

Introduction

THE BOOK OF DANIEL¹ IS ALL ABOUT INTERPRETATION, OR AT LEAST IT is according to the reading represented here. This is not to say, of course, that what we are about to embark upon is the only reading, nor is it an attempt to debunk the vast amount of historical-critical attention given to Daniel^B. Quite the contrary; as we will notice, this reading of Daniel^B not only invites other readings, but nearly insists upon their presence. We must further assert that this reading is not only cognizant of the historical situated-ness of the original text but also—and distinctively—of this reading presented hereafter.

The very issue of hermeneutics demands that its proponents must be conscientiously sensitive to the placement of a text in its historical setting, which also serves the readerly community with a sense of continuity in the vein of narrative theology. By and large our interests here do not entertain the vast amount of historical-critical data, with which Danielic scholarship is so inundated—and has been for centuries—as a separate and prefatory entity. While at present, I can offer no justification for reiterating already-overstated material on the Danielic historical-critical issues, neither do I wish to ignore such works; indeed, they will be one of several springboards that we will utilize to aid the accomplishments sought for in this reading. Though it is certainly not the preferred methodology here, I am not opposed to Danielic historical criticism per se. Due to the over-saturation of historical-critical attention given to Daniel^B, I feel compelled to validate any inclusion of historical-critical data in this text.

Firstly, of course, is that the primary protocol of this reading is interdisciplinarity; reading Daniel^B without seamless cognizance of its historical-critical context would fail to fulfill its own expressed reading strategy. Like the nature of hermeneutics itself, interdisciplinarity also

1. For the sake of clarity and economy, the *book* of Daniel shall henceforth appear as Daniel^B; Daniel as *character* shall henceforth appear as Daniel^C.

musters strength and acquires greater credence with the acknowledgment of pertinent historical details maintained in the equation.

Secondly, in some (post)structural attempts to read a text apart from any historical context, the pendulum has swung to a point of complete disregard for historical data and has suffered willful naïveté to some extent.² If such naïveté can be avoided simply by the awareness of historical data, then such information is a welcomed asset. We can come to the text not simply as contemporary and actual readers, but perhaps better as informed and ideal readers.

Thirdly, in the field of narrative theology, the dependence upon the historical identity of the community of the text is crucial for a deeper understanding of the continuity with the identity of the contemporary community of faith. Narrative theology as a methodology promotes that ‘real’ readers are best served as mindful members of a community in the grand historical continuum.

Fourthly, in the field of hermeneutics, which is constantly on our reading horizon, history is an integral part of its theory and practice. One of the many chasms that hermeneutics seeks to bridge is between the horizon of the past and the horizon of the present.

Fifthly, and perhaps most importantly, Daniel^B is not only an historical piece of literature but it is likewise emphatically historically conscious. Daniel^B’s deliberate concerns for history put a similar responsibility on the reader to acquire a like-minded historical awareness.

For these reasons—and perhaps more—the historical-critical issues remain important for this particular study. Yet, with that stated, it is important to note that the historical-critical issues will not be tackled here; again, that would only serve as a review of the prolific literature on these issues offered elsewhere. This is a fundamental competence that will be assumed for our reading.

In a similar vein, the vast amount of narratological and literary criticism will not receive an in depth treatment either. Biblical scholarship by and large has reached a point now when prefatory justification or full explanation of a literary approach is superfluous. Again, certain

2. Phillips addresses this issue in his “Introduction” to *Semeia* 51, 3–4. He claims that poststructuralism regains some ground in historical criticism lost by structuralism, yet poststructuralism reshapes the posture of “historical description” primarily by its rhetorical nature.

competencies will be assumed in this reading.³ At many junctures during our reading, proposals and reading protocols will be highlighted from the various leaders in the field, whether they are predominantly associated with either a biblical or literary discipline.

Yet I think it is well worth the time to summarize the essential differences between the historical and literary approaches, and further to explain the reasons they are both integral to our present work of hermeneutics. While historical criticism asks a certain set of questions that are external to the text itself, literary criticism asks an entirely different set of questions that are concerned with the internal workings of a text. The narratological approach allows the flourishing of new literary skills and tools that help us in understanding a text, whether it is ancient or modern. Though the historical-critical methods of traditional biblical studies are relatively modern in the long history of biblical interpretation, their goals are to read the ancient text in its most accurate and reasonably situated time and place. Narratology, which is quite remarkably different from historical-critical interpretations, invites fresh readings and seeks to loose the bonds of fossilization, an approach that we must realize has its advances and its shortcomings. Edgar McKnight nicely summarizes our present hermeneutical goal when he claims, “literary criticism dissolves the distance between the ancient texts and the modern reader-critic.”⁴

The crucial point to be made is that Daniel^B as an historical text is now being transplanted into a different and contemporary context, and now its meaning and effectiveness must be retained or perhaps reestablished. The point is not to de-historicize Daniel^B, but to promote its iterability, which further strengthens its place in history, regardless of immediate context.⁵ Reading Daniel^B solely as an ‘historical document’ potentially causes its fossilization and in effect dampens its contemporary significance; however, reading Daniel^B from a literary perspective ensures its vivacity and seeks new applications of relevance, which thereby provides an avenue of continuity.

