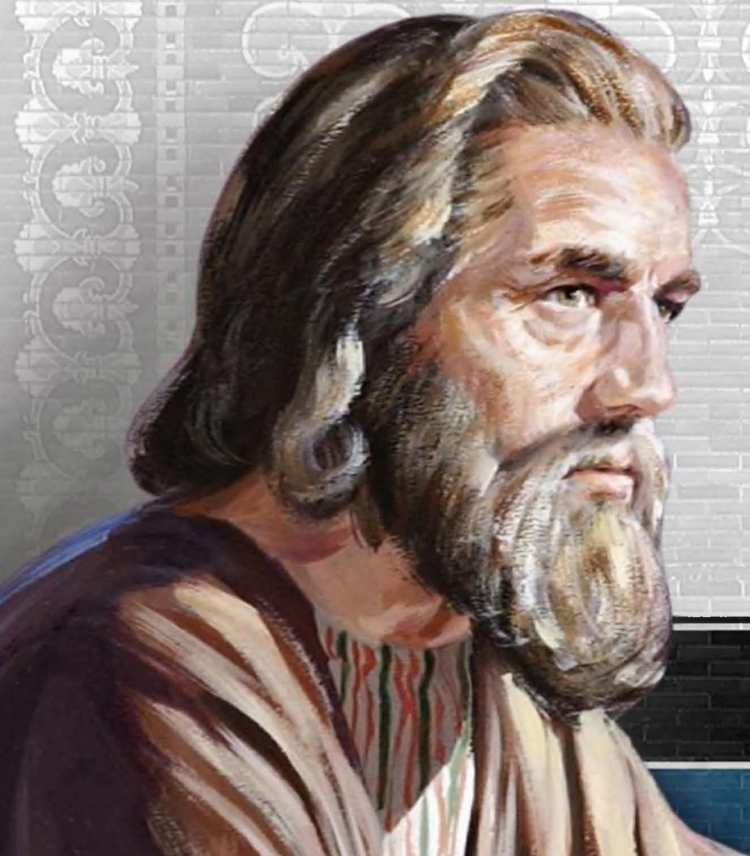


DANIEL

WISDOM TO THE WISE

Commentary
on the book
of Daniel



ZDRAVKO STEFANOVIC

FOR centuries, even millennia, the book of Daniel has been a source of courage and hope for believers. Even skeptics have been impressed by how the prophecies in Daniel have been fulfilled with astonishing precision. Yet the powerful message of this book has often been obscured by biased and subjective approaches. Now you can explore the complete book of Daniel, verse by verse.

Dr. Zdravko Stefanovic lets the Bible explain itself. This is the only way the book of Daniel can be clearly understood. Its life-changing message will leave you not just astonished but completely transformed by an awesome God who speaks even today through the book of Daniel.

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Stefanovic's study argues for a clear distinction between biblical statements confirming "fulfillment" of prophecy and mere cases of possible "applications" of prophecy as proposed by different interpreters. . . . It is a work charged with strong spiritual appeal, certain to influence the intellectual and moral character of the next generation of students of one of the Bible's most riveting and pertinent books of prophecy. —*Dr. Lael Caesar, professor of religion, Andrews University*



Dr. Zdravko Stefanovic teaches Old Testament languages (Hebrew and Aramaic) and biblical studies at Walla Walla University. He also volunteers as an adjunct professor in the Philippines and Europe. He has taught and held seminars on the book of Daniel in Asia, Europe, and North America. Zdravko is married to Božana, who teaches mathematics at Walla Walla University. They have two sons, Jonathan and David.

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To Bozana, my faithful and loving spouse!

Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said:

"Let the name of God be praised for ever and ever;
wisdom and power belong to him.

He changes times and seasons;
he sets up kings and removes them.

He gives **wisdom to the wise**
and knowledge to the discerning.

He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness,
and light dwells with him.

I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers:

You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you,
you have made known to us the dream of the king."

—Daniel 2:19-23, the author's translation

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FOREWORD

Wrestling with the meaning and interpretation of Daniel is a time-honored Adventist tradition that is fading out in many parts of the church. This fresh new commentary by Dr. Stefanovic has the distinct potential to help revive that great tradition. The exposition demonstrates clear awareness of traditional interpretations, but the author is not afraid to take a new look at where the text may lead. The commentary is both broad and deep and will appeal to both the casual reader and the serious student, the curious first-time examiner of Daniel and the long-time prophecy scholar. It begs to be discussed, reflected on, and pondered.

There are at least two reasons this commentary is a must read. First, the author is uniquely qualified for his task. As a preacher, college teacher, seminary professor, and missionary, he has dealt effectively with a wide spectrum of audiences. From first-hand experience, I know he can captivate both college freshmen and older lay people as well as those in between. His wide cross-cultural experience as a missionary enables him to be sensitive to both a book set in an international context as well as a global church. Stefanovic has published work on this apocalyptic book in both popular magazines and scholarly journals as well.

Second, this volume takes a broader look at Daniel than any previous Adventist commentary. Depending on how one counts, there are at least five ways each part of the book is examined. First, the author deals with the broad meaning of the entire book and its major sections. Second, he provides his own unique translation from the original languages. Third, he provides textual notes that look specifically at words and phrases and elucidate the text. Fourth, he grapples with the meaning of the various sections

for their original readers. Fifth, he attempts to apply the message to the contemporary world. All this means that the reader will be led to see Daniel in a broader context than just that of a repository of several major apocalyptic visions. This multifaceted approach opens up new vistas for the careful reader.

You may not agree with everything that Stefanovic says. If you wish, you may question and argue with what is taught. But don't ignore Daniel or this book. You can be sure that what is written has been carefully pondered and prayed over. You will know that the author loves God's Word and wants all to understand and be moved by it. Following Dr. Stefanovic through the story will kindle a new appreciation for the Bible and the book of Daniel. Be careful—you may even catch a passion for discussing Daniel that is incurable!

Jon Dybdahl

PREFACE

While reading the Bible as a child, I was fascinated by the stories in Daniel's book as well as its graphic visionary scenes. At that stage of life, prayer and imagination were the only tools I had for interpretation. To these were later added serious academic studies and the unique privilege of teaching this biblical book to both undergraduate and graduate students in a dozen countries on several continents over a period of some twenty years. Academic study has not diminished my fascination with Daniel's life, witness, and book. On the contrary, my appreciation of God and of the messages from Daniel's writings has constantly been growing.

Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise is a chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse commentary intended to be used by readers and students of the Bible. I hope that it will prove useful for personal study of Daniel's book. It can also be used as a textbook in colleges and seminaries. (It comprises a companion volume to my

brother Ranko's exhaustive study of the book of Revelation, titled *Revelation of Jesus Christ*.¹)

The approach taken in this book can be described as biblical expository or exegetical, while the method of study is both textual and thematic. The commentary is organized in the following way: A general introduction to the person and the book of Daniel is immediately followed by an introduction and exposition of Daniel 1, the chapter containing a summary of the whole book's message. Next, there is a general overview of Daniel 2–6 and then introductions to these chapters, each of which is followed by the author's translation from the original Hebrew and Aramaic in consultation with the New International Version of the Bible, the New American Standard Bible, and the Revised Standard Version. (I have taken quotations from biblical books other than Daniel from the New International Version.) Detailed notes examine

the linguistic, literary, and historical aspects of the original text, while the Exposition suggests what the text meant at the time it was written based on what the author most likely intended to say. What the text means today is briefly explored in the Summary of the Teaching presented at the end of each chapter.

Another overview introduces Daniel 7–12, followed by a chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse study and interpretation of each of the visionary chapters. This section of the commentary differs from the preceding portion in that at the end of the chapter, instead of the Summary of the Teaching, two types of Applications of Daniel's prophecies are presented, one in the history of the Christian church and the other more of a devotional type of application to the reader's personal life.

Since the approach in this commentary is biblical expository, it focuses on the text and themes from the book of Daniel and on the points of teaching that are directly derived from them. Because of its focus on the biblical text, this commentary is *not* intended to be a resource tool providing a wealth of material on apocalyptic literature nor any other subject that is explored by other disciplines such as dogmatic theology or church history. To take one example, the topic of divine judgment is addressed in the Exposition and Applications section on the pertinent passages from

Daniel. But a systematic presentation of this biblical topic goes beyond the scope of this study and can be found elsewhere.² The present study aims at affirming the primacy and authority of the biblical text while at the same time offering fresh and constructive insights relating to the reading, interpretation, and applications of Daniel's stories, visions, and auditions.

The present commentary continues the tradition of the intense interest and study of the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation among Seventh-day Adventists. Adventist publishing houses have produced no less than six in-depth books and commentaries on Daniel: (1) Uriah Smith wrote a chapter-by-chapter commentary titled *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*.³ (2) A part of volume four of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, written mostly by W. G. C. Murdoch in consultation with Siegfried. H. Horn and edited by Francis D. Nichol, is a verse-by-verse commentary on Daniel's book.⁴ (3) Desmond Ford wrote a commentary titled *Daniel*.⁵ (4) The first of the two volumes of *God Cares* by C. Mervyn Maxwell presents "the message of Daniel for you and your family."⁶ (5) Jacques Doukhan's book titled *Secrets of Daniel* presents a study of Daniel's life and book.⁷ And (6) William Shea's commentary delves into the themes from Daniel's book and their applications in the believer's life.⁸ Needless to say, these and many

other books and articles have enriched my own study of Daniel.

I am indebted to a number of individuals who have helped me grow in my understanding of Daniel's book and in the writing of this commentary. In the first place, I thank my God, who, in Daniel's words, is generous in dispensing wisdom and strength to human beings. As Daniel said, " 'He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning' " (Dan. 2:21b). Without the insights that came in answer to my prayers, this commentary would have never been completed. Next, I feel indebted to my parents, Milenko and Jozefina, who taught me to love God's Word. I am grateful to my wife, Božana, and our sons, Jonathan and David, for their support and patience.

It would take much space to list the names of the colleagues and of the students from my classes far and near who have all provided an inspiration to my study and writing. A special word of thanks goes to my colleagues and friends who read the manuscript and made valuable suggestions: Tarsee Li, Gudmundur Olafsson, William Shea, Ranko Stefanovic, and David Thomas. The administrators of Walla Walla College and the School of Theology kindly voted my (first ever) sabbatical quarter, while the

members of the Faculty Development Committee generously provided grants to cover some of the expenses. For these favors, I feel profound appreciation. I am indebted to Becky Masson for her careful proofreading of the manuscript. Last, but not least, I am thankful to Pacific Press® Publishing Association and its president, Dale Galusha, for the decision to publish this commentary, and I wish to extend special appreciation to David Jarnes for his work of the final editing of the text.

1. Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002).

2. LeRoy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1954); Gerhard F. Hasel, "Divine Judgment," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Raoul Dederen, ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000), 815-856.

3. Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, rev. and ill. ed. (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1944).

4. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1955), 743-881.

5. Desmond Ford, *Daniel* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1978).

6. C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 1 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1981).

7. Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000).

8. William H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2005).

INTRODUCTION

Daniel was “one of the greatest of the prophets, insomuch, that while he was still alive he had the esteem and applause both of the kings and of the multitude; and now he is dead, he retains a remembrance that will never fail, for the several books that he wrote and left behind him are still read by us till this time; and from them we believe that Daniel conversed with God.”¹ So wrote Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived in Rome in the first century A. D. His statement rests on the notion that among the Hebrew people, the sacred writings were customarily linked with important personalities for the purpose of enhancing their authority. Thus, for example, Moses was traditionally associated with the Pentateuch, King David with the Psalms, and his son Solomon with biblical wisdom literature.² In the case of Daniel’s book, its authorship is confirmed by a number of explicit statements found in the book itself. In the case of Daniel’s book, a number of

explicit statements found in the book itself confirm its authorship.

In the context of the Bible, wisdom is closely tied to the life and the teaching of the wise men and women, who were expected to demonstrate practical wisdom in everyday life. In the same way, biblical prophecy is inseparable from the office of a prophet, the person who was a spiritual leader of the people as well as the spokesperson for God. For this reason, we best understand a divine revelation when we study it in the context of the person who initially received it. As the famous Jewish writer Abraham Joshua Heschel has aptly stated, “The significance of Israel’s prophets lies not only in what they said but also in what they were. We cannot fully understand what they meant to say to us unless we have some degree of awareness of what happened to them.”³

On the other hand, it is possible to take a very different approach to the study of the Bible in general and the book of Daniel in particular. Some commentaries

on Daniel's book begin with the basic assumption that "Daniel is a non-historical personage modeled by the author(s) of the book"⁴ or supporting "the consensus of modern critical scholarship" that views "the stories about Daniel and his friends [to be] legendary in character, and [that] the hero himself most probably never existed."⁵ To approach the book of Daniel, its text and message, with such or similar assumptions is certainly one but not the only way to study it. This commentary follows the traditional view of the authorship and the dating of Daniel's book because that approach is based on the claims of the Bible itself.

The traditional approach to the book of Daniel holds that a person named Daniel wrote the book in the sixth century B.C. and that it was completed toward the end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire or in the very beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire (cf. *Notes and Exposition* on Dan. 1:21). Although the traditional approach is based on statements found in the text, certain scholars have challenged it on several grounds. These include the historical validity of some statements from Daniel that pertain to historical events and persons, the presence of certain linguistic features that are considered by some to be much later than the traditional time of writing, and also the presence of alleged inconsistencies of stylistic and theological nature.

Reactions to the denials of the traditional authorship and dating of the book

have not been lacking. Scholars who take the traditional approach have, in the past, produced works of technical as well as of popular nature to show that Daniel's book fits in the context of Neo-Babylonia with a possibility of minor editing and scribal updating from a later time when the book was copied. Thus, the arguments presented in defense of the traditional dating have focused on answering the historical, linguistic, stylistic, and theological questions regarding the book's dating and authorship.⁶ Yet Joyce Baldwin has shown that the strongest evidence in favor of the authenticity of Daniel's work can be found in the book itself.⁷ The reader will find several pieces of this type of internal evidence presented in the *Notes and Exposition* in this commentary.

Moreover, in this present study, Daniel's life story and his faith in God are considered to be of prime importance for a clear understanding of the message of this ancient biblical book. The context of the traditional Afro-Asian cultures, so akin to the world of the Bible, supports the notion that in religious and didactic types of literature, teaching is done far more effectively when it is illustrated through living examples rather than through theoretical concepts or abstract ideas. Certain tendencies in the world today point in the same direction. For these reasons, an overview of Daniel's life story is necessary before an introduction to Daniel's book and its messages is presented.

Daniel's Life and Career

The Bible is the main source of information regarding who Daniel was. His home must have been in or around Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, since he belonged to the Israelite “royal family and the nobility” (Dan. 1:3). He was likely born within a few years of the events of 622 B.C., the eighteenth year of the reign of King Josiah of Judah. Josiah is described in 2 Chronicles chapters 34 and 35 as a good king whose actions stood in stark contrast to those of his grandfather Manasseh and his father, Amon. “While he was still young,” says the chronicler, “he began to seek the God of his father David” (2 Chron. 34:3). The spiritual revival that followed his personal devotion to God is often referred to as Josiah’s reforms. It consisted of purging Judah and Jerusalem of idols, pagan shrines, and altars. The apex of this religious reform was the discovery of the lost “book of the law of Moses” by the priests in the temple. This exciting event prompted the king to renew “the covenant in the presence of the LORD” (2 Chron. 34:31) and to proclaim the celebration of the feast of Passover. The chronicler notes that “the Passover had not been observed like this in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; and none of the kings of Israel had ever celebrated such a Passover as did Josiah, with the priests, the Levites and all Judah and Israel who were there with the people of Jerusalem” (2 Chron. 35:18).

However, a tragedy struck the nation of Judah just as Daniel entered his teenage years. King Josiah died in a battle after his unwise decision to confront the Egyptian king Neco on the plain of Megiddo. The people of Judah mourned Josiah’s death, and the prophet Jeremiah composed laments for the occasion. This tragedy must have created a deep spiritual crisis in the lives of many Judeans, including Daniel and his family.

Another tragedy struck Daniel’s nation only a few years later. In 605 B.C., the Babylonians came, besieged Jerusalem, and carried off to Babylon their booty and captives. Biblical records indicate that through their religious apostasy, the kings of Judah had reversed Josiah’s work of religious reform and filled their land again with idol worship. This was true of Josiah’s sons Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:31, 32) and Jehoiakim (v. 34), as well as of Jehoiachin (2 Chron. 36:9) and Zedekiah (v. 11), of whom it is said that they “did evil in the eyes of the LORD.” Second Chronicles 36:15, 16 reads, “The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.”

Daniel was one of the captives who were led from Jerusalem to Babylon. He

and his friends were most probably between fifteen and eighteen years old when they were taken there.

These two tragedies must have affected Daniel's life and his faith in God in a most profound way. Was the God of his ancestors still in control or had he now become a captive of Babylon and of its patron god Marduk (Bel)? What course of action should the faithful follow in the imperial capital? Would he find enough strength to encourage his friends to remain faithful with him in that hostile environment? Was there still hope for the future of the Hebrews, who were God's chosen people? And what about the people who lived in Babylon—were they worthy of learning the power and goodness of the true God? Would God give them a chance to repent and come to know Him? (Jer. 51:9; cf. Exod. 7:5; Jon. 3:10.)

The book of Daniel tells us that normally, it was Daniel's custom in Babylon to pray "three times a day" (6:10). However, in crises and times of greater spiritual needs, he studied the prophetic writings and then turned his "face to the Lord God and searched for him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes" (9:3). At times, he would prolong this type of austere life for weeks, during which he would be on a very simple diet (10:2, 3). Various passages from Daniel's book indicate that his diligent and prayerful study of the Pentateuch and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah exercised a positive influence on

him. Yet it was the life and teaching of the prophet Jeremiah, Daniel's contemporary, that affected his life more than any other part of Scriptures.

Jeremiah was older than Daniel, and he carried out his long ministry in Jerusalem. He played a key role in Josiah's reforms and composed a lament for his funeral. Jeremiah was often placed under house arrest or imprisoned, and he was even thrown into a cistern. When the Babylonian army conquered Jerusalem, this prophet was mistakenly arrested and bound in chains with the rest of the captives, only to be released later (Jer. 40). Yet from the beginning of the national crisis, his message was one of hope and of a future restoration of the faithful remnant (chaps. 30; 31).

Jeremiah's great influence on some of the Hebrew captives in Babylon as well as on Daniel and his friends came from the famous letter to the exiles recorded in chapter 29 of his book. That letter urged the people to "build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters. . . . Increase in number there [in Babylon]; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer. 29:5-7). In other words, during the seventy years of the exile, the captives should live a normal life in Babylon and have a positive attitude toward that city.

This message was just the opposite of what Jeremiah's opponents, self-appointed prophets, one of whom was a certain Hananiah, were telling people. Their predictions were that the exile would end soon, perhaps in just a year or two (Jer. 28:11; 29:8, 9). So, there was a risk that the reading of Jeremiah's message would make him sound like a traitor, an accusation made against him on a number of occasions (Jer. 26:11; 32:3; 37:13; 38:4). Yet there was no doubt in the minds of those who believed in his prophetic calling that God would bring Babylon to an end at an appointed time (Jer. 50; 51). Then a remnant, liberated because of Babylon's fall, would return to Palestine (Jer. 30; 31). Babylon was still under God's control. Moreover, on more than one occasion, Jeremiah called King Nebuchadnezzar the Lord's servant (Jer. 25:9; 27:6). This fact explains why Daniel, when describing Babylon's capture of Jerusalem, says that "the Lord delivered" the king and the people of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hand (Dan. 1:2).

There is little doubt that Jeremiah's influence greatly helped shape Daniel's positive attitude in Babylon. He chose not to spend all his time sitting down "by the waters of Babylon" and weeping over the tragedy that Zion had suffered (Ps. 137). Nor did he choose to follow the false prophets and their supporters in their prophetic speculations or political activism. Instead, Daniel allowed Provi-

dence to open a brilliant career for him in order to be able to witness for his God and about his faith everywhere, including the royal palace. In this endeavor, he had the support of his three Hebrew friends, who prayed with him, especially in times of crises (Dan. 2:17, 18).

While in Babylon, Daniel was appointed to be a professional wise man. In the words of a Babylonian queen mother, he had "insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods" so that the king "appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners" (Dan. 5:11). Because of his exceptional ability to "understand visions and dreams of all kinds" (1:17), no "mystery was too difficult" for him (4:9). On no less than three separate occasions, Daniel solved the problems that no other wise man could resolve. In addition, as a high-ranking statesman, he "distinguished himself above all the other administrators and satraps" by his exceptional qualities (6:3). In Babylon, Daniel was the emperor's close friend whose presence at the palace helped make the emperor "free from care and prosperous" (4:4) even in times of crisis. Lastly, Daniel was God's prophet who was called to minister to His people in exile. When the heavenly messenger came to him in a vision, the messenger told Daniel that in God's eyes he was "greatly loved" (Dan. 9:23).

It is a well-known fact that the task of a person whom God called to speak for

Him was not an easy one. That is why most of the prophets were very reluctant to accept that responsibility. It is important that we understand this about Daniel's career in Babylon. Rather than presenting his success at the Babylonian and Medo-Persian courts as an uninterrupted growth in success and influence, the book depicts Daniel's administrative and religious career as a series of ups and downs. From the low status of a captive from Judah, he graduates from Babylonian education with top grades and assumes a position at the imperial court. By the end of the next story, the king promotes him to the lofty position of the "ruler of the entire province of Babylon." Some time later, the king has forgotten him, but in the end, he promotes him to the rank of "third highest ruler in the kingdom." Then, in his old age, the prophet becomes a target of jealous satraps and is thrown into a den of lions—only, shortly afterwards, to be reinstated to the powerful position of being one of the three top administrators in the empire.

In spite of Daniel's brilliant career in Babylon, no less than three times, his opponents and some who sought personal gain from their contacts with him referred to him as "one of the exiles from Judah" (Dan. 2:25; 5:13; 6:13). So, it is clear that as "a servant of God," Daniel knew what it meant to be rejected and even ignored and persecuted because of his faith in God and because of his witness and ministry to others. His source

of comfort in those difficult moments must have been the study of sacred writings such as Psalms and the prophets. His life of prayer led him to understand that his success in Babylon was more than just the result of his hard work. Rather, it was a gift from the One in whom he had placed his absolute trust and in whom he could find hope, especially in moments of crisis and despair.

When the Medo-Persian Empire came to power, Daniel probably moved his residence and office from the city of Babylon to the Persian city of Susa (or Shushan), one of the imperial centers that was located east of Babylon (Dan. 1:21). Extrabiblical traditions and legends tell us that Daniel died and was buried in this city, having passed the age of eighty years.⁸

Daniel as a Biblical Prophet

The positive influence that Daniel's life and ministry have exercised on the readers of his book through centuries, even millennia, is remarkable. Even today, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim believers hold the prophet in high esteem.⁹ Yet we must remember that in addition to being a prophet, Daniel was an administrator and a wise man. As such, his influence as a witness for God extended from the city of Babylon throughout the Neo-Babylonian Empire. While his administrative title "ruler over the entire province of Babylon" (Dan. 2:48) had to do with politics and government, the

other responsibility the emperor gave him, the supervision of “all its wise men,” had certain religious connotations.¹⁰

The Old Testament, also known as the Hebrew Bible or the *TaNaK*, is traditionally divided into three parts: *Tôrâ*, “the Pentateuch”; *N^cbi[’]im*, “the Prophets”; and *K^etûbîm*, “the Writings” (cf. Luke 24:44, where the book of Psalms heads the Writings). In the present form of the Hebrew canon, Daniel’s book is placed in the third division; that is, in the Writings.

Why was the book of Daniel placed among the Writings rather than among the prophets in the Hebrew Bible?¹¹ Although we cannot give a final answer to this question, we can list some possibilities. It is possible that in some circles, Daniel was considered to be a wise man first and only secondarily a prophet. It has been pointed out that half the book contains contemporary stories rather than prophecy. It is also true that part of the book was written in the “unholy” Aramaic language, as was the book of Ezra. (Yet at least one verse in a genuine prophetic passage, Jeremiah 10:11, is also found in Aramaic.) Moreover, one wonders if the reputation of the book of Daniel suffered due to a polemic against the early Christian believers, who were skillfully using passages from this book to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. Lastly, we may wonder whether the book was downgraded because, as is mentioned in the Talmud,

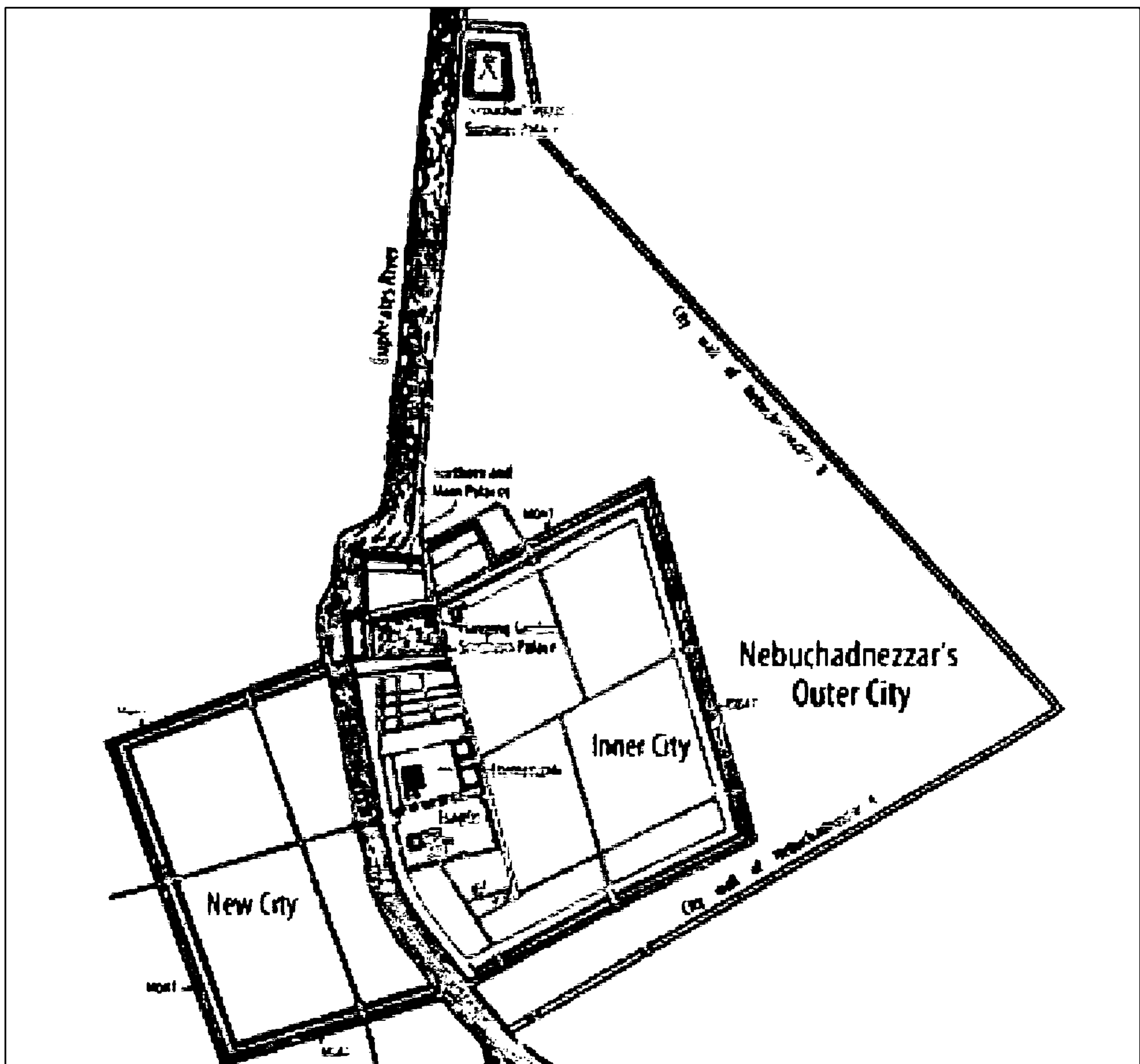
a rabbinical curse was pronounced on those who used the book to calculate the time of the end.¹²

In the story told in chapter 4, Daniel interprets King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and then ends his speech in a fashion typical of biblical prophets whose primary goal was to call people to repentance: “‘Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Break away from your sins by doing what is right, and from your wickedness by being merciful to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue’ ” (4:27). In like manner, in chapter 5, where Daniel confronts and rebukes King Belshazzar, he “sounds remarkably like a Hebrew prophet.”¹³ His speech in this case matches well those of biblical prophets who dared to confront the kings of Israel and Judah. Nathan rebuked David (2 Sam. 12:7-12), Elijah did the same with Ahab (1 Kings 21:20-24), and Jeremiah with Zedekiah (Jer. 38:20-23).¹⁴ Probably nowhere are the roles of a wise man and a prophet better contrasted than in the book of Amos. It says that a wise man, when faced with a calamity, “keeps quiet in such times, / for the times are evil” (5:13). But it also reveals how a prophet is compelled to speak for God:

The lion has roared—
 who will not fear?
 The Sovereign LORD has spoken—
 who can but prophesy? (3:8).

Strong evidence outside of the book of Daniel suggests that early in the development of the biblical canon, this book was considered to belong among the prophetic texts. This evidence comes from the status Daniel is given in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint and which is followed by the other ancient translations of the

Bible. In addition, as I noted earlier, Josephus considered Daniel to be one of the greatest Hebrew prophets. And in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, one of which is the document known as Florilegium, Daniel is clearly referred to as prophet.¹⁵ Last, but not least, in the sermon Jesus Christ preached about the end, He spoke of the writings of “the prophet Daniel”



Plan of the city of Babylon¹⁷

(Matt. 24:15). So, it is safe to affirm Daniel's position as prophet in the canon of the Bible. Moreover, it is not safe to use the placement of his book in the Hebrew Bible as evidence against the traditional date and authorship of the book. It is becoming increasingly clear that the order of the individual books in the Bible is more theological and thematic in nature than chronological.¹⁶

Kingdoms of Babylon and Medo-Persia

The traditional approach to Daniel places the events described in the book in the part of the world known as Mesopotamia, where the city of Babylon was located with the Euphrates River flowing through it. In the official Babylonian documents, the region around the city of Babylon was referred to as *Akkad*, while the territory located in the west, the region of Syria and Lebanon, was known as *Hatti* or *Hattu*. The name *Babylon* was applied to both the city and the region in which it was located. In the Akkadian language, the meaning of the name *Bab-el* or *Bab-ilu* is “gate to the gods,” indicating the presence of a strong religious flavor in the city's life, politics, and economy.

To some people, Babylon was “the city of eternal abode” (*āl šubat dārâti*). They considered it to be the city of wisdom, the center of the whole world. Surrounded by water, the city was famous for the hanging gardens that King Nebuchadnezzar had planted for his wife Amytis, to help relieve her home-

sickness for her Median homeland. Robert Koldewey's excavation of the site of this ancient city resulted in the discovery of the throne room located near the famous Ishtar Gate, from which started the Procession Street with 120 lion statues placed along its two sides. The Ishtar Gate was decorated with ornaments of lions that symbolized the goddess Ishtar, bulls that represented the storm god Hadad, and dragons that stood for the god Marduk (Bel).

The long history of Babylon is usually divided into three periods: Old Babylon (c. 1900–1600 B.C.), when the kingdom was ruled by such powerful figures as King Hammurabi, the famous lawgiver who ruled over all Mesopotamia. The period that followed was Babylon's Dark Age, when Assyria, its bitter enemy, and especially the Kassites, invaded the city and the regions around it. For a limited time around 1100 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar I was able to free Babylon from these hostile invaders and restore the statue of the god Marduk in the city. Another king who ruled later in this period was Merodach-Baladan, who is known to the student of the Bible from 2 Kings 20:12 and Isaiah 39:1, which say that he sent envoys to congratulate King Hezekiah of Judah on his recovery from an illness.

The third period, that of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom, lasted for almost a century (626–539 B.C.). Babylon's liberator from the hated Assyrians was Na-

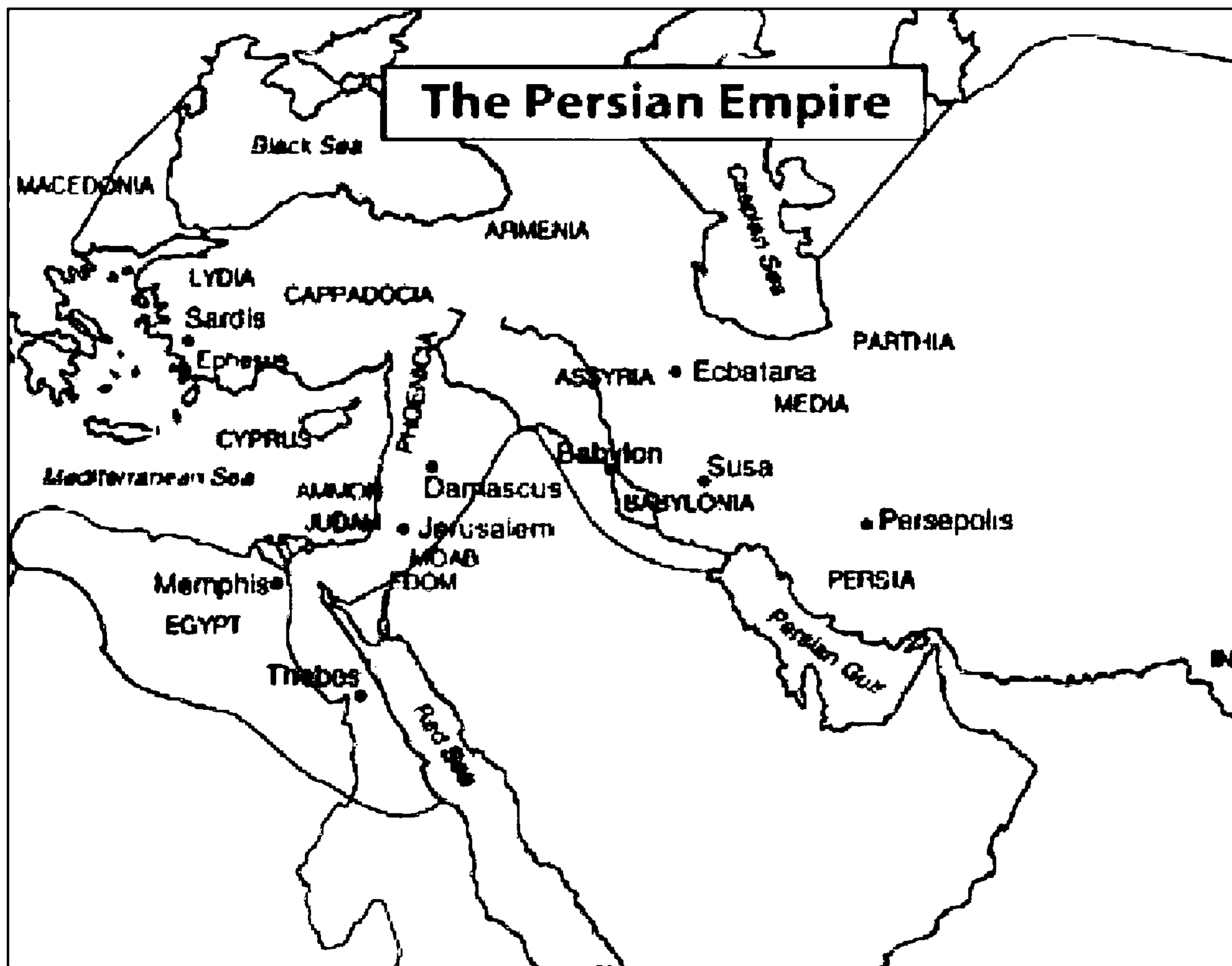
bopolassar (626–605). This king had made a pact with the Medes that enabled him to break free from the Assyrian yoke. He was also the founder of the Chaldean dynasty, which was named after a tribe from southern Mesopotamia to which both the king and the ruling class of Babylon belonged. Thus, two times in its history, Babylon achieved considerable power and world hegemony under foreign rulers—first under the Amorites from the west and then under the Chaldeans from the south. As for the Babylonians, it is remarked that they “were always more interested in making money than war.”¹⁸

Doubtless, the best known and the most influential king of Neo-Babylon is Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 B.C.), who established the Neo-Babylonian Empire. In addition to his successful military campaigns, he was the famous empire builder and is also remembered for his building achievements in the city of Babylon. His wife Amytis was a granddaughter of Cyaxares from Media. Nebuchadnezzar fathered eight children, one of whom was a daughter, Kaššaya.¹⁹ When Nebuchadnezzar died (at a very old age), he had ruled over Babylon for forty-three years. This king figures more prominently than any other in the stories about Daniel that took place in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar’s son Amel-Marduk (562–560 B.C.) was an unpopular king who reigned for a short time. In the Bible, he is called Evil-Merodach and is

best remembered for his act of kindness to the old King Jehoiachin of Judah, whom he “released . . . from prison, . . . spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor” so that Jehoiachin “for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king’s table” (2 Kings 25:27-30). Since the document known as the Istanbul Prism tells that a man called Ardi-Nabu was Amel-Marduk’s secretary (and tutor?), and since Ardi-Nabu could have been Abed-Nego, one wonders if this influence could explain the kind gesture. Amel-Marduk was killed by his brother-in-law Neriglissar (560–556 B.C.), an army general who seized power and became a strong king, unlike his son Labashi Marduk, who succeeded him on the throne for three short months.

A distinguished army general named Nabonidus killed Labashi Marduk and took the throne of Babylon (556–539 B.C.). He revived the cult of the moon god, Sin, much to the displeasure of the priesthood and aristocracy in Babylon. Because of his health problems, Nabonidus left Babylon, and his eldest son, Belshazzar, occupied the throne for the last ten years of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (549–539 B.C.). As a crown prince, he is considered to have been a coregent with his father. King Nabonidus’s long absence from Babylon and the interruption of the celebration of the New Year festival only added to his unpopularity and directly contributed to the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.



The following table lists the rulers of Neo-Babylon:

The Kings of Neo-Babylon

1. Nabopolassar (626–605)
2. Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562)
3. Amel-Marduk (562–560)
4. Neriglissar (560–556)
5. Labashi Marduk (556)
6. Nabonidus (556–539; the last ten years with Belshazzar)

In its heyday, the Medo-Persian Empire, which followed Neo-Babylon, was

the largest empire up to that time, stretching from Egypt to India (Esther 1:1). It was divided into administrative provinces known as *satrapies* that were ruled by *satraps*. The small kingdom of Judah belonged to the fifth satrapy. This empire is sometimes referred to simply as the Persian Empire, although in the Bible, the Medes and the Persians are often mentioned together.

Cyrus the Great, who was the empire builder, is the best-known Medo-Persian ruler. He became one of the most popular kings in the ancient world due to his

generous policies of support for the local gods and respect for the laws of the conquered lands. Cyrus was born of dual parentage—his father was Persian, and his mother was Median. This helped him unite these two lands and lead them into the conquest of Babylon and of much of that area of the world. He built a monumental and most efficient imperial organization, the greatest up to that time and one that still evokes admiration. Cyrus was succeeded by his son Cambyses, whose decisions are known to have differed from his father's generous and wise policies even at the time when he was still the crown prince. The table below lists the Medo-Persian kings starting with Cyrus the Great and his son Cambyses:

The Kings of Medo-Persia

1. Cyrus the Great (550–530)
2. Cambyses (530–522)
3. Darius I (522–486)
4. Xerxes I (486–465)
5. Artaxerxes I (465–424)
6. Xerxes II (423)
7. Darius II (423–404)
8. Artaxerxes II (404–358)
9. Artaxerxes III (358–338)
10. Arses (338–336)
11. Darius III (336–331)

Religion in Babylon

Religious traditions in the city of Babylon comprised a mixture of Sumerian and Semitic elements. While the Babylonians believed that humans were

created to serve the gods, they fashioned their gods in the image of human beings. Hence, deity was present in its image, be it a statue or a human person. Babylonian religion is often described as “polydemonic” because it attributed everything to magic and demons. At the top of the divine ladder was a triad of gods: Anu, the sky-god; Enlil, the air-god; and Adad, the weather-god. Subordinate to these gods was a triad of astral deities: Sin, the moon-god; his son Shamash, the sun god; and his daughter, the planet Venus, whose names were Ishtar and Inanna. She was often pictured as riding on a sacred lionlike beast. A third triad consisted of Ea or Enki, the god of the underworld; Marduk, Ea's son; and Marduk's son, Nabu or Nebo, the god of the art of writing. Below these three groups of gods were hundreds of deities.

The patron god of the city of Babylon was Marduk, the god of wisdom, whose popular name was Bel (“lord”). He was often pictured carrying a spade and accompanied by his pet, *Muš-ḫuš-šu*. This mythical monster was pictured in the form of a hybrid dragon with scales covering its body, with double horns of a viper, with the legs of a cat and a bird, and a tail consisting of a scorpion sting.

The city boasted of no fewer than sixteen temples, including the structure called Etemenanki, which is believed to be the oldest temple on earth, and Esagila,

the temple dedicated to the city's patron god, Marduk. In addition, Babylon contained forty-three cult centers and some nine hundred chapels. One of the streets located in the proximity of Esagila was called "Which god is like Marduk!" (Akkadian: *Ayu ilu ki Marduk*) testifying to the presence of strong religious feelings among the city's population and its priests. Some of the Babylonian temples were made in the shape of a Mesopotamian step-pyramid (ziggurat), leading the worshipers' thoughts upward through their "stairways to heaven." In some temples, the altar where the sacrifices were regularly offered was located at the bottom of the stairway. In most cases, it stood on the top floor.

The most important day in Babylon's religious and political calendar was the first day of the first month (*Nisanu*) of the year. On that day, new kings were inaugurated and the famous procession of the gods took place, which was the high point in the ceremony known as *Akitu* festival. The procession started from the Ishtar Gate and proceeded toward Esagila, into which, on the fifth day of the ceremony, the high priest entered first—followed, when a new king was to be inaugurated, by the royal aspirant, who was not yet wearing his royal robe. The king bowed before the image of Marduk. Then he was beaten on his cheeks so that tears would enhance his confessions before the high priest and in the presence of the image of the god of Babylon. Follow-

ing this ceremony, the new king was officially recognized as the legitimate ruler in Babylon, and his first year of reign was reckoned from that time on. This ritual clearly shows the power that the priests exercised in the name of the gods of Babylon and that often their authority exceeded that of the king.

The oracles of the biblical prophets mocked the Babylonian procession of the gods, whether along Procession Street or on boats floating on the Euphrates River. The prophets said that in contrast to Israel's God, Yahweh, who carried his people through the wilderness "as a father carries his son" (Deut. 1:31), the idols of Babylon "are borne by beasts of burden" (Isa. 46:1). Since they could not even walk, "ignorant are those who carry about the idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save" (Isa. 45:20).

Literary Features of Daniel's Book

The book of Daniel has been called a literary masterpiece. Its language is rich, filled with metaphors and imagery. Even a cursory reading of the text in a modern translation discloses a number of literary forms. Recognition of these genres is a key step in the proper interpretation of the text, and, conversely, a lack of awareness of them often results in a very narrow and stereotypical approach to the text and to the book in general. The following table presents a list of literary types that are found in Daniel's book.

The list is representative rather than exhaustive:

Literary Genres in the Book of Daniel

1. Story (chaps. 2; 3; 6; etc.)
2. Dream/vision (chaps. 2; 4; etc.)
3. Interpretation of a dream/vision (chaps. 2; 7; 8; 9; etc.)
4. Apocalyptic (chaps. 7; 8; etc.)
5. Audition (8:13, 14; 11:2–12:4; etc.)
6. Riddle or cryptic writing (5:25-28)
7. Prayer (6:16; 9:4-19)
8. Hymn of praise (2:20-23; 4:1-3, 34, 35; 6:26, 27)
9. Royal edict (3:29; 6:7-9, 26)
10. Royal proclamation (chap. 4)
11. List (3:2-6; 5:4, 23)
12. Dialogue (4:9, 18-20; 10:12-20; 12:8-13)
13. Oath (12:7)

Two literary types that are dominant in the book are stories and visions. The stories in Daniel are well structured, characterized by plot, setting, and characters. At the same time, they are rich in employing various literary devices. Moreover, Daniel's stories are pointedly God-centered.²⁰ The visions are full of symbols and imagery. At times, they are combined with auditions, and they are often accompanied by explanations provided by an angel interpreter. In line with what is found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, Daniel's visions deal with immediate, eschatological, and apocalyptic types of prophecy.²¹

The dominant literary form in Daniel's visions is apocalyptic, a term that comes from the Greek word that means "revelation" (*apokalupsis*).²² Scholars apply this term to a particular worldview, a social phenomenon, and a literary genre. "Apocalyptic literature designates those ancient visionary writings or parts of writings that, like the N[ew] T[estament] book from which the name is derived, the book of Revelation, purport to reveal the mystery of the end of the world (age) and of the glories of the world (age) to come."²³ In search of the origin of biblical apocalyptic literature, scholars have studied documents from Egypt, Iran, and Greece as well as biblical wisdom texts. The traditional view is that biblical apocalyptic is primarily the child of biblical prophecy. Some have viewed Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet whose proclamation centered on the topic of God's kingdom on earth.

The main characteristics of the apocalyptic genre are highly symbolic language, dualism, determinism, the presence of an angel interpreter, symbolic use of numbers, close interrelatedness between heaven and earth, and God's control over world history. The most notable canonical apocalypses include Isaiah 24–27; 34; 56–66; Ezekiel 37–39; Daniel 7–12; Joel 1–3; Zechariah 1–14; Matthew 24; 25; Mark 13; Luke 21; 1 Thessalonians 4; 5; 2 Thessalonians 2; 1 Corinthians 15; and the book of Reve-

lation. Some of the best-known apocryphal and pseudepigraphical apocalypses are the Apocalypse of Abraham; the Apocalypse of Baruch; the Apocalypse of Esdras; 1; 2, and 3 Enoch; the Animal Apocalypse; Jubilees; and the Ascension of Isaiah. Some of the Qumran scrolls have been classified as apocalyptic: the War Scroll, the Description of the New Jerusalem, and the Thanksgiving Psalms. For a comprehensive overview of apocalyptic literature in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the reader should consult *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*.²⁴

In studying apocalyptic texts from Daniel, the interpreter can see God's hand at work in the events of world history. Often, biblical symbols tell the reader far more about *what* God is going to do than about exactly *how* or *when* He will accomplish His ultimate purposes for the human race. It is equally useful to remember that for biblical prophets, revealing future events was not an end in itself but a means to the end of both comforting and challenging the faithful. The prophets' primary intention was "to turn the reader toward God, not just toward future events. Therefore, the actual event prophesied was clouded in the mist of symbolism and the reader had to turn to the God who would bring it to pass."²⁵ Moreover, a Christian interpreter of Daniel's visions will see Jesus Christ as "the central figure of prophecy."²⁶ (Cf. Luke 24:27, 44-47.)

Scholars have proposed several literary structures of Daniel's book. One obvious division is based on the two dominant literary genres:

Literary/Stylistic Structure

- A. Stories: chapters 1–6 (third-person report)
- B. Visions: chapters 7–12 (first-person report)

Sporadic exceptions are present in both parts: Chapter 2, for example, contains significant visionary material in its narrative, while in chapter 7:1, Daniel is referred to in the third person singular. These exceptions comprise interlocking elements that strengthen the unity of the book.

A second proposed structure is based on the use of the two original languages, Hebrew and Aramaic:

Linguistic Structure

- A. Hebrew: 1:1–2:4a
- B. Aramaic: 2:4b–7:27
- A'. Hebrew 8:1–12:13

This form is also known as an *A-B-A'* structure because the author wrote the first part of the book in Hebrew, then he switched to Biblical Aramaic, and finally, he returned to Hebrew.

Chiastic (concentric) structures have also been proposed for the Aramaic and the Hebrew sections of the book.²⁷ Parallelism comprises a basic feature of Hebrew literary style, and *chiasm* is usually

defined as inverted parallelism.²⁸ (The term is derived from the Greek letter *chi*, which looks like the letter X.) When the book of Daniel is viewed in terms of chiasmic literary forms, chapter 1 stands by itself as an introductory unit to the whole book and the rest of the chapters are structured as follows:

Chiastic Structure

Chapters 2-7

- A. Vision of world kingdoms (chap. 2)
- B. The faithful tested (chap. 3)
- C. Judgment on a king (chap. 4)
- C'. Judgment on a king (chap. 5)
- B'. The faithful tested (chap. 6)
- A'. Vision of world kingdoms (chap. 7)

Chapters 7-12

- A. Coming of the One "like a son of man" (chap. 7)
- B. Clash of east and west (chap. 8)
- C. Revelation about the "Anointed One" (chap. 9)
- C'. Vision of a Celestial (Divine) Being (chap. 10)
- B'. Clash of north and south (chap. 11)
- A'. The rise of Michael (chap. 12)

The structure of a text is a vehicle to its meaning. Knowing that Daniel intended the chiasmic structure—if indeed he did—can be of great help to those seeking to find the message of the book.

Scholars have also claimed that chapter 7, with its central concept of judg-

ment, serves as a bridge that holds the two parts of the book together. In fact, this chapter is the strongest interlocking element in the whole book because it combines the visionary material with text in Biblical Aramaic.

The three proposed structural plans that are presented above are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they all complement each other. Thus, they each contribute to communicating the overall message of the book of Daniel. This commentary takes the literary/stylistic plan as the primary structure because it is based on the two dominant literary forms in the book: stories (chaps. 1-6) and visions with auditions (chaps. 7-12).

The Purpose and Message of the Book

The first story found in the book of Daniel, in chapter 1, conveys the purpose of the book. This chapter begins with the report of a defeat of the people of Judah and the triumph of their enemies, the Babylonians. As the reader learns that the captives and the sacred temple vessels were carried off to Babylon, the question emerges: Could the God of Israel be led as captive to a foreign land? The author answers that question in the very beginning of the book, assuring readers that it was the Lord who delivered His people and city into the hand of a foreign king.

Although God can never be made captive, He did not abandon His people

in Babylon but instead was with them there. His presence and their faithfulness to Him resulted in a triumph over the power of Babylon's gods. In the triumph of the faithful in Babylon, the reader can foresee God's ultimate triumph over the hostile powers in the world. Thus, an important reason for the writing of the book of Daniel was to disprove the possible misconception about God's power by affirming emphatically that the Lord can never become a captive of a pagan god.

The book of Daniel was also written to show how God deals with human beings. Both the structure of the book and the stories it contains consistently show that His plan is not to destroy but to save human beings (Ezek. 33:11; John 3:17)—though, ultimately, the unrepentant will be destroyed. In harmony with this point, we understand why the author wrote the book in two languages: He intended to convey the message of the book to two different audiences.²⁹ In Babylon, Aramaic was the language of international business and diplomacy, so the author used this language to communicate the message of the book to all the inhabitants of the empire.

Chapters 4 and 5, which are found in the heart of the Aramaic section of the book, disclose its intended message. That message was that no people on earth, including emperors, can remain neutral toward the God of heaven. In other words, when God confronts a hu-

man being, that person has to decide to take a stand either for or against God. The examples from the lives of two Babylonian kings illustrate well this principle. One king responded positively to God's call to repentance, and his life was preserved and his power was restored to him. The other king remained unrepentant and paid the highest price for it. Daniel's book teaches that when it comes to making decisions about God and one's eternal destiny, neutrality is simply *not* an option.

The Hebrew section of the book was intended for the people who were exiled to Babylon. These were people God had chosen, and they had endured trials and persecutions. The visions of Daniel contain a message of divine judgment that was the source of hope for those who were oppressed for God's sake. The verdict on the oppressor is pronounced during the judgment, and in the end, the saints are vindicated, not condemned. Chapters 9 and 10 introduce the Person who protects the faithful and who will visibly come to their rescue at the end. The revelation recorded in Daniel 9:25-27 calls him "Messiah, the ruler." Moreover, in the end, God's sanctuary is restored to its rightful state. The themes of vindication and condemnation permeate the whole book.

We can summarize the message that the book bears to people today in the following way: In the most difficult and

dangerous times of earth's history or of one's personal life, children of God can be confident that He is in charge. He cares about people. Despite appearances that seem to point to the contrary, He is present and actively saving His oppressed and faithful people while condemning the forces of evil. His judgment in heaven affects the course of events down on earth. Most frequently, Daniel communicated this message through the hymns of praise that are scattered throughout the book. The first such praise comes from the mouth of Daniel himself (2:20-23). The rest of the hymns, which come from the mouths of the pagan kings Nebuchadnezzar (4:1-3, 34, 35) and Darius (6:25-28), echo the first hymn.

Approaches to Daniel's Book

In modern times, the study of Daniel's book has largely involved endless debates on the historical value of the facts reported in the text—on matters such as authorship, the unity of the book, and the validity of prophetic utterances. These issues have their value; however, the attention given them has far outweighed that given to the book's theological insights.³⁰ And, in the case of some scholars, it has resulted in a purely humanistic and antisupernaturalist approach that is diametrically opposed to the claims of the book itself.

Objections to the traditional dating and authorship of the book that have

been advanced by some scholars have to do with the prophetic, historical, and linguistic aspects of Daniel's text. The objections raised concerning the prophetic character of the revelations given to Daniel are part of higher criticism, a negative approach to the claims made by the authors of the prophetic books of the Bible. Higher criticism neglects and even denies the predictive aspect of biblical prophecy because it views the Bible as a product of purely human thought. The evidence from the text challenges the claims of this approach because each of Daniel's visions are clearly dated to the sixth century B.C. (Dan. 7:1; 8:1; 9:1; 10:1). Every reader of the Bible in general and of Daniel in particular has the privilege of choosing either to take seriously or to dismiss the statements of the biblical books. This choice will determine the result of the reader's interaction with the text.

In a similar way, some scholars have questioned certain statements in Daniel that are of a historical character. These include the dates of particular events (Dan. 1:1; 2:1), the identities of Belshazzar and Darius the Mede, and the miraculous events through which God saved the faithful from death (chaps. 3 and 6). Lastly, the presence and characteristics of diverse languages in the book have also served as grounds for questioning the book's traditional dating and authorship. Several scholars have responded to these objections, some in a very systematic

way.³¹ While it is true that some of the questions posed by higher criticism are still awaiting definitive answers, this present study assumes the validity of statements from the biblical text and takes the traditional view on the dating and authorship of Daniel's book.

Based on the objections mentioned above, a number of scholars consider that the final form of Daniel's book cannot go back to the sixth but rather comes from the second century B.C. It is also claimed that the book did not originate in Babylon but in Judea and that it was written not by a single author but by a number of different people. They believe the book of Daniel was meant to encourage the faithful Jews in their resistance to the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. This king became notorious in Jewish history for his desecration of the temple; his prohibition of keeping the law, including the Sabbath and the rite of circumcision; and his merciless attempts to suppress the opposition raised by pious Jews.

Several studies, however, have argued in a persuasive way that the attempts to fit Antiochus IV Epiphanes into Daniel's descriptions of the little horn are not satisfactory for several reasons: For one, Antiochus's persecution did not begin with a religious cause but rather "in order to subdue a rebellious people." Second, the information about the persecution by this king as provided by the books of Maccabees is mostly legendary. And third, the outlawing of the Jewish

religion and the legitimizing of the new cult was confined to Jerusalem and Judea and didn't take place in Jewish communities elsewhere.³² For these reasons, the original setting of Daniel's book fits better the time of the exile to Babylon rather than the oppression under Antiochus IV Epiphanes.³³ As for the hero of the book, he is described in the text as the chief of all Babylonian wise men (2:48), a title that more likely came from a foreign country and not from the group of freedom fighters in Judea.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are interpreters who take a rigid approach to the book, claiming to have all the answers to the questions that the text poses. Much like higher criticism, this side too is not flexible enough to put aside its preconceived notions and let Daniel speak for himself (cf. Dan. 5:12). There is a real temptation for the student of Daniel's book to engage solely in a study of its numbers, its historical details, or the differing interpretative nuances at the expense of the rich message of the book. It is preferable to let the overall message of the book come first and foremost in any study of biblical text. This is especially important in dealing with certain difficult texts in the book about the meaning of which scholars have not reached consensus. "Like a telescope it [the Bible] summons us to look through, not at, it and see the starry heavens. The most crucial question to ask is, Have you seen the stars? not,

What do you think of the lens?"³⁴ In the process of interpreting a passage from the Bible, one should constantly keep in mind that the passage is only a part of the biblical canon. If the passage is obscure, the bigger picture provided by the rest of the Bible may be of help.

In surveying the ways in which past and present interpreters have approached Daniel's book, one notes the presence of not one but a variety of approaches, such as philosophical/rationalistic, historical/geographical, archaeological/anthropological, literary/linguistic, expository/exegetical, didactic/theological, and social/cultural. Each of these approaches has made a valuable contribution to the study of Daniel, and this present study is indebted to all who have skillfully used tools, ancient and modern, in an attempt to arrive at the meaning of the text and its application in our time. An approach, however, that has been neglected in the study of Daniel is the type of exegetical study that places the *people* in the book at the forefront—one that places the book's main characters at the center of the events and the themes that are found scattered throughout it. This present study attempts to combine an in-depth exegetical study with what could be called a people-oriented approach.

The first half of the book of Daniel presents stories that are centered in God (theocentric), while the visions and auditions from the second half point to God's leading in history toward its glo-

rious close (eschatological). No student of Daniel would dispute the claim that God is the first and foremost Hero in the book, while at the human level, the hero of the book is Daniel. In addition, Daniel's friends and the kings that he mentioned by name all play important roles in the stories and the introductions to the visions of the book.

As has already been pointed out, the present study of Daniel's book gives primacy to Daniel's life and work, since the two provide the key that can unlock the message of its stories and visions. Thus, special attention is given to the people who are mentioned in the text, because the book primarily talks about God's dealing with the people of the past, while the messages are also addressed to the people who read the book today. This approach makes a unique contribution to the study of Daniel's book and message because of the trends in our time to place people at the forefront in society, politics, economy, religion, literature, and so forth.

Since Daniel's book belongs to the canon of the Bible, its message extends beyond what the original author was saying to the people of his day. It is relevant for every reader's time and place. First Peter 1:10-12 says:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to

find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

A sound hermeneutic will embrace both of these basic exegetical steps in an attempt to penetrate into the rich meaning of the text. The most complete definition of hermeneutics states that it is the science and art of interpreting a text. The artistic aspect of biblical interpretation has been neglected. Concepts such as the beauty and balance that characterize a literary unit were often left out. Yet the text of Daniel should not be portrayed only as reliable and trustworthy; it should be seen also as attractive and applicable in everyday life. This present study tries to give justice to both the historical and literary aspects of Daniel's text.

Greek Additions to Daniel's Book

The Greek translation of the Bible known as the Septuagint and the Latin translation known as the Vulgate contain three chapter-length passages that are absent from the version of Daniel in the Hebrew canon of Scripture. Protes-

tant Christians classify these passages as part of the Apocrypha, which Roman Catholics call "deuterocanonical documents." These three additions to Daniel's book are believed to have been composed in Hebrew in the first century B.C. One of them is inserted in Daniel 3, and the other two are attached to the book as chapters 13 and 14.

1. *The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men.* This addition is inserted between verses 23 and 24 of chapter 3. The introduction consists of two verses. It is followed by a twenty-verse prayer for deliverance supposedly spoken by Azariah, the companion of Daniel who was known in Babylon as Abednego. His prayer asks God to save the three Hebrew worthies from the fiery furnace based on God's promises to the patriarchs, the sufferings of His people, and their true repentance. The appeal for deliverance is followed by a request for the punishment of the enemies of Israel and a worldwide manifestation of God's glory.

In the second part of this passage, in response to Azariah's prayer, the angel of the Lord intervenes on behalf of the three Hebrews (w. 23-27). Then they join in a song of praise for deliverance from the heat of the burning furnace (w. 28-68), and they call upon everything—animate and inanimate—to give glory and praise to God.

In contrast to the Hebrew canon of the Bible, where King Nebuchadnezzar

is usually portrayed in a positive light (the Book of Jeremiah calls him “the LORD’s servant”), this document portrays him as “a wicked king, the vilest in all the world” (v. 9).³⁵

2. *Daniel and Susanna*. This story is attached to the book of Daniel as chapter 13. It is a religious romance about a beautiful and pious Jewish woman named Susanna who lived in Babylon. Two Jewish elders, who were appointed as judges, made lustful approaches to her that she firmly resisted. To cover up their inappropriate behavior, they accused her of adultery and arranged for her conviction and death sentence. In the denouement of the plot, young Daniel cross-examines the two accusers separately, and their contradictory testimony convicts all that the fault is with them and not with Susanna. Consequently, the elders are cast into a ravine and destroyed by fire from heaven.

3. *Bel and the Dragon*. This addition to Daniel’s book (as chap. 14) consists of two stories. In the first, Daniel acts as a detective who is able to unveil the falsehood that was practiced by the seventy priests of the god Bel (Marduk). These priests were deceiving Bel’s worshipers by claiming that Bel was consuming the food that the worshipers were placing in the temple. In reality, however, the priests and their families were entering the temple through a secret door during the night and feasting on the food. Daniel sneaked into the temple after hours and sprinkled

ashes on the floor. The footprints seen the next morning revealed the priests’ secret and thus proved to all that the image of Bel was only a dead idol. Angered by the priests’ deception, the king ordered them executed and the image destroyed.

In the second story, the Babylonians worshiped a live serpent known as a great dragon. Daniel refused to bow down to the idol and instead fed him with a strange mixture of boiled pitch, fat, and hair. When the dragon burst and died, Daniel was cast into the den of lions for seven days. During that time, he was miraculously fed by the prophet Habakkuk, whom an angel transported from Judea to Babylon for that purpose.

Since the apocryphal additions to the Hebrew Bible cannot claim canonicity, they are not included in this present study. This is not to deny their value to the student of the Bible. In the words of Martin Luther, “They are not held equal to the Holy Scriptures, yet are profitable and good to read.”³⁶ They are particularly useful for a better appreciation of the events and religious developments during the intertestamental times.

Daniel at Qumran

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 and subsequent discoveries in the years that followed revolutionized the studies of the text, canon, and theology of the books of the Bible. Fragments and quotations from Daniel’s book have come from caves one, four, and six. These

fragments attest the presence of all twelve canonical chapters in the library at Qumran. In fact, the material evidence indicates the presence of no less than eight copies of Daniel's book there.

The text portions from Daniel found in the Qumran caves are listed below, followed by the names of the manuscripts in which they are found:³⁷

1. Daniel 1:10-17 (1QDan^a); 1:16-20 (4QDan^a)
2. Daniel 2:2-6 (1QDan^a); 2:9-11 (4QDan^a); 2:19-49 (4QDan^a)
3. Daniel 3:1, 2 (4QDan^a); 3:22-30 (1QDan^b)
4. Daniel 4:29, 30 (4QDan^a)
5. Daniel 5:5-7 (4QDan^a); 5:10-12 (4QDan^b); 5:12-14 (4QDan^a); 5:14-16 (4QDan^b); 5:16-19 (4QDan^a); 5:19-22 (4QDan^b)
6. Daniel 6:8-22 (4QDan^b); 6:27-29 (4QDan^b)
7. Daniel 7:1-6 (4QDan^b); 7:5-7 (4QDan^a); 7:25-28 (4QDan^a); 7:26-28 (4QDan^b)
8. Daniel 8:1-5 (4QDan^a); 8:1-8 (4QDan^b); 8:13-16 (4QDan^b); 8:16, 17(?), 20, 21 (pap6QDan)
9. Daniel 9 ? (4QDan^c)
10. Daniel 10:5-9 (4QDan^c); 10:8-16 (pap6QDan); 10:11-16 (4QDan^c); 10:16-20 (4QDan^c); 10:21 (4QDan^a)
11. Daniel 11:1, 2 (4QDan^c); 11:13-16 (4QDan^a); 11:13-17 (4QDan^c); 11:25-29 (4QDan^c); 11:32

(4QFlor); 11:33-36, 38 (pap6Q-Dan)

12. Daniel 12:10 (4QFlor)

The importance of the fragments of Daniel's text from Qumran is twofold: (1) *Textual*: The text from Qumran is older by about one thousand years than the Masoretic text that is the standard Hebrew text of the Old Testament used today. Also, the changes from Hebrew to Aramaic and from Aramaic back to Hebrew are both attested by the fragments. (2) *Canonical*: The number of the copies of Daniel's book, eight in total, shows its importance in the first centuries B.C. and A.D. The people of Qumran held the book in high esteem, and they considered Daniel to be a biblical prophet. While no Greek addition to Daniel has been attested at Qumran, a document titled the "Prayer of Nabonidus" was discovered there that ascribes a temporary mental disorder to King Nabonidus of Babylon rather than to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Influence of Daniel on the New Testament

While the inhabitants of Qumran accorded great importance to Daniel's book, its influence on Jesus Christ and the writers of New Testament books cannot be overestimated. Daniel was one of Jesus' favorite books, perhaps *the* favorite one. This may be because "Jesus presented himself and his work in apocalyptic terms" and because "he under-

stood the book of Daniel to refer to his own time and to the near future.”³⁸ According to the Gospel writers, Jesus’ favorite title was “the Son of Man”—a title that pointed to His divine authority (Mark 2:10, 28) as well as to His destiny (Matt. 26:64). As for His audience, it is “likely that they were aware of the messianic interpretation of that manlike figure [from Dan. 7:13].”³⁹

New Testament allusions to the expressions, concepts, and themes from Daniel’s book can be sketched as follows:

Daniel 2. In his speech before King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel claims that only God in heaven reveals mysteries about kingdoms (2:27, 28). In Mark 4:11, Jesus tells His disciples that “‘the secret of the kingdom of God’” has been given to them.

Daniel’s words, “what will happen in days to come,” from verses 28, 29 are echoed in a number of New Testament passages, such as Matthew 26:54; Mark 13:7; Revelation 1:1, 19; 4:1; and 22:6.

Jesus applied the picture of the destructive stone that represented God’s kingdom in Daniel 2:34, 35 and 44, 45 to His life and ministry, and He concluded His speech with the following statement: “‘Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed’” (Luke 20:18).

Just as the kingdoms of this world vanish “without leaving a trace” (Dan.

2:35), so, according to Revelation 12:8, “no place was found” for Satan and his angels in heaven. Moreover, “there was no place for” the first earth and sky when the One seated on the throne sits down to begin the end-time judgment (Rev. 20:11).

Daniel assured the king that “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed” (v. 44), and both John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministries by proclaiming that the same “‘kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15).

Daniel 3. The theme of compulsory worship and a death decree dominates the story of Daniel 3. The last book of the Bible contains the same theme (Rev. 13:11-18). And the faith of Daniel’s friends, says the author of Hebrews, “quenched the fury of the flames” (11:34) because God “sent his angel and rescued his servants” (Dan. 3:28). Centuries later, He did the same thing for His servant Peter (Acts 12:11).

Daniel 4. King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a tree in the branches of which the birds of the air found shelter (4:12). Jesus used similar words to describe the remarkable growth of the mustard seed, which “‘becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches’” (Matt. 13:32; cf. Mark 4:32; Luke 13:19).

Daniel 6. Having been rescued from the lions, Daniel tells the king, “God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths

of the lions” (6:22). The author of Hebrews commends this act of faith in God (11:33).

Daniel 7. According to this chapter, four beasts rise out of the great sea (7:3). The first beast of Revelation 13:1 does the same. The total number of heads on Daniel’s four beasts is seven (7:4-7), and the beast from the sea has seven heads (Rev. 13:1). The ten horns on Revelation’s sea beast match the number of horns on the fourth beast in Daniel 7. The sea beast resembles a leopard, a bear, and a lion (Rev. 13:2), all three of which are mentioned in Daniel 7:2-8. And just as the little horn had a mouth that spoke boastfully (7:8, 11, 20; cf. 8:25) and also spoke words against the Most High (7:25), the sea beast “was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies” (Rev. 13:5).

Daniel says multitudes of angels surround God’s throne, and he pictures the court proceedings beginning with the opening of books (7:10). Revelation 5:11 also talks about God’s angels that “encircled the throne,” while the opening of books is tied to the execution of God’s judgment (20:11).

The clothing of the Ancient of Days is “as white as snow” (Dan. 7:9), and Matthew 28:3 says that the angel of the Lord who came to Christ’s tomb wore clothes “white as snow.”

According to Daniel 7:13, “one like a human being [was] coming with the clouds of the sky.” Revelation 1:7 describes Christ’s coming with the follow-

ing words: “ ‘Look, he is coming with the clouds, / and every eye will see him.’ ” Both verses use the word “look” to introduce the coming of this supernatural being. Jesus predicted that one day, people “ ‘will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory’ ” (Mark 13:26). And His statement that the Son of Man is the only One who came to earth from heaven is frequently found in the Gospels (John 3:13, 14; 6:61, 62).

According to Mark 8:38, the Son of Man will come “ ‘in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.’ ” After that, the Son “ ‘will sit on his throne in heavenly glory’ ” (Matt. 25:31)—an act that symbolizes His authority (Mark 2:10). Daniel 7:14 tells us that this authority was given to Him and therefore “all rulers will worship and obey him” (7:27). That authority also implies His right to judge (John 5:22, 27). In fact, God’s judgment and the role of the Son of Man are closely linked in Daniel 7:9-14 and also in Matthew 16:27, which says, “ ‘The Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.’ ” (Cf. Luke 12:8, 9; 21:36; Rev. 14:14.)

The faithful saints are persecuted on earth and even defeated by the forces of evil (Dan. 7:21, 25). Jesus adds to this statement the fact that the reason for this hostility is the world’s attitude toward Him (Luke 6:22). The oppressor is

the beast that “was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them” (Rev. 13:7), just as the beast from the Abyss attacks the two witnesses and overpowers and kills them (11:7).

The power given to the beast lasts for “a time, times and half a time”—an expression found in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 and in Revelation 12:14, along with the parallel expressions of forty-two months and 1,260 days (Rev. 11:2, 3). The good news, though, is that the Son of Man has a kingdom (Dan. 7:27; Matt. 13:41; 19:28) and His is a universal rule (Rev. 3:21).

Daniel 8. Daniel saw in his vision a ram with two horns (8:3), while John the revelator says that the beast that came out of the earth “had two horns like a lamb” (Rev. 13:11). The little horn from Daniel 8 attacks the Prince of princes (v. 25), the host of heaven, and the sanctuary and throws some of the starry host down to the earth (vv. 10, 11). Likewise, the sea beast slanders God’s name, His dwelling place, and those who live in heaven (Rev. 13:6),⁴⁰ while the dragon’s tail “swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth” (Rev. 12:4).

Daniel 9. Christ’s prayer on behalf of His followers (John 17) can be compared with Daniel’s long intercessory prayer on behalf of his people. And while in Daniel 9:21-23, Gabriel comes to announce the seventy-week period to the man who is “greatly loved,” the be-

ginning of Luke’s Gospel pictures the same angel appearing to Zechariah at the time of the sacrificial offering to tell him of the future birth of the one who “‘will be a joy and delight’” to many (Luke 1:8-14). And later, in the same chapter, Gabriel appears to Mary and greets her with the words “‘you . . . are highly favored!’” (v. 28).

The expression “abomination that causes destruction” that is found in verse 27 and in two more places in Daniel (11:31; 12:11) is mentioned in Jesus’ Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:15 (cf. Mark 13:14) and applied to a time in the future from Christ’s point of view.

Daniel 10. The epiphany of a human-like being described in Daniel 10:5, 6 has several elements in common with the one given to John in Revelation 1:12-16. Daniel met this supernatural Being face to face toward the end of his life and career, while John reports on his vision in the beginning of his book. John’s audition about the messages to the seven churches may be compared structurally with Daniel’s long audition about the great war (Dan. 11:2-45).

Daniel 11. “The man of lawlessness” whose coming will precede Christ’s coming is described in 2 Thessalonians in words very similar to those that describe the contemptible person from Daniel 11:36, 37. The text from 2 Thessalonians 2:4 says, “He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he

sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God."

Daniel 12. At the time of the end, the Mediator Michael stands up in order to defend his people (v. 1). In a similar way, Jesus pointed to the mediating role of the Son of Man (John 1:51). Moreover, Revelation 3:5 quotes him as saying: " 'He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.' "

Michael's rise will be in the midst of an unparalleled crisis to which Jesus referred in Matthew 24:21 (cf. Mark 13:19) and which the angel described to John as " 'the great tribulation' " (Rev. 7:14). Only those whose names are written in the book shall be delivered (Dan. 12:1). Revelation speaks of "the book of life" (3:5; 20:12, 15) and "the Lamb's book of life" (21:27).

In Daniel's text, those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake (Dan. 12:2). Jesus used the same language when He described Lazarus's death and His intentions to resurrect him (John 11:11; cf. Rev. 20:13). The dualism that will characterize the people on earth in the time of the end (Dan. 12:10) is echoed in Jesus' words from the Gospels (Matt. 25:46) as well as from Revelation (Rev. 22:11). In both Daniel and Revelation, the sealing of the scroll is related to the end of times (Dan. 12:9, 10; Rev. 22:10). And in both Daniel's revelations (12:12, 13) and Je-

sus' speech about the end time (Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:13), endurance is stressed as the faithful wait for the end.

1. Josephus Flavius *The Antiquities of the Jews* 10.11.7.

2. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 133.

3. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2001), vii, xiii.

4. W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 5.

5. John J. Collins, Frank Moore Cross, Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 1.

6. Donald J. Wiseman et al., *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (London: Tyndale, 1965); Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Book of Daniel: Evidences Relating to Persons and Chronology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19, no. 1 (1981): 37-49; Zdravko Stefanovic, *The Aramaic of Daniel in the Light of Old Aramaic*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement*, vol. 129 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Arthur J. Ferch, *Daniel on Solid Ground* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1988).

7. Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 17-46. In *Daniel*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 9, P. R. Davies described Baldwin's work as the best defense of the conservative interpretation of Daniel.

8. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 1117; Doukhan, *Secrets*, 7.

9. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 1.

10. The two concepts were usually inseparable in much of the ancient world. See the titles given to Joseph in Genesis 41:41-45.

11. For an extensive discussion on this topic, see Klaus Koch, "Is Daniel Also Among the Prophets?" *Interpretation* 39 (1985): 117-130.

12. The Babylonian Talmud *Sanh.* 97b.

13. Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 139.

14. *Ibid.*, 132.

15. Josephus *Antiquities* 10.11.7. For the Dead Sea Scrolls, see 4QFlorilegium. Fragments of no less than eight copies of Daniel's book have been found at Qumran, providing a highly positive textual, linguistic, and canonical evidence for the traditional view of the book.

16. H. Shanks, "An Interview with David Noel Freedman: How the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament Differ," *Bible Review* (December 1993): 37-38.

17. Map of the city of Babylon c. 600 **BC**.

18. Joanne Oates, *Babylon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 198.

19. D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon* (1986; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9-11.

20. More information about the stories in Daniel can be found in the general introduction to chapters 2-6.

21. More information on Daniel's visions is given in the general introduction to chapters 7-12.

22. For the meaning of the word *apocalypse* in the context of the book of Revelation, see Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 53.

23. Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press: 2001), 8.

24. J. J. Collins, et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 3 vols. (New York: Continuum, 1998).

25. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 231.

26. Beatrice Neall, "Jesus at the Center: How to Interpret Prophecy," *Adventist Review*, October 21, 1993, 6.

27. A. Lenglet, "La structure litteraire de Daniel 2-7," *Biblica* 53 (1972): 169-190; William H. Shea, "Further Literary Structures in Daniel 2-7: An Analysis of Daniel 4," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23 no. 2 (1985): 193-202; *cf.* *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23 no. 3 (1985): 277-295.

28. Soulen, *Handbook*, 32-33.

29. That two books were combined into one is "an ancient view" according to P. R. Davies, *Dan-*

iel, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 35.

30. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1993), 613.

31. Wiseman, et al., *Notes on Some Problems*. Baldwin, 19-46; Shea, *Daniel*, 21-31; Hasel, "The Book of Daniel and Matters of Language: Evidences Pertaining to Names, Words and the Aramaic Language," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 (1981): 211-225; Z. Stefanovic, *Aramaic of Daniel*, 13-27.

32. Helmut Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 212-213. See also Avigdor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, trans. S. Applebaum (New York: Atheneum, 1979); chapter 5 is titled "Antiochus Persecution of Judaism."

33. For a list of arguments against this thesis, see Arthur J. Ferch, "The Book of Daniel and the 'Maccabean Thesis,'" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21 no. 2 (1983): 129-141.

34. Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 17.

35. Another view is that this was a reference to Antiochus Epiphanes. Cf. W. H. Bennet, "The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Children" in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 1:633.

36. This statement serves as a preface to the apocryphal books placed at the end of the Old Testament in Martin Luther's German translation of the Bible.

37. Eugene C. Ulrich, "Daniel Manuscripts from Qumran. Part 1: A Preliminary Edition of 4QDana," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 268 (1987): 17-37; "Daniel Manuscripts from Qumran. Part 2: Preliminary Editions of 4QDanb and 4QDanc," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 21A (1989): 3-26.

38. Collins, 93.

39. *Ibid.*, 96.

40. In a private conversation, Gudmundur Olafson called my attention to the fact that in the Greek text of this verse there is no conjunction between "his dwelling place" and "those who live in heaven." He also observed that the Greek verb translated here as "live" is not used in Revelation of humans but only of God and His angels.

THE OPENING CHAPTER

(1:1-21)

Chapter 1 of Daniel serves as a prologue that “records the historical setting for the entire book.”¹ Some scholars believe that the original language of this chapter was Aramaic and that its purpose was to introduce chapters 2–7.² It is better, however, to view this chapter as the introduction to the whole book of Daniel. Its powerful story sets the stage for everything that follows, while at the same time it functions as a summary of the whole book’s message.³ It has been suggested that one can find in this chapter the seeds of all that the rest of the book features: “All the major themes to be developed later by narrative and visions are present in this introductory passage.”⁴ The most prominent themes that permeate this chapter include a test of faithfulness and the victory that results in the exaltation of the faithful.

The event reported at the beginning of chapter 1 dates to the year 605 B.C. This view is preferred to the one held by

some scholars, who consider the opening verses “a telescoping of various events that led up to the eventual dispersion of the Israelites in the sixth century.”⁵ This year is remembered in history because of the battle for the control of an Egyptian military outpost at Carchemish, near the Euphrates River. A few years earlier, these forces had fought each other at Haran. In the battle at Carchemish, the armies of Egypt and Babylon (in alliance with the Medes) clashed in their contest for control of Syria-Palestine. In the end, the Egyptians were defeated and pushed southward (Jer. 46:2) by the army called in Ezekiel “the most ruthless of all nations” (Ezek. 32:12; cf. 30:11; 31:12). The official Babylonian chroniclers provide some valuable insights into these events:

In the twenty-first year the king of Akkad [Nabopolassar] stayed in his own land, Nebuchadrezzar his eldest son, the crown prince, mustered (the

Babylonian army) and took command of his troops; he marched to Carchemish which is on the bank of the Euphrates, and crossed the river (to go) against the Egyptian army which lay in Carchemish. . . . fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He accomplished their defeat and to non-existence [beat?] them. . . .

At that time Nebuchadrezzar conquered the whole area of the Hattic country [Hamath].⁶ For twenty-one years Nabopolassar had been king of Babylon. On the 8th of the month of Ab [August] he died (lit. 'the fates'); in the month of Elul [September] Nebuchadrezzar returned to Babylon and on the first day of the month of Elul he sat on the royal throne in Babylon.⁷

Thus, in that same year there was a change of kings in Babylon. Nebuchadrezzar, the crown prince who commanded the Babylonian army, left the captives in the hands of his generals and hurried back to Babylon, taking the shortcut across the desert. "This haste was doubtless due to a desire to prevent any usurper from taking the throne."⁸ About a year after this battle, all the kings of Syria-Palestine came before him, and he received their tribute.⁹

According to a passage from the Pentateuch, God had promised to protect Israel's land in a supernatural way so that " 'no one will covet your land when

you go up three times each year to appear before the Lord your God' " (Exod. 34:24). This promise, however, was given on condition that the people would worship Yahweh only and keep His covenant stipulations, including their faithfulness in observing the Sabbath rest (Jer. 17:20-27). Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a person's ways are pleasing to the LORD, / he makes even his enemies live at peace with him." In several places in the Old Testament, one can read that the two exiles that the people of Israel suffered—to Assyria and to Babylon—were the consequences of their breaking of the covenant—their practice of idolatry and oppression of their fellow human beings. Says the chronicler, "The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:15, 16).

In a famous message delivered in the Jerusalem temple, the prophet Jeremiah had warned the people of his time that they should reform their ways and not "trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!'" (Jer. 7:4). The cherished promise that "God is within her [Jerusalem], she will not fall; / God will help her at break of

day” (Ps. 46:5) was not a blank check. God’s people had exhausted the measure of His abundant mercy and “there was no [other] remedy” but exile. Then, when the people were exiled from the land God had given them, the law was no longer violated, and consequently, “the land enjoyed its sabbath rests” (2 Chron. 36:21).

Daniel 1 opens with a brief report of a Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem, and it ends with the triumph of the faithful at the palace in Babylon. Thus the structure of the story recorded in this chapter is concentric, and it is clearly built on a reversal from defeat to triumph:

1. Defeat (1:1, 2)
2. Training (1:3-5)
3. Resistance (1:6-16, the longest part)
4. Triumph (1:17-21)

The longest part of the story in the chapter deals with the resistance of the young men to the influence of the culture and religion that was prevalent in Babylon. Two chronological markers, one found in the first verse of the chapter and the other in the last, bracket the main story and thus form an *inclusio* that identifies the span of Daniel’s career and the length of the exile to Babylon.

Defeat (1:1, 2)

The book of Daniel opens with a report on the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army, followed by an im-

portant reminder that God was in complete control of this tragic event in Judah’s history.

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the land of Shinar, to the temple of his god(s), and put in the treasure house of his god(s).

Notes

1:1 “*In the third year.*” The first word that is used in the Hebrew text of this verse is *bišnat*; it means “in the year of.” Because it is the opening word of the whole book, it reminds the reader of the first word in Genesis, *b^rēšît*, which literally means “in the beginning (of).” Both words are combinations of the preposition *b*, “in,” with a feminine noun in the construct state. Although this is most likely a coincidence, it is worth noticing.

The text links King Jehoiakim’s third year of reign with Nebuchadnezzar’s first bout with Jerusalem, in 605 B.C. It is clear from this statement that the author is using the accession-year method of counting the years of a king’s reign, in agreement with a practice that was common in Babylon. According to this chronological method, the first official year of a king’s reign began with the celebration of the first New Year festival (*Akitu*) after his accession to the throne. Thus, the event referred to in this verse took place in Nebuchadnezzar’s accession year, rather than in the first official year of his reign. In contrast, the prophet

Jeremiah, who lived in Jerusalem, used the non-accession-year system and accordingly dated the first year of King Nebuchadnezzar to “the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah” (Jer. 25:1; cf. 46:2). The two methods of reckoning the years of King Jehoiakim’s reign given in the two passages can be presented as follows:

Daniel 1:1 (Babylon):

Accession year	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year
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Jeremiah 25:1 (Jerusalem):

1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year	4 th year
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“Jehoiakim king of Judah.” Jehoiakim’s father, King Josiah, was killed at Megiddo in the battle of Haran in 609 B.C. (2 Kings 23:34). Jehoiakim’s brother Jehoahaz became king in place of Josiah but was later dethroned by the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco, who then appointed Jehoiakim king over Judah. This king’s original name was Eliakim, but according to 2 Chronicles 36:2-4, Neco changed his name to Jehoiakim (cp. 2 Kings 23:34). Although in the year 605 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar had Jehoiakim bound in bronze shackles “to take him to Babylon” (2 Chron. 36:5-8), there is no evidence that he was actually taken there. In fact, 2 Kings 24:6 says that Jehoiakim died in the land of Judah. His son, Jehoiachin, was exiled to Babylon in the year 597 B.C. A published cuneiform text from Babylon speaks in detail of daily provisions of food given to Jehoiachin, king of Judah, and his sons.¹⁰

“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.” Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 B.C.) was the second ruler of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which controlled

the ancient Near East for almost a century. In this verse, as in Jeremiah 46:2, he is referred to as *melek*, “king,” through anachronism (prolepsis). During the battle of Carchemish he was only the crown prince. Anachronism is found elsewhere in the Bible, for example, in the place names Bethel (Gen. 12:8), Dan (Gen. 14:14), and possibly Rameses (Exod. 1:11).

The spelling “Nebuchadnezzar” is consistent in all thirty-two occurrences in the first five chapters of Daniel’s book. The spelling “Nebuchadrezzar,” on the other hand, is found in the book of Ezekiel and is closer to its original Babylonian form, *Nabû-kudurri-uşur*, which literally means “O Nabu, guard the offspring [the eldest son]!” or “O Nabu, protect the boundary stone!” The book of Jeremiah uses the two spellings interchangeably. Some scholars have suggested that the spelling “Nebuchadnezzar” may be the result of a deliberate corruption of this king’s name by an opposition group in Babylon.¹¹ The place name “Babylon” may refer to either the capital city of the empire or to the main province of the empire, also known as Babylonia.

“Besieged it.” Neither this verse nor any other biblical or extrabiblical text reports a battle for Jerusalem in the year 605 B.C. Hence, it is most likely that Jehoiakim surrendered to the Babylonians without a fight, which may explain why he was not exiled to Babylon.

1:2 “And the Lord gave.” The word *‘dônāy*, “Lord,” is used in this context rather than God’s covenantal name *YHWH*, “the LORD,” or the general title *‘lōhîm*, “God.” Most likely, the author used this name of God to show that God was in charge of the events that were taking place. The Lord is greater than a mere local deity. In addi-

tion to being the patron God of Israel, he is the Lord of all the earth. This statement also contains the first of the three occurrences of the verb *nātan*, “he gave” in this chapter. The other two occurrences are in verses 9 and 17. Its use in this verse shows that the Lord was in full control when the leaders of Jerusalem surrendered to the Babylonian army.

“Jehoiakim king of Judah.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:1.

“Into his hand.” In the Bible, the word *yād*, “hand,” is often used figuratively to describe a person’s power and authority. When combined with the passive form of the verb *nātan*, “to give,” it means a defeat in a military conflict (Dan. 11:11).

“Some of the articles from the temple of God.” After a battle, the winning army would carry the booty back to their land. The trophies included some sacred temple objects such as containers made of precious material and used in sacrificial rituals. It was not unusual to see idols carried into exile. The victors did this to show the superiority of their gods over those of the defeated nation (1 Sam. 5:2; 21:9; Dan. 11:7, 8; Joel 3:5). So, for example, the prophet Jeremiah declared, “Chemosh [a Moabite god] will go into exile, / together with his priests and officials” (Jer. 48:7), and he said the same would happen to Molech, an Ammonite god (Jer. 49:3).

According to 2 Chronicles 4:16, the sacred articles taken included “the pots, shovels, meat forks and all related articles.” Daniel 5:2 adds “the gold and silver goblets.” Ezra 1:11 puts the total number of articles taken by the Babylonians at fifty-four hundred. Daniel 1:2 specifies that only “some” of the sacred vessels were taken to Baby-

lon at this time. The rest were carried away in subsequent invasions. And Jeremiah 27:16-22 says that “Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take away” a considerable portion of the temple treasure. The articles that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem were the only surviving material link between the first and the second temple (Ezra 1). The narratives of the books of Daniel and Ezra imply that King Nebuchadnezzar treated the sacred vessels with respect.

“The land of Shinar.” The Greek translation known as the Septuagint renders this expression as “Babylon.” The word in the original Hebrew is *šin’ār*, “Shinar,” one of the traditional names of the city (and the province) of Babylon. The name is found in a few other places in the Old Testament (Gen. 10:10; 11:2; 14:1, 9; Isa. 11:11; and Zech. 6:10). In the past, some scholars attempted to relate Shinar to the land of Sumer, traditionally known as the cradle of the first civilization. It is best, however, to consider this term as describing the land of Babylonia.

In the context of this chapter, the word *Shinar* alludes to the story of the building of the city and the Tower of Babel. According to Genesis 11, this project ended in confusion. The author is using here an “intentional archaism” to remind the reader that God called Abraham, the father of the nation, to leave this place of confusion and go to the Promised Land (Gen. 12:1-3). In Daniel 1, Abraham’s descendants, the Israelite captives, are pictured as reversing their ancestor’s experience. As they traveled together with the temple articles to Babylon, they were actually backtracking Abraham’s journey of faith.

The regular trade route to Babylon taken by the captives went north of Jerusalem toward the

cities of Riblah and Hamath. It then followed the river Euphrates southeastward, a trip totaling more than one thousand kilometers.

“The temple of his god(s).” The original Hebrew says *bêt ʿlōhāw*, “the house of his god(s),” and it contrasts with the previously given expression “the temple of God.” The articles were deposited in Esagila, the temple in Babylon built in honor of the city’s patron god, Marduk, whose popular name was Bel, “lord” (Isa. 46:1) Since King Nebuchadnezzar worshiped this god (Dan. 4:8), he named his eldest son, the crown prince, Amel-Marduk, after him (Evil-Merodach in 2 Kings 25:27; Jer. 52:31). Ezra 1:7 and 5:14 specify that the vessels were “placed in the temple of his [the king’s] god(s)” and remained there during the whole period of the exile. It is significant that the expression “his god” is given twice in this verse, most likely for emphasis.

Expositon (1:1, 2)

1:1 As stated previously, the first two verses introduce not only this chapter but also the entire book of Daniel. They present the reader with some of the most dramatic events in Judah’s history. The exile to Babylon that began *in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim* signaled the end of the political independence of God’s chosen people and their nation’s Davidic dynasty. The opening words in the chapter give the historical, geographical, and theological setting of the whole book. “Historically, they set the stories in the time of the Babylonian exile. Geographically, they locate them in Babylon. Theologically, they assert that

the exile is not due to the inability of Judah’s God to defend Jerusalem, but rather is brought about by a deliberate act of her God.”¹²

The Israelites considered Jerusalem “beautiful in its loftiness, / the joy of the whole earth” (Ps. 48:2), while the Babylonians prized Babylon as “the jewel of kingdoms, / the glory of the Babylonians’ pride” (Isa. 13:19). The prophet Habakkuk had written (Hab. 1; 2) that God would use the Chaldeans from Babylon as an instrument to judge his covenant people. Now, *in the third year of Jehoiakim*, one such judgment had occurred, when this king of Judah surrendered to the Babylonians. Prior to this time, the king was a vassal of the Egyptian Pharaoh Neco, who had appointed him to rule over Judah. The very mention of King Jehoiakim’s name in this verse reminds the reader of someone who dared to cut into pieces and throw into a fire a scroll that contained God’s message to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 36:22-24). As for Nebuchadnezzar, he is by prolepsis called *king of Babylon* in this verse, although in reality he was still only the crown prince.

Babylon obtained control of Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom of Judah, more than a century after Assyria’s deportation of the citizens of the northern kingdom of Israel (722 B.C.). Before Babylon’s defeat of Egypt at Carchemish, the kingdom of Judah was in alliance with Egypt. The Babylonian

army laid siege to Jerusalem on three separate occasions, though only the last two invasions feature in extrabiblical history. During the first expedition, which followed the defeat of the Egyptian army (Jer. 46:1-12), King Jehoiakim surrendered to the Babylonians. At that time, Daniel and other members of Judah's nobility were led to exile in Babylon. During the second expedition, when Jehoiachin was king in Jerusalem, the Babylonians came and led the king, the priests, and the princes into captivity. Daniel's contemporary Ezekiel was in this group of exiles. Some ten years later, King Zedekiah and most of the remaining people were taken to Babylon. Only the poorest of the poor, referred to as *'am hā'āres*, "the people of the land," were left to care for Palestine.

The three major Babylonian invasions can be summarized as follows:

1. **605 B.C.** Members of the royal family and nobility, including Daniel and his friends, were led to Babylon (2 Kings 24:1, 2; 2 Chron. 36:5-7).
2. **597 B.C.** King Jehoiachin, princes, and priests, including the prophet Ezekiel, were taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10-14; 2 Chron. 36:10).
3. **586 B.C.** King Zedekiah and all the remaining people other than the poor were exiled to Babylon (2 Kings 25:1-21; 2 Chron. 36:17-20).

1:2 The author says that *the Lord gave* the king of Judah along with the temple articles into the hands of the Babylonians. To the faithful, this bold statement of trust says that God was still in control and was a source of strength and courage. After all, had not God, through the prophet Jeremiah, called King Nebuchadnezzar "my servant" (Jer. 27:6)? Had he not put a time limit to the period of the exile in Babylon (Jer. 29:10)? That same *Lord gave* Judah's king, the captives, and the holy objects into the enemy's hand. Because King Jehoiakim had surrendered to the Babylonians, he was not taken to Babylon but eventually died in the land of Judah (2 Kings 24:6). The destiny of the captives and the temple vessels was very different, since they were *carried off* to Babylonia.

As the neighboring nations saw Jerusalem's defeat and the temple vessels taken to Mesopotamia, they must have concluded that Yahweh, the God whose dwelling was in that city, was defeated by the god Marduk (Bel) and was now led captive to Babylonia. "Wars were fought in a god's name and plunder thus belonged to him. The temple articles are his booty,"¹³ symbolizing the captivity of conquered gods as well as people. Since the Jews did not have an image of their God, the Babylonians carried off their temple vessels instead.¹⁴ "To all appearances, the God of Jerusalem has been defeated by the gods of Babylon."¹⁵

In part, the book of Daniel was written to disprove this misconception. It emphatically affirms that the Lord could never become a captive of Marduk, the patron god of Babylon. Had not the previous attempts to hold the God of Israel captive to the pagan gods failed (cf. 1 Sam. 5)? King Nebuchadnezzar defeated Jerusalem and its people, but he was able to do so only because the Lord allowed it to happen. Through the prophet Isaiah, he had predicted long before, in the time of King Hezekiah, that these holy vessels would some day be carried to Babylon (Isa. 39:6). This same God was still in control of the events in the world. In fact, he had set the limits to the power of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

Mention of the temple articles in the beginning of Daniel's book also prepares the reader for the story of Belshazzar's feast (chap. 5), which is placed in the context of Babylon's fall.

The intentional use of the archaic name *Shinar* for Babylon takes the reader back to the story recorded in Genesis 11 in which the human race tries to defy God's plan by building an imposing city-tower intended to be the capital of the world. Told "not without humor,"¹⁶ the story reports that the project was in the end aborted, resulting in a new—taunting—name given to the place: Babel, or "confusion." In the following chapter of Genesis (chap. 12), God called Abram to leave this place of rebel-

lion and confusion to go to a land that he promised to give to Abram's descendants so that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). Abram's journey of faith started in Haran (Gen. 12:4) and continued as far as Bethel (Gen. 12:8), until he reached the Negev, or the south (Gen. 13:3).

Years later, Abraham's grandson Jacob backtracked his grandfather's journey of faith after he deceived his brother and was forced to flee his father's home. Jacob left Beersheba (Gen. 28:10), the main town in the Negev, traveled to Bethel (Gen. 28:19), and finally reached his destination, the city of Haran, located in Mesopotamia (Gen. 29:4). In a similar way, Abraham's descendants, by leaving the Promised Land and going into exile *to the land of Shinar*, were reversing their forefather's journey of faith. "Now with the covenant broken by the descendants of Abraham, there was—by means of a captivity—a movement back to Shinar."¹⁷ The use of the term "Israelites," or literally "the sons of Israel [Jacob]," in verse 3 is probably intentional, reminding the reader that these captives were actually the descendants of Jacob. As they were on their way to Mesopotamia, they were in reality following in the footsteps of their ancestor Jacob, who was the first family member to reverse Abraham's journey of faith to the Promised Land.

In the eyes of biblical prophets, the land of Babylonia was a center of idola-

try. The prophet Zechariah was told in a vision that *the land of Shinar* was the “dwelling of iniquity and wickedness” (Zech. 5:5-11). Daniel and his people went into captivity mainly because of the breaking of God’s covenant. Later, the Jewish rabbis told a story that attempted to answer the question of why Israel went into exile in Babylon rather than in all other lands. They said it was “because the home of Abraham was there. They parable [tell] a parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like a woman who disgraces her husband so that he sends her away. He sends her away to the home of her father.”¹⁸ Some commentators take note of the fact that after the Babylonian captivity, “idolatry never again became a major temptation to Israel.”¹⁹

Training (1:3-5)

After a brief reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem, the text focuses on some of the captives who were selected and brought to Babylon for special training.

³Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—⁴young men without any defect, good-looking, skillful in all branches of wisdom, having knowledge, quick to understand, and competent to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Chaldeans. ⁵The king assigned them a daily amount of choice food and

wine from the king’s table. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to enter the king’s service.

Notes

1:3 “Ashpenaz.” Although it has been suggested that this is an Old Persian term that means “innkeeper,” most ancient and modern translations have taken it as a personal name. The name is attested outside of the Bible.

“Chief of his court officials.” The word *sārîs*, “a court official,” is translated by some as “eunuch” because originally, it designated a castrated male person (Isa. 56:3). The Hebrew title *rab sārîs*, “chief eunuch,” designated the person in charge of the king’s harem (women’s quarters).²⁰ Later, the semantic range of this term was broadened to include any trusted official of the king (2 Kings 18:17; Jer. 39:3, 13). Joseph’s master Potiphar, for example, is called *sārîs* in Genesis 39:1. As “chief palace servant,”²¹ Ashpenaz was the person in charge of the education of the royal youth. He was directly responsible to the king himself for their successful training (v. 18). As for the four young Hebrews, it cannot be demonstrated that they were made literal eunuchs in Babylon because the physical perfection mentioned in verse 4 could not be applied to eunuchs.

“Some of the Israelites.” Literally, the text says *mibb^enê yiśrā’el*, “some of the sons of Israel.” The plural noun *b^enê*, “sons of,” functions here as a noun of relation and thus expresses the concept of membership in a group. Therefore, it is best translated idiomatically rather than literally²²—hence the rendering of the whole phrase *mibb^enê yiśrā’el* as “some of the Israelites.”

The name *Israel* reminds the reader of the patriarch Jacob, who spent part of his life in the land of Mesopotamia. Thus the use of this term “is presumably theological.”²³ In the book of Daniel, the name *Israel* appears only here and in chapter 9. See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2.

“The royal family and the nobility.” It is not very clear whether these two terms express a single concept, something like “the royal family, that is, the nobility,” with the conjunction functioning here as explicative, or if the two have separate meanings, as is reflected in this translation. The title *happart^cmîm*, “nobility,” comes from Persian and is used only here and in Esther 1:3 and 6:9. This detail gives additional information about the family backgrounds of Daniel and his friends. They may have been members of either the royal family of Davidic descent or of the noble families from Judah. Ancient traditions relate the four young men to either King Zedekiah (Josephus) or King Hezekiah (Jerome).²⁴ In either case, they would already have had some kind of diplomatic training back in their homeland.

1:4 “Young men.” The expression *y^elādîm*, “young men,” means that the youth were in their adolescent years (Gen. 37:30). It has been suggested that the four Hebrews were between fifteen and eighteen years old when they were taken to Babylon. A scholar has called this “a teachable age.”²⁵ Joseph was around eighteen when sold into slavery (Gen. 37:2). The same plural noun *y^elādîm*, “young men,” is used in 1 Kings 12:8 to describe the friends of King Rehoboam who grew up with him and were his counselors.

“Without any defect.” The expression *’ên-bāhem kol-mûm*, “without any blemish,” is used to describe Israelite priests who served in the

sanctuary (Lev. 21:17-23) as well as the sacrifices that were offered there (Lev. 22:18-25). The term *mûm*, “defect,” is also used in nonreligious contexts. Absalom was described as a person who had “no blemish in him” (2 Sam. 14:25), just as was the beloved in Song of Songs 4:7 and Job in Job 31:7.

“Skillful in all branches of wisdom.” The Hebrew noun *maškilîm*, “skillful, wise,” that is used here describes persons who are prudent and have insight. Both this noun (Dan. 12:3) and its root (9:22) figure prominently in the visionary part of the book that teaches the divine origin of wisdom and skill. “Importantly, these youngsters are also described as *maškilîm* (NRSV ‘versed’), a term that is used later in the book for those who are ‘wise’ enough to bring understanding to many, even at the price of their own suffering and death (Dan. 11:33, 35; 12:3, 10).”²⁶

“Having knowledge.” This original wording, *w^eyōd^e’ê da’at*, literally means “and those who know knowledge.” This combining of two forms of the same verbal root is a common phenomenon in Biblical Hebrew; it is called *cognate accusative* (paronomasia). Its purpose is to place emphasis on certain people, events, or actions.

“Competent to serve.” The literal meaning of the original phrase, *wa^ašer kōaḥ bāhem*, is “and those who have strength in them to stand [in the palace of the king].”

“He was to teach them.” The subject of this part of the verse is Ashpenaz.

“The language and literature of the Chaldeans.” The original text uses the name *kašdîm*, “Chaldeans,” for the Babylonians. The two geographical names, “the land of the Chaldeans” and “Babylonia,” are interchangeable in the Bible

(Jer. 24:5; 25:12; Ezek. 1:3). Today, most of scholars hold that the language of the Chaldeans was Akkadian,²⁷ while an older view was that they were “originally an Aramaic-speaking people.”²⁸ The cities of Sippar, Uruk, and Babylon were the three centers of Chaldean learning.

The language component of the curriculum most likely included Akkadian, which was a Semitic language. Akkadian was written in wedge-shaped characters on clay tablets that were either dried in the sun or baked in a kiln to harden them. The curriculum also included Sumerian, the traditional language of religion in Babylon. And most importantly, the Hebrews would learn Aramaic, the international language of commerce and diplomacy.

The wisdom component of the curriculum consisted of mathematics, astrology, and the interpretation of dreams. Divination and omen interpretation were two types of expertise that “required extensive education in the vast Babylonian omen literature.”²⁹ Royal servicemen included “scribes, advisors, sages, diplomats, provincial governors or attendants to members of the royal household.”³⁰

1:5 “Choice food.” The Hebrew word *pat-bag* means “rich food” or “choice food.” It comes from the Old Persian word *patibaga* and originally meant either “an offering” or a portion of the special food served at the royal palace. This term is consistently followed by the noun *hammelek*, “the king”—underlining the fact that this rich food was provided at the king’s expense, and he, therefore, was its provider. The word *pat-bag* occurs in the Bible only here and in Daniel 11:26. The general words for “food and drink” commonly used in the Bible are given in Daniel

1:10. Ancient texts have been discovered from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar that specifically mention the food rations given to Jehoiachin, the imprisoned king of Judah and his family. They confirm the historicity of the statements found in Jeremiah 52:34 and 2 Kings 25:30. See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:10.

“Educated for three years.” The verbal root *gd*, “to train” or “to educate,” is used in the simple active stem meaning “to become great.” In the intensive stem, this Hebrew word is used of raising children in Isaiah 1:2.³¹ This word figures prominently in the visionary part of the book, where it is often associated with pride (Dan. 8:8-11). Scholars argue, based on some extrabiblical evidence, that a three-year education was the standard practice in Persia and possibly in Neo-Babylon.³² Verses 18 and 19 add more information on the training, stating that at the end of this period, the young men were to be examined and that the final test included an interview with the king himself.

“To enter the king’s service.” Literally, the Hebrew says *ya’amdû lipnê hammelek*, “they were to stand before the king.” This was a technical term for royal service commonly used in the Bible (cf. 1 Kings 10:8; 12:8). It is also used in a religious sense in Deuteronomy 10:8 and 2 Chronicles 29:11.

Exposition (1:3-5)

1:3 Choice captives were selected for special training so they could serve at the court. Then, if they ever returned to their homeland, they would function as vital links between the palace and the provinces in the empire. Scholars differ

on the issue of whether this selection was made in Jerusalem or in Babylon. Undoubtedly, other youth in addition to the four young men who are introduced in verse 6 were selected from Judah as well as from the rest of the countries of Syria and Palestine, the region conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. Yet the focus of the story is on these four.

Ashpenaz, the king's *chief official*, was in charge of the selection and education of the young captives. Since he is called literally "the chief eunuch" in this verse, some have concluded that all the *young men* that are mentioned here, including Daniel and his friends, were also made "eunuchs" in the literal sense of the word. While it is true that the Hebrew title in a narrow sense can describe a castrated person ("I am only a dry tree," Isa. 56:3), in its broader semantic scope, it can stand for any trusted official of the king. Potiphar, for example, is called a *sārīs* in Genesis 39:1, even though he was married. Thus, one can say that "it is not necessary to draw the conclusion that the [Hebrew] youths were made eunuchs" in Babylon.³³

1:4 The *young men* were between fifteen and eighteen years old, an ideal teachable age. The text discloses several criteria for their selection: family background, physical appearance, intellectual capabilities combined with readiness to learn quickly, and palace manners (etiquette). Physically, they had to be *without any defect*. The Bible uses the

same language to describe the priests and the sacrifices in the sanctuary (Lev. 21:17-23; 22:18-25) but also young people like Absalom (2 Sam. 14:25) and the beloved (Song 4:7). "Babylonian diviners were also expected to be 'without blemish in body and limbs' when they approached the gods."³⁴

The Chaldeans were the master race in Neo-Babylon, and by profession, they were the priests of the god Marduk (cf. Isa. 46:1). Moreover, they were the guardians of Babylon's sacred traditions. Ethnically, they belonged to the Semitic family of peoples. Prior to gaining control over Babylonia, they had dwelt in territories south of the city of Babylon. In biblical passages, the names "Chaldeans" and "Babylonians" are often used interchangeably.

Before the four Hebrews were exiled, the revealed word of God was the center of their life and learning. But in Babylon, their studies were to focus on Mesopotamian literature and sciences. Some of the disciplines practiced in Babylon posed a serious problem to these young men. Practice of magic, for example, was clearly prohibited by Mosaic legislation (Deut.18:9-14) as well as by the biblical prophets (Isa. 8:19, 20). It has been rightly observed that it was not necessarily the knowledge but the practice of magic that these texts condemned.³⁵

1:5 In accordance with the ancient customs, the king himself provided

choice food and wine for those who resided or served at the palace (1 Kings 4:7). Doing so ensured that he would be given credit for their success. The text repeatedly states that the food and drink came *from the king's table*. Yet, the young Hebrews must have clearly understood that their God, the Creator of everything, rather than the king or his god, was the ultimate Provider of all things, whether food and drink or life and wisdom.

The Babylonians planned the educational process to last *three years*, after which the young men's progress would be evaluated through a final test, a part of which was an interview with King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1:18, 19). Upon successfully passing that examination, the young men would be qualified to "stand before the king," a term for royal service that had both secular (1 Kings 10:8; 12:8) and religious (2 Chron. 29:11) connotations.

Since there is sufficient evidence in the book to show that Daniel studied the scroll of the prophet Isaiah while in Babylon, one can conclude that the four Hebrews were well aware of a statement made by Isaiah that put the exile in the perspective of God's plan for their lives. After a Babylonian delegation visited Jerusalem, Isaiah told King Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will

be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isa. 39:5-7). Daniel and his friends must have read these words more than once, which would have helped them understand the place of God's providence in their lives and also in Judah's history. Their trust in God's leading "did not prevent them from being taken into exile, but it did give them the opportunity to witness for their faith during that exile."³⁶

Resistance (1:6-16)

The young men's resistance to the acculturation in Babylon began with their attitude toward the new names given them and their decision not to partake of the rich food and drink that the king generously provided for them.

⁶Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷The chief official gave them (new) names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

⁸But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal choice food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. ⁹Now God had given Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief official, ¹⁰but the chief official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and

drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? So you would endanger my life with the king."

¹¹Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²"Please test your servants for ten days: Let us be given only vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and deal with your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵At the end of the ten days it was obvious that they were healthier and better nourished than all of the young men who ate the royal choice food. ¹⁶So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

Notes

1:6 "Among these." See the Notes on Daniel 1:3.

"Some from Judah." Literally, the text reads *mibb^enê y^ehûdâ*, "from the sons of Judah." The Hebrew word for "sons" that is used here functions as a noun of relation. See the Notes on Daniel 1:3.

"Daniel." All four Hebrew names listed here are theophoric—i.e., they contain a form of a divine name in them. Daniel's name, *dānīyē'l*, means "God is my judge!" The word "judge" is frequently used in the Bible in a positive way, with a meaning of "deliverer" or "savior" (cf. Judges 2:16, 18; 3:9, 15; 6:14). Three other passages in the Bible mention people who bore the same name: a son of King David (1 Chron. 3:1), a man whose name is in the lists of returned

Judean captives (Ezra 8:2; Neh. 10:6), and a person spoken of in Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and 28:3. Scholars are divided as to whether this latter person is the Daniel who wrote the prophetic book. Some argue that this is the case,³⁷ while others relate the name to a fifteenth-century B.C. "righteous ruler" called *dānīl* from the ancient city of Ugarit (Phoenicia).³⁸ Since Daniel was Ezekiel's contemporary and was famous for his wisdom even during his lifetime (Dan. 5:11, 12), it is possible to identify him with the person mentioned in Ezekiel's book.

"Hananiah." This name, which also appears elsewhere in the Bible, means "Yahweh is gracious/merciful."

"Mishael." Although the meaning of this Hebrew name is not very clear, it is attested elsewhere in the Bible. It probably means something like "Who is what God is!"

"Azariah." This name is based on the common Hebrew verb *'āzar*, "to help," which occurs frequently in the Bible. It means "Yahweh has helped." It is also found in the name *Ebenezer*, "the stone of help."

1:7 "Chief." The Hebrew noun *šar*, "prince," is used here instead of *rab*, "chief," as in verse 3. The two terms are used synonymously, both describing the position that Ashpenaz held.

"Belteshazzar." In interpreting the meaning of this name, one is faced with two possibilities: (1) Belteshazzar is a corruption of a common Babylonian name *Bel-sharra-usur*, which expressed a prayer to the god Bel (Marduk) to protect the king.³⁹ A second possibility is that the name contains the title for Bel's consort, Belet (or Belit), with the meaning "May [the goddess] Belet protect the king!" The first possibility is pre-

ferred here because it is supported by Daniel 4:8, which says that Daniel was given his Babylonian name after the name of Nebuchadnezzar's god. Moreover, the Greek text of Daniel has this name spelled *Baltasar*, the same way King Belshazzar's name is spelled in Daniel 5.

Scholars have suggested that all the Babylonian names in the Hebrew Masoretic Text "may be deliberately corrupted forms of names extolling pagan gods."⁴⁰ (On the name *Nebuchadnezzar*, see the *Notes* on Daniel 1:1.) This suggestion has been made because no reconstruction of the four Babylonian names "is completely convincing."⁴¹ The question is then raised regarding the possible reason for the corruption of these new names. Rather than being accidental, the change must have been intentional—the author of the book corrupting the names to express his disagreement with the religious teaching behind them. His point, then, would be that neither Bel nor his consort Belet (or Belit) nor his son Nebo (or Nabu) could protect the life of the king. Only Yahweh, the God of Israel, could do that. It is interesting to notice that in writing his book, Daniel used his Hebrew name far more frequently than his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar.

"Shadrach, . . . Meshach." These two names are also theophoric; they are related to the name of the moon-god Aku. Scholars are still debating their meaning.

"Abednego." The Babylonian form of this name, which is frequently attested in the texts, is Ardi-Nabu. The first element of this name as given in Daniel corresponds to a common Semitic word, *'ebed*, "a servant." The second element is more problematic. It can be translated as "shiny one," but this is somewhat forced. More com-

mon in Babylon were names based on the name of the god Nebo (or Nabu). In that case, the meaning of the name *Abednego* would have been "the servant of Nebo." This is another case of the intentional distortion of a name with the purpose of giving an early indication that the young men in Babylon tried to resist the surrounding idolatrous influence.⁴²

1:8 "Resolved." The Hebrew verb *šim* means "to place" or "to appoint." It is used here in the same form as in verse 7. Thus, there is a wordplay on this verb in the two verses. Verse 7 begins by stating that the chief official *yāšem*—"set" or "determined"—the new names for the young men. Beginning with the same verb, verse 8 says that Daniel *yāšem*—"set" or "determined"—in his mind *not* to defile himself.

The original text has here the additional words *'al-libbô*, "upon his heart." In the Hebrew culture, the heart was the seat of the will and intelligence of a person, meaning much the same as the word *mind* in our culture.

"Defile himself." In the Bible, the Hebrew root *g'l*, "to defile," is associated with blood defilement (Isa. 59:3; 63:3; Lam. 4:14). Used mostly by biblical prophets, the word speaks of an act of becoming impure. In this verse, it is used twice—once in the beginning and once at the very end.

As to why the young men decided to abstain from the rich royal food, scholars have put forward three proposals: dietary, political, and religious. The dietary reason had to do with the Mosaic prohibition against eating unclean animals and eating clean animals whose blood was not drained when slaughtered. The political reason had to do with the culture of the Bible: Eating with a person meant making an alliance or a

covenant with that person. The religious reason may have been belief of the four Hebrews that no earthly king but only the God in heaven should be given credit for one's success in life. According to the teaching of the biblical wisdom books, knowledge and wisdom are gifts that the Creator God has given to the people who love him and obey his instructions. It has already been observed (see the *Notes* on Dan. 1:5) that the term **choice food** is consistently followed by the words "the king" to stress the fact that the king provided for the young men's needs while they were in training. In other words, the young men were made "the king's pensioners."⁴³

"The royal choice food and wine." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:5.

"The chief official." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:3 and 1:7. The Hebrew term *šar hassārîšîm*, "the chief official," that is used in this verse is the same as in 1:7.

1:9 "God has given." In the original, this verse begins with the verb *wayyittēn*, "and he [God] gave." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2. This is the second of the three occurrences of the verb *nātan*, "he gave," in this chapter, informing the reader that God was in full control of the events in Daniel's life. Thus, the Hebrew text says that God gave Daniel favor and sympathy in the sight of the royal official, making him the object of mercy and grace before Ashpenaz.

"Favor and compassion." The combination of these two words that also mean "grace and compassion" is common in biblical prophets (Jer. 16:5; Hos. 2:19; Zech. 7:9). The first word, *hesed*, "grace," is difficult to translate by a single English term because it is so rich in meaning. Often rendered as "loving kindness" or "steadfast love," in

the Old Testament it is one of the key words in the covenant between God and Israel. Interestingly, this word is also used in the story of Joseph to show that he enjoyed the "grace" of the prison guard because God was with him (Gen. 39:21). It is also used of God's leading of the people of Israel from Egypt to Canaan (Exod. 15:13). The second word, *rahmîm*, "compassion," is related to the Hebrew word for "womb," considered in Bible times to be the seat of a person's deep emotion. Hence some render it as "tender love."

"The chief official." The original Hebrew says *šar hassārîšîm*, "the chief official." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:3 and 1:7.

1:10 "The chief official." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:9.

"I am afraid." The verbal root *yr'*, "to fear, to respect," is used here as a participle. It is common in the Bible. It does not express an action but a state of being, belonging to the group of *stative* verbs.

"My lord." The title *ʾdônāy*, "my lord," is based on the same root and is very similar in form to the word "the Lord" in 1:2. The subject in this verse, however, is clearly the king.

"Food and drink." In contrast to the previous terms for "choice food" and "wine" (Dan. 1:5, 8), the two words used here were general words commonly used in Bible times for food and drink.

"Why should he see?" It has been suggested that this phrase in Hebrew has the force of an emphatic denial, saying something like "he must not indeed see" (cf. Gen. 47:15, 19; 2 Chron. 32:4; Ezra 7:23).⁴⁴

"Looking worse." Literally, the original says "your face looking sad," culturally assuming that

a person's face betrays the innermost feelings.

"Young men." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:4.

1:11 "The guard." The young Daniel enjoyed the confidence of a lower-ranking official, whose title was *hammelšar*, "the keeper" or "the guard." Just as Ashpenaz, the chief official, had been "appointed" by the king (Dan. 1:10), this man was "appointed" by the chief official and was his subordinate. He agreed to take a risk in order to do the young men a favor. Some have suggested that in the process, this man may have profited from the situation. "With the connivance of the chief eunuch he evidently substituted his own meals for the royal delicacies and benefited from the exchange, a point which ensured the secret would be kept."⁴⁵

"Over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah." The young men's Hebrew names are preferred over the Babylonian names because the context here speaks of their attempts to resist the influences that went against their principles.

1:12 "Your servants." This expression, based on the root *'bd*, "to serve," was a standard form of a person's act of willing submission to a superior human (Gen. 32:4; 50:18) or a divine being (Ezra 5:11; Luke 1:38). It is commonly attested in the Bible and contrasted with the word *'dônāy*, "my lord/master." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:10.

"Ten days." The word "ten" is used here as a rounded-off number for the duration of a short test. It should be taken as a literal not a symbolic number because of the narrative genre in the story. For a similar use of "ten days of testing," see Revelation 2:10. Also, for the use of the number ten as a standard round number, see Genesis 24:55; 31:7; Numbers 14:22; Nehemiah 4:12; Job 19:3; Daniel 7:7; and Zechariah 8:23.

"Vegetables . . . water." A more precise meaning of the Hebrew term for *hazzērō'im*, "the vegetables," is "seeds," or better, "grains" or "cereals." It possibly includes seed-bearing plants or the plant food that grows from seeds. Its mention here with plain water takes the reader back to the Genesis Creation story, in which God prescribed the ideal human diet before the Fall: fruit, seeds, and water (Gen. 1:29). This reveals an old type of wisdom that considers a "close connection between plain living and high thinking."⁴⁶ In the Bible, meat and wine were foods of festivity (Isa. 22:13) and a symbol of the power of the wealthy. Although some scholars have in the past attributed the young men's choice of food to asceticism, this is improbable because Daniel 10:3 implies that at least in Daniel's case, "the diet of vegetables was a temporary regimen."⁴⁷

1:13 "The young men." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:4.

"The royal food." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:5. For the use of a more general term for food, see the *Notes* on Daniel 1:10.

"Your servants." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:12.

1:14 "Ten days." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:12.

1:15 "Better nourished." Literally, the original text says "fatter in flesh." This expression was an idiom in Bible times that pictured a healthy and good-looking person as stout and plump. At this point of the story, there may be a note of irony based on a possible wordplay. Even though, during the period of testing, the young men were on a plain diet, at the end of this period, their *bāsār*, "flesh," turned out to be "fatter" than that of the rest of the youth, who ate the rich

royal food based on *bāsār*, “animal flesh” (cf. Dan. 10:3).

1:16 “The guard.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:11.

“Choice food.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:5.

“Vegetables.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:12.

Exposition (1:6-16)

1:6 In the Bible, a person’s name often commemorated an important event that took place either at birth or at a turning point in the person’s life. At the same time, a name might have simply expressed a wish or a condensed prayer to God from the child’s parents. The Hebrew names given to the four young men at their births all contain divine names: *El*, “God,” in the case of *Daniel* and *Misrael*, and *Yah[weh]*, “the LORD,” in the names of *Hananiah* and *Azariah*. For this reason, they are called theophoric.

No information is given about the families from which the four Hebrew youth came. As scholars have observed, “Of our protagonist Daniel no ancestry is noted,”⁴⁸ and “contrary to the usual Hebrew custom, no patronymics are given.”⁴⁹ In the story of Moses’ birth, this great leader of God’s people is introduced in a similar way in order not to distract attention from God, the true Savior of his people (Exod. 2).

It has been suggested that the Hebrew names “connote devout parents. This perhaps explains why these, in contrast to the other young men, are found

true to God; they had godly homes in their earlier years.”⁵⁰ Yet, the fact that all four names are also attested in the book of Nehemiah (8:4; 10:2, 6, 23) shows that these names were common among the Jews around the time of the exile. Daniel’s name means “God is my judge,” and it is given first in the text because he was the leader of the group. The name *Hananiah* means “the LORD is merciful,” while *Azariah* means “the LORD has helped.” In contrast to these three, the meaning of the name *Misrael* is not very clear unless it is understood as a variation of Michael (“Who is like God!”). Mention of Daniel’s friends at this early point in the book prepares the reader for the story of the fiery furnace in chapter 3.

1:7 From the structure of this chapter suggested above, one can see that the testing of the young men’s faith and their resistance to a pagan culture forms the longest part of the chapter. Their resistance begins with the giving of the Babylonian names. Some scholars have suggested that these new names were given in addition to, not in lieu of, the Hebrew names. Others have argued that “the renaming of the foreigners was a matter of convenience rather than of ideology.”⁵¹ This is to say that “the Babylonians simply wanted to give these captives names which would be easy to recognize by the Babylonians with whom they would be working.”⁵² This is possible in the case of Esther, whose He-

brew name was Hadassah (Hebrew for “Myrtle,” Esther 2:7), and of Mordecai (cf. Marduk?).⁵³ Joseph in Egypt was given a new name (Gen. 41:45). Yet, in that same story, the mention of Joseph’s Egyptian name serves as a good illustration of the pressure to acculturate in a foreign country.

In the context of biblical culture, the act of naming a person or changing the person’s name, is, when imposed by a master, meant “to assert one’s authority over him.”⁵⁴ Mention of a person’s name change evokes the experience of the patriarch Jacob (Gen. 32:28), whose name Israel is mentioned in Daniel 1:3. In fact, name changing was “a prominent sign of dependent status, thus Abram to Abraham in covenant with God (Gen 17:5); Jehoiakim [originally called Eliakim] is renamed by Pharaoh (2 Kings 23:34); and Zedekiah [originally called Mattaniah] is renamed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:17).”⁵⁵ And the acceptance of a foreign name may have implied the recipient’s readiness to serve foreign masters and gods rather than the God of Israel. Elsewhere in the Bible, two Judeans who lived at the time of the return from exile bore Babylonian names: Zerubbabel and Sheshbazzar (Ezra 2:2; 5:16).

It is important to note that the Babylonian names given to the young men are also theophoric. Unlike the Hebrew names, which spoke of the true God, the Babylonian names contain names of

Babylon’s pagan gods. The giving of these *new names* implied a new allegiance, and that was what the young men tried to resist. This was most probably the main reason why “the foreign names of the four youths sound utterly nonsensical in Hebrew.”⁵⁶ A number of scholars believe that the young men’s Babylonian names were intentionally corrupted. In fact, one scholar argues that “all the Babylonian names in MT [the Hebrew Masoretic Text] may be deliberately corrupted forms of names extolling pagan gods,”⁵⁷ and this may apply even to the spelling of the name of King Nebuchadnezzar. The author is most likely showing how in the names of the young men, “the Babylonian gods lose their own identity. Through such a linguistic sleight of hand the author of the book of Daniel, as well as the bearers of the names themselves, express resistance to what was happening.”⁵⁸

Daniel’s new name as given by Ashpenaz was most likely Belshazzar—the same name as the later king, and a name that was common in Babylon (chap. 5). In the case of Daniel, however, this new name was intentionally altered to *Belteshazzar*, because the name *Belshazzar* was a prayer to the god Bel to protect the king’s life. Needless to say, Daniel and his friends believed it was Yahweh and not the god Bel who could protect the life of the king. In a similar way, the name *Abednego* makes no (religious) sense because of its faulty spelling. The

original name as given by Ashpenaz was probably *Abednebo* meaning “the servant of the god Nebo (or Nabu),” but most likely it was purposely altered to *Abednego* because Azariah was still the servant of the God of Israel. These are some of the examples of “deliberate corruption [in order] to heighten the gross paganism of foreign theophoric names which replaced the Israelite theophoric ones.”⁵⁹ The corrupted forms of the new Babylonian names are all “grotesque, silly names, which make fun of the gods whom they are supposed to honor.”⁶⁰

1:8 The young men carry their resistance to the influence of Babylonian religion and culture even further through their decision not to eat *the choice food* served to royalty and to the others who ate at *the king's table*. A wordplay is found in verses 7 and 8, both of which begin with the same word in Hebrew. Just as Ashpenaz, the chief official of the king, “determined” the new names for the young men, so, in the same way, Daniel “determined” in his heart *not to defile himself by the royal choice food*. The command to eat the food from the royal table was a test of faith similar to Joseph's test of character in Potiphar's house (Gen. 39).

