

DANIEL: IMPOSTOR OR PROPHET?

We all know the captivating story of Daniel in the Lion's den. But have you heard the real ending? You think you have, but have I got a surprise for you! It wasn't Daniel's traducers and their wives and children whose bones the lions had for lunch that fateful morning. Rather, according to this modern version, it is Daniel himself who has been gobbled up in the den by modern "scholars" and "commentators". Bit by bit, piece by piece, the man Jesus designated as "Daniel the prophet" (Matt. 24:15) has had the flesh of his prophetic writing clawed away from our precious Scriptures, until all that is left are the bones of an emaciated skeleton, now described by the critics as a "pseudonymous author" who wrote after the event --- what is euphemistically called *ex eventu* prophecy.

According to such modern critical commentary, Daniel wrote his book at the time of the Maccabees around 165 BC, or about 400 years later than the time of the Babylonian exile in 586 BC. Rather than being a first-hand historical account by the eye-witness testimony of a Daniel deported to Babylon from his homeland by king Nebuchadnezzar, this later 'Daniel' wrote from the land of Israel centuries after the event. Allegedly therefore, his "prophecies" are in fact, past history masquerading as prophecy. There is nothing 'supernatural' about this Daniel. We are rather, invited to believe he wrote his book as a "parable" in the form of the genre we find in Jewish apocalyptic literature typically composed during the Maccabean revolts. For some people Daniel got too much right to be taken seriously!

However, (we are further assured by this critical commentary) we are not to be alarmed. The aim of this later 'Daniel', like that of the rest of that crop of inter-testament writers was worthy enough. The writers of those books such as *1 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, *4 Enoch*, *et al* wished to encourage God's suffering people with the message that their God would at last break the heathen nations and so give His saints their

reward. To achieve their literary goal such apocalyptic writers simply looked back at the previous histories of their people, and re-interpreted that past history in the light of their current sufferings, even passing off such history as prophecy.

Popular since the late 18th Century, these modern scholars who essentially reject the possibility of real prophecy and who deny the supernatural, have justified their arguments under four headings. They allege Daniel has historical inaccuracies, or possibly more fairly, anachronisms. They allege linguistic irreconcilables (e.g. Daniel uses some Greek words (1) and wrote in a later Hebrew and Aramaic style). They allege doctrinal aberrations, and relevant to this brief article, they allege prophetic improbabilities. Such is the modern spin.

Did I say modern? Woops. It's really an old re-run first proposed by a critic by the name of Porphyry who was born in A.D. 233 in Tyre, Syria. Porphyry was a disciple of the famous Neo-Platonic philosopher Plotinus. He was a bitter opponent of Christianity and wrote fifteen books titled *Against the Christians*. As far as I can tell, Porphyry was the first critic who alleged Daniel's book was not prophecy, and was not written by Daniel, but was composed around the time of the Maccabean revolt. He tried to suck all the prophetic wind out of "Daniel the prophet" by indicting his book as spurious. Now, I can excuse Porphyry because he was an avowed and hostile skeptic. His aim was to discredit Christianity. He unashamedly hated Christianity. But I cannot excuse those today who say they speak for Christ while adopting Porphyry's exact same methods to cast doubt on what was clearly a book that Jesus himself read and loved and implicitly believed.

Reason Versus Revelation.

So, what shall we say to this? The first thing you may ask is, "So what? What relevance does this question have for my life in the 21st Century? Let the academics argue over the question as to whether

Daniel was an imposter or a prophet. Let's talk about more important matters!"

I would answer that there is no more important question for us as Christians for the precise reason that our Christian faith from start to finish claims to be supernatural in origin. Take away from Christianity the basis that there is a Living God in heaven who spoke and still speaks to the world through prophetic and supernatural revelation, then you have no Bible Christianity. After all, a Christian by definition is one who believes Jesus Christ is the one whose coming was announced, in minute detail by God through the Jewish prophets, hundreds and hundreds of years before-hand. (For example, in Daniel chapter 9: 20f the exact year Messiah would be crucified is accurately predicted, which means that even *if* a spurious Daniel wrote about 165 BC we have a startling example of fulfilled prophecy!) It is axiomatic then, that a Christian believes in the phenomenon of supernatural inspiration. The Bible claims to know the future before it happens!

