

**GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE HOPE
APOCALYPTIC HOPE**

**THE BOOK OF DANIEL
INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER 1
September 7, 2022**

Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature

The term *apocalypse* derives from the Greek word *apokalypsis* which means *revelation*. The book of Daniel in the Hebrew Bible and the book of Revelation in the New Testament are the only biblical examples of apocalypses. However a number of prophetic texts written during and after the Babylonian exile share features of content and form with the apocalypses. It is also noteworthy that a substantial proportion of Jewish literature written between 300 BC and 200 BC is in this form. As a result it played a prominent role in the thoughts of early Christianity.

The form and content of apocalypses imply a basic worldview. There is a supernatural world that is closely related to the one we live in and there is an eschatological judgment for all human beings that can include supernatural beings as well. Often there is a conflict between good and evil that results in a victory by the forces of good. Victory can be conceptualized in many ways. It may be a renewal of the earth (where life will be lived as it should be) (in union with God) (without evil in any form) or it may be a future, heavenly existence for human beings.

The Hebrew Bible gives us a great deal of raw material for the study of the apocalypse. For example in Genesis God communicated to Joseph through dreams or visions. God also gave Joseph the ability to interpret those dreams. In several of the prophetic writings God controlled human events from the heavenly court. The apocalyptic picture of God as a warrior who intervenes in history in order to defeat evil is a common biblical idea. Zechariah 14 and Ezekiel 38-39 speak of a great eschatological battle. Those texts inspired later versions of the final battle between forces for and against God.

Historical Background of Daniel

For nearly three hundred years prior to the time of Daniel, the Middle East was dominated by the Assyrians (900-612 BC). During this time the outlying areas (like Syria) made repeated attempts to rebel against them. However the grip of Assyria was strengthened under the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC). His forces invaded Israel during the period 734-732 BC and is also recorded in 2 Kings 15:29.

About the same time disturbances arose in Babylonia which led Tiglath-pileser to also take over their land. Under Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) Assyria had a three-year siege against the city of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, which resulted in its fall in 722 BC (remember that its collapse was predicted by Isaiah). Thousands of Israelites were deported. After a series of events that fueled the hatred of Babylonia for Assyria, the Babylonians eventually defeated Assyria late in the 7th century BC.

By 626 BC the Chaldean Nabopolassar won independence for Babylon and was recognized as their king (although he was not accepted or recognized by Assyria). Nabopolassar is important because of his eventual conquest of Nineveh and because he is the father of Nebuchadnezzar (the Babylonian king in the book of Daniel). Numerous victories established Babylon as the dominant world power of that day and set the stage for Judah's exile to Babylon.

The Neo-Babylonian Empire reached its peak under King Nebuchadnezzar. His rule began in 605 BC and lasted some 43 years until 562 BC. He is famous for the hanging gardens of Babylon (one of the seven wonders of the world) as well as his destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. During his reign, Daniel enjoyed great favor with the king. The end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire came in 539 BC when the armies of Cyrus captured the city of Babylon. His conquest fulfilled the words of Isaiah 45:1-4.

Following the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus ordered a decree to permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and city that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. This decree is recorded in Ezra 1:1-3. This decree was issued in 538 BC. By now Daniel was too old to return to Jerusalem. He chose to remain in the city and finish out his years under the rule of the Medes and Persians.

The Persian Empire dominated the Ancient Near East from 539 to 333 BC. There were wars with Greece but Persia was the unrivaled superpower. All of this came to a crashing halt in the 4th century BC with the appearance of Alexander the Great. With an amazingly incredible speed he conquered the world that had long been ruled by Persia. In Daniel 7:6 he is described as a speedy leopard with four wings on its back. The significance of Alexander's conquests was that the Greek influence and language spread virtually everywhere west of India. This included Palestine which set the stage for the Maccabean revolt many years later.

