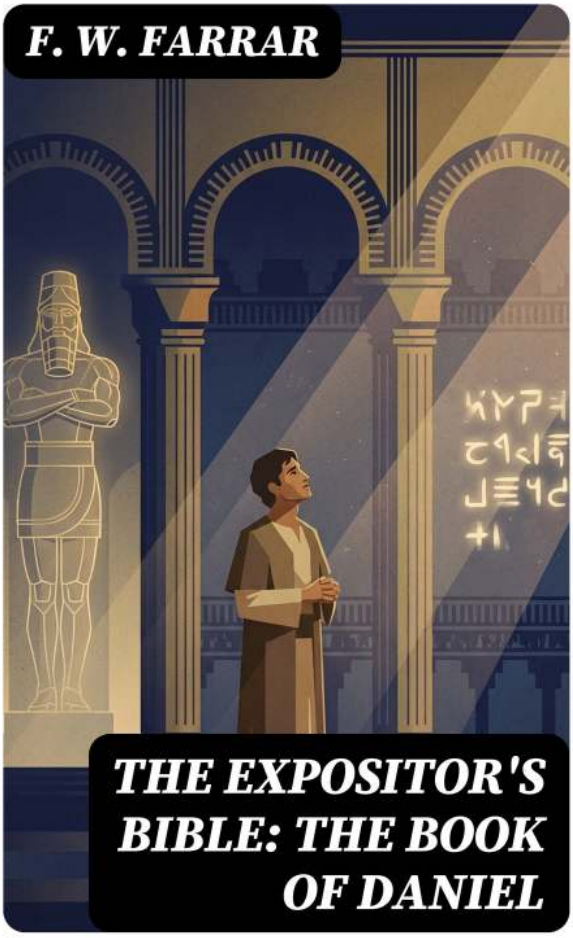
F. W. FARRAR

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE: THE BOOK OF DANIEL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The Expositor's Bible: The Book of Daniel

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Peter Boyd

EAN 8596547064039

Edited and published by DigiCat, 2022

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Introduction

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In The Expositor’s Bible: The Book of Daniel, F. W. Farrar probes the tension between fragile fidelity and imposing empire, tracing how a minority community’s wisdom and worship are tested amid courtly intrigues and cryptic visions, and asking what it means to remain conscientiously steadfast when authority is dazzling, coercive, and transient, yet history seems steered by a purpose that outlasts crowns, decrees, and crises, so that readers contemplate the demanding interplay of political prudence, spiritual integrity, and ultimate hope in a world where the visible powers claim to be absolute while the unseen claims allegiance of heart, mind, and future.

Farrar’s volume belongs to a late nineteenth-century series of readable biblical expositions, and it approaches Daniel as a work that moves from narrative at an imperial court to visionary discourse shaped by the upheavals of the ancient Near East. As a commentary, it synthesizes historical orientation, literary observation, and pastoral application, guiding non-specialists as well as ministers. Without presuming prior technical training, it sketches the political and religious world of Babylon and the subsequent Persian administration, situating the book’s episodes and symbols within the pressures of exile, the etiquette of service before kings, and the turbulent churn of regional power.

In place of a narrowly academic treatise, the exposition reads like a learned companion at one’s elbow, moving passage by passage with clear summaries, careful distinctions, and a reflective, measured tone. Farrar writes with the cadence of a Victorian preacher who has read widely, but he avoids jargon, translating difficult questions into terms that illuminate doctrine, ethics, and devotion. He introduces the book’s structure—court narratives followed by symbolic visions—without foreclosing interpretive possibilities, and he places the reader inside scenes of decision and prayer while keeping an eye on how apocalyptic imagery functions. The result is lucid, serious, and hospitable.

The commentary’s thematic center of gravity is the formation of character under pressure. Loyalty without fanaticism, prudence without compromise, courage without swagger, and humility without passivity form a moral palette by which the court stories are read. Farrar also emphasizes the sovereignty of God as a counterpoint to the spectacle of empire, not as a slogan but as a patient confidence that reorganizes priorities. When he turns to the visions, he treats hope as disciplined imagination: a way to endure ambiguity and upheaval. Identity in diaspora, the public witness of wisdom, and the practice of prayer bind narrative and apocalypse together.

