IDENTIFYING THE DANIEL CHARACTER IN EZEKIEL

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INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to clearly spell out the traditional rabbinic approach of identifying the character "Daniel" who appears in the Book of Ezekiel with Daniel from the Book of Daniel. It also contrasts that tradition with the accepted academic position of identifying said character with "Danel" who appears in the Ugaritic *Tale of Aqhat*. After discussing the advantages and disadvantages to both of these approaches, we present a third approach which identifies "Daniel" in Ezekiel with a different Biblical figure.

The Daniel character in question appears in two passages in the Book of Ezekiel and is mentioned a total of three times in that book.

Ezekiel prophesies that if man commits treachery against God, then He will smite them with a famine, wild animals, oncoming army, or a plague. But if amongst the people are Noah, Daniel, and Job – shining examples of righteousness – then those righteous men will be spared, and everybody else will suffer the aforementioned calamities (Ezek. 14:12–20). As Rashi and Radak explain, those three individual listed had the merit to save themselves, but not to save others.[1] In this passage, Daniel appears by name twice.

Daniel is again mentioned by Ezekiel in another context. Ezekiel lambasts the King of Tyre, for having attained the pinnacle of wisdom and having been in the Garden of Eden, where he had access to all sort of precious gems – but still al- lowing his excessive haughtiness to be the cause of his downfall. In that context, Ezekiel rhetorically asks the King, *Are you wiser than Daniel . . .* (Ezek. 28:3).

Who is this Daniel to whom Ezekiel refers?

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DANIEL FROM THE BOOK OF DANIEL

According to traditional rabbinic sources, the Daniel in question is none other than Daniel, the hero of the Book of Daniel. For example, in explicating the first passage which we cited, *Midrash Tanḥuma* (*Noaḥ* §5) explains that all three men that Ezekiel mentions experienced the world through three different life-circumstances: Noah experienced the pre-Deluge world, lived through the flood, and again saw the world repopulated post-Deluge. Daniel saw the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, lived through the Temple's destruction and the Israelites' exile, and again saw the Temple rebuilt. Job saw his household grow and prosper, lived through its tragic destruction, and again saw its restoration. Similarly, *Bereishit Rabbah* §96:6 explains that when Ezekiel asked whether the Tyrian King was wiser than Daniel, this refers to Daniel chapter 2 which tells of Daniel's keen ability to correctly interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and Nebuchadnezzar's reaction in which he sought to deify Daniel, but Daniel wisely refuses.

These midrashim clearly understand that the Daniel character under discussion is the same Daniel from the Book of Daniel. The classical commentators such as Rashi, Radak, and R. Joseph Kara all adopt this approach.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL ISSUE

The list of three men in Ezekiel would appear to be chronological.[2] This does not help much in identifying Daniel as TB *Bava Bathra* 14b–15b offers eight opinions as to the time-period in which Job may have lived.[3] Nonetheless, the order of names in Ezekiel's list suggests that "Daniel" lived between Noah and Job, and was certainly earlier than Ezekiel himself, which is not the case if he is referring to the Biblical Daniel.

Radak (to Ezek. 28:3) attempts to resolve this chronological problems by commenting that Ezekiel mentioned Daniel because Daniel's great wisdom was already well-known in Babylon in Ezekiel's lifetime.[4] Still, the text seems to imply that Daniel was not a younger contemporary of Ezekiel.

Moreover, there is a serious chronological difficulty with identifying the Daniel mentioned by Ezekiel as the same Daniel from the Book of Daniel. As mentioned above, the Midrash understands that Ezekiel contrasted the Tyrian King's wisdom to Daniel's because Daniel eschewed deification on the part

of Nebuchadnezzar, while the Tyrian King's haughtiness actually sought such deification. Therein lies the chronological issue.