Commentators have advanced several suggestions as to why Daniel and his three Hebrew friends considered eating the royal food served in the palace in Babylon defiling. These suggestions may be considered complementary to each

other rather than mutually exclusive because the Hebrew concept of life and spirituality was wholistic rather than analytical. We may group the suggested reasons in the following three categories:

1. **Dietary:** Certain types of meat proscribed by the Bible, such as pork (Lev. 11; Deut. 14), were served to the officials in Babylon. Babylonian soldiers regularly ate pork and horse meat while in service for the king.⁶¹ And the original Hebrew word that is translated in this verse as *defile* is associated with blood defilement in the Bible (Isa. 59:3; 63:3; Lam. 4:14). The eating of any kind of animal, clean or unclean, that hadn't been slaughtered in such a way as to drain its blood would defile a Hebrew person (Lev. 17:10-14). The prohibition, “You must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (Gen. 9:4), is very old and categorically echoed many times in the Pentateuch. In Babylon, the blood was not drained when an animal was slaughtered for consumption, so defilement by blood was virtually unavoidable. The presence on the menu of pork together with meat defiled by blood posed a serious problem for the Hebrew young men.

As for the wine that is mentioned in this verse, in Bible times, only the Nazirites practiced total abstinence from grape juice, both fermented and nonfermented (Num. 6:3). There are several passages, found mostly in the wisdom

books, that speak of drinking in very negative terms: For example, “wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; / whoever is led astray by them is not wise” (Prov. 20:1). The story of the Recabites from Jeremiah 35 may also shed some light on Daniel’s refusal to drink the wine from the king’s table.

2. **Political:** In the ancient world, eating at the same table with someone meant establishing a strong bond with that person. A number of biblical examples illustrate the widely held concept that to share table fellowship with a person meant one’s readiness to make a covenant with that person or a pledge of such complete loyalty as to become one with that person (Exod. 34:15; Dan. 11:26; Matt. 26:26-28; Luke 15:1, 2; 1 Cor. 8:7; 10:14-22; Rev. 3:20). The two passages quoted below illustrate this point:

Laban answered Jacob, “. . . Come now, let’s make a *covenant*, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us.” So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. He said to his relatives, “Gather some stones.” So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they *ate* there by the heap (Gen. 31:43-46; emphasis supplied).

Then he [Moses] took the Book of the *Covenant* and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.”

Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they *ate and drank*. (Exod. 24:7-11; emphasis supplied).

At least two prophetic passages, Ezekiel 4:13 and Hosea 9:3, 4, suggest that all the food eaten in Assyria and Babylon was viewed as “defiled” and therefore “unclean,” e.g.,

Threshing floors and winepresses
will not feed the people;
the new wine will fail them.
They will not remain in the Lord’s
land;
Ephraim will return to Egypt
and eat unclean food in Assyria
(Hosea 9:2-4).

The following words from Amos 7:17 imply that even living in a pagan country was defiling: “Your land will be measured and divided up, / and you yourself will die in an unclean country” (margin).

3. **Religious:** In many places in the ancient world, food and drink were sacrificed to the gods before the meal. A secular slaughtering of animals for consumption was rare.⁶² Meat was usually served from animals offered in a sacrifice to a god. In the Bible, the very act of eating had strong religious connotations—something well illustrated by the fact that every meal was preceded by a thanksgiving prayer. The following verse contains an invitation from Jesus Christ to become one with him through the act of partaking together in common meal: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and *eat* with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20; emphasis supplied).

Since the ancient city of Babylon was an important religious center, the food and drink available there would have come from the temple, where we may assume that some kind of pagan sacrificial ritual was carried out before and even after each meal. This concept is also implied in the Hebrew word used in this chapter to describe *the choice food* served at the king’s table.

Although some students of Daniel would say that the problem of eating foods sacrificed to idols is a New Testament issue, a careful reading of the biblical prophets shows that it was a concern in Old Testament times as well. Leviticus 11:44 shows a strong link between food and holiness: “I am the LORD

your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground.” Daniel 1 “does not, in fact, give any explicit reason for Daniel’s rejection of the delicacies. What the narrative does say clearly and repeatedly, though, is that the delicacies and wine are from the king (vv. 5, 8, 13, 15, 16).”⁶³ In this case, to eat from the king’s table meant “a pledge of loyalty to the king instead of remaining loyal to and dependent on God.”⁶⁴

The young Hebrews regarded the supreme God as the source of wisdom. Their concept of life as well as their success in life depended on God the Creator and the Giver of all things. “If they prosper, then to whom should they attribute their development and success?”⁶⁵ For that reason, they chose to rely on him rather than on either the king’s generosity or on the ability of a pagan idol to impart wisdom. Their choice of a diet consisting of *vegetables*—literally, “seeds”—and *water* (Gen. 1:29) showed their pledge of loyalty to the Creator and Sustainer, the One who, in the case of their successful training, should receive full credit and praise. Several passages from biblical wisdom books claim that the Creator God is the source of true wisdom (Ps. 104:24; Prov. 8:22-27; Jer. 10:10-12).⁶⁶

The example of the young men is “a symbolic denial of the king’s implicit

claim to be sole provider.”⁶⁷ At the end of the story, “the king could take pride in the products of his largess. Only the Judean youths knew the truth.”⁶⁸ Thus, at this point in the story, the stage is set for the God of the Hebrews to triumph over the Babylonian pantheon. The young men triumphed thanks to God’s providence and not to the king’s. In fact, as the last verse of the chapter shows, Daniel himself outlasted Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian successors.

It is important to note that the young men’s attitude toward *the royal choice food* may have been exceptional among the Judean captives. Second Kings 25:29 says that “for the rest of his life,” King Jehoiachin “ate regularly at the king’s table.” In contrast with him and other members of Judah’s nobility, Daniel and his friends considered this issue to be a test of their faith. Daniel’s stay in Babylon was characterized by a consistent prayer life. The four Hebrews took seriously the word from Deuteronomy 8:3 that says, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”⁶⁹ Although the food was fit for a king, “in Daniel’s judgment it was not fit for a servant of the King of kings.”⁷⁰

1:9, 10 According to the stories in his book, Daniel’s attitude in Babylon was consistently positive and circumspect. His life was characterized by active involvement combined with distinctiveness. First of all, he enjoyed the

trust and favor of his superior, much as did Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 39:4, 21) and Ezra (Ezra 7:28) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:8) in Persia. While he did not adopt a confrontational approach, neither was he ready to assimilate the new culture and religion. He demonstrated a definite sense of direction in life but was extremely prudent. When Ashpenaz expressed his feelings of fear, Daniel did not exert any pressure on him. He believed that his Lord was more powerful than the lord of the chief official.

Yet, the narrator makes clear that Daniel’s circumspect behavior was not what gained him the favors of his superiors. Rather, it was God who granted him *favor and compassion in the sight of the king’s chief official*. In his prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, King Solomon asked God for forgiveness of Israel’s future sins and also to “cause their conquerors to show them mercy” (1 Kings 8:50). That is what God did in this case because “He caused them [Israel] to be pitied by all who held them captive” (Ps. 106:46). “The God of judgment is paradoxically, also the God of grace.”⁷¹

1:11-14 Daniel now turns to a lower ranking official, one who is called *the guard*, who had been *appointed* by Ashpenaz. He simply suggests, “*Please test your servants for ten days*” (1:12). It is amazing to see again in the text the absence of any sort of pressure in Daniel’s dealing with the royal officer. The

ten-day period of testing Daniel proposed was short enough not to arouse suspicion yet long enough to reveal the effects of the new diet. Daniel continued, *“Then compare our appearance . . . and deal with your servants in accordance with what you see”* (Dan. 1:13). He could say this because he considered his God to be in full control of the events in his life.

The diet Daniel requested consisted of plant food that grows from seeds. Fruits, cereals, and water form the ideal diet given by the Creator God: “Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food’ ” (Gen. 1:29). This simple diet on which Daniel and his friends subsisted “during their entire course of training”⁷² was a form of half-fast. We do know that as far as Daniel is concerned, “the diet of vegetables was a temporary regimen.”⁷³ After the three years of training, during which time the food was not served from the king’s table, he reverted back to regular food—except for periods during which, he says, “‘I ate no choice food; no meat or wine entered my mouth’ ” (Dan. 10:3).

1:15, 16 Instead of deteriorating, the young men’s physical and intellectual condition improved. They turned out to be “fatter in flesh”—that is, *healthier and better* looking—than the rest of the young men at the palace. In this section, a foretaste of the young men’s complete

triumph in Babylon is given: They are described as *healthier and better nourished than all of the young men who ate the royal food* (Dan. 1:15).

Triumph (1:17-21)

Daniel’s God turned the defeat of his people into a triumph of the faithful remnant in Babylon. Thus he demonstrated that he is the only true source of wisdom and power.

¹⁷To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

¹⁸At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹The king talked with them, and none was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. ²⁰In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times superior to all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

²¹And Daniel remained (there) until the first year of King Cyrus.

Notes

1:17 “Young men.” See the Notes on Daniel 1:4.

“God gave.” This is the third and the last occurrence of this form of the verb *nātan*, “he gave,” in this chapter. (It is also used in vv. 2 and 9.) Here, again, it points to God’s full control over the events described in the story, and it stands in contrast to the official’s act of *nātan*,

“giving,” the food and drink to the young men (vv. 12 and 16).

“Knowledge, understanding . . . and learning.” Three different Hebrew words for knowledge and wisdom are used here synonymously.

“Literature.” The Hebrew word *seper*, “scroll” or “a writing,” is also used in verse 4 of this chapter. That verse says that the young men were to learn “the language and literature of the Babylonians.”

“Visions and dreams.” The word *ḥāzôn*, “vision,” occurs more than thirty times in Daniel’s book. Sometimes it is distinguished from the word *ḥlôm*, “dream,” since during a vision the receptor is fully awake, unlike in a dream, during which he is in a state of sleep. In this case, however, the two terms are used interchangeably. While the first noun is given in the singular in this verse, the second is in the plural.

In the ancient world, dreams were believed to be a customary way in which the divine world communicated with humans. In Babylon particularly, where wisdom was highly valued, dreams and their interpretations were considered to be a main source of knowledge, and they were therefore highly prized. The statement that Daniel **could understand visions and dreams of all kinds** foreshadows his active role in the story of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream found in chapter 2.

1:18 “At the end of the time.” The original Hebrew says *ûlmiqṣāt hayyāmîm*, “and at the end of the days,” a statement that is very similar to the one that opens verse 15 (“at the end of the ten days”), even though a different time period is meant here—the three years of training of verse 5.

“The chief official.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:3 and 1:7.

1:19 “The king talked with them.” The king himself presided over the final examination of the young trainees. In this way he could personally witness the extraordinary wisdom demonstrated by the four Hebrews. This observation prepares the way for the story in chapter 2, in which the king personally addresses his wise men, demanding that they answer his question.

“None was found.” The original Hebrew says *wlô’ nimṣā’ mikkullām*, “and none was found among them all,” informing the reader that this contest involved numerous participants who came from various lands conquered by the Babylonians that were now part of the empire (v. 20). See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:3 and 1:6.

“Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.” Once again (as in v. 11), the young men’s Hebrew names are preferred over the Babylonian. This is to teach that God, whose name was exalted by the young men’s names, should be given full credit for their outstanding success.

“They entered the king’s service.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:5. This statement harmonizes with the king’s plan outlined in verse 5 of this chapter: “They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to enter the king’s service.”

1:20 “Wisdom and understanding.” The two nouns are found in a construct relationship in the original Hebrew; hence the expression *ḥokmat bînâ* can be rendered as “wisdom of discernment.”

“The king consulted them.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:19.

“Ten times.” The Hebrew word *yādôt*, “times,” is in the plural. It literally means “hands.” It is also used in Genesis 43:34, which says, “Ben-

jamin's portion [on the table] was five times ["five hands"] as much as anyone else's." This rounding off of the number has possible hyperbolic overtones, meaning "infinitely better" (Gen. 31:41; Num. 14:22; Neh. 4:12). From the literary point of view, the use of the number ten here balances its previous mention in the story. In verse 12, the same number designated the number of days during which the impact of the young men's plain diet was tested. The statement here certainly "evokes wonder"⁷⁴ on behalf of the Babylonians.

"Magicians." The word *haḥartummîm*, "magicians," is used in the Bible to describe the magicians in Egypt (Gen. 41:8, 24; Exod. 7:11). The four young men whose source of wisdom was God are contrasted with the rest of the Babylonian wisdom elite, who relied on the practices of magic and enchanting to acquire knowledge.

1:21 "The first year of King Cyrus." The name *Cyrus* (Hebrew *kôrêš*, Elamite *kuraš*, Old Persian *kuruš*, Greek *Kyros*) may have been a throne name or a dynastic royal title. King Cyrus II, or Cyrus the Great, was the founder of the Medo-Persian Empire. Following a rather complicated situation surrounding the fall of the Babylonian Empire, Cyrus's official title in Babylon was "Ruler of the Lands." In this text, the first year of Cyrus means 539 B.C., the year during which Babylon fell into the hands of the Medo-Persians. That same year marked the end of the Babylonian exile (2 Chron. 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1-4). It is probable that after the fall of Babylon, Daniel moved his residence to the Persian city of Susa and eventually died and was buried there.⁷⁵ According to an old thesis, chapter 1 of Daniel was not written until the first year of Cyrus.⁷⁶ On the

other hand, it is possible that this dateline was added during the early days of the Medo-Persian Empire.

Exposition (1:17-21)

1:17 The last part of the chapter presents the results of the young men's three-year study in Babylon and of their trust in God. This verse says that God gave them outstanding success. The same God who had "given" Jerusalem and its king into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (v. 2) and the same God who had previously "given" favor and sympathy to Daniel before the king's official (v. 9) is the One who *gave knowledge and understanding* to the young Hebrews. This shows how "even in the land of Shinar, the infamous place of wickedness, God is at work and even providing."⁷⁷ Among the Babylonians, wisdom was the ultimate goal to achieve, whether in one's life or in one's academic career. Marduk, or Bel, the patron god of the city of Babylon, was the god of wisdom. But the Hebrew young men believed that only the Creator God could dispense wisdom. The One who is the source of virtues such as wisdom is of prime importance, not the virtues themselves. In the same way, learning is not an end in itself; it increases a person's knowledge of God and his work. Here one recalls a famous line by the Jewish writer Abraham Joshua Heschel: "The Greeks learned in order to understand, the Hebrews learned in order to revere!"

Among the four Hebrews, Daniel excelled because God gave him the ability to interpret *visions and dreams of all kinds*. If wisdom was a highly priced virtue in Babylon, the ability to explain dreams was supreme there. In fact, the topic of *visions and dreams* was the favorite field of study among the Babylonians. In the Bible, on the other hand, God speaks through dreams (Gen. 28:10-22; 1 Kings 3:5) but not through the other forms of divination that the Babylonians practiced. “Dream interpretation is one mode of divine revelation understood by Babylonians and accepted by pious Israelites.”⁷⁸ Divine wisdom meets people where they are.⁷⁹ It was not a mere coincidence that “of all the various divinatory ‘techniques’ used in the ANE [Ancient Near East], only dreams and dream interpretations find an acceptable place within orthodox Hebrew religion.”⁸⁰

The statement about Daniel given here prepares the reader for the rest of the stories in the book, in which Daniel exhibits this ability to interpret dreams on more than one occasion. It is best to credit his ability to interpret dreams to his life of prayer and to the revelations given to him by God. This prepared him for the role that he assumed later as described in the story in chapter 2. It has been correctly observed that “with the possible exceptions of Moses (Acts 7:22) and Solomon, Daniel was the most learned man in the Old Testament.”⁸¹

1:18-20 The high point of the final examination, following the three years of training, was an interview with the king himself, whose questions included riddles and difficult problems. The monarch was personally present to witness the extraordinary knowledge of the young men. Their Hebrew names are given here rather than their Babylonian names in order to highlight the triumph of their God. Azariah’s name is mentioned last, reminding the reader that “Yahweh has helped” all four of them to accomplish this outstanding success. They had excelled in fields of knowledge that were characteristically Gentile, not Jewish.

Through a somewhat hyperbolic expression, *ten times superior*, the author draws a sharp line between those who trusted Yahweh and his teaching and the others whose success in Babylon was credited to helpless idols. In fact, “Daniel and his associates are compared not only with the other young men who received the same training as they did (verse 19) but also with professional advisors to the king who were already at work in Babylonia.”⁸² The successful passing of the examination gave the young men the privilege of serving in the royal palace and becoming members of the group of Babylonian wise men. The text is not explicit on whether the four Hebrews openly talked about their God during the questioning. But the insistence of

the book's author on Yahweh's powerful presence in the lives of these young men as well as their presence at the palace all pave the way for their future witnessing in Babylon and the confrontations that this activity unavoidably entails.

1:21 The closing verse in this chapter says that *Daniel remained* in the royal palace in Babylon *until the first year of King Cyrus*. Two fragmentary texts may throw light on Daniel's high position in Babylon subsequent to King Nebuchadnezzar's reign. One tablet bearing a cuneiform text dates to the second year of Amel-Marduk, while the other one dates to the accession year of Neriglissar. Both of these tablets mention a certain Belshazzar who occupied the position of the chief officer of the king in Babylon. It is possible that this person was none other than Daniel.⁸³

It is almost certain that after the Medo-Persian conquest of Babylon, Daniel, whose age at this time was between eighty-five and ninety, moved eastward and settled in a Persian city, in all likelihood Susa (or Shushan). Josephus says that Daniel finished his career in Susa,⁸⁴ and ancient traditions claim that the prophet died and was buried in this city. That is why the text specifies that he stayed in the palace in Babylon *until the first year of King Cyrus*. The presence of many Persian loanwords in the book leads to the conclusion that Daniel's book was either written or at

least edited in the early period of the Medo-Persian Empire.

In addition to this fact, a number of scholars have seen, and rightly so, a deeper meaning in this statement—one that sets the perspective for all that follows in the book. This verse implies that the exile to Babylon cannot go on forever. Daniel lives on to see Babylon's fall. In fact, he outlasts his conquerors. The triumph of the Hebrews at the beginning of the exile was an important sign to remind their people of the prophetic announcements that said Babylon's end would usher in the time of their return home. For the faithful remnant, this would be a new exodus. Just as God's triumph over the gods of Egypt centuries earlier was a sure sign that Israel's slavery had come to an end (Exod. 12:12), so his triumph in the case of the four faithful youths indicated that his people's exile in Babylon would someday end too.

So, this chapter opens with the mention of a defeat of a Judean ruler by a triumphant Babylonian king, and closes with an allusion to the future triumph of someone who was "anointed" by God to be his shepherd and to say to Babylon's "watery deep, 'Be dry!'" and "of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundation be laid'" (Isa. 44:26-28). In this way, the end of chapter 1 anticipates the fulfillment of the words spoken through Moses that describe a future time when "the LORD

your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers” (Deut. 30:3-5).

Summary of the Teaching

1. *God is in control.* From the beginning to the end of this chapter, the reader can clearly see that God is in charge of the events in life—even when pagan Babylon conquered the holy land of Judah. It has already been observed that three times in the story, in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, the key expression “God gave” is found in the original text:

1. The Lord *gave* Jehoiakim and the holy articles to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1:2).
2. God *gave* favor and sympathy to Daniel before the chief official (Dan. 1:9).
3. God *gave* knowledge and understanding to the four young men (Dan. 1:17).

The expression “God gave” has been called “the gospel of this chapter”⁸⁵ and

“a key perspective in the book of Daniel.”⁸⁶ At this point in the book, “Daniel offers no answer to the question ‘Why are we here in exile?’”⁸⁷ He does that later, in chapter 9. Instead of providing here an intellectual answer to this question, he focuses on the practical aspect of the life in exile. In spite of the appearances that may point to the contrary, Yahweh is in full control over the events in history and over the day-to-day activities of the faithful believers. “Only the eye of faith could perceive God at work here.”⁸⁸ But the truth that God is in full control does not leave human beings in a passive role—in a sort of iron-firm deterministic or fatalistic position. “Divine aid (v 9) does not mean there is no need for the exercise of human responsibility and initiative (v 11); rather it opens the way to it.”⁸⁹ “Great favors presuppose great faithfulness.”⁹⁰

Living in a cross-cultural setting, Daniel and his friends learned what it means to be torn apart by the tension between the attitudes of assimilation and separatism, of being *in* the world but not of it (John 17:11-16). In spite of all they faced, they were brave enough to stand for their principles. It has been observed that “the relationship between faith and culture is a question which runs through the O[ld] T[estament].”⁹¹ In this story, we see Daniel actively involved and working with God in the context of the divine plan. He risked his own head when he decided not to eat

from the king's table. Fidelity comes before survival.⁹² "For Joseph in Egypt, resistance to the temptation of his master's wife was a matter of principle, a 'statement' of who he was. For Daniel, the resistance to the temptation of the king's pleasurable delicacies and wine was a 'statement' of who he was."⁹³ Both men "serve as models for godly behavior to God's people who live in a foreign culture."⁹⁴

The following list shows a number of parallels between the lives, tests, and triumphs of Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon:

- Both were led to foreign lands (Egypt, Babylon).
- Both were handsome (Gen. 39:6; Dan. 1:4).
- The faith of both was tested (Gen. 39:7-12; Dan. 1:14-16).
- God showed favor to both before their overseers (Gen. 39:21; Dan. 1:9).
- Both were given foreign names (Gen. 41:45; Dan. 1:7).
- Both could interpret dreams (Gen. 41:15; Dan. 1:17).
- Both outperformed all the wise men (Gen. 41:38; Dan. 1:20).
- Both were promoted to serve as a king's "ruler" (Gen. 41:41-44; Dan. 2:48).

Saadya, a famous Jewish interpreter, argued that Daniel's resolution not to

defile himself was due to his regular and devout reading of the "Shema," which says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4).⁹⁵ "An exiled Jew can be a winner because the God of Israel is a winner!"⁹⁶

According to the story in Daniel 1, God does not just work *for* his people; rather, he works *with* them. He acts like the true Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). "Daniel and his companions represent the godly remnant of Israel which preserved the testimony of God even in dark hours of apostasy and divine judgment."⁹⁷ A precious lesson that they learned—also demonstrated later in Christ's temptation—was that the cross comes *before* the crown. As the ancient Romans liked to say: "*Per aspera ad astra*"—"through suffering to glory!" (Literally, "through thorns to the stars.") The four Hebrews were able to "gain wisdom and prestige without losing holiness."⁹⁸ They were destined "to be a covenant for the people / and a light for the Gentiles" (Isa. 42:6).

2. *Wisdom comes from God.* In the Bible, wisdom is a spiritual and ethical virtue, not just a natural outcome of one's hard work. It is a gift from God. As such, wisdom, along with all the other virtues, is not self-serving but points to its divine source. True wisdom is not blended with mere intellectual curiosity but with deep trust in God's leading. "Society often judges the person of faith as intellectually weak, and science does

not easily accommodate itself with simplistic biblical explanations.”⁹⁹ Yet, both faith and wisdom are divine gifts. Respect for God, who holds the first place in a believer’s life, is the beginning of wisdom. Job 28:28 says, “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, / and to shun evil is understanding.” Biblical wisdom books, such as Psalms and Proverbs, call a righteous person “wise,” while the wicked is considered a “fool.”

Jesus Christ did not separate faith from wisdom. According to him, it is “a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matt. 7:24), and it was the wise bridesmaids who were ready for the coming of the bridegroom (Matt. 25:10). The concept of “spiritual wisdom” is one of the key themes in Daniel’s book. There are strong links in the second half of the book between wisdom and the apocalyptic visions that portray spiritual warfare. Lastly, the book of Daniel, just like the rest of the Bible, teaches that at its foundation, wisdom is not a lesson to be learned as much as it is a relationship to be enjoyed (Prov. 8:17).¹⁰⁰

3. *The book’s message in a nutshell.* The story in this chapter is built on a clear reversal or an adverse change of fortune¹⁰¹ because it begins with the king of Babylon and ends with the king of Medo-Persia. The king who is the great liberator takes the place of the king invader. This chapter, in fact, “contains a condensation of all the basic messages”

of the book of Daniel.¹⁰² Rather than being defeated by a foreign god, Yahweh, the God of Israel, has triumphed through his faithful servants on Mar-duk’s own ground, which was wisdom. The Hebrew young men demonstrated a kind of wisdom that was much superior to that of all the Babylonian and non-Babylonian wise men.

The success of Daniel and his friends in Babylon was nothing short of a miracle. They attained positions of leadership in Babylon not through military or political means but through God-given wisdom. Based on the triumph of the faithful remnant in Babylon, the reader can already anticipate all the future victories of God in the world. Daniel’s experience in Babylon is primarily a story of providence, not just of success.¹⁰³ What is success, if not a gift from God? This is the good news that becomes the source of hope to the oppressed people of God in all times and places:

But as for me, I watch in hope for
the LORD,
I wait for God my Savior;
my God will hear me.
Do not gloat over me, my enemy!
Though I have fallen, I will rise.
Though I sit in darkness,
the LORD will be my light
(Micah 7:7, 8).

Success is not a destination, it is a journey. The story of Daniel and his

friends “has continued for generations to edify people, not only about the possibility of living faithfully amid the messiness of human history, but especially about the mysterious and quiet working out of the sovereign God’s will in that history.”¹⁰⁴

1. John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 29.

2. Collins, 129.

3. Towner, 21.

4. Ford, 75.

5. C. L. Seow, *Daniel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 21.

6. Wiseman corrected his initial reading of this name to Hamath, or northern Syria (see *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon*, 17, note 113).

7. Donald J. Wiseman, ed., *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings* (London: The British Museum, 1956), 69.

8. Nichol, 4:756. Josephus (*Antiquities* 10.11.1) says that when Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon, “he found that the public affairs had been managed by the Chaldeans, and that the principal persons among them had preserved the kingdom for him.”

9. Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar*, 23.

10. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (ANET)*, 3rd edition with supplement (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 308. See also *Biblical Archaeologist* 5 (1942): 49-55.

11. Lucas, 46.

12. *Ibid.*, 52.

13. John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 15.

14. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “The Book of Daniel,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 7:38.

15. Goldingay, 21.

16. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 13.

17. Zdravko Stefanovic, “Daniel: A Book of Significant Reversals,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 30 (1992): 140.

18. Harvey K. McArthur and Robert M. Johnston, *They Also Taught in Parables* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 23.

19. Walvoord, 30.

20. Deuteronomy 23:1 says that no castrated person “may enter the assembly of the Lord.” It is widely held that Nehemiah was a eunuch.

21. Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. DiLella, *The Book of Daniel*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 129.

22. See Zdravko Stefanovic, “The Use of the Aramaic Word *bār* (‘son’) as a Noun of Relation in the Book of Daniel,” *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 6 (2003): 77-81.

23. Lucas, 52.

24. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 16.

25. James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), 120.

26. Seow, 24.

27. Collins, 138.

28. Hartman and DiLella, 129; Shea, *Daniel*, 58; Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 49.

29. Collins, 138.

30. John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 730.

31. Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman, 1994), 63.

32. Hartman and DiLella, 130.

33. Montgomery, 119.

34. Collins, 137.

35. Judah J. Slotki, *Daniel-Ezra-Nehemiah* (New York: Soncino Press, 1999), 20.

36. Shea, *Daniel*, 36.

37. John Day, “The Daniel of Ugarit and Ezekiel and the Hero of the Book of Daniel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980): 361-365. Day’s conclusions are supported by Collins (p. 1) and contradict the thesis of H. H. P. Dressler, “The Identification of the Ugaritic Dnīl with the Daniel of Ezekiel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (1979): 152-161.

38. This ruler is described as someone who “judges the cause of the widow, tries the case of the orphan” (Pritchard, 149-155).

39. Shea, “Bel(te)shazzar Meets Belshazzar,” *An-*

- drews University Seminary Studies* 26 (1988): 67-82. Walvoord (p. 36) claims that Daniel's Babylonian name *Belteshazzar* was identical with *Belshazzar*.
40. Lucas, 53.
 41. Seow, 24.
 42. Montgomery, 130.
 43. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 122.
 44. C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 81.
 45. Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale OT Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 84.
 46. Ford, 81. "A fat belly does not make a fine mind" (Montgomery, 132.)
 47. Longman, 53.
 48. Daniel Berrigan, *Daniel: Under the Siege of the Divine* (Farmington, PA: The Plough, 1998), 5.
 49. Collins, 140; also Montgomery, 123.
 50. Walvoord, 36.
 51. Baldwin, 81.
 52. Shea, *Daniel*, 39.
 53. Seow, 24.
 54. de Vaux, 46.
 55. Smith-Christopher, 39.
 56. Seow, 24.
 57. Lucas, 53.
 58. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 19.
 59. Goldingay, 5.
 60. *Ibid.*, 24.
 61. H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* (New York: Hawthorn, 1962), 176.
 62. René Péter-Contesse and John Ellington, *A Handbook on the Book of Daniel* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 18.
 63. Seow, 26.
 64. Péter-Contesse and Ellington, 18.
 65. Longman, 53.
 66. James L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 53-58.
 67. Davies, *Daniel*, 91.
 68. Lucas, 53.
 69. Keil, 80.
 70. Towner, 28.
 71. Seow, 21.
 72. Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1943), 484.
 73. Longman, 53.
 74. Collins, 145.
 75. Montgomery, 138.
 76. Nichol, 4:764.
 77. Seow, 27.
 78. Longman, 77.
 79. Nichol, 4:767.
 80. Lucas, 70.
 81. Walvoord, 29.
 82. Péter-Contesse and Ellington, 27.
 83. Shea, "Bel(te)shazzar," 67-82.
 84. Josephus *Antiquities* 10.11.7. This is in contrast to some Jewish legends, which say that Daniel returned to Judea and became a governor there. See Ginzberg, 1118, note 20.
 85. Goldingay, 27, quoting Lüthi.
 86. Lucas, 56.
 87. Goldingay, 28.
 88. Lucas, 57.
 89. Goldingay, 26, quoting Joubert.
 90. Maxwell, 19.
 91. Goldingay, 23.
 92. Berrigan, 11.
 93. Seow, 26.
 94. Longman, 74.
 95. Slotki, 4.
 96. Towner, 27.
 97. Walvoord, 43.
 98. Goldingay, 3.
 99. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 21.
 100. Longman, 87.
 101. Z. Stefanovic, "Daniel," 139.
 102. Maxwell, 15.
 103. Berrigan, 12.
 104. Seow, 30.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF DANIEL 2–6

Daniel 2–6 presents five stories about the four Hebrews in exile. Although chapter 1 also contains a story about Daniel and his friends, in this study it is separated from the rest of the stories. This has been done for practical reasons: Chapter 1’s message serves as a summary of the teaching of the whole book.

This overview focuses mainly on the literary and historical character of the stories from chapters 2–6. It will also cover the purpose of the stories and their function in the book.

Literary Type of the Stories

All six chapters in the first section of Daniel (chaps. 1–6) may be identified as “court narratives.” As such, they inform the reader of the events that took place following the arrival of the four young Hebrews to the city of Babylon. Each of the stories contains a plot that is directly or indirectly related to the royal palace and the services that the four men provided for the king. In each narrative,

God is shown to be present and actively involved in everyday events, providentially intervening in times of crisis.

The stories in chapters 2–6 are clearly bracketed, thus indicating the presence of an *inclusio*: Both the beginning (Dan. 1:21) and the end (6:28) of this literary unit mention Daniel’s position in the kingdom of Medo-Persia. Each of the five chapters combines prose and poetry. And each of them, with the exception of chapter 5, contains a hymn of praise that was composed in response to God’s supernatural intervention. While Daniel composed the first hymn, the others are found in the mouths of powerful monarchs and can be considered echoes of Daniel’s hymn. Thus, more than one literary type is present in these chapters—all providing the reader with a text that is rich from the literary point of view.

Historical Aspect of the Stories

In contrast to chapters 7–12, which are all dated with precision, chapters 3–6

do not make any explicit chronological reference. However, the introductory chapter and the five that follow are all presented in historical sequence. This order is changed in the transition from stories to visions with the placement of chapter 7 after chapter 6, although chapter 7 is dated chronologically before chapter 6. Interestingly enough, in the history of the interpretation of Daniel's book, the dating of the visionary chapters has been questioned far more often than has the dating of the chapters that contain stories.

What kind of history characterizes the stories in Daniel? Can we refer to them as "historical," or should we perhaps view them as simply didactic and thereby possibly fictional—or, as some scholars have suggested, a product of human fantasy? It is important to state here that the parts of the Bible that contain historical narrative were seldom intended to provide readers with solid facts that could be used for the study of history in a scientific sense. The Bible need not and cannot replace our contemporary textbooks on history. The reason for this is not that the text of the Bible is historically unreliable. On the contrary, various scholars have pointed to its trustworthiness, and in this study, biblical texts are considered to be reliable. Yet, the primary objective of the author of Daniel was *not* simply to provide an "objective history" of Judah, Babylon, or Medo-Persia. Instead, through divine inspiration, the author

of the book intended to put together, side by side, historical facts and the spiritual truths that lay behind them.

The particular purpose of the biblical authors means that it is more correct to refer to the type of history in a biblical book such as Daniel as "sacred history" or "interpreted history." This is clear from a number of passages scattered in the book. Right at the start, for example, the author says that Babylon succeeded in defeating Jerusalem because the Lord allowed it to happen (Dan. 1:2). In chapter 5, not only does the author report that Belshazzar was killed at the time Babylon fell into the hands of the Medo-Persians, but he tells the story in such a way as to provide an explanation regarding **why** that particular event took place. This style of writing enhances the didactic aspect of biblical narratives in which history teaches divine lessons. The author recorded past events "as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11).

Setting and Purpose of the Stories

The evidence derived from the text of Daniel's book places the stories in the context of the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C. The fact that most of these stories are not explicitly dated suggests that they hold an underlying timeless value that engages readers in a decision-making process in regard to their attitude toward God and their eternal destiny.

The stories are all centered on the person of God, and they demonstrate his acts of salvation toward the faithful. They portray God as the Creator and the sole Provider of life, health, and wisdom. He knows the future and communicates it to his servants. He can save his servants from danger when they are in the midst of it. He can humble the proud and grant new blessings to those who turn to him. His care extends even to those who are not members of his chosen people. This is very clear from his dealings with the pagan kings who are mentioned in the book. God dealt with them individually, saving the penitent and condemning the arrogant.

Chapters 2-4 present three stories in which King Nebuchadnezzar comes into direct contact with the true God through his interactions with Daniel and his Judean friends. Since the story in chapter 4 concludes with Nebuchadnezzar becoming "a captive of the God of his captives," chapters 2-4 unfold the step-by-step process through which this king was converted.

According to chapter 5, in contrast to Nebuchadnezzar's surrender to God, Belshazzar's final encounter with the Lord resulted in his loss of power and his death. He simply ignored the most precious lesson he might have learned from the life of King Nebuchadnezzar, whom he called "my father." For this reason, Belshazzar appears to serve as the author's type of the future anti-God

power that will cause great destruction and in the end be destroyed through God's intervention.

The story in chapter 6 is set during the reign of the first Medo-Persian ruler, who in this chapter is referred to as *melek*, "king." Darius the Mede has been identified in history as either Cyrus the Great or a ruler placed immediately subject to Cyrus's authority. This study prefers to view him as Cyrus himself (see the *Notes* and *Exposition* on Dan. 5:31). The king in chapter 6 is portrayed as very favorable toward Daniel, just as Nebuchadnezzar was in the second phase of his reign. He prays and fasts for Daniel; he openly confesses that only God could save his faithful servant; and in the end, he writes an edict calling on all his subjects to "reverence the God of Daniel" (Dan. 6:26).

In conclusion, it can be stated that in the stories from Daniel's book, "three monarchs are shown with their different responses to the living God."¹ King Nebuchadnezzar typifies those in Babylon who are penitent in the end and submit to God's rule. In contrast, Belshazzar represents the people who are defiant and thus go to their own destruction. King Cyrus is the ruler who cooperates with God in the work of delivering God's people from their oppressors. Cyrus, in fact, is presented as a type of Messiah in at least one prophetic passage of the Bible (Isa. 45:1-3). Psalm 47:6-9 invites the whole earth to ac-

knowledge God as the Supreme King who is worthy of universal praise because all "kings of the earth belong" to him:

Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing
praises.

For God is the King of all the earth;
sing to him a psalm of praise.
God reigns over the nations;
God is seated on his holy throne.
The nobles of the nations assemble
as the people of the God of
Abraham,
for the kings of the earth belong to
God;
he is greatly exalted.

The importance of the stories in the book of Daniel cannot be exaggerated. Their presence is crucial to a proper understanding of the book's message. Not

only that, they also provide the historical and literary setting for the visions and auditions that follow. Unfortunately, the role of the stories in Daniel has often been underestimated; many studies have one-sidedly focused on the visions while almost completely ignoring the crucial role that the stories play in the book. Yet the visions make sense only in the light of the stories. When applied in this case, the famous slogan that "faith is built on history" means that Daniel's visions should never be studied in isolation from the life experiences of the four Hebrews in Babylon. The readers of the visions are ready to put their trust in God in regard to their future because God has already demonstrated his supernatural power by protecting the faithful from destructive fire and by shutting the mouths of hungry lions.

1. Baldwin, 119.

KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S FIRST DREAM

(2:1-49)

Chapters 2 and 11 are the longest chapters in Daniel's book. Two main literary forms, or genres, dominate chapter 2: dramatic story and dream. Several scholars agree that this chapter "functions as a miracle story,"¹ because its main point teaches that only God gives the kind of wisdom that can reveal the mysteries of life.² Another important point that matches a theme found in several chapters in Daniel is that earthly kingdoms are transitory. Though the coming of the kingdom of God is not portrayed as imminent in the story, it is portrayed as assured.

In spite of the fact that the dream in Daniel 2 "should be regarded as an important prototype of the apocalyptic vision,"³ those reading the chapter should not focus so completely upon its eschatology that they overlook the importance of the immediate context of the story. The event described in this chapter is dated to the second year of King Nebuchadnezzar II, the best-known

ruler of Neo-Babylon. This king's long reign is usually divided in two parts. During the first part he may be called "Nebuchadnezzar the Destroyer," while in the second part "Nebuchadnezzar the Builder" would fit him well. (See the introduction to chap. 5 in this study.) Indeed, the first years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign were characterized by extensive military campaigns, including those to the *Hatti* (Hittite?) land that eventually became a part of the Babylonian Empire. All this success did not come without its toll. Heavy taxes as well as other forms of subjugation were causing rebellions throughout the empire. In spite of the great success, everyone's future—even that of the emperor himself—looked rather uncertain. In response to this uncertainty, God gave the king a dream about the future of the world.

The dramatic story in Daniel 2 climaxes in the king's praise to God and also in the promotion of Daniel and his

friends to high positions of authority. This chapter speaks of God's triumph over Babylon. Its concept of God's sovereignty is strikingly similar to that of Isaiah's prophecies.⁴ Consequently, it is appropriate at this point to recall a passage from Isaiah that must have been particularly meaningful to Daniel and his friends as they were going through the experience in Babylon that this chapter describes:

This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“See, I will beckon to the Gentiles,
I will lift up my banner to the
peoples;
they will bring your sons in their arms
and carry your daughters on
their shoulders.
Kings will be your foster fathers,
and their queens your nursing
mothers.
*They will bow down before you with
their faces to the ground;*
they will lick the dust at your feet.
Then you will know that I am the
LORD;
those who hope in me will not
be disappointed”
(Isa. 49:22, 23; emphasis supplied).

Much like the structure of the previous chapter, that of this one is also built on a reversal—this time from the king's anger to his gratitude. Here is the suggested structure of this chapter:

1. The king's anger (2:1-13)
2. Daniel's requests (2:14-23)
3. Daniel tells the dream (2:24-35)
4. Daniel explains the dream (2:36-45)
5. The king's gratitude (2:46-49)

Daniel's speech is found in the middle of the chapter, and it occupies most of its text. The chapter is bilingual, containing Biblical Hebrew (2:1-4a) and Aramaic (2:4b-49).

The King's Anger (2:1-13)

Although this chapter contains a vision, its most profound message comes through a story. After establishing the date and giving a brief introduction, the narrator takes us straight into the plot, with King Nebuchadnezzar as the protagonist.

¹In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. ²So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. So they came in and stood before the king. ³He said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles my mind, and I want to understand the dream."

⁴Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

⁵The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you torn limb from limb and your houses turned

into piles of rubble. ⁶But if you tell me the dream and show its meaning, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."

⁷A second time they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its meaning."

⁸Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are bargaining for time, because you see that this is what I have firmly decided: ⁹If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one sentence for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things until the situation is changed. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me."

¹⁰The astrologers answered the king, "There is no person on earth who can do what the king demands! Because no king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹What the king asks is too difficult. Moreover, no one can reveal it to the king except the gods, but they do not live among mortals."

¹²This made the king so enraged and furious that he commanded the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

Notes

2:1 "The second year." In contrast to the visions in the book, which are all dated, only the first two chapters in the historical section begin with a date. The date in this chapter has been described by a scholar as a "perplexing chronological note that defies modern attempts to treat it seriously."⁵ The previous chapter stated that

the training of the young men was to last for three years, so the question is raised how the dating of this chapter relates to that statement. Various suggestions have been made regarding the expression "the second year." (1) One is that the date refers to the "second year" following the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 587 B.C.⁶ That would mean that the event in the chapter took place not in the second year of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar, but two years after the destruction of the temple. (2) Another suggestion is that "the second year" means two years after the Babylonians defeated Egypt.⁷ (3) A manuscript from the Old Greek version of Daniel (MS 967) dates this chapter not to the second but to the twelfth year of Nebuchadnezzar.

Two facts may be of help here: First, according to the Babylonian reckoning, the training of the young men began during Nebuchadnezzar's accession year (or the year "0" of his reign) and prior to the New Year festival (*Akitu*) when he was officially installed as king in Babylon. Thus, the second year of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar corresponds to the third year of the young men's training. Second, the inclusive way of reckoning time was widespread in the ancient world (cf. 2 Kings 18:9, 10). This simply means that parts of time units were counted as whole units, as in the famous saying that Jesus was in the tomb for "three days and three nights."

Thus we may conclude that when measured by our modern calculations, the three years of training of Daniel and his companions lasted less than two full calendar years. When understood this way, the story in chapter 2 can chronologically follow the events found in the previous chapter. It has also been observed that this ex-

pression is paralleled with a detail from Joseph's story, which says that Pharaoh had a dream "when two full years had passed" (Gen. 41:1).

"He had dreams." The Hebrew text literally reads *ḥālam ḥālômôt*, "he dreamed dreams"—the verb and the noun having the same root. The root word *ḥālôm*, "a dream," is an abstract noun of feminine gender. It often appears in its plural form, as do the other abstract nouns in Hebrew. The plural form of this noun is usually explained as meaning either that the king had more than one dream that night or that he saw the same dream more than once⁸ or that he spent the entire night in a state of dreaming. Hence some translators render this phrase by saying that the king had "a series of dreams"⁹ or dream experiences or a number of images. However, though the noun here is in the plural, its usage may be idiomatic and its meaning singular and referring to one dream (cf. Dan. 4:2; 7:1). The king's overall experience explains the anxiety he felt when he woke up.

"His mind was troubled." The same expression describes Pharaoh's mood after his dream in Genesis 41:8.

"He could not sleep." The meaning of this Hebrew phrase is not clear because the difficult word *nihy^etâ*, "was upon him," can be explained as either "sleep passed over him, left him," or "but his sleep came back over him,"¹⁰ which means "he fell asleep again."¹¹ The phrase stands in parallelism with the words that precede it.

2:2 "The magicians." The term *ḥartummîm*, "magicians," is a loanword from Egyptian. It figures prominently in the story of Joseph (Gen. 41) and the narrative of the ten plagues (Exod. 7-10). The presence of Egyptian magicians in Mesopo-

tamia has been confirmed by extrabiblical sources, some of which speak of magicians as prisoners of war.¹² This fact gives a cosmopolitan emphasis to the events in the story.

"Astrologers." The original Hebrew word here is *kaśdîm*, "Chaldeans"—the same word used in Daniel 1:4, where it is translated "Babylonians." The name describes the people who were the ruling class in Neo-Babylon. Some scholars have argued that Daniel used this term in both the ethnic and the professional sense. Since the word here is preceded by three other terms that all describe professional groups at the palace, the conjunction that comes before it may be considered explicative, as saying "the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, *that is*, the Chaldeans." In the narrative that follows, all the wise men are referred to by this single term, "Chaldeans," "summing up the other synonyms."¹³ While the rest of the terms found in this verse have different shades of meaning, they are used interchangeably in the story to describe an impressive group of international experts who were "masters of esoteric knowledge."¹⁴

2:3 "I have had a dream that troubles my mind." The original text says, "I have dreamed a dream and my spirit is troubled." The form of the clause "to dream a dream" is common in Semitic languages. This type of construction is called a cognate accusative (paronomasia).

"To understand the dream." Literally, the Hebrew text says *lāda'at 'et-haḥālôm*, "to know the dream," but this sentence implies that Nebuchadnezzar wanted to understand the meaning of the dream.

2:4 "Astrologers." In this verse, as in verse 10, the Chaldeans are the actual spokesmen for

the entire group of wise men. See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:2.

“Aramaic.” From as early as the eighth century B.C., Aramaic was the lingua franca of the ancient Near East. This language belongs to the group of northwest Semitic languages, and it has had a number of dialects. The Aramaic of Daniel and Ezra belongs to the dialect called Biblical Aramaic (referred to by some as Imperial Aramaic). The word “Aramaic” in this verse marks the beginning of the section of Daniel written in Biblical Aramaic, which stretches to the end of chapter 7 and constitutes the longest portion of the Bible written in Aramaic.

“O king, live forever!” The customary greeting *malkā’ l’ālēmîn ḥēyî*, “O king, live forever!” was a common way of addressing royalty in Israel and among the neighboring nations (cf. 1 Kings 1:31; Neh. 2:3). In the story here, this type of greeting is “a particularly clever irony, given the fact that the dream will soon reveal that Nebuchadnezzar will certainly not live forever, and neither will his regime.”¹⁵

2:5 “The astrologers.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:4.

“Firmly decided.” The Aramaic word *‘azdā’*, “firmly decided,” is a noun that means “verdict” or “firm decision.” It is also found in Old Persian and Egyptian Aramaic and describes something that is publicly known, fixed, or determined. As such, it functions in this sentence (also in v. 8) as an adverb¹⁶ expressing the king’s determination not to change his mind and reveal the contents of the dream to the wise men. In other words, Nebuchadnezzar was saying, “What I say, I really mean!”

The translation of the whole statement,

which says *millētā’ minnî’azdā’*, “the matter is decided by me,” does not support the view held by some that the king forgot the dream because the word *millētā’*, “matter,” refers not to the dream but to the king’s decision. Daniel 2:15 says that Arioch “explained” to Daniel *millētā’*, “the matter,” which cannot be the dream but must be the king’s problem and the reason behind it.

“Torn limb from limb.” The text literally says *haddāmîn tit’abdûn*, “you shall be torn limb from limb,” and describes here a form of public torture practiced in ancient times (Dan. 3:29). The prophet Ezekiel also says that the Chaldeans cut their victims to pieces in public: “They will bring a mob against you, who will stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords” (Ezek. 16:40; cf. 23:47).

“Piles of rubble.” The word *nēwālî*, “ruins,” can also mean “dunghill” (cf. 2 Kings 10:27). Ezra 6:11 contains a similar threat of public punishment and destruction.

2:6 “Gifts and rewards.” The two Aramaic words *mattēnān ûnēbizbâ*, “gifts and rewards,” may be “expressing a superlative idea in Aramaic.”¹⁷ They are used side by side, and together they express a single concept (hendiadys).

“Great honor.” The Aramaic word *yēqār*, “honor,” is also used in 2:37, where Daniel informs the king that, ultimately, honor is a gift from God, not from the king.

2:7 “A second time.” The word *tinyānût*, “second time,” marks the beginning of the second round of the dialogue.

2:8 “Certain.” The word *yaṣṣîb*, “certain,” is also found in 2:45, where Daniel tells the king that the “dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy.”

"Bargaining for time." The text literally says *'iddānā' antûn zāb^enîn*, "you are buying time," meaning that they were looking for a way to escape or at least to delay the punishment.

"Firmly decided." See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:5.

2:9 "Sentence." The original text uses the word *dāt*, "law," which in this context means "penalty" or "sentence." The clause "there is just one sentence for you" is almost identical with the one found in Esther 4:11, which says, "The king has but one law: that he be put to death."

"Conspired . . . misleading . . . wicked." These three negative words are usually understood as referring to a false interpretation of the dream. It is probable that their serious character betrays the king's suspicion that the wise men might be involved in a plot against his reign.¹⁸ In that case, they could invent an interpretation in order to escape punishment (cf. 1 Kings 22). On the other hand, their successful "declaration of the content of the dream will serve as a proof of their claim to interpret it."¹⁹

"The situation is changed." Scholars explain this statement as saying that in time there will be a change—the king's anger will subside. Yet, the words that follow confirm the fact that the king's fear of losing the throne may have been behind this whole drama. "Change" was not a favorite concept of despots and dictators.

2:10 This verse begins the third round of dialogue between the king and the Chaldeans.

"Person." The Aramaic noun *'nāš* means "a human being" and is used in the famous title "son of man" in Daniel 7:13. Together with the word that follows, it forms an expression that says "there is no human being on earth."

"Great and mighty." The king of Assyria is described as "the great king" (2 Kings 18:28), possibly implying an emperor.

2:11 "Except the gods." By saying *lāhēn 'ēlāhîn*, "except gods," the wise men admit their inability to communicate with the divine world. "It is remarkable here that the Chaldeans do not turn to the gods for help, either by prayer or by ritual."²⁰ In contrast to the other wise men, Daniel lays his problem before God (v. 18). Biblical apocalyptic literature considers heaven and earth to be closely connected, with the distance between the two almost negligible.

"Among mortals." Literally, the text says *'im-biśrā'*, "with flesh." In Numbers 27:16, the corresponding Hebrew word is translated "human-kind." This word is used in the Bible as a symbol of human weakness and frailty (Ps. 56:4; Isa. 31:3).

2:12 "Enraged and furious." The words *b^enas ūq^esap śaggî'*, "enraged and furious," form another case in the narrative of hendiadys, which is common in Daniel. The motif of the king's rage is also found in Daniel 3:13, 19 and Esther 1:12; 7:7.

"Babylon." The meaning here is that all the wise men in the city of Babylon were ordered to be executed, not all those in the province or the empire.

2:13 "Daniel and his friends." Since according to the previous story, the four Hebrews had successfully passed the examination, they now belonged to the broad category of Babylon's wise men for better or for worse. They were, however, not present during the dialogue between the Chaldeans and the king.

Exposition (2:1-13)

2:1-3 The story is dated to the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign: *in the second year* of the king. He had "stood in the background in chap. 1; his figure now comes into sharper focus."²¹ In that year, the king had a dream that disturbed him a lot. In the ancient world, dreams were viewed either as ordinary human experiences or as customary ways in which the divine world communicated with human beings.²² Jacob, on his way to Mesopotamia, received a dream from God (Gen. 28), and Solomon conversed with God in a dream (1 Kings 3). Of all the Neo-Babylonian kings, Belshazzar's father Nabonidus was most interested in dreams, many of which related to his work of repairing the temples.

Scholars have pointed to a number of similarities between this chapter and the story of Joseph (Gen. 41–47). In both stories there is a king who is troubled by a dream, the professional diviners fail to dispel the ruler's anxiety, a young Hebrew captive accomplishes what the established experts could not do, the faithful captive attributes his success to God, and the captive is promoted to a position of enormous influence in the kingdom. Thus, like young Joseph who explained the pharaoh's dreams "when two full years had passed" (Gen. 41:1), "Daniel in the second year of his exile would enlighten his mighty captor and save others from certain death."²³

Because the word "dreams" is in the

plural, some have suggested that the king may have had more than one dream and that they were related to one another (cf. Gen. 41). Others think that he had just one dream that was repeated several times. However, the context of the story leads to the conclusion that the king had only one dream.

Because the dream was very disturbing and made Nebuchadnezzar afraid, he summoned his royal experts for a consultation early the morning after he dreamed. The function of the wise men's rituals at the palace was both explanatory and therapeutic.²⁴ In Babylon, dream books were commonly used to explain and treat dream-related problems. The experts were supposed to consult the books, explain the symbols and the meaning of the dream, and also conduct appropriate rituals to do away with the evil powers that were behind the dream.²⁵

2:4-6 The spokesmen for the group were the Chaldeans, members of the ruling class in Neo-Babylon. Their customary greeting, *O king, live forever!* contains a tone of irony here because the story's conclusion is that only God lives forever. Following the established procedure, the wise men politely ask the king to tell them his dream so that they can interpret it. But the king meets their request with threats. In a normal situation, the king would tell his dream, and the wise men would explain what it meant and attempt to remove the evil

consequences of an unpleasant dream. This time, however, the very nature of the dream suggested to Nebuchadnezzar that it did not convey good news, especially since something terrible happened to the statue, which he may well have assumed represented him. "The dream was unsettling in the extreme."²⁶

In order to make sure that the wise men's interpretation was correct, Nebuchadnezzar resorted to asking them to tell him both the dream and its meaning. The question may be asked here whether the king had forgotten the dream and that is why he asked the wise men to remind him of it.²⁷ In the ancient world, it was believed that if a person forgot his dreams, that meant that his god was angry with him.²⁸ It is clear from the story that the wise men did not think the king had forgotten the dream because they continued to plead with him to tell it to them. To say that the king had completely forgotten his dream would "make v. 9 a bluff. The story of the test of the Chaldeans requires that the king remembered at least enough of the dream to be able to be sure that when they told it to him he would recognize it."²⁹

The fact that Nebuchadnezzar "demands his soothsayers to tell him the dream itself should not be taken to mean that he had forgotten it; rather, he uses this as a test in order to have assurance that they can give him a reliable interpretation of it (vs. 9)."³⁰ He alone "is in a position to judge their confabulations,

since he alone holds the key to the dream."³¹ Careful consideration of certain details of the story leads to the conclusion that "although the king's mind was deeply impressed, he found it impossible, when he awoke, to recall the particulars"³² of the dream.

In order to convince the wise men to cooperate with him, the king uses both sticks and carrots, threats and promises. On the one hand, he threatens them with mass execution and total destruction of their property. On the other, he promises sumptuous *gifts and rewards*. The combination of promises and threats, reminders of blessings and curses, formed an integral part of ancient covenant treaties.

Nebuchadnezzar accused the wise men of deceit, of taking part in a "conspiracy,"³³ and of dragging their feet in the hope that the present order of things might soon change. Herodotus tells a story of a wise man who tried to usurp the throne of Darius I, and when the attempted coup failed, the king slaughtered all the magi. In the Bible, King Saul almost exterminated the priests in Israel because he suspected that they had sided with David (1 Sam. 22:13-19). Nebuchadnezzar's own "hall of infamy" included his harsh treatments of King Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:7), two Jewish rebels (Jer. 29:22), and Daniel's three friends (Dan. 3).

2:7-11 The conversation between the king and his trusted wise men takes three rounds and is presented as a series

of mutual misunderstandings. It has been observed that “the lengthy dialogue between the king and the wise men builds the tension of the story, culminating with the threat of death.”³⁴ The more the wise men go out of their way in trying to please him and keep him calm, the more agitated he becomes because he finds their answers to be seductive but also evasive. In the end, he accuses them of a lack of loyalty and even conspiracy. He will believe that their interpretation is correct only if they can tell him the dream.

In their despair, the wise men admit their impotence. They declare that this situation is unparalleled in the history of the world and that the king’s demand is simply unreasonable. The solution to the king’s puzzle certainly lies with *the gods*, yet the wise men are only human beings, and they consider communication with the higher world impossible.

2:12, 13 This part of the story ends with the peaking of the king’s anger. The theme of a king’s anger is frequently found in biblical wisdom texts (Prov. 16:14; 19:12; 20:2) and in stories from the exile (Dan. 3:13, 19; Esther 1:12; 7:7). Nebuchadnezzar makes no effort to hide his rage, and he pronounces the most severe verdict: *All the wise men* in the city of Babylon must die. It is because “the king is afraid that he threatens to kill.”³⁵ Scholars have rightly called this moment the lowest point in Babylon’s history in that it demonstrated the bank-

ruptcy of its astrological system. Astonishingly, Daniel’s book exposed this bankruptcy on two more occasions in the history of Neo-Babylon (Dan. 4 and 5).

These events cleared the stage for Daniel to make his entrance and introduce the God who is the only Source of knowledge and wisdom. Isaiah 44:25 describes God as the One “who foils the signs of false prophets / and makes fools of diviners.” Indeed, the failure of the wise men to reveal the dream was a sure sign of the impotence of their god Marduk (Bel), who, according to Babylonian beliefs, was, along with his father Ea (Enki) and his son Nabu (Nebo), a dispenser of wisdom. With the death sentence pronounced on *all the wise men of Babylon* by a king who was a devout worshiper of Babylon’s patron god, Marduk’s house was divided against itself and was doomed to fall (cf. Luke 11:17). The astrologers who relied on Babylon’s idols were helpless because they had not “stood in the council of the LORD / to see or to hear his word” (Jer. 23:18). The prophet Isaiah mocked Babylon’s power in the following way:

Let your astrologers come forward,
those stargazers who make predictions
month by month,
let them save you from what is
coming upon you (Isa. 47:13).

The plot in the story becomes further complicated when the reader learns that

the young Hebrews who worshiped Yahweh were threatened by the same death decree. Even though Daniel and his friends were generally considered as belonging to the Babylonian wise men (Dan. 1:19), they had not been present at the meeting that took place in the palace. It is possible that jealousy prevented the Chaldeans from inviting the young Hebrews to come to the meeting (cf. Dan. 6:6, 7). Later, in his speech before Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel refers to the wise men's inability to help the king, but in doing so he does not specifically mention the term "Chaldean" (Dan. 2:27).

Daniel's Requests (2:14-23)

At this point, the focus of the narrative shifts to Daniel and his friends, and the reader is led to wonder if this will result in the eventual denouement in the story.

¹⁴When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with tactful wisdom. ¹⁵He asked Arioch, the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. ¹⁶At this, Daniel went and asked the king to appoint him a time so that he might interpret the dream for him.

¹⁷Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah about the matter. ¹⁸He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹During

the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven ²⁰and said:

"Let the name of God be praised for ever and ever; wisdom and power belong to him.

²¹He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and removes them.

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.

²²He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.

²³I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, You have made known to me what we asked of you, You have made known to us the dream of the king."

Notes

2:14 "Arioch." This was the name of the king of Ellasar, an ally of Kedorlaomer, king of Elam (Gen. 14:1). Some have related this name to the Sumerian city of Uruk (Warka). In Babylonian, *Eri-Aku* means "servant of the moon-god," but it is possible that the origin of the name is Persian.

"The commander of the king's guard." The title *rab-ṭabbāḥayyā'* means "the chief executioner." Arioch was the person entrusted to carry out the execution of the wise men and thus protect the life of the king in the face of a threat. His position was comparable to that of Nebuzaradan, who bore the same title and was in the service of the same king (2 Kings 25:8; Jer. 39:9; 52:12).

"Had gone out to put to death." A good number of commentators believe that the execution

of the wise men had not yet started (Dan. 2:24). Thus, at this point in the story, Arioch is still on his way to begin the executions.

“With tactful wisdom.” The noun *ṭēṣm*, “tact,” is translated in Proverbs 26:16 as the adverb “discreetly.” Although the two nouns are different, they express one idea (another case of hendiadys), and they can be translated as “tactful wisdom.”

2:15 “The king’s officer.” Arioch’s title here differs from the one given in the previous verse. This title is more general in character.

“A harsh decree.” The word *mēhaḥṣepâ*, “severe,” can also mean “urgent” or “rash.” In the light of the statement from 2:16 (cf. *mēhaḥṣepâ* “urgent” Dan. 3:22), the decree was not just harsh but also hasty.

“The matter.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:5.

2:16 “Daniel went [in].” Based on Esther 4:11, it becomes clear that Daniel’s direct and brave action as recorded here could have cost him his life, yet this “life-risking action would preserve lives”³⁶ (Dan. 2:18). The normal protocol in approaching the king is given in Daniel 2:24. Some ancient versions emend the Hebrew text here, making Arioch act “as the intermediary between Daniel and the king.”³⁷ Based on this, some scholars argue that this text does not clearly say that Daniel saw the king because in that case the Aramaic expression *qōdām malkā’*, “before the king” (cf. Dan. 2:24, 25), would be used.

“Asked the king to appoint him a time.” Since the Aramaic word *zēmān* means “appointed time” and it is used here in combination with the verbal root *ntn* “to appoint,” the original text suggests the idea that Daniel did not ask for an indefinite period of time but rather for an ap-

pointment with the king regarding this matter. This fact adds even more urgency and seriousness to the situation faced by the four Hebrews.

2:17 “His house.” The word *lēbaytēh*, “to his house,” points to the place where the four young Hebrews resided in the city of Babylon.

2:18 “To plead.” The same verb, *bē’â*, “to ask,” that is used in 2:16, where Daniel asks the king for time, is used here.

“Mercy.” The Aramaic noun *rahmîn*, “mercies,” is also used (with a slightly different spelling) in Daniel 1:9, which says that God granted mercy to Daniel before the royal official. This time Daniel needs the same mercy from the same God. The Greek translation expands the Aramaic text by adding the words “he urged fasting and supplication.”³⁸ A scholar has observed that in this verse, “Daniel is mustering spiritual power for warfare” much as Ezra will do later (Ezra 8:21, 22; cf. Dan. 10:2, 3).³⁹

“From.” Literally, the Aramaic says *min-qōdām*, “from before,” which, during and after the time of the exile, was a reverential way of referring to God. The expression is very common in the Targums, Aramaic paraphrases of the books of the Old Testament.

“The God of heaven.” The title *‘lāh šēmayyā’*, “the God of heaven,” was not a typical Jewish way of referring to God, but it became common around the time of the exile due to the influence of Babylon and Persia. It is found eight times in Daniel’s book—four times in this chapter (Dan. 2:18, 19, 37, 44) and once as “God in heaven” (Dan. 2:28). It is frequently found in the book of Ezra (1:2; 7:12). It may be compared with two similar titles in Daniel, namely, “King of heaven” (Dan. 4:37) and “Lord of heaven” (Dan. 5:23). The

title "God of/in heaven" in the book of Daniel "emphasizes God's involvement in history (Dan. 2:27-30, 44, 45; 4:36; 5:23, 24)."⁴⁰

"This mystery." The Aramaic word *rāz*, "secret," is a loanword from Old Persian. It is found eight times in this chapter and once in Daniel 4:9. It became an important word in the interpretation of prophecies among the sectarians at Qumran.

"With the rest of the wise men." The word *še'ār*, "rest," is the Aramaic equivalent of a Hebrew word used for "remnant." The reader may think that Daniel and his friends prayed that only their lives would be spared. But from verse 24 we learn that they were also concerned for the lives of all the Babylonian wise men.

2:19 "The night . . . in a vision." God sent the answer to Daniel's prayer *b^ehezwā' dī-lēlyā'*, "in a vision of the night" or "in a night vision" (Job 4:13; 33:15), just like the revelation recorded in chapter 7. The words "vision" and "dream" are used interchangeably in Daniel (4:5, 9, 10; 7:1).

"The mystery." See the Notes on Daniel 2:18.

"Was revealed." Daniel's God-given ability that helped him resolve the mystery was "a supernaturally given insight obtained by direct revelation."⁴¹ This is because God "reveals mysteries" (2:28); he is called "the revealer of mysteries" (2:29). Other biblical prophets also claimed this kind of insight (1 Kings 22:19-23; Jer. 23:18; Amos 3:7), which was often given in response to prayer (Hab. 2:1-3).

"Praised." The use of the root *brk*, "to bless" or "to praise," was customary at the beginning of a Hebrew prayer addressed to God. It implied honor and praise to God's name. In Bible times, to bless someone was "to express in solemn

words one's appreciation, gratitude, honor, recognition."⁴² Psalm 63:4 says, "I will praise you as long as I live, / and in your name I will lift up my hands." When the word is used of God's blessing of a human being, it means "to do good" or "to grant a favor" to that person.

"The God of heaven." See the Notes on Daniel 2:18.

2:20 "Let . . . be praised." See the Notes on Daniel 2:19.

"The name of God." In certain biblical passages, *š^emēh dī-'ēlāhā'*, "God's name," is a reverential way of addressing Yahweh, the God of Israel (Pss. 113:2, 3; 135:1; Neh. 9:5). More directly, one may simply say "God." While God, as personal being, transcends the highest heavens, his name represents his presence among human beings (Deut. 12:5, 21; 2 Sam. 7:13; 1 Kings 8:16-29).

"For ever and ever." The idea of eternity was an abstract concept for the Semitic mind; therefore, *'ad-'āl^emā'*, "for ever," meant "for a long, long time" without an end in view (cf. Pss. 41:13; 90:2; 103:17; 106:48). An alternative and strictly literal meaning of this expression is "from the world to the world" explained by Jewish commentators as denoting the earthly and heavenly spheres."⁴³

"Wisdom and power." In the context of the book of Daniel, *h^okmā*, "wisdom," is not simply knowledge of theoretical facts. Rather, it is supernatural insight given by God. The two divine qualities—wisdom and *g^ebûrâ*, "strength" or "power"—were important especially in the context of Babylon's culture and religion. The Neo-Babylonian Empire was powerful in Daniel's time, and the city of Babylon was considered to be the center of all

wisdom ultimately dispensed by its patron god Marduk, the god of wisdom. Daniel's words here, along with the teaching of the whole book, directly opposed this claim. Daniel believed that his God was the sole dispenser of wisdom and power. In 2:23, Daniel praised the God who gave him wisdom and power.

2:21 "Times and seasons." The two Aramaic words that are used here express two different, yet complementary, aspects of the concept of time. The first noun, *'iddānayyā'*, "the times," denotes periods of time (cf. 2:16). Thus, the stress is on duration. The second noun, *zimnayyā'*, "seasons," expresses points in time, or appointed times and seasons. The two terms are inverted in Daniel 7:12. In opposition to God, the little horn tries "to change the set times regulated by the law" (7:25). The idea that God changes times and seasons must have been an open "challenge to the fatalism of the Babylonian astral religion."⁴⁴

"Sets up kings and removes them." The same concept is found in Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2 and Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55. This statement summarizes the explanation of the king's dream that Daniel will soon reveal in his speech before Nebuchadnezzar.

"Gives wisdom to the wise." The expression *yāhēb ḥōkmētā' l'ḥakkîmîn*, "giving wisdom to the wise," is a bold claim that it is God who makes a person wise and deserves credit for that. "Wisdom to the wise" (21) means, not that only [that] the wise ones receive the gift of extra wisdom, but that wherever there is wisdom it has been received as a gift from the only God who is its source.⁴⁵ In other words, wisdom is a gift from God. That is why at Gibeon, King Solomon asked God for wisdom (1 Kings 3:9, 12; 4:29). The focus

in this chapter is not on virtues themselves but on God who is the Source of those virtues.

2:22 "Reveals." See the Notes on Daniel 2:19.

"Deep and hidden things." The words *'ammîqātā' ûm^esatt^erātā'*, "deep and mysterious things," are used here figuratively, and they reinforce each other's meaning (hendiadys). Job 12:9, 22 speaks of God in similar terms: "He reveals the deep things of darkness / and brings deep shadows into the light."

"Darkness, and light." The literary device in which two or more opposite concepts are joined together with the purpose of expressing totality is called *merism(us)*. In this case, the author places the two contrasting concepts of darkness and light side by side. Hence, the hymn teaches that God knows all things, whether they are done in darkness or in daylight. Darkness sometimes stands for that which is unknown, while light is a metaphor for God-given wisdom. In Isaiah 45:7, God describes himself as someone who forms the light and creates darkness.

2:23 "You." While in verses 20-22 Daniel refers to God in the third person singular as "he," in this verse he switches to the second-person pronoun "you," addressing God directly. For a parallel, see Psalm 23.

"God of my fathers." The Semitic word *'ab*, "father," is often used to mean an "ancestor." Bible writers frequently referred to God in this way (Deut. 1:21; 6:3; 12:1; 1 Chron. 5:25; 12:17; 2 Chron. 33:12). The title "God of heaven" (Dan. 2:19) is applied to the God of Israel's ancestors (v. 23).⁴⁶ Daniel's expression "God of my fathers" has been described as "a defining term that is relevant outside the homeland."⁴⁷ Despite the

exile, the covenant God was still the center of Daniel's praise and worship.

"Wisdom and power." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:20.

"Given me." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:20. That God is the Giver of all things is a dominant concept found three times in the story in chapter 1.

"What we asked." See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:16 and 18. The switch in pronouns from the first-person singular ("me") to the first-person plural ("we") stresses the fact that both Daniel and his friends were praying. While God gave the revelation only to Daniel, he communicated the message to Daniel's friends through him.

"The dream." The Aramaic word *millâ* can mean either "word" or "matter." In this context it means more than just the king's dream; it includes also the problem that surrounds it and its interpretation. See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:5.

Exposition (2:14-23)

2:14-16 If the problem the young Hebrews faced in chapter 1 was difficult, the one in this chapter is certainly impossible, humanly speaking. No wonder Towner called the book of Daniel "theology for hard times."⁴⁸ Although shocked by the news from the palace, Daniel is willing to take initiative in the face of the verdict, and he does so *with tactful wisdom*. We can commend highly his "ability to keep calm under severe shock and pressure, to think quickly and exercise faith in a moment of crisis."⁴⁹ He is calm and acts right away with confidence. But he can overcome his problem only with divine assistance.

Through a laconic description, we learn of Daniel's courageous intervention that led him into the presence of the king, a move that could have cost him his life (Esther 4:11). Surprisingly, the king was willing to grant him a delay of the execution of the wise men—something that he was unwilling to do for the Chaldeans. Moreover, he allowed Daniel to confer with his friends without charging them with conspiracy. Why? The answer to this question must be sought in the ending of the story in the previous chapter, where the king himself witnessed the extraordinary wisdom of the young men and especially of Daniel, who "could understand visions and dreams of all kinds" (Dan. 1:17).

2:17-19 Upon returning *to his house*, Daniel shares the news with his friends. "In relation to the Babylonian authorities, Daniel stands alone. In relation to the people of God, however, he stands in fellowship with his three friends."⁵⁰ Faced with the harshness of a death decree, they decide to pray about the matter and entrust it into the hands of the God of heaven.⁵¹ Since they share in the danger, they can share also in the prayer.⁵² While the other wise men relied on their wisdom, Daniel and his friends relied on prayer to God, the true Source of wisdom. They are facing an imminent death, and their prayer is more than "a simple exercise of piety that somehow meets a person's psychological and other basic needs."⁵³ Their

prayer is rather a cry of supplication that expects an answer.

This act of faith was firmly grounded in their recent experience. After all, this was not the first time during their stay in Babylon that lives were being threatened. In Daniel 1:10, the king's official says, "I am afraid of my lord the king. . . . So you would endanger my life with the king." Thus, to the same God who "had caused the official" to show "mercy" to Daniel (Dan. 1:9), all four young men now turn to plead for "mercy" so that their lives may be spared (2:17), and not only theirs, but also the lives of **the rest of the wise men** (2:18).

Supernatural problems need supernatural solutions. The king's mystery could not "be ascertained through reason or conventional wisdom, but only through divine revelation. God and God alone is the revealer of such mysteries: Daniel affirms this (2:28) and so does Nebuchadnezzar (2:47)."⁵⁴ The answer to the young men's prayer came to Daniel through a night vision. Here is a good example showing that biblical revelation is a result of divine initiative, not of human initiation or manipulation.

2:20-23 Before going to see the king, Daniel prays again, yet this time he presents not a petition but a praise to God. This hymn of praise is the first and longest of the four songs of thanksgiving found in the book. It has been called "a model of thanksgiving" because "the symmetry and beauty of the poetry make

their own contribution to the praise of God."⁵⁵ It begins as a typical Hebrew prayer by praising God and ascribing wisdom and power to him. "Wisdom, which the experts summoned by Nebuchadnezzar are supposed to have, and power, which is presumed to belong to the king, are, in fact, God's to give."⁵⁶

After the introductory verse, there is a practical application of the two divine qualities given in a reversed order in 2:21. God's power, which now comes first, is made manifest by his ability to change **times and seasons**, something that others can only attempt to do (Dan. 7:25). When the faithful are persecuted, it is not enough for them to be aware that God knows the situation they are in. "It is also important to know that God is ultimately in control of things."⁵⁷ The psalmist said, "My times are in your hands" (Ps. 31:15). God rules over the kings of the earth, giving them power and taking it away from them.

In regard to wisdom, God not only possesses it but he also gives it to humans (Gen. 40:8; 41:16; 1 Kings 4:29). This includes his knowledge of **deep and hidden things**. Divine knowledge is here enhanced by the metaphor of light that represents the true knowledge that leads to light. God "wraps himself in light as with a garment" (Ps. 104:2), and he "lives in unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16). Moreover, he claims to be the Creator of all things, including light and darkness (Isa. 45:7).

The last part of the hymn switches from the indirect to the direct form of speech in which Daniel addresses God : **you**. He can do this because his God → Someone worshiped by his ancestors, with whom God had made a covenant. The God of Abraham, Jacob, and Moses the God who **has given . . . wisdom and power** to Daniel. He is a personal God with whom Daniel has an intimate relationship. Moreover, in the story in chapter 2, Daniel is portrayed as a model of wisdom (Dan. 2:14), prayer (1:18), praise (w. 19-23), and witness (27, 28).⁵⁸

Daniel's display of faith is remarkable, even before he goes to see the king, he assumes that the revelation about the dream is perfectly accurate, and he praises God for that.⁵⁹ The terms **wisdom and power** are found in the beginning and at the end of the hymn, thus forming brackets around it (*inclusio*). In the last two verses, Daniel includes his friends as recipients of these two divine gifts. The object of the revelation that Daniel received is **the dream of the king**. Daniel's hymn of praise is "a true prayer, for it has no personal aim but is offered in service in God, to humanity, and to history."⁶⁰

Daniel Tells the Dream (2:24-35)

Following the hymn of praise, which, most likely, was the central part of the young men's thanksgiving worship, the narrative reverts back to Daniel, who now goes into action.

²⁴So Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and thus he said to him, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret the dream for him."

²⁵Then Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means."

²⁶The king asked Daniel, whose name was also Belteshazzar, "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"

²⁷Daniel replied before the king, "No wise man, enchanter, magician, or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about,²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:

²⁹"As you were lying in your bed, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries made known to you what is going to happen.³⁰ As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living beings, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

³¹"You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, exceedingly bright statue, awesome in appearance.³² The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze,³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.³⁴ While you were watching, a stone was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and

clay and crushed them. ³⁵*Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold all together were broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind carried them away without leaving a trace. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.*

Notes

2:24 "Arioch." See the Notes on Daniel 2:14.

"The wise men of Babylon." See the Notes on Daniel 2:12.

"Take me." Literally, the text says *ha'ēlnî*, "bring me in." This detail in the narrative shows that Daniel followed the established protocol at the palace, in contrast to his previous visit to the king when he approached the monarch directly (2:16).

2:25 "At once." Literally, *b^ehitb^ehālâ* means "in haste."

"I have found." Almost all commentators notice that Arioch takes credit for his "discovery" of Daniel even though the text makes it clear that it was Daniel, who, after having found a solution to the king's problem, went to Arioch to inform him of it (2:34). Arioch acted as if the king had not known Daniel before (cf. Dan. 2:16).

"Among the exiles from Judah." Literally, the text says *min-b^enê gālûtâ' dî y^ehûd*, "among the sons of exile from Judah," but since the Aramaic noun *bar*, "a son," (*b^enê* is the plural construct) functions in this case as a noun of relation, it is best translated "one of" or "a member of." While Arioch speaks highly of his accomplishments before the king, he refers to Daniel in a rather degrading way, as "an exile" (cf. 5:13).

2:26 "The king asked." The opening words

of this verse, *'ânêh malkâ w^e'āmar*, which literally mean "the king answered and said to . . .," are identical with the words previously used in the dialogue between the king and the wise men (2:5, 8). The writer probably chose these words intentionally.

"Belteshazzar." This was Daniel's new name in Babylon; see the Notes on Daniel 1:7.

2:27 "Daniel replied before the king." Literally, the text says *'ânêh dānîyē'l q^odām malkâ w^e'āmar*, "Daniel answered before the king and said . . ." Just as in the previous verse, the choice of words here may be deliberately similar to the words the wise men spoke in their dialogue with the king (2:10). The word *q^odām*, "in the presence of," is commonly used in the Targums in reference to important persons such as God.

"No wise man." Notice that Daniel omits the terms *Chaldean* and *astrologer* from the list here. The Chaldeans were the spokesmen for the whole group of wise men (2:5, 10).

"The mystery." See the Notes on Daniel 2:18.

2:28 "A God in heaven." The title *'lāh bišmayyā'*, "God in heaven," is very close to "God of heaven." See the Notes on Daniel 2:18.

"Reveals mysteries." See the Notes on Daniel 2:19.

"He has made known." Daniel uses here the verb in the past tense (an accomplished action) in order to stress the certainty of what God will do in the future. The use of the prophetic perfect in the Bible underlines the notion of the certainty of God's promises. When God speaks of the future, his statements are as good as done.

"In days to come." Literally, the phrase says *b^e'aḥ^rîrî yômāyā'*, "in the end of the days" or "in the end of time." The phrase is considered to be

"the eschatological element" in the chapter.⁶¹ In the Bible, it is primarily found in the Pentateuch (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; 31:29) and in the prophets (Isa. 2:2; Ezek. 38:16; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 1:1), always pointing to a time in the future, near or far, depending on the context. At times, the expression may be considered an idiom for "the future," while at other times it is eschatological in the broadest sense of the word, pointing to the period that began with Christ's death on the cross. "In each case, the context has to decide what the meaning of 'the latter days' is."⁶² Three times in this and the next verse it is stressed that the dream concerns a time in the future: "in days to come" (2:28), "things to come" (2:29), and "what is going to happen" (2:29), (cf. 2:45, "what take place in the future").

"Your dream and the visions." In his speech, Daniel switches from the third to the second person. When he addresses the king indirectly in the third person, he does so out of politeness. The two words, "dream" and "vision," refer to the same revelation (hendiadys).

2:29,30 "As you... As forme." The form of the two introductory phrases (*casus pendens*) found in the beginning of the verses serves as a bridge between the king's experience and that of Daniel. It resembles the language used in covenant making. Both the king and Daniel received revelations that were closely interrelated. This rhetorical device serves to stress the common element of two communicating persons.

2:29 "The revealer of mysteries." This title undoubtedly refers to God. See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:19.

2:30 "This mystery has been revealed." See the *Notes on* Daniel 2:19.

"Your mind." The Aramaic text says *libbak*, "your heart," since among the Semitic people, the heart was considered to be the source of people's thoughts and not just of their emotions.

2:31 "You looked, ...and there." This is a standard formula that in the prophetic part of the book introduces scenes of dreams. It is attested elsewhere in the prophetic writings (Zech. 1:18). The Hebrew equivalent verb *haza*, "to look" or "to perceive," is used in the prophetic books to designate prophetic vision (Isa. 1:1; 2:1; Amos 1:1; Mic. 1:1; etc.).

"A large statue." In the translation of the word *salem*, "statue" is preferred here to "image" (the Hebrew word is used also in 2 Kings 11:18; 2 Chron. 23:17; Amos 5:26). Literally, the text says "one large statue." It has been suggested that the emphasis on the number one here means that the four empires represented by the statue constitute a unity.⁶³

Scholars disagree regarding whether this statue should be understood as an idol. In 1979, a basalt statue was accidentally discovered in northeastern Syria. Since that time it has become known as the Tell Fakhriyeh Statue. A bilingual text was engraved on this statue, so it is very precious to linguists.⁶⁴ The original inscriptions led scholars to conclude that this statue dates as far back as the ninth century BC.⁶⁵ The statue was made "in the likeness of *Hadad-yis'i*," the king who at that time controlled the whole region of eastern Syria, and it was placed before the god Hadad, "who dwells in Sikan." Even though the texts inscribed on this statue say that its purpose was to remind the god Hadad to bless this king and his posterity, the main reason behind its erection

must have been to serve as a visible reminder of who was in control of that region. This statue and the one in Daniel 2 share a common Mesopotamian background, and the purpose of both was to represent the authority of the kingdoms.

"Awesome in appearance." Literally, the text says *vfrehel d'heil*, "its appearance was frightening." The appearance of the fourth beast in chapter 7 is also said to have been "dreadful and terrifying" (7:7, 19). While the statue's appearance was magnificent, it was also terrifying; that is why its sudden disappearance made the king very afraid.

2:32 "Pure gold... silver." The gold mentioned in Genesis 2:12 is described as "good." In the ancient world, gold and silver were two materials that symbolically stood for something that is precious and majestic. Pagan idols were made of gold and silver (Isa. 31:7; 40:19). According to 2 Kings 25:13-15, the articles that Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple were made of gold, silver, and bronze. Some have tried to tie the silver to the concept of money in an attempt to find here an allusion to the elaborate taxation system of the Medo-Persian Empire. Silver was apparently the standard monetary value among the Persians.

2:32,33 "Bronze... iron." These two materials were symbols of that which is strong and hard. They are both mentioned in chapter 7, where the fourth beast is said to have "large iron teeth" (7:7) and "bronze claws" (7:19). Ezekiel 27:13 links trade in bronze with Greece. Bronze was to the Greeks as iron was to the Romans.⁶⁶

2:33 "Baked clay." The word *hasap*, "clay," indicates a sort of ceramic material. Some versions translate it as "tile" or "terra cotta." As a

symbol, the baked clay stands for weakness and transience (Job 4:19; 13:12). Its presence posed a threat to the whole statue and reminds the reader of the story in Genesis 11. Clay is to weakness as iron is to strength.⁶⁷

2:34 "You were watching." While the first occurrence of this phrase introduced the statue (Dan. 2:31), its occurrence here introduces the statue's destruction⁶⁸

"A stone." The Semitic word *'eben* can be translated either as "a stone" or "a rock." In the Bible, rock represents God's strength (Deut. 32:18; Pss. 18:2; 31:2,3) and kingdom (Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16; Zech. 3:9), but it also stands for the material of which important religious objects were made, such as the altar (Exod. 20:25), the tablets with the commandments (Exod. 24:12); the covenant stipulations (Deut. 27:4); and the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6:7). The ancient Greek and Latin versions insert here the words "from a mountain" to harmonize this verse with verse 45, which ties the origin of this stone to "a mountain." The passage from Isaiah 2:1-5 speaks of an imposing mountain that in the future will dominate the whole world (cf. Isa. 11:9). "The stone does not have the same value placed on precious metals by humans. A stone cannot be used to pay taxes or to make idols glisten in the sunlight. But this stone is in the hand of God, and its destruction of the human pretense to power is total."⁶⁹

"Not by human hands." Since in the Bible, *yad*, "a hand," stands for power, the meaning here is "not by human [but by God's] intervention" (cf. Job 34:16-20). For a parallel Hebrew expression, see Daniel 8:25, where the little horn is destroyed by divine agency. The idea is that this

stone is not to be associated with any human or earthly achievement. One characteristic of prophetic visions—particularly those that are apocalyptic—is God's direct involvement in the matter of world powers.

"On its feet." The feet of iron mixed with clay were the statue's weakest point. Ford called them "a rather muddy base!"⁷⁰

2:35 "Then the iron.." The order of the materials is reversed compared to the previous listing—this time the narrator moves from bottom to top. He does this to picture dramatically how the statue was destroyed.

"All together." Although composite in nature, the statue is considered as a unit. See the Notes on Daniel 2:31.

"Like chaff." Psalm 1:4, 5 also uses the picture of chaff blown by the wind as a result of God's judgment.

"A threshing floor in the summer." Many people of Bible times were agriculturalists, and for them the harvest time with all its activities was a fitting metaphor for God's judgment (Ps. 1:4; isa. 41:15, 16; Jer. 8:20).

"The wind." in Semitic languages, the word *ruah*, "wind," can also mean "air" or "spirit."

"A trace." For a similar idea, see Psalm 103:15, 16, where transience of human life is described in the following way:

As for man, his days are like grass,
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.

"A great mountain." In the past, some scholars have related this symbol to the Babylonian

temples and ziggurats (step pyramids), which supposedly were imitations of sacred mountains.⁷¹ On the use of the word *rab*, "great" or "huge," see the Notes on Daniel 2:48. "The coincidence between the origin and the outcome [of the stone] implicitly testifies to the kingdom's divine nature."⁷² This movement from mountain to mountain reminds one of the words about Jesus, who "had come from God and was returning to God" (John 13:3).

"Filled the whole earth." Isaiah 11:9 speaks of a future time when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD / as the waters cover the sea."

Exposition (2:24-35)

2:24-26 This part of the story proves Daniel's genuine concern for Babylon's wise men. He does not want to see them executed. For that reason he arranges for a second visit to the king. This time he follows the established protocol at the palace and lets **Arioch, the commander of the king's guard** appointed by the king **to put to death the wise men of Babylon** (Dan. 2:14), introduce him. The two men come into contact through Daniel's initiative—**Daniel went to Arioch** (Dan. 2:24). Yet, in the king's presence, Arioch claims full credit for "discovering" Daniel. At the same time, he downplays the young Hebrew's credentials—he introduces Daniel not by his official Babylonian title but as a captive from Judah. Later in the book, Daniel is addressed in the same way by King Belshazzar (Dan. 5:13) and by the jealous

satraps (Dan. 6:13), all of whom proved to be hostile to the Hebrew God and his servant. Through Daniel's humble words before the king, Arioch's attitude is contrasted with Daniel's: *This mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living beings . . .* (Dan. 2:30). The king does not say a word to Arioch but goes straight to his concern, asking Daniel about his ability to solve the mystery.

2:27-30 Daniel begins his speech with a disclaimer through which he dissociates himself from the wisdom of this world. He says that *no wise man*, including himself, is able to solve the king's problem. He then turns the king's attention to the Hebrew God, who is the only One capable of doing things that are humanly impossible (cf. Dan. 4:8, 9; 5:11, 12, 14, 18-24). In contrast to the rest of the wise men, who confidently relied on their own wisdom when they said, "We will interpret it," Daniel pointed to God—the only Source of wisdom—whose messenger he was. *There is a God* who lives among people, and he is none other than Daniel's God!⁷³ Montgomery has called the statement *there is a God in heaven* "the supreme theme of the book" and "the cardinal principle of the Bible."⁷⁴

It is important to notice that Daniel begins and ends his speech before Nebuchadnezzar by referring to his God. These two references form another set of brackets (*inclusio*) in this narrative. This

detail reminds Bible readers of Joseph's appearance before the Egyptian Pharaoh—Joseph began and ended his speech by directing attention to God (Gen. 41:16, 25). In like manner, Daniel humbly refuses to take credit for his ability to tell the dream and explain it. He readily admits that only God knows the future and can reveal it.

Daniel is "a prophet in all but name."⁷⁵ As a prophet, he was allowed to take part in the council of the Lord (cf. Jer. 23:18, 22; Amos 3:7). He places the king's dream in its original context, explaining the circumstances in which the dream was given. Ecclesiastes 5:3a says that "a dream comes when there are many cares," and a rabbinic saying notes that "a man is only shown in a dream what emanates from the thoughts of his heart."⁷⁶ Daniel says that Nebuchadnezzar's dream came as God's answer to the king's desire to know what will happen in the future. In his speech, Daniel builds a bridge between his God and Nebuchadnezzar, both of whom he respects and serves. If Daniel's role here is viewed as prophetic, we can see that biblical prophecy does not target exclusively the future but also the present in which the future events are firmly grounded.

2:31-35 Daniel's dream narrative before the king can be divided into two parts, the first of which begins with the words *you looked* and the second with *you were watching*. The first part, verses 31-33, describes the four materials of

the statue, and the second part, verses 34-36, talks of the stone and the effects of its destruction of the statue.⁷⁷ The contents of the king's dream consisted, first of all, in a composite statue that Daniel describes briefly. In a general way, one can say that in the ancient Near East, a statue often represented the presence of someone with authority—either a god or a king. To be more specific, when a powerful people conquered a foreign land, they would set up imposing monuments, often in the form of statues, to signal their presence in the subdued land. The intimidating size of these monuments, sometimes combined with splendor, served as effective imperial propaganda in the conquered lands. Some of the erected statues were of a religious nature.

The profound impression that the statue made on King Nebuchadnezzar was due to the fact that the statue was magnificent and terrifying at the same time. Most of its brilliance should be credited to the presence and effect of **the head. . . of pure gold** (2:32). This statue was a composite; its list of materials proceeds from gold to silver, bronze, iron, and baked clay. The elements are placed in the order of declining monetary value. Lamentations 4:2 speaks in similar terms of the decline of God's people:

The precious sons of Zion,
once worth their weight in gold,

are now considered as pots of clay,
the work of a potter's hands!

With the exception of the baked clay, however, there is an increase in strength and hardness, preparing the way for the last material mentioned, that of **a stone**, which is cut from a mountain, smashes the statue, and grinds it to powder. There is an implied contrast between the materials valued and prized by human beings and the despised, unworked stone (cf. Isa. 60:17).⁷⁸ While the stone becomes **a great mountain** that fills the whole world, the statue that turns to "chaff" is swept away by the wind **without leaving a trace** (2:35).

The **feet** of the image were its most curious part. Like the legs, they were made of iron—though not completely. The iron was mixed with clay (Dan. 2:33). In the Bible, clay is consistently the last on the scale of materials (Lam. 4:2; Zech. 11:13; 2 Tim. 2:20). This was "obviously a poor choice of material for attempting to hold the iron pieces in place."⁷⁹ There is an element of "caricature in the suggestion that the weakest substance was used in the feet, where it would have to bear the weight of the metals."⁸⁰ Thus, it comes as no surprise that a single rock, without a human action, is sufficient to exploit a fatal weakness inherent, not in the head of the statue, but in its feet.⁸¹

It is not too hard to imagine the kind of impression this dream made on

Nebuchadnezzar. From the very beginning, he must have identified with the dazzling statue.⁸² Though statues of gigantic proportion representing kings and gods were placed throughout the ancient Near East to symbolize the power of the ruling empires, in this dream, only **the head of the statue was made of pure gold**, while the materials that followed were of declining value. What must have made the king even more afraid was the fact that something terrible happened to the statue. From this he must have concluded that someone would try to kill him and grab his throne. This suspicion explains his great fear, which resulted in the irrational threat against his most trusted officials.

Meaning of the Dream (2:36-45)

Daniel's interpretation is much longer than his report of the dream. This time he proceeds with his talk by making a reference to both the king and God.

³⁶"This was the dream, and now we will interpret it before the king.³⁷You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you kingdom and power and might and glory;³⁸in your hands he has placed humankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are the head of gold.

³⁹"After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Then, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. ⁴⁰Finally, there

will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and crushes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.⁴¹ Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with baked clay.⁴²As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle.⁴³And just as you saw iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will mix with one another in marriage but will not remain united, anymore than iron mixes with clay.

⁴⁴"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will setup a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will its sovereignty be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵This is the meaning of the vision you saw of the stone cut out of the mountain but not by human hands—a stone that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold to pieces.

"A great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future. The dream is certain and the interpretation is trustworthy."

Notes

2:36 "We will interpret." The use of the first person plural pronoun "we" can be explained in no fewer than four different ways:⁸³ (1) plural of majesty; (2) plural of modesty; (3) Daniel and his friends; (4) Daniel and his God. The third option is supported by verse 47, where the king uses the word "you" in the plural, apparently to include Daniel's three friends.

"Before the king." See the Notes on Daniel 2:16.

2:37 "The king of kings." Babylonian kings bore the title in Akkadian of *sarsarrani*, "king of kings." The Aramaic construction *melek lalkayya'*, "king of kings," is usually explained as a superlative, meaning "the greatest of all kings" (cf. Hebrew *sir hassirtm*, "Song of Songs," *qddes fidasim*, "the Holy of Holies"). Without negating this explanation, we can suggest another possibility here, which is that the term may also have meant "the emperor," because in Nebuchadnezzar's time, he was the king of the kings (Ezek. 26:7). The Persian king Artaxerxes was also addressed as "king of kings" (Ezra 7:12). Nebuchadnezzar's dominion, however, was derived from a yet greater king. In Revelation 19:16, the Rider on the white horse (Jesus Christ) is called "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

"The God of heaven." See the Notes on Daniel 2:18. The lesson taught here is that the "God of heaven" has given dominion to "the king of kings."

"Has given you kingdom and power and light and glory." The literal meaning of the first noun, *malkuta'*, is "the kingdom." This statement is a leitmotif in the book, affirming the fact that kingship and dominion come from God. "Compare the claims of Nabonidus and Cyrus, each claiming that Marduk had made him king, and of Darius that Ahura Mazda had given him the kingdom."⁸⁴ First Chronicles 29:11 ascribes to God all the qualities mentioned in this verse.

2:38 "Hands." See the Notes on Daniel 1:2.

"Over them all." These words are a fulfillment of the prophecy in Jeremiah 27:6 (cf. Jer. 15:14), which says, "'I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of

Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him.'" Daniel 2:38 speaks of a universal dominion of the king over all creation, classified here in three categories: human beings, animal world, and birds. The Greek text adds "and the fish of the sea." King Nebuchadnezzar's dominion echoes Adam's, being described in the language of Creation (Gen. 1:26).

"You are the head." The Hebrew word *ro'sh*, "head," is often used in the Bible with a sense of primacy and superior quality. The root of the first word in the Bible, *bereshit*, "in the beginning," is *ro'sh*, "head." Amos 6:1, 6, 7 contain wordplays based on this word. Nebuchadnezzar's reign here represents the whole Neo-Babylonian Empire because he ruled over it for forty-three of the sixty-six years of its existence.

"Gold." In Jeremiah 51:7, Babylon is described as "a gold cup in the LORD'S hand." Similarly, the statue of gold in Daniel 3 represents the king's dreams of what the Babylonian Empire should be. Gold was the most popular metal in Babylon.

2:39 "Inferior." When viewed from top to bottom, the materials that made up the statue were of decreasing value but increasing strength. The Medo-Persian Empire occupied a larger territory than did Neo-Babylon.

"The whole earth." The statement *bekol-ar'a'*, "over the whole earth," may be taken as an exaggeration. Most of the world empires boasted of being universal.

2:40 "Breaks and crushes." The author combines these two verbs in order to express the destructive nature of this kingdom. The two verbs describe similar actions. Jeremiah graphically described Babylon as "the hammer of the

whole earth" (Jer. 50:23), which he said would be broken and shattered in the end.

"All the others." Literally, the text says *kol-'il-lên*, "all these." This expression may refer either to "everything" or to the previously mentioned elements of the statue.

2:41 "Toes." The toes have not been mentioned previously in the story. Their number is not specified, but some commentators assume that there were ten. Yet, "the writer does not mention the number ten, nor seem to attach any special importance to it, any more than he mentions the division of the body into two legs."⁸⁵

"Partly." The word *minn^ehên* actually means "some of them."

"Baked clay." See the Notes on Daniel 2:33.

"A divided kingdom." The concept expressed through the word *p^elîgâ*, "divided" (cf. *Peleg* in Gen. 10:25; 1 Chron. 1:19), is the basic characteristic (*differentia specifica*) that distinguishes the fourth kingdom from the previous three. Some scholars translate this word as "composite." The division is not into different parts; the intrinsic weakness of this part of the statue is due to internal tensions.

2:43 "Iron mixed with baked clay." While the iron is described as strong, the clay pottery is brittle, resulting in this kingdom's lack of cohesion. These two types of material are incompatible. In fact, in the Bible, iron is used to break ceramic: "You will rule them with an iron scepter; / you will dash them to pieces like pottery" (Ps. 2:9).

"The people will mix with one another in marriage." The Aramaic text literally says *mit'ārebîn lehewōn bizra' 'anāšā'*, "they will mix themselves with the seed of men." Some trans-

late it as "they will mingle in marriage" (cf. Ezra 9:2)—in Daniel, referring to attempts at political alliances by intermarriages. However, the text says that these alliances will not remain stable. Although a number of modern interpreters, looking also at Daniel 11:6, 17, see here in chapter 2 a reference to the interdynastic marriages during the time of the Ptolemies and Seleucides,⁸⁶ other scholars have argued for a more general concept of intermingling of diverse races (cf. Gen. 6:1-4; Exod. 12:38).⁸⁷ The latter view is also found among the famous Jewish interpreters, such as Rashi and Ibn Ezra. It is also noteworthy that the same verbal root *'rb*, "to mix," used in this text is also found in Jeremiah's description of the Babylonian army made up of "foreigners" (Jer. 50:37). Some scholars have called attention to Leviticus 19:19, which prohibits "mixed" planting of two kinds of seed in the field.

2:44 "Those kings." The kings referred to here are those representing the fourth, divided kingdom rather than the rulers of the first three kingdoms. This verse is the climax of Daniel's speech before the king. In the light of chapter 7, where ten horns are related to the fourth beast, some commentators have suggested that the ten toes here parallel the end-time confederacy of ten kings from Revelation 17:12.

"The God of heaven." See the Notes on Daniel 2:18. The same God who gave dominion to Nebuchadnezzar (2:37) will in the end set up an eternal kingdom.

"A kingdom." The traditional Jewish interpretation is that this is the Messianic kingdom, related to the symbol of stone from Zechariah 3:9; 4:7.⁸⁸

"Forever." See the Notes on Daniel 2:20.

2:45 "The stone." See the Notes on Daniel 2:34. Isaiah 51:1 applies the symbol of the rock to God, while Jeremiah 51:25 calls Babylon a "destroying mountain." Jerome claimed that the Messianic interpretation of this prophecy could be found in rabbinic writings, and he concluded that the rock represents Jesus Christ.⁸⁹ This interpretation is in line with numerous New Testament texts (e.g., Luke 20:18). In the Psalms (18:2; 42:9; 71:3), rock is a common metaphor for God and the protection that can be found in him.

"Cut out of the mountain." In the original, the word *turn*, "mountain," is preceded by the Definite article, suggesting that the reader knows which mountain is in view. Rocky mountains were not a common physical feature in Babylon. The origin of the rock is supernatural in this case, since it is cut out of a mountain, but not by a human hand. The prophet Isaiah urged the Israelites to "look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn" (Isa. 51:1). Martin Luther proposed that the mountain here symbolizes either the Virgin Mary or the Jewish people from whom Jesus Christ came.⁹⁰

"The iron." The order of materials in this verse is both reversed and random. See the Notes on Daniel 2:35. The iron that "breaks and smashes everything" (v. 40) is the first element to be broken to pieces (v. 45) and ground to powder (v. 35).

"A great God." The title *'alah rab*, "a great God," refers to the same person as do the titles "the God of heaven" (2:18) or "God in heaven" (2:28). Daniel began his speech with a reference to God, and he ends it in the same way (*inclusio*).

"The dream is certain and the interpretation is trustworthy." The fact that Daniel was able to tell the dream gave absolute certainty to his interpretation. It is possible that the conjunction here is "a conjunction of consequence," indicating that "the dream is true, therefore, the interpretation is trustworthy."⁹¹ The king himself was able to confirm this fact. Similar affirmations about God's revelations are found elsewhere in the book (Dan. 8:26; 11:2; 12:7), and also in the book of Revelation (19:9; 21:5; 22:6).

Exposition (2:36-45)

2:36-38 Daniel's interpretation of the dream begins with the "reiteration of where the source of true power is to be located."⁹² He speaks to the king in the first-person plural, pointing to the fact that his interpretation derives from his God or possibly that in his intercession he was joined by his friends. (In verse 47, the king praises "your God," with the word "your" in the plural, probably referring to Daniel and his friends.)

The interpretation is clearly divided into two parts, both of which speak of **the God of heaven** in the beginning: (1) Verses 37-43 describe the four world kingdoms, and (2) verses 44, 45 talk of God's kingdom. Thus the focus is on the first and the last elements in the statue.

As Daniel begins his interpretation, he addresses the king directly and links his power and his right to rule with God's sovereignty. He uses several superlatives

to describe Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, one of which is the title *the king of kings*, which elsewhere in the Bible is applied to God himself. The prophet Ezekiel, who was Daniel's contemporary, also refers to King Nebuchadnezzar as "king of kings" (Ezek. 26:7). In both of these references, the most probable meaning is "world's emperor." The emphasis here is not on Nebuchadnezzar's power but on God who gave that power to the king. That is why some have rightly said that the theology of history explicated in Daniel's interpretation of the dream cannot be adequately understood apart from his wisdom that came in response to prayers.⁹³

The text in our passage portrays the emperor as someone who rules over other kings and also over all creation. This includes not only human beings but also all *the beasts of the field and the birds of the air* (the Greek version adds "and the fish of the sea"), making his rule universal. According to the Creation story (Gen. 1:28), God initially gave this responsibility toward his creation to Adam and Eve. While the idea present here is that Nebuchadnezzar is a new Adam, the Creator God is the only true Source of authority and wisdom. The prophet Jeremiah, who was another contemporary of Daniel, spoke of the extent of King Nebuchadnezzar's dominion in the following terms: "I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even

the wild animals subject to him" (Jer. 27:6; cf. 28:14).

Daniel identifies the whole Neo-Babylonian Empire with Nebuchadnezzar because he ruled over Neo-Babylon longer than any other king and even longer than the reigns of all who followed him combined. To Daniel's words *you are the head of gold*, Nebuchadnezzar must have responded inwardly with a resounding "Yes!"

2:39, 40 As Daniel proceeds with the interpretation of the dream, he rushes over the next two kingdoms. They receive more attention in a later vision, where their historical application is clearly stated (Dan. 8). It is useful to notice that only the first and last kingdoms, the gold and the stone, are identified in this chapter. In the end, the four earthly kingdoms are replaced by a fifth, which is of a completely different order. The famous eighth-century Greek poet and philosopher Hesiod, in his *Works and Days*, divided the history of the world into five different "generations of men and spirits," four of which were represented by gold, silver, bronze, and iron. In Hesiod's case, the fifth generation, in which he lived, was represented by iron. In Daniel, that metal stands for the fourth kingdom and is placed in a considerably distant future. Scholars have pointed out several other differences between these two texts.⁹⁴

Daniel describes in detail the fourth kingdom, especially in its second phase.

That kingdom will be very strong and will be characterized by great destructive activity through which it will put an end to the preceding kingdoms. Yet, unlike the previous world empires, this one will have a major weakness. It *will be a divided kingdom*. While a historical application of the four kingdoms is presented below, the number of the earthly kingdoms in the dream can also be viewed as symbolic. In certain prophetic passages of the Bible, the number four is associated with the totality of the earth (cf. Isa. 11:12; Dan. 7:2, 17; Zech. 6:1-7; Matt. 24:31; Rev. 7:1). In a symbolic sense, the four kingdoms represent all the earthly kingdoms and empires that have ruled the world throughout history.⁹⁵ Thus, the story of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the interpretation of it that God gave to Daniel teaches the divine philosophy of history:

Every nation that has come upon the stage of action has been permitted to occupy its place on the earth, that it might be seen whether it would fulfill the purpose of "the Watcher and the Holy One" [Dan. 4:13]. Prophecy has traced the rise and the fall of the world's great empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. With each of these, as with nations of less power, history repeated itself. Each had its period of test, each failed, its glory faded, its power departed, and its place was occupied by another.⁹⁶

In the word of God . . . is shown that the strength of nations, as of individuals, is not found in the opportunities or facilities that appear to make them invincible; it is not found in their boasted greatness. It is measured by the fidelity with which they fulfill God's purpose.⁹⁷

2:41-43 The divisions within the fourth kingdom clearly stem from the differing qualities of the two materials that comprise this kingdom. In everyday life, an iron tool could be used for breaking pottery into pieces: "You will rule them with an iron scepter; / you will dash them to pieces like pottery" (Ps. 2:9). The union of these two elements can create only tension, never a harmonious coexistence. The divisions represented here are deep, for even the individual toes were partly iron and partly clay. Although the fourth kingdom seeks to repair its fragility, it is unable to "do so in a lasting way."⁹⁸ As for the number of toes, whether there were ten or twelve, (cf. 2 Sam. 21:20) that detail did not seem to be a great concern to Daniel.

Behind the tension between iron and baked clay is the bipolar character of the kingdom. While on one hand, this kingdom is the strongest of the four, on the other, it is very brittle. The people who make up this kingdom attempt to maintain its fragile unity in order to make it as strong as iron in its entirety, just as it was in the past. They carry out this plan

through what the text literally describes as “the mixing of human seed,” a strategy not new to the reader of the Bible (Gen. 6:1-4; 34:20-23; Num. 25:1-3; etc.). These attempts, however, are doomed to failure in the way in which a similar project carried out in the plain of Shinar had failed (Gen. 11). The clear lesson taught in this text is that all attempts to unite humanity outside of God are illusory. Even “a hectic end-time rush to conclude alliances”⁹⁹ will not result in a lasting unity. The only kingdom that will endure forever is of heavenly origin. “Finality belongs to God.”¹⁰⁰

2:44, 45 The coming of God’s kingdom is set in the context of the multiple divisions of the last kingdom, which all suddenly come to an end. Verse 44 has been called “the crux of the interpretation of the entire symbolic vision.”¹⁰¹ The eternal kingdom is fittingly represented by a stone or a rock that becomes a mountain and fills the whole earth (Isa. 2:1-5), a metaphor that to our present knowledge is not attested outside of the Bible. In the culture of the time, mountains with their solid bedrock were often tied with longevity and endurance.

The scene that is described here must be interpreted as an intervention from God because the rock was cut from the mountain *not by human hands*. God’s kingdom “is wholly other, the result of divine intervention.”¹⁰² Gentile powers,

on the other hand, together with their idolatrous practices are viewed here as a unit, destroyed together by the stone. A new future is coming, and it “is not merely an extension of the present. It is of supernatural origin. But it is located on earth, not in heaven.”¹⁰³ World history is moving toward this goal.

In the Bible, stone or rock stands for God and his reign on earth. Numerous biblical passages, especially of poetic genre, speak of God being as reliable as rock. For example, the prophet Isaiah said, “Trust in the LORD forever, / for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal” (Isa. 26:4). The same prophet saw in a vision that at the time of the end, the nations of the world will stream to worship God on the mountain of the Lord’s temple (Isa. 2:1-5). Ancient Jewish interpreters regarded the kingdom represented by the stone as that of King Messiah.¹⁰⁴ In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is identified with that stone (Luke 20:17, 18; 1 Pet. 2:4).

Some writers apply the coming of the stone kingdom to God’s intervention in history at Christ’s first coming, while the majority of interpreters apply it to the Second Coming. Here we must point to the phenomenon called “the telescoping of biblical prophecy.” Old Testament prophets, and this includes Daniel, could not clearly distinguish between the events tied to the two comings of Christ. Jesus, in his Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24; Mark 13), described

the fall of Jerusalem and his second coming as a single event in history. It is in the light of the New Testament that Christians have learned that Christ “was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Heb. 9:28).

Some New Testament writers refer to Christ and his work of salvation as “the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God” (1 Pet. 2:4; cf. Acts 4:11; Rom. 9:32). In a similar way, Jesus Christ in his parables talked about the miraculous growth of his kingdom. Moreover, he applied some Old Testament prophecies that mention stone to himself and also to the effects of his ministry in behalf of the humanity. He asked, “‘What is the meaning of that which is written: “The stone the builders rejected / has become the capstone”?’ ” To this he added enigmatic words that strongly allude to Daniel 2 as they point to the contrasting results that his two comings will produce: “‘Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed’ ” (Luke 20:17, 18).

Daniel closes his interpretation of the dream by referring once again to God’s control over history and his willingness to make his plans known to King Nebuchadnezzar. In this way, Daniel is able to reassure the king. There is no imminent danger to his throne. His kingdom and

the future empires serve only as landmarks that lead to the last, eternal kingdom of the God of heaven. As mentioned earlier, the two references to God, one in the beginning and the other at the end of Daniel’s speech form an *inclusio*. Thus, it is safe to conclude that the story of Daniel 2 “illustrates the sovereignty of God, who humbles the mighty and exalts the lowly.”¹⁰⁵

In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.¹⁰⁶

The King’s Gratitude (2:46-49)

Impressed by Daniel’s ability to tell and explain the dream, the king, in a rather unusual way, pays profound respect to God, who was the Source of Daniel’s wisdom.

⁴⁶Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and commanded that an offering and incense be presented to him.

⁴⁷The king said to Daniel, “Surely your God is the God

of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

⁴⁸Then the king promoted Daniel to a high position and gave him many great gifts. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.⁴⁹Moreover, Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

Notes

2:46 "Fell prostrate... and paid him honor."

The original says *n^opal 'al-'anpdhi QManiye'l segid*, "fell upon his face and worshiped Daniel," expressing a deliberate act of reverence and even submission. The same two verbs are used in parallelism in the story that follows, in which all the royal dignitaries were ordered to "fall down and worship the statue of gold" (Dan. 3:5). "Nebuchadnezzar pays no attention to the content of Daniel's interpretation, even though it implies the demise of the Babylonian Empire."⁹⁷

"An offering and incense." The word *minha*, "offering," describes a cereal type of offering (Lev. 2:1; Ezra 7:17). The king's intention was to make an offering, but Jewish legends portray Daniel as refusing to accept these honors.

"Presented to him." The Aramaic verbal root *n^osk* means "to pour out" something like a drink offering, but it can also mean "to present" a gift.¹⁰⁸ It is possible that the king here simply "provides Daniel with materials with which Daniel can make an appropriate offering to his God"¹⁰⁹ (cf. Ezra 6:9,10).

2:47 "Your God." The original has the possessive "your" in the plural, referring to the God

of both Daniel and his friends. In contrast, the pronoun "you" in the words that follow, "you were able," is in the singular, referring only to Daniel. In 2:36, Daniel speaks in the first-person plural when he says "now we will interpret it before the king."

"God of gods and the Lord of kings." The first title here is a superlative meaning "the supreme God" (cf. 2:37); it points to God's supremacy in heaven. The second title describes him as the Supreme Ruler over all earthly kings. Deuteronomy 10:17 clearly applies both of these titles to God. See the Notes on Daniel 2:37.

"Revealer of mysteries." See the Notes on Daniel 2:29.

"This mystery." See the Notes on Daniel 2:18 and 2:19.

2:48 "High position." Literally, the text says that the king *rabbi*, "made [Daniel] great." This chapter contains a play on the word *rab*, "great." Verse 35 says that the stone that struck the statue became a "great mountain." Verse 45 says that the "great" God has shown the king what will take place in the future. Verse 48 uses this word three times: The king made Daniel "great," gave him many "great" gifts, and made him the "great one"—or ruler—over the province of Babylon.¹¹⁰

"Ruler... in charge." Daniel's position was twofold: He became *sallit*, "ruler," of the most important imperial province, which included the capital city. The second title, *rab-signin*, "chief prefect," over the wise men may have involved certain religious prerogatives.

2:49 "Made request." See the Notes on Daniel 2:16 and 2:18.

"Administrators." Daniel's position was superior to the positions of his friends, an impor-

3rt detail to keep in mind while reading the -ext story.

the royal court." Literally, the text says *bi-malka'*, "in the gate of the king." "Gate" was a semi for governmental office in the ancient Near East (cf. Gen. 19:1; Ruth 4:1-12; Esther 2:19, 21). ~>e expression here suggests cabinet rank.

Exposition (2:46-49)

2:46, 47 The chapter began with the King's fear that became great anger. It ends with a report of the immediate effect :: the revelation upon the king, a highly positive impact that resulted in great appreciation. Nebuchadnezzar has just witnessed a veritable miracle, so he bows in Daniel's presence. The world's most powerful ruler falls prostrate before an exiled :-ib'ea. What a sight! Indeed, "the world -jiers are under God's control, and when r.c chooses he can make them acknowledge it."¹¹¹ The king's problem was now resolved, and here at the end of the story, ~e is reassured through the message of the iream that the worst will not happen. God has appointed his rule, and only God take it away.

The king's reaction to Daniel's inter-relation is curiously positive, given the net that Daniel had clearly stated that ru? kingdom will not last forever. Nebuziadanazzar's reaction reminds the reader :: King Hezekiah's reaction to the words :r the prophet Isaiah: " 'The word of the LORD you have spoken is good,' Heze- •jah replied. For he thought, 'There will be peace and security in my lifetime' "

(Isa. 39:8). So, in his reverent but still half-pagan excitement, Nebuchadnezzar **commanded that an offering and incense be presented** to Daniel, a living representative of the God of heaven.¹¹²

The fact that the king fell **prostrate before Daniel** and immediately ordered that offerings **be presented to him** is a disturbing element in the story. While the king's overreaction is understandable, at first sight, Daniel's attitude toward the king's worship does not reflect the teaching of the Bible on this subject (Rev. 19:10; 22:8, 9). Yet, a closer look into the text is very helpful as one attempts to solve this problem. First, the king was clearly overreacting. Who would not react similarly in the face of such an irrational fear? Second, in the king's presence, Daniel had concluded the interpretation by ascribing everything to God. "Throughout this encounter with the king, he had repeatedly given the glory and the credit for his knowledge to God."¹¹³

Josephus Flavius tells how Alexander the Great explained his act of lying on the ground before the high priest of Jerusalem by saying, "I did not adore him, but that God who hath honored him with that high priesthood."¹¹⁴ In like manner, Nebuchadnezzar, in his speech, first and foremost praised, not Daniel, but rather Daniel's God, who had helped Daniel resolve the king's problem. Third, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that offerings be presented—but we are

not told whether the order was carried out. In fact, Jewish tradition has generally denied that Daniel accepted the king's offering.¹¹⁵ If Daniel did not try to prevent this, that would mean that he himself understood that the king's worship centered on God and that he was only God's mouthpiece.

The captive Daniel represented God's reign on earth. He was only God's ambassador, and his words are echoed in the words of the monarch, who now places God above himself, calling him *the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries*. Montgomery has recognized the king's confession as "the real climax of the story."¹¹⁶ Nebuchadnezzar's act of bowing down fulfilled prophetic passages such as Isaiah 45:14; 49:23; 60:14. The story of chapter 2 and its vision are strongly linked. "The prediction of the collapse of the mighty statue of kingship by a mere stone is foreshadowed, and even set in motion, in this event [the king's worship], for the 'head of gold' is now in fact on the ground."¹¹⁷

2:48, 49 Having honored the Hebrew God, the king now rewards Daniel, too. He gives him the gifts that accord with the promises he made in the beginning of the story, but he also promotes Daniel. The prophet's promotion is twofold: The first position given to him is political and administrative in nature—he is made *ruler* of the capital province in the empire. That means he became a very powerful person, the *ruler* of Babylon's main

province and possibly next in rank to King Nebuchadnezzar. The second position was intellectual and possibly religious in nature. Since the *wise men*, the group that the king trusted most, had miserably failed him, Daniel is now appointed to be their leader. Daniel's political and religious power may be compared to those of Joseph in Egypt, who was put "in charge of the whole land of Egypt" and was given "Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest of On, to be his wife" (Gen. 41:43-45).

In the midst of his success, Daniel does not forget the friends who prayed with him during the time of danger. "They had shared in the prayer (v. 18); they shared also in the reward."¹¹⁸ At Daniel's request, the king promotes them as well. While in some cultures this would be viewed in a negative way, as a sort of nepotism, in the culture of Daniel's time and place, there was nothing unusual in his intervention on behalf of those who were members of his support group. They assumed high administrative positions of authority that were normally reserved for the Chaldeans, but their positions were not as high as Daniel's. These two details found at the end of the story—namely, that the Hebrews were now in positions of power coveted by the Chaldeans and that Daniel's position was higher than the positions of his friends—when put together with the idea of a statue, all set the stage for the story that follows in the next chapter.

Historical Application

The succession of the kingdoms that is mentioned in the story in Daniel 2 has a literal application in world history. Traditionally, the gold stands for the Babylonian Empire (605–539 B.C.), silver for Medo-Persia (539–331 B.C.), bronze for Greece-Macedonia (331–146 B.C.), and iron for the Roman Empire (146 B.C.–A.D. 476). Some scholars, however, in a very untraditional way, have linked the three kingdoms with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and his three successors based on the words of Jeremiah that “All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson” (Jer. 27:7). In that case, the stone that smashed the statue represented Cyrus, whose coming triggered Babylon’s fall and the end of Judah’s exile. Another, much more widespread application ties the symbol of gold to Babylon, silver to Media, bronze to Persia, and iron to Greece. The following chart pictures the traditional application in history and two applications that are espoused by some scholars of today:

The second and third of these applications (chart) are not really based on the interpretation found in the book. According to Daniel’s own interpretation of the dream, the first kingdom stands for the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar and by extension the rest of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Daniel describes the end of this empire (chap. 5), and in three places he says “the Medes and Persians” replaced it (Dan. 5:28; 6:28; 8:20). The book of Esther also considers the two nations as a single empire (Esther 1:3). The interpretation of the vision in chapter 8 identifies the successor of the Medo-Persians as “the king of Greece” (Dan. 8:20-22; cf. 10:20). Famous interpreters of the past, such as Josephus and Jerome, saw in the duality of hands in the statue the dual composition of the Medo-Persian Empire. Ford proposed that “as the shoulders and the body are larger than the head, so the realms of Medo-Persia and Greece extended their borders beyond that occupied by Babylon.”¹¹⁹

Applications of the Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Iron

	<i>Gold</i>	<i>Silver</i>	<i>Bronze</i>	<i>Iron</i>
1. Traditional:	Babylon	Medo-Persia	Greece-Macedonia	Rome
2. Modern:	Babylon	Media	Persia	Greece
3. Individual:	Nebuchadnezzar	Belshazzar	Darius	Cyrus

The only kingdom that is not identified in the book of Daniel is the fourth—the ironlike kingdom. While for a number of modern scholars, the fourth kingdom must be the Hellenistic Empire, for most interpreters in antiquity and still for many today, the fourth kingdom applies to the Roman Empire. One historical problem with the modern application is that Media never existed as a separate empire after the fall of Babylon. The world emperor after Babylon's fall was Cyrus the Persian (2 Chron. 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1-4), who had conquered Media before his capture of Babylon. Cyrus was born of “a hybrid parentage”¹²⁰—his father was Persian and his mother was Median. Thus, it is safe to conclude that the traditional application of the “iron kingdom” to the Roman Empire finds support in Daniel's text and has a “longstanding tradition” among biblical interpreters that goes back to Josephus.¹²¹

Like its predecessors, the Roman Empire is described as universal (Dan. 2:36-40). But unlike the first three, this kingdom in its second phase is said to be divided. The prophecy said that to overcome this division, certain extraordinary efforts would be made to unite this kingdom and keep it together. How should these divisions be viewed in terms of history? Should the application be restricted in time with a scope limited to only one world continent? To which time or times in history do the feet and toes apply? The standard futurist view is that “the ten-toe

stage of the image has not been fulfilled in history and is still prophetic.”¹²²

In saying that the fourth kingdom in the dream corresponds to the Roman Empire in world's history, we are not suggesting that one should go into unnecessary details—by saying, for example, that the two legs of iron stand for the division of the Roman Empire into eastern and western parts. This is especially important because the application of the second phase of this kingdom raises some interesting questions. It has been said that “the feet and toes represent the nations of modern Europe—some strong, some weak—that dwell in the territory of the western Roman Empire. These are the nations that will never be politically united.”¹²³

However, it can be argued that the application of the feet and toes in history should be universal rather than geographically restricted.¹²⁴ Two types of argument may be used in support of such an application: (1) The *theological* argument: If the second phase of the fourth kingdom applies to the world order that immediately precedes the coming of God's kingdom, then we are talking of the end of times and the type of prophecy that is present here is end-time or eschatological prophecy. It is commonly agreed that the best way to apply the end-time prophecies in the Bible is to consider them to be universal, without any geographical restriction. In this case, we conclude that the feet and toes in their bipolar divisions

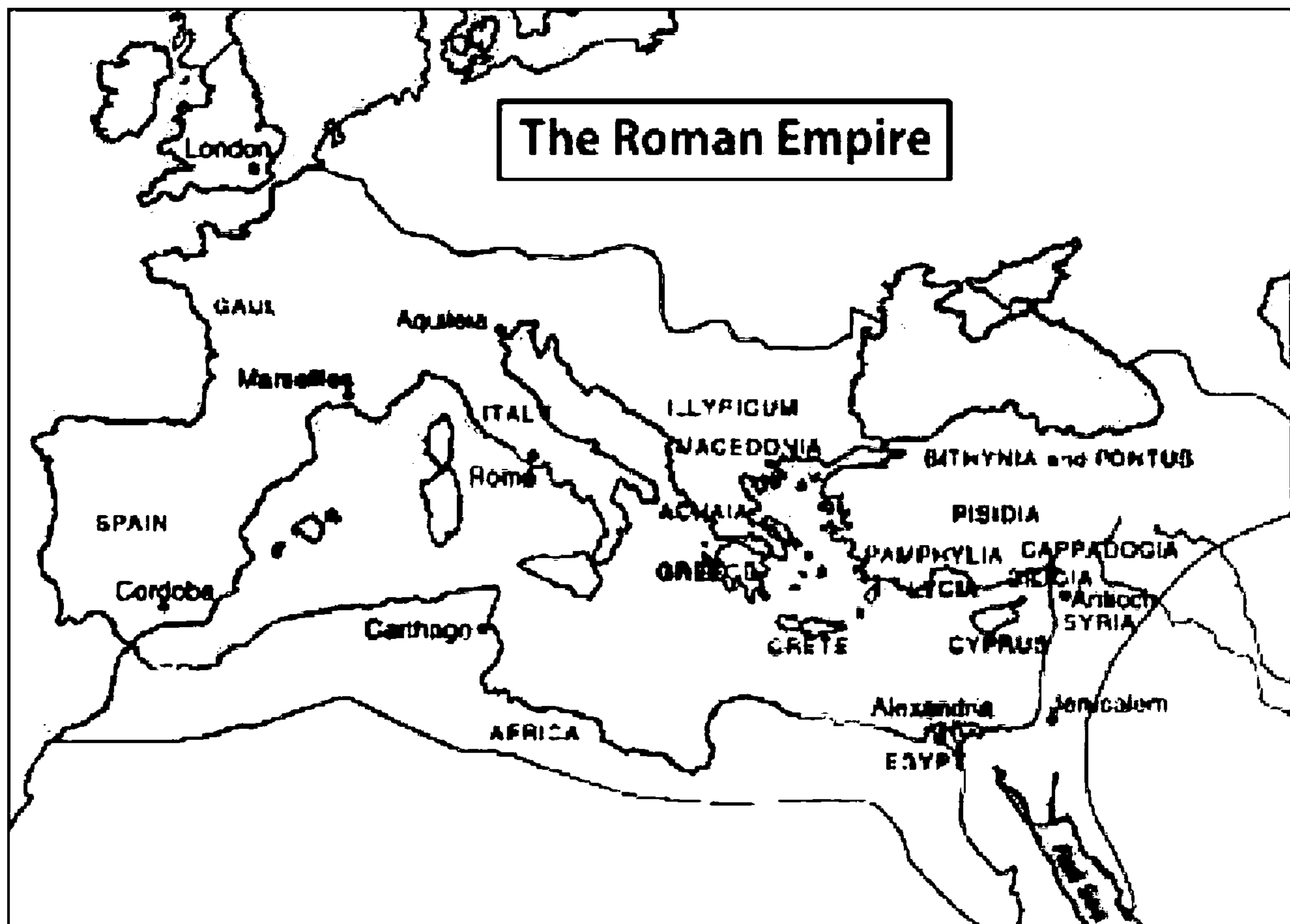
stand for the divided nations of the whole world that strive to unite as the end nears. (2) The *historical* argument: When the Roman Empire broke up, it was spread over parts of all three continents known at the time, namely, Europe (eastern and western), North Africa (Mauretania and Numidia), and western Asia (Asia Minor, Syria-Palestine, Mesopotamia). A look at a map of the Roman Empire in the fourth century A.D. in any atlas of world history makes this fact obvious.¹²⁵

So, it is logical to conclude that when, in its second phase, this last world kingdom strives to unite and maintain that unity, those efforts become visible not

just on one continent but worldwide. The part of Daniel's interpretation that pertains to the very end of this world's history should not be restricted to just one part of the world. Instead, it should be applied universally because the end of this kingdom will usher in the coming of God's universal reign on earth.

