

CHAPTER XVII

DANIEL

THE STRUCTURE OF DANIEL

A. The Present—Chs. 1-6.

- 1—Ch. 1. God the Protector of the captives.
- 2—Ch. 2. God the Revealer of the future.
- 3—Ch. 3. God the Lord of fire.
- 4—Ch. 4. God the Humbler of the proud.
- 5—Ch. 5. God the Avenger of His honour.
- 6—Ch. 6. God the Tamer of beasts.

B. The Future—Chs. 7-12.

- 1—Ch. 7. The End of World History.
- 2—Ch. 8. The Enemy of the Saints.
- 3—Ch. 9. The Messiah the Prince.
- 4—Chs. 10-12. The Fortunes of Israel.

WE deal with Daniel last, not because we consider that this is its true chronological position, but because both the Hebrew canon of Scripture and the nature of its contents put it outside the Prophets in the strict sense of the word.

Daniel, with its stress on the sovereignty of God, which not only compels rebellious men to do His will, but that even at the very moment of His appointing, has always been the most obnoxious of Old Testament books to the humanist, and a chief centre of his attacks. To complicate matters, the book seems to invite attack and to make the task of the critic the easier. For over half a century now the overwhelming majority of Old Testament scholars have taken the non-historical nature of Daniel for granted.

The results have been disastrous, for both sides have come to the study of the difficulties and the exegesis of the book with such bias that they are seldom able to do it justice.

"Historical Errors."

Except incidentally we shall not refer to the allegedly un-historical statements in the book. Those who are interested are referred to the works mentioned in the bibliography. These arguments are not nearly so important as often imagined, for the modern scholar has seriously weakened the force of his own attack.

Though scholars differ in details, virtually all who reject the traditional authorship are agreed that the book *in its present form* was produced about 168 B.C.¹ The writer attributed his visions to Daniel to get his message, in whose truth he profoundly believed, more readily accepted. Charles puts it thus: "How then from the third century B.C. onward was the man to act who felt himself charged with a real message of God to his day and generation? The tyranny of the Law and the petrified orthodoxies of his time, compelled him to resort to pseudonymity. And if these grounds had in themselves been insufficient for the adoption of pseudonymity, there was the further ground—the formation of the Canon. When once the prophetic Canon was closed, no book of a prophetic character could gain canonization as such, nor could it gain a place among the sacred writings at all unless its date was believed to be as early as Ezra."²

It should be clear that such a pious imposture could never have succeeded, if the new book had contradicted the already existing Scripture. Now, with only one major exception, the main "historical errors" are contradictions of Scripture as well. Thus the modern view virtually answers its own difficulties. Were the book a second-century production, we may guarantee that the writer must have had fully adequate grounds for his apparent contradictions of other Scriptures. The bigger the problem, *e.g.* the identity of Darius the Mede, the surer we may be that there is an adequate explanation. But the same argument holds if the book is dated earlier. Fiction that hopes to be accepted as history must be meticulous in its accuracy; how much more if it wishes to be accepted as inspired as well.

There is a tendency to underrate the critical acumen of the period. The Talmud shows us that the early rabbis were very conscious of discrepancies, real or apparent, in the Scriptures. We may not agree with the means by which they explained them away, but that does not diminish the clear-sightedness by which they saw them.

In all fairness it must be added that this only meets the charge of specific error, not that of giving a generally false picture of the times described. This is a charge more easily made than proved. Since, however, there is an increasing tendency to attribute the narrative part of Daniel to the fifth century B.C., it should be clear that the charge is not a serious one.

¹ For the usual modern view see HDB, article Daniel, Book of; Driver, LOT, ch. XI. Against see ISBE, article Daniel, Book of; Young, ch. XXIV; Lattey: *The Book of Daniel* and the Bibliography; Harrison, p. 1105 *seq.*

² Daniel (The Century Bible), p. xvi.

The Linguistic Problem.

