

# The function of Daniel 1 in a second century BCE historical context

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## Abstract

In the first chapter, the book of Daniel begins with an introduction of the main characters, and a short story about refraining from defilement by eating foreign food. From a literary perspective that focuses on form and content it is clear that this chapter was written as an introduction. This contribution reconsiders what earlier form of the book (Daniel 2-7 or Daniel 2-12) it was meant to introduce. In an attempt to alter scholarly opinion as regards the redaction history of the book of Daniel, the function of this chapter is determined against a second century BCE context.

**Keywords:** Old Testament, Daniel, historical context.

**Disciplines:** History, Biblical Studies, Literary Studies.

## Introduction

The book of Daniel in the Old Testament has been described as “a battlefield between faith and unbelief” (Pusey, 1886:175). This sharp dichotomy has a direct bearing on developments in biblical studies that gained huge momentum, especially in academic circles, during the second half of the nineteenth century. These developments were mainly historical in nature. However, such developments did not occur overnight. Hayes (2008:998) traces these developments further back when he states: “The first half of the eighteenth century witnessed for the first time the full integration of history and historical perspectives into the mainstream of hermeneutical work.” The full fruition of this historical approach resulted in studying the Bible by means of methods that were developed and used for the study of all textual artefacts from antiquity. In this way the Bible was seen losing its unique character as the infallible “Word of God”. How did this come about?

In his essay, *The Rise of Historical Criticism* (1913) Oscar Wilde, a contemporary of Pusey, indirectly provides an answer to this question. However, he follows a different trajectory to

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lay bare how the first seeds of a “rationalistic” approach<sup>2</sup> to understanding the past were sown by the ancient Greeks. He explicitly refers to Herodotus’ contribution in this regard by noting that Herodotus like “[n]o writer of any age has more vividly recognised the fact that history is a matter of evidence” (Wilde, 1913:20). Finding such evidence to support what many in the late nineteenth century held to be biblical *history*, became increasingly difficult as archaeological discoveries, at first hailed to “prove” the Bible, suggested that the ancient Israelites shared many customs with other peoples from the ancient Near East. Comparative studies of among others literary artefacts furthermore suggested a close relation to and even dependence of biblical material on mythical texts from the same cultural milieu (e.g. *Enuma Elish*). Wilde, though, does not refer to these developments in more contemporary thought. He stays in the classical period and notes how the development of a more “rational” approach to the past as reflected in the work of Herodotus also caused this historian and philosopher to seek divine pardon for such thinking. In question was Herodotus’ rejection of the mythical account of the foundation of Dodona in which mention is made of a talking dove (Wilde, 1913:19).

In an article focusing on the problem statement as an important starting point for historical research, De Klerk<sup>3</sup> (2001:434) notes how Droysen, also in the nineteenth century, indicated the importance of historical questions to the historical research process. As is clear from the remark by Pusey noted above, this type of questions was not traditionally asked when studying the Bible. When it comes to a text proclaiming to precisely prophesy events at least 370 years into the future (Dan. 2, 7-12); and claiming that through divine intervention people can withstand fierce fire and hungry lions (Dan. 3, 6); and suggesting a Babylonian king named Nebuchadnezzar went insane (Dan. 4) and had a son named Belshazzar (Dan. 5)<sup>4</sup> historical questions in the often cited Von Ranke fashion (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*) seem out of place. When reasoning from a “traditional” stance that the truth in the Bible should be

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2 Wilde (1913:15) speaks of a “*historic sense*, which is the rational antecedent of the science of historical criticism” (emphasis original).

3 It is indeed a privilege to present this article to Prof. Pieter de Klerk on the eve of his retirement. For 17 years he has constantly astonished me with the width *and* depth of his knowledge spanning many a field. First among these is of course his field of expertise, namely history. Although more interested in contemporary South African history, he could speak with authority on topics ranging from ancient civilizations to contemporary developments around the globe. His philosophical inclination meant that he often commented on the story behind the history. Furthermore, he is a keen reader of contemporary Afrikaans and English literature and a film connoisseur. It is impossible to write an article to complement all his diverse interests. Hence, I present this piece related to his primary field of study, wishing him a long and well-deserved period of slowing down somewhat.

