

The Date and Authorship of the Book of Daniel

© 2008 By [Charles Ray](#)

Bible teacher

Coppell, TX

It is no accident that the three most attacked books of the Bible are also the most significant (Genesis, Daniel, and Revelation). It is commonly known that if the foundation is faulty, the building will soon fall. This article will seek to refute the view that the Book of Daniel was written in the second century BC (as many liberals claim) and thus could not have been written by Daniel (ca. 622 – ca. 536). This being the case, the issue of the date of Daniel will be addressed first.

Miller concisely states the importance of this study: “One’s view concerning authorship and date is significant because it ultimately determines the interpretation of every aspect of this prophecy.”¹

The Date of Daniel

Position in the Canon

One of the arguments put forth which seems to indicate a late date (second century BC) for Daniel is its place in the canon. English versions of the Bible are based on the canonical order given in the LXX. As such, Daniel is grouped with the three major (writing) prophets. In the Hebrew canon, however, the book is positioned with the Writings (Ruth, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations).

Critics believe that since the Writings were collected *after* the prophetic canon was closed, Daniel could not have been written in the sixth century. The critics’ assumption is wrong. A number of the Psalms and Proverbs were composed between ca. 1020 and 950 BC. The events in the Book of Job likely happened in the days of Abraham (ca. 2000 BC). Therefore finding Daniel among the Writings does not require a late date. The Masoretes (ca. AD 750-950) may have moved Daniel from the Prophets to the Writings since much of the book is history and because Daniel was not a commissioned prophet to a certain people.²

Ben Sira’s Testimony

A second point espoused by liberals is the fact that Ben Sira³ does not mention Daniel. A passage in this apocryphal work (written about 195 BC) lists some notable OT figures but Daniel is not one of them. However, arguments from silence are generally considered weak. Too, the passage in question (44:1f) does not list Ezra or Mordecai either (among others). Some critics conclude that the author didn’t know about Daniel (which is nearly impossible to believe), thus forcing a late date.

Other evidence indicates Daniel was actually well-known by the second century.⁴ First Maccabees (2:59f) and Baruch (1:15-3:3) both allude to Daniel and his book.⁵ Furthermore, many fragments of Daniel were found at Qumran, implying the book was of some importance by the third century. It appears Ben Sira’s list was selective and not exhaustive.

Historical Considerations

Third, critics insist there are historical blunders in Daniel. They make that conclusion based on the assumption that a sixth century author could not have known such detail about the pre-Greek era. The critics simply reason that the historical parts are inaccurate, but that doesn’t bother them because such errors do not affect the religious teachings of the

¹ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994; NAC), 22, 23. Most of this article is based on this commentary.

² Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 423, 424.

³ This ancient document is known by several other titles, the best known being Ecclesiasticus (not to be confused with Ecclesiastes). Other titles are the Wisdom of Ben Sira, the Book of Sirach, and the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sira.

⁴ Miller notes (25, 26) that the author of Ben Sira may have been acquainted with Daniel after all. Hebrew fragments have been discovered which cover about two-thirds of Ben Sira, originally written in Hebrew (195 BC) but later translated into Greek (about 130 BC.) These Hebrew fragments seem to depend on the Hebrew portions of Daniel.

⁵ R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 1124.

book.

Since the book fits the historical setting of the sixth century better than it does the setting of the second century, the argument actually points to an early date. If the book were composed during the time of Antiochus IV (second century), one would expect more details from that time period. Too, is it not strange that Daniel does not mention such heroes as Mattathias and Judas Maccabeus?

Liberals are called on the carpet also because they seem to overlook the relationship between the man Daniel and the current administration, whether Babylonian or Persian. Nebuchadnezzar and Darius both appeared to have even respected Daniel. This was definitely not the case with Antiochus. He was killing as many godly Jews as he could lay his hands on. The second century Jews despised Antiochus IV.

“Even if the stories were written earlier than the second century BC and adapted by a Maccabean author, it seems logical to expect that he would have changed elements of the stories to fit his present situation.”⁶

Another source of debate is the use of the word “Chaldean” in the Book of Daniel. In some instances it is used to describe a race of people (Dan. 5:30, “Belshazzar the Chaldean king”) yet in other verses it is used to describe a group of wisemen (2:10, “The Chaldeans answered the king ...”). Critics charge that the sixth century is too early for that word to have developed into a term that refers to a certain group of men.

