

DANIEL

Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary

General Editors

T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner,
Andreas J. Köstenberger

Assistant Editors

James M. Hamilton, Kenneth A. Mathews,
Terry L. Wilder

Joe M. Sprinkle





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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago, 1999
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford, 1907
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
CAD	<i>Chicago Assyrian Dictionary</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CEB	Common English Bible (2011)
CEV	Contemporary English Version (1995)
COS	<i>Context of Scripture</i> . Ed. W. Hallo and K. Younger. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997–2002
CSB	Christian Standard Bible (2017)
D-stem	<i>pi'el</i> (Hebrew), <i>pa'al</i> (Aramaic), Semitic stems with similar meanings that double middle consonant of root (German <i>Doppelstamm</i>)
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
ESV	English Standard Version (2001)
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
EVV	English Versions
G-stem	the basic stem (German <i>Grundstamm</i>), <i>qal</i> (Hebrew), <i>pe'al</i> (Aramaic)
GNT	Good News Translation

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GW	GOD'S WORD Translation (1995)
H-stem	<i>hiph'el</i> (Hebrew), <i>haph'el</i> (Aramaic), causative stems characterized by a perfect ה
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden, 1994–2000
HB	Hebrew Bible (= MT Masoretic Text)
HNTC	Holman New Testament Commentary
HtD	<i>Hithpa'el</i> (Hebrew), <i>Hithpa'al</i> (Aramaic), the reflective/passive of the D-stem
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IBHS	<i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake, Indiana, 1990
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
KJV	King James Version (1611)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEB	Lexham English Bible (2012)
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint (early Greek translation of the Old Testament)
NABRE	New American Bible, Revised Edition
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NBD	<i>New Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by J. D. Douglas, N. Hillyer, D. Wood. 3rd ed. Downers Grove, 1996
NIDB	<i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 5 volumes. Edited by K. Sakenfeld. Nashville. 2006–2009
NIV	New International Version (2011)

List of Abbreviations

NJPS	Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New Jewish Publication Society Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text (1985)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
NLT	New Living Translation (2015)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library (series)
Š-stem	<i>Shaphel</i> (Aramaic causative stem)
Sanh.	Sanhedrin
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–2006
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass., 1997
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

I. The Story of Daniel

The book of Daniel tells the story of a certain Jewish man named Daniel and his companions Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (later known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) who were taken to Babylon “in the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah” (1:1; roughly 605 BC, see below). The exile of Daniel and his friends occurred some years before the exile of other Jews to Babylon. The exile of King Jehoiachin (Jehoiakim’s son) and his entourage occurred in 597 BC, and the exile of many others occurred in c. 586 BC after the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon.

The stories and prophecies of Daniel cover a period of time from Daniel’s exile through the fall of Babylon to Darius the Mede and through the third year of King Cyrus of Persia (Dan 10:1). Thus, the story of Daniel covers a period of almost seventy years. These accounts depict Daniel and his Jewish friends remaining faithful to God despite a hostile environment. They were willing to die rather than disobey God. The book also indicates that Daniel had a God-given ability to interpret dreams and that he received revelations concerning the future of his people and of world empires, leading up to the end of history and the establishment of the kingdom of God.

II. Languages and Structure

Daniel begins and closes in the Hebrew language, but Dan 2:4b–7:28 is written in Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew but clearly distinguishable from it. Some scholars suggest that the

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book was originally written in Aramaic and that the beginning and end were translated into Hebrew to give it a better reception among Jews.¹ But if that were the motive, why not translate all of it? Was the Aramaic portion originally a separate composition? Against this is the fact that the Aramaic of Daniel 7 crosses a genre boundary: In chapter 7 the book transitions from narrative to apocalyptic visions.

By genre the book divides as follows:

I. Court Narratives (Daniel 1–6)

Daniel and friends in Nebuchadnezzar's court (Daniel 1)

Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue

(Daniel 2)

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace

(Daniel 3)

Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a tree

(Daniel 4)

Daniel interprets the handwriting on the wall (Daniel 5)

Daniel and the lion's den (Daniel 6)

II. Visions of Daniel (Daniel 7–12)

First vision: Four beasts and the son of man figure (Daniel 7)

Second vision: Ram and male goat (Daniel 8)

Third vision: Seventy weeks (Daniel 9)

Fourth vision: Kings of North/South, distress/resurrection

(Daniel 10–12)

The Aramaic portion of the book has a striking chiasmic structure that shows literary unity.

(A) A dream about four earthly kingdoms and God's kingdom (Daniel 2)

(B) A story about Judeans who are faithful in the face of death (Daniel 3)

(C) A story about royal pride that is humbled (Daniel 4)

(C') A story about royal pride that is humbled (Daniel 5)

¹ H. L. Ginsburg, "The Composition of the Book of Daniel," *VT* 4 (1954): 246–75.

- (B') A story about a Judean who is faithful in the face of death (Daniel 6)
- (A') A vision about four earthly kingdoms and God's kingdom (Daniel 7).²

This chiasm intertwines with another chiasm that together incorporate the whole book.³ This shows that the final form of the book has a unified structure⁴ that transcends genre and language divisions:

- (A) Beginning of story (Dan 1:1–21)
- (B) Dream about four world kingdoms ended by the kingdom of God (Dan 2:1–49)
- (C) Judeans faithful in the face of death (Dan 3:1–30)
- (D) Royal pride humbled (Dan 4:1–37)
- (D') Royal pride humbled (Dan 5:1–31)
- (C') A Judean faithful in the face of death (Dan 6:1–28)
- (B') Vision about four world kingdoms ended by the kingdom of God (Dan 7:1–28)
- (E) Vision of Persian and Greek kingdoms to Antiochus (Dan 8:1–27)
- (F) Vision of seventy weeks (Dan 9:1–27)
- (E') Vision of Persian and Greek kingdoms to Antiochus (Dan 10:1–11:35)
- (B'') World kingdoms ended and the righteous established (Dan 11:36–12:3)
- (A') End of story: Vision sealed until the end (Dan 12:4–13)

Why is there Aramaic in Daniel? Archer suggests that the Aramaic part of Daniel has to do with the “nations,” and would be

² E. C. Lucas, “Daniel: Book of,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. M. J. Boda and G. J. McConville (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 110.

³ Compare the similar analysis of R. R. Lessing and A. E. Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the Lord: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 438.

⁴ Some critical scholars also argue for the unity of the book. E.g., H. H. Rowley, “The Unity of the Book of Daniel,” *HUCA* 23 (1950): 233–73; cf. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford, 1965), 249–80. Rowley argued vigorously for the unity of Daniel based on the interrelatedness of the two parts of the book and the continuity of style.

of special interest to the “citizenry of the Babylonian and the Persian empires” for whom Imperial Aramaic was the international language of trade and diplomacy, whereas the rest of the book would be of more specific interest to the Jews.⁵ This view can be supplemented with Snell’s suggestion that Daniel’s use of Aramaic (like Ezra’s) serves to strive for authenticity when citing the speech of foreigners.⁶

III. A Bi-Genre Book: Narrative and Apocalyptic Visions

Daniel consists of two major genres: narrative and apocalyptic visions.

A. The Court Narratives (Daniel 1–6)

Daniel 1–6 is a third-person narrative account of Daniel and his companions in the court of the kings of Babylon. Daniel 4 is a first-person narrative by Nebuchadnezzar about his dealings with Daniel. Although there are prophecies within these narratives, including Nebuchadnezzar’s apocalyptic dream of Daniel 2, the overall genre is clearly narrative. These narratives as a whole have a didactic function, teaching the people of God how to live in a hostile, gentile environment.

B. Autobiographical Apocalyptic Visions (Daniel 7–12)

Though introduced by the narrator (Dan 7:1–2a), the last six chapters of the book consist of a first-person account by Daniel, as if taken from a diary or an autobiography. The four visions of Daniel 7–12 do not match the chronological sequence of Daniel 1–6 but begin with the first year of Belshazzar and relate events at various points in time.

Daniel 7	First year of Belshazzar (c. 552 BC)
Daniel 8	Belshazzar’s third year (c. 549 BC)
Daniel 9	First year of Darius (538 BC)
Daniel 10–12	Third year of Cyrus (536 BC)

⁵ G. L. Archer, “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 6; Archer, *Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 391.

⁶ D. C. Snell, “Why is there Aramaic in the Bible?” *JOT* 18 (1980): 83–100.

