
GANZ NOTES – ON DANIEL OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL 1-6

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QUOTES

Overarching these significant theological issues is the problem of *theodicy*, God’s way of dealing with evil in the world. **The book of Daniel projects a clear solution to this problem: *God will not be mocked*.** God will achieve the divine purpose of the redemption of the world. Because this is the case, the Daniel who survives in exile and outshines the other wise men is not a passive figure who waits quietly until the Great Assize, but is one who issues forth into the fray. **That is why we can speak of the first chapters of the book of Daniel as “interim ethics,” that is, as instruction on how the saints should live in-between the times. The faithful friend of God does not simply hang on, observe all the strictures of the sect, and survive. The saint’s courage inspires others to believe and gives hope to those who are losing their hope. The saint helps bring about a world in which God is honored, idolatry is ended, the cries of the needy are heard, and the oppressed are liberated.** Like the deeds of his fictional contemporaries, Esther, Judith, and Tobit, Daniel’s deeds vindicate the daring and courage of believers, grounded as they are in well-placed faith in the self-vindication of the God of Israel.¹

Christian readers will also recognize a similarity to the picture of the ministry of Jesus in the NT. The “little apocalypses” of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 24–25, Mark 13, Luke 17:20–37) are to the account of Jesus’ ministry what the chaps. 7–12 of the book of Daniel are to the deeds of Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1–6. **Jesus’ ministry of healing and of liberating persons from the bondage of sin and despair was shot through with a strong sense of the immediacy of the coming kingdom, which would vindicate God’s way of combating evil in the world.**

¹ W. Sibley Towner, [“Daniel, Book Of.”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

His message, too, was a call not to quietism but to action, an invitation to people to offer in their own lives a foretaste of the character of the new age that is coming. His offer, like that of the book of Daniel, is of an “interim ethic,” a vital and productive way of living in-between the times.²

Daniel also heavily influenced the language and thought of the New Testament that follows it. Jesus’ self-designation as “the Son of Man” is based upon the mysterious figure who appears coming on the clouds in Daniel 7:13. Mark’s Gospel has Jesus refer to this verse from Daniel twice (Mark 13:26; 14:62) with regard to his coming glory. Jesus’ very proclamation of “the kingdom of God” is closely connected to the visions of the coming of God’s kingdom in Daniel 2 and 7. In addition to these strong ties to the person and preaching of Jesus, the book of Daniel also profoundly inspired the book of Revelation. The prophetic visions and fantastic imagery in the latter are unmistakably based on those of the former.³

Christian faith inevitably calls us to active nonconformity with the world, even in the manner in which we daily live our lives—the food we choose to consume, and the clothing we choose to wear. The message of Daniel 1 is a powerful reminder for us to search within ourselves for those aspects of “the king’s food and wine” that we ought to resist for the sake of the gospel message. For the writer of Daniel, food was merely one symbol among many others of the resistance to total domination and total assimilation to the culture and ways of dominant powers. So, too, is the Christian life a life of resistance—to the enticements of financial power and control over the destiny of others—such as powerful nations over the developing world—and to the enticements of luxury that come from the abuse of underpaid laborers in struggling societies. For Christians from dominant cultures in North America, Australia, and Europe, a man like Ashpenaz, rather than Daniel, may provide a more apt role model of resistance. Ashpenaz emerges from the power elite to have sympathy for those who suffer and resist. But like Ashpenaz, the faithful among the elite must be aware that their faith borders on treason; hence identification with, let alone sympathy for, the “exiled” peoples may have its cost.^{69 4}

² W. Sibley Towner, [“Daniel, Book Of.”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

³ Paul V. Niskanen, [“Introduction.”](#) in *Ezekiel & Daniel*, ed. Daniel Durken, vol. 16, *The New Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 120–121.

⁶⁹ See A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon, 1965). See also Introduction.

⁴ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, [“The Book of Daniel.”](#) in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 44–45.

This confidence in God’s ultimate victory in the struggle with evil may be the single most profound source of hope available in our modern culture. Science and fiction alike give only ambiguous readings of the future, encouraging us when they point toward to the evolution of the human species toward ever greater capacities, but often discouraging us, as well, when they point to totalitarian “big brothers” whose strength is underwritten by technology and nuclear threats. **The most radical forms of Marxism and Islam offer to our age alternative eschatologies, but both require the destruction of significant parts of the human community in order that the purposes of emancipation be achieved. In contrast, biblical apocalyptic literature sometimes attains a vision that is universal in scope and that is rich with hope for all things. On the great day that is coming, “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). On that great day, “one like a human being” will be given “dominion and glory and kingship ... His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed” (Dan 7:13–14).**⁵

MAP



⁵ W. Sibley Towner, “Daniel, Book Of,” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Counted among the prophets in the ancient Greek and modern Christian versions of the Bible, but included among the wisdom writings in the OT and modern Jewish translations, this work readily falls into two parts. **It begins with six tales about the wise and heroic exploits of the young Jew Daniel (see DANIEL) and his three friends in the courts of Babylon and Media (see ASSYRIA AND BABYLONIA).** These tales reflect a degree of acceptance of the rule of the imperial powers, over which the book believes the God of Israel is sovereign.⁶

The behavior of Daniel and his friends in the tales of chaps. 1–6 can serve as our starting point. Even if these chapters originated separately from the apocalyptic visions of chaps. 7–12, **the authors are offering the characters to their audience as ideal heroes. *In the context of foreign captivity, the four young Jews are steadfast in their observance of Torah, and in their refusal to participate in idolatrous royal cults. Their faithfulness repeatedly puts their lives at risk, and though they are not martyrs, they are certainly “saints.”*** In the apocalyptic half the book of Daniel we learn that when God finally overcomes the oppressors of the world, the kingdom is given to “the people of the holy ones of the Most High” (7:27). Probably these heirs of the age to come are identical with “the people who are loyal to their God ... the wise among the people” (11:32–33) and “everyone who is found written in the book” (12:1). Since all of these epithets apply to the heroes of chaps. 1–6, we can assume that the authors are presenting a consistent picture of loyalists willing to endure suffering and persecution for the sake of their community and their God. **The authors surely identify themselves with these figures that they are recommending, and are addressing themselves to an audience that shares their admiration for the fidelity of the heroes.**⁷

In spite of these peculiarities, the book of Daniel is a unified composition with a central message that permeates the whole. **This message relates to the challenge of living in fidelity to the LORD and to his covenant in a world where Israel is no longer an autonomous nation but is subject to foreign kings and kingdoms. This new situation begins at the time of the Babylonian exile in which the book of Daniel is set, but for Daniel it does not end with the return from Babylon.** Rather, he sees the position of the postexilic Jews who are pawns in the power politics of the world’s great empires as equally unacceptable. **The book of Daniel addresses difficult questions about the nature of God and God’s justice, attempting to discern God’s presence and action in this unjust world order. Daniel communicates a vision**

⁶ W. Sibley Towner, [“Daniel, Book Of.”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 15.

