




# A Critical Analysis of Selected Issues in the Book of Daniel: Implications for Contemporary Christianity

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## ABSTRACT

The book of Daniel is one of the frequently-quoted books when it comes to issues regarding resilience in one's faith. The setting of the book and the events surrounding Daniel's life in Babylon have many lessons for contemporary Christians. The purpose of this article was to bring out certain features and issues in the book of Daniel to present to readers relevant aspects of the context within which the book was written and to consequently equip them to successfully interpret and apply the message of Prophet Daniel. The paper is a literature-based research that gathered data from books and commentaries on Daniel and analyzed them critically to make meaning of the biblical book. One of the key findings was that God sovereignly guards his people and makes them have victory over evil. This study aimed at arousing interest in biblical scholarship on prophetic literature, especially the Book of Daniel. The paper encouraged contemporary believers to be resilient in their faith as they live in a world full of evil deeds. In times of difficult circumstances, Daniel persisted in not hesitating or giving up his faith to follow the patterns of the evil world; rather, he placed God above all things, and succeeded in his endeavours.

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### Publication History

Received 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2023  
Accepted 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2023  
Published online:  
8<sup>th</sup> December, 2023

*Keywords: Daniel, God, Christianity, Old Testament*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the intriguing books in the Old Testament is the book of Daniel which is known for its wisdom genre (see for example Dan. 1:17; 2:14). During his stay in the Babylonian capital, where his devotion to the king granted him special access to the highest echelons of society, Daniel chronicled his adventures and prophecies for the Jewish exiles. Daniel emerged as one of the biblical characters to leave behind a wholly positive record of his deeds due to their dedicated service to the Lord in a place and culture that was not their own. The Prophecy of Daniel is among the Writings in the Hebrew canon. However, the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) and English versions of the Bible place the book of Daniel among the prophetic books.

The book of Daniel may be divided into two: A group of six court tales in chapters 1-6, which are largely written in Aramaic, and four apocalyptic visions beginning in chapters 7-12, which are written in Hebrew. Daniel details prophecies concerning God's message to give humanity a preview of how the Messiah's kingdom (Matt. 24:15) will end the world powers (Dan. 7:17-18, 21-22). Daniel links up well with other Old Testament prophetic books and helps in the interpretation of the New Testament book of Revelation. Daniel's book demonstrates both implicitly and explicitly that the Highest rules in the kingdoms of humankind and gives them to anyone he wills (4:17, 2:28, 4:25, 5:26 and 7:26).<sup>1</sup> No matter how terrible some of the despotic regimes have endured, God has not relinquished his ultimate rule over human dealings. The book also illustrates

<sup>1</sup> Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary*, edited by Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 1015.

forcefully how Christians may serve admirably under ungodly governments without surrendering their beliefs. Daniel provides the Christian church with a much-needed example of servant leadership.

Many people consider it a difficult book because of its use of symbols and figures to convey its message. The books of Ezekiel and Revelation are also categorized as such. This paper is an attempt to bring out certain features and issues in the book of Daniel in order to help readers to appreciate relevant aspects of the context within which the book was written and consequently equip them to successfully interpret and apply the message of Prophet Daniel.

### **Background of the Book of Daniel**

Daniel is the author of the book of Daniel. In 7:1, 28, 8:2, 9:2, 10:1-2, and 12:4, Daniel explicitly states that he is the author of this book. Beginning from chapter 7, the first-person autobiographical tense is used. Jesus Christ gives Daniel credit as the author (Matt 24:15). Daniel's authorship is further supported by Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote in a secular context. Daniel's name was not a historical coincidence, unlike Cyrus (Isa. 45:3-4), a key person in the book of Daniel. Daniel's name, which means "God is judge" or "God is my judge,"<sup>2</sup> highlights one of the book's central themes; namely, the judgment of the nations (both Jewish and Gentile).

It is likely that Daniel was born during King Josiah's reign and was a teenager when he was brought to Babylon. He served the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires between roughly 605 and 537 BCE. The life of Daniel in Babylon stands out among the various biographical chapters in Scripture as being particularly distinctive. According to Paul Benware, "It is uncommon for a man to have worldly success, hold positions of authority, and still live a morally genuine and faithful life to God. And it is uncommon for a man to get to the position of being God's principal channel despite having riches, power, and status. Daniel is such a person, nevertheless."<sup>3</sup> In fact, Daniel stands as an example for everyone who is called by God and discovers their gifts in worldly pursuits that are not often regarded as serving God. The book of Daniel demonstrates how the Prophet Daniel and those around him triumphed in exile through the grace of God, how severe piety and discipline preserved the great legacy of their forebears, and how fidelity, fortitude, and knowledge overcame persecution.

A succession of visions received by Daniel kept future hope alive and grounded. Historically, Nebuchadnezzar was seated on Babylon's throne when the book of Daniel begins. During the latter part of the seventh-century BCE, the Babylonian dynasty succeeded the Assyrians as the preeminent power in the eastern Mediterranean area. It was firmly established when Nebuchadnezzar beat the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 BCE. He ascended to the kingdom in 604 BCE after his father died. As reported in the book of Kings (2 Kings 24:10 -17), he continued his father's conquests until, in 587-586 BCE, he ultimately subjugated Judah and devastated Jerusalem, taking a sizable portion of the inhabitants with him to Babylon. The book of Daniel assumes that there had previously been an invasion of Judah during which he had taken certain prisoners, among them Daniel.<sup>4</sup>

In the book of Daniel, there is a lot of focus on the identity, trajectory, and goals of this one king (Nebuchadnezzar).<sup>5</sup> Throughout their stay in Babylon, the conditions of God's people (Israel) underwent significant change. Coupled with the challenges of being obedient to the God of their forefathers despite the absence of a temple and any kind of animal sacrifice, they had to deal with the challenges of settling down as exiles in a foreign country where a pagan religion was dominant under Nebuchadnezzar. The loyal among them were able to remain true to God, as were Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Some Jewish exiles returned to Palestine.