Apocalyptic⁷ is a genre of biblical and extra-biblical writings. The term derives from *apokalupsis*, the Greek word used in the title and first sentence of the book of Revelation (“Apocalypse,” meaning “the unveiling”). Daniel and Revelation are regarded as apocalyptic books. Other biblical books have apocalyptic elements: parts of Ezekiel, Isaiah 24–27, Zechariah, the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21), and Paul’s Thessalonian letters. Books outside the Bible labeled apocalyptic are *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *Sibylline Oracles* (Books 3–5), *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Psalms of Solomon*, *Assumption of Moses*, *Martyrdom of Isaiah*, *Apocalypse of Moses*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Testament of Abraham*, *2 Enoch*, *2 Esdras* (= *4 Ezra*), *2 Baruch*, and *3 Baruch*. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls are *War Scroll*, *Book of Mysteries*, *Prayer of Nabonidus*, and *Genesis Apocryphon*.

Typical features of apocalyptic include (1) esoteric revelations that emphasize the revealing of hidden mysteries, (2) highly symbolic visions, like an impressionistic painting in which much makes little sense but the whole is clear, and (3) a theology that expresses the belief that, though situations seem hopeless as far as human deliverance is concerned, God is transcendent and sovereign (see §3.4, §3.8).

These theological premises lead to many derived corollaries: Since circumstances are hopeless, one must look not to human strength for deliverance but to God. Events happen because of God’s will, and everything is moving forward according to God’s predetermined plan. Apocalyptic literature contains black-and-white contrasts without many shades of gray. Sharp dichotomies exist between good and evil, between God and the world, and between the present age and the age to come. Since God is transcendent, he does not have immediate contact with men. Accordingly, most apocalyptic writings speak of angels mediating revelation to men. Since God is sovereign, the kingdom of God will be ultimately victorious. The sun, moon, and stars are often involved in the final judgment and victory of God. Persecutors will not escape their oppression against the people of God. Instead God will condemn them at a last judgment.

⁷ For more on apocalyptic, see D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964). The present discussion draws heavily on Russell’s work.

Most of these elements are seen in the apocalyptic portions of Daniel, which is a mixture of narrative and apocalyptic. Moreover, as will be seen below on authorship, critical scholars and conservative scholars typically have different understandings of how distinct apocalyptic as a genre is from the genre of biblical prophecy.

IV. Authorship and Historicity of Daniel

Probably in no book outside of the Pentateuch do traditional-conservative scholars and critical scholars differ as sharply as they do over the book of Daniel. Traditional conservatives say that the book portrays Daniel as a real, historical person of the sixth century BC and that the book contains his genuine prognostications. They believe that Daniel wrote the autobiographical part of the book (Daniel 7–12) and that the narratives about Daniel (Daniel 1–6), if not autobiographic, record what Daniel and his friends actually did in history. This assumes that Daniel was completed around the fifth century BC during the Achaemenid period of Persian history that begins with Cyrus and continues through the fall of the Persian Empire to Alexander the Great in 331 BC.

The most conservative view of Daniel's authorship is defended by Gleason Archer.⁸ He argues that even the third person narratives about Daniel were written by Daniel in the sixth century BC following a literary convention seen also in the writings of Xenophon's *Anabasis* and arguably by John in John 21:24, in which one describes oneself in third-person narration. This kind of narration would be fitting for a book from the hand of a literary genius like Daniel, to whom God gave "knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature" (Dan 1:17). That said, it seems simpler to say that the third-person narration comes from a biographer and that only the autobiographical part (Daniel 7–12)—itself introduced by the narrator (7:1–2a)—comes directly from the hand of Daniel. The biographer then is an unknown disciple of Daniel,⁹ perhaps writing in the late sixth or early fifth century. This unknown narrator organized the framework of the book and incorporated into it the autobiographic

⁸ Archer, "Daniel," 4.

⁹ A. E. Hill and J. H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 454. Similarly, T. Longman and R. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 373.

writings of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4) and the autobiographical visions of Daniel (Daniel 7–12).

What is essential for the traditional-conservative position is that the book records actual history and true, predictive prophecy. Traditional conservatives believe that by supernatural revelation Daniel prophetically anticipated many events known by us now to have occurred during the Persian, Greek, and Roman periods of Palestinian history. He also foresees matters related to the end times. To the traditional conservative, Daniel has some of the clearest, most-specifically fulfilled prophecy in the entire Bible, proving the supernatural nature of the revelation made to Daniel. This is in contrast with the anti-supernatural bias of most who affirm the critical view.

Most critical scholars, and some who self-identify as evangelicals or conservatives,¹⁰ look at the book entirely differently. Typically, they see the book as fictional or, more precisely, historicized fiction. Since the book is fictional, Daniel is not a historically accurate description of events during the sixth century BC. Moreover, the autobiographical parts are pseudepigraphic or pseudonymous. In other words, the autobiographical sections in Daniel 4 and 7–12 were written and put into the mouth of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel respectively by an unknown author or authors who actually wrote before 164 BC, the time of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes who tried to abolish the Jewish religion.¹¹ To these scholars, the book of Daniel as a whole is a “tract for hard times” to embolden Jews in the face of persecution by Antiochus IV to show courage and faith. John Hayes puts it this way: “The central figure of the book of Daniel probably does not reflect any historical personage but is instead to be associated with the legendary and wise Daniel [about which there is much folklore].”¹²

¹⁰ E.g., George Beasley-Murray, “A Conservative Thinks Again about Daniel,” *Baptist Quarterly* 12 (1948): 341–46, 366–71; J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas: Word, 1989); E. C. Lucas, *Daniel*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002).

¹¹ E.g., W. Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 13.

¹² J. Hayes, *An Introduction to Old Testament Study* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 368.

According to the critical view, what appears to be predictive prophecy in the book is actually apocalyptic rather than real prophecy (on apocalyptic, see discussion in previous section above). The predictions refer to things that already occurred before the book was completed. It is thus prophecy after the event (*vaticinium ex eventu*) or history in the guise of prophecy. Apocalyptic was a literary style of writing that became popular in the intertestamental period. Apocalyptic works outside of the Bible are typically pseudographic, use wild imagery, and anticipate the end of the world. Porteous, speaking for the critical view, states,

The only element of genuine prophecy relates to the anticipated death of Antiochus and the expected intervention of God in the establishment of his kingdom. Everything else that is “revealed” to Daniel is history viewed in retrospect either in symbol or as interpreted to Daniel, or in one case, by Daniel to a heathen king¹³

Moreover, this “genuine” prophecy about Antiochus’ death is in fact inaccurate prophecy which did not occur as predicted. According to the typical critical view, one knows where prophecy after the fact ends and where true prediction begins at the very point where the prophecy fails. Thus the critical view sees virtually nothing supernatural about the predictions in Daniel.

I will now offer the arguments in favor of both views, first the critical view, followed by arguments for a traditional-conservative view of Daniel.

A. Case for a Maccabean Date and the Fictional Nature of Daniel

1. Daniel was not included among the Prophets but in the Writings in the Hebrew canon. According to a critical reconstruction of the development of the canon popularized by H. E. Ryle¹⁴ and still followed by many critical scholars, canonization follows the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible. The law was made canonical first, perhaps around 400 BC, and next the Prophets around 200 BC. Then the Writings were made canonical in a process completed at the so-called Council of Jamnia (AD 90). According to scholars like

¹³ Porteous, *Daniel*, 13.

¹⁴ H. E. Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1909).

EXPOSITION

Throughout the exposition, each pericope will include two outlines: one with a simple structure and one that reflects the book's intertwining chiasmic structure.

I. Court Narratives (Daniel 1–6)

A. Daniel and friends in Nebuchadnezzar's court

(Daniel 1)

B. Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue

(Daniel 2)

C. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace

(Daniel 3)

D. Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a tree

(Daniel 4)

E. Daniel interprets the handwriting on the wall (Daniel 5)

F. Daniel and the lion's den (Daniel 6)

II. Visions of Daniel (Daniel 7–12)

(A) Beginning of story (1:1–21)

(B) Dream about four world kingdoms ended by the kingdom of God (2:1–49)

(C) Judeans faithful in the face of death (3:1–30)

(D) Royal pride humbled (4:1–37)

(D') Royal pride humbled (5:1–31)

(C') A Judean faithful in the face of death (6:1–28)

(B') Vision about four world kingdoms ended by the kingdom of God (7:1–28)

- (E) Vision of Persian and Greek kingdoms to Antiochus (8:1-27)
- (F) Vision of seventy weeks (9:1-27)
- (E') Vision of Persian and Greek kingdoms to Antiochus (10:1-11:35)
- (B'') World kingdoms ended and the righteous established (11:36-12:3)
- (A') End of story: Vision sealed until the end (12:4-13)

¹In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it. ²The Lord handed King Jehoiakim of Judah over to him, along with some of the vessels from the house of God. Nebuchadnezzar carried them to the land of Babylon, to the house of his god, and put the vessels in the treasury of his god.