Summary of the Teaching

1. *God and the future.* The story in this chapter teaches that while human beings are often ignorant and afraid of what may come, God knows, reveals, and holds the future. In fact, the central message of Daniel 2 is that God knows the future.



The pagan gods are impotent to shape events in history (Isa. 46:6, 7),¹²⁶ and if they existed at all, would not communicate with human beings about this topic. Unlike them, “the Sovereign LORD,” to borrow words from the prophet Amos, “does nothing / without revealing his plan / to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). The key assertion of this story and of the book of Daniel is not that there is a God in heaven. At the time the book was written, everyone believed as much. The key assertion “is that, contrary to the despairing assumption of the sages (v. 11), this God reveals secrets. The sages were right that a divine revelation would be needed to provide what the king asked for, wrong to assume that this was impossible.”¹²⁷ Three times in this chapter Daniel asserts that God reveals mysteries (vv. 20, 23; 27, 28; 29b, 30). In each case, he openly confesses who is the Source of his wisdom.¹²⁸

God’s omniscience in regard to the otherwise unknown future and his readiness to share it with the humans does not serve merely to establish his superiority over us. His knowledge of the future is one means through which he intervenes on our behalf. In this story, one can see that God protected his faithful remnant in Babylon in accordance with the numerous promises found in particular in biblical prophecies. Yet, God’s love story did not end with his grace toward those who know and serve him. God cared about the wise men of Babylon; he did not want to see them executed. Daniel

said to Arioch, “ ‘Do not execute the wise men of Babylon’ ” (v. 24). Thus, Daniel, whose life has been saved by the revelation about the future, now becomes God’s instrument for the salvation of others.

2. *God and Babylon.* The most provoking concept found in this chapter is that God loved King Nebuchadnezzar and had a role for him to play in the fabric of world history. John Calvin argued that the wise men of Babylon “deserved to be exterminated from the world, and the pest must be removed if it could possibly be accomplished.”¹²⁹ In saying that, Calvin reflected a type of negative feeling toward the Babylonians commonly found among the Judeans of Daniel’s time (Jer. 25:12-14; 50; 51; Ps. 137). But in several places, the Bible mandates love for one’s enemies (Exod. 23:4, 5; Prov. 24:17; 25:21; Luke 6:27). Thus, the God of the Bible is the God of all human beings. He reaches out to all in order to save. The new world order that God has decreed and which he brings to pass involves changing the lordship of this world, not abandoning this world.¹³⁰ According to this prophecy, in days to come, “even the most unlikely foreigners” will come to know and worship the God of Israel.¹³¹ The redemptive aspect of divine power stands in stark contrast to what the rest of the visions will portray as power in the hands of the human beings who are oppressive and destructive.

It has been suggested that the overall theme of the book of Daniel is that “in

spite of present appearances, God is in control."¹³² Indeed, one can say with Daniel that there is a God in heaven • ho knows all human beings and cares about their lives and destinies. "He numbers even the hair of our heads. Our rimes are in His hand, and He controls revolutions great and small which affect even the least of his children."¹³³

1. Towner, 29. I cannot agree that this chapter : a work of fiction, a fact that according to Towner : :mes as good news which sets us free from having : n deal with historical problems of the chapter.

2. Longman, 73. Lucas (p. 77) classifies this : r^pter as "a story of court conflicts." Elsewhere, Lucas (p. 66) agrees with Goldingay's classification : : this chapter as "dream report."

3. Collins, 173.

4. Seow, 35.

5. Smith-Christopher, 496.

6. Slotki, 7.

Josephus *Antiquities* 10.10.3.

8. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 25. According to Genesis -1 Pharaoh had two dreams in one night.

9. Peter-Contesse and Ellington, 30.

10. Goldingay, 30.

11. Montgomery, 142.

12. A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia: -merican Philosophical Society, 1956), 238.

13. Hartman and DiLella, 13.

14. Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, 732.

15. Smith-Christopher, 51.

16. Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 45, 63. See J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the orth-West Semitic Inscriptions*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 25.

17. Peter-Contesse and Ellington, 35.

18. Miller, 82.

19. Slotki, 9-10.

20. Collins, 157.

21. Goldingay, 52.

22. Ibid., 45.

23. Seow, 34.

24. Collins, 156.

25. Oppenheim, 219.

26. Berrigan, 55.

27. Josephus *Antiquities* 10.10.3.

28. Oppenheim, 237.

29. Lucas, 70.

30. Hartman and DiLella, 144.

31. Berrigan, 24.

32. White, *Prophets*, 491. Jerome's conclusion was that the king had only a vague recollection of the dream (Collins, 156). Baldwin (p. 87) argued that the king "had forgotten the details of the dreams that had been haunting him."

33. Collins, 153.

34. Ibid.

35. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 26.

36. Seow, 40.

37. Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 41.

38. Collins, 149.

39. Smith-Christopher, 52.

40. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 27.

41. Lucas, 72.

42. Goldingay, 47.

43. Slotki, 12.

44. Ibid., 13.

45. Baldwin, 90.

46. Seow, 42.

47. Smith-Christopher, 53.

48. Towner, 41.

49. Baldwin, 89.

50. Goldingay, 55.

51. On the prayers in Daniel's book, see Paul B. Petersen, "The Theology and the Function of Prayers in the Book of Daniel" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1988).

52. Walvoord, 54.

53. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 26.

54. Towner, 32.

55. Baldwin, 91.

56. Seow, 41.

57. Lucas, 79.

58. Goldingay, 36.

59. Gleason L. Archer Jr. et al, *Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebel, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 7:43.

60. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 28.

61. Collins, 154.
62. Gerhard Pfandl, *The Time of the End in the Book of Daniel* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1992), 315-317.
63. Ford, 95.
64. See for example Zdravko Stefanovic, *The Aramaic of Daniel in the Light of Old Aramaic*, JSOT 129 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).
65. Ali Abou-Assaf, Pierre Bordreuil, and Alan R. Millard, *La Statue de Tell Fekherye et son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne* (Paris: 1982), 97.
66. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 32.
67. *Ibid.*, 34.
68. *Ibid.*, 28.
69. Smith-Christopher, 57.
70. Ford, 94.
71. *Ibid.*, 85.
72. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 38.
73. Longman, 78.
74. Montgomery, 162.
75. Goldingay, 55.
76. The Babylonian Talmud, *Ber.* 55b.
77. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 42.
78. Ford, 96.
79. Shea, *Daniel*, 99.
80. Collins, 165.
81. Goldingay, 57.
82. Baldwin (p. 92) says that "the statue stood for the king."
83. Péter-Contesse and Ellington, 59.
84. Collins, 170.
85. Baldwin, 94. Cf. similar statements in Longman, 82, and Nichol, 4:775.
86. Collins, 170.
87. Montgomery, 190.
88. Slotki, 19.
89. Collins, 171.
90. *Ibid.*, note 178.
91. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 39.
92. Smith-Christopher, 54.
93. Seow, 41.
94. G. F. Hasel, "The Four World Empires of Daniel 2 Against Its Near Eastern Environment," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 12 (1979): 17-30.
95. Scholars who do not see this number as symbolic argue that "this map of the future is concerned with the people of God and the revelation made by God initially to the theocratic race whose home was Palestine. . . . To Palestine the Messiah would come, and the gospel would initially be proclaimed from that base. . . . Thus the four empires are those which had a special relation to the people of God and to the history of redemption" (Ford, 95).
96. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press®, 1952), 176-177.
97. *Ibid.*, 175.
98. Goldingay, 50.
99. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 36.
100. Berrigan, 40.
101. Walvoord, 74.
102. Lucas, 79.
103. Goldingay, 59.
104. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 39.
105. Seow, 35.
106. White, *Prophets*, 499-500.
107. Collins, 169.
108. Hoftijzer and Jongeling, 735.
109. Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, 734.
110. Seow, 49.
111. Goldingay, 62.
112. Maxwell, 32.
113. Miller, 103.
114. Josephus *Antiquities* 11.8.2.
115. Lucas, 77.
116. Montgomery, 181.
117. Seow, 49.
118. Nichol, 4:777.
119. Ford, 97.
120. Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 79.
121. Collins, 166.
122. Wolvoord, 72.
123. Maxwell, 37.
124. Zdravko Stefanovic, "Europe in Prophecy," *Adventist Review*, October 21, 1993. Also, "God's World Order," *South Pacific Division Record*, April 5, 1997.
125. See for example "Map of the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century A.D." in *Rand McNally Atlas of World History*, R. I. Moore, ed. (Chicago: Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1987).
126. Longman, 75.
127. Goldingay, 57.
128. Lucas, 78.
129. John Calvin, *A Commentary on Daniel*, Geneva Commentaries Series (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995), 1:135.
130. Goldingay, 60.
131. Towner, 43.
132. Longman, 73.
133. Ford, 100.

THE GOLDEN STATUE

(3:1-30)

Like the preceding chapters, Daniel 3 contains a story of conflict—this time between King Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel’s three companions. The setting of this story follows upon the conclusion of the preceding chapter.¹ Although the events of this chapter are not dated in the Aramaic text, the Greek text of the Septuagint version claims that they occurred in Nebuchadnezzar’s eighteenth year of reign—supposedly the same year when the Babylonian army destroyed the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 52:29).²

However, it is very likely that the events described in this chapter took place in the first half of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, when he might well be called “Nebuchadnezzar the Destroyer.” A date that has been suggested is the tenth year of his reign, falling in 594 B.C. This suggestion has been made because of two pieces of historical evidence that may shed light on the main event that took place that year relating to the topic

in this chapter.³ The first piece of evidence comes from the official Babylonian records:

In the tenth year the king of Akkad
(was) in his own land;
from the month of Kislev to the
month of Tebet
there was rebellion in Akkad . . .
. . . with arms he slew many of his
own army.
His own hand captured his enemy.⁴

This text supports the thesis that Nebuchadnezzar’s suspicion of his wise men in connection with his dream of the statue (Dan. 2) was not unfounded. Rebellions and attempted coups were not uncommon during the first part of his reign, and these plots sometimes involved people who belonged to the ranks of “his own army.” The mutiny that is described here must have been a serious one because the text suggests that the leader of the rebellion entered the very

throne room and engaged the emperor in hand-to-hand combat.

Following this serious threat to his reign, Nebuchadnezzar decided to do something that would make a lasting impression on his officials and thus hopefully prevent any future uprising against him. So, he had an imposing statue erected that visibly represented his long-lasting claim to reign. At its inauguration, all the high-ranking administrators of the empire—with the exception of the Chaldeans, the ruling class in Babylon—were to solemnly pledge their loyalty to the emperor.

In this context, a second piece of evidence, this time from the Bible, becomes equally valuable. It comes from Jeremiah 51:59-61 and dates to 594 B.C. It reads as follows: “This is the message Jeremiah gave to the staff officer Seraiah son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went to Babylon with Zedekiah king of Judah in the fourth year of his reign. Jeremiah had written on a scroll about all the disasters that would come upon Babylon—all that had been recorded concerning Babylon. He said to Seraiah, ‘When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud.’”

As far as we know, Zedekiah was the only king of Judah who traveled to Babylon and returned to Judea. It is possible then that Zedekiah was present on the plain of Dura for the occasion described in Daniel 3.⁵ Jeremiah says that this

king, upon his return to Jerusalem, hosted an anti-Babylon conference for the leaders of the countries in Syro-Palestine that were Nebuchadnezzar’s vassals (Jer. 27).

There was, therefore, a good historical and political reason behind King Nebuchadnezzar’s bold project to erect this statue and make it a symbol of his powerful and lasting reign. Undoubtedly, the stories found in this chapter and the previous one are closely related. There are several points of similarity between the two, the main one being the statue that represented kingdom(s). The king may not have been the only one in favor of erecting this statue. It has been suggested that “the wise men of his realm. . . proposed that he make an image similar to the one seen in his dream, and set it up where all might behold the head of gold, which had been interpreted as representing his kingdom.”⁶

Regarding the organization of this chapter, a four-part chiasmic structure may be proposed. This structure is built on a clear reversal from the king’s pride, related in the beginning of the story, to his confession and praise, found at the end:

1. The king’s pride (3:1-7)
2. The faithful accused (3:8-12)
3. The faithful tested (3:13-27;
the longest part)
4. The king’s praise (3:28-30)

The longest part in the proposed structure concerns the test of the faithful, a feature that is also found in the story of chapter 1. The only words spoken by the three young Hebrews are found in that part, in verses 16-18. They are considered to be “a key point in the story.”⁷

The length of this chapter in the Greek translations differs from that of the Hebrew Bible. The Greek versions have two passages, an additional sixty-six verses, which are inserted between verses 23 and 24. These passages are usually referred to as “The Prayer of Azariah” and “The Song of the Three Young Men.” Moreover, the English and Hebrew Bibles differ as to the division between chapters 3 and 4. While in modern translations, chapter 3 ends with verse 30, in the Hebrew Bible, it continues through chapter 4:3.

The King's Pride (3:1-7)

The person of King Nebuchadnezzar clearly dominates the story in this chapter. Without giving any detailed background information that would hint at the rationale for the events that follow, the author goes straight into the story as it unfolds.

¹King Nebuchadnezzar made a statue of gold sixty cubits high and six cubits wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ²He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates,

and all the provincial officials to come to the dedication of the statue which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

⁴Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations, and men of every language: ⁵As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipes, and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the statue of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into the midst of a blazing furnace.”

⁷Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, harp, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations, and men of every language fell down and worshiped the statue of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Notes

3:1 “King Nebuchadnezzar.” In the original Aramaic, this verse and the following one both begin with the words *n^ebûkadneššar malkâ*, “Nebuchadnezzar the king.” In a normal Hebrew sentence, the predicate comes before the subject. The reason for the inverted word order in this text may be the change of subject from the end of the preceding chapter. The focus here is on the king who figures so prominently in the chapter.

“A statue of gold.” In its Hebrew form, the word *š^elēm*, “statue, image,” is also used in the Creation story (Gen. 1:26, 27; cf. 5:1-3). This image is one of the key links to the previous

chapter (Dan. 2:31). The text does not say whether the statue was a representation of the god Marduk (Dan. 3:12, 14, 18, 28)⁸ or of the king himself.⁹ In either case, the image represented Nebuchadnezzar's authority and was an object of worship. The view that the statue was in the form of the god Marduk (Bel) is preferred here for several reasons. First, if the king was physically present on the plain, why would he demand his subjects to worship his statue and not him in person?¹⁰ Second, the concept of the worship of a king is not found in the stories in the book of Daniel. Third, while the Egyptian pharaohs were considered to be divine, in Mesopotamia, except in a few cases, the kings were considered the shepherds of their people in the service of the gods.

Ancient texts tell of huge statues placed all over the ancient world, from Babylon and Persia in the east as far to the west as Greece. A famous example is the stone statue of Rameses II from Egypt. Also, in the temple of Marduk in Babylon there were at one time no fewer than three statues of gold representing gods. One of them was in the form of the god Marduk seated on a golden throne.

The statue was most likely made of a less costly material, such as baked brick, and coated in gold, a practice common in the making of idols (cf. Isa. 40:19; 41:7; Jer. 10:3-9).¹¹ Some commentators think that the statue was made of wood or stone and overlaid with gold, much like the golden altar in the Tent of Meeting (Exod. 37:25, 26; 39:38; 40:5).¹² In the previous chapter, gold symbolized Nebuchadnezzar's reign. This is clear from Daniel's words to the king: "You are the head of gold" (Dan. 2:38).

"Sixty cubits high and six cubits wide." The statue was of gigantic proportions, and its appearance was more like an obelisk due to its massive foundation. Its height, about ninety feet, or thirty meters, was ten times greater than its width. The dimensions given in the original text are sixty cubits times six cubits. That conforms with the sexagesimal system handed down by the Sumerians and widely used in Babylon. In this system, the numbers six and sixty comprise the base figure (cf. 60 seconds, 60 minutes, 360 degrees, etc). The number sixty was associated with Anu, the chief god of the Babylonian trinity. The sexagesimal system of counting has "certain advantages over the decimal system. For example, 60 is divisible evenly by 12 factors, whereas 100 is divisible evenly by only 9 factors."¹³ Since the proportions 1:10 are not typical in the construction of statues, it is possible that the dimensions sixty and six that are given here are not just literal but have a symbolic meaning as well.

"Set it up." The verbal root *qûm*, which in the causative form means "to set up," is found no fewer than seven times in this portion of the story (vv. 1, 2, 3 [twice], 5, 7) and ten times in the first eighteen verses. Thus, it functions as a refrain in the first half of the chapter. The subject of this verb is King Nebuchadnezzar, who is placed here in opposition to God because of his attempt to control the fate of his empire and of the world. According to the climactic statement of the previous chapter, God is the only Person of authority capable of setting up an everlasting kingdom (Dan. 2:44).

"The plain of Dura." The word *biq'at*, "a plain," may be describing something like "a valley"; it is used in Genesis 11:2 to describe the

plain of Shinar. The place name *Dûrā'* was commonly used in Mesopotamia. It is generally described as being "in the province of Babylon," although the exact identification of this plain still evades scholars. *Dur* is the Babylonian word for "a wall." The meaning of the complete expression "the plain of Dura" then would be "the plain of the wall." It may have referred to the large open space located between the inner and outer city walls.¹⁴ It is difficult to prove that there are connections between the plain of Shinar from Genesis 11:2 and the plain of Dura.¹⁵

3:2 "He." The original text repeats the words from the preceding verse, *n^ebûkadneššar malkâ*, "Nebuchadnezzar the king." In fact, this verse opens and closes with the words "Nebuchadnezzar the king," thus forming an *inclusio*.

"Summoned." The original wording, *š^elah l^emiknaš*, means "he sent to assemble." Most likely, Nebuchadnezzar erected and dedicated the statue to strengthen the unity of his empire by coercing all his administrators to swear an oath of loyalty. This event may have been prompted by some act of insubordination. Not all the inhabitants of Babylon were assembled in the plain, "but only the various officials as representatives of 'every nation, tribe, and tongue' of the empire."¹⁶ Compare 1 Kings 8:1, which says, "King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the LORD's covenant from Zion, the City of David."

"The satraps..." This chapter betrays the author's love for lists (cf. Dan. 2:2; 4:7; 5:7; 6:7). These lists function primarily to reveal that the participation in the mandated worship was as

wide as possible. The Aramaic original text lists seven classes of officials, while the old Greek version and the Latin Vulgate have only six. Yet, none "of the order of 'wise men' mentioned in the previous chapters seem to have been invited."¹⁷ The list of officials includes two Semitic (Akkadian) titles such as prefects and governors, while the remaining five are Persian titles.¹⁸

The precise meaning of each of the seven different ranks that were part of the Babylonian hierarchy is not clear. It has been suggested that they are given in descending order of seniority, beginning with the satraps, who were provincial rulers (Esther 3:12), and ending with a generally inclusive sort of summary expression: "all the provincial officials." The conjunction "and" that precedes this phrase probably functions as an explicative, meaning "that is." The best known of the titles listed in this text is "satrap," a governor of the major provincial division in the empire.

Some have suggested that the anachronistic use (prolepsis) of Persian titles in Daniel's book supports the view that the book was *not* written in one sitting. The author may have done some "editing of his words toward the end of a long life in order to bring them up to date. Daniel not only lived through the Persian reorganization of the empire but was prominent in the new government."¹⁹

"Dedication." The word *h^anukkâ*, "dedication," has a religious meaning here. It is also used of the rededication of the sanctuary altar (Num. 7:10, 11; 2 Chron. 7:9) and of the Jerusalem temple (1 Kings 8:63; introductory note to Ps. 30). For that reason, the word "dedication" fits this context better than does "inauguration" (cf. Neh. 12:27).

3:3 "So the satraps . . ." The complete list of officials from the previous verse is repeated here.

"The statue." See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:1.

"Set up." This verb occurs twice in this verse. It is the key to a proper understanding of the story (cf. Dan. 2:44). See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:1.

3:4 "The herald." The Aramaic word *kārôzâ'*, "herald," is preferred in this context because it is stronger and more precise than the word "messenger."

"Loudly proclaimed." The word *b^ehāyil*, "aloud," literally means "with force." The root of the verb *qr'*, "proclaimed," is the basis of the Arabic word *Qur'an*, meaning "that which is read aloud."

"Peoples, nations, and men of every language." This list is shorter than the others found in the chapter (the officers and the instruments) and is in conformity with the literary device known as "three" that in this context reinforces the concept of universality (cf. Gen. 11:1). Here, the reference is to "the ethnic, political and linguistic components of the empire."²⁰ In the document known as the Cyrus Cylinder, King Cyrus claims to be "king of the four rims of the earth."²¹

3:5 "The sound." The word *qāl* literally means "voice," but in this context it is better to render it as "sound."

"Horn, flute" A total of six musical instruments are listed: two wind (horn and flute), three stringed (lyre, trigon, harp), while the identity of the last (bagpipes) is difficult to establish with certainty. It is possible that the list here is only partial of all the instruments that were played on the plain. The first instrument that is mentioned

was made of an animal horn shaped into a trumpetlike object held to the mouth and blown to create a sound (Josh. 6:5). The second instrument, called by some a pipe, was also blown. The term is built on the Hebrew root *šrq*, which means "to whistle" (Isa. 5:26). The horn or pipe was a simple instrument played by peasants (Judg. 5:16).²² It has been observed that none of the musical instruments mentioned here were used in Israelite worship. The fact that three of the instruments have Greek names attests to the presence of the Greeks in Babylon. Several studies of the names of the musical instruments listed in this chapter have concluded that their presence does not necessarily point to a late date of Daniel's book.²³

"Lyre, trigon, harp." All three are stringed instruments. Often, they are differentiated by the number of strings involved and the presence of a resonating device.

"Bagpipes." This last word is the most problematic term in the list for translators. The Aramaic *sûmpôn^eyâ*, "bagpipe," is viewed by some as a coordinating term used for the grouping of all the instruments that were previously mentioned ("a harmony of sounds" or "an ensemble"; cf. Luke 15:25). Our modern word "symphony" is related to it. Other scholars have proposed that a sort of drum is in view here.

"Fall down and worship." The context makes it clear that both verbs *tipp^elûn w^etisg^edûn*, "you will fall down and worship," should be viewed as describing a religious act. To fall prostrate was a standard posture for prayer and worship in Bible times (cf. Deut. 4:19; 8:19). Forms of the verbal root *sgd*, "to worship," combined with *npl*, "to fall," are frequently found in this chapter. More-

over, *sgd* is used in parallel with the verb *plh*, "to serve, worship," in verses 12 and 14 below.

Worshipping this statue was not a problem for the non-Jewish administrators because they were polytheists and could worship any god. Moreover, the king's religious act served a clear political goal. "Obeisance to the idol at the king's command would, no doubt, imply an affirmation of loyalty to the king."²⁴ Yet for the Hebrews, even if the statue was made in Nebuchadnezzar's likeness, to fall prostrate before it meant the worship of the king or his god Marduk (cf. Dan. 2:46). The union between worship and state politics was a widespread practice among ancient peoples.

"The statue of gold." See the Notes on Daniel 3:1.

"Set up." See the Notes on Daniel 3:1.

3:6 "Fall down and worship." See the Notes on Daniel 3:5.

"Immediately." The literal meaning of the expression *bah-ša'tā'* is "in that very moment." Two concepts, one of the death penalty and the other of instantaneous punishment, remind the reader of the story in chapter 2. The reaction of the administrators had to be automatic and mechanical, and their worship characterized by pure formalism.

"A blazing furnace." The original says "in the midst of the furnace burning with fire." The presence of *'attûn*, "a furnace," and its association with the idea of punishment by burning in fire should not come as a surprise. First of all, mud-brick making and baking was common in Mesopotamia (Gen. 11:3) due to a lack of stone. It is very probable that, given its size, the statue was made of baked brick and then coated in gold. In

this way the furnace would conveniently serve two purposes: first, the construction of the statue, and second, punishment. Some have suggested that this furnace was a lime-kiln fueled either by charcoal or crude oil. Typically, a furnace had two openings, one on the top and the other on a side (v. 26).

Fire is sometimes used in the Bible as a metaphor for refining and purification. All three divisions of the Old Testament mention the concept of the execution of the death penalty by fire: the Pentateuch (Gen. 38:24; Lev. 20:14; 21:9), the prophets (Jer. 29:22), and the writings (Joshua 7:15, 25). A Jewish legend says Abraham refused to bow down to an idol and was threatened with death by burning in fire.

3:7 "Therefore." The phrase *kol-q°bēl d'ēnâ*, which literally means "because of all of this," gives a logical outcome of the pressure exercised by the king's command coupled with the threat of a most severe punishment—the officials obeyed through "thoughtless reflex."²⁵ The response was complete and immediate; disobedience was unthinkable in this case. Bowing down to the statue was an act of perfect formality, devoid of any meaning. This scene conveys the impact of a large group that acts together under pressure. This verse is characterized by the presence of two lists: The longer one repeats the six types of musical instruments, and the shorter one reiterates the three parts of the audience that represented the population of the entire empire.

"As soon as." The text literally says *bēh-zimnā'*, "in the time." Three Aramaic words, *'iddān*, "season" (3:5), *šā'â*, "moment" (3:6), and *z°mān*, "fixed time," are used synonymously in this passage.

“The sound of.” The last instrument from the list in verse 5, “the bagpipe,” is omitted in this verse.

“Peoples, nations, and men of every language.” See the Notes on Daniel 3:4.

Exposition (3:1-7)

3:1 Even a casual reader of the stories in Daniel’s book will notice that the concept of *a statue* is a strong link between this and the previous chapter. However, the fact that this is obvious does not negate the presence of several basic differences. The statue in this chapter was in its entirety coated in gold, while in the previous story only the statue’s head was of gold. Moreover, there are no feet of clay present in this statue. Instead of feet of clay, there is a solid pedestal, evident from the dimensions of the statue. And the persons who *set up* the enduring kingdom differ. While in the previous chapter, Daniel said, “The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed,” (2:44), this chapter repeatedly states that King Nebuchadnezzar *set up* the statue. In fact, the person of the king dominates this whole story.

It is possible that Nebuchadnezzar “willfully tried to reshape the vision [of chapter 2] to his own liking.”²⁶ Thus, this story tells of an attempt on his part to improve on the image he had seen in a dream, or to forestall the inevitable advent of God’s eternal kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar’s defiant project curiously

resembles the one reported in Genesis 11, when human beings organized themselves on the plain of Shinar in order to challenge God’s plan. Both stories took place on “a plain,” and both ended in a fiasco.

In the ancient Near East, various kings, especially the rulers from Assyria, were known for their practice of erecting colossal statues in the form of human beings or gods. In this story, the author did not consider the shape of the statue important enough to tell us what it was. Some writers have proposed that the statue was made in the likeness of the king himself. Some details in the story, however, lead us to the conclusion that it was shaped in the form of a god. This is evident from the parallelism, found no less than three times in this text, between serving Nebuchadnezzar’s gods and worshiping the image of gold that he had set up (cf. Dan. 3:12, 14, 18). Moreover, in Daniel 3:28, the king praises the courage of the three Hebrews who *were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God*. Since King Nebuchadnezzar served Babylon’s patron god Marduk (Dan. 4:8), also known as Bel, this image was most likely made in the likeness of that deity.

The statue is said to have been made *of gold*. But the size of the statue and the presence of the furnace strongly suggest that it was made of baked bricks and then coated in gold. Several scholars

have come to this same conclusion: “Nebuchadnezzar’s statue was not necessarily of solid gold; it may have simply been overlaid.”²⁷ This was a common practice in making idols—Isaiah 40:19 says,

As for an idol, a craftsman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with
gold
and fashions silver chains for it.

In the apocryphal story “Bel and the Dragon,” Daniel, looking at the idol, laughs and says, “ ‘Do not be deceived, O king, for it is only clay inside and bronze outside, and never ate or drank anything’ ” (v. 7). Thus, the furnace that is mentioned in this text served a dual purpose: It was used for brick making (Gen. 11:3) as well as for punishing those who dared disobey the king’s command (Jer. 29:22).

The size of the statue was unusual: It is said to have been *sixty cubits* times *six cubits*. Since the height was ten times greater than the width, the object, including its base, looked more like an obelisk than an ordinary statue. “As a modern comparison, it is interesting to note that the figure of the Statue of Liberty, excluding the pedestal, stands twenty feet higher than did Nebuchadnezzar’s image.”²⁸ In the Babylonian sexagesimal system, sixty and six were the base numbers. While these dimensions should be taken as literal, they are

not devoid of a figurative meaning as well. In the Bible, the number seven expresses the concept of perfection that is associated with God (Gen. 1:1–2:3; Dan. 5:4, 23; cf. “seventy sevens” in Dan. 9:24), while the number six falls short of perfection.²⁹ In Daniel 5:4, 23, the prophet puts in sharp contrast the six idols praised by Belshazzar’s party with the seventh—“ ‘God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.’ ”

At this point, the question may be raised as to whether this object was an idol. The answer to this question is positive for several reasons: First, the statue was made—or better, coated—in a valuable material; in this case, gold (Isa. 40:19). Second, the statue was an object of worship. The Aramaic verb *plh*, “to serve, worship,” used several times in this chapter (3:12, 18, 28), is also used in Daniel 7:27, where it is said that all the rulers worship and obey the humanlike being. Third, as mentioned above, it is very probable that the form of the statue represented the god Marduk (Bel) whom King Nebuchadnezzar worshiped. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the statue in the story was an idol and that to bow down to it would have meant the transgression of the first two commandments of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:2-6). In this story, religious idolatry is enforced through political power.

3:2-7 All the provincial administrators were summoned to *the plain of Dura* to publicly show their support for

the unity of the empire under King Nebuchadnezzar. Some type of insubordination, as described in the introduction to this chapter, must have prompted the royal order requiring their act of obedience. Yet, more than political submission is at stake here. The statue is more than inaugurated, it is also dedicated. The word *hanukkah* is used in the Bible of the dedication of the sanctuary altar (Num. 7:10, 11; 2 Chron. 7:9) and of the temple built under King Solomon (1 Kings 8:63; introduction to Ps. 30). It is clear that in this story, “god, king and nation are closely interwoven and support each other.”³⁰

The story is full of lists, of officers, musical instruments, and even clothes. Some of the lists appear more than once in the chapter. The complete list of the royal officials is found in verses 2 and 3 (v. 27 contains a partial list): satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and provincial officials. The musical instruments figure in four different places (vv. 5, 7, 10, 15) with only one minor variation: horn, flute, lyre, trigon, harp, and bagpipes.

The presence and the repetition of the lists heighten the story’s dramatic character, communicating the king’s attempt to impress his subjects and move them to total obedience to his command. The order is to be obeyed to the letter. The oft-repeated expression *peoples, nations, and men of every language* found in verses 4, 7, and 29 con-

veys the concept of universality (cf. Dan. 4:1; 5:19; 6:26; 7:14). The book of Revelation uses similar language to portray this same concept closely tied to worship (Rev. 5:13; 7:9; 10:11; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). The assembled officials represented the population of the whole empire. With the help of the music, the officials obey the command mechanically, as automatons. Faced with a death threat, they do not dare to challenge the order and suffer the severe punishment. Whatever the officials are doing, they are doing out of fear. Human beings have been slow to learn that the highest values can never be legislated.³¹

The Faithful Accused (3:8-12)

When everything seemed to be in place and the pressure from the king appeared to have accomplished its purpose, the story takes a sudden shift.

⁸Just at that time some astrologers came forward and accused the Jews. ⁹They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! ¹⁰You have issued a command, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipes, and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the statue of gold ¹¹and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into the midst of a blazing furnace. ¹²But there are some Jews whom you have placed over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the statue of gold you have set up.”

Notes

3:8 “Just at that time.” The first five words of this verse, *kol-q^obēl d^enâ bēh-zimnâ’*, “therefore, at that time,” are identical to the opening words of the previous verse. The author may have intentionally used the same words to convey the message that the Chaldean slander took place at the very time the officials were bowing down to the statue.

“Some astrologers.” The original text says *gu-brîn kaśdā’in*, “men, Chaldeans.” On the meaning of the term “astrologers,” see the Notes on Daniel 2:2. According to chapter 2, the Chaldeans were among the Babylonian wise men whose lives were saved by Daniel’s intervention. Here they serve as the king’s informers. Apparently, sheer envy prompted their accusation of the Hebrews.

“Accused.” The original words used here for the act of slandering are very graphic—the idiomatic expression *wa^akalû qaršêhôn* literally means “and they ate their pieces of.” The concept here is that the talebearer eats his victim’s flesh—a sort of verbal cannibalism. In the story of Daniel’s rescue from the lions, the same expression is translated as “falsely accused” (Dan. 6:24).

“The Jews.” The gentilic form *y^ehûdâyē’*, “the Jews,” is not very common in the book of Daniel. When coupled with verse 12, which says, “Some Jews whom you have placed over the affairs of the province of Babylon . . . ,” the Chaldeans’ use of this term demonstrates that dislike of foreigners compounded their professional envy (cf. Esther 3:8-11).

3:9 “They said.” The phrase *‘nô w^e’ām^erîn*, “they answered and said,” is common in Aramaic whenever dialogue is being reported.

“O king, live forever!” On this customary greeting at the palace, see the Notes on Daniel 2:4.

3:10 “The sound of . . .” In this verse, all six musical instruments are listed just as in verse 5, while in verse 7, the last instrument is missing.

“Fall down and worship.” See the Notes on Daniel 3:5.

3:11 Except for the addition of the expression “immediately,” verse 6 is identical with this verse.

3:12 “Some Jews.” See the Notes on Daniel 3:8.

“You have placed over the affairs.” These words are a strong allusion to the end of the previous story, where Nebuchadnezzar promotes the young Hebrews—an act that apparently resulted in the Chaldeans giving way to professional jealousy. The words *dî-mannîtâ yāt^ehôn*, “whom you have placed,” contain “a veiled antagonism to the king himself,” who had promoted the young Hebrews to the highest positions in the government (Dan. 2:49).³²

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.” Throughout this chapter, the young men’s Babylonian names are given to remind the reader of their high administrative positions in the kingdom (cf. Dan. 2:49). The foreign names here contrast with the term “Jews,” which the Chaldeans use.

“Pay no attention to you.” Elsewhere in the book, the expression *sîm t^e’ēm* means to “issue a command, decree” (Dan. 3:10, 29; 4:6; 6:26). Here, just as in Daniel 6:14, it conveys the concept of respect and compliance with a command. The Chaldeans charge the Hebrews with lacking this respect and compliance.

“Neither serve your gods.” Since this statement is in parallelism with the statement that follows, “nor worship the statue of gold you have set up,” we can conclude that the statue was of the god Marduk (Bel) whom Nebuchadnezzar calls “my god” in Daniel 4:8. Similarly, in the book of Esther, Haman presents the accusation that the Jews “do not obey the king’s laws” (Esther 3:8).

“The statue of gold you have set up.” See the Notes on Daniel 3:1.

Exposition (3:8-12)

3:8 The presence of the Chaldeans or the astrologers in the story is another link with the previous chapter. When the Chaldeans were in life-threatening danger, the God of the three Hebrews graciously saved them from an angry king through Daniel’s intervention. In this story, since the Chaldeans have already passed the test of loyalty, they serve as policemen, making sure that everybody present complies with the royal order. In this capacity, they denounce the “foreign upstarts.” Daniel uses a very strong Aramaic term for their act of slandering. Idiomatically, the text says that they “ate the pieces of the Hebrews,” expressing a sort of verbal cannibalism.

3:9-12 Externally, the Chaldeans sound polite; they greet the emperor in the customary way: *O king, live forever!* The accusation they present against the Hebrews is fourfold: They accuse the three men of ingratitude, disloyalty, disrespect, and disobedience.³³ To enhance

their accusation, they repeat Nebuchadnezzar’s order word for word. And to make their slander stronger, they exaggerate the matter by saying that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do not pay attention to the king nor to his religious beliefs. The previous story clearly shows that Daniel and his friends worked for the welfare of the palace. Therefore, to say that the Hebrews were not paying attention to the king was a false accusation. This accusation reminds the reader of Haman’s slander of the Jews to King Xerxes: “There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them” (Esther 3:8).

The true character of the accusers, however, is betrayed when they remind the king that he is the one who placed the three Hebrews in high positions. Clearly, in saying this, the Chaldeans are making a veiled attack on Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment. Through these important details the author may be suggesting that the same people whose lives have been spared by the intervention of the God of the Hebrews are now denouncing his worshipers and thus directly attempting to obtain their capital punishment. Needless to say, pure professional jealousy must have motivated this malicious act of the Chaldeans.

The Faithful Tested (3:13-27)

In the description of the testing of the young Hebrews, the person of the king once again dominates the narrative, giving the impression that he is fully in charge.

³ Then, furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ³ These men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the statue of gold I have set up?¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipes, and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the statue I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into the midst of a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my Hands?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the statue of gold you have set up."

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and his facial expression changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.²¹ So these

men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans, and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the midst of the blazing furnace.²² Because the king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot, the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ²³ and these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, firmly tied, fell into the midst of the blazing furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the midst of the fire?"

They replied, "Certainly, O king."

"He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the midst of the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the appearance of the fourth looks like one of the gods."

²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the midst of the fire,²⁷ and the satraps, prefects, governors, and royal advisers gathered around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

Notes
3:13 "Furious with rage." The two nouns in the original Aramaic expression, *birgaz wahama*, "in rage and in fury," are placed together to express a single reaction with great intensity (hendiadys), a type of hysterical rage that may be

rendered as “extreme anger, fury” (cf. Dan. 2:12; 3:19).

“Before the king.” The Aramaic expression *q°dām malkā*, “before the king,” is a strong allusion to the Hebrew equivalent expression *lipnê hammelek*, “before the king,” in Daniel 2:2, where the Chaldeans face an angry Nebuchadnezzar.

3:14 “Said.” The original says, “Answering, Nebuchadnezzar said to them.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:9.

“Is it true?” The word *hašdā*, “what purpose?” used by the king in the beginning of his question is not attested anywhere else in the Bible (*hapax legomenon*). It is understood to be a combination of the interrogative particle with an adverb, and as such, it is to be translated as “really?” or “truly?”³⁴ The root of this adverb, however, is attested outside of the Bible in Official Aramaic texts.³⁵

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:12.

“My gods.” The noun *lē’lāhay*, “my gods,” is in the plural in the original Aramaic and may be explained as referring to the king’s practice of polytheism (cf. Dan. 1:2). If, however, this reference is to the golden statue, then this could be a plural of majesty.

“Serve . . . worship.” These two verbs are used in parallel in verse 12.

3:15 “Now . . . if you are ready.” The first half of this verse in the original text is an incomplete sentence. One way to understand it is to translate it as a question: “Are you now ready?” This verse repeats the king’s decree word for word, revealing his attempt to use the art of persuasion.

“The sound of . . .” Again six musical instru-

ments are listed. See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:5. The orchestra will play one more time just for the Hebrews.

“A blazing furnace.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:6.

“What god will be able.” These words are an addition by the angry king. They demonstrate his arrogance and loss of control of his temper. The king of Assyria insulted God’s power with similar words of arrogance and blasphemy (2 Kings 18:33-35; 19:12, 13; Isa. 36:19, 20; 37:11, 12).

“To rescue.” The verb *šēzib*, “to rescue,” is also found in verses 17 and 28. It is one of the key terms in this chapter, frequently attested in chapter 6 (also vv. 14, 16, 20, 27), thus serving as one of the strong links between the two chapters.

“My hands.” In the original, the noun *y°dāy*, “my hands,” is in the plural. On the meaning of “hand,” see the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2. The same King Nebuchadnezzar into whose hand God had delivered the king of Judah is now challenging God’s ability to save his servants from Nebuchadnezzar’s hand.

3:16 “O Nebuchadnezzar.” Scholars have explained the absence of the title *malkā*, “king,” in various ways. It is possible that this act of discourtesy, unparalleled in the rest of the book, is to remind the reader that the glorious King Nebuchadnezzar was a mere mortal in God’s eyes. The word “king” is found in the next verse, which continues the young men’s speech. In Daniel 4:18, the king speaks of himself, saying, “I, King Nebuchadnezzar.”

“We do not need to give you an answer.” The original says, “Concerning this matter we

do not need to answer you." The word *d'nâ*, "this matter," most likely refers to the king's challenge in the previous verse. The young Hebrews do not feel compelled to answer a challenge directed at their God. These words should be explained in the light of what the king has learned about the true God from the events described in the previous story. Neither the king's threatening words nor the heat of the furnace is sufficient reason for the young men to reconsider the power of their God and their decision to remain faithful to him.

3:17 "If we are thrown." The word order found in the answer of the three young men is basically the same as that of the king's question. "Corresponding to the king's *if-if not* scenario in verse 15, they offer another point of view, an alternative *if-if not* scenario of their own in verses 17-18."³⁶ Thus we can say that syntactically, the young men modeled their answer on the king's question, but only in order to say the opposite—to reverse the king's words. This type of "answer heightens the literary tension of the story."³⁷

"God." Literally, the text says "our God." The Aramaic words here, *'îtay e'lāhanā*, "there is (our) God," are strikingly similar to Daniel's in the previous chapter, *'îtay e'lāh*, "there is a God" (Dan. 2:28).

3:18 "But even if he does not." The original simply says *w'hên lā' y'dîa' leh'ewē'-lāk*, "but if not, may it be known to you." The Septuagint translation ignores the conditional nature of the answer, turning the answer into a strong affirmation. In the context of making an oath, the corresponding Hebrew construction, *'im lō'*, "if not," can also function as a strong affirmation.

Readers should not take these words as referring to the possible failure of God's saving power. Rather, they should be viewed as a reversal of the king's question as explained in the note on the previous verse. In verse 15, the king did not question the existence of God but rather his ability to intervene in this situation.³⁸

Some scholars have proposed an alternative view here, saying that in their answer, the young men left some room for uncertainty regarding the outcome of their test. In that case, their statement "adds a touch of realism to the story,"³⁹ teaching that God does not choose to deliver his faithful every time they face dangers.

"Serve . . . or worship." See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:12.

3:19 "Full of fury." The original words mean *hitm'li ḥ e'mā*, "filled with fury." When compared with verse 13, they show a progression of the king's anger. The reader is reminded of Nebuchadnezzar's fury in dealing with his wise men in Daniel 2:12.

"His facial expression changed." The meaning of the original text is that *š'lem*—"the image"—of the king's "face was disfigured with rage." The play on the word "image," which is one of the key words in this chapter, may be intentional. Another way to put it is to say that his "countenance" changed.

"Seven times." The Aramaic expression *ḥad-šib'â* literally means "one seven." In this context, it means "seven times." The furnace is heated beyond what was customary and necessary. The number seven should be taken here as functioning proverbially rather than literally (cf. Prov. 24:16; 26:16), saying that the furnace was as hot as it could be. In one more place in Daniel (4:16)

and in the Bible in general, seven is related to the concept of God's judgment (Lev. 26:18, 21, 24, 28). The furnace is now heated to maximum intensity, between 900 and 1,100 degrees centigrade, with the impact of deadly flames felt even outside of the furnace. It has been rightly observed that in order to increase the miscreants' pain, the king should have decreased the temperature of the furnace.

3:20 "The strongest soldiers." The term *gibbārê hayil*, "men of (physical) strength," and its Hebrew equivalents are sometimes used in the Bible for trained soldiers. This detail is another proof that in his rage, the king was overreacting. "The choice of military men of outstanding strength was probably to forestall the possibility of intervention on the part of the gods."⁴⁰

3:21 "Wearing their robes." The expression *l'bušêhôn*, "and their robes," together with the terms that precede it comprise another list in the chapter. The precise meaning of each piece of clothing is uncertain, but scholars agree that in general the text speaks of both inner and outer garments with a headdress, all indicating a formal dress fit for the occasion. In other words, the Hebrews were punished wearing their formal attire, a probable reversal of their appointment to their positions of influence in Babylon (Dan. 2:49).

"Trousers." The Aramaic word *sarbāl*, "trousers," is related to the Persian word *shalvar*, which has the same meaning.

"Turbans." The word *karbêlâ* means "a cap, a headdress."

"Into the midst of the blazing furnace." The original specifies that they were thrown into the

midst of the fiery furnace. This detail is consistently repeated in the narrative. See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:6.

3:22 "Urgent." The word *maḥṣpâ*, "strict," is based on the same root as the word *mêḥaḥṣpâ*, "severe," that is found in Daniel 2:15 in the context of Nebuchadnezzar's rage at his trusted officials. There it is translated as "harsh."

"The fire killed the soldiers." The Syriac translation of the Bible says that the fire killed the people who slandered the young Hebrews. In chapter 6, the hungry lions eat Daniel's enemies (6:24), while in the book of Esther, Haman is hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai (Esther 7:10). Similarly, Psalm 115:8 says that those who make idols and trust in them will themselves become like dead idols.

"Took up." Since the Aramaic root *slq*, "to go up," with the causative meaning "to take up," denotes an upward movement, the young men were most likely thrown into the furnace through the opening on the top (cf. v. 23).

3:23 "Three men." The number three is used intentionally to prepare the reader for the unexpected appearance of a fourth person in the fiery furnace.

"Firmly tied." The word *mêkappêtin*, "bound," is mentioned again to prepare the reader for the miraculous scorching of the ropes with which the young men were firmly tied.

"Fell into." This detail confirms that the young men were thrown into the furnace through its top opening. See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:22.

In the Greek versions of Daniel, sixty-six verses that are not found in the Aramaic text of the Hebrew Bible are inserted here. The absence

of these verses from the original Aramaic text has been confirmed by the fragments of Daniel found in the caves from Qumran (the Dead Sea Scrolls). These additional verses comprise two passages referred to as "The Prayer of Azariah" and "The Song of the Three Young Men."

"The blazing furnace." See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:6. Several passages in the Bible compare Israel's slavery in Egypt to an "iron-smelting furnace" (Deut. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer. 11:4). Moreover, Judah's exile to Babylon is called the "furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10).

3:24 "Asked." See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:9.

"Advisers." The Aramaic term *haddābar*, "a counselor," is of Persian origin. It denotes a close companion or a personal adviser of the king. It is found only in the book of Daniel (3:27; 4:36; 6:7).

"Three men." See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:23.

"Tied up." See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:23.

3:25 "Four men." The number four stands here in opposition to the number three explicitly mentioned in verses 23 and 24.

"Walking around." The furnace was apparently large enough to allow four persons to move around.

"In the midst of the fire." The original says that the four men were walking in the midst of the fire in the furnace. See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:6. Fire, or a pillar of fire, is often associated in the Bible with the manifestation of God's presence (Exod. 3:2, 4; 19:18; 20:18, 21). God spoke to the children of Israel from the midst of a fire (Deut. 4:11, 12). This verse shows that God's power transcends death.

"Unbound." The term *š'rayin*, "loose," is used here in contrast to the words "firmly tied" in verses 21-24.

"Unharméd." This statement stands in contrast to the fact that this same fire killed the king's strong men.

"Like one of the gods." Because the word *bar*, "a son," functions here as a noun of relation, it is best not to translate it literally as "son" but as "a member of (a group)." The second noun, *'elāhîn*, is usually interpreted as "gods." Some translators have related it to its Hebrew counterpart, *Elohim*, which is also in the plural and often refers to the true God of the Bible. In this text that meaning is possible but not probable because for all we know, Nebuchadnezzar's polytheistic background would still be reflected in his language at this time. In verse 28, he further describes this person as *mal'ak*, "messenger" or "angel." In a similar way, the Greek version translates the expression "one of the gods" as "angel of God." The Talmud, out of strong monotheistic concern, identifies this person with the angel Gabriel.⁴¹ The equivalent plural expression "sons of God" is attested in several places in the Bible (Gen. 6:1-4; Deut. 32:8, margin; Job 1:6, margin; 2:1, margin; 38:7, margin).

The text does not state how the appearance of the fourth person differed from that of the other three, nor does it clearly identify this being. He is described only as a supernatural being. "Christian tradition typically identified the 'son of God' here as Christ."⁴² In some passages of the Bible, the expression "the angel of the Lord/God" designates God himself (Gen. 16:10-13; 21:17; 22:15, 16; Exod. 3:1-7; Hos. 12:4). See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:28. It is possible that the fourth person was either an angel sent by God or God himself. In the visionary part of the book, the archangel Michael is presented

as the protector of the Hebrew people and also as the chief commander of God's armies (Dan. 12:1; cf. 10:13). Revelation 12:7 identifies Michael as Jesus Christ. Since Daniel's book gives Michael the role of defender of God's people, he would have been the ideal person "to have protected and defended the three Hebrews in the fire."⁴³

3:26 "The opening." Literally, the text says *t'ra'*, "gate." The side door of the furnace is most likely in view here because through it the king could see the young men walking inside the furnace. The other opening was on the top; the young men were thrown through it into the furnace (see the Notes on Daniel 3:22).

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego." See the Notes on Daniel 3:12.

"Servants of." For a similar creedal statement, see Ezra 5:11, where the Jews answer, "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth."

"The Most High God." The divine title *'lāhā' illāyā'*, "God Most High," is an ancient title applied to the supreme God. In the Bible, it is used mostly by non-Hebrews to refer to the true God (Melchizedek in Gen. 14:19; Balaam in Num. 24:16; the king of Babylon in Isa. 14:14). In this verse, this title is used to show the superiority of God to the elements of nature. In the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar, who was a polytheist, God was "the chief of all gods."

3:27 "And the satraps..." The last list found in the chapter forms an *inclusio* with the list of officers found in verse 2. The term "royal advisers" is an addition; it is also used in verse 24.

"Gathered around." Literally, the Hebrew

text says *mitkannēšîn*, "gathered together," using the same verb root as in the word *l'miknaš*, "to summon" in 3:2.

"They saw." The idea that is stressed here is that this distinguished group of dignitaries that represented a universal audience all acted as eyewitnesses to the triple miracle that had taken place.

"A hair... their robes." These two items would be the first things burned by the fire. So, in this story, the fire was selective.

"No smell of fire." This statement is almost hyperbolic. It stands in clear contrast to what happened to the king's strong men in Daniel 3:22.

Exposition (3:13-27)

3:13-15 The Chaldean slander made the king very angry. This fact reminds the reader of the previous story in the book where Nebuchadnezzar was very angry at Babylon's wise men (2:12). In this case the Chaldeans have managed "to turn the anger of the king against the Jews."⁴⁴ But the king's uncontrolled fury betrays his insecurity. There is no doubt that he is *furios*, yet, at the same time, he seems reluctant to proceed with the punishment due to the privileged positions held by the three Hebrews (Dan. 2:49), who were close friends of Daniel, his most trusted officer (Dan. 4:8, 9). For these reasons he is ready to give them one more chance. "His primary concern is with their public conduct, rather than with their private beliefs."⁴⁵

Nebuchadnezzar's unusually long question was intended to persuade the Hebrews to obey his orders. After a short introduction, he asks them if it is true that they are unwilling to bow down before his statue. He also tells them that either they should be *ready to fall down and worship the statue*, or, in the case of the contrary, they *will be thrown* into the fiery *furnace*. The king repeats the list of musical instruments in order to make his order more formal. He uses such words as *now* and *immediately*, putting emphasis on the immediate situation.

In the conclusion of Nebuchadnezzar's speech to the Hebrews, he goes so far as to challenge the God of the three men, claiming to be stronger than God Most High. "We see here the worldly power absolutely confident that there is no limit to its authority."⁴⁶ Lacking temper control, the king turns the conflict with his officers into a duel with the living God. He proudly asks, *Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hands?* The king's words in this verse present the key question in Daniel 1 through 6: What God is able to rescue his servants from the powerful monarchs? The stories found in this section of the book each in turn present the answers to that crucial question.

3:16-18 To remind Nebuchadnezzar that he is an ordinary mortal before God, the three men omit the title "king" in their opening address. The power of

their God is not unknown to this ruler from his dealings with the king, and for that reason they do not feel compelled to present a defense of their case. The Hebrews were well aware of the fact that the first and the second commandments in the Mosaic Decalogue prohibit worship of any person or object other than God. Exodus 20:2-6 (cf. Deut. 5:7-9) says,

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

"You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

The contest here is between the king and the God of heaven. "Nebuchadnezzar had converted his confrontation with men into a contest with the Lord God Almighty."⁴⁷ Moreover, since the first commandment is introduced by a statement of God's saving act, obedience to

that command is a result, not a precondition to it. “Faithfulness to that commandment is, therefore, a response to grace already experienced; divine deliverance can never be a condition to faithful conduct. Accordingly, one is to worship God alone and no other, regardless of how that God will or will not act.”⁴⁸ Only one biblical text related to a non-Israelite seems to be an exception to the rule and worship of only one God. Second Kings 5:18, 19 says, “‘May the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this.’”

“‘Go in peace,’ Elisha said.”

In Deuteronomy 4:27, 28, Moses had foretold the idolatrous context of the future exile: “‘The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell.’”

The young men prefer death to apostasy. Their unwavering faith, not the rescue from the fiery furnace, is the greatest miracle in this story. Speaking with one voice, the Hebrews dare to reverse the king’s words, challenging his command. Following a brief introduction to their answer, they construe

their sentence syntax so that it is strikingly similar to that of the king’s question. Verses 16-18 contain one of the great dramatic scenes of biblical writings, and the climax of this chapter. While the king’s question puts pressure on the young men by asking them to be *ready to fall down*, they, in their turn, point to the power of their God, who, they say, *is able to save* them. They continue by saying that if he does not save them, the king should know that they will not worship his statue anyway.

The ultimate issue was not God’s existence but his presence and power. We should not take the words *if . . . not* to mean that the three men doubted God’s saving power. On the contrary, they believed that God would save them. They used the words “if not” because the king has already used these words in his question, and the Hebrews are simply repeating them to turn the king’s words completely upside down and thus make their position as clear as possible.

The three men’s loyalty to God does not depend on the certainty of deliverance nor on God’s response to the danger. They based their bold answer on principle regardless of the consequences. A scholar has observed that the three Hebrews “do not make a deal with God in the way that people sometimes do.”⁴⁹ Their decision is to remain faithful regardless of what may come. “This is the character of truly ethical action. It is

motivated by the intrinsic merit of the action, not by its positive or negative pay-off.”⁵⁰ The Hebrews’ answer will never be forgotten. Its monumental significance is that “human potentates are defeated whether their victims escape the flames (as they will here) or whether they do not.”⁵¹

3:19-23 Nebuchadnezzar is now exceedingly angry and issues orders of violence in an attempt to show who is in charge of the situation (cf. Dan. 2:12). His fury has disfigured the “image” of his face because the three men are refusing to bow down to his “image” of gold. Proverbs 16:14 captures his mood well: “A king’s wrath is a messenger of death.” So, “in a fit of temper,” he issues commands that the furnace be heated to *seven times* its normal heat and that *some of the strongest soldiers . . . tie up* the three men and *throw them* into the fire. These commands confirm the fact that Nebuchadnezzar was not quite as confident of his power as he professed to be. Why make the furnace as hot as possible when burning in slow fire hurts even more? And why did the king command his strongest soldiers to carry out his order? Was the king afraid that some powerful god might attempt to intervene and provide a supernatural rescue operation in behalf of the faithful? The executioners are not even allowed time to strip the prisoners, a detail “which eventually heightens the miracle (v. 27).”⁵²

Ironically, through another reversal,⁵³ the king’s strong men die in the process of carrying out his orders. The Syrian Bible states that the persons who perish in the flame are those who have slandered the three young men. Although this is a logical idea, it finds no support in the original text. On the contrary, the slanderers’ lives are preserved so that they can witness the power of the God whose worshipers they have attempted to see executed. The Greek translation of the Bible pictures the Hebrews praying and singing in the midst of the fire. In the Aramaic text, however, they are freely *walking around* in the fiery furnace. “The human spirit, unconquerable through reliance on God, has been able to defy the worst that the earthly power can do.”⁵⁴

3:24, 25 Through the side door of the furnace, the king witnesses a triple miracle: The young men are not burned but intact, they are not bound but let loose, and they are no longer three in number but four. Again, not being certain about what is taking place, the king relies on the assistance of his counselors, whom he asks: *Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the . . . fire?* The answer coming from his unquestionably obedient advisers is predictable: *Certainly, O king.* Nebuchadnezzar is apparently the only person who sees that the three Hebrews are joined by someone whom he describes as *one*

of the gods, which is to say "a member of the divine family," and later as God's **messenger** (v. 28). The term is used elsewhere in the Bible for angels and even for God himself.

Accompanied by a heavenly being, the faithful are delivered not *from* the fire, but *in* the midst of it. Victory comes to them by way of the test, not away from it. One of the psalms says, "For you, O God, tested us; / you refined us like silver. . . . We went through fire and water, / but you brought us to a place of abundance" (Ps. 66:10, 12). Although fire is destructive, it figures in many biblical texts as a symbol of God's presence and protection.

Official Jewish interpretations have identified this fourth person as an angel, someone like Gabriel, who is mentioned by name in certain visionary chapters in the book. In the Bible, God's presence in life's trials may matter more to the believer than a miraculous deliverance. Throughout biblical passages, "the angel of the Lord" is described as someone who guided and protected Israel (Exod. 14:19; 23:20) and led them to the Promised Land according to God's promise to Moses that "my angel will go before you" (Exod. 32:34). This angel gave them victory over their enemies (Exod. 33:2), and at Jericho, Joshua showed readiness to obey his orders (Josh. 5:13-15). Moreover, this angel helped the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:7) and later de-

stroyed the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:35; Isa. 37:36). Because in this text he is portrayed as the being who rescues the faithful, he can be identified as Michael, Israel's guardian, who, in Gabriel's words to Daniel, **stands over your people (Qui. 12:1)**.⁵⁵

In the Bible, the semantic range of the word "messenger" is wider than the range of the English word "angel." In some biblical passages, "the messenger of the LORD" turns out to be the divine Person—that is, the Lord himself (see the *Notes* on Dan. 3:28). In the book of Revelation, Michael is the Commander of God's armies, implying that He is Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:7). In the history of Christian interpretation, many have rightly identified this fourth Person in the furnace with Jesus Christ. Jesus' name *Immanuel* means that through him, "God is with his people in the time of their deepest need and effects salvation for them from the direst threat to their existence"⁵⁶ (cf. Isa. 7:14).

3:26, 27 In verbs of action that counter his previous commands, Nebuchadnezzar addresses the three Hebrew men by their official names and tells them to **come out** of the furnace. He has to admit that they have not just survived the most severe test, but they have also encountered the Divine Presence in the midst of their trial. It has been aptly said that "by delivering us in trouble rather than saving us from trouble, God is

most honored and his people most blessed.”⁵⁷

As the faithful step out of the door of the furnace, the whole group of dignitaries, beginning with the king's close associates and advisers, gather closely around the three men and witness that *there was no smell of fire on them*. They see with their own eyes that the God of the Hebrews can save his servants from the power of fire.

“When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze”
(Isa. 43:2; cf. Ps. 66:12).

In later Jewish and Christian works, this story and the story of Daniel's rescue from the lions were both read as metaphors of the future resurrection of the righteous.

The King's Praise (3:28-30)

The story in this chapter ends with a hymn of praise uttered by the king to the God who had saved the three faithful Hebrews.

²⁸Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his messenger and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against

the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be torn limb from limb and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.”

³⁰Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Notes

3:28 “Nebuchadnezzar.” Regarding the omission of the title “king,” see the Notes on Daniel 3:2 and 16.

“Said.” See the Notes on Daniel 3:9.

“Praise be to the God.” Even though the root of the original word, *b'rik*, can mean “to bless,” it is better to translate this word as “praise” when referring to God. Since this was a typical way to begin a prayer in Bible times, this hymn of praise functions in this context as a prayer of thanksgiving.

“His messenger.” It is preferable to translate the word *mal'ak* as “a messenger” rather than “an angel.” In the context of the passage, this being is understood as “a heavenly messenger” or even “a divine messenger.” In some biblical passages, this title is used interchangeably with the divine titles “God” and “Yahweh.” For that reason, it is difficult to separate “the angel of the Lord” from the Lord himself (Gen. 16:7-13; 21:17-19; 22:11; 31:11-13; Exod. 3:1-7; Judg. 2:1-5). See the Notes on Daniel 3:25.

“Rescued.” See the Notes on Daniel 3:15.

“Servants.” See the Notes on Daniel 3:26.

“Their lives.” Literally, the Aramaic text says *gešmêhôn*, “their bodies.” The same Aramaic word is used in verse 27.

“Serve . . . worship.” See the Notes on Daniel 3:12.

"Any god." This is another detail supporting the view that the statue was a representation of Babylon's god Marduk.

3:29 "I decree." The words *ûminnî šîm t'ēm*, "I issue a decree," introduce the king's public proclamation of highest order. This proclamation prepares the way for the longer first-person edict that is found in the following chapter. For a similar proclamation, see Ezra 6:6-12.

"The people of any nation or language." The same three words in the singular are found at the beginning of the chapter (v. 4); thus they form another set of brackets (*inclusio*) in the story. In both cases, the idea of universality is dominant.

"Who say anything against." The concept conveyed by the original word *šāluh*, "anything," is one of negligence, a lack of respect demonstrated by "saying something carelessly."

"Torn limb from limb . . . turned into piles of rubble." See the Notes on Daniel 2:5.

"No other god can save." This statement is a flat contradiction of the king's boasting, "Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hands?" (v. 15).

3:30 "The king promoted." Literally, the original text says *hašlah*, "caused to prosper."

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego." See the Notes on Daniel 3:12.

"The province of Babylon." The ending in this story resembles that of the previous chapter (Dan. 2:48, 49).

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, in the English Bible, chapter 3 ends with this verse, while in the Hebrew, it continues through chapter 4:3. This commentary follows the chapter and verse divisions in the English Bible.

Exposition (3:28-30)

3:28 In this part of the narrative the title "king" is omitted once again—in contrast to its frequent occurrence in the earlier parts of the chapter (cf. v. 2). In this context, the king's greatness gives place to God's supremacy. Nebuchadnezzar now bursts into yet another hymn of praise to the Most High God, in whom Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have put all their trust. The king is now fully convinced that "the angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, / and he delivers them" (Ps.34:7).

This hymn is an echo of Daniel's hymn to God, which was recorded in chapter 2. The king's opening words, **Praise be**, could also be translated as "Blessed be." They are typical of the beginning of a prayer in the Bible. Through **his messenger**, God was able to deliver the three young men. Deliverance was "an act of faithfulness on God's part which is paralleled to but not triggered by the faithfulness on the part of the three young men."⁵⁸

God's greatest promise to humans as recorded in the Bible is summed up in these simple words: "I will be with you!" The three men claimed that promise. In the end, the king does not condemn but rather praises the young men's determination not to serve gods other than their own, including the king's own god Marduk. "The king who set out to exalt his own name and kingdom ends by vindi-

cating the name and kingdom of the God of heaven.”⁵⁹ The God who is so powerful as to be capable of saving from death itself is worthy of praise and honor from every single mortal.

3:29 The theme of changing the supposedly unchangeable royal decree is found throughout Daniel (Dan. 1:8; 2:9; 3:19; 5:5, 6, 9; 6:18; 7:7, 11).⁶⁰ Here, through a royal proclamation that reverses the first one, the king attempts to force all the people he has subjected from all nations and languages to reverence the God of the three Hebrews. All who do not comply with this order are to face a severe punishment that includes the destruction of their entire household (cf. Dan. 2:5). Once again the king ignores the basic principles of religious liberties. Yet, it is wrong “ever to consider religious violence as an expression of a profound conviction.”⁶¹

It has been rightly said that the conversion of this pagan king came neither easily nor quickly. Only moments before, the king in his pride had challenged the God of the Hebrews by saying, *Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hands?* Now he says that God can save as *no other god can save*. Thus, in the end, the king answers his own question. Deuteronomy 32:39 quotes God as saying,

“See now that I myself am He!
There is no god besides me.

I put to death and I bring to life,
I have wounded and I will heal,
and no one can deliver out of
my hand.”

At the end of the story recorded in this chapter the statue is forgotten. It was most likely stripped of its golden layer and left to decay in the elements. The attention now shifts from a dead idol to the living God in heaven. The king becomes the protector of the God whom he had previously challenged. The Hebrew religion attains the status of a legitimately recognized religion in the empire.

3:30 The jealousy of the Chaldeans toward the Hebrews only resulted in an even greater prosperity. “The ‘happy ending’ consists of promotion of the Jews in the pagan administration.”⁶² Their heroic faith has “quenched the fury of the flames” (Heb. 11:34). The three men became role models whose example will inspire believers down through time (cf. 1 Macc. 2:59). Whereas before they were simply administrators over the province of Babylon (Dan. 2:49), now they prosper in it.

The document known as the Istanbul Prism lists the names of some fifty officials of King Nebuchadnezzar.⁶³ Scholars have attempted to relate some of the names listed in this document to those the Bible places among Nebuchadnezzar’s officials. No fewer than five such names have been identified as possibilities. They are as follows:

Name	Position	Biblical Reference
1. Hanunu	“chief of the royal merchants”	Hananiah (Dan. 1:6, 7, 19; 2:17)
2. Mushallim-Marduk	“overseer of the slave girls”	Mishael (Dan. 1:6, 7, 19; 2:17)
3. Ardi-Nabu	“secretary of the crown prince”	Abednego (Dan. 1:7; 2:49; 3:12-30)
4. Nabuzeriddinam	“royal guard commander”	Nebuzaradan (Jer. 40:1)
5. Nergalsharusur	“a high official”	Nergal-Sharezer (Jer. 39:3)

It is interesting to note the possible influence of Abednego on the crown prince Amel-Marduk, who, as soon as he became king, released King Jehoiachin, who had been imprisoned in Babylon, and “spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king’s table” (Jer. 52:32, 33).

Summary of the Teaching

1. *God is patient.* In the encounter with Nebuchadnezzar described in chapter 2, God taught him the most important lesson, one that every ruler should learn: that the Lord, rather than any human being, is sovereign over the world, over the rise and fall of kings and empires. In the story in chapter 3, the king witnessed one of God’s greatest saving acts in behalf of human beings. “The God of the Bible is primarily the deity who saves.”⁶⁴ Yet, the happy end-

ing in this story is not the end of the learning process Nebuchadnezzar experienced. Although according to this story the king saw the laws of nature change, his own nature remained unchanged. To be completely transformed by God, he needs at least another—and this time a direct—encounter with the God of the Hebrews. That experience is the topic of the chapter that follows in the book of Daniel. A hymn of praise links this and the following stories.

As for this chapter, in it the king speaks of God as the God of the three Hebrews (not necessarily *his* God) who rescued *his* servants because they worship *their* God (v. 28).⁶⁵ Thus, although the king recognizes that the Most High God is a personal being, he claims no relationship of his own with that God.

2. *Worship and idolatry.* Worship is a dominant concept in this story, as is true of the entire Bible. God called Israel out of Egypt so that they could worship him (Exod. 4:23) in the Lord’s dwelling place, located on a mountain and estab-

lished by his hands (Exod. 15:17). In the biblical narrative, history begins (Gen. 4:1-8) and ends (Rev. 13:4, 14, 15) with a religious conflict between human beings centered on the issue of worship. The first two commandments speak directly on this topic. The message of the story of the fiery furnace “is a powerful polemic against idolatry.”⁶⁶ A good definition of idolatry is that it means “putting secondary things (even good things and desires) in the place of the absolute commitment that only God should be given. . . . Wealth, power, security, good health, religion, secular ideologies, and many other things have become such idols for individuals or whole societies.”⁶⁷

The story in Daniel 3 has an eschatological dimension and an end-time application. Revelation 13 builds on it, saying that an event similar to the one that took place on the plain of Dura will happen at the end of this world’s history. According to the passage in Revelation, a beastlike controlling power will erect an image that the whole world will be forced to worship. All those who refuse to comply will face a death threat. And the numbers sixty and six are related to that beast power. The leitmotif of Revelation 13 is “Worship the beast or perish!” The end-time faithful stand firm on the principles laid down in the words of the persecuted apostles: “‘We must obey God rather than men’” (Acts 5:29). The context of Revelation 13 says

that through his remnant, God will triumph over the evil forces (Rev. 12:11; 14:1-5; 15:1-4). Thus, based on the overall teaching of the books of Daniel and Revelation, it is safe to conclude that the miraculous deliverance of the three Hebrews prefigures the ultimate triumph and enthronement of the saints (Dan. 7:27).

3. *Miracles in the Bible.* A key term in this chapter is the word that may be translated as “rescue,” “deliver,” or “save.” It is found in three places: first, in the king’s challenge to God to “rescue” the three Hebrew youth from his hand (3:15); second, in the Hebrews’ declaration that their God will “rescue” them (3:17); and third, toward the end of the story, in the king’s praises of God’s angel, who “rescued” his servants (3:28). The king is forced to admit that “no other god can save in this way” (3:29). The God of the Bible has power over death. Hosea 13:14 says,

“I will ransom them from the power
of the grave;
I will redeem them from death.
Where, O death, are your plagues?
Where, O grave, is your
destruction?”

God *sometimes* chooses to perform supernatural miracles to save the lives of the faithful and make his power manifest to all. Yet we know that he does not *always* choose to deliver from suffering

and death. For that reason it is essential to stress that according to the teaching of the Bible, miracles do not produce nor create faith. Faith comes as a gift of God's Spirit. Miracles can only confirm or strengthen faith that already exists. Matthew 11:20-24 mentions three cities in Galilee in which Jesus performed "most of his miracles," yet, according to this text, "they did not repent."

The central message of Daniel 3 is the unwavering faith of the three Hebrews. While their miraculous deliverance is important, it is not as relevant to the life of the believer as the Hebrews' faith is. Only a believing heart can accept miracles as supernatural acts of God. Therefore, faith is essential to the process of recognizing and accepting supernatural miracles.

4. *Where was Daniel?* Why is Daniel absent from this story and from the whole chapter? We simply do not know the answer to this question because in this chapter, Daniel did not tell us anything about where he was. One possibility is that he presided over the palace when all the other officials were on the plain of Dura (cf. Dan. 2:48). Or he might have been sick (cf. Dan. 8:27). Still another possibility is that since he was the chief of all the wise men, who, according to the previous story have already passed the loyalty test in Babylon, thus he would have been exempted from this solemn pledge of loyalty to King Nebuchadnezzar. These speculations are

not mutually exclusive. It is also worth remembering that according to the story recorded in chapter 6, Daniel was not spared a similar test of his loyalty to his God.

In spite of Daniel's absence, his faithful friends were not abandoned in the fiery furnace. The narrative shows how a divine being came to substitute for Daniel, the absent ruler of Babylon's main province. At this time, he is beyond the grasp of the envious Chaldeans.

1. Towner, 46.

2. Collins, 176. Second Kings 25:8-10 states that the temple was destroyed not in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year but in his nineteenth year. This may be due to the different ways in which the years of reign were reckoned in the ancient world (see the *Notes* on Dan. 1:1).

3. William. H. Shea, "Daniel 3: Extra-Biblical Texts and the Convocation on the Plain of Dura," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 20 no. 1 (1982): 29-52.

4. Wiseman, *Chronicles*, 73

5. Maxwell, 58.

6. White, *Prophets*, 504.

7. Lucas, 86.

8. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 109.

9. Towner, 47.

10. Longman, 103.

11. Montgomery, 197, note 1.

12. Ford (p. 104) argues that the statue was made of wood because Israel's golden altar was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold (Exod. 39:38; 40:5). See also Walvoord, 80. Lucas (p. 88) mentions stone as one possible material.

13. Nichol, 4:780.

14. See Edward M. Cook, "In the Plain of the Wall (Dan 3:1)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 115-116.

15. A suggestion found in Doukhan, *Secrets*, 45.

16. Hartman and DiLella, 160.

17. Slotki, 22.

18. Walton, Matthews, Chavalas, 735.
19. Ford, 105; cf. Walvoord, 82. Archer (p. 51) says that Daniel finished his book around the time "when the new Persian titles would have been current in the metropolis of Babylon."
20. Seow, 54.
21. Pritchard, 307.
22. Smith-Christopher, 63.
23. Edwin Yamauchi, "Daniel and Contacts Between the Aegean and Near East Before Alexander," *Evangelical Quarterly* 53 (1981): 37-47; T. C. Mitchel and R. Joyce, "The Musical Instruments in Nebuchadnezzar's Orchestra," in *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*, ed. D. J. Wiseman, et al. (London: Tyndale, 1965), 19-27.
24. Collins, 183.
25. Seow, 54.
26. *Ibid.*, 52.
27. Collins, 181.
28. Shea, *Daniel*, 72.
29. Kenneth R. Wade, "Stuck on 6," *Ministry* (December 1988), 22.
30. Goldingay, 70. Montgomery (p. 73) quotes a statement by Herr Baldur von Schirach made in 1936: "One cannot be a good German and at the same time deny God. . . . If we act as true Germans we act according to the laws of God. Whoever serves Adolf Hitler, the Führer, serves Germany, and whoever serves Germany serves God."
31. Ford, 106.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Lucas, 94.
34. Rosenthal, 44.
35. Hoftijzer and Jongeling, 960.
36. Seow, 56; italics added.
37. Longman, 101.
38. Peter Coxon, "Daniel 3:17: A Linguistic and Theological Problem," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976): 400-405.
39. Collins, 188.
40. Nichol, 4:784.
41. The Babylonian Talmud *Pes.* 118a, b.
42. Collins, 190.
43. Shea, *Daniel*, 82.
44. Seow, 55.
45. Lucas, 95.
46. Porteous, 59.
47. Archer, 54.
48. Seow, 58.
49. *Ibid.*, 57.
50. Lucas, 95.
51. Goldingay, 74.
52. *Ibid.*, 71.
53. Z. Stefanovic, "Daniel," 139-150.
54. Porteous, 60.
55. Lewis O. Anderson, "The Michael Figure in the Book of Daniel" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1995).
56. Towner, 56.
57. Ford, 109.
58. Towner, 58.
59. Ford, 109.
60. Smith-Christopher, 65.
61. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 57.
62. Collins, 193.
63. Pritchard, 307-308.
64. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 54.
65. *Ibid.*, 55.
66. Slotki, 21.
67. Lucas, 94.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S SECOND DREAM

(4:1-37)

Chapter 4 of Daniel is an epistle from King Nebuchadnezzar written predominantly in the first-person singular. It contains a story that relates another contest between two sovereigns, the king in Babylon and God in heaven. The chapter was intended to be an open letter that was to be read publicly throughout the Neo-Babylonian Empire. It includes a long confession stemming from the king's personal experience, enhanced by praises to God crafted in the style of the praise hymns seen previously in the book.

The main event in the chapter is left undated, yet the context of the story, described in the king's own words, betrays the era of "Nebuchadnezzar the Builder"—the second phase of this king's reign, which was characterized by great building projects, mostly in the city of Babylon. Most commentators agree that the chapter should be dated to the closing years of Nebuchadnezzar's long reign.¹

Several events that are of interest to the student of the Bible took place in the interim between this and the previous chapter. During the second Babylonian invasion of Syria-Palestine in 597 B.C., Jerusalem was again besieged. The official Babylonian records speak of this event in the following way, referring specifically to the land of Judah: "In the seventh year, the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad [Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon] mustered his troops, marched to the Hattiland, and encamped against (i.e., besieged) the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Adar he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice (lit. heart), received its heavy tribute and sent (them) to Babylon."²

During the third Babylonian military campaign, the city of Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by fire. In Judea, these events were seen as a great tragedy. They were commemorated in the book of Lamentations:

How deserted lies the city,
 once so full of people!
 How like a widow is she,
 who once was great among the
 nations!
 She who was queen among the
 provinces
 has now become a slave. . . .

The roads to Zion mourn,
 for no one comes to her
 appointed feasts.
 All her gateways are desolate,
 her priests groan,
 her maidens grieve,
 and she is in bitter anguish. . . .

All who pass your way
 clap their hands at you;
 they scoff and shake their heads
 at the Daughter of Jerusalem:
 "Is this the city that was called
 the perfection of beauty,
 the joy of the whole earth?"
 (Lam. 1:1, 4; 2:15).

While Jerusalem and its temple lay in ruins, the city of Babylon was brought to architectural perfection. Its builder, King Nebuchadnezzar, was very proud of the fact that his name was impressed on thousands of bricks that were used in the city's building projects. In his boastful words, the king describes his "palace as the seat of my royalty, a building for the admiration of my people, a place of union for the land."³ This statement re-

calls the words found in the biblical prophets, who spoke of Babylon as "the jewel of kingdoms, / the glory of the Babylonians' pride" (Isa. 13:19).

Other than the evidence gathered from these sources, very little is known about the last thirty years of King Nebuchadnezzar's life. The story in chapter 4 says that at the end of this experience, Nebuchadnezzar praised Daniel's God and became a protector of the Divine Person whom he had previously challenged. It is useful to remember at this point that the prophet Jeremiah, on more than one occasion, called this king the "Lord's servant": "Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him" (Jer. 27:6; cf. 25:9; 43:10).

In this chapter, two praise hymns bracket the king's story—one at the beginning and the other at the end, forming an *inclusio*. The story and the hymns combine both first-person and third-person reports. The suggested structure⁴ below is based on the text of the English Bible because, as noted above, the Hebrew Bible makes the content of Daniel 4:1-3 the conclusion of chapter 3.

1. The king's praise (4:1-3)
2. The dream [first-person report] (4:4-18)
3. The interpretation [third-person report] (4:19-27)

4. The fulfillment of the dream [third-person report] (4:28-33)
5. The king's praise [first-person report] (4:34-37)

Daniel's explanation of the dream and his plea that the king exchange his pride for works of mercy toward those who are oppressed constitutes the heart of this chapter. In the Hebrew Bible, verses 10b-17 are set off as poetry.

The King's Praise (4:1-3)

The chapter opens with a hymn of praise intended to be proclaimed everywhere so that all people living on earth would revere the Most High God.

**¹King Nebuchadnezzar,
To all the peoples, nations, and men of every
language who live in all the world:**

May your prosperity increase!

²It is my pleasure to declare to you the wonderful miracles that the Most High God has performed for me.

**³How great are his signs,
how mighty his wonders!**

**His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;
his dominion lasts from one generation
to another.**

Notes

4:1 "King Nebuchadnezzar." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:1, where Nebuchadnezzar is called "king of Babylon." According to "the accepted style of ancient letter writing," the author's

name and title are mentioned first.⁵

"All the peoples, nations, and men of every language." See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:4. This list is one of the links between this and the previous chapters, with the emphasis on the concept of universality. The addressees included the whole known world at the time of Nebuchadnezzar. The same concept is reinforced by the parallel line that follows below. This type of "allusion to all ethnic, political, and linguistic constituencies is not new in Daniel" (cf. 3:4, 7, 29).⁶

"In all the world." Literally, the text says *bekol-'ar'ā'*, "in all the earth." In this context, it means "in the whole empire." Similar ideas of universality can be found in the biblical expressions "the ends of the earth" (Pss. 2:8; 72:8) and "there shall be no end" (Isa. 9:7). Of the eight occurrences of the word "earth" in the chapter, four relate to Nebuchadnezzar's dominion (4:10, 11, 20, 22), standing in opposition to the word "heaven" that describes God's dominion. The fact that this letter was written in Aramaic, the language of international business and diplomacy, contributes to its universal character.

"May your prosperity increase!" The expression *šelāmekôn yišgē'*, "may your prosperity increase!" was a type of formal greeting in royal proclamations in the ancient Near East. It is also found in Daniel 6:25. The first word in the original text is the Aramaic word *šelām* (Hebrew *šālôm*), a commonly used Semitic word that has a wider meaning than the word "peace" because it also includes good health and material and spiritual prosperity. The same word is mentioned in the introduction to King Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra quoted in Ezra 7:12.

4:2 "Wonderful miracles." The words

'ātayyā' wetimhayyā', "signs and wonders," are also used in Daniel 6:27. When found together, they may be expressing a single concept (hendiadys) translated as "wonderful miracles." The combination of the corresponding Hebrew words is found in several places in the Bible, referring mostly to God's act of bringing Israel out of Egypt (Exod. 7:3; Deut. 4:34; 7:19; 13:2; Ps. 135:9; Isa. 8:18).

"Most High God." See the Notes on Daniel 3:26.

"For me." Literally, the original text reads 'immî, "with me."

4:3 This verse is built on parallelism, and it is good poetry. The words that are parallel are as follows: *great* and *mighty*; *signs* and *wonders*; *kingdom* and *dominion*; *eternal* and *from generation to generation*. Literally, the verse reads, "His signs, how great are they! His wonders, how mighty are they!"

"Mighty." The root *tq̄p*, "to be(come) strong, mighty," is applied here to God's work. Its other four occurrences in this chapter (vv. 11, 20, 22, 30) are applied to King Nebuchadnezzar and his accomplishments.

"An eternal kingdom." See the Notes on Daniel 2:44. The statement that God's kingdom is eternal is the truth that according to the previous story Nebuchadnezzar resisted admitting.

"Dominion." The noun *šolṭān*, "dominion" (cf. *sultan*, "ruler"), denotes "authority to rule." It stands in parallel with the noun *malkû*, "kingdom." The term is very important in this chapter and is also the key word in the vision in chapter 7. The words "dominion" and "kingdom" are also found at the end of the story (v. 34), thus forming an *inclusio* in this chapter.

Exposition (4:1-3)

4:1 Written in the first-person singular, the story found in this chapter is a personal testimony proclaimed in a powerful way by the king who in the previous chapter had dared to challenge God by saying to the three Hebrews, "Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hands?" (3:15). Nebuchadnezzar, who in the previous stories gave orders, now testifies about what God has done for him. The fearful and enraged ruler who on occasions mistrusted his closest officials "has become a poet, breaking into song about the Most High. . . . Reading the passage, the Talmudic rabbis exclaimed: 'The king has stolen all the songs and praises from David.'"⁷

The hymn of praise that opens this chapter is an echo of Daniel's hymn in chapter 2:20-23. The hymn is built on strong parallelism and is filled with terms, such as "every" and "all," that convey the idea of universality. This aspect of universality is reinforced in the chapter by the presence of the Aramaic language, which served as the imperial language of international diplomacy and business. Although this type of self-perception was a characteristic of the Babylonian Empire, the concept of diversity was closely tied to it, and it is here expressed through the words *peoples, nations, and men of every language* (cf. 3:4, 7, 29).

While some writers consider the expression *all the world* hyperbolic, it was

the world that the people of that time and place knew. In his prayer to God, King Solomon asked that he would rule “from sea to sea / and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Ps. 72:8).

Nebuchadnezzar concludes his introductory address with a formal greeting, *May your prosperity increase!* This greeting contains the well-known and multi-faceted word *šelām*, “peace.” Here, it is inclusively rendered as **prosperity** (cf. Ezra 7:12).

4:2, 3 Nebuchadnezzar speaks of God as Someone who performs *wonderful miracles* because that was the way in which this king experienced God. Israel’s exodus from Egypt was accompanied by similar divine intervention. Deuteronomy 6:22 says, “Before our eyes the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders—great and terrible—upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household.” The king’s combination of fear, power, and pride was adequately met by someone who cared enough to turn those reactions into praise, joy, and blessing.

The key expression in the passage is *for me*. It contrasts the king’s past experiences with God to this present one. Whereas before he had only heard about God from Daniel and seen God’s miraculous intervention in the lives of others, this time his encounter with God is direct and personal. This type of close contact with the Divine Power has left him in awe and praise. One wonders little that he uses the word *How* to express the feel-

ings about the Most High’s works by which he is overwhelmed. At last, he has been led to the conclusion that only God’s kingdom and dominion endure forever—a crucial lesson that he had failed to learn in the previous stories. The parallelism between God’s eternal kingdom and dominion is also found in Psalm 145:13, which says, “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, / and your dominion endures through all generations.”

The Dream (4:4-18)

The king now proceeds to tell his story in the first-person singular, beginning with the account of an enigmatic dream and his confidence that Daniel could interpret it.

⁴I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, free from care and prosperous. ⁵I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind alarmed me. ⁶So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to explain the dream to me. ⁷Then the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners came, and I told them the dream, but they could not explain it to me. ⁸Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

⁹I said, “Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; explain it to me. ¹⁰These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the earth. Its height was great.

¹¹The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹²Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the sky lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

¹³In my visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy messenger, coming down from heaven. ¹⁴He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. ¹⁶Let his mind be changed from that of a human and let him be given the mind of an animal till seven times pass by for him.

¹⁷"The decision is announced by holy messengers, who declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'

¹⁸"This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now you, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can explain it to me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

Notes

4:4 "I, Nebuchadnezzar." The use of the first-person pronoun 'anâ, "I," in this chapter lends authenticity to the story. It also shows Nebuchadnezzar's self-centered language. It is interesting that the king ends his speech in the same way, adding only the word "King" to it. Thus, the

two words found in the beginning and end of the king's speech form an *inclusio*. In addition, this and the following verse contain a few cases of parallelism, with words such as *home* and *palace*, *images* and *visions*, etc.

"Free from care." The word *šelēh* means "relaxed" and free from care (Pss. 73:12; 122:6; Jer. 49:31). The same word is used in the sense of negligence in Daniel 6:4 (cf. Ezra 4:22; 6:9).

"Prosperous." The term *ra'nan*, "sprouting, prospering," is often used of green trees (Deut. 12:2; 1 Kings 14:23; Isa. 57:5; Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:8) and of people who thrive like plants (Pss. 37:35; 52:8). This verse combines the term with the word *house* just as Psalm 92:12-14 does:

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;
planted in the house of the Lord,
they will flourish in the courts of our God.
They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green.

The use of this term in the narrative anticipates the dream dominated by a tree.

4:5 "Afraid." The king describes his reaction to the dream before he reveals its contents, building the reader's suspense. Just as in the first dream, in which Nebuchadnezzar's fear arose because of the sudden destruction of the statue, here the felling of the tree alarmed the king.

4:6 "Wise men." See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:2. A number of elements found in these verses remind the reader of the story of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream. When the list of wise men from this and the following verse is compared with the one in chapter 2, it becomes clear that several terms are

common to both passages, including the Egyptian term *ḥartumayyā'*, "magicians."

"Be brought." For the use of the same verb, see Daniel 2:24, 25.

4:7 "Astrologers." The original text has the word *kaśdāyē'*, "Chaldeans." See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:2. The Chaldeans were the ruling class in Neo-Babylon, and according to Daniel 2:48, Daniel was their leader. Some interpreters claim that even if the wise men knew the meaning of the dream, they were afraid to voice it because of the dream's contents.

4:8 "Finally." The words *we'ad 'oḥ'rên* literally mean "at last." Some scholars suggest that the king intentionally tried to bypass Daniel. "Cornered, Nebuchadnezzar now had no choice but to hear the Hebrew prophet's interpretation. . . . Once again, an unexpected truth hits him, a disturbing truth like any of divine origin."⁸

"Daniel." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:6. Here the king mentions both of Daniel's names—his Hebrew name and his Babylonian one. This may be an emphatic way of saying that Daniel was in a class apart from the rest of the wise men.

"Belteshazzar." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:7. It is logical to assume that throughout the time of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, Daniel was known by his Babylonian name rather than his Hebrew name.

"My god." It has been proposed that by slipping in this phrase, "the king attributes Daniel's power to his Babylonian god."⁹ Nebuchadnezzar, like his father, Nabopolassar, worshiped the god Marduk, whose popular name was Bel (Isa. 46:1; Jer. 50:2; 51:44). Some scholars consider that the etymological link between Daniel's Babylonian name Belteshazzar and the name of the god Bel

as stated in this verse is "mistaken."¹⁰ Yet, the interpreter should let the text inform him rather than force his or her own views on it.

"The spirit of the holy gods." In no less than three places in the chapter, the king recognizes that Daniel is privileged to have in him *rûaḥ-'elāhîn qaddîšîn*, "the spirit of holy gods" (4:8, 9, 18). This expression reflects a current idiom that described someone who was very spiritual (cf. Dan. 5:11, 14). The Hebrew equivalent expression of the last two words, *'lāhîn qaddîšîn*, "holy gods," is used in Joshua 24:19 to describe God's holiness.

Some interpreters read this phrase as "the Holy Spirit of God" because the plural of the Aramaic noun *'lāhîn*, "gods," corresponds to the Hebrew name *Elohim*. However, since in this case the words came from "the mouth of the non-Jewish monarch, the plural is probably better."¹¹ As disturbing as the presence of some of the pagan terms may be to the reader of the Bible, it gives authenticity to the stories and supports the idea that the original context from which the stories came to us must have been a place like Babylon or Medo-Persia.

Daniel's reputation in Babylon was the same as Joseph's in Egypt. The latter was known as "one in whom is the spirit of God" (Gen. 41:38).

4:9 "Chief of the magicians." This title *rab ḥartumayyā'*, "chief of the magicians," that describes Daniel's position of authority is similar to but not identical with the one used in Daniel 2:48. The title used by the king in this verse may be an abbreviated form of the longer and more formal one in chapter 2. The presence of this and similar "pagan" terms lends authenticity to an original Babylonian setting of the stories from Daniel.

"The spirit of the holy gods." See the Notes on Daniel 4:8.

"Mystery." See the Notes on Daniel 2:18.

"Too difficult for you." Compare the words from Ezekiel 28:3: "'Are you wiser than Daniel? Is no secret hidden from you?'"

"Here is my dream." These words stand in contrast with the story in chapter 2, where the king asked the wise men to tell him his dream.

4:10 In the Hebrew Bible (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*), verses 10b-17 are set off as poetry.

"I looked, and there before me . . ." This is the standard formula with which the seer introduces his visions in the second half of the book (7:2, 6, 7, etc.). In Nebuchadnezzar's first dream, he "looked . . . and there before" him "stood a large statue" (2:31).

"A tree." The noun *'ilān*, "a tree," is indefinite. In the Bible, a tree is a symbol of either a righteous person (Ps. 1:3) or a very proud person (Isa. 2:12, 13; 10:34). A tall tree, for example, is often a symbol of human pride (Ps. 37:34, 35; Isa. 2:12-19; 14:4-20; Ezek. 17:3, 4; 31:3-9; Zech. 11:2). Jesus, on the other hand, compared the progress of God's kingdom in the world to the growth of a tree (Luke 13:19).

"In the middle of the earth." This detailed description of the location of the tree recalls the tree of life that was located "in the middle of the garden" of Eden (Gen. 2:9). The ancient Babylonians believed that Babylon was the center of the whole world. In a similar way, later in history, Rome was thought of as such a center.

"Great." The word *šaggi'*, "great, tall," is also used in the description of the statue in chapter 2. This tree was not an ordinary but a cosmic tree,

something that is confirmed by the tree's height: It reached to the sky (v. 11).

4:11 "Grew large and strong." See the Notes on Daniel 4:3. The two adjectives, *rab*, "great," and *taqqîp*, "strong, mighty," describe God's activities in verse 3. The Aramaic word *rab* that is translated here as "large" described the statue in Daniel 2:31.

"Its top touched the sky." The Aramaic word *rûm*, "top," is the same word that in the previous verse is rendered "height." The tree symbolically linked heaven and earth. Its height assumed cosmic proportions, language that was typical of Babylonian megalomania. This text reminds the reader of the Bible of an ambitious project undertaken by the builders in the plain of Shinar. They had wanted to construct "a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens" (Gen. 11:4; cf. Isa. 14:13, 14; Ezek. 31:3). The little horn of chapters 7 and 8 is characterized by the same ambition, and so is the contemptible king of Daniel 11:36.

"The ends of the earth." This expression may be a figure of speech expressing the idea of universality that is further elaborated in the following verse. In Daniel's book, it is often linked with the extent of Babylonian dominion.

4:12 "Found shelter." The inscription of Nebuchadnezzar found in Wadi Brisa contains similar words: "'Under its everlasting shadow I have gathered all the peoples in peace.'"¹²

"Every creature." This translation is preferred to the literal rendering "all flesh." It refers to every kind of living creature, both human and animal. The text speaks of the tree's all-encompassing influence and power. "The tree is described as visible to 'all the earth' (NRSV "'the whole earth'"); it provided 'food for all' and 'from it all

living beings were fed' (vv. 11, 12). The intent of the heavenly verdict is that 'all who live' may know who really is in charge (v. 17)."¹³

"Was fed." The text states twice that the tree provided food for all creatures. Some scholars have proposed that this characteristic of the tree indicates its association with the tree of life from the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 2:9).

4:13 "In my visions I saw." In the prophetic section of the book, these or similar words usually introduce a new development in the vision (cf. 7:2, 7, 13).

"I looked, and there before me." See the Notes on Daniel 4:10.

"A holy messenger." The two words *ʾir weqaddiṣ*, "a watcher and a holy one," describe a single being from heaven, not two; the two words form a hendiadys and together mean "a holy messenger." The first term comes from the root *ʾur*, "to be awake." It is not found in the Bible outside of this chapter (vv. 13, 17, 23), but it is widely attested in later Jewish writings. Some scholars have related this word to the office known in the ancient Near East as the "King's Eye." The second term describes an angel in Daniel (8:13) and elsewhere in the Bible (Job 5:1; 15:15; Zech. 14:5). This being is a member of God's council (Ps. 89:6, 7). Because of his proximity to God, he also is holy. He never sleeps but is always watchful.

Commentators consider this person to be a member of a special order of angels comparable to those seen by the prophets Ezekiel (1:17, 18) and Zechariah (1:10; 4:10). Biblical teaching contrasts the pagan gods who, when they sleep, need to be awakened by a loud noise (1 Kings 18:27) with the true God, "who watches over Israel [and] will neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps.

121:4; cf. Pss. 7:6, 7; 44:23; 59:4; Isa. 51:9). Moreover, his eyes "range throughout the earth" (Zech. 4:10).

"Coming down from heaven." Often in the Bible these or similar words describe God's coming to earth in judgment. A familiar example is found in Genesis: "The Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building" (Gen. 11:5).

4:14 "Called in a loud voice." Literally, the herald *qārē' beḥayil*, "shouted with might." These words remind the reader of the herald in Daniel 3:4, who *qārē' beḥayil*, "loudly proclaimed," the royal command. A New Testament parallel is found in Revelation 14:7, where the second angel proclaims a message "in a loud voice."

"Cut down the tree." The commands found in this verse are given in the plural. Some interpreters understand them as being given at the direction of the divine council (cf. Isa. 40:1; 1 Kings 22:19-22). For a similar use of the first-person plural form of speech by God, see Genesis 11:7: "Come, let us go down . . ."

"Scatter its fruit." The enemies of the prophet Jeremiah once plotted against him, saying, "Let us destroy the tree [the prophet] and its fruit [divine oracles]" (Jer. 11:19).

4:15 "But." The word *bʿram*, "but," is a strong adversative term in Aramaic.

"Its roots." Although many translators use the word "stump" to translate the original word *ʾiqqar*, "root," the meaning of the complete expression *ʾiqqar šārešôhî* is that the taproot or rootstock should be left in the ground. In the Bible, the act of leaving the root in the ground communicates hope of restoration (cf. Job 14:7; Isa. 6:13; 11:1).

“Bound with iron and bronze.” It has been suggested that bands of these two strong materials were used to encircle the stump in order to preserve it against further growth or destruction (2 Chron. 24:12). Since fetters and harnesses were made of iron and bronze (Judg. 16:21), it is better to relate the verb here to the binding of animals (cf. 2 Kings 7:10) or even war captives (cf. Ps. 149:8). The Aramaic term *‘sûr* suggests a tree that is “imprisoned,” while the context presents the king “in an animal state.”¹⁴ The words in this verse are often understood as signaling a shift in the metaphor from a tall tree to a wild animal. For a similar “shift from tree to human imagery,”¹⁵ see Ezekiel 31:18. Notice that Daniel’s interpretation does not provide a symbolic meaning of the two metals that are mentioned here (cf. 4:26).

“Let him.” Several verbs that are in the imperfect are translated as exhortations, “let...” (understood as jussive), in order to express the destiny of the object of this verdict.

“Dew of heaven.” It is worth noticing that all provisions listed in this verse come from heaven.¹⁶

“Let him live.” Literally, the text says *ḥ^alāqēh*, “let his lot be!”

“With the animals.” These words come in contrast to two biblical passages (Jer. 27:5, 6; Dan. 2:37, 38) in which Nebuchadnezzar is described as a human being who was given dominion over the beasts of the field. “The present passage involves an ironic reversal of the king’s status.”¹⁷

4:16 At this point in the narrative, there is a clear shift in metaphors. The tree becomes a human being with the mind of an animal. For another example of the mixing of images in Daniel’s

book, see 7:4, where the lionlike beast has wings of an eagle and the heart of a man. Similarly, in Psalm 23, two different metaphors are used to represent the Lord. He is described first as the psalmist’s Shepherd and then as his Host.

“His mind.” The text literally says *libbēh*, “his heart.” The heart was considered to be the seat of intelligence. Later, in his interpretation, Daniel says that the king will undergo a very unusual metamorphosis.

“A human . . . an animal.” The two nouns, *‘nāšā’*, “human being,” and *ḥēwâ*, “beast,” stand in opposition to each other.

“Seven times.” In the book of Daniel, the numbers seven and seventy are used in the context of testing or judgment. See, for example, Daniel 3:19, where the king orders that the furnace be heated seven times, and Daniel 9:2, which says that the exile will last for seventy years (cf. Jer. 25:11).

The Aramaic word *‘iddān*, “a season, period,” may express any period of time (cf. Dan. 2:8; 3:5). This same word has the meaning of a “year” in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7, and, in the context of this verse, most translators render it as “year.” This is an ancient view found in the Septuagint and confirmed by Josephus. The famous Jewish interpreter Rashi argued that Nebuchadnezzar was punished for a period of “seven years” because he destroyed the Jerusalem temple, which took seven years to build.¹⁸

4:17 “Holy messengers.” See the Notes on Daniel 4:13, where the two nouns are used together in the plural. Rashi maintained that the decision on the verdict in this case came as a result of God’s consultation with “His Heavenly Court.”¹⁹ The plural form of the nouns also intrigued the

Talmudic sages, who, based on this verse, concluded that “the Holy One does nothing without first consulting the family above.”²⁰ Elsewhere in the Bible, the term “holy ones” is used of the members of the heavenly host (Ps. 89:7; Zech. 14:5). Some have concluded that the watchers are the beings that constitute the divine council (Job 1; 2; Jer. 23:18).²¹ Daniel 4:24 clarifies that none other than God himself issued the verdict in this chapter.

“The Most High.” In the Bible, the divine title ‘*illāyā*’, “the Most High,” is often accompanied by the word “God,” indicating to whom it always refers. It occurs especially in the book of Psalms (91:1, 9) and also in Luke’s Gospel (1:32, 35, 76).

“The lowliest.” Although the word *šepal*, “lowly,” is used in Daniel’s book to convey an act of “humiliation” (4:37), in this context, a positive type of humility may be in mind, akin to the concept of “meekness.” There is an obvious contrast between “the Most High” and “the lowliest of men,” whom he exalts. This type of reversal of fortunes is found in several biblical passages (1 Sam. 2:8; Job 5:11). In the song sung by Mary, the mother of Jesus, she praised God who “has brought down rulers from their thrones / but has lifted up the humble” (Luke 1:52).

4:18 “I, King Nebuchadnezzar.” See the Notes on Daniel 4:4.

“Belteshazzar.” See the Notes on Daniel 1:7.

“The spirit of the holy gods.” See the Notes on Daniel 4:8.

Exposition (4:4-18)

4:4, 5 The use of direct speech in the first-person singular betrays the king’s self-centeredness but also lends credibil-

ity and authenticity to the story. It gives to the chapter “the force of a confession of faith.”²²

Several elements in this story remind the reader of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in chapter 2. These points of similarity are as follows:

1. The king’s dream makes a negative impression on him (Dan. 2:1; 4:5).
2. The wise men cannot help the king (2:10, 11; 4:6, 7).
3. Daniel/Belteshazzar appears before the king (2:25; 4:8).
4. The king addresses Daniel (2:26; 4:9).
5. Daniel makes a disclaimer (2:27, 30; 4:19).
6. The king’s dream involves a “great” object (2:31; 4:11).
7. The first scenario is optimistic (2:31-33; 4:10-12).
8. The second scenario is pessimistic (2:34, 35; 4:13-17).
9. The application begins “You, O king are . . .” (2:36-38; 4:22).
10. The king is humbled at the end (2:46; 4:31-33).
11. The king praises Daniel’s God (2:47; 4:37).

There are also several points of difference between the two chapters, the most notable being the king’s relaxed and care-free mood at the beginning of this story, which stands in sharp contrast to the anger

he directed at the wise men at the beginning of chapter 2. Yet this time the king openly admits that the dream has *made* him *afraid*. Chapter 2 implies that his great fear caused his irrational behavior.

4:6-9 For the second time in the book, the wise men are summoned to help the emperor. “Probably the wise men of Babylon were an important institution that could not be bypassed without insult.”²³ But once more, Nebuchadnezzar personally witnesses the inability of his wise men to interpret his dream. This time, however, the king, although frightened by the dream, is calm, because he knows that Daniel is around—a wise man in whom is *the spirit of the holy gods*. This was the way in which a non-Hebrew monarch referred to someone who was in touch with God. The suspense of the story is built on the fact that the Hebrew wise man appears at the end of the king’s query. Did the emperor intentionally try to bypass Daniel just as King Ahab ignored the prophet Micaiah “because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad” (1 Kings 22:8)?

The role of Daniel, known as Belteshazzar, *chief of the magicians* in Babylon, is now well established, and the king is confident that Daniel can resolve the mystery. Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that Daniel’s insight is the result of his close relationship with his God. Yet, at the same time, he is doing his best not to offend his own god Marduk (Bel), whom he relates to Daniel’s Babylonian

name, Belteshazzar. Indeed, in the beginning of this story, “Nebuchadnezzar appears to lack understanding about where the source of Daniel’s great wisdom is to be found.”²⁴

4:10-12 Just as in his first dream, the king saw a big object, but this time it was a tall *tree* that attracted his attention and admiration. The tree was located at the center of the earth and was *visible* to all. Hence, some have called it “a world tree” that linked heaven and earth. Others have compared this tree to the tree of life located in the middle of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9). The fact that the tree’s *top touched the sky* brings to mind the story of the building of the city and the Tower of Babel, where the builders planned to construct an object “that reaches to the heavens” (Gen. 11:4). Moreover, the tree provided *shelter* and *food for all* the living creatures. This implies that in one sense the tree was God’s representative on earth. Psalm 145:15, 16 speaks of God’s care for all his creatures:

The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food at
the proper time.
You open your hand
and satisfy the desires of every
living thing.

4:13-16 The positive scenario changes to negative in the second half of this dream just as had happened in the king’s first dream; an unexpected force comes

from outside of the earth and strikes the base of the imposing object. The verdict that decrees destruction is announced by a person who is called *a holy messenger* or “a holy watcher.” In the context of the Bible, this term may refer either to a member of a special class of guardian angels or to God himself, “who watches over Israel” and “will neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps. 121:4). In Job 7:20, Job called God “watcher of men.”

The text specifies that this being came *down from heaven*. In the Bible, these words constitute a technical expression for God’s descent to earth to execute his judgment: “Then the Lord said, ‘The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know’ ” (Gen. 18:20, 21). Moreover, verse 24 in Daniel 4 confirms that God himself originated the verdict pronounced by the *holy messenger*.

The tree is to be *cut down* and stripped of its branches, leaves, and fruit. Determinism is a characteristic of biblical apocalyptic prophecies. A major difference, however, is that in this dream, the destruction is not total, because the tree’s roots are spared—a detail that sends a signal of hope for a future restoration. Said Job:

“At least there is hope for a tree:
If it is cut down, it will sprout
again,

and its new shoots will not fail.
Its roots may grow old in the ground
and its stump die in the soil,
yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth shoots like a
plant” (Job 14:7-9).

In verse 15, the narrator passes “almost imperceptibly from a symbolic vision of the fate of the tree (representing the king) to a more realistic description of the fate of Nebuchadnezzar himself. In Aramaic, the noun translated ‘tree’ is masculine, so the transition from ‘it’ and ‘its’ to ‘him’ and ‘his’ is not evident.”²⁵ The transition is found in the description of the bands of *iron and bronze* that were used for binding animals and war captives. Psalm 149:8, 9 says that the holy warriors will

bind their [Gentile] kings with fetters,
their nobles with shackles of iron,
to carry out the sentence written
against them.

The tree/person with the mind of an animal would live among the flora and fauna of the wild field for *seven times* or seasons—probably seven years.

4:17, 18 The purpose of this dream, stated in no fewer than three places in the chapter, was to show that God is *sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes* (4:17, 25, 32). These words constitute what has been called “one of the immor-

tal sentences of the Hebrew Scriptures.”²⁶ They remind the reader of the words that Daniel spoke to the king earlier: “*‘The God of heaven has given you kingdom and power and might and glory’*” (2:37). It has been aptly said that the theme of God’s absolute sovereignty is “a scarlet thread which runs through all the stories of Daniel 1–6 and ties them with the same theme which is put forward in the strongest possible form in the apocalyptic narratives of Daniel 7–12.”²⁷ A similar statement could be made about the presence of the theme of divine judgment, which permeates the whole book.

God’s choices often surprise humans. In Mary’s words, he “has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble” (Luke 1:52). Her words were based on the statement from Psalm 113:7, 8:

He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash
heap;
he seats them with princes,
with the princes of their people.

King Nebuchadnezzar has already seen the fulfillment of these words in Daniel’s life and his prosperous career in Babylon. That is why in the beginning and at the end of his speech in this chapter he says with confidence that Daniel is filled with the divine spirit and therefore is capable of explaining his dream.

The Interpretation (4:19-27)

Daniel repeats the king’s dream in a summary fashion and then proceeds to tell its meaning, concluding it with a strong warning.

¹⁹*Then Daniel (also called Belshazzar) was perplexed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. So the king said, “Belshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.” Belshazzar answered, “My lord, may the dream apply to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!”* ²⁰*The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth,* ²¹*with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the sky—* ²²*you, O king, are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to the ends of the earth.*

²³*“You, O king, saw a holy messenger coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live like the wild animals until seven times pass by for him.’*

²⁴*“This is the meaning, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: ²⁵You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you recognize that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. ²⁶The command to leave the stump of*

the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you recognize that Heaven rules. ²⁷Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Break away from your sins by doing what is right, and from your wickedness by being merciful to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.

Notes

4:19 “Belteshazzar.” See the Notes on Daniel 1:7.

“Perplexed.” The word *’eštōmam*, “dismayed,” is also used, in its Hebrew form, to describe Daniel’s feelings at the end of his vision in 8:27. There it is rendered “appalled.”

“For a while.” It is impossible to determine the length of this pause in a precise way because the original word, *šā’â*, may mean a moment of time or an hour. The former meaning is supported by verse 33 of this chapter, where the word is translated as “immediately.”

“Enemies . . . adversaries.” The two words come in two lines with a strong parallel relationship. These words resemble those used by Assyrian and Babylonian dream interpreters when they performed their sacred rituals to dispel the evil effects of dreams. The context here, however, portrays Daniel more like a biblical prophet who proposes ethical means—such as moral conversion—of averting divine judgments. “In this regard Daniel functions more like a Hebrew prophet than like a Babylonian exorcist.”²⁸

4:20 “Tree.” See the Notes on Daniel 4:10.

“Large and strong.” See the Notes on Daniel 4:3 and 4:11.

4:22 “You, O king, are that tree!” Although the word *’ilān*, “tree,” is not found in the Aramaic

text of this verse, it is implied. The prophet Ezekiel, who was Daniel’s contemporary, compared both the nation of Israel (Ezek. 17:22-24) and the Egyptian ruler (Ezek. 31:1-18) to a tree.

“Great and strong.” See the Notes on Daniel 4:3. The root *rab*, “great,” is used in this verse no less than three times—twice as a verb and once as a noun.

4:23 “A holy messenger.” See the Notes on Daniel 4:13.

“Bound with iron and bronze.” See the Notes on Daniel 4:15.

“Seven times.” See the Notes on Daniel 4:16.

4:24 “The decree the Most High has issued.” According to Daniel’s interpretation, the decree proclaimed by the holy messengers (vv. 13, 17) derives ultimately from God.

“My lord the king.” Daniel has already referred to the king with the word *mārî*, “my lord.” In Daniel 2:47, Nebuchadnezzar called God “the Lord of kings.” In spite of the severe words of judgment that the divine decree spelled out against the king, Daniel’s attitude toward Nebuchadnezzar is very positive.

4:25 “Eat grass like cattle.” The scene of grazing animals is sometimes used in the Bible to portray a peaceful pastoral setting. Here, though, it portrays the king’s degradation. The delusion that one is an ox is called *boanthropy*, and that of being a wolf is *lycanthropy*. History furnishes many illustrations that show that “the king or commoner who thinks to become superman becomes instead a beast.”²⁹

“You recognize.” The original verb *yēda’*, “to know,” that is used here is very important in the context of the Bible because it is one of the key terms that regulate the covenant relationship

between God and his people. It is used, for example, in the Exodus narrative to show that God's ultimate purpose was not to punish the Egyptians nor to destroy their land but to lead them to the knowledge of him who is the only true God who rules the world (Exod. 7:5, 17; 8:10; 9:29; etc.).

4:26 "Heaven." This word is probably an abbreviation of the longer title *'elāh šemayyā'*, "the God of heaven" or "God in heaven," used in Daniel and other biblical exilic and post-exilic texts. While this word has the physical meaning of "the sky," it "occurs as a catch-word in this chapter (verses 13, 20, 26, 34, 37)."³⁰ Commentators consider it to be a periphrastic reference to God—a usage that is found only in this text in the Old Testament (cf. v. 34, where the king raised his eyes "toward heaven"). The expression is commonly used in this sense in the New Testament—for example in Luke 15:18, 21, where the lost son confesses to the father that he has "sinned against heaven and against you."

4:27 "Therefore." This word marks the conclusion of Daniel's speech before Nebuchadnezzar.

"Be pleased." The verb *šepar*, "to be good, pleasing," is also used in verse 2, where the king says "it is my pleasure to tell you . . ."

"Break away from your sins." In Biblical Hebrew, the equivalent verb *pāraq* conveys the idea of "breaking off" an object like a yoke (Gen. 27:40) or of "putting a definite stop" to an action.³¹ In Exodus 32:2, for example, Aaron tells the people, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." The most frequently attested meaning of this word in Aramaic is "to cut off."³² The whole verse is built on parallelism in which

practicing righteousness is explained as showing mercy and kindness to the poor and the oppressed.

"Right." The original word is *šidqâ*, "righteousness, justice." Proverbs 16:12 says that "a throne is established through righteousness." In postbiblical times, this word was tied to the idea of almsgiving, charity. Biblical prophets urged the people to reject evil ways and do what is right.

"Oppressed." The Hebrew equivalent *'ānî*, "poor, needy," is frequently found in the Bible—especially in the books of Psalms and the prophets. It describes someone who is oppressed either socially or physically (cf. Isa. 29:19; 32:7; Amos 2:7; 8:4).

"It may be." This expression, *hēn*, "perhaps," makes Daniel's statement conditional—an element that is also found in the messages of the biblical prophets (Joel 2:14; Amos 5:15; Zeph. 2:3). The text does not indicate how the king reacted to Daniel's interpretation of his dream and his call to repentance.

"Prosperity." The word *š'lēwâ*, "tranquility," is similar to the word *š'lēh*, "contented," in verse 4.

Exposition (4:19-27)

4:19 In this chapter more frequently than in any other in the book, Daniel is referred to by his Babylonian name, *Belteshazzar*. Perhaps this is so because the story was intended to be proclaimed throughout the Babylonian Empire and the use of Daniel's international name gives the story more authenticity. There may also be some irony present in this story. While the wise men who served

the god Marduk (Bel) were unable to help the king who worshiped that god, Daniel, who in Babylon was named after that god, was able to help the king—all the while giving credit to his God in heaven and not to any other god such as Marduk (Bel).

The content of the dream makes Daniel *perplexed* and even afraid. In the ancient world, the role of being the bearer of bad news was a dangerous one. “Messengers who bring bad news sometimes pay for it as if they were responsible for it, and the king reassures Daniel that he is not to fear for his own fate. Daniel’s fear, however, is for Nebuchadnezzar.”³³ The king addresses Daniel in the friendliest manner and assures him that he is safe in the palace. All this demonstrates that a rather warm relationship existed between the two men. Daniel responds to the king by saying that he wishes the dream applied to the king’s enemies. Rather than considering Daniel’s words as part of the established Babylonian ritual to dispel the evil effects of unpleasant dreams, we should view them as part of typical oriental courtesy. Daniel was saying something like “May what this dream portends never happen to you.”

4:20, 21 In the Bible, trees are often used as symbols of a righteous person:

He is like a tree planted by streams
of water,
which yields its fruit in season

and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers
(Ps. 1:3; cf. Ps. 92:12-15).

However, elsewhere, especially in the prophets, a tall tree stands for pride:

The Lord Almighty has a day in store
for all the proud and lofty,
for all that is exalted
(and they will be humbled),
for all the cedars of Lebanon, tall
and lofty,
and all the oaks of Bashan
(Isa. 2:12, 13).

The prophet Ezekiel compared another proud Mesopotamian empire to a tall tree:

“ ‘Consider Assyria, once a cedar in
Lebanon . . .
So it towered higher
than all the trees of the field’ ”
(Ezek. 31:3, 5).

4:22-25 In direct speech unusual for a royal palace, Daniel declares, *You, O king, are that tree!* There is a strong parallel in this verse with Daniel’s words to the same king in 2:37. “ ‘You, O king, are the king of kings,’ ” and in 2:38, “ ‘You are the head of gold.’ ” A similar expression of prophetic confrontation is found in the words of the prophet Nathan to King David: “ ‘You are the man!’ ” (2 Sam. 12:7). As the story sug-

gested all along, “the tree-man is Nebuchadnezzar himself.”³⁴

The interpretation that follows is similarly direct, pointing to *the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king*. So, Daniel says the decree originated with God himself (cf. v. 13, where a holy messenger proclaims the decree). The fortunes of the king, who had God-given dominion over the animals of the earth (Jer. 27:5, 6; Dan. 2:37, 38), will be reversed—God will humble him and give him the mind of an animal, and in his delusion, he will eat plants like they do. This state will last for seven periods, the length of which the original Aramaic text does not specify. Based on the context found in the rest of the book, the length of the king’s illness is understood to be seven years.

One can find other examples in the Bible where the numbers seven and seventy are used in the context of judgment. In Daniel 3:19, the king commands that the furnace be “heated seven times hotter than usual,” and in 9:2, Daniel studies Jeremiah’s prophecy about the seventy years of exile. The same numbers can be found in the Bible in the context of a flood (Gen. 7:2, 4, etc.), a famine (Gen. 41:2-7), covenantal curses (Lev. 26), a destruction by war (Josh. 6; Isa. 23:15), and exile (Jer. 25:11).

4:26 This humbling experience is not meant to destroy the king but to help him recognize God’s sovereignty. Once

he does that, he will be restored to his normal position. During the annual *Akitu* festival in the temple of Esagila, a Babylonian priest would slap the emperor in the face to remind him that he was only the representative of the ruling god Marduk (Bel). However, in Daniel’s interpretation of the dream, he points to the true God who is the sole Sovereign on earth. Centuries later, Jesus told the Roman governor Pilate, “‘You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above’ ” (John 19:11). “It is significant that the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar will be returned only when he realizes that he does not really have a kingdom; his reign is only by permit from the One who truly reigns over all living beings on the earth.”³⁵

4:27 Daniel closes his speech with advice that the king should *break away from* his proud habits of oppression and exploitation and replace them with kindness to those who are oppressed. Nebuchadnezzar should become a just and compassionate king in deeds, not merely in words. Daniel’s exhortation here is similar to many of those given by the biblical prophets (Amos 5:15). A good example of this type of call to repentance is found in Isaiah 1:16-18:

Take your evil deeds
out of my sight!
Stop doing wrong,
learn to do right!
Seek justice,

encourage the oppressed.
Defend the cause of the fatherless,
plead the case of the widow.

The chapter clearly teaches that “God is a God of mercy, even to the merciless,”³⁶ to whom he offers an opportunity to repent rather than die. The proclamations of both John the Baptist and Jesus began with the word “Repent!” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17).

In the construction of the city of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar used thousands of “slave laborers captured in various military campaigns. The extension of Nebuchadnezzar’s empire exacted a high cost in human lives—both of the defeated and of his own soldiers who died in battle.”³⁷ The impressiveness of the king’s achievements cannot be questioned, but they came with a price tag that was too high.

Daniel did not tell the king that his good deeds would automatically earn him favor with God and avert the coming judgment. Although the ultimate purpose of biblical prophecy is the salvation of human beings, God’s grace and mercy are rooted in his absolute sovereignty, and they are never to be taken for granted. Hence, Daniel concludes, *it may be that then your prosperity will continue*. These words remind us of the other biblical prophets, who, while calling people to repentance, said that forgiveness is not something they can earn; rather, it is a gift from

God. The reader of the Bible may compare these words to those of Amos 5:15, which says,

Hate evil, love good;
maintain justice in the courts.
Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will
have mercy
on the remnant of Joseph.

In a similar way, Zephaniah 2:3 says,

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the
land,
you who do what he commands.
Seek righteousness, seek humility;
perhaps you will be sheltered
on the day of the Lord’s anger.

The Fulfillment of the Dream (4:28-33)

The fulfillment of the dream is characterized by a reversal of the king’s fortunes. It is presented by a narrator in the third person, and its description extends down to verse 36.

²⁸*All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.*

²⁹*Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”*

³¹*While the words were still on the king’s lips, a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been removed from you. ³²You will be driven away from people and will live with the*

wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you recognize that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."

³³Immediately these words about Nebuchadnezzar were fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

Notes

4:29 "Twelve months later." Literally, the text says *liqṣāt yarḥîn terê-^aśar*, "at the end of twelve months."

"Walking on the roof of the royal palace." The original only says *'al-hêkal*, "on the palace," without using the word for roof. Since most house-type structures in the lands of the Bible have flat roofs, the translators insert the word "roof" to clarify that this was normal behavior rather than to give the impression that the king has already lost his mind. King David also sinned while he was walking on the roof of his palace (2 Sam. 11:2-5).

4:30 "Is not this . . . ?" This is the beginning of a rhetorical question asked by the king.

"The great Babylon." In other Semitic languages, the equivalents of this expression, *bābel rabb^etā'*, "the great Babylon," sometimes describe the capital city of a country. For example, *Ammon Rabba* designated the capital of the land of the ancient Ammonites (today's Amman, the capital of the kingdom of Jordan). In other words, Nebuchadnezzar was referring to his city as "Babylon, the capital [of the empire/world]." The expression "Babylon the Great" is

frequently used in the book of Revelation (14:8; 16:19; 18:2).

"I have built." Commentators and historians agree that King Nebuchadnezzar was the builder of the capital city of Neo-Babylon. The imprints of his name on thousands of bricks in the city wall illustrate well this historical fact.

"I . . . my . . . my." In the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar's speeches are presented as self-centered. They may be compared with the boasting of the Pharaoh in Exodus 15:9, 10 as well as with the boastful words of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14:13, 14.

"My mighty power." See the Notes on Daniel 4:3, where the king praises God's power and might.

4:31 "While the words were still on the king's lips." These words express the immediacy of divine judgment. If Nebuchadnezzar's punishment and banishment are comparable to Adam and Eve's from the Garden of Eden, then these words match the statement "'on the day you eat of it you will surely die.'" ³⁸

"A voice came from heaven." In Hebrew tradition, the voice from heaven is known as *bat-qôl*—literally, "daughter of a voice." It reveals God's will.

"King Nebuchadnezzar." The king is addressed here by name. The use of the title *melek*, "king," contrasts with the way in which the three Hebrews addressed the proud monarch on the plain of Dura (3:16).

"Has been removed." The use of the verbal forms in the perfect tense is typical of prophetic announcements in the Bible. This phenomenon is known as the "prophetic perfect"—a future event is spoken of as an accomplished action in order to emphasize its certainty.

4:32 This verse repeats the information already given in verse 25.

"Seven times." See the Notes on Daniel 4:16.

4:33 "Immediately." Literally, the text says *bah-ša'atā'*, "at that very moment." See the Notes on Daniel 4:19. The same expression is used in Daniel 3:6, where the administrators were forewarned that whoever does not obey the order "'will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.'"

"Like cattle." The comparative particle *kē*, "like," is important here just as it is in the vision in chapter 7. The king's appearance did not change as much as his behavior did.

"Hair... nails." These two details are new elements in the story. The comparisons that are used here focus on the length of the hair and nails. The hair on the king's head and body was unkempt and became "matted and coarse."³⁹ As such, his hair looked like the feathers of an eagle, and since the nails were not cut, they looked like a bird's claws.

Exposition (4:28-33)

4:28-30 The fulfillment of the dream is told in the third person because animals cannot speak the language of the humans. A year after he had the dream, the king boasted of the greatness of the imperial capital city and claimed its absolute ownership. In the experience related in the previous chapter, he had learned that the world is in God's hands, but he thought he could claim at least the capital city as his own. The king sinned while *walking on the roof* of his palace, much as David had when he saw

Bathsheba taking a bath and desired her (2 Sam. 11:2-5). Nebuchadnezzar's sin, however, was one of pride.

The city of Babylon tripled in size during this king's reign, and his building projects included the famed "hanging gardens" that reminded his wife Amytis of the countryside of her native Media. Nebuchadnezzar's palaces were built mostly of the famous cedar trees from Tyre combined with layers of brick. The news of the death of the proud king of Babylon is announced in Isaiah's book by the singing of a choir composed of the pine trees and cedars of Lebanon: " 'Now that you have been laid low, / no woodsman comes to cut us down' " (Isa. 14:8).

The text here is not condemnatory of Nebuchadnezzar's admiration of the city. Rather, it is his pride that is condemned. Psalm 48:12, 13 exhorts the temple worshipers to

walk about Zion, go around her,
count her towers,
consider well her ramparts,
view her citadels.

In a similar way, Solomon boasted about God's temple, saying, " 'I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever' " (1 Kings 8:13).

