

Introduction: Part 5

Versions

- **Versions of Daniel**

There are several major textual witnesses to the Book of Daniel. (1) The *Masoretic Version* is the authoritative and reliable Hebrew text of Daniel which we are most familiar with. (2) Prior to the Christian era, the combined Hebrew and Aramaic text of Daniel was translated into several Greek Versions as part of the Greek Bible known as the *Septuagint*. (3) Manuscripts from the *Dead Sea Scrolls* also contain passages from the Book of Daniel.

- **Masoretic Version**

The vast majority of modern translations of the Old Testament are based on the Masoretic Text (MT). This text is represented by a collection of manuscripts dating from as early as the ninth century. Although the earliest Masoretic text of the Book of Daniel is almost 1,000 years later than the time when Daniel wrote, this version has stood the test of time because of the meticulous care with which the Hebrew scribes accurately preserved the text over the centuries. We know this to be true because of evidence provided by the *Dead Sea Scrolls*.

Greek Versions

- **The Septuagint (Old Greek and Theodotion)**

The *Septuagint* is a Greek version of the Old Testament commissioned at Alexandria, Egypt which took place *circa* 250-150 B.C. There are two primary Greek witnesses to the contents of the Book of Daniel. The oldest one is designated the “Old Greek” (OG) and was first published in 1772 based on the newly-uncovered manuscript, *Codex Chisianus*. Although the OG version was the earlier text, it was supplanted very early by a subsequent version of Theodotion. A popular critical edition of the Septuagint, *Ralph’s Septuagint*, contains parallel columns in the book of Daniel where both the OG and Theodotion versions can be compared side-by-side.

- **Inferior to Masoretic Text**

Although the Greek versions have value in their own right, they should not be viewed as authoritative alternatives to the MT. The church fathers Origin and Jerome both considered the Septuagint to be inferior to the MT. Most modern scholars recognize that the Greek versions show evidence of editing in an attempt to “correct” what were seen to be inconsistencies in the text. This is especially true in passages pertaining to biblical chronology where *apparent* contradictions have been misunderstood and artificially “corrected” introducing errors into the text.

- **Additions to Greek Versions**

The Greek versions of Daniel contain three additions which are not found in the MT: (1) *The Prayer of Azarias and Song of the Three Children*; (2) *Susanna*; (3) *Bel and the Dragon*. These additions would probably be largely unknown if it weren’t for their appearance in

Roman Catholic versions of the Bible among the deuterocanonical books. There is no evidence that the additions were known by the early Jews or Josephus. Nor are the additions found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were evidently written after the Hebrew text of Daniel and may have originated in Egypt.

Dead Sea Scrolls

- **Daniel Popular at Qumran**

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, eight manuscripts of Daniel have been identified indicating that Daniel was very popular among the biblical books at Qumran. These manuscripts contain passages from almost every chapter of Daniel.

- **Witness to Reliability of Masoretic Text**

The Dead Sea Scroll versions of Daniel attest to the early form of the Hebrew text of Daniel which closely matches that of the Masoretic Text which is the basis of our modern translations.

"[With the advent of the Dead Sea Scroll fragments] we are able to compare for the first time in history the Hebrew and Aramaic of the book of Daniel with manuscripts of the same book that are about 1,000 years older. A comparison between the MT and the earlier manuscripts contained in 1QDan^a, 1QDan^b, and 6QDan, based upon a careful study of the variants and relationships with the MT, reveals that 'the Daniel fragments from Caves 1 and 6 reveal, on the whole, that the later Masoretic text is preserved in a good, hardly changed form. They are thus a valuable witness to the great faithfulness with which the sacred text has been transmitted' (Mertens 1971:31). These textual witnesses demonstrate that the MT was faithfully preserved and confirm that the Hebrew and Aramaic text of Daniel is reliable."

—Gerhard Hasel, "New Light On The Book Of Daniel From The Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Bible and Spade*, vol. 5 no. 2 (Associates for Biblical Research, Winter 1992), 47.

