

The Sixth Century Origin of The Book of Daniel

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I. Introduction

In his little book, Daniel: A Tract for Troubled Times, Jorge Gonzales represents the view that the Book of Daniel was written “sometime after 167 B.C. the date of the last accurate historical references.”¹ Clearly, Gonzales infers that Daniel contains inaccurate historical references. To say the least, this represents a serious challenge to one of the bedrock doctrines of the historical, evangelical Christian faith: Biblical inerrancy.

Edward J. Young puts the challenge into proper perspective:

The book of Daniel purports to be serious history. It claims to be a revelation from the God of heaven which concerns the future welfare of men and nations. If this book were issued at the time of the Maccabees for the purpose of strengthening the faith of the people of *that* time, and the impression was thereby created that Daniel, a Jew of the 6th cent. were the author, then, whether we like it or no – the book is a fraud. There is no escaping this conclusion. It will not do to say that the Jews frequently engaged in such a practice. That does not lessen their guilt one whit. It is one thing to issue a harmless romance under a pseudonym; it is an entirely different thing to issue under a pseudonym a book claiming to be a revelation of God and having to do with the conduct of men and to regard such a book as canonical. The Jews of the inter-testamental period may have done the first; there is no evidence that they did the second.²

The goal of this paper is to ask in what way Biblical archaeology speaks to the historical question of whether or not the Book of Daniel is a book of the 6th century B.C. This is extremely pertinent to the realm of Christian apologetics, because part and parcel of defending the faith once delivered unto the saints is to be able to defend the historical integrity of the Word of God itself. If the Bible cannot be trusted in regards to human history, how can it be trusted in things of eternal weight? Let us therefore examine how the science and art of archaeology contributes towards answering this historical question.

II. Why Critics Doubt 6th Century Origins

Gonzales claims that the “unknown author” – despite the assertion of the book itself “Then I, Daniel” (e.g. 8:1 & 12:5) – “had a superficial and often inaccurate knowledge of the events which dated back to those times.”³ He goes on to list the following “examples”: 1)

¹ Jorge Gonzales, *Daniel: A Tract for Troubled Times*, (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1985), p. 5.

² Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 25.

³ Gonzales, p. 3.

Inaccuracies pertaining Nebuchadnezzar's first raid on Jerusalem; 2) The identity of Belshazzar; and 3) That there never was a Darius the Mede. Gonzales tries to be consoling by stating that whomever the writer is he writes most accurately of events which take place over 400 years later! Further hollow sentiment is offered by appreciating that Daniel is written as any Christian might write a local congregation's history:

Suppose, for example, that you set out to write a history of your own local church and that you write it as if the author were one of the charter members of the congregation. Your history could include some correct information on the early years, but the closer you come to the present the more accurate it would be. If yours is an older church, there will be spotty information at the beginning, but for the present you could provide detailed information to the point of absurdity: names of the members of each church school class, for instance; or what was served at the last church dinner. But what happens if you try to write beyond the present into what will happen at your church for the next five, ten years? Even if all the history is written in the same style and all of it is presented as if it were the work of that founding member of the congregation, it will be easy for someone, reading that history twenty years from now, to determine when it was written, almost to the day. It was written at the point at which the "predictions" of that founding member no longer agree with what in fact happened. That is how we date Daniel's writing.⁴

Beyond these simple critiques that call the historicity of Daniel into question, there are also more sophisticated ones. The Westminster Press offers the work of Norman W. Porteous who offers an even more damaging analysis in regards to Daniel's historical accuracy. Porteous claims that the original Aramaic of ch. 2:4a-ch. 7 is in a dialect that was employed in the third or second century B.C.⁵ Furthermore, he purports that the author's knowledge of the Babylonian and Persian periods are vague. Thus, Porteous speaks as Gonzales when he puts the date for the book "shortly before 164 B.C."⁶ Thus, for this critic, "Everything else that is 'revealed' to Daniel is history viewed in retrospect either in symbol or as interpreted to Daniel..."⁷

Porteous also does not believe that the reference to the "abomination of desolation" is related to true prophecy. While within the pale of orthodoxy, one might debate whether this reference by Daniel was fulfilled in A.D. 70 or is yet to be fulfilled, Porteous is content to agree with Josephus in his opinion that it was something that happened during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century B.C.⁸ The reason this is of special interest to

⁴ Gonzales, p. 4.

