

In order to understand the use of the book of Daniel<sup>1</sup> in the book of Revelation, we give a short introduction to the book of Daniel and its message.

### 1. Influence on the book of Daniel from biblical and non-biblical literature

The book of Daniel suggests links with Israelite historiography (writing of history), a responsibility of Israelite scribes. The book begins with a virtual quotation from Chronicles (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:6-7), which explains the history of Israel as a theocracy. Also the stories in the book of Daniel work through a sequence of reigns, from Nebuchadnezzar to Cyrus. The visions in the book of Daniel contain postexilic history (the history of Antiochus IV) in quasi-prophetic form, especially Daniel chapter 11.<sup>2</sup>

The book of Daniel suggests links with Israelite prophecy.

*The prophetic feature in the stories* is the confrontation of sin and judgement. Although Daniel is not called 'a prophet', there are some prophetic features to the stories. As a man held in high regard, in whom the divine spirit dwells, and to whom such extraordinary revelations are given, Daniel may be more than a prophet rather than less. He confronts Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, speaking of sin and judgement in the manner of the pre-exilic prophets. The stories of these confrontations recall some prophetic stories in the book of Kings.

*The prophetic feature in the visions* is the interpretation of present history of the kingdoms of the world and a concern with coming decisive events. Historical dualism of prophecy is the contrast between this age and an age that God will bring about (cf. Isaiah 40 to 55; Ezekiel 38 to 39). The visions in the book of Daniel with their symbolism recall those of prophets such as Ezekiel and Zechariah. They manifest prophecy's concern with the interpretation of present historical events and with coming decisive events that will bring God's judgement on pagan kings who have resisted God's will. Unlike the stories, the visions do not confront people with a challenge to turn and thereby avert the judgement that threatens them. The hearers are not responsible for history; history itself seems predetermined rather than open, and God's purpose is only effected (caused to occur) in history negatively, not positively.

The book of Daniel suggests links with Babylonian, Persian and Hellenistic thinking. They are the likely source of some features of the book of Daniel which are not evidenced elsewhere in the Old Testament. Such features may include: the four-empire scheme (Daniel chapter 2 and chapter 7); the concept of revelation; pseudepigrapha (spurious writings, especially Jewish writings ascribed to various Old Testament prophets, but written in or somewhat before the early Christian period); and quasi-prophecy.

### 2. Prophecy and quasi-prophecy

*Prophecy* is speaking forth the word and acts of God, which focuses on *the past or the present or the future*.

The Old Testament prophets were the organs of fresh revelation and spoke the very words of God himself! All their words were God's authoritative words. Their function was to communicate revelations of truth from God. Their proclamations revealed who God is (Isaiah 40:11-31) and what God's will is in specific religious, moral and social issues (Isaiah 1:2-4, 10-20). Their proclamations were not simply predictions of the future, but served to explain *the past* (Isaiah 48:3-6a; Jeremiah 2:1-13), or to throw light on *the present* (Isaiah 48:17-18; Jeremiah 23:16-32), or to disclose *the future* (Isaiah 48:6b-7; Jeremiah 23:2-8; 29:10-11).

*Quasi-prophecy* (not real prophecy) is speaking forth the words and acts of God with regard to *the past and present* history as if it were prophecy with regard to *future* history. It is history cast in the form of prophecy that has become a means of revelation. Theologically, narrating history as if it were prophecy affirms that the events that unfold have been in the control and purview of God. This is not deliberate deception, but a legitimate literary genre used elsewhere at that time. See the origin of Jewish apocalyptic literature in supplement 4.

<sup>1</sup> A short summary of the introduction to Daniel in Word Biblical Commentary, volume 30, John E. Goldingay, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Read F.F. Bruce "Israel and the Nations", chapters 14 to 19, covering the period 539 B.C. to 164 B.C.

### 3. The book of Daniel is quasi-prophecy and pseudepigraphy

Thus, if the book of Daniel was written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., then the book of Daniel is a quasi-prophecy in the sense of speaking forth God's word with regard to historical events in Israel between the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. as if it were a prophecy spoken in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. concerning future events. The inspired author reflects on the empirical events from the time of the exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the time of Antiochus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Empire after empire had risen and fallen. If the present emperor, Antiochus IV, rises higher, it means that he will also fall harder.

History did not have to be read that way. It can remain secular if it is not interpreted. History becomes revelation when it is viewed in the light of the tradition of what God has said and done in the past, and in the light of the word he is speaking now. Revelation looks in the face of the dark realities of history since the exile of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and the even darker realities of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., but insists on also gazing steadily on how the future must be, given who God is.

