

THE BOOK OF DANIEL

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Nampa, Idaho | www.pacificpress.com

Cover design resources from Lars Justinen

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Souza, Elias Brasil de, author.

Title: The Book of Daniel / Elias Brasil de Souza.

Description: Nampa, ID : Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2019.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019016092 (print) | LCCN 2019981341 (ebook) | ISBN 9780816365142 | ISBN 9780816365159 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Bible. Daniel—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: LCC BS1555.52 .S68 2019 (print) | LCC BS1555.52 (ebook) | DDC 224/.506—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019016092>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019981341>

September 2019

Dedication

To Magela,

For her love, encouragement, and support

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Introduction

“Either do things worth the writing, or write things worth reading.”¹ Exhibit A for Thomas Fuller’s aphorism is the Bible’s record of Daniel’s life. He delivered on both counts. The book that bears his name and his steadfast allegiance are testaments to God’s faithfulness, compelling all to listen and learn. Early Adventists were urged to study Bible prophecy: “Daniel and Revelation are the books applicable to us, and should be carefully studied, with much prayer.”²

Historically, Daniel’s authorship and date of composition have been a matter of fiery scholarly debate. Critical scholars contend that the book was written or compiled by an unknown Jew to comfort his people during the persecution inflicted by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (ca. 167–164 B.C.). However, Seventh-day Adventists, along with other conservative scholars, view the book as being composed by Daniel himself in the sixth century B.C. They accept the book as an accurate account of the prophet’s life and a reliable record of predictive prophecies.

Several arguments have been advanced in support of an early date for the book. Of first importance is the chronological information noted in the book itself (Daniel 1:1, 21; 2:1; 7:1; 8:1; 9:1, 2; 10:1). Second, some historical details recorded

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in the book show the author had firsthand knowledge of the historical events being recorded. Third, fragments of the book of Daniel among the Dead Sea Scrolls favor an early date. Fourth, the inclusion of Daniel in the Hebrew canon of Scripture also suggests an early date for its composition. Fifth, the Septuagint translation of Daniel shows that the book was already old by the second century B.C., since several words seem to have posed difficulties for the translators. Sixth, the matter seems to have been settled by Jesus, who referred to the book of Daniel as a composition of its namesake author (Matthew 24:15).³

One peculiar feature worth noting is that the book of Daniel (like Ezra) was written in two languages. Daniel 1:1–2:4a and 8:1–12:13 are written in Hebrew, while Daniel 2:4b–7:28 are in Aramaic. Most likely, this bilingualism functions as a deliberate rhetorical device to show different points of view, further reinforcing the message of the book. After a short introduction in Hebrew, Daniel proceeds to record his memoirs and two broad prophetic outlines in Aramaic (chaps. 2–7). Interestingly, these are the chapters that convey both Daniel’s experience in Babylon and the prophecies related to the four world powers. Thus, these chapters were fittingly written in Aramaic, which was the international language of the time. But when the focus of the book turns to the sanctuary, the Messiah, and God’s people (chaps. 8–12), the book appropriately switches back to Hebrew, the sacred language of Israel.⁴

The overarching theological theme conveyed by the book of Daniel is the sovereignty of God as the Lord of history, nations, and individuals. While the narratives about Daniel and his companions show God’s love and care for the faithful exiles (chaps. 3, 6), the judgment of Nebuchadnezzar (chap. 4) and Belshazzar (chap. 5) reveals God’s sovereignty in judging pagan rulers. The sweeping prophetic outlines of the book bring eschatology to the forefront of Daniel’s message. In spite of the apparently accidental succession of kings and kingdoms, God will bring history to its consummation and establish an eternal kingdom under the rulership of the One designated as the Son of man, Prince, Messiah, and Michael (chaps. 2, 7, 9–12).

Introduction

The present study divides itself into thirteen chapters. The first chapter addresses introductory issues relevant to the understanding of the book, such as its literary structure and basic principles of interpretation. The subsequent chapters follow the twelve chapters of Daniel, as found in the Hebrew canon and modern Bibles. As we engage in the study of this fascinating book, “let Daniel speak” and “present the truth as it is in Jesus.”⁵

1. Thomas Fuller, comp., *Introductio ad Prudentiam; or, Directions, Counsels, and Cautions*, 3rd ed. (London: W. Innys, 1731), 40.

2. Ellen G. White, Letter 139, 1896, quoted in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 18 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 275.

3. Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, New American Commentary, vol. 18 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 24–43.

4. See B. T. Arnold, “The Use of Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible: Another Look at Bilingualism in Ezra and Daniel,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 22, no. 2 (1996): 1–16.