Herodotus may offer an explanation. In some of his writings he “refers to the Chaldeans in such a way as to imply that they were speedily put into all the politically strategic offices of Babylonia as soon as they had gained control of the capital. If this is the case, then ‘Chaldean’ may have early come into use as a term for the priests of Bel-Marduk.”⁷

Language

Fourth, it has been noted that the Book of Daniel has at least a few words from four different languages. Persian, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic are all represented. Critics claim this mixture is proof of a late date. However, the weight of the linguistic evidence suggests an early date.

A few words are Persian in origin. This fact should not be surprising. During the last few years of his life, Daniel served in the Persian government. Approximately half of the twenty Persian loan words found concern government officials in some way.

In the entire Book of Daniel only three words are of Greek origin. Liberal scholars advocate the idea that since Alexander the Great did not spread the Greek language until the fourth century, Daniel could not have been written in the sixth century.

All three words are musical instruments (3:5, 7, 10, 15). The word “lyre” (NASB; “zither,” NIV) is a translation of the Greek *kitharis*, a term found in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (eighth century BC).

The other two Greek words are *psaltērion* (“psaltery,” NASB; “harp,” NIV) and *symphōnia* (“bagpipe,” NASB; “pipes,” NIV). It is true that they are not known in any Greek literature until the sixth century. Other factors must be considered, however. (1) Simply because a word was not written in a certain language at a particular time does not mean the word did not exist. It is an argument from silence. (2) These are not “everyday conversation” words and thus it would be expected that they would rarely be encountered. (3) It is not wise to take a stand on the date of a biblical book based on only two or three words. (4) Greek merchants were trading with the Near East as early as the seventh century. (5) If Daniel had been composed in the second century, one would expect to see many words in Greek, the language of the day. For example, the terms for government officials are in Persian (as noted above) and not in Greek.

Therefore, it is not terribly surprising to find Greek words in Daniel.

A distinctive feature of the Book of Daniel is that just over half of it is written in Aramaic. For a time, scholars promoted the belief that this Aramaic was Western Aramaic and thus reasoned that the book was compiled in Israel. Further research, however, has discredited this conclusion. Archer shows that Aramaic was known throughout the Near East.⁸ Finally, the Aramaic of Daniel more closely resembles that of fifth century documents (such as the Elephantine Papyri) than it does of later writings (such as the *Genesis Apocryphon*, first century).

Surprisingly, less than half of Daniel was written in Hebrew. Much that was said about Aramaic (above) applies to the

⁶ Miller, 27.

⁷ Archer, *Old Testament Introduction*, 425.

⁸ Archer, *Old Testament Introduction*, 436. Archer goes into great detail on this matter.

Hebrew language as well. Critics claim the Hebrew of Daniel is not as “smooth” as that of what would be expected for sixth century Judaism. It is likely the Hebrew was updated during the centuries of its existence (spellings, names of places, *etc.*) yet no term in it precludes Daniel as the human author.

Two other considerations are in order. First, “the Hebrew portion contains words, phrases, and grammar common throughout the Hebrew Bible.”⁹ Second, these words and phrases are very much like those found in Ezekiel, Haggai, Ezra, and Chronicles, and not so much like the Qumran documents.

Theology

Those who hold to a later date for the Book of Daniel also look to theology to support their claim. Second-century advocates have the notion that the areas of angelology, Christology, and the resurrection and judgment are too far developed to be a product of the sixth century.

Daniel is unique in that it provides the names of certain angels (Gabriel and Michael), yet otherwise it contributes nothing new to the study of angels. These messengers of God are encountered in several OT books, even as far back as Genesis.

It is wrong to state (or imply) that the doctrine of Christ (the Anointed One, the Messiah) was not begun until the Book of Daniel was written. Genesis 3:15 has the first hint of a Messiah (“And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel”). Furthermore, Isaiah (written 740-680) has numerous passages which speak of a Messiah (7:14; 9:6; 11:1).

Concerning resurrection and judgment, again passages older than Daniel mention these concepts. Job 19:25-27, Isaiah 26:19, Psalm 49:15, and Hosea 13:14 (among others) speak about a resurrection. Isaiah 26:19 in particular declares, “Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, For your dew is as the dew of the dawn, And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.”

