I am in midst of starting to explain how a new view of the afterlife came into existence in Jewish circles right around the time of the Maccabean revolt, and to that end I have devoted one post to a brief narrative of what happened leading up to the revolt and a second post to two of our principal sources of information about it, 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Now, I need to provide yet more background: it was at this time, and in this context, that a new genre of literature appeared within ancient Judaism, the “apocalypse.” As we will see, the first Jewish apocalypse we have is in the book of Daniel, the final book of the Hebrew Bible to be written. To understand Daniel (and its view of the afterlife) it is important to know something about the conventions of its literary genre. That’s what I will explain in this post, in terms taken (with only a little editing) from my textbook The Bible: A Historical and Literary Introduction.

Apocalypse as a Literary Genre

At about the time of the Seleucid domination of Judea in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes there started to appear Jewish writings that presupposed, embraced, and set forth these kinds of apocalyptic views. In particular, it is at this time that Jewish “apocalypses” started to be written. The term apocalypse refers to a ...

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