⁷ W. Sibley Towner, [“Daniel, Book Of.”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 17.

of world history that unfolds according to the design of God. The present hardships under foreign rule are only temporary and will soon give way to the definitive kingdom of God. This theology, which sees God as supreme ruler and judge, is a continuation of Israelite thought. Daniel builds upon and interprets these earlier biblical traditions for the new world in which the Jews find themselves.⁸

DATE – Much figurative scholarly blood has been shed over the date of the book of Daniel. More traditional and conservative commentators have regarded the book’s own 7th and 6th cent. BCE dates for the tales and visions as accurate; **in contrast, modern critical commentators are almost unanimous in arguing that the book as we have it is the product of the early 2nd cent. BCE.** Numerous historical problems in the book show its grasp of exilic history to be rather more inaccurate than would be expected from writers who had actually experienced it.⁹ ... A 100 BCE date for 1 Maccabees gives us a reliable date for the acceptance of the book of Daniel as scripture.... This date for the canonical form of the book of Daniel does not require that all parts of it came into existence at that time. **The book certainly has a redaction history, though general agreement on the outlines of it has not been reached. The diaspora and even somewhat pro-Babylonian outlook of the tales in chaps. 1–6 suggest that these stories circulated as a separate and earlier Daniel cycle before being incorporated into the present book. They may even have originated in Jewish exilic contexts.**¹⁰

We have seen in the discussion of the composition of Daniel that the tales in Daniel 1–6 are pre-Maccabean and older than chaps. 7–12, but also that the ostensible setting of the tales in the Babylonian Exile is a fiction. While the collection of *the tales must be assigned to the Hellenistic age*, we lack the specific allusions that would enable us to ground the tales, either individually or taken together, in a specific place and time. We must be content, then, with more general inferences from the genre of the tales about the kind of circles that produced this

⁸ Paul V. Niskanen, [“Introduction.”](#) in *Ezekiel & Daniel*, ed. Daniel Durken, vol. 16, The New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 121.

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⁹ W. Sibley Towner, [“Daniel, Book Of.”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 18.

¹⁰ W. Sibley Towner, [“Daniel, Book Of.”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 18.

literature and their place in Judaism. Such inferences are, of necessity, hypothetical, but degrees of probability can be distinguished between different hypotheses.¹¹

Set in Babylon during the time of the exile (ca. 598–538 B.C.), and spanning the reigns of foreign kings from Nebuchadnezzar to Cyrus the Persian, the book of Daniel speaks God’s word to a people who have been dispossessed. As the prayer in chapter 3 spells out, the people have “no prince, prophet, or leader, / no burnt offering, sacrifice, oblation, or incense, / no place to offer first fruits, to find favor with [God]” (3:38). Such was the new reality for the Jewish people throughout much of the exilic and postexilic periods. The book of Daniel, which was probably written during the darkest hour of this difficult time (the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus IV from 167–164 B.C.), reaffirms God’s constant care for his people and ultimate lordship over history. It is a rousing call to remain faithful to the living God who does not forsake those who hope in him.¹²

LANGUAGE – **The book of Daniel is written in two languages.** Dan 1:1–2:4a and chaps. 8–12 are written in Late Biblical Hebrew. **The intervening passage, Dan 2:4b–7:28, is expressed in the language spoken in Judea at the end of the first millennium BCE, the so-called “Official Aramaic” (see ARAMAIC, ARAMAISM).** This tongue had become the *lingua franca* of the multi-national empires of the ANE, and was used in official correspondence, court records, and inscriptions from the days of the Assyrian empire (1100–605 BCE) through the Hellenistic period (down to 30 BCE). Why the book of Daniel has this bi-lingual character continues to be debated, with no definitive answer at hand. Clearly, the more nationalistic and anti-Hellenistic factions in Judea resisted the penetration of Greek culture in various ways, and **the use of indigenous Aramaic** might have been one of their means of doing so. One widely held theory is that the entire book was originally written in Aramaic and that Dan 1:1–2:4a and 8–12 were later translated into Hebrew.¹³

¹¹ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 47–48.

¹² Paul V. Niskanen, “[Introduction](#),” in *Ezekiel & Daniel*, ed. Daniel Durken, vol. 16, The New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 120.

ANE Ancient Near East

¹³ W. Sibley Towner, “[Daniel, Book Of](#),” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 19.

Aramaic¹⁴ describes a cluster of closely related dialects that first appear ca. the 9th cent. BCE and continue in use down to today. It belongs to the subdivision of the Semitic languages commonly referred to as Northwest Semitic that also includes the Canaanite dialects, most notably, Hebrew.¹⁵... In the 19th cent. CE, excavations in Babylonia directed attention especially to this Neo-Babylonian-Chaldean Empire. **Since the Book of Daniel is set during that time, scholars then referred to the non-Hebrew language of that book (i.e., Aramaic) as “Chaldee” or “Chaldean.”** These terms are no longer in use but are met in older references.¹⁶

Introduction

I. General Introduction to the Book of Daniel

Daniel is one of the earliest exemplars of **the *apocalyptic genre***. Accordingly, its relationship to the genre is rather different than that of later works.⁴⁷³ On the one hand, its composite origin gives it an ad hoc, experimental character. The combination of tales and visions does not conform to any clear precedent and, indeed, does not become a recurrent feature of the genre.¹⁷

¹⁴ The period of “official Aramaic” in the Ancient Near East was from 700 BCE to 200 BCE. “Middle Aramaic” existed from 200 BCE to 200 CE. “Late Aramaic” existed from 200 CE to 1200 CE. And Aramaic continues to exist today in the Middle East.

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¹⁵ Michael D. Guinan, [“Aramaic, Aramaism,”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 228.

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¹⁶ Michael D. Guinan, [“Aramaic, Aramaism,”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 229.

^{*473} This point is rightly noted by E. J. Tigchelaar, “More on Apocalyptic and Apocalypses,” *JSJ* 18 (1987) 141.

¹⁷ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, [《Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel》](#), ed. Frank Moore Cross, *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 58.

The Book of Daniel is found among the Writings in the Hebrew Bible but is associated with the Prophets in the versions and in modern Christian editions.¹ **The first half of the book recounts the exploits of one Daniel and his companions, who were reportedly deported to Babylon and rose to prominence in the Babylonian court.**

Babylon was located in Mesopotamia, the site of the world's first urban civilization. Many features converged to make urbanization possible, but primary among them was access to the slow-moving water of the Euphrates, and to a lesser extent the Tigris, which makes the alluvial plain of southern Mesopotamia easily irrigable. Urbanization took place in this region in the late 4th and early 3rd millennia BCE. The Euphrates did not flow through a single channel at this time but through several branches along which the most important cities were established. Babylon itself was located along the Arah ~tum-branch, which in later texts is identified with the Euphrates itself.¹⁸

The OT contains nearly 300 references to Babylon, the region of Babylonia, or its inhabitants, as well as eighty-nine references to the ethnically precise term “Chaldea/n/s.” Because of its international and cultural significance, and its role later in destroying Jerusalem and deporting large portions of its citizens, Babylon came to carry theological significance in the Bible even beyond its obvious historical importance. **The city itself came to symbolize ungodly power.**¹⁹

In addition to these historical connections between Babylon and Israel—and indeed, partly because of these connections—Babylon also plays an important theological and ideological role in the OT. **Especially notable in this regard is the pejorative tone adopted so frequently by Israelite prophets when referring to Babylon, a nation used as an instrument of divine wrath against Israel, which destroyed Jerusalem and deported large portions of its citizens.** Thus Babylon is referred to by the ancient literary cipher known as ATHBASH, in which “Sheshach” is a cryptogram for “Babylon” in contexts of rebellion and horror, and “Leb-qamai” stands for “Chaldea” (Jer 25:26; 51:1, 41; respectively). **Babylonian religion and imperialism come under especially sharp attack in the Hebrew prophetic literature. From the perspective of**

¹ There is considerable variation in the order of the books in the early Greek manuscripts and in the lists of the church fathers. See Henry Barclay Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914) 201–14; Albert C. Sundberg, *The Old Testament of the Early Church* (HTS 20; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964) 58–59. The early lists do not always distinguish clearly between the Prophets and the Writings.

