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When Was the Book of Daniel Written?

According to some, the “scholarly consensus” on the dating of Daniel is that the book of Daniel was written in the 2nd century B.C. Such a consensus makes me wonder about whether scholarship is controlled by people who are skeptical of the supernatural inferences in Daniel’s prophecies. Accordingly, I will address the literature on this topic.

The book of Daniel begins in 604 B.C., which is eighteen years prior to the destruction of the first Temple in 586 B.C. Daniel and several other young men (1:4) were deported from Judah to Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar. The book ends two years after the seventy years of exile in 532 B.C. The book is written in both Hebrew and Aramaic. The Aramaic portion is in Daniel 1 2:4 – 7:28. The first six chapters detail historical records of this time period, while chapters seven to twelve detail Daniel’s visions.

Perhaps its detailing of historical records led to its classification within the Jewish Scriptures as “writings” instead of “prophets.” Skeptics have often pointed to this classification to suggest that Daniel’s prophecies were of minor importance. It should be noted that Daniel is placed between the books of Esther and Ezra / Nehemiah, which also contain histories and were written in the early Persian period. Lamentations, written by the great prophet Jeremiah, is also in the “writings.” Furthermore, Jesus, who was considered a Jewish rabbi, referred to Daniel as a prophet in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14.

In his book *Against Christians*, Porphyry (285 A.D.) put forth the notion that Daniel was written no earlier than 165 B.C. Porphyry made this assertion based on Daniel 11:21, which he believed was a prophecy about Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Porphyry determined that Daniel must have written the book in hindsight, not in advance. Others in recent times have jumped onto Porphyry’s bandwagon, making similar claims of later dating. These “later dating” scholars are biased by their refusal to acknowledge fulfilled prophecies. If we didn’t have the Dead Sea Scrolls, which scholars believe are dated to around 150 B.C., skeptics would have said Daniel was written after 70 A.D. when the Temple was obliterated, just as he prophesied (9:27)!

We have numerous reasons to believe the book of Daniel was written when Daniel said it was written, between 604 B.C. and 532 B.C. I will list a few of them. For one, Daniel refers to himself in the first person in much of the book and makes the dating claim himself. Second, the languages are written in a way that is consistent with the ancient forms of the languages in those centuries. They were not written in a way consistent with dating around 165 B.C.

According to Wilson (1997), the Aramaic of Daniel aligns in orthography, syntax, and etymology with Egyptian papyri of the 5th century B.C. and of the Aramaic of the North Semitic inscriptions of the 9th, 8th, and 7th centuries B.C. Wilson (1997) notes that Daniel has a mixture of Hebrew, Persian and Babylonian words and differs from the Aramaic of the Nabateans. The Nabateans also spoke Aramaic, yet this group of Arabs was not established until the 3rd century B.C.

Numerous scholars have identified Old Persian words that were no longer in use in the 2nd century B.C. One example is the word Ashpenaz (in 1:3), which was unknown in the 2nd century and translated as a personal name with an unknown meaning, yet meant “innkeeper.” (Haughwout, 2013).

Skeptics also point to the instruments mentioned in Daniel, suggesting that they were Greek in origin and therefore not likely to be in Babylon. Kitchen (1965, pp. 77) states, “Only three words (of one class: music) are involved. Greek wares reached all over the Ancient Near East from the eighth century B.C. onwards; Greek mercenaries and artisans served the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar. Greek words occur in Imperial Aramaic at the end of the fifth century BC (statēr, probably dōrēma?, just possibly others), and there is nothing to stop them appearing earlier. It is unjustifiable to hold that Greek words in Aramaic imply a date after 330 BC. Many Old Persian words alongside hardly any Greek words in our text suggest a date in the Persian age; a document of Hellenistic date with a penchant for loan-words should have taken them from Greek (or Middle Persian). Hence, a second-century date cannot be based on three Greek words; a very late sixth-century date is early enough for the body of Persian words—between these dates no greater precision is possible linguistically.”

