
The Place of Daniel in Old Testament Eschatology

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It is self-evident that the topic to be treated in this paper has a direct bearing on the problem of the date of the Book of Daniel. If one could compose a neat, generally acceptable chronological outline of all Old Testament eschatology, Daniel could be put in its proper place there, and its approximate date would be patent. But such an outline is very difficult to achieve, for two reasons. First, the dating of many of the Old Testament's eschatological passages is as much in question as is that of Daniel. Thus if Daniel is a sixth century work, then the Isaiah «Apocalypse» (Is. 24-27) could be eighth century material; but if Daniel is second century, the Isaiah passages could well date from the third century. Duhm's remark is apposite, that the pro-

phet Isaiah could as well have written the Book of Daniel as Isaiah 24-27.¹ Daniel is almost as pivotal in the study of Old Testament and intertestamental eschatology as is Deuteronomy in Pentateuchal criticism. The second reason is that one must always beware of expecting a neat linear development of thought. If it be admitted that apocalyptic is the child of adversity and disaster, then there is no *a priori* difficulty in placing Daniel in the exilic period, other apocalypses in the second century onwards, and eschatological thought of a rather different type in the relatively peaceful centuries that intervened.

¹ B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (H.K.A.T.), 1902 (⁴ 1922), p. 143.

For these reasons, this paper will concern itself little with purely chronological questions, but investigate rather the relationship of Daniel to prophetic eschatology on the one hand and apocalyptic on the other. I have already placed it in the latter category, to be sure, and few will quarrel with this assumption: Daniel is usually classed as the only apocalyptic book of the Old Testament, and its unique character in the Old Testament is obvious to any reader. But for all that, this classification requires some comment or qualification: there are certainly other apocalyptic passages and sections in the Old Testament, so that Daniel's uniqueness in this respect is simply that it is sustained and lengthy apocalyptic; and on the other hand Daniel is in any case not typical apocalyptic. Daniel might therefore be viewed as a half-way house between prophetic eschatology, with its occasional apocalyptic elements, and the through-going apocalyptic works of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

APOCALYPTIC ESCHATOLOGY

The question immediately arises, how are we to define apocalyptic? Or rather, how are we to distinguish it from prophetic eschatology? This is a question more easily posed than answered, chiefly because apocalyptic grew out of prophecy, and is very much its child, so that a neat dividing line between the two is very difficult to draw. The generally-agreed distinc-

tive features of apocalyptic can often be found in embryo in prophetic passages, while on the other hand few apocalyptic works exhibit all of those features together. Wheeler Robinson drew the following distinctions and contrasts between the two.² (1) Apocalyptic was pseudonymous, prophecy either authentic or anonymous. (2) Apocalyptic was deterministic (and culminating in a crisis of the writer's own period). (3) Apocalyptic was futuristic and extra-mundane in outlook, prophecy supremely interested in the here and now. (4) Apocalyptic was literary, prophecy oral in the first place. Robinson also mentions that apocalyptic presented an impressive scheme of history and a belief in life after death, and he implies another contrast with prophecy in these respects too.³

Daniel, it may be conceded, falls into the category of apocalyptic on most of these tests. Whether it is pseudonymous is of course debatable; and so is its interest in a crisis of the writer's own age. While it is futuristic, its interests are definitely not extra-mundane. Otherwise Daniel is certainly apocalyptic, on these tests. But it may be observed that Robinson's tests are by no means homogeneous. The literary-oral antithesis is primarily a question of presentation, not of

² H. Wheeler Robinson in T. W. Manson (ed.), *A Companion to the Bible*, 1939, pp. 307 f.

³ Op. cit., pp. 308 f.

content (even though it may have far-reaching effects on the content). The fact that one work is originally oral in character, another literary from the start, should not in itself affect the character of the eschatological thought in each; yet the very antithesis prophetic-apocalyptic implies eschatological contrasts.