Driver's dictum is well known: "The *Persian* words presuppose a period after the Persian empire had been well established: the Greek words *demand*, the Hebrew *supports*, and the Aramaic *permits* a date *after the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great* (332 B.C.)."¹ We are not going to enter into linguistic discussions here, for while it has been proved that the language is compatible with the book's having been written in the fifth century B.C., nothing more than the bare possibility of a sixth-century date can be shown.

But the linguistic phenomena are more complex than the dictum just quoted suggests. From 2: 4b ("O king, live for ever . . .") to 7: 28 the book is not written in Hebrew but in Aramaic, and it is almost universally recognized that the words "in the Syrian language" in 2: 4 do not mean that Daniel spoke in that language—for Babylonian was the court language—but are merely a warning to the copyist that the language is changing. This change of language sets a problem that has seldom been adequately considered by conservatives.

The usual explanation that Aramaic, an international language, is used because these chapters deal with the nations, while chs. 8-12 deal with the Jews, will hardly hold water. 8: 26; 12: 4, 9 seem to preclude any idea that the book was to be widely circulated. In any case, we should expect under this theory the Aramaic to begin with 2: 1 or even 1: 1.

Many suggestions have been made by scholars, but there is only one which we consider covers all aspects of the problem. It is that the book was translated into Aramaic a century or more after its original composition. In course of time part of the original Hebrew was lost, and it was replaced by the Aramaic. The objection that the break could not have come so conveniently seems to have little force. It might have been anywhere in ch. 2, but the scribe responsible for the present form of Daniel would have made the transfer at what seemed the most suitable spot.

It can hardly be just a coincidence that all the Greek words, and all but three of the Persian, are in the Aramaic section. If the writer were a catcher up of foreign words, one would expect a more even distribution of them. If, however, the Aramaic is a century or two later, there is no difficulty in the translator's use of words which had become far commoner by his time. It will, however, be objected that any such loss of the Hebrew is inconceivable; but what evidence there is hardly supports the objection.

¹ Driver, LOT, p. 508.

When did Daniel enter the Canon?

Most Christians (and Jews) take their Bibles for granted, and never ask themselves how the various books came to be recognized as inspired. The history of the New Testament canon shows that while certain books were recognized as inspired within a generation of their having been written, others were regarded with suspicion for a considerable period of time. We have similar evidence for the Old Testament, for as late as the end of the first century A.D. and possibly even later, the right of certain books to be in the Canon was being challenged.

Great stress is laid by the opponents of Daniel's authorship on the fact that the book is not certainly referred to or quoted before 140 B.C. The argument from silence is always dangerous, and here the more so because we have so little literature from this period. For all that, it should not be dismissed offhand. The book is unique in the Old Testament; the form of vision, though prepared for by Ezekiel, is unique; the visions must have been until fairly late in the Greek period almost unintelligible; in addition, Daniel never had the standing of a prophet, and will not have seen his first vision until he was at least sixty-five. All this makes an immediate admission to the Canon improbable. In fact, everything points to the remarkable verification of certain parts of the book in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.) as the proximate cause of its being recognized as inspired.

That Daniel circulated in inferior MSS. is shown by the LXX translation (usually dated c. 140 B.C., but quite possibly earlier). Not only are there many striking variants, especially in chs. 4-6, but there are three additions (to be found in the Apocrypha) running to 174 verses. It seems incredible that any such additions and variations should have entered after the book had been recognized as canonical.

In the light of these facts, there seems little ground for objecting to the possibility of the Hebrew having been replaced by Aramaic. This would sweep away the cogency of the linguistic objection, the more so as the Hebrew does not really suit a second-century date, and is not inconsistent with Daniel's position; he probably seldom spoke Hebrew after the time when he was taken captive as a lad. This is amply adequate to explain many of its peculiarities.

The Miraculous Element.

When all is said and done, the real objection to Daniel is its miraculous element, both in its histories and in its veiled but detailed foretelling of the future. The predictive ele-

ment can only be removed from Daniel by doing violence to its natural meaning. The miraculous element in the histories does not pass the bounds of the credible, and in common with all Bible miracle stands or falls with the resurrection of our Lord, the greatest miracle of all.