Themes

- **God is Sovereign in History**

The dominant theme in the book concerns the sovereignty of God in history, setting up and deposing both Jewish and Gentile kings. As one commentator put it, "Daniel's book has a theme of such simplicity that the most brilliant minds in the world have been unable to grasp it. It is just this: God is in charge." This theme is explicitly stated in numerous passages within the book: Daniel 2:21, 37; 4:17, 35; 5:21; 7:25-26. This theme is also demonstrated by the linkage between the first six chapters which contain historical narrative and the remaining chapters which illustrate the sovereign control of God in the spiritual realm behind the scenes of history, especially His foreknowledge in predicting and determining the course of history.

- **The Superiority of Israel's God**

God permitted Babylon to judge Israel by destroying Jerusalem and taking the nation into captivity. Whenever God uses other nations to judge Israel, there is always the risk that

the Gentile nations will interpret the judgment of Israel as an indication that the God of Israel has a vindictive character or is incapable of protecting His chosen nation, being inferior to the gods of the Gentile nations (Ex. 32:12; Eze. 36:19-22). The events of the captivity and associated destruction of Jerusalem might appear to the natural eye as if to indicate that God was incapable or unwilling to defend Israel or that He had reneged upon His promises. His miraculous intervention in Daniel (e.g., dreams, fiery furnace, lion's den) are intended to demonstrate his continued interest in Israel and His superiority over Gentile gods.

- **The Eternal Kingdom of Messiah**
In contrast with the Gentile kingdoms which are shown to be temporal, the Book of Daniel predicts a coming eternal kingdom ruled by the Messiah. This eternal kingdom differs from the Gentile kingdoms in its righteous nature, but especially in its everlasting dominion (Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14, 27).
- **The Preservation of Israel**
The Babylonian Captivity was a judgment on the rule of the Davidic kings. This initiated the "Times of the Gentiles" during which Israel lacks a Davidic ruler and is subject to Gentile dominion. With the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon, the question naturally arises as to what will become of God's promises to Israel—and especially whether the nation will survive? Daniel's message answers these questions by indicating that Israel will be preserved and ultimately restored, even if it requires angelic assistance (Dan. 9:24-27; 11:1; 12:1).
- **Judgment**
As was mentioned in our discussion concerning the Authorship of the book, the name "Daniel" means either "God is my judge" or "God is judge." It would seem that Daniel's name is intended to call attention to the theme of judgment which runs throughout the book: (1) Israel, and especially the scepter of the Davidic throne, is judged by God by the captivity in Babylon (Eze. 21:10, 13, 25-27); (2) Man judges the sequence of Gentile kingdoms as a glorious image (Dan. 2; 3); (3) God judges man's rule as beastly (Dan. 4:28-33; 7:26); (4) Belshazzar's kingdom is judged and found wanting (Dan. 5); (5) At the end of the age, the righteous and wicked stand for judgment (Dan. 12:2-3).
- **The Spiritual Reality Behind History**
The Book of Daniel "lifts the curtain" on aspects of the spiritual realm to reveal that the political affairs of governments are influenced by angelic powers, some of whom stand opposed to God's will in history. Angelic powers are seen in conflict regarding the rise and fall of empires (e.g., Dan. 10:13; 11:1) and, in some cases, are dispatched by God in response to the petitions of the saints (Dan. 10:12).
- **Living Amidst Paganism**
The book opens by illustrating the response of godly young men who found themselves living in the midst of a pagan culture. This theme continues throughout the historical narrative. By the end of the book, Daniel shines forth as one of the premier examples in Scripture of faithful service to God while living in the midst of a pagan culture hostile to the God of Scripture.

- **The Framework of Prophecy**
The repetition of related predictions, especially as they pertain to the sequence of Gentile kingdoms during the Times of the Gentiles, intentionally underscores the importance of the content of the book as it contributes to a comprehensive understanding of other prophetic passages throughout Scripture. The sequence of metals of the image in Daniel 2, the sequence of beasts in chapters 7 and 8, and the events of chapters 9 and 10-12 all contribute to a larger revelation which extends through the NT, especially in the Book of Revelation. The contribution of Daniel to a prophetic understanding by believers future to Daniel's era is seen in numerous passages which indicate the predictions pertain to the time of the end (Dan. 8:26; 9:27; 11:35; 12:1, 4, 9) and in the fact that Daniel was told he would not understand their meaning and that the book was intentionally shut up until a future date when it would be revealed and understood, presumably by saints of that age (Dan. 12:9, 13).