In recent years the New Atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Carl Sagan and their ilk have launched an aggressive attack on whether faith in God --- and in particular faith in the God of the Bible --- is all just pure humbug. Richard Dawkins is evangelical in his belief that to believe in miracles, such as the virgin birth, the resurrection of Jesus, or the supernatural inspiration of the Scriptures, is to believe in fairy tales. For his school the only world that exists is our natural world, the world of empirically observable science.

Now I can live with those who wish to differ with my own Christian world-view, even though I think they are not prepared to look at the evidence. However, these New Atheists increasingly regard my faith as an enemy of the state. They regard any belief in Biblical Christianity a threat to social cohesion and indeed, human freedom. John Lennox reports that at a conference at the Salk Institute of

Biological Sciences in La Jolla, California, in November 1994, Nobel Laureate Steven Weinberg suggested ominously that the best contribution that scientists could make in this generation was the complete elimination of religion. (2)

And there's the rub. The book of Daniel the prophet is so accurate in its outlining of events relating to Israel and Jerusalem, the arrival and crucifixion of the Messiah, and the flow of world governments right up to the very end of this age when Christ returns to set up God's One World Government with His people. For the Christian, God predicts history because it's His story!

Ah, our skeptics and New Atheists will howl in derision at this last statement. They flatly deny any supernatural realm having anything to do with this world. And certainly they mock any thought of angels and demons behind the scenes as Daniel portrays. Allow me to borrow Lennox again for he says that such laughter strikes him as decidedly out of place:

“If any scientist announces with confidence that there is life elsewhere in the universe – or, as is very likely these days, that there is a multiverse; a plurality of universes, many of which are teeming with life – there is no derision, but rather fascinated and respectful attention. Yet when the Bible suggests that this may not be the only world (or universe), and there are other beings ‘out there’, it gets laughed to scorn. This is intellectually inconsistent, and simply shows the depth of prejudice that the naturalistic world-view has generated.” (3)

Bravo Mr. Lennox! The Christian sees no contradiction between faith and reason. In fact, the Bible does not ask us to believe anything not verifiable nor reasonable. Faith is not a blind leap into the dark hoping something is there. A Christian believes that as well as earth there is evidence for heaven, as well as the natural world there is the supernatural. And that is why the book of Daniel is so pilloried and mocked. Daniel claims to know the God of heaven who holds the

future in His hands. So, is this a reasonable proposition?

It is fascinating to note that Daniel faced his own Richard Dawkins long before these New Atheists came along. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, challenged the intelligentsia of his court not only to come up with an interpretation for his scary dream, but to also to come up with what the dream itself was. Whew. This was way too big an ask for anybody operating within a closed system of cause and effect. “No, oh king!” they protested and howled, *‘first you tell us the dream and then we will give the interpretation.’* But Nebuchadnezzar saw through their bankruptcy. If they could not tell him the dream they would die. And so these astrologers, wise men and magicians, were forced into the embarrassing position of admitting they were clueless and had no access to the world of their *imagined* gods. They could only operate on one level, the natural world of reason.

But what made Daniel’s faith and Daniel’s God different? Isn’t the God of the Bible just one more god on top of all the others, just a figment of fertile imagination? Ah, this is where we can test the claim through honest weighing of the facts. In Daniel’s case he comes before the king not only with the content of his dream, but also the interpretation. Daniel illustrates the relationship between reason and revelation. I like the way John Lennox puts this:

“Atheist thinkers often pit these against each other, as if revelation was anti-reason. Our story here shows that this is false. Reason and revelation are not even in the same category. Think of it on the human level first of all. The Babylonian advisors were prepared to use their reason on any data presented to them. Their problem was that Nebuchadnezzar was not prepared to reveal to them what he had dreamed. If he had been prepared to reveal it to them they would not have abandoned their reason; but they would have used it on the new data (the content of the dream as *revealed* to them by Nebuchadnezzar) in order to try to interpret it. In the very

nature of the situation, however, their unaided reason could not produce the data. Only revelation by the emperor could do that.