⁵ Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 13.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 13

us of course is that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself refers to “Daniel the prophet” (Matt. 24:15) and in this very verse, Christ shares in Daniel’s prediction yet to come. As is plain to see, if one rejects the reliability and integrity of one Biblical book, then it will be quite easy to question all the others!

In addition to the points already mentioned above – late-language aspects, so-called “vague” knowledge of the Babylonian and Persian periods, and the point just mentioned on his rejection of the abomination having any connection to later historical events – he goes onto list that there are no external literary references giving support to an early date for Daniel; that its place in the Canon supports an early date; *and* its character of theology and angelology suggests the same.⁹ It is now time for us to test some of these skeptical views.

III. Archaeology Confirms 6th Century Origins: Daniel’s Intimate Knowledge Of The Time

A. Nebuchadnezzar’s First Raid On Jerusalem

Daniel 1:1 states, “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.” Those who doubt Daniel’s 6th century origin jump all over this opening reference. In addition to pointing out purported inconsistencies in the Bible itself (e.g. Jeremiah 46:2 describing the battle leading to the Babylonian invasion of Judah as not occurring until Jehoiakim’s *fourth* year), it is noted that the Babylonian Chronicle makes no reference to action by Nebuchadnezzar in Judah during the third year of Jehoiakim nor to a siege of Jerusalem.¹⁰ The conclusion by radical critics therefore is that “[Daniel] begins with a glaring historical error.”¹¹

However, those who reject 6th century origins jump to remarkable assumptions on this topic. The assumption here is that Daniel is referring to the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem. C.F. Keil cites Berossus in the fragments of his Chaldean history preserved by Josephus (*Ant.* x. 11.1, and *c. Ap.* I. 19) to show that Nebuchadnezzar *apparently abandoned the siege against Jerusalem before he later captured the city. There are distinct “sieges,” one less severe and a later one that is more severe.* In this extra-Biblical source, Berossus explains the events surrounding Nabopolassar reacting to Egypt. He commits part of his army to his son

⁹ Porteous, p. 20.

¹⁰ Josh McDowell, *Daniel In The Critics’ Den: Historical Evidence for the Authenticity of the Book of Daniel*, (San Bernardino, CA: Here’s Life Publishers, Inc.), p. 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 49.

Nebuchadnezzar to bring the land back into Babylonian dominion. Then, Nabopolassar falls ill and dies in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar returns to Babylon to claim his throne and in process – as Berosus confirms – makes “all the land from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates” tributaries to the Chaldean empire.¹² The point of it all is this: Nebuchadnezzar’s capture of Judah is not the subject of his first journey to the area. Furthermore, “Daniel never states...that Jerusalem was captured in Jehoiakim’s third year...[but] merely says Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem.”¹³ Furthermore, from the standpoint of Babylonian records, Judah is not the main concern at this juncture while Egypt is.

Still, even if we establish that we are speaking of distinct events in regards to beginning siege and then later capture, what about the claimed discrepancy between Daniel and Jeremiah? The answer lies in appreciating different dating systems. Archaeology has taught us about the Babylonian calendar year. In Babylon, the year began in the spring. In Judah the year began in the autumn. “The Babylonian third year [Daniel’s context] would overlap the Judean fourth year [Jeremiah’s context] by about six months. The same date could be both the third and fourth year, according to the mode of reckoning.”¹⁴

B. The Identity of Belshazzar and Confidence In Regard To Darius The Mede

At issue here is the skeptical question, “Who is Belshazzar?” He appears as a king in the Book of Daniel, and yet this is not consistent with other historical records. Furthermore, if Daniel is so highly praised, why should he be third in the kingdom and who is second? Finally, if the Biblical record on Belshazzar is unreliable, how much easier is it to criticize the author of Daniel with the claim that there was a “Darius The Mede”? These are examples of the “spotty” early history of Daniel in the eyes of the radical critic.

