

ԿՐՕՆԱԿԱՆ

**THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT, NATURE, AND MAIN MESSAGE
OF THE OLD TESTAMENT
APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE
(THE BOOK OF DANIEL, CHAPTERS 7 – 12)**

The Old Testament Apocalyptic Literature

At the closing stages of the Old Testament period (ca. 2nd century BC), the Jewish eschatology, which had developed during the Late Old Testament period (post-exilic period, 530 – 350 BC)¹, began expressing itself in an apocalyptic form. The term “apocalypse” comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis* (ἀποκαλύπτω, Rev. 1.1) and it means “revelation,”² “disclosure” or “unveiling”³: the description of future events, especially the end-time⁴. The authors of such writings (apocalyptic and pseudegraphic) clearly emphasized the future events⁵ and believed that the struggle between God and satan was reaching its climax⁶ and thus an age was coming to its end. This theme is present in the second part (chapters 7 – 12) of Daniel⁷.

There are several characteristics of the apocalyptic literature, such as revelation (Jer. 23.18; Dan. 2.23, 5.11, 14), symbolism (1 Enoch 86.1-4, 89.1)⁸, pessimism (Dan 12.1; 4 Ezra 8.1)⁹, the shaking of foundations, the triumph of God (Isa. 66.22), determinism (2 Baruch 85.7)¹⁰, dualism (2 Esdras 7.50; 1 Enoch 45.4f., 72.1, 91.16f; 4 Ezra 7.28f.)¹¹, pseudonymity¹², rewritten history (1 Enoch chapters 85 – 90; 4 Ezra 14.11f.)¹³, ethical teaching (1 Enoch 5.4 – 6)¹⁴, prediction and historical perspective (Dan. 11.36)¹⁵, theology of history¹⁶, personal salvation and often bodily resurrection (Dan. 12.2; Isa. 26.14, 21, 66.24; Ezra 37.1 – 14; Job 14.12, 19.25; Hos 6.2)¹⁷, and especially the figure of cosmic redeemer, “The Son of Man” (Dan 7.9 – 14; 1 Enoch 48.9f., chapter 51, 69.26 – 29)¹⁸.

It is still under debate whether there was any foreign influence on Jewish apocalyptic literature¹⁹ or not²⁰. If there was any influence on Jewish apocalyptic thinking, it shows how Israel adopted it and made it her own²¹. But the evidence suggests to me that the apocalyptic literature developed within the Jewish context²², taking some elements from its Persian and

¹⁵ Bright, *History*, p. 443; Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, p. 583; Howley G. C. D., ed., *The Pickering Bible Commentary for Today*, (London/Glasgow; Pickering and Inglis, 1984), p. 903.

¹⁶ Freedman, “Daniel,” p. 34.

¹⁷ Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, pp. 583, 593; Xavier, “Resurrection,” pp. 495 – 496; Bromiley, “Daniel,” p. 865; Collins, *The Apocalyptic*, p. 9; Hastings, “Daniel,” p. 200; Freedman, “Daniel,” p. 35.

¹⁸ Bright, *History*, pp. 444 – 445; Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, pp. 586, 592; La Sor, *Old Testament*, pp. 673 – 674; Xavier, “Son of Man,” pp. 563 – 564.

¹⁹ Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, p. 587; Bromiley, “Daniel,” p. 865; Freedman, “Apocalypses,” p. 283.

²⁰ Morris, *Apocalyptic*, pp. 26 – 32; Freedman, “Apocalypses,” p. 281.

²¹ Bright, *History*, p. 445.

²² Russel D. S., *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1964), pp. 29 – 30.

Hellenistic environments. The core “of apocalyptic thought is a radically new summing up and evaluation of history as having run its course”²³. Even so, the apocalyptic literature is “no less the word of God and no less authoritative than other types of scripture”²⁴.

a) Historical Background of the Book of Daniel

From 404 BC to 333 BC, the Persian Empire gradually declined because of internal rebellions and assassinations, and, ultimately, fell to Alexander the Great²⁵. After his death (323 BC), when his empire was divided among his generals, Judah became a battleground between two rival kingdoms: the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria²⁶. During this political, military, and economic struggle, especially after a victory at Gaza, in 312 BC²⁷, the Ptolemies ruled Judah for more than a century (312 – 198 BC), but had little influence over Israel’s religious and cultural heritage²⁸. After the battle of Panium, however, 198 BC, the Seleucids gained control of Judah. The Jewish population welcomed Antiochus III the Great (223 – 187 BC), because he allowed them to live according to their Jewish laws, such as “the priests were exempted from taxation” and Antiochus even assisted in repairing the Temple²⁹. During the reign of Seleucus IV (187 – 175 BC), while the Jewish population enjoyed their internal freedom (2 Macc., 3.3), Hellenism, however, was gaining ground among the Jewish population and conservative Jews viewed it with increasing suspicion.

