

ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

Title of Document: *Bel and the Dragon* (Apocrypha)

Hypothesized Dating of the Document and Author,

Bel and the Dragon does not provide information about a precise date of its composition. Various authors do not share a consensus about any precise date either. It is evident that the document refers to events occurred during the Babylonian exile when Daniel were made captive in 605 BC by Nebuchadnezzar¹. With regard to its nature as a Tales, it is believed that the story fit the Persian period (539-333 BCE) when tales were at their heydays or even come down up to Hellenistic period² in the later 4th Century BCE. Should we also consider the fact that the document is part of the Septuagint, the writing of the *Bel and Dragon* is at least earlier than the first Century BCE³. In a nutshell, the document is referring to events that occurred during the Babylonian exile, but might have circulated as oral account or tales in popular Jewish circle before being written down before the first Century BCE.

The document does not provide explicit events going on in the time of its composition. However, the contain of the document shows Daniel, a Jewish faithful man, facing the gods of the most powerful world king. It is clear that in those days, it is believed that the power of a nation is tied to the power of his divinity. After the Babylonian exile and the return of some Jews to their homeland, other major events such as the Greek invasion came to question the power of the God of their ancestors. Why should pagan nations invade the nation of Israel again? In 331

¹Keener Craig S. and John H. Walton, eds., *NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 1420.

²Michael Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, 5th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2018), 1577.

³Larry R. Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Students* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 192.

BCE, Alexander defeated the Persian king Darius III and then began a gradual and consistent Hellenization of the world that will deeply affect the Jewish land who assimilated that culture⁴.

Though Alexander died soon, a power struggle in his clan transform the Jewish land into a war field between the Ptolemaic rule and the Seleucid. When Jews were compelled by a Greek law in 168 BCE by to participant in pagan rituals, there was a resistance that latter led to the Maccabees revolt⁵. To worsen the situation for the Jew; another strong yoke fell upon the Jew when between 67-37 BCE, Palestine submit to the Roman⁶. This succession of oppression over the chosen people of God brought about questions. Different groups emerged among the Jewish people with different interpretation of the situation.

The intended audience is not explicitly stated in the document. However, it shows to be particularly important for all Jew that might be experimenting dominion from others nations who worship others gods. The document shows another faithful Jew who faced the same situation before but came out as hero. In the document, Daniel the hero, despite being under bondage refuse to worship the god of the king as stated in verse 4; “But Daniel worshiped his own God”.

In a nutshell, the message in the document portrays the identity of a Jew which is to stay attached to the fact that, the God of Israel is the only true God who deserves worship in the midst of attractive idols and animals worship. Such conclusion is based on the description of a Jew penned in the mouth of outsiders themselves “The king has become a Jew; he has destroyed Bel, and killed the dragon, and slaughtered the priests”. A Jew is a person that shows discontent to Idol worship.

⁴ Lester L. Grabbe, *An Introduction to Second Temple Judaism: History And Religion Of The Jews In The Time Of Nehemiah, The Maccabees, Hillel, And Jesus* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 11.

⁵ George W. E. Nickelsburg and Michael E. Stone, eds., *Early Judaism: Text and Documents on Faith and Piety, Revised Edition*, Revised. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 18.

⁶ Larry R. Helyer, 231.

The document is prescriptive in the sense that it shows a Jewish man staying steadfast to the worship of his God despite living in the midst of idol worship. God saved him from the hands of his enemies. In addition to that, the story moved to a climax where even the ruling earthly king came to surrender to the God of Israel as he confessed; “You are great, O Lord, the God of Daniel, and there is no other besides you” (verse 41).

Structural Divisions

The text shows three important divisions

1. The God of Israel is the only one worthy of worship in the midst of idol worship (Verse 1-22). In this section, Daniel is to show his faithfulness with a king who worships idols made with hand.
2. The God of Israel is the only worthy of worship in the midst of animal worship (Verses 23-30)
3. God will save those who love Him and worship Him alone (31-42)

Key Theological Themes/Topics

The Theological theme that cuts across the document is that, The God of Israel is the only True God to whom Jew have to stay attached wherever they are. A strange element to this document is when the angel of the Lord told prophet Habbakuk in Judea to take the food to Daniel in Babylon. The powerful idea that echoes from the text is, a Jew worship the only true living God. That however raises a question, how can we worship the God of our father while being trampled by nations that worship others gods? The text shows that refusing to worship others gods can lead to severe trials. The text is not without biases, it is difficult to understand how the king was portrayed as such a powerful and feared man but still the people went to him

and told him; "Hand Daniel over to us, or else we will kill you and your household." (verse 29).

In some few lines later, the same king killed those who stood against Daniel.

Connections

The document was written to portray the true Jewish identity which is to worship the only true God despite all kinds of challenges. The author uses a narrative story of a Jewish man, Daniel, who stood steadfast to the worship of his God in foreign land. God delivered him. The story of Daniel should have been broadly used as a Tale as written documents might not be accessible to all the Jewish people scattered. The identity of the Jewish people is not solely attached to the worship in Jerusalem but to the worship of the only true God wherever they are.

The theme of idol worship links this document to the New Testament where idol worship is the cause of Israel's exile to Babylon as penned in the mouth of Stephen; "You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Babylon" Acts 7:43. Now God is calling all the people on earth, to worship the only true God. The Thessalonians were praised; "They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God," 1 Thessalonians 1:9

Summary statement

The Second Temple Judaism was a very challenging time for the Jews as their identity were being threatened by their removal from their homeland, the destruction of the center of the worship in the Solomon temple. It became therefore important for the Jewish people to portray others heroes of worship as Daniel who worshipped the only true God while away from his fatherland. The story weaves a new Jewish identity which is to love God and worship him alone whenever they find themselves. There is no other God than the only true God of Israel.

Some questions however rise from this text that need further investigation.

1. What is the theological implication of Daniel being fed by a prophet in Judah?
2. Was king Cyrus considered a Jew when he worshipped the only true God?
3. How was the Jewish identity shaped by the theology of this document?