In the king's short speech, first-person pronouns and boastful adjectives abound. This type of proud speech reminds the

reader of the Song at the Sea, in which the proud Pharaoh threatened to destroy the Israelites (Exod. 15:9, 10), and also of the Morning Star (Hebrew *hêlâl ben-šahar*) whose ambitions are described in the following way in Isaiah 14:13, 14:

You said in your heart,
 "I will ascend to heaven;
 I will raise my throne
 above the stars of God;
 I will sit enthroned on the mount of
 assembly,
 on the utmost heights of the
 sacred mountain.
 I will ascend above the tops of the
 clouds;
 I will make myself like the Most
 High."

Human greatness very often threatens "to rival the greatness of God himself."⁴⁰ According to Daniel 7:8, the little horn has a mouth that speaks great or boastful words. Pride leads people to forget their dependence on the Creator God. Humility, on the other hand, leads to happiness and fulfillment.

4:31-33 The response to the king's pride came from heaven, and it was swift and decisive. "The king suffers the fate which humans fear the most, exclusion from the human family, abandonment, alienation, and becomes a veritable were-wolf, long-haired, and with talons, but herbivorous like an ox."⁴¹ The diag-

nosis of King Nebuchadnezzar's mental illness is known as lycanthropy (the wolf-man syndrome). This type of mental disorder takes place when a person delusively thinks of himself and behaves like one of *the wild animals*. Kings "of recent centuries who have suffered from this are George III of Great Britain and Otto of Bavaria."⁴²

There are a few pieces of historical background that shed light on King Nebuchadnezzar's experience as told in this chapter. One comes from a very fragmentary cuneiform text published by A. K. Grayson in 1975.⁴³ This fragment recorded strange behavior by King Nebuchadnezzar. The text says that the king's life appeared of no value to him, that he showed neither love toward his children nor care for the temples. Even though this text is fragmentary, it may be related to what Daniel 4 tells about the king's mental disorder. Another extrabiblical story found in Eusebius describes Nebuchadnezzar at the end of his reign "in a fit of madness" warning his subjects from the roof of his palace that a Persian mule will take over Babylon with a "son of the Medes" being responsible for it. The king tries to dispel the omen by wishing that person would join the wild beasts and leave Babylon alone. Lastly, a document found at Qumran Cave IV, titled "The Prayer of Nabonidus," says that King Nabonidus was smitten by mental disorder and behaved like an animal. This story has

some similarities as well as some differences with the story from Daniel 4.

It is possible to trace the successive stages of Nebuchadnezzar's illness: (1) The king simply lives with the animals (4:15); (2) he goes through a psychological change, having now the mind of an animal (4:16); (3) his physical change can be seen in his hair and fingernails and toenails (4:33). The king's fingernails and hair grow very long, and the details of what he looked like and how he felt about himself are blended together in the text's description of his appearance.

In this story, the king lost his mind because of his pride and the wrong attitude he held toward his wealth. "Paradoxically, in seeking to surpass other humans, he has fallen below humanity."⁴⁴ Instead of partaking in a higher, super-human nature, the king is brought down to the level of a lower nature. The beast imagery of the human powers becomes an important motif in Daniel's visions, especially in chapter 7. In a parable Jesus told, a rich fool was warned that he could lose more than his mind—his very life depended on his readiness to repent (Luke 12:15-21).

The King's Praise (4:34-37)

Due to its chiasmic structure, the chapter ends the way it started, with a hymn of praise to God. The presence of the two hymns forms an *inclusio* in the chapter.

³⁴At the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I blessed the Most High; I praised and honored him who lives forever.

***His dominion is an eternal dominion;
his kingdom lasts from one generation
to another.***

***³⁵All the peoples of the earth are regarded as
nothing.***

***He does as he pleases
with the powers of heaven
and the peoples of the earth.***

***No one can hold back his hand
or say to him, "What have you done?"***

³⁶At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.

³⁷Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and honor the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Notes

4:34 "That period." The period in view here is that of the "seven times" mentioned in verses 16 and 23. The original text says *yômayyâ*, "the days," but in the Bible, the word *yôm*, "a day," is not specific as to its length unless there are other indicators that qualify it more precisely. It has been pointed out that between 582 B.C. and 575 B.C., a period totaling seven years, Nebuchadnezzar's army undertook no major military operation.

"I, Nebuchadnezzar." See the Notes on

Daniel 4:4; 4:30. The story now returns to the first-person account.

"Raised my eyes." The expression is figurative, here meaning that the king sought God's help (cf. Pss. 25:15; 121:1, 2; 123:1, 2; 141:8) and that he also recognized God's sovereignty (Isa. 40:26).

"Heaven." See the Notes on Daniel 4:26. It is very likely that "the God of heaven" is meant in this context. The king's behavior shows a definite change in attitude.

"My sanity." The Aramaic word *manda'*, "knowledge," is usually rendered as "understanding" or "knowledge." It speaks here of the king's return to sanity. Return to reason is based on a previous act of faith. "Sanity begins with a realistic self-appraisal."⁴⁵

"Restored." Along with its Hebrew equivalent *šûb*, the verb *tûb*, "to return," is used in the Bible for the act of repentance as well as for restoration. Thus, to repent in the Bible primarily means to turn away from one's way of life and toward God and his teaching.

"Blessed." The original uses here the verb root *brk*, "to bless," just as in 3:28, where the king praised the God of Daniel's three friends.

"The Most High." See the Notes on Daniel 4:17.

"Who lives forever." A similar statement about God is found in Daniel 12:7. Moreover, King Darius declared that Daniel's God "is the living God" (Dan. 6:26). In the story of Abraham, the Lord is called *'el 'ôlām*, "the Eternal God" (Gen. 21:33).

"His dominion . . ." This word and those that follow are poetic; they begin another hymn of praise that echoes Daniel's praise in chapter 2.

"An eternal dominion." See the Notes on Daniel 4:3. The words *dominion* and *kingdom* are also found in verse 3; they form an inclusio in the chapter.

4:35 "Regarded as nothing." Isaiah 40:17 says,

Before him all the nations are as nothing;
they are regarded by him as worthless
and less than nothing.

"The powers of heaven." More than any other prophetic book, the book of Isaiah teaches that God has complete control over the "starry host" (Isa. 24:21; 34:4). Isaiah 40:26 talks of God as the One

who brings out the starry host one by one,
and calls them each by name.
Because of his great power and mighty
strength,
not one of them is missing.

"Heaven . . . the earth." These two words are often used in the Bible in opposition to each other. Two opposite concepts used together in order to express totality constitute the literary figure known as *merism(us)*.

"Hand." See the Notes on Daniel 1:2.

"What have you done?" The words found at the close of the king's hymn are considered by some to be "the punch line of the story."⁴⁶ For a similar description of God's absolute power on earth, see Job 9:12; Ecclesiastes 8:4; and Isaiah 14:26, 27; 45:9.

4:36 "At the same time." The word *zēmān*, "time," usually indicates a precise point and is therefore rendered as "an appointed time."

"My sanity was restored." The words here are identical with those in verse 34 above.

"My advisers and nobles." The words that are used here refer to two important ranks in the royal court. The first term is also used in Daniel 3:24.

"Sought me out." The verb *be'â*, "to seek," is commonly used in chapter 2. In this verse, the meaning of this verb is similar to its meaning in 2:16, which pictures Daniel going to the royal palace to ask for an appointment for an audience with the king. A parallel to this text is the end of the story of Job, which says that Job's relatives and friends "came and ate with him in his house" (Job 42:11).

"Even greater than before." The previous stories ended with the Hebrew exiles being rewarded and promoted. The end of this story features Nebuchadnezzar's restoration and exaltation.

4:37 "Now, I." The first-person singular pronoun that is used here forms an *inclusio* with verse 4, where the king begins telling his story.

"Praise and exalt and honor." The three words that are used here are synonymous. They are used together here to produce a cumulative effect on the reader.

"The King of heaven." This divine title, *melek šemayyâ'*, is not attested elsewhere in the Bible. It may be compared to "the God of heaven" (Dan. 2:18), "God in heaven" (Dan. 2:28), and "Lord of heaven" (Dan. 5:23).

"Walk in pride." Walking is a common metaphor in the Bible for living or acting; it has to do with a person's behavior.

"He is able to humble." These are Nebuchadnezzar's last words in the book. The subject of this sentence is God. The king summarizes his own experience in this single line. "The human

ruler is finally to be an agent of divine will. A vehicle through which the greatness and sovereignty of God are universally made known."⁴⁷

Exposition (4:34-37)

4:34, 35 The narrative now resumes as a first-person report. At the end of the period given in the dream, the king turns his eyes toward God in *heaven*. Said the psalmist,

But my eyes are fixed on you,
O Sovereign Lord;
in you I take refuge—do not give
me over to death (Ps. 141:8).

This act of faith resulted in the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar's mental health, which, in turn, resulted in a hymn of praise to God from the king's mouth. The king's hymn claims that God's sovereignty is eternal (v. 34b), universal (v. 35a), and unquestionable (v. 35b), and he contrasts it with human beings, who *are regarded as nothing* (cf. Pss. 115:3; 135:6; Isa. 40:17). God's unquestionable supremacy in the world is also described in Isaiah 14:26, 27:

This is the plan determined for the
whole world;
this is the hand stretched out
over all nations.
For the Lord Almighty has purposed,
and who can thwart him?
His hand is stretched out, and
who can turn it back?

“As he emerges from insanity, Nebuchadnezzar sees nothing but God. He is suddenly aware that he owes Him everything. Without God he is nothing.”⁴⁸ The oft-repeated slogan from biblical wisdom books is that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7 Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10). That is why the kingdom of God belongs to “the poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3).

4:36, 37 Moreover, the king's throne is restored to him. His officers went to search for him at the end of the said period, and when they found him, they placed him back on his throne. He *became even greater than* he had been *before*. “Since the king has accepted that God rules over him, it is now possible for God to rule through him, and so he is restored to his kingdom and greatness.”⁴⁹ The words *I, Nebuchadnezzar*, with which the king began his speech are also found here at its end, forming an inclusio in the story. The king concludes that God is able to humble *those who walk in pride*; these words contain the moral of the whole story. They are found elsewhere in biblical wisdom books (Prov. 11:2; 29:23) and in the prophets (Isa. 2:11, 17; 13:11; Ezek. 16:49, 56). While Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction, / a haughty spirit before a fall,” Proverbs 15:33 says, “The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, / and humility comes before honor.”

The question is sometimes asked why no one took the throne from Nebuchadnezzar during the period of his mental illness. In the ancient world, there was a widespread belief that if a person was possessed by an evil spirit, that spirit could possess anyone who would willfully try to harm the afflicted person. It is also useful to remember that Daniel's position in Neo-Babylon placed him close to the emperor himself; thus he could have performed all the royal duties during the king's absence from the palace. Jewish tradition, on the other hand, claims that Nebuchadnezzar's son Amel-Marduk, the crown prince, was the acting king during that period.

Summary of the Teaching

1. *God and Nebuchadnezzar*. The stories from the book of Daniel show that the God of Israel is the supreme Ruler of the whole world. He controls the fate of kingdoms, but he also cares about individual kings. Moreover, he had a plan for King Nebuchadnezzar. The fact that the Hebrew Bible “never reproaches Nebuchadnezzar for the destruction of the temple is remarkable, especially, since Belshazzar is condemned in chap. 5 for desecrating the temple vessels.”⁵⁰

At the end of chapter 3, the king was only “half converted.” At the beginning of chapter 4, he failed to remember the Lord God who gave him “ability to produce wealth” (Deut. 8:18). Yet at the

end of the story from that same chapter, Nebuchadnezzar is a changed person. “This time he had not only witnessed the power of God, he had felt it in his own person.”⁵¹ The king “no longer relies on the power of physical force, but on the power of personal testimony.”⁵² The story from this chapter, in fact, “ends with the repentance and virtual conversion” of Nebuchadnezzar.⁵³ The king died in the year 562 B.C. at a ripe old age.⁵⁴

The king’s capitulation to the God of his captives and his subsequent conversion did not happen all at once but in steps, climaxing in a personal experience with God, whose objective was not to destroy the king but rather to lead him to know God himself. The king’s dream served the purpose of warning him against pride while simultaneously offering the possibility of repentance and hope. “Nebuchadnezzar is promised that he can be king from the point he acknowledges that actually he is not, because God is.”⁵⁵ Was this God’s ultimate plan for all the earthly monarchs throughout history? According to the Bible, some kings chose to ignore this plan to their own peril (Exod. 14:5-9; Isa. 10:12-19; 14:12-20; Ezek. 28:1-10; Dan. 5:22-28).

The longest biblical passage that parallels the story of King Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion thematically is found in Job 33:14-30. In the speech of Job’s friend Elihu, he explains the way in which God reveals himself to a human being through

a dream and disciplines him in order to save him:

“For God does speak—now one way,
now another—
though man may not perceive it.
In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falls on men
as they slumber in their beds,
he may speak in their ears
and terrify them with warnings,
to turn man from wrongdoing
and keep him from pride,
to preserve his soul from the pit,
his life from perishing by the
sword. . . .

“Yet if there is an angel on his side
as a mediator, one out of a
thousand,
to tell a man what is right for him,
to be gracious to him and say,
‘Spare him from going down to
the pit;
I have found a ransom for him’—
then his flesh is renewed like a child’s;
it is restored as in the days of
his youth.
He prays to God and finds favor
with him,
he sees God’s face and shouts
for joy;
he is restored by God to his
righteous state.
Then he comes to men and says,
‘I sinned, and perverted what
was right,

but I did not get what I deserved.
He redeemed my soul from going
down to the pit,
and I will live to enjoy the light.’

“God does all these things to a man—
twice, even three times—
to turn back his soul from the pit,
that the light of life may shine
on him.”

2. *Babylon's pride!* The God of the Bible presents himself as the God of mercy and justice. When revealing himself to Moses, he described himself as “the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet, he does not leave the guilty unpunished” (Exod. 34:6, 7).

But in the texts of the Bible that are colored by the Babel motif, God is portrayed as someone who does not use the language of love and justice but uses one of irony and sarcasm. This way of speech against Babylon and anyone else whose Babylonlike pride leads away from God is attested in the Bible as early as in Genesis 11. It is repeated in Isaiah 14 and continues all the way through the book of Revelation. Any created being whose ambition is to become superhuman by his own efforts or to climb one step higher than the rest of the human race and thus “play god” ends up falling a

step lower; partaking of a lower, animal-like nature; or even worse, facing death. Thus, “when we reject our creaturely status and seek to become God we are in danger of becoming sub-human.”⁵⁶

While to the faithful, the concept of God's sovereign power is welcome news and the only source of hope, to the proud this same concept comes as a threat. Jesus saw this type of pride in the town he had made his base, and he warned his audience about its consequences: “‘You, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths’ ” (Matt. 11:23). It is possible that Jesus was making a play on words, because the name Caper-Na(h)um can mean “the town of (the prophet) Nahum.” The Old Testament book of the prophet Nahum is filled with stern warnings to the city of Nineveh regarding its pride and cruelty.

To avoid tumbling into the pitfall of Babylon's pride, the reader of the Bible is summoned to heed the following warning from Jesus Christ: “‘Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted’ ” (Luke 14:11). At the close of this chapter, the words from Jeremiah 9:23, 24 seem very much fitting:

This is what the Lord says:

“Let not the wise man boast of his
wisdom
or the strong man boast of his
strength

or the rich man boast of his riches,
but let him who boasts boast about
this:
that he understands and knows me,
that I am the Lord, who exercises
kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight,”
declares the Lord.

1. Maxwell (p. 59) dates this chapter in the year 569 B.C. but gives no reason for doing so. Archer (p. 60) dates it to the year 583 B.C., with the seven years of Nebuchadnezzar's mental illness dated from 582 to 575 B.C.

2. Wiseman, *Chronicles*, 73.
3. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 55.
4. Towner, 60.
5. Baldwin, 110.
6. Seow, 65.
7. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 60-61.
8. *Ibid.*, 63.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Porteous, 67; Collins, 222. Lucas (p. 109) considers this to be a case of popular etymology.
11. Péter-Contesse and Ellington, 105.
12. Quoted by Collins, 224.
13. Seow, 69.
14. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 65.
15. Lucas, 111.
16. Seow, 68.
17. Collins, 227.
18. Slotki, 35-36.
19. *Ibid.*, 34.
20. The Babylonian Talmud, *Sanh.* 38b.
21. Nichol, 4:790.
22. G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between*

the Bible and the Mishnah (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 22.

23. Ford, 116.
24. Smith-Christopher, 73.
25. Péter-Contesse and Ellington, 110.
26. Montgomery, 236.
27. Towner, 65.
28. Collins, 229.
29. Towner, 65.
30. Baldwin, 116.
31. This fact was completely overlooked in Ernestus Vogt's *Lexicon Linguae Aramaicae Veteris Testamenti*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1994), 140.
32. Hofstijzer and Jongeling, 943-944.
33. Goldingay, 94.
34. Towner, 62.
35. Smith-Christopher, 75.
36. Berrigan, 69.
37. Shea, *Daniel*, 52.
38. Goldingay, 96.
39. Archer, 66; Nichol, 4:793.
40. Goldingay, 95.
41. Towner, 64.
42. Lucas, 111.
43. BM 34113. See Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 102-103, and G. F. Hasel, "The Book of Daniel: Evidences Relating to Persons and Chronology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19, no. 1 (1981): 37-49.
44. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 69.
45. Baldwin, 116.
46. Towner, 60.
47. Seow, 73.
48. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 73.
49. Lucas, 118.
50. Collins, 229.
51. Porteous, 73.
52. Lucas, 114.
53. Collins, 234.
54. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 77.
55. Goldingay, 94.
56. Lucas, 116.

BELSHAZZAR'S BANQUET

(5:1-31)

Like the chapters that precede it, chapter 5 in Daniel's book contains a court story, this one directly related to the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C., some twenty-three years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar. As in the previous chapter, the theme is one of God's judgment on human pride mediated through Daniel's role as prophet. The two chapters are seen as the core of the Aramaic section of the book, which comprises chapters 2–7. In chapter 4, the prophet was favorably disposed toward a king who was willing to learn from his mistakes. But Belshazzar differed greatly from Nebuchadnezzar, primarily in his response to the God of heaven. The end of chapter 5 forms the climax of the Aramaic section of the book. It is the only place in the entire Bible where the fall of Babylon is presented from a historical perspective. This chapter is also important from the point of view of biblical prophecy, because the interpretation of the first part

of the dream in chapter 2 finds its fulfillment and confirmation in the historical event of the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

It has already been observed that the scroll of Isaiah exercised a strong influence on Daniel. For that reason it is useful to refer at this point to at least one passage from Isaiah's book that speaks of Babylon's fall:

“Sit in silence, go into darkness,
Daughter of the Babylonians;
no more will you be called
queen of kingdoms. . . .

“Keep on, then, with your magic spells
and with your many sorceries,
which you have labored at since
childhood.

Perhaps you will succeed,
perhaps you will cause terror.
All the counsel you have received
has only worn you out!
Let your astrologers come forward,

those stargazers who make predictions
 month by month,
 let them save you from what is
 coming upon you.
 Surely they are like stubble;
 the fire will burn them up.
 They cannot even save themselves
 from the power of the flame.
 Here are no coals to warm anyone;
 here is no fire to sit by”
 (Isa. 47:5, 12-14).

This passage from Isaiah describes the helpless state of Babylon and its idols, which were not capable of saving themselves, much less the city that patronized them. The text of Daniel 5 also links the fall of Babylon with its idols, which at the moment of dire need proved to be helpless. Belshazzar’s father, Nabonidus, for example, worshiped the moon god called Sin. “On the night of the fifteenth of a lunar month such as Tishri, a full moon would be shining. Thus Babylon fell when Sin, the moon god, was at his fullest and most powerful.”¹

This chapter has a chiastic structure, showing the reversal of Belshazzar’s fortunes from his feast to his death. The king’s death directly affected Babylon’s destiny. The five-part structure is as follows:

1. The king’s feast (5:1-4)
2. The writing on the wall and the queen’s speech (5:5-12)

3. Bel(te)shazzar meets Belshazzar (5:13-17)
4. Daniel’s speech and the meaning of the writing (5:18-28)
5. The king’s death (5:29-31)

The chapter opens with Belshazzar’s feast and closes with his death. The speech by the queen mother is matched by Daniel’s rebuke and the interpretation of the cryptic writing on the wall. At the center of the chapter is a face-to-face encounter between two men who most likely bore the same Babylonian name. The middle part of the chapter is dominated by Daniel’s rebuke, which is intended to give the main reason for Babylon’s fall.

The King’s Feast (5:1-4)

The chapter begins abruptly. Without any formal introduction, either chronological or epistolary, the reader is led into the banqueting hall where Belshazzar and his noblemen are feasting.

¹King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in front of them. ²Under the influence of wine, Belshazzar commanded to bring in the gold and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³So they brought in the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the

king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. 'As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Notes

5:1 "King Belshazzar." The Aramaic form of the name *bēlša'ṣṣar* is based on the original Akkadian form *Bel-sharra-usur*, which means "O Bel, protect the king!" The Greek translations spell Daniel's Babylonian name exactly the same way as this king's name, Baltasar. Prior to the year 1861, Belshazzar's name was known only from this biblical story. Today, no fewer than thirty-seven known texts attest to Belshazzar's historicity.² These extrabiblical documents, such as the *Nabonidus Chronicle*, *Verse Account of Nabonidus*, *Prayer of Nabonidus*, *Nabonidus Dream Cylinder*, etc., confirm the claim that Belshazzar was King Nabonidus's oldest son, the crown prince.

During the last ten years of Nabonidus's reign, which he spent in Teima, Arabia, his son Belshazzar acted as vice-regent in Babylon. Belshazzar is called "king" no fewer than seventeen times in this chapter. It is not clear if he was perceived in Babylon to be a full-fledged king or just the coregent with his father. However, the Babylonian word *šaknu*, "ruler, governor" was translated into Aramaic as *melek*, "king," on the bilingual Tell Fakhriyeh Statue.³ (See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:31.) It is clear that Nabonidus conferred "kingship" on Belshazzar prior to his departure for Arabia. At the fall of Babylon, Belshazzar was almost fifty years of age.⁴

"A great banquet." The expression *leḥem rab*, "great banquet," can also be translated as "state banquet." The Aramaic word *leḥem* liter-

ally means "food" and by extension "eating" or "a feast" (Eccles. 10:19). For most agricultural people in the ancient Near East, the staple food was bread, while for pastoral people it was meat.⁵ A more common word for banquet is *mištē'*, which comes from the root *šth*, "to drink" (cf. *Notes* on Dan. 1:10). It is used of King Solomon's feast in 1 Kings 3:15.

Since the text does not specify what type of state banquet is in question, several theses have been advanced attempting to explain it: (1) This banquet could have marked the tenth anniversary of Belshazzar's reign in Babylon. (2) Some commentators have suggested that Belshazzar's coronation ceremony is in view here. (3) Others have proposed that at this ceremony, the royal palace may have been consecrated. (4) It is also possible that the feast was a part of the New Year festival (*Akitu*), which, according to the *Nabonidus Chronicle*, was observed in the year when Cyrus's army took the city. (5) According to a midrashic interpretation, "Belshazzar had miscalculated [Jeremiah's seventy years of exile], and had thought that the time was already past: it was in contempt for Jeremiah's words that he decided to desecrate the Temple vessels that night."⁶

"A thousand." The word *'alap* is found twice in this verse. It means "a thousand," which may be a rounded-off number simply meant to indicate that a great number of royal officials were in attendance. Its Hebrew counterpart can also mean "a military unit." Oriental monarchs, especially in Persia, were known as lavish entertainers (cf. Esther 1). Nehemiah, who was the cupbearer to the Persian king, was able to provide food for 150 officials (Neh. 5:17). Curiously enough, neither Daniel nor the queen mother was present at

this banquet until later, when they came to help solve the king's problem.

"Nobles." The word *rabr^ebānîn*, "lords, nobles," looks like the reduplicated plural form of the word *rab*, "great," that qualifies the word "banquet." So, the root of the word *rab* occurs at least three times in this verse.

"He was drinking wine." The same expression is found at the end of verse 4, thus forming an *inclusio* around the passage that opens this chapter.

"In front of them." Although some translations say "with them," the expression *loq^obēl* literally means "in front of them." For a parallel, see Jeremiah 52:33, which says that King Jehoiachin ate bread "before" (KJV)—that is, in the presence of—King Evil-Merodach.

5:2 "Under the influence of wine, Belshazzar commanded." Since the word *ṭ'ēm* can mean "order" (cf. Dan. 3:10), the original Aramaic text says that Belshazzar *'amar biṭ'ēm ḥamrā'*, "spoke on the order of wine," implying that the king was acting under the influence of the wine when he ordered that the gold and silver goblets be brought in.

"The gold and silver vessels." For more information on the articles taken from the Jerusalem temple, see the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2. The word "vessel" denotes here a type of sacred container used in sanctuary worship. The presence of these temple articles in Babylon served "as a symbol of the subordinate status of the Jews throughout their exile."⁷ In trying to desecrate them, Belshazzar's "deliberate purpose must have been to display his contempt of Israel's God."⁸ He also intended to remind his subjects of the god Marduk's apparent victory over Yahweh.

In Jewish traditions, "Belshazzar's death was viewed as a direct consequence of profaning the [temple] vessels."⁹ One biblical text ties the return from Babylon with the sacred nature of these vessels that were the only material link between the past and the future temples:

Depart, depart, go out from there!
Touch no unclean thing!
Come out of it and be pure,
you who carry the vessels of the LORD
(Isa. 52:11).

"His father." Six times in this chapter Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as Belshazzar's father. It is an established historical fact that Belshazzar's biological father was Nabonidus, not Nebuchadnezzar. Nabonidus did not belong to the royal line but came to the throne after a successful coup. It is very likely that the Aramaic word *'ab*, "father"—when applied to Nebuchadnezzar in this chapter—should be taken in a nonliteral sense. In the Bible, the common noun *'ab*, "father," may be used for "a grandfather" or "a remote ancestor" (Gen. 4:20, 21; 28:13).

Scholars who argue that the term "father" in this chapter should be understood as meaning grandfather or at least step-grandfather refer to Jeremiah 27:7, which says, "'All nations will serve him [Nebuchadnezzar] and his son and his grandson'" (emphasis supplied). It is possible that Belshazzar was King Nebuchadnezzar's grandson through his mother but not his father; however, there is no material proof for this assertion.

In some biblical texts, a predecessor in office is called father (2 Kings 2:12), and in others,

two people whose characters are alike are called father and son (1 Sam. 2:12; John 8:44).¹⁰ It is probable that the word "father" is used ironically in this chapter primarily because of the aspirations of Belshazzar's father, Nabonidus, and other Neo-Babylonian kings to be considered legitimate executors of Nebuchadnezzar's will.¹¹

"From the temple in Jerusalem." In several places in his book, Ezra refers to King Nebuchadnezzar's act of removing the holy vessels from the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:7; 6:5; cf. 2 Kings 25:13-17).

"His wives and his concubines." The singular form of the first word, *šēglātēh*, "his wives," is used in Nehemiah 2:6 to refer to King Artaxerxes' queen. The second word, *l'ḥēnātēh*, is usually translated as "his concubines," with a nuance of inferiority compared with the first term. However, scholars are not certain as to the exact meaning of this word (cf. 1 Kings 11:3; Song 6:8). The Greek translation of this text omits the mention of the women.

5:3 "The gold vessels." See the *Notes* on Daniel 5:2. This is most likely an abbreviation of the longer expression "the gold and silver goblets" mentioned in the previous verse. The Greek version of Theodotion adds the word "silver" in this verse. Ezra 1:11 says fifty-four hundred holy vessels were taken to Babylon from the temple in Jerusalem.

"The temple of God." Whereas in the previous verse only the word "temple" is used, here it is specified that the temple was *dî-bêt 'elāhā'*, "the house of God."

"Wives and his concubines." See the *Notes* on Daniel 5:2.

5:4 "Drank the wine." On the presence of an *inclusio* here, see the *Notes* on Daniel 5:1. The combination of this phrase with the one that follows has led some scholars to conclude that libations were poured during the banquet.

"They praised the gods." A scholar has rightly remarked: "As if to add to the shame of the event, the revelry also includes idolatry and the offering of libations to the gods."¹²

"Gold and silver." The number of materials of which the idols were made is six. This number may be related to the sexagesimal counting system commonly used in Babylon (cf. *Notes* on Dan. 3:1). With the exception of wood (cf. Isa. 40:20; 44:16-20), the list of the elements in this verse reminds the reader of the composite statue in chapter 2, where the materials are listed in the order of decreasing value. The materials listed here are very similar to those collected by King David for the building of the Jerusalem temple (1 Chron. 22:14; 29:2).

Exposition (5:1-4)

5:1 The author ended the previous chapter's story of King Nebuchadnezzar's encounter with God by quoting the king's words "those who walk in pride he is able to humble" (4:37b). In the opening of this chapter, he turns the reader's attention to the last day of life of the last ruler of Babylon. This was also the last day of Babylon's supremacy over the world. The author does not even mention the intervening reigns of no less than four Neo-Babylonian kings. The focus is solely on *Belshazzar*, whom he does not formally introduce

to the reader. As Longman has observed, “He is not introduced; he springs into action.”¹³ In line with the Hebrew style of writing, the author is far more concerned with Belshazzar’s actions than with his identity. Although for long centuries Belshazzar’s name was not attested outside of the Bible, today no fewer than thirty-seven known texts attest to his historicity. Based on the evidence from Daniel, classical writers describe Belshazzar as an indulgent, merciless, and godless young man.

Ancient sources support the tradition that *a great banquet* was held in Babylon on the night the city fell to the Persian forces. Prophetic texts in the Bible also link the fall of Babylon with a feast. One such text is found in Isaiah 21:5:

They set the tables,
they spread the rugs,
they eat, they drink!
Get up you officers,
oil the shields! (cf. Isa. 51:7, 8)

Likewise, Jeremiah 51:39 (cf. 51:57) quotes God as saying,

“But while they are aroused,
I will set out a feast for them
and make them drunk,
so that they shout with laughter—
then sleep forever and not awake,”
declares the LORD.

There have been many attempts to identify what event this banquet was meant to celebrate. Was the banquet supposed to mark the tenth anniversary of Belshazzar’s reign in Babylon? Not being able to match Nebuchadnezzar’s power and thus boast of his achievements, “Belshazzar has to make a feast at which he is the centre of attention.”¹⁴ Or, was it held in honor of Belshazzar’s coronation, occasioned when his father Nabonidus fled in the face of the approaching Medo-Persian army? With the surrounding cities already captured by the Medo-Persian army and with only Babylon remaining intact, the banquet may have been a last-ditch attempt to unite the empire. According to an interpretation found in the *Midrash* (the Jewish exposition of biblical books), Belshazzar had miscalculated the end of the seventy years of exile, and, thinking that the time was already past, he decided to desecrate the temple vessels in contempt of the prophet Jeremiah’s prediction in 25:11-14. Whatever the occasion, Belshazzar held this banquet in order to display his greatness. To heighten this notion, the word *thousand* is used twice in the original text of this verse (see, e.g., KJV), as is the term *great*.

5:2-4 In the course of Belshazzar’s feasting and drinking, he commands that the holy *vessels . . . from the temple in Jerusalem* be brought in *so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his*

concubines might drink from them. According to Ezra 1:11, fifty-four hundred “articles of gold and silver” were kept in Babylon. These vessels would become the only physical link between the old temple and the new temple to be built to God’s name in Jerusalem. The text specifies that the king issued this strange order *under the influence of wine*. Biblical wisdom passages contain warnings regarding the use of wine:

Do not gaze at wine when it is red,
 when it sparkles in the cup,
 when it goes down smoothly!
 In the end it bites like a snake
 and poisons like a viper.
 Your eyes will see strange sights
 and your mind imagine confusing
 things (Prov. 23:31-33).

Esther 1:10, 11 says that when “King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded” his eunuchs “to bring before him Queen Vashti.” And Jeremiah 51:7 speaks of Babylon as

a gold cup in the LORD’s hand;
 she made the whole earth drunk.
 The nations drank her wine;
 therefore they have now gone
 mad.

In addition to the arrogance demonstrated during this banquet, two more elements emerge that became the hallmarks of Babylon’s character frequently

attested in subsequent biblical texts. The first one is a disregard for the ancient oriental custom of men and women eating and drinking in two formally separated locations (Esther 1:3, 9). At this banquet, *the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines* were all feasting together in one place. The presence of women at this banquet ran contrary to the customs of the time and culture. It may be considered an act of debauchery that breached the bonds of morality. In a traditional oriental culture, women would hold a separate party for themselves, thus staying away from the company of men (Esther 1:9-12).

The second element is the praise to Babylon’s idols. The materials of the idols listed in this text total six, the number typical of Babylon. Also, the order in which the materials are listed strongly alludes to the metals previously seen in the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in chapter 2. One difference here is that wood is substituted for the clay of chapter 2. Belshazzar served the moon god Sin, just as his father Nabonidus did. During this banquet, the idols were praised while the God of the Hebrews was humiliated by the use of the holy vessels from his temple. Faced with the steady approach of the Medo-Persian army, it is very likely that Babylon’s officials were “hoping that their gods will bring victory for them as they had in the days of Nebuchadnezzar’s great conquests.”¹⁵

The Writing on the Wall and the Queen's Speech (5:5-12)

The state banquet suddenly comes to a standstill as mysterious writing appears on the wall of the palace.

⁵Suddenly, the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall opposite the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. ⁶His face turned pale, and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.

⁷The king called aloud to bring in the enchanters, astrologers, and diviners, and he said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

⁸Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king its meaning. ⁹So King Belshazzar became even more terrified, and his face grew pale. His nobles were perplexed.

¹⁰The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall and said, "O king, live forever! Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale! ¹¹There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king, I say—appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners. ¹²This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have an excellent spirit and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain rid-

dles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell what the writing means."

Notes

5:5 "Suddenly." Daniel 3:6, 15; and 4:34 contain the same expression, *bah-ša'tâ*, "at that moment." Isaiah 47:11 describes Babylon's sudden fall in similar terms.

"The fingers." In biblical texts, God's finger often represented his supernatural power, whether in his work of creating the heavens (Ps. 8:3) or sending plagues on Egypt (Exod. 8:19) or writing the commandments on tablets of stone (Exod. 31:18; Deut. 9:10) or even driving out demons (Luke 11:20).

"On the plaster." The Aramaic word *gîrâ'*, "plaster," occurs only here in the whole Bible (*hapax legomenon*), but a related Hebrew word is usually translated "lime," which was used in making plaster. The writing probably took place on the part of the wall not covered with blue enameled brick.

"Opposite the lampstand." This detail is mentioned to show that the writing appeared on the part of the wall that was well illuminated so that all, especially the king, could see it. Some have speculated that this lampstand may have been looted from the temple in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Kings 7:49).

"The royal palace." Although the word *hêk'elâ'*, "palace," may also stand for a temple, in this context it likely means "king's palace."

"The king watched." Just as Nebuchadnezzar was probably the only person who saw the fourth person in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:24, 25), so here, Belshazzar appears to be the only one who sees the hand that was writing on the wall.

"The hand." In the original text, two different words for "hand"—*pas* and *y^edâ*—are placed here side by side. The Aramaic word *pas*, "the palm," means the hand from the wrist downward. The word *yad*, "hand," figures prominently in Daniel's book. It often represents God's direct intervention (cf. Isa. 41:20; Job 12:9, 10).

5:6 "His face turned pale." The Aramaic words *zîwôhî š^enôhî*, "his color changed," were originally *zîwôhî šānayin ^alôhî*, "his color changed on him," as in verse 9. The details mentioned in this verse describe Belshazzar's physiological reactions and point to the fear and even terror that he felt.

"He was so frightened." Identical words describe Daniel's reaction to Nebuchadnezzar's dream reported in Daniel 4:19.

"His legs gave way." Literally, the text says *w^eqiṭrê ḥarṣēh mištārayin*, "the joints of his loin were loosened," which meant that Belshazzar lost physical strength (cf. Isa. 21:3). Isaiah 13:8 describes the impact of the siege of Babylon on its officers and soldiers in the following way:

Terror will seize them,
 pain and anguish will grip them;
 they will writhe like a woman in labor.
 They will look aghast at each other,
 their faces aflame.

In a similar way, the prophet Nahum describes Nineveh's terror at its fall:

She is pillaged, plundered, stripped!
 Hearts melt, knees give way,
 bodies tremble, every face grows pale
 (Nah. 2:10).¹⁶

For the presence of a wordplay on the term "loosed" here and in verse 12, see the Notes on Daniel 5:12.

5:7 "Called aloud." The same words, *qārē' malkā'*, "shouted with strength," are used in Daniel 3:4, where the herald "loudly proclaimed" the king's order.

"To bring in." See the Notes on Daniel 2:24.

"What it means." The Aramaic word *p^ešar*, "interpretation," is a very important word that is found frequently in the book of Daniel (e.g., 2:4) and, later, in the Qumran scrolls.

"Clothed in purple." Purple clothing was very expensive. Often, it was imported and worn by the wealthiest people of high status, such as those belonging to royalty (Esther 8:15).

"A gold chain." This word could have also meant "a collar." Pharaoh gave Joseph the same gift (Gen. 41:42).

"The third highest ruler." This phrase, which literally reads *w^etaltî b^emalkûtā' yišlaṭ*, "and the third he will rule in the kingdom," may be understood in two ways: If Belshazzar did not mean it literally, he was saying that the person would be given a high title at the court (Exod. 14:7; 2 Kings 7:2, 17, 19), becoming a triumvir (cf. Dan. 6:2; Gen 41:40-44). Understood literally, he was saying that the person would be third in rank, after Nabonidus and himself. The mention of purple clothing, which denotes royal authority, may suggest coregency.

5:8 "All the king's wise men." The word *ḥakkîm*, "a wise man," is a more general term inclusive of various types of royal advisers, some of which were listed in verse 7. In contrast to the statement from the previous verse, here "all the king's wise men" appear before the king.

"They could not read." For a third time in Daniel's book, Babylon's wise men cannot help the king in a critical moment (cf. chaps. 2 and 4). There is a progression of thought in this chapter in comparison with the previous ones. This time the wise men cannot even read the writing on the wall.

5:9 "Terrified." Other biblical prophetic passages also contain descriptions of terror caused by visions of judgment—cf. Isaiah 21:3; Ezekiel 21:7; Daniel 10:8; and Nahum 2:10.

"Nobles." This group is the same one mentioned in verse 1. It differs from the wise men who were brought into the hall later in the story.

5:10 "The queen." This verse begins with the emphatic use of the word *malk^etā'*, "the queen," that introduces a new subject in the story. All commentators, ancient and modern, agree that this woman's memory of the past and her authority at the palace indicate that she was the queen mother, not the consort. That she was a person of authority is clear from the fact that she was allowed to approach the king without a prior request (cf. Esther 4:11). The Greek translators tried to soften the reading of this verse by inserting a detail saying that the king called the queen to come. Ancient traditions claim that her name was Nitocris and that she was King Nebuchadnezzar's wife and either Belshazzar's mother or grandmother. It is obvious that she was not originally a member of the banqueting party. Several biblical passages mention the influence exercised by queen mothers (1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 10:13; 11:1-3; 24:12; Jer. 13:18).

"Hearing the voices." For an equivalent Hebrew expression, see Jeremiah 26:10.

"Into the banquet hall." The original says *bêt mišt^eyā'*, "the house of drinking."

"O king, live forever!" See the Notes on Daniel 2:4.

"Don't be alarmed." Literally, the text says *'al-y^ebah^alûk ra'yônāk*, "let not your thoughts alarm you!"

5:11 "There is a man." The queen mother's words remind the reader of Arioch's introduction of Daniel as *g^ebar*, "a man" (2:25). Much as in the previous stories, Daniel comes to the front only after the other wise men have failed. The motif of the forgotten wise man is found elsewhere in the Bible (cf. Joseph in Gen. 41:14-16).

"In your kingdom." In a twist of irony, it is "from within his own court that a witness to the God of the exiles comes to Belshazzar."¹⁷

"The spirit of the holy gods." See the Notes on Daniel 4:8. The queen mother uses language that reminds the reader of Nebuchadnezzar's way of describing Daniel (4:8, 9, 18).

"Your father." See the Notes on Daniel 5:2. This phrase occurs three times in this verse. Its use may have been intended to be an irony, pointing to the contrast between the two kings.

"Chief of the magicians." See the Notes on Daniel 2:48 and 4:9.

5:12 "Daniel . . . Belshazzar." The queen mother uses both the Hebrew and the Babylonian names. If Nebuchadnezzar originally named Daniel *Belshazzar*, then we have here another case of irony, because the godly prophet and the godless king were namesakes.¹⁸ See the Notes on Daniel 1:7.

"An excellent spirit." The original text uses the expression *rûa ḥyattîrâ*, "extraordinary spirit,"

which most likely parallels the expressions that follow it. The phrases that follow explain Daniel's ability in more specific ways.

"Interpret dreams." See the *Notes* on Daniel 5:7.

"Solve difficult problems." Literally, the original text says *ûmešārē' qitrîn*, "and to untie knots." It has been suggested that this is a wordplay on the almost identical phrase in verse 6, which says that the joints of Belshazzar's hips were loosened in fear.

"Belteshazzar." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:7 and 4:8.

Exposition (5:5-12)

5:5, 6 Divine displeasure manifested itself without delay through an act of writing by what looked like *a human hand* on the part of the palace wall that was near the lampstand where everyone could see it. Since the narrative focuses on Belshazzar, the text says that he himself *watched the hand* write on the wall. It is implied that his guests could not see the hand doing the writing but only the words it wrote.

There should be no doubt that the finger of Yahweh, the same God whom Belshazzar has been mocking, wrote on the wall. Was this the same divine finger that centuries before wrote on stone the commandment against idolatry? John 8:6 says that on one occasion, Jesus "bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger" words that likely described the secret sins of his opponents. Thus it is safe to propose that

"this was no 'human hand', but the hand of God."¹⁹

Generally speaking, a disembodied hand would represent a defeated enemy. The effect of this eerie scene might be similar if "the head of a decapitated victim began to speak."²⁰ Belshazzar's vision of a detached hand writing on the wall before him "remains one of the most haunting images in literature."²¹ The prophet Ezekiel once saw a detached hand connected with writing. The occasion was a vision about judgment: "Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he [the LORD] unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe" (Ezek. 2:9, 10).

The description of Belshazzar's fear is detailed and graphic. It contrasts with the preceding verses' description of his pride and arrogance. His *face turned pale*. "The noble silhouette of the king crumbles to a heap of bones rubbing against each other in fear."²² The prophecy of Isaiah describes Babylon's sudden fall in the following way:

Disaster will come upon you,
and you will not know how to
conjure it away.
A calamity will fall upon you
that you cannot ward off with a
ransom;
a catastrophe you cannot foresee
will suddenly come upon you
(Isa. 47:11).

Contrast this scene with Psalm 119:73a, where the psalmist sings praise to God's powerful hands, saying, "Your hands made me and formed me."

5:7-9 For the third time in Daniel's book, a Babylonian king faces a serious crisis with wise men who cannot help and thus contribute directly to the bankruptcy of Babylonian astrology. This is in spite of Belshazzar's promises to lavish gifts on the person who can read and explain the mysterious writing on the wall.

The promised gifts consisted of the type of clothing worn by a royalty (like Mordecai in Esther 8:15), *a gold chain* or a gold collar (like Joseph in Gen. 41:42), and the position of either coregent or triumvir in the empire (Dan. 6:2). The term *the third highest ruler in the kingdom* may have referred to either a high title at the court, or, if taken literally, promotion to third in imperial rank, after Belshazzar and King Nabonidus. Belshazzar operated on the principle that wealth can buy anything.²³ However, the promise of these gifts does not help the wise men in their difficult task, and their impotence makes both the king and the nobles *even more terrified*.

Texts from two biblical prophets graphically describe the kind of terror caused by the visions of God's judgment. Of one such night vision that pictured Babylon's fall, Isaiah said, "A dire vision has been shown to me." He de-

scribed the impact of this vision in the following way:

At this my body is racked with pain,
pangs seize me, like those of a
woman in labor;
I am staggered by what I hear,
I am bewildered by what I see.
My heart falters,
fear makes me tremble;
The twilight I longed for
has become horror to me
(Isa. 21:3, 4).

Ezekiel, on the other hand, uses similar language to convey the impact of a vision about Babylon's capture of Jerusalem and its temple: "Therefore groan, son of man! Groan before them with broken heart and bitter grief. And when they ask you, 'Why are you groaning?' you shall say, 'Because of the news that is coming. Every heart will melt and every hand go limp; every spirit will become faint and every knee become as weak as water.'" It is coming! It will surely take place, declares the Sovereign LORD" (Ezek. 21:6, 7).

5:10-12 In the face of the inability of the wise men to solve the fatal puzzle, the queen mother, whose name may have been Nitocris, steps into the place literally called the "house of drinking" with the intention of introducing Daniel. Neither she nor the aged prophet has been present at the banquet from its beginning. Her pres-

ence and intervention at this point in the story, characterized by both wisdom and authority, must have been the first reminder of the time when Babylon was strong and invincible under its famous founder, King Nebuchadnezzar. "Seeing her, Belshazzar finds himself forced to remember what he had tried so hard to forget."²⁴

While using a series of superlatives to describe Daniel, the queen mother rightly connects his high position with both *the spirit of the holy gods* and with the grandeur of the famous empire builder King Nebuchadnezzar, whose own words she has borrowed to describe Daniel's greatness (Dan. 4:8, 9, 18). In the course of her speech, she refers to Daniel's Babylonian name, which may have coincided with Belshazzar's. The confidence that she has in Daniel is astounding, because she says, *Call for Daniel, and he will tell what the writing means* (5:12). Faced with such clear conviction, Belshazzar "has no choice but to summon Daniel."²⁵ His bypassing Daniel previously may have been deliberate (cf. 1 Kings 22:5-18), since he could predict the kind of message he would get from him.²⁶

Bel(te)shazzar Meets Belshazzar (5:13-17)

This section is the climax in the chapter where the two men, possibly bearing the same name, meet each other. Ironically, their common name, *Belshazzar*, means "O Bel, protect the king!"

¹³*Then Daniel was brought in before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah?"* ¹⁴*I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence, and extraordinary wisdom.* ¹⁵*The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it.* ¹⁶*I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. Now if you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."*

¹⁷*Then Daniel answered before the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means."*

Notes

5:13 "Brought in before the king." For a similar statement, see the Notes on Daniel 2:24.

"Are you Daniel?" The original text quotes Belshazzar as saying 'ant-hû' dānîyē'l, "You are that Daniel!"

"One of the exiles." Literally, *min-b^enê gālūtā' dîy^ehûd* means "from the sons of the exiles from Judah." Since the noun *b^enê*, "sons," functions here as a noun of relation, it is best not to translate it literally but in the sense of "one of" or "a member of a group of people"—in this case, the exiles from Judah. In two other places in the book, Daniel is referred to as "one of the exiles" (2:25; 6:13). Here, Belshazzar reminds Daniel that he came to Babylon as a prisoner of war, a captive.

Note that the queen mother did not describe Daniel's position in Babylon in this way. Rather, she spoke of him as the chief of Babylon's wise men.

"My father the king." Having placed Daniel at the level of a captive, Belshazzar now proceeds to boast of his close relation with the famous Nebuchadnezzar.

"From Judah." The word *yêhûd*, "Judah," occurs twice in Belshazzar's question to Daniel as recorded in this verse (see, e.g., KJV).

5:14 "I have heard." See the Notes on Daniel 5:16.

"The spirit of the gods." See the Notes on Daniel 4:8. In contrast to King Nebuchadnezzar's words, Belshazzar omits the adjective "holy" when he refers to Daniel's supernatural knowledge in connection with "the gods."

"Extraordinary wisdom." The original Aramaic says *hokmâ yattîrâ*, "an exceptional wisdom." On the meaning of *rûah yattîrâ*, "an excellent spirit," see the Notes on Daniel 5:12.

5:16 "I have heard." In contrast to Nebuchadnezzar, who had told Daniel that he knew "that the spirit of the holy gods is in you" (4:9), Belshazzar states twice in his speech that he has only heard of Daniel. If this were true, then how would he know about Daniel's country of origin? Later in his speech, Daniel reminds Belshazzar that he "knew all this" (5:22).

"To give interpretations." The original says *pišrîn l' mipšar*, "to interpret the interpretation," a construction known as *cognate accusative* in which the verb and the noun come from the same root. The reading of the writing on the wall and its interpretation are interdependent.²⁷

"The third highest ruler." See the Notes on

Daniel 5:7. This promise is somewhat ironical in light of Daniel's high position at the Babylonian court during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

5:17 "You may keep your gifts." The absence in Daniel's address of the customary greeting "O king, live forever!" is noteworthy, disclosing his antagonistic attitude. His words here contrast with the way he related to the other kings that are mentioned in this book. In addition, from the beginning of his speech before Belshazzar, Daniel makes it clear that the promise of a rich reward will not have any impact on what he is about to say. For a similar refusal to receive gifts, see Genesis 14:21-24, where Abram tells the king of Sodom, "I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich' " (cf. Gen. 33:9).

Exposition (5:13-17)

5:13 Daniel was an old man, probably in his eighties. In stark contrast to the queen mother's words about Daniel, Belshazzar, right from the beginning of his address, puts Daniel down by reminding him that he was *one of the exiles . . . from Judah*. Moreover, in order to show his superior position over the prophet, he proudly states that his *father* Nebuchadnezzar brought Daniel as captive *from Judah*. According to the original Aramaic text, in a single sentence, Belshazzar refers twice to Judah, Daniel's homeland.

Although the king and the prophet probably bore the same name, they possessed opposite traits of character. Based

on the information found in this book, the two men may be contrasted as follows:

1. Daniel was named Bel(te)shazzar (1:7). The king's name was Belshazzar (5:1).
2. Daniel learned the language (1:4) and read the writing on the wall (5:18-28). Belshazzar could not read the writing (5:5-7).
3. In the presence of an official, Daniel refused to drink wine (1:8). Belshazzar drank wine in the presence of his officials (5:1).
4. Daniel was quick to understand (1:4) and to make up his mind (1:8). Belshazzar lost his understanding and could not control his mind (5:2).
5. Daniel refused to defile himself (1:8). Belshazzar defiled the holy vessels (5:22-24).
6. Daniel was given a high position (2:48). Belshazzar lost his high position (5:30, 31).
7. Daniel's countenance changed for the better (1:13, 15). Belshazzar's countenance changed for the worse (5:6).²⁸

5:14-16 On two occasions during Belshazzar's speech, he claims that other people have told him about Daniel's exceptional wisdom and insight. He cannot help but relate these questions to the presence of *the spirit of the gods* in

Daniel—yet, while quoting these words from Nebuchadnezzar and the queen mother, Belshazzar omits the key word “holy.” Then he offers to the prophet the same gifts that he had promised to his wise men.

Some have taken Belshazzar's words at their face value, reaching the conclusion that he did not know Daniel nor had he heard of him from others prior to this moment. Yet Daniel's words from verse 22 do not support this view: “But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.” What Belshazzar said when he began to speak to Daniel contains some details that the queen mother did not mention in her speech. Belshazzar already knew those details, thus they demonstrate that the aged prophet was no stranger to him. Moreover, the statement from Daniel 8:27 says that Daniel performed the regular “king's business” during the third year of Belshazzar's reign. It is therefore safe to conclude that Belshazzar “deliberately ignored Daniel.”²⁹ He had tried hard “to bury the past and with it the God of Israel. Deep down, he knows and has always known the truth. And because it disturbs him, he seeks to destroy it, to forget it.”³⁰

5:17 The absence of Daniel's customary greeting “O King live forever!” in the text contrasts with the way he addressed King Nebuchadnezzar in the previous chapter (4:19, 27) and clearly

shows that he dissociated himself from Belshazzar's idolatrous and blasphemous banquet. The prophet did not let the promise of gifts soften his rebuke of the king. After all, in view of the imminent fall of Babylon, Belshazzar had very little to give. Or, to put it differently, any promise of reward seemed "pointless in view of Belshazzar's imminent death."³¹

In the speech that follows, Daniel uses the strong language of judgment, not paying any attention to the price (cf. Gen. 14:21-24; Num. 22:18; 2 Kings 5:16, 17). Refusal of gifts characterized true prophets (Num. 22:18; Amos 7:14; Mic. 3:5, 11). The prophet Amos, for example, considered it a sacred duty to reveal God's message to the people of his time:

"The lion has roared—
 who will not fear?
 The Sovereign LORD has spoken—
 who can but prophesy?"
 (Amos 3:8).

Daniel's Speech and the Meaning of the Writing (5:18-28)

After a brief introduction, Daniel's speech focuses on the way God dealt with King Nebuchadnezzar.

¹⁸"O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar kingship and greatness and glory and splendor. ¹⁹Because of the greatness that he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to

death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. ²⁰But when his heart became arrogant and his spirit hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. ²¹He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognize that the Most High God rules over the kingdom of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

²²"But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. ²³Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the vessels from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life-breath and all your ways. ²⁴Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

²⁵"This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL and PARSIN.

²⁶"This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your kingdom and put an end to it.

²⁷"Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.

²⁸"Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given over to the Medes and the Persians."

Notes

5:18 "O king." See the Notes on Daniel 5:22. In the original text, this verse begins with the

words *'ant malkā'*, "You, O King!" From the point of view of syntax, these two words addressed to Belshazzar are not directly related to the contents of the verse (*casus pendens*), which speaks of Nebuchadnezzar's life and reign.

"The Most High God." See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:26. The presence of this divine appellative is a strong link between the narrative in this chapter and the one in chapter 4, where it was used frequently.

"Gave." God's generous gift of dominion to Nebuchadnezzar is also described in Jeremiah 27:5-7.

"Your father." See the *Notes* on Daniel 5:2.

"Kingship and greatness and glory and splendor." First Chronicles 29:11a claims that these qualities belong to God:

"Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours."

5:19 "The greatness." The Aramaic text says *r^ebûtā'*, "the greatness," a noun built on the root *rb*, "great," used frequently in this chapter. See the *Notes* on Daniel 5:1.

"All the peoples and nations and men of every language." These words convey the concept of universality. See the *Notes* on Daniel 3:4.

"Those the king wanted . . ." The presence of a meter in the four lines in this verse betrays its poetic nature. The arrangement of the lines is clearly chiasmic: to put to death (A), to spare (B), to promote (B') and to humble (A'). It has been rightly observed that "no description of the ca-

pricious nature of the head of a Near Eastern empire could be more telling."³² In fact, the prerogatives described in verse 19 express absolute power that belongs only to God (Job 5:11-16; Ps. 75:7; 1 Sam. 2:6, 7).

5:20 "Became arrogant." Literally, the text says *rim libbēh*, "his heart became exalted" (cf. Deut. 8:14; 17:20; Ezek. 31:10). In this way, Nebuchadnezzar's power became his weakness.

"His spirit hardened with pride." Literally, the Aramaic says *rûḥēh tiqpat lah^azādā*, "his spirit became strong." This phrase reminds the reader of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exod. 7-14).

5:21 "From people." The original says *ûmin-b^enê 'anāšā'*, "and from the sons of men." It is yet another example where the noun *bar*, "son," functions as a noun of relation. Here, the expression conveys the idea of human society in general.

"The mind of an animal." The author uses the word *l^ebab*, "heart," to show the reversal of Nebuchadnezzar's fortunes when his "exalted heart" (v. 20) was brought down to the level of beasts.

"With the wild donkeys." Daniel 4:23 uses a more general term, *ḥēwat bārā'*, "the wild animals," while here it specifically refers to "wild asses." In both texts, the emphasis is on the concept expressed here through the adjective "wild" (cf. Job 39:5).

5:22 "But you." Daniel's speech before Belshazzar can be divided into two parts, both marked by the use of the opening word *'ant*, "you." The first part comes after a brief introduction of verse 17 and covers verses 18-21, and it gives a summary of King Nebuchadnezzar's life.

The second part begins with verse 22. Here the prophet addresses Belshazzar directly.

“His son.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 5:2. This verse is the only place in the book where Belshazzar is referred to as Nebuchadnezzar’s son. The Semitic words *bēn* (Hebrew) and *bar* (Aramaic), “son,” can mean a successor on the throne. In extrabiblical cuneiform texts, Israel’s King Jehu is called “the son of Omri.” Jehu was not Omri’s literal son; he was a usurper who killed Omri’s descendants in order to seize the throne.

It is clear from the stories in the book that Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar had some similarities of character. One important difference though, was that when confronted by God, Nebuchadnezzar repented and acknowledged God’s sovereignty, while Belshazzar remained arrogant to the end.

“Have not humbled yourself.” Literally, the text says *lā’ hašpēlt libbāk*, “you have not humbled your heart.” The word *libbāb*, “heart,” is one of the key words in the description Daniel gives in verses 20, 21 of Nebuchadnezzar’s attitude toward God (cf. Dan. 7:4). Ancient rabbis attempted to balance divine sovereignty and human responsibility through the following dictum: “All is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given.”³³

“You knew all this.” Some scholars conclude from Belshazzar’s question in verse 13, “Are you Daniel?” that he did not know Daniel. It is not clear, however, that the opening statement in Belshazzar’s speech is to be understood as a question. Moreover, verse 22 does make clear that Belshazzar knew Daniel, suggesting that if he claimed not to know him, that claim was a pretence. The verb *yēda’*, “to know,” is one of the key verbs in the story of chapter 4—in which all

mortals and especially Nebuchadnezzar are called to “acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes” (Dan. 4:32b).

5:23 “Set yourself up.” The arrogance portrayed here is also found in the description of the activities of the little horn in Daniel 8:11, 25 and of the contemptible ruler in 11:36. Commentators have compared Daniel’s indictment speech to those of Hebrew prophets who confronted the kings of Israel and Judah, such as Nathan before David (2 Sam. 12), Elijah before Ahab (1 Kings 21), and Jeremiah before Zedekiah (Jer. 38).

“The Lord of heaven.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 2:37, 47; 4:26.

“The vessels from his temple.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 5:2.

“Brought to you.” The Aramaic text says *hay-tiw qādāmāk*, “brought before you,” implying that Belshazzar had the articles brought before him to show his superiority over the God of heaven. Because the holy vessels symbolized Nebuchadnezzar’s success, in drinking from them, “Belshazzar may have been deliberately ‘going one better’ than his ‘father.’”³⁴

“Your wives and your concubines.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 5:2.

“The gods of silver and gold.” The first two types of idol material are joined together in the original Aramaic text of this verse. Moreover, the author may have intentionally inverted the sequence gold–silver in order to signal the soon-coming shift of world empires, since in Daniel gold stands for the Babylonian Empire (2:38), while silver represents the Medo-Persian Empire (5:28).

"Which cannot see or hear or understand."

In line with the established polemic against idols found in the biblical prophets, Daniel describes idols as dead objects that show no sign of life in them (Deut. 4:28; Pss. 115:4-8; 135:16, 17; Isa. 44:17-20; 46:1-7; Jer. 10:5).

"You did not honor." The verb *hḏr*, "to honor," is used here in parallelism with the word *šbh*, "to praise." Both verbs were similarly used to express King Nebuchadnezzar's praise to the God Most High (4:34).

"In his hand." In the Bible, the word *yad* (Hebrew *yād*), "a hand," is often used as a symbol of power. See the Notes on Daniel 1:2.

"Your life-breath." The text literally says *nišm^etāk*, "your breath." In the second half of Isaiah more than in any other prophetic book of the Bible, God is portrayed as the living God who is the Creator and the Sustainer of all living things. Compare this statement with the one in Daniel 6:26, which says, "He is the living God."

"Your ways." In the Bible, the word "way" figuratively stands for "life" or "destiny."

5:24 "He sent the hand." Literally, the Aramaic says *min-q^odāmôhî š^elîah passā' dî-y^edā'*, "from his presence the palm of the hand was sent," a reverential way of referring to God's action. Several passages in Daniel show God's mighty hand as very active in history (2:45; 8:25), especially during the exodus from Egypt (9:15). This hand "no one can hold back" or say to God " 'what have you done?' " (4:35b).

"Wrote the inscription." The fact that the message was written adds to its veracity (Dan. 10:21; Rev. 21:5) and finality (Dan. 6:8; Rev. 22:10, 11).

5:25 It is important to keep in mind that the writing of these four words was purely consonantal and possibly without word divisions. Scholars have debated the question of the arrangement of the words. Were they written vertically or horizontally? Also, should they be interpreted as verbs or as nouns? Daniel read them as nouns, but in his interpretation, he treated them as passive participles.

As nouns, the four words are best understood as naming monetary weights: the mina, the shekel, and a fraction of a mina. Some commentators have suggested these monetary or weight terms are listed in a sequence of declining value to allude to a kind of liquidation-of-stock sale.

"MENE." The word *m^enē'*, "a coin," is mentioned in Ezekiel 45:12 and Ezra 2:69 (cf. 1 Kings 10:17; Neh. 7:71, 72). A *mina* is equivalent to sixty shekels. It is used in the Bible primarily as a measure of weight for gold and silver.

"TEKEL." The word *t^eqēl* is derived from the root *tql*, "weight." It is "the weight" par excellence.

"PARSIN." The Aramaic word *p^erēs* means "a division." Its plural (or dual) is *parsîn*, meaning "divisions."

5:26 Although Daniel has read the words as nouns, in his interpretation he treats them as verbs—given here in the perfect tense. The use of the prophetic perfect suggests finality.

"Mean." On the use of the word *pešar*, "interpretation," see the Notes on Daniel 5:7.

"Mene." According to this verse, in the writing on the wall, the verb *m^enâ*, "to number" or "to count," is emphatically repeated, and God is the Numberer, the Counter. The repetition may

compensate for the omission of the talent, which was the largest measure in the conventional system of the day.

“Put an end to it.” The verbal root used in the passive voice here is the well-known *šlm*, “to be complete,” known to the reader from the common Hebrew word “shalom.”

5:27 “Tekel.” The verb *teqal*, “to weigh,” is tied to the concept of balances. In Bible times, it was a familiar metaphor of divine evaluation and judgment (Lev. 26:26; 1 Sam. 2:3; Job 31:6; Ps. 62:9; Ezek. 4:16; Rev. 6:5).

5:28 “Peres.” There is a wordplay here involving the Aramaic verb *p̄ras*, “to divide,” and the word *p̄aras*, which means “Persia” or “the Persians.” Thus Daniel explains that Belshazzar’s kingdom is given to the Medes and the Persians. Daniel read the four words as numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided.

“The Medes and the Persians.” Several texts in Daniel’s book confirm the close association of these two names; for example, Daniel 8:20: “The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia.” This sequence of the two names is consistently found in Daniel’s book (6:8, 12, 15), while in Esther the sequence is the Persians and the Medes (1:19). Verse 31 introduces Darius the Mede as the next ruler over Babylon.

Exposition (5:18-28)

5:18-21 In the original Aramaic, Daniel’s words “You, **O king!**” mark the opening of his speech before Belshazzar (vv. 18-21). The prophet then introduces **the Most High God**, followed by a list of the blessings God gave to Nebuchadnezzar, the person whom Belshazzar has

claimed to be his “father” (5:13). Much of Daniel’s speech consists of relating God’s dealings with proud King Nebuchadnezzar, who truly was a “living parable.” This king’s reign was characterized by wide dominion. Jeremiah 27:5, 6 quotes God as saying, “ ‘ “With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him.” ’ ” In the rest of Daniel’s speech, he “opens old wounds—he speaks of pride, the king’s ancestral sin.”³⁵

Instead of recognizing God’s hand in his privileged life and prosperity, Nebuchadnezzar became very proud, and his **pride** led to his fall. He dared to claim for himself divine prerogatives, such as that of preserving or ending people’s lives. According to the Bible, the prerogatives described in verse 19 express absolute power that belongs only to God. Deuteronomy 32:39 says,

“See now that I myself am He!
There is no god besides me.
I put to death and I bring to life,
I have wounded and I will heal,
and no one can deliver out of
my hand.”

A king of Israel described God in a similar way when he asked, “ ‘Am I

God? Can I kill and bring back to life?' ” (2 Kings 5:7). Yet, in the end, when God humbled Nebuchadnezzar, the experience produced genuine repentance and a radical change in attitude toward the God of heaven. That in its turn led to his complete restoration.

5:22-24 Daniel's words of rebuke addressed to Belshazzar are much in line with the function of biblical prophets, who exhibited extraordinary courage when they delivered indictment speeches to Israelite or foreign kings (1 Kings 21:20-24). Typically, such messages were composed of a historical overview and then a list of charges and accusations followed by the verdict. The indictment in Daniel 5 has been described as both “dramatic and devastating.”³⁶ Verse 22 is considered to be the punch line in Daniel's speech:³⁷ The *son* had not learned the most important lesson from his “father.” “The father-son language serves to link the two kings: the one who took the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem with the one who desecralized them; the one who ruled at the beginning of Judah's exile under the Chaldeans with the one who ruled at the end of that period. The trouble with Belshazzar, as this passage has it, is that he ought to have learned the lesson from his ‘father’ Nebuchadnezzar (as told in chapter 4), but he has not (vv. 22-23).”³⁸

While the holy vessels were being desecrated, Belshazzar and his guests

were praising the dead idols—forgetting the God whose hands held their very lives. In listing the materials of the idols, Daniel may have purposely reversed the order of the first two, thus indicating the divine verdict that henceforth *silver* (Medo-Persia) would come before *gold* (Babylon). In the context of the book, silver stands for the world power that replaced Babylon (2:39). And in contrast to the idols listed in this verse, God *holds in his hand* people's lives and ways. Job 12:10 (cf. 34:14, 15) says, “‘In his [the LORD's] hand is the life of every creature / and the breath of all mankind.’ ”

Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar had a number of things in common, beginning with pride, but the *son* had failed to learn lessons of humility before God from the “father's” life story. Thus these two kings are portrayed in stark contrast in chapters 1, 4, and 5, as shown by the following list:

1. Nebuchadnezzar brought to Babylon victories and prosperity (1:2; 4:30). Belshazzar brought to Babylon defeat and subjection (5:23, 24, 30).
2. Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest legitimate king of Babylon (1:1; 2:37, 38). Belshazzar, the last king, held only second place in Babylon (5:7, 29).
3. Nebuchadnezzar was the son of the founder of the dynasty. Belshazzar

claimed to be the successor of Nebuchadnezzar (5:11).

4. God gave the temple articles into Nebuchadnezzar's hand (1:2). Belshazzar took them into his own hands and desecrated them (5:2).³⁹

In his book, Daniel consistently ascribes his ability to do what the rest of the wise men could not to his connection with God, who in this case *sent the hand that wrote the inscription* (v. 24). The king is guilty of excessive pride and of blasphemy and idolatry. Daniel's enunciation is followed by announcement.⁴⁰

5:25-28 Daniel now turns to the reading of the words and their meaning. In accordance with the established custom of writing Semitic languages, the words were written only as consonants and possibly with no divisions between them. This means that Daniel could read and explain these four words and what they meant to the king in more than one way. Bible scholars agree that the words written on the wall were not foreign to Belshazzar or to those who were present at the banquet. In fact, for Babylon's wise men, the challenge was not that of giving the dictionary definition of these four words but of disclosing what significance they had for the king.

Daniel read the four words as a list of weight measures that lacked the largest measure, the talent. In its place, the

word **MENE** is repeated. This word is followed by a word related to weight—**TEKEL**, and finally by a fraction of a measure—**PARSIN** (in the singular **PERES**). Daniel read the words as nouns, but he explained them as passive verbs: Numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided. The concept of certainty is expressed through the use of the past tense, which normally describes actions that have already been completed. In other words, "what God has decreed and announced through the handwriting on the wall is as good as done."⁴¹

To each of the four words, the prophet adds a four-word interpretation.⁴² Indeed, this cryptic writing presents an example of the Oriental love for wordplay. God *has numbered the days* of Belshazzar's reign and *put an end to it*. The same verbal root "to number" is found in Psalm 90:12, which says, "Teach us to number our days aright, / that we may gain a heart of wisdom." The deterministic character of this apocalyptic prophecy is reinforced through the presence of the element of numbering, suggesting "a destiny which cannot be changed."⁴³

The subject of the second word is not God but Belshazzar, who has *been weighed on the scales and found deficient*. In the Bible, the weighing-scale metaphor conveys the idea of judgment. In a prayer, Hannah warned her enemies,

“Do not keep talking so proudly
or let your mouth speak such
arrogance,
for the LORD is a God who knows,
and by him deeds are weighed”
(1 Sam. 2:3).

The same metaphor for judgment could be found among the countries surrounding Israel. The papyrus of Hunefer from Egypt, for example, contains a vignette in which the god Anubis leads the deceased toward the judgment balance, where the heart of the deceased is weighed against the standard called Maat. While the results of the judgment are recorded, the devourer, in the form of a composite beast, stands under the balance.⁴⁴

Finally, the subject of the third word is Belshazzar's kingdom, which is now *divided* and transferred to the next world empire—identified in the book as belonging to both *the Medes and the Persians*. The act of dividing up a land in the context of a judgment, accompanied by the loss of political independence, is aptly illustrated in Amos's words of rebuke to Amaziah, the priest of Bethel:

“Your land will be measured and
divided up,
and you yourself will die in an
unclean country.
And Israel will certainly go into exile,
away from their native land’ ”
(7:17b).

It is interesting to note that the total numerical value of the three words written on the wall is three full measures and a fraction of a measure, matching the numerical value of the materials in the vision of the composite statue in chapter 2. That statue was made up of three full elements followed by a fourth one that was divided. The same sum of measures is found in the expression “[one] time, [two] times and half a time” (Dan. 7:25; 12:7). This division of the Babylonian Empire was the sure sign of its end. From heaven's perspective, the strength and importance of a world kingdom is measured by its readiness to fulfill God's plans for humanity.

The King's Death (5:29-31)

In a rather brief way, the author describes Belshazzar's gifts to Daniel and Belshazzar's subsequent death that fateful night.

²⁹Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

³⁰That same night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, ³¹and Darius the Mede received the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.

Notes

5:29 “Belshazzar's command.” This verse implies that Belshazzar did not want to lose face and thus insisted that Daniel accept the gifts that he had previously refused to take (v. 17). Daniel's

words from verse 17 should not be understood as a direct refusal of the rewards but as a postponement until Belshazzar hears the verdict and decides whether to reward the interpreter or not.

“The third highest ruler.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 5:7.

5:30 “That same night.” This expression, *bēh b’lēlyā’*, may mean “in the course of the night that followed,” but in this context it suggests abrupt finality. Ancient sources confirm the fact that Babylon was captured following a surprise attack at night. For a similar case of instantaneous punishment, see 4:31, “The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven.”

“The Babylonians.” The Aramaic text says *kaśdāyā’*, “the Chaldeans,” since during the Neo-Babylonian dynasty, the Chaldean race ruled the empire.

“Was slain.” The word *qēṭil* is in the passive voice. It means “killed, slain.” In the Bible, “the use of the passive voice is often a way of ascribing an action to God.”⁴⁵

5:31 In the original Aramaic text, this verse is placed as the opening verse of chapter 6.

“Darius the Mede.” Up until now, no satisfactory answer has been given to the question of who Darius the Mede was. Among several proposals, the most attractive are the following two: (1) Extrabiblical sources reveal that a high ranking officer was in charge of Babylon right after its fall at the hands of the Medo-Persian army. The name of this person is variously given as Gaubaruwa (Gubaru), Gobryas or Ugbaru. The *Nabonidus Chronicle* claims, “Cyrus entered Babylon, green twigs were spread in front of him—the

state of ‘Peace’ [*šulmu*] was imposed upon the city. Cyrus sent greetings to all Babylon. Gobryas, his governor, installed [sub-]governors in Babylon.”⁴⁶

(2) Biblical evidence, on the other hand, leads to the conclusion that the name Darius may have been Cyrus’s Median title or his throne name, meaning “The Royal One.” At least one historical source refers to Cyrus as “King of the Medes.”⁴⁷ The biblical prophets Isaiah (13:17) and Jeremiah (51:11, 28) had claimed that Babylon would be conquered by the Medes, not the Persians. In addition, scholars have suggested that the conjunction in Daniel 6:28 may be taken as explicative, so that the whole verse should be read as “So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius which is the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”⁴⁸ The Bible contains a few examples of kings who had more than one throne name: Tiglath-pileser III is also called Pul (2 Kings 15:19, 29); Azariah was also known as Uzziah (2 Kings 15:1; 2 Chron. 26:1); Solomon was given the name Jedidiah at his birth (2 Sam. 12:25); and Jeremiah calls King Jehoiachin “Coniah” in Jeremiah 22:24 and “Jec-oniah” in 24:1.

“Received the kingdom.” The original text says that Darius *qabbēl malkūtā’*, “received the kingdom,” which may be explained in three ways: (1) Gobryas received the kingdom from the hand of Cyrus, who was still the emperor, or (2) Babylon’s priests and nobility welcomed Cyrus and proclaimed him as their new king, or (3) God delivered Babylon into the hands of Cyrus (cf. Dan. 1:2).

“At the age of sixty-two.” Scholars who identify Darius the Mede with Cyrus see this as an important detail that confirms their thesis,

because Cyrus was "in his early sixties at the time of the conquest of Babylon."⁴⁹ He died in 530 B.C.

Exposition (5:29-31)

5:29 The reader is surprised to learn that in Belshazzar's response to Daniel's speech, there was neither regret nor confession of sin. In contrast to Nebuchadnezzar's words of praise to Daniel's God, found in more than one place in the book, Belshazzar had nothing good to say about the greatness and power of the One who was the source of Daniel's wisdom. This attitude also contrasts with the praise to God rendered in the book by Darius the Mede. "In all the other cases, the king is presented in a better light than here; either he is entirely sympathetic (ch. 6), or neutral (chs. 1 and 2), or finally repentant and even converted (chs. 3 and 4)."⁵⁰ In spite of the rebuke, likely out of pride, Belshazzar proceeds to reward the prophet, but he never says anything positive about God. Daniel apparently consented to accept the gifts, possibly because of Belshazzar's insistence.

5:30 While God's punishment of Nebuchadnezzar in the previous chapter was disciplinary in nature, his punishment of Belshazzar was fatal.⁵¹ "That very night the God 'who removes kings' (2:21) brings Belshazzar's kingdom to an end (5:26)."⁵² The chapter ends with a reversal of fortunes. Daniel, the captive from Judea, is promoted; Belshazzar, who claimed to be the legitimate

successor on Babylon's throne, is killed. "When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, / but the righteous stand firm forever" (Prov. 10:25). Had it depended on Belshazzar alone, Daniel's promotion would not have lasted long, because the text says that during *that same night Belshazzar was slain*. Yet the story in this chapter does not end with the mention of Daniel's exaltation. It rather "comes to a climax with the fulfillment of prophecy"⁵³ given by Daniel's God. This detail is important in the context of the book because it describes the immediate fulfillment of the message about Belshazzar written on the wall and also of the previously made prediction about the fall of Babylon to "another kingdom" (Dan. 2:39).

It is also worth noticing that one of the last official acts of the Babylonian Empire was to honor Daniel, the servant of the God of heaven. This detail prepares the reader for an even greater reversal of fortunes that took place at the fall of Babylon, which opened the door for the exiles to return home. There is a good probability that verses 30 and 31 of this chapter were cast with the statement in Daniel 1:21 in mind—the statement that Daniel remained in the royal service in Babylon "until the first year of King Cyrus." At the end of this chapter, Belshazzar died, and through his foolishness and arrogance, he brought the whole empire to an end. But according to the closing words of chapter 1,

Daniel was able not only to survive the change of empires but also to retain a position of influence.

The question is often discussed as to how the Medo-Persian army took the seemingly impregnable city of Babylon, which was protected by sets of double walls. An old view, based on the reports from Herodotus and Xenophon, is that the river Euphrates was diverted so that the soldiers who had laid siege to the city could go in by the dry riverbed. This view is fostered by certain biblical passages that talk about the drying up of the river Euphrates (Isa. 44:27; Rev. 16:12). A fact that is often overlooked is that the prophetic passages that talk about the exile and return from Babylon are of figurative character and are couched in the language of the narrative about Israel's exodus from Egypt. Thus, biblical prophecies talk about the drying up of the Euphrates (Jer. 50:38; 51:36), but they also mention the drying up of the river of Egypt (Isa. 11:15; 19:5), a clear allusion to God's act of salvation at the Red Sea. Since the fall of Babylon can be dated with precision to the 16th of Tishri, when the Euphrates River is normally at its lowest, the question may be asked if there was a need to divert the river in order to use its bed to enter the city.

It is equally possible that the city of Babylon fell because soldiers who were sympathetic to Cyrus opened its gates so that the Medo-Persian army could enter

without damaging its walls. The words in Isaiah's book that credit God's hand with the opening of "doors before him [Cyrus] so that gates will not be shut" (Isa. 45:1) seem to add weight to this view of the fall of Babylon.⁵⁴ The famous Cyrus Cylinder claims that the Persians, aided by Babylon's patron god Marduk, took control of the city without battle and thus spared it from destruction. Furthermore, Cyrus declared, "When I entered Babylon as a friend, I set up the seat of government in the royal palace amidst jubilation and rejoicing."⁵⁵ The legitimate king of Babylon, Nabonidus, had been captured and sent into exile. Robert Koldewey's excavations of the site of the ancient city of Babylon have unearthed the royal palace in which the ominous banquet took place together with a number of other objects that illustrate the power and architecture of this city.

5:31 The transition of power in Babylon took place rather smoothly and without great casualties. This must have been due to the impact of Daniel's speech made before Belshazzar. Thus, for the second time in the book, a large-scale onslaught in Babylon was avoided thanks to God's intervention through Daniel (cf. Dan. 2:24). Even the life of Belshazzar's father Nabonidus was spared, and he was exiled to Carmania, where he died.

Daniel's book calls the king who took control of Babylon *Darius the Mede*.

This statement is meant to show that with the coming of a Median ruler, predictions made by biblical prophets have come to pass:

See, I will stir up against them [the
Babylonians] the Medes,
who do not care for silver
and have no delight in gold
(Isa. 13:17; cf. 21:2).

“Sharpen the arrows,
take up the shields!
The LORD has stirred up the kings of
the Medes,
because his purpose is to destroy
Babylon.
The LORD will take vengeance,
vengeance for his temple”
(Jer. 51:11; cf. 51:28).

Note that Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian army in the month of Tishri, some five days after the Day of Atonement, a Hebrew festival closely tied to the temple in Jerusalem.

The historical person behind the name *Darius the Mede* is still unknown today. Some pieces of extrabiblical evidence lead to the conclusion that he might have been Gobryas, the general who led the Medo-Persian army in their conquest of the city of Babylon. Most of the indicators from the Bible, on the other hand, point to Cyrus the Great, who may have been known by two titles due to his dual (Medo-Persian) parent-

age (Dan. 6:28). This commentary takes seriously the view that applies the title “Darius the Mede” to the person of Cyrus the Great.

One reason why the author of Daniel introduces the new ruler as a Median king may have been the pact that had been made years before by the founder of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, Nabopolassar, and the Median king Cyaxares, following the defeat of Babylon's worst enemy, Assyria. This pact made the Medes and the Babylonians friends. Moreover, Tobit 14:15 claims that Nebuchadnezzar and Ahasuerus together captured and destroyed Nineveh. Egypt was another enemy of both Media and Babylon. In other words, at the end of this chapter, the author is saying that the new ruler of Babylon was not a stranger who belonged to an enemy nation, but rather a historic ally who deserved to be welcomed to the city of Babylon.

Summary of the Teaching

1. *A type of the enemy.* When God's people, who are faithful in the same way that Daniel was, become successful because God has blessed them, they often become the target of jealousy. The success of faithful people often engenders false accusations by their enemies, who are also enemies of God himself. For this reason God's people may suffer for a while as they are subjected to tests of faith, but sooner or later, signs of God's

ultimate approval become visible even in this life.

In the encounter between Daniel and Belshazzar, the reader can discern more than just a mere conflict between two men. It is useful to remember that Daniel occupied a high position in Babylon throughout the Neo-Babylonian period and in the beginning of the Medo-Persian rule with just one exception: the latter part of the reign of Belshazzar, when Daniel was out of service and almost forgotten. Belshazzar's antagonism toward Daniel was motivated primarily by his attitude toward the God of heaven. As for Daniel, he entrusted the judgment on Belshazzar and his godless reign to God, the only just Arbiter of this earth's affairs.

Since the two key visions about the little horn's activities were given to Daniel during the reign of Belshazzar (Dan. 7:1; 8:1), we can see in this king a type of the anti-God power that is introduced in the visionary chapters of the book. In this chapter, Belshazzar is presented in stark contrast to Nebuchadnezzar and Darius. His attitude foreshadows the little horn's hostile activities toward God, his temple, and his faithful people. Much like Belshazzar's behavior on that fateful night when Babylon came to an end, so this power too will exalt idols over the true God, desecrate the sanctuary and its services, and show itself antagonistic to God's servants. Yet he too "will come to his end, and no one will

help him" (Dan. 11:45). The parallels between Belshazzar and the little horn are as follows:

1. Both appeared toward the end of their world empires (5:31; 7:8; 8:23).
2. Both claimed royal power and prerogatives (5:1; 8:23, 24).
3. Transgression on the part of both resulted in desecration of the temple (5:3, 4; 8:11, 12).
4. Both came to their end in rebellion against God (5:22, 23; 7:26).
5. Both came to a sudden end brought about by God (5:26-28; 7:26; 8:25)
6. Both spoke and acted blasphemously (5:23; 7:25; 8:11).
7. Both became strong by means of someone else's power (5:16, 23; 8:22).

2. *Reasons for Babylon's fall.* Several prophetic passages in the Bible speak of the fall of Babylon, but Daniel 5 is the only historical narrative that mentions this important event. The author of the book of Daniel presents the event that immediately precedes the fall of Babylon as an encounter between two persons, one who represented God and the other who represented human pride and arrogance. Thus the message to which the chapter points is the importance of obedience to the Word of the God who holds in his hand the life of every hu-

man being, including world emperors.

The key elements in this story—pride, blasphemy, inappropriate drinking of wine in the presence of women, praise to idols—all become standard metaphors in subsequent biblical texts that talk about Babylon's true character and its activities that stood in opposition to God. This is especially evident in the passages in Revelation that talk about Babylon's fall. A good case in point is Revelation 14:8, which speaks of Babylon's fall in prophetic terms: "A second angel followed and said, 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.'"

3. *God's Word can be trusted.* The events described in this chapter serve as a good illustration of the fact that God's prophetic words are fulfilled. Proverbs 21:30 says, "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan / that can succeed against the LORD." The details of the story in this chapter provide important internal witness to that fact. One such detail clearly stated in chapter 2 is that Babylon was not to rule the world forever. The following words from Isaiah's book of consolation stress that the most important difference between the true God and dead idols is the fact that God's words come to pass:

"Gather together and come;
assemble, you fugitives from the
nations.

Ignorant are those who carry about
idols of wood,
who pray to gods that cannot save.
Declare what is to be, present it—
let them take counsel together.
Who foretold this long ago,
who declared it from the distant
past?
Was it not I, the LORD?
And there is no God apart from
me,
a righteous God and a Savior;
there is none but me"
(Isa. 45:20, 21).

Similar affirmations are found at almost every step in the historical part of Daniel's book, and they all serve a definite purpose. The lesson to learn here is that God and his Word can be trusted. In this manner, the way is paved for the central message of the visions that are found in the second half of Daniel's book. Since these visions point to the future, they can be accepted only by faith—the kind of faith that is based on God's past and present dealings with human beings.

1. Shea, *Daniel*, 60.

2. P. A. Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556–539 B.C.* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 90.

3. See Alan R. Millard, "Daniel and Belshazzar in History," *Biblical Archeology Review* 11 (May/June 1985): 73-78.

4. Miller, 194.

5. Hartman and DiLella, 183.

6. Michael Hilton, "Babel Reversed—Daniel Chapter 5," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 66 (1995): 100.
7. Smith-Christopher, 81.
8. Slotki, 39.
9. Collins, 245.
10. The extrabiblical example that is often mentioned in this discussion is the text on Shalmaneser's obelisk that speaks of Jehu as "the son of Omri."
11. Zdravko Stefanovic, "Like Father, Like Son: Belshazzar's Relationship to King Nebuchadnezzar," *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* 1 (1998): 27-31.
12. Smith-Christopher, 81.
13. Longman, 136.
14. Lucas, 138.
15. Walton, Matthews, Chavalas, 737.
16. See D. R. Hillers, "A Convention in Hebrew Literature: The Reaction to Bad News," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 7 (1965): 86-89.
17. Goldingay, 114.
18. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 80.
19. Paul L. Redditt, *Daniel*, New Century Bible Commentary (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 91.
20. Walton, Matthews, Chavalas, 738.
21. Collins, 246.
22. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 79.
23. Baldwin, 121.
24. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 80.
25. Seow, 81.
26. Goldingay, 110.
27. Lucas, 129.
28. Zdravko Stefanovic, "Thematic Links Between the Historical and Prophetic Sections of Daniel," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 27 (1989): 124.
29. Lucas, 131.
30. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 81.
31. Maxwell, 77. Maxwell said this of Daniel's omission of the customary greeting of royalty, but it fits also his disregard of the promise of rewards for interpreting the words.
32. Smith-Christopher, 83.
33. Mishnah, *Abot* 3.16.
34. Lucas, 138.
35. Berrigan, 82.
36. Towner, 74.
37. Ford, 128.
38. Seow, 77.
39. Stefanovic, "Thematic," 124-125.
40. Berrigan, 82.
41. Towner, 75.
42. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 84.
43. Towner, 76.
44. James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures (ANEP)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 639.
45. Redditt, 99.
46. Pritchard, *ANET*, 306.
47. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 30-31.
48. This reading was first proposed by Wiseman. Shea ("Darius the Mede in his Persian-Babylonian Setting," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29, no. 3 [1991]: 235-257) supports Wiseman's thesis by saying that even if the conjunction in Daniel 6:28 is not explicative, the two titles describe Cyrus's consecutive stages of reign over Babylon.
49. Collins, 253.
50. Davies, 49.
51. Collins, 254.
52. Nickelsburg, 22.
53. Goldingay, 117.
54. For an Old Testament parallel, see Nahum 2:6; 3:13, which speak of the fall of ancient Nineveh.
55. Pritchard, *ANET*, 315.

DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN (6:1-28)

*M*ahatma Gandhi once stated that he “found much consolation in reading the book of the prophet Daniel in the Bible.” He said that what he had learned about Daniel, especially from chapter 6, made him believe that Daniel was “one of the greatest passive resisters that ever lived.”¹ The story of conflict recorded in this chapter of Daniel is a deliberate counterpart to the story in chapter 3, with which it has many parallels on the level of structure, vocabulary,² and theme. This chapter is also classified as the “story of a contest between [two] immutable laws: ‘the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked’ (v. 8), and the law of Daniel’s God.”³

The story of Daniel in the lions’ den plays an important role in his book because in chapter 3, only Daniel’s friends were tested; he himself was mysteriously absent. Now, in chapter 6, the faithful Daniel is first victimized by rivals and

then vindicated by God. Daniel’s experience is much like that of Joseph, Esther, and the three Hebrews in chapter 3. However, the main point of these stories is not that God always delivers his faithful followers in times of trials. Rather, it is that after a testing period characterized by divine silence, God at times chooses to manifest his saving presence in behalf of the suffering faithful. But whether or not he saves them supernaturally, he always assures them of his abiding presence in the midst of their trials.

The main event in this chapter is not explicitly dated, but it must have happened shortly after the fall of Babylon, or around 538 B.C.—at about the same time as the events of the previous chapter and also of chapter 9. In its heyday, the Medo-Persian kingdom that took control of the world was the largest empire up to that time, stretching from Egypt to India (Esther 1:1).⁴ The small kingdom of Judah belonged to its fifth

satrapy. The builder of this empire, Cyrus the Great, was known throughout the world as a tolerant emperor whose generous policies supported the local laws and temples.

This chapter is another in a series of records about the triumph of Daniel's God over earthly powers. All of the previous triumphs took place in or around the city of Babylon, while the place where this story happened is not identified. Most scholars assume that it was Babylon, even though it could have been Susa (Shushan) in Persia (which later became the capital city of the Medo-Persian Empire—see Esther 2:8). The place of the event was not nearly as important to the author of the book as was God's mighty act of delivering his faithful servant.

Daniel was around eighty-five years old at the time of this story. The experience that he had to go through recalls John the revelator's exile to Patmos as an old man (Rev. 1:9). The following prophetic promise from the scroll of Isaiah may have had great importance throughout Daniel's life—and especially after his deliverance from the lions' den:

“I, even I, am the Lord,
and apart from me there is no
savior.
I have revealed and saved and
proclaimed—
I, and not some foreign god
among you.

You are my witnesses,” declares the
Lord, “that I am God.
Yes, and from ancient days I am
he.
No one can deliver out of my hand.
When I act, who can reverse it?”
(Isa. 43:11-13).

As is the case with the previous chapters, this one too has a chiasmic structure. Thus, certain elements are reversed, such as a fatal decree that gives way to a saving decree. The five-part proposed structure is as follows: ⁵

1. The best satrap and a deadly decree (6:1-9)
2. Arrest and sentence (6:10-18)
3. Deliverance (6:19-22)
4. Release and doom (6:23, 24)
5. A saving decree and the best satrap (6:25-28)

The chapter begins and ends with Daniel's success at court. His arrest and sentence correspond to his release and his enemies' doom. At the heart of the story is Daniel's deliverance. Thus, in the end, a saving decree replaces the deadly one.

The Best Satrap and a Deadly Decree (6:1-9)

The story begins with a highly positive assessment of Daniel's successful career at the Medo-Persian court, something that prompted jealousy in

the hearts of his fellow administrators.

¹It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the whole kingdom, ²and over them three administrators, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. ³Because of his exceptional character, Daniel distinguished himself above all the other administrators and satraps, and the king planned to place him over the whole kingdom. ⁴At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds of accusation against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him because he was trustworthy and neither corruption nor negligence could be found in him. ⁵Then these men said, "We will never find any grounds of accusation against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

⁶So these administrators and satraps came by agreement to the king and said: "O King Darius, live forever! ⁷All the royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers, and governors have agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man for the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. ⁸Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be changed—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." ⁹So King Darius put the decree in writing.

Notes

6:1 "It seemed good." Literally, the text says *šepar qōdām*, "it pleased before" Darius. This was

a reverential way of talking about important persons such as kings.

"Darius." The original text has only "Darius," omitting the appositive descriptor "the Mede." Regarding the historical identification of Darius the Mede, see the Notes on Daniel 5:31. In addition to that verse, he is called "the Mede" in 9:1 and 11:1.

"To appoint." Just as chapter 3 repeatedly states that King Nebuchadnezzar *h^oqēm*, "set up," the statue of gold, so here Darius *h^oqīm*, "sets up," satraps over the Persian kingdom.

"120 satraps." One way to recognize Persian loan words in biblical texts is by their length. The Aramaic spelling of the word "satraps," for example, is *ʿḥašdarp^enayyāʿ*, contrasting with the typical trilateral and bi/tri-syllabic Semitic words. In a strict sense, Persian satraps were high administrative governors who ruled over the provinces of the empire, which were called satrapies. The number of these provinces varied through different stages of the empire. The number 120 mentioned here may be a round number that applies to the officials only, rather than to the number of satrapies into which the empire was divided in Daniel's time. In this context, then, these officials were of lower rank; they may be called "regional administrators."

"Throughout the whole kingdom." In the book of Daniel, the Aramaic word *malkūtāʿ*, "the kingdom," can also mean "the empire." Thus, the person referred to here as Darius could have been the emperor himself rather than one of the provincial governors.

6:2 "Three administrators." The term *sār^ekîn*, "presidents or chief ministers," may be Persian in origin. On the meaning of the number

three, see the *Notes* on Daniel 5:7. (Cf. the promotion of the three Hebrews in 2:49; 3:30.) It may be presumed that the other two administrators were Persian. Ezra 7:14 and Esther 1:14 speak of seven nobles or advisers surrounding the Persian king.

"One of whom." Although some translations say the "first of whom," the rendering of the Aramaic phrase *ḥad-minnêhôn* as "one of whom" is better.

"Daniel." One strong indicator of the Medo-Persian setting of this story is that Daniel's Hebrew name is consistently used, while his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, is not found in this chapter.

"Suffer loss." The word *nāziq* conveys a sense of "damage." This was an important concept in the Persian Empire, because next to maintaining peace, the orderly collection of taxes was the highest priority (Ezra 4:13, 14, 22).

6:3 "His exceptional character." The text literally says *rûaḥ yattîrā'*, "an excellent spirit," was in Daniel—a characteristic previously in the book called "the spirit of the holy gods" (4:8, 9; 5:11, 14). In this verse, it is related to his loyalty and trustworthiness.⁶

"The king planned." Daniel's high position during Nebuchadnezzar's reign must have also influenced this decision by Darius.

"To place him." In verse 1 of this chapter, the same verb is translated as "to appoint." See the *Notes* on Daniel 6:1.

"Over the whole kingdom." This position of the chief governor is very similar to, possibly identical with, the one that Daniel held under Nebuchadnezzar. It meant that in rank he was

very close to the emperor himself—he was a sort of grand vizier.

6:4 "To find grounds of accusation." The term *'illâ*, "ground for complaint," occurs two times in this verse. It describes attempts by Daniel's enemies to find faults in his administrative work for the king. The behavior of the officials noted in this text resembles the antagonistic attitude of the Chaldeans in chapter 3.

"His conduct of government affairs." Literally, the text says *miššad malkûtā'*, "from the side of the kingdom."

"Trustworthy." The word *mêhêman*, "faithful," is based on the same root as the word "Amen!" frequently used in prayers.

"Neither corruption nor negligence." According to an ancient view, Daniel was a man of honesty and integrity who refused to receive gifts.

6:5 "Men." The administrators and the satraps who were hostile to Daniel are both referred to in this verse as *gubrayyā'*, "the men."

"Grounds of accusation." The Aramaic word *'illâ* can also mean "a ground for complaint" (cf. Dan. 6:4). Daniel was a law-abiding citizen, and, as a state official, he was without reproach.

"The law of his God." In this context, the expression *dāt*, "law," corresponds to the Hebrew Torah and should be taken in a broad sense, denoting one's religious life that includes a daily walk with God. The word is one of the key terms in the chapter.

6:6 "Came by agreement." The exact meaning in the original text of the verb root *rgš*, "to come by agreement," is not certain. In the causative, this verb stem may mean "to come in a throng," "to come by agreement," "to swarm." The word is

found two more times in this chapter (vv. 11, 15). Its Hebrew equivalent describes either "an action in concert" (Pss. 55:14; 64:2) or agitation (Ps. 83:3, 4).⁷

"O King Darius, live forever!" On this customary greeting at the royal palace, see the *Notes* on Daniel 2:4.

6:7 "All . . . have agreed." The list of officials in this verse is the longest found in this chapter. Most likely, it was meant to impress the king. In addition to the two titles previously mentioned in the story, three more are added. The plotters who approached the king were likely few in number. The word *kōl*, "all," that they use here is either a gross exaggeration or part of a well-planned attempt to deceive the king, since Daniel was not included in the matter.

"Issue an edict." The original literally says *lʿqayyāmā qʿyām*, "to ordain (or issue) an ordinance"—a construction in which both the verb and the noun are built on the same root. This construction is called cognate accusative (paronomasia).

"And enforce the decree." The phrase *ûlʿtaqqāpâ ʿsār*, "and to enforce an interdict," is used in parallel with the phrase that comes before it and probably has the same or a very similar meaning.

"Who prays." The original says *yibʿēh bāʿû*, "he prays a prayer," another example of the cognate accusative (paronomasia) in this text. Daniel was known to others for his lifelong custom of regular prayer.

"To any god or man." Since the precise meaning of the second noun, *ʿnāš*, is "a mortal man," it is better to say "to any god or mortal." In

some countries of the ancient Near East, kings were treated like gods.

"Except to you." Through "a masterpiece of political deception,"⁸ Daniel's enemies appealed to the king's ego, proposing to make him either god-king or "the only legitimate representative of deity for the stated time."⁹ Since the early Persian kings were well-known for their religious tolerance, it is very likely that a decree of this kind came as a consequence of some type of religious or political problem that took place shortly after the change of the world empires and at a critical time when the new government was being formed.

"Lions' den." The word *gōb* really means "a pit." It was probably "a deep cistern-like cavity, the *mouth* of which above could be closed with a stone, and be sealed"¹⁰ (cf. Jer. 38:6-13). Lion hunting was a hobby of several ancient kings in Mesopotamia, especially in Assyria and Persia (Nahum 2:11). Babylon's Procession Street was lined on both sides with 120 lion statues. It has been suggested that there may have been a royal zoo beside the hanging gardens in the northwestern corner of the palace area in Babylon.

6:8 "Issue the decree." The verb *tʿqîm*, "issue," links this story with the one in chapter 3, in which Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree that stood in opposition to chapter 2's dream about God's setting up the eternal kingdom (Dan. 2:44). See the *Notes* on Daniel 6:7.

"Put it in writing." In his speech before Belshazzar in 5:24, 25, Daniel used a word based on the verbal root *ršm*, "to write or sign by hand." Since the prevailing culture in the ancient world was oral, the things that were writ-

ten down and signed were considered more binding than a verbal order (Esther 8:8). See the Notes on Daniel 5:24. It is logical to assume that the administrators brought only a proposal of the new law before the king (cf. Ezra 4:11-14; Esther 1:19; 3:9).

“So that it cannot be changed.” At this point, many commentators mention a story about Darius III, who passed a death sentence on an innocent man whose name was Charidemus. Darius immediately “repented and blamed himself, as having greatly erred; but it was not possible to undo what was done by royal authority.”¹¹

“The laws of the Medes and Persians.” In the original, the word *dāt*, “law,” is in the singular although its meaning here is collective. The statement in this verse “anticipates the irony of verse 26, where the new decree effectively negates the object of the original decree.”¹² Jerome saw in this statement perfect evidence that “there was only one kingdom of the Medes and Persians both, under the rule of Darius and Cyrus.”¹³

“So king Darius put the decree in writing.” Two biblical parallels involve a king being trapped because of a rushed decision: David in 2 Samuel 12 and Herod in Matthew 14.

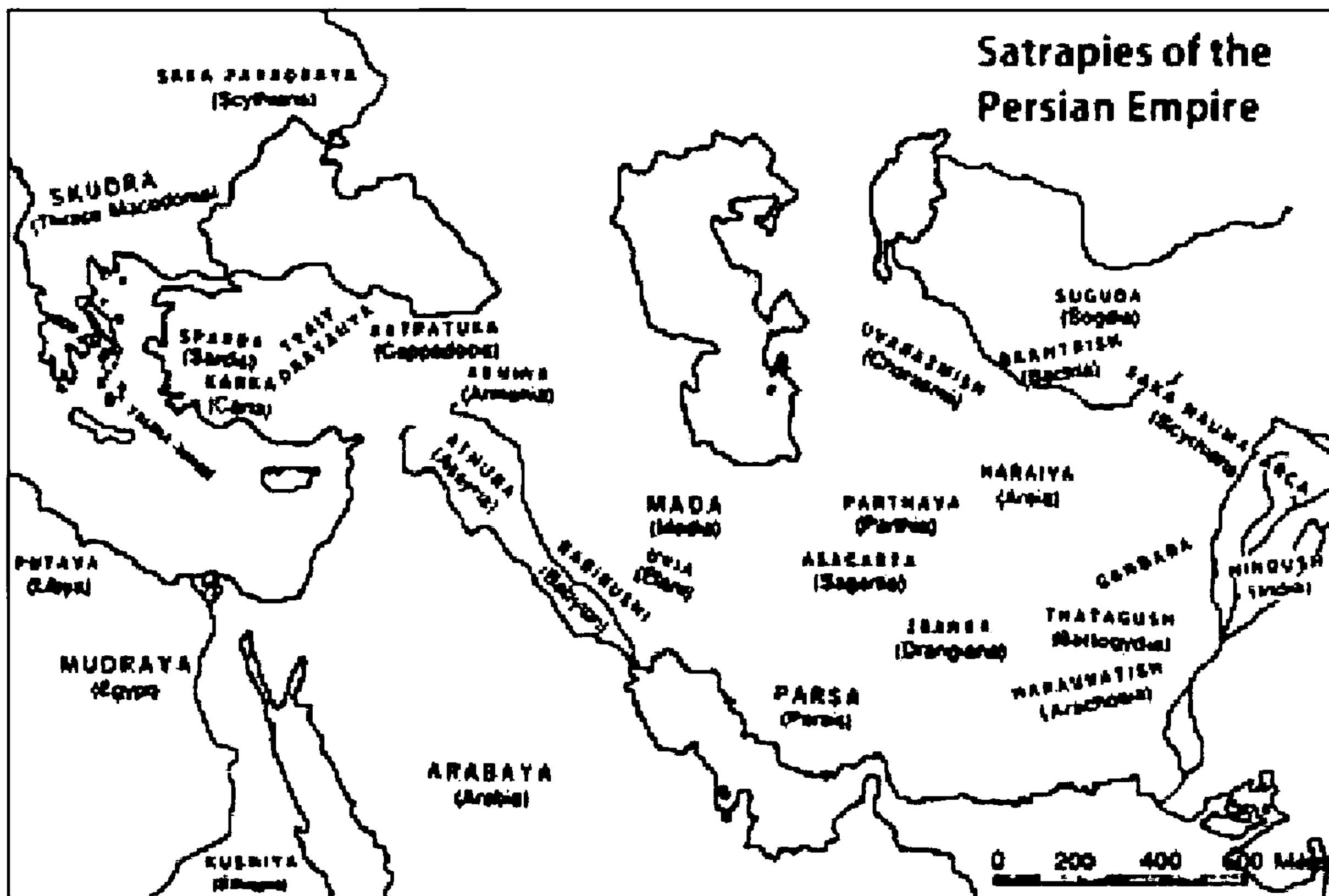
Exposition (6:1-9)

6:1, 2 The text does not indicate where the events in this chapter took place. It could have been either Babylon or Susa, one of the capital cities of the Medo-Persian Empire. The transition from the Babylonian to the Persian rule was smooth, generally speaking, because

most of the administrative officials retained their posts.

The empire that replaced Neo-Babylon was well known for its administrative organization. The text speaks about a hierarchy consisting of *120 satraps* who were either provincial governors or more likely lower-rank officials, *and over them three administrators*. The book of Esther mentions the 127 satrapies in the time of King Xerxes (Esther 1:1). The land of Judah belonged to the fifth satrapy, which was also known as the province “Beyond the River” (Ezra 4:11; i.e., beyond the Euphrates). The Medo-Persian Empire “was the largest empire the world had yet seen.”¹⁴ The imperial structure was meant to ensure that peace and an orderly collection of taxes were maintained.

Darius, who is introduced as king in the text, is described as Darius the Mede in the previous chapter. According to this chapter, he was someone in charge of *the whole kingdom*, not just of the province of Babylon. Thus, one may conclude that this person was probably the emperor, not just a governor. Most likely, this was Cyrus the Great. Apparently, to the author of Daniel, the identification of this person was of secondary importance, so that “what Darius *does* is more important than who Darius *is*.”¹⁵ He is presented in the chapter as a benevolent king, the antidote to Belshazzar, the dominant figure from the previous chapter.



Provinces of the Persian Empire

6:3-5 The high position Daniel occupies here serves as a bridge between this and the preceding chapters. Seeing Daniel's *exceptional character*, the emperor considers placing him in the position next to himself in power. The quality of Daniel's character is not something new to the reader of the book, but rather an established fact previously recognized by Nebuchadnezzar (chap. 4), the queen mother, and even Belshazzar (chap. 5).

The major issue here is that, unlike the other two top administrators, Daniel was originally neither Babylonian nor Persian. (A unique feature of the story in this chapter is that Daniel is consistently referred to by his Hebrew name.)

As has been well demonstrated in the previous stories (chaps. 3 and 5), the success of the Hebrews in exile became the grounds for professional jealousy and even false accusations related to their worship. Both chapters 3 and 6 of Daniel talk about faithful people who are successful, something that gives rise to professional jealousy, resulting in a royal proclamation that is in conflict with the law of God. The faithful are thus trapped and punished, and God then intervenes and saves them from their enemies.

Similarities in the vocabulary used in Daniel 3 and 6 are as follows:

1. The list of officials (3:2, 3 and 6:7).

2. The Jews are said to “pay no attention” to the king (3:12 and 6:13).
3. The king’s statement “I decree” (3:29 and 6:26).

Similarities in structure and theme in the two chapters are as follows:

1. The orders to worship false gods (3:1-6 and 6:1-8).
2. The faithful refuse the order (3:16-18 and 6:10-12).
3. The faithful sentenced to death (3:19-23 and 6:15-17).
4. The faithful delivered and the king repents (3:24-27 and 6:19-24).
5. The king utters a hymn of praise to God¹⁶ (3:28 and 6:26, 27).
6. The king issues a new decree (3:29; 6:26).

Daniel is completely *trustworthy* in performing his duties, and his enemies come to realize this fact. So in order to get rid of him, they devise a plan to infringe on his personal religious life. In Daniel 3, the Chaldeans were quick to denounce the refusal of Daniel’s friends to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s statue of gold. The issue of worship is also central to the plot to destroy Mordecai in the book of Esther (3:5-9). In this story, Daniel’s Persian colleagues, opposed to his promotion, plan to trap him by deliberately creating a conflict between two unchangeable laws, one human and the other divine.

6:6, 7 A delegation representing Daniel’s enemies swarms around Darius. The original Aramaic word that is used to portray their action implies agitation. The equivalent Hebrew term appears in Psalm 2:1, which says, “Why do the nations *conspire* and the peoples plot in vain?” These administrators greet Darius politely only to cover up their true intentions. Moreover, they deceitfully claim that *all the royal officials have agreed* to the idea of drafting a proposal for a new law that will regulate the private and public worship throughout the empire for a period of time. In this way, “the conspirators claim to speak for the entire officialdom.”¹⁷

The rest of the story reveals that Daniel’s enemies were agitating against King Darius himself (vv. 15 and 24). In their intrigue they go far beyond the Chaldeans in chapter 3: “The Chaldeans merely reported the perceived problem to the king and left it to him to handle the case as he saw it fit. By contrast, these officials now pressure the king to do what they want.”¹⁸

It is difficult to explain how the head of “a religiously tolerant” world empire would consent to approve an edict saying that *anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions’ den*. It has been suggested that this strange law could make sense only in the context of “disturbed religious conditions in Babylon immedi-

ately after the Persian conquest.”¹⁹ If the king in question was Cyrus, who was very popular in Babylon, a decree of this kind would have made sense during the period when the gods from the temples of the surrounding towns were still in Babylon or were in the process of being returned to the temples from which they had been taken.

The form of punishment in this story consists of casting of the transgressor into the lions' pit. Ezekiel 19 describes how people hunted lions in the ancient world. And in Psalm 57:4, the psalmist complains to God about slanderous people, whom he figuratively describes as lions: “I am in the midst of lions; / I lie among ravenous beasts.” Early Assyrian texts inform us that “oath-breakers were put into cages with wild animals set up in the city square to be publicly devoured.”²⁰

6:8, 9 The reader learns that the issuing of Darius's decree was a very serious matter because *the laws of the Medes and Persians . . . cannot be revoked*. The book of Esther also mentions the unchangeable character of “the laws of Persia and Media” (1:19), while Ezra 6:11, 12 describes the immutability of a Persian decree in the following way: “Furthermore, I decree that if anyone changes this edict, a beam is to be pulled from his house and he is to be lifted up and impaled on it. And for this crime his house is to be made a pile of rubble. May God, who has caused his Name to

dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in Jerusalem. I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence” (cf. Esther 8:8). Yet, in Daniel's life, worship was regulated by another immutable law—God's law.

Arrest and Sentence (6:10-18)

With the decree firmly in place, Daniel's enemies again go into action—this time to find proof that he is breaking the imperial law.

¹⁰When Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room, where the windows were opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks before his God, just as he had done previously. ¹¹Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel praying and asking God for mercy. ¹²So they approached the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “O king, did you not publish a decree that for thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you would be thrown into the lions' den?”

The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.”

¹³Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.”

¹⁴When the king heard this, he was deeply distressed; he was determined to deliver Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

¹⁵Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to him, "Know, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed."

¹⁶So the king commanded, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!"

¹⁷A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel's situation. ¹⁸Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

Notes

6:10 "He went home." The word *l'baytēh* literally means "to his house."

"Upstairs room." The word *'illî* designated a room located on the flat roof of the house where "one retired when wishing to be undisturbed"²¹ (cf. Judges 3:20; 1 Kings 17:19; 2 Kings 1:2; 4:10; Acts 1:13; 9:37-39). Acts 10:9 says that Peter "went up on the roof to pray."

"Windows were opened." The text does not say that Daniel purposely opened the windows for the occasion, but that they were already opened in the direction of Jerusalem.

"Toward Jerusalem." The custom of facing Jerusalem and its temple in prayer is repeatedly mentioned in King Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple. The phrase "pray toward this temple/this city/this land" comes as a refrain in that prayer (1 Kings 8:46-49; 2 Chron. 6:36-39).

"Three times a day." The psalmist talks about his custom of praying three times a day:

Evening, morning and noon

I cry out in distress,

and he hears my voice

(Ps. 55:17; cf. 119:164).

Daniel's morning and evening prayers matched the fixed times when the temple sacrifices were offered in the temple in Jerusalem (Dan. 9:21) and when the Levites offered prayers to God (1 Chron. 23:30, 31). A later Jewish law mandated the custom of praying three times a day just as Daniel did. According to Jewish tradition, this custom is said to have originated with the patriarchs: Abraham instituted the prayer in the morning, Isaac in the afternoon, and Jacob in the evening.²²

"On his knees." In the Bible, the posture in prayer varied between sitting, standing, bowing, kneeling, and falling prostrate. In this case, since the windows were opened, Daniel's posture of kneeling down betrayed his act of praying to his God and was witnessed by his enemies, who were looking for a reason to accuse him. The original text contains a wordplay on the verb *bārēk*, "he blessed," with the noun *birkôhî*, "his knees."

"Prayed, giving thanks." Daniel's prayer contained both acts of *m^ešallē'*, "petitioning," and *môdē'*, "thanksgiving." Praise was an integral part of the opening of a prayer in biblical times; prayers usually began with the words "Blessed are you, O Lord . . ." First Thessalonians 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances."

"Before his God." The literal reading—which

says *q°dām °lāhēh*, "before his God"—is a reverential way of referring to God.

"As he had done previously." This is an important detail. It shows that in praying, Daniel was not revolting against either the king or the other administrators. Rather, he was persisting in his spiritual commitments. Prayer for him was not a last resort to be relied on in a time of crisis such as sickness or death, "but an integral part of his life."²³

6:11 "These men." See the Notes on Daniel 6:5.

"Came by agreement." This is the second occurrence in the chapter of the root *rgš*, "to come together." See the Notes on Daniel 6:6.

"Found Daniel." In other words, as the context suggests, they caught Daniel praying. There is a wordplay here: In verse 4 the administrators seek to find fault with Daniel, while in this verse they find him seeking his God in prayer.

"Asking God for mercy." Literally, the text says *bā'ē' ūmithannan*, "making petitions and pleading for mercy." The two verbal roots are also found together in 2:18, where, facing a life-threatening situation, Daniel urged his friends "to plead for mercy from the God of heaven." The last two words in this verse are *q°dām °lāhēh*, meaning "before his God."

6:12 "To him." The original Aramaic text says *q°dām malkā'*, "before the king." These words stand in contrast to the expression *q°dām °lāhēh*, "before his God," found in the previous two verses. While Daniel was praying "before God," his enemies were denouncing him "before the king."

"Did you not publish a decree?" See the Notes on Daniel 6:8. Daniel's enemies ask the

king a rhetorical question. Curiously, they omit the customary greeting this time (cf. v. 6). The words describing the decree here are identical with those in verse 7.

"The decree stands." The term *mill°tā'* literally means "the word."

"The laws of the Medes and Persians." See the Notes on Daniel 6:8.

6:13 "They said." Literally, the text says *°nô w°ām°rîn*, "they answered and said." This expression is frequently found in Semitic narratives.

"To the king." Literally, the Aramaic text reads *q°dām malkā'*, "before the king." See the Notes on Daniel 6:12.

"Daniel." See the Notes on Daniel 6:2. The king's favorite administrator is charged with sedition. It is remarkable that Darius completely failed to notice that Daniel was not present to speak for himself.

"One of the exiles from Judah." This is the third time in the book that Daniel is called "an exile from Judah"; see the Notes on Daniel 2:25 and 5:13. Referring to Daniel as a captive who was brought from a foreign land was a deliberate slight. This detail in the text may reveal that ethnic tensions existed among the royal officials.

"Pays no attention to you." Clearly, this statement was a false accusation. In chapter 3, the Chaldeans made the same charge against Daniel's friends: "But there are some Jews whom you have placed over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the statue of gold you have set up" (3:12; cf. Esther 3:8). In this chapter, these words are a flat contradiction of

the conclusion the same group reached as recorded in verse 5: **“We will never find any grounds of accusation against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”** Daniel was accused of civil disobedience, but later in the story he states that he did not do “any wrong before you, O king” (6:22).

“He still prays.” The original literally says *bā’ē’ bā’ûtēh*, “he still prays his prayer.” Both the verb and the noun are built on the same root (cognate accusative—paronomasia).

“Three times a day.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 6:10.

6:14 “He was deeply distressed.” In biblical texts, the word *b’ēš* translated here as “distressed” often has the connotation of evil.

“He was determined to deliver.” The text literally says *šām bāl l’šēzābûtēh*, “he set his mind on saving him [Daniel]”—because the real reason for the decree had finally dawned on the king.

“Until sundown.” In spite of “his almost frantic efforts, the king could find no legal loophole by which to save Daniel and at the same time preserve” the immutability of the state law.²⁴ Daniel’s enemies pressed the king to carry out the execution that very day.

6:15 “These men.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 6:5.

“Came by agreement.” This is the third occurrence of the word *rgš* in the chapter. See the *Notes* on Daniel 6:6.

“Know, O king.” Although some scholars translate this phrase “Remember, O king!” the words *da’ malkā’*, literally mean “Know, O king!” For the second time, Daniel’s enemies skip the customary greeting when they approach the

king. Moreover, one wonders if addressing the king directly in the imperative way “Know!” should not be taken as a threat to the king himself.

6:16 “They brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den.” Whereas the three Hebrews were thrown into the fiery furnace by some of the king’s strongest soldiers (3:20), the subject of the verbs “brought” and “threw” is not specified in this verse. It is possible that the king was not punishing Daniel but was allowing him to be tried by ordeal (cf. Num. 5:11-31). It has been observed that prior to this act, “no investigation, no trial, no questioning of the accused, no defense offered by Daniel or on his behalf takes place.”²⁵

“Your God.” In the original text, the word *lāhāk*, “your God” (one word in Aramaic), comes first in the king’s sentence. This construction should be considered as an emphatic pointing to Daniel’s God as someone personal. The supreme god worshiped by the Persians was Ahura Mazda.

“Deliver you.” These two words translate one Aramaic word *yēšēzbinnāk*, “(he) will deliver you,” which is preceded by the personal pronoun “he.” This construction says emphatically, “he will rescue you!” or “may he himself rescue you!” The whole phrase may be taken as either a statement of faith or a prayerful wish. The author may have intentionally left it ambiguous, inviting the reader “to decide what he or she would mean in a situation of this kind.”²⁶ In either case, these words express the king’s hope in God’s saving power, since his own attempts to *šēzib*, “save,” Daniel had failed (6:14, 15). The mention of fasting and mourning in verse 18 supports the no-

tion that these words most likely expressed a prayer.

6:17 "A stone." Following Jesus' burial, his tomb was closed with a stone and sealed (Matt. 27:60-66).

"The mouth of the den." There is a good chance that the den was actually a cave or a cistern in which the lions were kept. See the *Notes* on Daniel 6:7.

"The king sealed it." The Hebrew equivalent of this verb is used in Daniel 12:4, where the seer is commanded to close up and seal the scroll. The stone placed over the cave was bound by a rope, and the seal consisted of a lump of clay placed partially on the stone and partially on the entrance to the cave. Its purpose was "not to secure the door but to show whether it has been opened."²⁷

"Signet ring." The flat surface of the ring would be applied to the clay seal to leave an impression and prevent any surreptitious removal of the stone. The royal seals typical of that time were "made of chalcedony and featured pictures of the king doing heroic acts (like killing beasts) under the protection of the winged sun disc (representing Ahura Mazda)."²⁸

"His nobles." This is the first occurrence of the term *rabrēbānôhî*, "his lords" or "his nobles," in the chapter. It is not clear how it differs from the two terms previously used in the narrative. The same word is found several times in chapter 5, where it describes Belshazzar's nobles.

"Nothing might be changed." The detail in the text about the double sealing of the pit "indicates something of the distrust that exists between Darius and the officials who have manipulated him into this act."²⁹

6:18 "His palace." The word *hêkal*, "a palace," can also mean "a temple." In this context, it most likely refers to Darius's palace.

"Fasting." The text literally says that the king *bāt tēwāt*, "spent the night fasting." Since the evening meal was the richest in the culture of the time, the text is saying that the king skipped the most important meal of the day (cf. Exod. 16:8). In ancient times, fasting times were usually accompanied by seasons of prayer.

"Entertainment." The word *dahōwān*, "diversions," occurs only here in Biblical Aramaic (*hapax legomenon*), and there is no consensus among scholars regarding its precise meaning. Some scholars have explained it as "tables,"³⁰ but others render it as "diversions," "women," "music," "dancing girls," etc. The parallel expression "without eating" supports a general term like "entertainment" or "diversion."

"And he could not sleep." A literal rendering of the phrase *wēšintēh naddat 'alôhî* would be "his sleep fled from him." Given some strong thematic links between this chapter and the story of Esther, it is easy to see a parallel between this phrase and the one in Esther 6:1: "That night the king could not sleep." It has been suggested that in Esther's book, that sentence marks the turning point in the narrative—the major reversal around which the structure of the whole book is built.³¹ Moreover, though that book contains no explicit use of God's name, many have seen God's implicit providence at work in this statement.

Exposition (6:10-18)

6:10 Daniel's habit was to give thanks to God **three times a day** regardless of what went on in his life. When facing a

difficulty, Daniel turned for help neither to his fellow officials nor to the king. When he felt powerless, he resorted to prayer. In fact, “long before this plot was formed against him, he had found prayer to be the vital ingredient in his busy life in Babylon as a high ranking official.”³² The believer knows all too well that “it takes less effort to pray during an emergency or trial than in the course of ordinary life.”³³

Daniel adds a petition to his praise, just as he did on a previous occasion when his life was threatened (Dan. 2:18). Psalm 55:16-18 also speaks of the custom of praying to God for protection from danger three times a day:

But I call to God,
and the LORD saves me.
Evening, morning and noon
I cry out in distress,
and he hears my voice.
He ransoms me unharmed
from the battle waged against me,
even though many oppose me.

According to his daily habit, Daniel prays in *his upstairs room, where the windows were opened*. In other words, “Daniel did not begin the practice in defiance of the king’s order; he continued his daily devotions without interruption.”³⁴ In fact, he did not do anything new in reaction to the decree. The place, the times, and the posture of his prayer remained unchanged.³⁵ The reader is re-

minded here of the following words from Jonah’s prayer:

“When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, LORD,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple” (Jon. 2:7).

In Jesus’ time, there were people who prayed on the street corners so as “‘to be seen by men.’” He urged his followers to close the door of the room when they prayed to God (Matt. 6:5, 6). “When prayer becomes trendy, it is better to pray alone.”³⁶

Daniel is said to have prayed in the direction of *Jerusalem*, even though the temple there still lay in ruins. This custom goes back to the time of King Solomon, who, in his prayer for the dedication of the temple, said:

“When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them *captive to a land far away* or near; and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captivity and say ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly’; and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their captivity where they were taken, and *pray toward the land*

you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and toward the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you” (2 Chron. 6:36-39; emphasis supplied).

6:11-13 After the opponents have found a basis for a charge against Daniel, they go to report it to the king. There is a play on the word “before” in this text. Because Daniel was praying *before his God*, he is here denounced by his enemies *before the king*.

The envious officials storm Darius’s office, but this time in addressing the king they omit the customary greeting “O king, live forever!” Moreover, they also try to put Daniel down by referring to him as a captive, saying *one of the exiles from Judah*. This is the third time in the book that Daniel is described this way. The first time it was by the ambitious Arioch, who brought Daniel before the king, hoping to get credit for finding the solution to Nebuchadnezzar’s problem (2:25). The second time, Daniel was addressed as a captive by Belshazzar, who intentionally chose to ignore Daniel’s brilliant career in Babylon (5:13). Here in chapter 6, the accusers imply that a foreigner can never be fully trusted. In fact, “there was no reason for mentioning that Daniel had

been a captive other than to humiliate him and make him seem more likely to be disloyal.”³⁷

Moreover, Daniel’s enemies use exaggerated and false statements in order to accuse him before the king. As has already been mentioned, the first time that they met with Darius, they said that *all* the officers agreed that the king should issue a decree. This could not have been true of Daniel, who also held a high office. Now, they accuse Daniel of not paying attention to the king. This is in direct contradiction with both Darius’s opinion about Daniel as reported at the beginning of the chapter (6:3) and the conclusion reached by these very officials, who could not find any fault with him (6:5). At the end of the chapter, Daniel reminds the king of his unchanged attitude toward him: “‘Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king’ ” (6:22).

6:14, 15 This story portrays Darius’s sense of justice as well as his devotion to Daniel as exceptional and commendable. A very strong Aramaic term, often used of something evil by nature, is used to describe his distress once he learns the real reason behind the decree. Immediately, he goes out of his way to try to *deliver* his best administrator from the lions. Yet, the opponents keep pressuring him. The text implies that they demand that the execution be carried out on that same day. In approaching Darius for the last time, they skip the customary

greeting, addressing him with an imperative ***Know!*** which has connotations of a threat. Two other kings in the Bible, David (2 Sam. 12:7) and Herod (Matt. 14:6-12), were cornered in a similar way. It has rightly been said that “immutable human law always threatens to trap its own makers.”³⁸

6:16 Once Darius discovers that he is trapped and powerless, all he can do is to pray to Daniel’s God for help: ***May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!*** Scholars argue that through these words, “Darius expresses his profound belief in the power of Daniel’s God to rescue his faithful follower.”³⁹ In fact, several commentators have proposed that Darius must have heard of the miraculous deliverance of Daniel’s friends from the fiery furnace. Darius’s prayer here may be considered as echoing Daniel’s prayer in verse 10 of this chapter. In contrast to the king, who openly “expresses the conviction that Daniel’s God will be able to save him, Daniel’s trust in the face of mortal danger is expressed quietly by his actions.”⁴⁰

6:17, 18 The seal was applied to exclude any attempt to tamper with Daniel’s situation. It prevented his enemies from hurting him in secret during the night, and it kept his friends from helping him by, for example, feeding the hungry lions. “In this way neither party could act independently of the other, and the possibility of surreptitious inter-

vention was ruled out.”⁴¹ The only person who could intervene on Daniel’s behalf was God.

Judging purely by appearance, it seems that Daniel’s enemies have triumphed over him and his God. One important lesson the book of Daniel teaches is that earthly forces “do have some power over the people of God.”⁴² The next chapter observes, ***As I watched, this horn waged war against the saints and prevailed over them*** (7:21). So, here, it is obvious from the text that the king is greatly concerned about Daniel. He ***spent the night in fasting and without any entertainment***, with little sleep and lots of prayer, eagerly waiting for the break of the day to see if Daniel survives safe and sound.

Deliverance (6:19-22)

This part of the chapter, although short in comparison with the other parts, functions as the center of the whole story.

