Daniel - Introduction, Part 4 ⧉

COURSE ⧉   COMMENTARY ⧉

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Apocalyptic

- **Daniel's Apocalyptic Passages**
  Like other OT passages and the Book of Revelation in the NT, portions of the Book of Daniel are classified as *apocalyptic.* This term is derived from a transliteration of the first Greek word within the Book of Revelation: Ἀποκάλυψις [*Apokalypsis*]. The word denotes the action of *uncovering*, *disclosing*, or *revealing.* Biblically, it refers to passages where God reveals information to man which *could not be obtained by any other means.*

- **Apocalyptic as Literary Genre**
  The term *apocalyptic* is also used to identify a literary genre describing written works sharing characteristics frequently found in revelatory passages where information is conveyed by way of visions containing symbols: *Apocalyptic literature is symbolic visionary prophetic literature, composed during oppressive conditions, consisting of visions whose events are recorded exactly as they were seen by the author and explained through a divine interpreter, and whose theological content is primarily eschatological.*

- **Antidote to Apparent Hopelessness**
  Apocalyptic revelation is often given in a period when man's response to God led to judgment or postponement of promises. In the case of the Book of Revelation, the Davidic king was rejected, crucified and His rule from the throne of David postponed (Acts 1:6-7) and the age of the Church began to unfold. With Daniel, the Jews, Jerusalem, and even God's house (the Temple) were judged and the people taken into captivity. In both cases, there were long periods characterized by disobedience and judgment, but the apocalyptic message given by God underscored the fact that God's intention cannot be thwarted and His will is destined to prevail upon the earth.

Languages

- **Four Languages**
  Sections of Daniel are written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Individual Greek and Persian terms also influence the text. For example, some terms in the Aramaic section are transliterations of Greek terms for musical instruments. The influence of these languages upon the text reflects the interaction of different cultures through the sixth century B.C. and the geographical reach of the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Medo-Persian empires.

- **Hebrew and Aramaic**
  Daniel 1:1-2:4a is written in Hebrew. Daniel 2:4b-7:28 is written in Aramaic. Daniel 8:1-12:13 reverts back to Hebrew. The use of Aramaic is not unique to Daniel, it is also found in Ezra, Jeremiah, and Genesis.

- **Why Aramaic?**
  It would seem that the change to Aramaic recognizes the Gentile setting of the historic narrative which follows because Aramaic was the predominant language spoken by the heterogeneous

population at Babylon. Not only was Aramaic spoken at Babylon, it was the *lingua franca* over a wide region during the sixth century B.C., especially in the realms of government and commerce. The use of Aramaic may indicate that the subject matter of chapters 2-7 are of special interest to non-Jews.

Dead Sea Scroll

Image provided by Daniel Baranek, *Dead Sea Scroll - part of Isaiah Scroll (Isa. 57:17-59:9), 1QIsab (ca 100 B.C.).* This image is in the public domain.

Style of Aramaic

- ### Eastern or Western Style of Aramaic?
  Critics have pointed to the style of the Aramaic within Daniel as evidence that the book was composed late, during the Maccabean era. They maintained that the Aramaic in Daniel was of a Western rather than Eastern style. Presumably, Daniel would have composed in the Eastern style since he lived most of his life in Babylon. Others who have studied the question disagree, noting that Daniel's Aramaic is Western, not Eastern. Still other scholars maintain that prior to the first century B.C., when Daniel would have written, there is no evidence that Aramaic had developed different Eastern and Western styles.

- ### Early Style of Aramaic
  Studies have shown that about ninety percent of the Aramaic vocabulary in Daniel occurs in fifth century texts or earlier. The style of Aramaic in Daniel is similar to that of the Elephantine papyri (5th century B.C.) and the Aramaic in the Book of Ezra.

Greek Loan Words

- ### Terms for Musical Instruments
  Several musical instruments in chapter 3 of Daniel appear to be Aramaic transliterations of their Greek names. Critics suggest that Daniel was written later because they allege Greek terms would not have been known in Babylon as early as the sixth century B.C., but only after the spread of Hellenism by the conquest of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.

King David Playing Zither

Image provided by Andrea Celesti, (1637-1712). *King David playing the Zither.* This image is in the public domain.

- ### Early Greek Influence
  Greek culture had a wide influence in the Near East in the time of Daniel. Contacts between Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt with Asiatic Greeks took place at least a century before the time of Daniel. Greek colonies are now known to have inhabited the coast of Palestine as early as the days of Hezekiah, a century before the time of Daniel. Music is often one of the earliest cultural influences to cross boundaries as musicians were employed at foreign courts, such as that of Nebuchadnezzar at Babylon.

Persian Terms

- ## Aramaic contains Persian Terms
  The text of Daniel also includes words of Persian origin. This also has been seen as evidence for a late date of composition for the book. But, like the Greek Words found in Daniel, the appearance of the terms is readily explained by early contact between Persia and Aramaic-speaking peoples as well as the restricted sphere where the terms were employed.

- ## Old Persian
  About half of the Persian loan words occur in Official Aramaic, and have been found in sixth- to fifth century B.C. literary sources. All such Persian terms are Old Persian in nature, i.e., earlier than *ca.* 300 B.C., as expected for the era when Daniel was written. The majority of the Persian loan words are technical terms used for governmental business--terminology Daniel, in his administrative position under the Medes and Persians, would have acquired.

- ## Evidence for Early Origin
  Concerning the contribution of the Septuagint regarding the date of Daniel, there is evidence that by the time the Septuagint was translated the meaning of a number of the Persian terms had been forgotten. Also, some of the Persian words are from an older form of Persian which no longer existed by the Maccabean era.

Summary

- ## Inspired Apocalyptic Genre
  The fact that much of Daniel is written in an apocalyptic genre does not discount the authority of its contents.

- ## Aramaic By Design
  The lengthy Aramaic passage of Daniel, unique to the OT, is by design: (1) it occurs in mid-sentence; (2) it spans both major sections of the book (chapters 1-6 & 7-12); (3) it can be explained by the universal or Gentile emphasis of much of the material in chapters 2-7.

- ## Early Composition
  The language of Daniel provides additional evidence of its early origin. The style of Aramaic reflects Daniel's sixth century setting. The Greek and Persian loan words appearing within the text are expected for a document written in the fifth century B.C. from the commercial center of a world-empire.