

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### **The Exiled Prophet, Part 1: Introduction to the Book of Daniel**

The book of Daniel has both inspired and mystified believers for over two thousand years. Many people have gained courage and hope from its stories of God delivering his people from lions and fiery furnaces, while others have devoted countless hours poring over the book’s prophecies and trying to discover when the Messiah is going to return. Daniel was written to a people that were exiled from their homeland and oppressed by their captors. It holds many valuable lessons for how we should interact with a world that seems to be increasingly hostile toward believers. It also holds valuable information about our past and our future. Most of all, it shows us who is really in charge of the world, and who we should be obeying and worshiping. In this series of teachings, we’re going to go through the book of Daniel, find out what lessons it was teaching to the people it was written to, and what lessons it has for us today.

In this, our first teaching in the series, we’re going to address how the book of Daniel came to be. Specifically, we’re going to discuss when the book of Daniel was written, who wrote it, and who it was written to. Let’s begin.

#### **When was Daniel written?**

The book of Daniel records events that occurred over a span of about seventy years, and prophecies events that occurred over a span of no less than four hundred years. It is likely that the entire book was not written at one time, but that different parts of it were written at different times, and then later all of those parts were compiled into one book that we call “Daniel.” So, when we ask, “when was Daniel written?”, we’re really asking two questions: first, when were each of the book’s individual parts written, and second, when were those parts compiled into the book we have today?

The Talmud claims that Daniel was compiled by members of the “Great Assembly.” It says this:

Jeremiah wrote his own book, and the book of Kings, and Lamentations. Hezekiah and his colleagues wrote... Isaiah [Yeshaya], Proverbs [Mishlei], Song of Songs [Shir HaShirim], and Ecclesiastes [Kohelet]. The members of the Great Assembly wrote... Ezekiel [Yehezkel], and the Twelve Prophets [Sheneim Asar], Daniel [Daniel], and the Scroll of Esther [Megillat Ester]. Ezra wrote his own book and the genealogy of the book of Chronicles until his period.

- *Bava Batra* 15a

This “Great Assembly,” that the Talmud says wrote the book of Daniel, was the assembly of elders that existed during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 10:1; Nehemiah 8:17; *Berakhot* 33a 25-26). If they compiled Daniel, then that would have been some time after 540 B.C.E., but probably well before 400 B.C.E., and the individual parts of Daniel that they were compiling would have been written before that.

For hundreds of years, nobody seemed to doubt that the sixth or fifth century B.C.E. was when Daniel was originally written. But, in the late third century A.D., a Phoenician philosopher by the name of Poryphyry wrote a paper, which he titled *Against the Christians*. In that paper, Poryphyry claimed that Daniel must have been written not in the sixth century B.C.E., as the Talmud claims, but in the second century B.C.E., about four hundred years later. The reason he makes this claim is because the book of Daniel prophesied events that happened long after it was supposedly written, and so Poryphyry argued that it must have actually been written after those events occurred. Jerome, an early Christian scholar and theologian, described Poryphyry’s argument like this:

Porphry wrote his twelfth book against the prophecy of Daniel, denying that it was composed by the person to whom it is ascribed in its title, but rather by some individual living in Judaea at the time of the Antiochus who was surnamed Epiphanes. He furthermore alleged that "Daniel" did not foretell the future so much as he related the past, and lastly that whatever he spoke of up till the time of Antiochus contained authentic history, whereas anything he may have conjectured beyond that point was false, inasmuch as he would not have foreknown the future.

- Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel* 617-618, translation by Gleason L. Archer  
([www.tertullian.org](http://www.tertullian.org))

So, Poryphyry claimed that the author of Daniel wrote down past events, and tried to pass them off as ancient prophecies of the future. While this argument was basically just a speculation from someone who was actively trying to discredit Christianity, it does bring up an interesting point: how do we know that Daniel was *not* written after the events that it accurately prophesies? This is an especially relevant question when we consider that many modern scholars agree with Poryphyry; the prevalent academic view today is that Daniel was written in the second century B.C.E. So, besides the testimony from the Talmud, what evidence do we have that Daniel was written in the sixth or fifth century B.C.E.?

