

EFBR

NEW TESTAMENT SYMPOSIUM 2025  
THE CHURCH IN AN AGE OF POLITICAL POWER

Acts and the Roman empire:  
An analysis in conversation  
with 1 Kings 18 and Daniel

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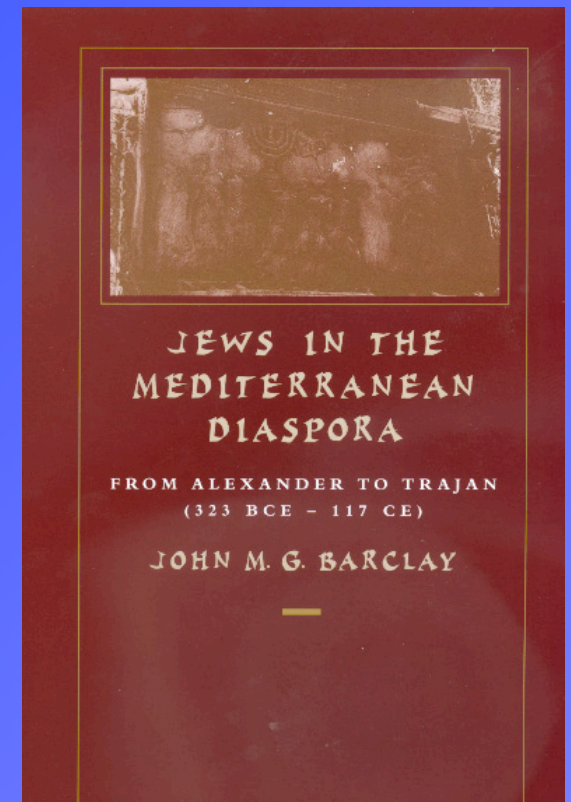
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# A conversation of texts

- Acts in the Roman empire
- the kingship of Ahab | Kings 18
- Daniel in Babylon

# A tool for analysis: John Barclay

- assimilation: social integration
- acculturation: cultural integration
- accommodation: how acculturation is used
  - opposition to gentile culture
  - integration with gentile culture



# The time of Ahab: I Kings 18

- “Ahab son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him”  
I Kgs 16:30
- Obadiah: social integration
- the prophets: social and cultural withdrawal
- Elijah: extreme non-accommodation

# Daniel and Acts: engaging with empires

- Daniel set in sixth century BC in exile in Babylon
  - focus on Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
- Acts set in first century AD in Roman empire
  - human focus on Peter and Paul
- worldviews dominated by the reign of God

# Centering on God

- Dan 3: the golden statue
  - “If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. **But if not**, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.” vv 17-18

# Centering on God

- Dan 3: the golden statue
- Acts 4: the Sanhedrin
  - “Whether it is right in God’s sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.”  
vv 19-20

# Centering on God

- Dan 3: the golden statue
- Acts 4: the Sanhedrin
- Acts 24: Paul and Felix
  - “faith in the Messiah Jesus” v 24
  - “justice and self-control and the coming judgement” v 25
  - Felix seeks a bribe v 26



# Active resistance—lack of accommodation

- Dan 1: request for vegetarian diet
- Acts 17:16-34: Paul in Athens
  - “a veritable forest of idols” v 16
  - “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?” v 19

# Active resistance—lack of accommodation

- Dan 1: request for vegetarian diet
- Acts 17:16-34: Paul in Athens
  - revelations or visions of the god
  - enough worshipers
  - building a temple for sacrifice and prayer
  - a statue of the god for the temple
  - priests to maintain sacrifices
  - festival days for the god

# Active resistance—lack of accommodation

- Dan 1: request for vegetarian diet
- Acts 17:16-34: Paul in Athens
  - not a new god: “an unknown god” v 23
  - Israel’s God as creator vv 24, 25
  - God has ordered space and time so people might seek him vv 26-27
  - God has created humans in his image v 29
  - Jesus and the resurrection vv 18, 30-31

# God dealing severely with rulers

- Dan 4: Nebuchadnezzar's breakdown

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- Dan 4: Nebuchadnezzar's breakdown
- Acts 12: Herod
  - Herod's death as "anti-scene" to Paul's Damascus road encounter 9:1-31
  - Herod as θεομάχος "God fighter" 5:39

# God dealing severely with rulers

- Dan 4: Nebuchadnezzar's breakdown
- Acts 12: Herod
- both judged for self-importance after chances to think and do better
  - Nebuchadnezzar Dan 2:46-47; 3:28-29
  - Herod Acts 12:2, 3; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.7.5

# Eschatology

- Dan 7–12
  - the human figure 7:13, 18
  - resurrection 12:2-3
  - the true story of history revealed to Daniel 8:15-26; 9:20-27; 10:4–12:4

