

The Book of Daniel: Study Materials

by Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D.

<http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Daniel.htm>

I) Introduction: Composition History

- **Author:** Although written in part as first-person narratives by a certain "Daniel," the real author is anonymous. Another much earlier "Daniel" is mentioned, along with Noah and Job, as a wise sage in Ezek 14:14-20; 28:3.
- **Date:** Although the events purportedly take place during the Babylonian Exile (6th cent. BC), the stories actually stem from the 3rd and early 2nd cent. BC, and the book was not compiled until ca. 167-164 BC.
- **Language:** The various stories in this book are written in three different languages: Hebrew (1:1—2:4a); Aramaic (2:4b—7:28); and Greek (13—14); scholars have various theories to explain this phenomenon.
- **Structure & Genre:** The book has three main parts, each from different eras and of distinct literary genres:
 - **Chapters 1-6**, from the 3rd cent., contain stories about the life and struggles of Daniel and his companions during the Babylonian exile; here Daniel is the interpreter of the dreams of various Babylonian kings.
 - **Chapters 7-12**, from the early 2nd cent., is a collection of four *apocalyptic* visions; here Daniel himself is the visionary, but he needs help from an angelic mediator to interpret and understand his own dreams.
 - **Chapters 13-14** are not found in the Hebrew Bible, but are in the Septuagint (ancient Greek Bible; LXX); they consist of two separate stories involving Daniel that are novelistic, not historical.

II) Contents:

Ch. 1 – Daniel & Companions at the Babylonian Court	Ch. 7 – Vision of the Four Beasts
Ch. 2 – Nebuchadnezzar's First Dream: Great Statue	Ch. 8 – Vision of a Ram and a Goat
Ch. 3 – Three Companions in the Fiery Furnace	Ch. 9 – Angel Gabriel and the Seventy Weeks
Ch. 4 – Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream: Great Tree	Ch. 10-12 – Historical Visions, Battles, the End
Ch. 5 – Belshazzar's Feast: Writing on the Wall	Ch. 13 (Greek) – The Story of Susanna
Ch. 6 – Daniel remains safe in the Lion's Den	Ch. 14 (Greek) – The Stories of Bel and the Dragon

III) An Overview of the Great Empires of the Ancient Middle East

- **Egyptians** - Imperial overlords of Palestine and many surrounding territories for most of 3rd and 2nd millennia BC.
 - **[United Kingdom of Israel]** - the "Golden Age" of Ancient Israel, when the twelve tribes are independent and united under Kings Saul, David, and Solomon (ca. 1030-930 BC); but after Solomon's death the kingdom divides.
- **Assyrians** - King Sennacherib destroys the northern Kingdom of Israel & its capital Samaria; the ten northern tribes of Israelites are exiled and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire (721 - 600's BC).
- **Neo-BABYLONIANS** - King Nebuchadnezzar captures the southern Kingdom of Judah, **destroys the Temple and city of Jerusalem**; many Jews taken captive to Babylon for several generations, in what is called the "Babylonian Exile" (587 - 539 BC).
- **MEDES** - a smaller kingdom which never directly ruled Israel, but helped others defeat the Assyrians and Babylonians; it was then incorporated into the Persian empire, becoming its largest province (by 550 BC).
- **PERSIANS** - King Cyrus conquers the Babylonian empire, allows the Jews to return to Judea and rebuild the temple; the Persians control Judea through approved local leaders (539 - 330's BC).
- **GREEKS** - After Alexander the Great becomes King of Macedonia (332 BC), his armies conquer the East (almost the whole Persian empire), but he dies very young (323 BC). His Hellenistic empire is then divided between four generals, who battle each other in the "Wars of the Diadochi." Eventually, two long-reigning dynasties rule in the East (see my page on **Hellenistic Era Rulers**):
 - **Ptolemies** - Greek rulers from Egypt who also control Palestine at first (ca. 323 - 198 BC);
 - **Seleucids** - Greek rulers from Syria who take over control of Palestine later (198 - 141 BC); the tenth in this dynasty (if starting from Alexander) is:
 - **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**, who **desecrates the Jerusalem Temple** by placing statues in it (167 BC), thereby sparking the "Maccabean Revolt"; the Jews soon recapture and **rededicate the Temple** (164 BC).
- **[Maccabean/Hasmonean Dynasty]** - the Jews briefly regain full independence (141 - 63 BC).
- **Romans** - General Pompey leads the Roman take-over of Israel in 63 BC (see my page on **Roman Era Rulers**).
- [See also my summary page on **Ancient Israelite and Jewish History**]