³The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family and from the nobility—⁴young men without any physical defect, good-looking, suitable for instruction in all wisdom, knowledgeable, perceptive, and capable of serving in the king's palace. He was to teach them the Chaldean language and literature. ⁵The king assigned them daily provisions from the royal food and from the wine that he drank. They were to be trained for three years, and at the end of that time they were to attend the king. ⁶Among them, from the Judahites, were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷The chief eunuch gave them names; he gave the name Belteshazzar to Daniel, Shadrach to Hananiah, Meshach to Mishael, and Abednego to Azariah.

⁸Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank. So he asked permission from the chief eunuch not to defile himself. ⁹God had granted Daniel kindness and compassion from the chief eunuch, ¹⁰yet he said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and drink. What if he sees your faces looking thinner than the other young men your age? You would endanger my life with the king."

¹¹So Daniel said to the guard whom the chief eunuch had assigned to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²"Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then examine our appearance and the appearance of the young men who are eating the king's food, and deal with your servants based on what you see." ¹⁴He agreed with them about this and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of ten days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the

king's food. ¹⁶ So the guard continued to remove their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷ God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind. ¹⁸ At the end of the time that the king had said to present them, the chief eunuch presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king interviewed them, and among all of them, no one was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they began to attend the king. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and mediums in his entire kingdom. ²¹ Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Context

Daniel 1–6 constitutes the court narratives of Daniel. Ancient Near Eastern court narrative is a genre of stories recounting the wisdom, abilities, intrigues, and adventures of royal courtiers. This includes tales of foreign courtiers who demonstrate superior wisdom to that of the king's staff and are rewarded accordingly.

This genre fits well with an early date for Daniel, as opposed to a Maccabean date during the reign of Antiochus IV (see discussion of authorship and historicity in the Introduction). Court tales do not particularly fit the context of Antiochus IV in Palestine in the 160s BC, where there was no royal court and where working in a non-Israelite king's court would have been considered treasonous among pious Jews. Collins argues that court narratives can “most plausibly be located in a milieu where such a court existed and was a focus of attention,” and so he takes these court tales in Daniel to contain materials that are older than the rest of the book, though in Collins's view they were then re-edited in the Maccabean period to fit with Daniel 7–12.¹ Patterson pushes the argument in the other direction. For him, evidence for the literary unity of the book of Daniel combined with the probable pre-Maccabean milieu for the court narratives is an argument for the pre-Maccabean date and Babylonian/Persian milieu for the whole book.²

¹ J. J. Collins, “The Court-Tales in Daniel and the Development of Apocalyptic,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 218–20.

² R. D. Patterson, “Daniel in the Critics' Court,” *JETS* (1993): 444–54.

Daniel 1:1

Daniel 1–6 has sometimes also been categorized as wisdom literature. The stories of Daniel and his friends exercising godly wisdom to navigate successfully through life's difficulties provide examples that readers were expected to imitate.³

This first court narrative is a salvation story of sorts.⁴ Here God delivers Daniel and his friends not from death but from a situation in which they might be required to compromise their moral and religious ideals. God does not deliver them by overt miracle, although the healthiness of the young men after being on a vegetarian diet as opposed to eating the royal food might be thought a covert one. Rather than by overt miracle, Daniel and his friends are saved from this situation by the wisdom God gave Daniel (1:17).

The passage follows a chiasmic structure (after Goldingay⁵).

- A Babylonians defeat Judah (1:1–2)
- B Jewish young men taken for training (1:3–7)
- C Daniel seeks to avoid defilement (1:8–10)
- C' Daniel succeeds in avoiding defilement (1:11–16)
- B' Jewish young men successfully complete training (1:17–20)
- A' Daniel (the Jew) outlasts Babylon (1:21)

1:1 Jehoiakim, who reigned over Judah from 609 to 598 BC, began as a vassal appointed by Neco king of Egypt and was regarded by the Bible as an evil king (2 Kgs 23:34, 37). He changed his allegiance from Egypt to Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar took control of Judah following the battle of Carchemish (2 Kgs 24:1; Jer 46:2). Daniel's chronology appears to follow the Babylonian regnal year dating system that counts the time between a king's assumption of the throne and the start of the new year on the first day of the month of Tishri (Sep/Oct) as year zero. Jeremiah dates Babylon's control of Judah to the fourth year of Jehoiakim rather than the third (Jer 46:2), but this can be reconciled with Daniel on the assumption that Jeremiah follows a Jewish, non-regnal year dating system that puts

³ T. Longman III, *Daniel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 58.

⁴ Collins, "The Court-Tales in Daniel," 227.

⁵ J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas: Word, 1998), 8.

the new year at Nisan (Mar/Apr). Thus Jehoiakim's fourth year in Jer 46:2 overlaps the third year of Jehoiakim in Dan 1:1, both referring to an event in 605 BC. See the discussion of authorship and historicity in the Introduction for more details.

There are two spellings for Nebuchadnezzar in the Hebrew Bible. The more common is Nebuchadnezzar (נְבוּכַדְנֶצְצַר). The less common, found in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, is spelled with an /r/ instead of an /n/ as Nebuchadrezzar (נְבוּכַדְרֶצְצַר; cf. Jer 21:2; Ezek 26:7). The latter is closer to the Akkadian *Nabu-kudurri-uṣṣur* that probably means “Nabu, protect my offspring.” An earlier but less likely interpretation of the Akkadian takes it to mean, “Nabu, protect the boundary.” The letters /r/ and /n/ are often interchanged between Semitic languages, so not much should be made of the spelling variation. However, it is tempting to see the more common spelling as based on a derogatory mispronunciation of the name as *Nabu-kudanu-uṣṣur* “may Nabu protect the mule.”⁶ By defeating Pharaoh Neco at the battle of Carchemish (Jer 46:2–12), the soon-to-be king Nebuchadnezzar was able to drive Egypt out of the Levant and take control of Palestine around May or June 605 BC. See further in the Introduction.

The words “laid siege” refer to a very short besiegement before Jerusalem surrendered. It is likely that the reference in 2 Chr 36:6 to Nebuchadnezzar's attacking Jehoiakim and bounding him in shackles to take him to Babylon occurs at this time (see comments on v. 2). Although this besiegement was minor enough that the historical books of the Bible fail to mention it explicitly, it is important for Daniel and his friends personally since it led to their deportations. It is also important for the book of Daniel since this event in 605 BC begins the period of seventy years that Daniel will mull over in Dan 9:2. See further in the Introduction.

1:2 Note the theology of God's sovereign, providential workings in and molding of human events: “The Lord handed King Jehoiakim ... over.” Hebrew נתן (“give, put, set”) is used similarly in 1:9 and 17 to express God's sovereign work (see §3.8). Whereas the Babylonians would likely attribute the plundering of the temple of Yahweh to the superiority of their god Marduk, Daniel attributes

⁶ D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1985), 2–5.

Daniel 1:2

these events to the sovereign will of Yahweh (see Dan 9:11–14). In judging Israel as a nation, God allows the innocent to suffer along with the wicked,⁷ including the exile of Daniel and his friends. The narrator likely derives from Jeremiah the idea that God handed his people over to Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Jer 21:7; 25:9). On “Lord” rather than “LORD” (Yahweh), see comments at 9:3.

A plundering of Judah by Babylon was predicted by the prophets (Isa 39:6; Jer 20:5). Second Chronicles 36:7 (“Also Nebuchadnezzar took some of the articles of the LORD’s temple to Babylon and put them in his temple in Babylon”) may draw on Daniel’s language here or vice versa. Though Daniel could be telescoping two plunderings of the temple, a minor plundering in 605 and a more significant plundering at the end of Jehoiakim’s reign in 598/7, 2 Chronicles is better taken as referring to a plundering in 605. Jehoiakim was placed on the throne by Pharaoh Neco in 609 BC (2 Kgs 23:34). According to 2 Chr 36:6–7, using language similar to Dan 1:2, Nebuchadnezzar shackled Jehoiakim for exile and took items from the temple to Babylon. This does not fit the end of Jehoiakim’s reign in 598/7 BC since at that time Jehoiakim died and was buried in Jerusalem after his corpse was cast outside the walls of the city (2 Kgs 24:6; Jer 22:18–19; 36:30), but this could refer to a brief exile after Nebuchadnezzar took control of Jerusalem or perhaps a threat of exile that was annulled when Jehoiakim swore allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar.⁸

The “vessels from the house of God” play a role in Dan 5:2. They are considered holy, derived from God’s holiness (see §3.6). The theological theme of desecration and/or restoration of God’s holy temple recurs a number of times in Daniel (1:2; 5:2; 8:11–14; 9:26–27; 11:31; 12:11). That God’s temple was plundered would have raised questions in the minds of Jews as to whether God was really sovereign (see §3.8).⁹ In fact God, as an expression of his sovereignty, was himself responsible for allowing the sanctuary to be destroyed (9:16; cf. Lam 2:7).