“Greek loans are explainable since the famous orientalist W. F. Albright demonstrated that Greek culture penetrated the ancient Near East long before the Neo-Babylonian period” (Laiu, 1999, pp. 101).

Additionally, the ancient historian Josephus recorded in *Against Apion* 1:8 that the canon of the Jewish Scriptures was closed at the reign of Artaxerxes, between 465 and 425 B.C. The passage is as follows:

“For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, [as the Greeks have,] but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time; and how firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation is evident by what we do; 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; but it is become natural to all Jews immediately, and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain Divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be willingly to die for them.”

In *Antiquities of the Jews* 11:8, the historian Josephus recounted a visit by Alexander the Great to Jerusalem around 332 B.C. and specifically mentioned the book of Daniel (11:8-5).

“And when the book of Daniel was shewed him, wherein Daniel declared that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he supposed that himself was the person intended. And as he was then glad, he dismissed the multitude for the present: but the next day he called them to him, and bid them ask what favours they pleased of him. Whereupon the High Priest desired, that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers: and might pay no tribute on the seventh year.”

Ezekiel further mentions Daniel in Ezekiel 28:3. He said, “Are you wiser than Daniel? Is no secret hidden from you?” Ezekiel was written between 593 and 565 B.C.

Furthermore, Daniel is linguistically quite similar to Ezra and both books are in both Hebrew and Aramaic. “The bilingual composition of Ezra (Hebrew 1:1 – 4:6; Aramaic 4:7 – 6:18; Hebrew 6:19 – 7:11; Aramaic 7:12 – 26; Hebrew 7:27 – 10:44) cannot be explained only on the basis of the presence of some official Aramaic letters, because the Aramaic text often extends beyond those letters intended to be rendered in their original language, just as in the book of Daniel. And the first official letter (the famous decree of Cyrus) is rendered in Hebrew. Moreover, the first change from Hebrew to Aramaic occurs in precisely the same literary manner (Ezra 4:6-7 cf. Dan 2:4), which is a proof that the term *tymir’a* in Dan 2:4 cannot be considered a later insert to indicate a late redaction, say, after the “lost” of the original language text. It is rather a mark of authenticity.” (Laiu, 1999).

Additionally, in the second century Greek was one of the primary languages spoken, so it is odd that Greek wasn’t of relevance in Daniel’s book. Kitchen (1965, pp. 67) states: “But when Alexander and his successors took over the Orient by 330 BC and following, the role of Aramaic as the language of government must have declined visibly; the official tongue of the new rulers was Greek.”

Kitchen (1965) and others have studied Aramaic in Daniel, noting it is “Imperial Aramaic.” “Within Imperial Aramaic, it is tempting to classify this or that minor peculiarity as hinting that this or that document shows E[ast] or W[est] connections; but by and large, this is still unconvincing. In Biblical Aramaic, word-order in sentences having finite verbs is quite different from normal N.W. Semitic usage (verb — subject — etc.). Instead we find the subject commonly first with the verb at the end of the sentence having the object more often before than after it (i.e. subject — object — verb; or, subject — verb — object). This stands in striking contrast to the Dead Sea Scrolls Genesis Apocryphon of about the first century B.C. and Targum of Job of the late second century B.C. both of them embarrassingly close in time to a supposedly second-century Daniel. But it agrees well with the word-order of the Assur ostrakon of the seventh century B.C. and with the freedom of order in the fifth-century Aramaic papyri from Egypt” (Kitchen, 1965, pp. 75-76).

During the reign of Ptolemy II between 285 and 246 B.C., seventy-two translators translated the Hebrew Torah into Koine Greek in what is called the Septuagint. The rest of the Scriptures are believed to have been translated by 150 B.C.

These are just a few of the many reasons to reject the notions that Daniel was written no earlier than 165 B.C. But consider that even if the book were written so late, it still contained prophecies of specific dating that Jesus fulfilled, such as the dating of His crucifixion in Daniel 9.

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