4 The very first verse in the book of Daniel contains a statement regarding an event for which no historical evidence exists. Reference is made to a capture of Jerusalem and looting of the temple by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the third year of king Jehoiakim of Judah, i.e. 606/7 BCE. This date is problematic since Nebuchadnezzar succeeded his father, Nabopolassar, only in 605 BCE. Also, the *Babylonian Chronicles* is silent on any campaign against Jerusalem before 597BCE (cf. Collins [1993:130-133] for an extensive discussion). King Nebuchadnezzar did not have a son named Belshazzar, but a later usurper king, Nabonidus, was succeeded by a son named Belshazzar, who also acted as co-regent during his father’s long period of absence from Babylon. A text from Qumran (4QPrNab) refers to an evil decease that struck Nabonidus, but the intervention of a Jewish diviner led to his cure. Many scholars maintain that Dan. 4, in which Nebuchadnezzar goes mad, is based on 4QPrNab or a similar textual tradition.

reduced to what is historically true, questions that seek *evidence* for such phenomena are frowned upon and easily dismissed as originating in the realm of unbelief.

Nevertheless, in the study of the Old Testament the historical approach towards understanding the text held sway for at least the past 200 years. This modern historical approach seeks to reach behind the text in order to locate a specific context that gave rise to the text and its further developments. In nearly all of the books in the Old Testament such a process of growth can be seen (Collins, 2004:16).

This contribution seeks to understand the introductory chapter of the book of Daniel against the historical context of the second century BCE. After a brief overview of modern developments in the understanding of the Old Testament, problems related to the book of Daniel are noted and discussed from both historical and literary perspectives. Finally, the introductory chapter of this book is discussed on basis of these perspectives.

### Reading the Old Testament: a concise overview

In various ways the historical approach to the biblical text tries to shed light on the process of its development. In what was initially known as literary criticism,<sup>5</sup> an effort was made to discover possible sources that lay behind the present text. This effort was focused especially on the Pentateuch, the first 5 books in the Old Testament. In a subsequent development, and one that had a huge impact on the study of the book of Psalms, the emphasis fell on reconstructing a possible real-life situation (*Sitz im Leben*) in which the text functioned in a pre-written (oral) form. This type of historical approach was called form criticism. It went out from the premises that the type of text (genre) opened a door to the real-life situation (mostly viewed as a cultic context) in which the text functioned in pre-written form.

Another historical approach, referred to as redaction criticism, sought to find evidence of a particular theological (or ideological) slant added in the redaction process by those responsible for the final form of the text. In the Old Testament, the story of the nation of Israel as found in the books Joshua – 2 Kings, was viewed as exhibiting at least one (and possibly more) redactional level(s) in which, among others, the idea of retribution was used as guiding principle in organizing the story related to this period. The story ends (2 Kings 25) with the exile of a portion of the Israelite community from the land they received from their God at the outset of the story (Joshua 1 – 12).

Lastly, tradition criticism as yet another historical approach was interested not so much in the written sources behind the present form of the text, but wanted to lay bare the blocks of oral or written *traditions* that constitute the final text. All these historical orientated methods and subsequent developments based on them were grouped together by biblical scholars under the heading historical criticism. Any study of the Old Testament that claims to be historical in nature will take as point of departure a methodology based on these classic approaches.

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5 Since the middle of the 20th century when literary criticism in the context of literary studies rather meant a focus on distinct literary features in the final text, in biblical studies literary criticism was renamed “source criticism” (see Barton, 1996:21).

