**Introduction Apocalyptic Literature**

 “All apocalypses are narratives, stories describing the disclosure of otherwise inaccessible secrets to a human seer by a heavenly being.” NIB Vol. 7 – pg 2

“The element common to all apocalypses is postmortem rewards and punishments, an idea that enters Judaism through the medium of apocalypticism, since it does not occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Israel’s religion as presented in the Hebrew Bible is focused on this life. After death, good and bad alike descend into Sheol and live a shadowy existence that bears little resemblance to later concepts of heaven and hell.” NIB Vol. 7 – pg 2

“Although apocalypses are often permeated by scriptural language, images, and patterns, they do not try to convince their readers through exegesis of Scripture… Apocalypses are more compelling in that they do not merely relay information but allow their readers to accompany the seer through the process of revelation by describing that process in detail.” NIB Vol. 7 – pg 3

“Apocalypses must be read as whole unites and as creative response to the new conditions of the Hellenistic world.” NIB Vol. 7 – pg 6

“Although a crisis setting is not provable or even probable for many apocalypses, they all express at least implicitly dissatisfaction with the temporal world.” NIB Vol. 7 – pg 7

* Two Crisis which helped produce Apocalypse writings
	+ Antiochus IV Epiphanes - Seleucid King – tried to outlaw Judaism (167 bce)
		- Sacrificed a pig on the altar of God.
			* Maccabean revolt
			* Several writings – Daniel, 1 Enoch: The Animal Apocalypse, 1 Enoch: The Apocalypse of Weeks
	+ Roman Destruction of Jerusalem (70 ce)
		- 4 apocalypse appeared
			* 4 Ezra
			* 2 Baruch
			* Apocalypse of Abraham
			* 3 Baruch
* Revelation and other writings seem to be born out of small scale persecution.
	+ 3 themes in Revelation
		- To the persecuted – hang on
		- To the apathetic – get going
		- To the conformists – don’t choose evil it will be destroyed

**Introduction to Daniel**

**SUMMARY**

Daniel 1-6 is set in exile. The Babylonian rulers, presuming to be in charge of the affairs of the world, challenge the faith of Daniel and his three fellow Judeans. Readers are to be encouraged because of the examples of God's care for Daniel and his friends during their ordeals.

Daniel 7-12 depicts both the hardship to be experienced by those who will live after Daniel and the actions of rulers who reign after the Babylonians. The final scenes shift to Palestine, the violence escalates, and rulers directly assault the people of God. Each vision ends with the affirmation that God will prevail; evil will not have the last word.

**SO WHAT?**

The dominant tone in the book is one of encouragement rather than chastisement. The book does not have a "sinner, take heed" tone. The examples of faithful courage in the first part of the book serve to encourage the reader who may have to live in the midst of the dark times envisioned in the latter part of the book. The visions have many different twists and turns, but they all end on the encouraging note that there is a limit to even the worst forms of evil and that the kingdom of God will prevail.

**WHO WROTE IT?**

Traditionally the book is attributed to Daniel, a Jewish exile, who lived during the reigns of the Babylonian kings named in the book as Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar and the Median and Persian kings named as Cyrus and Darius. This attribution is widely disputed. The primary alternative posits an extended period of composition with a final version emerging around 164 B.C.E.

**WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?**

The date of composition is intertwined with the question of authorship. Daniel 7-12 envisions history well into the future, reflecting broadly the succession of empires after the exile and specifically the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.E.). The extensiveness (and general accuracy) of the depictions of the actions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes has led many to conclude that the final composition dates from late in his reign. However, the depiction of his death does not readily square with the actual events and has led to the conclusion that the book was completed shortly before his death. Such dating understands Daniel 1-6 as traditional stories cited as encouragement for enduring persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

The alternative is to regard the book as written by Daniel in the exile to report his own experience and to predict the distant future.

