

The Question Of Daniel

Darron Steele

The Issue In A Nutshell:

If Daniel was written before the second century B.C.E., then there is a strong case that there is a God and that God was speaking through biblical authors. If Daniel was written in the 160's B.C.E., then there is a strong case that the Judeo-Christian tradition is founded upon a fraudulent Bible when it comes to objective truth.

Introduction To The Traditional Viewpoint

Traditionally, Daniel is known to have been written by a sixth-century B.C.E. statesman who served in the Babylonian and Persian courts. The book contains biographical data about Daniel as well as chronicles the dealings of the Babylonians and Persians with God and His people. This statesman, Daniel, saw several visions and interpreted some dreams that enabled him to prophesy about the future. Many of his prophecies came astonishingly true, and the ones that have not yet come true are believed to be reserved for future times.

Introduction To The Critical Case

The critical case assumes Daniel is a pseudonymous apocalypse. An apocalypse focuses on end time events. A pseudonymous work is a work written under a pretended authorship. In other words, they do not believe Daniel wrote the Book of Daniel. John Collins lays out the case for second-century B.C.E. dating of Daniel. Daniel's predictions have strong relevance to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and it seems strange to the critical scholar as to why a sixth-century prophet would focus on that particular time. Second, by c. 2000 C.E. knowledge, Daniel's references to the better-known Hellenistic periods in chapter 11 are very accurate, while references to the lesser-known Babylonian and Persian periods seem to be inaccurate. Third, pseudonymous apocalypses were common in Jewish literature beginning in the second century B.C.E.. He closes with this: "In view of these considerations, the balance of probability is overwhelmingly in favor of a Maccabean date, at least for the revelations of chapters 7-12, which clearly have their focus in that period" (Collins, 26). Another piece of evidence is that the book was not mentioned in Ben Sirach's book (around 180 B.C.E.) while Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets were mentioned (Hartman, DiLella, 52). Furthermore, Daniel does not appear among the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible but in the Writings, with Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Chronicles (books of history), Lamentations, Proverbs, Psalms, Job, among others. This is taken to mean that the Jews did not see Daniel as prophecy (Hartman, DiLella, 25). The classification makes sense; much of Daniel is historical-biographical with no prophetic content, while other parts are primarily prophetic.

The common belief about Daniel is that it was a piece of literature written to encourage Jews suffering persecution under Antiochus Epiphanus in the 160s B.C.E. by assuring them that God was and is in control of human history. God was preserving the Jews in captivity, and He would preserve them in the persecution. Of course, *ALL* prophecies in Daniel must refer to events up to the 160's B.C.E. and not beyond.

At Issue--The Reliability Of Scripture And Biblical Christianity

Matthew 24:15 has Jesus saying “Therefore when you see the Abomination of Desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (NASB). The phrase “abomination of desolation” appears in the NASB in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11. He is called the “appalling abomination” in the JPS 1985. Jesus attributes the prophecy to Daniel. I can think of three ways of looking at this:

1. The one who dates Daniel to the second century B.C.E. second-guesses Jesus Christ Himself. Such a person cannot appropriately call herself or himself a Christian. “Jesusian” or “neo-Christian” would be more appropriate.
2. If Daniel did not actually write this prophecy, then Jesus was mistaken. Consequently, Jesus cannot be fully divine.
3. Jesus did not actually say this; the gospel writer was putting words in Jesus’ mouth. The result of this is that the gospel writer cannot be trusted. There is no reason to believe anything the writer reports about Jesus, including the Messianic implications.

If Daniel is a second-century B.C.E. pseudonymous writing, then Christianity is a fraud. If Daniel is a pseudonymous writing, there is no reason to believe that any of the prophetic books are authentic, true prophecies. After all, if the Palestinian Jews accepted one false prophecy, why should we believe that any of the prophecies in the prophetic books, such as Isaiah, are not “after the fact” false prophecy written and accepted to advance Judaism? If there are no authentic prophecies in the Old Testament, then why should one believe that God spoke through the Old Testament? After all, fulfilled prophecy was evidence that God spoke through Old Testament prophets. If God did not speak through the Old Testament, then the Old Testament is the composition of men, some of who were liars pretending to be God’s spokesmen. If the Old Testament is due to the human imagination, how does one know the New Testament authors that did not manipulate Jesus to make him fulfill Old Testament prophecy? Why should one acknowledge Jesus as Christ? Why should I believe any of the Bible’s claims about God? Why would one believe there is a God? Obviously, there is much at stake here.