The situation got worse during Antiochus IV Epiphanes’ reign (175 – 163 BC), who canceled his father’s concessions (1 Macc., 1.41 – 62; 2 Macc., 6.1 – 11)³⁰. Antiochus, facing the threat of Roman expansion and needing the unity and all financial resources of his empire, began promoting Hellenism on a large scale and with vigor³¹. His policies met with strong opposition from the Jewish population of Jerusalem³². He forced upon the population harsh policies, like selecting the High Priest, taking gold and rifling the vessels from the Temple (1 Macc., 1.17 – 24; 2 Macc., 5.15 – 21), treating Jerusalem as an enemy city, erecting an altar to Zeus, offering swine sacrifices³³, which the Book of Daniel calls the “abomination that makes desolate” (Dan. 11.31; 12.11), suspending the Sabbath, the traditional feasts, the circumcision of male children, and burning copies of laws³⁴. On one hand, liberal thinking Jews welcomed these policies with

²³ Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, pp. 584 – 585.

²⁴ La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 495; Xavier, “Revelation”, p. 500.

²⁵ Flanders, Henry J., Jr. Crapps, Robert W., Smith David A., *People of the Covenant*, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 419 – 420.

²⁶ Flanders, *People*, p. 422; Howie C. G., *Ezekiel*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1961), p. 93.

²⁷ Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 342.

²⁸ Flanders, *People*, pp. 422 – 423; Bright, *History*, p. 404; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, pp. 341 – 342; Howie, *Ezekiel*, p. 93.

²⁹ Flanders, *People*, pp. 423 – 424.

³⁰ Flanders, *People*, p. 424; Bright, *History*, pp. 402 – 403; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 342.

³¹ Flanders, *People*, pp. 424 – 425; Bright, *History*, pp. 402 – 403; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 342.

³² Bright, *History*, p. 404; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 342; Howie, *Ezekiel*, p. 93.

³³ Flanders, *People*, p. 425; La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 487; Bright, *History*, pp. 404 – 405; Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, p. 590.

³⁴ Bright, *History*, p. 406; Howie, *Ezekiel*, p. 94.

open arms³⁵ (1 Macc., 1.43, 52), and on the other hand, with hostility and zealous opposition by Hasidic Jews, who were looking for religious freedom³⁶.

Rebellion broke out in the village of Modein by the Hasmonean family³⁷ and the family was joined by other Hasidim (1 Macc., 2.42f). the rebellion was headed by Judas Maccabeus and lasted for three years (167 – 165 BC)³⁸, until the Seleucid general Lysias “was forced to negotiate the proscriptions of Epiphanes against Yahweh worship”³⁹. Judas entered Jerusalem, purged the Temple, and rededicated it to Yahweh⁴⁰ (hence the story and tradition of Hannukah). After achieving religious freedom, the revolt continued under Jonathan (161 – 143 BC) and Simon (143 – 135 BC) until political freedom was also achieved⁴¹. “The achievement of both religious and political independence under the Maccabees made heroes of the family”⁴². The Maccabees ruled Judah until 63 BC, when Rome captured Jerusalem⁴³.

b) The Nature and the Date of the Book of Daniel

The Book of Daniel is one of the latest apocalyptic literary works of the Old Testament (Zachariah chapters 9 – 14 and parts of Isaiah are the others) and its popularity may have influenced others to use this type of literary genre⁴⁴. Some think of it as history⁴⁵, while others rule out its prophetic nature⁴⁶. It is a different kind of prophecy⁴⁷. That is why the book of Daniel was placed in the “Writings” section of the Jewish Biblical Canon.

The Book is divided into two parts: chapters 1 – 6, a collection of stories about Daniel and his friends, and chapters 7 – 12, a collection of visions by Daniel. Some scholars think that the book has one author⁴⁸, while others think that there are perhaps two or more authors⁴⁹.

The date of the book of Daniel is widely debated. Some put the date in the 6th century

³⁵ Bright, *History*, p. 407; Howie, *Ezekiel*, p. 94.

³⁶ Flanders, *People*, p. 425; La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 487; Bright, *History*, p. 410; Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, p. 590.

³⁷ Bright, *History*, pp. 410 – 411; Howie, *Ezekiel*, p. 95; Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, p. 590.