Apocalypse: Definitions and Related Terms

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http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Apoc_Def.htm

Preliminary Description of "Apocalypse":

- In **popular terminology** today, an "apocalypse" is a catastrophic event (e.g., nuclear holocaust).
 - In **biblical terminology**, an "apocalypse" is not an event, but a "revelation" that is recorded in written form:
 - it is a piece of crisis literature that "reveals" truths about the past, present, and/or future in highly symbolic terms;
 - the revelation often comes in dreams or visions, and usually needs to be interpreted with the help of an angel;
 - it is usually intended to provide hope and encouragement for people in the midst of severe trials and tribulations.
 - *Caution 1:* "**The Apocalypse**" is an alternate name (used especially by Protestants) for the "**Book of Revelation**" in the NT.
 - *Caution 2:* "**The Little Apocalypse**" or "The Apocalyptic Discourse" are names sometimes given to **Mark 13** (and parallel passages in Matt 24 and Luke 21), containing the teachings of Jesus about the future of Jerusalem and the end of the world.
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Scholarly Definition of "Apocalypse"

From the SBL's "Apocalypse Group"; published in J. J. Collins, *Semeia* 14 [1979] 9):

" 'Apocalypse' is a **genre of revelatory literature** with a **narrative framework**, in which a revelation is **mediated** by an **otherworldly being** to a **human recipient**, disclosing a **transcendent reality** which is

- both **temporal**, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation
- and **spatial** insofar as it involves another, supernatural world."

Addition to the definition, incorporating the purpose of the genre, from the suggestions of Hellholm (1982) & Aune (1986):

".intended to **interpret** the present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to **influence** both the *understanding* and the *behavior* of the audience by means of divine authority."

Subdivisions or Types of Apocalypses:

- Apocalypses can be classified according to features in their **CONTENT**:
 - Some apocalypses contain "Otherworldly Journeys" (e.g., the seer is purportedly taken on a tour of heaven)
 - Others do *not* contain "Otherworldly Journeys" (e.g., while seeing heavenly things, the seer stays on earth)
- Apocalypses can also be classified according to their primary **REFERENTS**:
 - Some apocalypses deal with *Personal* Eschatology (the death and after-life of individuals)
 - Others focus more on *Ethnic* or *National* Eschatology (the end of a nation or empire)
 - Many others contain *Cosmic* Eschatology (the ultimate end of the whole world)

Briefest Notes on the Book of Esther

Catholic Bible Institute—Orange
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Esther, a Jew, the successor to Vashti

Mordecai the Jew, cousin and guardian of Esther -- enemy of Haman

Haman the Agagite/Amalekite, Persian prime minister - enemy of Mordecai

Genre: “historical novel” (*combination of fact and fiction*)

Composition: The original story was written in Hebrew (the Hebrew version is in Jewish and Protestant canons) with additions to the story inserted later into the Greek version of the book (the Greek version is in Roman Catholic and Christian Orthodox canons). The extreme limits for the first and final editions are 400 to 114 BCE. The Greek additions are clearly secondary making the characters and events more dramatic, and always giving the narrative an explicitly religious character (which is lacking in the Hebrew text). For example, these additions include prayers to God and show God as engaged in the story whereas the Hebrew text has possibly one veiled reference to Divine activity in 4¹⁴. The Greek additions are:

1. Mordecai’s dream and its interpretation (Additions A and F) .
2. the king’s first and second official imperial letters (Additions B and E)
3. the prayers of Mordecai and Esther (Addition C)
4. Esther’s highly dramatic appearance before the king (Addition D)

Purpose of the book:

- to give the reason for the Feast of Purim, a celebration of victory. (The story was heard as a hero tale in which Jews triumphed over their enemies through clever imperial court intrigue.)
- to remind the Jewish people that they must always be prepared to defend themselves and their faith when they are in danger

How Maimuni Conquered His Adversary or Imagination Kills

A favorite Arabic catchword runs: "Today you are going to get something to drink, you *Kammun!*" However, the *Kammun* (Arabic for the caraway plant) is never watered; the meaning, therefore, is: You will never get anything. The following story is a Midrash based upon this catchword, a form of story which is very popular with the Yemenites.

