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**W.D. Jeffcoat, M.A.**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Theories regarding the date of the book of Daniel have prompted considerable discussion for many years. Conservative scholars have long held the view that the book was written about 530 B.C., while others have subscribed to a second century B.C. date. John W. Walvoord held the view that the record of events in the book extends to the third year of Cyrus (536 B.C.), and therefore spans a time period of approximately seventy years (1971, p. 11).

## **PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS**

The first heterodox view was that propounded by the pagan neo-Platonic philosopher, Porphyry, who died about A.D. 304 (see McNamara, 1969, p. 651). On a visit to Sicily, Porphyry produced a series of fifteen books titled, *Against the Christians*. Parts of the twelfth book, in which he attacked Daniel, have been preserved in Jerome's commentary on Daniel. Porphyry denied that Daniel, in the sixth century B.C., was the author of the book that bears his name, and asserted that the book was written around 175-164 B.C. by an anonymous scribe who lived in Judea during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. Porphyry came to this conclusion because the book of Daniel speaks so accurately about the times of Antiochus, which, of course, would give credence to predictive prophecy had it been written earlier. Porphyry's criticism, therefore, was based on his anti-prophetic philosophical presuppositions.

Porphyry's theory met with little favor from the outset. It was refuted before the time of Jerome by Methodius, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Apollinarius, and appeared to have been rejected for all time. However, such was not the case.

Except for the attack of Porphyry, no question was raised concerning the traditional sixth century B.C. date of Daniel until the rise of higher criticism in the seventeenth century—more than two thousand years after the book was written (see Walvoord, 1971, p. 11). The German literary critical movement be-

gan to advance Porphyry's supposition that the book contained no predictive element, despite the arguments of various conservative scholars. R.K. Harrison stated:

Objections to the historicity of Daniel were copied uncritically from book to book, and by the second decade of the twentieth century no scholar of general liberal background who wished to preserve his academic reputation either dared or desired to challenge the current critical trend (1969, p. 1111).

Arguing against the conservative view, Otto Eissfeldt stated that the more liberal approach became the "assured position of scholarship" (1966, p. 517). Edward J. Young observed that "It is probably not an exaggeration to say that most scholars now believe that the book of Daniel, as we have it, comes from the days of the Maccabees" (1949, p. 25). Despite the insistence of modern critical scholarship for a late date, able and learned men still advocate the conservative view. Interestingly, the critical scholars' tendency to admit the antiquity of some of the underlying material of the book actually has strengthened the conservatives' position.

The issue surrounding the date of Daniel is of importance for at least three reasons. First, the sovereignty of God as revealed in the book becomes a matter for consideration. If Daniel's God is able to predict the future, then there is adequate reason to believe that men today similarly live under the sovereignty of that same God. On the other hand, if the predictions are fraudulent, then men must remain, at best, agnostic in regard to their position about Daniel's God. Second, the divine inspiration of the Bible also becomes a matter for consideration. If the book contains accurate predictions, then there is good reason to believe that ultimately it owes its origin to God. However, if Daniel is viewed as a spurious and fraudulent literary work, then the reliability of other books in the canon of Scripture legitimately may be called into question as well. Third, understanding the nature of Jesus Christ depends on the answer to the date of the book, since Jesus Himself regarded the book of Daniel as a prophetic preview of future history (cf. Matthew 24:15-16, Mark 13:14, Luke 21:20). If Christ was wrong in His appraisal, then He must be less than the omniscient and sinless Son of God. But if His appraisal is correct, then His claim to deity cannot be refuted successfully.

The book can be dated by a number of widely accepted methods, including manuscript evidence, historical accuracy, and linguistic character. In discussing the latter, S.R. Driver stated:

The Persian words **presuppose** a period after the Persian Empire had been well established; the Greek words **demand**, the Hebrew **supports**, and the Aramaic **permits**, a date after the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great (332 B.C.) [1956, p. 508, emp. in orig.].

As we consider these matters from a linguistic standpoint, I shall present a number of theories that advocate a late date for the authorship of Daniel. These will be followed by negative arguments in substantiation of an early date for the book.

### PERSIAN LOAN WORDS

According to Driver, the use of fifteen Persian words to describe government officials under the Babylonians before the conquest of Cyrus shows that Daniel was written in a period after the Persian Empire had been well established (1956, p. 501). In reply to this suggestion, however, it should be noted that Daniel lived in the early years of the Persian Empire, and served as one of its officials. Thus, he would have been familiar with such political terms, having used them to describe the officials and to make them understandable to the people living after Persia conquered Babylon (see Walvoord, 1971, p. 29). These words naturally would have been used to refer to a new government. In addition, many words that formerly were considered Persian words are now known to be Babylonian words (see Wilson, 1939, p. 785).