The story of Daniel being deified by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 is said to have happened *in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign* (Dan. 2:1). However, Rashi and pseudo-Saadia point out that this date cannot be taken literally because earlier it is stated that Daniel underwent training for three years after Nebuchadnezzar brought him to Babylon (Dan. 1:5).[5] If this story actually happened in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, then Daniel could not yet have been serving in Nebuchadnezzar's court.[6] Instead, Rashi follows *Seder Olam Rabbah* (ch. 28) in dating the story in Daniel 2 to the second year following the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. This understanding exacerbates our chronological issue because Ezekiel's prophecies about Tyre began in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign[7] – before the destruction of the Temple – which would preclude him from talking about a story that occurred two years *after* the Temple's destruction.[8]

UNUSUAL SPELLING OF DANIEL'S NAME

Besides the chronological issue outlined above, some point to an orthographical issue with identifying the Daniel in Ezekiel with Daniel of the Book of Daniel. The name Daniel, as it appears in the Book of Daniel, is always spelled with a letter *yod*. However, all three times that our Daniel character appears in the Book of Ezekiel, his name is spelled without the usual *yod*. This would suggest that we are not dealing with the same person.

Nonetheless, this argument is not conclusive proof that Daniel in Ezekiel is not the same Daniel because names in the Bible often bear variant spellings, but still refer to the same individual.[9] In fact, the issue at hand is simply a matter of spelling because even the Daniel mentioned in Ezekiel is *read* "Daniel", as if it was written with the YOD found elsewhere.[10]

R. Yehudah ha-Hassid, the 12th century leader of the Hasidei Ashkenaz movement, addresses the missing letter in Daniel's name whenever he appears in the Book of Ezekiel. He writes that if gentiles give a Jew a name based on the name of their god, he should not allow himself to be called by that name. He adduces this ruling from the Bible by noting that when Ezekiel rhetorically asked the Tyrian King, *Are you wiser than Daniel . . .*, the Bible spells the name Daniel without the letter *yod*.[11] R. Yehudah ha-Hasid ex-

plains that the Bible wrote Daniel's name as if it was spelled Danel because, although Daniel objected to Nebuchadnezzar making him into a god, he did not protest Nebuchadnezzar calling him Beltshezzar (Dan. 1:7). The name Beltshezzar includes a theophoric element which refers to the name of the Babylonian deity Bel, so Daniel was expected to reject that name, yet we never find that he did. As a result, explains R. Yehudah ha-Hasid, the Bible expresses its dissatisfaction with Daniel's inaction by erasing the letter *yod* from his name whenever he appears in Ezekiel.[12]

R. David Cohen of Brooklyn takes a less esoteric approach and suggests that "Daniel" is spelled without a *yod* in Hebrew and is only spelled with a *yod* in Aramaic. Therefore it is spelled differently in the Book of Ezekiel, which is written in Hebrew, and the Book of Daniel, which is largely written in Aramaic.[13] However, this suggestion is problematic because if it were true, then one would expect "Daniel" to spelled without a *yod* in the Hebrew parts of the Book of Daniel, yet his name is consistently spelled with a *yod* throughout the entire Book of Daniel.

DANIEL IS DANEL FROM UGARIT

Ugaritic texts discovered at Ras Shamra revealed fragments of a Canaanite[14] mythological legend known as the *Tale of Aqhat*. That story tells of a childless man named Danel who offered sacrifices to his gods in order that they should grant him a son. Finally, Baal intercedes on Danel's behalf and asks El to grant him a son. Eventually, Danel's wife becomes pregnant and sires a son who is called Aqhat. Aqhat is later granted a special bow, which is coveted by the goddess Anat who eventually kills him and takes the bow. The fragments end with Danel mourning the loss of his son, but the resolution to the story seems to be lost.[15]

With the discovery of this ancient legend,[16] many scholars have suggested that the Daniel character mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel is actually Danel, the father of Aqhat. For example, Barton takes for granted that the Daniel character mentioned in Ezekiel is Danel of the *Tale of Aqhat*,[17] and this assumption is also backed up by Margalit.[18] In fact, John Day explicitly argues that because Ugarit is in the same general vicinity as Tyre, it would make sense that Ezekiel would reference a Syro-Phoencian myth which was likely already known to the Tyrian King.[19]

