

## DATING DANIEL

### **Higher Criticism and the argument from prophecy.**

Higher Criticism (HC) is simply the study of the date and authorship of a body of literature. As such it can provide insights to the Bible precisely because of the Bible's claim to be, in part, a work of history. As such, its historical claims are open to verification. The verification process enables the Bible to be uniquely "true" when compared to other holy scriptures. It also may be shown to be false.

HC is the ground where the "Battle for the Bible" largely takes place. The stakes are high for both believer and skeptic. Because of this, the battle is not fought on philosophically neutral ground. Each side has its presuppositions that drive it to selective use of the data and form of argumentation.

If I had simply wanted to argue for the existence of predictive prophecy, I could have used several examples where even if we grant the critical date, the prediction still stands (PCE, 96). My purpose here is to cast doubt on the "assured" results" of HC and put them under the same scrutiny that they hold the Scriptures.

Why exactly do date and authorship matter? Because this is the basis for the Bible's defense of itself (DEUT 18:18). The test for God's prophets is in the fulfillment. If we cannot date the fulfillment after the utterance, we have no proof God has spoken. It is considered naive to say that prophecy is history

written in advance. But this is sometimes close to the actual case. This "history in advance" prophecy (foretelling) is different from typology, where a pattern like the Old Testament cultic practice fills out a type which acts as a pointer- ultimately to the Person of Jesus. The fully developed pattern of the many types is confirmed by "history in advance" prophetic utterance, which gives descriptive details like time and place. Micah 5:2 (Bethlehem) and Daniel 9:24 (30 AD) give the place and time of the birth and death of Jesus.

Typology is not however in good repute with radical scholars. They consider the whole matter a case of tampering, ("ransacking") the OT on the basis of artificial judgments (PCE, 91). Thus, the Isaiah reference to a young woman giving birth (Isa 7:14) is typological to the Virgin Birth in Matthew. But critics would say the Church, i.e., "Matthew", used the everyday event of a young woman having a baby for doctrinal purposes. Hence the need to have the more explicit "history in advance" prophetic utterance to legitimize the typological picture.

Dr. Max Sotak argues (BA, 3) that while totally rejected by liberal Christianity, and even under suspicion in some evangelical circles, the argument from prophecy, typological and predictive, was at the core of the apostolic method for the advance of the gospel, at least as given to the Jews.

What is striking about the use of the OT by the apostles is that the "proof text" approach to the messianic strain in the OT was clearly used" (HOA 5, Dullas). While many apologists today deny the validity of this method because they believe biblical criticism calls it into question, there is no

denying that the apostles believed that that specific OT passages spoke directly to incidents surrounding Jesus, Judas, and the Jews (BA 5).

While there are many OT passages that seem to have been quoted by NT writers as typological pointers to Christ, there are also a number of prophecies that are not so easily explained. Daniel's 70 Weeks prophecy (9:24) seems to provide a concrete prediction.

This mixture of typological pattern and prophetic prediction in the NT's use of the OT seems to warrant the conviction that the OT is "fulfilled" in Christ (BA, 7)

## THE ROLE OF DANIEL

However remarkable the 70 Weeks prophecy (concerning the timing of the arrival of Messiah) may be, it is the apparent discrediting of Daniel's other prophecies concerning the sweep of history from Babylon to Rome that is problematic. Daniel is likely the most striking example of the "history in advance" prophecy due to its scope and detail. But Daniel seems to conform to a type of ancient writing called pseudographia- a narrative written under a big "name" like Abraham but obviously not from that period. It's like a historical novel that only a foolish fundamentalists take it seriously. If Daniel is in fact pseudographic, its real purpose was to minister to the Jews during the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus IV in 167 BC. Antiochus sacrificed a pig on the alter of the Temple- about the worst thing you could do to the Jews. (DAN 11:31)

The historical setting at the time is one of various wars among the descendants of the generals under Alexander the Great. The details of all this are well known to historians and apparently also to the writer of “Daniel” who claims to be writing this from 536 BC.

Since true knowledge of the future, especially in detail, is impossible under naturalistic assumptions, “Daniel” MUST have been written after 167 BC.

My choice of Daniel as an instrumental test of “The assured results of higher criticism” are several: It’s close enough in time to be open to the tools of historical method, it has been a battle ground ever since the pagan Porphyry (ca. 300) challenged the book on similar grounds as today’s critics and it directly affects our view of Christ.