**WHAT'S IT ABOUT?**

Daniel and three friends persist in their faith despite threats created by several foreign rulers whom they serve with dedication. They are a model of fidelity for those who must endure the future events Daniel's visions depict. The God they confess will be the one who will deliver the faithful throughout history, no matter how evil forces rage.

**HOW DO I READ IT?**

A cue to reading the book can be taken from Daniel 3 and 6, in which Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel let the future be in God's hands. The issues associated with correlating the kingdoms in the visions to past or future rulers or nations can be set aside. From that vantage point, the visions in Daniel 7-12 are like the stories in Daniel 1-6, in that they too wish to encourage faithful persistence in the face of any kind of persecution.

It is sometimes tempting to become cynical about all the cruelty in the world's history. We could simply accommodate ourselves to evil and only do what we have to do in order to survive in the short term. But as Christians, we have the hope of the women on Easter morning who knew, as Daniel glimpsed earlier, that everything had changed, fearful as that may be. The kingdom of God was at hand. This realization is frightening, because it brings us into the kingdom and the future God will make. In knowing that God has broken the power of evil and will transform the world, we know that such transformation will include our transformation, for we too participate in the evil of the world.

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**BACKGROUND**

The book of Daniel projects an exilic background for the period of composition. The stories in Daniel 1-6 are set in Babylon. The opening verses of each of the sections in Daniel 7-12 place Daniel within the rule of one of the kings, even though the visions themselves speak of events that are to occur long after Daniel's lifetime. The correlation of these references with actual chronology is disputed. Many interpreters understand the final shaping of the book to have occurred in the era of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.E.). Traditional stories from the exile were retold and augmented with visions (narratively attributed to Daniel) that speak directly to this later time.

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**Introductory Issues**

•    **Belshazzar-son of Nebuchadnezzar?**In 5:2, 11 and 18, Belshazzar is identified as the son of Nebuchadnezzar. Strictly speaking, he was the son of Nabonidus, a usurper of the Babylonian throne who ruled from 556 to 539 B.C.E. Nebuchadnezzar had died in 562 B.C.E. Several kings briefly occupied the throne between 562 and 556. At the very least, the book of Daniel compresses the sequence of events and the term "son" is not used in a biological sense.

•   **Darius the Mede.** Daniel places a ruler named Darius (identified as a Mede in 5:31; 9:1; 11:1) between the last of the Babylonians (identified as Belshazzar) and Cyrus, the Persian. Extrabiblical records identify Cyrus as the direct successor to the Babylonians. After the time of Cyrus, there is a Persian ruler named Darius, namely, Darius I Hystaspes who ruled from 522-486 B.C.E. The latter did organize the empire into satrapies as did the ruler named Darius in Daniel 6. Elsewhere in the Bible, Darius I is referred to as a Persian (Ezra 4:5, 24; 6:14; Nehemiah 12:22) and the reported activities fit with the dates for Darius I Hystaspes.

•   **Date of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest.** The date of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem, mentioned in the first two verses of the book, does not align with data from other sources (both biblical and extrabiblical). Daniel 1:1 states that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem in the third year of Jehoiakim (thus, 606 B.C.E.), but Jeremiah 25:1 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar first came to power in 605 B.C.E., the fourth year of Jehoiakim. Further, 2 Chronicles 36:5-8 places the attack on Jerusalem later in Jehoiakim's reign, a time frame that is corroborated by the Babylonian Chronicles.

•   **Exile and future suffering.** The lack of specificity about the exile suggests that the compelling interest of the book is in the persistence of suffering in the centuries after the return. The stories of Daniel and his friends are paradigmatic stories for a later time. By the end of the book the reader is positioned in Palestine centuries after the return and receives the exilic stories as encouragement to persist in the persecution being experienced well beyond the period of the exile.