The vision's perspective is the gift of revelation that is received by faith. The outrages of the present political events (the oppression and persecution under Antiochus IV, 175-163 B.C.) make it morally necessary that there should be judgement and a reversal of events in the future. If this does not happen, then all that people have believed about God and humanity's relationship to God is shattered. A crisis in history deepens faith in the power of God rather than destroying it.

The book of Daniel is not simply a prophetic book; it is an apocalypse: it uncovers and reveals history in the light of the providence of God. An apocalypse can make use of prophecy as well as quasi-prophecy. The best presupposition for a commentary is therefore that the forward projections in the book of Daniel were designed to bring a message that was meaningful to people in the postexilic period. Therefore, the seer's visions must be interpreted in the light of material in the book of Daniel itself and in the light of the history of the postexilic period.

Conservative scholarship has, sometimes overtly (openly), sometimes covertly (disguised), approached the visions in Daniel chapters 7 to 12 with the a priori conviction that they must be *actual prophecies*, because according to them quasi-prophecies issued pseudonymously could not have been inspired by God. Conservative scholarship has also approached the stories in Daniel chapter 1 to 6 with the a priori conviction that they must be *pure history*, because according to them fiction or a mixture of fact and fiction could not have been inspired by God.

Chronicles has been written by an unknown inspired author about 400 B.C. The book *interprets the history of the kingdom of Israel* between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in the light of God. The history of Israel is not simply secular history, but the history of God's salvation and judgement. And Israel is not a monarchy like other states, but a theocracy.

Daniel is a pseudepigraphy written by an inspired author about 160 B.C. and *interprets the history of the kingdoms of the world* between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. in the light of God. Also the history of the world is not really purely secular. From the perspective of the Bible the history of the world is ruled by the providence of God.

Compare this with the book of Revelation which is a *backwards-prophecy*: it uncovers the deepest significance of the historical events that have already happened between the creation and the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. in the light of God (heaven) and against the background of the coming end-time.

But the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not only capable of knowing future events and thus of revealing them (prophecy). He is also capable of inspiring people to write history (for example, the gospel of Matthew) and fiction (for example, the parables of Jesus), actual prophecy (e.g. Isaiah) and quasi-prophecy (e.g. Daniel), in their own name (e.g. the books of Samuel), anonymously (e.g. the books of Kings and Chronicles) or – in certain circumstances – pseudonymously (e.g. Daniel and other Jewish apocalyptic literature) (See supplement 4 B, dispensational or covenant theology). Both prophecy and quasi-prophecy in the Bible are inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16)!

Because prophecy had stopped with Malachi round about 400 B.C. the authors of (Jewish) apocalyptic literature between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. probably used as pseudonyms the names of Old Testament saints

like Enoch, Ezra or Daniel. We do not need to regard this as deliberate fraud in which they wished to have their literature listed among the prophetic books. We should rather regard the apocalyptic literature as *a literary style (genre) in which the authors desired to explain the revelations of the prophets.*

Thus, whether Daniel was a historical person or not, whether the stories in the book of Daniel are history or fiction, whether the visions in the book of Daniel are actual prophecy or quasi-prophecy, whether they are written by Daniel or by someone else, whether they are written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. or in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. or somewhere in between, makes surprisingly little difference to the interpretation of the book of Daniel or the authority of its message! The book of Daniel is a part of the canonical books of the Bible and as such is inspired by God and authoritative for doctrine and behaviour.

#### 4. Reasons for quasi-prophecy and pseudepigraphy

The visions in Daniel are for the most part quasi-prophecy and they are pseudepigraphy: we do not know who these visionaries were. The reasons for this conclusion is not philosophical (as if prediction of future events is impossible), but rather formal and theological. It is not that prediction of second century events in the sixth century would be impossible. Such a possibility is granted.

Formally, it is not essential to or distinctive of apocalypses to be pseudonymous or quasi-prophetic. Both these features are missing from the book of Revelation and are present in works of other genres. But ancient Near Eastern parallels to visions such as these - there being no Old Testament parallels - are all pseudonymous quasi-prophecies, not actual prophecies of known authorship. There is no reason to assume that the authors would necessarily have intended - or hoped - to deceive their hearers regarding the visions' origin. The hearers would have known how to read them.

Theologically, the God of the Bible characteristically speaks contextually, into situations rather than independently from situations. He reveals key truths about the End that are relevant to people's present lives. But he declines to give information about the future of a concrete or dated kind, insisting that people live by faith. It is difficult to see how the God of the Bible would reveal detailed (concrete and specific) events of the second century B.C. to people living in the sixth century B.C., even though he could do so.

