

Daniel

“I have heard of you that a spirit of the gods is in you, and that enlightenment, understanding, and excellent wisdom are found in you.” (DANIEL 5:14)

Daniel’s book presents itself as Daniel’s own testimony, placing its protagonist in the Babylonian and early Persian periods—beginning with Nebuchadnezzar’s deportation of Judean elites in 597–587 BCE and extending through the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius the Mede, and Cyrus. The stories depict a Jewish courtier navigating imperial power, maintaining covenant fidelity, and receiving visions that interpret the rise and fall of empires. Within this narrative frame, Daniel becomes a symbolic figure: a wise exile whose steadfastness reveals God’s sovereignty over kings and kingdoms.

However, modern scholarship places the book’s composition in the mid-second century BCE, during the crisis under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BCE). Under his reign, Judea faced a sharply different imperial posture. Unlike earlier suzerains, who generally tolerated Jewish religious customs, Antiochus attempted to secure his authority by aggressively hellenizing Judea. His program aimed not at cultural influence alone but at restructuring Jewish identity around Greek norms—installing foreign officials, promoting Greek civic institutions, and suppressing practices central to Israel’s covenant life. This was a deliberate political strategy, not incidental pressure: a coercive effort to break Jewish religious resilience by remaking Judea in the image of the Seleucid state.

Antiochus’s program of forced hellenization provoked broad Jewish resistance, which in turn brought harsh reprisals: public executions, bans on Torah observance, and the desecration of the temple, capped by the installation of a Zeus statue fashioned to resemble Antiochus himself. As oppression intensified, Mattathias the Hasmonean and his sons initiated an armed revolt against Seleucid rule (see 1–2 Maccabees), transforming scattered defiance into a sustained struggle for religious and political survival.

Although the revolt did not achieve full independence, it produced a decisive shift in Judea’s fortunes. The Roman–Jewish Treaty of 161 BCE recognized Judea as a Roman vassal state and granted the Hasmoneans a measure of self-rule and restored religious autonomy. Under their

leadership, Judea regained control of its temple, priesthood, and internal governance—an outcome unimaginable under Antiochus’s regime. Hasmonean authority continued until Herod the Great became Rome’s client king in 37 BCE, ending native rule and inaugurating a new

NARRATIVE UNITS in DANIEL

- 1–6 Hagadah – stories about the exploits of Daniel and his companions
- 7–12 Apocalyptic Visions
- [13–14 Hagadah – part of the Deuterocanon or Apocrypha]

political order. Antiochus's policies were not incidental pressures but a strategic assault on Jewish religious life. The desecration of the temple, suppression of core rites, and coercive imposition of foreign practices reveal a deliberate effort to erode the social and theological structures that sustained Jewish resilience.

In that setting, writing under Daniel's name becomes a deliberate strategy in which a faithful community adopts the persona of a revered exile to read their present crisis through an older moment of imperial oppression. The reader must therefore distinguish the literary setting from the historical setting.

THEMATIC & LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS

Haggadah – *Haggadah* (Hebrew for “setting forth”) is a narrative form that conveys theological and moral truth through stories that are either non-historical or creatively expanded from historical events. In the book of Daniel, the Haggadic narratives found in chapters 1–6 and later additions in 13–14 use vivid, dramatic episodes to model faithful resistance under foreign rule. Their form is simple, memorable storytelling—court tales, deliverance stories, and contests of wisdom—designed to highlight God's sovereignty over kings and idols. Their function is pastoral and polemical: to strengthen covenant identity, to encourage steadfastness amid oppression, and to proclaim the superiority of Yahweh over the religious systems of Israel's imperial oppressors.

Apocalypticism – Apocalypticism (from the Greek, meaning “to reveal”) is a literary genre and theological worldview that interprets history through revelation, cosmic conflict, and divine intervention. Apocalyptic literature arose in communities whose known or anticipated reality was destroyed or otherwise replaced by a conflicting reality. The traumatic dissonance created by such a loss demanded a new understanding of reality. It assumes that ordinary perception cannot grasp the true nature of reality; instead, God unveils hidden truths about the present age and its destined end. Apocalyptic literature features symbolic visions, angelic mediators, heavenly journeys, and a sharp contrast between the present world of oppression and the coming world of divine justice. Its purpose is not prediction for its own sake but moral formation—to sustain the faithful under persecution by revealing God's ultimate sovereignty.

In Daniel, the dissonance arose during the worsening political and social situation in Judea during the 2nd century BCE, including: the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BCE), Jewish collusion, the Maccabean revolt (167-160 BCE), and Roman suzerainty. The Danielic apocalypse was written between 168 and 164 BCE.

God's Sovereignty & Faithful Resistance – Daniel gathers its central convictions into a unified theological vision in which God's sovereignty governs every horizon of the book. Empires rise and fall, kings boast and are humbled, yet the divine kingdom alone endures. Within that

framework, Daniel and his companions embody faithful resistance, showing that covenant loyalty is possible even under coercive imperial power. Their deliverance scenes anticipate the book's larger pattern of judgment and vindication, in which oppressors are overthrown and the faithful preserved. The apocalyptic visions deepen this witness by offering revelation of hidden realities—unveiling cosmic conflict behind political events and interpreting history through divine agency rather than human might. All these strands converge in the hope of the coming kingdom, God's everlasting reign that will finally replace the violent empires of the world.

TYPOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

SELECTED USES OF DANIEL IN THE IMAGINATION OF EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS

Daniel becomes one of the most generative texts for the Christian imagination, shaping how New Testament writers and early Christian authors understand Jesus, persecution, history, and hope. Its images, characters, and theological grammar form a kind of apocalyptic lexicon through which the early church interprets its own moment.

The most influential thread is the Son of Man of Daniel 7. Jesus adopts this title for himself, and the Gospels use Daniel's vision to frame his authority, suffering, and eschatological role. Daniel's promise of resurrection and final judgment in chapter 12 becomes foundational for Christian teaching on the last day. Apocalyptic imagery—beasts, cosmic conflict, heavenly courts—shapes the rhetoric of Mark 13, 2 Thessalonians, and especially Revelation, which reads the church's trials through Daniel's symbolic grammar.

Early Christian writers extend this pattern. Origen and other pre-Constantine writers interpret Daniel's kingdoms spiritually, seeing Christ as the stone that shatters oppressive powers. Post-4th century writers (see Augustine and John Chrysostom) use Daniel to argue that history is ordered toward God's final justice and highlight Daniel's courage in the face of oppression. Across these traditions, Daniel offers a way of seeing: history governed by God, empires judged, the faithful vindicated, and the Son of Man enthroned. It becomes the church's script for interpreting suffering and anticipating the kingdom that will not pass away.

MORAL IMAGINATION

QUESTIONS TO HELP DISCOVER DANIEL'S RELEVANCE TO THE CONTEMPORARY READER

- Where do you see empires, systems, or powers claiming ultimate authority in our world, and how does Daniel's vision reframe those claims?
- Daniel and his companions remain loyal under pressure. What forms of courageous resistance are Christians called to practice in contemporary life?
- What habits, disciplines, or communal practices help us maintain covenant identity when cultural forces pull in other directions?
- Daniel's apocalyptic visions reveal unseen dimensions of conflict and hope. How might the church discern "hidden realities" beneath today's political or social events?
- Daniel shows boldness without arrogance. How can Christians cultivate moral courage that remains humble, prayerful, and wise?
- Daniel interprets history through God's purposes. How might his lens help the church read its own cultural moment with clarity and hope?

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