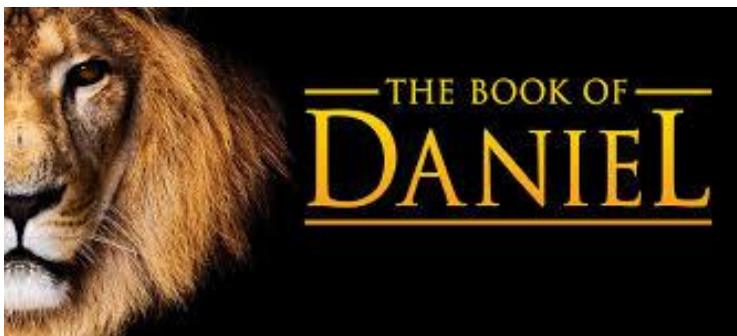


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Structure and Unity of Dani'el



The book of **Dani'el** breaks down into two halves: **Chapters 1** through **6** are clearly biographical in nature, tracing **Dani'el's** witness in the royal court of Babylon. **Chapters 7** through **12** contain a record of **his** visions of **God's** purposes for the future. The actual structure of the book, however, is more complex. For one thing, **Dani'el 2:4b-7:28** is written in Aramaic, which was the international language as early as the ninth or eighth century BC. It has therefore been suggested that this section in **Dani'el** would be of special significance to those who were not Jews and was written in the international language. It is important to notice that the Aramaic section does not neatly dovetail with the simplest division of the book into biography (**Chapters 1-6**) and visions (**Chapters 7-12**). In fact, rather than separate them, it links them together. It has been suggested that by doing so, it is made clear that **Chapters 2-7** represent the core of the book. **Chapters 2** and **7** represent the four world empires; **Chapters 3** and **6** present narratives of mighty deliverance; and **Chapters 4** and **5** describe the judgment of **ADONAI** on world rulers. The widely recognized chiastic arrangement of the Aramaic section of the book as seen below is often cited in support of a language-based approach to the structure of **Dani'el**.

A a dream about four world kingdoms replaced by a fifth (2:4b-49)

B three Hebrews in the fiery furnace (3:1-30)

C Dani'el interprets a dream for king Nebuchadnezzar (4:1-47)

C Dani'el interprets the handwriting on the wall for Belshazzar (5:1-31)

B Dani'el in the lion's den (6:1-28)

A a vision about four world kingdoms replacing by a fifth (7:1-28)

If this pattern reflects the intention of the author, then we also see the significance of the opening and closing sections of the book: **Chapter 1** sets the scene in Babylon for what follows, and **Chapters 8-12** describe the earlier pattern of world history in detail, but especially from the viewpoint of **God's** people, explaining **the LORD's** purposes for them.

Many of us have a tendency to prefer things to start at the beginning, continue without interruption, and finish at the end. It is often said, with good reason, that this is a distinctively Western mind-set. We must unlearn this linear view of things if we are to feel the full force of the book of **Dani'el**. Here we encounter a structure that can be described in different ways. It has been called "progressive parallelism," a style of presentation in which the author takes us from the beginning to the end of a sequence of events, and then returns to the beginning to describe them again, this time in different terms or from another perspective. One might liken the structure to a spiral staircase, turning around the same central point on more than one occasion, yet raising higher and higher at the same time.

Therefore, in the book of **Dani'el** we keep returning to the same general outline of world history (compare **Chapters 2** and **7**). Yet, we are presented with different viewpoints, or the material is presented through different imagery, or our attention is focused on a particular cross-section (for example **9:20-27**). This explains what may seem to some readers a certain monotony in the message of the book. It says the same thing over and over in different ways. That is something the reader has to recognize in order to focus on each new perspective presented on the central theme.⁸