The Christian should never forget that the narratives of Daniel receive their endorsement in Heb. 11: 33f, while the predictive truth of the visions is confirmed by our Lord Himself (Matt. 24: 15, cf. Mark 13: 14). This word of our Lord is a guarantee that the visions of chs. 9 and 10-12, in which the abomination of desolation is found, cannot be restricted to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.

The Moral Problem.

It is the New Testament endorsement of Daniel that is really fatal to the modern view. Unfortunately the achieving of good ends by wrong means has never been rare in religious circles; but the end never does justify the means. If Daniel is a second-century work, whatever the motives of the author, it is a sham and a forgery, and we are seriously asked to believe that our Lord had not sufficient spiritual insight to recognize it as such. The period 150 B.C.—A.D. 100 did produce a large crop of pseudepigraphic works,¹ of which Enoch and II Esdras (the latter in the Apocrypha) are perhaps the best known. There is no evidence known to us that the ascriptions of authorship in these books were taken very seriously by any of the Jewish religious leaders, and yet our Lord Jesus Himself (to say nothing of all the others) was completely deceived by Daniel!

To make matters worse, according to this view He took a book which had only been intended by its author to refer to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and so misunderstood it, that He made it apply to things yet future!

To sum up: Over a century of controversy and study has proved inconclusive. The honest verdict on the intellectual arguments of both conservative and liberal must be, Not Proven. Here, as so often in the Bible, the final answer must be one of faith. Pusey's words are as valid to-day as when they were first written in 1864, "The book of Daniel is . . . either divine or an imposture."² It is in our Lord's attitude, rather than in linguistic studies and archaeological research, however valuable and commendable they may be, that we shall find the answer to the problem.

¹ These were mostly apocalyptic and eschatological works attributed to various worthies of the past.

² Pusey: *Daniel the Prophet*, p. 1.

Daniel the Man.

If not of royal blood, Daniel belonged to one of the best families of Judah (1: 3). After Nebuchadnezzar's victory in 605 B.C. at Carchemish, Jehoiakim had to become a vassal of Babylon (this was Jehoiakim's fourth year according to the Jewish, but third according to the Babylonian style of reckoning, 1: 1). Nebuchadnezzar carried off children of the best families, probably as hostages, Daniel among them. The story creates the impression that he will have been about fourteen.

It seems likely that Daniel was made a eunuch (see 1: 3, and much early Jewish tradition). He rapidly rose to high office (2: 48f), which he probably retained until the death of the king (562 B.C.). The impression created by ch. 5 is that he then was either retired—he will have been nearly sixty—or moved to a subordinate post, the former being the more likely. When Cyrus conquered Babylon (539 B.C.) Daniel was an old man of over eighty, and it is easy to see why his work in the reorganization of the kingdom (ch. 6) probably lasted only a year (1: 21). The last recorded date in his life is two years later (10: 1), and it is probable he died not long after. It is too little realized that it was a white-haired old man who was thrown to the lions. Daniel's age is sufficient explanation of his not returning to Palestine.

Apart from legends of no value, we have no knowledge of Daniel apart from his book. The man mentioned by Ezekiel (14: 14, 20; 28: 3) is a figure of hoar antiquity, probably mentioned in tablets discovered at Ras Shamra, dating from before 1400 B.C. His name is spelled *Dani'el* (or more likely *Dan'el*), while the hero of our book spells his *Daniyye'l*, and this is true also of two other persons of the same name, I Chron. 3: 1 and Ezra 8: 2 (Neh. 10: 6). A spelling error by Ezekiel is hardly credible.

We have not even the outline of an autobiography. The stories of Daniel and his friends are told us to reveal the sovereign power of God in action, so that we may the more readily believe the all-sovereignty of God over the future. Not Daniel and his friends, but the sovereign power of God is the topic of each story (cf. especially 2: 47; 3: 28f; 4: 2, 3, 37; 6: 25ff).

The Stories of Daniel.