## PART I- REFUTATION OF THE MACCABEAN (LATE) DATE

In Mat 24:15 Jesus says “Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in the Holy Place....Flee”. In this case Jesus is using Daniel’s “Abomination” (Antiochus) to point to a future abomination to be committed by the Roman general Titus in 70 AD. Some exegetes, who wish to hold a high view of Christ while holding to modern methods of interpretation, try to say Jesus was referring to the Book of Daniel, not the *person*. For the consistent evangelical the matter is settled. The Greek construction, *dia*, always implies *personal* human agency (EBD, Archer, pg. 284). So even though the rest of this paper will concern itself with matters dealing with OT prophecy and OT fulfillment, its importance for our view of Christ cannot be overlooked.

To defeat the charge of HC, that Daniel is history not prophecy, traditionalists do not have to prove an exilic date of the 5<sup>th</sup> Cent. BC. All we must do is show that Daniel was written before 167 BC.

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) have an extensive collection of both manuscripts (mss) of the book of Daniel as well as commentaries on it. This group of documents represents the largest representation of ANY biblical book at Qumran, the DSS community. Two of the mss have portions of the last half, with “Maccabean” Ch 11. Two of the fragments date about 150 to 250 BC by carbon 14 dating and analysis of the writing itself. Notice these are the dates of copies, not the original! If these were copies of some antecedent mss, what might we reasonably infer about its exemplar or source document?

Apologist Glenn Miller (Good Question, [www.christian-thinktank.com](http://www.christian-thinktank.com)) looks at the possible dates for the origination of the content of the scroll considering:

1. Whoever wrote the scroll invented the content as they wrote, making the date of the scroll identical to the date of the content.
2. Whoever wrote the scroll made a copy from an antecedent scroll- a scroll itself older than the copy
3. Same as two but from someone reading the scroll.

What this would mean for dating, of course, is that unless they were making up Daniel on the fly, this scroll presupposes an earlier scroll. And since this antecedent copy could also be a copy of a copy, this cycle would need to be repeated back to the original acceptance of the document being “worthy of copying”. In other words, the content must be worthy of the expense of copying, and the higher expense related to high copy numbers indicating a more valuable content. We moderns need to consider the cost and difficulties in the ancient world of publishing. Remember Daniel is the most copied book at Qumran!

A manuscript (mss) copy (except in the miniscule probability that we have an autograph) requires the existence of an exemplar, and requires some period of time for that exemplar to become worthy of copy. A mss copy, for example dated at 100 BC, witnesses to far more than the simple fact that its contents existed at that date. It represents an end point to an earlier and much longer process of conception, origination, distribution, social acceptance (canonizing- in the sense of important to read) and THEN copying. (Good Question, Miller, pg 2)

And, that these copies are themselves copies can be seen from the fact that it is generally accepted that Daniel was not written at Qumran.

“Not a single document which has been identified as an apocalypse (Daniel's literary genre) appears to have originated with the Qumran community” (Aune, 626 and others).

The Daniel mss at Qumran reflects a different mss tradition than the Massoretic text (Your Bible). What this entails is that Daniel had already been circulated widely enough and had been copied enough prior to 150 BC to create at least two textual families. This presupposes a point of divergence in the past. To create a tradition the document has to create multiple generations of copying, not just making lots of copies of the original. Remember the critic has just 15 years for all this to happen (165 to 150) based on the Carbon 14 terminus date.

It is interesting that these arguments are persuasive to critical scholars on all the other books at Qumran EXCEPT Daniel! The discovery of a fragment of Chronicles renders a Maccabean date virtually impossible. In the case of Psalms, they had to be re dated after the discovery of the DSS to the Persian period (close to the traditional date for Daniel) because of the “literary diffusion time” requirement.

As DSS scholar Burrows has observed, the originals came from a period several centuries in advance of the earliest date to which these mss and fragments can be assigned on any basis of reckoning. (DSS pg. 118). This should close the case except some (including hyper conservatives driven by eschatological presuppositions) doubt the “Abomination” has anything to do with Antiochus. This would not eliminate a prophetic Daniel because this multi century pushback would capture all the post Alexandrian history of the Ptolemaics and the Seleucids and their wars over control of Palestine in 200-300 BC. This is given in detail in Dan 11:4-19.

## PART II - POSITIVE EVIDENCE FOR AN EXILIC DATE AND SETTING

More could be said regarding HC and the Maccabean date. But I think it has been shown that Daniel deserves an earlier date based on standard arguments the HCs accept for the other books at Qumran. But what evidence can we offer for the traditional exilic date?