Deuteronomy 10:17, 1 Samuel 2:10, and Judges 11:27 (all of which were composed before Daniel was) have something to say about God’s judgment. Genesis 18:25 calls God “the Judge of all the earth.” Many other passages could be rehearsed.

In summary, none of the doctrines presented in Daniel is without precedent. Arguments based on a book’s theology are weak at best. Except for eschatology, the Book of Daniel makes no significant contribution to theology.

Predictive Prophecy

The Bible student’s view of prophecy will influence his decision on the date of Daniel. Those who believe the Scriptures contain predictive prophecy usually choose an earlier date for the book. Those who don’t believe this assign Daniel to the Maccabean period.¹⁰ Actually this conclusion doesn’t make sense. Even if a person didn’t think Daniel was able to prophesy the Greek and Roman Empires has some explaining to do because there *is* predictive prophecy in the book.

Daniel 9:25, 26 speak of a Messiah Who would not be born for hundreds of years – or more than 150 years according to the second-century daters. The critics’ explanation? Most verses in Daniel are not to be taken literally.

It is true that Antiochus is a part of the prophecy of Daniel (11:21-35), which is not surprising since that was a very significant time in Israel’s history. This fact raises a question of note: “What would be the point of revealing to someone in 6th-century Babylon a detailed account of the history of 2nd-century [Israel]?”¹¹

As with all predictive prophecies, these revelations serve a number of purposes: they demonstrate the Lord’s sovereignty, they bring hope to a people in distress by revealing a favorable future, they exhibit the power and inerrancy of the Bible, “the doctrine of the resurrection (12:2, 13) would have comforted the aged prophet as well as other believers who faced death,”¹² *etc.* That is why it is not so far-fetched to accept the idea that Daniel received a great deal of information while living in sixth-century Babylon.

⁹ Miller, 32.

¹⁰ The era named for Judas Maccabeus who led a revolt against Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his Syrian army 167-164 BC.

¹¹ D. R. G. Beattie, *First Steps in Biblical Criticism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 90-91. Quoted by Miller, 33-34.

¹² Miller, 34.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Several manuscripts of Daniel were found at Qumran and 4QDan^e is of particular interest. Just about everyone agrees it dates to the second century BC. If that is true (and it is in all probability), then that piece of information actually supports the concept that Daniel was written in the sixth century, or at least some amount of time before the second century. Whence cometh this conclusion? A document originally composed in the second century would not have been accepted by the Qumran community in such a short amount of time. Harrison writes that “there would ... have been insufficient time for Maccabean compositions to be circulated, venerated, and accepted as canonical Scripture by a Maccabean sect.”¹³

Similar theories have been applied to Ecclesiastes and some of the Psalms. It was once believed that they were produced in the second century but the Qumran evidence showed otherwise. Again, support for a second century date for Daniel is very suspect.

The Septuagint

The Septuagint, abbreviated LXX, is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures put together in Alexandria, Egypt. When it was written is a matter of debate, yet the time period can be narrowed to some extent. It appeared no earlier than about 300 BC and no later than 100 BC. Other literature from that period suggests the LXX came out no later than 132 BC.¹⁴ Even if that date is off by 50 years, it still means Daniel was written much earlier.

It should be noted as well that four Persian words in Daniel were drastically mistranslated by the LXX authors. This indicates their meaning had been long forgotten. If the book was composed in the second century, how is it that the definition of those words had already been lost?

The Traditions of the Church, the Synagogue, and Other Ancient Documents

For almost 2,400 years the synagogue and later the Church have taught that the Book of Daniel was written by the person so named and that it is accurate on every count (historically, spiritually, *etc.*). It has only been recently when these conclusions were challenged. “Such a universal consensus in the church and Jewish community would seem to be unlikely if it were not true.”¹⁵

A handful of Jewish apocryphal works appear to uphold this centuries-old understanding. In 1 Maccabees (2:59, 60) Mattathias (on his deathbed) seeks to inspire his sons by recalling two events in Daniel: the three friends in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3) and Daniel in the lions’ den (Dan. 6).¹⁶ First Maccabees could have been written as late as 100 BC¹⁷ yet the fact that the scenes of Daniel were so well-known suggests the book was composed much earlier.¹⁸