Once the real purpose of the narratives in Daniel has been grasped, only a few comments on details are needed.

In the ancient world it was quite usual to honour one's god by giving him part of one's food, specially meat and wine (cf.

I Cor. 8; 10: 19-33; also Lev. 2 and 17: 3-9, this latter abrogated at least in part by Deut. 12: 15, 20f). As Nebuchadnezzar was a very religious man, it could be taken for granted that any food that came from his table had been so dedicated. There would have been little or no harm in Daniel and his friends eating this food, but to refuse to do so was one of the few acts of loyalty to Jehovah left open to them (ch. 1).

It is rather naïve to think that Nebuchadnezzar had really forgotten his dream (2: 5). He was so impressed by it that he did not want some spur-of-the-moment priestly explanation fobbed off on him. He argued shrewdly that anyone able to tell him his dream would know the explanation as well. The explanation of the dream is dealt with under the visions.

There is no justification for supposing that the golden (*i.e.* gold covered) image (3: 1) was of Nebuchadnezzar himself. It will have been of Merodach or Marduk, his favourite god. The absence of Daniel need cause no surprise, for the language of 3: 2f must not be stressed. In an empire where it might need months to reach the capital, it would never be possible to gather *all* the high functionaries of state together in one place at the same time. Provincial rule and international relationships had to be continued. The R.V. is correct in its rendering of 3: 25, "like a son of the gods"—the king was a pagan polytheist—so also R.S.V., but N.E.B. may give the sense.

The LXX bears witness to considerable textual doubt in ch. 4. This may be the explanation for the change from the first to the third person in vers. 19-33. The first person would have been expected throughout.

The versions, and indeed Daniel's own explanation, create an element of doubt as to the exact form of the words written on the wall (5: 25); (a) was *Mene* written once or twice? (b) was it *Peres* (sing.) or *Parsin* (plu.—*u* equals "and")? In any case, the doubt affects neither their meaning nor the interpretation of the scene. It seems likely that the words were written in Aramaic (or more probably Hebrew—see above) and that the more educated present had no difficulty in deciphering the letters; owing to the absence of vowels (as normally the case in Semitic writing) they will have read the words: a mina, a shekel, and a half mina (or half minas, or two half minas), which made little sense. (A mina was 60 or 50 shekels.)

The Visions.

Very few who lightheartedly embark on prophetic speculation have much idea of the variety and number of the explanations of Daniel that have been seriously put forward by

Christian expositors worthy of respect. All too often these explanations are mutually exclusive. It is remarkable, too, how seldom the supporter of one view is won over to another. There is not even much evidence that students of prophecy are drawing gradually nearer to one another in their explanations.

If we were simply to give an outline of our own interpretation, it would for these very reasons be largely waste of time. For a survey of all the principal lines of exposition we lack both space and inclination, so we have contented ourselves with laying down certain general principles which we are convinced must underlie any sound exposition of the visions in Daniel.

(a) Daniel is a book "sealed even to the time of the end" (12: 4, also 12: 9; 8: 19, 26). If we add to this an element of uncertainty about the text, and even more about the exact translation, we shall recognize that every detailed and dogmatic interpretation should be treated with extreme reserve.

(b) Ever since Jerome (A.D. 340-420) there has been a wide degree of general agreement on broad lines of exegesis among expositors, until the rise of modern views. Seeing that we have to do with a "sealed book," this is rather remarkable, and it rather disposes of the argument of some more recent writers that we can now understand the book because we are in the end-time. When that comes, we may reasonably expect something startlingly new.

(c) The one prophecy where unanimity might reasonably be expected, that of the Seventy Weeks (9: 24-27), has produced almost as wide a variety of interpretations, many mutually incompatible, as any other passage in this book. This seems to confirm the note of caution already struck.