Before we answer that question, we should first address what evidence there is for the claim of the skeptics—the claim that Daniel was written in the second century B.C.E. The answer, remarkably, is that there’s basically none!

There are two main arguments that are used to assert a second-century authorship of Daniel. For the first argument, scholars have asserted that Daniel could not have been written prior to the second century, because it is not mentioned by any other books prior to that time. For example, scholar A.A. Bevan wrote:

On the supposition that the narrative in Daniel is historical, it is marvelous that it should be

passed over in utter silence by all extant Jewish writers down to the latter half of the 2nd century B.C.

- A.A. Bevan, *A Short Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (London: C.J. Clay & Sons, 1892) pp. 12-13)

In other words, if the book of Daniel was written before 200 B.C.E., why didn't any other authors mention anything about its existence or its contents prior to that time?

This is a bad argument for several reasons. First, most books do not include lists of, or references to, all other books that are currently in existence. The fact that a book or its content is not mentioned by another book has little to do with whether both books existed at the same time. As scholar R.D. Wilson wrote:

it ignores the obvious fact that by similar reasoning we would have a cumulative argument from silence that Ezekiel and most of the Minor Prophets did not exist until the time of Ben Sira. In short, the argument is absurd.

- Robert Dick Wilson, *Studies in the Book of Daniel*, volume 1 (New York: Putnam, 1917), p. 75

Second, the premise of the argument is false. The book of Ezekiel, which is widely considered to have been written well in advance of the second century, mentions the person Daniel from the book of Daniel three times (Ezekiel 14:14, 20; 28:3). Skeptical scholars try to account for this by claiming that Ezekiel was referring to a different person entirely. As scholar Andre Lacocque writes:

The central character, Daniel, is mythical, and he belongs to an oral tradition of an extraordinarily wise hero, who is mentioned, along with Noah and Job, by Ezekiel. This tradition can be traced back to the Canaanite literature of Ugarit, where we find a king by the name of Dan'el, and it is echoed in 1 Enoch 6; 7; and 69:2.

- Andre Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel: Second Edition*, Translated by David Pallauer (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), p. 51

The claim being made here is that there was a fictional character, with a name similar to Daniel's, that was a staple of ancient Near Eastern stories, and that this character, not any historical Daniel, is the one mentioned by Ezekiel. However, this assertion is simply not supported by evidence. There is exactly one ancient Near Eastern text, called the *Aqhat Epic*, in which there is a character with a similar name to Daniel's. Ezekiel 28:3 says that Daniel was "wise," but the *Aqhat Epic* does not depict its character as especially wise; also, Ezekiel 14 describes Daniel as "righteous," but the *Aqhat Epic* does not depict its character as especially righteous either (Harold H. P. Dressler, *Vetus Testamentum* Vol. 29, Fasc. 2 (April, 1979), pp. 152-161). Furthermore, there is no evidence whatsoever that this character was significant enough in Near Eastern myth that Ezekiel would list him alongside Noah and Job; again, we have only one text that even mentions him, and he doesn't resemble the Biblical Daniel at all. It's far more reasonable to assume that Ezekiel is referring to the Daniel from the book of Daniel, who is depicted as wise (Daniel 1:20; 2:14; 5:12), righteous (Daniel 6:5, 16, 21), and significant (Daniel 6:3, 28) in that book, and who would have lived with Ezekiel in Babylon during the sixth century B.C.E. This is the only "Daniel" that fits the description that Ezekiel provides. As Wilson wrote:

So far as we know, no other Daniel but the one who flourished at Babylon as a contemporary of Ezekiel can have been compared in wisdom with Noah and Job. It would have been senseless for

Ezekiel to have appealed to the wisdom of a person unknown to his hearers and readers.

- Robert Dick Wilson, *Studies in the Book of Daniel*, volume 1 (New York: Putnam, 1917), p. 69

So, Daniel is mentioned by another author long before the second century. This renders the argument about the lack of references to him or his book completely irrelevant.

