
While Thomas Gaston’s previously published work includes an exposition on the book of Revelation (*Come and See: An Exposition of Revelation* [India: Culcreuch Exports Pvt. Ltd., 2007]), in this book, as the title indicates, he reappraises the historicity of the key events and persons mentioned in the book of Daniel. Higher Critical scholarship of the nineteenth century placed the origin of this book in the Hellenistic period, and some scholars still work within this framework. Later research and archeological discoveries, however, have led other scholars to conclude that the historicity of this biblical book should be taken more seriously (see, e.g., Donald J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*; Kenneth Kitchen, *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*; and Arthur Feth, *Daniel on the Solid Ground*).

In his approach to Daniel, Gaston first attempts to reestablish the historicity of the book’s hero. He contends that Daniel and Ezekiel were two contemporary prophets, “both in terms of date and location” (10). The opening verses of Daniel correctly report that the first group of exiles from Judah was taken to Babylon shortly after the Battle of Carchemish, which took place in May/June of 605 B.C. King Jehoiakim had most likely been taken as captive, but was later released “in return for his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar and served him as a vassal for three years” (35). As for Daniel and his friends, “their successful careers in Babylon paralleled the careers of scholars in the ancient Near East” (49).

When considering the stories about foreign kings, Gaston deals briefly with Neo-Babylon’s most important king, Nebuchadnezzar II. The historicity of this ruler’s madness cannot be confirmed from extrabiblical sources. A later work, known as the *Prayer of Nabonidus*, should be understood as a product rather than a source of the Danielic narratives. As for Belshazzar’s relationship to Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar may have been his maternal grandson, although in the story of Daniel 5 “it is the dynastic relationship, rather than the familial, that is of significance to the author” (81). Gaston also rightly observes that the focus of Daniel 5 “is on the character of Belshazzar, rather than the downfall of a mighty nation” (97). A definite historical identification of Darius the Mede “still eludes us” (131). The two most likely candidates for this title from history are Ugbaru, the general who captured Babylon, and Cyrus the Great. Between the two, Gaston is more inclined toward Wiseman’s idea that, based on “dual nomenclature,” King Cyrus was given the title Darius in Daniel’s book. Instead of being a throne name, “Darius” was a colloquial name perhaps used only among the Jews (132).

In chapter 7, Gaston evaluates and rejects the proposal that the author of Daniel believed that an independent Median kingdom succeeded Neo-Babylon. This is important for the interpretation of the Four Kingdom visions from Daniel 2 and 7. There are strong indications in the Bible that the Medo-Persian Empire was considered to be a single unit, both legally and militarily. One of Gaston’s insightful comments is the reference from Isa 21:2 that depicts the participation of Persia in the destruction of Babylon alongside Media. I submit
that the words “the destruction of Babylon” are an overstatement about the events of 539 B.C. and should be replaced by “the capture of Babylon.”

Doubts have been expressed by some scholars regarding the accuracy of Persian and Greek histories as presented in Daniel’s book. Alleged inaccuracies in Jewish chronology as presented in Daniel 9 have also been proposed, betraying “the a priori emphasis on the Maccabean period in the critical interpretation of Daniel 9” (140). Gaston concludes that Daniel’s prophetic synopsis is entirely accurate for the level of detail it includes (147). In the conclusion to the book, this conviction is broadened and applied to the whole book of Daniel. The author says that there are strong reasons to believe that the stories about Daniel and his friends are rooted in historical events and centered on real individuals (150). Similarly, to rob Daniel’s “visions and prophecies of their authority is to rob them of their purpose” (155).

Following a conclusion, the book contains a bibliographical list of selected studies on Daniel, past and present. Also included are several appendices, including genealogical charts, lists of kings, and a chronological table. Unfortunately, indices to biblical references or to modern authors are lacking.

Gaston’s work can be commended on several accounts, but I will limit my comments here to only two. First, I appreciate his insistence on the importance of the historicity of the book’s hero. This approach stands in contrast with Higher Critical scholarship on one hand, and very conservative interpretations on the other, both of which have tendencies to detach passages from Daniel’s book (especially prophetic ones) from his life and career in Babylon. This type of approach to the book of Daniel is inadequate, and Gaston is correct in stating categorically that “a fictional prophet cannot utter factual prophecy” (155).

The second commendable element in Gaston’s work is his determination to connect debates on the historicity of biblical events and persons with the practical issues of faith that affect the lives of believers and the way they relate to God and his revelation. To the reader of today who may wonder why the historical issues about Daniel’s book are so important, Gaston provides a straightforward answer: the historical issues justify the believer in taking the book seriously. Although I am not advocating here the concept of biblical inerrancy, I still believe that the sacred text begs its reader’s respect and trust. These two are the main reasons for which I recommend Gaston’s work to all serious students of Daniel’s book.

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