According to Alfred J. Hoerth, however, “Belshazzar represents a classic case of critical scholarship’s premature denial of Bible history.”¹⁵ Hoerth goes on to explain in careful detail:

¹² C.F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary On The Book Of Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), p. 64.

¹³ McDowell, p. 49.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 52.

¹⁵ Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology And The Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books), p. 379.

Since ancient Greek historians identified Nabonidus as the last ruler of the Babylonian Empire and made no mention of Belshazzar, nineteenth-century scholarship concluded that Belshazzar was a fictitious biblical invention. Subsequently, inscriptions were found that made reference to Belshazzar as Nabonidus's eldest son and crown prince. It is true that Belshazzar is never referred to as king in any of the documents, but there are indications that he held a special status, and one document has him entrusted with both the kingship and the army. Therefore, the Bible's reference is to Belshazzar's functional governmental role.¹⁶

From Babylonian records themselves we learn that Nabonidus had gone to Haran and then to Tema to worship Sin, forsaking Marduk and Babylon. In the process, he put his son Belshazzar as second in command. Consequently, when Daniel is exalted for his prophetic services, he is put in the highest position available to him, since Nabonidus was still king in absentia and Belshazzar himself was second.¹⁷ There is no contradiction pertaining to the order of kings in Daniel. Much to the contrary, archaeology leads us to see that no second century, pseudo author in Palestine would know what only the true Daniel in Babylon knew.

But what about Darius the Mede? Even the most ardent Biblical defender must admit that this historical difficulty has still not been resolved.¹⁸ Despite this difficulty, however, we ought keep in mind what Egyptologist Kenneth A. Kitchen likes to point out: "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."¹⁹ From this logical thought process, Hoerth makes a good point: "As with the conundrum over Belshazzar, it can be expected that Darius the Mede will be solved in time."²⁰ Indeed, the burden of proof rests squarely upon the skeptic, not Scripture. They were wrong about Belshazzar, why assume now that the Bible is wrong about Darius the Mede?!

Before we leave Darius the Mede, there is one exciting piece of information we ought appreciate. The critical charge against Daniel's record is usually to the tune of accusing Daniel of suggesting a Median empire between the Assyrians and Babylonians. Daniel, however, never makes this claim and we need simply recognize that the Darius in Daniel depicts the so-called "Medo-Persian" empire. This Darius was a ruler (probably a Persian sub-ruler)²¹ with a unique Median ancestry (as Cyrus possessed a Persian ancestry). These

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 379.

¹⁷ John A. Bloom, *CSAP 619 Biblical Archaeology Class Notes*, (La Mirada: Biola University).

¹⁸ Hoerth, p. 384.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 22.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 384.

²¹ Ibid. p. 384.

facts in no way suggest that Daniel is presenting distinct empires. Rather, he is presenting what was historically identified as one empire representing different ancestral lines.²²

C. Daniel's Detailed Knowledge – Not Vagueness – Of The Babylonian And Persian Periods

While we have chosen to zero-in on two specific examples above, what about the rest of the “feel” for Daniel’s knowledge of the 6th century B.C. period? Gonzales says that the author’s knowledge is “superficial and often inaccurate,” while Porteous asserts that the writer’s knowledge of the period is “vague.” Is there anything else that would contradict their analysis? There is in fact much more. Here are three more examples of Daniel’s first-hand knowledge of the period: 1) Daniel’s familiarity with Nebuchadnezzar’s pride in Babylon; 2) Paradoxically, Daniel’s knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar’s humble origin; 3) and finally, Daniel’s understanding of the Medo-Persian preference for execution.

First of all, Daniel was intimately familiar with Nebuchadnezzar’s pride. Daniel 4:30 records Nebuchadnezzar’s proud self-reflection: “Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?” What Daniel recorded is completely consistent with extra biblical texts. Here is one excerpt:

A great wall which like a mountain cannot be moved I made of mortar and brick...Its foundation upon the bosom of the abyss...its top I raised mountain high. I triplicated the city wall in order to strengthen it, I caused a great protecting wall to run at the foot of the wall of burnt brick...Upon the...great gates strong bulls...and terrible serpents ready to strike, I placed...A third great moat-wall...I built with mortar and brick...The produce of the lands, the products of the mountains, the bountiful wealth of the sea, within [Babylon] I gathered...The palace...I rebuilt in Babylon with great cedars I brought from Lebanon, the beautiful forest to roof it...Huge cedars from Lebanon, their forest with my clean hands I cut down. With radiant gold I overlaid them, with jewels I adorned them.²³

Daniel therefore is in no way exaggerating when he speaks his interpretation at 4:22: “it is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth.” Daniel had immediate knowledge of the king’s pride and his astonishing accomplishments.