“Babylon” in Hebrew is “Shinar” (CSB note; NASB). It is often rendered “Babylon” in the Old Greek LXX, as is the case here, though

⁷ R. W. Pierce, *Daniel, Teach the Text* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 14.

⁸ T. E. Gaston, *Historical Issues in the Book of Daniel* (Oxford: Taanathshilo, 2009), 22–29.

⁹ G. Goswell, “The Temple Theme in the Book of Daniel,” *JETS* 55/3 (2012): 514.

Theodotion transliterates as a proper noun in Greek. The plain of Shinar is first mentioned in conjunction with the great hunter and king Nimrod and with the tower of Babel story, which makes Babylon a symbol of sinful pride and disobedience to God (Gen 10:8–11; 11:2). Nebuchadnezzar’s sacking of the temple is another example of this (see Daniel 4). Shinar included the cities Babylon, Erech (or Uruk), and Accad (or Akkad) in central Mesopotamia, a region that includes the modern city of Baghdad some fifty miles north of Babylon. On the biblical-theological theme of Babylon as a proud nation in rebellion against God, see §7.

The expression “house of his god” or “house of his gods” (CSB note) is lacking in the Old Greek, leading some translators (e.g., NRSV) to think it not original and omit it as dittography. Assuming the expression is original, “house of his god” is probably a reference to the Esagila temple of Marduk, patron god of the city of Babylon, suggesting the singular translation “god.” That said, Mesopotamian temples dedicated to one god could be “visited” by other gods, as when the image of Nabu, son of Marduk in the mythology, was brought from his own temple in Borsippa about ten miles away to Esagila in Babylon on the New Year’s Akitu festival to visit his “father.”¹⁰

1:3 Josephus cites the Greek historian Berosus to the effect that immediately upon learning of the death of his father (Nabopolassar) Nebuchadnezzar dealt with “captive Jews, and Phoenicians, and Syrians, and those of the Egyptian nations” before hastening to Babylon to be crowned (*Antiquities* 10.11.1). Daniel and his friends may have been among the Jews captured at this time as Nebuchadnezzar came to Judah to consolidate his territories captured from Egypt. From a theological perspective, their exile fulfills God’s warnings that covenant violations would lead to exile (Lev 26:33, 38; Deut 28:64; see §4.3).

Ashpenaz’s job was to direct the education of foreigners in Babylonian language, literature, and customs. Judging from his name, Ashpenaz appears to be non-Babylonian, probably Persian.¹¹ He presumably had a Babylonian court name, as did officials in

¹⁰ H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon*, rev. ed. (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1988), 310.

¹¹ P. W. Coxon, “Ashpenaz,” *ABD* 1:490–91.

Nebuchadnezzar’s so-called Court List.¹² Daniel and his friends had Babylonian court names as well.

“His chief eunuch” (literally, “chief of his eunuchs”) is a rendering based on the Old Greek and Theodotion that takes קָרִיס to mean eunuch, though it is better taken to mean “[court] official” (NASB; NIV). Hebrew קָרִיס is derived from Akkadian *ša reši* (*šarri*) “the one of the (king’s) head.”¹³ Potiphar, who had a wife, is called a קָרִיס (Gen 39:1; cf. v. 7). Any association with eunuchs is secondary, going back to the common practice of employing eunuchs in positions of intimate contact with the court, especially in caring for wives (e.g., Hegai and Shaashgaz in Esth 2:3, 14). There is little reason contextually to assume that either Ashpenaz or the Hebrew young men were eunuchs. That the Hebrews were “without any physical defect” (v. 4a) probably precludes their being eunuchs at that time since Lev 21:17–20 identifies “crushed testicle” as a “defect” (cf. Deut 23:1). The cognate expression in Akkadian does not typically mean eunuch.¹⁴

Though the young men are called “Israelites,” that is, descendants of the patriarch Jacob (renamed Israel), more specifically they are Jews (3:8, 12), people from the country and tribe of Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel had long ago ceased to exist (722 BC).

“Royal family” is literally “seed of kingship.” This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that descendants of Hezekiah would go into exile as eunuchs/court officials (קָרִיסִים; Isa 39:7). The Jewish young men may have been brought into exile in conjunction with Judah’s King Jehoiakim’s exile (see comments on v. 2). That Daniel and his friends had to be of royal descent suggests they were intended from the beginning to play some political role, perhaps as liaisons between Babylon and its vassal nation of Judah. It turns out instead that Daniel serves as an adviser of kings, giving advice based on his insights into the supernatural, a role also played by Nebuchadnezzar’s diviners (see v. 20). “Nobility” (פְּרִתָּמִים) is a loanword from Old Persian *fratama*¹⁵ used only here and Esth 1:3; 6:9. On loanwords, see Introduction.

1:4 Daniel and his friends were probably in their early teens at their exile. They lack “defect” (מְאֻזָּם; without “blemish,” ESV)—that is, they are “handsome” (NIV), like Joseph whom Daniel resembles

¹² Wiseman, *Nabuchadnezzar and Babylon*, 84–85.

¹³ R. D. Patterson, “קָרִיס,” *TWOT* 634–35.

¹⁴ Wiseman, *Nabuchadnezzar and Babylon*, 85.

¹⁵ “פְּרִתָּמִים,” *HALOT* 3:979.

(Gen 38:6). This not only suggests that they are not eunuchs (see v. 3) but alludes to the sacrificial system. They are like animal sacrifices and priests, dedicated to God and without physical defect/blemish (Lev 22:20–25; 21:17–21). They are also intellectually gifted. Specifically, they had to be “suitable for instruction” (or alternatively “having insight/success”). The Hebrew root שָׂכַל means “to have success, insight, be clever.” It is unclear whether this is a statement of “aptitude” (NIV) or accomplishment (“versed,” NRSV). It likely implies both. On this root’s theological connections, see v. 17 below.

“Chaldean” was originally a term for Babylon’s ruling ethnic group. The Chaldeans entered southern Babylonia about 850 BC, and by the mid-700s took over the throne. Merodach-Baladan (2 Kgs 20:12; Isa 39:1) was Chaldean of the Bit Yakini tribe. The Chaldeans quickly assimilated to Babylonian culture and over time “Chaldean” came to mean “Babylonian.” In Dan 2:2 it is a term for diviners of Chaldean-Babylonian descent. The language spoken at court was in fact Aramaic (Dan 2:4), so Aramaic was presumably part of their studies.

The scholarly Babylonian language in Daniel’s day was Akkadian (Late or Neo-Babylonian dialect), and Daniel and his friends were given new personal names in Akkadian (see comments on vv. 6–7 below). So they presumably also studied the Akkadian literature that includes a whole range of historical, religious, magical, economic, and legal texts in Akkadian—much of which remains extant today: Laws of Hammurabi (widely copied in Neo-Babylonian times¹⁶), the Gilgamesh Epic (which contains a version of the flood story), Enuma Elish (Babylonian creation story of how Marduk, the god of Babylon, became king of the gods), the Babylonian Chronicle (gives historical data concerning activities of Babylonian kings), and the like. The curriculum perhaps included the omen literature with the expectation that Daniel would serve as a *baru* (“seer”) or expert in divination, and could have included various writings about the magical arts (dream books, celestial omen collections, extispicy manuals, etc.).¹⁷ Since knowledge of Sumerian is helpful in the study of Akkadian, it too was probably part of the curriculum.

¹⁶ Wiseman, *Nabuchadnezzar and Babylon*, 88.

¹⁷ J. H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 243.

1:5 “Food” is Hebrew פִּתְּיָבָג (also vv. 8, 13, 15–16), a loanword from Old Persian *patibaga*,¹⁸ or Elamite *batibaziš*,¹⁹ referring to food for the royal court, which would be of finest quality. Daniel and his friends were to be “trained [better, “educated”] for three years.” Hebrew לְדַל is also used of raising children. Babylon of the Neo-Babylonian period considered itself the “city of learning/wisdom” (Akkadian *al nemeqi*), a title once claimed by Assur, the capital of Assyria.²⁰ This would prepare them to “attend the king,” literally “stand before the king” (CSB note).

1:6–7 Only four young men from Judah are named. There could have been others who, unlike these, did not maintain their Jewish distinctives. “Chief,” used in vv. 7–11 and 18, is a different Hebrew word than “chief” in v. 3 (שָׂר rather than רֹב), though contextually they are synonyms for the man in charge. Daniel and his companions are each given Akkadian-Babylonian names, not only to make their names easier for Babylonians to pronounce but also to enculturate them. Babylon became a cosmopolitan home to various ethnic groups, and the Aramaic language was probably more widely spoken than Babylonian by this time. But Babylonian civilization remained the cultural norm, which is why the Chaldeans (of whom Nebuchadnezzar was one) who had migrated to Babylonia themselves adopted Babylonian names in the process of acculturation, as did other ethnic groups besides the Jews who found themselves living in Babylon.²¹ The intent is religious indoctrination as well as education. Each Hebrew name refers to the God of Israel, whereas the new Babylonian names, though there are uncertainties in the exact etymologies, refer to Babylonian gods, as Nebuchadnezzar himself explains for Belteshazzar (4:8). The Babylonians sought to assimilate these Jews into their polytheistic culture and wean them from their own religion. This was an affront to God’s call for his people to be holy and distinct from the nations (see §4.1).