First, Jesus calls Daniel a *profhtu*, or “one who proclaims inspired utterances on behalf of God”. I realize this carries no weight with the unbeliever but should give pause to the wavering evangelical. The book itself claims to written in the 6 Cent. BC. The author places himself in the midst of the Exile. “In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebeuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and besieged it” (Dan 1:1). This is known to have taken place about 605 BC. This is the first date given in the book. The last date given as history (as opposed to prophecy) is “the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Cyrus, King of Persia”, (Dan 10:1) which is 537 BC. The author seems quite aware of the difference between history and prophecy, a distinction I am not aware of in other pseudepigraphic writings.

The Dan 1:1 date (“the 3<sup>rd</sup> yr”.) was thought to be in conflict with Jer 25:1 which says the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoakim. This apparent error can be turned against critics because Jeremiah wrote just before the Exile from Palestine and used a Palestinian dating system. Daniel uses a Babylonian system and both equate to 605 BC (Harrison, pg. 1112). The Maccabean theory has Daniel writing from Palestine after 165 BC so why would he use, or for that matter have knowledge of a Babylonian calendar! Also, if Daniel were



pseudographic, he would want to get credibility by following an impressive figure like Jeremiah and use his dating.

Even if he had knowledge of a long ago and far away dating system, he would try to make his work seem as scriptural as possible. He writes as a prophet himself and it would be natural to put himself under the prophetic tradition of Jeremiah, especially if his purpose was to encourage his people under persecution.

The second main argument concerns Belshazzar. The mention of him as the last king of Babylon seemed to be an irreconcilable error. Secular sources since ancient times stated that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon. But with the discovery of the Nabonidus Chronicle, Daniel was proven correct; that he was co regent in his father's absence when Babylon fell in 539 BC. The mystery here is how a second century "Daniel" would have knowledge that Nabonidus left Balshazzar in charge when all knowledge of Balshazzar was LOST by at least 450 BC (EBD, pg 289). Belshazzar's reward to Daniel of the third highest place in the kingdom indicates a superior co regent.

The certain knowledge of a Balshazzar opens up another line of evidence regarding the scope of Daniels knowledge of history. The Maccabean theory, where a Daniel with human limitations must stop where he lands in a Greek setting, has a three-empire history-Babylon, Meado/Persia and Greece. However, when Daniel interprets "The Hand Writing on the Wall", Dan 5:28 clearly says, "Your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Meads AND the Persians. This now gives a *4-part* world history and the 4<sup>th</sup> must be Rome. This iron kingdom that ends in (Daniel's dream) in a 10-part mixture of iron and clay fits the symbolism of the stages of the Roman

Empire, and there is no other choice. It does not matter a wit for this argument if you believe the “hand writing” actually happened. The point is Daniel predicted it, wrote it, and it conforms to history. So even if the Maccabean theory were plausible, we would still have a real predictive prophecy-a post Maccabean Rome.

The final class of arguments are linguistic. With the wealth of new data from the DSS (Qumran) we know what 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC writings look like. It is clear that Daniel is several centuries older than the oldest DSS writing, The Genesis Apocryphon. Also, the location of the verb late in the clause points to an early or an eastern Daniel, either of which would be fatal to a Maccabean date but consistent with the Exile (EBD, pg. 283)

Finally, the HC charge of the existence of Greek “loan words” does not count against an early or eastern origin. Robert Dick Wilson of Princeton, perhaps the greatest expert in Semitic languages, has accounted for the influx of these words by the time of the Exile.

We can conclude the obvious acceptance (canonicity) of Daniel in the DSS as evidenced by the large copy number, the existence of commentaries and the existence of derivative (apocryphal) works based on Daniel, combined with a C14 date of 150 BC at the latest, makes an origination date of 167 BC untenable. Combine this with an author that seems well acquainted with 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Babylon in terms of history, dates and language and who lacks similar knowledge of 2<sup>nd</sup> century Palestine and one is left with no reason to accept the HC late date.

There is only one alternative left to account for the precision and detail (on this there is no argument) and the pre-Maccabean date of the Book of Daniel. The author knew of the future course of history from Cyrus the Great of Persia to the Roman Empire of Titus/Nero by direct revelation from God. No naturalist or rationalistic theory fits the objective data. We should give thanks to God for giving us so much to go on and thanks for the scholarship of His servants like Dick Wilson and Gleason Archer who have dedicated their lives to this difficult and life consuming calling.

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