

An Introduction to the Book of Daniel

by

Justin Imel, D. Min.

Daniel provides much for its reader. The book tells how God rules the universe; kings must do his bidding. It shows dedicated servants doing God's will. The author records the blessings of those servants. Certainly, the book deserves a special place in the canon.

Yet, no book has been surrounded by more controversy. Most scholars reject Daniel's authorship. They see the book as a Maccabean production. Some argue for multiple authors, while others argue for the book's unity. The book has been so dissected and debated that its message has been forgotten.

Authorship

Traditionally, the historical Daniel has been seen as the author, although the book never names Daniel as its author. However, beginning with chapter 7, reference is made to Daniel in the first person. It is stated that Daniel wrote down one of his dreams.¹ In his Mt. Olivet Discourse, Jesus made reference to what was spoken "by the prophet Daniel."²

Most scholars reject this traditional view. Many see it as a pseudonymous work written during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. It was not uncommon for authors in the Ancient Near East to write pseudonymously.³ In order to gain their work acceptance, they

¹ Dan. 7:1.

² Matt. 24:15.

³ John J. Collins, "Inspiration or Illusion: Biblical Theology and the Book of Daniel," *Ex Aduditu* 6 (1990): 30-32.

associated their work with a famous personage.⁴ Traditions about a righteous and noble Daniel were common during the Maccabean era.⁵

According to this view, the author of Daniel had many reasons to make use of these traditions. Prophecy did not hold the important place in post-exilic Judaism it had once held.⁶ The Danielic predictions proved true, causing most scholars to view it as *vaticinia ex eventu* (prophecy after the fact).⁷ Connecting his visions to traditions would make the author's work more authoritative.⁸ Some believe Daniel's author may have written pseudonymously to avoid retaliation.⁹

Not only is it popular to speak of Daniel as a pseudonymous work, many see it as the work of a redactor. The first six chapters are considered exilic in origin, while the final six are considered post-exilic.¹⁰ Yet, the book does not show significant changes in thought.¹¹

Date

Daniel's date has sparked quite a controversy. In the third century AD, the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry rejected the traditional view.¹² Since he had an antisupernatural bias, he believed the accurate descriptions of the Maccabean struggle were written after the fact.¹³ He

⁴ Collins, 32; and John H. Hayes, *An Introduction to Old Testament Study* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 376.

⁵ Hayes, *Old Testament Study*, 376.

⁶ Collins, "Inspiration or Illusion," 32; and Hayes, *Old Testament Study*, 376.

⁷ Hayes, *Old Testament Study*, 376.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Arthur J. Ferch, "The Book of Daniel and the 'Maccabean Thesis,'" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21 (Summer 1983): 130.

¹¹ D. J. Wiseman, ed., *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, by Joyce G. Baldwin (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 39.

¹² R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 1109; John C. Trever, "Prophecy and the Book of Daniel," *Biblical Archaeologist*, June 1985, 91; and Bruce K. Waltke, "The Date of the Book of Daniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (October-December 1976): 319.

¹³ Harrison, *Introduction*, 1109; and Waltke, "Date of Daniel," 319.

believed Daniel's author had written to encourage Jews during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes.¹⁴ The modern critical movement has followed these conclusions.

Porphyry's conclusions are followed so closely that they have been called "definitive."¹⁵ Many believe the book can be dated quite precisely.¹⁶ These scholars believe Daniel to be quite accurate concerning Antiochus' second campaign against Egypt (169 BC) and the desecration of the temple (167 BC).¹⁷ Yet, they believe Daniel's author showed no knowledge of Antiochus' death.¹⁸

Such arguments do not measure up to close examination. At one time critics alleged that Daniel made a mistake in the year when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem. Daniel states Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem in the third year of Jehoiakim, while Jeremiah indicates it took place in the fourth year of Jehoiakim.¹⁹ Scholars have offered different solutions to this problem.²⁰ The best solution seems to be that Daniel used the Babylonian dating system, while Jeremiah used the Palestinian system. The Babylonians considered the king's first year as "the year of ascension to the kingdom." This year was followed by the first, second, and following years of rule.²¹

¹⁴ Harrison, *Introduction*, 1109.