5. Ellen G. White, “The Study of Revelation,” *Pacific Union Recorder*, January 14, 1904.

1

CHAPTER

From Reading to Understanding

The book of Daniel begins in the ashes of exile and closes with the glory of the resurrection. One message rings forth throughout: God stands sovereign over the kingdoms of the world and watches over His people despite the evil powers that oppose Him and persecute His people. Kings and despots ascend to power and pass away, but in the end, the Prince of Peace obliterates the earthly powers and sets up a kingdom based on righteousness. Thus, no matter how complex certain portions of the book may be, one truth emerges loud and clear: Jesus wins.

Studying the book of Daniel is an exciting adventure, requiring a great deal of wisdom and understanding. Indeed, Daniel himself prays for understanding. His lack of understanding makes him feel faint and sick for a time. But an angel interpreter arrives to explain aspects of the divine message that require clarification. As you study the book of Daniel, you may feel like the prophet, longing for a better understanding of passages that seem difficult and obscure. In this regard, you may benefit from the scholarship of Adventist interpreters who have studied the book and explained its truths.¹ The present volume is a modest contribution to this end.

We will emphasize three elements to guide our study of this precious book. First, we will note its structure. The book has

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been organized along the lines of its narrative (chaps. 1–6) and prophetic sections (chaps. 7–12). Second, we will give attention to the proper approach to understanding the prophetic message of Daniel. Third, we will reflect on the contemporary relevance of the book of Daniel for our lives.

Structural and literary unity

As we study the book of Daniel (or any other biblical book, for that matter), we must bear in mind that God's special revelation has come to us through ancient modes of thinking and literary expressions. For example, we tend to present an argument in a straight line of thought: introduction, development, and conclusion. This Aristotelian-influenced line of reasoning, though foreign to the Bible, has become the foundation of the Western mind-set. To rightly understand the book of Daniel, it is important to set aside the expectation that its chapters and sections must unfold in a rigorous, straight-line manner.

In Daniel, we encounter a structure characterized by repetition and expansion, which applies to the prophetic and narrative sections. For example, literary parallelism is present in the lines of poetry found in Psalms but also functions in the large prophetic outlines and narratives in the book of Daniel. The prophetic outlines of Daniel 2, 7, 8, and 10–12 are a progressive chain of recapitulations and expansions. Each subsequent section repeats, expands, and adds information or details not previously covered. Likewise, the narratives are structured according to a pattern of repetition. The blazing furnace parallels the lions' den, and the temporary removal of Nebuchadnezzar from the throne parallels the permanent demise of Belshazzar. The outline below can help you visualize this structure:

Prologue (1:1–21)

Four metal kingdoms (2:1–49)

God delivers Daniel's friends (3:1–30)

God humbles Nebuchadnezzar (4:1–37)

God humbles Belshazzar (5:1–31)

God delivers Daniel (6:1–28)

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Four animal kingdoms (7:1–28)

The ram and the goat (8:1–27)

Daniel's prayer and God's answer (9:1–27)

The conflict of nations (10:1–12:4)

Epilogue (12:5–13)²

But the parallelism shown above by no means indicates mere repetition or circularity. In fact, such recapitulation must be qualified as a “progressive parallelism.” That is, “the author takes us from the beginning to the end of a sequence of events and then returns to the beginning to describe them again, this time in different terms or from another perspective. One might liken the structure to a spiral staircase, turning around the same central point on more than one occasion, yet rising higher and higher at the same time.”³ As noted in every prophetic outline, repetition and expansion come with a historical progression that spans history from the time of the prophet to the establishment of God's kingdom.

It also bears noting that the narrative section (chaps. 1–6) contains prophecy (chap. 2), and the prophetic section contains narrative portions (chaps. 9, 10).⁴ It is helpful to mention that the book begins in Hebrew (chaps. 1:1–2:4a), continues in Aramaic (chaps. 2:4b–7:28), and concludes in Hebrew (chaps. 8–12). A quick look at the literary and linguistic sections shows that they do not coincide but rather overlap each other, thus strengthening the unity of the book. Additionally, note that the Aramaic section (chaps. 2–7) is a concentric structure centered on chapters 4 and 5, emphasizing God's judgment on two rulers.

Another important aspect of the book that deserves attention concerns the interlocking nature of narrative passages with prophetic passages. The stories and prophecies recorded in the book should not be understood as independent strands that were later joined together.⁵ Rather, the narrative and prophetic sections intertwine around each other in a tight unity. For example, the narrative notes about the seizing of the temple vessels by Nebuchadnezzar and their subsequent profanation by Belshazzar point to the arrogant activities of the little horn

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in chapters 7 and 8.⁶ Likewise, Daniel and his friends' loyalty to God in the narrative section points to the faithfulness of God's end-time people in the prophetic section.