The names of Daniel and his friends teach about God (see §3.2). Daniel is derived from דָּיַן (“to judge”) and אֱל (“God”) and means “God judges,” “God is judge,” “God is my judge” (see §4.2). There is

¹⁸ “פִּתְּיָבָג,” *HALOT* 3:984.

¹⁹ Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, 85.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

²¹ P.-Al. Beaulieu, “Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon as World Capital,” *Journal of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 3 (2008): 5–12, esp. p. 6.

broader debate as to whether *î* in personal names is usually a case vowel or the first-person singular pronoun “my.”²² While the /î/ element in *Dan-i-el* could mean “my,” the alternative spelling in Ezek 14:14, 20; 28:3 (taken in the Introduction as a reference to the Daniel of the book of Daniel) suggests that it might not mean “my” since that spelling of the name lacks the letter yod (י) denoting “my.” His Babylonian name Belteshazzar is probably derived from Akkadian *beletsharušsur*, which means “may the lady [goddess Ishtar] protect the king” or, possibly, *Balaṣsu-ušsur*, “May he [Marduk? Nabu?] protect his life”²³ A less likely possibility is that Belteshazzar is an intentionally garbled form of Belshazzar (“May Bel protect the king”; see comments at 5:1). In other words, Daniel’s Babylonian name is the same name as that of a subsequent king, though the book garbles Daniel’s Babylonian name to distinguish the two men and to obscure the association of Daniel’s name with a false god.²⁴

Hananiah means “Yahweh is gracious” (see §3.6). He is renamed Shadrach, which may be an intentionally garbled pronunciation of Marduk the god of Babylon²⁵ or derived from *šaduraku* (or *šuduraku*) meaning, “I am very much afraid.”²⁶ A Persian derivation has also been proposed, though it seems less likely since the other names appear to be Babylonian.²⁷ The older proposal that takes Shadrach from *šudur-Aku* (“command of Aku”)²⁸ appears generally abandoned since neither *šudur* or *Aku* can be confirmed.²⁹

Misael in Hebrew is a rhetorical question that implies the greatness of God: “Who is what God is?” (see §3.7). He is renamed Meshach. The meaning is uncertain, but the name could be derived from Akkadian *mešaku*, “I am insignificant,” or *mešahu*, “I am

²² *IBHS*, 127.

²³ Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon*, 85; Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, NAC 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 65.

²⁴ William Shea, “Bel(te)shazzar meets Belshazzar,” *AUSS* 26.1 (Spring 1988), 67–81.

²⁵ S.v. “Shadrach,” *ABD* 5:1150.

²⁶ Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon*, 85; “שְׁדַרְךָ,” *HALOT* 4:1423.

²⁷ “שְׁדַרְךָ,” *HALOT* 4:1423.

²⁸ “שְׁדַרְךָ,” *BDB* 995.1; Miller, *Daniel*, 65.

²⁹ No deity by the name of *Aku* is known in the Babylonian pantheon, though it could be a garbled form of *Anu*. *Aku* as a common noun means “cripple” or spelled *akku* “owl” (*W. von Sodon, Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* [Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965], 1:29, 30). The Akkadian noun *šudur* does not exist, and the meaning of the rare word *šudduru* (*šunduru*) is unknown (*CAD*, s.v. *šunduru*).

Daniel 1:8

forgiven.”³⁰ The older proposal that derives it from *mi-sha-Aku* (“who is what Aku is?”)³¹ lacks support.

Azariah means, “Yahweh helps” (see §4.8). Abednego appears to be derived from *abdi nabu*, “servant of Nabu [son of Marduk],” in which the divine name Nabu is intentionally garbled to Nego by replacing the letter נ with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet א,³² perhaps influenced by an Aramaic wordplay on Nabu: *Ebed (Arad)-negu* “Servant of the Shining One [= Nabu].”³³

Subsequently in the narratives, the Babylonian names of these four young men tend to be used in overtly Babylonian contexts (Dan 2:49 3:12–30; 4:9, 18–19; 5:12), while in other settings, and when mentioned by the narrator, their Hebrew names tend to be used (2:13–14, 17; etc.).³⁴

1:8 Up until now Daniel and his companions are portrayed as pawns under the control of the Babylonians. Then Daniel, showing himself a leader,³⁵ asserted himself to maintain his religious heritage (see §4.8). The problem with the king’s food (see v. 5) is not spelled out. Was the food initially offered to idols before being served? This is also a matter of concern in the New Testament (1 Cor 10:28; Rev 2:14, 20). Oppenheim gives evidence that after being symbolically set before the image of deity, food would then be taken to the king—in one case brought to Belshazzar as the crown prince—for consumption. The idea was that offering it first to a deity transferred a blessing on the one who ate it.³⁶ To eat food offered to an idol could be considered acknowledging the deity to whom it had been offered, something a pious Jew like Daniel could not do.

Or was the food non-kosher, including pork which is forbidden by the Jewish food laws (Lev 11:7)? Or was the problem that the meat did not have its blood properly drained (cf. Gen 9:4)? The request to substitute vegetables (v. 12) suggests the problem is especially with

³⁰ Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, 85.

³¹ “מִי־שָׂא,” BDB 568.2; Miller, *Daniel*, 65.

³² “עֶבֶד נְגוּ,” HALOT 2:776.

³³ Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, 86.

³⁴ Shea, “Bel(te)shazzar Meets Belshazzar,” 73; A. E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2008), 89.

³⁵ Steinmann, *Daniel*, 99.

³⁶ A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, rev. ed. E. Reiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 188–89.

the meat. Yet Daniel objects also to the wine, which is not inherently forbidden to Jews by the Torah, though gentile wine is forbidden in later Judaism by the Mishnah (*Avodah Zarah* 2:3), perhaps based on this passage. More than one explanation may apply.

Here is the driving theological issue: Israel's food laws were meant to separate Israel from the gentiles (see Lev 20:25–26) to maintain Israel as a holy people separated to God (see §4.1). Daniel knew that to compromise even in the area of diet was spiritually detrimental.

1:9–10 That “God had granted [נתן] Daniel kindness” (v. 9) affirms God's sovereign providential working in the affairs of his people (see §3.8; cf. 1:2 and 1:17 for more on this theme). Two attributes associated with God are “kindness” and “compassion” (see §3.6). “Kindness” (Hebrew דִּסְדָּה) is a covenant term (see §4.3) with a broad range of meanings, referring to the love, grace, favor, mercy, loyalty, faithfulness, or kindness shown to someone with whom one has a relationship.³⁷ God's granting Daniel דִּסְדָּה thus implies he was in good standing with God. “Compassion” (רַחֲמִים, always plural) is an emotion frequently attributed to God in prayers (Dan 9:9 and comments there). It is cognate with the mother's womb (רֶחֶם), suggesting this is a deep-seated, mother-like emotion of love or pity.

There is a strong contrast between Ashpenaz's wanting to help Daniel and the official's fears. As subsequent narratives show, Nebuchadnezzar was someone to be feared (2:5; 3:6, 29; 5:19). This is followed by a question, “What if he see your faces looking thinner ... ?” “Thinner” (רַעַז), which could also be rendered “poorer” (cf. NRSV; NIV “worse”; NASB “more haggard”), is only used elsewhere in Gen 40:6, where EHV render it “distracted, troubled, dejected, sad” rather than thin. The Old Greek uses διατρέπω (“changed for the worst”) and Theodotion renders with σκυθρωπός (“sad, sullen”). “Your age” (לִי, “age-group, circle”) is a word that only occurs here in the Hebrew Bible. The meaning is based on the Greek (Theodotion, συνῆλιξ, “of like or equal age”; Old Greek, συντρέφω, “grow up together”) and cognates in later Hebrew and Arabic. “Endanger my life” is more literally “You would make my head guilty” (CSB note)—that is, subject to decapitation.

³⁷ K. D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Heseḏ in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1978); Sakenfeld, “Love (OT),” *ABD* 4:377–381.