The Fictitious Median Empire

To explain the succession of four empires in Daniel 2 and 7 late-daters propose that the author thought Media was an empire existing between those of Babylon and Persia (in Meeks, 1307, 1318). Secular history correctly teaches that Media became a province of Persia ten years before the conquest of Babylon (in Meeks, 1202-3, 1315). When Babylon was conquered, the Medes and the Persians were one political unit. The traditional viewpoint assumes that the author of Daniel was historically correct by assuming that the first empire was the Babylonian Empire, which was then conquered by the united Medo-Persian Empire, which was then conquered by the Greek Empire, and finally conquered by the Roman Empire. Again, the assumption that Daniel prophesied a Babylon→Medo-Persia→Greece→Rome succession of empires is assuming that Daniel was historically accurate. By necessity, this would have Daniel accurately prophesying the existence of the Roman Empire.

To avoid this, the critical case seeks to make the fourth empire the Greek Empire, which was in charge of Palestine in the second century B.C.E.. To do this, the critical case assumes that the author believed in a Median Empire between Babylon and Persia. This requires that Daniel make a first historical error: believing that the Medo-Persian Empire was two separate empires. This theory

places its holders in some serious inconsistencies, some of which they recognize. John Collins (who assumes a late date) thought that it was odd that Media would be mentioned in the succession of empires, since they never ruled Palestine (Collins, 166). Also odd is that Media would be considered the second empire; as noted earlier it was annexed by the Persians ten years *before* Babylon was conquered. In Daniel 2:37/38 Daniel says to the king of Babylon "you are the head of gold" (JPS 1985), which makes Babylon the first empire of the book of Daniel. The critical case therefore depends on the assumption that the author made at least two related historical errors: in addition to the first error described in this paragraph, the author also had to believe that a fictitious Median Empire ceased to exist *after* Babylon's annexation instead of before it. The critical case depends on the assumption that the author of Daniel had an inaccurate perception of history. If the author's history was accurate, the critical case falls apart, and Daniel anticipates the Roman Empire, the great empire that came after the Greek Empire. Unfortunately for the critical case, the text of Daniel clearly shows that the author was thinking of a united Medo-Persian Empire, and not of a fictitious Median Empire distinct from the Persian Empire.

We first come to Daniel 5:28, where Daniel tells the king of Babylon "your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians" (JPS 1985). The Medes and Persians, as one political unit, were to annex Babylon *simultaneously*, exactly as history has it. The new king was "Darius the Mede" (5:30/6:1). Recall Daniel 6, the story of Daniel's adventure in the lions' den. At 6:8/9 the conspirators say to Darius "So issue the ban, O king, and put it in writing so that it be unalterable as a law of the Medes and Persians that may not be abrogated" (JPS 1985). In 6:12/13 the author again refers to "a law of the Medes and Persians" (JPS 1985). At 6:15/16 the conspirators say "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that any ban that the king issues under sanction of oath is unalterable" (JPS 1985). We see one king, one law, over two peoples. The author considered the Medes and Persians as one political unit by the author from the annexation of Babylon onward.

The other major problem with this theoretical fictitious Median Empire is seen in Daniel 8. Daniel 8:3 seeing a ram which "had two horns; the horn were high, with one higher than the other" (JPS 1985). It is destroyed in 8:5-7 by a "he-goat" that "came from the west" (8:5 JPS 1985). All scholars, including scholars that date the book late, see the ram as the Medo-Persian Empire, the horns as Persia and Media, and the goat as Alexander the Great (in Meeks, 1320). The goat must be Alexander because he comes from the west, and the ram must be Medo-Persia because the ram's horns were "with one higher than the other, and the higher one sprouting last" (8:3 JPS 1985), and history teaches that Persia was both stronger and later than Media. The author of Daniel is clearly thinking of a united Medo-Persian Empire. From these, we conclude that the author of Daniel did not hypothesize a fictitious Median Empire. The late-date scenario relies entirely on the author of Daniel referring mistakenly to a separate Median Empire after Babylon's empire, and so it actually falls apart here. In other words, the late-date scenario is entirely dependent on Daniel making historical errors, and the text shows that Daniel did not err. The foundation and cornerstone assumption of the critical case is invalid. The reader has no need to read further; the rest of the evidence is only supplementary.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls contained eight manuscripts of Daniel, the oldest of which dates to 125 B.C.E. (in Abegg *et al.*, 482). This manuscript contained portions of all chapters except chapters 6, 9, and 12. Its textual nature has much to say about the age of the Book of Daniel.