¹⁸ Bill T. Arnold, “[Babylon, OT.](#)” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 377.

¹⁹ Bill T. Arnold, “[Babylon, OT.](#)” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 378.

the Israelite prophet, Babylon may be compared to Sheol, for just as Sheol's appetite for the dead is insatiable, so is the greed of the Babylonian empire for other nations (Hab 2:5).²⁰

BABYLONIAN JUDAISM. Many inhabitants of Judah were deported to Babylonia when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah in 587/586 BCE. Following the Persian occupation of Babylonia, Cyrus permitted the deportees to return, yet many remained. Rabbinic Judaism emerged during the Sassanian Empire (ca. 220 CE). The community was organized under the leadership of an exilarch. Talmudic academies for study of the MISHNAH arose in centers such as Sura and Pumbeditha (*see* TALMUD), which persisted into the 11th cent. CE. Jews continued to live in Babylonia (Iraq) through the 20th cent.²¹

The second half contains revelations given to Daniel with reference to a later time. The versions include some materials not found in the Hebrew Bible: two long prayers in chap. 3 and the stories of Susanna and of Bel and the Serpent. These are included in the canon of the Roman Catholic Church but are regarded as apocryphal by Protestants.

According to the consensus of modern critical scholarship, the stories about Daniel and his friends are legendary in character, and the hero himself most probably never existed. The earliest clear allusion to this Daniel is found in 1 Macc 1:60*, dating to about 100 B.C.E.² The name Daniel does occur in some earlier texts. Ezra 8:2* mentions a priest named Daniel, son of

²⁰ Bill T. Arnold, "[Babylon, OT.](#)" ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 378.

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²¹ Burton L. Visotzky, "[Babylonian Judaism.](#)" ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 380.

* 60 According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised,

1 Maccabees 1:60 (NRSV)

B.C.E. Before the Common Era

² That he is not mentioned in Ben Sira's "Praise of the Fathers" is not necessarily significant, since Ben Sira also fails to mention Ezra.

* 2 Of the descendants of Phinehas, Gershom. Of Ithamar, Daniel. Of David, Hattush,

Ezra 8:2 (NRSV)

Ithamar, who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem with Ezra, but this was at least a century after the Exile.³ More controversy has surrounded mention of the name Daniel in the Book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel 14:14* says that when a land sins, “even if these three Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.” Ezekiel 28:3* taunts the king of Tyre: “Are you wiser than Daniel?”⁴ **It seems clear from these references that Daniel was already the name of a legendary figure, famed for righteousness and wisdom, in the time of Ezekiel.**⁵

The view that Daniel was the name of a traditional, legendary figure received support from the discovery of the Aqhat story in the Ugaritic literature.⁶ There we find a king named Daniel (*dn.il*) who is initially childless. He supplicates the gods and is given a son, Aqhat. The son, however, runs foul of the goddess *Anat* and is struck down. Daniel retrieves his son for burial and his daughter, Pughat, sets out to avenge her brother. **Daniel is evidently a righteous man who supplicates the gods and, as king, gives judgment for widows and orphans.**⁷ He is not

³ The names of Daniel’s companions are also mentioned in the Book of Nehemiah: Azariah in Neh 8:7* and 10:2*, Mishael in Neh 8:4*, and Hananiah in Neh 10:23*. None of these can be identified with the figures in the Book of Daniel.

* 14 even if Noah, Daniel, and Job, these three, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord God.

Ezekiel 14:14 (NRSV)

* 3 You are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you;

Ezekiel 28:3 (NRSV)

⁴ The name is spelled **דַּנְיֵאל** in Ezekiel, but no significance can be attached to the variation in spelling. See E. Lipiński, review of *Le Livre de Daniel*, by André Lacocque, *VT* 28 (1978) 233. The name is attested at Mari in the eighteenth century B.C.E.

⁵ Martin Noth, “Noah, Daniel und Hiob in Ez 14,” *VT* 1 (1951) 251–60; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 314–15; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20* (AB 22; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 257. H.H.P. Dressler (“The Identification of the Ugaritic Dnil with the Daniel of Ezekiel,” *VT* 29 [1979] 152–61) has attempted to deny this but has been rightly criticized by John Day (“The Daniel of Ugarit and Ezekiel and the Hero of the Book of Daniel,” *VT* 30 [1980] 174–84) and Baruch Margalit (“Interpreting the Story of Aqhat: A Reply to H.H.P. Dressler,” *VT* 30 [1980] 361–65). Dressler’s rejoinder (H.H.P. Dressler, “Reading and Interpreting the Aqhat Text,” *VT* 34 [1984] 78–82) does not increase the plausibility of his position on this issue.

⁶ *CTA* 17–19; *ANET* 149–55; J.C.L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1977) 103–22.

⁷ The function of judge is suggested already by the name Daniel (“God is my judge”). Martin Noth (*Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* [Hildesheim: Olms, 1966] 35) suggests “God has judged” but has to dismiss the *i* as a connecting vowel. The function of judge reappears in the story of Susanna, which, though set in the Exile, is independent of the stories in Daniel 1–6.

portrayed as exceptionally wise, and even his righteousness is incidental to the story.⁸ If this is indeed the same hero that Ezekiel refers to, the prophet must have known other traditions about him.⁹ Nonetheless it seems gratuitous to suppose that there were two unrelated legendary figures by the name of Daniel.

The relevance of this figure to the hero of the Book of Daniel is limited. Only the name is taken over. **He is given an entirely new identity as a Jew in the Babylonian Exile.** There is no reason to suppose that the authors or tradents of the tales were at all aware of the Ugaritic legend. Most probably the name was taken from Ezekiel. Because Daniel was not as well-known as Noah and Job in Jewish circles, the post-exilic author was free to attach the name to a figure who would illustrate righteousness and wisdom in a historical context.

A few other occurrences of the name Daniel should be noted. It is the name of one of the Watchers, or fallen angels, in *1En* 6:7. It also appears as the name of a good angel on an Aramaic incantation bowl.¹⁰ Finally, *Jub* 4:20 reports that Enoch took a wife whose name was Edni, “the daughter of Danel, his father’s brother.” This latter figure may well be a variant of the Ugaritic *Dn.il*, but his tradition history remains obscure. In any case, none of these uses of the name Daniel seems to have influenced the hero of our biblical book.²²

THE TALES OF DANIEL 1-6

⁸ Hans-Peter Müller (“Magisch-mantische Weisheit und die Gestalt Daniels,” *Ugarit-Forschungen 1* [Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1969] 79–94) considers the Daniel of Ugarit to have been a wise man in virtue of his power to utter magic formulas, but his wisdom is not a theme of the story.

⁹ No one would suggest that Ezekiel was referring specifically to the Aqhat story. Dressier (“Identification of the Ugaritic Dn.il”) objects that Ezekiel would not have referred to a worshiper of Baal, as the Daniel of Ugarit surely was. This objection, however, misses the nature of the allusions in Ezekiel. Daniel is not being held up as a model to be imitated but is merely mentioned as one whose righteousness and wisdom were proverbial. Moreover, Frank Moore Cross points out that Daniel’s epithet, “man of Rapi’,” suggests that he was a worshiper of El.