I must also assert quite plainly and boldly that this reading is not a commentary on Daniel^B. Yet, if this is not a commentary on Daniel^B,

3. See the bibliography for references.

4. McKnight, *The Bible and the Reader*, 12.

5. Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, 64.

we might rightly ask, then what is it? The answer to this question leads to the issue of methodology.

From the beginning of this reading, the desire, goal, and understanding were to approach Daniel^B from an interdisciplinary position. Daniel^B would not receive similar treatment as traditional commentaries that focus primarily on historical-critical, theological, or practical issues in a verse-by-verse format. Though these approaches are indeed important; additionally, disciplines such as literary criticism, narratology, narrative theology, and hermeneutics would play integral parts in this reading of Daniel^B. Even within these disciplines, a certain intradisciplinary adherence must be maintained.

With this anticipated framework, the reading of Daniel^B began. Yet shortly into the reading, the interdisciplinary quality found in the hermeneutical character of Daniel^C became blatantly obvious. The text struck me: I was not the interdisciplinarian working on Daniel^B; Daniel^C was the interdisciplinarian already at work showing me the way to do interdisciplinarity in that he maintains religious, academic, social, and political perspectives integrally and proficiently. Furthermore, the challenges presented in the book such as narrational shifts, bilingualism, and genric⁶ interplays prove Daniel^B to be literature that demands interdisciplinarity in its reader as well. With this in mind, we must begin to read Daniel^B as an exercise in the theory and practice of interpretation, which demands sharp skills in at least the disciplines already mentioned. In short, Daniel^C is observed as the paradigm of the good theological hermeneut.

Likewise, much of the same can be stated concerning of the issue of hermeneutics. My intention was to interpret the text of Daniel^B, but what I found was that Daniel^B is a text that enlightens me how to interpret. The hermeneutical circle is essentially inescapable: I sought to interpret Daniel^B, only to read Daniel^{B/C} to discover the already-existent promotion of interpretive theory and praxis; then I study hermeneutics in order to be equipped to understand better the text of Daniel^B, until at last I interpret Daniel^B in a mode more aligned with the “Danielic interpretive ideology.”

6. “Genric” is employed over “generic” due to the “general” connotation of the latter; this follows Gerhart in her essay “Genric Competence in Biblical Hermeneutics,” 27–43.

Together interdisciplinarity and hermeneutics play complementary roles. The study of Daniel^B as an exercise in hermeneutics is indicative of its endorsement of interdisciplinarity. Hermeneutics is inherently an interdisciplinary field of study for it is at once a science and an art, a theory and a practice, and as we will see, it is human and divine, natural and supernatural, immanent and transcendent, material and spirit, temporal and timeless as well as past and present and future on a single continuum.

Furthermore, my reading of Daniel^B stems also from a narrative theological perspective, which requires both historical and literary competencies. In other words, discovering the aesthetic beauty of Daniel^B as literature will not suffice, nor will affirming the historical date of composition work to establish credentials; neither historical-critical data nor narratological discovery is the aspiration. History and narratology are only tools in order to get to a deeper—and perhaps “apocalyptically hidden”⁷—meaning of theological significance.

When we finally begin to read the text of Daniel, my reader might notice a sense of paradox in my treatments of the earlier half of the Danielic narrative and equally in the latter half of the narrative. In the earlier half, when dealing with the theoretical side of Danielic hermeneutics, I tend to go about digging through theories by way of praxis of interpretation. In short, I practice interpretation in order to arrive at the theories latent in Daniel^B. In the latter half when exposing the practical demands of Danielic hermeneutics, I proceed through the material using theory to demonstrate how the reader is expected to practice the act of interpretation. In short, I arrive at theory through praxis in the earlier half of Daniel^B, and theorize about the practical implications for the reader in the latter half.

To a certain degree I find this method quite apropos. If I was to theorize abstractly about the theory of interpretation as found in the earlier narrative, the foundational basis would remain too abstract and I would fail to demonstrate that Daniel^B is indeed laying down the groundwork as a hermeneutics textbook. Likewise, if I was to practice interpretation in the latter half of the narrative, as I believe the text encourages the reader to do, I could perhaps hamper the point of praxis by limiting other readers’ practices of interpretation to my own interpreta-

7. Such an oxymoron is indicative of the genre and the demands to interpret the mysterious.

tion. My goal is not so much to interpret the text but rather to show that the text of the latter half demands that we must indeed interpret; though admittedly, I ultimately come to these conclusions by way of interpretation. Again, the hermeneutical circle is inescapable; whether I arrive at these conclusions from my own (con)text or from the Danielic text is a very blurry line indeed.

Finally we will come to the last chapter in which we gather together the various and multiple implications for the reader. In this chapter the reader is recognized as playing a role as character, as text, and finally as hermeneut before going his/her way to do the business of hermeneutics. Ultimately our reading is about what significance the text has for the reader; not the historical reader, but the contemporary reader who is sensitive to his/her own placement in the historical continuum and as a theological and literary member of a long-standing pistis community.

The primary text used in English is the ESV, while others will also be used with reference. Other translations include those of Goldingay,⁸ Goldwurm,⁹ Fewell,¹⁰ and the NJPS Tanakh translation. All references to Hebrew and Aramaic are from the Masoretic Text, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.¹¹

8. Goldingay, *Daniel*.

9. Goldwurm, *Daniel*.

10. Fewell, *The Circle of Sovereignty*.

11. Kohlenberger, ed., *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*.