

Book of Daniel

Two parts:

- 1-6: (written in the early Hellenistic period 333-168). Folktale about Daniel (or Belteshazzar), a Hebrew man who lives in Babylon from at least 603 to 520 BCE, and becomes successful by interpreting the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar (Or Nabonidus) of Babylonia and Belshazzar of Persia.
- 7-12: (written around 164 BCE; counsels pacificism in contrast to Maccabees rebellion). Daniel has a series of dreams about the end-time, corresponding to the rebellion of Maccabeus against Antiochus IV. His dreams are interpreted by the angels Michael, guardian of Israel (or “son of man”), and Gabriel, whose name means “God is my warrior.”
 - All the dreams are about political events starting from 603-164, particularly the successive kingdoms of Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece.
 - Key figures are Alexander the Great; Antiochus IV; the Israelite “king” Onias III, whom Antiochus IV overthrows; and Jason, a “collaborator” and brother of Onias, installed in his place.

Context:

- For background on persecutions by Antiochus IV and resulting warfare, read I Maccabees (especially introduction and ch. 1:11-62.)

Language

- 1.1-2.4a and 8-12 are written in Hebrew, by this time language of worship, not conversation.
- 2:4b-7:28 are written in Aramaic, common language of the near east from 587-333.

Organization

- Ch.1 –Daniel (Belteshazzar) and his friends Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) are raised in the Babylonian palace and given Babylonian names. This upbringing gives Daniel training in “Chaldean” arts of astrology and divination (practices are forbidden in Torah).
 - Note setting—dating wrong; set in Babylon to give authority to apocalyptic predictions.
- Ch. 2--Nebuchadnezzar’s 1st dream: A great statue has a head of gold, chest of silver, thighs of bronze, legs of iron, feet of iron and clay. This corresponds to Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece (the feet = the end of the greek empire, Antiochus IV). Daniel and pals are rewarded for correct interpretation (succession of political events).
- Ch 3 –Nebuchadnezzar asks everyone to worship a golden statue. Daniel’s friends refuse to worship it and are thrown into a furnace. When Neb. Opens it, he sees an angel with them. Neb is impressed and commands all people to worship Yahweh.
- Ch. 4—Nebuchadnezzar’s 2nd dream: Great tree with birds in it, animals finding shade under it, that feeds all. An angel or “holy watcher” commands it be cut down and scattered. Let the tree’s mind turn from human to animal. Daniel interprets the dream to mean that Nebuchadnezzar will have a breakdown and wander in the fields with animals. This comes true, but Neb.repents after coming to his senses.
 - In actuality, these events probably happened to Nabonidus, Nebuchadnezzar’s successor, who disappeared into Arabia for about 7 years.
- Ch.5—King Belshazzar (son of Nabodimus/Nebuchadnezzar) and his concubines profane the temple relics. Human fingers write a message on the wall: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. Daniel can read the Hebrew words, which describe weights corresponding to Gold, Silver, Bronze, Iron. Predicts the fall of Babylon to Persia and is rewarded for it.
- Ch. 6—King Darius (or Cyrus) throws Daniel into a den of lions for praying to Yahweh instead of him. The angels close the lion’s mouth (See Bel & theDragon).

- Ch 7—Daniel’s first dream of 4 beasts (Babylon, Media, Persia, Greece). 10 horns (Ten kings) and a little horn (Antiochus IV) who will be defeated by Judas Maccabeus. Another interprets his dream.
 - Representation of God as Ancient of Days. Unique representation of God in OT (contrast Ezekiel, which influences this portrait).
 - Michael (“one like a human being” or “son of man”) represents Israel. He receives dominion over all peoples
 - Beast with horn makes “war with the holy ones.”
- Ch. 8—Daniel dreams of Ram and Goat (images from Babylonian astrology). Angel Gabriel interprets his dream. The “little horn” “threw down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars, and trampled on them.” (8:10)
 - Gabriel says Antiochus will be broken “and not by human hands” (8:25)—Antiochus actually dies in battle.
 - Antiochus raids temple and erects “transgression that makes desolate” or Baal Shamen (lord of heaven; Zeus (Greek). Hebrew play on words: “shiqquts shomem”
- Ch. 9—Daniel reads the book of years (Prophecies of Jeremiah) and prays to Yahweh for deliverance. (Note: It is unusual in bible to mention reading another book of bible).
 - Gabriel explains that Jeremiah’s 70 years was actually “70 weeks of years,” meaning that persecutions will last 490 years before end time and restoration of good.
- Ch. 10-11—Daniels’ vision of the end-time. Refers to book of truth. Rise of Jews against Antiochus IV.
 - Angels Gabriel and Michael fight against the angels that guard Persia (divine conflict mirrors earthly one). For more, see Deut 32:8.
 - “Lawless among your own people” 11:14 refers to a Jewish rivalry over control of temple.
- Ch. 12—first vision of resurrection. Angel Michael arises and resurrects those whose names are inscribed in the book. Daniel is instructed to keep “the words secret and the books sealed until the time of the end.”

Apocryphal Additions to Daniel

- Susanna—detective story. Probably earlier (5th – 4th) than other parts of Daniel, but added in 1st century. Greek. Added either at end or at beginning.
 - Beauty, chastity, prayer, and piety are major motifs—rewarded.
 - Like Greek Esther, prays in time of distress. Prayer answered; God doesn’t intervene until then.
- Bel and the Dragon – Midrash on Jeremiah 51:44 (Bel will disgorge what he has swallowed).
 - Food references are important.
 - Bel is Marduk, Babylonian God.

Notes on Apocalyptic Writing

- Repeated questioning: How long?
- Emphasis on eschatology (Last Things)
- Symbolism of animals; specific for historical events; vague for predictions closer to time of composition
- Dreams
- secret book that must remain sealed until the end (see Revelation)
- Angels or “watchers”
- Prophecy takes place by river (visionary experiences often take place there)
- Dualism (Good vs. Evil) influenced by Persia (Zoroastrianism) and Greek religions.
- Resurrection and Heaven/ Hell were Greek concepts; not specifically mentioned in bible before Daniel except in references to Sheol, Gehenna, and “Bosom of Abraham.”