•   **Exile and hope for a return to the homeland.** Questions arise when the book of Daniel is set alongside exilic writings such as Psalm 137, Lamentations, and Isaiah 40-55. In Daniel, there is no expressed yearning to return to Jerusalem, for the restoration of the Davidic rule, and no backward glance mourning the demise of the homeland. Even Jeremiah's letter to the exiles urging them to seek the welfare of the city in which they are exiled envisioned a return after seventy years (Jeremiah 29). Daniel 9 takes up the seventy-year reference from Jeremiah, but the interpretation focuses on enduring suffering. There is no description of or yearning for return analogous to Jeremiah 30-31 or similar prophetic visions of return from exile.

•    **Exile: Where are the others?** The lack of any mention of other exiles is puzzling. Daniel refers to Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael), and Abednego (Azariah), but no other exiles are mentioned. None of these four interact with other exiles. In contrast, Daniel 7-12 repeatedly refers to the people of the Most High (the exact terminology varies), and the scope of concern is for a community, not only a few individuals. What did other exiles do when Nebuchadnezzar erected his statue (Daniel 3) or when Darius decreed that everyone should pray to him (Daniel 6)? The reader's curiosity is raised when recognizing that Daniel is not mentioned in Daniel 3 and his three friends are not mentioned in Daniel 6. What did each of them do in the stories where they are not mentioned?

•    **Exilic author.** Correlating Daniel 1-6 and Daniel 7:12 has long puzzled interpreters. If the exilic Daniel wrote the entire book, chapters 7-12 are largely predictive. Unanswered questions remain, not the least of which is why the book is written in two languages (Hebrew and Aramaic). In addition, what is one to make of the persistence of evil beyond the days predicted as the final days for evil? If "prediction" is the genre employed by an exilic author (Daniel), the history of interpretation has not settled on what constitutes the "predicted" era.

•    **Extended "authorship."** If Daniel is a legendary figure whose persona is used for compositions written in later periods such as that of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.E.), questions of history and interpretation are not necessarily solved. The lack of exact correspondence in the succession and identification of Belshazzar (Daniel 5) and Darius (Daniel 6) becomes less problematic, but the lack of correspondence to extrabiblical data for the demise of Antiochus (11:40-45) becomes more acute. As with the view that exilic Daniel is the predictive author, the question of what one is to make of the continued presence of evil after Antiochus's demise remains. At some point in the history of the composition of the book, composers stopped adjusting dates (see, for example, the shift from 1,290 to 1,355 days in 12:11-12).

•    **Hebrew/Aramaic and stories/visions.** Daniel 1:1-2:4a and Daniel 8:1-12:13 are preserved in Hebrew and Daniel 2:4b-7:28 in Aramaic. There is no consensus on an explanation for this variation. The variation would be easier to grasp if it corresponded with variations in content. Daniel 1-6 consists of stories, some of which contain visions within the plotlines. Daniel interprets those visions, and they have an impact on the rulers. Daniel 7-12 contains visions which Daniel sees about times far beyond Daniel and the exile. Daniel needs assistance interpreting his visions, and they often have a deep impact on him. These contrasts, however, do not correspond to the distribution of the Hebrew and Aramaic sections.

•    **Hebrew/Aramaic and compositional history.** Some interpreters imagine a collection of stories about the exile (Daniel 2-6) with Daniel 7 serving as an updated and reinterpreted version of Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Daniel 2. The Aramaic section was, in this view, updated further with the visions in Daniel 8:1-12:4 written in Hebrew. (The use of Hebrew might signal some nationalistic fervor.) An introductory story was added (Daniel 1, in Hebrew) and subsequently the last vision was updated (Daniel 12:5-13). This version of a compositional history attempts to correlate the Aramaic and Hebrew variations, but there are still loose ends that lack a convincing explanation. Why, for example, would Daniel 2:1-4a be in Hebrew? Those verses are crucial to the rest of the chapter which is in Aramaic. The variation between Hebrew and Aramaic in Daniel remains an anomaly.

