

The Book of Daniel

The Book of Daniel comes in the Bible, at that difficult time when Israel had been overrun by an invading horde and her people carted off to Babylon. Daniel and his three young friends are selected as being the pick of the bunch, and are drawn into the royal court by King Nebuchadnezzar, where they encounter life-threatening problems. They survive into the subsequent reigns of Belshazzar and Darius.

I have always enjoyed the stories in chapters 1 to 6 of the book, but been puzzled by the abrupt transition to weird visions and predictions of battles in chapters 7 to 12. The two sections appeared to be unconnected. However, with reflection over time, I have discovered points in common between the two halves.

Cast into in the lion's den in chapter six, Daniel is down among the beasts: he is then confronted by four beasts rising up out of the sea in chapter seven. On inspection, the first three of these beasts are remarkably like the rulers in the earlier stories. Nebuchadnezzar became cow-like and eagle-like himself, but then rose up to two feet and was given the mind of a man (4:33-34 compare 7:4). When stuffing his face at his 'impious feast', Belshazzar probably reclined on one side (5:1 compare 7:5). And the trouble with Darius was precisely too many people in charge - himself and three chief administrators. That makes four heads (6:1-2 compare 7:6).

So what about the fourth beast of Daniel 7, who has no counterpart in the earlier stories? This turns out to be the point of the book. The difficulties that the exiles had with Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius were merely a warm-up for the battles and struggles that were to come later. However, the principle remained the same - stick up for what you believe in, even if it costs you your life. After all, the resurrection of the dead is coming - death is not the end (chapter 12:1-4). In fact, the whole book celebrates resurrection: the three escape the deadly flames of the fiery furnace, and God shuts the lions mouths in the den (3:26-27, 6:22). Even Nebuchadnezzar experiences resurrection when his mind is restored to him after his seven year physical and mental collapse (4:34).

I have tried to bring out these connecting themes in the music. The determination of the young men before the burning fiery furnace later becomes the fierce resolve of the battling warriors in the second half of the book (No. 3 bars 15-18 compare No. 7 bars 31-33). The music of the three earlier rulers becomes the music for the first three beasts rising up out of the sea in Daniel's vision (7 bars 12-24). The music for the return to sanity by Nebuchadnezzar becomes the resurrection music of the finale (4 bars 46-63 compare 10 bars 7-24). The kingly authority of Nebuchadnezzar, represented by

the repeated notes two octaves apart, and of the weaker Darius an octave and a sixth apart, turn out to be a reflection of the authority of the Ancient of Days (3 bars 20-21, 6 bars 12-13 compare 7 bars 41-42) . Theirs was shrill and insistent - his is measured and unarguable. Try to convey the difference between the two in your performance!

If in doubt, use more sustaining pedal rather than less. The blurring of contrasting common chords is to be welcomed rather than shunned.

I hope you enjoy the music. David Pennant, 2013

PS The subtitles on my performance on video would be helpfully reproduced in a concert performance if possible, so that the audience know what is happening. Ideally they should read the book in advance as well.