The Aramaic documents in the book of Ezra (4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26) certainly are considered genuine. In fact, W.O.E. Oesterley spoke of Ezra 4:8 to 6:18 as being an “extract from an Aramaic document” (n.d., p. 327), and went on to suggest:

In so far as these sources [those from which the earlier parts of Ezra and Nehemiah are drawn—WDJ] are brought into connection with the names of Persian kings, and assuming that this is correctly done, the dates of the kings in question will, of course, be the approximate dates of those parts of the book. ...the earliest portion will belong to the time of Cyrus, about 537, while the latest parts...cannot have been written later than the end of the reign of Artaxerxes, about 424 (n.d., p. 325).

If part of the Aramaic is possibly of as early a date as 537 B.C., then surely the Aramaic of Daniel could be as early as 530 B.C. It is significant that those Aramaic sections of Ezra admitted to be long before Alexander’s time (332 B.C.)—to say nothing of the date commonly accepted by the higher critics for the composition of Daniel (ca. 167-165 B.C.)—contain **more** Persian words, comparatively speaking, than does Daniel. If Daniel had been written in Alexandrian times in Palestine, likely it would have contained

a much larger Persian element than the Aramaic of Ezra because of the long, continued influence of the Persian language.

It has been assumed that Persian words could not have been used in Babylon until a considerable time had elapsed after the Persian supremacy had been established in the city. Such a theory, however, is by no means certain. Kenneth A. Kitchen concluded that the Persian loan words in Daniel are consistent with an earlier, rather than a later, date, and based his conclusion on at least three lines of evidence. First, he noted that it need not be as surprising as S.R. Driver supposed that Persian words should be used of Babylonian institutions prior to the conquest of Cyrus, since the work was written in the Persian rather than the Neo-Babylonian period. After considering the scope of Persian words borrowed into Aramaic during the Persian Empire, he concluded: "The almost unconscious assumption that Persian words would take time to penetrate into Aramaic (i.e., well after 539 B.C.) is erroneous" (1965, p. 41). He went on to note:

...if a putative Daniel in Babylon under the Persians (and who had briefly served them) were to write a book some time after the third year of Cyrus (Daniel 10:1), then a series of Persian words is no surprise. Such a person in the position of close contact with the Persian administration that is accorded to him in the book would have to acquire—and use in his Aramaic—many terms and words from his new Persian colleagues (just like the Elamite scribes of Persepolis), from the conquest of Cyrus onwards (1965, pp. 41-42).

Second, Kitchen observed that in four of the fifteen words in question, the old Greek renderings, made about 100 B.C., are mere guesswork. He reasoned:

If the first important Greek translation of Daniel was made sometime within 100 B.C. to A.D. 100, roughly speaking, and the translator could not (or took no trouble to) reproduce the proper meaning of these terms, then one conclusion imposes itself: their meaning was already lost and forgotten (or, at least, drastically changed) long before he set to work. Now if Daniel were wholly a product of 165 B.C., then just a century or so in a continuous tradition is surely embarrassingly inadequate as a sufficient interval for that loss (or change) of meaning to occur by Near Eastern standards (1965, p. 43).

Third, in the interest of objectivity, Kitchen noted that the Persian terms found in Daniel are specifically old Persian words; that is, they occurred within the history of the language to about 300 B.C. (1965, pp. 43-44).

## GREEK WORDS

Driver concluded that the presence of three Greek names for musical instruments—*kitharis*, *psalterion*, and *symphonia*—gives credence to a late date (1956, p. 501). By way of reply, it should be noted that Greek traders and mercenaries were familiar sites in Egypt and throughout Western Asia from the seventh century on, if not earlier (see Albright, 1957, p. 337). A Greek coin, the *drachma* is mentioned in Ezra 2:69 and Nehemiah 7:70,72 as having been used in Persian times. Additionally, archaeologists have found much evidence of the early spread of Greek influence (see Harris, 1969, p. 149).

The Greek culture penetrated the Near East long before the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Actually, as is evident from archaeological discoveries, there was not a century of the Iron Age during which objects of Greek origin—mostly ceramic in nature—were not being brought into Syria and Palestine. In fact, as early as the sixth century B.C., the coasts of Syria and Palestine were dotted with Greek ports and trading emporia.