Before the invention of printing, any book or writing was copied one and only one way: by hand. This was the case for any Old Testament book, New Testament book, non-biblical Jewish or Christian writings, non-Jewish or non-Christian religious writings, secular writings, or any other writing conceivable. The copying generally was done using one of two methods. The first was to read the document to be copied from, and then write as the copyist remembered into the new copy. There are several copyist errors that could be made here. One is reading incorrectly, another is remembering incorrectly, yet another is misspelling, and of course there are other errors. The second copying method was to have one person stand in front of two or more copyists and read, while the copyists wrote down what was heard. There are also several mistakes that could occur: the first is hearing incorrectly, the second is misspelling, and a third is the reader reading incorrectly, among several possible mistakes. Other scribal practices that occurred were 1) changing spelling or geographical names to be contemporary to the scribe, 2) polishing grammar, and 3) adding words to explicitly state what was implied in the text. Over time, you had numerous manuscripts disagreeing on generally minor things. The more time passed, the more numerous the disagreements got; textual variance increased. (This does not mean that what was originally written is lost; by comparing copies of a work, scholars very rarely fail to determine for certain the original words of every statement in a writing). The more time passes, the greater the textual variance becomes.

Taking this knowledge to Daniel and the Dead Sea Scrolls we must conclude that Daniel is older than the second century B.C.E.. A preliminary note is needed: the first Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, or LXX, was completed by the end of the second century B.C.E. (in Achtemeier, 1116). The Book of Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus, or Ben Sira), found in the Old Testament of the Roman Catholic Bible, dates from before 175 B.C.E. (NJB, 808; in Meeks, 1531; NAB, 771 OT; Open, 1320; Smith, 1341) and was translated in the Septuagint. Sirach is only a few decades older than the late date for Daniel. In the *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (HarperCollins, 1999), Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich noted 11 cases where the oldest manuscript of Daniel (4QDan^a from c. 125 B.C.E.) differed in text from the Hebrew text translated in the LXX, where the Masoretic Text agrees with the LXX. Among the Scrolls, 223 of Daniel's 357 verses are preserved. The oldest manuscript of Sirach (MasSir, first half of first century B.C.E.) had only one such variant. Among the Scrolls, 134 of Sirach's 1345 verses are preserved (from Abegg, *et al*). This shows 0.746 variants per 100 verses, which is less than one variant per 100 verses, for Sirach after about a century. In contrast, Daniel shows 4.93 variants per 100 verses by the end of the second century B.C.E.. Even though the oldest manuscript of Sirach was copied around 100 years after the original manuscript, it had less than one-seventh of Daniel's textual variance at the end of the second century B.C.E.. This shows that it is unreasonable to believe that the Book of Daniel is younger than the Book of Sirach. Daniel must be older than Sirach.

A comparison between Daniel, who was not included among the Prophets in the Palestinian Jewish Bible but rather among the Writings (books of wisdom), and other prophetic books of secondary status yields similar results. The Book of Zechariah, which is the longest of the Books of the Minor Prophets, is dated to be centuries older than the late date for Daniel. In the case of Zechariah, we have the Hebrew Masoretic Text, whereby we can be certain that LXX differences to the Dead Sea Scrolls are for certain due to differences in Hebrew text. This was not the case for Sirach, because there is no Masoretic Text for the Book of Sirach. From *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, we get information that 79 of 211 verses in Zechariah are preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Of all the manuscripts of Zechariah, there were noted two variants where the

Masoretic Text and the LXX disagreed with a scroll (from Abegg, *et al*). This shows 2.53 variants per 100 verses by the end of the second century B.C.E.. Again, the oldest single manuscript of Daniel had 4.93 variants per 100 verses, roughly twice Zechariah's textual variance, by the end of the second century B.C.E.. The latest proposed date for Zechariah is the fourth century B.C.E. (NJB, 1132; in Achtemeier, 1240). This separates Zechariah and its oldest manuscript by at least two centuries, yet its textual variance at the end of the second century B.C.E. is less than half that of Daniel. This makes it entirely unreasonable to believe that the origin of Daniel is only four decades before its oldest manuscript and the completion of the Septuagint. Again, Daniel must be centuries older than its oldest copy found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. That puts Daniel at 325 B.C.E. or before.