These scholars support their assertion that the Ezekielian Daniel is Danel by noting that the biblical Daniel lived during and after Ezekiel's time, making it unlikely that Ezekiel would refer to him. Furthermore, they note that the other two individuals with whom Daniel is grouped (i.e. Noah and Job) lived much before Ezekiel, which suggests that the Daniel in question also lived much before Ezekiel. Moreover, they argue that because the other two righteous men mentioned alongside Daniel were not Israelites, which suggests that the Daniel in question was also not an Israelite. Some scholars point to the change in spelling of Daniel's name as indicative of the notion that a different individual is meant.

Ultimately, the fact that Noah and Job (who are mentioned alongside Daniel) were not Israelites, coupled with the chronology issue outlined above, leads the various authors of the relevant volumes of the *Daat Mikra* series to endorse this approach.[20]

R. David Shlomo Shapiro (1909–1989), an American rabbi and Bible scholar, rejects the traditional approach of viewing Daniel in Ezekiel as the same Daniel from the Book of Daniel for another reason: Even if the chronological issue could be resolved, Ezekiel should not have resorted to drawing a lesson from a younger contemporary, if dozens of righteous Israelites lived throughout the ages who could have been used an example. This leads him to entertain the academic approach, before settling on a third, novel interpretation.[21]

PROBLEMS WITH THE UGARITIC DANEL THEORY

Despite its widespread acceptance, there are strong reasons to doubt the academic identification of Daniel in Ezekiel with Danel. First of all, there are no known instances of the Bible referring to a character only known from non-Biblical mythologies.

Secondly, Dressler notes that Danel in the *Tale of Aqhat* is never described as particularly wise, nor is he ever portrayed as a typical sage who utters proverbs, riddles, and/or other expressions of cleverness. This would suggest that he is not the "wise man" to whom Ezekiel refers.[22] Daniel in the Book of Daniel is certainly portrayed as a wise person, whose counsel was sought out by the Babylonian and Persian kings.

Dressler also notes that when put in context, mentioning the Ugaritic Danel in Ezekiel 14 certainly does not seem to be appropriate. In that passage, Ezekiel warns against those who are disloyal to God – which in biblical parlance refers to idolatry. The Danel depicted in the Ugaritic *Tale of Aqhat* would clearly be considered an idolater from Ezekiel's perspective, and would not be cited as an exemplary prototype for a righteous man.[23]

Some argue that looking at the others with whom Daniel is mentioned actually suggests that he was indeed the Daniel of the Book of Daniel. They argue that the trio mentioned in Ezekiel do not all have to be of the same background or time period, Ezekiel's point was simply that they were all righteous. Moreover, Ezekiel may have purposely chosen these three individuals to maximize the range of his examples in terms of time. He may also have chosen specifically these three to represent the widest array of ethnotypes: a pre-Israelite (Noah), an Israelite (Daniel), and a non-Israelite (Job).[24]

DANIEL IS THE SON OF KING DAVID

There is another character in the Bible named Daniel who has generally been overlooked in this discussion. The Bible (I Chron 3:1) lists King David's six eldest sons who were born to him in Hebron: Amnon, Daniel, Absalom, Adonijah, etc… The appearance of a "Daniel" here is somewhat perplexing because elsewhere (II Sam. 3:3) the Bible again lists King David's six oldest sons and instead of "Daniel" appearing in the second position, "Chileab" is there instead. Both Daniel and Chileab are reported by the Bible to be sons of David's wife Abigail and both of them are reported to be the second oldest. A Jewish tradition maintains that Daniel and Chileab are actually alternate names for the same individual.[25]

The Bible does not report anything about Daniel/Chileab other than that he was King David's second son. However, rabbinic tradition tells us a little bit more about him. TB *Bava Batra* 17a states that Daniel/Chileab was one of four biblical characters who was so righteous that he would have merited to cheat death (if not for the "bite of the snake" which brought death to all men). Additionally, TB *Brachot* 4a explains that his real name was "Daniel", but the Bible calls him "Chileab" alluding to his scholastic prowess in Torah study.

