

Strangers in a Strange Land

The Book of Daniel

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What would the English language be like today if there were no Bible? Good Samaritan, city set on a hill, a lamb to the slaughter, valley of the shadow of death, promised land, apple of his eye, balm in Gilead, the blind leading the blind, cast the first stone, ox in the ditch, gospel, root of all evil, wash your hands of something, eat drink and be merry, brother's keeper, the patience of Job, sheep among wolves, my cup runneth over, no man can serve two masters, man does not live by bread alone, quick and the dead, sew the wind and reap the whirlwind, scapegoat, shibboleth, sin of the fathers, stiff-necked, stranger in a strange land, through a glass darkly, ye of little faith, baptism of fire, eye for an eye, the truth shall set you free, cross to bear, house divided, the first shall be last, all things to all men, blood money, born again, and the handwriting on the wall. It's this last phrase that brings us to our study—the book of Daniel.

1. Os Guinness writes in his book *The American Hour*, “A generation that fails to read the signs of the times may be forced to read the writing on the wall.”¹

2. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of

¹Os Guinness, *The American Hour: A Time of Reckoning and the Once and Future Role of Faith* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 414.

escape also, that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:11).

I. Introduction

A. Daniel is read mostly as a book of prophecy, but it’s the practical living sections that are instructive for (a) how Christians can and should live in a hostile, anti-Christian environment, (b) outlast the schemes of God’s enemies, and (c) even rule if they are faithful, knowledgeable, wise, and acknowledge God’s sovereignty and providence in seemingly impossible times.

1. We think we have it bad: churches on nearly every corner, the Bible in nearly every language, dozens of English translations, freedom to worship, freedom to educate our children, a standard of living that would rival most monarchs prior to the 20th century, instant global communications, ease of travel (I complain about a five-hour plane trip to the west coast in air-conditioned comfort),² foods from around the world brought to our neighborhood while we sleep, the ability to change the political landscape without revolution or fear of governmental reprisals when a change is made, medical care (Who was the first president born in a hospital?),³ anesthesia,⁴ antibiotics, etc.

2. In some areas we do have it bad, but not as bad as Daniel and his three friends.

²In 1845, it took four to five months to travel from New York City to California by Wagon Train and 89 days by clipper ship around Cape Horn (16,000 miles). In 1870, it took 10 days to go from New York to San Francisco via Chicago. In 1903, it would have taken you 63 days to do it by car, and you would have had to take a mechanic along. In 1920, you could make the trip in three days. In 1933, you could go by air in 18 hours. (Lorraine Moffa, “America in Motion,” *American History* [February 2009], 42–43).

³Jimmy Carter: <http://www.infoplease.com/askeds/first-president-born-hospital.html>

⁴Humorist P. J. O’Rourke says, “When you think of the good old days, think ‘dentistry.’” Gary North writes, “The greatest invention of the modern world is anesthetics. Prior to 1844, in preparation for an operation, you drank booze until you passed out—hopefully. Then the physician—‘sawbones,’ he was called—got started hacking away.” Also see Gary North, “The Good Old Days”: <http://www.lewrockwell.com/north/north289.html> and <http://tinyurl.com/5meup>.

- a. Generally things are worse when government has gotten involved: education,⁵ taxes,
 - b. Deported from their home country (2 Kings 24:1–16; Dan. 1:1): Christians have all the rights as citizens and many do not use their political freedoms to their fullest.
 - c. No financial resources.
 - d. No political connections.
 - e. Placed in an attractive reeducation environment.
 - f. Separated from their families.
- B. How is survival, let alone dominion, possible under such circumstances, and yet that's exactly what Daniel accomplished. He, like Joseph before him, became a ruler in Babylon during a time when he came to Babylon as a captive.
1. "Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" (Dan. 2:48).
 2. "Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he now had authority as the third ruler in the kingdom" (Dan. 5:29).

⁵"By 1940, the literacy figure for all states stood at 96 percent for whites, 80 percent for blacks. Notice that for all the disadvantages blacks labored under, four of five were nevertheless literate. Six decades later, at the end of the twentieth century, the National Adult Literacy Survey and the National Assessment of Educational Progress say 40 percent of blacks and 17 percent of whites can't read at all. Put another way, black illiteracy doubled, white illiteracy quadrupled. Before you think of anything else in regard to these numbers, think of this: we spend three to four times as much real money on schooling as we did sixty years ago, but sixty years ago virtually everyone, black or white, could read." (<http://www.johntaylorgatto.com/chapters/3b.htm>).