There are numerous considerations that assure the possibility of the use of Greek musical instruments at Babylon in the sixth century B.C., including the following: Greek inscriptions of Abu Simbal in Upper Egypt (dating from the time of Palmtek II in the early part of the sixth century B.C.); the Minoan inscriptions and ruins in Crete; the revelations of the wide commercial relations of the Phoenicians in the early part of the first millennium B.C.; the lately published inscriptions of Sennacherib regarding his campaigns in Cilicia against the Greek seafarers (telling about having carried Greek captives to Nineveh about 700 B.C.) to which Alexander Polyhistor and Abydenus both referred; and, the confirmation of the wealth and expensive ceremonies of Nebuchadnezzar (made possible by the discovery of his own building habits and other inscriptions) [see Wilson, 1939, p. 785].

The term *kitharis* was used in the epic poetry of Homer (Iliad III, 54; XIII, 731; Odyssey I, 153; VIII, 248) long before Daniel's time (see Tisdall, 1921, p. 208). It does not seem unlikely that, if **one** Greek musical instrument had become known in Babylonia before Daniel's time, two others should have been introduced also, especially as the names of other instruments mentioned in the same connection were known not long afterwards in Greece. In fact, it would be extremely unusual if a few Greek words did not

find their way into, not the cultivated Babylonian vernacular, but the colloquial Aramaic (the *lingua franca* of the business community of the Babylonian Jews in the sixth century B.C.). In reference to this issue, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. has written:

Actually the argument based upon the presence of Greek words turns out to be one of the most compelling evidences of all that Daniel could not have been composed as late as the Greek period. By 170 B.C. a Greek-speaking government had been in control of Palestine for 160 years, and Greek political or administrative terms would surely have found their way into the language of the subject populace (1964, p. 388).

As early as the reign of Sargon (722-705 B.C.) there were, according to the Assyrian records, Greek captives who were sold into slavery from Cyprus, Ionia, Lydia, and Cilicia. The Greek poet Alcaeus of Lesbos (600 B.C.) mentioned his brother Antimenidas serving in the Babylonian army. Thus, it is evident that Greek musical instruments were in use in the Semitic Near East long before the time of Daniel (see Archer, 1964, p. 387). The name of such instruments usually does not change from nation to nation. So, it is not unusual that the instruments that are mentioned in Daniel 3:5 should keep their Greek name (see McGarvey, 1956, pp. 259-260). Furthermore, if the Jews were required to furnish music (see Psalm 137:3), it would not be incredible to assume that Greeks from Cyprus, Ionia, Lydia, and Cilicia were required to do the same (see Unger, 1951, p. 399). R.K. Harrison has observed that the instruments under consideration were of Mesopotamian origin (1969, p. 1126).

The claim that the Greek musical terms in Daniel give credence to a late date cannot be defended successfully. Greek words now are authenticated in the Aramaic documents of Elephantine dated to the fifth century B.C. For example, one document refers to a "starter" as the *ksp jwn*, meaning "silver of Greece." Jacob Rabinowitz suggested that three other words possibly are Greek words in the Elephantine Papyri (1958, pp. 76-82). J.A. Montgomery recognized the weakness of Driver's view when he wrote: "The rebuttal of this evidence for a low date lies in stressing the potentialities of Greek influence in the Orient from the sixth century and onward" (1927, p. 22). Archaeologist Edwin Yamauchi demonstrated this in convincing fashion in his work, and concluded: "The only element of surprise to this writer is that there are not more Greek words in such documents" (1967, p. 94).

## THE ARAMAIC OF DANIEL

Driver believed that the Aramaic of Daniel was a Western dialect spoken around Palestine from the third century B.C. to the second century A.D. (1956, pp. 502-503). In reference to this view, R.H. Charles observed that recent discoveries of fifth century B.C. Aramaic documents have shown that Daniel, like Ezra, was written in a form of Imperial Aramaic. From existing documents and inscriptions, the differentiation of the language into Eastern and Western cannot be established before the first century B.C., if that early (see Charles, 1929, p. 24). The Aramaic portions of the book may have been revised in spellings and endings, in order to conform to the current usage, as late as the second century B.C. (see Leupold, 1949, p. 32). It should be noted as well that the Ras Shamra text of the fifteenth century has an Aramaic peculiarity (see Freeman, 1968, pp. 269-270).