#### 5. Division of language in the book of Daniel

Daniel 1:1 to 2:4a is written in Hebrew. Daniel 2:4b to 7:28 is written in Aramaic. And Daniel 8:1 to 12:13 is again written in Hebrew.

#### 6. Division of the book of Daniel into stories and visions

<b>Stories - Daniel 1-6</b> A series of messages from God given to kings, with Daniel interpreting them.		<b>Visions - Daniel 7-12</b> A series of messages from God given to Daniel, with an angel interpreting them.	
1-4	Nebuchadnezzar	7-8	Babylon (7:1; 8:1)
5	Belshazzar	9	Media (9:1)
6	Darius	10	Persia (10:1)
6:28	Cyrus	11-12	Greece (11:2)

The stories and the visions are characterised by repetitions.

Dan 1, 3 and 6 relate *God's faithfulness in times of testing of the exiles.*

Dan 2, 4 and 5 relate Daniel's skill in interpretation and his revelations concerning *the fall of kings.*

Dan 2 and 7 relate a vision of a sequence of *four empires.*

Dan 7, 8, 9 and 10-12 relate a quasi-prophecy of *events up to the Antiochene crisis and a promise of its end.*

The difference between the stories and the visions suggest that there are times in history when the hand of God can be detected in the processes of history (the stories) and there are times when it has to be looked for at the End (the visions).

## **7. The author(s) and audience of the book of Daniel**

We have no direct information concerning what circles might have generated the stories or the visions.

*The stories* (chapter 1-6) are told about Daniel in the third person and are of a popular kind and may have been designed to speak to Jews as an ethnic and religious minority in Babylon during the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. exile, the implicit argument being that if people like Daniel and his friends in their positions remained faithful and proved the faithfulness of God, ordinary people can do so too.

*The visions* (chapter 7-12) are written down by Daniel in the first person and presuppose a quite different audience, in 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Jerusalem. They were intended for the faithful in their time of testing during the Antiochene crisis. They were the means of the discerning teachers (Daniel 11:33; 12:3) to fulfil their ministry. The authors will have belonged to the Hasidim, if we take the term to denote “the people committed to faithfulness to traditional Judaism” (although 1 Maccabees 2:42; 7:12-13; 2 Maccabees 14:6 use the term with particular reference to “the people who fought for the right to maintain that faithfulness, thus identifying them with the Hasmonaeans or Maccabaeans”).

The various parts of the book do not suggest common authorship. Diversity of authorship might be one of the reasons for diversity of language in the book.

## **8. The date of the book of Daniel**

*The stories* (Daniel 1-6) suggest a setting in the eastern dispersion in the Persian period where there are specific pressures on Jewish faith, but also the possibility of not only survival but success. This fact suggests a date in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

*The visions* (Daniel 7-12) presuppose a setting in Jerusalem in the 160's B.C. where power lies in the hands of constitutionally hostile Gentile authorities (the Seleucids) and a compliant Jewish leadership in Jerusalem (the Tobiads) that has co-operated with the subversion and outlawing of traditional Jewish faith. This fact points to a date in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.

There are specific pre-second century B.C. indications to be found in Daniel 7 and elsewhere, but the arguments for identifying earlier strata are not compelling.

The Aramaic chiasm consisting of the stories in chapter 2 to 6 and the vision in chapter 7 probably came into existence in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. The chapters 7 to 12 are chronological sequential. The visions in chapter 7 to 12 were written in the light of the stories in chapter 1 to 6 and they derive their apocalyptic (disclosing, uncovering, revealing) features from these stories. Each vision refers back to one or more of its predecessors.

The stories in chapter 1 to 6 and the visions in chapter 7 to 12 manifest a consistent viewpoint. This fact, however, does not suggest common authorship. Diversity of authorship might be one of the reasons for the diversity of language. Perhaps Hebrew-writing authors added chapters 8, 9 and 10 to 12 to the Aramaic chiasm and may have been responsible for chapter 1, which is also written in Hebrew.

Based on the division between quasi-prophecy in Daniel 11:1-39 and real prophecy in Daniel 11:40 to 12:3, Goldingay concludes that the book of Daniel as a whole must be dated in the 160's B.C.