Concerning other apocryphal books Harrison writes, “If the pseudepigraphic material designated 1 Enoch borrowed from Daniel (compare 1 Enoch 14:18-22 with Dan. 7:9-10), the section involved, which was probably written prior to 150 BC, would testify to the use of Daniel as authoritative Scripture at that time.”¹⁹

Daniel and Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel mentions Daniel three times (14:14, 20; 28:3). Whether or not this is “our” Daniel will be discussed below. For now it is assumed that it is. The question then becomes: when was the Book of Ezekiel written? Most scholars would say it was written after 593 BC (cf. Ezek. 1:2). Thus, it is not farfetched to believe the Book of Daniel was composed in the sixth century.

¹³ Harrison, 1127.

¹⁴ See Miller (39, 40) for more details.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Some books of the Apocrypha are fictional but others provide some reliable historical information, and 1 Maccabees is in the latter group.

¹⁷ Mattathias died in 166 BC.

¹⁸ Baruch (written as late as 60 BC) may have references to Daniel also.

¹⁹ Harrison, 1107.

The Authorship of Daniel

Within the Book of Daniel, the issues of date and authorship are so intertwined that if you are convinced of one, you have found the other.

Some scholars don't completely agree with that statement, such as Goldingay. He admits that the chapters "manifest a generally consistent viewpoint, though this need not suggest common authorship..."²⁰ He later writes, "Diversity of authorship might be one of the reasons for diversity of language..."²¹

Goldingay lists these as possible authors:²² a group of Jewish priests (because of the book's concern for the Jews and their Messiah), the group of intellectuals brought to Babylon from Jerusalem (1:4; 11:33-35), or a group related to the intellectuals.

Many liberal scholars believe the author was a descendant of the latter group, a second-century Jew who was a member of the Hasidim²³ and wrote using Daniel's name. Porphyry, a second century Neo-Platonist, was the first to challenge the traditional view which held that Daniel of the sixth century wrote the book named after him. Porphyry in his writings directly stated that the book was composed in the second century and thus could not be a product of Daniel.

Claims of the Book Itself

One of the most obvious and powerful arguments in favor of Daniel being the author is the fact that the book itself reports that it was composed by a Daniel. The following verses contain either "me, Daniel" or "I, Daniel:" 7:28; 8:1, 15; 9:2; 10:2; and 12:5. Other passages strongly suggest Daniel is the author (7:1, 2, 4, 6, 28; 12:4). Indeed, it is ridiculous to utilize a fraudulent work to teach religious or moral values.²⁴

Some people are bothered by the fact that the first half of the book is written in the third person (e.g., "...Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den...", "6:16; cf. 7:1, 10:1) yet the second half is written in the first person (e.g., "As for me, Daniel ...," 7:28). Such a shift in the style was rather common in antiquity. Certainly this cannot be used to support the idea that more than one author was involved because the name "Daniel" is solidly linked with "me" or "I."

Historical Accuracy

The historical accuracy of the book also confirms that it is more likely that the work was compiled in the sixth century and not in the second century. Two examples will be given.

One has to do with the very first verse. Daniel 1:1 declares, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." This appears to contradict Jeremiah 46:2 ("To Egypt, concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt, which was by the Euphrates River at Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim...").

Nebuchadnezzar invaded both Carchemish and Jerusalem in the same year – 605 BC. Yet Jeremiah makes it clear that 605 was Jehoiakim's fourth year whereas Daniel says it was Jehoiakim's third year. The difference has to do with the methods Jeremiah and Daniel employed in counting the number of years a king had been reigning.

Jeremiah dated a king's reign using the Judean system. That method considered the accession year the first year of the reign. Thus, since Jehoiakim was appointed king in 608 (by Pharaoh Necho), 605 would have been his fourth year.

Daniel used the Babylonian system (of course) which did not count a king's first year until the beginning of the next calendar year. Therefore, the beginning of Jehoiakim's first year would not start until the next calendar year.²⁵

A second example concerns the identification of Babylon's last king. Was it Nabonidus or Belshazzar (Dan. 5)? For many years scholars were of the opinion that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon and that Belshazzar was a legendary figure. Not even Herodotus among the ancient historians mentions him.

²⁰ John Goldingay, *Daniel* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 327.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 329, 330.