¹⁵ Brian Croke, "Porphyry's Anti-Christian Chronology," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (April 1983): 172.

¹⁶ George Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, trans. David Green (London: S. P. C. K., 1970), 478; George A. F. Knight and Frederick Carlson Holmgren, eds., *International Critical Commentary, Signs and Wonders*, by Robert A. Anderson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), xiii; and John C. Traver, "The Book of Daniel and the Origin of the Qumran Community," *Biblical Archaeologist*, June 1985, 89. It is interesting to note that Anderson claims one can pinpoint the month and year Daniel reached its final form, but he gives neither.

¹⁷ Fohrer, *Introduction*, 477-78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Dan. 1:1; Jere. 25:1, 9; 46:2.

²⁰ See Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), 385 for different solutions.

²¹ Gleason Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 425; Harrison, *Introduction*, 1112; Waltke, "Date of Daniel," 325; and Young, *Introduction*, 384-385.

Not only was Daniel's historical accuracy questioned, his reference to Belshazzar has been considered inaccurate. Daniel referred to Belshazzar as king,²² but Belshazzar never bore the title "king."²³ However, Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father, did not reside in Babylon during much of his reign. During this time, Belshazzar served as his viceroy.²⁴ One document dating from the fifth year of Nabonidus' reign makes it clear that Belshazzar was given the same tribute as his father.²⁵ It should not, therefore, surprise readers that Daniel called Belshazzar "king."

Critics have also scoffed at Daniel's calling Belshazzar Nebuchadnezzar's son.²⁶ Some scholars have pointed out that *son* does not necessarily mean a biological descendant; it could refer to a successor.²⁷ However, many now believe that Nitocris, Belshazzar's mother, was Nebuchadnezzar's daughter. It seems reasonable to believe this is how Nabonidus became king in the first place.²⁸ Jeremiah lends credibility to this view. He says that all nations would serve Nebuchadnezzar, his son, and his grandson.²⁹ In light of such evidence, it seems difficult to accuse Daniel's author of historical inaccuracy.

The mention of Darius the Mede has also been used to show Daniel's author made blunders. One writer said that since history does not have a clear reference to Darius he "must

²² Dan. 5:1.

²³ Archer, "Modern Rationalism and the Book of Daniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (April-June 1979): 135; idem, *Survey*, 426; and Young, *Introduction*, 384-85.

²⁴ Archer, "Modern Rationalism," 135; idem, *Survey*, 426-27; Michael J. Gruenthaner, "The Last King of Babylon," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 11 (October 1949): 413-19; Harrison, *Introduction*, 1120; Waltke, "Date of Daniel," 328; and Young, *Introduction*, 388.

²⁵ Gruenthaner, "The Last King," 418.

²⁶ Dan. 5:2, 11, 22.

²⁷ Archer, *Survey*, 426; and Harrison, *Introduction*, 1120.

²⁸ Gruenthaner, "The Last King," 424-26; and Harrison, *Introduction*, 1120.

²⁹ Jere. 27:7.

be explained as having been created by a combination of fact and imagination.”³⁰ Yet, simply because no extra-biblical literature mentions Darius is no reason to discredit his authenticity. Some have identified Darius with a governor named Gubaru.³¹ Another possible solution, based on Dan. 6:28, sees Darius and Cyrus as the same person.³² It is also possible that “Darius” was a title similar to the title “Caesar” in the Roman Empire.³³ All of these suggestions have some merit, and it is difficult to ascertain which one should be accepted.