Following Nebuchadnezzar's passing in 562 BCE, his sons and grandchildren proved to be useless, and in 556 BCE a revolution put an outsider named Nabonidus in power. Belshazzar, who appears to have been in charge of Babylon as his father's replacement when the Empire was overthrown by Cyrus in 539 BCE, was Nabonidus's son. Following this, a series of Persian kings governed the Near East for two centuries. Darius I was traditionally the most well-known of them.<sup>6</sup>

After Cyrus the Persians took power in 539 BCE, and the number steadily climbed until the temple and then the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. The Persian rulers were generally kind, and the repatriated population had a good deal of religious freedom throughout the Persian rule.

Alexander the Great then successfully overthrew the Persian Empire in the latter half of the fourth century, ushering in Greek dominance over the whole region in 331 BCE. Under the Greek empire, the Jews

<sup>2</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1949), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Benware, *Daniel's Prophecy of Things to Come* (Clifton, TX: Scofield Ministries, 2007), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Robert B. Jr. Thieme, *Daniel: Chapters One through Six* (Houston, Texas: The Lockman Foundation Press, 2008), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald S. Wallace, *The Message of Daniel* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter – Varsity Press, 1979), 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Darius consult Isaac Boaheng and Justice Korankye, "A Christian View of Stewardship: A Study of Daniel 6:1-4," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, 8 no.6 (2022): 156-165. <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.2022862>

were subjected to a greater peril than any of them had ever experienced, not even in exile. In addition to wanting to conquer the world, Alexander the Great also desired to “Hellenize”<sup>7</sup> it. Alexander started the process of Hellenization, and those who came after him were very successful in Hellenizing the then-known world. Greek etiquettes and perspectives on the world quickly spread. Everything was infused with Greek culture. The ancient eastern faiths that were influenced by Greek civilization gave rise to the Hellenistic mystery religions. Since there was no external pressure to adhere to Greek customs in Palestine during Ptolemaic control, the Jewish people as a whole were able to resist this movement for many centuries. But there developed a strong Hellenizing faction within the Jewish community, particularly among the priestly and “intellectual” groups and those active in the power politics of the day.

After Alexander’s passing, his dominion in the Near East was divided in half. The Ptolemaic dynasty, named after its first king Ptolemy I Soter, dominated the region around Egypt while the Seleucid dynasty, named after its first king Seleucus I Nicator, tended to govern Syria and Palestine.<sup>8</sup> Intermarriages, plots, and betrayals occasionally occurred between the two houses. The Egyptian Ptolemies held sway until Antiochus the Great of the Seleucid Empire conquered Ptolemy Epiphanes in 198 BCE and took complete control of Palestine. In terms of the Jews, the most significant development occurred in 175 BCE, when Antiochus IV Epiphanes successfully seized the Seleucid throne after considerable intrigue.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes began a relentless drive to force Hellenism on the entire populace after seizing control of Syria and Palestine. He did this by enticing people with gifts, bribes, and intrigue while ruthlessly putting an end to any open resistance. His strategies, successes, and final defeat are recorded in the book of Maccabees. Jason, one of the leaders of the Hellenizing faction, was bought off to get installed as a high priest at Jerusalem even before his rule officially began.<sup>9</sup> This was followed by the establishment of a school in Jerusalem where Jewish children and adults were taught Greek customs, sports, and styles. Deeper plots developed as the Hellenization effort advanced, and a cunning impostor, Menelaus, succeeded Jason in the King’s favor. Under Menelaus’ leadership as high priest, there was further conflict and plot, which resulted in a slaughter in the streets, the construction of a Syrian garrison in the city, a conflict over refugees, and the issuance of edicts prohibiting Jewish people from practising their religion. Death was the outcome of the offense.<sup>10</sup> In the year 168 BCE, a Zeus altar was built in the temple, and sacrifices were offered on it, following instructions that the temple be established only for the worship of Zeus Olympus. There were other places to worship pagan deities, and it was required to eat “unclean” food. The laws were strictly upheld and numerous martyrs and massacres occurred.

Matthias, a rural priest, and his sons inspired and led the Maccabean group, which inspired armed opposition, went into war, and finally prevailed. The Hasidim, or “holy ones,” was the name of the other resistance group. They were a “separatist” group whose posture was passive resistance and rigorous adherence to the law, particularly at points that looked to them to be key matters, such as the laws prohibiting the consumption of particular foods. They did not stage any opposition even throughout the combat on the Sabbath day and allowed themselves to be ruthlessly dispatched.<sup>11</sup> These two sides eventually came together. The Maccabees really halted Sabbath observance at one time, inspiring the Hasidim to put aside one of their ethical principles. The time range of history that Daniel discusses in his book is between 605 and 165 BCE.<sup>12</sup>

### **Biblical Traditions in the Book of Daniel**

It is difficult to classify the book of Daniel in a particular literary genre. As noted earlier, the book is listed among the writings, not the prophets, in the Hebrew canon. In the Christian Bible, it is classified as a prophetic document. This section outlines three key traditions in the Book of Daniel. The first is the prophetic tradition. There is some support for including Daniel in the group of prophets. For example, his main contention, namely, that God’s promises for his people as a nation may actually be fulfilled in spite of their transgressions, is shared by all the prophets. He had several traits that were distinctive to the prophetic tradition in his perspective on the events of this world and his outlook on its destiny. A few of these features are discussed briefly below.