Because Daniel has long attracted debate, Farrar situates readers within major questions about date, authorship, language, and genre without reducing the book to a thesis. He notes the alternation of Hebrew and Aramaic, considers how court narrative differs from symbolic apocalypse, and

sketches how historical referents have been proposed for certain visions, all the while reminding readers that the aim is understanding rather than sensational prediction. Ancient Near Eastern customs, royal titles, and administrative practices receive concise explanation, not to overwhelm, but to clarify what is plausible in the text’s world. Arguments are weighed, tensions acknowledged, and pastoral usefulness kept central.

Modern readers will recognize themselves in Daniel’s dilemmas: how to serve with integrity in institutions that do not share one’s deepest loyalties, how to weigh conscience when public policy turns coercive, and how to hope when headlines churn. Farrar’s exposition discourages both cynicism and credulity, encouraging thoughtful engagement in civic life and steady habits of prayer, study, and compassion. It models responsible reading of apocalyptic literature—resisting sensational timelines in favor of resilient trust—and suggests how wisdom can be both loyal and critical. In a fragmented, plural society, these pages commend a posture that is loyal to neighbors and loyal to truth.

Whether approached for private devotion, classroom exploration, or sermon preparation, this book offers a stable framework for entering Daniel without being trapped by either technicality or speculation. Its explanations are concise enough for group study yet textured enough to reward slow reading, and its tone invites honest questions alongside reverent attention. By keeping literary craft, historical setting, and theological claim in conversation, Farrar shows how a difficult biblical book becomes a school

for courage, patience, and hope. Readers who seek a commentary that is both accessible and serious will find here a guide that dignifies faith and challenges thought.

Synopsis

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F. W. Farrar's The Expositor's Bible: The Book of Daniel is a late nineteenth-century commentary that introduces general readers to the biblical book’s content, background, and theological significance. Written within The Expositor’s Bible series, it combines accessible exposition with attention to scholarship and pastoral application. Farrar outlines the book’s place within the wider canon, clarifying its narrative texture and apocalyptic elements without presupposing specialized training. He signals the principal concerns that will guide his reading: faithfulness under foreign rule, the problem of suffering, and the claim of divine sovereignty in history. Throughout, he aims to explain rather than to argue, foregrounding clarity, context, and moral insight.

Farrar begins by surveying Daniel’s structure, language, and literary forms. He notes the division between court stories and visionary materials, and explains the book’s use of both Hebrew and Aramaic. Historical orientation is provided through concise sketches of Babylonian and Persian administrations, exile conditions, and the cultural pressures exerted on Judean elites. He presents the main scholarly questions associated with Daniel—authorship, date, sources, and genre—summarizing representative views without reducing the text to a thesis. This opening framework equips readers to understand the book’s composite character while keeping attention on its unifying

motifs of wisdom, loyalty, and hope under contested political power.

Turning to the court narratives, Farrar expounds episodes set in royal service, where Judean youths navigate education, ritual expectations, and imperial commands. He elucidates how dietary decisions, dream interpretation, and bureaucratic responsibilities become tests of integrity and vehicles for demonstrating insight granted by God. Royal dilemmas are read as moral parables about humility, justice, and the limits of authority. Historical notes illuminate court protocol, titles, and the workings of ancient administrations. Without dramatizing outcomes, he highlights the recurring pattern of peril, prayer, and public recognition, showing how these stories model fidelity that does not retreat from civic duty yet refuses idolatrous compromise.

Farrar then examines narratives involving successive rulers, drawing out the interplay between royal pride and moral accountability. He discusses figures named in the text, explaining what is known from inscriptions and classical sources and clarifying where uncertainties remain. Particular attention is given to issues of identity and chronology surrounding Belshazzar and Darius the Mede, with competing explanations laid out for readers’ consideration. Rather than resolving every puzzle, the commentary shows how the stories function theologically and ethically, offering instruction about responsibility in power and the transient nature of empire, while remaining candid about the limits of external corroboration for specific details.

