

# WHEN WAS DANIEL WRITTEN?

**DANIEL 1** The dating of Daniel is controversial (see also the book introduction). Traditional scholarship holds that the book was composed in the sixth century B.C., concurrent with the historical information it provides. But common arguments for dating Daniel in the second century B.C. are as follows:

- ◆ Jesus ben Sirach (Sir 44–50),<sup>1</sup> writing in approximately 180 B.C., cited numerous Old Testament heroes—but not Daniel.
- ◆ Belshazzar is called “king” of **Babylon**<sup>2</sup> in Daniel 5; the actual king was Nabonidus.
- ◆ Darius the Mede (ch. 6) is otherwise unknown.
- ◆ The stories of Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity<sup>3</sup> and of the fiery furnace read like pious legends—far-fetched miracle stories common in **intertestamental** Jewish texts.
- ◆ Half of Daniel was written in Aramaic,<sup>4</sup> a language Jews spoke during the **intertestamental period**. Daniel 3 also includes three Greek words—suggesting that the book was written after Greek culture had invaded the Near East.
- ◆ But this evidence is not as strong as it appears:
- ◆ Ben Sirach also omits mention of other famous Israelites, including Ezra. Also, Sirach may himself have been influenced by Daniel. In Sirach 36:10 he prayed, “Hasten the day, and remember the appointed time”—verbiage resembling Daniel 11:27, 35. It may be that ben Sirach offhandedly cited Daniel, which of course implies that the book already existed in his lifetime.
- ◆ The book demonstrates familiarity with the history and culture of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. Daniel rightly portrays the position of Belshazzar, coregent with Nabonidus. He could have appropriately been called “king” (5:1), but in 5:16 Belshazzar offered to make the one who could interpret the writing on the wall “the third highest ruler in the kingdom.” As Belshazzar was himself the second ruler,<sup>5</sup> this was the highest honor he could confer.
- ◆ Darius the Mede is not mentioned by that name outside the Bible.<sup>6</sup> This is the kind of historical puzzle scholars frequently encounter in ancient texts. In contrast, intertestamental Jewish works of religious fiction lack historical credibility in a way that has no parallel in historical works. The Apocryphal book of Judith, for example, written during the reign of Antiochus IV, contains absurd historical blunders and is altogether unlike Daniel.
- ◆ The miracles of Daniel are outside the ability of history or archaeology to prove. Still, the following observations are pertinent: Miracles do not prove that a work is fictional.

Nebuchadnezzar’s madness was a rare but authentic clinical condition called boanthropy. “Made-up” miracle stories contain outrageous elements with no clinical analogy (e.g., in Tb 2:9–10, another Apocryphal book, Tobit goes blind because of sparrow droppings in his eyes).



Basalt stela representing Nabonidus (555–539 B.C.), the last ruler of the Neo-Babylonian Empire

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- ◆ The fact that half of Daniel is written in Aramaic is a mystery with regard to any proposed reconstruction of its history.

But the Aramaic of Daniel is “official,” or “imperial”—the standardized Aramaic used in official correspondence when Aramaic was the lingua franca of the Near East (see 2Ki 18:26; Ezr 4:7; Da 2:4), not the colloquial, regional Aramaic of second-century B.C. Palestine, at which time the common language of the region was Greek.

All three of the Greek words of 3:5 are musical terms. Greek poets and musicians were renowned, so their musical vocabulary came into use early. What would be surprising is how little Greek appears in Daniel, if the book had been written in the second century B.C., when the world was thoroughly **Hellenized**.

The Persian words in Daniel are of an older, pre-Hellenistic Persian.

- ◆ The Dead Sea Scrolls have thrown new light on Daniel. Cave 1 at **Qumran** contained several fragments of the book (1QDan<sup>a-b</sup>) in a script suggesting a second-century B.C. date. Other Daniel fragments from Cave 4 are in a style suggestive of a late **Hasmonean** or early Herodian date. It would be unlikely that such an unusual book, written as late as 165 B.C., would have been so quickly accepted and circulated as authoritative Scripture.

<sup>1</sup>Sirach is an Apocryphal book; see “The Apocrypha” on page 1973. <sup>2</sup>See Glossary on page 2080 for definitions of bolded words. <sup>3</sup>See “Nebuchadnezzar’s Madness” on page 1391. <sup>4</sup>See “Languages of the Old Testament World” on page 672. <sup>5</sup>See “Nabonidus and Belshazzar” on page 1394. <sup>6</sup>See “Darius the Mede” on page 1396.