The prophets occasionally portray a picture of what is to come that differs significantly from the Jewish apocalyptic. They frequently paint idealized scenes of paradise being restored within the growth and transformation of this earth’s history itself, of a golden age arising out of the current age, either blending with it now or developing alongside it, as they speculate about what will happen in the “later days” on this planet. They

<sup>7</sup> To Hellenize means “to make non-Greeks adopt Greek culture, religion, language and identity.”

<sup>8</sup> E.W. Heaton, “Daniel,” in *Teachers’ Commentary* (London: The Camelot Press, 1962), 291-292.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald Wallace S., *The Message of Daniel* (USA: Downers Grove, Illinois, Inter – Varsity Press, 1979), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald S. Wallace, *The Lord Is King: The Message of Daniel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979).

<sup>11</sup> Wallace, *The Lord Is King: The Message of Daniel* .

<sup>12</sup> Robert B. Thieme Jr., *Daniel: Chapters One through Six* (USA: Houston, Texas, The Lockman Foundation Press), 2008, 13.

occasionally have an image of the Messiah, who will reign during these times, as an earthly Prince and ideal King descended from the house of David.<sup>13</sup> Daniel's prolonged and fervent prayer (cf. Dan. 9:3-19), which was motivated by readings from the prophets and particularly Jeremiah, demonstrates his anxiety for the accomplishment of the Messianic and Davidic promises. His themes are similar to those of the prophets in that they center on sin, righteousness, mercy, forgiveness and restoration. He cares about social justice and the release of the oppressed just as much as Amos and other prophets do.

Secondly, Daniel also has an apocalyptic tradition. By the second century BCE, it was evident that the prophetic voice, which had for so long inspired and guided Israel's religious and moral life, had totally stopped speaking. Instead, a fresh batch of writings started to emerge at this point, all of which shared a common structure, style, and attitude. These books were read widely and had a significant impact. They were written in the now-classified apocalyptic genre. The authors thought the present era was coming to an end. Apocalypses attributed to Baruch, Moses, and Abraham were among the writings of Enoch. The writers decided to remain anonymous and present their message as though it were a prophecy or dream that had been revealed centuries before giving the message more authority. Thus, historical and modern-day occurrences could appear to have been prophesied long ago. Then, using language and imagery reminiscent of those found in the book of Daniel, their insights revealed God's covert plan for the end of the ages.

The vast volume of literature that was produced during this period has some roots in the teachings of the great prophets of Israel as well as in the book of Daniel. Apocalyptic thinking and literature flourished particularly during the intertestamental period. In addition, Jesus incorporated ideas from these apocalyptic books into his discourses on the kingdom and the end of the world (cf. Matt. 24—25). As a result, the New Testament's other books including the book of Revelation, which represents the pinnacle of Christian apocalyptic tradition, all express apocalyptic themes. In light of this, it is important to recognize that Jesus himself was attracted to certain aspects of the emerging apocalyptic outlook.

The emergence of the Apocalyptic tradition was influenced by the book of Daniel. The literary shape that most of it was put into served as a guide for subsequent authors. Apocalyptic literature is characterized by visions and dreams; composite symbolism and emphasis on divine sovereignty and unconditionality. Very much like the authors of the classic works of Jewish apocalyptic literature, Daniel makes use of enigmatic numbers and symbols, has visions, and accurately predicts history (Dan. 7:3-4, 6; 8:3,20; 12:11-12). Between those who created the late apocalyptic viewpoint and them, there are other formal connections. In Daniel's future vision, the coming kingdom of God will contrast drastically with the existing kingdoms of this world. For instance, Daniel's visions clearly highlight the distinction between the two realms of heaven and earth. However, it should be noted that despite Daniel's decisive role in shaping this significant tradition, he maintained a strict adherence to the word of God as it had been revealed in the prophetic tradition at the time. Daniel also refrained from succumbing to the unfavorable changes that occurred in the later Judaistic period's apocalyptic literature.

Thirdly, the book of Daniel also depicts a wisdom tradition. There is no reason to doubt the very strong biblical tradition linking David and Solomon with this wisdom tradition because wisdom literature has been known to exist as early as 2500 BCE in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Far East. Ecclesiastes, Job, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon contain literary works that reflect Israelite wisdom, and characters like Ahitophel and Hushai occasionally appear as wise men who offer advice. The English word "wisdom" comes from the Hebrew word "*khokma*," which also denotes experience or good judgment.<sup>14</sup> "Wisdom" also refers to shrewdness, prudence (in matters of religion), and ethical and religious knowledge. It is the capacity to employ these to think and behave in such a way that common sense wins out and decisions are advantageous and fruitful.<sup>15</sup> The Bible makes it clear that wisdom begins and ends with fear of the Lord (cf. Prov. 9:10). God has given humans the wisdom to act, speak, think, labor, and make sensible judgments. The effects of this ability are for the good of the individual, the group, the people, and God's glory.

In the book of Daniel, wisdom is defined as follows: First, "wisdom" refers to intellectual prowess, which includes knowledge of and understanding of all genres of literature and academic study (1:17), as well as a comprehension of all types of visions and dreams (1:17). Second, wisdom means leading a moral life that includes speaking wisely and tactfully (2:14) and doing one's task honestly (6:4). Third, it refers to submission such as relying on God in prayer (2:17–18), refusing to worship the golden image (3:12), and defying the king's order to worship God (6:13). Fourth, wisdom denotes bearing hardships, such as pleading with God on behalf of the country and fasting for the future while interceding in prayers for Jerusalem (6:10). (10:1-3). Daniel 2:31-

<sup>13</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making Volume 1*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1939), 102 -104.

