

Daniel's Double Chiasm

A series on Daniel's prophecies and fulfillment (part 4)

Among its many distinctions, the book of Daniel was written in two different languages in which half was written in Hebrew and the other in Aramaic. Only the book of Ezra can be considered similar in that four of its ten chapters are in Aramaic. Aramaic, part of the same family of Semitic languages that includes Hebrew, was the common language of the major empires of the time influencing Israel: Neo-Assyrian (911 – 605 B.C.), Neo-Babylonian (605 – 539 B.C.) and Achaeminid (539 – 323 B.C.).

Epigraphic evidence indicates that Aramaic was the language for official government administration, and the biblical account is consistent with this archaeological conclusion:

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, 4 youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him **to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.**
(Dan 1:3-4)

Having half the book written in two different languages may suggest to some that the book of Daniel was not written as a singular book or by a single author. However a close study of the literary structure indicates that Daniel used Aramaic and Hebrew to construct two sophisticated chiasms intended to emphasize two key messages from God.

The use of two languages was a common practice of ancient writers as a means to communicate to a wider audience.

Aramaic, used in Daniel chapters 2-7, was intended for a wide Gentile audience including the ruling class.

Hebrew, used in Daniel chapters 8-12, was intended for the nation of Israel.

The chiasm design that Daniel employs is an ordered sequence of ideas that leads up to an apex, after which the ideas are presented in reverse order. Each chapter of the book is one idea, and the apex calls attention to God's message.

Aramaic (Daniel chapters: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7)

Prophecy of the Four Kingdoms (Dan 2: Nebuchadnezzar's great metal statue)

Trial of God's Faithful (Dan 3: Nebuchadnezzar sends Daniel's friends to the fiery furnace)

Prophecy to the Pagan King (Dan 4: Nebuchadnezzar is repentant)

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride. (Dan 4:37)

Prophecy to the Pagan King (Dan 5: Belshazzar is unrepentant)

Trial of God's Faithful (Dan 6: Darius sends Daniel to the lions' den)

Prophecy of the Four Kingdoms (Dan 7: Daniel's Four Beasts from the sea)

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Observations:

1. With the exception of Daniel 2:27-45, where Daniel records what he is saying to king Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel chapters 2-6 are consistently narrated in the third person as though Daniel is an outside observer.
2. Daniel chapters 2-6 are principally a historical and chronological account of the Gentile nations that God uses to discipline the nation of Judah within Daniel's lifetime.

Daniel chapters 6 and 7 are not in chronological order. The reign of Darius the Great (Dan 5:30-31; 6:1) occurs after the end of Belshazzar king of Babylon (Dan 7:1). The switch of chapters appears intentional as it preserves the chiasm's literary structure.

3. At Daniel 4:37, the apex of the Aramaic chiasm places an emphasis on the sovereignty of Daniel's God: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's greatest king, recognized that the God of Israel gives and rules the kingdom of men. Written for the Gentile audience, Daniel is aware that God's message is also for government administrators.

The theme of God's sovereignty is reinforced in each chapter of this Aramaic chiasm.

It is implied as Daniel records the responses of the Gentile kings. Daniel chapters 2-6 end with either God being exalted or praised and / or Daniel being honored (Dan 2:46-48; 3:28-30; 4:34-37; 5:29; 6:25-28).

It is explicit as Daniel reveals or records Gentile kings stating that God's kingdom is everlasting and which none can overcome (Dan 2:44; 4:3, 34-35; 5:21; 6:26; 7:14, 27).

4. Daniel 7 deserves special mention, because in Aramaic, Daniel presents to the Gentile world the sovereign rule of his God, the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9-12), and the one like the Son of Man (Dan 7:13-14). Daniel's God not only ruled for the good of His people Israel, but for the good of all people (Dan 7:14).

Hebrew (Daniel chapters: 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12)

Prophetic Details of the Second and Third Kingdoms (Dan 8)

Daniel's Prayers of Deliverance of God's People (Dan 9:1-23)

The Arrival and Purpose of the Messiah (Dan 9:24-25)

Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing (Dan 9:26)

The Death and Return of the Messiah (Dan 9:26-27)

Daniel's Prayers and Fasting of Deliverance of God's People (Dan 10)

Prophetic Details of the Third and Fourth Kingdoms (Dan 11)

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Observations:

1. With the exception of Daniel 10:1-3, Daniel chapters 8-12 are consistently narrated in the first person as Daniel records the prophecies that he personally receives. This is in contrast to Daniel's Aramaic chiasm which is narrated in the third person.
2. Daniel chapters 8-12 are prophecies intended for Daniel personally and specifically concern his people. Recorded in chronological order, they reveal God's use of Gentile kingdoms to discipline His people beyond Daniel's lifetime (Dan 8:16-19; 9:21-23; 10:14; 12:8-13).

While the exile of the Jews from the Promised Land was 70 years, Daniel reveals that God's discipline of His people continues for a far longer time until Jesus Christ returns.

3. At Daniel 9:26, the apex of the Hebrew chiasm places an emphasis on the death of the Messiah: "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing."

The Hebrew term for "cut off" is used for executing the death penalty for a criminal; thus, the prophecy is foretelling the crucifixion of Jesus.

"Have nothing" foretells that at the time of death, the Messiah will not have a kingdom.

The New Testament provides some clarity to the prophecy Daniel receives from the angel Gabriel (Dan 9:20-27).

Jesus identified Himself as the Messiah:

The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." (John 4:25-26)

The apostle John notes that the nation of Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah:

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. (John 1:10-11)

The meaning of the Hebrew chiasm would not be understood by the Gentile audience; however, its Messianic message would have held significance to the Jews.

The presence of the double chiasm indicates that Daniel intentionally wrote in a manner so that his audience would receive a specific message from God. Yet despite his loving concern for his people, Daniel could not prayerfully intercede and repeal God's judgment of faithless Judah. Ezekiel, a prophet contemporary to Daniel, in equating Daniel with faithful men of God (Noah and Job) emphasizes the depth of faithlessness exhibited by the nation of Israel.

Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it and cut off from it both man and beast, **even though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst**, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves," declares the Lord God. "If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so that no one would pass through it because of the beasts, **though these three men were in its midst**, as I live," declares the Lord God, "they could not deliver either their sons or their daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the country would be desolate. Or if I should bring a sword on that country and say, 'Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,' **even though these three men were in its midst**, as I live," declares the Lord God, "they could not deliver either their sons or their

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daughters, but they alone would be delivered. Or if I should send a plague against that country and pour out My wrath in blood on it to cut off man and beast from it, **even though Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst**, as I live," declares the Lord God, "they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness." (Ezek 14:12-20)

When considering the book of Daniel as one literary unit, the chiasms are seen in the following manner:

Historical Prologue (Dan 1 [Hebrew]: How Daniel comes to Babylon)

Prophecy of the Four Kingdoms (Dan 2: Nebuchadnezzar's great metal statue)

Trial of God's Faithful (Dan 3: Nebuchadnezzar sends Daniel and his friends to the fiery furnace)

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Historical Epilogue (Dan 12 [Hebrew]: Daniel go your way)

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