Daniel: Responses to Questions

## The Stories

*Are these stories literal or parabolic?*

\*\*As usual I’m inclined to think that they are not wholly made-up, in that they correspond to real pressures and I wouldn’t expect people to make up stories about God’s protection if it never happened, but that the actual stories are the “based on fact” version.

*The shift to King Belshazzar is abrupt. Was he really Nebuchadnezzar’s son or what?*

\*\*He was his (eventual) successor, and in this sense his son, though his actual father was King Nabonidus. The story jumps on a while from Nebuchadnezzar to the last ruler of Babylon.

*Why did God choose to save those individuals when they were tested or nearly killed for their faith. How are we to apply or conceptualize those examples in light of martyrs, etc.?*

\*\*The book itself reflects the fact that God sometimes saves people from martyrdom and sometimes does not (see 11:33). I don’t know that we can say why one rather than the other happens.

*Why was God so interested in making sure that Nebuchadnezzar understood He was the one true God? And why did God so badly want to tell King Nebuchadnezzar about his future?*

\*\*Because Nebuchadnezzar was the ruler of the superpower. It would demonstrate who was really King. And God commonly wants to confront kings to get them to repent.

*Daniel’s prophesy that King Nebuchadnezzar would be driven from the people to eat grass and live like the animals and he would be restored, and how he was converted: how was that played out in the history of Babylon?*

\*\*There’s no record of anything like this in connection with Nebuchadnezzar but in connection with his banishment there are records that imply something somewhat similar about Belshazzar’s actual father Nabonidus. Which rather supports the idea that there are historical ideas underneath the stories but that the stories themselves are the Hollywood version.

*I found it interesting that the dream was never stated in the first part of chapter 2. Was the telling of the dream implied at some point?*

\*\*It comes only when Daniel can describe it, before interpreting it—which adds to the wonder of what he can do.

*Why is king Belshazzar killed when it never says that he rejects the interpretation? Why do you suppose Nebuchadnezzar was given the chance to repent, but Belshazzar was not?*

\*\*You don’t need to be told you have chance to repent in order to know you can repent (see the story of Jonah and the Ninevites). Belshazzar would be assumed capable of working this out and therefore he is guilty for not repenting.

*If various people in the story could interpret dreams (the wise men, seers, and sorcerers), how could one do so without the power of God? This reminds me of the story of Moses where the opposing “wise men” could also make snakes out of their rods.*

\*\*Yes, that’s a good parallel. The assumption is that you don’t need Yahweh to be able to do anything, but that Yahweh is best.

*What was the Judahites’ counter-cultural stance? Of course not worshipping other Gods is imperative, but how far do we go in taking a stand, and what are things in culture that impede our beliefs. I’m thinking in reference of them not eating the palace food and wine and its implications.*

\*\*I think the insight from the chapters is that it may not be so important where we take a stand as long as we take a stand somewhere.

*These first six chapters of Daniel seem to be oriented around a focus on God’s sovereignty. In your estimation, does Daniel’s conception of the sovereignty of God differ in scope or understanding with the major prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—giving us fuller insight or a different perspective?*

\*\*The difference is that the focus is confined to the superpower and thus to God’s sovereignty in world history not just in relation to Judah itself.

*Who are the Kaldeans? The term sometimes seems to describe an ethinic group, sometimes as it means “wise” or "courtier."*

\*\*Yes. Originally the Kaldeans were a people from southern Babylonia who took over control of Babylon itself. The Kaldeans were then known for their expertise so the word gained that connotation.

*What were the other kingdoms as represented in the image of the statue that has a gold head and clay feat. I know the gold head represents Babylon, so do the rest of the parts represent Syria, Egypt and such?*

\*\*Yes, the usual view is the same as for chapter 7 (Babylon, Media, Persia, Greece). But I mylf think they are the next four kings mentioned in the book.

*In Daniel there are kings who are faithful servants of Yahweh and men like Daniel in the king's court serving God. We do not get a picture of people of influence and success in the NT. What does this say about our ability to serve God in the midst of wealth and privilege in light of the NT's emphasis on the rich being more challenged to follow Jesus?*

\*\*Maybe those OT guys are like people such as Joseph of Arimathea and Gamaliel and Paul in the NT? But you’re right that the NT does not have much of a vision for involvement in politics or for rulers coming to serve God. So maybe that’s a reason why the OT is important when the time comes when followers of Jesus can be involved in politics, as happened in the time of Constantine.