¹⁹***Then the king, at the first light of dawn, got up and hurried to the lions’ den.*** ²⁰***As he was coming near the den, he called out to Daniel in an anguished voice, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”***

²¹***Daniel answered, “O king, live forever!*** ²²***My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was innocent in his sight. Also, I have not done any wrong before you, O king.”***

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6:19 "At the first light of dawn." The word *bisparpara'* means "at dawn," while the idea of light comes from the word *n^egah*, "brightness."

6:20 "An anguished voice." The word *'sib*, "anguish," is also related to "pain" and "anxiety." In the context here demonstrates that Daniel was at the center of the king's preoccupation during the night as well as in the morning.

"O Daniel." Daniel's name is found three times in this verse.

"Servant." In contrast to the envious satraps, to whom Daniel was only an exile (v. 13), Darius calls him "servant of the living God."

"The living God." The phrase *'elaha' hayya'*, "the living God," suggests that Darius was well acquainted with Daniel's religious life. A second reference to "the living God" is found in verse 26 of this chapter. The authors of the Bible frequently referred to God as "the living God" (Deut. 5:26; Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26; Matt. 26:63; John 6:57; Heb. 9:14; etc.), which differentiates him from the idols of the nations (Isa. 44:9-20).

"Has your God?" God's name is found twice in the king's question. The king's words in this verse are almost identical to those in verse 16. Here the phrase "from the lions" has been added.

6:21 "O king, live forever!" On this customary greeting at the royal palace, see the *Notes* on Daniel 2:4. The ancient Greek version turns this greeting into Daniel's answer to the king's question: "O king, I am alive!"

6:22 "My God." Right after greeting the king, Daniel turns the focus to his God. In *chapter 2*, when he appeared before Nebuchadnezzar, he

began and ended his speech with reference to God. The expression "my God" points once more to the personal relationship that Daniel had with his God.

"His angel." For the use of this term, *mal'akeh*, "his angel," in the context of God's saving act, see Daniel 3:28. The Septuagint says that it was God himself who saved Daniel from the lions. It is difficult to say who shut the lions' mouths, God or his angel. In the Bible, the Hebrew and Aramaic word *mal'ak* primarily means "a messenger," denoting someone sent to perform a special task, which includes the protection of the faithful: "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, / and he delivers them" (Ps. 34:7; cf. Isa. 37:36; Matt. 28:2). In the story of the burning bush in Exodus 3, the person who revealed himself to Moses is described as "the messenger of the Lord" but also as "God" and even "the LORD." The three terms are used interchangeably in that passage.

"He shut the mouths of the lions." There may be a wordplay involving "the mouths of the lions" here and "the mouth of the den" in verse 17. Daniel's enemies shut the mouth of the lions' den in an attempt to take his life, but God's messenger shut the lions' mouths and saved Daniel. An interesting extrabiblical parallel comes from the Babylonian story of the righteous sufferer (*Ludlul Bel Nemeqi*): "It was Marduk who put a muzzle on the mouth of the lion who was eating me."⁴³

"They have not hurt me." The root *hbl*, "to do wrong, to harm," is used three times in this and the following verse. Here it is used as a verb, while in the other two places it occurs as a noun.

"I was innocent." Literally, Daniel says that *zākû*, "innocence," was found in him before God. That innocence was not the only reason for the rescue is clear from verse 23, where it is said that Daniel was saved "because he had trusted in his God." Daniel is saying here that he was tried by ordeal. The fact that he did not die was proof that he was faithful to both his God and his king.

"Any wrong." There is a wordplay involving the word *ḥ^abāl*, "wrong" in this and the following verse. Daniel did not do any *ḥ^abûlâ*, "wrong," before the king, and when he was lifted from the den, nothing *ḥ^abāl*, "wrong/wound," was found on him (v. 23).

Exposition (6:19-22)

6:19, 20 Darius's personal interest in Daniel's life and safety is admirable. At the very break of day, he **hurried to the lions' den**, hoping to find evidence that the life of his trusted officer has been preserved. In his call to Daniel, the king refers twice to Daniel's God, the same One into whose hands he had entrusted his destiny the evening before (Dan. 6:16). Darius calls Daniel **servant of the living God**, implying that because God is powerful and active, his servant Daniel would have passed the trial by ordeal (Num. 5:11-31). The king's words remind the reader of the way in which Daniel, in Belshazzar's presence, described God, contrasting him with the lifeless idols. The prophet declared to the king that the true God **"holds in his hand your life-breath"**

(5:23). Also, in Daniel 4:34, King Nebuchadnezzar **"praised and honored him who lives forever,"** while in 12:7, God is referred to as the One "who lives forever."

6:21 From the bottom of the pit, Daniel greets the king in the most polite way: **O king, live forever!** This is "the only time in the book that the phrase 'live forever' is spoken by a Jew in reference to the king."⁴⁴ Nehemiah, the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, greeted him by saying, " 'May the king live forever!' " (Neh. 2:3). Daniel's formal greeting of the king shows his respect for his superior as well as his observance of the courtly protocol.

6:22 Daniel does not hesitate to credit his protection from the lions to the direct intervention of God's messenger (cf. Dan. 3:28). The text implies that "what the earthly emperor was unable to accomplish, the living God achieved; He shut the mouths of the lions and delivered His servant from death (Heb. 11:33)."⁴⁵ Psalm 34:7 says, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, / and he delivers them." The author of Hebrews (11:33) ascribes Daniel's miraculous escape from death to the kind of faith that "shut the mouths of lions."

This story says Daniel's life was spared for two reasons: First, Daniel **was innocent** before both God and King Darius. And second, "he had trusted in his God" (6:23). Often in the lives of Bible char-

acters, these two qualities—trust in God's mercy and a life of integrity—are blended together. Noah, for example, "found favor in the eyes of the LORD," while at the same time he was a righteous and blameless person, someone who "walked with God" (Gen. 6:8, 9). "There is great strength in this dual testimony: blamelessness and trust are the keys to successful survival in the face of overwhelming odds."⁴⁶

Release and Doom (6:23, 24)

Daniel's miraculous deliverance is a source of joy to the king, while at the same time it spells doom on his enemies.

²³The king was overjoyed and commanded that Daniel be lifted from the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

²⁴At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

Notes

6:23 "Overjoyed." The text literally says that the king *šaggī' t'ēb*, "greatly rejoiced." This expression contrasts with the expression in verse 14 that says Darius *šaggī' b'eš*, "was greatly distressed."

"Lifted from the den." There is a definite similarity between the description of this under-

ground pit and the cistern into which the prophet Jeremiah was thrown and from which he later was pulled up with ropes (Jer. 38). Daniel was more than eighty years old when he was thrown into the pit.

"No wound was found on him." On a play on the word *ḥ^abāl*, "wound," in the previous and this verse, see the Notes on Daniel 6:22. The fact that Daniel was totally unharmed is an important detail that reminds the reader of the story in chapter 3, in which the king saw the three young men in the midst of the fire "unbound and unharmed" (3:25). The word *ḥ^abāl*, "wound," is found in both passages.

"He had trusted." The same root *'mn*, "to trust," that is used at the beginning of the chapter to describe Daniel's trustworthiness is also used here. See the Notes on Daniel 6:4.

"His God." This chapter contains several cases of the combination of possessive pronouns with the word "God": "his" in verses 5, 10, and 23; "your" in verses 16 and 20; and "my" in verse 22. The possessive pronouns in this chapter present God as Someone with whom Daniel was intimate.

6:24 "The men." See the Notes on Daniel 6:5.

"Falsely accused Daniel." Literally, the text says *^akalû qaršôhî*, "those who had eaten his pieces." On the use of this Aramaic idiom, see the Notes on Daniel 3:8.

"Were brought in and thrown into..." These two verbs are identical with the ones in verse 16, where Daniel was brought in and thrown into the den. Deuteronomy 19:19 formulates the conclusion of the "eye for an eye" type of law (*lex talionis*) about bearing false witness:

"Then do to him as he intended to do to his brother" (cf. Esther 9:25; Ps. 140:9-11). In the story in Daniel 3, the king's strong men are killed by the flames of the fiery furnace.

"With their wives and children." This is an example of the ancient world's concept of corporate punishment or family solidarity—the main purpose of which was to prevent retaliation from the surviving members of the family. Literally, the text says that their wives and *benehon*, "their sons," were executed. The daughters are not explicitly mentioned unless the noun "sons" is to be understood as inclusive of both sons and daughters.

"Before they reached the floor of the den." This is a hyperbolic description of immediate and definite punishment.

"The lions overpowered them." This detail, together with the sealing of the den, confirms the fact that during the night, nobody came to feed the lions and thus help Daniel.

"Crushed all their bones." The expression *haddiqu*, "broke in pieces," means that the lions devoured everything, including the bones. The description of the crushing of bones in the original language is rather graphic and onomatopoeic.

Exposition (6-ZS, Z4)

6:23 The king's great joy at hearing Daniel's voice is the climax of his positive attitude toward his faithful servant. In the end, his great distress turns into great joy. No wound could be found on Daniel *because he had trusted in his God*. This statement may be considered as the moral of the whole story. "If it

was obedience to God's law that landed him in the pit in the first place, it was trust in God that delivered him in the second place."⁴⁷ Not only does Darius order that Daniel be immediately taken out of the pit, but he also punishes the culprits.

6:24 The king's great joy spells great trouble for Daniel's enemies. The form of punishment that Darius ordered is very harsh. The principle used is/ "measure for measure," and it reflected the corporate type of punishment common to societies where family bonds are particularly strong (Deut. 19:19; Prov. 19:5, 9; 21:28). Children were often perceived as extensions of the lives of their parents. Moreover, in the ancient world, including Israel, the punishment for false accusation was severe. Some have assumed that the king punished all 120 satraps and the two other administrators. The text, however, specifies that only *the men who had falsely accused Daniel* with their wives and sons were thrown into the pit. The Greek text specifies that only the two administrators were executed on the king's order.

The details of cruelty are reported to stress the point that no friend of Daniel came during the night "to feed the cats" and thus help him. The Midrash says that when Darius confronted Daniel's accusers, they suggested that the lions were not hungry and that was why they did not harm him. "If so.

responded Darius, "go down and spend the night with them to see if they are not hungry."⁴⁸ In this sense, the sealing of the den is a valuable detail that points to the fact that the preservation of Daniel's life was the result of God's miracle.

In order to prevent any sort of revenge, group punishment is inflicted on the whole family to which the guilty person belonged. One cannot help but feel sorry for the family members executed together with their leaders. It has been aptly said that "violence for God does not atone for violence against God."⁴⁹ In this text, the retribution is reported without either approval or disapproval. In the biblical story of Achan's execution, in addition to his family members, his "cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had" were destroyed (Josh. 7:24). However, there are biblical texts that clearly teach that "fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16; cf. Ezek. 18). One positive example is that of King Amaziah of Judah, who "did not put the sons of the assassins [of his father] to death, in accordance with what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses where the LORD commanded: 'Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sins'" (2 Kings 14:6).

A Saving Decree and the Best Satrap (6:25-28)

A new decree is issued in a very different—even opposite—tone, praising Daniel's God and replacing the previous royal edict.

²⁵Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and men of every language who live throughout the land: "May your prosperity increase!"

²⁶I make a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must respect and reverence the God of Daniel.

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For he is the living God

and he endures forever;

his kingdom will not be destroyed,

his dominion will never end.

²⁷He delivers and he saves;

he performs wonderful miracles

in the heavens and on the earth.

He has saved Daniel

from the power of the lions."

²⁸So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius—that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Notes

6:25 ***"All the peoples, nations, and men of every language."*** For similar proclamations by King Nebuchadnezzar during the Babylonian Empire, see the Notes on Daniel 3:4, 29. In this verse, the phrase functions as a reminder that the decree was of imperial and universal proportions. The parallel phrase "throughout the land/earth" that follows confirms this interpretation.

"Your prosperity." The root of the word used here is *š^elim*, "to be at peace, to prosper." It is related to the well-known Hebrew word *šālôm* (*shalom*)—a term rich in meanings, all of which are positive.

6:26 The second half of this verse marks the beginning of the fourth and last hymn of praise in the narrative section of the book.

"In every part." The word "part" here translates the Aramaic word *šolṭān*, "dominion" or "right to rule," a word that is frequently attested in chapter 7 with worldwide connotations.

"Kingdom." In the book of Daniel, the term *malkû*, "kingdom," can also stand for an empire.

"Must respect and reverence the God of Daniel." The first two terms are used synonymously, while the words *min-q^odām* *lāhēh*, mean "before (his) God"—Daniel's God.

"The living God." See the *Notes* on Daniel 6:20. Jeremiah 10:10a says, "But the LORD is the true God; / he is the living God, the eternal King." To say that God is living is to state that he is powerful and that he is active in the world.

"He endures forever." On the word *l'āl^emîn*, "forever," see the *Notes* on Daniel 2:20. The concept that is communicated here is that God is beyond the limits of time.

"Kingdom . . . dominion." These two terms, *malkû*, "kingdom," and *šolṭān*, "dominion," used here synonymously, are the key words in chapter 7.

"Not be destroyed." The root *ḥbl*, "to harm," is used as a verb in verse 22, "to hurt," and as a noun, "wound," in verses 22, 23. The indestructible and everlasting nature of God's kingdom is taught in several places in the book of Daniel, in both stories and visions (2:44; 4:3; 7:14, 27).

6:27 The first half of this verse speaks of God's saving power in general terms, while the second is more specific, referring to the act of saving Daniel's life.

"He delivers." For another use of the same verb, see the *Notes* on Daniel 6:14, 16.

"Wonderful miracles." See the *Notes* on Daniel 4:3. Both of these terms refer in this context to God's supernatural interventions.

"In the heavens and on the earth." *Merism(us)* is a literary figure in which two or more opposite terms are placed together in order to express the concept of totality. Here, the nouns *heavens* and *earth* are joined to convey the idea of universality.

"He has saved Daniel." See the *Notes* on "he delivers" in this same verse. The king's hymn is definitely centered on God—which is true of the whole chapter. "It is God's act that the story relates, not Daniel's or the lions'."⁵⁰

"The power." The word used in the original is *yad*, "a hand." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2. Based on the story in this chapter, Christian tradition has seen in Daniel a type of Christ.⁵¹ In a sense, Daniel rose from the dead—was brought back to life from a sealed tomb (cf. Matt. 27:66; Heb. 11:33, 34).

6:28 "So Daniel." The original says, "So this Daniel . . ." See the *Notes* on Daniel 6:2.

"Prospered." The same term, *ḥašlah*, "prospered," is found in Daniel 3:30, referring to the three young men, who were "promoted" by the king after the test of their faith. Thus, Daniel is not only restored but also promoted in the kingdom.

"That is." If Darius the Mede is Cyrus the Great, then this conjunction *w^e*, "and," is explica-

...e, and the verse says, "So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, *that is*, the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

"*Cyrus the Persian*." Some scholars call this verse "a reprise of 1:21." The statements from these two verses (1:21 and 6:28) comprise the beginning and the end (*inclusio*) of the narrative part of the book. Moreover, in both verses, the mention of this king's name "hints at the end of the exile as the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Israel's restoration."⁵²

Exposition (6:25-28)

6:25-27 Chapter 6 in Daniel is a story of two decrees. The first decree, made by the king at the instigation of Daniel's opponents and directed against his God, was life-threatening. Through the second, life-saving decree, King Darius makes a universal proclamation about mandatory respect and reverence for Daniel's God. The introductory statement, **May your prosperity increase!** was a customary greeting used in correspondence. The whole book of Daniel consistently teaches that people should first and foremost praise God and only secondarily his servants. If Daniel's punishment was a challenge to the power of the God whom he obeyed, then his rescue is an open demonstration of that same divine power. Moreover, God's supernatural action in daily life is a sure sign that his kingdom is of another order.

The end of the chapter presents the fourth and last hymn of praise to God.

This hymn is another echo of Daniel's hymn of praise in 2:20-23. The three echoes of Daniel's prayer come from the mouths of two Gentile kings. This hymn of Darius clearly teaches the following three points: (1) God **is the living God**, and he is eternal. (2) Because God is eternal, **his dominion will never end**. (3) In accordance with his nature, God saves in miraculous ways—he is the One who saved Daniel from the lions. In the light of the words of this hymn, "Darius appears to be almost a convert to Judaism"⁵³—which reminds the reader of King Nebuchadnezzar's conversion (chap. 4). In conclusion, God's eternity and his ability to save are in focus here—two points about God that also dominate the second half of the book of Isaiah.

6:28 The last verse serves as an epilogue in the chapter, forming an *inclusio* with the statement in 1:21. Both of these verses show that "the lowly exile outlasts the kings of those [Babylonian and Persian] empires!"⁵⁴ In other words, Daniel's career spanned the two world empires. Kingdoms change, but the faithful remain—much like their God, who is eternal. This verse specifies that as a result of his successful passing of the test, **Daniel prospered** in the new kingdom. He probably became the head satrap, close to the emperor. As the royal inspector, he made an annual visit throughout the kingdom and was known as the "King's Eye."⁵⁵

This verse has been used as evidence in favor of the thesis that Darius the Mede was none other than Cyrus the Great. If the conjunction is understood to be explicative, then the verse says, ***Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*** Darius's unique devotion to Daniel and his God, as evidenced throughout this chapter, supports this view (cf. Isa. 44; 45).

Summary of the Teaching

1. *Conflict between two unchangeable laws.* The story in this chapter is built on the theme of professional jealousy, and its plot is based on the conflict between two unchangeable laws, one human, and the other divine. Humans pretend to make their laws immutable, but in reality, only God's law is unbreakable and permanently abiding. It has been rightly said, "We should never believe people who say that human decisions cannot be changed."⁵⁶ Daniel's enemies were able to devise a trap in which they placed a law of the Medes and Persians in direct conflict with God's eternal law. The tension here was aggravated by the fact that their law focused on worship, and the first two commandments of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:2-6) introduce the only true God and the proper way to worship him.

Daniel's attitude of unquestionable loyalty to God sets a good example for others to follow. This story also stresses

that Daniel's respect and his faithful service to the king were unwavering. The Bible teaches that "the authorities that exist have been established by God (Rom. 13:1) and therefore should be respected, except when their orders conflict with God's laws. Centuries after Daniel's time, when Christ's followers were questioned on the matter of authority, they stated before the Sanhedrin, " 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God' " (Acts 4:19).

Genesis 4 informs us that the very first conflict between human beings recorded in the Bible centered on the subject of worship. Moreover, the book of Revelation (chaps. 13; 14) indicates that the last conflict in this world's history will also center on worship—people will have to choose whether to obey God or endure oppression of a beastly nature. Nonbelievers often consider the cost of discipleship too high. So, it is comforting to learn that the end of the story in Daniel 6 "offers a foretaste of the coming victory of God over all foes, even death itself."⁵⁷ Psalm 91:8-13 may be understood as a general application of Daniel's experience in the lions' den:

You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the
wicked.

If you make the Most High your
dwelling—

even the LORD, who is my
 refuge—
 then no harm will befall you,
 no disaster will come near your
 tent.
 For he will command his angels
 concerning you
 to guard you in all your ways;
 they will lift you up in their hands,
 so that you will not strike your
 foot against a stone.
 You will tread upon the lion and the
 cobra;
 you will trample the great lion
 and the serpent.

2. *Daniel's trust in God.* This story presents Daniel's positive attitude in stark contrast to that of his enemies. On three occasions his opponents storm the king's palace with a goal in mind. When they come the first time, they sound pome, using the customary greeting in the beginning of their address: " 'O King Darius, live forever!' " (Dan. 6:6). Yet, the second time that they visit the king, they skip this greeting and begin their speech with a rhetorical question: " 'Did you not...?' " (6:12). When they approach Darius the third time, they sound like they are threatening him by warning him not to try to help Daniel because that will undermine his position in the kingdom (6:15). Thus it is clear from the text that when Daniel's enemies do show some politeness, it is not something spontaneous but rather the

result of careful calculation on their part, with the objective of trapping Daniel and cornering Darius, who was trying to shield him.

Daniel, on the other hand, is presented as polite all the way through the story. This old man finds himself down at the bottom of a pit full of lions, yet he greets Darius, " 'O king, live forever!' " (6:21). This detail shows that Daniel was not angry at the king nor at his God. He knew that his life was in God's hands, not in the hands of his enemies or even of the king. That is why when he was tested, he was still courteous and showed kindness and forgiveness. Daniel's attitude toward Darius reminds the reader of Joseph's words to his brothers when they were in Egypt: " 'It was not you who sent me here, but God' " (Gen. 45:8). What an example for every believer in God to follow!

3. *A portrayal of Daniel's God.* The opening verses of Daniel's book deal with the topic of God's sovereignty and power, and the first six chapters reveal God's magnificence through the names and appellations attributed to him by Hebrews and foreigners:

God of heaven (2:18, 19, 37, 44)
 King of heaven (4:37; cf. Prince of
 the host in 8:11)
 Heaven (4:26; cf. Ancient of Days
 in 7:9, 13)
 Most High (4:17, 25; cf. 7:25)
 Most High God (3:26; 4:2; 5:18, 21)

God of gods and Lord of kings
(2:47; cf. God of gods in 11:36)
Living God (6:20)
God of my fathers (2:23)
Lord (1:2; cf. 9:3, 7, 9, 19, etc., and
Yahweh in 9:2, 4, 8, 13, 14, 20)⁵⁸

In a similar way, each of the first six chapters centers on God; thus each contributes to the reader's understanding of who God is and how he acts toward humans.

According to the story in Daniel 1, God is the One who gives victory, favor, and wisdom. As the Creator of all things, he is the ultimate Provider of life, strength, and knowledge. Daniel 2 portrays God as the One who knows, reveals, and holds earth's events from times past, present, and future. This chapter points to the Lord who sets up and removes the rulers of this world. In chapter 3, he is presented as the God who can save his faithful followers from death. In the words of King Nebuchadnezzar, "no other god can save in this way" (v. 29).

The God of heaven is also Someone who can change the mind of human beings and thus lead them to repentance. Daniel 4 tells a conversion story in which the king ends up becoming a captive of the God of his captives. Yet, according to chapter 5, the nature of that same God demands that he judge the unrepentant person who dares to insult the One **"who holds in his hand your life-breath and**

all your ways" (v. 23). As "the Judge c: all the earth" (Gen. 18:25), he also hold accountable every human being on earth. And according to chapter 6, the same God is powerful to do that which the kings of this world cannot accomplish; He rules over nature and saves his faithful. He **"saved Daniel from the poive-of the lions"** (v. 27).

The stories in Daniel 1-6 clear: teach God's superior power in the world. Moreover, they bring out the contrast between the ways, on the one hand, in which earthly rulers (mis)use their God-given dominion in order to control and oppress, and, on the other, the outworking of God's saving power. In this way the reader is prepared to approach the revelations recorded in chapters 7-12 which portray the same truths about God and his future acts of salvation and judgment, which climax in the time when the history of this world will draw to an end. King Darius alluded to the fact when, in his hymn of praise addressed to Daniel's God, he declared,

"He is the living God
and he endures forever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed,
his dominion will never end.
He delivers and he saves;
he performs wonderful miracles
in the heavens and on the earth
He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions"
(Dan. 6:26, 27).

1. M. K. Gandhi, *Gandhi's Complete Writings* (Bombay: Indian Government), 9:541; quoted in Smith-Christopher, 94.

2. For a complete list of the words common to both chapters, see Lucas, 145, and Doukhan, *Secrets*, 88.

3. Towner, 78.

4. Yamauchi, 19.

5. A similar but more detailed structure of this chapter may be found in Towner, 79.

6. Note that Belshazzar is the only person who in his speech omits the adjective "holy" from the phrase "the spirit of the holy gods" (5:14) when talking about Daniel.

7. Seow, 89.

8. Longman, 160.

9. J. Walton, "The Decree of Darius the Mede in Daniel 6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31 (1988): 280.

10. Montgomery, 276.

11. *Ibid.*, 270.

12. Baldwin, 126.

13. Collins, 268.

14. Baldwin, 126.

15. Shea, *Daniel*, 84.

16. Péter-Contesse and Ellington, 155.

17. Montgomery, 269.

18. Seow, 90.

19. Shea, *Daniel*, 85.

20. Walton, Matthews, Chavalas, 739.

21. Slotki, 49.

22. See the Mishnah, *Ber.* 4, and the Babylonian Talmud, *Ber.* 26b, 31a.

23. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 91.

24. Nichol, 4:813.

25. Seow, 92.

26. Goldingay, 132.

27. Collins, 413.

28. Walton, Matthews, Chavalas, 739.

29. Seow, 92, 93.

30. Rosenthal, 86.

31. Y. T. Radday, "Chiasm in Joshua, Judges and Others," *Linguistica Biblica* 3 (1973): 6-13.

32. Shea, *Daniel*, 86.

33. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 92.

34. Slotki, 50.

35. Seow, 90.

36. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 91.

37. Miller, 184.

38. Towner, 89.

39. Slotki, 51.

40. Collins, 272.

41. Baldwin, 130.

42. Lucas, 155.

43. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 56; quoted by Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar*, 112.

44. Seow, 93.

45. Baldwin, 135.

46. Towner, 85.

47. Redditt, 111.

48. Slotki, 53.

49. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 95.

50. Goldingay, 129.

51. Ford, 130-132; Towner, 8; Goldingay, 136; Jan W. Van Henten, "Daniel 3 and 6 in Early Christian Literature," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 158-160.

52. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 98.

53. Smith-Christopher, 93.

54. Seow, 96.

55. Oates, 138.

56. Towner, 89.

57. *Ibid.*, 88.

58. Based on Arthur J. Ferch, "Authorship, Theology, and Purpose of Daniel," in Frank B. Holbrook, ed. *Symposium on Daniel*, (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986), 53.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF DANIEL 7–12

The revelations that Daniel received are recorded in chapters 7–12. They consist of visions, auditions, and interpretations. Their main purpose is to “reveal that the supernatural world determines the natural world and human history.”¹ The first and last visions (Dan. 7:1ff; 10:1ff) both begin with third-person reports, bracketing this section of the book and thus forming an *inclusio*. This is in contrast to chapters 8 and 9, which begin with first-person reports. The four units (chaps. 10–12 form a single unit), which contain the revelations given to Daniel, are placed in chronological order.

What has already been stated in the “General Overview of Daniel 2–6” needs to be reiterated here for emphasis: Daniel’s visions and auditions make sense only in light of the stories that are found in the first section of the book. This means that one should never study the revelations in the second half of Daniel in isolation from the life experiences of the

four Hebrew men in Babylon told in the first half of the book. These stories provide the historical contexts of the chapters in the second half. Thus, they offer the key to a sound understanding of the visions and auditions. In particular, because of the ways the kings who are mentioned in the stories act, they become types of the more abstract powers that are described in the visions.² The general hermeneutical principle that “Scripture interprets itself” is particularly relevant to the study of the stories and revelations in Daniel. The student of this book must place chapters 7–12 in the wider context of biblical prophecy, as is done in what follows.

Definition and Types of Biblical Prophecy

In defining the phenomenon of biblical prophecy, it is essential to begin with a description of the person who held the prophetic office. That person was known in the community by several

titles: “seer” (*rō’eh*), “prophet” (*hōzeh*), “spokesman for God” (*nāvi’*), or simply “man of God” (*’iš hā’elōhîm*). A prophet was, in the first place, a spiritual leader of the community to which he ministered. He did not choose his occupation but was called by God to be his spokesperson. The prophet’s task consisted of proclaiming God’s messages to the people of his time (forth-telling) as well as pointing to God’s future dealing with his people and with the nations of the world (foretelling).

The Hebrew prophets may be divided into two groups: the writing and the nonwriting prophets. Most of the messages delivered by the earliest prophets in Israel were oral and were probably never written down. The recorded messages of the biblical prophets, on the other hand, served as a reliable witness to their listeners and readers, showing that God is just and merciful in dealing with his people and with the non-Israelite nations.

The written oracles of the prophets are generally classified into three groups: (1) Local or immediate; (2) end-time (eschatological) that can be either national or universal; and (3) apocalyptic or cosmic. All three types of prophecy are present in Daniel’s book: (1) God’s verdict delivered through Daniel to King Belshazzar was immediately fulfilled in the city of Babylon: “That same night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom,

at the age of sixty-two” (Dan. 5:30, 31). (2) The climax of Daniel’s explanation of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (chap. 2) foretold a time at the end of the world’s history when “‘the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will its sovereignty be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.’” (2:44). (3) Toward the end of Daniel’s life, he was told that after the rise of Michael, “‘Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever’” (12:3). While it is relatively easy to distinguish between local and end-time prophecies, the line between the end-time and the apocalyptic passages of the Bible is not always very clear.

Apocalyptic prophecy may be defined as end-time prophecy that assumes cosmic proportions, involving such objects as the sun, the moon, and the stars. It is universal in scope, and it “celebrates God’s victory over the enemies of the godly,” because the godly are oppressed and persecuted in the present age.³ Although apocalyptic prophecies appear to be deterministic, the reader of the Bible should not lose sight of the fact that the ultimate goal of *all* prophecy, including apocalyptic, is the repentance and salvation of human beings. The fact that there will be a violent end to the world’s history may come as a shock to the reader of a biblical apocalyptic pas-

sage. Yet the prophet does not intend that shock to result in the reader's paralysis. On the contrary, the prophet hopes to motivate a radical change in the present course of the reader's life because of what is going to happen in the future. It has been correctly observed that "biblical apocalyptic is not literature of withdrawal from the world; rather, it shows how God's followers are to live in the world."⁴

Apocalyptic prophecies are filled with rich symbols and vivid images. This study maintains that these symbols should be explained primarily from the biblical text. Moreover, several scholars have proposed that they must not be interpreted literally except when it is absurd not to do so. Most of the numbers, for example, appear to be symbolic. So, when interpreting apocalyptic texts, the reader should keep in mind that his or her task is to determine the figurative sense that the symbol has in the larger context in which metaphors exhibit the multiple senses of the semantic range. "This means that the true meaning is not to be found in our present situation but rather in the use of that symbol in its ancient setting. This point can hardly be overemphasized in light of the misuse of biblical symbols in many circles today. This does not mean that prophecy and apocalyptic should not be applied to the current situation nor that their 'fulfillment' should not be sought. Rather, it means that the interpreter should seek first the 'author's in-

tended meaning' in the original context before delineating the way that the prophecies apply to our time."⁵

Since the apocalyptic genre is metaphorically rich, its images speak truth accurately but oftentimes not as precisely as the reader would like to have it. In dealing with the particulars of the apocalyptic passages, the interpreter should avoid despair on the one hand and overconfidence on the other. In other words, "caution and reserve are virtues in the interpretation of apocalyptic."⁶

Prophecy and History

Biblical prophecies were not given in a vacuum. Rather, prophetic utterances were grounded in history. For that reason, it is important to study the context in which a prophecy was given. God's past and present leading in the life of an individual or a group of people provides landmarks for the future. The example of the Song at the Sea (Exod. 15) is very instructive in this regard. The Israelites had just witnessed God's power defeating the Egyptians who were pursuing them. Their enemy "sank to the depths like a stone" (v. 5). As the Israelites sang a hymn of praise to God (vv. 1-12), their eyes of faith turned away from the sea and toward the Promised Land (v. 13). The second part of their song proclaims that the same God who had just delivered them from their enemies will lead them safely into the land of Canaan (vv. 17, 18). Should any people attempt to

stand in the way, God will deal with their army in the same way as he dealt with the Egyptians (vv. 14-16). The song says that by the power of God's arm, the future enemies "will be as still as a stone" (v. 16). Thus, in terms of biblical prophecy, the future may be defined as the past leading of God manifested anew in a more powerful way in behalf of his people and increasing in intensity as the end draws near.

Daniel's prophecies are sometimes studied in isolation from the time and place in which they were communicated and also in isolation from Daniel's life of faith. They have not always been compared systematically to the writings of the Hebrew classical prophets, such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Zechariah, etc. This study suggests that type of approach to Daniel's revelations is no longer acceptable. One cannot comprehend Daniel's prophetic messages without constant reference to the messages of the other biblical prophets, to which they are closely related.

In the book of Daniel the reader can see how God used present events to show the prophet what the future would be. This fact is particularly helpful for understanding the symbol of the little horn. It is not a mere coincidence that the two chapters that deal with the activities of the little horn, chapters 7 and 8, are dated to the reign of King Belshazzar. In fact, a careful study of the book shows the presence of a number of parallels between

Belshazzar and the little horn.⁷ Given the information about Belshazzar's character and activities (Dan. 5), one is led to the conclusion that this ruler's personality and actions prepare the reader to meet a more distant anti-God power that would rise against God, his services, and his sanctuary and also oppress God's faithful people. In a similar way, Belshazzar's sudden death, from which no one could save him, presages the downfall of the end-time power when God has judged it.

Prediction, Fulfillment, and Applications

The Hebrew prophets were not just forth-tellers but also foretellers—they made predictions that they claimed came from God. Thus, predictions form an essential part of biblical prophecy, and their fulfillments attest to the fact that the persons who made them were true prophets (Deut. 18:21, 22; Jer. 14; Ezek. 13). Some predictions are conditional, but prophecy as a whole is not. A prediction may not come to pass and may even seem to have failed, yet divine prophecy never fails. Its ultimate goal is God's salvation of human beings. The context of Isaiah 55:11 is God's offer of salvation to all who desire it. This verse describes the effect of God's prophetic word: " 'It will not return to me empty, / but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.' "

When a prophetic word comes to pass, the Bible calls that event the *fulfillment* of God's spoken word. Jesus closed

his Scripture reading in the synagogue at Nazareth by saying, “‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4:21), and Paul’s famous statement in Galatians 4:4, 5 says, “When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”

A careful consideration of passages such as Acts 2:16, where Peter speaks of the fulfillment of an end-time prophecy from Joel 2, has led some scholars to the conclusion that biblical prophecies may have more than one fulfillment. Thus, it is stated that in the case of some prophecies, one can speak of single, dual, and multiple fulfillments. The identification of the fulfillment(s) must not be done artificially. Rather, it should be informed and controlled by the evidence from the biblical text as the student uses the Bible as its own interpreter.

The issue becomes more complicated when dealing with apocalyptic prophecies. Some scholars allow room for their dual and multiple fulfillments, following the dictum that says “apocalyptic is unbeatable because it is re-heatable.”⁸ They argue that multivalent images, so often present in apocalyptic passages, are difficult to limit to definite historical identifications. On the other hand, a good number of evangelical Christians take a firm position that apocalyptic prophecies can have only a single fulfillment. They believe that doing anything

else would weaken the certainty of their predictive element, a factor that is important in the context of biblical prophetic authority.

A helpful step in studying, interpreting, and applying apocalyptic prophecies would be to define the terms *fulfillment* and *application* and then carefully distinguish between them in order not to confuse that which the biblical texts say with the explanations and the conclusions of the modern interpreter. As has already been stated, if the reader maintains that the Bible is its own interpreter, his or her identification of the “fulfillment” of an apocalyptic prophecy needs to be informed and controlled by the evidence from the Bible. But what about the symbols and events whose precise fulfillments are not clearly stated in the Bible? In such cases, *application* is a better term to use. Applications are made by people who are not “inspired” in the biblical sense of the word but are rather illuminated. They should not be confused with fulfillments of apocalyptic prophecies clearly identified in the texts of the Bible. Such applications can take place at the level of world and church history and also at a personal, devotional level.

One advantage of the definitions of terms proposed here is that when they are followed, the interpreter’s ideas and conclusions (*applications*) are clearly separated from the clear statements that come from the biblical text (*predictions* and *fulfill-*

•ments). All too often, especially at the level of popular presentations on prophecies, the interpreter's conclusions seem indistinguishable from the statements of the biblical text. Yet, such a distinction is not only desirable—it is mandatory. For that reason, in the present study, the term *fulfillment* is used only of the persons and events that are clearly, specifically, and directly identified as fulfillments in the biblical text. All other equations that are proposed between symbols and subsequent events are referred to as applications, whether they are made in history or in the believer's life.

Applications of Daniel's Prophecies

The history of the interpretation of Daniel's visions reveals no less than three standard approaches that scholars have taken. These approaches are usually referred to as "schools of prophetic interpretation." In the light of the discussion above, this expression may be considered a misnomer; they might better be called "schools of prophetic applications."

The proponents of the approach that is sometimes called "the preterist school" apply Daniel's visions to the situation in Judea in the second century B.C., the intertestamental period, during which pious Jews known as the Hasidim were persecuted by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes. This school maintains that historical predictions from Daniel's book relate exclusively to that time. Scholars of this persuasion remind us

that Daniel's visions were a source of hope to the believers who lived in that era—which no doubt was true.

It is, of course, an undeniable historical fact that the attempt of Antiochus [IV] to force the Jews to give up their national religion and culture, and to adopt in its place the religion, culture, and language of the Greeks, is the most significant event in Jewish history during the entire intertestament period.

The threat posed by Antiochus Epiphanes confronted the Jews with a crisis comparable to the crises precipitated by Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman, and Titus. During his brief reign of 12 years Antiochus very nearly exterminated the religion and the culture of the Jews.⁹

First Maccabees 2:59, 60 states that Daniel's story played an important role in the spiritual reform that followed the oppression described above. Yet, the applications of Daniel's prophecies should *not* be limited to the past. For this reason, "Adventists do not accept the total application of the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and Revelation to the past."¹⁰

The intertestamental application of Daniel's visions has often been combined with the presuppositions of the higher critical approach to the text of the Bible, and at times it is difficult to

separate the two.¹¹ The proponents of this combination credit the origin of Daniel's book to several anonymous authors and editors. Furthermore, they allege that at least the visionary half of the book was written in the second century B.C.

Pertinent responses to the claims made by the scholars who subscribe to the so-called Maccabean thesis on the origin of Daniel's book have not been lacking.¹² For more information on this view, see the brief discussion presented in "Approaches to Daniel's Book" in the introduction to this commentary. The intertestamental applications from the appendices in this study are all taken from the widely used commentary on Daniel by John J. Collins, a leading authority on the interpretation of biblical apocalyptic texts. The two other works that are quoted regarding this approach are the commentaries authored by Norman Porteous and John Goldingay.

The scholars who subscribe to the approach called "the futurist school" claim to take the predictive element in biblical prophecies seriously. (Thus they may also be said to be taking a "literalist" approach.) While this school maintains that some of the visions have already been fulfilled in the history of Israel and in the life of Christ, they look to the time just prior to the second coming of Christ for the fulfillment of several of the key revelations in Daniel's book. A prominent branch of this school is

known as "dispensationalism," which is best known for its "gap theory" in the application of the last of the seven weeks from Daniel 9:24-27.

In this study, the main source of the literalist type of application is the work on Daniel's book authored by John Walvoord, a leading proponent of this type of approach to the Bible and its prophecies. The two other works that are quoted in this application are the commentaries authored by Gleason Archer and Stephen Miller.

While the relevance of Daniel's revelations for the time of the end cannot be denied, the literalist approach to biblical apocalyptic prophecies is marked by a number of questionable assumptions. The reader today can find several in-depth studies that are particularly useful for providing some constructive correctives on this approach.¹³

The scholars who take the approach called "the historicist school" apply Daniel's prophecies to the time of Judah's exile and return, through the period of the Christian church, and down to the church's end-time remnant. Seventh-day Adventist interpreters have followed this approach. They "stand in continuity with the historical and premillennial interpretation of biblical apocalyptic, believing that the fulfillment of the predictions covers the entire history of pagan empires from Daniel's day down to the final setting up of God's kingdom."¹⁴ In this commentary, the application of the

prophecies to the history of the church is credited on Mervyn Maxwell's book on Daniel, *God Cares*, volume 1. Among Adventists, Maxwell was a widely accepted authority on church history, and his book presents current historicist views on Daniel. Two other works that complement Maxwell's applications are William Shea's *Daniel* and Jacques Doukhan's *Interests of Daniel*.

In commenting on the application of these three approaches to one of Daniel's prophecies, Mervyn Maxwell wrote, "In some sense or other they may all be right!"¹⁵ He was simply saying that each generation of the faithful since Daniel's time has applied Daniel's prophecies to their own times and places. However, most of the proponents of these three approaches claim that only their way of applying prophecies is correct and that all the other applications are invalid and should be rejected or ignored. And too often, interpreters of Daniel's prophecies have neglected applying them to the believer's day-to-day life. This study presents applications of Daniel's revelations both in church history and on the level of practical Christian living.

1. *Application in church history ("historicist").* Several of Daniel's visions contain long-range revelations that apply to events in the world and also to the life of the community of the faithful from Daniel's time up to the second coming of Christ. Since ancient times, interpreters have made applications

based on this approach. Doing so has made believers down through the ages aware of the relevance of Daniel's visions; they have realized that Daniel's prophecies are in the process of being fulfilled.

In making this type of application of biblical prophecies, it is essential that evidence from the text of the Bible govern the interpretation of the symbols in the visions and auditions. History books and newspaper articles are secondary. This means that the first task of every interpreter of biblical prophecy consists of letting the text and its context(s) explain its symbols. The need for this reminder is fostered by the following observation:

An unfortunate tendency is to be noted . . . among those who hold the "historicist" approach. Out of the concern to relate the prophecy to the event, they have often overlooked the reality of the biblical text. Instead of starting from the text, they have come to the text out of the historical or political event. Thus, the language of the prophet, his world of thought, his literary and historical settings have been ignored in most cases. Some have gone so far as to substitute themselves for the prophet and even guess the event to come—hence the numerous discrepancies and the strange applications which have discredited this approach.¹⁶

2. *Application in personal life.* Since prophetic visions are a part of Scripture, their message should not be presented only to provide the members of the community of faith with intellectual knowledge or to attempt to motivate them to spiritual living through fear of dire consequences. The prophets' message should also make a direct contribution to the reader's devotional life. Since Christians consider God's Word to be spiritual food, the prophetic messages should in the first place feed and edify the believers. While in the past, apocalyptic visions were seldom applied at a devotional level, some recent commentators have taken this type of application more seriously.¹⁷ This is a very positive direction in approaching Daniel's prophecies, and this study follows that same trend. It has been rightly stated that for a Christian reader, "a true understanding of Bible prophecies reveals the gospel teaching that the abiding Presence of the Saviour affords protection and deliverance from hostile foes: victory is assured through the indwelling Spirit of God."¹⁸

In contrast with the applications in church history and in personal life, the two applications that are described below namely, intertestamental (preterist) and literalist (futurist), are *not* traditionally espoused by Adventist expositors. These two types of application are included in the appendices to chapters 7-9 and 11 and 12 of Daniel to provide the

reader with a general idea of how many interpreters have applied Daniel's prophecies to intertestamental times and to the time of the end. In this way the reader will be able to compare and contrast various types of application in his or her study of Daniel.

The Little Horn in History

As has been mentioned above, for centuries and even millennia, each generation of believers has sought and often found comfort in Daniel's apocalyptic visions. Many of those faithful sincerely believed that they belonged to the last generation of God's people on earth. Often, these were people who were oppressed and even condemned to death because of their faith. The hostile powers that persecuted them seemed to act much like the anti-God power represented by the symbol of the little horn.

The little horn figures prominently in chapters 7 and 8 of Daniel. The activities of this power are described in detail in these chapters, picturing this entity as the end-time foe of God and his people. These chapters should be compared to other prophetic passages of the Bible, such as Ezekiel 38; 39. The destruction of this power parallels the end of earth's history. The list below shows how the symbol of the little horn from Daniel 7 has been applied in the history of the interpretation of Daniel's book by Jewish and Christian expositors:

Applications in History of Daniel 7's Little Horn

- 1 Antiochus Epiphanes (Porphyry, Syrian tradition, Aphrahat)
- 1 Antichrist (Hippolytus, Origen, Jerome, Augustine)
- 5 Papacy (certain medieval interpreters, certain Jewish interpreters like Abarbanel and Malbim, Martin Luther, John Knox)
- Roman Caesars (John Calvin)
5. Titus (Rashi)
- j. Muhammed, Islam, Turkish Empire (Martin Luther)
- King Charles I or Cromwell (English Puritans)

As for the historical applications of the symbol of Daniel 8's little horn, most interpreters past and present have maintained that this figure points to Antiochus Epiphanes, while some others have applied this symbol to Islam or the papacy. A good number of interpreters, such as Jerome, Augustine, and Luther, saw a dual application of this symbol in history. For such scholars, the persecution of the faithful Jews by Antiochus prefigured that which the end-time antichrist will inflict on God's church prior to Christ's second coming.

Although biblical prophecies cast light on specific historical events, in a more general way, they have a wider universal application. Since pain, suffering, and death are a part of the life of every human being, believers should

proclaim to all people on earth the message of hope that comes from God's revelations. However, it is a sad fact that religious feelings have fueled much hatred and destruction. As we survey history, we rarely find a faith group that has not demonstrated or practiced some type of religious intolerance. This is true of Christian denominations as well. As Maxwell pointed out, Protestant Christians did not learn from the failings of the medieval church.¹⁹ Nor has the Orthodox Church in the East lagged behind the oppressions and violence practiced by the church in the West.²⁰ Religious groups today still face the same challenge—the question of how to relate to other religious groups and also how to deal with dissent in their own midst. To coerce or not to coerce, that is still the question.

A Synopsis of Prophetic Symbols in Daniel

It has been a custom in commentaries on Daniel to point to the parallels between the symbols from the individual visionary chapters of the book. The following synopsis points to those parallels on the level of symbol only, in order to avoid the complications that come with various applications of the symbols in history. The reader can find the individual applications of the visions and their symbols in the sections of this commentary dealing with each of the chapters presented.

Daniel's Prophetic Symbols

Chapter 2	Chapter 7	Chapter 8	Chapters 11; 12
1. Gold	Winged lion	_____	_____
2. Silver	Bear	Ram	Persian kings
3. Bronze	Leopard	Goat	"A mighty king"
4. _____	Four heads	Four horns	Kings of north and south
5. Iron	Dreadful beast	_____	_____
6. Iron and clay	Ten horns	_____	_____
7. _____	Little horn	Little horn	"The contemptible ruler"
8. Stone	Heavenly court	Sanctuary cleansed	Rise of Michael

FOUR BEASTS AND TWO HEAVENLY BEINGS

(7:1-28)

Chapter 7 contains Daniel's first recorded revelation. This one begins the prophetic section of the book, which contains three more revelations. While the focus in the previous chapters was on kings and dreams, this text presents Daniel's own dream and his need for an interpreter. The text combines several literary genres, such as poetry and dialogue, which appear in other parts of the book as well. Chapter 7 is considered to be the center of Daniel's book and one of the summit chapters in the Bible—comparable in importance with Leviticus 16, Isaiah 40, Matthew 24, and Revelation 14. The key concept in Daniel 7 is God's judgment, which in the Bible can have both positive (cf. the name *Daniel*) and negative connotations. The psalmist's prayer "Judge me, O LORD!" (7:8) provides a good example of the positive aspect of God's judgment. According to Daniel 4, God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar turned out to be a redemptive experience be-

cause of his repentance. In Daniel 5, Belshazzar, on the other hand, refused to humble himself, and the outcome of divine judgment in his case was death and destruction.

The vision recorded in this chapter was given to Daniel in the first year of Belshazzar, who ruled over Babylon during his father's ten-year-long absence from Babylon. Since the Babylonian texts seem to tie the first year of Belshazzar to a certain "third year," some scholars date this vision to the year 553/552 B.C., which is the third year of Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father. A close examination of the original Babylonian sources for the period shows that King Nabonidus spent the last ten years of his reign in Tema, Arabia, and returned to Babylon shortly before its fall. This fact would indicate that Belshazzar's first year in power took place ten years before the fall of Babylon. Thus, the suggested date for this chapter is the year 550/549 B.C.,¹ some fifty years after the date of chapter 2.

In the very year this chapter was written, King Cyrus defeated Astyages, the Median ruler, and thus laid foundation for the world's next empire.

The document known as the "Verse Account of Nabonidus" gives a valuable insight into a major event that took place that year. This historical source describes a solemn ceremony that took place in Babylon at Nabonidus's initiative. The purpose of that ceremony was to transfer power from father to son:

After he [Nabonidus] had obtained
 what he desired, a work of utter
 deceit,
 Had built (this) abomination, a
 work of unholiness
 —when the third year was about to
 begin—
 He entrusted the "Camp" to his
 oldest (son), the first-born,
 The troops everywhere in the country
 he ordered under his (command).
 He let (everything) go, entrusted the
 kingship to him.
 And, himself, he started out for a
 long journey,
 The (military) forces of Akkad
 marching with him;
 He turned towards Tema (deep) in
 the west.²

This text, although a part of Babylon's anti-Nabonidus propaganda, describes an important historical event that signaled a change in the royal pal-

ace. Nabonidus conferred on his eldest son, the crown prince Belshazzar, important prerogatives, such as supreme command of the military forces as well as the kingship. These details are important because in chapter 5, Belshazzar is consistently referred to as "king."

Several connections are evident between this historical event and the central part of the vision in chapter 7. The transfer of power in Babylon in 549 B.C., an event of which Daniel must have been an eyewitness, served as the starting point for this revelation.³ The primary purpose of the dream was to show a future transfer of power in heaven that would have some profound effects on earth. Just as Belshazzar's coming to power signaled an end to Babylon, the coming of the humanlike person points to the beginning of God's eternal kingdom. "The literary setting of Daniel 7 is, therefore, the beginning of the end of the Babylonian Empire. . . . More is at stake [here] than the demise of Babylon."⁴

The following four-part structure may be proposed for this chapter:

1. Four beasts and a horn (7:1-8, prose)
2. *God's judgment* (7:9-14, poetry)
3. Daniel's reaction (7:15-22, prose)
4. Interpretation (7:23-28, poetry)

Two main literary genres are noticeable in the chapter: prose, which domi-

nates the text, and poetry in the verses that speak of a judgment that takes place in heaven. The chapter contains a number of echoes and allusions to the dreams and visions found in the previous chapters. "The allusions appear to be intentional, so one cannot interpret Daniel 7 without the background of the first half of the book."⁵

Four Beasts and a Horn (7:1-8)

The introduction to the chapter includes the dating of the vision supplemented by a few personal notes about Daniel. Then, having briefly referred to the scene of a restless sea and the four winds of heaven, the author rushes on to introduce the four beasts and their activities.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind while he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the summary of his dream. Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there were the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea.³Four great beasts, different from one another, came up out of the sea.

⁴The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were plucked and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human and a human mind was given to it.⁵And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and devour much flesh!⁶After that, I looked,

and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard, and on its back were four wings of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

⁷"After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and dreadful and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured (its victims), and the rest it trampled underfoot. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.⁸While I was contemplating the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were plucked up before it. In this horn were eyes like the eyes of a human and a mouth that spoke great things."

Notes

7:1 "First year of Belshazzar." As stated in the introduction to this chapter, it is best to consider this date as 550/549 B.C., or ten years before Babylon's fall. Belshazzar, son of Nabonidus, was acting as ruler of Babylon during its last years of supremacy over the world. He was between forty and fifty years old when he was granted this position. Official Babylonian sources did not date events to the reign of Belshazzar but to that of Nabonidus.

"King of Babylon." Earlier in the book, this same ruler is called *malka' kasdaya'*, "king of the Chaldeans" or "the Chaldean king" (5:30). In Daniel 1:1, Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled over the whole kingdom of Neo-Babylon, is described as *melek babel*, "king of Babylon." Since Belshazzar is introduced in the same way in this verse, his title implies that he was ruler over the entire empire and not just its capital city (Dan. 5:31).

“Had a dream.” The root of the verb *ḥ^ozâ*, “to see, to perceive,” is the same as that of the word *ḥezwê*, “visions,” that follows. Biblical prophets frequently used this verb to describe their experience of receiving divine revelations.

“A dream, and visions.” These two nouns, *ḥēlem*, “dream,” and *ḥezwê*, “visions,” are expressing a single event—the conjunction between them is probably explicative, meaning “a dream, that is, visions” (cf. Dan. 6:28). The fact that the second noun is in the plural indicates the composite nature of the vision, which is to say that there were distinct parts of the dream that followed one another—confirmed by the occurrences of the expression “in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was/were . . .” (vv. 2, 7, 13).

“Visions passed through his mind.” The expression *w^e ḥezwê rē’sēh ‘al-mišk^ebēh*, “and visions of his head [as he lay] in his bed,” is almost identical to the words that describe Nebuchadnezzar’s dream experience in Daniel 2:28.

“Lying on his bed.” Verse 2 confirms the view that the vision was given at night “when the darkness highlights fear and imagination is at its most vivid.”⁶ Zechariah, another apocalyptic prophet, also received a vision at night (1:8).

“He wrote down.” In the ancient world, writing was often viewed as a sort of authentication of a message. From the perspective of biblical writing prophets, the very mention of the recording of the dream vision legitimates the account as God’s revelation (cf. Isa. 8:1, 16; 30:8; Jer. 30:2; 36:2; 51:60; Ezek. 43:11; Hab. 2:2).

“The summary of his dream.” The expression *rē’s millîn* literally means “head of words.” “The sum of the matter” is another possible way

to translate this expression. The word “head” (i.e., the most important part of the body) is used twice in this verse, suggesting a wordplay: Of the visions that had passed through his *rē’s*, “head,” Daniel recorded only the *rē’s*, the “head” or the “substance.” A similar expression is used in Psalm 119:160, where it can be literally translated as “the sum of your words.”

7:2 “Daniel said.” The word *‘āmar*, “he said,” is the last word in this verse, and translators often leave it out. It functions like quotation marks. At this point in the chapter, there is a shift from the third person singular to the first person singular. Direct speech by Daniel dominates the visionary part of the book.

“In my vision at night.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 7:1.

“I looked.” The expression *ḥāzēh h^awēt*, which literally means “I was looking,” is found in the beginning of the transitions in the chapter. Its most complete form is found, in addition to this verse, in verses 7 and 13.

“The four winds of heaven.” In the context of the Bible, this expression refers to the four cardinal points of a compass; in other words, it means “all directions” (Jer. 49:36; Ezek. 37:9; Zech. 2:6; 6:5; Matt. 24:31). The word *š^emāyā’* “the heavens,” is sometimes used in Daniel as a euphemism for God (Dan. 4:26). In the Genesis creation story, the word *‘lōhîm*, “God, divine,” qualifies the word *rûah*, “wind, spirit,” describing either the power or the person who had an active role in the creation of the world (Gen. 1:2).

Claiming universal dominion, Mesopotamian kings called themselves rulers of “the four corners of the earth.” In the Babylonian creation

epic, the four winds were created by the sky god Anu. The same story says that the god Marduk „sed the winds of heaven to fight Tiamat.

“Stirring up.” The verb *mʿgihan*, “were stirring up,” denotes an agitating action that made the sea very rough, suggestive of a storm at sea. Certain biblical passages ascribe this type of activity to God. In Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God hovers over the waters. Ancient texts speak of the churning of the cosmic ocean that disturbs the sea monsters, which represent chaos and disorder. That may be the reason why a similar activity on God’s part is portrayed figuratively in some poetic passages in the Bible. Job, for example, says of God that “by his power he churned up the sea; / by his wisdom he cut Rahab to pieces” (Job 26:12).

“The great sea.” Especially when it is preceded by the definite article, the Hebrew equivalent of the term *yamma’rabba’*, “the great sea,” is used in the Old Testament to refer to the Mediterranean Sea (Ezek. 47:10, 15, 19, 20). Some scholars, however, have argued that the reference here is to the primeval ocean at the time of creation, called in the Bible “the great deep” (Gen. 7:11; Isa. 51:10; Amos 7:4). In that case, “the great sea” would represent the power of chaos and disorder, “a cosmic force opposed to God and to God’s order.”⁷ Given the apocalyptic genre of this text, its language has definite symbolic connotations. Thus, it is possible that the sea in this text refers to the Mediterranean but not in an exclusive way.

In the Bible, large bodies of water, whether rivers or seas, have negative connotations because they symbolize the power of the nations that were often hostile toward Israel. Similar por-

trayal of the hostile forces and God’s control over them can be found scattered in both Testaments. The origin of this imagery may be traced back to the stories of the exodus and the exile (Exod. 15:8; Pss. 46:1-6; 93:2-4; Isa. 19:5; 43:2; Rev. 17:15). It is therefore clear that in the Bible, “Daniel was not the first one to use sea imagery this way. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, Yahweh’s struggle and victory over evil is recounted as a fight against the sea and its monsters. God blasts the sea with his rebuke (Ps. 18:15); he sets a guard over the sea (Job 7:12; Jer. 5:22); he causes the sea to dry up (Nah. 1:4); he treads on the sea (Hab. 3:15); and he fights the sea monsters (Isa. 27:1).”⁸

Since verse 17 says that the four beasts are the kings or kingdoms that will rise up from the earth, then “the waters here pictured stand for the whole turbulent earth.”⁹ Isaiah 57:20 says,

The wicked are like the tossing sea,
which cannot rest,
whose waves cast up mire and mud.

Ancient Canaanite texts speak of the god Baal who succeeded in defeating Yam, the god of the sea. Daniel 7, on the other hand, teaches that God is in full control over the powers of this world.

7:3 **“Four.”** In the Bible, this number can have both literal and figurative meanings. In this context, “four” stands for the number of world kingdoms described in the chapter. Figuratively, this number expresses the idea of completeness or totality in regard to space (cf. Gen. 2:10).¹⁰ In the previous verse, for instance, the expression “the four winds of heaven” stands for “all directions.”

“Great beasts.” The dream report from this chapter begins with the images of four ferocious animals. Scholars have related this series of wild beasts to Mesopotamian and Canaanite epics. The walls of the Ishtar Gate in Babylon were decorated with representations of lions, bulls, and dragons, which signified the protection of the city by the gods Ishtar, Adad, and Marduk, respectively. Moreover, 120 lion statues lined both sides of Procession Street, which ran through the city center. The creation epic known as Enuma Elish speaks of Babylon’s patron god Marduk (Bel), who, with the help of the four winds, defeats a sea monster and is in the end proclaimed king of all the gods.

The Bible says that God created animals on the sixth day and made them subject to the authority he gave to human beings (Gen. 1:28). However, as a result of the fall, the human race lost this divinely ordained dominion (Gen. 3:13-15). Figuratively, the beast stands for uncontrolled power that is often portrayed as a negative type of force (Deut. 8:15). Here, their coming out of the sea “reveals their nature as opponents of God.”¹¹ At the end of history, God will judge the oppressive sea monsters such as Leviathan, *Tannin* (Isa. 27:1), and also Rahab (Isa. 51:9).

“Out of the sea.” See the Notes on Daniel 7:2. The power of the nations represented by “the great sea” in the previous verse stands in parallel with the dominion of the unclean, hybrid beasts introduced in this verse. Verse 17 says that the kingdoms that the beasts represent originate from the earth.

7:4 “Like.” The importance of the comparative preposition *kē*, “as, like,” in this chapter

should not be overlooked. The beasts that the author saw had the likeness or semblance of certain animals that were known to the readers, yet they were *not* identical to them. The same may be said of the humanlike person that is described in verse 13 in this chapter.

“A lion.” The Aramaic word *’aryēh*, “lion,” describes “one of the largest and strongest carnivores, dangerous not only to domestic cattle, but also to man”¹² (cf. 1 Kings 13:24; 20:36; 2 Kings 17:25). Its basic qualities combine majestic appearance with swift movements and fearlessness. In ancient times, the lion was a proverbial symbol of majesty and strength. Proverbs 30:30 describes it as “mighty among beasts, / who retreats before nothing” (cf. Judg. 14:18).

In the Bible, the lion is used as both a positive and a negative symbol of strength. Thus, Revelation 5:5 describes Christ as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” while 1 Peter 5:8 talks about Satan as “a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” Jeremiah compares the threat posed by the people of Babylon to the roaring of young lions (51:38), while their king Nebuchadnezzar is likened to a lion that crushed the bones and devoured Israel (Jer. 50:17; cf. 4:7). In his turn, God will come out of Jordan’s thickets like a lion to expel the Babylonians from his land (Jer. 50:44; cf. 49:19).

“The wings of an eagle.” The Aramaic word *nēšar* is best rendered as “imperial eagle,” which in the context of the Bible denotes the beauty and majesty of a bird of prey. Jeremiah prophesied about the coming destruction of the proud people of Edom brought about by the Babylonians, whom he compared with a lion and eagle (Jer. 49:19-22; cf. Lam. 4:19; Hos. 8:1; Hab. 1:8).

Ezekiel also likened the same power to “a great eagle with powerful wings” (17:3).

“Plucked.” The plucking of the wings may be a sign of a loss of power and ability to soar, hence a defeat. Commentators apply this picture to either Nebuchadnezzar’s mental illness or to the less glorious rule of Neo-Babylon following the death of this king who was the empire builder.

“Lifted from the ground.” This phrase may be understood in two ways. One is that the front feet of the animal were lifted up, and the other that the four feet with the animal itself were lifted up above the ground. The first view is more attractive, because the idea that the animal stood up on its hind legs and took the standing position of a human being is better supported by the context (see the *Notes* on the words that follow). Some interpreters see Nebuchadnezzar’s restoration behind this picture.

“Stood on two feet like a human.” In this passage, “two feet,” which normally characterizes human beings, stand in contrast to the “four feet” of an animal. Some scholars believe that this phrase should be understood as a parallel expression with the statements found in verse 5, where the second beast “was raised up on one of its sides,” and with verse 6, which says the third beast “was given authority to rule.” “The upright position is symbolic of power and dominion.”¹³ (For a description of Nebuchadnezzar’s God-given, universal and supreme power, see Jer. 27:6, 7; Dan. 5:18, 19).

“And a human mind was given to it.” The original text uses here the Aramaic word *l'bab*, “heart.” In the Bible, the heart stands for the mind and the human ability to make rational decisions. Animals were typically portrayed as irratio-

nal. (One exception is Isa. 1:3.) The transformation described here is a reversal of what happened to King Nebuchadnezzar when he was given the heart of an animal (Dan. 4:16) and the look of an eagle (4:33).

7:5 “Like a bear.” The second beast resembled a bear, an animal that is often mentioned in the Bible together with the lion (e.g., 1 Sam. 17:37). “The Syrian bear which today may be found in the mountains of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon is brown in color and may reach a length of two metres and a weight of up to 250 kilos. . . . The bear may be dangerous to man if provoked or ‘robbed of her cubs’ (2 S 17.8).”¹⁴

“Raised up on one side.” The meaning of the expression *w'lištar-ḥad h'qimat*, “and on one side it was raised up,” is not totally clear. It may be understood either as “standing on his hind legs” poised to attack, or, as a deformed animal and thus “half crouching.” The command “Get up!” could be understood as “Stand up straight!” The Aramaic word *h'qimat*, “it was raised up,” is also used in the previous verse, where it is said of the winged lion that “it stood” on two feet. Another suggestion is that the bear was limping because one of its legs was shorter and thus it lacked balance.

“Three ribs.” The impression made by this picture is that the bear has eaten another creature and some of its bones are still in the mouth of this “insatiable monster.” Some have understood the number “three” literally, taking the ribs here to stand for the nations conquered by Medo-Persia: Lydia, Babylon, and Egypt. In certain prophetic passages in the Bible, the number three (or one-third) is sometimes associated with the concept of either total victory or total

destruction (1 Chron. 21:10-12; Ezek. 5:2, 12; Zech. 13:8; Rev. 8:7-12; 9:18; 12:4; 16:19). In verse 7 of this chapter, two sets of “threes” are used to describe the appearance and the destructive activities of the fourth beast.

“Between its teeth.” In verses 7 and 19, the fourth beast is said to have had “iron teeth.”

“It was told, ‘Get up.’” Literally, the text says *w^kēn ‘ām^erîn lah qûmî*, “and thus they said to it: ‘Get up!’” The person or persons who issued the command are not identified. In Hebrew and Aramaic, the third person plural often expresses the passive form of the verb. The command could be understood as “Stand up straight!” or “Stand up completely!” because it has already been said that the bear was “raised up on one of its sides.”

7:6 “I looked.” See the Notes on Daniel 1:2.

“Like a leopard.” Scholars are not sure if the Aramaic word *n^emar* means “leopard” or “panther.” The presence of the comparative particle in front of the word leads to a conclusion that identification of beasts is not what is most important. Because of its Hebrew cognate, this word is often translated as “leopard.” The leopard is one of the most dangerous beasts of prey, both to other animals and to humans. Its lurking, its noiseless movements, and its unexpected attack instill terror (Hos. 13:7).

“Four wings of a bird.” Wings stand for speed, and four wings represent extraordinary speed (Ezek. 1:6). See the Notes on Daniel 7:3 and 7:4.

“Four heads.” For the symbolic meaning of the number four, see the Notes on Daniel 7:3 and 7:4. In this context, the noun *rē’sîn*, “heads,” stands for *šolṭān*, “authority to rule.” The fact that the beast has four heads means that it “is looking

in all directions for prey.”¹⁵ The same symbol can also represent “the authority to rule over the whole world,” a concept found in the words that follow.

“It was given authority to rule.” This statement may be parallel with the one in verse 4, “it stood on two feet like a human.”

7:7 “In my vision at night.” See the Notes on Daniel 7:2.

“Terrifying and dreadful and very powerful.” The first two words *d^ehîlâ*, “terrifying,” and *‘ê^mtānî*, “dreadful,” are synonyms, while the third, *taqqîpā’yattîrā’*, “very powerful,” describes the natural physical strength of this beast.

“Iron teeth.” Iron is related in the Bible to concepts of strength and destruction: “You will rule them with an iron scepter; / you will dash them to pieces like pottery” (Ps. 2:9). The fourth kingdom from chapter 2 is said to be “strong as iron” (Dan. 2:40).

“It crushed.” The Aramaic root *dqq*, “to break into pieces,” is also used to describe the destruction brought about by the iron kingdom—“as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others” (Dan. 2:40)—and in Daniel 6:24, where the lions crush the bones of Daniel’s enemies.

“And the rest.” The Aramaic word *š^e’ārā’* is a cognate of the Hebrew word *š^e’ār*, “a remnant,” and is used often in the books of the prophets.

“Trampled.” The verb *rāp^esâ*, “trampled,” is used in Daniel 2:34, 45 and 6:24 with the meaning of “smashed,” “broke into pieces” and “crushed.” Some scholars have suggested that this mysterious creature is like an elephant that breaks things into pieces and then tramples on whatever is left.

“Different.” Daniel’s difficulty in trying to relate this monster to a known species may have been due to its hybrid nature, a phenomenon that was not uncommon in the ancient Near East. It is possible that this animal resembled the composite dragon-beast that in Babylonian art is consistently shown to accompany the god Marduk. The head of this scaly coated monster is like that of double-horned viper, “the front legs are feline, the hind legs end in scaly claws of a bird of prey and the tail terminates in a scorpion sting.”¹⁶ The beast in this verse differs from the first three by the magnitude of its destructive power and also by the division of its power, symbolically represented through the ten horns. In the vision of chapter 2, the fourth kingdom differs from the previous one because it was a *p^elîgâ*, “divided,” kingdom (Dan. 2:41).

“Ten horns.” In the Bible, a horn stands for strength or power—either political (kingship) or religious (part of an altar). A horn is a symbol of a person’s honor on the one hand (1 Sam. 2:1; Ps. 112:9), or of sinful pride on the other (Ps. 75:5). The author of Psalm 92 says,

You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox;
fine oils have been poured upon me.
My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries;
my ears have heard the rout of my
wicked foes (Ps. 92:10, 11).

In biblical passages, the number ten (or a tenth) is often used as “a representative number for the corporate whole.”¹⁷ Scholars have also seen the concept of completeness in the symbolism expressed by this number: “Ten is a number of rounding off, completeness, exclusive-

ness, and of the extreme exhaustibleness.”¹⁸ In this verse, the number ten is found in the context of the division of a unit.

7:8 “Contemplating.” The participial form of the verbal root *škl*, “to observe,” conveys the idea of looking intently at an object; hence it is rendered “considering” or “examining.” This is much stronger than the expression *hāzēh h^awêt*, “I was watching,” that is used elsewhere in this chapter. Its Hebrew equivalent is used in Daniel 9:22, where Gabriel comes to make Daniel “wise,” and in 12:3, which says that the wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens.

“A little one.” The original Aramaic word *z^e’êrâ*, “small,” is a feminine adjective that qualifies the basic difference between this and the other ten horns. Although small in its beginning, this horn speaks “great things,” and according to the evidence presented in the following chapter, it grows to be the tallest of all (Dan. 8:9-11). Thus, it has been correctly observed that the adjective “‘little’ is slighting.”¹⁹

“Three.” For a figurative meaning of the number three or one-third, see the *Notes* on Daniel 7:5. Rounded off, three is one-third of ten.

“Were plucked up.” The verb *’et^aqarâ*, “uprooted, plucked,” in the original text is in the passive form, so the agent of the action is not specified here. Based on verse 24, which says, **he [the king represented by the little horn] will put down three kings**, some commentators consider the little horn to be the agent.

“Eyes of a human.” In the Bible, eyes symbolize intelligence (2 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 119:18; Matt. 6:22; Rev. 5:6). Zechariah 4:10 says that God’s eyes “range throughout the earth.” The “eyes of a man” in this context should be related

to pride because of the parallel expression that follows. The Bible associates the concept of pride and haughtiness with the eyes. The Lord hates “haughty eyes, / a lying tongue” (Prov. 6:16, 17; cf. Isa. 2:11; 5:15; Ps. 101:5). The qualification “of a human” points to this power’s human personality, a counterfeit of the “one like a human being” who is introduced in verse 13 below.

“Spoke great things.” The original text says *rabr̄bān*, “great things,” used here in a negative sense and indicating pride and arrogance. The Hebrew equivalent expression is used in Psalm 12:3 to describe proud words coming from a flattering tongue. The precise object of this horn’s verbal attacks is identified in verse 25 below. Scholars interpret this symbol as the little horn’s power of speech. The greatness of the words in this passage stands in contrast with the smallness of the horn.

Exposition (7:1-8)

7:1 The importance of the dating of this vision and how the way in which Daniel indicated the date points to the message of the vision is discussed in the introduction to the chapter. The central part of the vision (vv. 9-14) is closely related to the important event that took place in the year 549 B.C., when King Nabonidus handed his rule over to his eldest son, the crown prince. The Babylonian sources tell us that during that ceremony Belshazzar was made the chief commander of the imperial forces and that he also received the kingship. The only other person referred to in the book as *King of Babylon* is Nebuchadnezzar

the empire builder. He stands in contrast with Belshazzar, Babylon’s last king. Thus, Daniel’s dream was “occasioned by the kind of negative political rule that was typified by the story of Belshazzar.”²⁰ In the vision of Daniel 7, the Ancient of Days takes the dominion away from the powers of this world because they use it only to oppress, exploit, and destroy. The authority to rule is then transferred to a humanlike being who will be worshiped by all people, nations, and tribes and whose kingship will last forever.

The introduction to the vision says that Daniel wrote down what he saw. One reason he did so was, to borrow Isaiah’s words, so “that for the days to come / it may be an everlasting witness” (Isa. 30:8). Yet the seer recorded only *the summary*, the most important facts that he saw in his dream. This is useful for people to keep in mind when they read the vision. They may not find in the text all the details they would like to know, such as a clear identification of the powers that are symbolically represented. The Aramaic word *rēš* used in this verse may be understood as either “head” or “substance” of the words that Daniel recorded. It is also possible to understand the whole expression as saying “the beginning of the words,” because this chapter closes with the words *this is the end of the revelation* (v. 28).

7:2 The first scene presents a storm on the restless sea. This *great sea* may refer

to the Mediterranean, yet because the literary form in this chapter is apocalyptic, this symbol should not be restricted to its literal sense. In the light of biblical symbolism, this sea should also be understood as the ever-changing Gentile world in which the future looks unpredictable. Verse 17 explains the symbol of **the great sea** as "the earth" from which the kingdoms emerge. If these two contrasting expressions were used together in order to express the concept of totality (merism), then **the great sea** in this passage is symbolic of the entire earth and of all the peoples who inhabit it. In biblical symbolism, large bodies of water are viewed negatively. The uncontrolled force of rushing water, whether in great rivers, lakes, or seas, is often symbolic of enemies who threaten to flood the land and invade it. Large bodies of water are also portrayed as the abode of great monsters, such as Leviathan, that threaten to come out and destroy the earth and its inhabitants (Isa. 27:1). Only God can control such an enormous power. Said the prophet Isaiah,

Oh, the raging of many nations—
they rage like the raging sea!

Oh, the uproar of the peoples—
they roar like the roaring of
great waters!

Although the peoples roar like the
roar of surging waters,
when he rebukes them they flee
far away,

driven before the wind like chaff on
the hills,
like tumbleweed before a gale
(Isa. 17:12, 13).

When the term **the great sea** is interpreted universally, then it stands for *haggoyim*, "the nations" of the world. The storm on the sea is caused by the winds of heaven. They are four in number, meaning they come from "all directions," which communicates the idea of universality. Jeremiah 49:36 refers to the same symbol as it describes God's judgment on Elam:

"I will bring against Elam the four
winds

from the four quarters of the
heavens;

I will scatter them to the four winds,
and there will not be a nation
where Elam's exiles do not go."

The fact that the four winds originate from heaven leads to the conclusion that the events on earth are *not* outside of control of the Creator God. The reader is reminded that at Creation, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen. 1:2). The Song at the Sea suggests that wind was God's most important weapon against the Egyptian army (Exod. 15:8, 10). Jonah 1:4 says "the LORD sent a great wind on the sea," resulting in a violent sea storm. A number of other biblical passages claim that God

often uses wind as a means to attain his ends (Gen. 8:1; Exod. 10:13-19; 14:21; 15:10; Num. 11:31; 1 Kings 18:45; 19:11, etc.). Biblical prophets spoke of God's direct involvement in the political events on earth. Thus, regarding Babylon's fall, Jeremiah declared, "The LORD has stirred up the kings of the Medes, / because his purpose is to destroy Babylon" (51:11). There are also, on the other hand, biblical passages that speak of God's angels "holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree" (Rev. 7:1).

7:3 In the beginning of the vision, Daniel sees **four great beasts** that come **out of the sea**. The first three beasts resemble known species from the animal world of Daniel's time. As Daniel introduces them individually, he uses the comparative preposition **like** to show that he is using the language of analogy. The fourth beast is unique in appearance, and the description of its appearance and activities is more detailed. The story of Creation in Genesis 1 says that God created the animals on the sixth day, while he made *hattanninim*, "the great creatures" of the sea, on the fifth day (Gen. 1:21). All the things that God created were very good and "according to their kinds" (Gen. 1:25), yet, the beasts in Daniel 7 show some defects, such as "being raised up on one side and having multiple heads or multiple horns."²¹

After God created human beings, :: gave them dominion over "every living creature" in the sea, air, and on nt ground (Gen. 1:28). According to cc story of the Garden of Eden, an animal deceived Adam and Eve, so humans i: this God-given authority (Gen. 3:13-1 ~ - This may be the reason why, in the r ble, beasts often stand for unrestrained force and are viewed negatively (Deu: 8:15). This is even more characteristic c: the animals that do not appear to fit the known created species. "Since as a whole they correspond to no earthly creature but are bizarre combination of know-beasts, they assume an otherworldly and awful aspect. They are suitable, therefore, to represent powers that are both this-worldly and cosmic."²²

A valid proposal regarding the background to the imagery used in this chapter is that the vision portrays a replay or the story of Creation from Genesis 1. Elements common to both Genesis 1 and Daniel 7 include large bodies of water whose surface is rough (Gen. 1:2 Dan. 7:2), the appearance of animal (Gen. 1:20-25; Dan. 7:3-7), follower by the appearance of human (like being(s) (Gen. 1:26, 27; Dan. 7:13 and the granting of authority to the human (like) being(s) (Gen. 1:28; Dan, 7:14). The beasts portrayed in Daniel ; vision receive their power from God but seem to step outside of God's control when they oppress and ruin the res: of God's creation on earth. "Nothing

less than world order is at stake as creation seems to become undone."²³ For that reason God himself promises to judge and defeat the wild beasts at the end of time (Isa. 27:1).

The symbolism of wild beasts used in this chapter is not without a parallel in the Bible. On the subject of oppression, for example, Proverbs 28:15 says, "Like a roaring lion or a charging bear / is a wicked man ruling over a helpless people." The dominant theme of Daniel 7, however, is God's judgment. In Amos, the divine judgment is portrayed through attacks by a lion, a bear, and a snake (Amos 5:19). In elaborating on this theme, the prophet Hosea warned Israel of the coming divine judgment through words that instill terror because they portray four unclean and blood-thirsty animals seemingly unrestrainedly attacking defenseless human beings:

"So I will come upon them like a lion,
like a leopard I will lurk by the
path.
Like a bear robbed of her cubs,
I will attack them and rip them
open.
Like a lion I will devour them;
a wild animal will tear them apart"
(Hosea 13:7, 8).

In this passage God warns the people of Israel in the first person in order to emphasize the idea of his direct involvement in the execution of the judgment.

The word "like" occurs four times in this text. Similarly, in Daniel 7, the first three beasts are compared to animal species by the use of the same comparative preposition. The fourth beast in Daniel is without a parallel from nature, while Hosea speaks of a lionlike "wild animal" without further specification. Also, Hosea's sequence of beasts differs slightly from Daniel's lion-bear-leopard series.

The beasts are said to be **four** in number. In the biblical context, this number may be either literal or symbolic, depending on the literary form of the passage in which it occurs. The literal meaning of the number **four** in this verse is supported by the fact that four beasts are introduced and described in the verses that follow. For that reason, in the *Applications* section of this study, they are identified as four kingdoms. However, given the fact that biblical apocalyptic texts abound in symbols, a figurative meaning of this number is also possible. As a figure, **four** expresses the idea of completeness. This is clear from the previously used expression **the four winds of heaven** (v. 2). Thus, while the four beasts represent four specific empires that rise to power and control the earth,²⁴ figuratively, they portray the totality of the world's empires from the beginning to the end of history.

7:4 The first beast is compared to **a lion** that has the **wings of an eagle**. In the ancient world, these two creatures

were proverbial of beauty, majesty, strength, and swiftness. In his lament over the deaths of King Saul and his son Jonathan, David compared the two men with eagles and lions: " "They were swifter than eagles, / they were stronger than lions' " (2 Sam. 1:23). And Jeremiah compared the Babylonian invasion of the land of Edom with the attack of a lion and an eagle (Jer. 49:19-22). Pictures of winged lions were common in ancient Mesopotamian art. There is very little doubt that the wings here stand for speed combined with the terms that represent destructive forces. The prophecy of Habakkuk describes the speed of the Babylonian army in the following words:

"Their horses are swifter than leopards,
fiercer than wolves at dusk.
Their cavalry gallops headlong;
their horsemen come from afar.
They fly like a vulture swooping to
devour;
they all come bent on violence.
Their hordes advance like a desert wind
and gather prisoners like sand"
(Hab. 1:8, 9).

Although Daniel 7 does not identify the lionlike beast portrayed there with the Neo-Babylonian Empire in an explicit way, biblical evidence, especially from the prophetic books, strongly points in that direction.

The plucking of this animal's wings symbolizes the eventual loss of speed in

conquering the world. Furthermore, the verse states that the beast **was lifte: from the ground so that it stood on tu : feet** and was given **a human mind**. The reader learns that in the end, "the first of the creatures is the most human."²⁵ According to Genesis 1, both animals and humans were created on the sixth day of the Creation week. The Bible contains stories of animals acting human (cf. Balaam's donkey in Num. 22:28). Daniel 4 speaks of Nebuchadnezzar's beastlike appearance and behavior, as well as his eventual return to a normal human state. Possible connections between Daniel 7:4 and chapter 4, which speaks of Nebuchadnezzar's illness, are discussed in the *Applications* part below. Some interpreters offer a different view suggesting that the giving of **a human mind** stands for "the succession of weak-hearted rulers" on the throne of Babylon following Nebuchadnezzar's reign.²⁶

7:5 The bear's coming to power is described by the same passive form or the verb used of the first beast. The passive verb form suggests that the power or the beasts was not their original prerogative but something that ultimately belongs to God. Since the lion and the bear are two of the largest and strongest animals of prey, they are often mentioned together in biblical texts. Addressing King Saul, David said, " "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philis-

tine' " (1 Sam. 17:37; cf. Amos 5:19). The first command given to the bear could be rendered "Stand up straight!" (Cf. Revelation 6:1-6, where the four creatures around God's throne call on the four horses to "Come!" onto the world's scene.)

The **three ribs** seen **between its teeth** portray graphically the destructive behavior of this beast that has just devoured another creature and in whose mouth are still found some bones of the victim. Amos pictures a shepherd who ~ 'saves from the lion's mouth / only two leg bones or a piece of an ear' " (3:12). Although the number three can be used in a positive sense in some biblical passages, elsewhere, "three" and "a third" are associated with destruction. The dragon in Revelation 12:4, for example, with his tail "swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth." The second command given to this animal is " 'Devour much flesh!' " This indicates that under the dominion of this beast, destruction is ongoing and progressive. Only the rise of a subsequent beast can stop the devastating activity of this force. The Talmud connects the Persian Empire with the symbol of a bear because its people "eat and drink like a bear, are fleshly as a bear, overgrown with hair like a bear, and are restless as a bear."²

7:6 If the pair of wings of the lionlike animal speaks of the speed of its conquests, **the four wings** of the leopardlike

animal suggest that it will conquer the world even more quickly. Its **four heads** symbolize its dominion stretching to all four directions of the compass. The beast **was given the authority to rule** over the whole world. The **four heads** should not be viewed as representing a division in this power that results in weakness—as is the case with the fourth beast, where there is a conflict between the horns (7:8) and between the iron and the clay in chapter 2 (w. 41-43).

7:7 The author, who has rushed over the first three animals, slows down in his description of the fourth. Unlike the first three beasts, which resembled known species, the fourth one looks to the seer like a hybrid monster. As one scholar said, "It defies any zoological category."²⁸ Drawing on an analogy with Hosea 13:8, one may conclude that this wild animal was somewhat lionlike. Revelation 13:2 describes the beast that came out of the sea in the following way: "The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion." A number of negative terms are used to portray the fourth beast's destructive activities: terror, **iron teeth**, trampling **underfoot**, etc. While the first three beasts are described by passive forms of verbs such as "lifted," "given," "raised," and "told," active forms of verbs such as **crushed**, **devoured**, and **trampled** express the destructive activities of the fourth beast.²⁹

Just as in the vision of chapter 2, here the fourth symbol is characterized by a division of power—a weakness that eventually results in internal tensions and conflicts. The picture of the **ten horns** on the head of the beast stands for a division of power into a number of smaller entities. The extent of this division matches the extent of the empire represented by the beast. Since in the Bible the number ten is sometimes associated with the concept of division of a complete unit (Lev. 27:30; Deut. 4:13, 14; Matt. 25:1; Luke 19:13, 17; Rev. 17:12), the ten horns symbolize this kingdom's division into many smaller entities rather than standing for a centralized concentration of power.

7:8 Daniel's attention is next directed toward the last symbol of power whose activities anticipate God's judgment. The beginning stage of this power is so insignificant that it is likened to only a part of an animal, a horn. This horn seemed small and **came up** among the other horns. In the process of becoming prominent, this power proceeds to "subdue" others (v. 24). The number three is used here in a context of destruction just as in verse 5 of this chapter. The horn is said to have **human** eyes and the ability to speak **great** words. The symbol of (divine) eyes is sometimes used in the Bible to convey the concept of intelligence, while haughty eyes may stand for pride, which is the meaning intended in this

text. Isaiah looked forward to the day when

man will be brought low
and mankind humbled,
the eyes of the arrogant humbled
(Isa. 5:15; cf. Isa. 2:11; Ps. 101:5)

The expression **the eyes of a humar** may also be related to the persecuting activity of this power—activity that further described in the interpretation of the vision (v. 25). The parallel statement, **a mouth that spoke great things** is later explained as an activity directed against "the Most High." The two concepts, blasphemy and persecution, that are so characteristic of this power's activity are only briefly alluded to here but further expounded in the interpretation of the vision. Finally, it is worth noticing that although the little horn has the eyes and mouth of a human, it contrasts strongly with the **one like a human being** (v. 13) seen in the same vision.

God's Judgment (7:9-14)

Most of this passage is poetry that describes a judgment scene that takes place in heaven. (It is surprising that some modern translations do not indent verses 13 and 14 as they do other poetic passages.) Inserted between this passage's two poetic sections is a brief description of the end of earthly powers that shows the impact the judgment in heaven has on this world.

***9"As I looked, thrones were cast,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.
His clothes were as white as snow;
the hair of his head was white like pure
wool.
His throne was flaming with fire,
and its wheels were all ablaze.
"A river of fire was flowing,
coming forth before him.
Thousands times thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood
before him.
The court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.***

***"7,hen I watched because of the sound of the
great words the horn was speaking. I kept looking
until the (fourth) beast was slain and its body de-
stroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. "As for
the other (three) beasts, they had been stripped
of their authority to rule, but were allowed to live
for an appointed period of time.***

***13"ln my vision at night I looked,
and there before me was one like a
human being,
coming with the clouds of the sky.
He approached the Ancient of Days
and was led into his presence.
"He was given dominion, glory, and kingdom;
all peoples, nations, and men of every
language should worship him.
His dominion is an eternal dominion that will
not pass away,
and his kingdom is one that will never
be destroyed."***

Notes

7:9 "Thrones." In Aramaic, the word *korsawan*, "thrones," is indefinite and in the plural. The plural has been explained either as the plural of majesty or as indicating that more than one person is presiding over this judgment. Certain Jewish traditions saw in this picture two thrones, the first for justice and the second for charity,³⁰ or one for God and the other for King David (cf. Ps. 110:1). Several New Testament passages portray Jesus Christ after his resurrection as seated on God's right side (Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). In some biblical passages, the saints are granted the unique privilege of sitting in judgment at God's side (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 3:21; 20:4). It is noteworthy that the second occurrence of the word "throne" in this verse is in the singular. It clearly refers to God's throne.

"Were cast." The basic meaning of the Semitic root *rmh* is "to throw." It is used in Daniel 3 of the three Hebrews being thrown into the fiery furnace (3:6, 11, 15, 20-24). Also, in chapter 6, it is used of Daniel's being cast into the lions' den (6:7, 12, 16, 24). In the Song at the Sea, the Hebrew equivalent of this verb is used to say that the Lord hurled the Egyptian army and its chariots into the sea (Exod. 15:1, 21). Thus, it is theoretically possible that this verse is saying that oppressive powers occupied the thrones (including the thrones of the ten kings) and are then *fmiw*, "overthrown."³¹ In that case, this verse serves as a summary statement of the whole vision of divine judgment, with Daniel saying, "As I looked, the thrones [of the beasts] were overthrown because [the explicative *vav*] an Ancient of Days took his seat." Beginning a narrative

with a summary statement is a common practice in the Bible (cf. Gen. 1:1).

"The Ancient of Days." *Jhe* title *'attiqyomin*, "Ancient of Days," is used indefinitely here, but it has the definite article in verses 13 and 22 of this chapter. The title describes One who is eternal and whose longevity and experience instill a trust that his decisions are wise and just. In ancient Canaanite texts, the supreme god El is called "father of years."

"Took his seat." *in* biblical times, this was the position of authority (Ps. 110:1; Matt. 5:1; Mark 16:19).

"As white as snow... white like pure wool." Figurative language is used here to say "extremely white." In the Bible, whiteness often symbolizes purity and righteousness. Isaiah 1:18b says,

"Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool."

The word "snow" can describe whiteness in a negative sense (Exod. 4:6; Num. 12:10) and also a positive sense (Isa. 1:18; Matt. 28:3; Rev. 1:14).

"The hair of his head." Based on this passage, the Talmudic sages concluded that God's hair is black as that of a young man when he goes to war, but it is white as snow when he sits in judgment (cf. Rev. 1:14).³²

"His throne." The second occurrence of this noun in this verse clearly refers to God's throne. Here, it is definite and is used in the singular.³³

"Fire." The word *riur*, "fire," that is used in this and the following verse differs from the

word used in verse 11. This word is related to the concept of "light" and "brightness" in the Bible. The symbol of fire is frequently used in the Bible for God's presence and his holiness (Gen. 15:7; Exod. 3:2; 19:18; Deut. 4:11, 33; Ps. 97:1-4; Heb. 12:29; Rev. 1:14).

"Its wheels." *in* the ancient Near East, thrones were movable—the judgment seats had wheels. (Hebrew *merkaba*, Ezek. 1:15, 26; 10:2). This wheeled throne probably is related to the concept of a divine chariot that was widespread in the ancient Near East (Ps. 68:17).

7:10 **"A river of fire."** While Psalm 46:4 mentions "a river whose streams make glad the court of God," the book of Revelation speaks of "the lake of fire" in which the wicked will die the eternal death (19:20; 20:14; cf. Ps. 50:3).

"Before him." *Jhe* word *q^odamdhi* could also be translated "before it," meaning from before the throne. If it is referring to God in a reverent way, then the whole expression could be rendered as "coming out from him" that is, from the Ancient of Days (cf. Lev. 9:24).

"Thousands times thousands... ten thousand times ten thousand." A literary figure known as "numerical progression" is used here to describe the totality of God's army, which is without number (Num. 10:36; Deut. 33:2). Other biblical terms describing God's ministering angels in the Bible are "armies" or "hosts" or "myriads of holy ones" (Deut. 33:2). In Old Testament times, when the people went to war, they were described as the "thousands of Israel." In a number of places in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *'elep* is used to denote a group of a thousand either in a military or a tribal sense. Roland de Vaux said, "When the people take up arms

they are referred to as the 'thousands of Israel' (Nb 31:5; Jos 22:21,30; Jg 5:8). These units were commanded by a 'leader of a thousand', *sar 'elep* (1 S 17:18; 18:13).³⁴

"Attended him." The word *fsamm'sunneh* can also be translated as "served him." In the Bible, serving God is synonymous with worshiping him (Dan. 3:12).

"Stood before him." In Bible times, standing before someone expressed readiness to serve that person (1 Kings 10:8). The parallel statement "attended him" that is found in the previous line reinforces this concept. Daniel 1:5 says that the four young Hebrews were to be educated in Babylon for three years and then, literally, "they were to stand before the king," which means they were "to enter the king's service."

"Satin judgment." See the *Notes* on Daniel 7:9. This statement means that the court proceedings began.

"The books." in the original text, this plural noun, *siprm*, "scrolls, books," is indefinite. Modern translations add the definite article to this word based on the understanding of the people of antiquity that all the deeds of human beings were carefully recorded in books kept in heaven. The same books are said to contain the destinies of all people (Exod. 32:32; Pss. 56:8; 69:28; Jer. 17:1; Mai. 3:16; Rev. 20:12).

7:11 **"The great words."** See the *Notes* on Daniel 7:8.

"The horn." That is, the little horn.

"The (fourth) beast." The last—or fourth—beast is the first one to be destroyed. In the vision of chapter 2, the stone strikes the statue on its iron and clay feet.

"Body." In Daniel 3:27, 28, the noun *g^esem*,

"body," is also used in the context of a punishment by burning in fire. Since the author is emphasizing the destruction of the fourth beast by order of the court, he does not specify how and by whom it was slain.

"Fire." Biblical prophetic passages speak about God's end-time punishment of the sea monsters that represent the earthly powers hostile toward God and his people (Isa. 27:1; 51:9,10). In this text, after a general statement on the destruction of the fourth beast, a further statement specifies the means by which the punishment was carried out. The word 'essa', "fire," is not the same word as the one used in the description of God's throne in verses 9 and 10. Psalm 97:3 says that fire coming out from God's throne consumes his foes. For another case of punishment by burning with fire, see Daniel 3:11. In the end, Revelation's beast is destroyed in fire (19:20; 20:15).

7:12 **"The other (three) beasts."** Called "a flashback to the past,"³⁵ this verse intends to say that the first three beasts seen in the vision were defeated but not destroyed right away.

"An appointed period of time." Two different words for "time" are used in the original, *fman*, "a fixed point in time," and *'iddan*, "a period of time." Combined, they express the idea of a period of time that ends at an appointed time (hendiadys). In other words, the destruction of the first three beasts is only delayed, not foregone. The author is making the point that the beasts stand for rulers who "are creatures of time; transient, doomed to undergo the death they inflict on others."³⁶

7:13 **"In my vision.."** See the *Notes* on Daniel 7:2. This is the third and last occurrence of this

long introductory phrase in this chapter. It is also found in verse 2, where it introduces the whole vision, and in verse 7, where the fourth beast is introduced. The scene described in this and the following verse is considered to be the climax of the entire vision.

"One like a human being." The Aramaic phrase *bar ʿenas*, "a son of man," has been the subject of numerous studies. Together with its Hebrew and Greek equivalents, it appears about two hundred times in the original texts of the Bible, with almost half of the occurrences found in the Gospels. The expression here is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *ben-'adām*, "a son of man," a title that is used in parallelism with the noun *'adam*, "a human." Psalm 8:4 says, "What is man that you are mindful of him, / the son of man that you care for him?" (cf. Num. 23:19; Isa. 56:2). In the next chapter, Daniel is called *ben-'adām*, "son of man" by an angel (8:17). The same Hebrew expression is found in the book of Ezekiel at least ninety-two times. There it always refers to Ezekiel himself.

Technically, the first noun in this expression, *bar*, "son," is functioning as a noun of relationship (*nomen relationis*). As such, it should not be translated literally ("son of man" is "a literalistic Semitism"³⁷), but rather as identifying an individual who belongs to a group. Thus, a better translation would be "a member of the human family" (cf. Jer. 49:18), "a humanlike being," or simply the "Human One."³⁸ Other gender-inclusive translations of this title include "Child of Humanity" or simply "Human Being."

The comparative particle *lf*, "as, like," is important here, since the person introduced is only likened to a human being but should not

be limited to that category. In contrast to the earthly kingdoms that are beastlike, this being is humanlike. His coming corresponds to the stone that was cut from the mountain in chapter 2. Most Jewish interpreters from the past understood this figure to be the Messiah. Other identifications of this being that have been proposed include the angel Gabriel, the high priest Onias III, Judas Maccabaeus, Daniel, and the people of Israel collectively. In the Synoptic Gospels, "Son of Man" is Jesus Christ's favorite title for himself. In Matthew 25:31, he is quoted as saying, "When the Son of Man comes in glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory" (cf. Matt. 16:27; 26:64).

"Coming." The original verb that is used here is *'ateh*, "he was coming." It may be of interest to students of the Bible to know that the root of this verb is found in the word "Maranatha" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:22 (cf. Rev. 22:20).

"The clouds of the sky." In the Bible, a cloud is a symbol of the divine presence (Deut. 33:26; Ps. 104:3; Isa. 19:1). The metaphorical language describes here a supernatural being. When the Israelites left Egypt and traveled toward Canaan "by day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night" (Exod. 13:21; cf. Ps. 105:39). At Sinai, God made his presence manifest to the people through a cloud (Exod. 19:9). In contrast to this, ancient Canaanite texts refer to the god Baal by the title "the rider of the clouds."

"Led into his presence." The words describe a formal introduction in a palace setting. In a

similar way, Genesis 47:2 describes how Joseph's brothers appeared before the Pharaoh.

7:14 **"He was given dominion."** Identical words are used to say that dominion or authority to rule was given to the third beast (Dan. 7:6).

"All... every." These two short words express the concept of universality and remind the reader that the vision was given in the context of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which claimed universal rule on earth (Dan. 3:4; 4:1; 5:19). The use of the Aramaic language in the chapter reinforces this notion.

"Should worship him." This same verbal root, *plh*, is used in chapter 3 in King Nebuchadnezzar's command to worship the statue of gold and in chapter 6 to speak of Daniel's worship of the true God.

"Dominion." The Aramaic word *soltan*, "dominion," or "authority to rule," is used eight times in this chapter. It is a key word in this vision, where the primary issue is, Who has the dominion? The vision ends with the assurance that ultimately the eternal dominion will be given to the One to whom it truly belongs.

"Never be destroyed." Whether intentionally or not, this verse reminds the reader of King Nebuchadnezzar's description of God's eternal kingdom (Dan. 2:44; 4:34).

Exposition (7:9-14)

7:9 This verse marks a rather abrupt transition. Daniel's attention suddenly shifts from the little horn to a scene taking place in God's court in heaven. While Daniel describes the chaos on earth in prose narrative, he describes the court in heaven poetically, through four

sets of two parallel lines. Visions of God sitting on the throne are described in several places in the Bible. Some of those reports focus on God's interaction with the beings that surround the throne (1 Kings 22:15-22; Isa. 6; Rev. 5), while others dwell on a detailed description of what the throne looked like or the beings that are around it (Ezek. 1 and 10; Rev. 4). The text says that God's throne is movable and has **wheels**—a picture that combines the concept of a throne with that of a chariot. God's movable throne communicates "the dynamic nature of divine presence"³⁹ (Ezek. 1 and 10). Psalm 68:17 says,

"The chariots of God are tens of thousands
and thousands of thousands;
the Lord (has come) from Sinai
into his sanctuary."

The vision of God's **throne** focuses on the divine judgment. The word **throne** is used twice in this verse. The first time it comes in the plural. This has been explained either as "the plural of emphasis," saying that God's throne is a "superthrone,"⁴⁰ or as indicating that the vindicated saints are given the privilege to sit in judgment on God's side. "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" asked the apostle Paul of the Corinthian believers (1 Cor. 6:2). Referring to the royal palace in Jerusalem, Psalm 122:5 says, "There the

thrones for judgment stand, / the thrones of the house of David." An alternative explanation that merits further exploration is that the word **thrones** found in the beginning of this verse stands for the authority of the beasts, which are overthrown following the divine judgment. The second time the word **throne** is mentioned in this verse, however, it is in the singular and with the definite article, so it clearly designates God's throne. This throne "symbolizes the absolute and sovereign authority of God who invests the Son of Man with universal kingship and entrusts Him with the everlasting kingdom."⁴¹

The title **the Ancient of Days** points to God's eternal nature as well as to his wisdom. No parallel expression is found in the Bible; the most similar statement is Psalm 74:12, which calls God the "king from of old." The white color of his hair and clothing symbolizes purity and justice. David prayed to God, saying, "wash me, and I will be whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7b). Yet, in many places in the Bible, God is described as a person filled with compassionate mercy. "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, / is God in his holy dwelling" (Ps. 68:5). The oppressed saints are vindicated by a strong, just, and merciful God. **His throne** looked like **fire**—a standard metaphor for God's holy presence throughout the Bible. "Our 'God is a consuming fire,' " wrote the author of Hebrews (12:29).

Psalm 97:1-3 brings all these concepts together:

The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad
let the distant shores rejoice.

Clouds and thick darkness surround
him;
righteousness and justice are the
foundation of his throne.

Fire goes before him
and consumes his foes on every
side.

His lightning lights up the world;
the earth sees and trembles.

7:10 The **river of fire** that comes from the throne reminds the reader of Revelation's lake of fire, the place of God's final judgment on the wicked. The ministering angels that are stationed around the throne are without a number, the literary figure known as numerals-progression is used to convey this fact. Psalm 68:17 says,

The chariots of God are tens of
thousands
and thousands of thousands;
the Lord (has come) from Sinai
into his sanctuary.

This multitude of God's servants stands in contrast to the thousand nobles who attended Belshazzar's banquet (chap. 5, although the banquet was chronologically later than this vision)

They are standing in his presence ready to do his will (cf. Dan. 1:5) and also to witness the process.

The court proceedings begin when the attendants take seats and *the books* are *opened*. In the ancient kingdoms, records were kept so that when there was a need, a crisis, the documents could be consulted (Ezra 4:15; 6:1; Esther 2:23; 6:1). Similarly, several places in the Bible mention detailed records of the deeds of human beings (Jer. 17:1; Mal. 3:16; Matt. 12:36, 37; Rev. 20:12). Since the revelation given to Daniel in this chapter deals with the oppression of the just, it is appropriate here to recall the prayerful words in Psalm 56:8:

Record my lament;
list my tears on your scroll—
are they not in your record?

The context of this vision of Daniel 7 suggests that the primary focus of God's judgment concerns "the power realities—kingdoms and rulers who 'do as they please.'" ⁴³ Here, the judgment on the beasts results in their destruction. Later, this chapter says that through this same judgment, God's people are vindicated.

Associated with the picture of the books are the concepts of answerability and accountability found on both group and individual level. Some interpreters see the investigation derived from this passage (though the word "investiga-

tion" is not used in this text) as a picture of God's judgment on individuals. The notion that "God or God's agents watch each individual and make a daily record of the good and the evil which each one does"⁴⁴ is attested in the Bible. Ecclesiastes 12:14, for example, says,

God will bring every deed into
judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil.

7:11, 12 As Daniel's eyes turn back to earth, the boastful *great words* of the little horn still resonate in his ears. The divine judgment "passed in heaven has immediate consequences on the earthly level."⁴⁵ It is executed first on the fourth beast, which is *slain and its body destroyed* in fire. Presumably the beast's horns, including the little horn, are destroyed together with this beast. Although the words for *fire* in this and the previous verses are different, it is difficult not to relate the means of judgment on this beast with the fire that characterizes God's throne as well as the Revelation's "lake of fire."

The extension of life granted to the first three beasts is another sign of God's control over the situation. All three are given a *period of time* (*'iddān*) to live, yet God has already decreed the fixed time, *ʾmān*, of their end.

The description of the beasts and of their activities in the beginning of the

chapter implies that dominion is given to them. When that dominion is taken away, the Author of life chooses to grant them an extension of their existence. Rather than being destroyed right away, these powers are absorbed in the following kingdoms. Unlike the fourth beast, which acted destructively to the utmost, their activities seemed to have been somewhat restrained. “The fourth beast was *different* from the others and so was dealt with differently, as its greater offences deserved.”⁴⁶ The “measure for measure” principle is carried out in the judgment on the four. Thus, “in Daniel 7, God’s judgment condemns evil power that oppresses God’s people and brings about their deliverance from oppression.”⁴⁷

7:13 For a second time, Daniel’s eyes are directed toward heaven, where a second phase of judgment is taking place. This scene pictures the executive phase of the judgment. The introductory words, *In my vision at night I looked, / and there before me was*, are found three times in the chapter. They introduce the whole vision in verse 2, the fourth beast in verse 7, and finally, the humanlike person in verse 13.

The Aramaic phrase *k̄bar ’nāš*, *like a human being*, comprises three elements: First, the comparative particle *k̄*, “as, like,” that in this chapter is also used in the description of some of the beasts. It clearly shows that the being described here only looks *like a human* but in re-

ality is not a human being. The word *bar*, which literally means “son,” functions here as a noun of relation and should not be translated literally but rather as denoting a member of the human family. In Hebrew, the title “son of man” is often used in parallelism with the common noun “man,” as in Numbers 23:19: “‘God is not a man, that he should lie, / nor a son of man, that he should change his mind’ ” (cf. Ps. 8:4; Isa. 56:2).

“The Semitic expression ‘son of man’ means simply *a human being*. A humanlike figure is brought before the divine throne. However, the author does not say that the figure *is* a man.”⁴⁸ The meaning of this whole expression is therefore *one like a human being*, a description that stands in contrast to the appearances of the beastlike creatures that have preceded it. The visible signs of his divine nature are evidenced in the presence of *the clouds of the sky*, the standard metaphor for God’s abiding and guiding presence throughout Israel’s journey in the wilderness (Exod. 13:21; cf. Ps. 105:39). Psalm 104:3b, 4 speaks of God in the following way:

He makes the clouds his chariot
and rides on the wings of the wind.
He makes winds his messengers,
flames of fire his servants.

Like the Ancient of Days to whom he is introduced, this person is also di-

vine (see the *Notes* on Dan. 7:13). His coming reminds the reader of the stone that struck the statue in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Within the setting of chapter 7, the one who looked *like a human being* is "an individual, eschatological, celestial being with messianic traits."⁴⁹ Biblical passages identify the archangel Michael⁵⁰ as the one who fought on behalf of the people of Israel (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1). As the commander of the armies of the Lord, he is the one who was able to defeat Satan and his angels (Rev. 12:7-9). In the Gospels, "Son of Man" was Jesus' favorite title for himself and one that he often associated with the concept of judgment: "The Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done" (Matt. 16:27). Thus, it is safe to say that this Being is Jesus Christ.

7:14 This humanlike Being receives from the Ancient of Days *dominion, glory, and kingdom*. These qualities contrast with the dominion received by Belshazzar, the beasts, and the little horn because they will last for eternity. In addition, this Divine Person becomes the object of the worship of all beings on earth. The key issue in this chapter is this: Who has the dominion, or the authority to rule the earth? The beasts and the little horn hold this dominion for a while, but after the pronouncement by the heavenly court, it is transferred to

the Divine Being who looks like a human and whose dominion is eternal and worthy of universal worship. "All peoples, nations and languages, instead of worshipping a lifeless statue (Dan. 3:4, 5), will serve this man."⁵¹

When Jesus Christ was on earth, he often referred to himself as "the suffering Son of Man." The origin of the concept of a suffering son of Adam goes back to the story of Abel (Gen. 4), the first martyr, whose correct way of worship cost him his life. In Abel's destiny, Jesus saw his own martyrdom (Matt. 23:32-36). Yet, in Daniel 7, the humanlike Person is not martyred but glorified instead. When the Sanhedrin questioned Jesus, he responded by applying the words of Daniel 7:13, 14 directly to himself. He said, "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). In the end, "the realization of God's creation ideal comes not through the world's becoming more human but through God's gift of this humanlike person."³

The action in this vision takes place on two levels. "The beasts appear, act, and are destroyed on earth. The court is a heavenly one, and it is there that the one like a son of man is exalted."⁵³ The event described here in Daniel 7 closely resembles what Revelation 5 presents as the inauguration of Jesus Christ as King of the universe.⁵⁴ Both chapters end with

the universal worship of the Divine Person. Ephesians 1:19b-22 seems to allude to this same event in salvation history: “That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ, when he raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.”

Daniel’s Reaction (7:15-22)

Daniel’s reaction to the vision is negative. In a state of despair, he asks for help. Verses 17, 18 summarize the meaning of the vision.

¹⁵“I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit and in body, and the visions that passed through my mind alarmed me. ¹⁶I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. So he told me and gave me the explanation of these things: ¹⁷“These four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. ¹⁸But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.

¹⁹“Then I desired to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most dreadful, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured (its victims) and the rest trampled underfoot. ²⁰I also desired to know about the ten

horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—the horn that was greater in appearance than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things. ²¹As I watched, this horn waged war against the saints and prevailed over them, ²²until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the set time came when they possessed the kingdom.”

Notes

7:15 “I, Daniel.” The first-person reporting is a recurring feature in the prophetic section of the book (7:2, 28; 8:1, 15, 27; 9:2; 10:2, 7; 12:5).

“In spirit and in body.” The Aramaic word *nidneh* literally means “sheath”; that is, the leather container in which a sword is kept (cf. 1 Chron. 21:27). Here it stands for Daniel’s body. As such, it is related to the word *rûah*, “spirit,” that immediately precedes it. Similarly, Daniel 2:1 says that Nebuchadnezzar’s “spirit was troubled” (NRSV) because of a dream.

“And the visions that passed through my mind alarmed me.” The original phrase, *wêhezwê rē’sî yêbaḥ^alunnani*, “and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me,” is also found in Daniel 4:5. There it describes Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction to his dream of the tree. Other biblical prophets describe the psychological impact that visions made on them—see Jeremiah 4:19; Ezekiel 3:15; Zechariah 4:1.

7:16 “One of those standing.” This person is presumably one of the angels from the multitude described in verse 10—possibly Gabriel (cf. Dan. 8:16). It is clear from this verse that Daniel is still in vision. This fact should influence

the way the reader approaches the interpretation of the dream and its symbols. Interpreting angels are also known from other biblical prophetic books, such as Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Revelation.

7:17 "Four kingdoms." On the meaning of the number four, see the **Notes** on Daniel 7:3. Literally, the text says *'arbe'a malkin*, "four kings"; but in the book of Daniel, the words *melek*, "king," and *malku*, "kingdom," are interchangeable (2:36). The Application in Church History section at the end of this chapter identifies the four kingdoms by name. Symbolically, these four kingdoms represent the negative side of world kingdoms throughout earth's history.⁵⁵ "They arise, then they vanish.... Yet all are alike, superhuman and subhuman at once, in conduct intensely, virulently at odds with God and God's justice."⁵⁶

"Rise from the earth." In contrast to the statement in verse 3 that says the beasts "came up out of the sea," this verse states that the kingdoms will rise to power from the earth.

7:18 "The saints of the Most High." The two words translated as "the Most High" are in the plural and could be understood as an attribute of the saints, who are "the holy ones on high" (cf. "the holy ones" in Dan. 4:17). But consideration of the equivalent expression in Biblical Hebrew suggests that the traditional view—that the words are a title for God—is better.

Scholars have debated the identity of the group called *qaddise 'elydnin*, "the saints of the Most High." Many hold that angels are in view here, while others argue that they are most likely the group of people that constitute God's faithful children on earth (Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21). Since

verse 27 designates them as "people," they are primarily human in the context of this chapter.⁵⁷ In Daniel 8:24, the object of the little horn's attack are "the mighty people and the saints." Apocalyptic texts do not always distinguish clearly between God's people in heaven and on earth.

"The kingdom." The word *malkuta'*, "the kingdom," is used twice in this verse. The kingdom that the saints receive is the same as that given to the humanlike Person by the Ancient of Days (v. 14).

"Forever." See the **Notes** on Daniel 2:20. The triple repetition of the Aramaic word *'alema'*, "a long time, eternity," means the word is to be understood in its absolute, superlative sense.

7:19 "Different." See the **Notes** on Daniel 7:7.

"Bronze claws." This is a new element not mentioned previously in the text.

7:20 "Greater in appearance." This is another new element in the narrative. The original says *v^hezwah rab min-habratah*, "and its appearance (or visibility) was greater than its fellows." This is an important detail given the fact that this horn is usually referred to as "little." It is truer to say that this horn is "the last and the greatest power" of all.⁵⁸

7:21 Verses 21, 22 are an extension of Daniel's vision rather than an explanation by the angel interpreter. They contain several new pieces of information. The suggestion has been made that verse 23 answers the question posed in verse 19, while verses 21,22 answer the question asked in verse 20. In other words, we see a chiasmic structure in these five verses.⁵⁹

"The so/nts." The same group of people is in

mind even though this time their name is abbreviated to "the saints" and "of the Most High" is omitted. Both forms are used in parallelism in verse 22.

"And prevailed over them." In several places, Daniel reports that for a limited time, the evil powers triumph over God's people (7:25; 8:24; 11:33).

7:22 "The Ancient of Days." The two titles used in this chapter, "the Ancient of Days" and "the Most High," refer to one and the same Person.

"Came." See the *Notes* on Daniel 7:13, where the humanlike person "was coming" to the court. Here, the Ancient of Days comes to take his seat in judgment—an act that ultimately translates into the deliverance of the oppressed saints. Thus, the solution to the oppression comes from heaven.

"In favor of." The basic meaning of the preposition ¹⁶ is "to, for," but the translation "in favor of" (a dative of advantage) is best in this context. It expresses the idea of deliverance from oppression and vindication. Thus, the saints are not the *object* but rather the beneficiaries of *this judgment*. Psalm 76:8,9 says,

From heaven you pronounced judgment,
and the land feared and was quiet—
when you, O God, rose up to judge,
to save all the afflicted of the land.

"Possessed the kingdom." Some commentators suggest that here God gives to the saints "the right to judge." Thus, it is possible that the meaning implied in these words is that the saints "received the power to rule."

Exposition (7:15-11)

7:15, 16 As a direct result of the vision, Daniel is troubled both *in spirix and in body*. His experience here parallels that of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 1 because he is now in desperate need of an interpreter. The angel interpreter *is* obviously one from among the multitude who stood before God's throne. It is possible that he is the same angel, Gabriel, who interprets the vision recorded in the following chapter.

7:17, 18 These two verses contain the meaning of the whole vision in a nutshell. Oppressive powers dominate earth. In spite of the appearances, however, God is in control, and he will take the dominion away from the oppressors and give it to his saints.

Although the original text identifies the four beasts with "four kings," the context of the book helps identify the same as four kingdoms (v. 23). The interpretation that the angel gave is close; *related to the vision, and it is at least partially expressed in symbolic terms*. Moreover, the fact that Daniel is still dreaming indicates that the language used by the angel is still figurative.

The identity of the *saints of the Most High* has puzzled interpreters of Daniel for centuries. Scholars who identify them as angels point to the fact that they are called not only "saints" but more precisely *the saints of the Most High*. Those who argue that human beings compose this group point to the fact that the saints

are called "people" in verse 27 and that they are defeated by the enemy and suffer for a time before they are ultimately vindicated. Although angels are sometimes referred to as people, the saints here are primarily human beings because they do not figure prominently in the parts of the chapter that describe the events that take place in heaven (w. 9, 10, 13, 14). Daniel 8:10 contains a clearer reference to angels: It says the little horn throws "the starry host" down to the earth.

A growing number of scholars see a mixed group consisting of both angels and humans behind the term *the saints of the Most High*. They are on God's side and are therefore all affected by the conflict between good and evil. It is good to keep in mind that apocalyptic writings view heaven and earth closely linked together, and they do not always make a sharp division between the beings that populate the two. In this case a rigid "dichotomy between earthly and supernatural"⁶⁰ may violate the original intention of the author of the text.

7:19-22 Daniel's attention now focuses on the fourth beast with its horns. It is described here as having *bronze claws*. The seer asks the interpreting angel to explain the symbols involved. A new detail that was not previously mentioned in the narrative but that Daniel noticed in the vision is that the little horn succeeds in prevailing over the saints. However, direct intervention by the Most High puts an end to the little

horn's oppressive power and results in the vindication of God's saints, who are then granted the eternal kingdom. At the end, the saints are given the right to rule together with the *one [who looked] like a human being* (w. 13, 14, 27).

Interpretation (7:23-28)

The angel interpreter continues to explain the most important aspects of the vision, supplying a number of intriguing details that were not previously mentioned in the chapter.

""This is what he said:

'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will be on earth.

It will be different from all the other kingdoms

and will devour the whole earth trampling it down and crushing it.

²⁴*The ten horns are ten kings who will arise from this kingdom.*

After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will put down three kings.

²⁵*He will speak out against the Most High*

and will wear down the saints of the Most High

and will intend to change the set times regulated by the law.

The saints will be given into his hand for a time, (two) times, and half a time.

²⁶*But the court will sit in judgment, and his power to destroy totally will be taken away.*

27Then the kingdom, dominion, and
greatness
of the kingdoms under the whole
heaven
will be handed over to the saints,
the people of the Most High.
His kingdom is an eternal kingdom,
and all rulers will worship and obey
him.'

28This is the end of the revelation. I, Daniel,
was deeply alarmed by my thoughts, and my face
turned pale, but I kept the matter in my mind."

Notes

7:23 Verses 23-27 are considered to be poetry, even though some translations do not indent them as such.

"This is what he said." This verse answers the question found in verse 19. It repeats the facts that the fourth beast will have a worldwide dominion and very destructive power.

"The whole earth." The same words *kol-'ar'a'*, "the whole earth," are used to describe the extent of the third world kingdom from Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which would "rule over the whole earth" (Dan. 2:39).

7:24 "Ten horns." See the *Notes* on Daniel 7:7. Scholars are divided on whether the ten kings rule at the same time or in succession, one after the other. However, it is clear that the eleventh ruler comes after the first ten and uproots three of them. Revelation 17:12-14 also speaks of "ten horns" that represent "ten kings," but it specifies that they will form a confederacy of ten kings prior to the Second Coming. In the same book, the dragon (12:3) and the Sea Beast (13:1) both are said to have ten horns on them.

"He will put down." Whereas in the vision report in verse 8 a passive form of the verb *hsh* is used to describe the removal of the three horns, this verse clearly says that the little horn takes an active role in putting them down.

7:25 "He will speak out." The same verbal root *ml*, "to speak," used in verse 8 is also found here. Yet that verse did not identify the target of the horn's proud words. This verse clearly says that the object of its attack is the Most High God.

"Against." The Aramaic preposition *l'sac* "against," can also mean "at the side of," possibly implying pretentious statements made by this power (cf. Isa. 14:13, 14).

"Wear down." In its intensive form, the verbal root *blh* means "to wear out" like a garment suggesting here a long, unrelenting persecutor. The same verb is used in Psalm 102:26, though in a different context: "They will perish, but you remain; / they will all wear out like a garment. (Cf. Isa. 51:6.)

"Intend." The verb *sbr* means "to think," "to plan," or "to intend."

"To change the set times regulated by the law." The Semitic noun *zirmnln*, "set times," is used in the Old Testament for the important days in the Hebrew calendar (Ezra 10:14; Neh. 10:34; 13:31; Esther 9:27, 31). The second noun *dat*, "law," is in the singular and should be considered the Aramaic equivalent to the Hebrew word *Torah*. These two nouns are placed next to each other in order to express a single concept (hendiadys). Therefore, the whole expression means "the set times regulated by the law," and it includes the seventh-day Sabbath. The book of Daniel teaches that God is the only One who "changes times and seasons" (Dan. 2:21).

"His hand." The original says *bfdeh*, "into his hand." See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2.

"For a time, (two) times, and half a time." This verse uses two Aramaic words for "time" just as does verse 12. The first word is *fman*, "a set time" or "an appointed time" that the little horn intends to change. The second word that is used here is *'iddan*, "a season" or "a period of time," with the emphasis being on the length of time. Its plural, "times," is usually understood as "two times," and here it is followed by a fraction of a time. The Hebrew equivalent of this expression occurs in Daniel 12:7, while the Greek expression is found in Revelation 12:14.

In the context of this chapter, the word "time" suggests temporality. It contrasts sharply with the word "everlasting," which occurs in verses 14 and 27. The whole expression "time, times, and half a time" can be viewed as a literary figure known as a "broken numerical progression" in which the anticipated next figure (three times) is not reached. Instead, the progression of the evil power is suddenly broken into a fraction.⁶¹

7:26 "The court." Some scholars translate the word *dina'* as "judgment" in verse 10. Both words describe the same event that takes place in heaven.

"Will sit in judgment." See the *Notes* on Daniel 7:9.

"Power." The word *sofatan* is best translated as "dominion" or "the authority to rule." See the *Notes* on Daniel 7:14.

"To destroy totally." The two words in the original Aramaic are given in their infinitive verbal forms; they say, literally, "to destroy and to annihilate." If both of these words describe the power of the little horn, then the text is saying

that God's judgment takes away the oppressive dominion that intended to destroy and annihilate God's creation infinitely/eternally. The expression '*ad-sopa*' literally means "to the end," but in this context it may mean "infinitely/eternally." Daniel 7:25 states that the little horn will "wear down" (persecute) God's saints for an extended period of time.

7:27 "Then." The beginning of this verse introduces another case of the reversal of fortunes found in many places in the book of Daniel.

"The kingdom, dominion, and greatness." This list of "three" is a literary figure expressing the concept of completeness. This literary figure is often found in the eighth-century prophets, especially in Hosea (for example, "grain, new wine, and oil" in 2:22).

"Under the whole heaven." This is another expression that conveys the concept of universality.

"The people." The Aramaic word *'am*, "people," is used here to describe the saints, lending support to the view that they are human beings. Daniel 12:7 says that the "holy people" will be persecuted for "a time, times, and half a time."

"His kingdom." The possessive pronoun "his" or "its" refers either to the people, who are the saints, or to the Most High God. The verse suggests that the saints share in God's kingdom. When combined with verse 14, this verse identifies the kingdom of the humanlike Person with the kingdom possessed by the saints of the Most High. He and they belong to the same group of God's faithful. "The one is the many; the many are the one."⁶²

7:28 "The end of the revelation." The word *sopa'*, "the end" (cf. v. 26), may have been used to

mark the conclusion of the vision report, corresponding to the word *re's*, "head, beginning, sum," used in the opening of the report in verse 1. (cf. Jer. 51:64; Eccles. 12:13). Both words are immediately followed by the noun *milla*, "word, matter," which in this verse stands for the vision and its interpretation.

"I, Daniel." These two words signal the change of Daniel's state from vision to consciousness. Since the same pronoun is used at the beginning of the chapter, its two occurrences form an *inclusio*.

"My face turned pale." This expression is almost identical to the one that describes Belshazzar's reaction to the writing on the wall (Dan. 5:6).

"In my mind." The original text literally says that Daniel kept the matter *be'libbi*, "in my heart." In biblical times, the heart was considered to be the seat of intelligence. Thus, the meaning here is "in my mind."

Exposition <7:23-28>

7:23, 24 Since the four beasts represent the four world kingdoms, the fourth one stands for the last world empire. At this point, Daniel's attention turns to that beast and its horns, including the little one. Just as this beast is different from the earlier ones, so the eleventh horn differs from the ten. In order to establish itself, this power resorts to destructive activities against those around it. Based on the evidence in verse 21, it is clear that the persecuting activity of this horn targets the saints. The horn overpowers them but is in the end itself

totally defeated by the **judgment i**: which **the Ancient of Days presides**. The **judgment** is pronounced in favor of the saints of the Most High God (v. 22) s: that they may possess the kingdom for ever.

7:25 Verse 25 summarizes the activities of the little horn better than does another part of this chapter. It consists of four poetic lines characterized by parallelism:

A **He will speak out against the Most High** (blasphemy)

B **and will wear down the saints of the Most High**
(persecution)

A' **and will intend to change the set times..** . (blasphemy)

B' **The saints will be given into his hand for a time . . .**
(persecution)

This verse elaborates on the brief statements found in verse 8, where the little horn is said to have the eyes of a man and a mouth that speaks boastfully. Verse 25 says that the horn's pride eventuates in blasphemy against God and a long persecution of his saints. The original text says that the little horn "wears out [like a garment]" the faithful. The same verb is used in the sense of oppression in 1 Chronicles 17:9: "I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed.

Wicked people will not oppress them [in Hebrew "wear them down"] anymore, as they did at the beginning.' "

The set times regulated by God's law are also under attack. That includes the observance of the Sabbath day that is commanded in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15). Daniel 2:21 presents the ability to change "times and seasons" as a prerogative exclusively reserved for God. This text says that the little horn attempts to usurp that divine prerogative.

The timeframe given for the period of persecution as well as for the activity of this power is not stated in plain language. Rather, it is given through a literary figure known as a "broken numerical progression." Through this figure, the progress of the little horn's activity is described in the words **a [one] time** and **(two) times**, yet the anticipated goal of three times is never reached. Instead, the ongoing success of the horn is suddenly broken, presumably by divine intervention. In a similar way, several other texts in Daniel teach that God allows only limited success of the forces of evil (Dan. 5:26-28), and he promises to deal suddenly and decisively with this power. It will come to an end "and no one will help him" (11:45). Several chapters in the Bible inform us that this is the established way in which God deals with the powers that epitomize sinful pride and intend to usurp God's supreme authority (Gen. 11; Isa. 14; Ezek. 28).

In addition to this figurative (literary) meaning, the expression **time, (two) times, and half a time** can also be understood literally and applied in history. The word *'iddan*, "season," is often interpreted prophetically as a full year. That is true of this passage as well as of Daniel 4:16, which speaks of the seven "times" of Nebuchadnezzar's mental illness. Viewed in this way, the total length of this time period is three and a half years. The book of Revelation also mentions in parallel forty-two months (11:2) and 1,260 days (12:6).