•    **History and Daniel.**Daniel 11:2-45 provides a sweeping description of the future. Two centuries of Persian rule are covered into a mere verse and thirteen rulers collapsed into four (11:2). Alexander the Great, along with the breakup of his empire, is dealt with in two verses (11:3-4). Precision increases in 11:5-20, describing the struggle between the Seleucids and Ptolemies, and in 11:21-39, describing Antiochus IV Epiphanes reign from 175-164 B.C.E. Extrabiblical data aligns well with most of the details. The correspondence falls off with the description of the death of Antiochus in 11:40-45. Antiochus died in Persia, not Palestine, and the projected war between the Seleucids and Ptolemies did not occur. It should be noted that Antiochus is never named in Daniel and, thus within the history of interpretation, the "little horn" (8:9) has been identified with rulers beyond the time of Antiochus.

•   **Looking backward: mythology and ancient lore.** Regarding Daniel 7, a recent line of interpretation has centered on potential allusions to or appropriations of earlier ancient Near Eastern cultural traditions. The Ancient One (7:9, 13) has been compared to El, "father of years," and the one like a human being/a son of man "coming with the clouds of heaven" to Baal, the "rider of clouds." In addition, for some interpreters, the judgment scene in Daniel 7 resonates with scenes of the divine council in other traditions. The allusions, if they are that, do not rise to the level of citations and are subject to continued scholarly reassessment.

•   **"Onelike the Son of man" (Daniel 7:13 KJV).** In the history of interpretation in both Jewish and Christian communities, Daniel 7:13 and the surrounding scene has been appropriated in directions that go well beyond the literal text. Jewish interpretation moves in the direction of angelic figures, from Michael to super-angelic figures somewhere between God and the other angels. In the Synoptic Gospels the Christian tradition pulls the passage in a specifically messianic and christological direction. There, the phrase becomes a title and the "Son of Man" is seen as coming in clouds, sending angels, and gathering the elect (Mark 13:26-27 and elsewhere, with parallels in the other gospels). Philippians 2:7 and Revelation 14:14, however, use the expression in a less titular manner; the "like" of Daniel 7:13 is retained. The specific conclusions that interpreters reach regarding Daniel 7:13 is deeply interconnected with how they understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments in general and the New Testament's citations of the Old Testament in particular.

•    **Stories-tests of faith.** The book of Daniel switches from stories about Daniel and his three friends (Daniel 1-6) to visions received by Daniel (Daniel 7-12). In the former, Daniel interprets visions in chapters 2, 4, and 5. These are disturbing visions for the rulers who receive them and their native interpreters are unable to understand them. Daniel was able to interpret them (with the assistance of an interpreting vision in chapter 2). Other chapters are episodes in which Daniel's and/or his friends' fidelity to God is tested by situations created through the pride and vanity of the kings. There is no direct persecution of the faith of Israel.

•    **Translation: Human being? Son of man?** The most direct equivalent for the Aramaic phrase bar 'enash is "human being." The KJV translated the phrase as "one like the Son of man," which tilts the passage clearly in the direction of New Testament christology. Most current translations drop the definite article and do not capitalize the word "son." The latter practice at least recognizes that there is ambiguity in the expression. It need not be anything more than a way of saying human being. As Daniel saw figures that looked like a lion, like a bear, and like a leopard, so he saw a figure that looked like a human being. This would be consistent with Psalm 8:4 and with the way Ezekiel is addressed (2:1, 3, 6, 8 and throughout the book, though with Ezekiel too the translation varies with the versions; the NRSV simply prefers "mortal"). A similar use occurs in Daniel 8:17.