“At this juncture Daniel stepped in. He knew that Nebuchadnezzar was not prepared to reveal the content of the dream. But Daniel believed that there was a God who knew not only the content of the dream but its meaning. He also believed that, if he so desired, God could reveal that information to him. So now the story advances the concept of revelation one level deeper. It is not human revelation now, but divine.

“However, the same principle applies. When God revealed the matter to Daniel this did not suspend his use of reason. Daniel had to use his reason to understand the words God said to him, and to formulate his response to Nebuchadnezzar. In turn the emperor had to use his reason to grasp that Daniel not only knew the content of the dream, but that his interpretation made sense.

“These distinctions are so important that it is worth illustrating them further. When a crime is committed Hercule Poirot investigates the crime scene and uses his ‘little grey cells’ on what he sees. But an equally (if not more) important part of his inquiry consists in talking to people. There he is dependent on what they are prepared to reveal to him. If they do not speak, he will not know. If they speak, he will again use his little grey cells to process what they say. It is perfectly obvious that reason operates in both situations, even though in the second situation reason must be assisted by revelation; and revelation produces information that unaided reason cannot access. To say that reason and revelation are antithetical does not even rise to the dignity of being false. It simply doesn’t make sense – it is a confusion of categories, as the philosophers say.

“It is possible, however, that when the skeptics say that reason and revelation are antithetical, what they actually mean is that there is no reason to believe in revelation. Our story says

otherwise. When Daniel related the content of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar in all of its detail, Nebuchadnezzar had all the evidence he needed to believe in revelation. That belief was warranted, since there was no way, apart from divine revelation, that Daniel could have known what thoughts had gone through the king's mind while he dreamed. Nebuchadnezzar now had strong reason to take seriously the claim that God had given Daniel the interpretation. But that did not mean that Nebuchadnezzar would be uncritical – he would also use his reason to see if the proffered interpretation made sense. And so can we, since the whole account lies before us.” (4)

So the question is important and determines our whole world-view. To have faith in the Bible's claim to supernatural revelation is surely reasonable. Does the evidence stack up? Is Daniel an imposter or a prophet of God? Was Daniel pretending to be contemporary with the events of the Babylonian exile yet all the while writing roughly just one-and-a-half centuries before Christ during the days of the Maccabees? There is no space here to address in detail such weighty issues. But let us note a few pertinent points briefly.

Daniel is in the Canon of Old Testament Scripture.

First, the book of Daniel has always been included in the Hebrew canon of Scripture. Whether the book was originally in the section called 'The Prophets' or 'The Writings' is irrelevant. After the debate is over, nobody will disagree the book *was* included in the Sacred Canon of the Hebrew Bible, and has always been so fixed.

Other very noble books are not included; books such as *1 Maccabees* or *Ecclesiasticus*. These two works for example, were highly regarded by the Jews of the time, but are not in the canon, nor considered to be Divinely inspired. The reason is the Ancient Synagogue believed that after the prophet Malachi there was no prophetic voice for 400 years until the voice of John the Baptist. This is to say, those who allege Daniel was an imposter writing around 165 BC want us to believe the

book of Daniel was smuggled into the canon by the very men who knew Nehemiah and Malachi were the last true prophets of the Old Testament era; by the very men who revered their holy Scriptures as Divinely inspired and dared not tamper with them.

A recurring sadness in *1 Maccabees* is that “there is no prophet in the land”! The dying priest Mattathias in *1 Maccabees 2:49-70* used the example of Daniel and his three companions to rally his sons to be found faithful to the God of Israel. He appealed to the voice of a past prophet because at that time there was no living “Daniel the prophet” in the land. Bottom line: If Daniel was written in the inter-testament period he was “no prophet”! The fact is he was a prophet because he wrote and spoke before God silenced His prophets in the 400 years leading up to John the Baptist’s grand announcement in the wilderness. (5)

A leading authority on the Dead Sea Scrolls writes:

“Inasmuch as Daniel was already cononical at Qumran at about 100 BC, how could it have become so quickly canonical if it had just been produced a mere half century before? While we do not know exactly how long it took for books to become canonical, it may be surmised that insofar as Daniel was reckoned to belong to the canonical books, it had a longer existence than a mere five decades, as the Maccabean dating hypothesis suggests. Both the canonical status and the fact that Daniel was considered a ‘prophet’ speak for the antiquity of the book of Daniel. An existence of a mere five decades between the production of a Biblical book in its final form and cononization does not seem reasonable.” (6)

Another authority notes that the second-century dating of the book of Daniel was:

“Absolutely precluded by the evidence from Qumran ... because there would have been insufficient time for Maccabean

compositions to be circulated, venerated, and accepted as canonical Scripture by a Maccabean sect ... there can no longer be any possible reason for considering the book as a Maccabean product.” (7)

And John Lennox confirms that:

“The most recent publications of Daniel manuscripts confirm this conclusion.” (8)

Daniel is in the Septuagint.

Second, every Bible student knows the Septuagint, the LXX, (the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible) was translated around the years 300 to 250 BC, during the years of the Egyptian Ptolemies. And guess what? The book of Daniel that you and I read today was and is there in the Septuagint! If you are following the maths you will know that 250 B.C. is chronologically prior to 165 BC.

Josephus and Alexander the Great.

Thirdly, and to follow on, I have always loved the story of Alexander the Great as recounted by Josephus (who wrote about 80 A.D.). In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, chapter 8 Josephus tells us a gripping story how during the siege of Tyre the great Greek conqueror asked the Jews for provisions for his army. Jaddua, the high priest, refused Alexander’s request. The reason he gave was that the Jews had sworn allegiance to the Persian king, Darius. Once Alexander had overcome Tyre, he furiously marched on Jerusalem to teach the Jews a lesson. Alexander would do to Jerusalem what he had done to every other city-state that had dared oppose him ... raze it.

Josephus says Jaddua the high priest had been told by God in a dream what the Jews must do. All the priests dressed in white. Jaddua put on his high priestly garb, a scarlet robe, the breastplate and the golden mitre. Followed by the procession of the priests in white, and singing the songs of Zion, the Jews went out to greet Alexander on his

white steed with his fierce and unstoppable army. According to Josephus, Jaddua showed Alexander the prophecies of Daniel, as read in chapter 8: 1-8 and 15-22. These are passages that prophesied of Alexander's arrival and invincibility on the world stage.

Apparently, Alexander was so overcome by the accuracy of the Danielic prophecy that he offered sacrifices and worshipped the God of the Jews. The salient point is that this happened around 330 B.C. The critics of course, at least are consistent when they dismiss Josephus' account as being that of a lying historian who also wrote after the event.

The indisputable fact however, remains: Alexander destroyed every city in Syria allied to Darius, with the sole exception of Jerusalem. Indeed, Alexander not only spared Jerusalem and its Temple, but highly favoured it. Why? Well, make up your own mind. Josephus informs us of a very reasonable explanation: The impression made upon him by the reading of Daniel the prophet. Alexander was "floored" as he realised he was the star of this supernatural prediction written generations before his arrival!

Internal Linguistic Confirmation.

Fourth, when the Dead Sea scrolls came to light in 1947 we learned the Qumran community had in their possession many ancient texts and fragments of the Hebrew prophetic Scriptures. Included in this treasured cache were fragments of the books of the prophet Isaiah and Daniel, amongst others. W.A. Criswell comments:

"The scrolls of Daniel date back practically to the time the critics say that Daniel was forged. The scrolls of Daniel ... are written partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic, and the Aramaic is not at all the Aramaic of the other documents of the Maccabean period, but the eastern Aramaic of the sixth century BC. Where the Bible is, where Isaiah is, there Daniel is. And the Hebrew language of Daniel in the Qumran

Scrolls is the good, classical, Biblical Hebrew of the Old Testament, not the Hebrew of the Maccabean period.” (9)

On purely linguistic grounds, we know the former portion of Daniel (2:4-7:28) is written in Aramaic (or Chaldee), while the latter portion (8:1-12:13) is written in Hebrew. I understand the linguistic situation during the Babylonian Exile to be thusly: In Hezekiah’s day (604 BC) Syriac (or Aramaic) was not understood by the Jews (e.g. 2 Kings 18:26), but after the Exile in Ezra’s day (426 BC) Hebrew had been so far forgotten that it had to be explained (Neh. 8:8). In Daniel’s day (495BC) both languages were generally understood, and both could be and were thus used by him. So, if an ‘impostor’ had written the book in Hebrew some 250 years later why should he have defeated his own object by writing any portion in Aramaic as well, thus proving himself to be a fool as well as a forger?

