

## Life and death

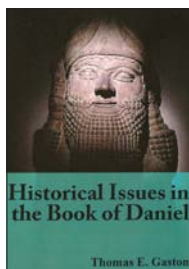
The book ranges entertainingly over a variety of current scientific mysteries, including homeopathy and the placebo effect, life on Mars, cold fusion, the scientific definition of 'life', and the nature of free will. Significantly, it discusses the difficulties that the theory of evolution faces in accounting both for sexual reproduction and for death. There are no obvious reasons why natural selection should favour either, and, despite numerous attempts, no evolutionist has come up with convincing explanations. Here, as so often in reading these books, the believer wants to shout out that the answers are to be found in the Word of God!

These two books contain much fascinating detail about mankind and the universe in which he lives, but ultimately they are perhaps most useful to us in revealing the limitations of materialistic science and its inability to answer the most basic questions about why we are here and where we are going. For those answers we can turn only to the Bible. As Solomon, under inspiration, so succinctly expressed it: "I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, He has put eternity [Heb. *olam*] into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (Eccl. 3:10,11, ESV).

## Review

# Historical issues in the book of Daniel

John Nicholls



### Historical Issues in the Book of Daniel.

Thomas E. Gaston (2009).

Published by Taanath Shiloh.

ISBN 978-0-9561540-0-2

**T**HE PROPHECY of Daniel has ever been under attack from unbelievers and critics because of its miracles, and also because of its prophecies, which cover such huge spans of time. Simple faith is content with the endorsement of Daniel by the Lord Jesus in the Olivet Prophecy, by the Apostle Paul in the letters to the Thessalonians, and by the Apostle John in the Revelation. That endorsement assures us that the Word of God came to Daniel through the ministration of angels, by dreams and by visions. But we do need to know what the opponents of the Truth are saying about the Scriptures, so that their claims can be shown to be false. At a time when belief in God and His Word is under attack as never before, it is timely to have a scholarly assessment of documents that support the historical truth of

the book of Daniel, and a rebuttal of the critics' claim that it was written in the second century B.C. by some other person.<sup>1</sup> The book under review is not an exposition of Daniel or a character study of this great and much loved man of faith. Several books published by the Christadelphian will give readers such expositions.<sup>2</sup>

### Careful research

Brother Gaston has access to and is able to read original documents dating from the time of the Babylonian Empire on the subject of Daniel. In

1. Brother Gaston can be contacted at 47 Wykeham Crescent, OXFORD, OX4 3SD, and by email at [taanathshiloh@yahoo.com](mailto:taanathshiloh@yahoo.com), but the book can be obtained through Lulu. The book is printed by Lulu and is printed on demand. Copies can be obtained from <http://www.lulu.com/content/paperback-book/historical-issues-in-the-book-of-daniel/6045251>. The current price is £12:00 and postage and packing are extra. Lulu will post to anywhere in the world. It is hoped the online bookstore Amazon will begin to sell the book soon, and further details can be obtained from Brother Gaston.
2. *Exposition of Daniel* by John Thomas; *The Prophecy of Daniel* by Edmund Green; *Daniel Study Guide* by Michael Lewis. All obtainable from The Christadelphian, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham, B28 8SZ, UK.

his studies for a postgraduate qualification he has access to libraries in Birmingham and Oxford Universities. He deals with the historical issues connected with Daniel from the standpoint of an academic historian, making his book quite hard to follow if you, like the reviewer, are not an academic historian! The brevity of this review is in part due to the academic character of the book. This said, however, the end of each chapter has an assessment or conclusions, and it is from these that it is possible to see how that the case of the critics who favour a late date for the writing of Daniel is losing its edge as more information and discoveries are made about the time that Daniel lived in. Thus in his first chapter, about the references to Daniel in the prophecy of Ezekiel (14:14,20 and 28:3), Brother Gaston concludes (p. 19) that it is "more likely" that the Daniel of Ezekiel was the same as Daniel in Babylon than the bizarre suggestion of "a character otherwise unknown to extant Israelite discourse based upon a Ugaritic poem whose hero . . . was a Baal worshipper".