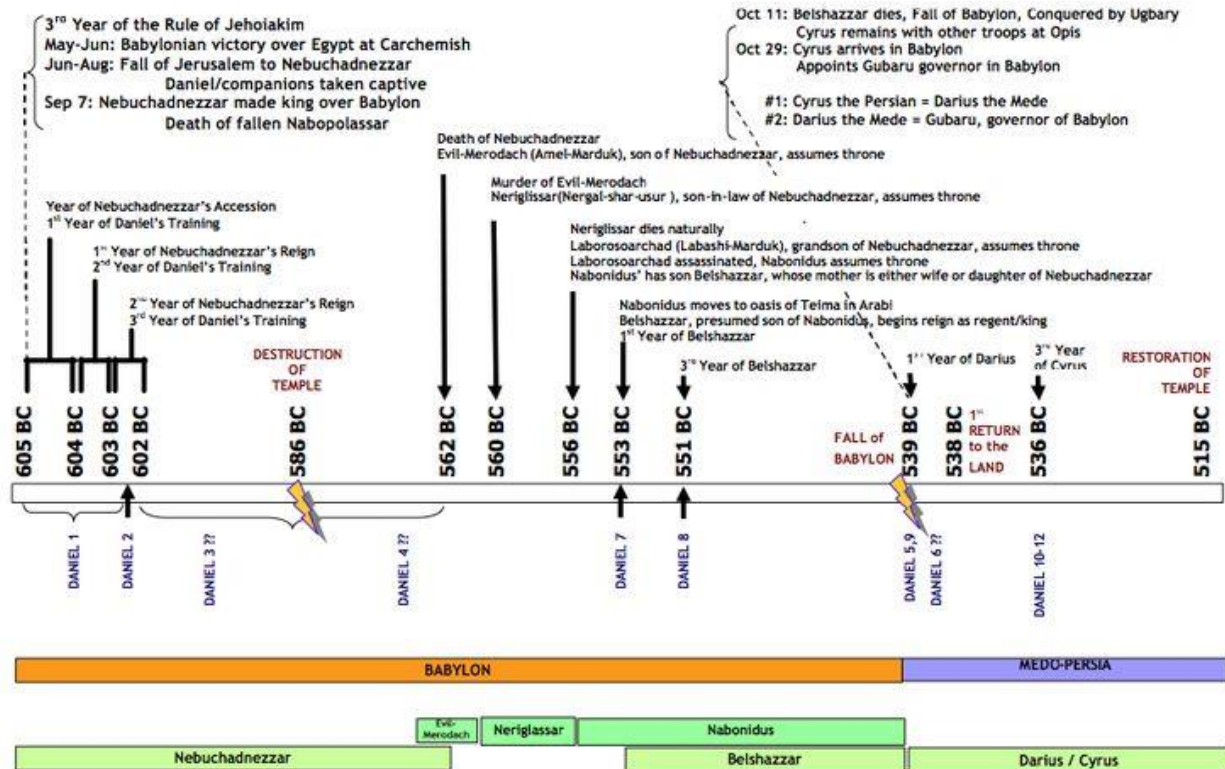
Alexander died very suddenly in 323 BC at the age of 32. Since there was no clear successor to his throne, a power play ensued for his empire. By the year 301 BC the empire was divided between four of his generals:

Ptolemy	Egypt and Palestine
Seleucus	Phrygia as far as the Indus (included Syria and Babylon)
Lysimachus	Thrace and Bithynia
Cassander	Macedonia

The rise of Alexander and the division of his kingdom into four realms is symbolically envisioned in Daniel 8:8. The strife between the Ptolemies and Seleucids is clearly foretold in Daniel 11. From the Seleucid rulers emerged Antiochus IV Epiphanes, another prominent figure in the book of Daniel. The references in Daniel speak so clearly of him that scholars insist the book was written after his time in power.

Antiochus did unspeakable acts and took offensive measures that led to the Maccabean revolt as recorded in 1 and 2 Maccabees. The revolt succeeded eventually and by 164 BC the Temple was renovated and rededicated. Antiochus died in the same year and there was a brief relief. By 64 BC Pompey brought in the armies of Rome to overtake both Syria and Palestine. With the coming of the Roman Empire the fourth beast of Daniel had come to light. Rome would rule for over 500 years until 476 AD. In the meanwhile the Messiah also came!

Timeline of the Book of Daniel



Archaeological Evidence for Daniel 1

There is archaeological evidence that would suggest the book of Daniel accurately describes the world of the Jewish exiles in Babylon during the 6th century BC. Here are some of the discoveries that support that theory.

Daniel 1:1

The Nebuchadnezzar Stele contains the best-preserved likeness of the king. He is depicted as a bearded man dressed in his royal robe, wearing a conical crown, and holding a long staff. He is standing before a tower dedicated to the Babylonian god, Marduk.

Daniel 1:2

The Temple of Marduk is the more likely location of the place Nebuchadnezzar placed the captured vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. It was a massive complex (much like a museum) with suites of rooms containing beautiful and valuable artifacts.



Daniel 1:3

The Nebo-Sarsekim Tablet refers to the Chief Eunuch, Nebo-Sarsekim, who is mentioned in Jeremiah 39:3. The title Chief Eunuch is rare in ancient texts but this tablet affirms its use in a Babylonian context in both Jeremiah and Daniel where Ashphanez is so identified. Daniel likely knew two chief eunuchs in Babylon, Ashphanez (who oversaw his training) and Nebo-Sarsekim (who held the role a decade later).

Daniel 1:1 and 3-4

The Babylonian Chronicle 5 is also known as the Jerusalem Chronicle. It records the events from 605-595 BC and early in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. The Chronicles are a collection of clay tablets that describe the significant events in Babylonian history for each year. It covers the beginning of Daniel's time in Babylon.

The Chronicle describes in detail the siege of Jerusalem in 597 BC, the removal of King Jehoiachin, the appointment of King Zedekiah, and the deportation of the people (affirming many details of 2 Kings 24:10-17). It alludes to his campaign of 605 BC when Daniel was taken to Babylon.