7:26, 27 Toward the end of the angel's interpretation, he reminds Daniel that the end of the activities of the little horn is a direct outcome of the judgment that takes place in heaven. The saints, who are now referred to as **people**, are the recipients of the kingdom that is identical with the kingdom of the Most High. Rather than being an abstraction, this kingdom is characterized by **dominion, and greatness**. It includes the authority to rule over the whole world—the gift that the Creator gave the human race at the beginning of earth's history (Gen. 1:28). But human beings lost this right to "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), who boastfully told Christ in the wilderness, "I will give you all their [the kingdoms of the world] authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to" (Luke 4:6). The saints, who are also called **the**

people of the Most High, will rule over God's kingdom. According to verse 14, the same authority to rule is also granted to the "one like a human being."

This kingdom is **an eternal kingdom** in which the Most High receives the universal worship and obedience of all beings **under the whole heaven**, including the rulers of the world. King Nebuchadnezzar's submission to and worship of God (chap. 4) prefigures this event. Revelation 3:21 quotes Jesus Christ as saying, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne."

The vision from this chapter combines horizontal and vertical dimensions, something that is typical of apocalyptic literature. Heaven and earth seem so closely connected that whatever happens on earth affects events in heaven, while the activities and decisions in heaven have a direct consequence for the earth and those who dwell on it. "The text does not say that explicitly; it demonstrates it graphically."⁶³ The cognizance of this truth inspires hope in every believer. "For Christians, to live with a constant sense of the advent of Christ is not an irresponsible disengagement from the world but a life-style *within* the world that is built on the vision of God's true kingship and dominion. It is to live as if the sentence on the beasts has already been carried out, despite the fact that

their lives appear to be 'prolonged for : season and a time.' "⁶⁴

7:28 Daniel began his report in this chapter with the word *re's*, "head" or "beginning"; he closes it with the word *sopa*, "**end**" This gives the vision a notion of completeness. The word "end" found at the conclusion of this vision report can also mean "goal." Thus, one can say that the goal of the vision is reached when the people of the Most High receive the kingdom and all rulers worship and obey God throughout eternity.

Daniel's overall reaction to the vision was puzzlement. A number of the vision's details left him wondering about the future realization of the events portrayed. He does not hide from the reader the fact that in spite of his extraordinary wisdom and also in spite of the explanation given through a heavenly messenger, he felt inadequate to grasp the full meaning of this revelation. Thus, he says, he kept the matter to himself.

Applications

This vision, more than any other recorded in Daniel, lacks precision regarding the identification in history of the powers involved. Whereas in chapter 2, Daniel clearly identified the Neo-Babylonian Empire, none of the powers symbolized in the vision of Daniel 7 is named as a kingdom or an individual. The interpretation given in the chapter does not even identify the Ancient of Days, although the text implies

that he is the eternal God. Needless to say, for this reason, historical applications, proposed "fulfillments," and interpretations abound.

Several scholars have pointed to the parallel sequence of symbols in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (chap. 2) and in this chapter. The most important of these may be listed as follows:

Parallel Symbols in Daniel 2 and 7

Daniel 2	Daniel 7
1. Head of pure gold	1. Winged lion
2. Chest and arms of silver	2. Bear
3. Belly and thighs of bronze	3. Leopard
4. Legs of iron	4. Dreadful beast
5. Feet of iron and clay	5. Ten horns and the little horn
6. Stone from the mountain	6. Ancient of Days and humanlike Person

These parallels have proven helpful in the interpretation and applications of the vision from Daniel 7.

As stated in the introduction to the prophetic section of the book, the exposition or interpretation of the symbols and images should in the first place be controlled by the evidence that comes from the biblical text. Only then is the interpreter safe to proceed with applications on different levels. In modern times, various schools of prophetic interpretation draw similar lessons from this prophetic passage, yet they differ on

their applications of the imagery and symbols in history. In what follows, I will present first a mainstream application to the history of the church. Then I will give a personal or devotional application.

1. *Application in Church History ("historicism")*

As already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the historicist approach to Daniel's prophecies sees them applying to the whole span of church history with a special focus on the time of the end. Shea concludes his exposition on Daniel 7 by saying that this chapter "marks the transition from the mostly historical first half of the book to the fully prophetic section in the second half. That is why chapter 7 contains both history and prophecy—although more prophecy than history."⁶⁵

7:2-6 According to Maxwell, the term "the great sea" should be understood as "symbolic waters" that in reality are " 'peoples, multitudes, nations and languages' " (Rev. 17:15). The four beasts represent "the same series of world powers that we met first in Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel 2: Babylonian,

Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, followed in due time by the kingdom of God."⁶⁶ Shea agrees with Maxwell's identification of the four kingdoms, but for him "the great sea" is the Mediterranean: "Looking back through the centuries from our vantage point in history, we can trace the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy and see how the specifications are matched evenly by the procession of kingdoms that arose and fell in the Mediterranean region."⁶⁷ The man's heart symbolizes Babylon's change of character after Nebuchadnezzar's death. The three ribs in the bear's mouth stand for Babylon, Tydia, and Egypt—the three main territories conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire. In the case of the third beast, while wings aptly connote speed, the four heads are the four kingdoms (8:22) that divided up Alexander's Hellenistic Greek Empire after his death: Cassander ruled over Macedonia and Greece; Tysimachus, over Thrace and much of Asia Minor; Ptolemy, over Egypt, Cyrenaica, and Palestine; while Seleucus ruled the rest of Asia.

7:7, 8 Through the fourth beast, a one-sided, negative picture of Rome is purposely presented in spite of the fact that the Roman Empire was responsible for a great many good things, such as roads, laws, peace, etc. In Daniel 7, says Maxwell, God purposely represented Rome as ugly to teach us how much he dislikes persecutors. The ten horns represent the tribes that originated the na-

tions of the western Europe of today—the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandal; Burgundians, Lombards, Anglo-Saxon; Franks, Alemanni, Heruls, and the Sueves. Shea remarks that it is not necessary to be adamant about precisely which tribes were involved: "There was a flux in the number of tribes migrating through Europe, and so likewise, the; has also been a flux in the number of modern nations derivative from them. We can make the number, ten, as a representative number for the corporate whole of such tribes and nations."⁶⁸

The four beast powers of chapter 7 appear to be concerned with territorial expansion, while the little horn is "clearly a religious power and is interested in distinctly religious issues."⁶⁹ The description of the little horn fits the activities of the Christian church in apostasy as it rose to power at the time of the decline of the Roman Empire. The three horns uprooted by the little horn were the three Arian tribes: the Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Heruli (or the Visigoths according to Shea). Verse 12 says that in contrast to the fourth beast, which was judged and destroyed, the lives of the first three beasts were to be prolonged for a season and time after their dominion was taken away. In a symbolic gesture, Alexander married a Bactrian princess, Roxane, and he enthusiastically endorsed the marriages of ten thousand of his Greek soldiers to Persian wives. Thus was set in motion a blending of the

Old Babylonian and Persian cultures with the Greek culture that was to stamp civilization as "Hellenistic" for centuries to come, extending some of its influence even to us in this day.

7:9-14 In agreement with a host of commentators, the Ancient of Days is identified as God, while Jesus applied the title "Son of Man" to himself. God is the Judge, but he has chosen to delegate the judging to his Son. Thus, Jesus plays a dual role in judgment, serving as both our Judge and our Advocate. The legal basis for this judgment is God's moral law, given in the form of the Ten Commandments. The book of Revelation describes God's faithful at the time of the end as those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12).

According to Shea, the reality of the judgment and the establishment of God's everlasting kingdom is just "as certain as has been the fulfillment of the earlier stages of the historic panorama of Daniel 7. The procession of human powers expressed by the beasts and the horns sets the stage for God's final and decisive action in history."⁷⁰ Doukhan adds that for Daniel, the judgment is "unique and universal even taking place in the final moments of human history."⁷¹ The ultimate result of the judgment is that the saints become fellow heirs with Christ. He receives the kingdom and immediately shares it with all the people who trust him.

7:23-27 There are, in Daniel 7, eight identifying marks of the little horn. They are as follows: (1) It rose out of the fourth beast (w. 8, 24). (2) It appeared after ten other horns (v. 24). (3) It was little when it was first seen, but in time it became greater than its fellows (w. 8, 20). (4) It "put down three kings" (w. 8, 24). (5) It had **eyes like the eyes of a human and a mouth that spoke great things**, and it spoke **out against the Most High** (w. 8, 25). (6) It was to **wear down the saints of the Most High** (v. 25). (7) It was to **intend to change the set times regulated by the law** (v. 25). (8) It was allotted special powers for **a time, (two) times, and half a time** (v. 25).

Only one entity really fits all eight of these identifying marks—the Christian church, which rose to "religio-political" prominence as the Roman Empire declined. The world of that time was in many ways blessed by the church of western Europe. Catholic universities fed the torch of learning in law, medicine, and theology. Most Catholic monasteries maintained hospitals and provided care for the orphaned and aged. The Latin language provided a lingua franca for diplomacy and commerce, while Roman Catholic missionaries Christianized large areas of western Europe. Yet, Maxwell remarks, the same church began to teach that its bishop was "another God on earth." Several New Testament passages prophesied this type of apostasy in the church.

Both Maxwell and Shea maintain that the aspect of historical Catholicism that affects Protestants the most is probably its record as persecutor. This included the use of legal torture. Yet, Maxwell reminds the student of history that Protestants also persecuted Catholics.

In regard to the attempts to change the times and the law, the church departed from the Bible as its sole rule of faith and made changes in the law of God through its own authority. The most obvious of these is the change from the Sabbath commandment to Sunday observance. As Shea says, "This prediction fits precisely with the role of the little horn in regard to God's seventh-day Sabbath."⁷² The expression "a time, times, and half a time" totals 1,260 prophetic year-days that are applied to the period between A.D. 538, the date of the crushing of the Ostrogoths, and 1798, when the French general Berthier arrested Pope Pius VI. This calculation is based on the year-day principle in prophecy also found in two biblical passages that speak of divine judgment on rebellious people: Numbers 14:31-35 and Ezekiel 4:1-8. Doukhan specifies that the same year saw "the Jesuit uprising, the rise of the Encyclopedists (philosophers of doubt), and the French Revolution with its outcry of rage against ecclesiastical authority. The French Revolution would confront the church with an atheistic society having but one god: reason." /³

Daniel 7's vision ends on a positive note. The kingdom that God will establish will differ from human kingdom; in both character and the time of its dominion. It will be "based upon love and justice and grace," and in contrast to the transitory earthly kingdoms, "this kingdom will be eternal; its dominion will go on forever."⁷⁴

2. *Application in Personal Life.* The essence of the vision in Daniel 7 can be described as God's perspective on the world's history. The first phase of the vision is portrayed in a rather pessimistic manner. As Baldwin says, "The writer was not encouraged to see in historical evolutionary progress, but rather the reverse." ⁿ

One feature that is unique to this chapter is the fact that no power in the vision or in the interpretation is identified historically. It seems that for the author of the book, what the kingdom and kings do is far more important than who they are. "Indeed, to be mainly concerned when we are studying the symbolic vision with identifying the referent of the symbol is to miss the point of the vision."⁷⁶

The message of this chapter in a nutshell is its portrayal of God's transfer of power from the oppressive beasts to the humanlike person. Maxwell is correct in saying that "the basic message of Daniel is that God is our Friend" and therefore every person "who puts his or her trust

in Jesus Christ will find salvation full and free."⁷⁷ So, it is just as important for the reader to grasp this message as it is to analyze the vision in terms of specific historical references.⁷⁸ Biblical scholars have not given their full attention to a personal application of the messages that come from the biblical apocalyptic texts such as Daniel 7.⁷⁹ It is legitimate to ask whether this vision contains a clear message for the individual believer who feels oppressed and at times even defeated by the forces of evil. Does the future transfer of power from the political and religious institutions of this world to the humanlike Person make a difference in one's daily struggle with sin? Romans 8:1 says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." In order to overcome the world through faith and "to pass from the judgment to the kingdom we must go through him."⁸⁰

As has been the case through long centuries, individual believers as well as groups of the faithful can find comfort even today in this chapter. Daniel's book, including the vision in chapter 7, has been a source of study and inspiration to countless believers through millennia. When one feels tossed by the restless sea of life, frightened by the evil forces that arise one after another like wild beasts, it makes a great difference to know that God has not forgotten us. This was true in the past, and it is so in the present. The timeless truth is that in

our daily spiritual struggles, we often feel that every time a head of the monster is cut off, two new ones grow in its place. The conflict can at times spring out of the believer's own person. Who has not experienced the influence of evil forces within his or her own heart? Can one overcome the power that comes from "the beast in the heart of each one of us"?⁸¹ Said the prophet Jeremiah,

The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.

Who can understand it? (17:9).

Chapter 7's vision must have made a difference in Daniel's own life with God. The revelation was given to him at a time when there was a lot of ground for concern in regard to safety, prosperity, and freedom of worship. At the time Daniel saw this vision, Belshazzar's accession to power had interrupted the prophet's long career; he was ignored and almost forgotten. The vision of the transfer of power in heaven gave him reassurance that dominion belongs to God forever.

There are times that remind the reader of these words written by the apostle Paul: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Yet according to this chapter, God does *not* keep quiet or indifferent in those times. The persecuting power is and will be subject to God's judgment. The oppressed people of God

will become rulers seated on the thrones. "Ultimately, the battle is 'not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Eph. 6:12). This ultimate spiritual battle behind our earthly struggles was anticipated in the Old Testament, but the New Testament rips away the curtain so that we see the heart of the battle."⁸²

This chapter from Daniel not only comforts but also confronts the reader. It speaks of the records in heaven in which our daily deeds are recorded based on the observation of the "all-seeing eye." This fact points to concepts presently neglected in our culture, those of "answerability and accountability"⁸³ in all that we do. Sadly, religious persecution has been the worst type of oppression in the history of our world. How valid is the statement that "all Christians are to some degree responsible and [are] a part of the evil incarnated by the little horn!"⁸⁴ Obedience to God and love of one's fellow human beings is an integral part of the message of the Bible.

1. Goldingay, 159; Shea, *Daniel*, 198.
2. Pritchard, *ANET*, 313.
3. W. H. Shea, "The Neo-Babylonian Historical Setting for Daniel 7," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 24 no. 1 (1986): 31-36.
4. Seow, 101.
5. *Ibid.*, 99.
6. Baldwin, 140.

7. Murphy, 8.
8. Longman, 182.
9. Ford, 142.
10. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 104.
11. Murphy, 8.
12. United Bible Societies, *Fauna and Flora of Bible* (New York: United Bible Societies, 19--50).
13. Peter-Contesse and Ellington, 183.
14. United Bible Societies, 8-9.
15. Baldwin, 140.
16. Oates, 162.
17. Shea, *Daniel*, 206; cf. Smith-Christopher: 103.
18. Keil, 414; see also Goldingay, 164; Milier 203; and Ford 148.
19. Collins, 299.
20. Smith-Christopher, 100.
21. Walton, Matthews, Chavalas, 740.
22. Murphy, 8.
23. Seow, 102.
24. Baldwin, 141.
25. Goldingay, 162.
26. Shea, *Daniel*, 201.
27. The Babylonian Talmud, *Kidd.* 72a.
28. Montgomery, 282.
29. Seow, 105.
30. Slotki, 58.
31. *Ibid.*
32. The Babylonian Talmud, *Hag.* 14a; Doukhan *Secrets*, 114.
33. Rosenthal, 32.
34. de Vaux, 216.
35. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 116.
36. Berrigan, 120.
37. Goldingay, 167.
38. Z. Stefanovic, "The Use of the Aramaic," 77-8
39. Seow, 107.
40. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 113.
41. Daegeuk Nam, *The "Throne of God" Motif in the Hebrew Bible* (Seoul, Korea: Institute for Theological Research, 1994), 426.
42. Smith-Christopher, 103.
43. *Ibid.*, 117.
44. Towner, 100.
45. Nickelsburg, 84.
46. Lucas, 183.
47. Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, MI Diadem, 1999), 343.
48. Nickelsburg, 84.

49. Arthur J. Ferch, *The Son of Man in Daniel Seven* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1979), 191.
50. Murphy, 9.
51. Baldwin, 143.
52. Goldingay, 190.
53. Nickelsburg, 83.
54. See Ranko Stefanovic, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1996).
55. Longman, 190.
56. Berrigan, 113.
57. See G. F. Hasel, "The Identity of 'The Saints of the Most High' in Daniel 7," *Biblica* 56 (1975): 176-185.
58. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 106.
59. Peter-Contesse and Ellington, 196.
60. Goldingay, 178.
61. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 242-245. See Z. Stefanovic, "The Presence of the Three and a Fraction: A Literary Figure in the Book of Daniel," in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Institute of Archaeology, 1997), 199-204.
62. Seow, 110.
63. Murphy, 9, 10.
64. Smith-Christopher, 108.
65. Shea, *Daniel*, 128.
66. Maxwell, 109.
67. Shea, *Daniel*, 127, cf. 113.
68. *Ibid.*, 205-206.
69. *Ibid.*, 117.
70. *Ibid.*, 127.
71. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 111-112.
72. Shea, *Daniel*, 122.
73. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 109.
74. Shea, *Daniel*, 128.
75. Baldwin, 140.
76. Goldingay, 169.
77. Maxwell, 107.
78. Lucas, 199.
79. With some notable exceptions, like Longman's commentary.
80. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 118.
81. Longman, 195.
82. *Ibid.*, 197.
83. Towner, 102.
84. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 111.

APPENDIX A

Literalist and Intertestamental Applications of Daniel 7

The material presented in this section is intended to inform the reader about two types of applications commonly made by interpreters of Daniel. These applications are not generally accepted by Seventh-day Adventists.

1. *Literalist Application ("Futurist").* This approach says that Daniel 7 is one of the great chapters of the Bible, giving a panoramic view of future events. In interpreting Daniel's prophecies literally, Walvoord tells the reader that his literal interpretation of Daniel's prophecies is "conservative and premillennial."¹ This vision, given to Daniel—"a godly prophet"—stands in sharp contrast to the one in chapter 2 in which "a wicked and heathen king" is used as a vehicle of divine revelation. However, Archer notes that both of these chapters "set forth the four empires, followed by the complete overthrow of all ungodly resistance, as the final (fifth) kingdom is established on earth to enforce the stan-

dards of God's righteousness."² Goitir beyond the text of chapter 2, Daniel ~ says that the Messiah will head the firm kingdom.

7:2-6 Walvoord agrees with Keil th; the great sea is not the Mediterranean but the ocean, and the storm on it represents the "tumults of people" (Jer 46:7, 8). The frequent use of the number four in this passage points to the concept of universality.

The changes in the first beast are undoubtedly an allusion to the experience of Nebuchadnezzar. The fact that the second beast raised itself on one side indicates the one-sided union of the Persian and the Median kingdoms. Although coming up last, Persia became by far greater and more powerful, absorbing the Medes. Archer says that it is hopeless to make out any plausible link between this bear and the earlier, separate Median Empire that preceded Cyrus's victory over Astyages. The three ribs in the beast's mouth stand for Me-

dia, Persia, and Babylon, while the command "devour much flesh" relates to the subsequent conquest of Lydia and Egypt. The four heads and four wings of the third beast refer to the conquest and the subsequent divisions of the Greek Empire.

7:7, 8 The fourth beast is the Roman Empire, which was ruthless in its destruction of civilizations and peoples, killing captives by the thousands and selling them into slavery by the hundreds of thousands. The description of Daniel 7:7 is more appropriate for this empire than the Macedonian kingdom or any of its derived divisions. "Rome controlled most of the culturally advanced portions of the earth."³ Regarding the horns, Walvoord strongly disagrees with the scholars who tend to spiritualize both the number ten and the number three and thus escape the necessity of finding any literal fulfillment. The ten horns are ten men, and the little horn is also a man because it has eyes and a mouth. For Miller, on the other hand, the number ten in this context may be understood as indicating the concept of "completeness." According to Archer, since the ten horns parallel the ten toes in the vision of Daniel 2, they must be understood as contemporaneous. In the light of Revelation 17:12, Miller explains the ten kings represented by the horns as future rulers. They form a confederation of kings or nations "that emanate from the old Ro-

man Empire."⁴ The Lord's return ends their rule.

The eleventh horn represents the last ruler of the times of the Gentiles, which will end when his empire is destroyed. This ruler will be the final world dictator; he will arise after the ten horns have been set up. Ruling over this coalition, he will be both brilliant and arrogant. According to Miller, he is none other than the "antichrist," the most infamous person in all of human history. Antichrist will differ from the other kings in that he will be greater in power, intelligence, and arrogance. His other biblical titles are the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:3) and the beast (Rev. 13:1). The historic Roman Empire lost its strength gradually, over a period of centuries, so the biblical picture of the destruction of the beast does not fit its fall. In the light of Revelation 19:20, this beast will be destroyed in the future, at the second coming of Christ.

7:9-14 The Ancient of Days is clearly God the Father, and the thrones are placed for him and the Son of Man. Verse 13 is the climax of the chapter, and it follows verse 10 chronologically. For Walvoord, the judgment described in this chapter will take place in heaven at the time of the final judgment on the nations. This comes at the end of the interadvent age and the end of the times of the Gentiles. "It, therefore, demands a fulfillment which is yet future, and it is futile to attempt to find anything in

history that provides a reasonable fulfillment of this passage."⁵

The Second Person in the vision, the "son of man," represents the Lord Jesus Christ, whose millennial rule is described in these verses. For Miller, "the most compelling evidence for the messianic identification of the son of man is furnished by Christ himself. In Mark 14:61-62 he identified himself as that 'Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'"⁶ Since the dominion of the Son of Man extends over the saints, the "son of man" cannot be a symbol representing them. Moreover, as Archer says, Daniel 7:13 is the verse in Daniel most frequently quoted in the New Testament. "Christ is to be the supreme source of political power on earth after his earthly kingdom is established; and all humans, whatever their race, nationality, ethnic origin, or language, will worship and serve him."⁷ The saints of the Most High, according to Walvoord, include the saved of all ages as well as the holy angels, which are sometimes described as "the holy people" (Dan. 8:24; 12:7; Pss. 16:3; 34:9; Jude 14). The judgment is given on their behalf.

7:23-27 According to Archer, the fourth beast is said to devour the whole earth, yet in reality, that applies not to all known parts of the inhabited earth but rather to the entire territory of the Near and Middle East that in any way

relates to the Holy Land. Walvoord asserts that the little horn is the outstanding personage at the end of the age who will be destroyed with the inauguration of the kingdom from heaven. The little horn's attempt to change times and laws represents this person's attempt to change times of religious observance; and the religious traditions that characterize those who worship God. While Miller takes "the set times" to be "religious holidays,"⁸ Archer broadens this activity to "a revision of the calendar such as the one attempted during the French Revolution. While Antiochus Epiphanes may foreshadow the activities of the little horn of Daniel 7, the complete fulfillment will be much more severe and extensive.

The phrase "time, times, and half a time" meets its fulfillment in the last three and a half years preceding the second advent of Christ. Archer relates it to the beginning of the last of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9:26, 27. During the second half of "the final heptad of years, the progressive judgments of the wrath of God will be worked out."⁹ These judgments will follow the great tribulation and will climax in the second coming of Christ. That the word "time" stands for a year is confirmed by Daniel 4:25 where "seven times" equals seven years. Thus, concludes Miller, the persecution of the saints will continue for three and a half years, which is exactly half of anti-christ's seven-year career.¹⁰

As a major proponent of this type of application, Walvoord consistently rejects any notion of a figurative interpretation of prophecy and argues for a literal futuristic interpretation that "lends accuracy to prophetic revelations." He says, "It should be borne in mind that when a symbol is interpreted, while the symbol is obviously parabolic and figurative, the interpretation should be taken literally."¹¹ He says there is nothing in this chapter of Daniel to alter the conclusion that the fourth beast is Rome, that its final state has not yet been fulfilled, and that it is a genuine prophetic revelation of God's program for human history. He concludes by saying, "In a modern world, when attention is again being riveted upon the Middle East, and Israel is once again back in the land, these items become of more than academic interest, because they are the key to the present movement of history in anticipation of that which lies ahead."¹²

2. *Intertestamental Application ("Pret-erism")*. Collins agrees with other commentators that chapter 7 occupies a pivotal place in Daniel's book. He dates its composition precisely to late 167 B.C., in conformity with what he calls "scholarly consensus."

7:2-6 Based on the cosmic perspective of Genesis 1, Goldingay suggests that "the totality of the winds of heaven generates the totality of the events of

history in which Israel's own story unfolds."¹³ The great sea must be understood to be a much larger entity than the Mediterranean. The four beasts are not simply kings that arise on the earth. Rather, "they are the embodiments of the primeval power of chaos symbolized by the sea in Hebrew and Canaanite tradition."¹⁴ The description of the individual beasts cannot be explained from any Canaanite sources that are available to us; Daniel 7 is not simply a reproduction of an older source, like a Canaanite one. The imagery of the beasts is determined by biblical tradition, although familiarity with the Canaanite sources and the hybrid forms of Mesopotamian mythology have been an influence. Hosea 13:7-9 contains the closest parallel we have to the sequence of animals in Daniel 7. Creation is threatened by the eruption of the beasts from the sea, but the threat will be overcome by the Rider on the clouds.

The winged lion corresponds to the biblical comparisons to King Nebuchadnezzar, and the positive transformation of the beast into a man anticipates the story of chapter 4. The second beast that stands up ready to attack represents Media, which according to Jeremiah 51:11, 28, God stirred up against Babylon. Porteous sees in the detailed description of this animal "a cryptic allusion to Median greed for booty, while the bear's curious posture may imply aggressiveness rather than some kind of

limitation of effectiveness of the Medes as power."¹⁵ The third beast is characterized by great speed, a detail also mentioned regarding Cyrus in Isaiah 41:3 (and of the Babylonians in Hab. 1:8). The four heads of this beast can be applied either to the four kings of Persia implied in Daniel 11:2, or to the four corners of the earth and thus the universality of the Persian Empire.

7:7, 8 While for Porteous, the fourth beast "undoubtedly" represents the Greek kingdom of Alexander and his successors, Collins does not elaborate much on this beast. For Goldingay, Greece is the general concern of the subsequent visions, such as the one in chapter 8. "The Greek empire is evidently viewed as the last."¹⁶ Only in New Testament times did Rome come to be a part of the scheme of the empires as the fourth, climactic power of the sequence. This incorporation of Rome is "a novel one unknown to Daniel himself." The ten horns represent great strength and violent power and refer specifically to the successive rulers of the Seleucid dynasty from the divided Greek Empire, commencing with Seleucus Nicator, the founder of the dynasty.

The little horn is clearly said to follow in chronological sequence. The symbol of human eyes is associated with haughtiness, which is parallel here with the horn's arrogant speech—also mentioned in Daniel 11:36. Collins concludes that in history, the little horn was

Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Seleucid king who persecuted the Jewish people. Moreover, this ruler was the first Hellenistic king to introduce divine epithets such as "God Manifest" on his coin; Porteous is very emphatic that without the symbolic reference to this king, "who was challenging the authority of God ^ none of his predecessors had done, the chapter loses its point."¹⁷

7:9, 10 In Ezekiel 1, the animals support God's throne, but in Daniel 7, the fourth beast in particular seeks to subvert it and is judged before it. While the judgment scene belongs to the tradition of biblical throne visions attested in several prophetic passages, ancient traditions about the council of El, where the gods sit on their princely thrones, definitely stand in the background. The use of the plural form "thrones" indicates that one throne is for the Ancient of Days and the other for "one like a human being" (verse 13). Collins notes that the angel interpreter, most likely Gabriel, never identifies the Ancient of Days, but Porteous considers him to be "a majestic and venerable King." The "one like a human being" is presented in contrast with the beasts that come up from the abyss. He is associated with the saints of the Most High. The title "the Most High" refers to God.

7:13, 14 The identification of the "one like a human being" with the person of Michael, who is mentioned in Daniel 10-12, is greatly strengthened

by the fact that the saints of the Most High are the angelic host. Michael, the prince of Israel and the leader of the heavenly host, is the most logical choice to receive the kingdom. The kingdom given to him is similar to God's dominion mentioned in the doxologies in Daniel 4:3, 34 and 6:26. The same can be said of the kingdom received by the people of the holy ones of the Most High. Goldingay, on the other hand, suggests that since the one like a human being is not identified in the vision, "this is a facet of the chapter which interpretation has to preserve."¹⁸ The focus should be on this person's role, not on his identity. Since in the book of Daniel the title "holy ones" refers to angels, we must expect that it carries that reference in chapter 7, although the phrase in this context is somewhat allusive.¹⁹ "As the kingdoms that are to pass away are symbolized by supernatural beasts, it seems appropriate that the symbol of what is to replace the bestial kingdoms should be both human and supernatural."²⁰

There is synergism between the faithful Israelites on earth and their angelic counterparts in heaven. When things go badly on earth, it is because they are going badly in the heavenly battle, too. But when the Ancient of Days arrives in judgment, fortunes are strikingly reversed on both levels. Michael's victory in the heavenly battle entails the victory of the persecuted Jews on earth.

The symbolism of the beasts received new vitality in Christianity through Revelation, which itself drew heavily on Daniel. While this vision is not one for all seasons, nevertheless "human history has never lacked for situations where such a vision seems appropriate or even necessary."²¹

7:23-27 Collins claims that Daniel 7:25 should be tied to the disruption of the cultic calendar—in the light of 1 Maccabees 1:45, it should be applied to the decree of Antiochus that required the Jews "to profane Sabbaths and feasts." Moreover, 2 Maccabees 6:6 says that a Jew "could neither keep the Sabbath nor observe the feasts of his fathers." Instead, he had to participate in pagan sacrifices and celebrate the festival of Dionysus. The evil of the fourth kingdom was concentrated in Antiochus.

The period of time, times, and half a time totals three and a half years, which matches the last half week of years in Daniel 9:27 and approximates the calculation attempts in 8:14 and 12:11, 12. For Porteous, though, three and a half years are half the period of Nebuchadnezzar's madness, which lasted seven years. He goes on to say that through "a remarkably accurate forecast,"²² the projected time period points to the profanation of the temple under Antiochus IV, which lasted for "exactly three years." Goldingay argues for a figurative meaning of the phrase. One "time" may or may not be a year long.

The period ruled by the prophecy's king is a long one, yet it is brought to a sudden termination. That is where the emphasis should be placed.

In conclusion, one can clearly see that the preterist application of the vision in Daniel 7 is restricted to certain events that took place during the inter-testamental period of Jewish history.

1. Walvoord, 8.
2. Archer, 85.
3. Miller, 213.

4. *Ibid.*, 202.
5. Walvoord, 165.
6. Miller, 209.
7. Archer, 91.
8. Miller, 214.
9. Archer, 94.
10. Miller, 215.
11. Walvoord, 170.
12. *Ibid.*, 177.
13. Goldingay, 185.
14. Collins, 289.
15. Porteous, 105.
16. Goldingay, 174.
17. Porteous, 97.
18. Goldingay, 172.
19. *Ibid.*, 178.
20. Porteous, 110.
21. Collins, 324.
22. Porteous, 114.

THE VISION OF A RAM AND A GOAT

(8:1-27)

Chapter 8 of Daniel is dated to the third year of Belshazzar, or two years after the vision of chapter 7. Scholars who date the first year of Belshazzar to 553 B.C. place this chapter in 551 B.C., but a better date is 547 B.C.,¹ or about seven years before the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. The basic message of this chapter is the same as that of the previous one. Both teach that the conflicts on earth together with the challenges against God's rule in heaven will someday end and be replaced by God's kingdom. Oppression and rebellion will give place to justice and mercy. This message offers to the reader a ray of hope in the midst of oppression and deceit. God promises to restore dominion to the humanlike person and to the human race—the dominion that he gave at the time of Creation. In the same way, the perpetual worship service to the living God will be reestablished at an appointed time in the future, when the sanctuary will be restored to its rightful state.

In chapters 7 and 8, this message was delivered in two different languages and in symbols drawn from two different spheres of life. These facts point to two aspects of the conflict involved and also to the two audiences for which the chapters were written. Chapter 7 was written in a dialect of Aramaic, the language of international diplomacy and commerce, and it uses the imagery of wild beasts. The key word in this chapter is "dominion," which focuses on the importance of power and views the conflict between God and the opposing powers on earth from a political perspective. Its message was intended for a universal audience—people throughout the whole empire. Chapter 8, written in Biblical Hebrew, the language of a chosen people, focuses more on the religious aspect of the same conflict. It uses the imagery of clean, sacrificial animals, thus pointing to the sanctuary, which is its central concept. Its message was clearly shaped for a particular audience.²

In chapter 8, the wild beasts that represented earthly powers in the previous chapter are replaced by domestic, clean, sacrificial animals. The Ancient of Days and the humanlike Person to whom he grants authority and power are replaced by the institution of the temple and its continual services. Likewise, chapter 7's portrayal of God's judgment was intended for the whole world. In chapter 8, this message is recast for the covenant people and placed in the context of God's sanctuary. Daniel 7 and 8 serve as good examples of the contextualized character of biblical revelations—the essence of the message in these two chapters is the same; but it is prepared for two audiences: one universal and the other particular. The change of language and symbols illustrates the principle that biblical messages were not given in a vacuum. Rather, God meets people where they are.

The central focus of this chapter is God's sanctuary. The vision pictures it as the target of fierce attacks by the anti-God power, which is symbolized by a little horn. The vision describes the activities of this horn, but it does not provide detailed information on its identification and fall. In Bible times, the sanctuary was a structure that marked the place where God's name dwelt on earth and where he met with his people. Since God is holy and human beings are sinful, the sins of the people were cleansed in the sanctuary so that they

could have access to God's presence. Thus the sanctuary was central in Israel's life, education, and worship. In the Hebrew mind, the world could not exist without the presence of God's temple. That's why, when Jesus foretold the future destruction of the Jerusalem temple, his disciples asked, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). To them, the destruction of the temple meant the end of the world. In several places, the book of Exodus says that God led the Israelites out of Egypt so that they could worship him in the sanctuary: "Let my son go, so he may worship me" (Exod. 4:23; cf. 15:13, 17). After Babylon's fall, King Cyrus set the Judean captives free so that they could go back home and rebuild the temple, which lay in ruins (Ezra 1:1-4).

The tractate *Yoma* in the Jewish work known as the Mishnah ties the reading of certain passages from the book of Daniel to the services in the temple. According to that source, the person whose duty it was to read selected biblical passages in the presence of the high priest on the eve of the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippurim*) recalls the following fact: "Many times I read before him [the high priest] out of Daniel." This information provides an interesting link between the book of Daniel and the sanctuary services. In fact, several sanctuary terms are scattered throughout this chapter, showing that the sanctuary is

the central concept of Daniel 8. Since the chapter begins with the mention of two sacrificial animals that figured prominently in the service in the sanctuary, a ram and a goat (Lev. 16:5), the conflict between them suggests a reversal of the rituals that took place there. The two animals fight against each other, and the scene turns into comic tragedy when a horn “comes out” and turns the whole sanctuary and its services upside down. This upheaval affects the high priest too. Then a voice in heaven assures Daniel that through yet another reversal, God will restore the sanctuary and its services to its rightful state.

The proposed structure of this chapter has some similarities with that of Daniel 7. It consists of five parts as follows:

1. Clash Between East and West (8:1-8)
2. The Little Horn (8:9-12)
3. Audition (8:13, 14)
4. Daniel’s Reaction (8:15-18)
5. Interpretation (8:19-27)

While the beginning of the chapter focuses mainly on events that happen on earth and that Daniel witnessed, the central part in this structure is an audition that reports a conversation that took place in heaven (vv. 13, 14). The function of this part is the same as that of the poetic section found in the middle of the previous chapter, which focused on the judgment taking place in

heaven (Dan. 7:9-13). It is generally recognized that verses 23-26 are poetic in style. The three most frequently used terms in this chapter are “to stand” or “to arise” (nine occurrences), “to become great” (six occurrences), and “a hand” or “a power” (three occurrences).

Clash Between East and West (8:1-8)

This chapter, like the previous one, to which it briefly refers, begins with an introduction consisting of a date. It then focuses on two animals, a ram and a goat.

¹In the third year of King Belshazzar’s reign, I, Daniel, had a vision after the one that had already appeared to me. ²In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; in the vision I was by the Ulai Canal. ³I looked up, and there was a ram with two horns standing in front of the canal, and the horns were tall. One of the horns was taller than the other but grew up later. ⁴I watched the ram charging toward the west and the north and the south. No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great.

⁵As I was thinking about this, suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground. ⁶He came toward the two-horned ram I had seen standing in front of the canal and ran at him in great rage. ⁷I saw him come close to the ram in fury, striking the ram and breaking his two horns. The ram was powerless to stand against him; the goat knocked him

to the ground and trampled on him, and none could rescue the ram from his power. ⁸The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his tall horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven.

Notes

8:1 “The third year of King Belshazzar’s reign.” This chapter dates to the year 547 B.C.—some seven years before the fall of Babylon. Given the fact that the book of Daniel presents Belshazzar’s character in negative terms (Dan. 5), it is fitting that a vision of anti-God activities would be related to this king’s reign. On the name “Belshazzar,” see the Notes on Daniel 5:1.

“I, Daniel.” This first-person report is a continuation of the direct speech found in the previous chapter with the exception of the very beginning, where the third person is used (7:1).

“The one that had already appeared to me.” The reference to the *hāzôn*, “vision,” in chapter 7 ties the two chapters together and supports the view that they contain the same message. They describe two different aspects of the same conflict because they were intended for two different audiences.

8:2 “I saw myself.” Some scholars, including Josephus,³ have argued that Daniel was physically present in Susa just as a few years later he found himself standing by the Tigris River (Dan. 10:4). According to another view, the prophet was only taken in a vision to that city, while in actuality he was physically still in Babylon. Daniel’s contemporary Ezekiel was sometimes transported in the spirit to a distant place (Ezek. 8:3; 11:24; 40:2). In fact, there are several proposed

links between this chapter and the prophecy of Ezekiel:

1. Both prophets received their visions in Mesopotamia (Dan. 8:2; Ezek. 1:3).
2. Both were given visions near bodies of water (Dan. 8:2; Ezek. 1:1).
3. Both seers were transported in spirit (Dan. 8:2; Ezek. 8:3; 11:24; 40:2).
4. In both cases, angels appear as humans (Dan. 8:15-18; Ezek. 40:3).
5. Both prophets are referred to as “son of man” (Dan. 8:17; Ezek. 40:4).
6. Both seers react to their visions (Dan. 8:17; Ezek. 1:28; 3:23).
7. Both revelations mention God’s day of wrath (Dan. 8:19; Ezek. 22:22-31).
8. The climaxes of both revelations focus on the sanctuary (Dan. 8:13, 14; Ezek. 40–48).
9. The visions both received were given for a distant future (Dan. 8:26; Ezek. 12:27).
10. Lastly, the literary type of the visions both received is apocalyptic narrative.

“The citadel of Susa.” The Hebrew word *habbîrâ* is variously translated as “the capital,” “the fortress,” “the citadel,” or “the acropolis.” The same term is also found in Nehemiah 1:1 and Esther 1:2. In 1 Chronicles 29:1, 19, this word is used to describe the Jerusalem temple. Susa (or Shushan), a fortified city, was the ancient capital of the region known as Elam. During the time of the Medo-Persian Empire it served as one of three capital cities. Its location was east of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. In the Bible, the Elamites were remembered as famous warriors. Genesis 14:1 names Kedorlaomer, king of Elam,

as the leader of the coalition of Mesopotamian kings. Both Nehemiah and Esther resided in this city, and some traditions say that Daniel retired and was buried there.

"In the province of flam." The modern name for this region, which lay between ancient Babylon and Persia and is located in today's Iran, is Khuzistan.

"Ulai canal." The word *'ubal* can also mean "river/stream" (Jer. 17:8). The Greek name for Ulai is *Eulaeus*. The element of water here reminds the reader of "the great sea" mentioned in the previous vision (Dan. 7:2).

8:3 "I looked up, and there." This is a common Hebrew idiom that in the context of Daniel's book begins the dramatic narration of a vision (2:31; 4:10; 7:2; 10:5). The expression is also used in narrative texts of the Bible, such as in Genesis 22:13, which says, "Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns."

"A ram." In the Bible, both sheep and goats are called "small cattle." The *'ayil*, "the ram," and the he-goat are the leaders of flocks of sheep and goats (cf. Ezek. 34:17). It is of interest to note that "the Persians often used the ram motif in their architecture."⁴

"Two horns." Normally, the ram had two horns. In Bible times, the horns were used as trumpets (Josh. 6:4) and as oil containers (1 Sam. 16:1). In the context of the sanctuary, animal horns were to be found on the four corners of the altar (Exod. 27:2).

"Tall." The literal meaning of the original word *g^ebdhdt* is "high."

8:4 "The west and the north and the south." Since the ram most likely came from the east (cf. Isa. 41:2),⁵ it charged in the remaining three di-

rections. A fragmentary copy from Qumran cave 4 (4QDan^a) adds the east to this verse. The direction of the east or "the rising sun" is often used positively in the Bible (Gen. 2:8; Ezek. 43:2; Dan. 11:41,44; Matt. 2:1; Rev. 16:12).

"From his power." Literally, the text says *miyyado*, "from his hand." For the figurative meaning of the word *yad*, "hand," see the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2.

"He did as he pleased." This has been called "a stock phrase" that paints "a picture of the arbitrary whim of political power"⁶ from the perspective of the subordinated populations, especially during Judah's exile (Neh. 9:24, 37; Esther 1:8; 9:5; Dan. 11:3; cf. vv. 16, 36). According to King Nebuchadnezzar's testimony recorded in Daniel 4:35, only "God does as he pleases."

"Became great." The causative form of the Hebrew verb *gadal*, "to be great," means "to magnify oneself"—in the sense of arrogance rather than of physical growth (cf. Lam. 1:9). The same word is found in Daniel 8:8, 11, 25; 11:36, 37, 39.

8:5 "A goat." The original text speaks of *s^epirhd'izzfm*, "the goat." The use of the definite article here is a detail that sharply contrasts with the introduction of the ram as the indefinite *'ayil 'ehad*, "one ram." The goat belongs to the family of the hollow-horned ruminants. Black was the common color of the goats in Palestine: "Your hair is like a flock of goats / descending from Gilead" (Song 6:5b). "The Syrian goat is characterized by its long pendulous ears and backward-curving horns."⁷

"A prominent horn between his eyes." In contrast to the two horns on the ram's head, the goat in this vision has only one horn ("unicorn"),

something not normally expected. The word *hazut*, "prominent," can also mean "highly visible, or noticeable."

"From the west." The goat came from the direction opposite of that from which the ram had come.

"Without touching the ground." This is probably a case of emphasis by overstatement. Daniel was figuratively saying that the goat was moving very fast, appearing not to touch the ground, or flying. In Daniel 7:6, the leopardlike beast that represented the third kingdom had four wings on its back, a picture that conveys the same concept.

8:6 "In great rage." The text literally says *bah^amatkdhd*, "in the heat of his rage," a superlative type of language that conveys an excessive feeling of anger.

8:7 "Come close to." A wordplay may have been intended here based on the presence of the same Hebrew root *nig'*, "to come close, touch, hit, strike," as in the previous verse, which says that the goat came "without touching the ground." This verse uses the causative form of the verb, expressing the idea of confrontation. Hence its meaning is "to attack." Thus, the goat that did not touch the ground violently "touched" or attacked the ram.

"In fury." The verbal root *mrr* has the connotation of bitterness (cf. Exod. 15:23; Ruth 1:20). This word differs from the one used at the end of the previous verse.

"The ram." The word *ha'ayil*, "the ram," is found no less than four times in this verse, indicating the sole object of the goat's furious attack.

8:8 "Very great." Verse 4 says that the ram became *higdil*, "great." In contrast, this verse says

the goat becomes *higdil* 'ad-m^a'dd, "very great" **"His tall horn was broken."** This statement implies an abrupt change.

"Four prominent horns." Regarding the word "prominent," see the *Notes on Daniel* Si. In the interpretation of the vision (v. 22), this is understood as the breaking of the empire into smaller entities toward "the four corners" of the earth.

"Toward the four winds of heaven." The same expression is used in Daniel 11:4, where it implies "toward all directions." In the previous vision, the "four winds of heaven" were "churned up the great sea" (7:2; see the *Notes on the* verse).

Exposition (8:1-8)

8:1, 2 The chapter begins in a way very similar to the previous one. In fact the author ties the two visions together by saying that this vision came **after the one that had already appeared to me**. Both visions were given to Daniel during the reign of **Belshazzar**, the eldest son of King Nabonidus, who was the crown prince and became the ruler of Babylon during the last ten years of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. The mention of Belshazzar may be meant to prepare the reader to meet the power known as "the little horn" that figures prominently in this and the previous chapter. In other words, Belshazzar typifies a power that in the future will attempt to oppose God and his plans. Thus "Belshazzar can be seen as a pale foreshadowing of the small horn."⁸

In the vision, the prophet was taken to **the citadel of Susa**, the capital of **Elam**, which lay east of the Euphrates River. This body of water was one of the natural boundaries of the land that God had promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18). Since the central concept of this chapter is God's sanctuary, the reference to **the Ulai Canal**, an artificial supply of water, may be intentional, because in the traditional oriental culture, holy places are usually supplied by ample quantities of water, and rivers are symbolic of purity. Ezekiel's vision was given by the Kebar River (Ezek. 1:1), while Ezra gathered Judean exiles "by the Ahava Canal" (Ezra 8:21). And when traveling through Philippi, Paul and his companions "went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer" (Acts 16:13).

8:3-8 In his vision, Daniel first saw two animals, **a ram** and **a goat**. In the Bible, both of these animals are symbols of strength and leadership (Jer. 50:8; Zech. 10:3). The ram came from the east and charged in the remaining three directions of a compass. Several specific details are given regarding this ram. He had **two horns** that **were tall** but not equal in length. For a time, no other animal could match his power. Then **a goat with a prominent horn** came "flying **from the west**. The two animals began a terrible fight, and the goat won, knocking the ram to the ground and trampling him.

The presence of **a ram** and **a goat** reminds the reader of the Bible of the crucial services that took place in the sanctuary (Lev. 16:5). As stated in the introduction to this chapter, this conflict between the two sacrificial animals suggests a reversal of the rituals that took place there. The two animals, in their pride, begin to fight against each other. In the end, the goat wins. In contrast to the ram that **became great**, the goat becomes **very great**, yet his greatness is short lived because soon his power is broken and divided among **four prominent horns** that **grew up toward the four winds of heaven**. It is useful to remember at this point that the altar of burnt offering (Exod. 27:2) and the altar of incense (Exod. 30:2) had a horn "at each of the four corners" pointing in the four directions of a compass.

The concept of pride is also the subject of the prophecy of Amos, who foresaw the day when God would

"destroy the altars of Bethel;
the horns of the altars will be
cut off
and fall to the ground"
(Amos 3:14).

The interpretation that is found in the second half of the chapter (w. 20-22) identifies **the ram** as the Medo-Persian Empire and **the goat** as the kingdom of Greece, which was later divided into smaller kingdoms. Thus far,

the conflicts prompted by sheer pride have been presented as mainly political in character and taking place on earth.

The Little Horn (8:9-12)

The focus of the vision shifts from the conflict between the animals to another conflict, one caused by a small part of an animal body—a horn.

"Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew very tall toward the south and toward the east and toward the Beautiful Land.¹⁰ It grew as high as the host of heaven, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them.¹¹ It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the continual sanctuary service from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown.¹² Through rebellion, a host was placed over the continual sanctuary service. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.

Notes

8:9 "One of them." While the Hebrew word *'ahat*, "one," is of the feminine gender, the pronominal suffix *-hem*, "them," is masculine. The question is often raised as to the antecedent of the word *them*. Does it refer here to the "four prominent horns" or to the "four winds of heaven," both of which are mentioned in the previous verse? Because the Hebrew word *qeren*, "horn," names a part of the body, it is mostly used in the feminine gender. The word *ruah*, "wind/spirit," on the other hand, may be both feminine and masculine. The word *hassamayim*, "heaven," is masculine. Based on this observation, it has been

argued that the masculine suffix *hem*, "them" in this verse cannot refer to the goat's horns, which are feminine in Hebrew, but to the "four winds of heaven," because the word *hassamayim* is masculine.

The random nature of gender shifts in the context of this chapter, however, weakens the argument. For example, the verbs *yasa'*, "care out," and *higdil*, "it set itself up" (v. 11), go together with the noun "horn," but both take forms of the masculine gender. Thus, the gender agreement alone is not a very strong argument to show that the little horn came from one of the "four winds of heaven."⁹ It is possible that the text here is intentionally ambiguous, with the suffix "the" referring to both the four horns and the four winds toward which the horns grew up.

"Came." In Biblical Hebrew, the verb normally used to express the growing of a horn is *'aid* "to go up" (Dan. 8:8). A different verb, however, is used in this verse: *ydsd*, which literally means "to come out" (Dan. 9:22,23,25). In Daniel 11:11, this verb stands in parallel with the verb *lhm*, "to make war." Daniel 11:44 says that the king will **go out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many** (emphasis supplied).

"Started small." The original text literally says *qeren-'ahat misfira*, "one horn came from smallness or littleness."¹⁰ The Aramaic cognate form *sē/ra*, "small," describes the origin of the little horn in Daniel 7:8. While this horn in chapter 8 has several points of similarity with the little horn of chapter 7, the two have some notable differences, such as different points of origin. The power represented by the little horn in chapter 7 arose following the division of the fourth kingdom (7:24), while in this chapter, it comes to

the scene after the break up of equivalent of the third kingdom of chapter 7 (cf. 8:21-23). This horn's littleness stands in contrast with the tall, prominent horn described in verse 8.

"Grew very tall." *The Hebrew phrase wattigdal-yeter, and it grew "exceedingly great," contrasts with the smallness of this horn at its beginning. The phrase expresses the third step in the progression found in the chapter and is based on the root gdl, "to be great": The ram was great (v. 4), the goat was very great (v. 8), while this horn grew "exceedingly great" (v. 9, NRSV).*

"Toward the south and toward the east and toward the Beautiful Land." The word *hassebi*, "beautiful land" or just "beautiful," refers to the land of Palestine (cf. Dan. 11:16, 41; Pss. 48:1, 2; 106:24; Jer. 3:19; Lam. 2:15; Ezek. 20:6, 15; Zech. 7:14). Psalm 50:2 says, "From Zion, perfect in beauty, / God shines forth." According to Daniel 8:4, the ram must have come from the east since he charged toward the three remaining directions—the west, the north, and the south. This verse says that the little horn charged toward the south, the east, and the Beautiful land. From Daniel's point of reference in the vision, Palestine was located in the west. That means that the little horn most likely came from the north, because the direction left out in this verse is the north. The mention of the north reminds the reader of the Bible of the place of God's dwelling in heaven (Job 37:22; Isa. 14:13, mg.; Ezek. 1:4), and it also brings to mind the direction from which most of Israel's enemies came (Isa. 41:25; Ezek. 26:7; 38:15; Zech. 2:6, 7).

8:10 "The host of heaven." In some biblical texts, *s^eba' hassamayim*, "the host of heaven," stands in parallel with the stars in the sky (Deut.

4:19; 17:3). Some interpreters link this expression with "the saints of the Most High" from the preceding chapter. The proud ambitions of the enemy of God are often portrayed in the Bible as an attempt to reach the heavens where God dwells: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens" (Gen. 11:4). It is important to note that both verses, Genesis 11:4 and Daniel 8:10, combine the root *gdl*, "great, tall," with the noun *hassamayim*, "the heavens." The little horn, according to this verse, enters into conflict with the heavenly army. Even though "a cosmic battle is ultimately at issue here,"¹¹ the explanation in verse 24 identifies the host of the heavens with **the mighty people and the saints**. Normally, in the Bible, God's angels are not referred to as "people." Certain biblical passages state that in the end, even the pagan gods, also described as the host of heaven, will be punished on the day of the Lord (Isa. 24:21).

"The starry host." In the Bible, stars are introduced as God's close allies (Judg. 5:20). The word *saba*, "host," is used for the second time in this verse. Should one assume that the parallelism between "the host of the heavens" and "the starry host" means the two expressions point to the same beings? Some commentators argue that the host of the heavens and the starry host describe only God's people on earth, not beings in heaven. To support their view, they quote Daniel 12:3. Yet, a careful look at Daniel 12:3 shows that a future time is in mind, when the wise will be glorified. In that verse, the wise are only compared to the stars, not simply identified as such.

To resolve the issue of the identity of the beings under attack by the little horn, one has to consider both the genre of this text and its

context. It is also helpful to look at similar prophetic passages in the Bible, such as Isaiah 14 and Revelation 12. As has been observed in the previous chapter in regard to the saints of the Most High (7:27), it is difficult to draw a clear line of separation between God's people in heaven and on the earth.

"Trampled." The verb *ramas*, "to trample," is also used in Daniel 8:7, where the goat tramples on the ram, signifying his triumph. Daniel 7:7 states that the fourth beast "trampled underfoot" the rest of its victims. Verses 21, 22 from that same chapter say that the little horn defeats the saints of the Most High God, while according to Revelation 12:4, the dragon's tail "swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth."

8:11 From the point of view of grammar, verses 11 and 12 are among the most difficult in the book.

"It set itself up." In the whole chapter, the verbal root *gdl*, "to be great" (with the causative stem meaning "to magnify oneself"), is found six times, four of which describe the little horn. This term expresses an attitude of rebellious defiance toward God comparable to that of the people who built the *migdal*, "the tower" of Babel (Gen. 11:4).¹²

"The Prince of the host." Some interpreters argue that the title "the Prince of the host" stands here for God.¹³ The title *sar*, "prince," is sometimes used in the Bible to describe the leader of the priests and Levites who served in the temple (1 Chron. 15:5; Ezra 8:24). The title "Prince of the host," on the other hand, is used of an army leader (Gen. 21:22; 1 Sam. 12:9).¹⁴ Presumably, the person in question here is the leader of the armies of

the Lord. Joshua 5:14 speaks of a person who called himself commander or prince of the arm of the Lord. When this person appeared at Jericho, Joshua worshiped him. In the second half of Daniel's book, the title "prince," *sar*, is applied to a supernatural being sometimes called Michael (8:25; 10:13,20,21; 12:1).

"It took away." Since this verb, *huras*, "take away," is used in its passive form, the text literally says "the daily was taken away from him [the Prince of the host]."

"The continual sanctuary service." This term has been a subject of much debate. The common way of translating the Hebrew word *tamid* is "daily or continual." The word is frequently used in the texts of the Bible that are in the priestly genre. In several passages, the term is applied to the daily (morning and evening) offering of a lamb—also described as a "regular burnt offering" (Exod. 29:38-42; Num. 28:3; 1 Chron. 16:40). Yet, the same term is applied to the lamps in the sanctuary (Lev. 24:2) as well as to the sacred showbread (2 Chron. 2:4). It is also important to note that the word *sacrifice* is not found in this verse in the original Hebrew.

In this chapter, the noun *tamid*, "daily, continual," is used with the definite article. As such, it covers a number of activities that were regularly performed by the priest in the holy place in the sanctuary. Thus, the best way to understand this term is to say that it covered various types of services that were regularly performed in the sanctuary. It has also been proposed that the term should be rendered as "continual intercession."¹⁵

"The place of his sanctuary." The Hebrew word for "place" is *maqdm*; however, the word

used here is *makon*, which may be translated as "the foundation" of the sanctuary. The Syriac translation renders this word as "the establishment." Psalms 89:14 and 97:2 describe the foundation of God's throne through the use of the terms "righteousness," "justice," "love," and "faithfulness." The possessive "his" refers to "the Prince of the host" who is mentioned earlier in this verse.

"Overthrown." The original word *huslak* has a much stronger sense than the expression "brought low." The power here is attempting to overthrow the foundation of God's dwelling place, which is his sanctuary. Nehemiah 9:26 uses the same verb to describe the rebellious people, who threw God's instruction behind their backs.

8:12 "Rebellion." Among several words for sin that are used in the Bible, *pesa'*, "rebellion," is one of the strongest because it conveys an act of willful covenant breaking. Daniel 9 uses the root of this word frequently to describe the sins of Israel. Scholars do not agree on whose rebellion is meant here, the little horn's or a host's. It could be that both are implied, since through the work of the little horn an abomination is set up with the purpose of replacing the true worship of God.

"A host." In contrast to the three previous occurrences of the word "host" in verses 10 and 11, where this noun is definite, in this verse it is not used with the definite article. In this way it differs from the word *tamid*, "continual sanctuary service," which, as mentioned earlier, comes with the definite article as well as the preposition 'al, which means either "toward," "against," or "concerning."

"Was placed over." In the context of Daniel 1:2, an active form of the verb *natan*, "to give, to appoint," is often translated as "delivered." "Over" in that verse could be understood in the sense of control. If that is the intended meaning of the passive form of that same verb here, then the situation of "the host" could be compared to the saints who were defeated in the war with the little horn (Dan. 7:21). The same Hebrew verb, however, can mean "to set, place, lay, or appoint."⁶ Because of the preposition that follows this verb, the whole phrase could be translated as "through rebellion, a host was placed against the continual sanctuary service."

"It prospered." The apparent success of the little horn is described in more detail in three places in the previous chapter: Daniel 7:8 and 24 say that this power subdued three kings; verse 21 speaks of it waging war against the saints and defeating them; and finally, the numerical progression of the time period of the little horn's activity given in verse 25 goes from a time to (two) times. It has been rightly observed that "sin must run its course before it is punished."¹⁷ The sudden and complete destruction of the little horn is presented in both this and the previous chapter (7:26; 8:25).

"Truth." The Hebrew word *'emet*, "truth," should not be understood as referring to abstract truth but rather to "religious truth as contained in the Torah (Law)"⁸—the words "truth" and "law" are synonymous in some passages of the Bible (Ps. 119:43).¹⁹ According to the previous vision, the little horn intends **to change the set times regulated by the law** (Dan. 7:25). In the context of this whole passage, the word applies to the truth about God's sanctuary in heaven.²⁰

Exposition (8:9-12)

8:9 Beginning with verse 9, the scene changes from a kingdom represented by an animal to an unusual power represented by only one part of an animal's body: the **horn, which started small**. The horn symbolism reminds the reader of the anti-God power in the previous chapter. In this vision, where the concept of the sanctuary dominates, it is good to remember that horns were a part of the sanctuary furniture, especially of the altar, which had a horn on each of its four corners (cf. Jer. 17:1). According to Exodus 27:2, God gave Moses the following instruction in regard to the altar of burnt offerings: " 'Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are of one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze.' " Amos 3:14 paints a picture of God's judgment directed against "the horns of the altar" at Bethel, which "will be cut off / and fall to the ground."

The growth of this horn is first traced in three directions of a compass on the horizontal level, with the omission of the fourth—which becomes then, the direction from which this horn most likely came. A number of commentators argue that the horn came out of one of the four horns located on the goat's head. It is equally possible to argue that this horn came out of one of the **four winds of heaven** mentioned at the very end of verse 8. The verb that is used to describe the origin of this horn is not

the one usually used, *'aid*, "to go up" (1 Cr Dan. 8:8), but *yasa* "to go out." The same verb is used of the angel Gabriel who said he had "come out" (NRSV) c: heaven to answer Daniel's prayer (9:22). This verb is used in the book in parallelism with a Hebrew verb that means "to make war" (11:11) and "to destroy many" (11:44). Ruth 1:13b quote; Naomi as saying, " 'No, my daughter; It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD'S hand has gone out against me! " "

People sometimes ask, "From which of the four directions of the compass that marked the growth of the four horns did the little horn come?" A look at the previous verses in this chapter may be of help in answering this question. Even though verse 3 does not explicitly state that the ram came from the east, verse 4, which says that the ram charged toward the west, the north, and the south, leads to that conclusion. If this procedure is applied to the information found in verse 9, then it is safe to conclude that the horn came from the north since its growth was in the directions of **the south, the east, and the Beautiful Land**, or Palestine, which lay in the west in relation to Elam. (In regard to the expression **the Beautiful Land**, Ezekiel 20:6 quotes God as saying to Israel: " 'On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of Egypt into a land I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and

honey, the most beautiful of all lands.' ")

Several biblical passages, especially from the prophets, indicate that God's throne is located in the north (Isa. 14:13, mg.; Ezek. 1:4). Job 37: 22 says, 'Out of the north he comes in golden splendor;

God comes in awesome majesty.' " Furthermore, the north is important because most of the enemies of God's people came from that direction (Isa. 41:25; Jer. 1:14; 4:6; 6:1; Ezek. 26:7; 38:6, 15; 39:2; Zech. 2:6, 7). The prophets also taught that one day the Lord will bring his people back from their captivity in the north (Jer. 3:18; 16:15; 23:8; 31:8; Zech. 6:6, 8). It is important to note that Psalm 48:2 compares Mount Zion in Jerusalem with "the utmost heights of Zaphon . . . the city of the Great King." Here Zaphon, which is in the north, means the heavenly place of Yahweh's rule, while Zion is its earthly counterpart. The Lord's reign extends over the entire world from Zaphon in the north, the place of his heavenly throne, while at the same time he reigns from its earthly counterpart, his temple located on Mount Zion.

The fact that according to chapter 8 the little horn most probably originated from the north is the key to the proper understanding of verses 10-14. According to this vision, the ultimate power behind the little horn is of cosmic proportion, suggesting a universal struggle in which God's sanctuary is the prime

object of the attack. This passage is best understood if related to Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and Revelation 12.

In Isaiah 14, the prophet is sarcastically describing the proud king of Babylon by telescoping through time into the remote past—to the emergence of a much greater figure, a figure of cosmic proportions. The famous star that had fallen from heaven to earth epitomizes the ultimate extent of pride. His boastful words clearly betray ulterior motives:

"I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne
above the stars of God;
I will sit enthroned on the mount of
assembly,
on the utmost heights of the
sacred mountain
[Hebrew *Saphon*, "the north"].
I will ascend above the tops of the
clouds;
I will make myself like the Most
High" (Isa. 14:13, 14).

To read the verses above and conclude that the prophet described the pride of the Babylonian king merely by hyperbole would be an understatement. This passage is better viewed as the prophetic blending of two proud personalities, an earthly king and an angel in heaven separated in time but associated in pride. In other words, telescoping through time, Isaiah is showing how the

pride of this earthly king is only a reflection of the sin of a much superior personality, who was the first to challenge the divine order of things.

Ezekiel, who was Daniel's contemporary, was also exiled to Babylon, where he prophesied to his fellow Judeans. In chapter 28 of his book, this prophet described the pride of the prince of Tyre. However, it is generally recognized that in doing so, he telescoped through time and blended the figure of this earthly ruler with that of a fallen cherub who in the remote past was in Eden, the garden of God, and who walked among the fiery stones on God's holy mount. Ezekiel's text places this rebellion in the context of a sanctuary (28:18), and it identifies the cherub's pride as the cause of his fall (28:17). Ezekiel's description of this proud being, who was definitely superior to the prince of Tyre, is of cosmic character and is useful for a study of Daniel 8:10-14.

8:10 The little horn's power was "unmatched on earth; it stretched up to heaven."²¹ Verse 10 states that this power **grew as high as the host of heaven.** "The conflict between power and greater power develops now into a trial of strength" between a created being and the Creator Himself.²² In addition to **the host of heaven**, the text lists some additional objects of the little horn's attack: **the starry host** and **the Prince of the host** (v. 11). The question of the identity of this **host** is often raised. In all three in-

stances in this passage, the noun **host** used with the definite article. The **host: - the heavens** stands in parallelism with **the starry host**. The conjunction that found between these two expressions may be explicative and could be translated: "that is" or "namely." Thus, the two expressions probably describe the same group. Moreover, this verse says, literally that the little horn threw **down to the earth** "some of the host and some of the stars." This means that the host is the same as the stars in heaven. The whole statement would then read as follows: "I threw some of the host, that is, some of the stars to the ground."

Isaiah 14 shares several common elements with Daniel 8: First, in Isaiah's taunting song, the leaders of the nation are called *'attude 'ares*—literally "the goats of the earth" (Isa. 14:9). Second, Isaiah's song relates the activities of God's enemy to the direction of the *Saphon*, "the north" (Isa. 14:13). It is hard for the reader of the Bible not to relate this text to Revelation 12:4, in which the dragon "swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth." Apocalyptic visions in Daniel and elsewhere in the Bible consistently portray cosmic conflicts between good and evil on both vertical and horizontal axes. While the enemy of God dares to target God's throne in his attacks, he does not spare the faithful or earth from trials and persecution. Verse 24 in this chapter speaks of the destruc-

tion of **the mightypeople and the saints**. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that the hostile activities of the little horn are directed against God's host in heaven as well as against his people on earth. The phenomenon known as "prophetic telescoping" helps us understand the way in which historical events that are separated by long time periods are blended together and described as single events (cf. Num. 24:17; Matt. 24).

Revelation 12 speaks of a war in heaven in which Michael and his angels fight against the dragon and his angels. It says that the dragon's "tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth" (v. 4). Since Michael won this war, the dragon and his angels were hurled to the earth. The dragon's antagonism, however, was not limited to Michael and the stars of the heavens. In his anger, the dragon continues to wage wars against God's people on earth. Because we are dealing with an apocalyptic passage, the meaning of "the host" should not be limited to angels, but also extended to God's faithful people, who are persecuted by the dragon's agents on earth (cf. Dan. 8:24). Chapter 7 says that the little horn defeats the saints; similarly, chapter 8 states that the little horn tramples on them. Zechariah 2:8 describes God's great concern for his people on earth by saying "whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye."

8:11, 12 The **Prince of the host** is most likely the same being as the One

who, under the title "commander/prince of the army of the Lord," appeared at Jericho and was worshiped by Joshua (Josh. 5:14). In the Bible, the term **prince** is sometimes applied to the leader of the priests and Levites who served in the temple—probably the high priest (1 Chron. 15:5; Ezra 8:24). Moreover, "in the tabernacle context the word 'hosts' refers to the Levitical guard (Num. 4:3, 23)."²³ In Daniel's book, the title **sar**, "prince," is often applied to Michael (10:13, 21; 12:1). He is the Chief Prince of God's people on earth and the Supreme Commander of the armies of the Lord (Rev. 12:7). In Daniel 8, the Prince is mentioned together with **the continual sanctuary service** and also with the foundation of God's **sanctuary** that is tied to his "righteousness, justice, love and faithfulness" (Pss. 89:14; 97:2). A Talmudic reference to Michael describes him as the Person who serves in God's presence in the temple in heaven.²⁴ Hebrews 8:1, 2 presents Jesus as the High Priest "who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man."

The evidence from the Bible leads to the conclusion that **the Prince of the host** in Daniel 8 is the Leader of God's armies that fought together against the pretender to God's throne. This being can be compared to the heavenly Michael, who, in the book of Daniel, is portrayed as the Prince Defender and High Priest of Daniel's people (Dan.

10:13, 21; 12:1). In this study, he is understood to be Jesus Christ. In Daniel 7, the little horn's attack targets the Most High God, his saints, and the times regulated by the law. In chapter 8, the same power wages war against **the Prince of the host**, God's faithful servants, truth, and the foundation of and the services in the sanctuary.

In this context, truth should be related to the law mentioned in chapter 7 and understood as the truth about God's sanctuary. These two words, "law" and "truth," are used together in several biblical passages. Psalm 119:142 says, "Your righteousness is everlasting / and your law is true" (cf. w. 151, 160 and Malachi 2:6). Thus it is safe to conclude that **truth** here is "the word of God, so far as it is embodied in the worship."²⁵ Although verse 12 is very difficult to understand, in the context of the whole passage, it may be explained as a summary statement in which a host, a counterfeit of God's and Christ's army, is placed over or against the sanctuary service by the hostile power that leads in this rebellion against God. In this way, God's sanctuary, his Prince, and the continual sanctuary service are all eclipsed by the activity of **a host** that the impostor has set up.

Audition (8:13,14)

The two verses that describe what Daniel heard in his vision stand in contrast to that which he saw. They

form the climax of this important vision in the book.

¹³Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the continual sanctuary service, the rebellion that causes destruction, and the surrender of the sanctuary and the host that trampled it under foot?"

"He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be restored to its rightful state."

Notes

8:13 "A holy one."The words' **ehad-qadc**: "a holy one," refer to an angelic being, corresponding to the Aramaic word **qaddis** found in Daniel 4:13. Most likely, this title was used for an angel because of the sanctuary theme in this chapter: This was "a holy one" who ministers in the "holy place." One tradition identifies this holy being as Michael. Presumably, this person is one of the holy beings who constitute "the myriads gathered around the throne in chapter 7, and in this chapter they seem to be members of the 'host of heaven' of verse; 10-12."²⁶

"How long will it take?" The interrogative Hebrew phrase **'ad-matay**, "until when?" relates not so much to the duration of the sacrilegious actions by the little horn as to the point in time that marks the definite end to those actions. In the Bible, this type of question usually comes in a psalm of lament, although it is also found in prophetic passages (Isa. 6:11; Zech. 1:12). Psalm 79:1,5 says,

O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance;
 they have defiled your holy temple,
 they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble....
 How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever?
 How long will your jealousy burn like fire?

The question presupposes a limit to the progress made by the evil forces. Oftentimes, from a human perspective, divine judgment seems to have been delayed in order to give evidence of God's mercy, but it is delayed also "so that it may be clear, when it is passed, that it is justly administered."²⁷

"The vision." *the* Hebrew word for vision that is used here is *hazdn*. The question asked in this verse "is about the length of *the vision*, not about the length of the activities of the little horn. The activities of the little horn are included within this vision, [and] indeed they mark its climax, but they are not all that there is to the vision."²⁸ The main points covered by the entire vision include an attack on the continual sanctuary service, the destructive rebellion, the surrender of the sanctuary, and the host's trampling underfoot of truth about the sanctuary. The question in this verse covers several terms that appear to concern events that are detached from one another, and it is not very clear how they relate to each other. The list given here is a summary of the statements found in verses 10-12 of this chapter.

"To be fulfilled." These words are not found in the original Hebrew but are supplied here for the sake of clarity.

"The continual sanctuary service." On the meaning of the word *tamid*, see the **Notes** on Daniel 8:11.

"The rebellion that causes destruction." *The* Hebrew words *happesa'sdmem*, "the destructive rebellion," constitute a general expression that describes the impact of the activities of the little horn on God's people and on the sanctuary services.

"The host that trampled it underfoot." See the **Notes** on Daniel 8:12.

8:14 "To me." Some ancient versions, such as Greek and Syriac, read "to him." Unlike them, the Hebrew text says *'elay*, "to me"—meaning that the answer was given to Daniel rather than to one of the angels. If the question was asked for Daniel's sake, then it is logical that the answer was given to him. Zechariah 3:5 contains a similar case of a prophet's participation in an apocalyptic vision. There, the prophet interjects by suggesting that a clean turban be placed on the head of the high priest.

"It will take." *The* question began with the preposition *'ad*, "until," and so does the answer, pointing to a definite point of time in the future.

"2,300 evenings and mornings." In the original text, the two nouns *'ereb*, "evening," and *boqer*, "morning," are given in the singular and without the conjunction *and* between them. According to the story of Creation, a biblical day consists of an evening and a morning (Gen. 1).²⁹

It is normal to expect the presence of symbolic numbers such as three, four, seven, ten, etc., in apocalyptic texts. Yet, the number 2,300 cannot possibly be regarded as symbolic. For that reason, some have tried to divide this number into an equal number of evenings and mornings, arriving at 1,150 days. They have done so to harmonize this period with the "time, times, and half a time" in Daniel 7:25, which totals 1,260

days. This division, however, ignores the biblical contexts of the passages in which the terms *evening* and *morning* are combined together. It has been rightly stated that "no-one has been able to suggest a reason for the use of the number 1,150 days."³⁰ The correct translation of the Hebrew original statement is **2,300 evenings and mornings**.

Since in certain biblical prophetic passages that deal with God's judgment, days are used for years, this period can be understood as "2,300 prophetic years." The first such passage is Numbers 14:34, which describes the divine punishment the people of Israel would experience in the following way: ""For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you."" The second passage also has to do with the sins of Israel. It quotes God as telling the prophet Ezekiel, "I have assigned you 40 days, a day for each year" (Ezek. 4:6b). The passage in Daniel to which the year-day principle³¹ is most commonly applied is the prophecy about the seventy weeks of years (9:24), which is contrasted with the "three weeks of days" mentioned in the Hebrew text of Daniel 10:2.

"The sanctuary." The Hebrew word *qddes* is one of the two terms used for the "sanctuary." Although some interpreters argue that the Jerusalem temple is meant here, in the context of the whole passage, the sanctuary in heaven is intended.³² In Revelation 13:6, the beast from the sea slanders God's name and his dwelling place, which includes those who dwell in heaven, that is, God's angels.

"Restored to its rightful state." The simple passive form *nisdaq*, "be reconsecrated or re-

stored," is unique in the Old Testament [*הִפְסֵדוּ* *legomenon*). It is based on the Hebrew root *sr*. "to be just or right," which is attested 524 times in the Old Testament and is one of the richer terms in the Bible. The Septuagint translates for *nisdaq* in this verse is the Greek *woe katharisthesetai*, "be cleansed." The modern English translations of this term that scholars have suggested include "justified," "cleanse: "purified," "vindicated," "rededicated," "make legitimate," and "made right."³³ In the context of this passage, the term "seems to describe the (heavenly) reaction to the activities of the [little] horn."³⁴ Thus, the best way to translate *nisdaq* in this context is to say "restored to rightful state,"³⁵ a statement that stands in contrast to the destructive damages inflicted on the sanctuary and its services described in verses 10-13.

Exposition (8:13.14)

8:13 During the audition, Daniel overhears a conversation between two heavenly beings, who are called "hob ones" because of the sanctuary context of the chapter. One of these two beings may be Michael and the other Gabriel. The question **How long?** literally means; "Until when?" putting the emphasis not on the duration or the length of the time involved but rather on the point in time that will demarcate the end of the rebellion. While the word **vision** is found in the original text and refers to that which is described in verses 10-12, the word **fulfilled** is not in the original Hebrew but has been supplied by translators.

The vision's main points can be summarized as follows: It speaks of the removal of the continual sanctuary service, the rebellion that causes destruction, and the surrender and trampling of the sanctuary underfoot. As in verse 11, **the continual sanctuary service** here pertains to the whole service in the sanctuary and should not be limited to the morning and evening sacrifices. The **rebellion that causes desolation** is best understood as the type of aggressive rebellion that results in the destruction of the services of the sanctuary and of some of the people who serve in it. The question asked in this verse relates to the time period covering the whole vision, beginning with the time of Medo-Persia.

8:14 The answer begins with the same interrogative preposition "until?" with which the question began, pointing again to a definite point of time in the future. This answer should be understood in the light of the question asked in the preceding verse. The days are described here through sanctuary language as **evenings and mornings**, pointing to the two times when the sacrifices in the sanctuary were offered (Dan. 9:21). The number **2,300** looks like an arbitrary number and should not be taken figuratively. Some interpreters have tried to divide it by two, proposing a period of 1,150 days that would fit the intertestamental application of this prophecy. That approach, however, contradicts the

biblical definition of what constitutes one full day (cf. Gen. 1:5).

In the interpretation part of the chapter, it is stated in three places that the time to which this vision points is far in the future—it points to the very time of the end (w. 17, 19, 26). For that reason, it is best to apply the year-day principle to this time period and view the days here in question as prophetic years. At least three other biblical passages—two of which are found in contexts of divine judgments—apply the year-day principle: Daniel 9:24 (cf. Dan. 10:2); Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34. Although Daniel is told that this prophetic period begins in the time of the Medo-Persian Empire (v. 20), from this point in time it stretches into a distant future. This chapter does not contain the beginning date of this prophetic timeline. Given the fact that several elements connect chapters 8 and 9 (see the introduction to Daniel 9 in this commentary), both the 2,300 days and the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 begin from the same date. Based on Daniel 9:24, Adventists hold that the seventy weeks are cut off from a much longer prophetic period, which is the 2,300 days. The Application in Church History found at the end of this chapter gives the precise date that marked the end of this period of time.

This passage teaches that the "central feature in the act of deliverance would be not the destruction of an enemy but the fate of the sanctuary."³⁶

The point in time that is specified here stands far in the future, coming at the end of 2,300 years, when "the heavenly temple, the prototype of the Jerusalem temple of old"³⁷ **will be restored to its rightful state.** In other words, through divine intervention, all that the little horn had reversed and destroyed will **be restored to its rightful state.** W. Vogel has correctly said that "judgment from the sanctuary not only involves the theme of the sovereignty and reign of God on the divine level but also the dimension of atonement and vindication on the divine *and* the human level."³⁸ And Doukhan has proposed that the cleansing of the sanctuary "is in fact the sign of the total purification of the whole earth on the day of God's judgment.

Daniel's Reaction (8:15-18)

The second half of the chapter contains, first of all, Daniel's strong reaction to the vision. The presence of heavenly beings, who explained the revelation, made a difference in his experience.

¹⁵ While I, Daniel, was watching the vision and sought to understand it, there before me stood one who looked like a human. ¹⁶And I heard a human voice from the Ulai calling, "Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision."

¹⁷As he came near the place where I was standing, I was afraid and fell prostrate. "O man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end."

¹⁸While he was speaking to me, I fell into : deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Then :- touched me and raised me to my feet

Notes:

8:15 "I, Daniel." As in Daniel 7:15, 28, and 8:1, the first-person introduction is used here:: lend authenticity to the contents of the eyev, nness report. The prophet's emergence from the dream to the real world may have prompted tb : emphatic use of his name.

"To understand it." The Hebrew noun *b'r*: means "understanding." This word is built on the root *bin*, "to discern," which is used frequently r the book. Since a similar word, *mebin*, "unde-- standing," based on the same root, occurs in the last verse of this chapter where Daniel says, : was beyond understanding" (v. 27), the t,'c words form an *inclusio* that clearly marks the beginning and the end of this literary unit in the chapter. This same word root dominates the revelation recorded in chapter 9. The concept o* "understanding" also figures in Jesus' reference to Daniel in his Olivet Sermon (Matt. 24:15)

"Looked like a human." The original text says *lfmar'eh-gaber*, "someone having the appearance of a man." The noun *geber*, "a strong man," signifies an adult male person. Its synonym *ends*, "a human being," a cognate Aramaic wore that is used in 7:13, has a more generic meaning. The proper name "Gabriel" has the same root as the noun *geber*.

The text does not specify who the person in question is. One possibility is that in addition to Gabriel, Michael is also present here. Based on some strong parallels between this passage and Daniel 10-12 and coupled with the use of the

same expression in Ezekiel 1:26, it is likely that this being was a divine person.

8:16 "A human voice." The Hebrew word for "man" is *'adam*. It differs from the word used in the previous verse. The word *'adam* is usually translated as "human being" or "mankind." In this context, it is best to render the whole phrase as "a person's voice" or "someone's voice." in the light of Ezekiel 1:26, the voice most likely came from God. "Who else but God has the authority to issue orders to an archangel?"⁴⁰ It has been suggested that since Daniel could only hear this being's voice, he was not permitted to see him.⁴¹

"From the Ulai." On the Ulai River, see the Notes on Daniel 8:2. The preposition *ben* that stands before the word *Ulai* means "between"⁴² or "in the midst of" (Isa. 44:4; Ezek. 31:10,14). This picture of a divine being hovering in the air over the waters of the river should be compared with Daniel 12:7, where **the person clothed in linen** is standing between the banks of the river above its waters. In this passage, however, the focus of the narrator is on neither the person nor the place where he was standing, but rather on the voice that Daniel heard.

"Gabriel." This is the first of the rare instances in which an angel is named in the Bible. Daniel's book is the only one in the Old Testament in which angels are named. And Michael and Gabriel are the only angels that are mentioned by name in the Bible. The name *Gabriel* is usually understood to mean "man of God" or "God is my hero/warrior."⁴³ This angel serves as a messenger (Dan. 9:21) and interpreter, yet his service to Daniel goes far beyond this because he fights against hostile princes that are opposed to God's

plans (10:20). In the Gospel narratives, Gabriel figures prominently in the story of Jesus' birth (Luke 1:19,26).

8:17 "He came near." The subject of this verb is understood to be Gabriel.

"And fell prostrate." Literally, the text says that Daniel "fell on his face." In the Bible, this expression is used for either an accidental fall (the fall of Goliath in 1 Sam. 17:49) or the intentional showing of respect: "When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground" (1 Sam. 25:23). The rendering "fell prostrate" suggests an act of worship of God in the presence of his messenger (cf. Dan. 2:46). In the book of Revelation, an angel refuses John's worship on two occasions (19:10; 22:8,9).

"O man." The phrase *ben-'addm*, "son of man," is the Hebrew equivalent of the Aramaic expression in Daniel 7:13. In this verse, the comparative preposition "as, like" is missing because Daniel was only a human being. The phrase emphasizes one's humanity and is frequently found in the book of Daniel's contemporary Ezekiel. Some translators render the expression as "mortal (man)."

"The time of the end." The phrase *'et-qes* is sometimes rendered as "the end of the world" or "the final days." It differs from the expression "the end of time." The specification "time of the end" means the time prior to the second coming of Christ, which is different from the expression "the latter days."⁴⁴ Pertaining to that distant future time, it "requires understanding, for the more distant the time, the more understanding is required."⁴⁵ This is the first of the three statements found in this chapter that

point to the time when the vision will be completely fulfilled. The other two places are verses 19 and 26.

8:18 "A deep sleep." Even though the literal meaning of the Hebrew verb *radam* is "to fall into a deep sleep" (Dan. 10:9; Gen. 2:21; Jon. 1:5), it is assumed that a loss of consciousness is intended here. According to Genesis 15:12, Abraham, while in vision, fell into a deep sleep.

"Touched"me. "This is one of several parallels between this vision and the one recorded in chapter 10, where no less than three times Daniel is "touched" and strengthened by the heavenly messenger (10:10, 16, 18). Other biblical prophets were touched during their vision (1 Kings 19:5; Isa. 6:7; Jer. 1:9; Rev. 1:17). Some scholars understand this verb as saying "he grasped me."

Exposition (8:15-18)

8:15, 16 In telling about his reaction to the vision, Daniel uses the first person speech **I, Daniel**, also used in verse 1 of this chapter. This enhances the authenticity of the report, and it also makes the reading more dramatic. As the prophet pauses at the end of this enigmatic vision, he sees a person **who looked like a human** standing before him. Ezekiel 1:26 describes God's appearance as "a figure like that of a man." The first being that Daniel saw is most likely Michael, who accompanies Gabriel. He is pictured here as standing between the banks of the canal over the surface of the water. Daniel 12:7 describes the person clothed in linen as

standing above the waters of the river.'

Gabriel serves in the second half : the book as Daniel's interpreting ange. The name *Gabriel* means "man of God. The **voice** coming from the one who is standing "over the water" of the car.i, invites Gabriel to tell Daniel the meaning of the vision. In the visionary part **or** the book, an interpreting angel regular! helps and instructs Daniel. "He who ha: been the skillful interpreter of dream and visions still needs his own vision explained."⁴⁷

8:17, 18 The impact of the vision **on** Daniel was such that he was terrified and fell on the ground. This fall can be understood as either an act of worship or the result of great fear and exhaustion. "One confronts God at great peri. and enters into the dialogue with **God** or the angelic emissaries of God **onh** with divine permission."⁴⁸ Gabriel addresses Daniel as a **man**. A similar title is found in Daniel 7:13, where it is preceded by the preposition "like" because. in contrast to Daniel, who was only a human being, the person in Daniel was more than a mere human.

Words that were intended to bring some encouragement to Daniel reveal that the **vision concerns the time of the end** rather than a near future. This is the first of the three statements in the second half of the chapter that apply the fulfillment of the audition from this chapter to the distant future at the time of the end. The words spoken here by

Gabriel did not change Daniel's situation much. He still lay with his face to the ground in a deep sleep, probably unconscious, until the angel grasped him and raised him to his feet. Daniel's strong reaction to this vision points to its great importance and relevance in the context of the book.

Interpretation (8:19-27)

Gabriel's interpretation of the vision contains a number of elements previously mentioned in the vision. They are presented here in summary fashion.

¹⁹ He said: "Look! I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end. ²⁰The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. ²¹The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the tall horn between his eyes is the first king. ²²The four horns that replaced the one that was broken represent four kingdoms that will arise from his nation but will not have the same power.

²³"In the latter time of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, skilled in intrigue, will arise. ²⁴He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding destruction and will succeed in what he does. He will destroy the mighty people and the saints. ²⁵Through his cunning, he will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be broken, but not by human power.

²⁶The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future."

²⁷1, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and performed the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding.

Notes

8:19 "Later." The word translated here as "later" is based on the root 'ahar, which means "behind" or "after." This word's two basic meanings give insight into how the ancient Hebrews pictured the future events. In contrast to our modern view, they viewed the future as being located behind—not in front of—a person.

"The time of wrath." The Hebrew word *hazza'am*, "the wrath/indignation," describes a reaction of the holy God to sin and is often associated with God's judgment, pointing to the time of the end. "In the perspective of the vision, the end of the world is the time when God, in his anger, will punish human beings for their sins. This will be followed by the restoration of the people of God, who will be reconciled with their creator and master after having received their own chastisement."⁴⁹ The prophecy of Isaiah speaks of God's wrath in the following words:

Go, my people, enter your rooms
and shut the doors behind you;
hide yourselves for a little while
until his wrath has passed by (26:20).

The view that the exile was a period of God's wrath is supported by such passages as 2 Chronicles 36:16 and Daniel 9:11-14.

"The appointed time." The Hebrew word *mo'ed*, "an appointed time," describes a fixed date. In the Hebrew calendar, it stood for Israel's regular feast days (Lev. 23). The combination of this word with the word *qes*, "end," that follows describes the appointed time that is directly related to the time of the end.

8:20 "Two-horned ram." See the **Notes** on Daniel 8:3.

"The kings." The word *malke*, "kings of," is in the plural construct state. In Daniel, the word *melek*, "king," is often interchangeable with *mal-ku*, "kingdom" (2:36; 7:17).

"Media and Persia." In Daniel (and Esther 1:19), these two kingdoms are consistently referred to as one (5:28; 6:8, etc).

8:21 "The shaggy goat." While verse 5 has only the Hebrew word for "goat," here in this verse, the Aramaic equivalent *hassa'tr*, "goat," is placed side by side with Hebrew *hassdpir*, "the goat." For that reason, translators render the two words as "the shaggy goat" (hendiadys).

"Greece." In the Bible, the place name *eyawan* refers to Greece. A more correct name for the Greek kingdom would be the Greco-Macedonian Empire, since Philip and his son Alexander were from Macedonia.

"The first king." The Hebrew word *hari'son*, "the first," can also mean "the strongest" or "the most important." All interpreters agree that these words speak of Alexander the Great.

8:22 "Four kingdoms." For the meaning of the number four, see the **Notes** on Daniel 7:2. In terms of world history, scholars relate these words to the division of the Greek Empire into four entities.

"His nation." Here, the word *goy*, "nation," is

indefinite in the Hebrew. As such, it literal means "a nation," presumably Alexander's.

"Will not have the same power." The - literally says *welo'bekdho*, "but not with his pc .e' * It is assumed that this means the four kingo: will not be as strong as the united one was. V, -e- related to history, this means that the terr:: * Alexander held was geographically greater what the four following kingdoms controller Or, it may possibly mean that this powerful r _ r did not divide his empire himself; the parce - : of the territory was the natural outcome of - death.

8:23 At this point, the text switches to poet", through a metrical form, and it continues as sue- through verse 26.

"Their reign." The suffix *-am*, "their," rexe) to the kings who ruled over the divided Ge-r< kingdom.

"Rebels." The identification of the persor: described as *pds'im*, "the rebels" or "the transgressors," is not clear. It is also possible to res: this word as "the rebellions" or "the transgressions."

"Completely wicked." In a few places in the Bible, God is portrayed as waiting and allow: sin to reach a measure of gravity before proceed- ing with his judgment (cf. Gen. 15:16). Sim = • expressions are used to describe the act of a definite refusal to acknowledge Jesus (Ma- 23:32; 1 Thess. 2:16; Rev. 6:11).

"A stern-faced king." The word *'az*, "stern bold," is similar to the word "goat" from verse 5 and can be understood to describe someone unyielding and merciless. Although some commentators have read in this graphic descriptor the physical appearance of this individual, the

description should probably be related to his character. Deuteronomy 28:49,50 uses the same language to describe Israel's enemy: "The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a *fierce-looking* nation without respect for the old or pity for the young" (emphasis supplied).

"Skilled in intrigue." The original text presents here a person that *mebin hidot*, "understands riddles." King Solomon was able to answer the Queen of Sheba's *hfdot*, "hard questions" (1 Kings 10:1-4). Yet, the context leads to the conclusion that in this verse, the phrase speaks of a negative characteristic, describing someone skilled in cunning and intrigue.

"Will arise." The verb *ya'omdd* is commonly used in Daniel to describe a king's coming to power, it is frequently found in chapter 11, where it anticipates Michael's "rise" at the end of time (12:1).

8:24 "Not by his own power." The words *weld' bekoh'o*, "but not with his power," have been explained in at least three ways: (1) This is a reminder that the king in question is still under God's sovereign authority in spite of his great power. (2) The power of this king came from either another human power or from Satan, not from himself (cf. Rev. 13:2). (3) This king acquired his power not by conventional means, like force of arms, but through intrigues and deceitfulness. The three explanations are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they complement one another. See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:22.

"Will succeed." The notion that evil is allowed to prosper for a limited time is a regular

feature of Daniel's visions. See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:12.

"The mighty people." The expression "*sumim*, "mighty men," has no definite article here. It applies to kings of the earth and other important political figures. The term is sometimes used of multitudes in the Bible (Deut. 4:38; 7:1; 9:1). "As such, 'the powerful' is frequently juxtaposed with the word 'many.'"⁵⁰

"And the saints." While the previously mentioned group "the mighty men" has more of a secular meaning, the expression *'am-qadosim*, "the saints" or "the holy people," definitely has a notion of the sacred. This group may be related to the saints of the Most High in chapter 7, who were the object of persecution by the little horn. The additional words "of the Most High" that appear in chapter 7 are missing here, but the similar expression used in this chapter may be the abbreviation of the longer phrase. If the conjunction between this and the preceding phrase in this verse is taken as explicative, then the two expressions describe the same group of people. In that case, the whole statement would read something like "mighty men who are the holy people."

8:25 "Through his cunning." The key term in this expression is *sekel*, "wisdom," which in its general usage is positive but in this context has a negative meaning. Some translate it here as "crafty scheming."

"He will cause deceit to prosper." In the original text, the words *byadd*, "under his hand," are at the end of this statement. For the meaning of *yad*, "hand," see the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2.

"Consider himself superior." The text literally says *ubilbdbo yagdil*, "and he will magnify

himself in his own heart." In the Bible, the heart represents the mind, the seat of intelligence.

"When they feel secure." The Hebrew word *salwa* means "ease, security, peace." Some scholars translate the whole expression as "without warning." See the *Notes* on Daniel 4:4.

"Many." The Hebrew word *rabbim*, "many," is found in a few more places toward the end of the book, where it stands in parallel with "the wise." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:27 (cf. 12:2,4).

"The Prince of princes." Verse 11 of this chapter speaks of the Prince of the host. The Hebrew construction *sar-sarim*, "prince of princes," is a superlative comparable to "king of kings" in Daniel 2:37. While according to some interpreters this title is most likely a euphemism for God, it is more probable that Michael is in view here.

"Not by human power." For a figurative use of the word *yad*, "hand/power," see the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2. The whole phrase may be compared to the expression found in Daniel 2:34, 45, where a stone is cut out of a mountain not by human hands but rather through divine intervention. Belshazzar's "fate was sealed by a hand sent from heaven. In his sudden downfall, then, there is a hint of what will happen to the small horn."⁵¹

8:26 "Evenings and mornings." The two nouns are given in the singular in the original Hebrew text. See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:14. This verse confirms the view that the audition part of the chapter (vv. 13,14) is the climax of the whole vision. It is worth noting that no detail regarding the time period is given in the interpretation section of this chapter.

"True." The occurrence of the word *'emet*, "truth," here balances its use in verse 12, which

says that "truth was thrown to the ground :» the little horn.

"Seal up." The presence of a seal implies a written document.⁵² In Bible times, a seal impressed on clay or another material indicates ownership of an object. Here it points to the fact that the revelation given to Daniel is reliable (Dan. 12:4,9).

"The distant future." This is the third indication in the chapter that this vision concerns distant times of the end of earth's history (w. 'J, 19). It points to the fact that the Sovereign God is at work throughout long time periods. The text literally says that the vision pertains to *yom-rabbim*, "many days"—that is, the far future. Semitic word *yom*, "day," may indicate time periods of various lengths, including years. The whole phrase "2,300 evenings and mornings" should be understood as describing symbolic (prophetic) rather than literal days.

8:27 "I, Daniel." See the *Notes* on Daniel 8 and 8:15,

"Was exhausted." The term *nihyeti*, "I was exhausted," is difficult to translate. It is very similar in form to the verb found at the end of Daniel 2:1

"The king's business." This verse informs us that under Belshazzar, Daniel performed at least some administrative duties. Furthermore, the detail agrees with the statement of Daniel 1:1 that says he remained at the palace until the time of King Cyrus.

"I was appalled." The original word *'estome* ~ "I was appalled," is usually negative. It is similar to the word *somem*, "destruction" (Dan. 8:11 9:27; 12:11).

"Beyond understanding." The translation of the phrase *'en mebin* as "beyond understanding

reflects the original, suggesting that not just Daniel but possibly no other human being as a veil could understand the full meaning of the vision. These words contrast with the command in Daniel 8:17, where the heavenly messenger tells the seer, "Understand that the vision concerns the time of the end." "The fact that the prophet did not understand the revelation has led some interpreters to see in these words a confirmation that "Daniel wrote under the authority of God."⁵³

Exposition <8:19-27>

8:19-21 For a second time during his interpretation of the vision, Gabriel mentions the time of the end. First of all, he uses a very strong word that sometimes implies "a curse" to refer to the future **wrath** or "indignation." He then ties this time of wrath to the words **end** and an **appointed time**. Since the expression **appointed time** is used in Leviticus 23 and elsewhere in the Pentateuch to describe the annual festivals in Israel, we may draw the logical conclusion that the context here points to a sanctuary festival placed in the distant future. In his interpretation, Gabriel repeatedly associates the term **appointed time** with the word **end**, disclosing the concept of the end-time feast of the Lord that will be celebrated in the distant future.

8:20-22 The interpretation of the first half of the vision focuses on the political aspect of the conflicts that take place on the horizontal or earthly level.

Since the ram came from the east and the goat from the west, these two contrasting terms when placed together may express a totality of the conflicts taking place on earth (**merism**). Some historians regard the war between the Persians and the Greeks as nothing short of a major clash "between east and west."⁵⁴ As for the symbol of the horn, this chapter portrays a gradual development of religious pride that ultimately culminates in the horn's attitude and hostile activities against the sanctuary, its services, and its leader.

8:23-26 According to Daniel's visions, political conflicts that take place on the horizontal level sooner or later become religious struggles. In this vision, when the wicked powers reach a certain measure in their rebellion against God, provoking him to send his judgments, a very peculiar ruler rises to power. The characteristics of his that are listed in this chapter parallel the ones previously seen in chapter 7. This king is described as shrewd, manipulating, and owing his authority to someone other than himself. The author used the word *goat* as the transition term to introduce this goatlike ruler who is often described as a **stern-faced king**. Bold and successful in what he does, he causes much **destruction**. Two words summarize his activities: deception and destruction.

The targets of this power's attacks are God's people, truth, and even **the Prince of princes** or the Most Excellent Prince,

who in the book of Daniel is also presented as "one who looked like a human" (Dan. 7:13), Messiah, the Ruler (9:25), and Michael (chaps. 10-12). In the light of verses 10-12, this earthly power is the agent of the cosmic power that in the remote past had attempted to overthrow the rule of the Most High God. Gabriel assures Daniel that this power will be destroyed by God's own intervention. God will not be mocked for long by a created being.

The interpretation closes with a seal of the authenticity of the vision, which is defined as the vision **of the evenings and mornings** and which, for the third time in this passage, is placed in **the distant future**, which will come after many days. The previous two references in the chapter to this time (w. 17, 19) equate that distant future and the time of the end. As a parallel example, "in Ezek. 12:27, it was on the grounds that it referred to the distant future that the prophet's contemporaries dismissed what he said."⁵⁵ The thought that the temple would be desecrated for such a long time (w. 13, 14) made Daniel *sic* **for several days** (v. 27).⁵⁶

8:27 Daniel ends the report of this revelation by describing the impact of the vision on his body and mind. For the third time in the chapter he uses emphatically the first-person pronoun together with his name, **I, Daniel** (cf. w. 1, 15), to tell the reader that the vision made him **ill for several days**. This verse

also confirms that in the early part of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel was still actively performing duties in the palace. Daniel "goes about the king's business, knowing that the king's power has already been taken away—the die is cast."⁵⁷ Chapter 5 indicates that in the second part of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel was almost forgotten (cf. 5:13).

The closing words in this chapter emphasize that full understanding of this vision was beyond human grasp. This statement links the chapter with the one that follows, where we find Daniel still searching for a fuller understanding of this difficult but important revelation. Some have suggested that the prophet's reaction to the vision recorded in this chapter implies that he anticipated the period of 2,300 days to be much longer than a period consisting of mere literal days.

Applications

Chapter 8 of Daniel presents the conflicts between proud kingdoms on earth that sooner or later become religious, hostile encounters not just against one another but also against God, his people, and his sanctuary. Following the destruction of the little horn's attack on the leader of the heavenly host, a promise was made that the sanctuary will be restored to its rightful state and the leader of the rebellion will be destroyed.

As was the case with the vision and its interpretation in Daniel 7, so here too,

the applications proposed by commentators are very diverse. There is, however, a consensus on the meaning of the symbols in the first half of the vision. This is because the interpretation found in the second half of the chapter identifies those symbols: The ram represents "the kings of Media and Persia" (v. 20); the goat is the kingdom of Greece; its single horn stands for Alexander the Great; and the four horns that replace the single horn are the territories ruled by Lysimachus, Cassander, Seleucus, and Ptolemy. The differences come with the identification of the little horn that follows the four horns. From the outset, it is clear that many scholars neglect the cosmic perspective found in the text, especially in verses 10-12, although the application to church history comes closest to it. As in the previous chapter, an application to the reader's life follows the application in the history of the church that is presented below.

Application in Church History ("Historicism"). The vision in chapter 2 takes the reader through the rise and fall of nations and reaches its climax when Jesus Christ sets up his kingdom of glory. Chapter 7 adds to the vision of chapter 2 the tragic course of unfaithful Christianity, and it reaches its climax in the judgment in heaven, where Jesus receives his kingdom and graciously shares it with the saints. Although chapters 8 and 9 omit Babylon, like chapters 2 and

7, they take us through the political entities of history, including the kingdom of Rome, placing emphasis, as Shea affirms, on Rome's spiritual or religious phase.⁵⁸ These two chapters point more directly to Christ's work of atonement and of salvation from sin, thus preparing the saints to inherit the kingdom. While chapter 2 focuses on Christ our King and chapter 7 on Christ our Judge, chapters 8 and 9 focus on Christ as our High Priest.

8:3-8 In commenting on the two horns of unequal height (v. 3), Maxwell observes that Cyrus at first ruled only the tiny Anshan province of Persia. At that time, the Median horn was much taller than the Persian horn, so to speak. But later on, Cyrus rebelled against his grandfather, King Astyages, and succeeded in subjugating Media to Persia. In this way, the horn that came up second found itself taller than the first one. Later, Cyrus added to his kingdom Lydia in Anatolia (ancient Turkey) in the north, Babylon in the west, and Egypt in the south. This broad-minded and generous king treated the Medians more as allies than subjects, giving rise to the term "Medo-Persian Empire," which later became simply the "Persian Empire." Alexander defeated this powerful empire no less than three times. Thus, the "goat easily trounced Persia's ram, just as Daniel had foreseen two hundred years earlier."⁵⁹ After Alexander's sudden death, his kingdom did not go to

his son but "was divided among his generals."⁶⁰

8:9-12 The little horn arose out of one of the four winds of heaven. This is an idiom that means one of the four directions of the compass. For Maxwell, this power is clearly Rome. Since the Roman Empire arose from a point westward from the first three empires of prophecy, Maxwell concludes that the little horn comes from the direction of the west. Doukhan, on the other hand, merely sees the origin of the little horn "in one of the beasts."⁶¹ He does not specify which beasts are in question here. Maxwell states, "It is regrettable that some readers have supposed that the little horn of Daniel 8 was the strange little king, Antiochus Epiphanes."⁶² In discussing this king's activities against the conservative Jews, the books of Maccabees quote phrases from Daniel 8 and 9. Yet, the Bible does not state that the little horn is Antiochus Epiphanes, and in many ways, this king does not fit this prophecy.

Confirming Maxwell's position, Shea mentions "seven reasons why Antiochus cannot be the small horn of Daniel 8," but he presents only three at length:⁶³ (1) Horns represent kingdoms, but Antiochus was only an individual king. (2) He did not appear at the latter end of the Seleucid kingdom but rather in the middle of it. (3) Nor did he prosper or grow exceedingly great. Rather, it was his father, Antiochus III, who was rightly

called "the Great." Instead of grown in power to the east, he actually died in Mesopotamia. Moreover, all attempts to fit his desecration of the Jewish temple into "2,300 evenings and morning" have uniformly failed because the interruption of the temple services during the reign of this king lasted only three years and ten days. Even though 1 Maccabees 1:54 applies the phrase "abomination that causes desolation" from Daniel 9:27 to what Antiochus Epiphanes did to the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus applied the same phrase to the future rather than to Antiochus (Matt. 24:15).

Regarding this chapter, Maxwell proposed eight identifying marks of the little horn that lead to the conclusion that the little horn represents Rome in civil and religious phases⁶⁴: (1) Chronologically, Rome follows Greece. (2) Rome arose in the west, out of one of the "four winds." (3) Because of the continuum between civil and religious Rome, a single prominent horn appropriately represents both of them. (4) The Roman Empire took control of the Middle East at the "latter time" (8:23) of the dominion of the Hellenistic kingdoms. (5) The countries that Rome conquered (Macedonia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt) were located in the south, the east, and the glorious land (8:9). (6) Civil Rome "set itself up" against the "Prince of the host" (8:11) when Pontius Pilate and the Roman soldiers crucified Jesus. (7) Both civil and religion

Rome persecuted and tortured "mighty people and the saints" (8:24). And (8) Rome "took away the continual sanctuary service" and overthrew "the place of his sanctuary" (8:11). In AD. 70 Roman soldiers destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. Maxwell also points out that the unfaithful Christian church in the West obscured Christ's priesthood through certain practices and doctrines that its priests introduced. These include confession, penance, transubstantiation, hell, purgatory, the pope as the supreme head of the church, and the absolute authority of the church through which it attempted to change the sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day, Sunday.

It is unfortunate that many Bible translators render the Hebrew term *tamid*, "daily, continual," as "burnt offering" in an attempt to make the passage fit the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes. But in Daniel 8, this term is symbolic, representing the continual—that is, the all-of-the-time—high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ on our behalf in heaven (Hebrews 8:1, 2). *Tamid*, therefore, is "a word that comprehends all of these activities connected with the sanctuary, not just the one idea of sacrifice."⁶⁵ This high-priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary is as vital to our salvation as was his death on the cross. This means that the work of the little horn consists of presenting the heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ as requiring human or priestly activities on earth to

mediate its grace to humanity.

8:13, 14 The audition found in these two verses has rightly been called the peak and focus of the entire book. The key words in this passage are "sanctuary" and "evenings and mornings." In the context of the chapter, both expressions are symbolic. By saying that the vision extended to "the appointed time of the end" (v. 19) and that "it concerns the distant future" (v. 26), Gabriel directed Daniel's attention to a restoration of the sanctuary *at the end of time*. As Doukhan says, "The prophet understands that it [the end of this time period] involves a question of the end of time."⁶⁶ As for the time period of 2,300 evenings and mornings, it should *not* be understood as 1,150 days. The rendering of this verse by the Jewish scholars who translated the first and principal translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Greek language confirms the reading of 2,300 days.

Since this chapter gives no event as the starting point for this prophetic timeline, and since chapters 8 and 9 in Daniel form a unit, the event mentioned in Daniel 9:25 should be taken as its beginning. Shea points out that through the use of the term *mar'eh*, which means "appearance" or "vision," "there is a direct link between Daniel 9:23 and Daniel 8:14 through Daniel 8:26."⁶⁷ The period of 2,300 prophetic days should be understood in term of years, based on the year-day principle also attested in

Ezekiel 4:6 and Numbers 14:34. It commenced in 457 B.C., during the Persian period, and ended in A.D. 1844, when Jesus Christ began the final phase of his high-priestly ministry in heaven. The translation of the Hebrew word *nisdag* as "cleansed" is correct, but a preferred translation is to say that the sanctuary will be "restored to its rightful place." For Shea, this term describes an act of "righting the wrongs that the little horn has created."⁶⁸

Seventh-day Adventist interpreters understand the universal judgment in heaven in Daniel 7 to be a parallel event to Daniel 8:14's cleansing or restoration of the sanctuary that precedes the second coming of Christ. "What chapter 7 calls the Day of Judgment chapter 8 labels as the Day of Atonement. They are in fact the same event."⁶⁹ According to Shea, this eschatological Day of Atonement accomplished the cleansing of the sanctuary from the sins of the people and also from the impact of the false way of worship.⁷⁰ Although the terms are not used in the Bible, Maxwell asserts that for convenience, one can speak of phases of the final judgment that deal with "investigation," "examination," "separation," and "execution." The unfaithful Christian Church has misrepresented Christ's ministry, but through this judgment, God puts a stop to this state of affairs and sets all things right. Thus, the Day of Judgment in chapter 7 is seen in chapter 8 as God's way of set-

ting the heavenly sanctuary aright. This investigation can be called the "pre-Advent judgment." The fact that should be stressed is that God's principal purpose in this first phase of the final judgment is *not to condemn, but to acquit* *r*: faithful people (John 5:24). Every person who sincerely desires it can be vindicated and cleansed through Christ: ministry of forgiveness.

Application in Personal Life. There is truth in the statement that "in the book of Daniel, the vision is concerned not with individuals but with the power realities—kingdoms and rulers who 'do as they please.'"⁷¹ Yet a personal application of the message from this chapter is crucial for the believer today; modern readers may "take the cue that the meaning of the passage is not locked in the past—not in the time in which the vision is set . . . , but for days to come, including one's own."⁷²

In this life, the believer "may expect persecution, but he or she must not seek it out."⁷³ It makes a difference to know that a cosmic war stands behind the human conflicts with which we struggle daily here on earth. That cosmic war is under the control of the One who is all powerful. He "overcame and sat down with the Father on his throne (Rev. 3:21). The answer to the often-asked question "How long?" comes in this chapter as a promise. "It is the promise of the gospel that darkness will not last forever, that in-

nocence will not be crushed forever, that justice will be had."⁷⁴

When reading this chapter, it is most helpful to remember that Christ is now serving as our High Priest in heaven. He waits for us to confess our sins and is ready to forgive us every time we come to him with penitent hearts. Hebrews 4:14-16 says, "Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

The message of Daniel 8, when applied at a personal level, is that the same Christ who cleanses the temple in heaven is ready to cleanse the temple of our heart if we ask him to do it. David longed for such an experience when he prayed to God. He said,

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin. . . .

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will
be clean;

wash me, and I will be whiter
than snow. . . .

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit
within me (Ps. 51:1,2, 7, 10).

In this way, every believer can experience the truth that "repentance leads to deliverance."⁷⁵ Like David and Daniel, we also can learn "in this life the principles of the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, that blessed kingdom which is to endure for ever and ever, [so that] we may be prepared at His coming to enter with Him into its possession."⁷⁶

1. Towner, 115; Goldingay, 208.

2. This shift to Hebrew is a phenomenon called "nativism," explained by some scholars as "a type of behavior under intense stress" (Redditt, 134).

3. Josephus *Antiquities* 10.11.7.

4. Seow, 120.

5. Slotki, 65.

6. Smith-Christopher, 112.

7. United Bible Societies, 37.

8. Lucas, 222.

9.1 am indebted to Tarsee Li for kindly turning my attention to the gender shifts in this context.

10. Margit L. Siiring, "The Horn-Motifs of the Bible and the Ancient Near East," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 22, no. 3 (1984): 338.

11. Longman, 209.

12. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 124.

13. Slotki, 67.

14. Goldingay, 210.

15. Angel M. Rodriguez, "Significance of the Cultic Language in Daniel 8:9-14," *Symposium on Daniel*, 533.

16. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*,

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- Study ed., 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 734, 735.
17. Lucas, 224.
 18. Peter-Contesse and Ellington, 214.
 19. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 124.
 20. Keil, 301.
 21. Redditt, 139.
 22. Baldwin, 156.
 23. Rodriguez, "The Sanctuary," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 2000), 394.
 24. The Babylonian Talmud *Hag.* 12b.
 25. Keil, 301.
 26. Towner, 121.
 27. Lucas, 225.
 28. Shea, *Daniel*, 183, 184.
 29. S. J. Schwantes, "EREB BOQER of Dan 8:14 Re-Examined," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 16, no. 2 (1978): 375-385.
 30. Lucas, 218.
 31. For further study of the year-day principle in interpreting biblical prophecy, see Ford, 300-305, and Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, 2nd ed., Daniel and Revelation Committee Series (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 1:67-110.
 32. On the typological use of this term in Exodus 25:40, see Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 367-388.
 33. R. M. Davidson, "The Meaning of Nisdaq in Daniel 8:14," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society!*, no. 1 (1996): 118.
 34. Martin Probstle, "A Linguistic Analysis of Daniel 8:11, 12," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 7, no. 1 (1996): 97.
 35. Niels-Erik Andreassen, "Translation of Nisdaq/Katharistbesetai in Daniel 8:14," *Symposium on Daniel*, 495, 496. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 12, trans. David E. Green and Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 243.
 36. Goldingay, 220.
 37. Towner, 123.
 38. W. Vogel, "Cultic Motifs and "Themes in the Book of Daniel," *Journal of the Adventist Theol. Society!*, no. 1 (1996): 39.
 39. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 129.
 40. Towner, 124.
 41. Slotki, 69.
 42. F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs- 7 *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lex.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 107.
 43. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I—IX*. The Anchor Bible (Garden City. v Doubleday, 1981), 28:328.
 44. Pfandl, *The Time of the End*, 315-317.
 45. Slotki, 69.
 46. Miller, 231.
 47. Seow, 126.
 48. Towner, 124.
 49. Peter-Contesse and Ellington, 221.
 50. Seow, 131.
 51. Lucas, 222.
 52. Redditt, 145.
 53. *Ibid.*, 146.
 54. D. More and J. Bowman, *Clash of East: West* (New York: H. B. J., 1980), 7-13.
 55. Lucas, 221.
 56. I am grateful to Gudmundur Olafsson, v. - in a private conversation shared with me this insir into the text.
 57. Smith-Christopher, 117.
 58. Shea, *Daniel*, 173.
 59. Maxwell, 156.
 60. Shea, *Daniel*, 176.
 61. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 125.
 62. Maxwell, 159.
 63. Shea, *Daniel, MI*, 178.
 64. Maxwell, 160, 161.
 65. *Ibid.*, 182.
 66. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 132.
 67. Shea, *Daniel*, 186.
 68. *Ibid.*, 187.
 69. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 127.
 70. Shea, *Daniel*, 193.
 71. Smith-Christopher, 117.
 72. Seow, 133.
 73. G. Arthur Keough, *Let Daniel Speak* (Hagc town, MD.: Review and Herald®, 1986), 90.
 74. Smith-Christopher, 118.
 75. Longman, 209.
 76. White, *Prophets and Kings*, 548.

APPENDIX B

Literalist and Intertestamental Applications of Daniel 8

1. *Literalist Application ("Futurism").* Scholars who approach Daniel's prophecies in a literalist way maintain that the vision recorded in this chapter concerns the empires of Persia and Greece as they relate to Israel. Walvoord says that Persia is under the zodiacal sign of Aries, the ram, while Syria under Greek rule is under the sign of Capricorn, the goat. Under the government of the Persians, Israelites went back to rebuild their land and the city of Jerusalem, whereas during the Greek domination, especially under Antiochus Epiphanes, the city and the temple were again "desolated." Miller compares the symbols of the little horn in chapters 7 and 8. He says, "In the previous chapter God had given a preview of world history with emphasis on the end times, particularly the evil activities of the antichrist. God's people also needed to be warned of another crisis that would come in less than four hundred years after Daniel's lifetime—the persecution of a madman named

Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.)."¹ And Archer states that the little horn arising from the third kingdom in this chapter serves as a prototype of the little horn of the fourth kingdom described in Daniel 7.²

8:3-8 While the ram stands for the Medo-Persian Empire, his two horns represent its major kings. The inequality between the horns means that even though the Persians came up last, they were more prominent and powerful. Cyrus united powerful Media in the north and less powerful Persia in the south. The directions that represent the conquests of the ram include all except the east, because the Persians expanded their borders toward Palestine, Asia Minor, and Egypt. "In spite of the immense numerical superiority of the Persian imperial forces, and their possession of military equipment like war elephants, the tactical genius of young Alexander, with his disciplined Macedonian phalanx, proved decisive."³ Thus, the goat

represents the king of Greece, and the single most important horn between his eyes is Alexander the Great. "Incredibly, within only three years Alexander had conquered the entire Near East."⁴ While at the pinnacle of its strength, this horn was broken. With remarkable accuracy, Daniel predicted the emergence of the four kingdoms of the *Diadochi* headed by Cassander, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy.

8:9-12 Walvoord argues that according to Daniel's account, the little horn emerges from one of the four notable horns mentioned in verse 8. In history, Antiochus Epiphanes came from the land of Syria. Archer maintains that this "Greek tyrant" emerged from the midst of the four horns. This king was particularly important to the author of the book "because of his exploits against the inhabitants of Palestine."⁵ That the little horn grows great even unto the host of heaven means that this power persecuted the people of God, whose protectors are the angelic hosts and God himself. For Archer, the host of the heavens are the Jewish believers who took part in the war defending their faith and liberty against the Greeks. Miller identifies them as "the Jewish saints in Palestine." To show that the stars signify God's holy people, the faithful Israelites, Walvoord makes reference to Genesis 15:5; 22:17; and Daniel 12:3, overlooking the comparative particle "like, as" found in these verses.

In fulfillment of verse 11, megalomaniac Antiochus claimed divine honor as brought out in his name *Epiphane*: which refers to glorious manifestation: such as belonged to God. This kim stopped the morning and evening sacrifices, taking away from God the daily tokens of Israel's worship. The temple itself was not torn down, but it was desecrated to such a point that it was hardly fit for use. In verse 12, the host that was given over to the little horn refers to the persecuted people of Israel, while the truth that was cast to the ground was the Law of Moses.

8:13, 14 The commentators differ in understanding the period of 2,300 evenings and mornings. Walvoord is not in favor of dividing it into 1,150 sacrificial days. Rather, he suggests that exegetically, a safe course to follow is to find fulfillment in Antiochus Epiphanes and then proceed to consider what eschatological or unified prophecy may be involved. In light of all the evidence considered, Walvoord concludes that the 2,300 days are literal days that cover the period from 171 B.C., when the legitimate high priest Onias III was murdered, to 164 B.C., when Antiochus died during a military campaign in Media. In spite of this claim, Archer still favors the interpretation that this period consists of 1,150 days because the morning and the evening sacrifices "marked each day in temple worship."⁶ Miller understands the 2,300 days to equal the six years and

almost four months that started in 170 B.C., when the former high priest Onias III was murdered, and ended in 164 B.C. with the rededication of the temple under Judas Maccabeus.⁷

8:19-22 Gabriel's interpretation of the vision brings in certain new dimensions. The term "wrath" refers to God's anger against Israel, while the end-time wrath means the ultimate consummation of Gentile times at the second advent of Christ. The little horn in Daniel 7 has some similarities with the one in chapter 8, but there are important differences as well. This leads Walvoord to the view that there is a *dual* fulfillment in the prophecy of Daniel 8 because its last part is specifically futuristic. On the one hand, the entire chapter was historically fulfilled in Antiochus, and on the other, it foreshadows the future world leader who will dominate the situation at the end of the times of the Gentiles. The passage intentionally goes beyond Antiochus to provide prophetic foreshadowing of the final Gentile ruler."

8:23-26 Miller claims that these verses are the heart of the vision and the reason for the revelation to Daniel.⁸ They speak of Antiochus's persecution. Walvoord argues that these verses list no fewer than ten characteristics that were fulfilled historically in Antiochus Epiphanes. The last of these is the expression "he will be broken, but not by human power," which refers to this king's death from "a foul disease." Although some

statements in the text can be applied to Antiochus's rise to power and activities, other terms are difficult to harmonize with this king's reign. His power ultimately came from Satan. The little horn's rise against the Prince of princes is the same as the opposition to God, Israel, and the Messianic hope in general. "After all, Christ existed in Old Testament times as God and as the Angel of Jehovah and as the defender of Israel."⁹ The holy people whom Antiochus persecuted were the believing Jews. By erecting the statue of Zeus Olympius in God's temple and by sacrificing unclean animals on the altar of Yahweh, this king "committed the greatest possible sacrilege and affront to the Jewish people."¹⁰

In conclusion, although the last part of this chapter proves to be difficult to interpret, its text reaches beyond that which was historically fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes—it foreshadows the world leader of the end time. He will carry on a persecution of Israel and a desecration of the temple similar to what Antiochus did. Thus, the interpretation of the vision is an illustration of *double* fulfillment of prophecy, using Antiochus as a type of the ultimate king who will oppose Israel in the last days. Miller lists eleven parallels between Antiochus IV and the antichrist. The latter will be "broken without hand" at the time of the second coming of Christ. The intent of the vision was to record the prophecy

for the benefit of future generations rather than for Daniel himself. Yet, according to Archer, the prediction of the time of great tribulation greatly disturbed Daniel. "He may well have been puzzled about why Yahweh would permit even this brief time of brutal oppression under the little horn."¹¹

2. *Intertestamental Application ("Pretorism")*. Whether or not Daniel 7 was written by the same person as Daniel 8, it is part of a coherent whole with the earlier chapter. The most disputed passages in the chapter are verses 11, 12 (given in the allegorical mode) and also 13, 14 (that are an audition rather than a vision). Collins considers the vision recorded in Daniel 8 to be a symbolic dream influenced by chapter 7, which speaks of the little horn and the holy ones, and Ezekiel 8, which mentions an interpreter and the title "son of man."

8:2-8 The animal symbols are explained in the chapter, while the relevance of the astral geography (the signs of the zodiac) for its interpretation is questionable. For Collins, the representation of Media and Persia as two horns of the same kingdom departs from the view of "the four kingdoms standard" throughout the book, which treats Media separately. Porteous says that the victory of the goat over the ram symbolizes the swift and decisive victory of Alexander over Darius Condomannus. "Persia's previous display of strength is

now matched by that of Alexander, the sudden end of whose reign is represented dramatically by the snapping off of the horn."¹² In a short time he was able to establish an empire that extended from Europe to India.¹³ The singularity of the prominent horn on the goat reflects the singular importance of Alexander the Great. The four horns that replace him are the four generals who succeeded him: Ptolemy, Philip, Antigonus, and Seleucus.

8:9-12 The writer hurries on to what is of supreme interest to him: the image of the little horn that is "borrowed from chapter 7 but fits the context nicely. Collins confidently but inaccurately states that "all commentators recognize that the chapter in its present form refers to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes."¹⁴ Porteous adds that there is general agreement about this identification even among those who refuse to see any reference to Antiochus Epiphanes in chapter 7. Goldingay notices that Antiochus was "an insignificant person [when] compared with Alexander."¹⁵

The focus of the little horn's action was the Jerusalem temple and the attack was on its cult. "To the pious Jews any interference with the prescribed service of God from outside or any neglect on the part of the worshippers themselves was a dreadful disaster."¹⁶ The host of heaven that was attacked by the little horn connotes both the stars and heavenly beings—either gods or angels. The

host in this chapter must be identified with the good angels. The motif of knocking down the stars was known in the ancient eastern Mediterranean world and thus was a traditional motif apart from Daniel (cf. Isa. 14:12-15; Rev. 12:4). The host of heaven and the stars are viewed by Collins as mythic-realistic symbols.

The prince of the host is God, as is the "Prince of princes" (8:25) and in Daniel 11:36 "the God of gods." In accordance to the synergism between the heavenly and earthly worlds that is pervasive in these chapters, the title "the Prince of the host" may be a double reference to Michael and the high priest Onias. The sanctuary place (v. 11) may refer to both the heavenly and earthly abode of God, the foundation of his throne, or the base of the altar. Since Antiochus did not tear down the temple, this may be a reference to the desecration of the altar. The giving over of the host is explained as the empirical tribulation of the Jewish people that has its counterpart in the heavenly battle. They are viewed "as of heavenly significance because of their relationship with the God of heaven."¹ An attack on the Jerusalem temple was just as much an attack on God, the supreme leader of his people. The transgression must be identified with the "rebellion that causes destruction" of verse 13, while the truth that was cast to the ground is not an abstract concept; it means the Jewish law.

Porteous points out that under Antiochus, sacrifices were forbidden as well as the observance of the Sabbath and the festivals. The same applied to the rite of circumcision and food laws. All copies of the Torah were destroyed, and death was threatened against anyone who would read it or practice its laws. The objects of this king's violence and trickery, according to Goldingay, were the people of God. Porteous stresses, however, that in imposing these sanctions, Antiochus enjoyed the support of a large portion of the Jews, who had committed themselves to his policy of the hellenization of their land.

8:12-14 Collins finds these verses to be extremely problematic. The "rebellion that causes destruction" is usually identified with the "desolating abomination" of Daniel 9:27 and 11:31, but in the context of these verses, it refers to all the actions of the little horn. Since "the daily" was offered twice a day, the 2,300 evenings and mornings total 1,150 days, during which the daily sacrifices will be omitted. The evil power targeted more than just the sacrifices. The religious practices of the temple in general were affected. For Goldingay, the abomination consists in the rebuilding of the altar to serve a different cult. This period of 1,150 days is slightly shorter than the three and a half years of Daniel 7:25, and it is at least approximately correct in describing the oppression by Antiochus. This prediction does

not precisely fit the time before the purification of the temple—which for Collins is good evidence that the text here must have been composed before the actual rededication of the Jerusalem temple. The meaning of *nisdaq*, "restored," is clear in the context of the passage. It means that the sanctuary will be "set right" or "cleansed." As Goldingay says, "The central feature in the act of deliverance would be not the destruction of an enemy but the fate of a sanctuary."¹⁸

8:17-22 Porteous stresses that Gabriel had no great interest in the Persian period nor in the "astonishing career of Alexander the Great." He hurries on to the king who will appear at the time of the end mentioned in verse 17, which is a rough equivalent to a similar expression at Qumran. Here it stands for the final period of tribulation. In verse 19, it refers to the period of Gentile rule, which is now in its latter stage. The emphasis is on the sin of the Gentile kingdoms, not on that of Israel. Those kingdoms cause the tribulation, especially in its latter phase.