1En 1 Enoch

¹⁰ Charles D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (SBLDS 17; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975) 102–3 (Text 43, lines 4–5).

Jub Jubilees

²² John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, [*Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*](#), ed. Frank Moore Cross, *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 1–2.

Josephus already distinguished between the stories about Daniel, which he treated as an historical source, and Daniel's writings or "prophecy."³³⁵ The possibility that the two halves of the book came from different authors was entertained already in the eighteenth century. **Little attention, however, was paid to the genre of the tales until the end of the nineteenth century. Rosenthal laid the foundation for future studies when he observed the affinities of Daniel 1–6 with the stories of Joseph and Esther.**³³⁶ The basis of comparison was widened by George Barton's study of the story of Aḥikar in relation to Daniel.³³⁷ L. B. Paton, in his ICC commentary on Esther, confidently assigned that book to the same age and the same class of literature as "the Jewish romances," Daniel, Tobit, Judith, 1 Esdras 3, and the story of Aḥikar.³³⁸ Gunkel and Baumgartner went further and placed the biblical tales in the broader context of Near Eastern court tales, which are also found in Herodotus, Ktesias, Xenophon, and the *Thousand and One Nights*.³³⁹ The most thorough formulation of this approach to the tales as yet presented is that of Lawrence Wills.³⁴⁰²³

The categories of **folklore** are undoubtedly helpful for appreciating the genre of Daniel 1–6. We have already noted the folkloric theme of "the disgrace and rehabilitation of a minister" in connection with Aḥikar and Daniel 6. The theme of the lowly person who attains status by

³³⁵ *Ant.* 10.11.7 §§267–69. Josephus refers to the "books" that Daniel wrote, but the reference is probably to the different visions in Daniel 7–12, as there is nothing to indicate that Josephus knew other Danielic literature.

³³⁶ Ludwig A. Rosenthal, "Die Josephgeschichte, mit den Büchern Ester und Daniel verglichen," *ZAW* 15 (1895) 278–84. Paul Riessler ("Zu Rosenthal's Aufsatz, Bd. XV, S.278ff," *ZAW* 16 [1896] 182) contended that the affinities were not found in the OG and were secondary in nature. Rosenthal replied in his "Nochmals der Vergleich Ester, Joseph, Daniel," *ZAW* 17 (1897) 125–28, that there are ample parallels between the texts, even in the OG.

³³⁷ George A. Barton, "The Story of Aḥikar and the Book of Daniel," *AJSL* 16 (1899/1900) 242–47. See also F. C. Conybeare, J. Rendel Harris, and Agnes Smith Lewis, *The Story of Aḥikar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913) lx–lxii.

ICC International Critical Commentary

³³⁸ Lewis B. Paton, *Esther* (ICC; New York: Scribner's, 1916) 75.

Xenophon of Athens (c. 430–354 BCE), pupil of Socrates, author of various historical, philosophical and scholarly works, ed. E. C. Marchant, 1900 ff.

³³⁹ Hermann Gunkel, "Esther," in *RGG* (2d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1928) 378–79; Walter Baumgartner, *Das Buch Daniel* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1926) 9; idem, "Ein Vierteljahrhundert Danielforschung," 131 ; Curt Kuhl, *Die drei Männer im Feuer* (BZAW 55; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1930) 58.

³⁴⁰ Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*.

²³ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 38–39.

solving a problem when no one else can is also widely known in folklore and underlies Daniel 2 and 5³⁶⁵ while this universal, cross-cultural aspect is important, however, it should not eclipse the local color of the tales, which derives in large part from their setting in a royal court.³⁶⁶... The most widely accepted categorization of these stories is undoubtedly “**court tales**.”³⁶⁷ Stories of courtiers and their intrigues and adventures were widespread in the ancient Near East, although only a few have survived in Semitic languages.²⁴

The function of the tales was aptly described by Humphreys: they project a “life-style for diaspora” that affirms the possibility of participating fully in the life of a foreign nation.⁴²¹ Daniel and his companions exemplify the advice of Jeremiah to the exiles: “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile...for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer 29:7*). At the same time, the tales insist on the importance of fidelity to the Jewish religion and refuse any compromise with idolatry. It is because of (not despite) their fidelity to their own God that the Jews succeed.²⁵

The six tales that make up the first half of the book narrate the successes in the courts of Babylon and Media of the young Jewish exiles, Daniel and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. **In chap. 1**, the captive youths profit by the training they receive at the Babylonian academy of wisdom. They rise to high positions in the court of King

³⁶⁵ Jan de Vries, *Die Märchen von den klugen Rätsellösern* (Folklore Fellows Communications, 73; Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1928); Niditch and Doran, “The Success Story”

³⁶⁶ Pamela J. Milne (*Vladimir Propp and the Study of Structure in Hebrew Biblical Narrative* [Sheffield: Almond, 1988]) has attempted to apply the categories of Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (2d English ed.; Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1968) to the tales of Daniel. She concludes: “Since none of the stories in Daniel 1–6 could be fully described with the aid of Propp’s model...in this case Propp’s model could not be used to classify according to genre” (p. 264).

³⁶⁷ This was already true when Baumgartner published his survey of scholarship in 1939 (“Ein vierteljahrhundert Danielforschung,” 131).

²⁴ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 42.

*421 Humphreys, “Life-Style” 222–23.

* 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. Jeremiah 29:7 (NRSV)

²⁵ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 51.

Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 BCE) in spite of their refusal to compromise their Jewish identity and independence by partaking of the sumptuous fare of the king’s table. **In chap. 2**, as to Joseph long before him, God gives to the ideal courtier, Daniel, the gift of dream interpretation. Daniel reveals that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a colossus made of four metals, descending in order of value, whose feet of iron and clay are smashed by a great stone that fills the whole earth, is a summary of imperial history through four empires culminating in final and eternal fifth monarchy. **Chapter 3** narrates the heroism of the three friends who prefer being thrown into a fiery furnace to bowing down before an image of the king. Saying that they will remain faithful to God whether or not God can save them (3:16–18), they survive the ordeal with the help of a mysterious fourth man with “the appearance of a god” (3:25) who joins them in the flames. Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream of his own exaltation and subsequent humiliation to animalism, Daniel’s interpretation of it, its fulfillment, and the king’s hymn of praise to God make up the content of **chap. 4**. **The fifth tale** recounts the interpretation by Daniel of mysterious words (*see* MENE, MENE, TEKEL, AND PARSIN) written by a ghostly hand on the wall of the banquet hall of BELSHAZZAR. Finally, **in chap. 6**, we hear a successor king, “DARIUS the Mede,” reluctantly sentence Daniel to death in a DEN OF LIONS because he is charged with violating the royal edict that all prayers be directed to the king alone. God saves Daniel, of course, his accusers are eaten by the lions, and Darius, like Nebuchadnezzar before him, proclaims his faith in Daniel’s “living god” (6:25–27).²⁶

THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

The Book of Daniel has, over the centuries, been seized upon by interpreters eager to find in it the time and manner of the end of history. In reaction to this literalism and millennialism, other students of scripture, especially in the mainstream of Judaism and Christianity, have either ignored this material or treated it as at best a highly mythic and probably very naïve attempt to write history in advance. **Stationed between these two extreme understandings of Daniel and biblical apocalyptic is the interpretive stance that biblical eschatological literature is invaluable to religious thinking because its vision draws readers into the future. And that is good because, as the sage observed long ago, “where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov 29:18).**