Scholars also allege that ben Sira’s failure to mention Daniel in his “hymn of the fathers” shows the book was written in the second century.³⁴ Ecclesiasticus, Ben Sira’s work, itself dates from the second century B.C.; the prologue, written by Ben Sira’s grandson, dates between 132-116 B.C.³⁵ Critics reason that had Daniel been written at that time Ben Sira would have mentioned him. However, Ecclesiasticus does not give an exhaustive list of important Hebrew figures.³⁶ Ecclesiasticus does show literary dependence upon Daniel. Daniel used the Hebrew terms for “time” and “appointed time” in reference to eschatological themes; Ecclesiasticus 36:8 uses the terms in the same manner.³⁷ This “must be seen as exceedingly strong evidence of literary dependence.”³⁸

³⁰ Balmer H. Kelly, ed., *The Layman’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 13, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, by Carl G. Howie (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1961), 90.

³¹ Archer, *Survey*, 428; and Waltke, “Date of Daniel,” 327.

³² Brian E. Colless, “Cyrus the Persian as Darius the Mede in the Book of Daniel,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 56 (December 1992): 114-116.

³³ Archer, *Survey*, 429-30.

³⁴ Archer, “Modern Rationalism,” 132; and Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1948), 765-66.

³⁵ Douglas E. Fox, “Ben Sira on OT Canon Again: The Date of Daniel,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (Fall 1987): 335.

³⁶ Archer, “Modern Rationalism,” 132-33; and Harrison, *Introduction*, 1123.

³⁷ Fox, “Ben Sira,” 342.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

The discovery of Danielic manuscripts at Qumran points to an early date of composition. The Qumran community itself had a Maccabean origin. The way these manuscripts were copied shows that Daniel was revered as Scripture in the second century B.C.³⁹ This discovery indicates that Daniel was in its full form and had a wide circulation before the Maccabean struggle.⁴⁰ Actually, these manuscripts point to a writing at least fifty years prior to the second century from which they date.⁴¹

Divisions

The Book easily divides into two sections. The first section (chapters 1-6) contains narratives about Daniel and his comrades; the second section (chapters 7-12) contains Daniel's visions.⁴² The first division is narrated in the first person, while the second is narrated by Daniel himself.⁴³

Even though these divisions exist, it seems best to see Daniel as a unified work. The first section presents Daniel as one who can interpret visions, and the second section shows Daniel interpreting visions.⁴⁴ Both sections present history in light of God's providence. Both show

³⁹ Harrison, *Introduction*, 1107; and Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Hermeneutical Issues in the Book of Daniel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (March 1980): 14.

⁴⁰ William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederick Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982; reprint, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 667 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

⁴¹ John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 20.

⁴² Bervard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 614; Collins, "Inspiration or Illusion," 29; Phillip R. Davies, "Eschatology in the Book of Daniel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 17 (1980): 33; Harrison, *Introduction*, 1107; Hayes, *Old Testament Study*, 367; Howie, *The Book of Ezekiel; the Book of Daniel*, 88; and LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 663.

⁴³ Childs, *Old Testament as Scripture*, 614; John J. Collins, "The Court-Tales in Daniel and the Development of Apocalyptic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (June 1975): 229; and Hayes, *Old Testament Study*, 367.

⁴⁴ Child, *Old Testament as Scripture*, 614.

that God rules worldly empires. Furthermore, chapter seven is strongly dependent on chapter two.⁴⁵

Language

Daniel strikes expositors because it contains two languages. Part was written in Hebrew (1:1-2:4a; 8-12), and part was written in Aramaic (2:4b-7:28).⁴⁶ Yet, such was not an uncommon feature in the Ancient Near East. Written in two languages was often used to increase effect.⁴⁷ Scholars have also noted that those sections pertinent to earthly kingdoms are in Aramaic, while those sections relating to God's people are in Hebrew.⁴⁸

The Aramaic cannot be used to support a late date. Daniel's Aramaic is Imperial Aramaic. It began in the courts and chancelleries of the seventh century BC, and it later became common in the Ancient Near East.⁴⁹ This Aramaic is closely related to that found in Ezra and the fifth century BC Elephantine papyri. Yet, the Aramaic is far from that of the second century BC documents found at Qumran.⁵⁰

Some scholars want to use the appearance of Persian words to prove a late date; one writer advocating a late date called these words "a significant fact."⁵¹ They may be "a significant fact," but they far from prove a late date. Daniel's use of Persian words should come as no surprise since the book was written after the Persian conquest.⁵² The words used by

⁴⁵ Davies, "Eschatology in the Book of Daniel," 37.