With the transition to visions, Farrar guides readers through apocalyptic imagery that portrays kingdoms in symbolic forms and sets earthly turmoil beneath a transcendent judgment. He describes the literary conventions of apocalyptic speech—composite beasts, angelic interpreters, numerical patterns—and explains how such images communicate assurance to communities under pressure. The vision of a humanlike figure and a heavenly court is explored in its immediate context and in light of later reception, avoiding definitive historical assignments while clarifying theological trajectories. Farrar stresses that these scenes aim less to satisfy curiosity about timetables than to form resilient hope and ethical steadfastness.

Subsequent visions receive careful treatment of their symbolic animals, contested rulers, and time references. Farrar analyzes the prayer and confession that frame interpretive disclosure, presenting them as models of penitence and intercession rooted in Scripture. He describes major interpretive approaches to the seventy weeks and related chronological schemes, outlining their implications without insisting on one calculation. Linguistic observations and brief textual notes support his exposition, while practical reflections address perseverance, disciplined worship, and wise witness amid pressure. The commentary’s balance of caution and encouragement keeps speculative detail in check, allowing the book’s central themes of mercy and justice to predominate.

In conclusion, Farrar situates Daniel within the broader history of Jewish and Christian thought, noting its influence on later apocalyptic literature, communal worship, and

moral teaching. He underscores how the book sustains communities facing displacement or cultural dominance, offering a vision of sovereignty that dignifies faithful service and resists dehumanizing claims of power. The Expositor’s Bible volume thereby serves as a bridge between historical study and pastoral concern, commending careful reading and measured interpretation. Without fixing final answers to every debated question, it leaves readers with an enduring sense of Daniel’s imaginative force, ethical urgency, and hope-filled realism.

Historical Context

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The Expositor’s Bible: The Book of Daniel by Frederic William Farrar (1831–1903) appeared in London in 1895 within the Expositor’s Bible series published by Hodder & Stoughton and edited by W. Robertson Nicoll. Written for clergy and educated lay readers, the series combined accessible exposition with current scholarship. Farrar, an Anglican churchman and classicist, addressed the Old Testament book set in Babylon and Persia but long debated in modern scholarship. His volume emerged in late Victorian Britain, a period marked by expanding universities, vigorous religious periodicals, and an English-speaking readership eager for guides that reconciled historical research with devotional and pastoral application.

Daniel’s setting touches pivotal Near Eastern transitions: the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar II (reigned 605–562 BCE), Judah’s deportations (597 and 586 BCE), and the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Great in 539 BCE, inaugurating Achaemenid rule. Later Jewish memory also focused on the crisis under Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BCE), whose policies toward Jerusalem and the Temple provoked the Maccabean revolt beginning in 167 BCE. These dates, rulers, and conflicts form the historical scaffolding used by nineteenth-century commentators to orient the court narratives and symbolic visions, irrespective of where they placed the book’s composition within Second Temple Judaism.

In the nineteenth century, historical-critical methods—philology, comparative history, and source analysis—reshaped biblical studies. German scholars such as Heinrich Ewald and Ferdinand Hitzig had earlier analyzed Daniel's language, Aramaic and Hebrew features, and historical allusions. In Britain, S. R. Driver's An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament (1891) argued for a second-century BCE composition, reflecting the Antiochene persecution. These views followed wider controversies sparked by Essays and Reviews (1860) and by J. W. Colenso's Pentateuch critiques, which tested church attitudes toward inspiration and inerrancy. Farrar situated his exposition amid this debate, presenting readers with the arguments under active scholarly discussion.

Contemporary Assyriology profoundly affected discussions of Daniel. The decipherment of cuneiform by scholars including Georg Friedrich Grotefend and Henry Rawlinson opened royal inscriptions and chronicles. Discoveries such as the Nabonidus Cylinder and related texts, published from the 1850s, established Belshazzar as the son and co-regent of Nabonidus, clarifying a name disputed in earlier histories. The Cyrus Cylinder (found 1879) illustrated Persian policy toward subject peoples. At the British Museum and other institutions, tablets from Babylon and Sippar enriched knowledge of sixth-century BCE administration. Farrar drew on this expanding evidence to address questions of historicity, chronology, and the book's depiction of imperial courts.