Proverbs 29 –

¹⁸Without a vision the people lose restraint;

²⁶ W. Sibley Towner, “[Daniel, Book Of.](#)” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 16.

but happy is the one who follows instruction.* ²⁷

The encompassing purpose of the book of Daniel is to offer vision and to inculcate hope, not simply for individual escape from persecution and death but for the people of God as a whole. Before addressing that large theological purpose, however, several other theological issues raised by this book should be noted. **The unswerving affirmation of the sovereignty of God over all human sovereignties emerges is a theme in the first chapter and continues to be proclaimed vigorously throughout the book. The question of “interim ethics,” or how to live until the Day of the Lord dawns, is illustrated narratively in the tales of Dan 1–6, and vindicated in the culmination of history envisioned in Dan 7–12. The doctrine of revelation, with the corollary issues of the significance of dreams and the interpretations of mysteries, surfaces as a major issue in chap. 2.** So does the difficult theological problem of determinism, sometimes shaped by the apparent conviction that what the future holds is already “appointed” or “decreed” by God (Dan 8:19, 9:26–27, 11:35). Chapter 7 provides an opportunity to think about the impact of myth on biblical literature, for surely the great beasts that appear out of the sea have their roots in the mythic theme of the warfare that the creator God must wage—at the end of time as at its beginning—against the forces of chaos.²⁸

The political stance of the tales is one of loyalty and optimism.⁴²³ *The legitimacy of gentile rule is not in doubt.* As the loyal subject of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel wishes that the ill-omened dream may be for his enemies (4:16*). When Belshazzar is deprived of the kingdom, it is given to another Gentile. Even the four-kingdom prophecy in chap. 2*, which looks forward to the end of gentile rule, does so with no great urgency. **In the meantime, Daniel accepts the**

* This much-cited proverb has been interpreted in several different ways. “Vision” and “instruction” mean authoritative guidance for the community. *People are demoralized without credible leadership*, but any individual heeding traditional instruction can still find happiness. As in 15:15 wisdom enables an individual to surmount days of trouble.

²⁷ *New American Bible*, Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Pr 29:18.

²⁸ W. Sibley Towner, “Daniel, Book Of,” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

⁴²³ The distinctly religious perspective of the tales on the political situation of diaspora Judaism is discussed by John Goldingay, “The Stories in Daniel: A Narrative Politics,” *JSOT* 37 (1987) 117–24.

* 19 Then Daniel, who was called Belteshazzar, was severely distressed for a while. His thoughts terrified him. The king said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or the interpretation terrify you.” Belteshazzar answered, “My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you, and its interpretation for your enemies! Daniel 4:19 (NRSV)

* 5 I saw a dream that frightened me; my fantasies in bed and the visions of my head terrified me. Daniel 4:5 (NRSV)

honors of the Babylonian king and seeks the promotion of his friends. The sovereignty of the Most High God is compatible with gentile rule for the present. There is no call for revolution to bring about the kingdom of God; nor does the question “How long?” occur in these chapters. Even in the tales of court conflict, where Jews are endangered because of their religion, there is confidence in the ultimate benevolence of the kings. Darius, in chap. 6, is benevolent throughout. In chap. 3, Nebuchadnezzar is readily won over when he sees the power of God in preserving the three youths. **Such troubles as the Jews encounter are due to the malice of lesser officials or to a temporary aberration** but do not reflect any serious problem with the system. **This confidence in the ultimate benevolence of the highest authorities is typical of diaspora literature for much of the history of the Second Temple period.**^{424 29}

The latter part of the book treats the difficult question of *the meaning of history*. Is history an incomprehensible and foreordained series of events that gain what little significance they have by merely by pointing toward the relative proximity of the end? Or do the deeds of the saints and the decisions of God actually affect the course of history and become part of its fabric? *Angels and their relationship to human beings* become topics of importance beginning with Dan 8. The great prayer of Dan 9 raises the issue of *divine retribution*: Must everything that happens to the people of God be interpreted as either reward or punishment? This chapter also sharpens the perennial question, voiced in many sectors of the OT, “How long, O Lord, must the righteous suffer.”³⁰

Of course, the appearance in Dan 12:1–3 of *the motif of the resurrection of the dead*, some to eternal life and some to eternal death, introduces into the biblical tradition for the first time (except, perhaps, for a cryptic reference in Isa 26:19), a belief that will assume major proportions in the NT (*see* RESURRECTION, EARLY JEWISH; RESURRECTION, NT; RESURRECTION, OT). Interwoven with these theological issues are problems that the book of Daniel as a whole presents. **Is apocalyptic theology a “failure-of-nerve theology,” written**

⁴²⁴ Cf. 3 Maccabees, which refuses to blame “the Greeks” for the troubles of the Jews and where the king finally repents of his tyrannical behavior. See John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem. Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 107.

²⁹ John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 51.

³⁰ W. Sibley Towner, “Daniel, Book Of.” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

by oppressed groups who have no other hope left to them except divine intervention? If so, has it anything to say to today's affluent and secure believers?³¹

Overarching these significant theological issues is the problem of *theodicy*, God's way of dealing with evil in the world. **The book of Daniel projects a clear solution to this problem: *God will not be mocked. God will achieve the divine purpose of the redemption of the world.*** Because this is the case, the Daniel who survives in exile and outshines the other wise men is not a passive figure who waits quietly until the Great Assize, but is one who issues forth into the fray. **That is why we can speak of the first chapters of the book of Daniel as "interim ethics," that is, as instruction on how the saints should live in-between the times. The faithful friend of God does not simply hang on, observe all the strictures of the sect, and survive. The saint's courage inspires others to believe and gives hope to those who are losing their hope. The saint helps bring about a world in which God is honored, idolatry is ended, the cries of the needy are heard, and the oppressed are liberated.** Like the deeds of his fictional contemporaries, Esther, Judith, and Tobit, Daniel's deeds vindicate the daring and courage of believers, grounded as they are in well-placed faith in the self-vindication of the God of Israel.³²

Christian readers will also recognize a similarity to the picture of the ministry of Jesus in the NT. The "little apocalypses" of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 24–25, Mark 13, Luke 17:20–37) are to the account of Jesus' ministry what the chaps. 7–12 of the book of Daniel are to the deeds of Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1–6. **Jesus' ministry of healing and of liberating persons from the bondage of sin and despair was shot through with a strong sense of the immediacy of the coming kingdom, which would vindicate God's way of combating evil in the world. His message, too, was a call not to quietism but to action, an invitation to people to offer in their own lives a foretaste of the character of the new age that is coming. His offer, like that of the book of Daniel, is of an "interim ethic," a vital and productive way of living in-between the times.**³³

This confidence in God's ultimate victory in the struggle with evil may be the single most profound source of hope available in our modern culture. Science and fiction alike give only ambiguous readings of the future, encouraging us when they point toward to the evolution of the human species toward ever greater capacities, but often discouraging us, as well, when they point to totalitarian "big brothers" whose strength is underwritten by technology and nuclear

³¹ W. Sibley Towner, "[Daniel, Book Of](#)," ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

³² W. Sibley Towner, "[Daniel, Book Of](#)," ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

³³ W. Sibley Towner, "[Daniel, Book Of](#)," ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

threats. The most radical forms of Marxism and Islam offer to our age alternative eschatologies, but both require the destruction of significant parts of the human community in order that the purposes of emancipation be achieved. In contrast, biblical apocalyptic literature sometimes attains a vision that is universal in scope and that is rich with hope for all things. On the great day that is coming, “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). On that great day, “one like a human being” will be given “dominion and glory and kingship ... His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed” (Dan 7:13–14).³⁴

³⁴ W. Sibley Towner, [“Daniel, Book Of.”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

DANIEL 1 – THE FOOD TEST

Version: 16, 17 September 2020

TEXT

The Food Test. ¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, * king of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came and laid siege to Jerusalem.^a ²^b The Lord handed over to him Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and some of the vessels of the temple of God, which he carried off to the land of Shinar* and placed in the temple treasury of his god.