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, apart from his splendid gifts as teacher of the Law and master of philosophy, was also an outstanding doctor; His reputation in this science was so great that the Sultan of Egypt made him his personal physician. Many doctors begrudged him this high position, and with all their might sought to remove him from his exalted place. One doctor among them, named Kammun, which means "caraway," had the best prospect, having many influential friends at court. These were soon aware that the Sultan was dependent on Rabbi Moshe and placed unbounded confidence in him. They suggested that he should take Kammun as a second personal physician, in order that the care of the royal health might not be left to the wisdom of a single man and especially to a Jew. "Two personal physicians are no use," asserted the Sultan, "but since you tell me so much about Kammun I will put both of them to the test, and whoever proves himself the greater master of his profession shall be my personal physician." Soon afterwards, the Sultan summoned the two of them and when they had come before him, he said, turning to Kammun as he did so: "They have told me that you are an even greater physician than Maimuni; but I do not want to rely on the statements of others, but to make trial of your ability for myself. I will set you a task whose accomplishment will give me a clear proof of the superiority of the victor. You shall each try to poison the other, and whoever succeeds in remaining alive through wisely chosen antidotes shall be my personal physician."

When Kammun heard these words he was delighted, because he was in fact a notorious poisoner, and many highly placed persons had been put out of the way through his medicines without the cause ever becoming known. But Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon was deeply grieved, for he was now in the terrible position of either committing murder or being killed. Soon Kammun, experienced in such matters, had found means to get poison mixed with the food which Rabbi Moshe ate. But Rabbi Moshe knew how to render each poison harmless by an antidote; and everyone was astonished each day when he appeared at court to find him still alive and in blooming health. But what did Rabbi Moshe do in order to free himself from Kammon? Nothing whatsoever. He would not have the blood of another on his hands, in spite of the sage who had said: If any man goes about to kill you, forestall him by killing him.

Only, when he saw Kammun, as he daily did at court, he said to him in passing, "Today you will get the poison to drink, Kammun; today you are going to get something to drink!" Kammun carefully analyzed all the food and drink that he took, but could discover no trace of poison in them. The people at court constantly asked him, "What has Maimuni given you today?" He was ashamed to show his ignorance, and said each time, "He put this and that in my food, and I have taken this and that as antidote." Now, as he could not discover the nature of the poison in question, he feared that it was a creeping, slow-working substance, and soon refrained from eating any food at all. The only thing he took was some milk, from a cow that was milked before his eyes. He became paler and weaker day by day, while Maimuni, with his health intact, went about his business.

One day, while holding a half-empty jar of milk in his hand, he encountered Maimuni in one of the anterooms of the Sultan's palace. Maimuni immediately said to him, "Now you are drinking it, Kammun!" This frightened him to death, for he could think nothing else than that he had taken the deadly poison. He scarcely had the strength to place the jar on the table; then he fell to the ground and passed away.

The news of it spread like wind through the town, and soon the doctors and alchemists gathered together to investigate the drink with which Maimuni had done the renowned poisoner to death. But Maimuni had a suckling child brought in and, in front of all, gave it the rest of the milk, and behold, nothing in the slightest happened to the child! There was no end to their astonishment, and everyone was convinced that Maimuni had overcome his enemy by sorcery.

But Maimuni answered, "There is no sorcery in Jacob, and no black art in Israel, but there is a little proverb that even the galley slave on the ship knows, and with this counsel I mastered my adversary." Thereupon he told them the whole story, and so all came to know that Kammun died of nothing but unfounded fears, as the proverb says: "Imagination kills." The Sultan was greatly pleased at the wisdom of his personal physician and rewarded him royally, saying, "Now I know that you are truly a great doctor, because you heal not only the body but the soul as well."