The term "a stern-faced king" (8:23) is used in Deuteronomy 28:50 for the nation that the Lord will send against Israel, and it can be taken to imply that the rise of Antiochus was a covenantal curse. This king is characterized by wisdom that is traditionally associated with ancient kings, yet ultimately his wisdom is shown to be perverse. The primary targets of his plotting are either the an-

gelic holy ones or the human people or the holy ones. That he destroys mam who are caught off guard is a reference to the surprise attack on Jerusalem reported in 1 Maccabees 1:29, 30, when the chief tax collector at first spoke of peace but then suddenly attacked the city. Deception is a recurring feature of Antiochus's career. The promise is given that his power will be broken without human agency. "The disease which terminated his career (see II Macc. 9) was regarded as a manifest judgment of God (cf. 11.45)."¹⁹

8:23-26 Daniel's revelations were to be made public in the time of persecution, which Collins claims was the time when they were actually composed. The interpretation only "supposedly refers to events and people in the distant future."²⁰ Much like Daniel 7, this chapter transposes the historical crisis of the Maccabean era to the supernatural plane. The struggle is not with flesh and blood. The arrogance of Antiochus, "his ruthless boldness and his artful cleverness,"²¹ are but a reenactment of "the myth of the Day Star" in Isaiah 14, and the end of the story is assured. The leader supreme, says Goldingay, against whom Antiochus sets himself must be God himself. This presentation of the situation could bring comfort and reassurance to the persecuted Jews. "By assimilating the historical situation to the timeless myth, however, the vision could transcend its historical situation. The

little horn remains a symbol of human hubris for any generation, like Nebuchadnezzar in chap. 4 and the beast in chap. 7."²²

1. Miller, 219.
2. Archer, 99.
3. Ibid., 97.
4. Miller, 223.
5. Ibid., 225.
6. Archer, 103.
7. Miller, 229, 230.
8. Ibid., 234.
9. Walvoord, 198.
10. Archer, 104.
11. Ibid.
12. Porteous, 122.
13. Goldingay, 209.
14. Collins, 343.
15. Goldingay, 209.
16. Porteous, 125.
17. Goldingay, 209.
18. Ibid., 220.
19. Porteous, 129.
20. Collins, 342.
21. Goldingay, 217.
22. Collins, 343.

DANIEL'S LONG PRAYER ANSWERED

(9:1-27)

The opening verse of chapter 9 dates its contents to the first year of Darius the Mede, which would be 538 B.C. With the fall of Babylon, the world came under new rulership, that of the Medo-Persian Empire. Among the exiles from Judah, this event generated great expectations of being set free and being allowed to return to Palestine. The period of the seventy years of the exile, as foretold by the prophet Jeremiah, was coming to an end. During these ten sabbatical years, the land of Judah, which had been polluted by idolatry and subsequently made desolate, enjoyed its Sabbath rests from people's sins (2 Chron. 36:21). Jeremiah 29:10, 11 says, "This is what the LORD says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' "

The document known as the Cyrus Cylinder contains the following words of King Cyrus the Great, whose generous policies made him very popular throughout the ancient world:

I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, mighty king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters. . . . When I entered Babylon in a peaceful manner, I took up my lordly reign in the royal palace amidst rejoicing and happiness. . . . My vast army moved about Babylon in peace; I did not permit anyone to frighten (the people of) [Sumer] and Akkad. I sought the welfare of the city of Babylon and all its sacred centers. As for the citizens of Babylon, upon whom he imposed corvée which was not the god's will and not benefiting them, I relieved their weariness and freed them from their service. . . . I returned the (images of) gods to their sacred cen-

ters . . . and I let them dwell in their eternal abodes. I gathered all their inhabitants and returned (to them) their dwellings.¹

The beginning of the book of Ezra (1:1-4) speaks of King Cyrus in a similar way, as fulfilling what God had proclaimed through the prophet Isaiah (44:28; 45:4). In contrast to the claim on the cylinder that the Babylonian god Marduk gave success to this king, though, the Bible claims that it was Yahweh, the God of Israel, who raised Cyrus to power. He also moved this king's heart to proclaim freedom for the exiles.

The revelation given to Daniel and recorded in chapter 9 builds on the previous chapter's vision and interpretation. At the end of chapter 8, Daniel had said that the vision "was beyond understanding" (v. 27). According to Daniel 9:23, Gabriel came to help him "understand the vision." In fact, this "entire passage is related to chapter 8 as if it were an answer to the question, How long, O Lord, will the oppression of the saints endure?"² Moreover, the presence of the angel Gabriel in this chapter "forms an immediate link with Daniel 8."³

Chapter 9 stands as the centerpiece of Daniel's visions. The central concept in this chapter is the covenant God made with his people at Sinai (Exod. 19:5, 6). He had promised to be Israel's God, and the Israelites pledged to be his people. The words that regulated the

terms of this agreement were covenant stipulations. A summarized version of these stipulations is found in the "ten words," better known today as the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20; Deut. 5). God wrote them with his finger on both sides of two stone tablets (Exod. 32:15), and they were kept in a sacred container called the ark of the covenant, which was kept in the holiest place in the sanctuary. One tablet represented God, and the other the people. The presence of these two tablets visibly illustrated the union between God and his people.⁴ Because the people of Israel broke the covenant, the prophets announced that they would go into exile and that only a small remnant would survive. But they also announced a future renewal of God's covenant with that faithful remnant.

The suggested four-part structure of this chapter is as follows:

1. Confession (9:1-14; the longest part)
2. Petition (9:15-19)
3. Answer (9:20-23)
4. Revelation (9:24-27)

Daniel's confession is the longest part of the proposed structure of this chapter. It is followed by a petition that received an immediate answer from heaven. The Hebrew of this long prayer is more regular and freer of Aramaic influence than are the other Hebrew passages in Daniel.⁵ The last part of the chapter (vv. 24-27), in which Daniel receives a new

revelation, is one of the most difficult passages in the book to interpret.

The Confession (9:1-14)

The introduction to the chapter contains the date of Daniel's prayer and heaven's response, and it is followed by a description of the setting in which Daniel presented his petition to God. The confession part of the prayer may be divided into two sections. The first speaks of God's character and people's sins, while the second describes the curses that came as a result of the breaking of the covenant.

¹In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes, a Mede by birth, who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—²in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the books, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. ³So I turned my face to the Lord God and searched for him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of steadfast love with all who love him and obey his commands, ⁵we have sinned and done wrong. We have acted wickedly and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. ⁶We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

⁷"To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but this day we are covered with shame—the men

of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered them because of their unfaithfulness toward you. ⁸O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. ⁹To the Lord our God belongs mercy and forgiveness, even though we have rebelled against him; ¹⁰we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God or lived by the teachings he gave us through his servants the prophets. ¹¹All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey your voice.

"Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against him. ¹²He has fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great calamity. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. ¹³As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us, yet we have not sought the face of the LORD our God by turning away from our sins and giving attention to your truth. ¹⁴The LORD was ready to bring the calamity upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him."

Notes

9:1 "In the first year." While the revelation recorded in chapter 7 was given to Daniel in the first year of Belshazzar, he received this one in the first year of Medo-Persian rule over Babylon.

"Darius son of Xerxes." On the historical identification of Darius the Mede, see the Notes on Daniel 5:31. This ruler was different from Darius Hystaspes (521–486 B.C.), who is mentioned in

Ezra 4:24. The appositional expression "son of Xerxes" is in Hebrew *ben-'ōhaswerds*, "son of Ahasuerus," which may have been an ancient royal title. This ruler is consistently "mentioned in a favorable light in a number of places in the book of Daniel."⁶

"A Mede by birth." The original text says *mizzera' maday*, "from the seed of the Medes." Darius may have been an old Median title. See the *Notes on Daniel* 5:31.

"Was made ruler." The form of the Hebrew verb *homlak* is causative passive, hence the translation "he was made ruler." For a similar usage of a passive verb, see the *Notes on Daniel* 5:30. Scholars who argue that Darius the Mede was Gobryas often refer to this statement to show that he "was made ruler" over Babylon by Cyrus the Great. Yet, this statement may be understood as the writer's way of giving credit to God, who through his outworking had brought Cyrus to power and given Babylon into his hand.

"Babylonian kingdom." The original text uses the word *kasdfm*, "Chaldean." The setting at the beginning of the chapter is the time shortly after the fall of Babylon.

9:2 "In the first year." These words are identical with those in Daniel 9:1.

"I, Daniel." This phrase is used frequently in the second half of Daniel, lending authenticity to the book. In the previous chapter, it is used no less than three times—once in the beginning, once in the middle, and once at the end. It is also found in Daniel 7:15,28. See the *Notes on Daniel* 8:1.

"From the books." The original text says *bass'parim*, "in the books." We are given here a

rare insight into the history of the biblical canon of the holy books. Daniel most probably was not the only person who already considered Jeremiah's words as authoritative while Jeremiah was still living and prophesying.

"The word of the LORD." The majority of modern translations render the Hebrew words *donay*, as "Lord" (cf. Dan. 1:2; 9:3,4,7,9,15,16, 17, 19) and *Yahweh* (the holy tetragrammaton, YHWH) as "LORD" (9:2). Of some fourteen names and appellatives used for God in Daniel's book, the personal name *Yahweh* is found only in this chapter, where it is used seven times (vv. 2,4,8, 10,13,14, 20). Daniel likely used the name *Yahweh* in this chapter because the chapter's key concept is God's covenant, and in the biblical passages that speak of the covenant, the most frequently used divine title is "the LORD [*Yahweh*] God" (Exod. 20:2). Unlike the title '*EldhJm*, which is sometimes used of the pagan gods in the Bible, the personal name *Yahweh* is used only of God. *Yahweh* probably means "He is." When God spoke of himself in the first person, he gave his name as '*Ehyeh* or "I am [the One who is]" (Exod. 3:14).

"Given to Jeremiah." In Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon, he says the Judeans would spend seventy years in exile. Although Jeremiah 25:11, 12 also mentions the period of seventy years, Daniel is referring here to Jeremiah 29:107

"The prophet." The Hebrew word *nab!*, "prophet," describes a person who speaks for God and therefore holds a prophetic office. Biblical prophets were forth-tellers as well as foretellers—they were preachers who proclaimed God's messages to the people of their time.

"Seventy years." It is difficult to specify an exact seventy-year period for the exile in Babylon. Some scholars begin the seventy years in 605 BC and end it in 539 BC. Others take the year 586 BC, when Jerusalem was destroyed, as the starting point, and designate 516 BC, when the restoration of the temple was completed, as its end (cf. Zech. 1:12). Certain scholars consider this number to be figurative, a rounded number indicating a lifetime (Ps. 90:10; Isa. 23:15).⁸ In Israel, the covenant was renewed in the month of Tishri (October) at the end of every sabbatical year (Deut. 31:10-13), so it is reasonable to conclude that Daniel's prayer and study as described in this chapter took place in that month.

9:3 "Turned my face to the Lord God." In biblical times, when worshipers prayed, they turned toward Jerusalem, just as Daniel is said to have done (Daniel 6:10). The prophet here set his face toward the Lord, asking for the fulfillment of his promises.

"Searched for him in prayer and petition." The verb *biqqes*, "to search, seek," that is used here is often used in the context of worship when the believer seeks the face of the Lord. The same holds true for its synonym *daras*, "to seek." In Amos 8:12, this verb is used in the sense of seeking the word of the Lord. In this verse, the verb "to seek" is used with the noun *fpila*, which means "a prayer." The essence of Daniel's prayer is further explained through the word *tahⁿnunim*, "petition," the root of which, *hnn*, "to be merciful," is also found in another passage that speaks of Daniel praying (6:11).

"In fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes." The three words used here, beginning with *sozz*, "fasting," describe the external signs of mourn-

ing and humility in Bible times (Gen. 37:34; Esther 4:1-4; Isa. 58:5; Amos 8:10; Jon. 3:6). Sackcloth was a rough coarse cloth made of the hair of an animal such as goat or camel and worn around one's waist, while (cold) ashes were placed on one's head. Both were used as symbols of mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem (Lam. 2:10).

The day God commanded the Israelites to observe as a day of fasting, known as *Yom r : purim* or the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-31; 23:27, 32; Num. 29:7), fell on the sixteenth of Tishri. Thus, it is possible that the prayer of Daniel recorded in this chapter was offered in the month of Tishri (October).

9:4 "The LORD my God." See the Notes on Daniel 9:2. The Hebrews normally referred to the LORD as "our God," but here Daniel emphasizes his personal relation to "my God."

"Confessed." Like the prayer of Ezra (9:5-10:1) and of the Israelites at the time of Nehemiah (9:2), this part of Daniel's prayer is confessional in character. Leviticus 26:40 speaks of the need for the future exiles to confess their sins to God.

"The great and awesome God." The Hebrew participle *hanndra'*, "awesome," is used here as an adjective and refers to God, who had performed signs and wonders in the course of Israel's history (Deut. 4:32-34).

"Keeps his covenant." The statement that God is always faithful in relationship with his people is one of the most important teachings in the Bible. Deuteronomy 7:9 says, "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands."

"Steadfast love." The Hebrew noun *hesed* is best rendered as "loving-kindness." The idea is one of sustained loyalty, commitment, and love. The words *covenant* and *love* are connected with a conjunction, expressing a single meaning: "covenant of love" (hendiadys). The identical expression, "who keeps his covenant of love," is found in Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Kings 8:23; and Nehemiah 1:5.

9:5 The first three confessions that are listed in this verse are also found together in Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 8:47).

"We have sinned." This is the first of several different words for sin used in this chapter. The basic meanings of the root *ht* are "to miss the target," "to lose the way," or "to be mistaken." This verb is used in Judges 20:16: "Among all these soldiers there were seven hundred chosen men who were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not *miss*" (emphasis supplied).

"And done wrong." Sometimes the verb *'awa*, "to do wrong," expresses the concept that is the opposite of doing what is right or straight, thus paralleling the meaning of the previous term.

"And acted wickedly." The meaning of the verb *rasa'* is both "to cause wickedness" and "to act wickedly." The concept that this verb conveys is doing something that is contrary to accepted behavior.

"And have rebelled." The verb *marad*, "to rebel," is the fourth and strongest of the terms used for sin in this verse. It is a synonym of *pasa'*, "to rebel," and may also express the act of breaking an agreement or rebelling against an established authority—in this case, God's authority. In

this verse, the words "sinned" and "done wrong" are in parallel, as are "acted wickedly" and "rebelled." In addition, there may be a progression in the way these four words are used here to convey the intensity of sins.

"Turned away." The reason for people's sinfulness is given last: They had turned away from God and his Word. What they need to do is *sub*, "to turn back," to the Lord. In the Bible, "to turn back" to God means the same thing as "to repent."

9:6 "Your servants the prophets." This expression is commonly found in Jeremiah (25:3,4; 26:5). Several biblical passages claim that Israel engaged in idolatry and went into exile mainly because they rejected God's warnings given through his prophets (e.g., 2 Chron. 36:15-18).

"Spoke in your name." The term *nabi'*, "a prophet," describes someone who speaks for God or in his behalf. A common prophetic formula is "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel..."

"Our kings, our princes." Often, in Bible times, national apostasy began with the sins of the leaders, whose example the common people imitated until sin polluted the whole land.

"Our fathers." The word *'abot*, "fathers," can also mean "ancestors" or "elders." See the *Notes* on Daniel 5:2.

"All the people of the land." The words *'am ha'ares*, "the people of the land," is an all-inclusive term for ordinary citizens in contrast to the leaders mentioned above. The two groups are mentioned together to express the concept of completeness or totality (*merism*).

9:7 "To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness." The original text has the word *l'ka*, "to you," at the beginning of the sentence for

emphasis. The noun *sēdaqa*, "righteousness," is used frequently in the Bible. It means acting correctly.

"We are covered with shame." The Hebrew text speaks here of *boset happanim*, "the shame of the face," that belongs to Daniel's people and that stands in contrast to God's righteousness. In some cultures, this is called a feeling of disgrace or simply a loss of face.

"Jerusalem." In addition to being mentioned in this chapter, the holy city also appears in Daniel 1:1 and 6:10.

"All Israel." The use of the name *Israel* is significant here—Daniel is making confession both for Judah and for the ten northern tribes "both near and far," which means those who are still at home in Samaria and the ones who are in exile (1 Kings 8:46; Isa. 57:19; Jer. 25:26). Biblical prophets never accepted as legitimate the division of the nation of Israel into two kingdoms.

"You have scattered them." In several biblical passages God Himself declares that he was the one who sent the people of Israel into exile (see Jer. 24:5; 29:4, etc.).

"Because of their unfaithfulness toward you." A more literal translation would be "because of the treachery which they have committed against you." The noun *ma'al*, "treachery," that is used here is very strong. It is built on the same root as the verb *ma'al*, "to act treacherously," that follows it, forming a cognate accusative (paronomasia), which is a common feature of Biblical Hebrew.

9:8 "LORD." On the use of God's personal name in this chapter, see the *Notes* on Daniel 9:2.

"Covered with shame." The original text says: *boset happanim*, "the shame of the face." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:7.

9:9 "Mercy." The noun *rehem*, "mercy," is the plural. It is also found in Daniel 1:9 and 2:17. It refers concretely to the intestines, which were considered the seat of the emotions, such as affection. More generally, it points to the womb: to describe a mother's compassion for her child.

"Rebelled." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:5.

"H/m." Changes from the second to the third person and vice versa are common in Biblical Hebrew.

9:10 "We have not obeyed." Although the verb *sama'* means "he heard, listened," when it is followed by the preposition *bē*, it means "he obeyed."

"The LORD our God." This is the most complete form of the name for Israel's covenant God. It is used often in the Pentateuch (cf. the "Shema" in Deut. 6:4). It combines God's personal name with a general name modified by the personal suffix "our."

"Lived by the teachings." Literally, the text says *laleket b'tdrotaw*, "to walk in his laws," which means "to live according to his instructions." Visually, the Torah is presented in the Bible as a straight line in which the righteous walk. Walking is a common metaphor for living. Thus, walking in the Torah means living in conformity with God's will.

"Through." Literally, the text says *b'yad*, "through the hand of"—that is, "by means of."

"His servants the prophets." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:6.

9:11 "Transgressed your law." The expression *'abaru 'et-torateka*, "they transgressed your

law," describes an action that is opposite of "walking [straight] in the Torah" of the Lord.

"To obey." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:10.

"The curses and sworn judgments." In the original text, both of these nouns are in the singular with a collective meaning. The conjunction between the two is most likely explicative, meaning the phrase could be rendered "curses, that is, sworn judgments." It is also possible that the two nouns express a single concept, "sworn malediction" (hendiadys). The reference is clearly to the covenantal curses in the Pentateuch, listed in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-29.

"The Law of Moses." In a broad sense, the expression *torat moseh*, "the Law of Moses," describes the Pentateuch. It is identical with "the Law of God" (Neh. 8:1, 8, 14, 18). In its narrow sense, the expression refers to only one part of it, such as the Decalogue or the book of Deuteronomy.

"The servant of God." Moses is also called God's prophet (Deut. 18:15; 34:10). In verse 6 of this chapter, the prophets are called God's servants.

"Poured out." The verb *nittak*, "to pour out," is normally used for the pouring out of a molten metal. Through a figure of speech, the writer describes the curses that are poured out on people (Jer. 7:20; 42:18). Similarly, in Revelation 16, the plagues are poured out from the seven bowls of God's wrath.

"We have sinned." For a precise meaning of the root *ht*, "to miss the mark," see the *Notes* on Daniel 9:5.

9:12 "Our rulers." In this context, the word *sop'tenu*, "our judges," has the sense of "leaders" (Judg. 2:16-18; Amos 2:3). The text literally says

"our judges who judged us," a case of cognate accusative (paronomasia).

"Under the whole heaven." The phrase *tahat kol hassamayim*, "under the whole heaven," is also found in Daniel 7:27. It expresses the concept of universality, meaning "in the whole world." It is found in biblical wisdom books—e.g., Job 28:24 and 41:11. In the Pentateuch, it is found in the context of judgment (Gen. 6:17; 7:19; Deut. 2:25). This expression can be compared with *tahat hassames*, "under the sun," which occurs frequently in Ecclesiastes.

9:13 "Written." In the world of the Bible, where oral culture prevailed, what was written was of binding character.

"The face of the LORD our God." Although some translations say "the favor of the LORD our God," the original text says *'et-p'ne yhw'w 'l'bhenu*, "the face of the LORD our God." (Cf. 2 Chron. 33:12; Ps. 119:58). In Bible times, worshipers prayed that God would turn his face toward them (Num. 6:26). They dreaded God's threat of hiding or turning his face away from them (Isa. 1:15).

"Giving attention to your truth." The original Hebrew text uses here the verbal root *ski*, "to be wise, to discern," which is an important term in Daniel—as is the participle *maskil*, "wise," that is built on it (cf. v. 22). The truth is a concept that epitomizes firmness and solidness, and it is related to the law. See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:12.

9:14 "Was ready." The basic idea behind the verb used here is that the Lord watched or kept a vigil (Ps. 127:1) over people's deeds. The same concept is found in Jeremiah 1:12; 31:28; and 44:27.

"The calamity." *The* great tragedy that came in the form of curses was a consequence of the breaking of the covenant.

"The LORD our God." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:10.

"Righteous." *The* term **saddiq**, "righteous," is a basic character quality of the covenant God. The word may also be understood as "reliable" or "consistent."

"Everything he does." Literally, the text says *kol-ma^asaw ^aser 'asa*, "all the deeds which he has done," forming another cognate accusative (paronomasia).

"We have not obeyed him." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:10. The Egyptian Pharaoh made a similar confession when he said to Moses and Aaron, "This time I have sinned.... The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong" (Exod. 9:27).

Exposition (9:1-14)

9:1 The two visions that describe the activities of the little horn (chaps. 7 and 8) were dated in the first and the third years of Belshazzar respectively. This chapter and the one that follows deal with the topic of the exile and the return in the context of God's covenant, and they are dated in the first and the third years of Darius the Mede and Cyrus, respectively. At that time, based on Jeremiah's prophecies (25:12, 13), "the mind of exiled Israel would naturally turn to thoughts of the coming redemption."⁹

Darius the Mede (a name that probably was an old Iranian title) likely was Cyrus the Great, whose mother was from

Media. Biblical prophets had foretold that Babylon would be conquered by the Medes:

See, I will stir up against them the
Medes,
who do not care for silver
and have no delight in gold
(Isa. 13:17).

"The Lord has stirred up the kings
of the Medes,
because his purpose is to
destroy Babylon. . . .

"Prepare the nations for battle
against her—
the kings of the Medes,
their governors and all their officials,
and all the countries they rule
(Jer. 51:11,28).

The statement that Darius **was made ruler** is significant here because it reinforces the concept of God's providence and sovereignty: The same Lord who delivered Jerusalem and its king into Nebuchadnezzar's hand (Dan. 1:2) was at work in bringing Darius (Cyrus) to power and making him ruler over the Babylonian kingdom (Dan. 11:1). The book of Daniel teaches that "the Lord God is the one who 'sets up kings and deposes them' (2:21)."¹⁰

9:2, 3 To give more authenticity to the second half of the book, the author frequently uses the personal pronoun I

in combination with his name. Although Daniel was receiving visions and held the office of prophet himself, that did not prevent him from studying the inspired writings of the other prophets, such as Isaiah and **Jeremiah** in particular. The apostle Peter reminded his readers how diligent biblical prophets were in their search of the sacred texts: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Pet. 1:10, 11).

Jeremiah had received the revelation that specifically referred to the length of the exile in Babylon: " "This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place" ' " (Jer. 29:10; cf. 25:11, 12). From a careful reading of this letter addressed to the exiles, Daniel learned of the time limit God set for Babylon: seventy years. Isaiah 23:15 says seventy years is "the span of a king's life." The period of seventy years equals ten sabbatical cycles, during which, according to the Bible, "the land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken

by Jeremiah" (2 Chron. 36:21; cf. Lev. 26:43). At the end of every sabbatical year, in the month of Tishri, the covenant was renewed in Israel (Deut. 31:10-13).

The revelation in Jeremiah 29 was accompanied by an instruction to turn wholeheartedly to God: " "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart' " (Jer. 29:12, 13). Long before Jeremiah, Moses had given a similar instruction: "If from there [the land of exile] you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 4:29). Daniel's study was accompanied by intense **prayer** and **fasting** as well as by the external signs of mourning and humility. "If Scripture is divinely inspired, then the appropriate way to read it is prayerfully."¹¹ In Bible times, fasting was almost exclusively religious in nature and was connected with making requests of God. "The principle is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background."¹² Fasting and mourning were also means of preparation for receiving divine revelation (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:9; Dan. 10:3).

9:4 Having learned of the significance of the time pertaining to Babylon's end, Daniel turns toward his covenant God

and intercedes on behalf of his people by using the familiar language of his Bible. Scholars have shown that every word or phrase in this prayer has a parallel elsewhere in the Old Testament. Also, for the first time in the book of Daniel, God's personal name, *Yahweh*, is used, because that was his covenant name (Exod. 3:14-16) and conveyed the concept of intimacy. The name *Yahweh* means "HE IS," pointing to God's eternal existence. (When God speaks of himself in the first person, he uses the name *'Ehyeh*, or "I AM.") King Solomon spoke of God in the following way: "'O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below'" (1 Kings 8:23). And Nehemiah used words very similar to Daniel's when he prayed: "'O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands . . .'" (Neh. 1:5).

Daniel calls the God of his people "my God." In a similar way, David called God, the Shepherd of the people of Israel, "my shepherd" (Ps. 23:1).

The long prayer of confession begins with the statement that God is always faithful in his covenant relationship with his people. That is why his covenant is one of *hesed* that is, **steadfast love** or "loving kindness." This rich Hebraic term is found in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:6) and no fewer than twenty-six

times in Psalm 136, which begins, "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. IH: *love endures forever*" (v. 1; emphasis added). More than any other biblical book Deuteronomy teaches that God entered into a covenant with the people of Israel out of pure love for their ancestors (Deut. 7:7, 8).

Daniel 9:4 is built on a chiasm of reversed parallelism:

- A. God **"keeps his covenant"**
- B. "of steadfast **love**"
- B'. "with all who **love him**"
- A', "and **obey his commands**"

9:5-10 Out of solidarity with his people, Daniel offers a communal prayer in his confession to God. The prophet speaks in the first person plural and thus identifies himself with sinful people. Daniel's prayer is carefully crafted; he piles up different terms one after another to describe the sins of Israel that stand in contrast to God's faithfulness. These terms convey a progression: Daniel begins with a basic term for sin, moves to one that indicates wickedness, and climaxes with a term that conveys open rebellion against God and his covenant. The leaders of this national apostasy were the kings and rulers—the very people anointed to execute God's will and serve as examples to the people of the land. The negative influence of the past generations could still be felt in Daniel's time, and its most obvious consequence

was the exile. Faced by clear demonstrations of God's righteousness, all that the penitent sinners can feel is disgrace, shame, and loss of face.

The sins that ended in the exile are the logical consequence of turning away from God and his prophetic word. In describing this, Daniel's confession contains a series of contrasts between God's acts and Israel's response to those acts. He states that in contrast to God's **steadfast love**, the people have **rebelled**. They have shown treachery in return for his **righteousness**. When talking about God's mercy, Daniel uses the word *ralfmim*, a term loaded with profound emotions that refers literally to one's intestines, which were considered the seat of affection in Bible times. Hosea 11:8 quotes God as saying,

"How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over,
Israel? . . .
My heart is changed within me,
all my compassion is aroused."

But the people of Israel have rejected God's affection. And not a single individual from the nation's past or present is excluded from this corporate guilt: **All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey your voice** (v. 11). Time after time, the prophetic calls to repentance fell on deaf ears, until "there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:16).

9:11-14 Natural consequences for breaking God's covenant are **the curses** that are spelled out in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27 and 28. Daniel uses a very graphic figure of speech as he describes how the **judgments** have been **poured out** on Israel from the bowl of God's wrath (cf. Revelation 16). He also uses overstatement (hyperbole) for emphasis when he says that in the whole world, **nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem**. Yet, all of the judgments that have taken place have been in accordance with the prophetic words written long ago. There is an element of determinism in the words that describe the Lord as someone who kept a vigil the same way "the watchmen stand guard" (Ps. 127:1). In this way the Lord made sure that all of the covenant curses took place in response to Israel's sins and rebellions. Jeremiah 44:27a quotes God as saying about his people who were in Egypt: "I am watching over them for harm, not for good." This is a part of God's divine nature, because he is holy and **righteous in everything he does**. The problem was that people did not take this aspect of his character seriously. "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong" (Eccles. 8:11). The full display of divine judgments has the purpose of waking them up, calling them to obedience, and leading them back to God.

The Petition (9:15-19)

Having confessed the sins of his people, Daniel now intercedes before God in their behalf. The two halves of the petition are clearly separated, each beginning with the word **now**. In his prayer, Daniel "pleads for divine intervention, for forgiveness, for the restoring of the sanctuary and the city."¹³

¹⁵"And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name as it is today, we have sinned, we have been wicked. ¹⁶O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill, because our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

¹⁷"And now, our God, hear the prayer and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, let your face shine on your desolate sanctuary. "Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the ruins of the city that is called by your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. ¹⁹O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people are called by your Name."

Notes

9:15 "And now." The word *wə'atta*, "and now," marks the transition from Daniel's confession to his petition for mercy. This word is repeated at the beginning of verse 17.

"Brought your people out of Egypt." Daniel begins his petition with a brief reference to God's

saving act during the Exodus from Egypt, an event that clearly established a solid reputation for his name. A quote from Balaam's oracles illustrates well Daniel's claim:

"The LORD their God is with them;
the shout of the King is among them.
God brought them out of Egypt;
they have the strength of a wild ox.
There is no sorcery against Jacob,
no divination against Israel.
It will be now said of Jacob
and of Israel, 'See what God has
done!'" (Num. 23:21 b-23).

"With a mighty hand." For the figurative meaning of the word *yad*, "hand," in the Bible see the Notes on Daniel 1:2. God's "mighty hand" is a commonly recurring formula in the Bible found especially in the context of his protection or deliverance of his people (Exod. 3:20).

"A name." The noun *sem*, "name," often expresses one's reputation or renown. In Genesis 11:4, the builders of the city and the Tower of Babel plan to make a name for themselves. In contrast to that, Genesis 12:2 presents God's promise to Abram: "I will make your name great."

"We have sinned." See the Notes on Daniel 9:5. The people's sins are mentioned here in sharp contrast to God's act of salvation.

9:16 "Your righteous acts." There may be a wordplay on the root *sdq*, "to act righteously," in this verse and verse 14, which says that God punished Israel because of his righteousness. On God's righteousness, see the Notes on Daniel 9:7.

"Your anger and your wrath." The two nouns *'appēka wafmafka* can also mean "your nose and your burning heat." Since a person who is angry tends to breathe hard through the nose, ancient Hebrews often pictured one's great anger as smoke rising from heat.

"Your city, your holy hill." While these two phrases stand in parallel, the second one describes either Mount Zion or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. In ancient times, worship was often associated with elevated places. The second person singular pronominal pronoun is used a number of times in Daniel's petition, tying God's reputation with the consequences of his judgments on the people of Israel.

"Our fathers." This expression can also mean ancestors. See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:6.

"An object of scorn." The noun *herpa*, "reproach," is used in the Bible of an object or person that people mock.

9:17 "And now." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:15.

"Our God, hear." These words remind the reader of the introduction to the Hebrew creed, the *Shema*, which says "Hear, O Israel,..." and of Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 8:28).

"Petitions." The Hebrew root *hmn*, "to be merciful," is an important term in the Bible that often describes the gracious side of God's character (Exod. 34:6).

"Your servant." Daniel speaks of himself in the third person singular in order to show his submission to God (cf. Dan. 2:4).

"For your sake." Literally, the text says *l'ma'an donay*, "for the sake of my Lord." In his petition, Daniel is implying that in the present order of things, God's own reputation is at stake.

A continuous punishment of Israel is having a negative impact on the reputation of God's name on earth (cf. Exod. 32:11,12).

"Let your face shine." The original text says *wfha'erpaneka*, "and cause your face to shine!" In worship, believers sought God's face and asked him to make his face shine on them (Num. 6:25). Here, Daniel is asking God to make his face shine upon—i.e., to look with favor upon—the sanctuary that lay desolate in Jerusalem.

"Your desolate sanctuary." This is a clear reference to the temple in Jerusalem, which at that time was lying in ruins. The temple figures prominently in the previous vision in the book (Dan. 8:11-14). In this chapter, Daniel's understanding was that the sanctuary on earth was in question.

9:18 "Give ear, O God, and hear." The two verbs are used here in parallelism for the sake of emphasis.

"The ruins." The verbal root *smm*, "to be desolate," is used in this and the previous verse. It serves as a bridge with verse 27, where it is again found.

"Called by your Name." Literally, the Hebrew text says *"ser-niqra'simkd 'aleha*, "on which your name is called." The reference here may be to the blessings over Jerusalem or the prayers offered to God on its behalf.

"Not... because we are righteous." These words blend together Daniel's confession and petition. They emphasize the true reason why God should act in behalf of his people. Verses 14 and 16 refer specifically to God's righteousness, which is the basis of the divine acts of judgment and redemption, while here Daniel is saying that the basis of his petition is God's mercy.

"Mercy." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:9.

9:19 "O Lord." God's name is used four times in this verse: three times as "Lord" and once as "my God."

"Listen." This is the third time that the verb *samo'*, "hear" is used in the imperative form in the petition (see vv. 17, 18). This verse is the conclusion of Daniel's petition and of the whole prayer.

"Forgive." The root *slh*, "to forgive," is one of the key terms used in the Bible. It is found twenty times in the Pentateuch, most frequently in the context of the sanctuary. It describes exclusively God's act of forgiving sins of his people, never the act of one human being forgiving another.¹⁴

"My God." In contrast to the preceding references to the Lord as "our God" (with the exception of v. 4), in this verse, Daniel addresses the Lord as a personal God. This should not be understood as conveying the intention of being exclusive.

"Do not delay." A concept similar to this is found in Zechariah 1:12, where the angel of the Lord asks, "LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?" It is worth noticing that the answer to Daniel's prayer came without delay, a fact reported in the verses that follow.

"For your sake." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:17.

"Your Name." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:15.

Exposition <9:15-19)

9:15 The petition that Daniel presents before God is the climax of the whole

prayer. It begins with a mention of Israel's exodus from Egypt, an event that became the paradigm of God's act of salvation and was remembered throughout biblical history. It was the single most dramatic event in the history of the people of Israel as well as a very important component of their creeds, such as the one recorded in Deuteronomy 26:5-8: "Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptian mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders.' "

Rahab's words to the two Israelite spies also come to the mind here: " I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt' " (Josh. 2:9, 10). Thus the exodus from Egypt was, on the one hand, the paradigm of God's act of salvation toward Israel, and on the other, a demonstration of his superiority

over the gods worshiped by the surrounding nations.

9:16 Because of his love and mercy, God had brought his people out of Egypt despite their sins. Now, Daniel is pleading for God's mercy on account of the same divine righteousness. Although Israel's punishment was severe and perhaps unparalleled in world history, the prophet still believed that his prayer could turn the heat of God's fury away **from Jerusalem** and its **holy hill**. The sins that had made Israel and God's great name by which his people were called into **an object of scorn to all** around could be forgiven through divine justice and mercy. Much like the creed known as the "Shema," which invited people to listen to the voice of the one and only God (Deut. 6:4), Daniel now requests God to hear his petitions and prayers.

9:17-19 The prayer becomes very intense in the last verses, which have been called "a liturgical gem in form and expression."¹⁵ God is entreated to **hear** and **see** the present desolation and to act accordingly. Daniel pleads that this should be done not because of people's acts but in spite of them, and only because of God's righteous character. In this part of the prayer, Daniel uses repeatedly the second-person possessive **your**. He does this intentionally by reminding God in a subtle way that since everything is his—the **people**, the **land**, the **city**, the **sanctuary**, etc.—it is God's

own reputation that is at stake here. The student of the Bible recalls here Moses' intercession before God when he openly expressed his concern for the respect among the non-Israelite nations for God's name:

"O LORD," . . . "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and wipe them off the face of the earth?' " (Exod. 32:11, 12).

"If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, 'The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert' " (Num. 14:15, 16).

Daniel uses this same strategy as he tries to avert God's wrath. In addition, both Moses and he appealed to the love and **mercy** of God that formed the basis of forgiveness: "Daniel's final appeal to God is based on the honor of His name (verses 17-19). By forgiving the unworthy, undeserving people of Judah, God would cause His name to be honored among all the nations of the world. People everywhere would realize how great and merciful He really is."¹⁶

The Answer (9:20-23)

The answer to Daniel's prayer is immediate. It comes through the angel Gabriel.

20While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request before the LORD my God for his holy hill—²¹ while I was still speaking in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.²²He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come forth to give you wisdom and understanding. "As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision."

Notes

9:20 "My sin and the sin of my people Israel." This statement reminds the reader of Leviticus 16:6, where, on the Day of Atonement, Aaron the high priest interceded first for himself and his household and only then for the children of Israel. The same word for sin occurs in these two passages.

"The LORD my God." See the Notes on Daniel 9:19.

"His holy hill." See the Notes on Daniel 9:16.

9:21 "While I was still speaking in prayer." This statement should be contrasted with the delayed answer to Daniel's prayer reported in Daniel 10:12,13.

"Gabriel, the man." On the name *Gabriel*, see the Notes on Daniel 8:16. The Hebrew noun 'is, "man," is a very general and inclusive term

that can mean "an individual" or "a person/number of biblical passages, God's messenger are portrayed as looking like human beings.

"The earlier vision." The obvious reference is to the vision in chapter 8, but it is possible Gabriel was Daniel's interpreter in chapter 7 well.¹⁷

"Came ...in swift flight." The Hebrew word *mu'ap bi'ap*, "in swift flight," is a cognate accusative (paronomasia). It poses a challenge to translators here because its exact meaning is unclear. Ordinarily, angels in the Bible do not appear with wings. An alternative translation is "my extreme weariness," which then would describe Daniel's exhaustion at the end of a long session of prayer and fasting rather than Gabriel's way of coming to earth.¹⁸ With the present evidence, all that can be said is that both translations are equally possible.

"Came to me." It is possible that because of the verb *naga'*, "to touch," the meaning here is "he touched me." See the Notes on Daniel 8:18.

"The time of the evening sacrifice." The time of day referred to could have been late in the afternoon before the sun set, when, before the temple was destroyed, the sacrifices were offered (Exod. 29:38-41; Num. 28:4; 1 Kings 18:25-36). Ezra says that he prayed to God "at the evening sacrifice" (9:5). In Palestine during Bible times, the day ended around six o'clock in the evening, so the evening sacrifice was offered late in the afternoon, between three and four o'clock.

9:22 "He instructed me." Literally, the text says *wayyaben*, "he made understand," without an explicit object. The obvious implication is that he came to instruct Daniel. The Greek

and Syrian translations of the Bible omit this verb.

"I have now come." The verb *yasa'*, "to come out," most probably means that Gabriel came from heaven. In a negative sense, the same verb may describe the aggressive aspect of an activity, like the coming of the little horn out of one of the four winds of heaven (Dan. 8:9).

"To give you wisdom and understanding." The first word is based on the root *ski*, "to be wise," which is also used in verse 13. Since the root of the second word, *bind*, "insight," is used at the beginning of the chapter (v. 2), it refers to Daniel's enlightenment concerning Jeremiah's seventy-year prophecy.

9:23 "As soon as you began to pray." The original text says *bithillat tah^anuneka*, "in the very beginning of your supplication." This verse implies that Gabriel left God's presence even before Daniel ended his prayer.

"An answer was given." The Hebrew term *dabar*, "a word" or "thing," is translated here as "answer." It is also used in verse 2 in reference to God's revelation to Jeremiah. "Given" translates the Hebrew verb *ydsd'*, "to come out"—the word that also describes Gabriel's coming to Daniel in verse 22.

"Greatly loved." The Hebrew text says *hamudot 'atta*, "you are preciousness." It may also mean "greatly beloved," because the original word expresses deep affection or attachment to someone. The use of this expression implies God's great love for Daniel.

"Consider the message and understand." The verbal root *bin*, "to discern," is used twice in this verse, the first time in the simple sense and the second time in the causative. The word

translated as "message" is the Hebrew *dabar*, "the word"—also used in the beginning of this verse.

"The vision." The word *mar'eh* means "vision" or "appearance." Some scholars think that this is a reference to Jeremiah's revelation about the seventy years of exile. However, this word is also found in Daniel 8:27, and this use in chapter 9 may be a reference to the vision in chapter 8. In the light of Daniel 8:26, it is likely that, while the word *hazon*, "prophetic vision," describes the overall revelation that Daniel received in chapter 8, the word *mar'eh*, "appearance," is more specific and relates to the audition recorded in verses 13 and 14 of that chapter.

Exposition (9:20-23)

9:20, 21 Daniel ends his prayer by earnestly urging God to hear and act without delay (v. 19). His request is granted—Gabriel, the angel interpreter from the previous vision, comes to him **in swift flight** while he is still praying. The phrase *uf'dd 'ni ufdabber*, **while I was still speaking**, is found at the beginning of both verse 20 and verse 21. Gabriel informs Daniel that an answer to his petition was given in heaven as soon as he began to pray. Isaiah 65:24 also portrays God as answering a prayer while the petitioner is still praying: "Before they call I will answer; / while they are still speaking I will hear." The situation is very different in the following chapter. There, when the prophet prays, he must wait three weeks for an answer. And more than seven years

elapsed between the revelations recorded in chapters 8 and 9. These examples show that in his devotional life, Daniel experienced immediate answers to his prayers as well as seeming delays of divine interventions.

According to Leviticus 16, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest offered sacrifices for himself and for his household before he proceeded to cleanse the sins of the people: " Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household' " (Lev. 16:6). Though Daniel was not a priest, as a prophet he interceded for himself and then for his people much like Aaron had done when he atoned for Israel's sins. The intercessory role of the biblical prophet was all too well known in ancient Israel. The first person to be called *ntib'i* "a prophet," in the Bible was Abram; about whom God told Abimelech, king of Gerar, " 'He is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live' " (Gen. 20:7). When faced with the certainty of God's judgments in response to sin, the prophet Amos interceded twice in behalf of his people, saying, " 'Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!' " (Amos 7:2; cf. v. 5).

The text specifies that Gabriel came to him **at the time of the evening sacrifice**. Since the temple lay in ruins in Jerusalem and the sacrifices could no longer be offered, prayers of the worshipers

effectively took the place of temple offerings. Said the psalmist,

O LORD, I call to you; come quick-
to me.

Hear my voice when I call to you
May my prayer be set before you
like incense;
may the lifting up of my hand
be like the evening sacrifice
(Ps. 141:1, 2).

We may ask why Daniel prayed if God already knew the situation of the people and his temple. In spite of the fact that God knows what is in the heart of a praying believer, his promises are not "intended to displace prayer. Instead, they are meant to stimulate our calling upon God."¹⁹

9:22, 23 Gabriel encouraged Daniel; by telling him that in the eyes of God he was **greatly loved** or "highly esteemed." The revelation that the angel brought was complex; therefore the prophet needed **wisdom and understanding**. Gabriel's message related directly to the vision described in the previous chapter. This is evident from the fact that in verse 21, Daniel referred to Gabriel as the one he "had seen in the earlier vision." At the time Daniel received the vision and audition on chapter 8, an additional revelation was given with the purpose of clarifying what he had seen and heard. However Daniel had admitted that the message

Gabriel brought was still "beyond understanding" (8:27). According to the book of Daniel, **wisdom and understanding** are God-given gifts (2:20-23). So, an important reason for Gabriel's visit was to bring these gifts to the prophet.

The Revelation (9:24-27)

The new revelation that Gabriel brought to Daniel was meant to clarify some of the elements from the previous visions that were particularly hard for the prophet to understand.

""Seventy weeks (of years) are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish rebellions, to put an end to transgressions, to forgive sins, to bring in eternal righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy.

²⁵"So know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah, the ruler, comes, there will be seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks. It will be rebuilt with streets and moat, but in times of trouble.²⁶After the sixty-two weeks, the Messiah will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and destruction has been decreed.²⁷He will confirm a covenant with many for one week. In the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of abominations will come the one that causes destruction, but the end that is decreed will be poured out on the destroyer."

Notes

9:24 Verses 24-27 are highly poetic and elaborately structured. For more details, see the *Exposition* of this passage and Appendix C at the end of this chapter.

"Seventy weeks (of years)." The Hebrew word *sabu'a* denotes a unit of seven and means "a week." Hence, the translation of the whole expression is "seventy weeks."²⁰ Undoubtedly, this expression builds on the period of "seventy years" in verse 2, which was the time God intended to let the Promised Land that had been polluted by idol worship enjoy its Sabbath rest (2 Chron. 36:21). Here, its span is extended from seventy years to seventy "sevens" or seventy weeks of years. Leviticus 25:8 mentions seven weeks of years, and sevenfold punishment is mentioned several times in Leviticus 26 (vv. 18, 21, 24, 28). When interpreted literally, this period covers 490 years. The details of its historical fulfillment are presented in the *Application* section of this study. Literal applications, however, have not been done without difficulties, making "this passage one of the most controversial in the history of the interpretation of the book."²¹ For that reason, it is possible that the author also intended a wider, symbolic meaning of this text.

The Hebrew expression *sabu'im sib'im*, "seventy weeks" or "seventy sevens," is not identical with but is similar to *sib'im v^ssib'a*, "seventy-seven times" or seventy-sevenfold, which is found in Genesis 4:24 and interpreted figuratively in all commentaries. In Matthew 18:22, a Greek equivalent of this expression is given: *hebdomekontakis hepta*, "seventy-seven times." From a literary point of view, this figure expresses a very large—perhaps an indefinite—number of

times. When this concept is applied in the context of chapter 9, "the seventy weeks" expression multiplies the period of seventy years, which then becomes a much longer time. When taken "in an indefinite and universal sense,"²² it is the period during which God will commence a special outworking of his purpose for all history and in behalf all of humanity.²³ Just as the seventy years of verse 2 can be taken to be a period of ten sabbatical cycles, so this period of 490 years corresponds to ten jubilee cycles, "and so is an appropriate period to end in the ultimate deliverance from oppression."²⁴ While Daniel 10:2 uses the expression "weeks of days," the context of the chapter and the year-day principle indicate that weeks of years are intended here.

"Are decreed." The simple passive form *nehtak* means "determined, imposed"²⁵ or "cut off."²⁶ The verb occurs only here in the whole Bible (*hapax legomenon*), so its meaning has to be determined by the context. Scholars who translate this word as "cut off" understand that the seventy weeks of years are part of a much longer period, which is the 2,300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14.

"Your holy city." Daniel mentions the city of Jerusalem by name several times in his prayer (9:2,7,12,16 [twice]), and in the petition part of the prayer, it is also implied in the word "city" (9:16,18,19) and is preceded by the possessive suffix *-ka*, "your."

"To finish rebellions." The Hebrew reads *ʔkalle'happesa'*, "to stop the rebellion." The same verb is used in Genesis 2:2 to describe the completion of God's work of creation, and in Exodus 40:33, where it is said that Moses completed the

work of building the tabernacle. In Number 11:28, Joshua tells Moses "to stop" the two men who were prophesying in the camp. The word *happesa'*, "the rebellion," is also used in Daniel 8:13, where it describes **the rebellion that causes destruction**. Although this noun is in the singular, it should be understood as collective, meaning "rebellions."

"To put an end to transgressions." Litera *ulehatem hatta'dt* means "and to seal transgressions." However, in this context it means "to put an end to transgressions."

"To forgive sins." The verbal root *kpr*, "to purify" or "to forgive," is attested mostly in the intensive active form. The majority of its occurrences are in Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel. Its etymological meaning is either "to cover" or more likely "to do away" or "to wipe off" sins (Lev 4:20; 14:18-21). Isaiah 27:9 says "By this, then, will Jacob's guilt be atoned for, / and this will be the full fruitage of the removal of his sin." The verb has also been translated as "to appease" and "to purify." "The active use of *kipper* with God as subject is associated primarily with the language of prayer."²⁷ Since the word "to atone" is not a familiar term today, it is better to say here "to forgive sins/transgressions." The cumulative effect of the three expressions in the text above is very important.

"Eternal righteousness." The root *sdq*, "to be righteous," is used several times in Daniel's prayer describing God and his way of acting toward his people. The promise given here is that God will set up eternal justice. The prophets announced that the time is coming when Jerusalem's name will again be "the City of Righteousness" (Isa. 1:26). Ancient Jewish interpreters

maintained that everlasting righteousness could be established only during "the Messianic era."²⁸

"To seal up vision and prophecy," The verbal root *htm*, "to seal," was used previously in this verse in the expression "to put an end to transgressions." The two nouns *hazon*, "vision," and *nabi*, "prophet," are used without the definite article; thus they may stand for biblical visions and prophecy in general. Some scholars understand this text as saying that vision and prophecy will be authenticated or confirmed (1 Kings 21:8; Job 33:16; Jer. 32:10,11,44). A third possibility is that this verse is saying that chapter 8's prophecy will be confirmed when the predictions from this chapter come to pass. Yet, the expression can also be understood as saying that vision and prophecy will be closed, or ended.

"To anoint the most holy." The verbal root *msh*, "to anoint," is the same as the one used in the Hebrew noun *masiah*, "an anointed one, messiah." The nouns that follow describe "the most holy" place, although without the definite article. The omission of the definite article in this passage is understandable given the poetic form that is used. It is generally agreed that "the most holy" refers to the second compartment of the temple (cf. Dan. 8:13,14), although some scholars think that a most holy person is in view. In support, they quote 1 Chronicles 23:13, the only text that seems to apply this expression to a person. They assume that Aaron the high priest is called the most holy one.

9:25 "Know and understand this." The original does not use the imperative forms of these two verbs. It uses the imperfect, meaning "you will know and understand." For the meaning of the second verb, see the *Notes* on Daniel 9:22.

"Issuing of the decree." The literal meaning of the Hebrew phrase *min-masa' dabar* is "from the going forth of the word." The expression is constructed on the same root as the one in verse 23 that is translated "an answer was given," primarily relating to the prophetic word announced by a divine oracle. Thus, the human word "that announces the reconstruction of Jerusalem is the answer to the word from above that inspires it."²⁹

"Messiah, the ruler." In Bible times, priests and kings commissioned to serve God were anointed in the presence of the people. Neither of these two nouns has the definite article, but they may still be considered as definite because the passage is poetic and most of the nouns in verses 24-27 are indefinite. The root of the first noun is found in the previous verse in the expression "to anoint." The second word, *riagid*, "a ruler," can also be translated as "a prince." These words are used together in Ezekiel 28:2,14. Several persons have been proposed as the objects of this prophecy: Cyrus the Great (Isa. 45:1); Zerubbabel (Hag. 2; Zech. 4); Jeshua, the son of Jehozadak (Ezra 2:2, 36); and Jesus of Nazareth. In this study, the title is applied to Jesus Christ.

"Seven weeks and sixty-two weeks." The word *sabu'a*, "a week," is used twice in this expression in the plural and serves as the basis of the wordplay. So, the period in question totals sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years.

"Streets and moat." The first word, *fhob*, means "an open place" or "a plaza." This place was usually located inside the city gate, where court cases were decided. In a more general way, the word may be used of "city streets," referring to the places "that are the centers of lively economic

and social activities in the city. To some extent, these 'streets' are the ancient Near Eastern equivalents of shopping malls in modern American culture."³⁰

In the light of its Akkadian cognates, the second noun, *harus*, means "town moat." It describes the "trench cut into the rock on the exterior walls of the city in order to make the wall a more difficult obstacle for those who would attempt to attack from the outside."³¹

If the two words were meant to complement each other (*merism*), then the meaning intended here is that the city will be completely restored—both the internal layout of the city and its external defenses. "Jerusalem would be built again 'inside and out.'"³² An alternative proposal is that the word *iʿhob* means "city square" while *harus* describes the city's public place where decisions were made. In that case, the latter term should be rendered "decision-making" (cf. "valley of decision" in Joel 3:14).³³

"Trouble." The literal meaning of the noun/adjective *soq* is "gorge, precipice"; figuratively, it means "distress" or "danger."

9:26 Certain parts of this and the following verse are obscure and very difficult to interpret.

"The Messiah." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:25.

"Cutoff." The root *krt*, "to cut," is often used with the word *berit*, "covenant" (cf. v. 27). Its form here is passive. In the Bible, this term is used for the act of putting someone to death. Isaiah 53:8 says that the servant of the Lord "was cut off from the land of the living."

"And will have nothing." The phrase *vʿen 16* is difficult and enigmatic. It has been understood in several ways: "he will have nothing left," "he

will be left alone," "not for himself," etc. The expression most likely describes this person's rejection by the people. A more complete form of this expression is found in Daniel 11:45: *Wer ʿozerlo*, "and no one will help him." Psalm 22:" says,

Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

"The ruler who will come." Some scholars hold that this *nagtd*, "ruler," is not to be confused with Messiah, the Ruler, who is mentioned in the previous verse and who, according to the first half of this verse, will be cut off. The people who come with this verse's "ruler" form an army (cf. Judg. 5:2; 2 Sam. 10:13). Alternatively, based on the literary pattern used in this passage, some have proposed that the verses are referring to the same person. So, "the people of the ruler who will come" are considered to be "the people of the Messiah."³⁴

"The city and the sanctuary." The city in question here is Jerusalem, while the second noun refers to the whole temple complex rather than to a part of it, such as "the most holy" place mentioned in verse 24.

"Its end will come like a flood." This is another enigmatic phrase. The word *qisso*, "his/its end," has a possessive suffix and should be rendered either "its [the city's (and the sanctuary's?) end]" or "his [the ruler's] end." The last word here is the Hebrew noun *setep*, "flood." It signals the catastrophic end of either the city or the ruler. Figuratively, this noun can mean overflowing anger (cf. Prov. 27:4). In the Bible, great waters

and floods may symbolize the threat by an invading army. Isaiah 8:7,8 says,

"The Lord is about to bring against them
the mighty floodwaters of the River—
the king of Assyria with all its pomp.
It will overflow all its channels,
run overall its banks
and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it,
passing through it and reaching up to
the neck.
Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of
your land,
O Immanuel!"

"Destruction." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:17.

9:27 "He will confirm." The verbal root *gbr*, "to be strong," is found in the name *Gabriel* and in the common noun *man* (Dan. 8:15). Here it is used in the causative stem, meaning "to make strong or firm," and its subject is problematic. Theoretically, it can be either Messiah or "the ruler who will come," but the former fits the context better. Sudden switches in subjects are attested elsewhere in the Bible, particularly in Daniel 11.

"A covenant." This noun is indefinite. However, given the poetic nature of the text its meaning may be definite, referring to God's covenant. It is of significance that Daniel's book pictures this covenant confirmed, ratified, and made stronger. It is neither abrogated nor changed from old to new. The Hebrew word for *new* can also mean "renewed." The prophet Habakkuk, for example, prayed that the Lord would "renew" his famous deeds in Habakkuk's time and make them known again (Hab. 3:2).

"With many." The Hebrew adjective *rabbim*, "many," is found in several places in the final chapters of the book (Dan. 12:2, 10). It is also found in several places in Isaiah (2:3; 53:11,12), where it clearly implies the universality³⁵ that will characterize the coming of the Messiah. Matthew 20:28 says, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." In Matthew 26:28, Jesus tied the words "covenant" and "many" with his death and the forgiveness of sins: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

"In the middle of the week." Some scholars propose that half of a week means "three and a half," which is a broken and even an unlucky number.³⁶

"Sacrifice and offering." The first word used here is *zebah*, "sacrifice"; it describes the animal type of sacrifice. The second word is *minha*, "offering"—a general term used for offerings of grain, wine, and oil. Combined, the two words indicate that all sacrificial activities would cease in the future from Daniel's point in time.

"On a wing." The translators insert "of the temple" after this word to mean the pinnacle of the temple (cf. Matt. 4:5). The Hebrew text says *w^Aal linaq siqqusim m^ssdmem*, "on a wing of an abomination by one who makes desolate." Isaiah 8:8 describes the Assyrian attack on Judah by saying that "its outspread wings" will cover the whole land.

"Abominations ...the one that causes destruction." The first word *siqqusim*, "abomination," is a noun in the plural, while the second, *m^ssdmem*, is an active participle in the singular that describes the agent behind the abomination.

See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:13. The same expression is found in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11, while in the New Testament, Christ uses its Greek equivalent in relation to the coming of the Roman army (Matt. 24:15; cf. Luke 21:20). Throughout the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *siqqus*, "abomination," is consistently associated with abominable idols.

"The end that is decreed." The expression *kala v'neh'rasa*, "an end that is decreed," comes from Isaiah 10:23 and 28:22, where it is used in the context of God's final judgment.³⁷

"Poured out on the destroyer." The subject of the verb *tittak*, "poured out," is the noun *kala*, "end." The object is the destroyer who caused the desolation, most probably the ruler who will come (v. 26). There is a wordplay between verse 11, where the curses and sworn judgments were "poured out" on the covenant people, and this verse, where the end is decreed and "poured out" on the desolator who caused the destruction. The imagery also alludes to the story in chapter 5, where Belshazzar's end was decreed and then came to pass.

Exposition (9:24-27)

9:24 The revelation that Gabriel brought to Daniel contains a message of hope, but it is couched in a highly poetic form of speech. The passage is a masterpiece from the point of view of literary artistry. Some of its details, however, are extremely difficult to interpret. It is no wonder that scholars consider this passage to be more obscure than any other in the book. Since the literary form in which the revelation is given is

poetry, a proper understanding of the structure and literary devices that are present in the text is the key to a sound interpretation.

Verse 24 has been called an "eschatological ideal."³⁸ It functions as both an introduction and a summary of this whole passage (w. 24-27). As for its literary quality, it is highly structured and rich in vocabulary. After the reference to the figure of **seventy weeks**, two subjects are introduced: the **people** and the **city**. The first expression **for** (or concerning **your people**) consists of two words in Hebrew, while the second **for** (or concerning) **your holy city** has three words in the original. The first three statements that follow relate to the people, each consisting of two words, while the last three pertain to the city, each having three words. In the first three statements three different words for sin are used in order to describe the rich variety of forgiveness that God would grant to his people. The following table illustrates the point here:

TWO HEBREW WORDS:

'al-'amm#ka, "concerning your people"

1. (to) finish rebellions
2. (to) stop transgressions
3. (to) forgive sins

THREE HEBREW WORDS:

uf'al-'ir qodseka, "concerning your holy city"

1. (to) introduce eternal righteousness

2. (to) seal up vision (and) prophecy
3. (to) anoint (the) Most Holy

In the opening verses of this chapter, Daniel mentions the seventy-year exile of Jeremiah's prophecy. This revelation was the starting point of his prayer. The revelatory message that Gabriel brings to the prophet builds on this concept with an enlargement in view. The new time frame set by God will be seven times longer. The seventy years usher in a period of time that will consist of **seventy weeks** of years, or 490 years. The period of ten sabbatical cycles is enlarged here to ten jubilee cycles. In Israel, at the end of a jubilee cycle, slaves were to be set free and the land returned to its original owner (Lev. 25). Isaiah 61:2 applies the year of jubilee to the end of times, when, on the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the Lord's servant would proclaim "the year of the LORD'S favor." Jesus Christ described the beginning of his own ministry in terms of a new jubilee (Luke 4:18, 19).

"Periodization of history" is attested elsewhere in Daniel's book (chaps. 2; 7; etc.) and is typical of apocalyptic writings. From the literary point of view, the biblical expressions "seventy sevens," "seventy-seven times," "seventy-sevenfold" or "seventy times seven" all convey a number of times that is indefinite or unlimited. In boasting to his wives, Lamech said, " 'If Cain is avenged seven times, / then Lamech seventy-seven

times' " (Gen. 4:24). In Jesus' answer to Peter's question on forgiveness, Jesus reversed Lamech's dictum by saying: " 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times [or " 'seventy times seven' "]' " (Matt. 18:22). In the light of these biblical passages, Gabriel's words point to a new period decreed by God that would be much longer than the seventy years of the exile. The word **decreed** is given in a unique form here. It can be understood either as **decreed** or "cut off" from a longer period—likely the 2,300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14.

God pledged to work out the forgiveness of people's **sins, transgressions, and rebellions** during this longer period of **seventy weeks**. The transgressions will come to a stop, be "sealed," and completely forgiven—notice that the three statements comprise a literary progression. In this way, God's initial plan for his people to be holy just as he is holy (Lev. 19:1) will finally come to realization. In a similar way, God promised to restore Jerusalem to its ideal status. Centuries before Daniel's time, Isaiah had wondered at Jerusalem's moral downfall and was shown its future transformation:

See how the faithful city
has become a harlot!
She once was full of justice;
righteousness used to dwell in
her—
but now murderers! . . .

"I will restore your judges as in days
of old,
your counselors as at the beginning.
Afterward you will be called
the City of Righteousness,
the Faithful City."

Zion will be redeemed with justice,
her penitent ones with righ-
teousness (Isa. 1:21, 26, 27).

The first change Gabriel announced regarding the city of Jerusalem had to do with justice and **righteousness** carried out by its political and civil leaders, such as kings and judges. He then talked about the prophetic office in Israel; the prophets' visions will be fulfilled and confirmed. Finally, in regard to the third office, the priestly office, the most holy part of the sanctuary, including its high priest, will be anointed. In this way, both the people and the institutions that belong to God will be completely transformed so they can fulfill the purpose for which they were established in the first place. The text that follows elaborates the way in which this change will actually happen.

9:25-27 The point of departure of the **seventy weeks** is marked by **the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem**. According to Ezra 1:2-4, the decree that Cyrus the Great issued had to do with the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. King Darius's decree, which followed, reinforced Cyrus's de-

ree in response to the hostilities th
the Judeans encountered during the
work of restoration of the temple (Ezr:
6:3-12). A third decree, one made r
King Artaxerxes, authorized Ezra to in-
stall both city and regional officers anc
made the city of Jerusalem the adminis-
trative center for the whole province
(Ezra 7:11-26). After recording this de-
cree, Ezra added a thanksgiving prayer
to God (Ezra 7:27, 28).

The main subject of the revelation found in verses 25-27 is the Person whom Gabriel called **Messiah, the ruler**. He comes toward the very end of the period of seventy weeks to do the important work summarized in verse 24. This Ruler would be executed or, as the original text says, **cut off**—the verb that is used in the Bible for the making ("cutting") of a covenant. The subject of this verb is not clear in the text; that is, it doesn't identify those who execute **Messiah, the ruler**. The text goes on to say that when he dies, no one will come to help him—reminding the reader of the words of Isaiah 63:5:

"I looked, but there was no one to help.
I was appalled that no one gave
support;
so my own arm worked salvation for
me,
and my own wrath sustained me.

Through his life and teaching as well
as through his death, Messiah, the ruler.

will **confirm** (or "make strong") **a covenant with many**. One consequence of this covenant will be a halt to the temple sacrifices and offerings (cf. Heb. 10:5-9). Hebrews 10:1-14 says, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins," therefore, Christ offered the sacrifice of his body "once for all."

Daniel's contemporary Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant that God initiated:

"The time is coming," declares the

LORD,

"when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel

and with the house of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant

I made with their forefathers

when I took them by the hand

to lead them out of Egypt,

because they broke my covenant,

though I was a husband to them,"

declares the LORD. . . .

"For I will forgive their wickedness

and will remember their sins no

more" Qer. 31:31, 32, 34).

Ezekiel, another contemporary of Daniel, described this covenant as "an everlasting covenant" (Ezek. 16:60) and also as "a covenant of peace" (Ezek. 34:25). In Daniel's book, this covenant is *not* called new, but rather a covenant that is confirmed or made strong with *rabbim*, **many**. Zechariah 2:10, 11 speaks of the time when God

will call many non-Hebrew peoples '*ammi*, "my people"—a term previously restricted to the people of Israel. " 'Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,' declares the LORD. '*Many* nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you' " (emphasis added; cf. Zech. 8:20-22). In contrast to Jeremiah's language, which stresses the concept of discontinuity, Daniel 9:27 says the Messiah will confirm or make this covenant strong. This passage is meant to show the continuity between this covenant and those that preceded it.

This text links the death of **Messiah, the ruler**, with the coming of another ruler, the destroyer, whose army will bring devastation to the city of Jerusalem. Just as the reconstruction of the city took place in a time of trouble, so the future destruction of Jerusalem and its temple will happen in the context of **a war** that is figuratively likened to **a flood** (cf. Isa. 8:8). The devastation of the city and the temple will be so massive that Gabriel describes it as **abominations** brought about by **the one that causes destruction**. This conflict will last until the time when the prince destroyer will come to his own ruin. In his Olivet discourse, Jesus told his disciples that the time of the end would be like the coming of the Roman army that will

destroy Jerusalem and the temple: " 'So when you see standing in the holy place "the abomination that causes desolation," spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains' " (Matt. 24:15, 16; cf. Luke 21:20). The historical event to which Jesus referred here took place in A.D. 70.

Although this text speaks of wars, destruction, and desolating abomination, to fail to discern the message of hope that transpires through the passage would be to miss its main point. That hope is inseparably tied with the person and activity of Messiah. The identity of this Ruler should not be confused with that of the ruler who comes with an army to destroy the city and the temple.

Each of the last three verses in Daniel 9 (w. 25-27) contains some information about the time period involved, some facts about the person and activity of the Messiah, and a brief mention of the difficult circumstances related to the particular situation. The following outline may be helpful to understanding the persons and events involved in this passage:

1. Daniel 9:25
 - a. Messiah, the Ruler, comes.
 - b. Period of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.
 - c. Jerusalem restored in times of trouble.

2. Daniel 9:26
 - a. Period of sixty-two weeks.
 - b. Messiah will be cut off.
 - c. War and destruction related to Jerusalem and the temple.
3. Daniel 9:27
 - a. Messiah confirms a covenant with many and stops sacrifices.
 - b. Period of one week and focus on "the middle of the week."
 - c. Abominations and the destroyer come to an end.

It is clear from the outline above that the death of the Messiah is central to this passage. (For a more detailed outline of this passage, see Appendix C, at the end of this chapter.) Throughout the Bible, the coming of the Messiah is compared to birth pains and pictured in a context of God's people experiencing difficult times. Daniel 9 ends with the statement that the ruler who caused the destruction of the city and the abominable destruction of the sanctuary will ultimately come to ruin. Isaiah 33:1 fittingly expresses the "measure for measure principle" that is applied in the judgment on the prince destroyer:

Woe to you, O destroyer,
you who have not been destroyed!
Woe to you, O traitor,
you who have not been betrayed!
When you stop destroying,
you will be destroyed;

when you stop betraying
you will be betrayed.

In a similar way, Obadiah's prophecy pointed to God's execution of justice on the head of the oppressor:

"The day of the LORD is near
for all nations.
As you have done, it will be done to
you;
your deeds will return upon
your own head" (Obad. 15).

Closely tied to the message that Gabriel brought to Daniel is the concept of two exiles. Daniel's prayer focused on the shorter exile to Babylon, which lasted for seventy years and ended when Cyrus captured Babylon and issued an edict allowing the captives to go back home. Yet this return from exile was incomplete because most of the Judeans did not take part in it. Moreover, those who did return to Palestine were faced with a number of obstacles and disappointments, aptly expressed in the conclusion of the prayer recorded in Nehemiah: " 'We are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress' " (Neh. 9:36, 37).

The new revelation centered on the longer—the continuous—exile in which God's people are captives to sin in the world. They will be set free when the Messiah comes and through his life and death puts an end to the necessity of the sacrificial system. These events will take place in the context of wars and religious conflicts through which Jerusalem is destroyed and the sanctuary made desolate. The ruler whose army causes the destruction and abominable desolation will be destroyed because God has decreed that outcome. "It is only at the end of this longer epoch that **true** restoration will take place, and on a more comprehensive scale than the 'restoration' under Cyrus. This will be the culmination of a history in which Jews have lived under a succession of foreign rulers, when a final and eternal kingdom of God's chosen people will be inaugurated."³⁹

Applications

All scholars argue that Daniel 9:24-27, which contains the revelation that Gabriel brought to Daniel, is of paramount importance for the reader of Daniel's book, in spite of its great difficulties. Yet, the applications and interpretations of this passage vary between differing schools of thought. A study has shown that in contrast to some modern translations and commentaries on this passage, its most usual interpretations in Judaism until after A.D. 70

and in Christianity until the end of the nineteenth century were Messianic. "There is a strong evidence to show that the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Zealots all thought that they could date, at least approximately, the time when the Son of David would come, and that in each case their calculations were based upon Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks {*Dan.* 9, 24-27) understood as 70 weeks of years."⁴⁰ People concluded that the predictions of this important passage would be fulfilled between 10 B.C. and A.D. 70.

So, the application of this passage to the history of the church is in its essence an old view that also became very popular among early Christians. While the *Exposition* part of this present study focuses on the literary interpretation of the period of seventy weeks, the applications of this prophetic time period in the history of the church and in the believer's life are presented below. The interpretation and applications presented in this study are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they complement one another.

Application in Church History ("Historicism"). The scholars who make this type of application all affirm the traditional Christian view that Daniel 9 is one of the most Christ-centered chapters in the Old Testament. Doukhan adds, "It is not just a messiah we are dealing with in this context, but *the*

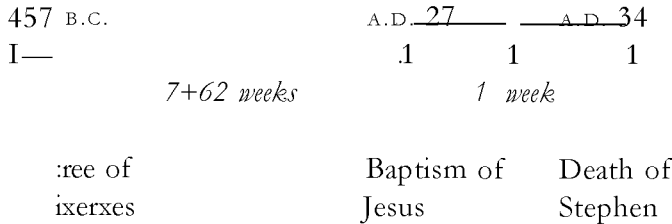
Messiah . . . of all peoples, the Messiah who will save the world."⁴¹ The fulfillment of the precise predictions concerning the first coming of Jesus has fascinated Christians since the early days of the church. For Seventh-day Adventists this chapter, when linked to Daniel 8, dates the beginning of the judgment that precedes the second coming of Christ. Shea asserts, "No commentator holds that all of the predicted events could have taken place in a literal year and a half. . . . Clearly we are dealing here with symbolic time."⁴²

9:24 The starting point in history for the time periods in this and the preceding chapter is the year 457 B.C., when Artaxerxes I Longimanus formulated the decree to restore Jerusalem. This decree fits the prophetic specifications better than did the previous ones because it commissioned Ezra to appoint magistrates and judges with full political and religious authority."⁴³ Forty-nine years later, in 408 B.C., the restoration of Jerusalem took place with its first phase complete. Shea admits that there is a "lack of direct evidence" regarding this precise date.⁴⁴ After the next sixty-two weeks of years, in the year A.D. 27, Jesus Christ was baptized and anointed by the Holy Spirit to begin his public ministry (Matt. 3:13-17). Some four years later, in A.D. 31, he was crucified. And about three years later, in A.D. 34, Stephen, "*the last prophetic voice*"⁴⁵ to Israel's leaders and the first Christian martyr, was

stoned to death by members of the Sanhedrin, the highest governing body in the Jewish commonwealth. This rejection of the message about Christ—and thus of Christ himself—led directly to the proclamation of the gospel in the non-Jewish world. Soon after this event, Paul the apostle converted to Christianity, and since that time, the gospel has been freely preached to the Gentiles. So, the stoning of Stephen marks the end of the seventy weeks of years.

worshiping Roman soldiers—the 'desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel' (Matthew 24:15)—would ruin the entire city and leave it uninhabited and desolate."⁴⁷ Shea, on the other hand, claims that the people in question here are the people of the Messiah, because the cause of Jerusalem's destruction was the Jewish rebellion. "In that sense," concludes Shea, "the people of the Jewish Messiah Prince caused or brought about the destruction of Jerusalem in

TIMELINE OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS OF YEARS



A.D. 70."⁴⁸ The temple in Jerusalem was a symbol of God's presence on earth and among his people. Doukhan clarifies that although the prophecy concerns the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, it "does

9:25-27 One of the key terms in Daniel 9:24-27 is the word "desolate," which describes the destruction brought about by the soldiers under the command of the Roman general Titus, son of the emperor Vespasian, in A.D. 70. "The desolation was caused by the Roman army after its conquest of Jerusalem. The abominations were those things going on in Jerusalem preceding its destruction and desolation."⁴⁶ The "people of the ruler who will come," according to Maxwell, are Titus's soldiers, who set the temple on fire. These "idol-

not date the event" but places this tragedy "sometime after the Messiah's death."⁴⁹

The book of Hebrews speaks of Christ's priestly ministry in the sanctuary in heaven. The seventy weeks of years are "cut" or "amputated" (Hebrew *nehtak*) from the longer period of 2,300 years. The phrases "to put an end to transgressions," "to forgive sins," and "to anoint the most holy" are plainly sanctuary language, tying Daniel 9:24-27 with Daniel 8. Upon Jesus' ascension to heaven after his resurrection, he

anointed the heavenly sanctuary as a whole. At that time he "was inaugurated there as our great High Priest. The earthly sign of this heavenly anointing was the falling of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost."⁵⁰

This prophetic timeline, "fulfilled with astonishing precision,"⁵¹ illustrates well the apostle Paul's words in Galatians 4:4, 5: "When the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." Atonement is God's entire program for meeting our needs and for reconciling us to himself. The Cross and the cleansing through judgment—each very different and each essential—are two major, unique events in the grand drama of the plan of salvation.

Application in Personal Life. There is much truth in the statement that "to be human is to be needy."⁵² This was certainly true of Daniel. His consistent life of prayer is an example for every believer to follow. In this chapter we are told that his prayer was accompanied by fasting. He became so preoccupied with spiritual things that he simply forgot food and other necessities of life. Daniel prayed while holding God's inspired words in his hands. He communed with God while repeatedly reading the precious promises from the scrolls of the prophets. He applied those promises to his own life as well as to the history of

his people. Too many people approach the prophetic promises of the Bible only from an intellectual point of view. Such an approach excludes the heart of the believer from the process. Jeremiah 29:12, 13 quotes God as saying to the exiles from Judah, " 'You will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.' "

Confession of sins was an important part of Daniel's prayer. It is a condition for forgiveness, and it results in joy and peace. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Yet believers of today are not always ready to make private and public confessions of the wrongs they have committed. People who receive mercy from God need to show the same attitude of kindness toward others. That which Daniel's prayer omitted is also important. Daniel did not pray for divine vengeance on Israel's enemies/ Divine mercy overcomes feelings of resentment.

Time and again, Daniel's book teaches that God has predetermined an end to evil. In spite of the fact that, as this world's prince, the enemy who wages spiritual wars against us often appears to be victorious, he has already been conquered. We all know too well that it is not easy to wait for final, full freedom from the oppressive evil forces. That is

why Smith-Christopher speaks of a state of readiness for God's cause when he says, "We are called to be 'adventists' in the radical sense of those who live under the ethics of expectation."⁵⁴ God's promises regarding the rise of Cyrus and the fall of Babylon came to pass. The same will be true of his promises about the second coming of Christ and the ultimate defeat of the anti-God power in the world.

1. Pritchard, *ANET*, 316.
2. Towner, 128.
3. Redditt, 147.
4. Meredith Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 19.
5. Collins, 347.
6. Smith-Christopher, 121.
7. Ross E. Winkle, "Jeremiah's Seventy Years for Babylon: A Re-Assessment: Part I: The Scriptural Data," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25, no. 2 (1987): 212.
8. Lucas, 235; Seow, 139.
9. Slotki, 71,72.
10. Miller, 240.
11. Lucas, 249.
12. Walton, Matthews, Chavalas, 744.
13. Ford, 205.
14. Gudmundur Olafsson, "The Use of NS' in the Pentateuch and Its Contribution to the Concept of Forgiveness," (doctoral dissertation, Andrews University, 1992), 264-269.
15. Montgomery, 361.
16. Shea, *Daniel*, 146, 147.
17. Goldingay, 256.
18. *The New American Standard Bible*. © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977. Used by permission.
19. Ford, 221.
20. *The New American Standard Bible*.
21. Lucas, 137. One problem with a strict historical application is that if the seventy weeks of years ended in A.D. 34 with the stoning of Stephen, why is the prediction about the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 included in the description of events that take place during that same period?
22. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 14.
23. Baldwin (pp. 168-177) argued for a symbolic interpretation of the seventy-week period.
24. Lucas, 248.
25. Koehler and Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon* 1:364.
26. Brown, Driver, Briggs, *The Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. [batal\].
27. Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 7:300.
28. Slotki, 77.
29. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 142.
30. Seow, 149.
31. Peter-Contesse and Ellington, 255.
32. Redditt, 162.
33. Brempong Owusu-Antwi, *The Chronology of Daniel 9:24-27* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1995), 379.
34. Shea, *Daniel*, 166.
35. Doukhan, "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9: An Exegetical Study," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 17, no. 1(1979): 21.
36. Redditt, 163.
37. Ford, 235.
38. Collins, 353.
39. Davies, 21.
40. Roger T. Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation," *Revue de Qumran* 10, no. 4 (1981): 521.
41. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 140, 141.
42. Shea, *Daniel*, 149.
43. S. H. Horn and L. H. Wood, *The Chronology of Ezra 7* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald®, 1953).
44. Shea, *Daniel*, 163.
45. *Ibid.*, 152.
46. *Ibid.*, 171.
47. Maxwell, 231.
48. Shea, *Daniel*, 167.
49. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 149, 150.
50. Shea, *Daniel*, 153.
51. Maxwell, 225.
52. Berrigan, 162.
53. *Ibid.*, 160.
54. Smith-Christopher, 129.

APPENDIX C

The Chiastic Structure of Daniel 9:25-27*

A. Construction of Jerusalem (9:25a)

From the issuing of the decree
to restore and rebuild Jerusalem

B. Coming of the Anointed One (9:25b)

until Messiah, the ruler comes
there will be seven weeks,
and sixty-two weeks.

C. Construction of Jerusalem (9:25c)

It will be rebuilt with
streets and plaza,
but in times of trouble.

D. DEATH OF THE ANOINTED ONE (9:26a)

After the sixty-two weeks,
the Messiah will be cut off
and will have nothing.

C'. Destruction of Jerusalem (9:26b)

The people of the ruler who will come
will destroy the city and the sanctuary.
Its end will come like a flood:
War will continue until the end,
and destruction has been decreed.

B\ Activities of the Anointed One (27a)

He will confirm a covenant
with many for one week.
In the middle of the week
he will put a stop to sacrifice and offering.

A'. Destruction of Jerusalem (9:27b)

And on a wing of abominations
will come the one that causes destruction,

but the end that is decreed
will be poured out on the destroyer.

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1. The proposed chiastic structure of
Daniel 9:25-27 is based on Holbrook,
Symposium on Daniel, 243.

APPENDIX D

Literalist and Intertestamental Applications of Daniel 9

1. *Literalist Application ("Futurism").*

The leading proponents of this view argue that unlike the prophecies of chapters 2, 7, and 8, which concern the nations of the world, the vision of Daniel 9:24-27 outlines the program of God for literal Israel, culminating in the coming of the Messiah to the earth to reign. Since Daniel is the only prophet who received a comprehensive prophecy for both Israel and the world at large, the study of Daniel and especially of this chapter is the key to understanding the prophetic Scriptures. The deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt is the standard illustration in the Old Testament of the power of God and his ability to deliver his people. In the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's standard of power (Eph. 1:19, 20). Walvoord claims that in the future millennial reign of Christ, the standard of God's power will be the regathering of Israel and their restoration to their land (Jer. 16:14, 15). The final

act fulfilling Amos 9:11-15 will occur when, in relation to the millennial kingdom, Israel is regathered, never to be dispersed again.

9:24 The concluding four verses of Daniel 9 contain one of the most important prophecies of the Old Testament. Verse 24 contains the prophecy in summary form. According to Miller, it presents a total of seventy weeks of "literal years ending with Christ's second coming."¹ For Archer, this verse "sets forth the approach of 'seventy 'sevens' ' of years during which God would accomplish his plan of national and spiritual redemption for Israel."² Verse 25 covers the first sixty-nine sevens. Verse 26 details the events occurring between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth seven. And verse 27 describes the final period—the seventieth seven.

All Christological interpretations tend to interpret the first sixty-nine sevens as "literal." But opinions diverge regarding the interpretation of the seventieth

seven and of the timing of the events that verse 27 describes. Were these fulfilled in the first century A.D., or will they be fulfilled around the time of the Second Coming? According to Walvoord, they will be fulfilled at the Second Coming in a literal manner. Archer adds that “since all or most of the six goals seem to be as yet unfulfilled, it follows that if the seventieth week finds fulfillment at all, it must be identified as the last seven years before Christ’s return to earth as millennial King.”³ God, whose comprehensive plan renders future events certain, will execute these as yet unfulfilled prophecies in behalf of his people at that time.

According to Walvoord, even in ruins, Jerusalem remained the city set apart in the heart of God and, together with the term *Israel*, must be understood literally. To make *Jerusalem* and *Israel* equivalent to the church composed of both Jews and Gentiles is to read into the passage something entirely foreign to the thinking of Daniel. Walvoord categorically rejects the notion that the church has any relation to the city of Jerusalem or the promises given to Israel regarding their return to Palestine and their restoration in the Promised Land. In a similar way, Miller claims that this verse does not apply to “spiritual Israel” (the church) but to “the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem,”⁴ even though the great acts prophesied will affect all of humanity.

9:25, 26 While the six statements found in verse 24 pertain mostly to the first coming of Christ, verses 25-27 are difficult and require special spiritual discernment. The key to the interpretation of this whole passage is the phrase “from the issuing of the decree to restore and to build Jerusalem.” Since the early chapters of Nehemiah (2:12-15) speak of the city of Jerusalem still in utter ruins, Walvoord’s explanation is that the decree relating to the rebuilding of the city itself is the one given to Nehemiah in 445 B.C., about ninety years after the first captives returned and started rebuilding the temple. This date marks the beginning of the seventy weeks, the first sixty-nine of which ended shortly before the death of Christ. The natural interpretation of verse 26 is that it refers to the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross. The prominence of the Messiah in Old Testament prophecy and the mention of him in verses 25 and 26 make the cutting off of the Messiah one of the important events in the prophetic unfolding of God’s plan for Israel and the world. Miller, on the other hand, believes that the seventy weeks began with the decree to Ezra issued in the year 458 B.C.

9:27 In regard to verse 27, two theories exist: namely, the *continuous* fulfillment theory, which holds that the seventieth seven immediately follows the sixty-ninth, and the *gap* theory, which holds that a period of time separates the

sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks and that the seventieth week is yet to come. Historically, the destruction of Jerusalem occurred in A.D. 70, almost forty years after the death of Christ. So, says Walvoord, those who hold the continuous fulfillment theory are left without any explanation as to how the destruction of Jerusalem literally fulfilled the prophecies at the end of verse 27. The interposition of these events after the sixty-ninth seven makes necessary a gap of at least forty years. So, proponents of the gap theory argue that a long period of war and desolation is to intervene between the sixty-ninth week and the seventieth week, which will usher in the Second Coming.⁵ “The text also indicates that the seventieth seven would not follow the sixty-ninth immediately.”⁶ The two princes that are in conflict in these verses are the Messiah and the Roman commander whose army destroyed Jerusalem and its temple.

While all of verses 25 and 26 were fulfilled historically, verse 27 is an enigma as far as history is concerned, and only a “futuristic interpretation” allows any literal fulfillment. Miller says that the last seven years constitute the period immediately prior to the Lord’s return. The determination of the antecedent of *he* in verse 27 is the key to the interpretation of this entire verse. Some have suggested that it refers to Antiochus, while others connect it to Christ. But Walvoord finds no seven-year period

marked off in any clear way in history that has fulfilled the last unit of seven of Daniel’s prophecy. The most natural and intelligent exposition of this text gives no alternative but to declare that the entire seventieth seven is future. According to Miller, “at the end of the present age, God will again deal with Israel in a special manner, and the final seven will begin.”⁷ The prince who is to come is some future enemy of the people of Israel who will bring them into the great tribulation anticipated as still future in the book of Revelation, which was written at least sixty years after Christ’s death and twenty years after the destruction of Jerusalem.

The events of the last week of years begin with the making of a covenant. Miller asserts that the Antichrist enters into a covenant relationship with “the many,” who are unbelieving Jews, also identified in verse 24 as “your people.” Such an alliance will be an unholy relationship for a seven-year period and will ultimately work to the detriment of the people of Israel, however promising it may be at its inception. The one who confirms the covenant will stop the sacrifice and offering in the middle of the week. This cannot refer to Jesus Christ on the cross because the sacrifices did not cease until A.D. 70, some forty years later. Moreover, Antiochus’s desecration of the temple was only the type of what is to come at the beginning of the great tribulation. According to Christ, a clear-

cut event referred to as the abomination of desolation will occur in the period just preceding his second coming. The fulfillment of this prophecy necessarily involves the reactivation of the sacrificial system in the temple in Jerusalem. Walvoord concludes, "The present occupation of Jerusalem by Israel may be a preparatory step to the reestablishment of the Mosaic system of sacrifices. Obviously, sacrifices cannot be stopped and the temple cannot be desecrated unless both are in operation."⁸

Although Christ's reference to "abomination" (Matt. 24:15) may allude to Antiochus in Daniel 11:31, in 12:11 it clearly refers to the future stopping of the daily sacrifices for forty-two months before the Second Coming. Miller says that this term includes the Antichrist's idolatrous claim that he is deity and an attempt to force people's worship of himself.⁹ The 1,290 days seem to extend beyond the Second Advent to the beginning of the millennial kingdom. Antiochus's small-scale persecution of Israel and the stopping of their sacrifices in the second century B.C. will be repeated on a worldwide scale in the future great tribulation under the future world leader (Rev. 13). His period of great power will terminate at the Second Advent.

In conclusion, the proponents of this view state that the prophecy of the seventy weeks comprehends the total history of Israel from the time of the Per-

sian Empire to the second coming of Christ. During the first period of seven sevens, Jerusalem and its streets are rebuilt. Near the conclusion of the following sixty-two sevens, the Messiah appears. In the gap between the sixty-ninth seven and the seventieth seven, two important events take place: the death of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70). Verse 27 says that the Antichrist (according to Miller) or the world dictator (according to Archer) will make a covenant with (un)believing¹⁰ Jews and then he will take away Israel's special liberties and protection. The rebuilt temple will be desecrated and the sacrifices stopped. At that time, says Miller, the majority of the people in Israel will acknowledge Jesus as the promised Messiah, repent, and be saved.¹¹ The culmination of the seventieth week will be the second coming of Christ, when the history of Israel and of the nations will come to a close. For most of the period, the two great lines of the prophecy—the one about the nations and the other about Israel—run concurrently, and both end in the same event: the coming of Jesus Christ. Then God will deliver Israel and judge the Gentile oppressor.

2. *Intertestamental Application* ("Pret-erism"). Daniel 9 differs from the other chapters in the book on two points: First, another biblical text is stated to have been the point of departure for the

revelation. In this context, the seventy years referred to by Jeremiah is a round number, equivalent to a lifetime. Second, half of the chapter contains a lengthy prayer. According to Goldingay, the oracle reported in this chapter might be "a response to Daniel's confession of Israel's sin."¹² Collins's commentary on this chapter is short. He remarks that this chapter serves as a link between chapters 8 and 10-12.

9:1-23 Porteous states that we cannot be absolutely sure Jeremiah actually prophesied that the exile would last for seventy years. He continues, "But, even if he did, the number seventy should probably be regarded as a round number and so as one not intended to be taken literally. The exile was to last long enough to make the advice which Jeremiah gave in his letter to the exiles (chapter 29) very wise and practical."¹³ As for Daniel's prayer, without it there would be something essential missing from the book of Daniel. Collins believes that Daniel's prayer was not composed for the present context of the chapter, yet the author of the chapter included it purposefully. The prayer draws heavily on traditional biblical language, as a number of parallels with biblical passages show. Even though Daniel prayed earnestly and confessed Israel's sins, in his visions, the primary sin with which God deals is that of the Gentile king. Daniel asks God to act in accordance with his revealed character. The

answer to the prayer came at the time of the evening offering because "the preoccupation with the disrupted cult" is continuous with Daniel 8. The timing of the end is another element common to chapters 8 and 9.

9:24 The course of events that Gabriel foretold was already determined before and independently of Daniel's prayer. Collins claims Daniel rejected the chronicler's view that the restoration in the Persian period fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy. The angel's explanation departs from the plain sense of the text because the seventy weeks are extended to ten jubilees. This took place under the influence of the sabbatical theology of Leviticus 25 and 26 and also the custom of "periodization" of history present in other apocalyptic works using ten as the schematic number. According to Porteous, "The seventy 'weeks of years' are clearly intended to span a certain stretch of time, but, as a period of 490 years cannot be made to fit exactly the known facts of history, it may be concluded that it is a round number."¹⁴ What we have here is the use of a period of a lifetime (seventy years) combined with the principle of sevenfold punishment from Leviticus 26:28. Goldingay concludes that the "number 490 is not an arithmetical calculation to be pressed to yield chronological information."¹⁵

Verse 24 presents a string of six infinitives, with God as the implied subject. Collins proposes that "taken together

they constitute an eschatological ideal."¹⁶ For Goldingay, the concern of verse 24 is Israel and Jerusalem. The verse "does not have a worldwide perspective."¹⁷

9:25 The expression "from the issuing of the decree" in verse 25 must be taken as referring to the divine word rather than the decree of a Persian king, just as it is in verse 23. That is what makes this starting point uncertain. The word is the revelation given to Daniel rather than the original prophecy of Jeremiah. The seventy weeks of years are presented as a unit but also as three divisions of seven, sixty-two, and one. Porteous explains the first seven weeks by stating that "it was almost exactly 49 years (7 x 7) between the fall of Jerusalem [in 587 B.C.] and the fall of Babylon [in 539 B.C]."¹⁸ The other two time periods are given as 539-170 B.C. and 170-164 B.C.

Goldingay mentions that forty-nine years cover the time between Jeremiah's prophecy in 605 b.c. and Cyrus's accession in 556 B.C. Yet he considers that literal applications of this period are arbitrary; a general consideration of Old Testament dates supports the view that a figure such as 490 years is not designed to offer chronological information. He also says that the New Testament does not refer to the seventy weeks in that way. The point here should not be chronology but chronography.¹⁹

9:26 Traditionally, Christian interpreters have seen in verse 26 a reference

to the death of Christ. Porteous categorically states that the Christological interpretation of this verse by the early church must be rejected. Similarly, Goldingay says that exegetically, such views are mistaken, and he restricts the meaning of this passage to "the Antiochene crisis," stating that "there is no reason to refer it [especially verse 24] exegetically to the first or the second coming of Christ."²⁰ The crisis in this verse is heralded by the death of one high priest and the wickedness of another. Thus the Anointed One, the Ruler, is an Israelite figure, while the anointed one who cut off is the high priest Onias III, who was murdered in 171 B.C. at the instigation of Menelaus (2 Macc. 4:23-28). The ruler who comes is Antiochus, and his army is the Syrian soldiers who settled in Jerusalem under his rule. While the text specifies that this army will destroy the city, the Syrians did not demolish Jerusalem. However, did they make it desolate by corrupting the cult. Antiochus's cataclysmal end at the conclusion of this chapter is very similar to the description of his destruction in Daniel 11:45. For Porteous, the writer of Daniel 9 had anticipated the type of war that is the final eschatological struggle between good and evil.

9:27 The opening words of verse 27 "He will confirm a covenant with many for one week," refer, according to Collins, to the alliance of Antiochus with the mighty aristocrats or Hellenizing

Jews. First Maccabees 1:11 pictures them as saying, " 'Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles round about us.' " The word "covenant" in this verse "has negative connotations."²¹ The half-week corresponds to the three and a half years found in the expression "time, times, and half a time" in Daniel 7:25. Daniel's phrase "the desolating abomination" was, according to Collins, a derogatory pun on the title "lord of heaven"—the Syrian counterpart of Olympian Zeus. The earliest interpretation of this phrase is found in 1 Maccabees 1:54, which says, "Now on the fifteenth day of Chislew, in the one-hundred-and-forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering." The reference is to the disruption of the Jewish cult by Antiochus Epiphanes and involves a structure placed on the great altar of sacrifice with its "wing-like" top corners usually described as horns. Thus, the abomination was a pagan altar on which, according to Josephus, the king "slaughtered swine" as a sacrifice that was "neither lawful nor native to the religion of the Jews."²² This profanation of the temple lasted for half a week only, a short period when viewed against the longer backdrop of history.

Collins concludes that the specificity of the prediction is significant for the psychological effect of the revelation,

and this, he claims, is a distinctive characteristic of Daniel's prophecy. For Porteous, the writer of the book maintained "a predestinarian view of history."²³ According to Goldingay, the calamity that is described here is not meaningless but a fulfillment of prophecy. It is "determined, not endless," and it is primarily a promise. In this sense one can speak of "a typological relationship between the events and people of the Antiochene crisis and deliverance and those of the Christ events and the end we still await."²⁴

1. Miller, 257.
2. Archer, 112.
3. Ibid., 113.
4. Miller, 259.
5. Archer, 116.
6. Miller, 269.
7. Ibid., 257.
8. Walvoord, 235.
9. Miller, 273.
10. According to Archer, "the believing Jews" (117).
11. Miller, 257.
12. Goldingay, 259.
13. Porteous, 135.
14. Ibid., 140.
15. Goldingay, 266.
16. Collins, 353.
17. Goldingay, 258.
18. Porteous, 141.
19. Goldingay, 257.
20. Ibid., 260.
21. Ibid., 262.
22. Josephus *Antiquities* 12.5.4.
23. Porteous, 143.
24. Goldingay, 268.

DANIEL'S VISION BY THE RIVER (10:1-11:1)

The opening words in Daniel 10 date this vision to the third year of King Cyrus, or 536 B.C. By that time, the first group of the Judean exiles had already returned to Palestine following the decree of Cyrus. Ezra 1:1-3 says:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:

"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

"The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the

God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.' "

There must have been a great deal of excitement among the Judean exiles when Cyrus's proclamation was made. Daniel was then more than eighty years old and most likely had left Babylon and settled in the city of Susa. His advanced age must have prevented him from joining those who returned to Palestine.

In Judea, the rebuilding of the temple had begun with a fresh wave of enthusiasm:

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord:

"He is good;
his love to Israel endures forever."

And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid (Ezra 3:10, 11).

However, the excitement of those who returned to Judea did not last long. This remnant soon faced some serious difficulties. In the first place, the surrounding peoples strongly opposed the rebuilding of the temple. This hostile attitude was partially due to the negative and somewhat exclusivist response that the Judeans made to those who offered to help in the work of rebuilding the temple. Ezra 4:3-5 says,

Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, "You have no part with us in building the temple to our God. We alone will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us."

Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. They hired counselors to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.

It would have been impossible for

Daniel not to relate the complications regarding the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem with the contents of the visions that God had been giving him. After all, the topic of the temple service had figured prominently in several of the revelations that he received. In Persia itself, Cyrus had temporarily promoted his son, the crown prince Cambyses, to the position of coregent.¹ This young statesman was neither favorable nor generous toward the provinces and may have even been religiously hostile toward people like the Jews. So, once again, when faced with difficulties, Daniel fasted and prayed, asking God for help.

Chapter 10 of Daniel is classified as a "prophetic call vision."² It serves as a prologue to the revelation given in chapters 11 and 12, which form a single unit with chapter 10. In addition, chapter 10 is closely linked to the previous one, the two chapters forming the central part of the second half of the book. In these two chapters, Daniel is introduced to the work done by a special person on behalf of Daniel's people. This special Person appears as the Messiah in chapter 9 and as a humanlike being "clothed in linen" in chapter 10.

The four-part structure of this chapter may be presented as follows:

1. The preparation (10:1-4)
2. The vision of a divine being (10:5-9)
3. Daniel's reaction to the vision (10:10-19)

4. Summary of a long conflict (10:20-11:1)

Central to this chapter is Daniel's vision of a supernatural being, who, while not named in the chapter, was most probably Michael. In addition, at least one more person speaks with Daniel during this vision. Most likely this person is Gabriel, the angel interpreter known from the previous visions (9:21).

The Preparation (10:1-4)

At the beginning of the chapter, Daniel gives the dating and the topic of this vision, specifying the exact time of the year when he saw it.

1 *In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel whose name was also Belteshazzar. Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him through a vision.*

2 *At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three full weeks.³¹ I ate no choice food; no meat or wine entered my mouth; and I used no lotions at all until the three full weeks were completed.*

4 *On the twenty-fourth day of the first month I was standing on the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris.*

Notes

10:1 "In the third year of Cyrus." The third year of Cyrus was most probably 536 BC. Each of the four visions in Daniel is dated.

"A revelation." The Hebrew text says *dabar nigla*, "a word was revealed." The term *dabar*, "a

word," found three times in this verse, also figures prominently in the revelation recorded in the previous chapter (9:23,25). In chapter 10, the term describes the audition that Daniel receives: (v. 11), which is recorded in chapter 11. An audition holds the central place in the revelation - chapter 8 as well.

"Belteshazzar." This was Daniel's Babylonian name. See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:7. In this verse, Daniel is referred to in the third-person singular, while in the rest of the chapter in the first person.

True. The word *'emet*, "truth" or "true," is used to describe the vision in Daniel 8:26. According to Daniel 8:12, "truth" is one of the objects of the attacks by the little horn.

"A great war." The expression *sdba'gadol*, ~c great war," may be understood as "a long war" because of the time span covered in chapter 1". Another possibility is that it is called "a great war" because of the profound impression that this revelation left on Daniel and also because two powerful angels, Gabriel and Michael, are involved in it. In the Bible, this expression can also mean simply "warfare."³ This is more likely than the suggestion made by some commentators that the conflict in question involved Daniel's own mental struggle to understand this war and its outcome.

"The understanding." The word *bind*, "understanding" or "discernment," is used here in combination with the verb *bin*, "to discern," forming a cognate accusative (paronomasia). The root of these two words comprises another link between this chapter and chapter 9. See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:22 and 22.

"A vision." The Hebrew word *mareh*, "vision," is found in Daniel 9:23 as well. Since this term

also refers to the appearance of the humanlike Person that Daniel saw (v. 7, referring to the person described in verses 5,6), it is safe to conclude that this vision was the key that unlocked the revelation that Daniel heard and that is recorded in chapter 11.

10:2 "I, Daniel." This emphatic first-person introduction is common in the second half of the book and lends authenticity to Daniel's visions. See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:1,15,27.

"Mourned." In Bible times, people mourned over sin, calamity, and death. The most probable reason for Daniel's mourning, however, was the delay and the eventual halt of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:5,24).⁴ Isaiah had promised joy for all who mourn over Jerusalem:

"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her,
all you who love her;
rejoice greatly with her,
all you who mourn over her" (Isa. 66:10).

But now, "hostile silence greets the joyful cries of the returning exiles."⁵ Ezra's book says that the Samaritans hired counselors to oppose the Judeans. Later, Nehemiah's concern over the same issue made him sit down and weep: "For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (Neh. 1:4). It has also been suggested that Daniel's mourning was intended to prepare him to understand God's revelation (cf. Dan. 9:2,3).

"For three full weeks." The Hebrew text says *sēlḏsa sabu'im yamim*, "three weeks of days," referring to "three complete weeks." These ordinary seven-day weeks are most likely in contrast with the weeks of years in Daniel

9:24-27. The precision here is intentional because of Gabriel's words about his delay in verse 13. Some biblical texts mention people spending three days in preparation for God's revelation or his intervention in history (Exod. 19:10-15; Esther 4:16). "Such is the intensity of his prayer that Daniel multiplies it with seven."⁶

10:3 "Choice food." The expression *lehem hāmuddt*, "bread of delightfulness," can also be translated as "delicacies." In the culture of the Bible, this type of food was considered "festal food" and the opposite of *lehem 'dni*, "bread of affliction" (Deut. 16:3). Verse 19 describes Daniel as *'is hāmuddt*, "a person of delightfulness." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:23. In the Bible, "fasting is associated with preparation for revelation. Moses ate no bread and drank no water before the theophany in Exod 34:28, and similarly it is implied that Elijah fasted for forty days and nights in 1 Kgs 19:8."⁷

"No meat or wine." The Hebrew nouns *basar*, "flesh," and *yayin*, "wine," describe either a luxury or a festal type of diet. Daniel's temporary abstinence from certain types of food and drink can be considered as a form of fast that he began with the intention of entering a closer union with his God. For the precise timing of Daniel's fasting and mourning in chapter 9, see the *Notes* on Daniel 9:3.

"No lotions." Perfumed olive oil was generously poured on the hair and face as a part of skin and hair care in the dry climate and heat of the lands of the Bible (2 Sam. 14:2; Isa. 61:3; Matt. 6:17). Anointing with oil was associated with gladness and feasting (Eccles. 9:8). In a time of sorrow, people placed ashes on their head (see the *Notes* on Dan. 9:3).

10:4 "On the twenty-fourth day." It has been suggested that this day was Saturday, the biblical Sabbath, just as John's vision of Christ took place on "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10).⁸ Another scholar considers the twenty-four days to be the equivalent of three and a half weeks (of days).⁹

"The first month." According to the religious (spring) calendar used by the ancient Hebrews, the first month was Nisan, which overlaps parts of March and April of our calendar. The two important religious feasts in that month are Passover and Unleavened Bread. Daniel's failure to observe the Passover feast posed a problem to ancient Jewish interpreters, some of whom proposed that the first month mentioned here relates to the third year of Cyrus's reign.¹⁰ Tishri is the first month of the autumn calendar, and it falls in September and October. The Feast of Trumpets ("Rosh Hashanah"), the Day of Atonement ("Yom Kippur"), and the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) are the feasts celebrated in that month. It is likely that Daniel's mention in this verse of the first month should be understood as a reference to Tishri rather than Nisan. Verse 12 of this chapter describes Daniel's "humbling himself before God," a term frequently used in Leviticus 16 and 23 to describe people's experience on the Day of Atonement. Edwin Thiele argued that Daniel used the old calendar in which a year began in the month of Tishri.¹¹

"On the bank." The original text says *'alyad*, "on the hand of," but the context requires the use of the word "bank."

"The Tigris." *Hiddeqel*, Tigris, is one of the two great rivers that bounded *Mesopotamia*, that is, the "land between the rivers." The other

river is the Euphrates, which flowed through the ancient city of Babylon. The Tigris flowed some twenty miles to the east of the Euphrates. The two rivers are mentioned in the story of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:14). Some scholars think that the name "the Tigris" is a later addition to the original text and that the River Euphrates was meant by the expression "the great river." This claim cannot be substantiated.

The Euphrates was one of the natural borders of the land promised to Abraham and his children. Since the Tigris River is located beyond the Euphrates, in this passage its mention fosters the concept of universality, pointing to a geographical area beyond the limits of the land promised to Abraham. Generally speaking, rivers in the ancient world were considered as symbols of purity, but in the Bible they could also represent hostile nations.

Exposition (10:1-4)

10:1 Chapters 9 and 10, which focus on the Messiah and a divine being, are dated to the first and the third years of Cyrus the Great. The time when this revelation was given to Daniel is significant, because biblical references to *Cyrus king of Persia* are consistently positive (Isa. 44:28-45:4). In contrast, chapters 7 and 8, which contain two visions about the negatively viewed little horn, date to the first and the third years of Belshazzar, the Babylonian king who also is viewed negatively in the book of Daniel.

The *revelation* that Daniel received and that is recorded in this chapter is re-

lated to the one in the previous chapter. The prophet says that the **message** that came to him **was true**, like the previous one to which it is related: "The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future" (Dan. 8:26). Daniel had already been told that this divinely revealed "truth" would be an object of the attacks by the power symbolized by the little horn (8:12), so it is not surprising to see him greatly concerned in regard to this revelation. While the revelation itself is about **a great** or a long **war** in which powerful angelic beings play important roles, its understanding was communicated to Daniel **through a vision** that is given in the first half of this chapter. The vision, recorded in this chapter, prepared him for the audition that is disclosed in chapter 11 and in which lies the content of the revelation.¹² Also, while at the end of chapter 8 Daniel had stated that the vision was "beyond understanding," here he claims that he was able to understand the divine revelation.

10:2-4 In describing the events that prepared him for the vision, the prophet makes his report more authentic by using the first-person personal pronoun I, a frequent feature of the second half of the book. For **three full weeks**—that is, twenty-one days—Daniel was mourning and abstaining from the use of the perfumed oil known in the Bible as "the oil of gladness," which was considered

an antidote to mourning (Isa. 61:3). His special diet excluded festive delicacies such as animal flesh and **wine**. Since Daniel's fasting and humbling himself before God recorded in chapter 9 took place in the month of Tishri, his similar actions that are reported in this chapter may have taken place in that same month. Tishri is **the first month** of the Hebrew autumn calendar. It falls in the months of September and October.

Daniel's rigorous preparation for the revelation points to its importance. Late in **the first month**, he found himself standing by the river **Tigris**, one of the two great rivers in Mesopotamia that, according to Genesis 2:14, were two of the four branches of the river that flowed through the Garden of Eden. The Tigris River is located east of the Euphrates. The Euphrates was one of the natural borders of the land God had promised to Abraham: "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates'" (Gen. 15:18). The reference to the Tigris River in verse 4 gives to this passage the notion of universality, enlarging the scope of revelation given to Daniel beyond the limits of God's covenant with the people of Israel. In the previous chapter, the word "many" played the same role, enlarging (in our understanding) the group for whom the Messiah makes the covenant stronger through his death (Dan. 9:26, 27).

The Vision of a Divine Being (10:5-9)

In this section of the chapter, Daniel describes a personal encounter with an unusual being whose appearance was humanlike.

⁵I looked up to see and there was a person clothed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist.⁶His body was like chrysolite, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.

⁷1, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men who were with me did not see it, but such terror fell on them that they fled and hid themselves.⁸So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my natural color turned deathly pale, and I had no strength.⁹Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.

Notes

10:5 *"I looked up to see."* The original text has a common Hebrew idiom, *wa'essa"et-'enay wa'ere'*, "I lifted up my eyes and I saw." The same idiom is used in Daniel 8:3, where it is translated, *I looked up, and there was a ram* (cf. Josh. 5:13).

"A person." In the Bible the Hebrew common noun *7s*, "a man," can be used of a person or of a being who may or may not be a mere human. The context here clearly indicates that someone who is more than human is in view because his brightness outshone that of the angels whom the prophet saw. The person described appears to be the Person standing in the air above the

river in Daniel 12:6¹³ and also the "heavenly high priest of Daniel 8."¹⁴ Some scholars consider this vision to be a *theophany*, an appearance of God or of Jesus Christ. This view is preferred to the one that considers this being an angel.

"Clothed in linen." Linen is a white cloth material made from the fibers of flax. Valued for its strength and coolness, it was the traditional material of the garments worn by the priests (Lev. 6:10; 1 Sam. 2:18). In the Bible, angels are also portrayed as dressed in linen garments (Ezek. 9:2,3; Rev. 15:6)

"A belt of the finest gold." The Hebrew word *ketem*, "pure gold," is often found in biblical wisdom and hymnic passages (Ps. 45:9; Job 28:19). The word translated here as "the finest" is *'upaz*, "Uphaz." The gold of Uphaz was highly valued in biblical times (Jer. 10:9)—comparable to the gold from Ophir (1 Kings 9:28). The name *Uphaz* is very similar to the Hebrew words *paz*, "pure" (cf. Song 5:11), and *mupaz*, "refined" (1 Kings 10:18). Hence, the meaning here is gold of a high quality.

10:6 The series of visual comparisons that are used in this verse convey the concept of radiance.

"Chrysolite." The Hebrew name *tarsis*, "Tarshish," reminds one of the city of Tarshish (Jon. 1:3). Sometimes this word is translated "beryl" or "topaz." Daniel compares the body of the Person he saw to a jewel that was one of the twelve placed in the breastplate worn by the high priest (Exod. 28:20; cf. Rev. 21:20). Its color is yellow-brown.

"Flaming torches." The word *'es*, "flaming," is a common Hebrew word for fire. The symbols of whiteness and fire dominate the vision of the Ancient of Days and his throne in Daniel 7:9,10.

10:7 "I, Daniel." For the emphatic use of the first-person singular pronoun, see the *Notes* on Daniel 8:1. This is the second time the expression "I, Daniel" appears in this chapter (cf. v. 2).

"The vision." See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:1. The vision or apparition of this Divine Person gave Daniel an understanding of the revelation concerning the great war (v. 1).

"The men." The plural noun *"nasim*, "men," should be translated as "people." See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:5. The people in question are considered to have been Daniel's friends. This verse reminds the reader of Paul's experience as recorded in Acts 9:7.

"They fled and hid themselves." The phrase *wayyibfthu b'hehabe'* can also be translated as "they fled into hiding" or "they fled to hide themselves." This reaction of sinful mortals to a theophany is not uncommon, especially in the prophetic passages in the Bible (cf. Isa. 2:10, 19, 21; Hos. 10:8; Luke 23:30; Rev. 6:15).

10:8 "This great vision." See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:1, 7. The word *hagg'dola*, "great," implies that this Person's appearance was beyond description and that it left a deep impression on Daniel. "This great vision," *hammare'a hagg'ddla hazzd't*, was the key to Daniel's understanding of the revelation about the *saba'gadol*, "great war," mentioned in verse 1.

"I had no strength left." There may be an intentional wordplay in this verse: Daniel says *nis'arti*—"I was left"—alone to gaze at the vision and there was no strength *nis'ar-bi*—"left in me."

"Deathly pale." The original text implies Daniel's passing from life to death. This description reminds the reader of the suffering servant

about whom Isaiah 52:14 says, "His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man / and his form marred beyond human likeness."

"I had no strength." In the original text, Daniel states twice that he had no strength in him. The reader is reminded of the following verse in Isaiah: "Woe to me! I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty'" (Isa. 6:5).

10:9 This verse contains two statements, and both are repeated.

"A deep sleep." The prophet's experience in this chapter is similar to the one he reported in Daniel 8:17.

"My face to the ground." Daniel's fall was most likely unintentional; it happened because he fainted. For a voluntary fall on one's face with the purpose of worship, see Daniel 2:46.

Exposition (10:5-9)

10:5, 6 The supernatural Being that Daniel sees has an appearance that transcends that of human beings. Although called simply **a person**, he "is more radiant than Gabriel,"¹⁵ and more like Michael. As in the description of the Ancient of Days in chapter 7, whiteness and fire are used to describe his character and power. In addition, the elements of **gold**, a jewel, **lightning**, and **polished bronze** all help to communicate the concept of radiance. He is dressed in white **linen** and has a golden belt **around his waist**, two details that give him the appearance of a priest and a king. His body looks like **chrysolite**, one of the

twelve precious stones that the high priest wore on his breastplate in the sanctuary (Exod. 28:20).

In contrast to the eyes of the little horn, which were **like the eyes of a human** (Dan. 7:8), the eyes of this Being look like **flaming torches**. Also, in contrast to the boastful way in which the little horn spoke, the authority with which this Being speaks is described as resembling **the voice of a multitude**. In the light of the prophet Ezekiel's vision recorded in the beginning of his book (1:26-2:2) and also in the light of the vision of the apostle John found in Revelation 1, this Being should be considered divine. Moreover, in the light of the overall biblical teaching and also in agreement with early Christian commentators, this Being most likely represents Jesus Christ.

10:7-9 In order to underline the authenticity of his eyewitness account, Daniel emphatically states that he himself **saw the vision** and that he alone saw it, because those who were around him had **fled** in terror and **hid themselves** from its brightness. The vision's impact on the people who were with Daniel reminds the reader of the prophetic passages that describe the typical reaction of sinners at the sight of God's coming to earth in glory and majesty:

Men will flee to caves in the rocks
and to holes in the ground
from dread of the LORD

and the splendor of his majesty
when he rises to shake the earth
(Isa. 2:19).

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and even-free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev. 6:15, 16).

This great vision overwhelmed Daniel. But he needed a **great vision** to prepare him for the revelation about the **great war** (v. 1). The climax of this whole revelation is the rise of Michael, who is called "the **great prince**" (12:1).

Wordplay is used to show how weak the prophet's body felt after he gazed at this Being. He had been **left alone** by the people who had been with him; now he **had no strength left** in him—in fact, he was close to death. Then he fainted and fell on his face. Daniel had a similar experience though of lesser intensity during the vision recorded in chapter 8. At that time, he fell prostrate in terror (8:17).

Daniel's Reaction to the Vision (10:10-19)

At this point in the vision, an angel, most likely Gabriel, enters the scene, and Daniel hears his now-familiar voice.

"Suddenly; a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. ¹¹He said, "Daniel, you are greatly loved. Consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you. "And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

¹²Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to understand and you humbled yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. ¹³But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me for twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I was detained there with the kings of Persia.¹⁴Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future time, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."

¹⁵While he was saying these words to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. "Then one who looked like a human touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of this vision, my lord, and I have no strength. ¹⁷How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe."

¹⁸Again the one who looked like a human touched me and gave me strength."⁹"Do not be afraid, O man greatly loved," he said. "Peace to you! Be strong now and take courage." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."

Notes

10:10 "A hand." The common noun *yad*, "hand, appears frequently in Daniel's book, with sometimes positive and sometimes negative con-

notations. See the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2; 5:5; and 8:25. In this verse, this hand may have been either that of the man dressed in linen or Gabriel's.

"Touched me." Although the basic meaning of the verb *naga'* is "to touch," in this context it means "to take hold," so the whole phrase means "it took hold of me." Daniel was on his hands and knees when this "celestial first aid"¹⁶ helped him to his feet.

10:11 "Greatly loved." In the previous chapter as well, Gabriel had told Daniel that he was greatly loved or highly esteemed (9:23). The same adjective *hamudot*, "beloved" or "esteemed" is used here with the addition of the word *'is*, "man." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:23.

"The words I am about to speak." The noun *dabar*, "a word," is used in the plural together with a verb that comes from the same root, forming a cognate accusative (*paronomasia*). On the meaning of *dabar* in this context, see the *Notes* on Daniel 10:1.

"Stand up." The phrase *wa"mdd 'al-'am^edeka* literally means "and stand on the place where you are standing" (cognate accusative) in order to be able to listen attentively (cf. 8:17).

10:12 "Do not be afraid." In the Bible, the expression *'al-tira'*, "Do not be afraid!" is the standard form used by a messenger from heaven when greeting a human being on earth. When spoken by God, it is usually followed by the reassuring words "I am with you."

"Your mind." The Hebrew text has *libb^eka*, "your heart." The people in Bible times considered "heart" to be the place of one's mental activities.

"Humbled yourself." See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:3. The verbal root *'ana*, "to be humble or

afflicted," is also found in Leviticus 16 and 23 to describe people's experience on the Day of Atonement.

10:13 "The prince of the Persian kingdom."

The noun *sar*, "prince," that is used here differs from the word *nagid*, "ruler or prince," which is used in Daniel 9:25, 26. Scholars have debated the identity of this prince. Most think that a supernatural being similar in rank to Gabriel is in view and that he was the patron angel of the Persian kingdom—an evil angel, or perhaps Satan himself. Since in Daniel's book there is "a synergism between events in heaven and on earth,"¹⁷ it is possible that a person on earth, someone like the crown prince of Persia, opposed God's plan at the instigation of his spiritual counterpart. The crown prince Cambyses, whom his father, King Cyrus, made co-regent, was a devout Zoroastrian.¹⁸

"Resisted me." This phrase consists of two words, a verb and a preposition. The preposition *neged* can have a basic meaning of support, as in Genesis 2:18. It can also express confrontation, as in this context, in which the hostile prince stood in Gabriel's way. This delay in the answering of Daniel's prayer was due to opposition in the spiritual realm, not due to God's reluctance to answer the prayer. This opposition could have been either verbal or legal in character (Zech. 3; Job 1; 2).

"For twenty-one days." This period matches the "three weeks of days" mentioned in verse 2. It shows that they were three complete weeks.

"Michael." The personal name *Mikael* means "Who is like God!" This is the first place in the book where this name occurs.

"One of the chief princes." Michael is called one of the chief *sdrtm*, "princes." The same He-

brew noun is used for the prince of the Persian kingdom. Michael is also described as "the great prince" in Daniel 12:1. Some scholars relate him to the guardian angel of the people of Israel mentioned in Zechariah 3:1,2. As the commander of God's army, he was able to defeat the dragons and his angels who had rebelled in heaven (Re. 12:7-9). Michael can also be identified with the messenger of the Lord who led Israel into the land of Canaan (Exod. 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:3-33:2; Josh. 5:14).

"Came to help me." Although the words built on the Hebrew root 'zr, "to help," may describe the roles and actions of human beings: (Gen. 2:18,20), most often they relate to God. as in the place name 'eben'ezer, "the stone & help"—explained in 1 Samuel 7:12 as "Thus the LORD helped us."

"So I was detained there with the kings of Persia." This sentence is not clear in the original text. What is clear is that Michael came to help the angel Gabriel, who had been detained by his conflict with the prince of the Persian kingdom.

10:14 "To explain to you." The original text actually says *lah"bin"kd*, "to make you understand." The root *bin*, "to discern," occurs frequently in the second half of the book as both verbs and nouns. Here it is found in the causative stem, with the meaning "to make understand...: explain."

"In the future time." The meaning of the original *b'e'ah"rithayydmm* is "in the latter days" an expression that is also used in Daniel 2:28 (cf. Gen. 49:1). However, the Hebrew noun *yom* = "day," can mean a period of time other than a twenty-four-hour day, depending on the context. See the Notes on Daniel 2:28.

“A time yet to come.” Literally, the text says that the vision is *layyāmîm*, “for days”—that is, “for many days.” Both this and the previous word refer to a time in the future (Hab. 2:3). See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:17, 19, 26.

10:15 “Saying these words to me.” The original says *ûb^edabb^erô ‘immî kadd^ebārîm hā’ēlleh*, “when he had spoken to me according to these words.” Both the verb and the noun are built on the same root, forming a cognate accusative (paronomasia).

“My face toward the ground.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:9. In Bible times, this was an expression of one’s attitude of humility—in contrast to one’s “lifting up of the eyes.”

10:16 “Then.” The transition phrase *w^ehinnēh*, “And look!” or “And now!” is also used at the beginning of verse 10, which speaks of Daniel being touched by a hand.

“Looked like a human.” The original text says *kidmût b^enê ‘ādām*, “in the likeness of the sons of men.” The last word, *‘ādām*, means “humankind.” The person referred to here may be the same as the one in verse 15. The word *b^enê*, “sons of,” functions as a noun of relation and should not be translated literally. See the *Notes* on Daniel 7:13.

“Touched my lips.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:10. Daniel’s lips were touched at this time because the vision had rendered him incapable of speaking, (cf. Isa. 6:7; Jer. 1:9).

“My lord.” The title of honor, *‘dōnî*, “my lord,” is found nine times in the preceding chapter, where the speaker was addressing God. It is also used in the Bible by someone who was addressing another human being.

“I have no strength.” A number of the expressions found in this part of the verse are iden-

tical with those in verse 8. Daniel lacked strength and felt helpless (cf. Isa. 21:3). The original Hebrew text says that his pains were similar to those of childbirth (1 Sam. 4:19).

10:17 “Your servant.” The noun *‘ebed*, “servant,” is used here in contrast with the *‘dōnî*, “my lord,” of the previous verse. When Daniel speaks of himself in the third person, he does so in the spirit of humility, fully realizing that his rank differs from that of the person he is addressing.

“I can hardly breathe.” The Hebrew says “no breath is left in me.” The noun *n^ešāmâ*, “breath,” is related to life (Gen. 2:7). Thus, Daniel was saying that he was as good as dead.

10:18 “Touched me.” This is the third time in the chapter that Daniel is touched. See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:10, 16.

“The one who looked like a human.” The expression *k^emar’ēh ‘ādām* literally means “like the appearance of a human.” It differs from the phrases in verses 5 and 16. The first noun, “appearance,” is the same as the one Daniel used in verse 5 to describe the man dressed in linen. The differing wording in the description of the persons in this chapter does not necessarily mean that another person is in view, because different words for “a human” may be used synonymously in a text.

10:19 The three exhortations that are present in this verse, “Fear not!” “Peace be with you!” and “take courage!” are each frequently attested in the Bible.

“Do not be afraid.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:12.

“Man greatly loved.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:11 (cf. Dan. 9:23).

"Peace to you!" The greeting *šālôm lāk*, "Peace to you!" is common in Hebrew. It uses the well-known word *šālôm*, a rich Semitic term that can mean a number of positive things related to wholeness, such as good health, prosperity, well-being, peace, etc. The concept that fits best in this context is one of safety.¹⁹

"Be strong now." The imperative of the verb *hāzaq*, "to be strong," is stated here twice, for emphasis—meaning something like, "Take courage. Yes, take courage!"²⁰ Translators who try to avoid the repetition say, "Be strong and of good courage" (cf. Deut. 31:7; Josh. 1:6, 7).

Exposition (10:10-19)

10:10, 11 In the Bible, the word *hand* symbolizes power (Dan. 1:2). It is interesting to observe that in Daniel's book, the text portrays certain actions being performed by *a hand* without clearly specifying whose hand is doing it. For example, a hand wrote the four cryptic words on the wall of the palace that spelled Belshazzar's verdict (5:5). Also, Daniel 8:25 says that the little horn will be destroyed, yet "not by human power." It is possible that in this text, the hand that took hold of Daniel and set him on his hands and knees belonged to the person dressed in linen. The words that Daniel hears are very similar to those spoken by Gabriel in Daniel 9:22, 23. They express, first of all, heaven's appreciation for Daniel as someone who is *greatly loved* by God. The words that follow point to the importance of the divine revelation that

Daniel is about to receive. These words enable Daniel to stand up completely and listen attentively.

10:12 Oftentimes, when in the Bible a being from heaven appears to a human being, his greeting is *Do not be afraid!* And it is followed by words of encouragement saying that God is present with that person. To Daniel, who was overwhelmed by the sight of the vision, these words were very meaningful. Then Gabriel assured the prophet that, just as in the previous vision, God had sent the answer to Daniel's prayer when Daniel first began to pray. In fact, Gabriel's coming to Daniel was in response to his prayer. Yet, unlike the experience of the previous vision, this time the response was delayed due to a conflict between God's messengers and forces hostile to the divine plans.

10:13, 14 At the center of this conflict is a mysterious person simply called *the prince of the Persian kingdom* or "the prince of Persia" (v. 20). Some commentators have suggested that this verse contains "one of the strangest accounts in the Bible,"²¹ through which humanity has been given a glimpse of the behind-the-scenes activities pertaining to the great cosmic struggle. Some commentators argue that this being is one of the "sons of God" (cf. Deut. 32:8 in the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls) and as such, the guardian angel of the kingdom of Persia. Yet, based on the context of Daniel 10:13, 14, a good

number of scholars have concluded that this supernatural being was opposed to God's messengers in heaven. Thus, in all likelihood, he is a fallen angel or Satan himself, because his activity was openly hostile to God and his work of helping human beings.

In Daniel's book, the realms of heaven and earth are so closely linked that no important event takes place on earth without a reaction from heaven, and also nothing happens in heaven without affecting the people who live on earth. To the question, Who on earth was hostile to God's plans in regard to the work of restoration in Judea? the best answer that can be given is the crown prince Cambyses. The supernatural forces of evil worked through the attitude of resistance that this prince betrayed right after he became the coregent with his father Cyrus the Great, who was widely known for his generous policies toward the conquered peoples. Note that Gabriel was detained in this conflict for precisely the same length of time that Daniel spent in prayer and humility before God (w. 2, 3).

At the end of this period, Gabriel's way was cleared thanks to the intervention of **Michael**, the guardian angel of Israel. The name *Michael* means "Who is like God!" and this name discloses the secret of his victories. Through his name and his very nature, this person directs attention to God and his character. This point is aptly illustrated through Zecha-

riah 3:1, 2, in which the messenger of the LORD says to Satan, the accuser of Israel's high priest, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you!" Jude 9 speaks of Michael in a similar manner: "Even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'"

Michael can be identified with the humanlike person of Daniel 7:13 and the Messiah of Daniel 9:25, 26. Revelation describes him as the archangel who commands the armies of the Lord that defeated Satan and his fallen angels during "a war in heaven" (Rev. 12:7-9). This leads to the conclusion that he is Jesus Christ, whose victory on the cross defeated Satan. His role of Deliverer becomes crucial when at the time of the end he stands up to defend God's people (Dan. 12:1).