As noted above, the middle of the twentieth century saw the introduction of an alternative to a historical understanding of the Bible. This change to a literary approach was informed by developments in the field of general literary theory that made its way into the field of biblical studies. According to this view, the meaning of a text cannot be found by means of constructing a historical context from which a text supposedly stems. All aspects related to meaning were to be found in the text itself. Hence, the text is bracketed from any historical context and literary features found in the text itself (e.g. stylistic features, structure, plot, character development etc.) were studied for the meanings they convey. Although the present contribution focuses more on a historical understanding of the text, certain literary features that contribute to meaning will be noted below.<sup>6</sup> Next, though, a few scholarly problems related to the book need to be highlighted.

### **The book of Daniel in a problematic context**

A person reading the book of Daniel finds herself faced with a number of interesting issues pertaining to this collection. If this person is reading, like most readers of the book, from a modern translation she notes that chapters 1 – 6 present a different type of literature compared to the last six chapters of the book. Whereas the first six represent the same number of upbeat stories about the successes of Jewish courtiers doing duty for foreign rulers (such as Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius), the last six chapters are totally different. Here strange symbolic language is used to communicate four visionary experiences. The tenor in this section is markedly more subdued and perplexing. Modern scholars choose to indicate this change in literary type between the first and the second part of the book by means of the epithets “court tales” (Dan 1 – 6) and “apocalyptic visions” (Dan 7 – 12) (Seow, 2003:9-11). In the latter section the typical figure of an *angelus interpres* comes to the aid of a visionary (Daniel) who stands confused at what he has seen or read. In the first section of the book the very same Daniel came to the aid of authorities seeking understanding for what they had dreamt (Dan 2, 4) or seen (Dan 5). In two other stories the lives of Daniel (Dan 6) and his three comrades (Dan 3) are threatened by persecution due to their faithful religious conduct.

A scholarly reading of the book in its ancient languages finds even more intriguing problems to deal with. First, there is the issue of language: chapter 1, an introductory story, and chapters 8 – 12, three visionary experiences, are written like nearly all of the Old Testament, in Hebrew. However, the five remaining stories in the first part of the book (chapters 2 – 6), as well as the first of the visions in the second part (chapter 7), are written in Aramaic. The fact that the difference in language does not square up with the different literary types makes the issue even more complex. Adding the ancient Greek versions to the list of ancient sources of the book of Daniel also adds another complexity. In this instance the versions referred to as respectively the Old Greek (LXX) and Theodotion differ not only from the Hebrew/Aramaic book, but also from each other. The Greek versions, for example, include a few further stories about the main characters, Daniel and his friends. In the first of these, usually inserted in Daniel 3 between v. 23 and v. 24, we find a prayer of deliverance by one of the three friends thrown into a fiery furnace. This is followed by the three men’s song of

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6 See Hayes and Holladay (2007) for a more elaborate overview of developments in the field of biblical interpretation.

praise for the saving act of God that they witnessed. The second addition to the Greek versions is the story of Susanna. Since it also introduces the reader to the character of Daniel, it is placed before Daniel 1 in the Theodotion edition. However, in the Old Greek version it is found only after the visions. The last addition, commonly known as Bel and the Serpent (or Dragon) weaves together two tales about Daniel illustrating the folly of idolatry. For his trouble Daniel is thrown into a lion's pit where he receives a visit from the prophet Habakkuk and, finally, is vindicated by the king.

When comparing the two Greek versions with each other one finds further discrepancies, such as: Dan. 4 – 6 in the Old Greek differs quite a lot when compared to Theodotion (and the Aramaic text). Also considerable differences are noted between the two Greek versions regarding the story of Susanna. It is clear, then, that the book of Daniel poses some quite unique challenges to the reader – scholarly or otherwise. Needless to say that no consensus exists regarding a “theory of everything” that may solve all of these perplexing problems. In order to perhaps move us in that direction, we now turn to an investigation of the book in a specific historical context.