<sup>14</sup> William L Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1972).

<sup>15</sup> Jack Wellman, "What Is The Bible Definition Of Wisdom? How Are We Wise In God's Eyes," 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/05/22/what-is-the-bible-definition-of-wisdom-how-are-we-wise-in-gods-eyes/>.

49, 4:16-27, 5:13-30, 7:1-8, 8:1ff, 9:20ff, and 10:1ff are among the passages that highlight the fact that Danielic wisdom does indeed “stretch over the secrets of the future.”<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, wisdom in the book of Daniel refers to God's capacity to foresee future events in accordance with his purpose and sovereign authority.

### Thematic overview of the book of Daniel

The primary themes of the book are outlined below:

- i. **The Sovereignty of God.** To further his goals, God builds and overthrows kings and empires; this is emphasized in the book as evidence of his sovereign rule over Gentile nations. Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, finally realized this tremendous truth about the God of Daniel (4:35).
- ii. **Personal dedication to God.** The deportees could have learned how to live in a pagan society from Daniel's own devotion to God in Daniel 1. The exiles looked up to Daniel as an outstanding example of godliness.
- iii. **God's faithfulness to his people.** The book presents an illustration of God's commitment to his covenant people in safeguarding and preserving them even though they were under divine discipline for their disobedience. To lead his covenant people to blessing, God patiently interacts with them and does not abandon them.
- iv. **Reveals Israel's future deliverance and blessings in the coming Millennial Age.** Israel's impending deliverance and the blessings she will experience during the upcoming Millennial Age are revealed in Daniel's book. God assured Abraham that the land he promised him would be inhabited by his descendants. The country will be forced to repent, confess, and receive restoration even if she must be punished for her disobedience. God continues to be devoted. In the covenanted kingdom they have on this planet, He preserves His people and assures them of the ultimate blessing.
- v. **The spiritual reality behind history.** The purpose of the book is to visually depict the prophetic era known as “the days of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24). The history of the Gentiles during the protracted era in which Israel was and is now subject to punishment by the Gentiles is traced in the book of Daniel. Additionally, during the upcoming Tribulation, God's plan for the Gentiles will reach its full completion. The impact that Gentile nations will have on Israel while she waits for the fulfillment of God's agreements with her during the reign of the Messiah is depicted in the book thoroughly and in detail.

### Some Critical Issues in the Book of Daniel

#### Prophetic Visions

God used visions to communicate with Daniel and his people in the book of Daniel. Daniel is given an explanation by God in a vision of events, such as the time Nebuchadnezzar beheld a giant figure with a head made of gold, a breast and arms made of silver, a belly and thighs made of bronze, legs made of iron, and feet made of mixed iron and clay. Then he saw the statue destroyed by a boulder that changed into a mountain covering the whole planet. This book is meant to reassure the weak but devoted Jews that a bizarre new kind of literature has started to be published in some Hasidic communities. The term “apocalyptic,” which comes from the Greek word for “reveal,” or “unveiling,” describes modern literature. In order for the devoted reader to be inspired to live courageously in the now wicked period, the future is “unveiled” so that they might witness the wondrous things God is about to perform through the author's visions.

Daniel's use of strange forms and symbols makes his message “veiled.” These function as a sort of code on one hand, meaningless to an officer of Antiochus' occupation force as they are to the majority of readers, but they were crystal plain to a Jew aware of the events going on around him and knowledgeable about Israelite traditions. The angel tells Daniel in his last vision that none of the wicked will comprehend, but the wise will (Dan. 12:10). The writing of the apocalypses is done under the names of famous historical figures to further perplex “the wicked.”<sup>17</sup> The reader was, however, reminded by the enigmatic symbols that God, not they, holds the future. Even the devoted still have questions about what is ahead. Although he is aware that God will benefit his people, he does not know how.

Chapter 7 of Daniel's vision opens with the appearance of four strange creatures who emerge from the sea one after the other. The sea represented disorder and evil for the Jews as well as the majority of Eastern peoples (Gen 1:2; Isa. 51:9-10, Rev. 21:1). These horrifying creatures, which are tainted with evil from birth, are not animals that one would find in a zoo. The characteristics of the first three creatures are combined, while the fourth is so awful that no other animal can even be compared to him (Dan. 7:7). Of course the monsters

<sup>16</sup> Michael Kenneth Wilson, *The Lives of the Wise in an Anti-God World: Daniel 1-6* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> S.R. Driver, “The Book of Daniel,” in *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 83.

represent something. But what do they represent? In verse 17, an angel informs Daniel "These four big beasts are four kings who shall come out of the earth," providing the reader with a key to this portion of the code. They may be best interpreted as the four countries that are represented by their kings, as verse 23 implies. The initial vision's message is now pretty obvious. Although Antiochus appears to have complete freedom to carry out his deadly schemes, God is keeping an eye on things. The very accomplishments of Antiochus' nefarious schemes just increase his overall guilt in the eyes of God. God will soon execute his judgment, shattering this despot. The kingdom of God, where the Jews who remained obedient to the very end shall reign forever, will replace his corrupted kingdom.