   In fact, while the Bible explains why three out of four of King David's eld-
est sons were unable to succeed their father, it fails to report anything about
his son Daniel. The firstborn Amnon was killed by Absalom as revenge for
raping Tamar (II Sam. 13:28–29), the third-born Absalom was killed after
rebelling against his father (II Sam. 18:14–15), and the fourth-born Adonijah
started a rebellion which was quashed by Nathan and Batsheba (I Kgs. 1).
The Bible does not mention what happened to King David's second-born son,
Daniel. To answer this question, R. Elijah Kramer of Vilna (1720–1797)[26]
writes (in light of the above) that Daniel was so dedicated to his Torah study,
that he did not even *want* to become king – so he was not even a potential
candidate to succeed David. Alternatively, Radak (to I Kgs. 1:6) suggests that
Daniel died during King David's lifetime, so as David's death approached,
Adonijah – the third-born son – was his oldest surviving son and was consid-
ered heir-apparent.[27] These two approaches are cited by Malbim.[28]

   Based on all of this, R. David Shlomo Shapiro suggests identifying the
Daniel character of Ezekiel with Daniel, the son of King David. He notes that
there was clearly an independent tradition about Daniel's righteousness and
wisdom that was divorced from any hermeneutical considerations in inter-
preting Ezekiel 14 and 28; rabbinic literature finds no allusions to King Da-
vid's son in Ezekiel. Yet these traditions about Daniel, son of King David,
certainly fit with Ezekiel's description of a wise, righteous man named Dan-
iel.[29]

ADVANTAGES TO THE DANIEL/CHILEAB APPROACH

   There are several advantages and disadvantages to identifying the Daniel
character in Ezekiel with King David's son Daniel. First of all, by dating the
Daniel of Ezekiel to a time which obviously predates the prophet Ezekiel, we
have skirted the chronological issues that arise with equating him to Daniel of
the Book of Daniel. We also circumvent the major problem of the Ugaritic
identification that the Bible never refers to people known only through out-
side mythologies. Moreover, while Danel of the *Tale of Aqhat* is never de-
scribed as particularly wise or righteous, tradition explains that King David's
son Daniel was both of those – plus he was thoroughly devoted to God, and
not an idolater.

On the other hand, it does not resolve one small problem, the inconsistent spelling of Daniel. This is indeed problematic, and identifying Daniel of Ezekiel with Daniel, son of King David does not resolve the issue because the latter is also spelled with a *yod*.

CONCLUSION

Until this point, we have considered three possible contenders for the identity of the Daniel character mentioned in Ezekiel: Daniel from the Book of Daniel, Danel from the Ugaritic *Tale of Aqhat*, and Prince Daniel, the son of King David. When all is said and done, there is no conclusive proof to any of these options, and each one has significant drawbacks

The prophet Zechariah famously compares the future eulogy over Jerusalem to the eulogy of Hadadrimmon in the Valley of Meggido (Zech. 12:11). Exegetical allusions aside, the identity of this Hadadrimmon is obscured, and Ibn Ezra simply writes that he was an important person in his generation and we do not know all of history in order to know who was. In the same vein, we can argue that when Ezekiel refers to a character named Daniel, it might not be somebody who we know and might not even be somebody that we need to know in order to understand the prophet's message here. The name Daniel/Danel appears in numerous sources and was apparently a popular name in the ancient world.[30] Ultimately, we must admit that we do not know precisely who this Daniel is.

NOTES

1. *Sforno* (to Gen. 6:8) explains that because Daniel did not preach to the people of his generation, he did not merit to save them, even though he himself was a wholly righteous individual. R. David Oftrodt, in his commentary to *Sefer Hasidim*, explains that Daniel's merit could not save others because of his failure to protest Nebuchadnezzar giving him an idolatrous name (see below). This comment is published in S. Guttman (ed.), *Sefer Chassidim* vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Otzar HaPoskim, 2007), pg. 223.