### The book of Daniel in a historical context

One of the results of modern historical research carried out on the book of Daniel was to distinguish between the time when the book was written and the time referred to in the book itself. As mentioned, the book of Daniel pertains to date to the sixth century BCE describing episodes from the lives of Jewish courtiers at foreign courts (mainly in third person narration)<sup>7</sup>, as well as a series of four visions seen by Daniel (mainly in first person narration)<sup>8</sup>. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century the opinion was still held, by among others Spinoza and Isaac Newton, that Daniel himself wrote the visionary sections (in the first person), while the preceding narratives in the book were written by other authors and then added to the visions. In some evangelical circles it is still upheld that the book should be dated in the sixth century BCE.

However, issues such as the authenticity of the predictions, literary critical considerations, and problems related to historical references in the book led to modern scholars to adopt the view that the book is a product of the second century BCE. This line of thought links up to some extent with an ancient voice, namely that of Porphyry, dating from the late third century CE. This neo-Platonist philosopher believed that the author of the book lived in Palestine in the second century BCE and that he was not predicting the future, but rather describing the past up to the time of the Seleucid emperor, Antiochus Epiphanes. These ideas of Porphyry are only available to us through the work of Jerome in his commentary on Daniel. Needless to say, Jerome did not agree with Porphyry on the issue of dating.<sup>9</sup>

Modern scholarship, then, tells a different story about the history of the book of Daniel. In essence it goes like this: stories about a legendary character (who is known from earlier

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7 Dan. 4 purposing to be an encyclical from the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, is the exception.

8 Dan. 7:1-2a is exceptional in that it is written in the third person.

9 Collins (1993:25) notes that Porphyry also differs from modern scholarship as regards a few issues related to the second century dating of the book, e.g. taking Daniel's prediction of Antiochus death as correct and viewing 11:45 as the place where Daniel switches from *ex eventu* to real prophecy (modern scholars place this break at 11:40).

sources such as Ezekiel 14:14) were in circulation during the Persian period. The discovery of a number of Daniel texts at Qumran confirms the “popularity” of these stories (Flint, 1997:41-60). The difference between the two Greek version’s renderings of Daniel 4 – 6 suggests that these three Aramaic stories (i.e. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about a huge tree; Belshazzar’s seeing a writing on the wall; and Darius’s impulsive edict that led to Daniel being thrown to lions) may be the oldest part of the book.

This nucleus gradually grew during the Persian period by the addition of related tales, such as Daniel’s three friends in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3) and Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the huge statue composed of diverse metals (Dan. 2). These previously independent tales, according to one influential theory, originally served the purpose of outlining a lifestyle for the Diaspora (Humphreys, 1973). In the early Hellenistic period were added to these tales an introduction (Dan. 1 – on which I shall focus in more detail below) and the first vision (Dan. 7 – written in Aramaic). This introductory chapter, so the theory goes, was also written in Aramaic, but after the addition of the last three visions (written in Hebrew), the introduction was translated into Hebrew (Collins, 1993:35).

The crisis in Jerusalem that followed on Antiochus IV’s persecution of the Jews and more specifically the desecration of the altar and temple (Dan. 8:11-13; 9:27; 11:31) led to the composition of three visions that closes the book when the deuterocanonical material is not included. These visions are concerned with the period of time that will lapse before this dreadful experience will finally end. Since most modern scholars do not find any reference to the rededication of the temple (in 164 BCE) in the book of Daniel, it is presumed that the book reached its final (and apparently unchangeable) form before this decisive event.

With this scholarly tale about the literary origin of the book of Daniel told, let us briefly consider the historical context in Jerusalem in the second century BCE in a little more detail. As could be gathered from what preceded, the main protagonist is the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes. He starts off as a political hostage in the Roman Republic in order for the Roman authorities to keep the reigning Greek family in Palestine in check. When his father, Antiochus III, died he was succeeded by his son and brother of Antiochus IV, Seleucus IV. This meant that Antiochus IV could be replaced as hostage by his nephew and son of Seleucus IV, namely Demetrius I. However, when Seleucus IV is murdered by a usurper, Antiochus reclaims the throne for the family. With the rightful heir still in Rome, Antiochus declares himself co-regent along with an infant brother of Demetrius I, whom he has murdered after a few months. Now, as sole regent he sets his eyes on the Ptolemaic Empire in the southwest (Egypt). After limited success during a first invasion, Antiochus launches another onslaught in 168 BCE, only to be stopped by the Roman ambassador drawing what became the proverbial “line in the sand”. During this second campaign in 168 BCE a rumor reached Jerusalem that Antiochus IV had lost his life. This set in motion a chain of events in Jerusalem that were in the making for some time. We should briefly consider these.

