Introduction

“The Most High Rules Over The Realm Of Mankind”

The 4th chapter of Daniel records how Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, boasted of his many achievements. And there was much he could boast of for he had completed the overthrow of Assyria that his father had begun, fashioning a Babylonian empire that extended throughout the Fertile Crescent. And to top it off, he had fashioned his capital city into one of the marvels of the ancient world. “Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4.30). But the text goes on to state how as soon as Nebuchadnezzar made this boast, he was humbled by Jehovah God and became like one of the beasts of the earth (vss. 31-33). Why was the great king of Babylon humbled in such a way? So that he would “recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.” (Daniel 4.32).

That is the point of the book of Daniel, to show that Jehovah rules over mankind. Interestingly, the idolatry of the Babylonian and then Persian kings is not directly challenged (for the most part), yet the book makes a point of referring to God as “the Most High” (see Daniel 3.26; 4.2,17,24,25,32,34; 5.18,21; 7.25). The theme of God’s supremacy and control is found throughout the narratives of chapters 1-6 as we see God’s faithful ones (Daniel and his three companions) exalted and rescued because Jehovah is greater than world rulers and their gods. It is also found throughout the visions of chapters 7-12 where Daniel is shown just how much upheaval the world would experience with the rise and fall of various empires and the tribulation God’s chosen people would experience. Yet, God’s supremacy is still at the forefront because not only does He know the future, He controls the future to bring about the salvation of all His people.
Date of the book

The book of Daniel claims to be written by a Jewish man named Daniel who was carried into captivity by the Babylonians in 605 BC and would serve Babylonian and Persian rulers until around 535 BC. Note how the author uses first person often in the book (Daniel 7.2,4,6,28; 8.1,15; 9.2; 10.2). Yet, critics have long advocated that the book was written in the 2nd century BC by a contemporary of the Maccabees. Others opt for a hybrid approach, conceding that chapters 1-6 could have been written in the 6th century, but maintaining that chapters 7-12 were written in the 2nd century. However, the evidence favors the "traditional" view that the entirety of the book was written by Daniel in the 6th century (just as it claims). Consider the following:

Daniel’s accuracy as a historian

• Nebuchadnezzar is able to change Babylonian law at will (2.12,46) but Darius is unable to change laws of the Medes-Persians (6.8,12,15).

• Babylonians used fire for capital punishment (3.11) and the Persians used the lion’s den (6.7). Fire was sacred to the Persians and would not be used as a means of punishment (Yamauchi, Persia and the Bible, 447).

• Existence of Belshazzar - If Daniel wrote in the second century BC, he knew something no other historian at that time knew.

Josephus shows extensive knowledge of the book and attributes it to a 6th century author (Antiquities of the Jews, book 10, chapters 10-11).

Evidence from Qumran

• At least 17 fragments of Daniel have been found at Qumran. They date to about 120 BC.

• Manuscript evidence of Chronicles and Psalms at Qumran have convinced scholars that those works had to be written much earlier than the 2nd century, otherwise they would not have been accepted as Scripture by the Qumran community.

• Yet, the same consideration is not extended to Daniel. To do so would allow for predictive prophecy, something the critics will not allow.

Language

• “There are 15-20 Persian words used throughout the book of Daniel. The Persian words are Old Persian and some of the terms did not occur after 330 BC (Baldwin, 33). Many of the Persian terms are administrative and some of them were not understood by the Greek translators (Collins, 18-19) In LXX the translations of these words ‘are hopelessly inexact—mere guesswork’ shows words were so ancient that their meaning was lost by then (Miller, 28).” (Taken from Peeler class notes)
Daniel is mentioned by a contemporary prophet (Ezekiel 14.14,20; 28.3). Daniel is described as a prophet by Jesus (Matthew 24.15).

So, why would anyone dispute the early date? Because if the book was written in the 6th century then it is the work of inspiration and the product of a God who is truly the “ruler over the realm of mankind. “The central argument is this; ‘Almighty God does not or cannot work miracles, or reveal the future of His creatures. Therefore since miracles or prophecy are impossible, a book which contains an account of miracles must be written long after the alleged miracles are related to have been worked; a book containing predictions beyond the unaided sagacity of man must have been written after the events which are predicted.’” (Daniel the Prophet, E.B. Pusey).

Historical Context:

To fully appreciate the theme of Daniel, that God rules over the realm of mankind, we need some knowledge of what was happening in the ancient near east during the latter part of the 7th century BC and beginning of the 6th century. Let’s begin with a brief sketch of Babylonian history and then note how this affected the kingdom of Judah.