1:11–14 “Guard” or “guardian” (NABRE) (v. 11; מְלִצֵר) is a person whose job was to protect. It is a loanword from Akkadian **manšāru/maṣṣāru*.³⁸ Daniel showed his practical wisdom (vv. 17, 20) by persistence in trying to maintain his Jewish scruples after being refused by Ashpenaz. Rather than give up, he attempted to work with a lesser official, the guard, who proved more amenable. Daniel proposed a “scientific” experiment, which the guard accepted. Though the verb “test” is an imperative, the term “servants” shows humility and subordination to Babylonian authority. “Ten days” is a lengthy period of verification to show any detrimental effects of their diet of vegetables and water in comparison with the “control group” of young men eating the royal food and wine. Revelation 2:10 seems to allude to this ten days of testing for Daniel and his three friends when it speaks of Smyrna being similarly tested ten days.³⁹ John appears to mean for his audience to think of themselves in a position similar to that of Daniel and his friends—ruled by a hostile, demanding foreign power but committed to faithfulness to God. The faithfulness of Daniel and his friends thus typifies—both in the book of Daniel and more broadly in biblical theology—how the people of God must remain faithful under pressure.

The guard may have exchanged his own food for the royal rations issued to the young men.⁴⁰ “Vegetables” (זֵרְעִים) is actually a term broader than vegetables, denoting “a class of food that is not meat but including grains,”⁴¹ like a modern vegetarian diet. The root זרע is related to “seeds” and “sowing.”

1:15–16 “Better and healthier” is literally “better and fatter (בְּרִיא) of flesh.” In a world where starvation and malnutrition were greater dangers than obesity, fatter (well-fed) was healthier. In Pharaoh’s dream the skinny (= unhealthy) cows and grain are contrasted with the fat (= healthy) cows and grain (Gen 41:3–7). In addition, Ps 73:4 describes the wealthy as “fat” in the sense of well-fed and healthy (Ps

³⁸ “מְלִצֵר,” HALOT 2:594.

³⁹ G. K. Beale and S. M. McDonough, “Revelation,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1093.

⁴⁰ J. G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, TOTC (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1978), 84.

⁴¹ J. Swanson, “זֵרְעִים (zē-rō-’im),” *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

73:4). It is known today that vegetarian diets, so long as they include items with enough protein, vitamins, and minerals, can be as healthy as any non-vegetarian diet. On the other hand, the author probably intends the reader to understand the healthier appearance of the young men as a miracle.

1:17 Theologically, intellect and academic success are among blessings given (נתן) by God (see §4.4; see Jas 1:17; 1 Cor 4:7). The intelligence of Daniel is repeated later (5:11, 14). Thus Daniel affirms that fervent faith and intelligence are entirely compatible with each other.⁴² This is the third time נתן is used to express God’s sovereign work (1:2, 9; see §3.8). “Understanding” (from שכל; see 1:4 above) includes qualities of success and insight. Thus “skill” (ESV, NKJV) and “understanding” (CSB, NIV) are both correct renderings, but neither is complete. Those whom God is with find שכל (1 Sam 18:14; 2 Kgs 18:7). Studying God’s word—an activity in which Daniel engages (Dan 9:1–2)—is a source of שכל (Josh 1:8–9; 1 Kgs 2:1–4). It is associated with obeying God’s covenant (Deut 29:9), turning to God (Jer 10:21), and trusting God (Prov 16:20). The serpent tempted Eve with a type of שכל apart from and in contradiction with God’s revelation, a שכל that led to death (Gen 3:6). On “literature” see v. 4.

As seen in Proverbs, “wisdom” (Hebrew/Aramaic חָכְמָה) has to do with skillfulness in living. The root can refer to skills such as craftsmanship and navigating rough seas (Exod 36:1–2, “skilled/wisdom”; Ps 107:27, “skill” CSB). It thus goes beyond mere knowledge to proper use of knowledge in practical situations. Only God knows where true wisdom lies (Job 28:23). Godliness and obeying God’s instructions in Scripture—both exhibited by Daniel—are the first steps in attaining wisdom (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:9; 9:10).

“Daniel also understood” does not bring out the pending case syntax with its emphatic subject suggesting contrast with his friends: “But as for Daniel, he understood visions and dreams.” In terms of biblical theology, this statement invites the reader to associate Daniel with others who have had revelatory dreams and visions: Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and the prophets. Visions and dreams are not infrequently mentioned together (Num 12:6; Job 33:15; Dan 2:28; 4:5; 7:1; Joel 2:28) to describe how God conveys revelation (see §2) both to prophets and other individuals. The person received

⁴² Baldwin, *Daniel*, 167.

messages and/or symbolic imagery while dreaming or in some sort of trance. Such visions/dreams were given to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:3; 4:5) and to Daniel himself (Dan 2:19; 7:1; 8:1–2; 9:23; 10:1). That Daniel understood “dreams of every kind” may imply a superiority to divination priests who specialized in certain kinds of dreams.⁴³

1:18–19 The “chief eunuch” (better “chief official”; see comments at v. 3) is Ashpenaz, who presented Daniel and his comrades to the king to interview them and commission them for public service in accordance with their abilities. “They began to attend the king” is literally, “they stood before the king,” a phrase probably metaphorical for entering the king’s service. However, another interpretation is possible. The expression may refer to how Nebuchadnezzar confirmed that these young men were so gifted. They stood before him, he asked them questions, and their answers proved that their abilities surpassed all others.

1:20–21 On “wisdom,” see v. 17. “Wisdom and understanding” is literally “wisdom of understanding.” That is, they showed insight and balanced, professional judgment in all their responses. “Understanding” (בִּינָה, “insight, understanding”), often used as a synonym for wisdom, is derived from the verb בִּין, used in v. 4. Like wisdom, בִּינָה and its cognates can refer to professional skills (see 1 Chr 15:22 [music]; 27:32 [counselor]; Exod 31:3 [craftsman/artisan]) as well as intellectual ability. “Ten times better” is a hyperbole to indicate they were decisively better. The Hebrew reads “ten hands” (CSB note). “Hands” meaning “times” occurs also in Gen 43:34. Daniel’s superiority finds confirmation in Daniel 2 during Nebuchadnezzar’s second year (Dan 2:1–49) while Daniel was still in his three years of training (see 1:5). Only Daniel (not Babylon’s wise men) could interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. On “magicians and mediums” see 2:2. From the Babylonian perspective, Daniel with his prophetic gift was regarded as a diviner.

“The first year of King Cyrus” takes us to near the end of Daniel’s career (cf. 6:28; 10:1) and the end of Jeremiah’s prophecy of a seventy-year Babylonian exile (see comments at 9:2), which began with Daniel’s own exile in 605/604 (1:1–5). Thus this verse forms an

⁴³ A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East with a Translation of an Assyrian Dream Book*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 46.3 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956), 239.

inclusio with the beginning of the chapter. Daniel finished his training around 602 BC. He remained in the employ of the Babylonian court until the Persians replaced them. Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC, roughly six and a half decades after Daniel first came to Babylonia. No mention is made of any Median rule between Babylon and Cyrus of Persia, contrary to a common critical view of Daniel's four kingdoms (see Introduction).

Bridge

Daniel 1 fits into the biblical-theological motifs of the need for God's people to be holy (see §4.1), to remain faithful to God even at personal risk (see §4.8), and to use their God-given practical wisdom (one of God's blessings, see §4.4) within a hostile environment. God allowed the exile in accord with his covenant threats (Dan 1:1–3; see §4.3). Though he is given the title “Lord” (Dan 1:2; see §3.2), at issue is whether God would remain Lord in the lives of these exiles. Would loyalty to their new lord Nebuchadnezzar—and his attempt to indoctrinate them in Babylonian culture—take precedence over their submission to God?

Daniel and his friends were keen not to violate God's laws concerning forbidden foods (Lev 11; Deut 14:3–21; cp. the forbidden fruit in Gen 2:16–17), even though this was not without danger (cf. Dan 1:10). A major purpose of Israel's food laws was to help make Israel separate from the nations (Lev 11:44–45; 20:25–26). In the context of exile it was not possible for Jews like Daniel to be totally separated from gentiles, but this was not essential. Nor was it necessary to remain ignorant of Babylonian ways. That Daniel and his friends became experts in the Babylonian language and literature, and excelled in its educational system, is to be celebrated. They even became officials in the Babylonian government despite the idolatrous elements. What was essential was to resist the pressure to assimilate to the culture morally and spiritually—something Israel at the time of the judges failed to do (Judg 2:11–13).

Christians today are likewise pressured to conform to the world's values, and we too must remain holy (1 Pet 1:15–16). This holiness does not require a special diet, for Israel's food laws were abolished (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:9–16; 11:9; Rom 14:14). Even meat possibly sacrificed to idols can in most cases be eaten by a Christian with a clear

conscience (1 Cor 10:25–30). This abolition of the food laws conveys deep theological symbolism, namely a breaking down of the barrier between Jews and gentiles in the church, as God taught Peter (Acts 11:4–9). Under the new covenant, we are sent into a world that is hostile to our God and his Word, but we are not to be “of the world” morally or religiously (John 17:14–19).