When Antiochus IV came to power in 175 BCE, Onias III held the highest religious office in Jerusalem. However, his brother Jason offered Antiochus a sum of money as bribe to be named High Priest in Onias’ stead. The emperor accepted the offer, but 3 years later Menelaus persuaded Antiochus with the promise of an even higher bid to obtain this influential office. This caused Jason to flee from Jerusalem, only to return on hearing the false rumor of Antiochus’ death and in order to claim back the office he had to vacate. The subsequent unrest in Jerusalem caused Antiochus to crack down on the Jewish population;



killing thousands and committing sacrilege in the temple in 167 BCE. Only 3 years later, after a Maccabean uprising, the temple was rededicated. As mentioned above, since the book of Daniel seemingly does not refer to this important event, but instead contains an erroneous prophecy about Antiochus' further exploits and ultimate end (11:40-45) it is assumed that the book was concluded, never to be updated, before the time of the rededication of the temple.

After establishing the historical context that most scholars agree on for the writing of the book of Daniel we briefly address the literary context of the book.

### **The book of Daniel in a literary context**

Returning to the book of Daniel in its final literary form (again, not taking into account the deuterocanonical additions) we should focus our attention to two aspects: 1) the structure of the book; and 2) the different genres reflected in the final form.

As regards the structure, Lenglet (1972) persuasively argued that the Aramaic section of the book (Dan. 2 – 7) is carefully arranged in the form of a concentric pattern. Accordingly, there are similarities between chapter 2 (the statue constituted of different metals symbolizing four major empires that were brought to an end through divine intervention) and chapter 7 (four animals symbolizing four empires that also come to an end by means of divine intervention). Chapter 3 (a persecution story about Daniel's three friends who miraculously escape a fiery furnace in the wake of their disregard for King Nebuchadnezzar's decree to worship a huge statue) and chapter 6 (a persecution story where Daniel miraculously escape being devoured by hungry lions due to his disregard for King Darius' proclamation to worship him) also show distinct thematic and literary agreement. In the center of this ring composition we find chapters 4 and 5. The similarities between these two chapters are likewise quite obvious. Daniel 4 is story about Daniel's interpretation of a dream of King Nebuchadnezzar in which his kingdom is represented by a huge tree that is felled due to the king's hubris. Daniel 5 narrates how the "son" of Nebuchadnezzar, in the narrative world called Belshazzar, gets a similar warning by means of a hand writing a message on a wall and Daniel is called in to interpret this fateful omen.

Turning our attention to the introductory chapter of the book, written in Hebrew, Goldingay (1989) made us aware of the fact that this chapter mirrors this concentric pattern found in the Aramaic section of the book. According to Goldingay (1989:8):

*Dan 1 forms a chiastically-shaped short story composed of three double panels, the central panels being themselves subdivided chiastically.*

This means that vv. 1-2, which set the context of the beginning of the exile, is similar to v. 21 that refers to Cyrus and the end of the exile. Furthermore, vv. 3-7 notes how "young men are taken for training" at the Babylonian court, while its chiastic counterpart, vv. 17-20, narrates, "the young men are triumphant in the training." The middle section and center of the narrative (vv. 8-16) tells how Daniel avoids defilement by means of instigating an experiment in healthy eating and obtaining positive results.