One well-known criticism of Daniel is of the record in Daniel 1:1-7, which says that Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon in the third year of King Jehoiakim. There is no captivity recorded for the third year of Jehoiakim, either in the book of Kings or in Babylonian texts. A detailed examination is undertaken of the way in which records were kept in those far-off times. The author concludes that the "account given in Daniel 1:1-2 is entirely consistent with other historical sources for this period" (p. 35). Some scholars even question whether the Babylonian exile was real. The author deals with these objections and considers the whole Daniel narrative, including such terms as 'Master of the Eunuchs' and 'Chaldeans', as well as the religious persecution and the forms of judicial punishment therein. An intriguing issue is Nebuchadnezzar's seven-year madness. Brother Gaston takes the historian's viewpoint when he writes: "At present, the historicity of Daniel 4 still hangs in the balance" (p. 66); but he cites some traditions that do parallel Daniel 4 in some respects. On Belshazzar he is able to write like this: "The book of Daniel is shown to be reliable on the issue of Belshazzar, and, in fact, superior to the Greek historians who seem to have scanty information about Belshazzar". He adds these words: "Whether or not readers accept the miraculous events recorded in Daniel 5, the author has shown himself a capable and informed narrator and his testimony is worthy of the attentions of historians" (p. 85).

### **Critical views challenged**

The chapter on the fall of Babylon is a fascinating one, and Brother Gaston tries to bring all the documents together in his "speculative reconstruction" of events. Whilst Christadelphians have tended to accept the Greek accounts of Babylon's fall by Herodotus and Xenophon, there are other documents in existence, and they need to be taken into account as well.

Critics have accused Daniel of believing that an independent Median kingdom succeeded Babylon. From this the critics interpret the four kingdom visions in Daniel 2 and 7 as:

- 1 Babylon;
- 2 Media;
- 3 Persia;
- 4 Greece.

Conservative scholars (and of course Christadelphians) see Media as being part of the Persian Empire, thus leading to the four kingdoms as being:

- 1 Babylon;
- 2 Medo-Persia;
- 3 Greece;
- 4 Rome.

Brother Gaston deals with the critics' ideas well in his seventh chapter. In his eighth chapter he discusses the problem of who "Darius the Mede" was (Dan. 5:30,31; 9:1). There have been various attempts to answer this question, and it is worth citing the author's summary on pages 131 and 132, after he has surveyed the evidence: "The two most likely candidates are Ugbaru (the General who captured Babylon) and Cyrus"; "The key piece of evidence is still missing—there is yet to be discovered any Babylonian, Median or Persian text that names any individual 'Darius the Mede'"; "The British Museum houses a collection of about 130,000 cuneiform texts, about a third of which have never been published. It is possible that one . . . yet to be published will bear the name 'Darius the Mede'".

The last chapter of this book concerns the Persian and Greek periods, and at the chapter end there are interesting implications discussed on the date and interpretation of Daniel (pp. 151-5). On the date, the issue is more or less settled due to the discovery of a fragment of Daniel amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls dated c. 125 B.C. Those who believe in a late date for Daniel (second century B.C.) have their case severely weakened by this discovery. Linguistic studies of the Aramaic used in Daniel also support the early date for Daniel. On interpretation, Brother Gaston cites E. B. Pusey, who wrote in the nineteenth century: "The book

of Daniel is especially fitted to be a battlefield between faith and unbelief. It admits of no half-measures. It is either Divine or an imposture". Brother Gaston goes on to say: "The first step in reclaiming the book of Daniel is to re-establish the historicity of its hero. That is why the historical issues of the book of Daniel are so important: they justify the believer in taking the book seriously". This is true, but our faith in Daniel comes from

reading and understanding its message, as Jesus counsels us to do, and trying to follow in the steps of Daniel's faith.

Brother Gaston's book has ten pages of references, and contains three appendices. It has a key to abbreviations used, and a total of 174 pages. It is commended to all who wish to know in detail the kind of evidence that would convince scholars of the historicity of the prophecy of Daniel.