(d) This dogmatism comes largely from the certainty with which we can apply some parts of the visions to Antiochus Epiphanes, *viz.* ch. 8 and the bulk of ch. 11. But Lattey is surely right in principle, when he says, "The full exegetical exposition of the Book of Daniel must take into account, as it were, three historical planes, that of the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and of the first and second comings of Christ, our Lord. This is part of the mystery of the book, and is not fully expounded in it . . ." ¹ The fact that we can so fully understand the book, when it refers to the past, does not imply that the past has exhausted the meaning of any part of the book, or that the past is a sure guide to the understanding of the book in its future aspect.

(e) The most important thing for the average reader is to discover what the Holy Spirit would have us learn from Daniel for *to-day*. Though he may get a thrill of awe as he realizes

¹ Lattey: *The Book of Daniel*, p. vii.

how completely the past has been in God's hand, we may be sure that this is not the book's chief value. Still less will it be a purely hypothetical picture of things yet future. We may be sure that the chief purpose of Daniel to-day is to bring strength and comfort to the individual or church faced by apparently overwhelming and irresistible difficulties and opposition. Its picture of God's absolute sovereignty in the crisis of the present and in the yet unveiled future is a guarantee of God's succour for all who trust Him and of His ultimate and complete triumph.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Ch. 2).

The king's dream is not referred to elsewhere in Scripture, nor is any attempt made in Daniel to link it with the visions. Its purpose is not to give Nebuchadnezzar a preview of human history—why should God give this to a heathen king?—but to teach him that God is sovereign in the affairs of men, raising up whom He will, and that at the end of an unspecified time of God's own choosing, He would set up His kingdom on earth (ver. 44f). It is not even stated that each kingdom must immediately follow its predecessor. We need hardly doubt that both comings of our Lord are in view here. It is just because the revelation in the dream is general rather than detailed that no attempts at finding deeper interpretations have ever really carried conviction, except to those who have made them.

The End of World History (Ch. 7).

It is a commonplace of exegesis that the four beasts of this chapter are the same as the four portions of the image in ch. 2. The only evidence for this supposition is the alleged suitability of the symbolic animals. Since, however, the symbolism is found suitable both by the supporters of the old traditional views and also of the modern ones, which make everything in the book end with Antiochus Epiphanes, the argument would seem to be rather weak.

In fact, on the face of it, there is no connexion at all. There is no suggestion that the beasts fight with one another, and certainly none are vanquished and destroyed, for when all is finished, the first three are still in existence (ver. 12), while the fourth has been destroyed by God's action (ver. 11). Everything in this vision gives the impression that we are dealing with the end times.

The R.V. of ver. 9 should be noted. Daniel sees God as an old man, because the form of God in this vision is as symbolic as the beasts themselves. Similarly in ver. 13 the R.V. is correct in rendering "one like unto a son of man." This is

symbolic language, for ver. 27 clearly equates him with "the people of the saints of the Most High." The one like a man is a people just as the beasts are. This does not mean that we are to rule out the personal interpretation as well, for to the Jew the people without its Messianic ruler was inconceivable and obviously the ruler received the dominion on behalf of his people. As early as the Book of Enoch (c. 100 B.C.) it is already clearly used in a Messianic sense. It is to be noted that in Revelation our Lord is linked both with one like unto a son of man and with the ancient of days (Rev. 1: 13f, R.V.).

The Enemy of the Saints (Ch. 8).

The interpretation of this vision is in large measure given (vers. 19-26), and from this it is clear that in the first place it refers predominantly to the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes. On the other hand there is every reason for supposing that this does not exhaust its meaning, for it is clearly stated that "it belongeth to the appointed time of the end" (ver. 19, R.V.). Such an extension of the prophecy hardly seems to justify the prolonging of the primary interpretation beyond the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. In other words we should look on Antiochus rather as a foreshadowing of him who finally fulfills the vision.

The Messiah the Prince (Ch. 9).

In many ways this is the crucial chapter of Daniel. If indeed we have here a prophecy of Jesus Christ, then Daniel is truly prophetic, and its application is not bounded by the times of Antiochus Epiphanes. The test is the fairer, for while the language of vers. 24-27 is cryptic, it is hardly symbolic.