Gabrielle Boccacini (2002) noted a similar pattern in the last, Hebrew, part of the book (Dan. 8 – 12). He explicitly refers to the important place of Daniel 9 in the second part of the book and states (2002:181):

*Dan 9 is the nucleus of the second part of the book (Dan 8–12) and at the center of ch. 9 is Daniel's prayer to God (9:4–19).*

He goes on to add:

*Structurally and theologically, Dan 9 plays a central role in the book of Daniel (Boccacini, 2002:188).*

Summarising these literary notes, it can be concluded that:

- The different sections of the book, denoted by their differences in language, are each structured in a chiasmic pattern;
- This chiasmic pattern is most obvious for the Aramaic section, whereas in the case of the last Hebrew section it is less clear, although certainly still present;
- Daniel 1, as introductory chapter, mirrors this chiasmic pattern.

We are now in a position to consider the focus of this study, namely the place of Daniel 1 in a second century context.

### **Daniel 1 in a second century BCE context**

This section focuses on the following question: *What* exactly is the first chapter of this book introducing? In addressing this question I suggest that we reconsider the developmental history of the book as outlined above and seek to establish a place for Daniel 1 in the proposed alternative redaction history of the book.

First, I need to outline my thoughts in this regard.<sup>10</sup> I question the widely held assumption that the stories we find in the first part of the book necessarily forms a first collection of what later became the book of Daniel. According to the standard theory the final book was formed after the addition of at first one (Aramaic) vision (Dan. 7) and subsequently a further three (Hebrew) visions (Dan. 8–12) to the original tales.

Based on the similarities between the heading to the visionary section beginning in Daniel 8:1 and the headings of other postexilic prophecies such as Haggai (1:1) and Zechariah (1:1),<sup>11</sup> I suggest that what is referred to as the three Hebrew visions in the book of Daniel at first could have been the complete book of the prophet written in the wake of the desecration of the temple and the persecution by Antiochus IV. This prophetic book sought to find reasons for the second century BCE calamity, as well as an answer to the question of how long this period of predicament will continue.

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10 A detailed discussion of my position will be published in due course and is not elaborated on here (cf. Van Deventer, 2012).

11 Dan 8:1 – “In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after the one that had appeared to me at first”; Zech 1:1 – “In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo, saying ...”; Hag. 1:1 – “In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest.”



Unlike the Maccabees, the group that was responsible for these visions is viewed as quietists (Albertz, 2001:171). This group rejected militancy or force to overturn what was happening in Jerusalem under Antiochus IV. In the only reference in the book of Daniel to the Maccabees (11:34), they are viewed as “a little help” in the ongoing crisis (Collins, 1993:386). In contrast to the Maccabees, the wise *maskilim* in die book of Daniel “pursue a non-violent course.” (Collins, 1993:385). This group expressed their hope in an altogether different time frame and attitude. Their ultimate answer was an unheard of theological leap, namely that those who were persecuted will rise from the dead (12:2-3). Human activity and initiative had to take a backseat and wait for divine action.

However, the Maccabean resistance proved successful in the end when due to their militant actions the temple in Jerusalem was rededicated to Yhwh. How did the quietist group responsible for the visions in the Hebrew part of the book of Daniel react to this unforeseen outcome? Well, first of all, they made sure not to make any explicit mention of this success in their writings. The rededication of the temple was brought about by means they did not endorse. But, in order to retain group cohesion and have their standpoint and the prophecy of resurrection remembered, they added three popular Aramaic tales about the prophet Daniel to their visions. At this stage what later became the book of Daniel consisted of three visions to which three tales were added. These three tales were introduced by superscriptions similar to those of the three visions. In each case three successive foreign rulers are listed in the headings. In the original visions these were: Belshazzar (8:1), Darius (9:1) and Cyrus (10:1). The added tales were already in circulation as independent stories about an ancient hero. In the context of their new function to help keep the visionary hope of the authors of the prophetic book alive, the kings mentioned in the headings had to be altered. Since Cyrus was the liberator of the Jews, he is only mentioned at the end of the persecution story in chapter 6. In the headings to these stories now appears Nebuchadnezzar at the beginning of the sequence of foreign rulers in 4:1, followed by Belshazzar (5:1) and Darius (6:1).