## **9. The four winds of heaven in Daniel (7:2)**

The cosmic storm recalls the motifs in Genesis 1:1-2. The creation speaks first of God's creative activity, then of the existence of formless waste, then of a supernatural wind (breath, spirit) sweeping over it as a preparation for God uttering his life-giving word. God's wind (breath, spirit) also operates at the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:10). In Job chapter 40 and 41, the Lord affirms that he controls the heaving and thrashing of those huge creatures that symbolise forces of chaos asserting themselves against order and meaning. Daniel's vision combines the cosmic perspective of Genesis 1:1-2, the broad perspective on human history and experience of Job chapter 40 and 41, and the Israelite perspective of Exodus chapter 14 and 15: *the totality of the winds of heaven generates the totality of the events of history in which also the history of*

*Israel unfolds.* Here the powers of chaos are *not natural forces, but historical forces.* The taming of the powers of chaos has not yet taken place, either at the beginning of creation, or at the exodus, or at any other time in history.

*Like the prophets, Daniel believes that God is the Lord of historical events and can achieve his own purpose through them.* Like the prophets, he also recognises that the process of history is nevertheless an unsavoury, unnatural, dark, and not reassuring one, despite of the fact that God is the Lord of it - in a sense, the more so because God is the Lord of history.

God's creative work on the formless deep does not mean he has exorcised from it all potential forces of disorder. Within history there continue to emerge entities that embody that disorder, yet Daniel assumes they are called forth by God himself. Perhaps, we may even say that behind the fourfold wind we may see *the Holy Spirit acting "to bring forth those forms and frames of rule (human governments) which he will make use of"*. That is why the Psalmist cries, "How long?" (Psalm 74:10; 80:4). Daniel's visions are in effect an answer to that cry.

## **10. The four animals in Daniel (7:4-7)**

The line of animals as a whole represents the empires of the Middle East from Nebuchadnezzar to the Seleucids, the totality of powers that dominated the history of the Jews from the end of the Jewish monarchy in 587 B.C. to its revival in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Daniel's vision affirms that this sequence of world empires have been summoned up from the primeval and formless depths by the activity of God himself, so that it manifests something of the purpose of God for responsible government of this world, and at the same time manifests something of the instinct of humanity for self-aggrandisement and destructiveness.

The last of these empires is the most arrogant, godless and destructive, but this does not in itself imply that all history is degenerating rather than progressing. *The animals represent history as a whole as it was experienced by the Jews between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.* It had been consistently threatening, but now it had become extremely threatening.

### **a. The first nation. A responsible, caring nation.**

The first animal is a lion, the king of animals, a symbol of strength, courage, ferocity, destructiveness, rapacity, and fearsomeness. It has the wings of an eagle or vulture, the king of the birds, which is the symbol of speed and rapacity. *The first animal represents a large, powerful, and expansionist nation, a moral threat to smaller peoples.*

We are reminded of the power and authority given to the first of the four regimes in Daniel chapter 2, that of Nebuchadnezzar. The respective distinguishing characteristics of an animal and a bird are to walk on four feet and to fly. Extraordinarily, the lion-eagle is relieved of both these characteristics: its wings are removed and it is set on two feet. It is enabled to behave and think like a human being. That again reminds us of Nebuchadnezzar's restoration in Daniel chapter 4.

The whole picture underlines the present vision's affirmation of the nation symbolised by the first animal. Where animals symbolise nations, human beings often symbolise heavenly beings. The first nation occupies a godlike position of honour, responsibility, and caring for the world, as is God's purpose for human governments (Genesis 1:28; Romans 13:1-7; cf. Daniel 2:38; 4:20-22). Although nations have their origin in dark forces, aggressive impulses, and defensive fears (cf. Revelation 17:15), they can sometimes become means of God's will being effected.

### **b. The second nation. A greedy, expansionist nation.**

The second animal is a bear, a huge, strong and fearsome creature, not normally a predator, but in the vision encouraged to indulge its appetite. *The second animal represents a greedy, expansionist nation. The greedy expansionism of nations can evidently have a place within the purpose of God.* Its distinctive characteristics may link with features of a specific people, but they are rather elusive.

### **c. The third nation. A powerful, energetic nation.**

The third animal is another fearsome predator whose natural speed is enhanced by an unnatural capacity to see and swoop in any direction. *The third animal represents a powerful, energetic nation. God can evidently give a powerful, energetic nation a wide-reaching dominion.*

d. The fourth nation. A fighting and fearful destructive nation.

The fourth animal is the most explicitly fearsome and destructive of the four animals. It is likened to no species and retains a touch of mystery over its identity, though it seems in fact to be an elephant, a fit symbol for the Greek empire beginning with Alexander the Great as a whole or for the Seleucids in particular.