The other main argument for Daniel being written in the second century is that Daniel gives prophecies about events that occurred in the sixth, fourth, and early second centuries, and those prophecies are remarkably accurate. The argument is that Daniel could not have predicted what would happen in the future with such accuracy, so he must have written about those events after they had already happened. But, this argument assumes that either God does not exist, or that he did not or could not reveal the future to Daniel. We don't have any good reasons to assume either of those things. It is one thing to be skeptical about Daniel's claim that God revealed the future to him, but to claim that such a thing is impossible is leaving the realm of skepticism, and simply entering the realm of atheism. Arguing that a Biblical event could not have happened because God does not exist is kind of silly, given that part of the Bible's purpose is to be a testament to God's existence. Instead of assuming that Daniel is lying, we can turn to outside sources of evidence, like history and archaeology, to provide us with either confidence or doubt in the Bible's stories.

When we do turn to linguistics, history, and archaeology for clues about when the book of Daniel might have been written, we actually find some compelling reasons to believe that it was, in fact, written by Jewish captives in Babylon during the sixth century B.C.E. First, let's look at the arguments from linguistics.

Some parts of Daniel are written in Hebrew, and some parts are written in Aramaic. These are the languages that Jewish books from the sixth century were typically written in; for example, the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel were both written around the sixth century, and they contain both Hebrew and Aramaic. Most of the second century Jewish books, like the apocryphal books of 1 Maccabees and Tobit, were written in Greek (Hamilton, James M., Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014), p. 40). If Daniel was written in the second century, we would expect that it would also have been written in Greek, but since it was written in Hebrew and Aramaic instead, that fits the pattern of sixth-century books much better. Furthermore, the Hebrew and Aramaic vocabulary and grammar that are used in the book of Daniel are both consistent with other sixth-century writings (K.A. Kitchen, "The Aramaic of Daniel," D. J. Wiseman, ed., *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*. London: The Tyndale Press, 1965, p.79; W. J. Martin, "The Hebrew of Daniel," D. J. Wiseman, ed., *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*. London: The Tyndale Press, 1965, p. 30).

Another important linguistic point is that Daniel contains very few words that are derived from Greek. If the book of Daniel was written in the second century B.C.E., at a time when the Greek language was the primary language, then we would expect many more Greek terms to be found in it, but we don't (Manzani, Patrick, "The Book of Daniel in Light of the Ancient Near Eastern Literary and Material Finds: an Archaeological Perspective" (2008). Dissertations. 93 p. 371). From the linguistic evidence, it is far more likely that Daniel was written when Hebrew and Aramaic were the standard languages that Jews used to write their books, which was long before the second century B.C.E.

When we look at history and archaeology, we find evidence that the author of Daniel was intimately familiar with sixth-century Babylon. The Babylonians kept records on clay tablets, and over the last

several hundred years, archaeologists have dug up hundreds of these tablets, which has shed a lot of light on what life was like in ancient Babylon. Daniel's descriptions of Babylonian practices have lined up remarkably well with descriptions from these tablets. One example of a sixth-century Babylonian practice that Daniel accurately describes is the dating of the reigns of kings.

In Babylon, a king's reign was dated from the year after he began to rule (Walvoord, John F., *Daniel*, edited by Charles H. Dyer & Philip E. Rawley (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), p. 52). So, if a Babylonian record said "in the tenth year of the king," that would mean that the king had already ruled for ten whole years, and was starting what we would call his eleventh year. But, when an Israeli record said "in the tenth year of the king," it meant that the king had reigned for nine years, and was now in his tenth year (Walvoord 53). (We see this one-year discrepancy between the Babylonian record of Nebuchadnezzar's second siege of Jerusalem versus the Jewish record of the same event. The Babylonian record says that this second attack occurred in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (Wiseman, D. J., *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings* (London: British Museum, 1961), p. 73), but 2 Kings 24:12 says that this event occurred in Nebuchadnezzar's eighth year. This demonstrates the one-year discrepancy between the way these two cultures calculated the years of a king's reign.) The book of Daniel actually contains this Babylonian dating scheme (Manzani 370). Jeremiah says that Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem "in the fourth year of king Jehoiakim" (Jeremiah 25:1), while Daniel says that this same event happened in "the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim." (Daniel 1:1).