We believe that any unbiased student—not necessarily a Christian—will agree that the usual modern interpretation is unsatisfactory by any normal canons of interpretation. By referring the prophecy to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes a chronological error of some sixty-five years is created. The command (lit. "word") to restore and to build Jerusalem is Jer. 29: 10—surely a desperate expedient! The anointed one, the prince (lit. "an anointed-prince") in ver. 25 (R.V.) is someone else than the anointed one in ver. 26. In addition much remains without adequate explanation. Beek, a modern, is far fairer, when he says quite candidly that he has not found a satisfactory solution.¹

On the other hand, it will not be chance that this passage is not referred to in the New Testament. Though its application to our Lord and His work seems clear enough, there is no unanimity, when it comes to detail. This lack of agreement

¹ M. A. Beek: *Das Danielbuch*, 1935.

seems to deprive the prophecy of most of its evidential value.

Of less importance is the divergence on the question whether the seventieth week is still future or not. Both views involve us in difficulties of exegesis, and up to the present neither side seems to be able to convince the other.

Far more important are the variant efforts to solve the chronological problems involved. Those that take the seventy weeks as meaning 490 years may be divided into four groups:

(a) Those who begin the period with the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (Neh. 2: 1, 5-8) and who consider the error of something over ten years unimportant.

(b) Those who begin it with the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7: 7); while the chronology tallies now, there is nothing in the decree given to Ezra (Ezra 7: 11-26) which makes it fit the language of Dan. 9: 25.

(c) Those who reckon from the same starting point as in (a) but work with "prophetic years" of 360 days. There is an inherent artificiality here that has made the theory unacceptable to the majority.

(d) Those who make the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1: 2ff) the starting point. Undoubtedly this is the most attractive starting point, but the chronology can only be maintained by rejecting the accepted secular dates and affirming, on the basis of Dan. 9, that the decree of Cyrus was 487 years before the crucifixion instead of about 570 as given by all modern secular histories dealing with the period. This is entirely convincing to the convinced, and to none others.

Yet others assure us that the seventy weeks are *merely* a conventional symbolical round number representing the fullness of time. This is of course possible, though improbable; it does save us a lot of trouble in interpretation, but it reduces an apparently precise prediction into a generalization of relatively small evidential value.

The only reasonable conclusion is that God does not wish our faith to rest on chronological proofs, however marvellous. However close the fulfilment may have been in fact, we must probably allow for a symbolic element in the seventy weeks, though we do not agree that they are solely, or even mainly, symbolic.

The Fortunes of Israel (Chs. 10-12).

How remarkable this vision is can be grasped only by one who has studied ch. 11 with the help of a good commentary. In it we have detailed historical prophecy of a type unique in the Bible. The problem that must face the intelligent reverent reader is not whether God could have so foretold the future, but whether He would have so done. We have come to no

definite opinion on the subject, but it is worth noting that Zockler, Wright and Boutflower (conservatives all) suggest that in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes a genuine prophecy of Daniel's was worked over and paraphrased, thus bringing it into this minute conformity with historical detail. If the book was not considered canonical until after the time of Antiochus, such treatment would have been quite possible.

We do not doubt that this prophecy passes over from Antiochus Epiphanes to the Antichrist, whom in many ways he foreshadows, and so in ch. 12 we pass on over to a picture of the end and of the resurrection. It will be noted that only a resurrection of the very good and the very bad seems to be proclaimed (12: 2). This in itself suggests an early date for the book. In the days of Daniel very little clear teaching about the resurrection existed, but in the second century B.C. the resurrection hope, which was to receive its real certainty in Jesus Christ, had already expanded beyond this point.

The exact functions and powers of the angels mentioned in Daniel cannot be decided from the book itself, nor would it be wise to speculate unduly. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is Daniel's chief theological interest, and the chief function of the angels is to stress the gulf between God and man.

Additional Note.

Those desiring a modern and scholarly answer to some of the attacks on the sixth century date of *Daniel* can refer to D. J. Wiseman and others, *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (Tyndale Press). See also Harrison *ad loc.*