The Canon--Josephus and II Esdras (also called IV Esdras)

The *Open Bible* refers us to II Esdras 14, where a twenty-four book canon is specified (*Open Bible*, 1319). In II Esdras 14:42-48 the author attempts to avoid canonical limits. Here the author claims to be involved with five men writing ninety-four books. In 14:45-6 the author has God saying to Ezra "Make public the twenty-four books you wrote first; they are to be read by everyone, whether worthy to do so or not. But the last seventy books are to be kept back, and given to none but the wise among your people" (REB). A set canon apparently placed an obstacle before the tastes of the author of II Esdras, so the author proposes a 'secret' acceptance of some non-canonical books. II Esdras was written in the last decades of the first century C.E. (in Achtemeier, 306; *Open Bible*, 1320). We see that by the end of the first century C.E. the Hebrew canon was firmly set.

Josephus (late first century Jewish historian), specified how long the canon of the Hebrew Bible had been established. He wrote that no books had been added to the Palestinian canon since the time of Artaxerxes, whose reign ended in 423 B.C.E. (*Open Bible*, 1318-9). The specific reference is near the beginning of *Against Apion*, where Josephus discusses the "sacred books"

"which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine...as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes...for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them" (Josephus, *Against Apion*, translated by Whiston).

Josephus was a Palestinian Jew. The "sacred books" Josephus describes compose the Protestant/Jewish Old Testament; the quantity 24 comes from the ancient Jewish division of the Old Testament writings into "books," which differs from the divisions used by Christians and modern Jews. This list includes Daniel. Rabbinical records support Josephus's limit on when the last additions of the canon occurred: "When Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi died, the Holy Spirit left Israel" (*Tosefta Sotah* 13:2 quoted in Laymon, 1211). Hence, Daniel antedates Artaxerxes, who antedates the end of the fifth century B.C.E., so Daniel must antedate the 160's B.C.E. by more than 240 years.

The Canon--Deuterocanonical Literature

There were several books written after the fifth century B.C.E. that are found in the Roman Catholic Old Testament. They are:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Tobit | 5. Wisdom |
| 2. Judith | 6. Sirach |
| 3. I Maccabees | 7. Baruch |
| 4. II Maccabees | 8. Additions to Daniel and Esther |

These books were accepted from the Greek Jewish Old Testament, which also accepted the books I Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. This means that these books were popular. These books, however, were not in the canon mentioned by Josephus the Palestinian Jew. If these books, which all date after the fifth century B.C.E., were not accepted by Palestinian Jews, in spite of their great popularity, why would Daniel have been the one book accepted? This suggests that Daniel antedates the fifth century B.C.E..

The Canon--Apocalyptic Literature

The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary describes apocalyptic literature as books that “report mysterious revelations that are mediated by angels and disclose a supernatural world.” They focus on eschatology, and were common between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. and were almost always pseudonymous. Usually classified among apocalyptic literature are I Enoch, Daniel, II Enoch, II Baruch, and the Apocalypse of Abraham (in Achtemeier, 39). Other examples of this literature are II Esdras as well as the Apocalypse of Zephaniah cited by Clement of Alexandria. The reader should take notice that of all these books only one was accepted. Even I Enoch, which was tremendously popular and widely circulated, was rejected. This suggests that Daniel had something different about it. The New Testament is very clear that all cited prophecies were believed to come from whom they were attributed to; a reading of Matthew shows this most clearly. It is clear that the Jews did not accept any false prophecy, and so they rejected I Enoch, II Baruch, and the other pseudonymous literature. The rejected books are all universally acknowledged to be pseudonymous, while Daniel for centuries was accepted as authentic. This suggests that Daniel was not pseudonymous.

