

Interestingly, one of the major flaws of this commentary is that it fails to consistently connect the chapters to Christ, which is part of the main purpose and aim of the commentary series. According to the introduction to the series, each book will “read the text in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. No other commentary series does this important work consistently in every volume” (xv). Widder does well in connecting the text to modern Christian life, but it is not clear how she consistently reads the text “in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus.” It was not clear from the commentary how the book of Daniel consistently “anticipates the gospel” (ibid.).

Widder is to be commended for her knowledge of the issues concerning the book of Daniel and for her attempt to refrain from tendentious polemics. Her writing is exceptional and she competently presents the stories in their ancient contexts. In addition, she offers thought-provoking and meaningful connections to the text and modern Christian living. However, Widder’s non-traditional interpretive approach toward the dreams/visions contradicts traditional interpretations with little exegetical support. Also, her interpretation of Dan 9:24–27 raises several Christological questions. Finally, she does not consistently demonstrate how the text “anticipates the gospel” (ibid.). Overall, the purpose and aim of the new commentary series is a welcome addition to the genre and Widder’s work is commendable, but the complexity of the book of Daniel can be a quandary to any commentary series.

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Wright, Christopher J. H. *Hearing the Message of Daniel: Sustaining Faith in Today’s World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017. 248 pp. Softcover. USD 17.99.

Christopher Wright is International Ministries Director of the Langham Partnership and a mentee of the great Christian preacher John Stott. He often preaches on Daniel, though he has previously written books on other biblical topics, such as *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (1995) and *The God I Don’t Understand* (2008). In *Hearing the Message of Daniel*, Wright, with the help of what some would call “pastorally informed imagination,” draws lessons from Daniel’s book and presents them to pastors, small group leaders, and Christians in general. On a previous occasion, I had a chance to review *Preaching Christ from Daniel*, by Sidney Greidanus, AUSS 51.2 (2013), but it is obvious that Wright’s book, though smaller in size, takes a broader view of homiletical gems from Daniel’s book.

The chapter titled “Compromise or Confrontation” presents the story from Dan 1. The subtitles in this chapter are very descriptive of the lessons the author does not want us to miss: “They Said ‘Yes’ to a Pagan Education,” followed by “They Said ‘Yes’ to a Political Career,” then “They Said ‘Yes’ to a Change of Name,” and finally “They Said ‘No’ to the King’s Food.” The author could have mentioned the young Hebrews’ resistance to the giving of the new (Babylonian) names, something that is evident in the intentional corruption of the names Bel-te-Shazzar and Abed-Nego.

After reviewing the story of Dan 2, Wright concludes that Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream is more than a timetable for history. It is a theology of history. This theology informs us that heads of gold have a precarious future if they rest on the feet of clay, so the succession of human kingdoms will end with the coming kingdom of God. This eternal kingdom "is not just an escape to heaven but the establishment of the rule of God over the earth itself" (59).

"Bow or Burn" deals with the story from Dan 3. The author rightly points out that, "The world can demand a high price from those who refuse to do things its way" (65). God's servants may face terrifying threats—one minute a respectable job in high office, next minute hauled to face the flames of instant execution. "Believers can never afford to relax" (73). He missed, however, an important lesson from this story and it is the one that says how God does not save his servants *from* the fire of the furnace, but *through* it or *in the midst* of it.

Daniel 4 is a powerful testimony by a king who is not just the subject but also the speaker in this story. All this adds rhetorical power to the whole chapter. Nebuchadnezzar was quite happy for the gods to rule in heaven, just so long as it was clear who ruled on earth. Wright concludes this chapter with the following lesson: When people praise you, don't let it sink into your inner thoughts and breed the cancer of pride. He quotes Stott's famous saying: "Flattery is like cigarette smoke. It does you no harm if you don't inhale."

Another insight from Dan 4 has to do with Daniel's remarkably redemptive attitude toward the king in this chapter: Daniel became a resident in Babylon by force and he could be described, at best, as "a conscript missionary" to that city. In spite of this, Daniel did not harbor permanent hatred toward his superiors or neighbors, but rather loved his enemies and prayed for them, as instructed by Jeremiah (ch. 29). Wright says, "It is hard to go on hating somebody you're praying for every day" (98). Another insightful comment is about the king's boastful words of how he had built the city of Babylon by the power of his might. Wright reminds us that the king had *not* built the city. Babylon was rather built by the sweat of the nameless thousands of oppressed slaves, immigrants, and other poor sections of the nations.

The author draws several lessons from the story of Belshazzar's feast. There is no forgiveness where there is no repentance! He says that it is a very serious and dangerous thing to go on doing what you know to be wrong. Then he goes on to say that it is typically human to take credit for success and blame God for disaster. In Dan 6, the prophet is described as a person whose life of prayer was not escapism out of the daily grind of political administration. Rather, Daniel's daily prayer was his means of bringing the power and presence of Israel's God into his immediate work.

In dealing with Dan 7, the author dwells on the contrasts between the beasts, on the one hand, and the vision of God and "a man" on the other. While bestial rule is terrible it is also temporary. God and man's rule, however, will be heavenly and eternal. In this chapter of Daniel, God reveals the future which is under His control. Wright reminds us that the purpose of apocalyptic visions in Daniel and Revelation is more than making predictions.

It is “unveiling” or showing “the reality of what is going on in the present” (167). The timeless reality is that God is still on the throne. Wright calls the Ancient of Days “the Auditor-in-Chief,” the One to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden. As for the Son of Man, the saints share with him identity, destiny, suffering, then vindication and eternal reign.

The closing comment in Dan 8 is noteworthy: Although the vision was beyond understanding and it made the seer exhausted for several days, Daniel still got up and went back to his day-to-day work (Dan 8:27). In this regard, Daniel presents a good example to the reader of the book on how to be a diligent student of the prophetic work and at the same time remain active in one’s daily activities. In commenting on Dan 9, Wright sees no problem in identifying Cyrus the Great with Darius the Mede. He also describes the conflict in Dan 10–12 as “cosmic,” though surprisingly he seems certain that the Anointed One from Dan 9:25 and 26 should not be identified with Jesus Christ.

When dealing with historical applications of Daniel’s visions, Wright, first of all, proposes that the prophetic imagery “fits more than one regime or individual tyrant in the long history of Jews and Christians” (160). Yet, I feel that a disproportionate amount of attention is given to Antiochus IV Epiphanes in this book at the expense of many other examples of intolerance and persecution in the history of the three monotheistic religions. One could also question the author’s statement that Dan 8 binds the Medes and Persians together, though Wright acknowledges that early Christian interpretations identify the last earthly kingdom with the Roman Empire.

Toward the end of his book, the author reminds us again of prophetic “theology of history” described by him as “an underlying pattern within history.” Considering the big picture painted by biblical prophets, Wright rightly stresses that empires rise and fall as they successively overarch themselves in arrogance. Fortunately, in the end they are completely overthrown by God.

Wright’s work is a stimulating reflection on Daniel’s book and I recommend it to all who are interested in biblical preaching.

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