2. Without citing the Talmud, F. W. Hardy, "Daniel in Ezek 14:14, 20 and 28:3," *Historicism* vol. 2 (1986), pp. 5–9 concludes that Job lived sometime between Jacob and Moses, the first three options mentioned in the Talmud. He arrives at this conclusion by plotting the declining lifespans of Biblical characters, and based on the fact that Job lived to the age of 140 (Job 42:16), Job's lifespan was commensurate with the life expectancy of the time between Jacob and Moses.

3. H. H. P. Dressler, "The Identification of the Ugaritic Dnil with the Daniel of Ezekiel", *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 29:2 (1979), pg. 156, argues, based on textual evidence, that the Book of Eze-

kiel does not attach much importance to exact patterns for enumeration, so listing Daniel between two characters from much earlier in history does not suggest that Daniel should be dated likewise. If we accept this argument, then we should also not take the order in Ezekiel's list as reflective of *any* chronological order.

4. See also A. Marcus, *Barzilai* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1983), p. 299.

5. See S. R. Miller, *Daniel: The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), pp. 76–77, who argues that Daniel did not actually complete his three-year training or that because of the Babylonian method of counting regnal years, Daniel finished his three years in what was called Nebuchadnezzar's second year. For more about this chronological issue, see Z. Ron, "*In the Second Year of the Reign of Nebuchadnezzar* (Daniel 2:1)," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* vol. 44:4 (2016), pp. 261–265.

6. Pseudo-Saadia writes that Daniel's dream interpretation of Dan. 2 happened at an unspecified time, but that said dream was a recurring dream which Nebuchadnezzar began to see in his second year. Similarly, Gersonides (to Dan. 2:1) explains that Nebuchadnezzar's dream happened in his second year, and this is why he did not initially ask Daniel for an interpretation. Only later, after Daniel finished his three-year training, did Daniel offer his interpretation. Ibn Ezra cites one R. Moshe who explained that the *second year* does not mean the second year from the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, but rather the second year before the end of his reign. Ibn Ezra rejects this exegesis on the basis of the fact that nowhere else does the Bible date a king's reign to its end.

7. That is the date given in Ezekiel 26:1 and it safe to assume that Ezekiel 26–28 which all discuss Tyre were said at around the same time. Moreover, Ezekiel's prophecies about Tyre include the fact that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer the city-state, and that happened before Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah.

8. One could argue that in mentioning Daniel's wisdom to the King of Tyre, Ezekiel prophetically referred to an event which did not yet happen. However, this approach is quite difficult to accept because Ezekiel's message to the Tyrian king would be lost to him if Ezekiel was talking about something which did not yet happen.

9. This is all true in the MT of the Bible. In the LXX and the Theodotian, Daniel's name is spelled the same in all books of the Bible. The Peshitta to Ezekiel thrice spells Daniel with an extra *yod* as the penultimate letter. In the DSS, there are two ways to spell "Daniel" one is the regular way found in the MT and the other is without the letter *aleph*, see Hardy, p. 2.

10. *Minhat Shai* to Ezekiel 14:14; 28:3 makes this point. See also Miller, p. 42.

11. R. Haim Palagi in *Nefesh Haim* (*Maarechet Dalet*, §23) explains why, of all the letters in Daniel's name, specifically the letter *yod* is omitted in order to prove this point.

12. *Sefer ha-Hasidim* §194.

13. D. Cohen, *Ohel David* vol. 6 (Brooklyn, 2005), p. 83.

14. See Y. Kaufmann & M. Greenberg (trans.), *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 220.

15. J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Third Edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 149–155.

16. Even before the discovery of the Ras Shamra texts in the 1930s, Bible scholars were inclined to interpret the Daniel of Ezekiel as some ancient mythical hero. With the discovery of those

texts, they found their hero. See D. B. Wallace, "Who is Ezekiel's Daniel?," *Bible.org* [URL: https://bible.org/article/who-ezekiels-daniel].