**Babylon**

- “In 731 B.C. a Chaldean prince, Ukin-zer, attacked Babylon and seized the throne. Three years later Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria, supported by the priesthood, launched a counter attack and deposed Ukin-zer. By keeping the Assyrians busy defending their Babylonian dependencies, the Chaldeans provided some relief for Israel and Judah from interference in their affairs.” (Pfeiffer)
- “Soon after the reign of Sargon II began in Assyria, another Chaldean, Merodachbaladan II, seized the Babylonian throne and succeeded at uniting the previously fragmented Chaldean tribes. Merodach-baladan is most notable for his ability to forge military alliances in his anti-Assyrian efforts, as he did with Babylon’s neighbor to the east, Elam. He attempted to draw Hezekiah of Judah into this international coalition against Assyria, as we know from 2 Kings 20:12–19 and Isaiah 39.” (IVPDOT:Prophets)
- “Nabopolassar (626-605 B.C.) threw off the Assyrian yoke and founded an independent Chaldean, or Neo-Babylonian Empire. Not only were the Assyrians unsuccessful in putting down his revolt, but they lost their own capital, Nineveh, when Nabopolassar joined forces with Cyaxeres the Mede in 612 B.C. The Assyrians retreated westward to the ancient city of Haran, but it too fell to the Babylonians and their allies (610 B.C.). The following year Pharaoh Necho of Egypt (609-593 B.C.) marched northward to Carchemish on the Euphrates to assist the Assyrian king, Ashuruballit, in an effort to retake Haran from the Babylonians.” (Pfeiffer)
In the early summer of 605 B.C. a Babylonian army, led by the crown-prince Nebuchadnezzar, launched a surprise attack on Carchemish and crushed the Egyptian army which was based there. The survivors were pursued all the way to the frontier of Egypt, and might have been pursued farther, but for the fact that just then Nebuchadnezzar received news that his father Nabopolassar had died (August 16). He hurried back to Babylon with a few attendants, by the shortest route across the desert, to secure the throne for himself. The remainder of his forces returned home by the longer route, via Carchemish. They took with them captives from the Egyptian army and hostages from the states of western Asia which had recently been vassals of Egypt, including some of the noblemen of Judah.” (FF Bruce)

Judah
- Josiah 640-609 (2Kings 22-23.30; 2Chron 34-35)
  » Assyria began to weaken after the death of Ashurbanipal (631-626).
  » Asshur fell to Medes in 614 and Nineveh fell to the Babylonians in 612.
  » Josiah was killed in 609 because he opposed Pharaoh, who was going to the aid of Assyria (2Kings 23.28-30; 2Chron 35.20-27).
- Jehoahaz 609 (2Kings 23.30-33; 2Chron 36.1-4)
  » Made king by the people of the land (23.30). Actually younger than Jehoiakim.
  » Probable that Jehoahaz was anti-Egypt, whereas Jehoiakim was pro.
- Jehoiakim 609-598 (2Kings 23.34-24.7; 2Chron 36.5-8)
  » Placed on the throne by Pharaoh (23.34).
  » Battle of Carchemish 605 - Babylon now the dominate power. Captives taken to Babylon (including Daniel), Judah now a vassal of Babylon.
  » Rebelled and served Egypt (2Kings 24.1) and was swiftly punished by Babylon (2Kings 24.2-4).
• Jehoiachin 598-7 (2Kings 24.8-17; 2Chron 36.9-10)
  » Succeeded his father Jehoiakim who died as Babylonian forces were on their way to Jerusalem.
  » Surrendered to Babylon on March 15/16 597.
  » His captivity is mentioned in Babylonian rations list and 2Kings 25.27-30 and Jer. 52.31-34.
• Zedekiah 597-587 (2Kings 24.18-25.7; 2Chron 36.11-21)
  » Initially loyal to Babylon, but rebelled.
  » Jerusalem and Temple destroyed in 587.

Where was God? Had he been defeated by the Babylonian god Marduk? Was Jehovah the Most High? Did He rule over the realms of mankind? These are the questions the Jews would have faced during these troubling days and these kinds of questions have continued to be asked through the years as God’s people have suffered at the hands of the world. Daniel boldly asserts that the Most High rules over the realm of mankind, the hope of the righteous then and now!
The Neo-Babylonian Empire

710 BC

704 BC Merodach-Baladan sends envoys to Hezekiah in Jerusalem
(2 Kgs 20:12–19; 2 Chr 32:31; Isa 39:1–8)

630 BC

625 BC Nabopolassar of Babylon

All dates are approximate.