³ The king told Ashpenaz,* his chief chamberlain, to bring in some of the Israelites, some of the royal line and of the nobility. ⁴ They should be young men without any defect, handsome, proficient in wisdom, well informed, and insightful, such as could take their place in the king's palace; he was to teach them the language and literature of the Chaldeans. ⁵ The king allotted them a daily portion of food and wine from the royal table. After three years' training they were to enter the king's service. ⁶ Among these were Judeans, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷ ***The chief chamberlain changed their names: Daniel to Belteshazzar, Hananiah to Shadrach, Mishael to Meshach, and Azariah to Abednego.**

* According to 2 Kgs 24, the siege of Jerusalem took place after the death of Jehoiakim, but 2 Chr 36:5–8 says that Jehoiakim was taken to Babylon.

^a 2 Kgs 24:1; 2 Chr 36:6; Jer 25:1.

^b Dn 5:2; 2 Chr 36:7; Gn 10:10.

* *Shinar*: ancient name for Babylonia, a deliberate archaism in this text; cf. Gn 10:10; 11:2.

* The proper name Ashpenaz is sometimes taken as a title, major-domo.

* Other prominent Jews with Babylonian names include Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, who were leaders of the postexilic community.

⁸ But Daniel was resolved not to defile himself with the king's food or wine; so he begged the chief chamberlain to spare him this defilement.* ⁹ Though God had given Daniel the favor and sympathy of the chief chamberlain, ¹⁰ he said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who allotted your food and drink. If he sees that you look thinner in comparison to the other young men of your age, you will endanger my life with the king." ¹¹ Then Daniel said to the guardian whom the chief chamberlain had put in charge of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then see how we look in comparison with the other young men who eat from the royal table, and treat your servants according to what you see." ¹⁴ He agreed to this request, and tested them for ten days; ¹⁵ after ten days they looked healthier and better fed than any of the young men who ate from the royal table. ¹⁶ So the steward continued to take away the food and wine they were to receive and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷ To these four young men God gave knowledge and proficiency in all literature and wisdom, and to Daniel the understanding of all visions and dreams. ¹⁸ At the end of the time the king had specified for their preparation, the chief chamberlain brought them before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ When the king had spoken with all of them, none was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; and so they entered the king's service. ²⁰ In any question of wisdom or understanding which the king put to them, he found them ten times better than any of the magicians and enchanters in his kingdom. ²¹ ^c Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.* ¹

COMMENTARY

Overarching these significant theological issues is the problem of *theodicy*, God's way of dealing with evil in the world. **The book of Daniel projects a clear solution to this problem: *God will not be mocked.*** God will achieve the divine purpose of the redemption of the world. Because this is the case, the Daniel who survives in exile and outshines the other wise men is not a passive figure who waits quietly until the Great Assize but is one who issues forth into the

* *This defilement*: the bread, meat, and wine of the Gentiles were unclean (Hos 9:3; Tb 1:12; Jdt 10:5; 12:1–2) because they might have been offered to idols; and the meat may not have been drained of blood, as Jewish dietary law requires. This test relates to the attempt of Antiochus to force Jews to eat forbidden foods in contempt of their religion (1 Mc 1:62–63; 2 Mc 6:18; 7:1).

^c Dn 6:29.

* *The first year of King Cyrus*: the year of this Persian king's conquest of Babylon, 539/538 B.C.

¹ *New American Bible*, Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Da 1:1–21.

fray. That is why we can speak of the first chapters of the book of Daniel as “interim ethics,” that is, as instruction on how the saints should live in-between the times. The faithful friend of God does not simply hang on, observe all the strictures of the sect, and survive. The saint’s courage inspires others to believe and gives hope to those who are losing their hope. The saint helps bring about a world in which God is honored, idolatry is ended, the cries of the needy are heard, and the oppressed are liberated. Like the deeds of his fictional contemporaries, Esther, Judith, and Tobit, Daniel’s deeds vindicate the daring and courage of believers, grounded as they are in well-placed faith in the self-vindication of the God of Israel.²

Christian readers will also recognize a similarity to the picture of the ministry of Jesus in the NT. The “little apocalypses” of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 24–25, Mark 13, Luke 17:20–37) are to the account of Jesus’ ministry what the chaps. 7–12 of the book of Daniel are to the deeds of Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1–6. **Jesus’ ministry of healing and of liberating persons from the bondage of sin and despair was shot through with a strong sense of the immediacy of the coming kingdom, which would vindicate God’s way of combating evil in the world. His message, too, was a call not to quietism but to action, an invitation to people to offer in their own lives a foretaste of the character of the new age that is coming. His offer, like that of the book of Daniel, is of an “interim ethic,” a vital and productive way of living in-between the times.**³

The opening verses of the book of Daniel set the stage for much of what follows throughout the entire book. **The historical background that provides the context for both folktales (chs. 1–6; 13–14) and visions (chs. 7–12) is the period of the exile.** Daniel opens with a brief description of the beginning of the exile when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captures Jerusalem and deports its leading citizens along with some of the vessels of the temple (1:1–2). Although the historical details are somewhat muddled, the event alluded to is Nebuchadnezzar’s first capture of Jerusalem in 598, not the later campaign in 587, when the temple was destroyed, and a second wave of exiles deported. The seemingly minor detail of removing some of the vessels of the temple is significant for understanding what the exile means throughout the book of Daniel. We might assume it is merely the period from 598–538, at which time Cyrus of Persia permitted the Jews to return from Babylon to Judea. **However, in Daniel, exile refers not so much to location as to situation. Particularly in regard to the temple, the exile is seen as continuing as long as the temple is defiled, and the Jews subjugated by a foreign power.**⁴

² W. Sibley Towner, “[Daniel, Book Of.](#)” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

³ W. Sibley Towner, “[Daniel, Book Of.](#)” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 22.

⁴ Corrine L. Carvalho and Paul V. Niskanen, [Ezekiel & Daniel](#), ed. Daniel Durken, vol. 16, *The New Colleague Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 122.

