion. Evil concentrated in human government will often be a plague and trial for the people of God in this age, but the one who rides the clouds like a chariot and the Ancient of Days will crush all rebellion, and the King of Kings will reign righteously forever and ever.

Reference:

An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.