Interpretation of the prophetic message

Important to a proper interpretation of Daniel is the recognition that its prophetic message belongs to the so-called apocalyptic genre, which is a type of prophecy that stands in contrast to classical prophecy. Apocalyptic prophecies are of a revelatory nature, inasmuch as they disclose what has been hidden from human sight and knowledge; the prophetic messages preserved in books such as Isaiah, Amos, and Jeremiah are designated as classical prophecy. Apocalyptic prophecy also discloses God's long-range and unconditional plans for history, with a focus on the end of human history, pointing to a time when God will bring the present world order to a close and establish His eternal reign. Classical prophecy, however, focuses mainly on God's conditional plan for national Israel within the bounds of the covenant.⁷

Apocalyptic prophecy also displays other features. Revelation comes mainly in visions and dreams and often through the mediation of heavenly beings. It is also characterized by striking contrasts, such as good versus evil and the present versus the future. It may also use composite and vivid imagery—for example, winged lions and a horn with eyes and a mouth. All in all, apocalyptic prophecy emerges in times of crisis to convey a message of hope—God stands in control of history.⁸

At this point, we must remember that everyone brings an interpretative bias to the study of Daniel. Recognizing presuppositions and unique interpretational perspectives is the first step in gaining a proper understanding of its message. Throughout history, the prophecies of Daniel have been understood from at least four main perspectives: preterism, futurism, idealism, and historicism. Preterism views the prophetic events as already fulfilled. Futurism believes that the prophecies of Daniel will be fulfilled literally in an eschatological (end-time) period. Idealism understands the prophetic events as timeless truths with no specific historical referents. Historicism recognizes

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that the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies takes place within the flow of history, from the time of Daniel to the establishment of God's kingdom.

To understand how these approaches differ, consider how preterism equates the antichrist with Antiochus IV. Futurism views the antichrist as a world ruler that will appear far into the future. For idealists, the antichrist represents any evil power that oppresses God's people or opposes the gospel. And historicists identify the antichrist with the papacy, whose power and influence extend from the Middle Ages to the end of the world.

Given these different approaches to Daniel, which one would be the most compatible with the nature and purpose of the book? Seventh-day Adventists have adopted the historicist view, not simply because of a supposed inherited tradition from the Reformers but because careful study has validated that the historicist view flows naturally from the book of Daniel itself. This fact is recognized by a reputable Adventist source:

The validity of historicism as a method for the interpretation of Daniel and Revelation is provided by the fact that the angel interpreter in Daniel used this method in explaining the meaning of the visions to the prophet. In a dream he is informed that the dream of the king in Dan. 2 represents four kingdoms that will arise in human history before the kingdom of God is established (verses 36–45). The four beasts of Dan. 7 represent those same kingdoms, after which God will give the kingdom to the saints (verses 18, 19). The first kingdom was identified as Babylon (verses 36–38). In Dan. 8 two animals are used as symbols to represent the Medo-Persian and Greek empires (verses 19–21). The fourth kingdom is not identified in Daniel, but Jesus takes it to be Rome (Matt. 24:15). According to Daniel, this kingdom was to be divided, and a little horn would exercise political and religious control over the people. In the time of the end the horn is to be destroyed and God's kingdom established forever.⁹

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In addition, Jesus understood Daniel 9:26, 27 from a historicist perspective as He referred to the future destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Luke 21:20–22). And in the same vein, Paul mentioned a succession of prophetic events to be fulfilled within history before the second coming of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:1–12).¹⁰ From these observations, it follows that “historicism as a method of interpretation is found in the Bible itself, and it provides the key for the interpretation of the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation.”¹¹

Let us turn to the year-day principle—a crucial interpretive element within the historicist approach. Three major reasons demand the application of the year-day principle to the time prophecies of Daniel. First, the magnitude of the events described in the prophecies leading up to the “time of the end” indicates that the time periods mentioned in these prophecies should extend through history and not be limited to a few literal days, weeks, or months. For example, from the broad scope of Daniel 7, it is unlikely that the struggle with the little horn would be resolved in three and a half literal years.¹²

Second, the symbolic imagery and language of the prophecy require that the time units be symbolic. As aptly noted, “In many apocalyptic prophecies, both the major entity and the time element involved have been zoomed down into a symbolic microcosmic scale that can be better understood by zooming them up into their macrocosmic fulfillment.”¹³ This has been called “miniature symbolization” and “allows the year-day principle to be applied to the ‘seventy weeks’ with their time subdivisions (9:24–27): ‘a time, two times, and half a time’ (7:25; 12:7); the 1,290 ‘days’ (12:11); the 1,335 ‘days’ (12:12); and the 2,300 ‘evenings and mornings’ (8:14). But the absence of such symbolization in regard to the ‘seven times’ (4:16, 23, 25, 32), the ‘seventy years’ (9:2), and the ‘three weeks’ (10:2) implies that these time periods have to be understood literally.”¹⁴

Third, the Bible presents ample evidence that a day can stand for a year. Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6, as well as a host of other passages across the various books and literary genres of Scripture, reference parallels between a day and a year. Interestingly, the

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first time prophecy mentioned in the Bible seems to have been calibrated in terms of a year-day equivalence. Due to the corruption of the antediluvian world, God pronounced this verdict: “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his *days* shall be one hundred and twenty *years*” (Genesis 6:3; emphasis added). So the year-day equivalence that emerges in the time scales of apocalyptic prophecy already appears to be embedded in Scripture.