The next chapters and the second vision in Chapter 8 explore similar themes. The promise of salvation is explained, and Antiochus and his actions are mentioned. The creatures are replaced by various animals in Chapter 8. Nebuchadnezzar is absent, and in place of two beasts, the Median-Persian Empire is portrayed by a ram with two horns. More specifically, Alexander's empire is pictured as a large Billy goat with just one "conspicuous horn" at first, which is Alexander the Great. This horn represents Alexander's four generals and the split empire, and when it is shattered (Alexander dies), it is replaced by "four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven." With particular emphasis on his devastation of the Temple, Antiochus' presumption against the Most High is precisely recounted. Once more, God is said to act quickly, and even a window of time until the Temple is purified is mentioned. If Chapter 7:25's three and a half years are to be interpreted as consisting of the twenty-three hundred evenings and mornings (v.14), then the time spans eleven hundred and fifty days. The temple was actually desecrated on the 15th of Chislev, 167 B.C., and rededicated on the 25th of the same month, 164 B.C. Verse 25 makes a final important point by explicitly promising that "he shall not be broken by human hand."<sup>18</sup>

The vision in chapter 12 reaffirms the idea that the establishment of God's Kingdom will be brought about by divine rather than human forces. Additionally, a brand-new, crucial idea is presented. An issue among the orthodox Jews surfaced in the individualism that had emerged in the Hellenistic Age that seems to have received little notice prior. Even though justice would be meted out to Antiochus and the Kingdom of God would finally come into being, what about those sad Hasidim who had perished for the cause but never experienced the joys of that Kingdom? What about the bad employees who passed away at this time while sleeping soundly and were spared from sharing in that terrible judgment? The first explicit Old Testament mention of the concept of resurrection of the dead is found in Daniel 12, which offers a possible solution. Of course, this is not yet a global resurrection; rather, it is just predicted that "many" of those who passed away during this age will "awaken," "some to everlasting life and some to disgrace and everlasting contempt." Observe again that the dominion in this resurrection is an earthly one; there is no mention of a celestial paradise. However, the query has been posed, and a response has been made. For those who are deeply distressed, this as-yet-unknown hope is added to the consolation of the apocalypse.

### **Messianic Hope**

The expectation of a specific leader, the Messiah, grew to dominate both the apocalypticists and the Zealots' political freedom during the Roman era of rule. The Greek word "Christos," was used to translate the English word "Messiah," meaning "anointed." Many people, including prophets, priests, kings, and even Cyrus are described as "God's anointed" in the Old Testament (Isaiah 45:1). The dream for a future monarch who would be seen as an idealized version of David had started to emerge in Judah after the fall of David's kingdom. The "wonder-child" in Isaiah 9:2-7 and the "branch of Jesse" in Isaiah 11:1ff are examples of this kind of hope. The expectation of a new David, who would rule over a united and pure people for all time, was postponed to a distant future during the Exile (Ezek. 37:21-28).

The Jews' hope for future salvation during those challenging times did not just take the form of the anticipation of a New David. Once more, a paradigm shift in their political environment, a fresh danger, or a glimmer of hope would drive them back to their Bibles, where they would frantically look for any hints as to what the significance of their future may be. Several pictures of how God will behave in the "end days" were created by combining various scriptural texts with the numerous interpretations prompted by shifting circumstances. A Messiah of Aaron, a great High Priest, who would oversee the worship of the New Israel after the current age ended, was anticipated by some groups, such as the Essenes around the Dead Sea. Some people interpreted Daniel 7:13-ff as referring to a specific person rather than to pure Israel, and they searched for the "Son of Man," who was presumably thought of as a celestial, angelic figure. Of all the characters in The Jewish Hope, this Son of Man continues to be the most enigmatic. Once more, some people sought a "prophet like Moses" (Deut.18:15) who would give Israel a better law and guide them through a fresh Exodus. Enoch (Gen.

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<sup>18</sup> Wayne Meeks A., *Go from your father's house* (Virginia: the CLC Press, 1967), 121-123.

5:24), Elijah (2 Kings 2), and, according to later stories, Moses and Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, were among the Old Testament characters who were miraculously carried to heaven and who were occasionally anticipated to return at the end of time as God's forerunners. There were also numerous other versions. In some cases, no Messiah was anticipated at all; instead, it was thought that God would directly and personally intervene and start to rule as ruler of the world. It was frequently anticipated that multiple redeemer figures would unite. One such group that appears to have anticipated the arrival of the Prophets, the Messianic Priest, and the Messianic Prince is the Dead Sea cult.

The diverse images used by Jews to express their desire for the end of the world served to highlight how strong and universal that yearning was. All of the images shared the following fundamental components. Restoration comes first. Israel and the entire world would be restored. This signified that God will recreate His great rescue act from Israel's distant past in these last days. The Exodus would be completed by a fresh and complete emancipation. The creation would be made new, cleansed of evil, and perfected in peace and joy, and the new covenants would be inscribed on the hearts of the people. Judgment is the second imagery. To be judged by God's flawless righteousness, all men must stand before him and have their lives evaluated, but this judgment was primarily interpreted as God's vindication of His own people Israel and a condemnation of the pagans. God's kingship comes in third. The world would be ruled by God and his people for all time. Finally, an age for the Covenant People had come to an end, and they had come out of its crises with a chastened and revitalized hope that had been completely realized in the advent of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

### **Deliverance from the Great Tribulation and the End-Times**

The great tribulation and the resurrection that follows, which are referenced in the opening verses of Chapter 12, serve as the culmination of the material characterized as the fourth vision of Daniel, which begins in Chapter 10 of the Book of Daniel. This is also the pinnacle of the entire book of Daniel, as well as the intended outcome of Daniel's prophesies about both Israel and the Gentiles. It is analogous to Revelation 19, the pivotal passage in the final book of the Scripture. The lengthy stretch that started with Chapter 10 is ended with the first four verses of Chapter 12. They express the writer's anticipation of the divinely predetermined outcome in astonishingly succinct compass and restrained language. Israel would be at the center of it, as evidenced by the fact that Michael, Israel's patron angel, will play a crucial role on God's side. Israel, that is, everyone in Israel whose names are recorded in the Book of Life, as it comes to a head (Psa. 69:29; Exod. 32:32; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5) will survive the great tribulation. God is already aware of His own people. The time of the end has a special relationship with Israel (all of God's children), and those who worship God in Israel will experience a special deliverance during that time. In addition, the doctrine of resurrection, which culminates at the time of the end, is the special hope of those who are martyred.