³⁸ Bright, *History*, pp. 410 – 411; Howie, *Ezekiel*, p. 95; Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, p. 590.

³⁹ Flanders, *People*, p. 426.

⁴⁰ Flanders, *People*, p. 426; Bright, *History*, p. 411; Howie, *Ezekiel*, p. 95.

⁴¹ Bright, *History*, p. 412.

⁴² Flanders, *People*, p. 426 – 428; La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 487.

⁴³ Flanders, *People*, p. 428 – 429; La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 487.

⁴⁴ Morris, *Apocalyptic*, p. 76; Harrison R. K., *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Toronto: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p. 1107; Howley, *The Pickering*, p. 903; Weiser Arthur, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), p. 317; Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible*, pp.345, 350; Montgomery James, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1964), p. 78; Russel, *The Method*, pp. 28 – 29; Freedman, “Daniel,” p. 31.

⁴⁵ La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 659.

⁴⁶ Harrison, *Introduction*, p. 1106.

⁴⁷ La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 661; Howley, *The Pickering*, p. 903; Weiser, *Introduction*, p. 317; Montgomery, *Critical*, pp. 78 – 80.

⁴⁸ Morris, *Apocalyptic*, p. 77; Harrison, *Introduction*, p. 1109; Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible*, p. 346; Bromiley, “Daniel,” p. 862; Hastings, “Daniel,” p. 200; Freedom, “Daniel,” p. 30.

⁴⁹ Harrison, *Introduction*, p. 1107 – 1110; Weiser, *Introduction*, pp. 316 – 317; Collins, *The Apocalyptic*, pp. 70 – 71.

BC⁵⁰, while others put it during the Maccabean period⁵¹, since the Book tries to encourage the people to resist alien, not native, religious influences and teachings and be faithful to the religion of Yahweh⁵². The Book was written “to hearten God’s people in difficult days with a ‘tract for the times’⁵³”. In La Sor’s words, “the Book of Daniel is neither ‘history written in advance’ nor ‘prophecy after the event.’ It is apocalyptic, which is always trans-historical; it seems to spring from history, but its purpose goes beyond history and provides a timeless message”⁵⁴.

c) The Message of the Book of Daniel

The main message of the Book of Daniel is a religious message⁵⁵ and that message is the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God over the kingdoms of the earth (Dan. 2.44)⁵⁶. While the prophets gave a glimpse of future events, the message of Daniel is as clear as it is sustained⁵⁷. For the Jewish population of that time and for all, in later centuries, who were living under difficult situations of oppression, the message of Daniel is that the final victory will be for the religious and the pious⁵⁸, because of their loyalty to God and His Law⁵⁹, because God is the Sovereign Lord of the world⁶⁰, because God has a plan⁶¹ and the Kingdom of God is eternal⁶² and spiritual and includes all the people of the earth⁶³. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of peace, happiness, and righteousness⁶⁴. The vision of a divine purpose and plan gave Daniel great hope⁶⁵. The kingdoms of the earth will end when the Kingdom of the Most High comes and with it the Last Judgment will come (Dan. 7.17, 27)⁶⁶.

⁵⁰ Morris, *Apocalyptic*, p. 78; Harrison, *Introduction*, p. 1110 – 1127; Bromiley, “Daniel,” pp. 861 – 862; Eissfeldt, Otto, *Old Testament*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 527 – 529.

⁵¹ La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 666; Harrison, *Introduction*, pp. 1110 – 1127; Howley, *The Pickering*, p. 903; Weiser, *Introduction*, p. 315; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, pp. 348 – 350, 355; Howie, *Ezekiel*, p. 89; Childs Brevards S., *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 615; Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, p. 590; Montgomery, *Critical*, pp. 76 – 77; Collins, *The Apocalyptic*, p. 70; Hastings, “Daniel,” p. 200; Freedman, “Daniel,” p. 30.

⁵² Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, pp. 356 – 358; Howie, *Ezekiel*, pp. 92, 96; Childs, *Introduction*, p. 614; Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, p. 520.

⁵³ Morris, *Apocalyptic*, p. 77.

⁵⁴ La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 672.

⁵⁵ Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, pp. 345 – 346.

⁵⁶ La Sor, *Old Testament*, pp. 659, 668 – 669; Xavier, “Kingdom,” *Dictionary*, pp. 292 – 293; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, pp. 344, 350 – 351; Hastings, “Daniel,” p. 200; Freedman, “Daniel,” p. 34.

⁵⁷ La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 659; Howley, *The Pickering*, p. 903; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 350.