MAJOR AND MINOR FEATURES OF APOCALYPTIC

Nor are these tests of equal importance. Rist maintains that the only basic features of apocalyptic are dualism and true «eschatology» (i.e. expectation of the *eschaton*): every other common characteristic is secondary.⁴ There is much to be said for some such distinction between characteristics of major and minor significance. But it is remarkable that while Daniel shows several of Rist's secondary features, in the two major ones the Book scarcely shows any advance on prophetic parts of the Old Testament. The dualism of good versus evil is not at all evident; the powers of evil have no place, and even wicked men are treated not unsympathetically. There are no anti-Babylonian or anti-Persian diatribes; some of the prophets are much more vehement in their remarks concerning Assyria or Babylon. As for the *eschaton*, Daniel certainly shows a clear interest in it; but there is not the clear-cut

⁴ M. Rist in G. A. Buttrick (ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962, vol. 1, p. 158 (s.v. «Apocalypticism»).

distinction between this age and the age to come that is so characteristic of later apocalyptic. The fifth and final kingdom is clearly more desirable and glorious than its predecessors, but it does not appear to be totally different in kind from them — it is undeniably an earthly kingdom. (It is to a certain extent different of course — cf. 7:23, explicitly.) Whatever the defects of the first four kingdoms, God still reigns over them: Nebuchadnezzar was told, «The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will» (4:32). In other words, Daniel's *eschaton* is no more a complete break in history than is the Day of the Lord in Amos and his successors.

Rist's tests therefore serve to show that Daniel is not typically apocalyptic in its chief features. We may now note two further tests for apocalyptic noted by G. E. Ladd: pessimism and ethical passivity.⁵ Now some scholars (Pfeiffer,⁶ e.g.) claim both for Daniel; Pfeiffer sees pessimism in the steadily declining values given to the kingdoms, each empire «surpassing the previous one in wickedness and brutality.»⁷ But this feature of Daniel may rather be viewed as dramatic contrast; the truly apocalyptic pessi-

⁵ G. E. Ladd in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962, p. 44 (s.v. «Apocalyptic»).

⁶ R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1952, pp. 772-781.

⁷ Ibid., p. 777.

mism saw no future for this earth whatever, whereas Daniel saw a glorious future for it, in the final kingdom. As for ethical passivity, this can really be asserted of Daniel only if the prayer of 9:14-19 is viewed as an interpolation.⁸ Even without that passage, there is a clear moral note in chapter 4, where Nebuchadnezzar is rebuked and punished for pride and other sins. It is probably true of the prophets that they laid less stress on Israel's sins when promising comfort and restoration than when they were threatening doom and disaster.

DETERMINISM

In Frost's view, it is the determinism of the Book, as much as anything, that makes it apocalyptic. Says he, «That a kingdom should be weighed in a balance and found wanting is the very stuff of prophecy; that it should be divided is a pronouncement of divine judgment in the very manner of an Isaiah; but that it should be *numbered* is the thought of an apocalypticist alone».⁹ With this aspect of Daniel we might link the Book's impressive scheme of history (to hark back to Wheeler Robinson). In both respects Daniel is undoubtedly written in the apocalyptic manner; although again one has to note that both features are adumbrated in earlier Scripture. Determinism derives ultimately from

⁸ Cf. Pfeiffer, op. cit., pp. 771, 774.

⁹ S. B. Frost, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, 1952, p. 186 (*his italics*).

the irrevocability of the spoken word, especially when it is God's word; indeed, Daniel specifically names the source of part of its determinism — the seventy weeks of years are explicitly an interpretation of a prediction of Jeremiah (Dn. 9:2,24). As for the scheme of history, Daniel links the approach of a prophet with that of a historian; the Old Testament writers in general show a thoroughly elaborated historical viewpoint, and Daniel develops this by looking to the future instead of the past, and by including the whole world in its scope. There is certainly originality in Daniel here, but it is Biblically based.

Frost also draws attention to the esoteric type of revelation in Daniel — the *raz-pesher* treatment.¹⁰ This approach is characteristic of the Qumran Biblical commentaries, but it is not necessary to maintain that Daniel is inspired by the same *Zeitgeist*. His inspiration (if any except historical facts be needed!) is quite patently the Joseph stories of Genesis 40 f. Just as Pharaoh had the dreams, Joseph the God-given interpretation, so too in Daniel: now Nebuchadnezzar is the royal dreamer, and the prophet Daniel the expatriate interpreter. It is worth noting, moreover, that the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams in Genesis 41 is thoroughly deterministic — «there will come seven years of great plenty... but after

¹⁰ Op. cit., p. 186.

them... seven years of famine» (vs. 29 f.).