In addition, the studies of Franz Rosenthal have shown that the kind of Aramaic that Daniel used was that which was present in the "courts" from the seventh century on, and subsequently became widespread in the Near East (1939, pp. 66ff.). Therefore, it cannot be employed as evidence for a late date of the book, and, in fact, constitutes a strong argument for a sixth century B.C. period of writing. It also is important to note that there are similarities between the Aramaic in the Elephantine Papyri and that in Daniel (see Archer, 1964, p. 389). This Aramaic differs materially from the prevailing dialect of the later Chaldean paraphrases of the Old Testament, and has much more relation to the idiom of the book of Ezra (see McClintock and Strong, 1968, 2:669).

Kitchen not only concluded that the Aramaic sections of Daniel 2:4b-7:28 are by nature closely related to the language of the fifth-century-B.C. Elephantine Papyri, but also to that of Ezra about 450 B.C. (1965, pp. 31-79). In commenting on these linguistic peculiarities, E.Y. Kutscher remarked:

With regard to Biblical Aramaic, which in word order and other traits is of the Eastern type (i.e., freer and more flexible in word order) and has scarcely any Western characteristics at all, it is plausible to conclude that it originated in the East. A final verdict on this matter, however, must await the publication of all the Aramaic texts from Qumran (1957, p. 338).

While the Aramaic of Daniel fits into the period of official Aramaic, it does not agree completely with the Aramaic of the *Genesis Apocryphon* discovered in Qumran Cave One and dated in the first cen-

ture B.C. From the standpoint of spelling, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, now it is possible to determine within quite narrow limits what would have been likely or possible in 168 B.C., so far as literary Aramaic is concerned. Archer, after having made a detailed linguistic analysis of the five columns of the text, concluded: "...it may be said that the *Genesis Apocryphon* furnishes very powerful evidence that the Aramaic of Daniel comes from a considerably earlier period than the second century B.C." (1970a, p. 169).

Some critics affirm that the occurrence of the word "Aramaic" in Daniel 2:4 implies that the writer of the book was of the opinion that Aramaic was then the vernacular of Babylon. This is an impossible explanation of the word, for, even about 167-165 B.C. (the supposed date of the book according to the higher critical hypothesis), the Babylonian tongue still was spoken there, and any Palestinian forger would have had knowledge of this fact.

#### **THE HEBREW OF DANIEL**

It has been asserted by Driver that the Hebrew of Daniel resembles the Hebrew of a later date (1956, pp. 504-505). Archer has replied to this, and indicated that in the sectarian documents of the Qumran material, which is later, there is no similarity in syntax or in style of expression to that of the Hebrew found in Daniel (1964, p. 391).

The author of Daniel must have been equally conversant in both Hebrew and Aramaic—an attainment perfectly suited to a Hebrew living in the exile, but not in the least to an author living in the Maccabean age, when the Hebrew had long since ceased to be a living language and had been supplanted by the Aramean vernacular dialect. Moreover, the Hebrew in Daniel bears a great affinity to that in the other later books of the Old Testament, and in particular has idioms in common with the book of Ezekiel (see McClintock and Strong, 1968, 2:669).

The Hebrew found in the book of Daniel is what one should expect at the age in which Daniel lived. The number of words or idioms peculiar to Daniel suits the age of one who had full mastery of the language. The use of words, which have not lived on in the Aramaic that the Jews cultivated, but that have lived on in the language of Western Syria, belongs to a date when those dialects were more allied than

they came to be, or perhaps before they had yet separated. The proportion of certain idioms (which Daniel had in common with the middle age of Hebrew) to that of the books that historically are of a late period, demonstrates that there is no marked preponderance of either, while there is not one word or idiom that, in the slightest degree, has reference to an age later than that of the prophet (see Pusey, 1885, p. 462).

In endeavoring to justify a date for Daniel that falls after the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great, Driver listed some thirty words that were said to occur never or rarely in the earlier literature (1956, p. 508). To make a plausible case for a late date of Daniel on lexical grounds, it is necessary to show not only that the words or idioms did not occur earlier, but that there was *prima facie* evidence against the possibility of their appearing. There is no intrinsic probability that any of the terms listed could not have been used much earlier. Words that are not recorded in the literary language are to be found in the dialects. In discussing this point, W.J. Martin stated: "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." (1965, p. 30).