A world ruler, a world religion, a world war, a time of great tribulation for Israel, deliverance for the people of God at the end of the tribulation, resurrection and judgment, and a reward for the righteous are just a few of the major elements of the time of the end that are revealed throughout the entire section from Daniel 11:36 to 12:3. This section introduces each of these elements. The additional information from the Scriptures is that "the period of the end" will last for three and a half years, and that it will start when "the prince that shall come" breaks the agreement (Dan. 9:26-27, 7:25, 12:7; Rev 13:5). Liberal scholars who try to identify Antiochus Epiphanes in Daniel 11:36-45 are severely embarrassed by the fact that the beginning section of Chapter 12 is unmistakably eschatological. Antiochus Epiphanes is plainly not mentioned in Chapter 12, which is logically related to the previous part, but rather, the end of the ages, the resurrection of the saints, and their reward. A careful exegesis of these lines shows that nowhere does the attempt to render Daniel totally historical fail more badly than here. The "time of the end" is described in this manner, which supports Daniel's prophecy that it will be a time of unprecedented trouble, the likes of which the world has never known, trouble that, if it were not stopped by the consummation, the second coming of Jesus Christ, would lead to the extinction of the human race. Revelation 6-19, which describes the enormous catastrophes that strike the globe when the seals are broken, the trumpets are blown, and the vials of divine judgment are emptied, makes this obvious. The affliction of the latter times has never before occurred, according to all of these Scriptures. Daniel 12:1 is impossible to reconcile with Antiochus Epiphanes' persecutions in the second century BCE, according to even liberal interpreters.

### **Reflections on Daniel's Message for Contemporary Christians**

Below are some of the most important lessons deducible from the book of Daniel.

#### **Remaining Loyal to God**

Daniel decided in his heart not to consume any of the food that Nebuchadnezzar had prepared. The phrase "so he might not pollute himself" (Dan. 1:8) means the food King Nebuchadnezzar gave was food that Jews were



not permitted to consume. It is important to keep in mind that Jews were subject to severe dietary laws. Daniel was free to violate his Jewish principles even though; he was in a strange, heathen land. An example from the current era of this would be that of a child who visited a friend's house and found them watching a movie or playing a video game that they were not allowed to watch. This child could watch the movie or play the game without anyone noticing because his parents are not there. God was the central aspect of Daniel's life. He was determined to please God because he had been raised with integrity and the rules of God. Whatever the people around him were doing did not matter. Only Daniel and his three friends are mentioned in the text as declining the king's dinner. Every other prisoner consumed food that the monarch was providing. Daniel did not give a fig about this. He would not make a concession. Daniel's loyalty to God also means he focused on God all the time. He prayed to God three times a day while kneeling at his window and looking towards Jerusalem in chapter 6:10. This led to his being placed in the lion's den. God was the center of Daniel's life in every way.

The lesson that young people (and adults) should learn is very significant. Peer pressure can be very effective. Many young individuals lose their faith as a result of little difficult circumstances they may go through. Like Daniel, followers of Christ must decide they would never compromise the standards of the Bible's teachings. Christians must resolve in their hearts, as Daniel did, that they will not give up what they know is right in God's eyes no matter what comes their way. This is very important in today's world where many people are polluted with ungodly attitudes. The incident involving Daniel is a wonderful example of the effectiveness of prayer, as well as a significant challenge to maintain one's faith in the face of difficulty. It also demonstrates one's loyalty to God. Daniel's life depicts how to remain faithful in all circumstances. Plez Lovelady Junior posits that "the Christian life involves risks, but God has promised rewards, not only in the "here-after," but also for resisting the defiling influences of the world."<sup>19</sup> When devoted Christians stand firm in the face of obstacles and testify to the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, they become effective tools in God's hands in this diabolic universe. They serve as an example and a source of inspiration for everyone who would steadfastly uphold God's righteousness and truth.

In fact, God permitted Daniel to be placed in the den, just as He had previously permitted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be placed in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:17–23), just as He permitted Paul and Silas to be imprisoned (Acts 16:23–24), and just as He permitted all of these, Daniel's enduring faith in God kept him at peace (Dan. 6:16–23). The sense of peace that surpasses all understanding is what trust in the living God brings in a believer, according to Philippians 4:7. It provides calm and composure in the face of dreadful circumstances. God desires that mankind trust Him above all else in life, just as Daniel did. Daniel was saved by the strength of "faith and prayer" (Dan. 6:20–23). Knowing that God can deliver from sin (Heb. 7:25), fear (Psalm 34:4), doubt (Matt. 14:31), anxiety (Phil. 4:6-7), and bad habits (Heb. 7:25) is a wonderful experience. He entirely fulfils, in other words (2 Tim. 4:18). If one puts his or her faith in the living God, the same power that released Daniel can also free that person when he or she finds himself in a dangerous lair under the threat of any kind of lion.