Review And Conclusion

All this should show clearly that the book of Daniel could not have originated in the second century B.C.E. with prophecy extending only to that era. First of all, the core of the late-date scenario is that the author of Daniel was mistakenly of a Median Empire which existed independently of the Persian Empire after Babylon's fall. History teaches that Persia annexed Media ten years before Babylon's fall. The text of Daniel clearly indicates that Daniel made no such historical error: the author was thinking of a united Medo-Persian Empire. This clearly indicates that Daniel was thinking beyond the era of the Greek Empire.

Comparisons of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament) suggest that the textual variance of Daniel was seven times greater than that of a popular pre-175 B.C.E. near-canonical work known as the Book of Sirach by the end of the second century B.C.E.. Since the Septuagint and the oldest Dead Sea Scroll of Sirach are only about a century apart, this makes it unreasonable to believe that Daniel's origin is just decades before its oldest Dead Sea Scroll and the Septuagint. This makes it entirely unreasonable to believe that the Book of Daniel is *younger* than Sirach.

Comparisons of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, and the Masoretic Text show that by the end of the second century B.C.E., Daniel had twice the textual variance of Zechariah,

which was the longest book of the Minor Prophets. Remember that Daniel was not even counted among the prophets in the Palestinian Jewish Bible. Zechariah had slightly more prophetic status than Daniel, and is centuries older than the second century B.C.E., yet its textual variance was less than one half that of Daniel by the end of the second century B.C.E.. Since the distance in time between this time period and the origin of Zechariah is to be measured in centuries, it is entirely unreasonable to believe that Daniel's origin is just decades before the Septuagint and its oldest Dead Sea Scroll.

The first century C.E. Jewish historian Josephus is clear that nothing had been added to the Jewish Old Testament since the fifth century B.C.E.. The non-canonical status of numerous popular books from after the fifth century B.C.E. is clear indication that no book was welcome in the Jewish Old Testament after the fifth century B.C.E.. These four things make it clear that Daniel is not restricted to the second century B.C.E. either in prophetic vision or in time of composition.

The most remarkable prophecies of Daniel are those of the Greek and Roman Empires, which were after his time. It seems that the book of Daniel is true prophecy. It seems to have been written by someone with great insights to the future. This person cited the source of his insights; they came from a personal God. This God wanted us to have evidence as to which words and messages come from Him and point to Him. If someone can speak for Him, and claims predict events hundreds of years in advance because of Him, we can be very certain that he is speaking for God. The very accurate prophecies of Daniel point to the Jewish God.

Bibliography And Works Cited

Abegg, Martin Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich. The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999.

Achtemeier, Paul J. (ed.). The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary. New York: HarperCollins, 1985, 1996.

Collins, John J. Daniel. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Filson, Floyd. Which Books Belong In The Bible? Philadelphia: Westminster, 1942.

Hartman, Louis F. and Alexander A. DiLella. The Anchor Bible: The Book Of Daniel. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978.

Laymon, Charles (ed.). The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary On The Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971.

Meeks, Wayne A. (gen ed.). HarperCollins Study Bible (New Revised Standard Version). New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

Metzger, Bruce, and Roland Murphy (eds.). New Oxford Annotated Bible (New Revised Standard Version). New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

NAB (New American Bible)--Saint Joseph Edition. New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1992.

NJB (New Jerusalem Bible)--ABS Edition. New York: American Bible Society, 1992.

Open Bible (King James Version). Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985.

RVR (Reina-Valera Revision) 1995--Edicion De Estudio. Bogota, Colombia: Sociedad Biblica Colombiana, 1995.

Smith, F. LaGard. The Daily Bible (New International Version). Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1984.

Whiston, William. The Life And Works Of Flavius Josephus. Philadelphia: John C. Winston, undated.

All citations of the Old Testament were taken from this translation:

All Scripture marked (JPS 1985) taken from the Tanakh, copyright 1985 by the Jewish Publication Society. All rights reserved.

These versions were also cited:

All New Testament quotations and Old Testament terms marked (NASB) were taken from the New American Standard Bible, copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

All quotations from the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical books are marked (REB) and were taken from the Revised English Bible, copyright 1989 by Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press.