The Expositor's Bible series (1887–1896), conceived by W. Robertson Nicoll, recruited leading preachers and

scholars to produce readable, informed commentaries. Issued by Hodder & Stoughton, it stood between technical monographs and homiletic sermons, reflecting a late Victorian print culture of magazines, lectures, and circulating libraries. Contributors such as Alexander Maclaren, Marcus Dods, and A. B. Davidson modeled engagement with criticism without abandoning pastoral aims. Farrar’s Daniel volume shared this ethos, organizing discussion of language, genre, and historical background alongside practical reflection. The format encouraged attention to disputed questions while maintaining the series’ purpose of edifying instruction for congregational contexts.

Farrar’s ecclesiastical career shaped his approach. Educated at King’s College London and Trinity College, Cambridge, he taught at Harrow and served as headmaster of Marlborough College before becoming Canon and later Archdeacon of Westminster. In 1895 he was appointed Dean of Canterbury. Known for popular works like The Life of Christ (1874), he communicated scholarship to broad audiences within the Church of England’s Broad Church tradition. His writing on Daniel balanced literary and historical analysis with moral application, reflecting a pastoral concern for faith amid controversy. He acknowledged linguistic and historical issues raised by critics while urging readers to grasp the book’s ethical and theological claims.

Victorian readers encountered Daniel amid rapid scientific and social change. Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species (1859) prompted debates over revelation and natural history. University reforms, such as the University

Tests Act (1871), widened academic participation and facilitated professionalized biblical studies. At the same time, prophetic speculation gained currency in evangelical circles, from dispensational schemes associated with J. N. Darby to popular prophecy conferences. These developments shaped expectations placed on apocalyptic texts. Farrar addressed this climate by clarifying literary form and historical context, discouraging chronological dogmatism while emphasizing themes—divine sovereignty, perseverance, and hope—that could be responsibly taught in parish and lecture hall.

The book reflects and critiques its era by integrating recent philological and archaeological research, engaging the higher-critical case for a Hellenistic-era composition, and cautioning against sensational predictive readings. It exemplifies the late nineteenth-century Anglican effort to harmonize faith with historical inquiry, trusting that careful attention to genre and context strengthens, rather than weakens, Scripture’s authority for instruction. By presenting Daniel’s court tales and visions with attention to their literary shaping for a community under pressure, Farrar offered Victorian readers a model of learned, measured exposition. His commentary thus documents how British scholarship and church life negotiated modernity while reaffirming enduring theological and ethical concerns.

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AUTHORITIES CONSULTED

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COMMENTARIES AND TREATISES

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25 A Latin phrase used here for Roman 'averting' deities; in Roman religion it refers to gods or rites invoked to ward off calamity or evil, i.e., protective or propitiatory powers rather than a single named god.

26 A Jewish interpretive method assigning numerical values to Hebrew letters so words or names with the same totals are linked; it was used in antiquity for symbolic or cryptic readings of texts.

27 The Greek counterpart of gematria, a practice of adding up numerical values of Greek letters to derive symbolic or cryptographic meanings; it appears in ancient and medieval literary and cryptographic contexts.

28 Refers here to fifth-century monks described as 'Boskoi' (Greek for shepherds or feeders) who were reputed in some sources to live on grass or very austere diets; the historical details and prevalence of this practice are uncertain.

29 An ancient river mentioned by classical and biblical writers near the Persian royal city of Susa; modern scholars commonly identify it with the Karkheh (Kerkhah) river in southwestern Iran, famed in antiquity as royal drinking water.

30 A watercourse named in Daniel as the scene of visions near Susa; it is usually understood as a branch or canal of the Choaspes/Karkheh, though exact identification remains debated among scholars.

31 An angelic figure called an archangel in Jewish and Christian tradition who appears in Daniel to interpret visions; Gabriel later appears in other scriptural and apocryphal texts as a divine messenger.

32 Rendered in the text as 'lord of two horns,' this Semitic phrase is applied to the two-horned ram in Daniel and symbolizes rulership or power (here read as Media-Persia), reflecting ancient horn imagery for authority.