Daniel was almost 70 years old when these things happened in Chapter 6. Although one would have thought he had slowed down during his retirement years, the obedient prophet was still in God's service. Evidently, age is not a hindrance to spiritual usefulness. The wonderful gospel principles that have been developing throughout the chapters chronicling Daniel's life in Babylon come to a head in Daniel's situation when it is shown that God is a dependable deliverer. Again, Christians must understand that everything revolves around them, with God at the center. In every area of life, God must be the top priority. In moments of prayer and Bible classes, He may occasionally just come into mind. All hearts, souls, and thoughts are to be given over to loving God. One must not reduce God to merely existing in his/her life. As it was identified in Daniel's life, God needs to be the focal point in the lives of humans and all activities.

### **Exercising authority in a godly way**

One of the issues facing many contemporary societies is leadership crisis. Many leaders or people in authority do not live up to their task. Daniel's way of exercising authority and his perspective on authority have some implications for contemporary authorities. The kingdom of God, which Daniel saw in a vision as "an Ancient One," was highlighted in Daniel's book (7:9–10, 13–14), as well as the eternal kingship bestowed upon someone who resembles a human being. This book's main themes are kingship and sovereignty. The theme of Daniel's book is the connection between heavenly and earthly suzerainty, with particular emphasis on how God's will determines the sovereign power of earthly monarchs (Dan. 2:21, 5:32). These verses are part of a lengthy vision report that begins in the early years of the mythical King Belshazzar's rule (7:1). The majority of the book is

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<sup>19</sup> Lovelady Junior, Plez, "Strength for Today- Being Faithful in All Circumstances in Daniel 6: 12-17," Indiana: Beula Bible College & Seminary, 2020, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/strength-today-being-faithful-all-circumstances-6-plez>.



based on years being measured in terms of earthly monarchs' reigns. This method of keeping track of the passage of time was widely used in the ancient Near East and is also mentioned in the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles. This method of chronology highlights for Daniel's audience the historical fact that Judah did not have its own earthly king after Nebuchadnezzar conquered it in 587 BCE (1:1-2). Judeans were no longer subject to the whims of rulers who respected their autonomy as a people or acknowledged the power and authority of their God but were now ruled by the Babylonian empire. In Daniel's narratives, the Babylonian kings are shown ordering the worship of idols (chapter 3) and putting themselves in the role of God (chapters 4, 6).

The conclusion of Chapter 5 informs readers that King Belshazzar's haughty impiety causes God to end his kingship (Dan. 5:26-28). Judeans are still not free, nevertheless. The kingdom is instantly "received" by Darius the Mede once Belshazzar passes away (5:30). This story depicts Cyrus' conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE. The Judeans, both at home and in captivity, who had previously been subjects of the Babylonian Empire, became subjects of the Persian Empire during this time. A further empire would eventually succeed Darius', and the Judean people would continue to endure foreign tyranny according to Daniel's vision in Chapter 7. In the years 333-332 BCE, the Macedonian general Alexander the Great overthrew the Persian Empire, including Judea. His successors engaged in conflict to build their own kingdoms after his passing. His generals Ptolemy and Seleukus each established an empire, the Seleukid Empire with its capitals at Seleukia in Mesopotamia and Antioch in Syria, and the Ptolemaic Empire with its centre in Alexandria, Egypt. Judeans were governed by the Ptolemies and afterward, the Seleukid rule.

The Seleukid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes tormented his Judean countrymen during the years 167 and 164 BCE, profaned the temple in Jerusalem, stopped the regular sacrifices to YHWH, and installed a Seleukid military garrison in Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> During Antiochus IV Epiphanes' persecution of Judean Jews, Daniel 7 took on its final form. Jews who had lived under foreign control for more than four centuries and were now subject to state oppression and persecution found hope in the vision of the one who was like a human person. Daniel's vision permitted them to see something else even though they witnessed their homes being burned, their loved ones being tortured and killed, and their temple being profaned by an "abomination that desolates" (Dan. 9:27, 11:31, 12:11). They were able to see the fall of empires, God's omnipotence, and their own future kingdom. It would not be long before the king who oppressed them died. His kingdom will perish (7:11), just as the kingdoms that came before it had done (7:12), which is represented as a grotesque, mutant beast in the verses. God would replace it with an eternal kingdom (7:14, 18, 27) that would not go away. In addition to the human-like person, it would also be delivered "to the people of the holy ones of the Most High" (7:27).<sup>21</sup>

Contemporary Christians are influenced by so many domestic and materialistic ideologies that sometimes prevent them from worshipping the Lord wholeheartedly. Nonetheless, Christians have the power to overcome certain challenges and to influence others in one way or the other. Whether it is the waiter at the restaurant or the Sunday morning churchgoers, everyone Christians interact with has an impact in some way. Sadly, a lot of Christians fail to use their power for the advancement of God's kingdom. Direct evangelism is not the exclusive method of winning souls to Christ. In chapter 2:47, following the prophet's interpretation of his dream, King Nebuchadnezzar remarked, "Look at Daniel; certainly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings." Daniel influenced the king of Babylon with the help of his power. In chapter 6:25-27, after King Darius saw Daniel was spared from being eaten by the lions, he decreed that no one should worship anyone but the God of Daniel. Again, Daniel exercised his power in a very effective and positive manner. While it's unlikely that Christians today would ever be able to change legislation as effectively as Daniel did, believers can still use their influence to transform the society.

