

Dating the Prophecy of Daniel

In general, scholars find issues with Daniel's historical details, and so they speculate he did not live in the sixth century as the text attests, but rather late in the post-exilic period of the second century. The issues and their mitigation are as follows.

1. The date of Daniel's capture in Scripture works out to be 605BC, but the earliest extra-biblical attestation of Nebuchadnezzar attacking Jerusalem is 597BC. The mitigation for this is that we know Nebuchadnezzar had a campaign against Egypt in 605BC, which had to pass through Judah, and could have involved a hostage deportation from the Jerusalem area. The Babylonian Chronicle attests that after defeating Egypt at Carchemish in 605BC, Nebuchadnezzar took all of the Syria-Palestine area.

2. Reference to Belshazzar as king and son of Nebuchadnezzar, when we know Nabonidus was king and Belshazzar's father is a problem. The mitigation for this is knowing that Nabonidus had handed power over to Belshazzar, and it was not unusual to call Belshazzar "king" in those circumstances. The fact that when Daniel was to be elevated, it was to the third position of authority instead of the second supports this perspective. In the ANE cultures, "son of" could mean "descendent of" or even a "spiritual descendent of."

3. A greater issue is the designation of "Darius, the Mede" and "Darius, the son of Ahasuerus" as the first Persian ruler whom Daniel served, when it is known that the Persian king Cyrus conquered Babylon, and his successor Darius had a son named Ahasuerus, not a father. From an evangelical standpoint, it is impossible to believe that a Jewish author of any period would confuse someone else for Cyrus, who not only liberated the exiled Jews but also was named in Isaiah 45.1. The mitigation is to see that the Bible always stresses the Persian provenance of the Darius who was Cyrus' successor, so Darius the Mede must be someone else. When Cyrus left conquered Babylon to return to Persia, he left in Babylon a Mede named Gubaru as governor. This fellow ruled the Babylonian province as a virtual king under Cyrus' authority, and Daniel – who was in Babylon – might have served him. Perhaps Gubaru took Darius as a throne name; Daniel 9.1 says Darius was "made king," which suggests someone, such as Cyrus, placed him in power. Another possibility is to understand the Hebrew morphology of Daniel 6.29 to read that "Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, even the reign of Cyrus the Persian," though that does not explain the attribution of Mede.

4. There is a find at Qumran called, "Prayer of Nabonidus," which resembles Daniel's account of Nebuchadnezzar's humbling at God's hand. The mitigation for this is to realize it is far more likely that the writer of the Qumran text conflated two chapters of Daniel's story than that Daniel split one secular story into two [as scholars often assume]. Conflation was far more common in the ANE textual histories than division.

5. An ironic issue – considering most of the others involve supposed historical inaccuracies in the text – is Daniel's predictive accuracy. Secular and liberal scholars do not believe in predictive prophecy through revelation. Furthermore, even some more conservative scholars remark on how unusual such detailed predictive prophecies were. The mitigation is first to realize that there is no more basis to assume revelation and predictive prophecy were impossible

than to assume they were possible [the latter supported by the external support for the historicity of the Old Testament text in general]. While the predictive details of Daniel might be unusual, the same argument was used against Isaiah, so it was not that unusual.

6. There is a question as to why Daniel would bother discussing events that would happen centuries later and thus be of no interest to his contemporary audience. The mitigation is to realize there was a need and an interest in what Daniel had to say. Daniel addressed the nature of God's authority in the context of successive Gentile empires dominating the Jews, and addressed the chronological gap that would precede restoration of the Jews from exile and the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. On kingdom issues especially, several other prophets spoke of distant events, not just Daniel.

7. The apocalyptic nature of Daniel is suspect because the apocalyptic genre reached its height in Jewish circles from the second century BC to the second century AD. The mitigation is to realize there were other instances of Jewish apocalyptic type writing which occurred much earlier than the second century, such as Zechariah 8-14. Also, there are Babylonian prophecies of major shifts in kingdoms which are apocalyptic in genre from hundreds of years before Daniel's sixth century date, and Daniel's extensive education and training would have introduced him to these.

8. There are supposed historical inaccuracies in Daniel's prophecy after Antiochus IV's reign, which with the other issues above leads scholars to conclude that Daniel was written in second century BC, accurately to that point but not so as it predicted into the future. There are two possible mitigations to this. One is that the verses summarize actions of Antiochus IV which were already given previously, a not uncommon literary technique. Another is that there is a shift in what Daniel saw from the historical Antiochus IV to a future type of him in a climactic period of history, especially since there is end-time language in the text. We know from the New Testament and the history of the early church period that there were repeated patterns of what Antiochus IV represented to Daniel, particularly Titus in AD70 and the ultimate antichrist of Revelation.