This one-year discrepancy is easily explained by the fact that Jeremiah, who lived and wrote in Israel, was using the usual Jewish reckoning of the length of a king's reign, while the author of Daniel, who lived in Babylon, was using the Babylonian method, which started dating a king's reign one year later. If the author of Daniel was an Israeli Jew living in the second century, why would he write his chronology in a way that seemed to contradict Jeremiah's? Why would he use the antiquated Babylonian dating system, instead of the contemporary Jewish dating system that all of the other Jewish writers were using? The most obvious answer is that the author of Daniel was using the dating system of the country that he lived in.

As we progress through this teaching series, we're going to find other examples from the book of Daniel that suggest that the book's author was intimately familiar with Babylonian customs of the sixth century, and the most likely explanation for his familiarity is that he actually lived in Babylon during that time. We would not expect a second-century Israeli to be able to accurately describe practices from sixth-century Babylon, which was hundreds of miles away, and hundreds of years in the past. The most reasonable way to explain this accuracy is that the author of the book of Daniel lived in Babylon, and was there around the same time as the events that are described in the book.

So, in spite of the opinions of skeptical scholars, the best linguistic and historical evidence points to the book of Daniel being written in the late sixth or early fifth century B.C.E.

## **Who Wrote Daniel?**

Now that we have a likely date for when the book of Daniel was written, the next question is, who wrote it? It might seem that the prophet Daniel would obviously be the author of his own book, but there are some reasons to suppose that it had multiple contributing writers.

Daniel chapters 8 through 12 are the only chapters in the book that give their author's name. The author of these chapters refers to himself as 'I, Daniel,' (Daniel 8:15, 9:2, 10:2, 12:5) and there is no evidence

to suggest that these chapters were written by anybody else. However, chapters 1-7 are not written from Daniel's perspective; the author of those chapters does not write them as 'I, Daniel,' but writes about Daniel, as though Daniel was another person. It would be a little bit strange for an author to write half of a book referring to himself in the third person, and the other half referring to himself in the first person. Also, chapters 8 through 12 are written entirely in Hebrew, while chapters 2 through 7 are written in Aramaic.

While Daniel certainly would have been able to speak and write Aramaic, since it was the international language of Babylon, it does seem strange that he would write roughly half of his book in one language, and half in another. It is entirely possible that Daniel could have written the whole thing, but these features suggest that, perhaps, there were other authors as well. These other authors, if there were any, would almost certainly have been other Babylonian Jews, since, as we mentioned earlier, they described Babylonian customs with such accuracy.

## **Who Was Daniel Written To?**

Since Daniel was written in both Hebrew, the language of Israel, and Aramaic, the language of Babylon, its intended audience was most likely Jews who were living in Babylon, or who had recently left Babylon. These Jews were facing great difficulties. After the Persian king Cyrus conquered Babylon in 540 B.C.E., he allowed the Babylonian Jews to return to Jerusalem, and to begin rebuilding the temple there, but these Jews faced many obstacles from other rulers who did not approve of this policy. The story of the struggles of these Jews can be found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Meanwhile, Jews who remained outside of Israel faced serious persecution of their own, which is described in the book of Esther. Wherever they were, the Jews of the fifth century faced great uncertainty (Esther 8:11; Ezra 4:21; Nehemiah 2:2-3) and significant persecution (Esther 3:8-11; Ezra 4:6; Nehemiah 1:3).

Daniel's stories of how he managed to overcome similar problems with the help of God would have been a great source of inspiration and comfort to these people. While we, today, are not fifth-century Babylonian Jews, we can also find inspiration and comfort in the words of this book. In fact, as we read through the book of Daniel over the course of this teaching series, we might find that we have much in common with Daniel's intended audience.

So, to wrap up, let's review what we covered in this teaching:

- Modern academics believe that Daniel was written by Israeli Jews in the second century B.C.E., but the main reason they believe this is because of the accuracy of some of Daniel's prophecies.
- Linguistic and historical analysis, as well as the testimony of Ezekiel and the Talmud, suggest that Daniel was actually written much closer to the sixth century B.C.E., by Jews who lived in or had returned from Babylon.
- Daniel himself likely wrote chapters 8-12, and possibly wrote the entire book, though it is also possible that the other chapters were written by other authors.
- Daniel was written to Jews who lived in, or had recently returned from Babylon, and were facing serious political persecution.

In the next teaching in the series, we will start examining Daniel chapter 1. We hope to see you there.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For*

*more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)*

**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

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