Contemporary relevance

To understand the book of Daniel, we must know more than the history and dates related to its prophecies; we must read it to learn about the God who revealed Himself in its narratives and prophecies. On every page, God shows Himself to be in control. At the beginning of the book, He gives Jerusalem over to Nebuchadnezzar, but at the end, He raises His people from the dead. As the book unfolds, God watches over His servants and gives them wisdom. He accompanies them in the blazing furnace and the den of lions. He sets up kings and removes them, revealing His long-range plan to establish His eternal kingdom.

The book of Daniel bears witness to Christ by disclosing God’s grace and highlighting its ultimate revelation in Jesus. The merciful nature of God and what He does for His people point to Jesus as Savior and Lord. The fourth Man in the blazing furnace and the Man clothed in linen are specific disclosures of the pre-incarnate Christ. But Christ also appears at the heart of the prophetic message of the book as our Sacrifice, Priest, and King.

The lordship of Christ is also evident in the narratives of Daniel and his friends, providing models of excellence, integrity, and wisdom. They inspire us to live faithful lives as we serve God in a pluralistic and relativistic culture. Ellen White notes, “A faithful study of the story of Daniel and his three friends will teach the principles that underlie a strong, true character. These young men had first learned to serve God in their homes. They had there learned the meaning of true religion and what God would do for them if they remained loyal to him. When they were carried to the court of Babylon, they

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determined to yield up life itself rather than be untrue to God.”¹⁵ As one writer has asserted, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’ ”¹⁶

The book of Daniel also aids us in understanding the biblical worldview. Its portrayal of God, for example, provides glimpses into the nature of ultimate reality. God communicates with humans, predicts the future, and drives history forward to its consummation. This view of ultimate reality stands in sharp contrast to pantheism, deism, and materialism. Amid the many competing approaches to life, the book of Daniel serves as a spiritual GPS, orienting us to our current position and our ultimate destination in God’s plan.

Finally, the book of Daniel highlights the privilege and responsibility of the remnant people. One historian’s comment on a specific verse can certainly apply to the book as a whole: “Daniel 8:14 is not so much for personal salvation as it is an anchor point in time for a final world mission that would take a special message to every nation, tribe, and tongue (Revelation 10:11; 14:6).”¹⁷ To a large extent, our identity, message, and mission are grounded in the prophetic message of Daniel.

Conclusion

This information can help us to navigate the book of Daniel. As we journey through its pages, we will encounter a landscape populated with various creatures. We will meet prayerful people, arrogant kings, hybrid animals, speaking horns, and brilliant angels. But above every character and every prophecy stands the all-powerful Sovereign of the universe. It is He who drives the flow of history to its ultimate goal. We will find Him walking in a fiery furnace, moving in a den of lions, serving in the heavenly court, or even standing above a river. But in the end, we will meet Michael, our Prince, face-to-face—the One who abides with us in life and death!

1. See, e.g., Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Daniel*, vol. 2, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute,

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1986); Gerhard Pfandl, *Daniel: The Seer of Babylon* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2004); William H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2005).

2. Adapted from Mitchell Loyd Chase, “Resurrection Hope in Daniel 12:2: An Exercise in Biblical Theology” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 48; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 531, 532; Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2008), 22, 23.

3. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Daniel*, Preacher's Commentary, vol. 21 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 17.

4. Carol A. Newsom and Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 289.

5. John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 37–39.

6. Winfried Vogel, “Cultic Motifs and Themes in the Book of Daniel,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 7, no. 1 (1996): 21–39.

7. William G. Johnsson, “Biblical Apocalyptic,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000), 784–814.

8. Johnsson, “Biblical Apocalyptic,” 784–814.

9. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1995), s.v. “Historicism.”

10. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Historicism.”

11. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Historicism.”

12. William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, vol. 1, rev. ed., Daniel and Revelation Committee Series (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 72.

13. Alberto R. Timm, “Miniature Symbolization and the Year-Day Principle of Prophetic Interpretation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 42, no. 1 (2004): 166.

14. Timm, “Miniature Symbolization,” 166.

15. Ellen G. White, “Knowing God,” *Youth's Instructor*, April 7, 1908, 13.

16. Abraham Kuyper, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 488; emphasis in the original.

17. George R. Knight, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2008), 37, 38.