Daniel

Is it possible to be faithful to God when you are under pressure or persecution? The book of Daniel tells a series of stories about people in this situation who proved that God would be faithful to them. It continues with a series of visions that presuppose a context when God is not active in the present in the same way and when readers are challenged to maintain faith and hope nevertheless.

**Name.**

Daniel; he is the book’s hero.

**Contents.**

The first part of the book is a series of stories about Daniel and his three friends, who had been forced by the Babylonians to go to live in Babylon along with many other Judahites about 600 B.C.E. They face various challenges and crises there but experience God’s miraculous deliverance. The second half comprises a series of visions concerning events in the centuries after Daniel’s own day. They come to a climax in a period of oppression in Jerusalem in the 160s B.C.E. in the time of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV, who banned observance of the Torah and introduced alien forms of worship in the temple. The visions promise that God will rescue his people, put down the forces of wickedness, and bring about the final victory of his purpose. The book is partly in Hebrew, partly in Aramaic. There is a longer Greek version in the Deutero-canonical Writings.

**Date and Authorship**

The different foci of its two parts provide one reason for thinking that the book was not written all at once. The stories were told in the dispersion during the Persian period to bring encouragement and challenge in that context with its pressures. They incorporate reference to real people and events but these dramatized accounts of God’s acting to rescue people are like movies “based on fact” than simply history.

The visions address the situation in Jerusalem in the 160s and were presumably written in that context. Other writings from the Middle Eastern and the Greek worlds present themselves as predictions of coming events but were actually written after the events. Similarly, the visions in Daniel present themselves as visions received by Daniel in the sixth century but were actually composed in Jerusalem during the crisis there by someone was perhaps “inspired” by Daniel. Speaking of the past as if it had been predicted reassures people that it has been under God’s control, and encourages them to believe in the visions’ promise of deliverance.

We do not know who actually wrote the stories or the visions.

**Interpretation**

The stories portray God active in implementing his purpose in the present and delivering his servants. They encourage people to believe that survival and success can be combined with faithfulness to God. The visions presuppose a context when God is not active in history in the present, and his servants are being persecuted. God’s act of deliverance lies in the future, after the martyrdom of some people. Daniel 12 is the only explicit reference to resurrection in the OT.

**Reception History**

Against all odds, the visions’ promise was fulfilled. Antiochus’s forces were defeated and the temple was cleansed. This fulfillment perhaps brought Daniel’s acceptance as scripture. But the final End remained future, and the visions have been reapplied in subsequent contexts. Their references to a “desolating abomination” and to a “Son of Man” figure are taken up in the New Testament.

The stories invite people in situations of pressure to be faithful and expectant that God can enable them to survive and even triumph. The visions invite people to maintain faith and hope in situations where God is not active and to stay convinced that God will eventually put down oppression and bring about the consummation of his purpose.

**Further Reading**

Russell, David S. *Daniel: An Active Volcano*. Wipf and Stock, 1999.

Seow, C. *Daniel*. WJK, 2003.

Essays on Daniel in the journal *Review & Expositor* 109/4 (Fall 2012).