

Daniel

*This is part of an ongoing series of short articles designed to help us understand what scripture is and what is **in** each book of scripture. Previous articles can be found at www.openarms-communityofchrist.org.*

The book of Daniel contains two of the stories that many children are familiar with—Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, and Daniel in the lion’s den.

However, there is much more to Daniel’s writing than just these two stories. While it is often grouped with the prophetic books, in the Hebrew Scriptures it stands with the books called simply “the Writings.” The prophetic nature of the book is different from the books of the prophets that precede it; it is the only apocalyptic book in the Hebrew Scriptures. It shares that designation with the book of Revelation in the New Testament.

Apocalyptic literature says that the work of God in the world can be understood, but only through revelatory experiences. These experiences take different formats, but they use symbols and signs to express their vision of the future.

The author of Daniel seems to have been a pious Jew who lived during a time of significant persecution of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes, which took place 167-164 BC. This persecution forbade all Jewish rites and the worship of Yahweh. An altar to Zeus was erected in the Temple, and sacrifices were to be made before an idol in the image of Antiochus. The Jews rebelled against this persecution under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus and were eventually successful—at least for a period of time.

During the persecution, this author pulled together six stories which were familiar to the Jews that illustrated how earlier Jews, loyally practicing their religion, were able to triumph over the enemies through divine aid. Then he also shared four visions in which he interpreted current history and predicted the coming time when the faithful Jews would win the ultimate victory over those who were seeking to destroy their faith.