Critics have pointed out that the NT book of Jude cites 1 Enoch and that the first Christians read pseudonymous books. True, and this was common practice. For example, Paul cites pagan poets and common pagan sayings to bring his Christian gospel into the public arena. This was part of the apostolic apologetics. It does not prove that Paul believed in “an Unknown god” when he mentions him in Acts 17 though! Nor should Jude citing pseudonymous authors mean he *ipso facto* believed the contents of 1 Enoch to be inspired either. But of one thing I am sure, Jude’s epistle is inspired commentary but 1 Enoch is not. And Jude’s statement is true, regardless of his source, and that is why it is canonical.

On purely linguistic grounds Daniel was composed hundreds of years before modern commentators want us to believe it was composed. The real “Daniel the prophet” prophesied hundreds of years *before* the Maccabees. The real “Daniel the prophet” supernaturally revealed God’s decreed future *before* the events came to pass in history. Daniel passes the test God sets for being a genuine prophet.

Daniel is Ezekiel's Hero!

Fifth, consider this. The prophet Ezekiel in chapter 14:14,20 and in chapter 28:3 mentions a certain Daniel alongside two other great heroes of the Hebrew Bible... Noah and Job. Critics have been quick to dismiss Ezekiel's reference by saying Ezekiel does not refer to the Daniel of the Book of Daniel. Supposedly the Hebrew name for Daniel in the Ezekiel passages is not the same (i.e. Dan'el), so is from the story in the Tale of Aqhat. This is desperate in light of the facts...

The father of Aqhat was this Canaanite by the name of Dan'el who lived about 1400BC. This Dan'el is presented in Ugaritic literature as being wise and just in judgment to the fatherless and the widow. He thus became a legend and so was supposedly named in Ezekiel alongside Noah and Job. Once slight problem: If you know anything about this Ugaritic legend you will know that this Dan'el prays to Baal! He eats his meal in the house of Baal. This Dan'el also sets up a stele to his ancestral gods. He offers oblations to these gods. And furthermore, this Dan'el curses in revenge and mourns with no hope in the Living God! So how can we possibly say Ezekiel's Daniel is the same person? Ezekiel holds his Daniel up as a shining example of righteousness and faith. Ezekiel's Daniel is a paragon of faithfulness to the God of the Jews, Jehovah. Is it imaginable that Ezekiel would hold up such a dubious Dan'el to inspire the Jews suffering at the time of the Maccabees?

Remember that Ezekiel wrote at the time of the Babylonian Exile and was a contemporary with Daniel. He calls this Daniel "righteous" and "wise". I hardly think God would call a man writing in 165 BC pretending to be His prophet (but actually looking back *ex eventu* and interpreting retrospectively) either righteous or wise. No! Ezekiel's Daniel is famous for his holiness and wisdom in the same league as Noah and Job. Ezekiel testifies of a Daniel who is a true hero like the one I read of in my Bible today.

“Me Daniel”.

Sixth, let us consider this: The writer of Daniel in my Bible testifies that he is a “seer”, that is, a prophet and that the LORD God appeared to him in visions, spoke to him through angelic messengers, and by other means. For instance in Daniel 8: 1 he testifies, “... a vision appeared unto me, even unto **me Daniel**, after that which appeared unto me at the first.” We are specifically told by this “me Daniel” the precise years he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams ... “Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams ... “ (Dan. 2:1). Daniel testifies not only that God told him the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream but that he stood before the king and revealed its meaning during that king’s second year on his throne. Also in Daniel 7:1 we read, “In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed ...” Then in Daniel chapter 8 Daniel’s solemn statement again reads, “In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel ...” Our choice is this: Either Daniel is who he claims to be and is telling the truth when he dates these visions and their inspired interpretations, or he is an imposter.