⁵⁸ La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 670; Xavier, *Dictionary*, p. 293; Howley, *The Pickering*, p. 901; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, pp. 350, 355.

⁵⁹ Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, pp. 356 – 357; Freedman, “Daniel,” pp. 34 – 35.

⁶⁰ Howie, *Ezekiel*, pp. 96 – 97; Howley, *The Pickering*, pp. 901, 903; Weiser, *Introduction*, p. 316; Bromiley, “Daniel,” p. 861; Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, p. 528.

⁶¹ Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, p. 528; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 356; Bromiley, “Daniel,” p. 861; Freedman, “Daniel,” p. 34.

⁶² La Sor, *Old Testament*, p. 670; Howley, *The Pickering*, p. 901; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 350.

⁶³ Howley, *The Pickering*, p. 901; Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 357.

⁶⁴ Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 350.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 357.

⁶⁶ Buttrick, *Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 357; Gottwald, 7; Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible*, p. 592.

In chapters 7 – 12, Daniel describes what will happen (8.17, 19, 26; 9.25 – 27; 10.14; 11.3, 31). The main message, however, comes in chapter 12, when “your people shall be delivered” (12.1), and the resurrection of the dead will take place (v. 2)⁶⁷. The Book of Daniel is a call to devotion, a challenge to faithfulness and an attempt to stop the falling away of God’s people⁶⁸. In the book, the term and the concept of “Son of Man” has a different meaning than that of Ezekiel’s (Ez. 2.3, 3.4). The concept symbolizes the “tribunal of God and receives universal royalty” (Dan. 7.13f). But the term also contains a far larger context than the Messiah and the Son of David⁶⁹. The Book of Daniel “was intended ‘for the time of the end’, and to proclaim to any who believes that during such a time of dire persecution that ‘the Most High rules,’ and that the saints of the Most High will inherit a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed”⁷⁰.

Thus, the Book of Daniel comes to us with a message of persistence and of great hope for a brighter and glorious future in the Kingdom of God. Its message is not for the past, but for all generations, especially for those who suffer under persecution and oppression, bringing hope and self-confidence, and assurance that “whenever any earthly ruler persecutes the people of God, his times are limited, and his destruction is assured. Saints of every age have found comfort in their own interpretations, and still the vision retains its age-long message of hope and assurance”⁷¹.

NAVASART MARDOYAN

Cited Works

1. Bright John, A History of Israel, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1962.
2. Bromiley, Geoffrey, (ed.), The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 1, Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980.
3. Buttrick George A., (ed.), The Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. 6, New York: Abington Press, 1965.
4. Childs Brevards S., Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.
5. Collins John J., The Apocalyptic Imagination, New York, Crossroad, 1984.
6. Eissfeldt Otto, Old Testament, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965.
7. Flanders Henry J., Jr. Crapps, Robert W., Smith, David A., People of the Covenant, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
8. Freedman David N., (ed.), The Anchor Hebrew Bible, vol. 1, New York, Doubleday, 1992.
9. Gottwald Norman K., The Hebrew Bible, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

⁶⁷ Howie, Ezekiel, pp. 97 – 98; La Sor, Old Testament, pp. 467 – 469, 660 – 661; Gottwald, Hebrew Bible, p. 593.

⁶⁸ Buttrick, Interpreter’s Bible, p. 355.

⁶⁹ Xavier, “Kingdom,” “Son of Man,” Dictionary, pp. 293, 564; Gottwald, Hebrew Bible, p. 592; Freedman, “Daniel,” p. 35.

⁷⁰ La Sor, Old Testament, p. 662; Bromiley, “Daniel,” p. 865, Montgomery, Critical, pp. 317 – 324; Freedman, “Daniel,” p. 35.

⁷¹ La Sor, Old Testament, p. 670.

10. Harrison R. K., Introduction to the Old Testament, Toronto: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977.
11. Hastings James, (ed.), Dictionary of the Bible, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963.
12. Howie C. G., Ezekiel, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1961.
13. Howley G. C. D., (ed.), The Pickering Bible Commentary for Today, London/Glasgow; Pickering and Inglis, 1984.
14. La Sor, William Hubbard, D. A. Bush, F. W. M., Old Testament Survey, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1982.
15. Montgomery James, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel, Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1964.
16. Morris Leon, Apocalyptic, Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974.
17. Russel D.S., The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic Literature, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1964.
18. Weiser Arthur, Introduction to the Old Testament, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961.
19. Xavier Leon-Dafour, "Revelation," Dictionary of Biblical Theology, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973.