The three popular stories added to the visions were carefully selected from a larger number in circulation. They did not only form a numerical balance to the three Hebrew visions, but also mirrored the content of these visions. Hence, we encounter the receiver of a dream vision and its interpretation in chapter 8 as an interpreter of a dream vision in in chapter 4. The person who seeks an interpretation of a writing of Jeremiah in chapter 9, is himself an interpreter of a writing on the wall in chapter 5. Lastly, the climax of the book that proclaims the resurrection in chapter 12 (as part of the third vision), finds a counterpart in the third story in chapter 6 where a martyr survives a certain death among hungry lions.

What bearing does this have on Daniel 1 as introduction to the present book of Daniel? Well, after joining the three stories to the original three visions, an introduction was not needed, since in Daniel 4 the prophet is introduced by Nebuchadnezzar. Another introduction became necessary only after a fourth popular story was added. This is the story of the three friends thrown into a fiery furnace in Dan. 3. Why was this added to the well-balanced three stories and three visions? Well, in the aftermath of the Maccabean uprising, there was another problem to address, namely that of group martyrdom. From the Maccabean point of view, “[m]artyrdom may be a forcible option and a last resort for the individual, but it becomes an irresponsible act when it jeopardizes the very existence of the Jewish people” (Boccaccini, 2002:164). In the stories added to the prophetic visions, the issue of individual martyrdom is raised in Dan. 6. To emphasise their anti-Maccabean point that group martyrdom remains an option for devoted Jews, the story of the three friends in the fiery furnace was added (Dan 3).

This addition necessitated a new introduction. The new introduction did not only introduce the main characters and allude to issues that were taken up in both the stories and visions. Its composition in Hebrew<sup>12</sup> also meant that this chapter could bind together the four stories and three visions into a single unit. Daniel 1 thus functioned to:

1. Introduce by name the four Jewish individuals (1:6) that appear in the subsequent stories and visions. The character of Daniel is foregrounded in the introduction since the bulk of what is to follow involves him directly;
2. Introduce the issue of sacrilege with reference to temple goods that were given to Nebuchadnezzar by God (1:2) to be taken away to the temple of a foreign god. The issue of the desecration of the holy surfaces in the story in chapter 5, but is prominent in each of the Hebrew visions (8:11-13; 9:27; 11:31);
3. The ability of Daniel to interpret dreams and have insight into writings is noted in the introduction (1:17) since it is put into practice in Dan. 4 and 5. The fact that in the visions he is no longer able to do so heightens the tension and underscores the need for divine intervention in those circumstances;
4. The first chapter also functions as statement of the theological (ideological) point of view of the authors: they are not totally opposed to a process of introducing new cultural goods (e.g. change of names and foreign learning – a situation mirrored in the second century context and the struggle over the high priesthood in Jerusalem). However, this group also wanted to stress that they are not part of the transgressors of the “Zadokite covenant” and indicated this through the story of defilement with food in Dan. 1.
5. Lastly, and perhaps most important, the new opening chapter refers to this group as “*maskilim*” (1:4) – the same epithet used in the last vision (11:33, 11:35, 12:3) for “the heroes of the Maccabean crisis” as Collins (1993:137) refers to this group.

## Conclusion

Today, the historical questions posed by biblical scholars in their encounter with the biblical text are in very few academic circles viewed as constituting a test of true belief. However, in scholarship some theories related to answering these historical questions have become so entrenched that to venture outside these known confines may be viewed as a form of academic heresy. In this article a new angle was suggested from which to view the redaction history of the book of Daniel. The introductory chapter to this book was investigated from this new angle and suggestions as to its function were made. Although this reading of Daniel 1 does not prove the suggested theory regarding the growth of the book it surely does not rule it out either.

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12 See the suggestion in this regard made by Van Deventer (2005) from the perspective of Corpus Linguistics.

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