The idea that the book of Daniel is of the same genre as the other inter-testament writings is false for the reasons outlined above. In fact, Daniel is the prototype! Daniel is the first, (and the only) genuine apocalypse in the Hebrew Bible. All later apocalyptic writers subsequently model themselves on the original prophet Daniel of the Babylonian exile!

Jesus Believed “Daniel the Prophet”.

Finally, the Lord Jesus calls Daniel “the prophet” (Matt. 24:15). Jesus did not say, “Daniel the Pretender”! He did not nominate him, “Daniel the parable man!” He did not say “Daniel the historian,” as though he merely was a commentator who looked back over his shoulder to his predecessors. No! Our Lord Jesus himself believed the Spirit of

prophecy testified through Daniel. Jesus believed Daniel's "Son of Man" was a prophecy that had looked forward to his own appearance on the world's stage! And looking even further ahead, Jesus believed Daniel prophesied events still in our future, namely the coming Great Tribulation and the Anti-Christ and the fearful persecution to be unleashed on those living in Judea at the end of this Age.

Conclusion.

The critics and the skeptics reject the book of Daniel because of its uncanny prophetic accuracy. Many of Daniel's prophecies have been fulfilled to the minutest degree. Some await a still future fulfillment. There is no denying this evidence. Based on his proven track record Daniel gives us solid reason to take him seriously about world events soon to transpire.

To write Daniel off as a genuine eye-witness to the historical events listed in the book that bears his name, to write Daniel off as a genuine prophet to whom the LORD God revealed in remarkable detail the future events from Babylon onwards to the very consummation of this present Evil Age, is to threaten the whole fabric of Jesus, his apostles and indeed, the Scriptures themselves. It is to fatally rewrite the story. It is to see Daniel swallowed by his critics!

So, who among us will be as noble as the anxious king of the Medes and the Persians whose sleep deserted him as Daniel spent the night in the lions' den? Will we not be as concerned as the king of that vast empire for Daniel's integrity, when he fasted the night, refusing to be distracted by any light-hearted entertainment, and who before the sun arose in the morning rushed off in his pyjamas to enquire after Daniel (Dan. 6: 18-19), "Has your God whom you served been able to deliver you from the lions" (V. 20)? I have a hunch the living God will yet send His angel to stop all contrary mouths and vindicate "Daniel the prophet" in a Day near at hand. May Daniel's God be our God!

FOOTNOTES

1. There are 3 Greek words. They are the names of musical instruments. But this is not any more a problem than our words 'piano' or 'viola' are Italian, which only proves the names of the instruments carry their original names when they cross countries and cultures!
2. Lennox, John. C. *Against the Flow: The Inspiration of Daniel in an Age of Relativism*. Monarch Books. Oxford, U.K. 2015. p. 2.
3. Ibid. p. 320
4. Ibid. p. 95-96
5. There is much debate on when and which books of the Prophets and Writings were translated and included in the OT canon. Critics believe that since the Writings were collected after the prophetic canon was closed, Daniel could not have been therefore written in the 6th Century BC. This assumption is flawed. A number of Psalms and Proverbs were composed between ca. 1020 and 950 BC. The events of the book of Job probably occurred in the days of Abraham. Therefore finding Daniel among the Writings does not require a late date for composition. (There is the possibility that the Masoretes may have moved Daniel from the Prophets to the Writings since much of the book is history and because Daniel was not a commissioned Prophet to a certain people.) Surely the much easier to believe is that since I Maccabees and Baruch quote Daniel that they copied him, which fact in itself proves Daniel was well known in the Jewish community prior to the Second Century BC.
6. Hasel, Gerhard,
<http://www.biblicalarcheology.org/post/2012/07/31>

[/New-Light-on-the-Book-of-Daniel-from-the-Dead-Sea-Scrolls.aspx#Article](#)

7. Harrison, Roland. K. In 'Daniel, Book of", *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979, p. 862.
8. Lennox. Ibid. p.101
9. Criswell, W.A., *Expository Sermons on the Book of Daniel*. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1972. p. 46.