- C. Christians today get discouraged and feel helpless even though they have the freedom, ability, and means to make changes at every level of society.
1. Many believe cultural change is impossible.
 2. Many believe it's futile: "'Reclaiming' the culture is a pointless, futile exercise. I am convinced we are living in a post-Christian society—a civilization that exists under God's judgment."⁶
- D. There is a connection between moral decline and national decline: "Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?'" (Deut. 31:17; cf. 32:9–44).
1. "Your silver has become dross, your drink diluted with water" (Isa. 1:22).
 2. "Rebuke the beasts in the reeds, the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples, trampling under foot the pieces of silver; He has scattered the peoples who delight in war" (Ps. 68:30).

II. Historical Context

- A. The division of the Northern tribes of Israel (under Jeroboam I) and the Southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin (under Rehoboam) in 931 B.C.
- B. The Northern kingdom falls to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.
- C. The Southern kingdom falls to Babylon around 587/586 B.C. even though there were earlier deportations.

III. Author

⁶John F. MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience: Drawing the Line in a No-Fault, Guilt-Free World* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), 12.

A. We don't know much about Daniel except what we read about in the book that bears his name.

1. Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, mentions him as an example of righteousness along with Noah and Job (Ezek. 14:14, 20) and wisdom (28:3).
2. Daniel came from a royal family (Dan. 1:3).
3. He was educated (1:4). This would work to the king's advantage if he could turn Daniel to the Babylonian way of thinking.
4. Daniel was a faithful Jew who was able to deal with the philosophies of Babylon (1:8). There is a lesson here for today's young people, many of whom are not prepared to take on modern-day Babylonian culture and ethics.
5. There is no mention of Daniel's family, but it's obvious that his parents did a great job raising him (cp. 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14–15).
6. A word needs to be said about public (government) education and parent-controlled, parent-directed, and parent-funded education.
 - a. Daniel and his three friends were compelled to study in the government school system of Babylon. Their parents would never have chosen Babylonian education as an option.
 - b. They were not teenagers. Most likely they were in their early 20s.

B. During the first part of the book, Daniel is spoken of in the third person, raising the possibility that a secretary or amanuensis compiled some of the writings for Daniel.

1. There wouldn't be anything unusual about this since Paul used an amanuensis (Gal. 6:11; Rom. 16:22;⁷ 1 Cor. 16:21;⁸ Col. 4:18;⁹ 2 Thess. 3:17).

⁷“I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord” (Rom. 16:22).

2. Daniel was an official in the kingdom of Babylon and most likely would have had servants.

IV. Languages

A. Aramaic and Hebrew are the two languages used in Daniel.

1. Hebrew is used in Daniel 1:1 to Daniel 2:4a and chapters 8 through 12 with Aramaic being used from Daniel 2:4a to 7:28.
2. The Aramaic language was the common language or *lingua franca*, used in Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian communication (see Esther 1:1, 22). Aramaic is found also in Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:12-26 and Jeremiah 10:11.

B. Why did Daniel compose a portion of his revelation in a foreign language?

1. Some have used the use of Aramaic to argue for a late date for the book of Daniel.
2. This makes no sense since the “Arameans” (see 2 Kings 24:2) developed Aramaic around 1200 B.C.
3. Aramaic was the common language in the sixth century B.C., not the Maccabean period (166 B.C) where Greek became the common language.
4. Aramaic in Daniel’s day is equivalent to English in our day. Daniel 2:4 to 7:28 would be accessible to any literate, Greek, Babylonian or Jew in Daniel’s day and later.
5. Aramaic is very similar to Hebrew.
6. Daniel’s message was not only to the Jewish people, but to the nations.

V. Dating

A. Late Date

⁸“The greeting is in my own hand—Paul” (1 Cor. 16:21).

⁹“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment” (Col. 4:18).

1. Liberals who deny the divine inspiration of Scripture attempt to place the date of composition of Daniel around the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, who ruled from 174 to 164 B.C., due to the accuracy of the prophecies. (If the prophecies had been wrong, Daniel also would have been rejected.)
2. Liberal critical analysis is based on Naturalistic Assumptions.
 - a. There can be no such thing as predictive prophecy, therefore, the book of Daniel had to have been written after the events took place and was made to look like a book of prophecy.
 - b. A similar charge is made against the prophetic portions of the NT. This is why liberal commentators date a number of NT books late into the first century and early into the second century.
 - c. Because of the unmistakable prediction of the destruction of the temple and sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), the gospels and the book of Revelation are often dated late in the first century. It's unfortunate that conservative scholars also date a number of NT books after the destruction of Jerusalem.

B. Early Date

1. A late date does not help liberals since there are prophecies in Daniel that extend well beyond the second century B.C. that predict the rise of the Herods, the Roman Empire, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the destruction of the rebuilt temple in A.D. 70.
2. Fragments of Daniel have been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, making any attempt to date the book later futile.