²² McDowell, p. 69.

²³ Hoerth, pp. 376-377.

Secondly, however, is an even more remarkable aspect. At Daniel 4:17, Nebuchadnezzar seems to confess that he is among “the lowliest of men.” How would a “Daniel” centuries removed possess this kind of knowledge of the king’s humble origins?! This origin was brought out through the discovery of an inscription made by Nebuchadnezzar’s father, Nabopolassar:

Nabopolassar, the just king, the shepherd called of Merodach, the offspring of Ninmenna, great and illustrious queen of queens, holding the hand of Nebo and Tasmit, the prince of beloved of Ea am I. When I *in my littleness, the son of a nobody*, sought faithfully after the sacred places of Nebo and Merodach, my lords: when my mind pondered how to establish their decrees, and to complete their abodes, and my ears were opened to justice and righteousness: when Merodach who knows the hearts of the gods of heaven and earth, who sees the ways of men most clearly, had perceived the intention of *me, the insignificant, who among men was not visible*, and in the land where I was born had designed me for the chieftainship and for the rulership of the land and people over whom I was nominated, and had sent a good genius to go at my side: when he had prospered all that I had done, and had sent Nergal, strongest of the gods, to go beside me – He subdued my foes, dashed in pieces my enemies: -- the Assyrian, who from the days of old ruled over all men, *I, the weak, the feeble*, in dependence on the lord of lords, held back their feet from the land of Akkad and broke their yoke.²⁴

From the standpoint of looking back on history, a second-century author would surely hear the echo’s of Nebuchadnezzar’s greatness, but how would these non-royal origins survive the immensity of his success over time? This is yet another example of Daniel’s historical accuracy and another testimony that Daniel lived in and knew the period of the Babylonians.

Finally, Daniel knew an amazing detail about the Medo-Persians as well. Who is not familiar with the famous account of Daniel in the lion’s den? And yet despite the immense popularity of this account, it describes a method of execution that belonged to the Medes not nearly as well known! “If the book were written in 168 B.C., how did the author know that Darius the Mede was a fire worshiper and would not have thrown Daniel into the fire, as did Nebuchadnezzar to Daniel’s friends?”²⁵ What is more, Hoerth presents the archaeological evidence of Mesopotamian game preserves that depict the type of “den” of lions Daniel was thrown into.²⁶ These are details known by the true Daniel of the 6th century B.C.

²⁴ McDowell, p. 12

²⁵ Ibid. p. 11.

²⁶ Hoerth, pp. 356-357 & 385.

IV. Archaeology Confirms 6th Century Origins: Literary Aspects Consistent With The Time

A. Is Daniel's Hebrew and Aramaic Language (and Persian and Greek Word Use) Too Late?

If the skeptics find that their objections relating to historical events have been answered, then they will try to fall back on the questions surrounding literary characteristics. As mentioned above, Porteous believes that the language itself shows that the Book of Daniel is of third or second century B.C. origin (critics question the language from several fronts, the Hebrew, Aramaic and a few Greek words found in the Book of Daniel are all cited as examples of a late date). It would be a yet another false assumption to go along with these oft-repeated claims that Daniel's language could not be from the sixth century. Young will not go along with the skeptical analysis and defends Daniel's historicity in that all of its language is consistent with the conservative time period:

It is also claimed that the language of Daniel proves that the book must have been written long after the sixth century BC...Nor does the presence of Greek words in Daniel 3 necessarily militate against Daniel's authorship. For it is becoming increasingly clear that evidences of Greek culture penetrated into the Near East at a much earlier date than has hitherto been supposed...As to the nature of the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, it may be said that there is nothing in them which in itself necessarily precludes authorship by Daniel in the sixth century BC...the grammatical forms...of the Aramaic portions to Daniel do contain much that is old. The recently discovered (1929) texts from Ras Shamra [15th century BC] also contain Aramaic elements, which in some respects have relation to the Aramaic of Daniel.²⁷