17. G. A. Barton, "Danel, a Pre-Israelite Hero of Galilee," *Journal of Biblical Literature* vol. 60:3 (1941), p. 223. See also M. Noth, "Noah, Daniel and Hiob in Ezechiel XIV," *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 1:4 (1951), pp. 251-60 [in German].

18. B. Margalit, "Interpreting the Story of Aqht: A Reply to H. P. Dressler, VT 29 (1979), pp. 152-61," *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 30:3 (1980), pp. 361–365.

19. J. Day, "The Daniel of Ugarit and Ezekiel and the Hero of the Book of Daniel," *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 30:2 (1980), p. 175.

20. See Y. Z. Moskowitz (ed.), *Daat Mikra –Yehezkel* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1985), p. 82; S. Cohen & Y. Keil (eds.), *Daat Mikra – Daniel* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1994), pp. 24–25; and A. Hakham (ed.), *Daat Mikra – Iyov* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1988), p. 19. It should be noted that there are opinions that Job was an Israelite, see TB *Baba Batra* 15a, "R. Johanan and R. Eleazar both stated that Job was among those who returned from the [Babylonian] Exile, and that his house of study was in Tiberias."

21. D. S. Shapiro, *Torat Moshe ve-ha-Neviim* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1961), pp. 267–268.

22. Dressler, pp. 153–154. Day, p. 176; 180–181 offers the counter-argument that because Danel is portrayed as judging widows and orphans, therein lies his wisdom and righteousness.

23. Dressler, pp. 158–159. Miller, p. 41 also notes that Danel in the *Tale of Aqhat* was clearly an idolater whose gods included Baal, El, and Anat. Nonetheless, Day, pp. 176–177 counters that in the *Tale of Aqhat*, Danel is ultimately portrayed as a devotee of El, whom the Bible seems to equate with God.

24. See Dressler, pp. 156–157.

25. The Targum explicitly writes that Daniel is Chileab, while the Peshitta simply translates "Daniel" as "Chileab".

26. *Biur ha-Gra* (to I Chron. 3:2).

27. II Sam. 24:15 mentions a plague which afflicted the Israelites in the later years of King David's reign and according to a midrash cited by *Yalkut Shimoni* (Sam. §165) at that time Gad the Seer and four of King David's sons died. R. Shmuel Laniado (d. 1605) in E. Batzri (ed.), *Kli Yakar I Melakhim* vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Haktav Institute, 1988), p. 10, assumes that Daniel is one of King David's four sons who died in this plague, and cites this midrash to support Radak's position that Daniel had already died by the time of Adonijah's rebellion.

28. R. Meir Leibush Weiser (Malbim, 1809–1879) in his *Lev Melakhim* (to I Kgs. 1:6) follows the approach of Radak, while in *Yimei Kedem* (to I Chron. 3:1) he adopts R. Kramer's position.

29. Shapiro, pp. 268–269.

30. There is another biblical character named Daniel who was a Kohen in the time of Ezra (Ezra 8:2, Neh. 10:7). Two apocryphal books record a tradition of early characters named Danel: I Enoch 6:7 identifies Danel as one of the leaders of the Angels who cohabited with the daughters of men, and Jubilees 4:20 reports that Enoch's wife was named Edna, daughter of Danel, making Enoch's father-in-law, and the grandfather of Methusaleh, a character named Danel. I have not checked the DSS versions of those books to see exactly how Danel was spelled in the Hebrew. The Jubilean tradition is also accepted by R. Shmuel Algazi (circa. 1550) in *Toldoth Adam* (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1944), p. 5. The Farhi Bible records a similar tradition

that Enoch's wife was named Erkhi, daughter of Danel, see A. A. Harkavy, <u>H</u>*adashim Gam Yeshanim* (Jerusalem: Carmiel Publishers, 1970), p. 102. Additionally, the name Dnil is found in numerous Babylonian writings.