33 Translation of the Hebrew tamîd, referring to the regular daily sacrifice offered in the Jerusalem Temple; stopping 'the daily' indicates the interruption or abolition of normal Temple worship.

34 A Hebrew term for a prescribed section of the Torah read in public worship; in this context it denotes the routine Scripture lesson that, when forbidden, led to the alternate practice of prophetic readings.

35 An older form of the word now more commonly spelled 'Haftarah,' meaning the public reading from the Prophets that traditionally accompanies the Torah portion and which gained prominence when Torah readings were restricted.

36 A Jewish high priest in the early 2nd century BC whose deposition and murder (commonly dated around 171 BC) are recorded in intertestamental histories and are linked to the political and religious turmoil described in Daniel and 1–2 Maccabees.

37 Judas Maccabeus was a Jewish military leader of the Maccabean revolt against Seleucid rule who led the recapture and rededication of the Jerusalem Temple (commemorated in the sources as occurring in the mid-160s BC); exact dates are approximate in surviving accounts.

38 Abib (Hebrew) and Nisan (Babylonian) are names for the first month of the Jewish ecclesiastical/yearly cycle,

roughly corresponding to March–April in the modern Gregorian calendar; exact dates vary from year to year.

39 Hiddekel is the Hebrew name for the Tigris, a principal river of ancient Mesopotamia (flowing through parts of modern Turkey and Iraq) frequently mentioned in biblical and Near Eastern sources.

40 Uphaz appears in biblical texts as a source or descriptor of fine gold (e.g. “gold of Uphaz”); its precise identification is uncertain—scholars have proposed it may be a place name (sometimes linked to Ophir) or a term for refined gold.

41 A rabbinic Hebrew phrase cited here to denote the 'pangs' or 'birth-throes' expected before the coming of the Messiah; literally בְּלִי מָשִׁיחַ (bli/blei moshiach) and used in Jewish tradition for a period of distress preceding redemption.

42 A phrase from the Book of Daniel for a sacrilegious object or act set up in the Jerusalem Temple; in the Maccabean context it commonly refers to Antiochus IV's desecration of the Temple (erecting pagan altars and forbidding Jewish rites) around 167 BCE.

43 A Hebrew term meaning 'the pious' (here transliterated Chasidîm), used of parties in the Maccabean era who resisted Hellenising influences and sought strict observance of Jewish law (often identified with the Hasideans of the 2nd century BCE).

44 Saadia Gaon (commonly called Saadia the Gaon) was a leading Jewish rabbi, exegete, and philosopher in Babylonia, active roughly c. 882–942 CE, known for Hebrew

grammar, biblical translation and commentary and for heading the Sura academy.

45 Agada (also spelled Agadtha or Haggada, often rendered today as Haggadah or Aggadah) refers to the non-legal, narrative and homiletic material in rabbinic literature—stories, ethical teachings and interpretations distinct from the legal (Halacha) portions.

46 A Mesopotamian title attested in Babylonian sources, often translated ‘chief magus’ or ‘chief of the magi’; it likely designated a high-ranking priestly or court official, but its precise office and functions are debated by scholars.

47 A Hebrew word (Elohim) in the plural form meaning ‘gods’ and used both for the one God of Israel (as a plural of majesty) and for foreign deities; context determines usage, and here it is noted as meaning ‘gods’ when spoken by a non-Israelite.

48 An archaic biblical name for a region of Mesopotamia, typically understood as southern Mesopotamia (ancient Sumer/Babylonia); in later/exilic usage the same area is more commonly called Babel or Eretz Kasdim.

49 Marduk (also spelled Maruduk) was the chief deity of the city of Babylon in Mesopotamian religion, attested in cuneiform sources from about the late third millennium BCE and mentioned in the Bible (e.g. Jeremiah); the name is a transliteration that appears in various forms.

50 Assur-bani-pal (commonly Anglicized Ashurbanipal) was a Neo-Assyrian king of the 7th century BCE, usually dated c. 668–c. 627 BCE, known from inscriptions and reliefs for extensive military campaigns and building projects; the