In such situations we must be “as shrewd as serpents and as harmless as doves” (Matt 10:16), just as Daniel wisely found ways to remain faithful despite his environment. Other court narratives contain overt supernaturalism, but here God expresses his sovereignty (see §3.8) and blesses his faithful servants (see §4.4) in more subtle, providential ways without obvious miracles: in history (1:2), in working unseen to create good results (1:9), and in granting his servants practical wisdom (1:17). This narrative is an example of what Paul states in Rom 8:28: “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God.” Daniel and his friends show God’s people that living holy in an environment not supportive of our religion is not only possible but that we might even thrive in that kind of environment—with faith, commitment, wisdom, and God’s help.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL THEMES

§1 Theological Implications of Introductory Matters

Daniel is one of the most disputed books in the Hebrew Bible (see Introduction). To most theological conservatives, the book of Daniel gives historically reliable accounts of Daniel and his friends and contains genuine, detailed, and remarkably fulfilled prophecies. To critical scholars it is a work of fiction with many historical errors and prophecies that are only “fulfilled” after the fact—that is, written after the events they supposedly foretell.

Some argue that it matters little theologically whether the book of Daniel is history or fiction. The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) remains true theologically and morally regardless of whether there really was a “good Samaritan.” So, some say, the theological and moral message of Daniel likewise remains true regardless of whether the events actually happened.

But the book of Daniel is not a parable. Its genre appears to be historical narrative (Daniel 1–6) and autobiography (7–12), both of which contain predictive prophecy. In my view, a rejection of the historicity and genuine predictive nature of Daniel’s prophecies undermines the book’s theology. As James Hamilton puts it,

There is a massive difference between the theological meaning of a wish-fantasy and that of a historically reliable account of God miraculously preserving someone alive in a fiery furnace. Dismissing a false fable as irrelevant to my conduct reflects my view of the theological meaning and

value of fairy tales. Risking my life because I believe the stories result from convictions about theological meaning that cannot be separated from historicity. ...

If some Maccabean-era author is making fraudulent claims, if these are fictional deliverances and not future predictions but recitals of what has already happened presented *as though* being predicted by Daniel, then there is no real proof that Yahweh can either deliver from death or predict the future. This means there is no proof that he is any better than the false gods who can neither reveal the future nor deliver their worshippers, which is exactly what the book of Daniel claims Yahweh can do. ...

The whole theological meaning of the book depends upon Yahweh's ability to deliver his people and declare the future before it takes place. If he cannot do these things, no one should "stand firm and take action" and risk his life for Yahweh (Dan. 11:32).¹

If God saved Daniel and his friends from death, this provides proof of and confidence for believers that God can save them. But if Daniel is fictional, the book proves nothing. Moreover, if Daniel is a fictional character who did not write about the abomination of desolation (9:27; 11:31; 12:11), it implies that Jesus misspoke when he asserted that Daniel "spoke of" it (Matt 24:15), a conclusion with negative christological implications. If Daniel's prophecies are real, they are among the most detailed fulfilled predictions in the Bible, demonstrating that God has foreknowledge of the future and the ability to shape future things. It also illustrates the supernatural character of biblical prophecy.

Conversely, if the prophecies are *vaticinium ex eventu* (prophecy after the fact), as critical scholars argue, Daniel's theology of God's foreknowledge of the future (see §3.5) and his affirmation that God moves history toward predetermined goals (see §7) are seriously undermined if not completely gutted. God and his prophets become no better than the pagan diviners and their gods whom the book ridicules for their inability to explain revelation. If, as most critical

¹ J. M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 32 (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2014), 31–32.

scholars believe, the prophecy about the one like a son of man (7:13–14) is really about Israel or an angel, then this undermines the authority of the NT, which interprets it as a prophecy about Jesus Christ. If Daniel’s predictions about the end of Antiochus IV’s life failed along with his timing on the appearance of the kingdom of God, the book would be an unreliable guide in matters divine and leave us with no basis for accepting any other of its theological claims—such as the resurrection of the dead (12:2). Thus, rejecting the critical view of the book is essential to preserving its theological and practical value.²

§2 Revelation of God

God reveals himself in various ways: through nature (Ps 19:1; Rom 1:19–20), through mighty works in history like the Passover and exodus from Egypt, and through the incarnation in Jesus Christ. He reveals himself in dreams and visions. And he reveals himself in a foundational way though Scripture conveyed by apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20; 2 Pet 3:2). The book of Daniel contributes to our understanding of God as a “revealer of mysteries” (Dan 2:47).

Prophets play a prominent role in conveying God’s revelation. Though the book of Daniel never calls Daniel a prophet, his revelations from God and prophet-type activities (e.g., calling on Nebuchadnezzar to repent, 4:27) allow the NT to call him one (Matt 24:15). The Bible warns of false prophets who wrongly claim to convey supernatural revelation (Deut 13:1–3; 18:20–22; Jer 14:14; Matt 7:15; 2 Pet 2:1). Since false gods have no real existence, all “prophets” who prophesy in their name are considered false. The book of Daniel shows that not all claims of supernatural revelation are true. In Dan 2:8–12 Nebuchadnezzar concludes rightly that his diviner wise men are largely frauds. Diviners repeatedly prove useless to explain God’s dream-revelations (2:2–11; 4:6–7; 5:7–8), developing a theme also found in the Joseph story (Gen 41:8, 16, 24–25) that only someone with the Spirit of God can reveal such mysteries (Gen 41:38; Dan 2:27–28; 4:8–9). Exposing false “miracle workers” or prophets does not justify rejection of all things supernatural. Such a conclusion goes from one extreme to another. Daniel proves himself a true conveyer of God’s revelation in contrast with Nebuchadnezzar’s

² This paragraph draws on A. E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2008), 18–19.

fraudulent diviners (Daniel 2). The book reveals that the true God reveals himself and his ways to his prophets.

Daniel's God can and does reveal truth to people (2:22, "He reveals the deep and hidden things"). God, as the "revealer of mysteries," can indicate what will happen in the future:

But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has let King Nebuchadnezzar know what will happen in the last days. ... Thoughts came to your mind about what will happen in the future. The revealer of mysteries has let you know what will happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but in order that the interpretation might be made known to the king. (2:28–30)

The purpose of revelation is so that "the living will know" things about God (4:17), sometimes warning people to change their ways to avoid catastrophe (4:26) and sometimes explaining why the catastrophe must inevitably come (5:22–25).

God conveys revelation through dreams (Daniel 2, 4) and visions (2:19; 7:2; 8:1; 9:23; 10:1), the two terms often being interchangeable (2:28; 4:2; 7:1). The revelation involves the recipient being asleep or in a trance (8:18; 10:8–9). Such revelatory experiences sometimes terrified Daniel, either by their ominous content or by the numinous experience itself (2:1; 4:5; 5:6; 7:15, 28; 8:17, 27; 10:7–8, 12, 19).

Various Aramaic terms elaborate on the nature of God's revelation.³ God reveals (גלה) secrets, hidden things, and wisdom (2:19, 22, 29–30, 47). He shows/tells (D- and H-stem of חזה) what no diviner can (2:11; 2:27; 5:7, 12, 15). He makes known (H-stem ידע) what will happen in the future and interprets mysteries (2:28–30, 45; 5:8, 15–17). He causes prophets to "see" (חזה) visions that others cannot (7:1, 2, 15; cf. 10:7). God's revelation allows prophets like Daniel to give "interpretation" (פִּשְׁר) of mysterious dreams and visions (2:30; 4:24; 5:12–17). Daniel receives revelation in the form of the "law [חֻקֵּי] of his God," devotion to which no doubt contributed to his being a man of integrity (6:4–5). While Aramaic (and Persian loanword) חֻקֵּי might mean little more than religion or religious practice, Ezra is

³ D. R. Davis, *The Message of Daniel: His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013), 41, 72.

called an “expert in the דָּת of the God of the heavens” (Ezra 7:12, 21), and in the Hebrew portion of Ezra he is called a scribe skilled in the תּוֹרָה (“law”) of Moses and the תּוֹרָה of Yahweh (Ezra 7:6, 10). Thus in Dan 6:5, Aramaic דָּת (“law”) is probably the equivalent of Hebrew תּוֹרָה (“law, instruction”), referring to the written revelation of God through his prophet Moses.