The artistic or intellectual achievements of Greek civilisation do not feature in the vision's portrayal of the fourth animal. It is distinguished from its predecessors chiefly by being more inclined to fight. There is perhaps a reflection here of Palestine's experience of being fought over by rival Greek empires during two centuries (cf. Daniel chapter 11). *The fourth animal represents a nation inclined to fight, crush and devour its victims. God evidently makes use of such a nation to fulfil his purposes on earth.*

## 11. The horns in Daniel (7:8)

a. The ten horns.

Like the first three animals, the fourth animal has an anomalous feature: ten horns, suggesting a comprehensive totality of royal strength. They represent Hellenistic kings. Though we cannot refer them with certainty to 10 specific kings and perhaps the author did not have 10 specific kings in mind.

b. The three horns.

Likewise, a number of historical persons could be more or less plausibly identified as the three displaced kings.

c. The small horn.

The small horn is Antiochus IV.

The small horn that emerges from among the ten horns can be identified as Antiochus IV, the Seleucid king who precipitated the greatest crisis in the history of the Jews between the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the events of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Antiochus sought to bring order to Palestine, but it met resistance as a pseudo-order. Because it was the only order he was prepared to envisage, it had to be imposed by force. Pseudo-order soon exposed itself as a masked embodiment of chaos, not a bulwark against chaos. The principalities and powers in theory undergird and protect human life, but in reality easily threaten it. It is only with the fourth empire that this possibility surfaces, but what does then surface is *the inner nature of all the empires*, because it reflects their origin in the chaos of the primeval deep.

The small horn has certain human features: it looks and speaks like a human being. However, Antiochus sees himself as having the power of a heavenly being, and speaks accordingly. But he is not given such a position by God, as the first three animals were given their different commissions by God (note the passive verbs: was lifted, was given, etc). It gradually becomes apparent that Antiochus is someone of arrogant look and tongue, whose person and activity constitute a challenge to God himself (note the active verbs: crushed, devoured, trampled) (cf. the challenge of the Babylonian king in Isaiah 14:12-15).

The first three animals were clearly under control. The fourth animal decides for itself what to do. It was brought into being by God, but it is overreaching itself. Instead of playing the part that God's purpose had designed for him (the times set by decree)(Daniel 7:25), this eleventh king grasps the rudder of history for himself. And he is able to take charge of the process of history. So it goes on for a time, and for a longer time, and for yet more time ... (Daniel 7:25) but the promise is that a limit is set to this! It will not go on forever. Antiochus thinks that he controls history, but in fact there is a stronger hand on the rudder of history (God)!

The small horn is Rome.

It is possible to make out a plausible case for identifying Rome as the fourth animal. Whether one finds later identification (the Turks, Islam, the pope, Nazism, communism, capitalism, the European Community, the United Nations, the USA, etc.) more or less plausible will depend on one's political and ecclesiastical commitments rather than on explaining the text of Daniel!

*The very use of symbolism in the vision encourages its reapplication to later embodiments of the same dark forces as Antiochus, initially Rome (cf. 2 Esdras 12; Revelation 13)<sup>3</sup>. Even in his interpretation of the vision,*

---

<sup>3</sup> Koch, K. Vom prophetischen zum apokalyptischen Visionsbericht, in Apocalypticism, ed. D. Hellholm, 439

Daniel does not name its historical referents, and thus *he permits its reapplication to subsequent situations where there is a reappearance of the pattern seen in the events of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.*, a pattern itself known from earlier situations and being reworked in the book of Daniel. The process of such reapplication of Daniel's animal images to later empires reflects the fact that international history continues to be a process in which "one ethnic group, then another, becomes through rampaging expansion a monstrous coherence of power and peoples".

#### The small horn is the Antichrist.

Another tradition of interpretation identifies the small horn with Antichrist. Antiochus could indeed be seen as a kind of anti-messiah, a royal figure who realises the opposite of the messiah ideal, a negative to whom the humanlike figure of Daniel 7:13-14 is the corresponding positive, one who aspires to the authority of heaven itself.

However, in Daniel chapter 7, the small horn is not a mere anticipation of something still to come. He is actual, the unpleasant reality in the life of the people of God living in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. It is his reality that makes it possible for the later generations (up to today) to take him as a model for their own portrayal of evil.

#### Conclusion.

Exegetically and historically, the small horn refers only to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. king Antiochus IV, who was the unpleasant reality in the life of the people of God, the implied readers of the book of Daniel.

Typologically, the small horn is a model or Old Testament *type of recurring future realities*, which *may be reapplied* to subsequent situations where there is a reappearance of the pattern of events of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. John calls them "antichrists" (1 John 2:18), and this includes the future reality of the final Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:1-10).