Little can be said here concerning the messianic concepts, if any, of Daniel, in view of the vexed and complicated problem of identifying the son of man (7:13). It is very likely that the term «son of man» is deliberately chosen as a contrast to the four beasts of 7:2-7; but what it was intended to signify to the reader is disputed. If it refers either to the Messiah or to the nation of Israel, Daniel is here unique only in its presentation; but if an angelic interpretation is demanded, that is a different matter.¹¹ It is often claimed that Daniel 12:2 is the only Old Testament passage clearly to mention bodily resurrection. This claim depends, in any case, on one's view of such passages as Job 19:25f., Psalm 16:10f., 49:14f. It must be admitted that explicit teaching of bodily resurrection is very rare in the Old Testament, and that the dating of relevant passages is either uncertain or debatable; it is not therefore clear whether or not Daniel 12:2 does mark the beginning of a new concept. If not, no question confronts us; but if it is an innovation in Daniel, we may well ask its source. There can be no certainty, but it could conceivably have been a development out of such teaching about national resurrection as that of Ezekiel 37 (note especially

¹¹ See the brief discussion in N. W. Porteous, *Daniel: a Commentary*, 1965, pp. 115 f.

verse 13). National and personal resurrection are very different things, to be sure, but possibly the Hebrew concept of corporate personality brought the two ideas closer together than would be possible for a modern western mind. Nevertheless, against the view that Daniel is propounding something new, it may be urged that the treatment of the topic is too brief and casual.

DANIEL NOT OUT OF STEP

This discussion is intended to indicate that Daniel is not out of step with earlier Old Testament eschatology, not to deny the Book any originality. Undeniably Daniel is a thoroughly literary work, and in this respect differs from the prophets (generally speaking). This distinction between prophecy and apocalyptic is usually listed as just one of the distinctions — cf. Wheeler Robinson's list; but it is at least a possibility that some of the other distinctive features of apocalyptic, or rather of Daniel in particular, may derive simply from its literary nature: without elaborating, we may suggest that from it derive the novel symbolism, some of the terminology, the thorough scheme of history, the futuristic interests, the meditation on earlier Scripture, perhaps even the developed angelology. (Even if the Book is pseudonymous, it is doubtful whether pseudonymity was in this instance a mere literary device, if

Rowley may be followed,¹² although it was in other apocalypses, conceivably in imitation of Daniel.) Later apocalyptic may well have modelled itself on Daniel. It is easy to see how some of the distinctive features of non-canonical apocalyptic derived from Daniel. For instance, the transcendent Son of Man of the Book of Enoch «is obviously a development of the one in Daniel»¹³, albeit with overtones of Persian eschatology. We may also repeat Rowley's suggestion that the pseudonymity of later apocalyptic was in deliberate imitation of Daniel.

The *magnum opus* of D. S. Russell gives a good deal of attention to the methods of apocalyptic; but even he selects only the following as the «general marks of apocalyptic»: its esoteric character, literary form, symbolism and pseudonymity.¹⁴ All of these have already been discussed here. Again, it is noteworthy that the latter two aspects depend on, and are bound up with, the literary nature of apocalyptic; a prophetic oracle, orally delivered, could not in the nature of things utilize a complex symbolism, far less could it be pseudonymous.

LITERARY FEATURES

Both Eissfeldt and Weiser view the learned approach of the Book of

Daniel as one of its distinguishing features. Eissfeldt speaks of the Book's «erudition»,¹⁵ while Weiser draws attention to its «learned interest in calculating and predicting precisely the details of the end».¹⁶ In other words, Daniel is both literary and deterministic. Weiser goes on to suggest that in Daniel «the prophetic foundation of confident reliance on faith is abandoned»; but on the same page he adds, «Yet . . . the book champions the true heritage of the prophets, namely faith in the God who controls all history»¹⁷. It is not easy to draw a distinction between Daniel and the prophets on the basis of these statements! Weiser also finds significance in the interest the Book shows in earlier prophetic writings; but whereas Daniel provides a novel treatment of earlier prophecy, it would not be true to say that all the prophets neglect their predecessors. The Book of Jeremiah, for instance, shows interest here and there in the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah;¹⁸ once again, the oracular nature of much in the prophets may explain their lack of detailed reference to earlier Scripture, and our attention is thus drawn to the literary character of Daniel. For their part, the historical books of the Old Testament by no means ignore the prophets.

¹² Cf. H. H. Rowley, ZAW 9, 1932, pp. 256-268.

¹³ Cf. S. E. Johnson in IDB, vol. IV, p. 414 (s.v. «Son of Man»).