In the Hebrew portion of Daniel, some of God’s revelation can be found “written in the law [תּוֹרָה] of Moses” (9:13). God’s revelation is described as a message or word (דְּבָר) from God that is revealed (N-term of גָּלָה; cp. Aramaic גָּלָה above) (8:26; 10:1). Daniel also “sees” (רָאָה) visions (חֲזוֹן, 8:1–2, 13, 15, 17, 26; מְרָאָה, 8:15–16, 26–27; 9:23; 10:1) and vision-apparitions (מְרָאָה) (10:7–8, 16). Through angels God caused him to understand (H-stem of בִּין) the vision (8:16; 10:14) and “make known” to him (H-stem of יָדַע; הוֹדִיעַ = Aramaic הוֹדַע) what will happen (8:19 ESV). Daniel also “understood” (Qal of בִּין) the ways of God and his will by reading prophetic books like Jeremiah (9:2), whose divine revelations were recorded. God by his angel Gabriel gave understanding (H-stem of בִּין) by giving Daniel insight (H-stem of שָׁבַל) in understanding (בִּינָה) as part of the prophecy of the seventy weeks (9:22) or by giving him understanding (בִּינָה) by means of a vision (10:1).

In paganism idols served as signs of divine presence and were thought to convey revelation.⁴ But pagan diviners themselves sometimes considered the gods too remote to disclose much (2:11). Daniel showed the black arts of diviners to be futile in revealing divine mysteries that God freely revealed to him (2:4–11, 27–28; 4:6–7; 5:8). This demonstrated the superiority of Daniel’s God who can genuinely reveal truth through his prophets (2:19).

The book of Daniel may affirm that Daniel prophesied by God’s Spirit. At least Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar recognized that Daniel spoke from a divine spirit: “the spirit of the holy gods” (4:8–9, 18; 5:14), something not unconnected with Daniel’s “extraordinary spirit” (5:12; 6:3). This “spirit of the holy gods” may mean that “the divine Holy Spirit” was in him (*The Message*; see discussion at 4:8). But even if it is correctly rendered “spirit of the holy gods,” Nebuchadnezzar’s statement is close to the truth: biblical theology

⁴ J. H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 116–18.

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affirms that prophets like Daniel speak from God’s Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20–21; cf. Gen 41:38; Num 11:25–26; 1 Sam 10:6; Neh 5:30; Joel 2:28; Zech 7:12; Acts 1:16).

Daniel 9 exhibits a considerable degree of intertextuality, alluding to earlier written Scriptures (see the following chart). Daniel affirms the reliability and authority of the law of Moses by acknowledging that the curses of that law for covenant disobedience (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28) had come upon his people (Dan 9:11–13; cf. 6:5). He read “the books,” referring to the Scriptures, including Jeremiah (Dan 9:2; cp. Jer 25:11; 29:10). As a result, he had confidence to pray for the restoration of his people based on Jeremiah’s prophecy of a seventy-year captivity and exhortation to seek God from exile (Dan 9:1–19; cp. Jer 29:10–14). Clearly Daniel expected God’s prophecies through Moses and Jeremiah to be fulfilled (9:2, 12). Elsewhere Daniel may draw on Jeremiah’s imagery to describe Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:20–22; cp. Jer 27:5–7), and he also frequently evoked passages in Isaiah.⁵

Intertextuality in Daniel 9	
Dan 9:2	Jeremiah’s “seventy years” (Jer 25:11; 29:10)
Dan 9:3	Daniel obeyed Jeremiah’s call to pray and “seek/search for” (בקש) God for restoration from exile (Jer 29:12–14)
Dan 9:4	“keeps his gracious covenant” (Deut 7:9; 1 Kgs 8:23)
Dan 9:5	“sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly” (1 Kgs 8:47)
Dan 9:6	“[God’s] servants the prophets” (Jer 44:4–5); kings and leaders disobeyed God (Jer 37:2; 44:21)
Dan 9:10	Disaster for ignoring God’s word through his “servants the prophets” (Jer 7:25–26; 25:3–7; 29:19; 32:23; 35:15; 44:2–6)
Dan 9:11, 13	Curses “written” in the law of Moses (Lev 26:14–39; Deut 28:15–68)
Dan 9:12	“Nothing like what has been done to Jerusalem has ever been done” (Ezek 5:9)
Dan 9:13	“turning” (שוב) (e.g., Jer 3:12, 14; 4:1; 5:3; 8:5; 15:19)
Dan 9:14	“kept . . . in mind” (שקד) or “kept watch [over the disaster]” (NRSV) (Jer 1:12, 14; 31:28; 44:27)

⁵ See G. Brooke Lester, *Daniel Evokes Isaiah: Allusive Characterization of Foreign Rule in the Hebrew-Aramaic Book of Daniel*, LHBOTS 606 (London: Bloombury T&T Clark, 2015).

Intertextuality in Daniel 9 (continued)	
Dan 9:15	“brought your people out of Egypt with a strong hand” (e.g., Exod 13:9; Deut 5:15)
Dan 9:16	“anger and wrath” (הַמַּחַד, חַד) against Jerusalem (Jer 32:31); “holy mountain” (Jer 31:23; cf. e.g., Joel 3:17; Pss 2:6; 3:4)
Dan 9:24	“seventy” weeks (Jer 25:11; 29:10; cp. Dan 9:2)

God also speaks through “miracles/signs and wonders” that show that he is great and mighty (4:2–3; 6:27). The miracle in the fiery furnace proves to Nebuchadnezzar that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is superior to his gods (“For there is no other god who is able to deliver like this,” 3:29). This leads the king to threaten severe punishment for anyone who defames God (3:28–29). The miracle of saving Daniel from the lions reveals to Darius God’s power and willingness to save (see §3.7, §4.5), which leads to a similar proclamation to show reverence to Daniel’s God (6:25–27). Miracles typically are not used alone to reveal God but in conjunction with prophetic revelation to explain the meaning. Daniel’s prophetic message helped Nebuchadnezzar understand the significance of the miracles he experiences in his madness and recovery (4:19–27).

In some cases God revealed to Daniel what he would do before Daniel passed it on to others (Dan 7:16–28; 10:4–6; 12:8–10).⁶ But Daniel often did not initially understand the visions, needing angelic help to interpret them (7:15–16; 8:15; 9:22–23). In contrast with earlier prophets who were the sole mediators of divine revelation, in late prophetic and biblical apocalyptic writings angels often appear to present or interpret visions to prophets.⁷ Thus, the prophet became the mediator of the (angelic) mediator. This motif of interpretative angel may serve a polemical function to repudiate divination as a means of revealing the future (cf. Deut 18:9–14).⁸ The reason for this change is a matter of speculation. One suggestion is that God

⁶ D. Stuart, “The Old Testament Prophets’ Self Understanding of Their Prophecy,” *Themelios* 6.1 (September 1980): 13.

⁷ Ezek 40:1–3, 45; 41:22; 42:13; 47:3, 6; Zech 1:9, 14, 18–19; 2:1–4; 4:1–7; 5:2, 5, 10; 6:4–5; Dan 8:13–16; 9:21–22; 10:10–14; 12:7–9; Rev 1:1; 7:13–14; 10:1–10; 17:1, 7; 18:1–3; 19:9; 22:8–11.

⁸ See D. P. Melvin, *The Interpreting Angel Motif in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), esp. 1–5, 159–72.

distanced himself from people in conjunction with his departure from his temple (cf. Ezekiel 7–11; cp. §3.4).⁹ The NT indicates that even earlier revelation, namely the Mosaic law, was mediated by angels (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19).

The book of Daniel emphasizes repeatedly that all genuine revelation from God, including predictive prophecy, is true, reliable, trustworthy, and certain (2:45; 8:26; 9:13; 10:1, 21; 11:2). “The great God has told the king what will happen in the future. The dream is certain, and its interpretation reliable” (Dan 2:45). Unlike false prophets who change their message depending on how they are paid (cf. Mic 3:5), a true prophet conveys God’s revelation without modification (Dan 5:17). The trustworthiness of revelation depends on the faithfulness of God whose works are true (4:37). Daniel expected prophetic revelation and warning to come true “just as it is written” (9:13), including Jeremiah’s prophecy of a seventy-year Babylonian desolation of Jerusalem (9:2). However, he probably assumed that God would mercifully shorten prophesied judgments in response to prayer. God’s revelation is true in that it accurately predicts what will happen in the future (2:45; 8:26; 10:1; 11:2). Taken at face value, Daniel 8 and 11 preview Persian and Greek history with some of the most detailed, fulfilled predictive prophecies of the entire Bible, demonstrating the supernatural nature and reliability of prophetic predictions. Since God’s predictions of judgment are reliable, they must be heeded (9:6, 10–11).

Revelation is truth progressively grasped over time. Some prophetic truths are mysterious and will remain hidden and sealed till the time of the end (12:4, 9, 13), when some with “insight” will understand them (12:10). Until then God’s people must “go on [our] way” (12:9) and remain satisfied with only a partial understanding of God’s future plans (cf. Matt 24:36; Acts 1:7).

§3 God

The name Michael (Dan 10:13; 12:1) in Hebrew means, “Who is like God?” and “Mishael” (1:6–7) means, “Who is what God is?” Such rhetorical questions demonstrate that God is incomparable.

⁹ D. P. Melvin, “Revelation,” *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012–2015).