⁴⁶ Archer, *Survey*, 434; Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 473; Harrison, *Introduction*, 1125; and Hayes, *Old Testament Study*, 373.

⁴⁷ Harrison, *Introduction*, 1110.

⁴⁸ Archer, *Survey*, 434; and Young, *Introduction*, 398.

⁴⁹ Fohrer, *Introduction*, 473; Harrison, *Introduction*, 1125; and Waltke, "Date of Daniel," 322.

⁵⁰ Archer, *Survey*, 435-36; Harrison, *Introduction*, 1125; LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 666; and Waltke, "Date of Daniel," 323.

⁵¹ Harlan Creelman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1917), 294.

⁵² Archer, *Survey*, 430; Harrison, *Introduction*, 1126-27; and Waltke, "Date of Daniel," 323.

Daniel are now known to be old Persian words (i.e., they occurred in the language until about 300 BC).⁵³

Scholars have also attempted to use Greek loan words as proof of a second century date. *Symphonia*, one of these terms, has not been found in any extant Greek literature before the fourth century BC. Yet, less than ten percent of classical Greek literature is extant for comparison.⁵⁴ It is not uncommon to find the names of foreign musical instruments in another country's language.⁵⁵ Also, well before 500 BC Ionian Greeks entered into the Near East. Greek influence could even be seen in Nebuchadnezzar's throne room.⁵⁶ Obviously, linguistic arguments point to an early date for Daniel's composition.

Apocalyptic Literature

Daniel is different from most other canonical books in that it is apocalyptic. The term "apocalypse" literally means "unveiling."⁵⁷ This unveiling generally involves a revelation of conditions in another world or in the near future; such revelations are often given through beings from another realm.⁵⁸ In apocalyptic prophecy, the writer stresses future events and presents them in timeless forms.⁵⁹ Apocalypses often use different figures and symbols.⁶⁰

Such easily describes the book of Daniel. Daniel sees beasts (7:3ff), horns (7:7-8; 8:3; et. al.), a ram (8:3), a male goat (8:5), and other symbols in his visions. His visions are interpreted

⁵³ Harrison, *Introduction*, 1126; and Waltke, "Date of Daniel," 323.

⁵⁴ Archer, *Survey*, 431.

⁵⁵ Archer, *Survey*, 431; and idem, "Modern Rationalism," 142.

⁵⁶ Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Daniel and Contacts Between the Aegean and Near East Before Alexander," *Evangelical Quarterly* 53 (January-March 1981): 40-42.

⁵⁷ C. I. Scofield, ed. *The New Scofield Study Bible New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 1103.

⁵⁸ Hayes, *Old Testament Study*, 336; and Pamela J. Milne, "Daniel: Introduction," in *The Harper Collins Study Bible New Revised Standard Version*, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 1302.

⁵⁹ LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 661.

⁶⁰ Scofield, *Scofield Study Bible*, 1003.

by metaphysical beings (7:16ff; 8:15ff; 9:22ff; et. al.). The entire book (court-tales and visions) could be seen as apocalyptic in that apocalypses often blend different genres together.⁶¹

Canonicity

Daniel was considered canonical beginning in the second century BC.⁶² The Qumran community's use of the book demonstrates this.⁶³ Yet, the most pertinent question concerning Daniel's canonicity concerns its place in the canon. The Hebrew Scriptures place the book with the Writings and not with the Prophets. Critical scholars see this as proof of a composition after the biblical prophets.⁶⁴