Young offers a very common sense answer in regards to Persian words that the skeptics just can't seem to grasp: "If Daniel wrote after the fall of Babylon, say in the third year of Cyrus, he might very well have employed Persian terms in certain cases as substitutes for the older Babylonian terms. Thus his writing would become understandable to readers who lived during the Persian age."²⁸ There is no good reason to insist that the vast empires of Mesopotamia ought be so limited and narrow so as to be exposed to no more than one language! McDowell quotes one of his sources as saying, "There is nothing about the Hebrew of Daniel that could be considered extraordinary for a bilingual or, perhaps in this case, a trilingual speaker of the language in the sixth century B.C."²⁹

²⁷ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), p. 371.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 369.

²⁹ McDowell, p. 107.

B. What About The Manuscript Evidence?

There appears to be considerable evidence that the early-date Book of Daniel is attested to in early copies of the Old Testament and in extra-biblical sources as well. One example of this is Qumran.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls do not help the critical claim that Daniel was written during the time of the Maccabees. Not only were there at least 17 fragments of Daniel uncovered, but the dating of other Old Testament books during the Maccabean period have been found to be inaccurate based on the Qumran finds. Furthermore, “Frank Cross, professor at Harvard and authority on the Dead Sea Scrolls, is forced to admit...[that] the Daniel manuscripts at Qumran are dated around 165 B.C., the time the critics claim Daniel was written.”³⁰ Finally, “the Qumran manuscripts of Daniel are all copies; and if the Qumran sect was actually Maccabean in origin itself, it would necessarily imply that the original copy of Daniel must have been at least a half century earlier, which would place it before the time of the alleged Maccabean authorship of Daniel.”³¹

In addition to the Qumran evidence towards a later not earlier date for Daniel, there is also the witness of Ezekiel. Ezekiel 14:14 and 14:20 says that Daniel is noted with Noah and Job for his righteousness. Ezekiel 28:3 adds to the characteristic of righteousness, by attributing wisdom to Daniel.³² These qualities fit the historical figure presented in the Book of Daniel. He is righteous and wise to say the least. “The critics think it is remarkable that Ezekiel should refer to a young contemporary along with the ancient Noah and Job. But Ezekiel’s ministry did not begin until 592 B.C., about 14 years after Daniel’s deportation. Daniel had plenty of time to build his reputation, especially considering the spectacular things he did.”³³

An interesting extra biblical source is the First Book of Maccabees. In chapter 2, Mattathias encourages his sons by mentioning “...Daniel for his innocency was saved from the mouth of lions.” What is so fascinating about this is that Mattathias died in 166 B.C., a year before the date that critics assign to Daniel. “In addition, the context seems to indicate

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 26-27.

³¹ John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key To Prophetic Revelation*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 20.

³² McDowell, p. 27.

³³ Ibid. p. 28.

that Mattathias was referring to an event far in the past. If Mattathias said this, then the late date theory cannot be maintained.”³⁴

Finally, McDowell also points out the fact that the author of 1 Maccabees “shows familiarity with the Septuagint version of Daniel. The Book of Daniel had to exist long before Antiochus Epiphanes to allow sufficient time for its translation into Greek.”³⁵

V. Conclusion:

This little journey of discoveries backing up a sixth century origin of Daniel has done much more than exemplify the value of archaeology in application to Biblical research, because it has also said something about the desperate attempts of those who reject the accuracy of the Bible. When you put all the evidence together, the skeptical position against the divine agency of Holy Scripture begins to appear just blindly stubborn.

But if the Bible is trustworthy in the historical nuances mentioned above, how much more is it trustworthy in the realm of the miraculous and eternal salvation? No, we haven't seen any instances of archaeology *proving the miracles* in the Book of Daniel, but we have seen that archaeology overwhelmingly affirms Daniel in terms of the early history it claims to be. Thus, archaeology provides us better reason to suspect that the miraculous aspects are true as well.

³⁴ Ibid. pp. 28-29.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 29.