•  **Visions-times of persecution.** In Daniel 7-12, the hardships endured by the faithful move from the tests of faith to times of direct persecution. In addition, the persecution is to occur in the lives of those who live after Daniel. Belshazzar (7:1; 8:1), Darius (9:1), and Cyrus (10:1) are mentioned as the rulers at the time Daniel receives his visions, but these rulers are not part of the plot, in contrast to the stories in Daniel 1-6. The rulers to come are not merely pride-filled; they violently succeed one another, and the people of God are caught up in the turmoil. The rulers shift from pride to direct blasphemy, reaching its epitome in the desecration of the temple and the abolition of daily sacrifice (11:31). Persecution is directly aimed at the people of God in Palestine. Many of the faithful will die. The resurrection, announced more clearly here than anywhere else in the Old Testament (12:1-4), is the justice of God enacted beyond history.

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**Theological Themes**

•    **God can deliver-only God.** Daniel asserts that God delivers the faithful; even foreign kings make this assertion (for example, Darius in 6:26-27). This affirmation is pushed to the limit in the visions; God must defend the faithful who are not only tested, but explicitly persecuted. The theme "God can deliver" moves to "only God can deliver," for there is no other escape from the tyranny of the persecutors.

•   **Hubris to blasphemy.** The hubris of rulers in the first half of Daniel becomes blasphemy in the latter half. God controls the coming and going of kingdoms in the former, but in the latter the battle becomes cosmic and evil will be finally defeated. In the end, there will be no more imperial coming and going, only the reign of God which will create new life beyond the turmoil of history.

•   **Impermanence-turnover and turmoil.**Each empire and king depicted in the book seeks to establish its permanence, whether through conquest and building (for example, Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4) or through unchangeable laws (Darius in Daniel 6). The quest for permanence is coupled with increased violent domination in the visions in the latter part of the book. The repeated turnover is one sign of the actual impermanence of empires.

•   **Mockery-faith-filled defiance.**The rulers in Daniel 1-6 clearly can threaten harm, but the narratives mock their pretensions. They cannot command mysteries and they often look decidedly "un-royal." Even their "confessions" about God at the end of episodes have a tone of bombast. Narrating stories of imperial conduct with a mocking tone is one form of defiance to sustain readers under later persecution (Daniel 7-12).

•    **Permanence-faithful continuity.** For those who live within imperial turmoil and persecution a long-range perspective is little comfort; more than a perspective is needed. The violent impermanence of kings must be offset by the permanence of God's dominion. Permanence comes from the One who is trusted by the faithful; all else has an end. Faith itself is an act of defiance and resistance against imperial presumption and persecution.

•    **Sovereignty of God-against Israel.** The book of Daniel does remember that the sovereignty of God did operate against Israel, not just against Israel's opponents. Daniel 1:1-2 states that God gave Jerusalem into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, which resonates with the perspective of the book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6). Daniel, in his prayer in 9:4-19, confesses that one dimension of past and continued affliction is punishment for Israel's lack of fidelity to the covenant. The petition for forgiveness is constant.

•    **Sovereignty of God-against the nations.** The nations relentlessly move toward dominance and thus sooner or later challenge the rule of God. The narratives depict this movement in terms of personal hubris that is both comical and destructive. The visions describe this movement as increasingly violent toward the people of God and explicitly defiant toward God. The former are controlled by God and the latter are defeated by God; rather than a new human kingdom replacing a prior one, the dominion of God is put in place.

•    **Sovereignty of God and human fidelity.** The sovereignty of God permeates the book of Daniel. Human fidelity is, of course, expected and commended; Daniel prays to and praises God (for example, 2:17-23; 9:3) as well as reads scripture (9:2), but the decisive acts are those of God. God gives power (for example, 4:17; 5:21), but abusive use of power is constricted. Abusive power is limited and has an end. It will be destroyed by God, not with human power (8:25; see also 4:34; 11:44-45).

•    **Sovereignty of God-established and promised.** The evil that both persecutes the faithful and challenges God directly will be defeated by God and the heavenly hosts that God directly commands. There are narratives of God's triumph both accomplished, especially in the first half, and promised, increasingly in the latter half. If the book was finalized near 164 B.C.E., it is striking to note that the book does not pick up on the military alternative offered by the Maccabean rebellion.

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