These scholars overlook important considerations. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus indicated that in his day Daniel had a place among the Prophets instead of the Writings.⁶⁵ Many of the works in the Writings are old (Job, the Davidic psalms, and the writings of Solomon).⁶⁶ One scholar believes Daniel was placed in the Writings because of its close association with Ezra, another book with a substantial Aramaic portion.⁶⁷ Yet, the book probably finds its place in the Writings due to two factors: (1) Daniel was not seen as a prophet in the same sense as Isaiah or Jeremiah; (2) the book contains historical narratives as well as prophecy.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Baldwin, *Daniel*, 51.

⁶² Harrison, *Introduction*, 1107.

⁶³ Harrison, *Introduction*, 1107; and Yamauchi, "Hermeneutical Issues," 14. Fohrer takes issue with this view. He claims the Danielic fragments found at Qumran are not in canonical style; therefore, the book was not considered canonical in the second century. See Fohrer, *Introduction*, 473.

⁶⁴ Archer, "Modern Rationalism," 131; idem, *Survey*, 423; and Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 273.

⁶⁵ Archer, "Modern Rationalism," 131.

⁶⁶ Archer, *Survey*, 423.

⁶⁷ James E. Miller, "The Redaction of Daniel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 52 (December 1991): 119.

⁶⁸ Archer, *Survey*, 423; and Harrison, *Introduction*, 1106.

Theology

Several theological concepts find themselves in Daniel. Daniel presents Yahweh as the One who rules all kingdoms; earthly powers must bow to him. It was the Lord who allowed Jehoiakim to fall into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. God established Nebuchadnezzar over the Babylonian kingdom. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he would live as a wild animal "until [he had] learned that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals, and gives it to whom he will." God brought the Babylonian kingdom to an end.⁶⁹

Not only did God bring the Babylonian kingdom to an end, he protected his people in perilous times. The narratives of Daniel and his companions show how God provided for their needs. When these four refused to eat meat from the king's table, God blessed them with knowledge. After Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that his wise men could not interpret, he gave a decree that his wise men, including Daniel and his companions, should be killed. Daniel asked Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to pray for him, and God blessed Daniel with the interpretation of the dream. God protected Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah when they were thrown into a fiery furnace after refusing to worship an idol. When Daniel was thrown into a den of lions for refusing to pray to Darius instead of Yahweh, Yahweh sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions.⁷⁰

The book presents angels in an interesting light. Angels are sent by God to minister to his servants.⁷¹ Angels interpreted visions to Daniel.⁷² Daniel gave names to the angels.⁷³ While

⁶⁹ Dan. 1:2; 2:37-38; 4:25 NRSV (New Revised Standard Version); 5:26.

⁷⁰ Dan. 1:17; 2:1-18; 3:6.

⁷¹ Dan. 6:22.

⁷² Dan. 8:13ff; 9:20ff; 10:5ff; 12:9ff.

⁷³ Dan. 8:16; 9:21.

these developments are interesting, Daniel's angelology is not totally unique. Daniel's angelology is very similar to that of Ezekiel and Zechariah.⁷⁴

Daniel also mentions the resurrection and the final judgment. IN a time of anguish, those whose names are written "in the book" shall be delivered. Many sleeping in the dust shall rise, some to everlasting life and others to everlasting contempt.⁷⁵ Although such may show a progression in revelation, it should be remembered that other prophets spoke of the resurrection and final judgment.⁷⁶

Conclusion

The Book of Daniel does much for today's world. The book, written by the historical Daniel in the sixth century BC, shows God's involvement in history. It shows Yahweh as the One who gives earthly monarchs the right to rule. Yahweh protects his people. Yahweh gives angels to watch over his people. One day, the dead will be raised.

⁷⁴ See Archer, *Survey*, 437; and Harrison, *Introduction*, 1131.

⁷⁵ Dan. 12:1-3.

⁷⁶ See Archer, *Survey*, 438.