Christian faith inevitably calls us to active nonconformity with the world, even in the manner in which we daily live our lives—the food we choose to consume, and the clothing we choose to wear. The message of Daniel 1 is a powerful reminder for us to search within ourselves for those aspects of “the king’s food and wine” that **we ought to resist for the sake of the gospel message.** For the writer of Daniel, food was merely one symbol among many others of the resistance to total domination and total assimilation to the culture and ways of dominant powers. **So, too, is the Christian life a life of resistance—to the enticements of financial power and control over the destiny of others—such as powerful nations over the developing world—and to the enticements of luxury that come from the abuse of underpaid laborers in struggling societies.** For Christians from dominant cultures in North America, Australia, and Europe, a man like Ashpenaz, rather than Daniel, may provide a more apt role model of resistance. **Ashpenaz emerges from the power elite to have sympathy for those who suffer and resist. But like Ashpenaz, the faithful among the elite must be aware that their faith borders on treason; hence identification with, let alone sympathy for, the “exiled” peoples may have its cost.**^{69 5}

Verses 1-2 – The first two verses of the first chapter serve notice to the reader that the context of these stories is of paramount importance to the writers and editors of the book of Daniel. These verses introduce the book as a whole and not merely the first story, reminding the reader of the context of dominance from which these stories derive their life and power. 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, significantly, in the “treasury of his gods” (v. 2). This is an important note, since we know that the Babylonians were highly aware of the propaganda value of placing captured religious symbols “under” the Babylonian gods in the Babylonian imperial shrines, thus symbolizing the captivity of conquered gods as well as people.** Since the Jews did not have an image of their God, the Babylonians used their temple vessels instead. **Note that these materials were not merely**

⁶⁹ See A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon, 1965). See also Introduction.

⁵ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, [“The Book of Daniel.”](#) in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 44–45.

melted down (see chap. 5) but kept intact so as to serve as symbols of the Jews' subordinate position in relation to Babylonian imperial and religious power.^{44 6}

Verses 1-2 – Surely it is much more sensible to assume that a **folktale** is interested not in chronological details, but in the power of the context of exile.⁴⁶ Much more interesting, however, is the reference to “Shinar,” a name for Babylon that recalls the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 and associates Babylon with the *hubris* evident in that tale.^{47 7}

Verses 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 (specifically from the leadership of the Jewish people) for specialized training in Babylonian language and culture. **Note that the assessment of their competence to serve in the king's palace is made before they have been trained, implying that they have something to offer the king's court, and that, therefore, their knowledge of Jewish language and culture is what the king is particularly interested in.** For what other reason could they be useful than for maximizing the efficiency of Babylonian rule? If they are actually drawn from the royal families or from the priestly families, as Lacocque has suggested, noting that the ones chosen were “without blemish,”⁴⁸ then the Babylonians' interest in them would surely be even greater.⁸

⁴⁴ The Persians were especially attuned to the significance of symbols that are directed to mass consumption. See M. C. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire*, vol. 9 of *Acta Iranica, Textes et Memoires* (Leiden: Brill, 1979). Note also N. Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965) 26–27; and John Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas: Word, 1988) 15–17.

⁶ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, [“The Book of Daniel.”](#) in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 38–39.

⁴⁶ John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 132. Collins is rather critical of attempts to mesh the dates in Daniel with some configuration of dates drawn from Chronicles, Jeremiah, or elsewhere.

⁴⁷ André Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, 25. The association of exile, Nebuchadnezzar, and the tower of Babel is explicit in the enigmatic Dead Sea Scroll fragments designated 4QpDan a, b, and c in F. García-Martínez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic, Studies on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran* (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 127–61; but also published as 4Q243–245 in R. Eisenman and M. Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (Shaftsbury: Element, 1992) 64–67.

⁷ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, [“The Book of Daniel.”](#) in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 39.

⁴⁸ Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, 27.

⁸ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, [“The Book of Daniel.”](#) in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 39.

What particularly strikes me about this “selection” of such “TAG” young people by the Royal Court is how flattering, in a dangerous way, it must have been for those young men to be picked out especially. How intensely, completely, utterly I saw how this dynamic works in my own life: the wonder and hope at being so chosen, picked out, but later to discover that those who did so, of corrupted purposes, then require my acceptance of subjugation to them and a requirement to flatter them back, all the time. What is striking about Daniel is his self-possession – “they’ll take your soul if you let them / but, oh, don’t you let them”, as Carole King wrote. He belongs to God, and no one, however socially attractive, will *ever* supersede his commitment to God. See “The Inner Ring” address by C.S. Lewis about the real danger of “the inner ring” people, and the power that such a group exercises against the freedom and life of others.

Verses 6-7 – The young Jewish exiles are each given a Babylonian name: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This reflects the common usage of two names by Jews in the bilingual environment of the exilic and postexilic periods. They often retained a Hebrew name while also using a name of the dominant language and culture. Well-known New Testament examples of Jews bearing both Hebrew and Greek names are John Mark (Acts 12:25) and Saul also known as Paul (Acts 13:9).⁹

Verse 7 – NAME CHANGING – Name changing is, of course, a prominent biblical sign of dependent status, thus Abram to Abraham in covenant with God (Gen 17:5); Jehoiakim is renamed by Pharaoh (2 Kgs 23:34); and Zedekiah is renamed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:17). **The practice became common in late biblical literature.** While it is true that many observant Jews in the Hellenistic period took on non-Jewish names (Philo), and even earlier there is evidence of names like “Zerubbabel,” **the issue here is not whether the names are non-Israelite, but that it is done by a power that assumes the authority to make such a change.**^{49 10}

Verse 8ff – on POLLUTION AND PURITY – The planned assimilation of the four Jewish representatives of the exile community runs into a brick wall. Daniel (Why not the others? Does this imply a division among the Jews on these issues of resistance?) firmly states his refusal to accept the king’s offer of food and wine, stating that he would be “**polluted**” (לִנְאָל *gā’al*) by them. **This powerful term is highly suggestive for the exilic and post-exilic experience. Ezra the priest would also strongly assert the necessity of maintaining “purity” in the conditions**

⁹ Corrine L. Carvalho and Paul V. Niskanen, *Ezekiel & Daniel*, ed. Daniel Durken, vol. 16, The New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 123.

⁴⁹ Thus, I would respectfully take issue with Goldingay, Collins, and Porteous. On this matter, Lacocque is much more alive to the impact of forced name changes. See Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, 29.

¹⁰ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “*The Book of Daniel*,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 39.

of subordination in the post-exilic community, and we know that the priests involved themselves diligently in the codification of levitical purity law during the exile. Furthermore, purity concerns that even exceeded the specific demands of the priestly purity laws are not unusual in the late biblical and Hellenistic periods (e.g., Tob 1:10–11; Jdt 12:1–4; 2 Maccabees 6–7; *Jub.* 22:16; and Josephus *The Life of Flavius Josephus* 3.14). **As Mary Douglas has shown, worries about the purity of the body are symbolic reflections of concerns for the integrity of the social group, and purity laws serve as effective barriers to assimilation.** The assertion of purity concerns during the exile served as **an important spiritual and social bulwark against the dangers of disappearing as a people**, and Daniel 1 obviously maintains this important theological motif.^{50 11}

Verses 8-16 – FOOD AND POWER – A full appreciation of this story also requires that one keep in mind **the prominence of food as a symbol of privilege and wealth and foreign overindulgence.** Lacocque notes that Daniel 1 illustrates “the custom in ancient royal courts of introducing important prisoners to the national diet.”⁵² But if the modern reader is alerted to the significance of food in the context of post-exilic conditions, Daniel 1 takes on added significance.... **Throughout biblical history, control of food, especially large amounts of it, is symbolic of power.** This can best be summarized in a discussion of feasting and the taxation of foodstuffs (in-kind taxation). This discussion obviously anticipates some of the symbolism of Belshazzar’s feast in chap. 5 as well.¹²... **These examples reveal banqueting to be a potent biblical symbol of power, that moves from a positive symbol of prosperity in the pre-exilic texts and stories to a predominantly negative symbol of foreign oppression in the prophetic and post-exilic contexts,** when the oppressors would have feasted on utensils taken from Jewish tables to satisfy their appetite for materials and money.¹³... Resistance to food in Daniel 1, therefore, and the clear condemnation of Belshazzar, pictured in drunken revelry in chap. 5, clearly relate to symbolic awareness of the meaning of controlling food stores as a key to controlling lives. **In short, I agree with Davies’ assertion that Daniel 1 is “a symbolic denial**

Jub. Jubilees

⁵⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

¹¹ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “[The Book of Daniel.](#)” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 39–40.