²³ Hasidim means "pious ones" or "saints." This sect thrived during the second century BC. They believed the priests had become too Hellenized and thus they were determined to maintain the traditions of Judaism.

²⁴ Miller, 37.

²⁵ Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 284, 285. Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe's *When Critics Ask* (291) has more details.

However, more recent archaeological evidence shows that Belshazzar served as co-regent with his father Nabonidus during the last few years of the Babylonian Empire. An inscription found at Ur contains a prayer for a Bel-shar-usur, a prayer offered only to monarchs. "Still other cuneiform documents record how Belshazzar presented sheep and oxen at the Temples of Sippar as 'an offering of the king.'"²⁶ Moreover, Belshazzar bestowed upon Daniel the third, not the second, most authoritative position in the empire (Dan. 5:16).

The truth is Nabonidus was not in Babylon at the time of Cyrus' invasion. He was in North Arabia where he was killed about the same time as the invasion. Thus, Belshazzar was the last king. Since this name had been forgotten by the time of Herodotus (c. 450 BC), the author of Daniel had to have written much earlier than that. Certainly a second century author would have no knowledge of Belshazzar.

Miller concludes,

If Daniel predicted that the messianic age would ensue at the end of Antiochus's reign, which is the view of those who hold the Maccabean date of writing, how could later Jewish believers who observed that this event failed to materialize accept the book as divinely inspired? The Septuagint translators and Qumran scribes lived only decades after Daniel was supposedly written, and they considered Daniel canonical. Yet Antiochus had come and gone, and the messianic age had not arrived. The book's pronouncements were proven to be fallacious. These Jewish scholars were certainly acquainted with Deut 18:22: "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously." If Daniel had predicted the arrival of the messianic age immediately after Antiochus's death, the book would have been thoroughly discredited in the eyes of Jewish believers. It would never have found its way into the canon but would have suffered the same fate as the other pseudoprophetic books of that period.²⁷

Jesus and the New Testament

Matthew 24:15 (cf. Mark 13:14) is quite pertinent to this discussion: "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) ..." The "abomination of desolation"²⁸ is referenced three times in Daniel (9:27, 11:31, 12:11). Exactly what this is is beyond the scope of this article.²⁹

Regardless, in Jesus' view (which is always accurate) it was the prophet Daniel who wrote the book that bears his name. That alone should settle the issue. His hearers did not question the implications by Jesus that Daniel was an historical person who lived in the sixth century. Even those scholars who are not in favor of dispensationalism admit this conclusion. "Both in Matthew and in Daniel ... an individual living in Babylon during the exile is represented as prophesying events hundreds of years ahead."³⁰

It has been suggested that Jesus merely acquiesced to the standard thinking of the day, and thus the statements of the previous paragraph are not certain. This is nonsense because (1) He boldly challenged the thinking of His day. In Matthew 15:6 Christ chided the Pharisees because they "invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition." (2) our Lord would have been deceiving the people and that is impossible. In John 14:6 He labels Himself as "the Truth."

Finally, Jesus alludes to Daniel 7:13, 14 in Matthew 26:64, "hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (cf. Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). "Again Jesus treated Daniel as an account of future events by indicating that the passage in Dan[iel] 7 refers to himself and his future second coming."³¹

²⁶ Archer, *Encyclopedia*, 286.

²⁷ Miller, 37.

²⁸ In 9:27, the KJV has "for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate." Other translations are: "abomination that causes desolation" (NIV); "on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate" (NASB). In 11:31 and 12:11 (and Matt. 24:15), the NASB has "the abomination of desolation."

²⁹ See "A Study of Daniel 9:24-27, Part IV" by Charles H. Ray in *The Conservative Theological Journal* (Vol. 4, No. 11, March 2000).

³⁰ Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 13, 14. Quoted by Miller, 35.

³¹ Miller, 35.

Furthermore, Josephus in his writings implies that Daniel is the author of the book bearing his name.³² The evidence which indicates that Christ was wrong about Daniel is virtually nonexistent.

Summary and Conclusion

That there was little opposition to the traditional view of Daniel for thousands of years is not conclusive but it certainly provides some force. The weight of the evidence supports the traditional view. That the Book of Daniel was written in the sixth century BC by the man Daniel better fits the facts than does any other theory.

³² Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.8.5.