Hebrew Bible: Daniel 1:1-2

The book of Daniel is written in two languages. The opening is in Hebrew (the first chapter and the four initial verses of Chapter 2). At that point the text switches to Aramaic until the end of Chapter 7. The rest of the book is in Hebrew. By the time of its writing, Aramaic had for the most part replaced Hebrew as the Jewish dialect.

The first two verses of the first chapter serve notice to the reader that the context of these stories is of utmost importance to the writers and editors of the book of Daniel. These verses introduce the book as a whole. The bare facts are that Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, captured King Jehoiachin (son of Jehoiakim who died while Jerusalem was under siege), and

took captive not only the king but the temple implements as well. These implements were placed in the *treasury of the gods*. It symbolized the captivity of conquered gods as well as people. Since the Jewish community did not have an image of God the Babylonians used their temple vessels instead.

Scholars agree that the writers and editors were not interested in chronological details but in the power of the context of the exile. The third year of Jehoiakim was 606 BC and there is no evidence that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem then. On the contrary, other documents show that he and his army were occupied elsewhere at that time. He did make a raid into Jerusalem and took Jehoiakim captive nine years later. So this introduction serves as the essential background to the proper appreciation of the stories and the visions in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 1:3-7

The first story in the book of Daniel focuses on the treatment of the exiles from the perspective of the Babylonian conquerors. The king requests that members of the captured peoples be selected from the leadership of the Jewish people for specialized training in the Babylonian culture and language. The assessment of their competence to serve in the palace of the king was made before they were trained. It implies that the Jewish people had something to offer in the courts of the king. Their knowledge of Jewish language and culture interested him.

The four Jewish exiles are carefully introduced with their Jewish names before they are changed to Babylonian names –

Daniel	Belteshazzar	Protect the king's life
Azariah	Abednego	Servant of Nabu
Hananiah	Shadrach	Shining
Misrael	Meschach	Mithra

Daniel 1:8-10

The planned assimilation of the four Jewish representatives of the exile community runs into a brick wall. Daniel states firmly his refusal to accept the offer of the king for food and wine. He would be *polluted* by them. Why did not the others also refuse the food and drink? We do not know the answer to that question. However, to voice concerns over purity laws during the exile served as an important spiritual and social protection against the dangers of disappearing as a people. Daniel maintains this important theological understanding.

It is interesting that Daniel accepts the vegetables from the royal supply so the likelihood that he wanted to avoid any Babylonian food that had been dedicated to pagan gods seems not to be the issue. Wine was not forbidden in Levitical purity laws. But meat and wine were the foods of the wealthy – wealth that was stolen from the nations conquered by the Babylonian empire.

We note in verse 9 that Daniel received special protection from God. According to the writers and editors God influenced the events in the life of Daniel by giving him *hesed* or steadfast love. The term is understood as deliverance or protection given to one who keeps faith with God. In this case God makes Daniel the object of his steadfast love and mercy. It is reminiscent of Joseph finding favor in the eyes of Potiphar.

Daniel 1:11-17

The Jewish captives were to be tested and compared to the young Babylonians. In the last part of this section there is mention of the visions and dreams of Daniel. It is a foreshadowing of the stories to come. It implies that it was a later addition to the book of Daniel. In the end knowledge and wisdom became the crucial factors when the four men stood before the king. That Daniel understood visions and dreams set him apart from his three friends whose wisdom was limited to books and other forms of knowledge. Joseph was also an expert interpreter of dreams.

Daniel 1:18-20

Standing before the king is a common theme in biblical literature. In other biblical stories Esther and Mordecai as well as Ezra and Nehemiah had their turn to stand before the king. Here the implication is that the court of Nebuchadnezzar is an awe and majestic setting. The questions posed by the king were intended to be a test. His interrogation of the four Jewish men resulted in the conclusion that these exiles were ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters throughout the kingdom.

Babylon was known as a center for magic and enchanters. The concept passes into some of the Biblical readings even to the *wise men* of the New Testament. Another term, Chaldean, is used throughout Daniel to refer to an astrologer who is one of the royal court officials.

Daniel 1:21

The final verse notes that Daniel started his work during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar and remained in his position until the first year of King Cyrus. The writers and editors clearly want to connect Daniel to the fate of the exiles (from the time of the conquest by Nebuchadnezzar to the beginning of the reign of Cyrus as liberator).

Chapter 1 parallels with the capture of the Jewish community and ends with the victory over the Babylonians. However we will see that Daniel as a whole does not imagine that the exile has ended. Rather he extends it to seventy weeks of years or 490 years (far beyond the prediction by Jeremiah of seventy years). The book of Daniel does not presume an end to the exile at all. As a result we will read the book from the perspective of resistance and not from a sense that the danger has passed.

Next Session on September 13

Daniel 2 – 3