### **Remaining unfazed by challenges**

The men who accused Daniel of being unfaithful to the king suffered the identical destiny they had sought for Daniel. In Chapter 6, Daniel was cast into a den of lions, but God miraculously protected Daniel. This story also emphasizes how Daniel persisted in praying to God without focusing on the obstacles he faced from his accusers. This demonstrates how, despite a government law prohibiting him from doing so, Daniel's faith propelled him to honour God via prayer. This story serves as a reminder that despite allowing Judah to be conquered by the Babylonians and allowing the captivity of many Jews, including Daniel, God was still a mighty being. Although he was more powerful than the gods of Babylon, He could still protect those who revered him. In addition to forbidding Daniel from practising his faith, the government had also made it against the law, and anyone caught

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<sup>20</sup> Our primary literary sources for the persecution are the biblical books of Daniel and 1 and 2 Maccabees (the latter two are regarded as deuterocanonical by Catholics and as belonging to the Apocrypha by Protestants). They speak of a state-sponsored campaign of terror, death, and servitude as well as the criminalization of Jewish identity, Torah, and prayer.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph A. Seiss, *Voices from Babylon* (Philadelphia: Castle, , 1879), 311.

disobeying the law had to suffer the appropriate penalties. Daniel would then be subjected to the Lion's Den (Dan. 6:10–23), deceit, and plotting against him. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three (3) Hebrew men, would have to endure being hurled into the Fiery Furnace to be put to death. Daniel 3:1–28

Nebuchadnezzar, like Satan, was intelligent enough to realise that luring these young men with alluring, sinful temptations would make it much easier for him to convert them to his gods and regime. They were given the King's own rations, not the lunches, which included wine and meat. However, Daniel's God had declared in his Word that partaking in these things was wicked for a child of God (Dan. 1:5, 8). Daniel 6:4–6 stipulates that Daniel was forced to live in a society that had now outlawed his faith. It was now against the law of the land to pray to his God and to publicly practice his faith. Daniel identified that prayer is the means of getting solutions to certain difficult circumstances but Daniel was totally banned from societal edict as well as the symbols of faith, such as the Cross of Jesus Christ, nativity displays, and the 10 Commandments to get solutions to the nation's problems. Contemporary Christianity is facing the same challenges of secular education, sinful enticements, and social edicts as Daniel encountered, in the land of "Religious Freedom."<sup>22</sup>

It is only now that Christians are actually being threatened with suffering as a result of upholding their faith by the ruling class. Being a Christian who unapologetically and fearlessly practises their faith wherever they may be, regardless of what the price for practicing Christianity may be, is increasingly becoming the price paid for doing so. This price may include being fined, imprisoned, slandered, losing one's job, and so on. After being informed by the law that Daniel was not permitted to pray, Daniel went to his usual location and time for prayer as he had done in the past. Daniel also opened his windows so that everyone could see that he was continuing to live according to his faith despite the law of man and the repercussions for breaching it. These were the difficulties that Daniel had as a Christian living by himself in a strange land. If one has the guts to go against the grain and loudly proclaim his or her faith, like Daniel did (2 Tim. 3:5), they will discover that this world will appear foreign and hostile to them as well. If a Christian decides to follow Jesus despite all the obstacles that are urging him or her not to, he or she can also come across people who are hostile and who will want to harm him or her.

The Bible records that Daniel was thrown into the lion's den because he was faithful to God. The other officials serving under King Darius were fiercely envious of the king's preference for Daniel and his well-known success as governor (6: 3-4). To lessen Daniel's influence with the king, they searched for something they could accuse him of that would either reflect poorly on his ability to lead or his personal life. They were unable to find any fault with Daniel because of his faithfulness, according to chapter 6:4. These governors and satraps deceive the king into adopting legislation that effectively forbids anybody in the realm from worshiping anyone other than Darius. Both political and personal factors could be involved in accusing Christians of their true worship as in the case of Daniel. It's critical to resist the enemy's advances in any case. To be able to extinguish the evil one's fiery darts, Christians must put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:16). Just like Daniel, their first priority should be serving and honoring God. The Bible makes it clear that if they are following Christ the way they should, they are going to suffer persecution (John 15:20).

## CONCLUSION

The Book of Daniel illustrates principles for godly exercise of power, with Daniel as a model. Key lessons include unwavering devotion to God, maintaining integrity amid challenges, demonstrating wisdom, humility in leadership, courage in persecution, influencing for God's glory, faithful stewardship, and reliance on God's timing. Daniel's life exemplifies a timeless guide for individuals seeking to wield power in ways that honor God and positively impact their surroundings. In addition, Daniel's unwavering faith and resilience in the face of adversity serves as a timeless and relevant lesson for contemporary Christianity. Despite living in a foreign land that had outlawed his faith, Daniel exemplified steadfast devotion to God. His commitment to prayer, even when it was prohibited, demonstrated a refusal to compromise his beliefs. The parallel between Daniel's challenges and the current struggles of Christians in a society marked by secularism, sinful temptations, and restrictive social norms is striking. The story underscores the increasing societal pressure on Christians to conform and the potential consequences for boldly practicing their faith. Daniel's courage in defying the law and continuing to pray openly, even at the risk of severe penalties, serves as a poignant example. In a world where practicing Christianity unapologetically can result in fines, imprisonment, job loss, or slander, Daniel's unwavering commitment to God becomes a source of encouragement.

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<sup>22</sup> Jack Woodard, "Daniel: The Christian In The New America," Jack Woodard's Blog, 2015, <https://jackwoodard.wordpress.com/2015/05/20/daniels-challenges/>.

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