¹⁴ D. S. Russell, The Message and Method of Jewish Apocalyptic, 1964, pp. 104-139.

¹⁵ O. Eissfeldt, The Old Testament: an Introduction, ET 1965, pp. 528 f.

¹⁶ A. Weiser, Introduction to the Old Testament, ET 1961, p. 317.

¹⁷ Op. cit., p. 317.

¹⁸ Note Jeremiah 26:18 f. in particular.

There is a sense in which apocalyptic is more akin to history than to prophecy. The Old Testament prophets gave an oral ministry, based very much on the immediate situation they found. In the historical books, however, we have literary works in which appears a reasoned religious philosophy of past history; in Daniel similarly we find a literary work, with a reasoned understanding of God at work in both past and future — it is history developed to its logical conclusion.

PSEUDONYMITY

The question of the pseudonymity of Daniel deserves some further consideration. It is often held that the pseudonymity of Daniel is one of its typically apocalyptic features;¹⁹ and Rowley's argument that the unintentional pseudonymity of Daniel was slavishly copied by later apocalyptists seems to be widely accepted today. These opinions would seem to be mutually exclusive; for on the latter view, the pseudonymity of Daniel was quite different in character from that of later works, and cannot therefore be treated as a common characteristic of apocalyptic in the case of Daniel. Neither theory need be further considered, of course, if the traditional authorship of the Book be maintained. But even if the presuppositions of the two

theories be adopted, neither view is altogether convincing.

The former view demands that the name of Daniel was given to the Book (and to its hero) in order to enhance its authority. But there is every reason to distinguish this Daniel from the patriarchal figure Dan'el mentioned in Ezekiel and extra-biblical literature.²⁰ The name of a little-known exilic figure can scarcely have given the Book much authority. The same fact tells against Rowley's hypothesis too, for the majority of later apocalypses went much further back than the Exile to find their authoritative figures — Enoch, Noah, Moses, for instance; Baruch will be the only name at all comparable with Daniel, and he was at least a well-known literary figure. Moreover, it is not altogether clear how later apocalyptists were to know that the linking of the Book with the name of Daniel was a mere fiction, deserving their emulation.

To summarize, Daniel is indeed pivotal in Old Testament writings. It is in many ways distinct from its successors in the apocalyptic tradition; in particular, unlike them, its eschatology owes nothing we can be sure of to outside (especially Iranian) influences. This means that its date cannot be determined

²⁰ Cf. Porteous, op. cit., pp. 17 f. The name in Ezekiel 14:14,20; 28:3, though rendered as «Daniel in EVV, has in Hebrew a slightly different spelling from the name of the exilic Daniel; if the vowel of MT are ignored, the most natural vocalization seems to be «Dan'el».

by eschatological considerations. However, there are two other conceptual features of the Book which are sometimes viewed as demanding a late date, *i.e.* the concept of the four world empires, and the developed angelology. The metal-symbolism of Daniel 2:31-45, concerning the four kingdoms, has been linked with Iranian and with Greek thought by different scholars. Conceivably this concept was well-known in the Near East before the fall of the Hebrew monarchies, for it appears as early as Hesiod;²¹ alternatively, the parallel may be coincidental, for the metals themselves are common enough, and their order is perfectly logical.

But a bigger problem is posed by the angelology of Daniel, which merits separate attention. There can be no doubt that later apocalyptic did owe something in this respect to Persian thought; and Daniel undeniably goes well beyond the simple treatment of the rest of the Old Testament. Perhaps two comments are all that can be made here. Firstly, if Daniel does owe anything to Persian eschatology, it is remarkably odd that Satan finds no place in the Book. Secondly, wherever the names Daniel gives to angels came from, they owe no-

thing to Persia. It is even possible that the names Gabriel and Michael were created by our author; in a Book which lays stress on the themes of godlike-ness and manlike-ness, names meaning «man of God» and «who is like God?» are particularly apposite. Be this as it may, in its presentation of angels as man-like, Daniel is in full harmony with the rest of the Old Testament.

²¹ *Hesiod, Works and Days, 106 ff. Cf. J. A. Montgomery, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel (I.C.C.) 1927 (² 1949), pp. 188 f.; T. F. Glasson, Greek Influence in Jewish Eschatology, 1961, p. 2. (Hesiod is to be dated in the 8th or at the latest the 7th, century B.C.).*