## The Visions

*Why is there not more apocalyptic literature in the Bible?*

\*\*Hmm. Why aren’t there more love poems or short stories? But I wonder if it’s better to ask why Daniel in particular is there (because I think I know the answer!)—which is that the visions were proved true by the deliverance of Jerusalem from Antiochus. Generally apocalypses were fanciful products of pure human imagination?

*I’d like to know the connections between Daniel and Revelation. I know that understanding Daniel helps unpack Revelation.*

\*\*You’re right that Daniel gets picked up in Revelation, though not as much as (say) Ezekiel; and I don’t think understanding Daniel will necessarily help you understand Revelation, because Revelation is doing its own thing new with material from Daniel and elsewhere.

*What was the writers’ message, especially if parts were written futuristically when in actuality they had already happened? Was it to interpret those past events from the lens of God’s sovereignty and faithfulness?*

\*\*I think that’s a good way to put it, but one would need to add that the readers were living in the midst of persecution and crisis and this reassurance about God’s sovereignty was designed to encourage them—and it was vindicated when God did rescue them.

*Is the “son of man” an individual or does it stand for the people as a whole?*

\*\*In the vision it’s an individual, but v. 27 shows that the individual stands for the people. (An apocalypse called Enoch talks about a “son of man” who’s an individual, so this idea is around in Jesus’ day.)

*I was shocked that people in the OT did not have hope for a resurrection and everlasting life. Yet they must have "felt" that something was after death?  Does Daniel 7 and 12 prove that they looked to God’s great deliverance, judgment is delivered to the wicked and they look to being with God in his eternal dominion?*

\*\*The idea of the final kingdom in 7 is not so different from the Prophets—it would be an encouragement to (say) Daniel, but he would know he wouldn’t personally benefit from it. The promise in 12 is indeed the OT’s only reference to resurrection.

*Why did the one in human form tell Daniel to keep the words secret “until the time of the end,” and why didn’t Daniel do that (12:4)?*

\*\*But he does—the vision gets published at the time of the End, which in this context means the crisis in the 160s. The point is that no one knew the visions in daniel’s day, when they were irrelevant.

*How does the coming of the Kingdom as mentioned in the end of chapter 7 in Daniel relate to the deliverance that the Maccabees brought about in the second century?*

\*\*The Maccabean deliverance is an interim fulfillment of that promise: God delivers his people, puts down the oppressor, and puts the Judahites in control of their own destiny for the first time for six hundred years.

*If the book of Daniel was written after the fact, how can the book be considered prophetic? Is it just another historical narrative? Why did the author write as though it will happen, if it has already happened? Is its theology that makes it unique?*

\*\*It’s not entirely written after the fact. As well as giving their quasi-prophetic historical account of the past to show people how Yahweh had been lord over it and how it was going nowhere under its own steam, they declared that God was going to deliver his people and put down their oppressor—which then happened. So they were prophetic, and their promise was fulfilled.

*Why didn’t 1 and 2 Maccabees make it into the OT canon? They are often referenced in commentaries to bridge the gap between Daniel and the coming of Jesus in the time of the Roman empire. Were they written too late, or are there some glaring inconsistencies or exaggerations within the account that made unsuitable for canonization?*

\*\*Maybe the question puts it the wrong way around. Lots of Jewish books did not come to be treated as scripture. The question is, why (for instance) did Daniel get to be treated as scripture? And my guess is that the stimulus was the way the visions in the book were proved true by the deliverance from Antiochus—that event showed that these visions came from God. First and Second Maccabees didn’t have some equivalent qualities. First Maccabees is an exciting account of the deliverance, but told as a human achievement. Second Maccabees also has the drawback of being written in Greek.

*What’s the book’s political message? To encourage people to be politically involved?*

\*\*That would emerge from the stories. But the visions would then add, but don’t attach too much hopes to what you will achieve.”