# Eschatology

- Dan 7–12
- Acts
  - reality of future judgement
    - Jewish setting—synagogue 10:42
    - gentile setting—Pisidian Antioch, Athens 13:46; 17:31
    - Jesus will judge 10:42; 17:31
    - echo of Dan 7 in Acts 1:9-11



# Eschatology

- Dan 7–12
- Acts—what believers do not do
  - influence public policy
  - quietism?
    - regard for believers 2:47; 5:13; 19:31; 11:26
    - visibility 19:23-29; 16:16-24

# Eschatology

- Dan 7–12
- Acts
  - Rowe: neither pro- nor anti-empire
  - “another king, Jesus” 17:7
  - Paul’s Roman citizenship 16:37; 22:25
  - Paul’s appeal to Caesar 25:11
  - cf. Rom 13:1-7

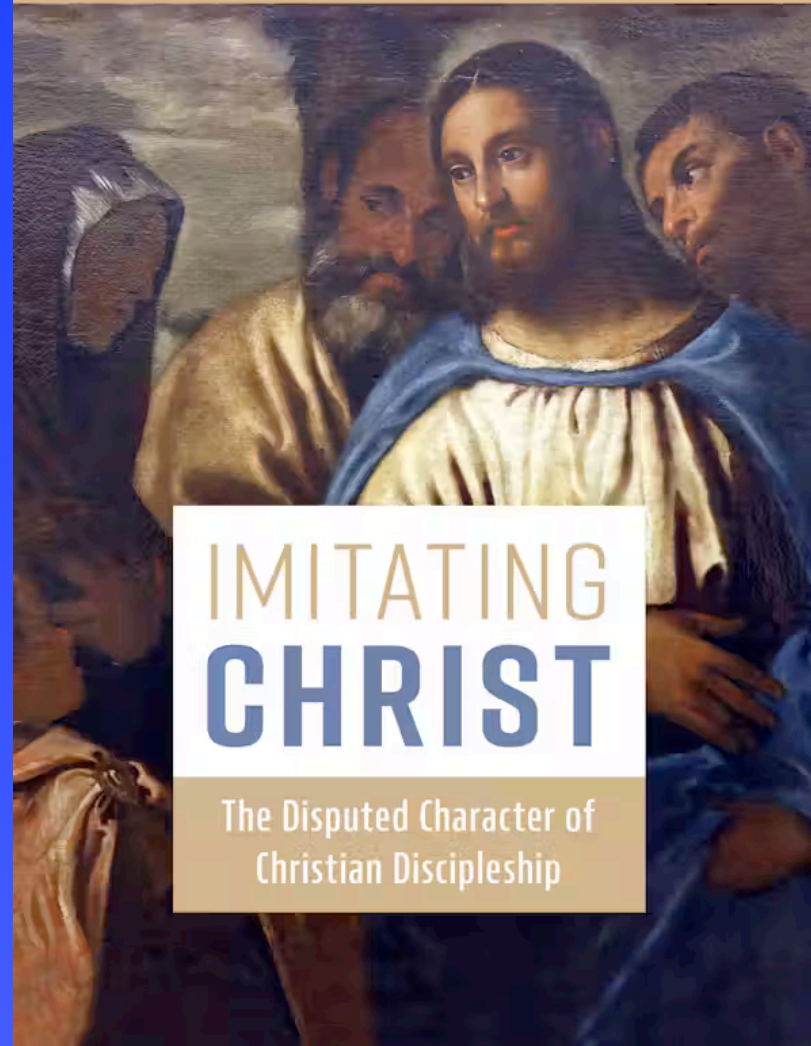
# Eschatology

- Nebuchadnezzar Dan 4:34-37
  - “the Most High” whose rule is everlasting v 34
  - “the king of the heavens” v 37
  - humbles those who “walk in pride” v 37
  - yet “still more greatness was added to me” v 36

# Conclusion: factors emerging

- the life of the *polis* is relativised in the light of the gospel and eschatology
- God judges what goes on in the world
  - wealth and poverty
  - being “pro-life”
- believers must “read” their culture and time

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON



Luke Timothy Johnson, *Imitating Christ: The Disputed Character of Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024)

The single greatest countercultural act Christians perform is to worship together and proclaim that Jesus is Lord. To cease from the constant round of commerce and consumption, to resist the manipulation of media that insists that work and possession defines worth, and to proclaim with the body language of communal gathering that Jesus, not any other power, is Lord is enact the politics of God's kingdom and to embody the prayer, "your kingdom come."

Luke Timothy Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church: The Challenge of Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 124

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<http://steve walton.info>