⁵² Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, 28.

¹² Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “[The Book of Daniel.](#)” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 40.

¹³ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “[The Book of Daniel.](#)” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 41.

of the king's implicit claim to be sole provider,"⁵⁶ but when this observation is set within the context of the politicization of food as symbol, Daniel 1 (and chap. 5) is read with more appreciation of the theme of resistance.^{57 14}

Verses 9-10 – One answer is that the king was not present, but only the official called Ashpenaz (the name probably derives from the Persian for “Innkeeper,” or keeper of the court). Many commentators have noted the sympathy of Ashpenaz toward Daniel and its significance for the continued idea about a positive view of foreigners in Daniel 1–6. **But Ashpenaz is not so powerful that he does not have to fear for his life if called before the emperor (v. 10). The friendship between Daniel and Ashpenaz, therefore, is the solidarity of the oppressed, both of whom serve the imperial will under threat of death; and this solidarity crosses ethnic lines, as Ashpenaz obviously admires Daniel's courage.** This is hardly a sign of positive attitudes toward Babylonians!¹⁵

Verse 9 - HESED – God influenced events in Daniel's favor by giving Daniel *hesed*. The term is typically translated as “steadfast love,” but because of Katherine Doob Sakenfeld's detailed work, we understand *the full implications of hesed as “deliverance or protection as a responsible keeping of faith with another with whom one is in a relationship.”*^{58 16} So, in v. 9 God makes Daniel the object of *hesed* and mercy before Ashpenaz. *Hesed* is closely associated with “mercy” (see Neh 1:11, in which Nehemiah requests mercy before “this man,” the emperor; cf. Psalm 106). **Sakenfeld's concluding statement on the use of *hesed* in the psalms is that the term is “predominantly associated with deliverance rather than any special**

⁵⁶ P. Davies, *Daniel* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 91.

⁵⁷ **My argument here is in contrast to the view that fasting is an ascetic practice.** See, e.g., D. Satran, “Daniel: Seer, Philosopher, Holy Man,” in G. Nickelsburg and John J. Collins, eds., *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980) 33–48.

¹⁴ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “[The Book of Daniel.](#)” in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 42.

¹⁵ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “[The Book of Daniel.](#)” in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 42.

⁵⁸ K. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978) 233.

¹⁶ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “[The Book of Daniel.](#)” in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 42.

blessing.”⁶⁰ Sakenfeld suggests that *hesed* as “delivering power” reaches its height in a series of texts in which it parallels “strength.”¹⁷

Verse 9 – *Hesed* and mercy, especially in the context of late biblical theology, are given to those Jews who appear before the Babylonian and Persian monarchs, which forces us to conclude that the passage assumes the necessity for God’s delivering action against a presumed enemy. **Praise was directed to God’s delivering power, not to the Babylonian or Persian monarch’s (or an assistant’s) good intentions.**¹⁸

Verses 8-16 – In the ancient world, however, these were the food items that were typically offered in sacrifice to gods. **To partake of these items was to acknowledge in some way the god to whom they were offered.** Rather than partake of this implicit idolatry, Daniel asks that he and his companions be fed only vegetables and water (1:12). While modern nutritionists might tell us that this is in fact the healthier diet, such was not the ancient view. Thus, it may be regarded as somewhat miraculous that after a period on this diet the Jews are healthier in appearance (literally “fatter”) than their counterparts (1:15).¹⁹

Verse 12 – **LEARN TEMPERANCE FROM THE ANCIENTS.** LEANDER OF SEVILLE²⁰: A fish is caught by being enticed by a hook. A bird falls into a net while trying to get food. Animals that are tough by nature’s endowment fall into a pit from the desire to eat, and what nature does not soften, food deceives. Therefore, learn temperance and parsimony from the prayer and the examples of ancients: from prayer, because the Lord says, “Lest your hearts be overburdened with self-indulgence and drunkenness”;⁵ from examples, because David was unwilling to drink the water he wanted, since he recognized the danger of being responsible for another’s blood;⁶ because Daniel scorned the feasts of kings and lived on vegetables. What you possess in

⁶⁰ Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, 218. See also K. D. Sakenfeld’s more recent summary statement of her work on *hesed* in the Bible: *Faithfulness in Action: Loyalty in Biblical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985).

¹⁷ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “[The Book of Daniel](#),” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 42–43.

¹⁸ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “[The Book of Daniel](#),” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 43.

¹⁹ Corrine L. Carvalho and Paul V. Niskanen, *Ezekiel & Daniel*, ed. Daniel Durken, vol. 16, The New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 125.

²⁰ **Leander** (c. 545–c. 600). Latin ecclesiastical writer, of whose works only two survive. He was instrumental in spreading Christianity among the Visigoths, gaining significant historical influence in Spain in his time.

⁵ Lk 21:34.

⁶ 2 Sam 23:14–17.

common with your companions should be acceptable to you, and you should not cause others to be intemperate; also, do not become a cause for scandal to those to whom you wish to set an example by encouragement and by proof of a good life. THE TRAINING OF NUNS 13.⁷²¹

Verse 17 – EYES OF UNDERSTANDING. JEROME: Note that God is said to have given the holy youths knowledge and learning in secular literature, in every book and branch of wisdom. **Symmachus rendered this by “grammatical art,” implying that they understood everything they read, and by the Spirit of God they could make a judgment concerning the lore of the Chaldeans.** But Daniel had an outstanding gift over and above the three youths, in that he could astutely discern the significance of visions and dreams in which things to come are shown forth by means of certain symbols and mysteries. Therefore, that which others saw only in a shadowy appearance he could perceive clearly with the eyes of his understanding.

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^{*7} FC 62:208*.

²¹ Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Gluerup, eds., [Ezekiel, Daniel](#), Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 159.

^{*10} JCD 22*; CCL 75A:781–82.

²² Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Gluerup, eds., [Ezekiel, Daniel](#), Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 160.

Bob Dylan - "The Times They are a-Changin'" (October 1963)

Wikipedia notes: "'The Times They Are a-Changin'" is the third studio album by American singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, released on January 13, 1964 by Columbia Records. Whereas his previous albums *Bob Dylan* and *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* consisted of original material among cover songs, Dylan's third album was the first to feature only original compositions. The album consists mostly of stark, sparsely arranged ballads concerning issues such as racism, poverty, and social change. The title track is one of Dylan's most famous; many feel that it captures the spirit of social and political upheaval that characterized the 1960s."

"The Times They Are A-Changin'"

Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you
Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'

Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with your pen
And keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon
For the wheel's still in spin
And there's no tellin' who
That it's namin'

For the loser now
Will be later to win
For the times they are a-changin'

Come senators, congressmen
Please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway
Don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt
Will be he who has stalled
There's a battle outside
And it is ragin'
It'll soon shake your windows
And rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'

Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticize
What you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
Your old road is
Rapidly agin'
Please get out of the new one
If you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'

The line it is drawn
The curse it is cast
The slow one now
Will later be fast
As the present now
Will later be past
The order is
Rapidly fadin'
And the first one now
Will later be last

For the times they are a-changin'