In ascribing the Hebrew of Daniel to a later date, the charge has been made that it resembles not the Hebrew of Ezekiel, or even of Haggai or Zechariah, but that of the age "subsequent to Nehemiah." One of the alleged proofs of such a charge is that in Daniel 1:21 and 8:1, the name of the king **precedes** the title. That this order is a proof of lateness is affirmed in the words of Driver: "So often in the post-exilic writings, the older Hebrew has nearly always the order—'the king David'" (1956, p. 506). It is somewhat surprising that Driver would employ this particular testimony to suggest that Daniel did not resemble Haggai or Zechariah, but was "subsequent to Nehemiah," for the books of Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, and Nehemiah each use the same phrase that is produced as evidence that Daniel is later than they. Furthermore, higher critics have not produced a single example from Hebrew literature (i.e., literature that they place in the age subsequent to Nehemiah) to show that the form, "the name of the king precedes the title," was used by the Jews **subsequent** to Nehemiah. The phrase does not occur in Isaiah 24-27; nor does it occur in Jonah, Joel, Ecclesiastes, or in any of the psalms or proverbs (see Wilson, 1959, pp. 96-98).

Conservative scholars object to a word being considered as an evidence of age when no other word in the language could have expressed the exact meaning as well as the one employed. Thus, *gil* in Daniel 1:10 is said to indicate a date in the second century B.C., rather than the sixth. The only reason Driver gave for such a conclusion on his part was that in the use of this word, the Hebrew of Daniel resembles the Hebrew “of the age subsequent to Nehemiah,” since it is used “also in Samaritan and Talmudic” (1956, pp. 506,10). R.D. Wilson has pointed out that it seems strange that it is not found in Ecclesiastes or the Zadokite Fragments—if it characterizes the age “subsequent to Nehemiah.” Also, it would seem to prove that Daniel was written after the Zadokite Fragments (i.e., after A.D. 40) [1959, pp. 127-128].

No doubt some critics will suggest that the writers of these books had no occasion to use the word, since they do not make any reference to a company of men such as Daniel and his three well-known companions. Such a statement would be correct. However, the same is true of all the writers of the other Old Testament books, and Daniel shows his linguistic ability in that, to express a new idea or a concept different from that employed by others, he made use of a different word.

### **THE DIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES**

Joseph D. Wilson affirmed that the diversity of languages points to the fact that Daniel was composed later than the traditional view would allow (n.d., p. 66). In rebuttal to such a view, it may be observed that Ezra employed this same style of writing, and his work is accepted at face value. Furthermore, an Aramaic text also is found in Jeremiah 10:11. Such diversity cannot be maintained on a bilingual argument in view of current information regarding literary patterns of the Near East (see Harrison, 1969, p. 1108). The compilation of works in such bifid form was not uncommon in antiquity. Archaeological research has shown that ancient Mesopotamian writers frequently enclosed the main body of a unified literary work within a linguistic form of a contrasting nature to heighten its general effect. In fact, such is the case in the Code of Hammurabi and in the book of Job (see *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1975, pp. 12-13).

## CONCLUSION

If the book of Daniel were written in the second century B.C., then it follows that Daniel is not its author, and therefore the book purports significant untruths, both implicitly and explicitly.

Jesus regarded the book as having come from Daniel himself (cf. Matthew 24:15, Daniel 9:27, 12:11). Some, of course, have objected to this statement by suggesting that the incarnation of Christ caused Him to have incomplete knowledge on certain “non-essential” points. Thus, it is argued that Christ, lacking any knowledge on the subject, simply followed the then-current tradition.

This theory should be rejected on the grounds that there is no evidence that the incarnation somehow made Christ “ignorant” on what some would style “non-essential” matters. Furthermore, since Christ spoke regarding Daniel, the fact that He, as deity, was omniscient, ensured that He spoke correctly. If the incarnate Son of God endorsed a false view, He is guilty of deception, and is not worthy of occupying the exalted position of sinless Savior.

It is my conviction, because of the linguistic evidence presented here, that the book of Daniel was written about 530 B.C. A later, second-century-B.C. date cannot be defended in view of the available facts. Theories based on languages simply cannot be employed successfully as arguments against the antiquity of the book.

Although the evidence for a sixth century B.C. date of composition certainly is trustworthy, some scholars reject it in favor of a Maccabean hypothesis. Perhaps this is because of the fact that many scholars embrace a liberal, naturalistic, and rationalistic philosophy. Such views obviously will not allow for the supernatural predictions of the book of Daniel. As Archer has observed:

The committed antsupernaturalist, who can only explain the successful predictions of Daniel as prophecies after the fulfillment...is not likely to be swayed by any amount of objective evidence whatever (1970b, p. 297).

I agree with such an assessment, and believe it explains why the late date of the authorship of the book of Daniel has become so popular in certain circles.

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