Gabriel's coming to enlighten Daniel on the events that would take place was in answer to the prophet's prayer mentioned in verse 12. The purpose of his visit was **to explain**, or, as the original text says, "to make him [Daniel] understand" the revelation. The Hebrew term *bin*, "to discern" or "to understand," is one of the most important concepts in the visionary part of the book. The events that Daniel desired to understand would take place in **a time yet to come**—literally, after "many days." In chapter 8, Gabriel used very similar words three

times to point to the fact that the revelation was for an appointed time of the end (8:17, 19, 26). The prophet Habakkuk reports that he was instructed to

"Write down the revelation
and make it plain on tablets
so that a herald may run with it.
For the revelation awaits an appointed
time;
it speaks of the end
and will not prove false.
Though it linger, wait for it;
it will certainly come and will
not delay" (Hab. 2:2, 3).

10:15-19 Daniel is *touched* by the humanlike Being for the second time after he once more feels overwhelmed by the vision. He directs his eyes toward the ground in an attitude of humility. His *lips* are touched just like Isaiah's (Isa. 6:7) and Jeremiah's (Jer. 1:9). He admits again his helplessness in the presence of the Divine Person, whose rank was much superior to his own and whom he calls *my lord* (v. 17). At the moment when Daniel feels that he is about to faint again and admits that he is as good as dead, the humanlike Person touches him for a third time to restore him to life and strengthen him. The words *Do not be afraid!* and the statement that God loves him greatly are repeated and reinforced by a "shalom" greeting. And twice in this verse this humanlike Being emphatically exhorts Daniel to *be strong*.

Summary of a Long Conflict (10:20-11:1)

The angel's closing words in this chapter have the purpose of singling out one particular person who is the focus of the revelation recorded here.

²⁰So he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Now I am about to return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go out, the prince of Greece will come;²¹ but I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. No one supports me against these powers except Michael, your prince.^{11:1} And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I took my stand to support and strengthen him."

Notes

10:20 "To fight against." The Hebrew construction *ʔhillahem 'im* can also be translated as "to fight alongside with." The context indicates that a hostile attitude is being expressed here.

"The prince of Persia." The title *sar paras* "the prince of Persia," is similar to the expression "the prince of the Persian kingdom" in verse 13 and refers to the same person. See the Notes on Daniel 10:13.

"When I go out." The Hebrew says *wa'ar yose'*, "when I go out." On the use of the same verb, see the Notes on Daniel 8:9 and 9:23.

"The prince of Greece." The word for Greece here is *yawan*, which also occurs in Daniel 8:21. Some commentators maintain that this prince is an angel protector much like "the prince of Persia." The coming of this Greek prince is introduced in Hebrew with the word *hinneh*, "Look, or "Now!" This transition word is also found in

verses 5, 10, 13, and 16 of this chapter. The two titles “the prince of Persia” and “the prince of Greece” mentioned together in this verse are general designations for the earthly powers that wage wars on earth. These wars, according to the book of Daniel, are the starting points for religious conflicts.

10:21 “But.” The Hebrew adverb *’abāl*, can mean “indeed,” “certainly,” or “truly.” Its function here is disjunctive, hence the translation “but” or “however.”

“I will tell.” The word *’aggîd* can also be rendered “I will declare” or “I will make known.”

“What is written.” The word *hārāšûm*, “that which is written,” looks more Aramaic than Hebrew. In the oral culture of Bible times, the words that were written down were considered to be of serious character and binding. In this context, the expression shows God’s absolute control over the events of history.

“The Book of Truth.” The original says *k^etāb ’emet*, “the writing of truth.” Several biblical texts speak of the books in heaven in which human works or destinies are recorded (e.g., Dan. 7:10; 12:1). In verse 1 of this chapter, the word “truth” (or “true”) describes the revelation given to Daniel. See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:1.

“Supports me.” The verbal root *ḥzq*, “to be strong,” that is used here appears also in verse 19, which says that the One who looked like a human being strengthened Daniel during his vision.

“Michael, your prince.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:13. From this verse the reader learns that Michael is Israel’s Protector. The pronominal suffix “your” here is in the plural; it refers to Daniel’s people.

11:1 Although this verse begins a new chapter, it belongs to the end of the preceding one. The chapter divisions were not a part of the original Hebrew texts. Chapters 10–12 comprise a single unit.

“The first year.” The expression *bišnat ’aḥat*, “in the first year” (of Darius), occurs twice in Daniel 9:1, 2. See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:1.

“Darius the Mede.” The historical identity of this ruler is discussed in the *Notes* on Daniel 5:31 and 9:1. This commentary takes the position that this title refers to Cyrus the Great, who had Median heritage through his mother. The Septuagint has the name “Cyrus the Persian” here instead of “Darius the Mede.”

“I took my stand.” The verb *’āmad*, “to stand,” appears frequently in this chapter. See the *Notes* on Daniel 10:11. The same verbal root is used also in Daniel 12:1, forming an *inclusio* with this verse. “The historical overview in 11:2–45, then, is framed by the presence of Michael who . . . is, in fact, subliminally present throughout that historical recitation.”²²

“Him.” There is a question as to whom this Hebrew suffix refers to—Michael or Darius the Mede. It makes more sense to take the latter name as its antecedent; the text then says that Gabriel supported Darius, that is Cyrus (cf. Dan. 9:1). In either case, the support relates to the downfall of the Babylonian Empire when “an intense spiritual conflict took place during the first year of Darius the Mede.”²³

Exposition (10:20–11:1)

10:20 Even though Gabriel has already said that his coming to Daniel was in answer to the prayer, he asks him the

question, ***Do you know why I have come to you?*** The obvious reason is that Gabriel has an important message from God that related to the conflicts reported in the previous visions. The conflict that is in question this time is between himself, with Michael on his side, and the princes of the world kingdoms such as ***Persia*** and ***Greece*** on the other side, the side that is hostile to God. This long war is the topic of the audition recorded in chapter 11.

The two titles ***the prince of Persia*** (slightly different from "the prince of the Persian kingdom" in v. 13) and ***the prince of Greece*** should be taken as describing various political powers on earth that are at war and whose conflicts serve as starting points for the clashes that are of a religious nature. The power from the east is juxtaposed here with the power from the west, and the two may be representing the totality of earthly powers (*merism*) that are hostile to God. Although the two powers Persia and Greece wage wars against each other (cf. chap. 8), according to this chapter they both oppose God's plans on earth and prepare the way for the coming anti-God power described in the second half of Daniel 11.

10:21 In order to give the correct perspective of this long war, Gabriel turns Daniel's attention to ***Michael***, on whose support he counts and whose presence in this war guarantees the victory of the armies of God. Thus, in the

same way in which Gabriel points to Michael, Michael's name, "Who is like God!" directs attention to God himself, who has predestined the outcome of this conflict. The revelation about the outcome of this conflict comes from ***the Book of Truth***, a record that most likely contains God's perspective and his mighty acts of judgment and salvation in the history of the world and its final events (Exod. 32:32; Dan. 7:10:12:1). The prophet Malachi mentions "a scroll of remembrance" that was written in the Lord's presence concerning those who fear God and honor his name (Mai. 3:16).

11:1 With the rise of the Medo-Persians to the position of world power, Gabriel had assumed a special role in this great conflict. He took his ***stand to support*** Darius the Mede, that is, King Cyrus, because of the important role that he played in freeing the Judean exiles from captivity (Ezra 1: Dan. 9:1). The Greek translation known as the Septuagint gives the name of Cyrus the Persian in this verse instead of Darius the Mede.

Gabriel's activity is also evident in the visions of Daniel that focus on the world kingdoms of Medo-Persia and Greece—visions in which he has served as angel interpreter (chaps. 8-12). Since, in the Bible, Cyrus serves as a type of the Messiah (see Isa. 44; 45), Gabriel's active role in supporting "Darius the Mede" during the begin-

ning of the Medo-Persian period is noteworthy. In the Gospel of Luke, we see this same angel taking a similar initiative around the time when Jesus Christ was born:

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God" (Luke 1:26-30).

Several terms in Gabriel's words to Mary reflect his talk with Daniel in chapter 10—terms such as "Greetings!" (cf. "Peace!" v. 19), "you are in favor with God" (cf. vv. 11, 19), and "do not be afraid!" (vv. 12, 19).

Gabriel's words to Daniel *I took my stand* are echoed in the standing up of Michael in Daniel 12:1, thus forming an *inclusio*. In this way, the whole report on the long war given in the form of an audition is bracketed by the two events that are described as the interventions of God's messengers in defense of his faithful people.

Summary of the Teaching

1. *God's answers to prayers may seem to be delayed.* The book of Daniel clearly reveals that the forces of evil are real in this world and often they appear so strong as to be able to oppose God's plan to save humanity. This chapter teaches that earthly conflicts are inseparably tied with conflicts in heaven. For that reason we say that Daniel's visions speak of a cosmic war. The role of God's angels in this type of warfare is essential:

This poor man called, and the LORD
heard him;
he saved him out of all his
troubles.
The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him,
and he delivers them
(Ps. 34:6, 7).

The crucial question here is, What do the faithful do when God's answers seem to be delayed? Based on the example set by Daniel, persistent prayers, not complaints, are the right attitude in that situation.

2. *Prayer as an instrument of war.* Because believers experience spiritual warfare, prayer is essential. "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. . . . All heaven is on the side of the one who humbles himself and seeks to understand God's plans and purposes."²⁴ Yet this type of prayer is

characterized by involvement. One cannot help but agree with Longman's statement that

most of us think of prayer as a retreat from the action, not as an offensive weapon with which we attack the enemy. After all, when we want to pray, we usually seek out a quiet spot. We also hear and use the expression "let me pray about it" when we are not sure we want to do something we are asked to do.

In reaction against this, we must cultivate a mindset that sees prayer as a powerful tool by which to foil Satan's schemes and destroy his handiwork. We are to see prayer as our principal means of communication with our divine Commander.²⁵

No biblical passage describes prayer as an instrument of war better than does Ephesians 6:10-17:

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand

your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

1. Shea, "Wrestling with the Prince of Persia: A Study on Daniel 10," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21, no. 2 (1983): 225-250.

2. Redditt, 167.

3. Lucas, 258.

4. Slotki, 80.

5. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 157.

6. *Ibid.*, 158.

7. Smith-Christopher, 123.

8. Shea, *Daniel*, 234.

9. Goldingay, 290.

10. Slotki, 81.

11. Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 166.

12. Goldingay, 282.

13. Keil, 410; followed by Miller, 280.

14. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 159.

15. Baldwin, 178.

16. Towner, 152.

17. Lucas, 298.

18. Shea follows Calvin's view (*Daniel*, 236, 237).

19. Hartman and DiLella, 265.

20. Lucas, 260.

21. Miller, 284.

22. Seow, 186.

23. Miller, 289.

24. Keough, 112.

25. Longman, 263.

THE REVELATION ABOUT A LONG WAR (11:2-45)

*A*s previously mentioned, chapters 10–12 in Daniel’s book form a single unit. The opening words in chapter 10 date the vision and the audition to the third year of King Cyrus, which was the year 536 B.C. By that time, the first group of Judean exiles had already returned home and had begun the work of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. For all that we know, Daniel did not return to Palestine, possibly due to his age.

Daniel 11 contains “the longest and the most detailed oracle in the book.”¹ Students of the Bible consider this chapter to be one of the most difficult chapters in the Bible, one that has defied interpreters through centuries. Its form is more literal than symbolic, while its language is condensed and at times even laconic and vague. Consequently, in several places it is difficult to know who or what the pronouns refer to or which historical person fits the description in the text.

When dealing with difficult parts of the Bible, one should focus first on the passages that are clear and also take into consideration the bigger picture presented in the Bible as whole. Only after the interpreter has grasped the message of clear passages can he or she safely proceed to the passages that are more difficult and that challenge one’s understanding. In other words, the interpreter should proceed from that which is known to the things that are less known or even unknown, but not vice-versa. In practice, however, some people are more readily attracted to the passages of the Bible that are obscure.

In approaching Daniel 11, one can take any of the following three positions: (1) One can consider the chapter too difficult and in despair give up any attempt to understand its content and its message. (2) On the other extreme, one may fall to the temptation of claiming that he or she can figure out the precise

meaning of every single minute detail appearing in the text. Those who succumb to this feeling of overconfidence often couple it with extremely literalistic explanations of the prophetic symbols. (3) Or, following a more balanced approach, one may keep in mind the obvious fact that the details of the text are vague and even obscure and consequently maintain a relative vagueness even at the level of interpretation.

The various interpretations that have been proposed for this chapter differ mostly on the meaning and application of verses 16-39. Interpreters hotly debate the question of whether or not the Roman Empire plays a role in the events presented in this chapter. The challenge of interpretation is eased when one takes into account the points and themes that parallel those in the other visionary chapters in Daniel. It is worth noticing that the most difficult section of the chapter contains three key parallels with the preceding chapters. Verse 22 mentions “a Prince of the covenant” who is destroyed, which links this chapter with Daniel 9:25-27. Likewise, verse 31 speaks of “the continual sanctuary service” that will be abolished, thus tying this chapter to Daniel 8:12, 13. And finally, verse 33 refers to the persecution of the wise—a topic that calls to mind a similar persecution of the saints described in Daniel 7:21, 25. Because of these parallels, we hold that chapter 11 is a report on the long conflict between

the forces of good and evil that is more detailed than those previously seen in Daniel’s visions.

The structure of this chapter is characterized by the presence of double parallelism and a concluding crescendo that prepares the way for the climax of the audition found at the beginning of the next chapter. The five-part structure of this chapter may be presented as follows:

1. Conflicts between east and west (11:2-4)
2. Conflicts between north and south (11:5-20)
3. Political activities of the contemptible person (11:21-30)
4. Religious activities of the contemptible person (11:31-39)
5. Conflicts at the time of the end (11:40-45)

Chapter 11 is unusually long, being matched in length only by chapter 2. It picks up where chapter 10 left off, and it anticipates the events of chapter 12. Moreover, this chapter has several parallels with chapter 8, one being that both of them picture two powers in conflict: chapter 8 focuses on conflicts between east and west, and chapter 11, on conflicts between north and south. Combined, the two chapters mention all four directions of the compass, which is probably meant to convey the idea of the totality of conflicts on earth, both

political and religious (cf. Ps. 89:11, 12; Ezek. 21:3-5). This literary figure is known as *merism*, which is the placing together of two or more contrasting elements to express totality. The most noticeable parallels between the events present in chapter 8 and those in chapter 11 are outlined in Appendix E at the end of this chapter.

Conflicts Between East and West (11:2-4)

The long war begins with a conflict of political nature between two world empires, Medo-Persia from the east and Greco-Macedonia from the west.

²And now, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will arise in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. Once he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece. ³Then a mighty king will arise who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. ⁴While he is still rising to power, his kingdom will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised, because his empire will be uprooted and given to others besides these.

Notes

11:2 "I tell you." Some translate the verbal form *'aggîd* as "I will show you."

"The truth." The word *'emet*, "truth" or "true," links this verse with Daniel 10:1, where the message of the revelation given to Daniel is de-

scribed as *'emet*, "true," and also with 10:21, which mentions the Book of Truth.

"Three more kings... and then a fourth." The presence of a numerical progression in this verse ("three, four," cf. Prov. 30:15-31) indicates that the Persian Empire would last for a considerable period of time.

"Will arise." The verb *'amad*, "to stand," is used frequently in this chapter to describe a king's coming to power in a kingdom. See the Notes on Daniel 11:1 and 12:1.

"Far richer." The root of the word *'šr*, "to be rich," occurs three times in this verse to describe the fabulous wealth of the fourth king, whose riches are said to be greater than that of all who ruled this kingdom before him. The text also indicates that this king will "buy power" through his riches. The wealth of this ruler confirms the success of the empire that succeeded Babylon. The second beast in Daniel 7:5 was told, **"Get up and devour much flesh!"** (Cf. Dan. 8:4).

"He will stir up." It is not clear in the original text who will be stirred up. Both "everyone" and "the kingdom of Greece" qualify to be the object of this verb.

"Greece." See the Notes on Daniel 10:20.

11:3 "A mighty king." In the Bible, the adjective *gibbôr*, "mighty," is used to express masculinity. When used as a noun, it means "a warrior." Its root *gbr*, "to be strong," is found in the noun *geber*, "man," in Daniel 8:15, in the name *Gabriel* in 8:16, and in the verb that means "to confirm, make strong" in 9:27.

"Will arise." See the Notes on Daniel 11:2.

"Rule with great power." The Hebrew construction uses a verbal form and a noun, both based on the same root, *mšl*, "to rule." This construction

says emphatically that the king was “to rule with great ruling” (cognate accusative, or paronomasia). The noun *mimšāl*, “to rule,” is an equivalent of the Aramaic word *šolṭān*, “dominion,” which means the God-given right to rule.

“As he pleases.” In Daniel 8:4, the same term, *kiršônô*, “as he pleases,” is applied to the ram.

11:4 “While he is still rising to power.” The original text can be translated “as he is arising” or “while still rising to power” to stress the short reign of this king.

“Four winds of heaven.” The expression means “in all directions.” See the Notes on Daniel 7:2 and 8:8.

“Given to others besides these.” The original literally says *w^la^aḥērîm mill^ebad-’ēlleh*, “will go to others besides these.” It is not clear from the context who the word “these” refers to. The traditional understanding is that it refers to Alexander’s descendants, who did not inherit the right to rule after his death because the kingdom was divided between the four generals.

Exposition (11:2-4)

11:2 Daniel did not see the events recorded in this chapter in a vision. Rather, he heard about them from Gabriel during an audition that reminds one of what he experienced previously (Dan. 8:13, 14) and also of Gabriel’s interpretations of his visions of previous chapters. This chapter begins by linking the events of the great war with the word *truth*, thus echoing Daniel 10:1 and 21, which summarize the contents of this whole revelation through that same word. The Book of Truth contains the

message about Michael’s role in that war. In a nutshell, that message is, Gabriel can count on the support of no one other than Michael, the Supreme Protector of the faithful against the evil forces that oppose God (Dan. 10:21).

A quick overview of the history of the Medo-Persian Empire is given in just one verse. The presence of a numerical progression from *three . . . kings to a fourth, who will be far richer*, implies that this empire that was in power toward the end of Daniel’s life would last for a considerable period of time. The fourth king who rises to rule skillfully uses *his wealth* to buy *power*, and that in turn increases his riches. The words **“Get up and devour much flesh!”** directed to the bearlike beast in Daniel 7:5 can fitly be applied to this power-hungry king, who paves the way for the coming contemptible person introduced in verse 21 below. The great ambitions of this ruler are betrayed by his large-scale conflicts with the kingdom of Greece.

11:3 It can be said that just as the history of the Medo-Persian Empire was colored by the selfish aspirations of its fourth king, so the Greek kingdom was centered in one extremely famous ruler, Alexander of Macedonia, who was called “the Great” by humans who measure his success by earthly standards. In contrast to the Persian king who bought his power, this ruler was *a mighty king* or literally *melek gibbôr*, “a

warrior king," and that is how he acquired his fabulous power to rule. The *mimsal rab*, **great power**, that he exercised reminds the reader of the words of Daniel 7:6, which says that the third beast was given *soltan*, "dominion" or "authority to rule"—something that this ruler did in any way that pleased him (cf. Dan. 8:4).

11:4 To show that all earthly power is transient, Gabriel points to Alexander's very short reign, because **while still rising to power**, so to speak, he died, and his widespread empire was **broken up and parceled out** in all directions. The expression **toward the four winds of heaven** is idiomatic and implies the involvement of the divine hand in the events that are described in the text (cf. Dan. 7:2). This great empire would **be uprooted** and its power and riches distributed among the army generals rather than to Alexander's descendants.

These three verses present a very compact version of the story of two of this world's great empires, whose conflicts ranged east and west. They spent their God-given authority in power trafficking and the waging of wars, sacrificing human lives on the altar of self-aggrandizement. The final point that Gabriel made provides a twist of irony regarding the end of the Persian and Macedonian empires: Neither their founders nor the children of their founders could hold on to their power and riches forever.

Conflicts Between North and South (11:5-20)

The history of the conflicts between the north and south begins with an alliance initiated by the south that did not last long. This is followed by an attack of the king of the South on the king of the North. In a second phase of this long conflict, the initiative for the attack came from the north—the power that in the end triumphed over the south.

⁵*The king of the South will become strong, but one of his commanders will overpower him and he will rule his kingdom with great power. ⁶After some years, they will become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make peace, but she will not retain her power, and he and his power will not last. In those times she will be handed over, together with her royal attendance and her father and the one who supported her.*

⁷*One from her family line will arise to take his place. He will attack the forces of the king of the North and enter his fortresses; he will fight against them and prevail. ⁸He will also seize their gods, their metal images and their valuable articles of silver and gold and carry them off to Egypt. For some years he will not attack the king of the North. ⁹Then the king of the North will invade the realm of the king of the South but will retreat to his own land. ¹⁰His sons will prepare for war and assemble a huge army, which will sweep on like a flood and carry the battle as far as his fortress.*

Then, moved with anger, the king of the South will march out and fight against the king of the North, and he will raise a large army, but

it will be defeated. ¹²When the army is carried off, his heart will be filled with pride and will destroy tens of thousands, yet he will not remain triumphant.¹³And the king of the North will raise another army, larger than the first; and after several years, he will advance with a huge army fully equipped.

"In those times many will rise up against the king of the South. The violent men from among your people will rebel in order to fulfill a vision, but they will fail. ¹⁵Then the king of the North will come and build up the siege ramps and will capture a well-fortified city. The forces of the south will be powerless to resist; even their best troops will not have the strength to stand. ¹⁶The invader will do as he pleases; no one will be able to stand against him. He will establish himself in the Beautiful Land and he will completely control it.¹⁷He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will make peace with him. And he will give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow the kingdom, but she will not support him nor be of help to him. ¹⁸Then he will turn his attention to the coastlands and will take many of them, but a commander will put a stop to his insolence and will turn it back upon him. ¹⁹After this, he will return toward the fortresses of his own land but will stumble and fall, to be seen no more.

²⁰His successor will arise and send out a tax collector to maintain the splendor of his kingdom. In a few years, however, he will be broken, neither in anger nor in battle."

Notes

11:5 "The king of the South." *Jh* is the first occurrence of the title *melek-harinegeb*, "king of

the South," in Daniel. The kingdom that lay to the south of Palestine was Egypt. Verse 8 specifically names the country of Egypt. Almost all commentators say that in this passage "the king of the South" means the Ptolemaic kings, who ruled a fourth of the kingdom that had been Alexander the Great's.

"One of his commanders." Or "one of his princes"—the word *sar* is translated "prince" in chapters 10 and 12. Modern translators opt for the word *commander* or *officer* because a prince usually means a son of a king.

"Great power." At the end of this verse, no less than three words are used that are each built on the root *msl*, "to rule." The emphatic use of this verbal root expresses a superlative: "The dominion ruled by him shall be a great dominion."

11:6 "After some years." An indefinite period of time is in view here because the original simply says *ul'qes sanim*, "and at the end of years."

"Allies." The purpose of the alliance is to unite the two kingdoms by means of a marriage.

"The king of the North." This is the first occurrence of the title *melekhassapon*, "king of the North." Originally, in the Bible, the kings of the North were the Mesopotamian rulers of Assyria and Babylon who, although located in the east, would attack the land of Israel from the north. Most commentators take for granted that in this context, this title represents the Greek ruler of Syria.

"Make peace." The Hebrew word *mesarim* means an act of "making things straight," whereas in this context it means the "making of an agreement or alliance," the purpose of which is

to seal a peace treaty between the two kingdoms. In the ancient world, peace treaties often included intermarriages between the members of royalty of the kingdoms involved.²

"Her power." The original says *koah hazz'eda'*, "the strength of the arm"—implying the concept of a coercion-forced unity that will not last long.

"He and his power." The meaning of the masculine subject here is not clear. It may be either the king of the North or the *koah*, the "strength," of his daughter. Another way of translating the original would be to say "he and his offspring."

"Handed over." This expression, *w'tinnaten hi'*, "she will be given up," implies this woman's death.

"Her father." The word *hayyoMah* means either "the one who fathered her" or "her child." Some translators prefer the second option, which requires a change of vowels in the original text.

11:7 Some translations begin this verse with the last words (one word in Hebrew) of the previous verse; thus they say "In those times."

"One from her family line." Literally, the Hebrew says *minneser saraseha*, "from a branch of her roots," using the image of the family tree to say "a member of her family."

"His place." The Hebrew says *kanno*, "his place." This masculine gender suffix refers either to the king of the South mentioned in verse 5 or to the father of the woman who was given in marriage to the king of the North.

"His fortresses." Although in the original this noun is in the singular, it has a collective meaning.

11:8 "Their gods." The Hebrew noun *'elohim* can mean God or "gods," depending on the context (Exod. 20:2, 3). In this verse, this word is in parallelism with idols, therefore its meaning is clearly "gods."

"Silver and gold." For another instance of the reversed sequence of these two metals, see Daniel 5:23.

"Carry them off." The original Hebrew phrase is often used in the Bible with regard to the trophies that the winning army carried away as booty. King Nebuchadnezzar took the holy vessels from the temple in Jerusalem (Dan. 1:2).

"To Egypt." This is a clear reference to the land ruled by the king of the South.

11:9 "Will invade... will retreat." The original text does not make the subject of these two verbs explicit. Because the king of the North is the last person mentioned at the end of the previous verse, modern translators take him as the subject of these verbs.

11:10 "Sons of the North." The assumption regarding the previous verse, that the person in question is the king of the North, applies to this verse, also.

"Sweep on like a flood." In the middle of this verse the subject changes from the plural to the singular, possibly referring to one of the sons of the king of the North. The Bible sometimes uses the image of a flood of rushing water to portray an army's attack (Isa. 8:8; Dan. 9:26).

"His fortress." The possessive "his" refers to the king of the South.

11:11 "Moved with anger." The verb *Wiyit-marmar*, "and he moved in anger," is given a prominent place in the verse.

“He will raise a large army.” The subject is again obscure, but many translators assume that it is the king of the North.

“Defeated.” The Hebrew text says *w^enittan . . . b^eyādô*, “and given into his hand.” For a similar expression, see Daniel 1:2, where *yād*, “hand,” stands for power.

11:12 “Filled with pride.” The original says *w^erām l^bbābô*, “his heart will be exalted.”

“Destroy tens of thousands.” The word *ribbō’ôt*, “thousands,” means here a great number of enemy soldiers will be killed in battle.

11:13 “Another army.” The original uses the word *hāmôn*, “multitude,” but the context indicates that an army is in view. The verbal form *w^ešāb*, “and he will return,” that begins this verse can mean either that the king will return home in order to raise another army or simply that he will raise an army again.

“Several years.” The Hebrew text says *ûl^eqēš hā’ittîm šānîm*, “at the end of the times, that is years” implying an extended period of time.

“Fully equipped.” The Hebrew noun *r^ekûš*, “possession,” usually refers to a person’s possessions, which includes wealth, cattle, sheep, and goats (Gen. 12:5; 13:2-6). In the context of a war, it probably refers to army equipment.

11:14 “Many.” As in the book of Isaiah, in Daniel’s visions the word *rabbîm*, “many,” describes the nations other than Israel.

“The violent men.” Literally, the text says *ûb^enê pārišê*, “sons of the violent ones.” The noun *b^enê*, “sons,” is not translated literally because it functions here as a noun of relation. See the Notes on Daniel 7:13.

“In order to fulfill a vision.” The original says *l^eha^amîd hāzôn*, “to make a vision stand.” The

word “vision” has no definite article in the original.

11:15 “Build up.” The Hebrew verb *šāpak*, “to pour out,” describes the work of bringing earth in baskets and pouring it at the base of the city wall.

“Siege ramps.” When a city was besieged, siege ramps served as bridges that enabled the enemy army to reach their targets inside the city.

11:16 “The invader.” The original says *habbā’êlāw*, “he who comes against him.” The subject “he” probably refers to the king of the North, and the object “him” to the king of the South.

“As he pleases.” See the Notes on Daniel 8:4 and 11:3.

“The Beautiful Land.” See the Notes on Daniel 8:9, where only *hašš^ebî*, “the Beautiful,” is found. Both expressions refer to the Promised Land.

11:17 “He will determine.” The original says *w^eyāsēm pānāw*, “he will turn his face,” describing the determination of the king of the North to attack the king of the South.

“The might of his entire kingdom.” Another possible translation is “conquering his [the king of the South’s] entire kingdom.”

“Will make peace.” The original text is very obscure, saying something like “and right intentions (he shall bring) with him and perform them.”

“And he will give him.” Neither the subject nor the object is clear in this part of the verse, but it is assumed that the king of the North is the subject and the king of the South the object.

“A daughter.” Literally, the text says *ûbat hannāšîm*, “and the daughter of the women.”

Some have taken this expression to be the feminine equivalent of "Son of man" in Daniel 7:13, simply meaning "a woman." There are two important differences here, however. The word "women" is definite (making the preceding noun "daughter" definite as well), and it is in the plural in contrast to "son of man," where both nouns are in the singular and indefinite.

"She will not support him." Or, "she [the daughter] will not succeed."

11:18 "Turn his attention." The words *w^eyāšēb pānāw*, "and he will turn his face," indicate hostility.

"Coastlands." In the light of Genesis 10:5, the word *'iyyîm*, "coastlands," can refer to the maritime people who live along the coast and on the islands, such as in Greece.

"Many." The Hebrew term *rabbîm*, "many," is used here in parallelism with coastlands. For its meaning in Daniel, see the *Notes* on Daniel 9:27.

"A commander." The title *qāšîn*, "a leader," is an archaic term for a judge or a commander (Josh. 10:24; Judg. 11:6).

"Turn it back on him." This rendering is one attempt to clarify the original text, the meaning of which is very obscure at this point.

11:19 "He will return." In the original Hebrew, the two words found at the beginning of this and the previous verses are identical, signaling the turning points in this king's military expeditions.

"Stumble and fall." This translation reflects the original. In this context the two words may convey a defeat in battle.

"To be seen no more." This is a euphemistic way of expressing the death of the king of the North.

11:20 "To maintain the splendor of his kingdom." It is not clear how this phrase relates to the words that precede it, so the translation here gives only one possible interpretation of this difficult text. In this context, the word *heder*, "splendor, glory" means "wealth," "jewel," or "adornment."

"In a few years." Literally, the original says *ûb^eyāmîm 'oḥādîm*, "within a few days." Often in the Bible, the word *yôm*, "day," stands for periods of time that are longer than literal days.

"Neither in anger." The original *w^elô' b^e'apayim*, "and not by the nose," uses a figure of speech found in the Bible in which the word *nose* stands for anger.

Exposition (11:5-20)

The brief overview of the history of the conflicts between east and west is followed by a somewhat longer sketch of selected wars between north and south. Centuries before Daniel was born, the land of Palestine was sandwiched between some of the greatest and most ambitious political and military powers in the world. The land of Egypt, which lay in the south, was often more than eager to control the lands of Syria and Palestine. In a similar way, the great Mesopotamian empires, such as Assyria and Babylon, waged large-scale wars in an attempt to control this same region. During the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the whole region was eventually conquered and annexed to the kingdom. A neighboring nation, Syria, was also known for its periodic incursions into

Israel's territory. Thus, as far as the history of Israel and Judah are concerned, the conflicts between north and south do not begin with the divided Greco-Macedonian Empire. The language and imagery present in this chapter go much farther back into the past. Yet, since Gabriel's speech about the long war is to be taken as chronological, the events described in this part of the chapter should apply in the first place to the times of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid rulers.

11:5-10 The capital cities of these two divisions of the Greek kingdom were Alexandria in Egypt and Antioch in Syria. The kings of the South were known by the name Ptolemy, while the throne name of each of the kings from the north was either Antiochus or Seleucus. Like Alexander, one of the army commanders of the king of the South becomes very strong and succeeds in gaining control of territory belonging to the king of the North. After a time, genuine attempts are made to unite the two kingdoms through an alliance sealed by intermarriage between the royalty of the two kingdoms, as was the custom in the ancient world. These attempts, however, fail and end in the murders of the king of the South and his daughter. The southern kingdom retaliates—led, most probably, by the crown prince. They attack and sack the fortresses of the north, plundering the riches and idols of the northern kingdom and carrying them down *to Egypt* as trophies (cf. Dan.

1:2). It is not clear whether verses 9 and 10 recapitulate this war that ended in a victory for the south or whether they speak of a later attempt by the north to recover the losses by launching an offensive against the south.

11:11-13 In the description of the events that follow, it is not always clear who does what in the military confrontations. Like floods, large-scale army expeditions sweep away people and possessions. They are motivated mostly by *anger* and a full measure of *pride*—and often end in reversals of power. The north wins in the end, but the cost of this victory is enormous: the death of *tens of thousands* of human beings killed in the battle. Ironically, once an army is destroyed, a new one, *larger than the first* and referred to as a “multitude,” is raised in its place. Sooner than expected, it is fully equipped for yet another war.

11:14, 15 In addition to the ruler of the North, many other people rise against the king of the South. It seems that even some of Daniel's fellow Judeans become involved in the conflicts around them; their land is sandwiched between these two powers. People who resort to violence will rise up, inspired by *a vision* that is not identified in the text. Possibly Daniel's own visions served as an inspiration to the people who resorted to violence in their attempt to overthrow foreign rule. Yet, this armed resistance fails, and in the

end it results in the king of the North's capture of *a well-fortified city*, probably Jerusalem. The defeated king of the South is incapable of helping the land of Judah.

11:16-18 The proud ruler from the north *will do as he pleases* because he holds the power to destroy. The expression *will do as he pleases* is found in two other places in this chapter (vv. 3 and 36), where it illustrates the wise saying, "Pride goes before destruction, / a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).³ A *peace* treaty intended to bring the two kingdoms together is ratified by a royal intermarriage, but it fails. One of the two kings, most likely the one from the north, turns *his attention to the coastlands* and captures many until he is stopped by *a commander*, or as the original text says, *qāṣîn*, "a mere tribal leader."

11:19, 20 The proud king of the North returns home, is defeated, and dies *to be seen no more*. Verse 20 specifies that the royal *splendor of his kingdom* that was supported by heavy taxation will collapse as well. It will do so "naturally," not through another military confrontation. Thus, the long history of conflicts and attempted peace treaties between the north and the south ends in a way similar to the end of the powers from the east and west (chap. 8). The confrontations that are prompted by pride and vengeance come with high price tags, resulting in senseless losses of

human and animal lives. The land of Judea was greatly affected by these conflicts.

Political Activities of the Contemptible Person (11:21-30)

Most of the interpreters of the book find a significant transition at this point in the narrative. The kings of the North are replaced by a particularly contemptible person, who receives much attention in this part of the chapter.

²¹*The one who will arise in his place will be a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom without warning, and he will seize it through smooth talk.* ²²*Then armies will be swept away before him; and even a Prince of the covenant will be broken.* ²³*After coming to an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully, and with only a small people he will rise to power.* ²⁴*When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did. He will distribute plunder, loot, and wealth among them. He will plot the overthrow of fortresses—but only for a time.*

²⁵*With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him.* ²⁶*Those who eat his royal food will try to destroy him; his army will be swept away, and many will fall and be destroyed in battle.* ²⁷*The two kings, with their hearts bent on evil, will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but*

to no avail, because an end will still come at the appointed time. ²⁸Then he will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action and then return to his own land.

²⁹"At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. ³⁰Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and give attention to those who forsake the holy covenant."

Notes

11:21 "The one who will arise in his place."

Just as verses 18 and 19 begin with identical words, so do verses 20 and 21. They both begin with the statement *v^ʾamad 'al-kanno*, "and in his place shall arise," followed by a participial form of a verb. This phrase serves as a link with the preceding narrative.

"A contemptible person." The Hebrew word *nibzeh* describes someone who is despised, as contrasted with someone who is given honor (Ps. 15:4; Isa. 53:3).

"Who has not been given the honor of royalty." The idea here is that this person had no legitimate claim to the throne.

"Without warning." When speaking of the little horn in Daniel 8:25 (see NRSV), Gabriel uses this very word, *b^ʾsalwa*, which is translated "without warning."

"Smooth talk." Since the Hebrew word *h^ʾlaqlaqqot*, "flatteries," is related to something that is smooth, its meaning may be rendered as "smooth talk."

11:22 "Armies." Literally, the text says *fro'o*: "arms," but the context here points to "armed forces."

"Swept away." A noun and a verb both based on the root *stp*, "to overflow," are used together here, forming a cognate accusative (paronomasia), which expresses emphasis.

"A Prince of the covenant." This may also mean "a covenant leader." The word *nagid*, "rule-prince" is also found in Daniel 9:25 and is there related to the word *b^ʾerit*, "covenant," in 9:27. The same person is in view here.

11:23 "Deceitfully." The Hebrew noun *mirma*, "deceit," is also found in Daniel 8:25 where it describes the activities of the little horn in making deceit prosper. The conceo' : *deceit stands in opposition to truth (Dan. 11:21).

11:24 This verse begins with the expression *b^ʾsalwa*, "without warning," in combination with the verb *bo'*, "to come." The two words are also found together in verse 21.

"The richest." The Hebrew word *mismc** "rich," has a connotation of fatness. Genes 27:28, 39 speak of the "fatness of the earth" meaning "the earth's richness."

"Plunder, loot, and wealth." From the literary point of view, this is a figure called a "three" it contains three related terms that cumulative . express the concept of totality—here, of goods taken by force.

"Only for a time." Literally, the text says *v^ʾad-'et*, "and until a time," implying some kind of time restriction or limitation.

11:25 "Stir up." The same verb, 'ur, "to rouse oneself," also in the causative stem, is found in verse 2.

"His... courage." The original text says *l'babo*, "his heart."

"The plots." Neither the author nor the object of these plots is clear in the original text.

11:26 "His royal food." The term *pat-bag* means "rich food," the kind that was served in the palace. The same word is used in Daniel 1:5. In this context, the word stresses the concept of intimacy with the king.

11:27 "Hearts." In the Bible, the heart is the center of intellectual activities. Some translations say "minds."

"To no avail." The verb *salah*, "to succeed," also describes the success of the little horn in Daniel 8:12.

"An end... at the appointed time." The two nouns *qes*, "end," and *mo'ed*, "appointed time," are also used together in Daniel 8:19 and Habakkuk 2:3. They stress the concept of divine determinism in regard to the flow of human history.

11:28 "Wealth." Although the noun *fkus*, "possession," is used earlier in this chapter in the sense of "military equipment" (v. 13), in this verse it means booty captured in war (cf. v. 24).

"Heart." See the *Notes* on Daniel 11:27.

"Holy covenant." This chapter is the only place in Daniel where a covenant is described as holy. The expression is also found twice in verse 30.

"He will take action." The original is not nearly as clear as is this translation. The Hebrew text simply states *v'f'dsd*, "and he will do/make," with the type of action left unspecified.

11:29 "The appointed time." In several places in Daniel, the word *mo'ed*, "an appointed time," is tied to the word *qes*, "end" (Dan. 8:19; 11:27)—

but not in this verse. Yet, the concept of determinism is present here too, implying the idea of "God's time."

"Different from what it was before." The events alluded to here are described in verses 25-28 of this chapter, where the king of the North makes a successful incursion into Egypt.

11:30 "The western coastlands." The original text uses the name *kittim*, which may be a reference to the island of Cyprus. In Jeremiah 2:10, this place name is applied to "the westerners," or the people who lived throughout the Mediterranean basin. Josephus says that the Hebrew term *kittim* is used for all islands and maritime countries.⁴ At Qumran, this term is consistently applied to the Romans.

"The holy covenant." See the *Notes* on Daniel 11:28.

"Give attention." The literal meaning of the word *w'yaben* is "and he will give heed" or "he will pay attention."

Exposition <U:Z1-30>

11:21-24 There is a stylistic element of continuity between the **contemptible person** introduced in verse 21 and the kings that ruled before him. This link is found in the words "and in his place shall arise" followed by a verb that is identical in form with the beginning of verse 20.

Yet, in spite of this element of continuity, commentators have consistently pointed to a clear break at this point in the narrative. No other king mentioned in the text to this point has been labeled "despicable" or **contemptible**. The verses

that immediately follow provide the reason that the label is given to this king: This person has no legitimate claim to the throne but comes to power as a usurper. Instead of winning in conventional wars, his strategy is to use flatteries and *smooth talk* as he attacks *without warning*—just as the little horn did, according to the description given in Daniel 8:25: “He will cause deceit to prosper. . . . When they feel secure, he will destroy many.”

Prior to this king’s rise to power, strong *armies* are swept away before him (cf. Dan. 7:8)—an event comparable to a great flood. This military demise is in some way linked to the death of a *Prince of the covenant*, a person whose title matches Messiah, the ruler in Daniel 9:25-27. In both of these passages, the prince suffers a violent death. Verses 23 and 24 of this chapter elaborate more on the strategies used by this power, which verse 21 referred to only briefly. From his modest beginnings, this ruler will rise to a position of unprecedented power and wealth. His cunning ways of invading and overthrowing lands will prove very successful, and he will richly reward his allies. Yet, the end of verse 24 states that a time limit is set to his activities.

11:25-28 In waging wars against the kingdom of the South, this king’s plots will prove more effective than the use of large armies. “Eating together,” which in Bible times meant trust and

friendship (Gen. 31:44-46; Rev. 3:20), will be perverted and seasoned with deceit. The rich *royal food* served to the two kings will be spiced with lies and evil scheming. Even though the strategies work out for the contemptible king and he wins time and again, what appears as a complete victory is not given to him yet, because it is reserved for *the appointed time* of the end (Dan. 8:19; Hab. 2:3). His pride, nevertheless, leads him as far as to take actions *against the holy covenant*. This chapter is the only one in the book in which the covenant is described as *holy*, the key word in Daniel 8:14 that describes God’s sanctuary.

11:29, 30 God determines the course of events in earth’s history. At an appointed time (different from the appointed time of the end), this king will *lose heart* during his offensive against the south, because a power from the west *will oppose him*. *Kittim* is a term that was originally tied with the island of Cyprus but that later was applied in a much broader way to all the people who live in the Mediterranean basin, also referred to as “westerners” (Jer. 2:10). Unable to match this new power, the king will be forced to retreat and *vent his fury against the holy covenant*.

Religious Activities of the Contemptible Person (11:31-39)

When the activities of this king begin to affect the temple and its daily services,

there is no doubt that a new, religious dimension has been added to the previously political conflicts.

³¹***“His armed forces will rise up and desecrate the temple fortress and will take away the continual sanctuary service. Then they will set up the abomination that causes destruction. ³²By smooth talk he will seduce those who violate a covenant, but the people who know their God will take action.***

³³***“Those who are wise among people will instruct many, though for some time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. ³⁴When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. ³⁵Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time.***

³⁶***“The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say astonishing things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. ³⁷He will pay no attention to the gods of his ancestors or to the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. ³⁸Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god that was not known by his ancestors he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. ³⁹He will deal with the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land for a price.”***

Notes

11:31 “The temple fortress.” The word *miqdāš*, “sanctuary” is also used in Daniel 8:11, where it is portrayed as an object of the attacks by the little horn. The sanctuary buildings could provide shelter in times of war.

“The continual sanctuary service.” The noun *tāmîd*, “daily,” figures prominently in the vision of chapter 8. It means the complete sanctuary service.

“The abomination that causes destruction.” The expression *haššiqqûš m’šômēm*, “the desolating abomination,” is also found in Daniel 9:27. Jesus Christ used the same expression when he referred to Daniel’s visions (Matt. 24:15; cf. Mark 13:14).

11:32 “By smooth talk.” See the Notes on Daniel 11:21.

“A covenant.” In the original, the noun *b’rît*, “covenant,” is without the definite article.

“Know.” The Hebrew verb *yāda’*, “to know,” is one of the most important terms regulating God’s covenant with Israel. It expresses an intimate, experiential type of knowledge (Gen. 4:1; Exod. 6:7; cf. John 17:3). Amos 3:2 quotes God as saying, “You only have I chosen [Hebrew “known”] / of all the families of the earth.” The antonym of *yāda’* is “to forget.”

“Take action.” This verb, *yaḥziqû*, “they shall stand firm,” is followed by another verb, *’āšâ*, “to do.” As was the case in verse 30 of this chapter, the object of the two verbs is not specified. The *New American Standard Bible* renders these two words as “will display strength and take action.”

11:33 “Wise . . . will instruct.” The roots *śkl*, “to be wise,” and *bîn*, “to discern” (causative “to

make wise or instruct”), figure prominently in chapter 9. There, Gabriel makes Daniel wise by making him understand the divine revelation.

“Many.” The noun *rabbîm*, “many,” is also found in verses 14, 18, and 26. See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:27.

“They will fall.” The subject of this verb is probably the “many.” Verse 35 says that some of the wise will also fall.

11:34 “Receive a little help.” Literally, the text says *yē’āz’rû ‘ēzer m’āt*, “they will be helped with a little help”—another cognate accusative (paronomasia).

“Many.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:27.

“Who are not sincere.” The original says *baḥ’laqlaqqôt*, “with flattery”—used here in a negative sense, as in verses 21 and 32.

11:35 “The wise.” The group of people called *hammaškîlîm*, “the wise,” is introduced in verse 33. They are also mentioned in Daniel 12:3.

“Refined, purified, and made spotless.” These three similar words, placed in a different order, are used in Daniel 12:10. In both occurrences they refer to the *rabbîm*, the “many,” who go through hardship and persecutions.

“The time of the end . . . at the appointed time.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 11:27.

11:36 “As he pleases.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 11:3.

“Exalt and magnify himself.” The second verb is used in Daniel 8:4, 8, 11, to describe the pride of the ram, the goat, and the little horn.

“Astonishing things.” The Hebrew term *niplā’ôt*, “wonders,” can be used in the Bible in a positive sense as in Exodus 34:10, which speaks of the “wonders” that God promised to perform in behalf of his people. In this context, however,

the term is definitely negative, just as it is in Daniel 8:24, where it is associated with the “astounding devastation” the little horn causes.

“The God of gods.” This superlative is a reference to the supreme God. For its Aramaic equivalent, see Daniel 2:47.

“Successful.” See the *Notes* on Daniel 11:27.

“The time of wrath . . . determined.” For the meaning of these two expressions, see the *Notes* on Daniel 8:19 and Daniel 9:27, respectively.

11:37 “He will pay no attention.” For a positive meaning of this verb, see the *Notes* on Daniel 11:30.

“The gods of his ancestors.” This expression resembles Daniel’s addressing his God as “God of my fathers” (Dan. 2:23). Since the word *fathers* can mean “ancestors,” the whole phrase refers to the gods worshiped by this king’s ancestors. The noun *‘lôhê*, “the gods of,” may be taken as either singular or plural. Here, its meaning is most likely plural. In the next verse, the same noun is given in the singular.

“The one desired by women.” This is an obscure expression that has no definite article in the Hebrew. The root *ḥmd*, “to desire,” is also used in Gabriel’s address to Daniel as a person “greatly loved” (Dan. 9:23; 10:11). Commentators see a parallelism here with the previous expression, making “the gods of his fathers” equal to “the one desired by women.” The combined expression would then mean “the god that women love/worship.” The function of the noun *nāšîm*, “women,” in this context is far from clear. The pagan god Tammuz was very popular among women in Old Testament times (Ezek. 8:14).

“Exalt himself above them all.” This is a de-

scription in the superlative of the king's pride that reminds the reader of the little horn's self-exaltation described in Daniel 8:10, 11.

11:38 "A god of fortresses." This expression stands in contrast to "the one desired by women" and refers to a god who was considered the defender of fortified cities.

"His ancestors." See the Notes on Daniel 11:37.

"Costly gifts." Some translate *lehem ḥ^amudôt*, "choice food," in Daniel 10:3 as "delicacies." On the meaning of the root *ḥmd*, "to desire," see the Notes on Daniel 11:37.

11:39 "Deal with the mightiest fortresses." The meaning of the original is more ambiguous than is this translation. Literally, the text says *w'āsâ l'mibšerê mǎ'ūzzîm*, "he will deal with the strongest fortresses"—not specifically stating whether a defensive or offensive action is in view. Most commentators understand it to be a defensive action.

"A foreign god." This statement simply reiterates what was said in the previous two verses.

"Over many." For the meaning of *rabbîm*, "many," see the Notes on Daniel 9:27.

"For a price." The statement *bimḥîr*, "for a price," has been understood in two different ways: (1) The sale of the conquered lands to this king's cronies at a low price, or (2) the distribution of those lands as a reward for people's services.

Exposition (11:31-39)

11:31, 32 The apocalyptic visions in Daniel together with their interpretations portray conflicts on two levels: First, the horizontal level: Earthly powers clash because of their political ambi-

tions. Sooner or later, however, the clashes assume the second—the vertical—dimension, with confrontations that are of a religious character, often stemming from an arrogant and hostile attitude toward God, his people, and his institutions, notably the sanctuary and the worship of God. In dealing with God's people, this king will use the same strategies that proved successful in the past: force in dealing with some and flattery in dealing with others. Like the little horn of chapter 8, this power too attacks the temple and its continual services. The *continual service of the sanctuary* is replaced with the *abomination that causes destruction*, that is, the idolatrous way of approaching God in worship.

11:33-35 Only those who remain true to God's covenant can resist this power. With their God-given wisdom, they *instruct many* in the midst of the persecution that is directed against both groups. In the context of Daniel's vision, the term *many* refers to the non-Hebrew people, many of whom join the wise from among the remnant people. Daniel's use of the terms *many* and *wise* parallels that of the book of Isaiah (Isa. 2:1-5; 53:11, 12). In the book of Daniel, the wise are those who are instructed through God's revelation and who trust God's prophetic words. The result of the persecution will be that the wise and the repentant from among the *many* will be *refined, purified, and made spotless* in

preparation for **the time of the end**, which will certainly **come at the appointed time**.

11:36 Having described some of this king's activities, both political and religious, Gabriel now returns to his character. The opening words in verse 36, **the king will do as he pleases**, come as a refrain in this chapter. They remind the reader of chapter 8's description of the arrogant powers. In contrast to this power, Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in heaven; / he does whatever pleases him." That which pleases this ruler is self-aggrandizement and blasphemous ambitions to make himself higher than idols—almost equal with God.

Daniel 7:8 says the little horn has a mouth that speaks proud words. Similarly, this king will speak unheard of things against God. In Israel's history as recorded in the Bible, this term, "unheard of" or **astonishing** acts, describes God's mighty work of redemption in behalf of his people: "Then the LORD said: 'I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do *wonders* never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you'" (Exod. 34:10; emphasis supplied). The success of this ruler will last only till the time of divine punishment, because God has predetermined the time of his end.

11:37 The object of this king's worship is not **the gods of his ancestors**.

When Daniel prayed to his God, he called him "God of my fathers" (Dan. 2:23). In contrast, this king's worship is not just pagan and polytheistic, but it even deviates from the worship practiced by **his ancestors**. In the ancient world, the king often served the god worshiped by the queen mother. But this king does not even show regard for the god loved and worshiped by women. According to Ezekiel 8:14, in the time of the exile, the god Tammuz was popular among female worshipers: "He brought me to the entrance to the north gate of the house of the LORD, and I saw women sitting there, mourning for Tammuz." Thus, in the case of this contemptible ruler, commonly worshiped idols seem unattractive to him. The sole object of worship is his own persona.

11:38, 39 In addition to this king's self-deification, he will worship **a god** whom he believes to be the guardian of his **fortresses**, which symbolize military power. In the name of this **foreign god** he will wage wars and also try to defend his strongholds. The subjects who honor him he richly rewards and promotes to high positions over **many people**—that is, over the nations on earth.

In spite of the elements of continuity with the previously described kingdom of the North, a number of things peculiar to this power are listed in the chapter, namely, its origin, its strategy, its progress from small to the greatest, and its attitude toward God, God's people,

and their worship services. Jerome, the great scholar of the Christian church, argued that verses 21-45 of this chapter refer to the future antichrist. Since in Daniel's book a king sometimes can represent a kingdom, it is possible that this very unusual ruler symbolizes more than a single individual—more likely an oppressive politico-religious system.

While going through the narrative presented in this chapter, the reader is reminded, time and again, that this power too is under God's sovereign control. Even though the appointed *time of the end* (the end of time) has not come yet, events in earth's history point toward it. Like the previously encountered powers, this kingdom is given a limited period of time with a clearly marked end. The ultimate demise of this power and the wrapping up of all the other conflicts that preceded it is the topic of the last part of this chapter.

Conflicts at the Time of the End (11:40-45)

At the instigation of the south, the last battle is fought between the two kingdoms. The king of the North wins.

⁴⁰“At the time of the end, the king of the South will attack him, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and horsemen and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. ⁴¹He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Tens of thousands of people will fall, but Edom,

Moab, and the main part of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. ⁴²He will extend his power over many lands; Egypt will not escape. ⁴³He will control the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, and the Libyans and Nubians will submit to him. ⁴⁴But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will go out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. ⁴⁵He will pitch his royal tents between the seas and the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.”

Notes

11:40 “The time of the end.” For the meaning of the expression *‘ēt qēš*, “time of the end,” see the Notes on Daniel 8:17 and 11:27. This expression serves as the introduction to the events found in verses 40-45 of this chapter, which will occur in the period known as “the time of the end.”

“Attack.” Since the verb *yitnaggaḥ*, “to push, gore,” is often used of a butting animal, this may be an allusion to the ram and the goat of chapter 8.

“Storm out.” The speed and devastation of this final attack by the king of the North is likened to a sudden storm.

“Chariots and horsemen.” Because of what happened during the exodus event (Exod. 15:1-4; Deut. 17:16), biblical references to *rekeb ūpārāšîm*, “horses and chariots,” are often associated with the military forces of Egypt. King Solomon is said to have imported horses and chariots from Egypt (1 Kings 10:28, 29).

“Like a flood.” For the use of the flood metaphor to describe a military invasion, see verse 10 of this chapter and also Daniel 9:26, 27.

11:41 "The Beautiful Land." In Daniel's book, the terms *hass^{bf}*, "the beautiful," and *'ereshass^{bi}*, "the beautiful land," are references to the Promised Land. See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:9.

"The main part of Ammon." Although some translators render the Hebrew word *re'sit* as "the leaders of," it is also possible to say "the main part of." This word is the first word found in the Bible, and it is most commonly translated as "beginning" (Gen. 1:1).

"Will be delivered." In its simple passive form, the Hebrew verbal root *mlt* means "to escape, to be delivered." It is also found in Daniel 12:1, which says that Daniel's people will be delivered. For the opposite statement, see the *Exposition* on verse 42 below.

"His hand." For *yad*, "hand," as a symbol of power, see the *Notes* on Daniel 1:2.

11:42 "Lands." While the plural noun *'aras*, "lands," could refer here to the three countries named in the previous verse, it more likely means the rest of the countries in the region.

"Egypt." The land of Egypt lay to the south of Palestine. It is also mentioned by name in verse 8 of this chapter.

11:43 "ff/c/jes/" For the meaning of *h"muddt*, "costly things," see the *Notes* on Daniel 11:37,38. In both places the term is applied to gold, silver, and other precious materials.

"The Libyans and Nubians." In the Bible, the geographical term *kus* refers to the upper Nile region and is sometimes translated as "Ethiopia." The two regions named in this verse were located to the west and the south of Egypt, and during the time of the Greco-Macedonian Empire, they were under the rule of the Ptole-

mies. The idea is that the complete territory of the king of the South comes under the control of the king of the North. Ezekiel 38:5 describes the "exotic entourage" of Gog, the chief prince from the North, consisting of "Persia, Cush and Put." The passages from both Daniel and Ezekiel tell of the submission of the land named *kus* to the power from the North in the time of the end.

11:44 "The east." The literal meaning of the term *mizrah* is "the rising of the sun." In the Bible, figurative references to the east are consistently positive (Gen. 2:8; Matt. 2:1,2; Rev. 16:12). During his vision of the new temple, Ezekiel "saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east" (43:2) and entering "the temple through the gate facing east" (43:4).

"Go out." The verb *yasa'*, "to go out," describes the beginning activity of the little horn in Daniel 8:9. Its use can also be positive, as in Daniel 9:23.

"Many." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:27.

11:45 "He will pitch." The first two words in this verse are almost identical with the text in Genesis 12:8 that speaks of Abram pitching his tent between Bethel and Ai. By doing that and also by erecting altars to God, Abram was symbolically conquering the land of Canaan.⁵ Daniel 11:45 describes the king's ambition of maintaining control over the conquered lands.

"Royal tents." The word *'appadno*, "(his) royal (tent)," occurs only here in the entire Old Testament [*hapax legomenon*]. Persian in origin, it comes into Hebrew through Aramaic. This type of luxurious tent served as the living quarters of the king of the North during his military campaign.

"Between the seas." The plural noun *yam-mim*, "seas," can be a reference to the Dead Sea, located to the east of Jerusalem, and the Mediterranean Sea, which lay to the west of it. This phrase may also describe the lands located between the Mediterranean in the west and the Persian Gulf in the east.

"And the beautiful holy mountain." The Hebrew text says *ḥar-sebi-qodes*, "toward the mountain of glory and holiness," which is a clear reference to the temple mount (isa. 56:7; Obad. 16; Pss. 2:6; 15:1).

"Come to his end." The phrase *uba' ad-qisso*, "he will come to his end," is a veiled reference to this king's (violent) death. The verb *bo'*, "to come," is used here in the perfect tense, describing an accomplished action that points to the certain fulfillment of the prediction. God's word is as good as done.

"No one will help him." The phrase *w'en dzer ld*, "and there will be none to help him," may be a longer expression of the abbreviated *v'en 16*, "and will have nothing," found in Daniel 9:26, where it describes the death of the Messiah.

Exposition (11:40-45)

11:40-43 The long awaited **time of the end** (cf. Dan. 8:17) has finally come. Just as the long war began with an attack by the king of the South (11:7), so in the end, this same kingdom will take the lead in launching a final military offensive against the north.

An important issue to resolve at this point is the relationship between the "contemptible person" (v. 21) and the

king of the North. In the Hebrew text, the contemptible person is not explicitly called **the king of the North** in verses 21-39. Yet, since verses 20 and 21 begin with the same words, the elements of discontinuity in the text should not be overemphasized at the expense of its continuity. Although technically speaking this king is not just another of the kings of the North, he claims to be their legitimate successor (cf. Belshazzar's words in Dan. 5:13). Thus, in the context of this passage, it is *not* wrong to refer to him as "the end-time king of the North." Major biblical prophets foresaw that "a northern foe" would be the last entity to launch an offensive against God and his people and would in the end be defeated (Isa. 47; Jer. 50; 51; Ezek. 38; 39).

At the time of the end, the army from the north fights with **chariots and horsemen** (v. 40), a detail that calls to mind the military power of Egypt (Exod. 15:1-4; Deut. 17:16). Moreover, the army from the north, equipped with the chariots and cavalry, is joined by **a great fleet of ships**, a phrase that is used in this chapter to describe the military power of the *kittim*, or the peoples from the western coastlands (v. 30). Using this whole spectrum of military force, the end-time king of the North is once again victorious and sweeps **like a flood** (Dan. 9:26; 11:10) through many countries, including the Promised Land (Dan. 8:9).

Three lands escape his dominion: *Edom, Moab, and the main part of Ammon*. According to the biblical stories of the patriarchs, these three neighboring peoples were Israel's relatives (Gen. 19:36-38; Gen. 25:30). Their lands were located to *the east* of Judea (Deut. 2:4-23). Their mention here reminds the reader of God's acts of grace extended to non-Israelites in Old Testament times (Rahab, Ruth, Namaan, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, etc.). The land of Egypt will be occupied, and its *riches* or "costly things" plundered, while the lands to the west and south of Egypt will be subjugated. Thus, in the end, the king of the North reclaims the entire territory previously controlled by this power.

11:44, 45 The king of the North has gained complete control of the south, north, and west. Then, with the exception of a region in the east, he conquers the land *between the seas* and the temple mount, which is described as the mountain of glory and holiness. The psalmist asked, "LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? / Who may live on your holy hill?" (Ps. 15:1). The king *will pitch his royal tents between the seas*, possibly making the holy mountain his living quarters during the major military campaign that aims at destroying and annihilating *many*. Yet at the moment of this seemingly complete triumph, *reports from the east and the north will alarm him*. The direction east is consistently positive in the Bible, while the

north can be either positive or negative. Here, combined with the east, it is positive (cf. fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.) and indicates God's intervention as described in Daniel 12:1.

When Michael rises, this end-time king of the North is destroyed and no one can help him. Thus ends the longest chapter in Daniel, which contains a record of the great war but also of the world's tragic failures to bring lasting peace and prosperity through its brutal wars and fragile alliances.

Applications

There is a general agreement among scholars that the subjects of the first four verses of Daniel 11 are the empires of Persia and Greece. Most scholars also agree that verses 5-13 cover the period of the divided Greek kingdom. However, verse 14 marks the beginning of a diversity of applications. The application to the history of the church ("historicism") limits the attention given to Antiochus Epiphanes to verses 14b and 15, which are followed by a much longer description of the Roman power, in both its civil (vv. 16-20) and religious (vv. 21-39) phases. This application projects the events described in verses 40-45 into the future, and here the interpreter should proceed with the utmost prudence and humility.

Application in Church History ("Historicism"). The truth of the prophecy

presented in this chapter “is sealed by the appearance of God Himself in chapter 10 and by His oath recorded in chapter 12.”⁶ The language of Daniel 11 is considered to be “literal” in that it is not symbolic in the same way that the language of chapters 2, 7, and 8 is. Yet it is cryptic, almost like a code—each sentence condensing a quantity of information. Many pronouns do not seem to have clear antecedents. While the other chapters in the book deal with empires and the broad sweep of history, this one often speaks of individuals. Because of the great amount of detail, the interpreter may easily miss the forest for the trees. The forest, in this case, is the outworking of the great plan of salvation and the eternal fate of God’s people. Maxwell categorically states that the sealing of this part of the book until the time of the end means that old interpretations of its text “are *bound to be inadequate*. Only interpretations made in relatively recent years have any chance of getting the real issues straight.”⁷

11:2-4 After the death of King Cyrus the Great, the next three kings of Persia were his son Cambyses (530–522 B.C.), a usurper called the False Smerdis or Bardiya (522 B.C.), and Darius I (522–486 B.C.). The fourth king was Xerxes (486–465 B.C.), known in the Bible as Ahasuerus—the Persian king who married Esther. The Greeks defeated him in the battles of Salamis (480 B.C.) and Plataea (479 B.C.). “The purpose of the

prophecy,” says Shea, “was not to give a thorough survey of Persian history, but to trace it to the point at which the next power was introduced on the scene of action.”⁸ Later, the Greek army, united and led by Alexander of Macedonia, conquered the Medo-Persian Empire. As Alexander was drafting plans to rebuild the old city of Babylon and make it his capital, he died suddenly at the age of thirty-two. His leading generals fought among themselves, eliminated Alexander’s brother and son, and sliced the empire into four parts. The far west went to Cassander, the north to Lysimachus, the east to Seleucus, and the south to Ptolemy.

11:5-9 The king of the South who became strong and is mentioned in verse 5 was Ptolemy I Soter (323–280 B.C.), while the general who became even stronger was Seleucus I Nicator. There is a gap between the end of this verse and the beginning of verse 6, where “they” no longer refers to the two kings mentioned above but to Ptolemy II and Antiochus II. The rest of this verse gives details of the well known and tragic story of Bernice, the second wife of Antiochus II. After the death of Bernice’s father, Ptolemy II, the jealous Laodice, Antiochus’s first wife, murdered Bernice, Antiochus, and their son. Verse 7 describes the determination of Bernice’s brother, Ptolemy III (246–221 B.C.), to avenge her death. In this he was very successful, and because he was able to

recover the previously stolen Egyptian images and gods, the Egyptians began to call him *Euergetes*, “Benefactor.”

In contrast to Maxwell and Shea, Doukhan does not apply this passage nor the verses that follow to the divided Greek kingdom. And the only reference to Rome that he finds in this chapter is the last word of verse 4. He states, “As in chapter 8, Daniel 11 barely alludes to the kingdom of Rome. . . . The events introduced in verse 5 come chronologically after Rome and do not apply to the Hellenistic kingdoms of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, as the traditional line of interpretations infers.” Given the parallels between chapters 8 and 11, the king of the North and the little horn represent the same power, both originating from the north. Beginning with verse 5, the allusions to the north and south become abstract and metaphorical. While the north represents evil, the south stands for human power without God. Moreover, the unit “north-south” can express the idea of totality and earthly space.

11:10-15 The quarrels and wars between the two dynasties continue through centuries. Verses 10-12 describe the battle of Raphia, which took place in 217 B.C. Trained elephants were used in this battle, and tens of thousands of soldiers were killed and thousands wounded. Antiochus III, who was the loser in this battle, prepared a second attack against Egypt, which is described in

verse 13. Egypt’s internal political trouble is hinted at in verse 14, which says, “In those times many will rise against the king of the South.” The Ptolemies also faced some external problems, because Philip of Macedon secured an alliance with Antiochus III. Verse 15 speaks of the great military success of Antiochus III, which resulted in his complete control over Judea. Shea says verses 14b and 15 refer to the notorious Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who oppressed the Jewish people and desecrated the temple in Jerusalem.

However, according to Maxwell, the words “the violent men from among your people” who will “rebel in order to fulfill the vision, but [without success]” describe the rise of Rome. He argues that the Hebrew translated as “the violent men” should rather be rendered as “the breakers or the robbers of your people.” This, he says, refers to the Romans who broke the power of Judea, destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, and carried some of its objects with them back to Rome. In fact, Maxwell says, “Verse 14 wraps up Roman history in a concise prophetic nugget.”¹⁰

11:16-20 Beginning with verse 16, the vision describes the Roman conquest of the Beautiful Land—that is, Palestine. Verses 17-19 portray Julius Caesar and his affair with “the daughter of the women,” Queen Cleopatra of Egypt. Cassius Longinus was the commander who “put an end to his insolence” and

led in the plot that ended in Julius's murder. Julius's insolence can be illustrated by his boastful statement that his army killed 430,000 Germans in a single day. His successor was Caesar Augustus, whose role is briefly mentioned in verse 20 and under whose reign Jesus Christ was born. From his reign on, every Roman king would be called an "*augustus*"—the term became synonymous with "emperor." Shea's application at this point is similar to Maxwell's, except that he says verse 16 introduces the Roman Empire, since the title "the king of the North" is not found from this verse down to verse 40 of this chapter. Similarly, he proposes that verses 21 and 22 refer to Tiberius, under whose reign Jesus Christ died.

11:21-24 Verse 21 calls the religious power that succeeded the Roman state "a contemptible person." Like all the other leaders in chapter 11, he is presented from the perspective of his hostilities. This power grew to strength from an early position of smallness (v. 23). It made and broke treaties (v. 23) and plundered the rich in order to reward its friends in unprecedented fashion (v. 24). According to Maxwell, this description fits the activities of the Christian church when it departed from the gospel of Christ.

Since verse 22 speaks of "the Prince of the covenant" who will be broken, a reference to Jesus Christ and his execution by the Romans, it is difficult to see

how verse 21 can apply to the apostate church. For that reason, Shea holds that the description and the spiritual struggle of this power start only in verse 23.

11:25-30 According to Shea, "Daniel 11:23-30 is the most difficult passage to interpret *historically* in terms of events that now lie in the past."¹¹ There are no less than five different ways to apply this passage in history. Maxwell says these verses foreshadowed the era of the crusades initiated by Pope Urban II—"a momentous phenomenon and one of the most prominent examples of Roman Christianity as hostility."¹² The attack on the "king of the South" (v. 24, 25) was the first crusade against the caliphs (later, the sultans) from Egypt. (Both Maxwell and Shea maintain that the phrase *king of the South* refers to Egypt, though the crusades took place more than a millennium after Christ's crucifixion.) The expression the "ships of the western coastlands" (v. 30) stands for the Greek naval vessels that the Muslims hired to oppose the crusaders. Although the crusaders lost in the end, they returned home enriched, carrying sugar, cotton, glass mirrors, and other goods from the east (v. 28).

The two kings who "sit at the same table and lie to each other" epitomize "the perfidy and hypocrisy that conspicuously characterized the crusade experience." There was a mutual distrust. This was manifested primarily among the Christian allies, but there also were numerous

violations by the Christian leaders of the peace treaties they made with generous Muslim rulers and townspeople. Although the Muslims were considered as “heretics,” many of them were sincere believers in God’s “holy covenant” (vv. 28, 30), and they were killed by a form of Christianity that obscured the continual ministry of the High Priest in the sanctuary in heaven. No wonder that “medieval Christianity shows up badly in the book of Daniel.”¹³

11:31-39 The act described in verse 31 as *the abomination that causes destruction* comes from a system that for a thousand of years led people away from the priestly ministry of Jesus and deprived them of access to the *Prince of the covenant* (v. 22). In this way, “an earthly religious power substituted its activity for the work of Christ.”¹⁴ Verses 32-34 describe the great persecution of the saints also described in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7. The “wise” who fell by the sword or were burned, captured, or plundered (v. 33) were the faithful people like Waldenses, Hussites, Anabaptists, Huguenots, and devout Roman Catholics who held loyally to God in times of persecutions and counter-persecution.

The king who exalted himself above every god (vv. 36-39) stands for the power of the church that had claimed the right to kill people whom God loved and also to change the Ten Commandments. Instead of relying on God for

help, the church trusted in “a god of fortresses” (v. 38), hiring armies to achieve its political ends. Thus, the application of the message of chapter 11 is the same as the one in chapters 7 and 8—these messages all describe the activity of a politico-religious entity that overshadows Christ’s ministry in heaven and persecutes the faithful, a fact summed up in the expression *abomination that causes destruction*. This power is also guilty of blasphemy.

11:40-45 A distinction needs to be made between the “time of the end” and the “end of time.” Shea defines the former as “a period of time, a segment of history in which certain events will happen. . . . The ‘end of time’ is a point in time; it is the end of human history as we know it.”¹⁵ While the “king of the North” stands for a spiritual power, the “king of the South” represents secular powers that use reason as their weapon.

Maxwell, in his application of verses 40-45, focused solely on verse 45, which “apparently parallels in part the career and demise of Roman Christianity.”¹⁶ The “beautiful holy mountain” appears as a metaphor for the Jerusalem temple, which, in turn, symbolizes the location of God’s dwelling, which is the heavenly sanctuary. The control of the holy mountain symbolizes “the encroachment of the king of the north on the prerogatives of Christ’s sanctuary ministry.”¹⁷ Thus it is safe to conclude that

the little horn of chapter 7 and the king of the North of this chapter represent the period of earthly supremacy by the same religious power. Yet its victory will be neither total nor definitive. The battle mentioned in this verse is further described in Revelation 16 as the battle of Armageddon. It will be spiritual in nature. And this battle does not directly concern the modern state of Israel; its battlefield stretches much wider—into the whole world. "From this final battle, Christ and His heavenly army will emerge victorious. Satan and all his hosts will be defeated in this final great spiritual battle on earth."¹⁸

Doukhan says that the symmetry and structure of this passage warn against a strictly literal and historical interpretation. "Its development in seven stages (the seventh stage being the time of the end) further supports the allegorical or symbolic aspect of the narration."¹⁹ In regard to the precise events on earth that will take place in the future, Maxwell says that "wisdom suggests we may not know them until they actually take place." The primary purpose of biblical prophecies is not to provide prior knowledge of specific future events, but rather to build faith after they are fulfilled (John 13:19; 14:29; 16:4). At his ascension to heaven, Jesus told his disciples that it was not for them " 'to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority' " (Acts 1:7) and that he chooses to keep secret. "The impulse to

schedule the future in detail has embarrassed many earnest Christians over the centuries."²⁰

Application in Personal Life. The book of Daniel teaches that God's plan for humanity's ultimate destiny is good and not evil, life and not death, salvation rather than destruction. "Evil will come to an end with a finality that is irrevocable. That day will be a day of rejoicing for all those who have turned away from it and a day of doom for all those who have been fascinated by it."²¹ In chapter 11, "hostile humans are portrayed as cheating, undercutting, and killing one another, then turning their practiced pride and rage against God himself."²² Goldingay traces the pattern of history as it emerges from this chapter as the exercise of power that leads to external conflict, internal dissolution, or eclipse by a more powerful entity. "It is the nature of kings not to recognize this; they always aspire to the elusive final victory," which they seek by marriage alliances or the use of force.²³

With human beings responsible for what they do, the question is raised as to how to resolve conflicts on earth. Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote,

What is history? Wars, victories, and wars. So many dead. So many tears. So little regret. So many fears. And who could sit in judgment over the victims of cruelty when their

horror turns to hatred? Is it easy to keep the horror of wickedness from turning into a hatred of the wicked? The world is drenched in blood, and the guilt is endless. Should not all hope be abandoned?

What saved the prophets from despair was their messianic vision and the idea of man's capacity for repentance. That vision and that idea affected their understanding of history.²⁴

The solution at the worldwide level can be brought only through God's direct intervention in the affairs of the world. William Dyrness said that the biblical prophets' description of the Day of the LORD "is a grand vision of God's future victory, his vindication and his reign. The images are so manifold and lively that they defy systematization: they break out of all the narrow categories in which they are placed. All was not clear; but what was clear was exciting indeed. In the midst of the destruction and misery that lay around them there was hope in the air."²⁵

Daniel's book teaches that a child of God *can* make a difference in the lives of other human beings. This fact should encourage all people who live to glorify God's glory and to serve their fellow human beings. After all, Babylon became a better place because Daniel and his friends lived and worked there. The same could be said of the positive influ-

ence that true believers should exercise on our world today. The same divine providence that is discernible in Gabriel's revelation about the long war is at work in our day-to-day lives. G. Arthur Keough wrote, "History is full of accounts of wars, full of the exploits of ambitious men. But everyone has ended up in the grave. Only a man who called Himself the Son of man has overcome the tomb, and He offers His victory to all who will believe in Him."²⁶

1. Baldwin, 178.

2. Péter-Contesse and Ellington, 285.

3. Collins, 380.

4. Josephus *Antiquities* 1.6.1.

5. U. Cassuto (*Commentary on Genesis, vol. 2* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992 reprint], 301), calls it "the ideal conquest."

6. Shea, *Daniel*, 230.

7. Maxwell, 279 (emphasis in original).

8. Shea, *Daniel*, 240.

9. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 168.

10. Maxwell, 291.

11. Shea, *Daniel*, 254.

12. Maxwell, 293.

13. Maxwell, 296.

14. Shea, 260.

15. *Ibid.*, 263.

16. Maxwell, 296.

17. *Ibid.*, 297.

18. Shea, *Daniel*, 268.

19. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 174.

20. Maxwell, 297.

21. Keough, 120.

22. Maxwell, 278.

23. Goldingay, 293.

24. Heschel, 1:185.

25. W. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 234.

26. Keough, 112.

APPENDIX E

Structural Parallels Between Daniel 8 and Daniel 11

Daniel 8		Daniel 11–12:1	
Introduction (verses 1-3)		Introduction (verse 2)	
<i>Political Phase</i>	<i>Religious Phase</i>	<i>Political Phase</i>	<i>Religious Phase</i>
verse 4 The ram does as he pleases.	verse 11 A “pretended king” sets himself up against the Prince of the host.	verse 3 A mighty king does as he pleases.	verse 21 A pretender arises and sets himself against a Prince of the covenant.
verses 5-7a Conflicts between west and east	verses 9, 10, 23, 24a Up-down conflicts	verses 5-14 Conflicts between south and north	verses 22-27 Conflicts between north and south
verses 7b, 8b The west wins and then boasts, but its power is suddenly broken.	verses 12, 13; 24b, 25b The pretender wins, prospers, and sets himself against the temple, the saints, and the Prince of princes.	verses 15-18 The north wins and then boasts, but is stopped by a commander.	verses 28-43 The pretender wins, boasts, and sets himself against the temple, the saints, and the God of gods. (He is stopped by the western ships.)
verse 8c The end marked by the power breaking and division	verses 14, 25c The end of the pretender in destruction	verses 19, 20 The end marked by a fall and destruction	verses 44, 45 The end of the pretender through sudden destruction
verse 26 Sealing of the vision		12:4 Sealing of the vision	
Climax (verse 14) <i>The Sanctuary Restored</i>		Climax (12:1) <i>The Rise of Michael</i>	

APPENDIX F

Literalist and Intertestamental Applications of Daniel 11

Whereas the application in the history of the church focuses on the two phases of Rome, civil (vv. 16-20) and religious (vv. 21-39), the literalist and intertestamental applications pay much attention to the person and activities of Antiochus Epiphanes. The literalist interpreters consider that this ruler is presented in verses 14-36. A millennia-long gap follows, about which Daniel says nothing. Then, verses 37-45 end the chapter with a description of events still future. The intertestamental application, on the other hand, sees Antiochus Epiphanes in verses 14-39 and considers verses 40-45 to be the author's failed attempt to predict the end of this notorious person. Archer proposes that the occasion for the spiritual warfare was the restoration of the believing remnant to the holy land.¹

1. *Literalist Application ("Futurism")*. The literalists say that in attempting to do exegesis of this difficult chapter, the interpreter must be aware that though the

prophecy here is accurate, it is also *selective*. The revelation does not contain all the history of the period, nor does it name all the rulers. According to Walvoord, in this chapter Antiochus Epiphanes is given more space than any other ruler because of the relevance of his activities to the people of Israel. Thus, the fourth and final vision given to Daniel contained the revelation of important events that began with Darius the Mede and extended to the last Gentile ruler in the time of the end.

Daniel 11 "divides into two major sections." The first, verses 2-35, describes the major rulers of the Persian Empire and then gives in great detail some of the major events of the third empire following Alexander the Great, concluding with the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.). Then the prophecy skips over the entire period from the death of Antiochus to the time of the end, making no reference to events in the present church age. The second section, verses 36-45, deals with "the last Gentile ruler who will

be in power when Christ comes in His second advent.”² Miller refers to this person as antichrist.³

11:2-4 The historical details found in this prophecy are astounding. Walvoord’s identification of the four kings of Persia is as follows: Cambyses, Pseudo-Smerdis, Darius I, and Xerxes I, who may be identified with the Xerxes I of the book of Esther. Darius and Xerxes were more important than the rest of these kings. The ill-fated expedition against Greece may have occurred between chapters 1 and 2 in Esther. The description of the mighty king of Greece fits Alexander the Great perfectly because he had great dominion and was an absolute ruler who did “as he pleased.” The words “while he is still rising” indicate the brief duration of this king’s reign. The prophecy about the breaking up and dividing of his empire was fulfilled literally in history. Alexander’s empire was not given to his legitimate successors.

11:5-9 This section of the chapter begins by telling of the ongoing conflicts between the kings of Syria and Egypt that covered a period of about 150 years and reached down to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.). In tracing this history, however, the prophecy is selective; the text does not mention all the rulers. In spite of this, the identification of the rulers is clear: Ptolemy I Soter and Seleucus I Nicator laid the basis for two lines of rulers who became rivals, and a seesaw battle between the two nations began. The murder of Bernice was

followed by the revenge of her brother Ptolemy III Euergetes.

11:10-20 This section of the chapter describes the events that led to the ascendancy of Syria over Egypt. The most prominent ruler in this period is Antiochus III the Great (223–187 B.C.), whose series of attacks against Egypt is covered in verses 13-16. As Archer says, verse 10 describes this king’s advent and his conquest of the Holy Land. “The violent men among your own people” (v. 14) were the persons “who violate law and justice.” These words refer to the Jews who entered into a league with Antiochus the Great against Egypt. When the Egyptian general Scopas surrendered to Antiochus III, says Archer, the Antioch government permanently acquired the Holy Land.⁴

The phrase the “fulfill[ment of] the vision” pictures the afflictions of the Jews under Antiochus III. The Syrian king controlled Palestine. Under the threat of Rome, he made a pact with Egypt sealed by a marriage between his daughter, Cleopatra I, and the Egyptian king Ptolemy V. In his ambition to become a new Alexander the Great, Antiochus waged a war against Greece, but in this he was notably unsuccessful. He returned to his land defeated and broken and met an ignominious end.⁵ Finally, verse 20 speaks of Seleucus IV Philopator, remembered for his heavy taxation of the people of Israel.

11:21-23 According to the literalist view, these verses mark the beginning of

the section of the chapter that is devoted to an obscure Syrian ruler previously described as the little horn (Dan. 8:9-14; 23-25) and known from history as Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Miller says that much attention is given to him because his actions profoundly affected Israel. The reason for his prominence was that he desecrated the Jerusalem temple and its altar and bitterly persecuted the Jewish people. The perspective on the Gentile dominion is viewed here primarily from its relationship to the Jewish nation. And Antiochus is viewed from God's perspective on his immoral life and his hatred and persecution of the people of God.

Antiochus obtained royal power through flatteries. Three words describe his career: intrigue, expediency, and lust for power. Archer says that he is the same individual as the little horn of Daniel 8. Verse 22 speaks in a very general way of several military campaigns by Antiochus against Egypt. The death of the "prince of the covenant" applies to the murder of the high priest Onias by Antiochus in 172 B.C. In verses 28 and 32, the term *covenant* is used for the Jewish state. Verse 23 speaks of Antiochus's leagues—colored by intrigue and deceit—with various lands, especially Egypt.

11:24-34 According to Walvoord, verses 24-26 speak of Antiochus's intrigues, through which he robbed the richest places under his control. The periodic agreements made between Syria and Egypt did not last because neither of the

rulers of these kingdoms honored their agreements, as stated in verses 27 and 28. In addition, this wicked king began to manifest his hatred against the Jewish people. Verses 29-31 say that during one of Antiochus's expeditions against Egypt, he was opposed by Rome. The Roman consul demanded that he leave Egypt. He drew a circle around Antiochus and then told him that before he stepped out of the circle he must decide whether or not he would comply with Rome's will. Thus, when opposed by "ships of the western coastlands" (v. 30), Antiochus was humiliated. (In the Septuagint, these ships are referred to as "the Romans.")

The vile king then vented his wrath on the Jewish people (v. 30) through the events described in the two books of Maccabees. The Jews who sided with this king are the ones said to have "violated the covenant" (v. 32). Antiochus polluted the altar in the temple and forbade the offering of the daily sacrifices and the worship of God in general. He had an idol (Jupiter or Zeus Olympus) erected in the holy place; this was *the abomination that causes destruction*. "The persecution of the Jews by this evil tyrant had now escalated to calamitous proportions."⁶

The literalist application of this passage is not limited to the time prior to the first coming of Christ. In Matthew 24:15, Christ likened this type of desecration to the beginning of the great tribulation at the end of times. Antiochus thus became a type of the future

man of sin whose acts foreshadowed the ultimate blasphemies and persecution.

Verses 32-35 describe the persecution of those who tried to oppose Antiochus. This opposition was led by a family whom Archer calls “the valiant Maccabees.” The members of this family were ready to fight on the Sabbath when they felt they must and also to attack their fellow Jews who had sided with Antiochus—those who had succumbed to his flattery and defected. The Maccabees were helped by the wise, whom Archer refers to as “the patriot leaders.”⁷ Verse 35 indicates that the purging process due to persecution will continue to “the time of the end.”

Walvoord claims that the first thirty-five verses of chapter 11 contain no less than 135 prophetic statements, and “there is no supported evidence that can contradict any one of them.”⁸

11:35-39 Miller says that the direct result of the persecution was the cleansing of individuals and the nation from their sinful practices and the strengthening of their faith in God. The expression “time of the end” in verse 35 marks a sharp break in the chapter. Up to this point, according to Walvoord, the prophecy dealing with the Persian and Greek Empires was fulfilled “minutely and with amazing precision.” With verse 36, however, an entirely different situation begins. “No commentator claims to find precise fulfillment in the remainder of this chapter.”⁹ The “contest between the Seleucids and the Jewish patriots ends”¹⁰ with verse

35. Much of the historical data from these verses does not harmonize with Antiochus’s life nor with his death. In the first place, he did not die in Palestine but in Persia. The king who “will exalt and magnify himself above every god” must be the future Roman ruler who will control the world in the last days and about whom the book of Revelation also talks. He is none other than the little horn of chapter 7, and his end shall take place at the second coming of Christ (2 Thess. 2:3-10). Verses 36-39 describe his character, while the verses that follow (40-45) talk of his wars. As mentioned before, Miller calls this ruler the antichrist, while for Archer, he is “the Beast of the last days”—an atheistic or ungodly dictator.

11:40-43 Verse 40 speaks of the military struggle that will characterize the end of the age. The king mentioned in verses 36-39 will be attacked by both powers, those from the south and from the north. Walvoord maintains that, whereas the earlier references to the king of the South referred to Egypt, here they refer to the leader of a military and political force that comes from south of the Holy Land—therefore, an African army is in view. In a similar way, the “king of the North” is a much broader entity, a coalition of all the countries located north of Palestine (Ezek. 38).

When the southern force (possibly an Arab bloc of nations, according to Miller) attacks antichrist, he retaliates and decisively crushes it. The power of

Egypt is at last defeated. The king of verse 36, although engaged in a bitter struggle, continues to dominate the world until the second coming of Jesus Christ. He counterattacks those who have assailed him and enters their countries, including Egypt. His victory secures him great riches. Yet, his domination over the world is not complete; a few lands escape his rule.

11:44, 45 The conflict described in the last verses of this chapter extends over a period of time. "Antichrist will use the Jerusalem temple for his headquarters."¹¹ The reports coming from the east refer to the gigantic invasion during which two hundred million men cross the Euphrates and descend upon the Holy Land (Rev. 9:13-21), the focal point for this terrible war.¹² Another invasion is reported from the north. The king launches his counterattacks and succeeds in establishing his tent-palace on the beautiful holy mountain. This conflict does not cease until the Second Coming. In the end, says Walvoord, this final world ruler of the times of the Gentiles, along with the false prophet, is cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:17-20:6).

As a whole, Daniel 11:36-45 describes the events of the closing days of the time of the Gentiles. This end-time period will be characterized by the great tribulation, one world ruler, a world religion, and a materialistic philosophy. All these will come to an end at the time of the Second Coming. The lesson from

this chapter is that "God foretells future events and therefore must have supreme knowledge and power over history."¹³

2. *Intertestamental Application* ("Preterist"). Daniel 10-12 constitutes a long concluding section that brings this whole book to its climax. Goldingay considers the focus of Daniel 11 to be the career of Antiochus IV, whom he calls "the arrogant gentile warrior."¹⁴ Collins says that the lengthy prophecy of a succession of kings is characterized by a distinctive feature: "It presents a remarkably accurate portrayal of Hellenistic history down to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes." This point was established by Porphyry and accepted by Jerome.¹⁵ The passage about Persia gives a drastically abbreviated history of the Persian Empire. This led Jerome to comment that the Spirit of prophecy was not concerned about preserving historical details but merely presented a summary of the most important matters. For Porteous, this is a selective account of past history from the Persian period down to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, ending with the writer's forecast of the immediate future. Porteous summarizes Daniel 11 by saying that in this chapter, the Jewish observer "watches the course of power politics unfolding itself until, with the challenge of Antiochus Epiphanes against God himself, it seems inevitable that God should intervene."¹⁶ The writer of this chapter stands in the line of the great prophets of Israel who

taught that human history has a meaning because God plays an active role in it.

11:2-4 In chapter 7, Collins argues, Persia was represented as a leopard with four wings, so four kings are mentioned in Daniel 11:2. Only four Persian kings are named in the Bible: Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:5-7). These four names are envisaged here. Yet, the description of the fourth king who amasses great wealth is not Xerxes but Darius III Condomannus. The statement that the wealth of the empire reached its apex in this king's reign is, according to Collins, "determined by dramatic effect rather than historical information." The warrior king is Alexander, whose importance is assessed merely in terms of power. The king who does "as he pleases" is a recurring motif in chapter 11. "Not a hint is given that this writer had any inkling of the nobler side of Alexander's character or of his dream of a unified world enjoying the blessings of Greek culture. The Jews remembered Alexander as a portent."¹⁷ His sudden death and the division of the empire among the Diadochi is given here and also in Daniel 8:8. His brother and son, who nominally succeeded him, were murdered.

11:5-13 Like Maxwell and Walvoord, Collins follows the standard historical identification of the kings whose activities are described in verses 5-12. Porteous says that verse 7 gives a brief account of the Laodicean War undertaken by Ptolemy III Euergetes. In regard to Ptolemy,

Collins quotes Josephus, who says that after this king's conquest of Syria, he came to Jerusalem to offer thanksgiving sacrifices to God instead of sacrificing to the gods of Egypt. Philopator defeated Antiochus III in the battle of Raphia. Despite this defeat, however, Antiochus III became known as "the Great" because of his success in extending his empire to the east. Thus king was more renowned for his military daring than for his organizing ability and statesmanship. With the Syrian victory over Egypt in the famous battle at Paneas in 200 B.C., the land of Judea finally passed from Ptolemaic to Seleucid control.

11:14-20 While the reference to "many" who will rise against the king of the South in verse 14 is clear, the rest of the verse is obscure. At this point, again, Collins refers to the writings of Josephus. The words *ubfnepdrise 'amnfka*, "the violent men from among your people," implies a negative evaluation.¹⁸ These "violators might be seen as unintentionally fulfilling Daniel's revelation."¹⁹ The vision in question is more probably the one in Ezekiel 7. Judea, at this time, was rent into factions, with one group supporting Egypt (the Tobiads) and another Syria (the Oniads). When the Syrians besieged Scopas's garrison in Jerusalem, the Jews sided with Antiochus III against Scopas and his mercenaries. Verse 16, which says, "the invader will do as he pleases," describes the splendid reception that Antiochus received in Jerusalem. When he

occupied that city, the Jews welcomed him as a deliverer. However, instead of filling its role of serving as the religious center of Judea, Jerusalem became a Hellenistic city state.

Scholars are divided as to whose kingdom verse 17 refers to—the Ptolemaic or Seleucid kingdom. They all agree that there is a clear reference to the marriage between Ptolemy Epiphanes and Cleopatra I, “the daughter of the women,” a superlative expression that reflects the author’s admiration for this queen and her loyalty to the Ptolemaic house. Verse 18 speaks of Antiochus’s ambition to conquer Greece and of his defeat by the Romans. The commander (*qāṣîn*, “a leader” or “a consul”) who put an end to his insolence was Lucius Cornelius Scipio, the victor at Magnesia. Antiochus met an ignominious death at Elymais in 187 B.C. while attempting to sack the temple of Bel in order to procure money to pay his tribute to Rome. His successor’s reign (Seleucus IV Philopator) was also marked by financial exigency.

11:21-28 According to Porteous, the author now begins to describe “contemporary history.” According to historicists, the contemptible person of verse 21 is Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who—like the little horn of chapters 7 and 8—is consistently derided in the book of Daniel. The longest and the most important section of this chapter (vv. 21-45) is devoted to the reign of this king, who was “remarkable for his shrewdness.”²⁰ This man,

without open warfare, usurped the throne that rightfully belonged to the sons of Seleucus. Verses 22-24 give a general introductory overview of the reign of this king who was rapacious and prodigal according to both Jewish and Greek historical sources.

According to Collins, the death of the prince of the covenant mentioned in verse 22 is “universally accepted by modern scholars” to refer to the death of the high priest Onias III, who is also mentioned in Daniel 9:26.²¹ In verse 24, the writer says that Antiochus will succeed in what he does “only for a time.” This is a statement of confidence that though he was a powerful, strange, and enigmatic tyrant, God had set a limit to his activities. Verses 25-27 speak of Antiochus’s first invasion of Egypt and the negotiations with Ptolemy VI that followed and that were marked by treachery and deception. Commenting on verse 28, Collins calls attention to the fact that in 143 B.C., Antiochus despoiled the temple in Jerusalem and stationed a garrison in the citadel. He did this because he needed funds.

11:29-35 Verse 29 speaks of Antiochus’s second invasion of Egypt, and the verse that follows reports on his humiliation by the Roman envoy at Alexandria and his attack on Jerusalem in 168 B.C. In Collins’s view, verse 31 telescopes the events of 168–167 B.C. At that time, Antiochus reestablished the authority of the Tobiad leadership in Jerusalem. The second part of this verse reports on what this

wicked king did to the temple and its sacrifices and tells of his setting up of the abomination that causes destruction. Chapters 8 and 9 also refer to these events.

Verse 32 speaks in a general way of the Jewish resistance. The author of the book belongs to the *maskîlîm*, “the wise” (v. 33)—a group among the Jews that pursue a nonviolent course. Through suffering and even martyrdom, they triumph and obtain the status of heavenly exaltation (Dan. 12:3; Isa. 53:11). Though here on earth they received very little help (v. 34), they have a lasting effect on the *rabbîm*, the “many” (v. 35). The appointed time is the same one mentioned in Daniel 8:19 and 11:27. The momentous, painful, and horrifying events were all within God’s control. In contrast to “a little help,” the set moment will usher in the ultimate victory and deliverance.²² Thus, the statement about God’s limit to the period of persecution was “an expression of faith from the very middle of the dark days.”²³

11:36-39 These verses do not continue the chronological order of events. Rather, they recapitulate the king’s character and activities. The description of the events now moves from earthly attacks on God’s people and his temple to heavenly attacks on God himself. As in Daniel 8, Antiochus is described as rebellious against the gods, especially when he placed on his coins titles such as BASILEOS ANTIOCHU THEOU EPIPHANOUS, “belonging to Antiochus, God the Mani-

fest.”²⁴ To a Jew, says Porteous, this was sheerest blasphemy and clearly a challenge that God could not ignore—one that demanded his intervention. Antiochus was also guilty of plundering the temple in Jerusalem. The statement in verse 37, that the king did not show regard to the gods of his fathers, is problematic; however, it speaks of neglect rather than a hostile attitude.

Antiochus promoted the cult of Zeus, but it cannot be proven that he was intolerant of the other gods nor that he made everyone worship Zeus. Furthermore, the expression “a god of fortresses” is “a derisive title” since it cannot be applied to Antiochus’s type of worship in a literal sense. Collins claims that when Daniel says “a god that was not known by his ancestors he will honor,” he is “indulging in polemical exaggeration.”²⁵ What Antiochus did that his fathers had not done was to impose the cult of Apollo on Jerusalem. He used religion as a means of gaining political advantage. He also established a colony of his soldiers in Jerusalem with full authority over the local population and the right to confiscate the property of anyone who was found to be rebellious (v. 39). Porteous categorically rejects the view that these verses form a prophecy about the antichrist. He says that such a view is based on a priori reasoning and does not arise out of sober exposition of the text.

11:40-44 In line with some other scholars, Collins and Porteous view verse 40 as marking the transition from

“a recorded history” (*ex eventu*) to real predictive prophecy. Goldingay reminds the reader of Daniel that it “is not the nature of biblical prophecy to give a literal account of events before they take place.”²⁶ The “time of the end” has the same meaning as in verse 35—it describes the period of history when the crisis comes to its resolution.

The three scholars agree that the subject of this passage is still the same, Antiochus Epiphanes. In later Christian traditions about the antichrist, Antiochus is “assimilated to a mythic pattern.” Edom, Moab, and Ammon (v. 41) were traditional enemies of Israel, and we would not expect that Antiochus would attack them, even though they were not listed as his allies. The words “Egypt will not escape” form part of the climax of the long hostility between Syria and Egypt that is the leitmotif of the whole chapter. “Reports from the east” (v. 44) reminds the reader of the vulnerability of kings to rumors of rebellion at home during their absence while away on long military campaigns, as was the case with Sennacherib’s retreat from Jerusalem (Isa. 37:7; 2 Kings 19:7).

11:45 This verse says that the king will place his royal pavilion in the land of Israel. His victory heralds the final battle that will take place at the center of the world, at the place long expected to host the final conflict.²⁷ According to Collins, the words “he will come to his end” describe the death of Antiochus. That he was reportedly “smitten with

madness” because he tried to rob the temple at Elymais is probably a legendary story. The three accounts of his death in the books of Maccabees differ in details. One point on which they agree, however, is that the king died in Persia, where he had attempted to rob a temple.²⁸ Porteous admits that all attempts to reconcile this passage in Daniel with the well-attested facts of history about Antiochus’s death are “a waste of time.”²⁹ One may, however, talk of a fulfillment of this prophecy only in part.

1. Archer, 127.
2. Walvoord, 252.
3. Miller, 290.
4. Archer, 132.
5. Miller, 296.
6. *Ibid.*, 300.
7. Archer, 141.
8. Walvoord, 269.
9. Walvoord, 270.
10. Archer, 143.
11. Miller, 312.
12. Archer, 148.
13. Miller, 313.
14. Goldingay, 293.
15. Collins, 377.
16. Porteous, 150.
17. *Ibid.*, 157.
18. Collins, 380.
19. Goldingay, 297.
20. *Ibid.*, 299.
21. Collins, 382.
22. Goldingay, 303.
23. Porteous, 168.
24. Collins, 386.
25. *Ibid.*, 388.
26. Goldingay, 305.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Collins, 380.
29. Porteous, 170.

THE CONCLUDING CHAPTER (12:1-13)

Daniel 12 is the shortest chapter in the book of Daniel. It contains a part of the last revelation the prophet received. Several interesting parallels may be drawn between Daniel's life and career and those of John the revelator. Both were in exile, both received divine revelations concerning end times, both were assisted by an angel interpreter, and both were able to meet the Person who was the source of their visions face to face. One difference between the two is that while the resurrected Christ appeared to John at the beginning of his prophetic career (Rev. 1:12-18), Daniel had a direct encounter with "one who looked like a human" toward the end of his life and ministry (Dan. 10:5, 6). Daniel began his career in Babylon as a wise man, and then he became a seer who received visions; the climax of his prophetic office was his face-to-face encounter with the Divine Messenger.

A superficial look at Daniel's book and life may give the impression that he

was very successful in Babylon, so one might visualize his career as a straight ascending line. But an in-depth study of his book shows that this was not the case. His career is better pictured as a series of ups and downs. In chapter 1, we find Daniel led into captivity, but then he becomes a court officer. At the end of the following chapter he is the governor of the city of Babylon and the chief wise man in the kingdom. In chapter 5, however, he is almost forgotten—only to be promoted to the position of the third ruler in the kingdom at the end of the story of Babylon's fall. In chapter 6, Daniel is thrown into the lions' den, but then he is released and placed in the position of prime minister. Through all these up-and-down experiences, he consistently remained a person of prayer. His career was not just a product of his hard work nor of his ambition. Rather, it was the result of God's plan to make him a witness in Babylon.

The legitimacy of Daniel's successful

career as prophet was confirmed by no less than three outstanding Jewish sources many centuries ago: (1) In Jesus' Olivet Discourse, when he was talking about the signs of his coming, he referred to the apocalyptic passages written by "the prophet Daniel" (Matt. 24:15). (2) The document from Qumran titled *Florilegium* contains a number of Old Testament quotations, some of which are from the scroll of "Daniel, the prophet." And finally (3) Josephus Flavius, the official Jewish historian in Rome, said that Daniel was one of the greatest Hebrew prophets.

The opening and closing chapters of the book of Daniel have several themes in common: Both are placed in the context of an attack on the glorious holy mountain by the king who came from the north, and both feature the ultimate victory of God and his faithful remnant. Both present a period of test that results in the faithful becoming wise and reaching a glorified destiny. And similarities extend to common phrases, such as "at the end of the days/time" (Dan. 1:15, 18; 12:13), and the words "to rise/stand" (1:5 [see KJV]; 12:1, 13) and "to understand" (1:17, 20; 12:10).

The following structure, consisting of three parts, may be proposed for this chapter:

1. The rise of Michael (12:1-4)
2. Waiting for the end (12:5-12; the longest part)

3. The rise of Daniel (12:13)

According to the proposed structure, the rise of Michael is a precondition for Daniel's resurrection at the time of the end, when the prophet will receive his allotted inheritance. Some translations set verses 1-3 of this chapter as poetry. The middle part deals with a topic that is vitally important in chapters 10-12—that is, waiting for the end to come.

The Rise of Michael (12:1-4)

As mentioned above, in some translations verses 1-3 are set off as poetry. At the beginning of this chapter there is a clear change of focus away from "the contemptible king" of chapter 11 to Michael, Israel's prince. These four verses constitute the end of the speech of Gabriel that began in chapter 10 and continued through chapter 11.

¹At that time Michael, the great prince who stands over your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of a nation until that time. But at that time your people will be delivered, everyone whose name is found written in the book. ²Many who sleep in the dust of the earth will wake up; some to eternal life, others to shame and perpetual contempt. ³Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever. ⁴But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there and knowledge will increase.

Notes

12:1 "At that time." The expression *ba'et hah!*, "at that time," is found three times in this verse (counting also the variation *ha'et hahi!*, "that time"), while the word *'et*, "time," occurs four times. In a general sense, this expression refers to "the time of the end" (Dan. 11:40-45), and more specifically, to the time when the anti-God power comes "to his end, and no one will help him" (Dan. 11:45; cf. Jer. 3:17).

"Michael, the great prince." In Daniel 10:13, Michael is called "one of the chief princes," while in 10:21 he is said to be "your prince." The possessive pronoun "your" is in the plural, referring to Daniel's people. In this verse, Michael is called *hassar haggaddl*, "the great prince" or "the chief prince." The report of King Nebuchadnezzar's victory in the opening chapter of the book is balanced by this report about "the ultimate victory of Michael, Prince of Jerusalem."¹

"Who stands over your people." *JUe* original says *ha'omed 'al-b'ne 'ammeka*, "who protects the sons of your people." Here, the word *sons* functions as noun of relation that should not be translated literally.

"Will arise." There is a wordplay in this verse based on the verb *'amad*, "to stand." Thus, Michael, who continually *stands* over Daniel's people, *stands up* at the time of the end, assuming a position of judicial and also military responsibility (cf. Josh. 5:13). This single act replaces the repeated "rising" of the earthly leaders mentioned in chapter 11. This verse gives the main reason the contemptible king (11:21) has suddenly come to his end (11:45): It happens because of the rise of Michael.

"A time of distress." The Hebrew expression *'et sara*, "time of trouble," is also used in Jeremiah

30:7. In the Bible, the time of the end is closely related to the concept of God's judgment during which God will punish the unrepentant world. When talking about the end-time crisis, Jesus referred to a "'great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again'" (Matt. 24:21; cf. Mark 13:19).

"Not happened from the beginning of a nation." The word *goy*, "nation," is in the singular. This expression has the meaning of a superlative, saying that the event is without historical parallel. Exodus 9:24 contains a longer expression that says the same thing with very similar wording in Hebrew: "It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation." (Cf. Exod. 9:18; Deut. 4:32; Joel 2:2).

"Will be delivered." Even though Michael is the great Prince, he does not prevent the faithful "from enduring the suffering; rather he delivers them in the midst of it {cf. chapters 3 and 6}."²

"Is found." The fact that the names of the faithful are *nimsa'*, "found," implies a prior investigation.³ Jeremiah 50:20 also mentions the investigative aspect of the divine end-time judgment:

"In those days, at that time,"
declares the LORD,
"search will be made for Israel's guilt,
but there will be none,
and for the sins of Judah,
but none will be found,
for I will forgive the remnant I spare."

"Written in the book." Since Daniel 10:21 mentions the Book of Truth, the two references bracket chapter 11 and thus form an *inclusio*. This book is probably the same as "the book of life"

(Exod. 32:32, 33; Ps. 69:28; Rev. 3:5; 17:8; 21:27), and the "book of remembrance" (Mai. 3:16).

12:2 "Many." The plural form of the Hebrew noun *rabbim*, "many," is also used three times in the preceding chapter (vv. 14, 33, and 39). The same word is also used in Daniel 9:27, where the Messiah makes a strong covenant with *rabbim*, "many." The word is all inclusive, meaning "all" (Deut. 7:1; Isa. 2:3; 52:14,15; 53:11,12). In chapter 11, this word is always used in contradistinction from the people of Israel.

"Who sleep... will wake up." In the Bible, all death other than eternal death is temporary and is likened to sleep. This is the only text in the Old Testament that all scholars agree teaches individual and bodily resurrection from the dead.

"The dust of the earth." Literally, the text says *'admat-'apar*, "the earth of dust," which could mean something like "the land of dust." Although in a somewhat different form, the two nouns "earth" and "dust" occur also in the stories of the creation of Adam (Gen. 2:7) and of the Fall (Gen. 3:19). The waking up of those "who dwell in the dust" comes from Isaiah 26:19. Just as the Fall was a reversal of Creation, so the resurrection is a sort of new creation that reverses the consequences of the Fall of the human race.

"Eternal life." The original says *hayye 'olam*, "the life of eternity"—an expression that is found only here in the Hebrew Bible. To the Hebrew mind, any abstract idea—including eternity—was difficult to comprehend. For that reason, the original sense of the noun *'olam* would be "a very, very long time" or "an indefinitely long time."

"Shame." The original Hebrew word *ʾf̄rapot*, "shame," is given here in the plural form of "in-

tensive fullness," connoting the feeling of great shame,⁴

"Contempt." Whereas the previous noun *hʾrapot*, "shame," is commonly found in the Hebrew Bible, the word *dir'on*, "contempt," is rare and most likely comes from Isaiah 66:24. Its basic concept is one of "repulsiveness."

12:3 "Wise." The root *ski*, "to be wise," is one of the key terms in chapters 1,9, and 11, where it describes an important, God-given quality of the faithful (Dan. 9:22).

"Shine like the brightness of the sky." Literally, the text says that the wise shall shine like the brightness of *haraq'i'a*, "the firmament," a word also found in Genesis 1:6-8. The root *zhr*, "to shine," is used here both as a verb and a noun, forming a cognate accusative (paronomasia) that says "shine brightly like the brightness of the sky."

"Many." See the *Notes* on Daniel 12:2. According to Isaiah 53:11, the suffering "servant will justify many," while Daniel 11:33 says that the **wise... will instruct many, though for some time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered.**

"Righteousness." The root *sdq*, "to be righteous," is found elsewhere in the book—mostly in chapter 9, where it describes God as Someone righteous in contrast to sinful people. This word is used in the Bible as both a legal and a relational term. In this verse, *hammaskilim*, "those who are wise," and *masdiqe harabbim*, "those who lead many to righteousness," are mentioned in parallelism and refer to the same group of people. In Daniel 4:27, the prophet summons the king to do "what is right." This verse and Daniel 12:3 are linked by the use the same root *sdq*, "to be right(eous)."

"The stars." The word *hakkokabim*, "the stars," fits well the Mesopotamian background of the text, because the people who lived there were famous for their star gazing (cf. Gen. 15:5; Num. 24:17). The comparative particle *kô*, "as, like," precedes this noun. "The wise in Daniel are not said to become stars but to shine like them."⁵

"Forever." For the meaning of the word *'dlam*, see the Notes on Daniel 12:2.

12:4 "But you, Daniel." Normally, in the second half of the book, the first-person singular pronoun is used together with Daniel's name to foster the authenticity of the visions (7:15, 28; 8:1, 15, 27, etc.). In this case, the use of the second-person pronoun serves the same purpose.

"Close up and seal." The two imperatives are used in parallelism to refer not to two commands but to a single one. On the act of sealing, see the Notes on Daniel 6:17. While cylinder seals were used in Mesopotamia and scarab seals in Egypt, stamp seals were used mostly in Syria-Palestine.⁶ The temporary sealing of the scroll is necessary for preservation and authenticity because the time of the end is some distance away in the future (cf. Isa. 8:16; Jer. 32:11, 14; Dan. 8:26; 9:24). The end-time fulfillment of the predictions in this scroll will confirm its trustworthiness. For the opposite command, see Revelation 22:10.

"The time of the end." See the Notes on Daniel 8:17. Certain ancient Jewish commentators took this expression as meaning "until the Messianic era."⁷

"Many." See the Notes on Daniel 12:2.

"Will go here and there." The verbal root *stt*, "to go here and there," has been understood in a variety of ways, including as meaning an act of apostasy by the "many." However, that interpre-

tation contradicts the context. Elsewhere in the Bible, it is translated as the rowing of a boat (Jon. 1:3), swimming (Isa. 25:11), and of gleaners gathering manna (Num. 11:8). The sense that comes closest to Daniel 12:4 is found in Amos 8:12, where it describes an act of wandering in search of God's word. Thus, in this context, the verb describes searching through the prophetic scroll in an attempt to grasp the full meaning of the divine message.⁸

"And knowledge will increase." The original text says *vftirbeh hadda'at*, "the knowledge shall increase." Since the noun *da'at*, "knowledge," takes the definite article here, a specific knowledge is in question—that of God's prophetic revelation.⁹ For the use of the root *yd'*, "to know," see Daniel 9:25, where it is used in combination with the root *ski*, "to be wise." An increase of knowledge in a very general sense at the time of the end may be implied in this statement, but only on a secondary level. The primary type of knowledge in view is prophetic, relating in the first place to the revelations given to Daniel.

Exposition (12:1-4)

12:1 The first four verses of chapter 12 continue Gabriel's speech and bring it to a climax. Commentators generally agree that the chapter division found between the end of 11:45 and 12:1 is unfortunate. The climactic character of the passage is confirmed by the poetic style of the first three verses. The reference to **Michael** ties verse 1 with the last verse of chapter 10, forming an *inclusio*. In both verses, Michael's unique and incomparable role in the long conflict is

disclosed. He is **the great prince** seen by Daniel in a "great vision" (10:8), which prepares him for the revelations about "a great war" (10:1).

The rise of Israel's Protector takes place at the **time** of the end. In the visions of Daniel, **that time** is also referred to as the appointed time of the end. The importance of this moment in history can be seen from the three occurrences of the expression **that time** in this verse, with the word **time** appearing in it four times. Generally speaking, this is the time of the end, previously mentioned in 11:40-45, when the king of the South challenges the contemptible king. In a more specific way, this is the time when the last foe that opposes God and his people comes to an end as the direct result of Michael's rise.

Through a wordplay in this verse, **Michael** is described as the One who continually **stands over** to protect Daniel's people. At the time of the end, he **will arise**, or "stand up," once again to intervene in a decisive way on their behalf. **Distress** unparalleled in the history of the world will mark this time. This distress is most likely caused by the devastating activities of the contemptible king, who, alarmed by **reports from the east and the north**, will **go out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many** (Dan. 11:44). For the faithful, this time is another test of trust in their God. Just as it was on the Day of Atonement, when the people denied and humbled themselves

while keeping their eyes fixed on the high priest in the sanctuary, so here at the appointed time of the end, God's people go through a similar yet far more intense distress. Their eyes should be fixed on **Michael**, who is their Defender.

In the Bible, God's people usually underwent troublesome times before they experienced divine intervention and deliverance. It has been aptly said that "by delivering us in trouble rather than saving us from trouble, God is most honored and his people most blessed."¹⁰ A good illustration of this is the time when the children of Jacob were enslaved in the land of Egypt, and they "groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help . . . went up to God" (Exod. 2:23). Fortunately, their cries did not fall on deaf ears; the text says, "God heard their groaning and . . . was concerned about them" (Exod. 2:24, 25), and he decided to act on their behalf. "The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land'" (Exod. 3:7, 8).

The prophet Jeremiah called this **time of distress** "Jacob's trouble." This expression alludes to the crisis in the patriarch's life when he was returning from the land of Aram and preparing to meet his brother Esau. Genesis 32 tells

the story that lies behind Jacob's new name, Israel. In Jeremiah's prophecy, the patriarch's trouble and triumph are projected into the future:

" 'How awful that day will be!
None will be like it.
It will be a time of trouble for Jacob,
but he will be saved out of it' "
(Jer. 30:7).

If the distress is without a parallel, so is God's power to deliver. Michael's name ("Who is like God!") directs the reader's attention to God, whose power in the conflict between good and evil is incomparable. He promises to use his power to deliver all those whose names are written in the book of life. Jeremiah 50:20 says,

"In those days, at that time,"
declares the LORD,
"search will be made for Israel's guilt,
but there will be none,
and for the sins of Judah,
but none will be found,
for I will forgive the remnant I spare."

Thus, from the beginning of this unparalleled crisis, the outcome is never in doubt.

Just as the Book of Truth attests to the positive outcome of the long war (Dan. 11:21-12:1), so the deliverance of those whose names are recorded in the book of life is certain because God has predeter-

mined the world's destiny. When Michael rises, he does so in the context of judgment. The execution of that judgment is described in the next verse. As an important document, the Book of Truth has also been called "the citizen list of the true Jerusalem."¹¹ Isaiah 4:3 states, "Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem." Jesus called on his disciples to rejoice because their "names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

12:2 Daniel 12:2 is considered the clearest Old Testament reference to an individual and bodily resurrection from the dead. Other Old Testament references to resurrection, either literal or figurative, include 2 Kings 4:18-35; Job 19:26; Psalms 17:15; 73:23, 24; 13:20, 21; Isaiah 25:8; 26:19; Ezekiel 37:1-14; and Hosea 6:2. The key concepts and terms found in this verse, such as *many*, those *who sleep in the dust*, and *perpetual contempt*, are all found in the book of Isaiah (2:3; 26:19; 66:24). In Isaiah's book, the term *rabbim*, *many*, broadens the concept of God's people to include the faithful from the Gentile nations who turn to God and to his revelation to humanity. According to Daniel 9:27, the Anointed One or Messiah the Ruler makes a covenant with *many* during the last of the seventy weeks. For these reasons, it is safe to conclude that the resurrection is not restricted to the people of Israel.¹² The words *who sleep*

in the dust of the earth remind the reader of Jesus' words in John 5:25: "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." Daniel is included among those who will be raised.¹³

Caught in the wars and conflicts that chapter 11 describes, both the righteous and wicked die (Dan. 11:33-35) and wait to be resurrected. One can see in this verse a special type of resurrection prior to the second coming of Christ, because those who are not saved are also raised back to life. This group consists of those who were responsible for Christ's death (Matt. 26:64; Rev. 1:7). At the same time, "the resurrection promise of this prophecy can be taken in both a special and a general sense."¹⁴ Looking from a long distance in time, Old Testament prophets referred to the two comings of Christ as a single event. "As is the case with other Old Testament prophecies (e.g., Zech. 9:9-10), future events separated by many years are telescoped together with later revelation clarifying the time difference."¹⁵

The fact that some *wake up* to life and others to shame means "there is individual accountability in this notion of resurrection."¹⁶ In John 5:28, 29, Jesus alluded to Daniel 12:2 when he said, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and

those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." "

12:3 Verse 3 describes the bliss of the eternal life that is given to the faithful who are *wise*. The metaphors used in this verse fit very well the original Mesopotamian context of the vision (Dan. 10:4; cf. Gen. 15:5; Num. 24:17). After the wise, who had led *many to righteousness*, wake up to eternal life, they *shine like the brightness of the sky* and like the stars throughout eternity. Comparable with the face of Moses (Exod. 34:29), their blissful state is a logical continuation of a life that was filled with the Divine Presence prior to the time of their transfiguration. In the Bible, the concept of shining is directly tied with God's presence (Exod. 34:29; Luke 9:31). According to Matthew 13:43, after the second coming of Christ, "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." The following words of the wise man are fitting here: "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, / shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (Prov. 4:18).

Daniel's life and career in Babylon serve as a good example of the impact of God's presence on the life of an individual. Not only was his reputation in wisdom and understanding proverbial at the palace in Babylon (Dan. 4:9, 18; 5:11-16), but he used that God-given wisdom to lead others to the Source of all righteousness (Dan. 4:34; 6:26). Daniel 4:27 portrays the prophet as pleading with the

king to practice the divinely ordained righteousness and mercy. Proverbs 11:30 says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, / and he who wins souls is wise." Thus, Daniel, the leader of the faithful remnant of God's people in Babylon, is the first to pass the test of the two qualifications given in this verse, and he was therefore assured that at the end he would receive his "allotted inheritance" (Dan. 12:13). The statement in this verse presents "a dramatic reversal of destiny" from what is said in Daniel 8:10, where the little horn ascends as high as **the host of heaven**, casts some of the starry host down to earth, and tramples on them. In this way, the ambitious enemy who attempts to reach the stars (Dan. 8:10; 11:36, 37) is brought low, whereas those who have fallen (8:10; 11:33-35) are in the end exalted.

12:4 Repeating what was said in three separate instances toward the end of chapter 8, Gabriel tells Daniel that the message about the long war pertains to the time of **the end**, and therefore its revelation should be closed up and sealed in order to be preserved as a document that is binding. Moreover, the sealing of a document attests to its authenticity and reliability (cf. Dan. 6:17). This concept is confirmed by the use of the second-person pronoun **you, Daniel**. The words about this long war were closed up through the use of symbolic language. In contrast, John the revelator was told not to seal the words of his prophecy

"because the time [of its fulfillment] is near" (Rev. 22:10).

The time of the end will be characterized by an intense search of prophecies in this and the other prophetic books. Those who will study the words of this revelation are described as the **many**, a term previously seen to refer to God's people that come not just from the Jewish nation but also from the Gentiles. With their eyes, they **will go here and there** through the scroll in order to understand the divinely revealed words of prophecy. The prophet Amos uses the same verb, "to wander," to describe the end-time spiritual hunger and thirst for God's Word:

"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD,
 "when I will send a famine
 through the land -
 not a famine of food or a thirst for
 water,
 but a famine of hearing the
 words of the LORD.
 Men will stagger from sea to sea
 and wander from north to east,
 searching for the word of the LORD,
 but they will not find it"
 (Amos 8:11, 12).

The type of **knowledge** spoken of in Daniel 12:4 that will increase in the time of the end is primarily prophetic, while a general type of knowledge may be implied on a secondary level. At the

end of the long conflict, those who study Daniel's prophecies will be able to see that the foretold events have come to pass.

Waiting for the End (12:5-12)

The passage that follows reverts to a first-person report by Daniel. It contains a clarification of certain events that will take place toward the end of time.

⁵Then I, Daniel, looked and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and the other on the opposite bank.⁶ One of them said to the person clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things come to an end?"

⁷The person clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever that it will be for a time, times, and half a time. Then will the shattering of the power of the holy people be brought to an end, and all these things will be completed.

⁸I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?"

⁹He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰Many will be purified, made spotless, and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.

¹¹"From the time that the continual sanctuary service is taken away and the abomination that causes destruction is set up, there will be 1,290 days.¹²Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of 1,335 days."

Notes

12:5 "I, Daniel." See the Notes on Daniel 7:15 and 12:4.

"Looked." In this context, the verb *ra'iti*, "I looked," most likely means "I continued to look."

"And there." See the Notes on Daniel 10:5.

"Stood." See the Notes on Daniel 12:1. It is not very clear whether a literal or a figurative meaning of this verb should be read in this context.

"Two others." These two beings are described as *'aherim*, "others," in order not to confuse them with Gabriel and the man dressed in linen. The presence of two witnesses (Deut. 19:15) anticipates the making of an oath that occurs in verse 7.

"The river." The word *hay'dr*, "the stream," has the definite article and is used only in this chapter in Daniel. It is different from the words "canal" and "great river" in Daniel 8:2 and 10:4, respectively. Several commentators maintain that the Tigris River is meant in this verse because of Daniel 10:4. Yet, the Hebrew word *ye'or*, "river," is often used in the Bible in reference to the Nile and also in the description of the eschatological city of Jerusalem (Isa. 33:21). A vision in Isaiah's book speaks of the day when the two bitter enemies of God's people, Egypt in the south and Assyria (located on the Tigris River) in the north, will worship the true God together, and God will call them "my people" (Isa. 19:23-25).

12:6 "Said." The subject of the verb *wayyo'mer*, "and he said," is not explicit in the Hebrew text. It is assumed that one of the two beings mentioned in the previous verse is asking the being dressed in linen this question. This

conversation has much in common with the one between the two angels in Daniel 8:13-16.

"Clothed in //nen." This is the same Person as the One whom Daniel saw in the vision recorded in 10:4-9.

"Above the waters of the river." Some scholars think that this Being was standing either by the river or upstream.¹⁷ The Hebrew expression *mimma'al l'meme hay'dr* literally means "above the waters"¹⁸ of the stream. The position here differs from that taken by the two beings who are mentioned in the previous verse—they were standing on the two banks of the river (v. 5).

"How long." The wording at the beginning of this question is identical with the wording in Daniel 8:13.

"Astonishing things." In the Bible, the word *happela'ot*, "wonders," describes both God's mighty acts of salvation on behalf of his people (Exod. 15:11; Ps. 77:11,15; Isa. 25:1) and his judgments on the wicked (Isa. 29:14). The expression *qes happela'ot*, "the end of the wonders," refers to the end of the events presented at the conclusion of chapter 11 and through 12:1-3. For related terms, see Daniel 8:24 and 11:36.

12:7 "Above the waters of the river." See the Notes on Daniel 12:6.

"Lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven." In Bible times, people normally swore by raising just one arm (Gen. 14:22; Deut. 32:40; Rev. 10:5,6). This Being raises both arms to emphasize the exceptional, solemn nature of his oath. It has also been suggested that the lifting of both hands is a gesture of prayer to God (Exod. 17:11,12).¹⁹

"I heard." As at the beginning of Daniel 8:13, Daniel uses here the first-person verbal form to

report a revelation that he received through an audition.

"Who lives forever." The reference is to the eternal God (Dan. 4:3,34; 6:26; cf. 7:9), who in the Bible sometimes grounds his oath upon himself (Gen. 22:15,16; Deut. 32:40) or upon his "great name" (Jer. 44:26).

"A time, times, and half a time." The expression *mo'ed md'dim wahesi*, "time, (two) times, and half (of) a time," is the Hebrew equivalent of the Aramaic expression *'iddan wfiddanin up'lag 'iddan*, which is found in Daniel 7:25. It answers the question asked in the previous verse.

"The power." The word in the original Hebrew is *yad*, "hand," used figuratively here to mean power. See the Notes on Daniel 1:2.

"The holy people." In several places in the Bible, Israel is called "the holy people" (Exod. 19:6; Deut. 7:6; 14:2).

"Be brought to an end." According to Daniel 7:21, the little horn was able to defeat the saints during this long period of persecution (cf. 7:25).

12:8 "Did not understand." This refers to the meaning of the statement given in the previous verse. At the end of the vision recorded in chapter 8, Daniel made a similar confession (v. 27). The root *bin*, "to discern," is frequently used in the passages that contain the interpretations of the visions the angel interpreter gave to Daniel.

"I asked." At this point in the narrative, Daniel engages in the conversation, although some scholars think that he is the one who asked the question in verse 6. See the Notes on Daniel 8:14.

"My lord." Although in the Bible the title of address "*doni*, "my lord," may apply to God or to

human beings, here it probably refers to the Being dressed in linen who is divine. As such, the word could be capitalized. For the use of this title, see Daniel 10:16-19.

"Outcome." The Hebrew word *Writ*, "end," is also used in Daniel 8:19 in combination with the word "wrath." See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:19. The question the heavenly Being asked in verse 6 of this chapter had to do with the length of time (cf. Dan. 8:13). Unlike that question, Daniel's question concerns the *result* or the outcome of the conflict.

12:9 "Go your way." The word *lelc* should be understood as meaning "Do not worry!" or "Go on!" The verb *halak*, "to walk," is often used in the Bible as a metaphor for living. The same Hebrew words are also found in verse 13. They resemble God's commands to Abram to go from his country to the Promised Land and later to go to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 12:1; 22:2).

"The words." The noun *dabar*, "word," appears three times in Daniel 10:1. It describes the long war reported in chapter 11. Daniel was able to understand this "word" only through the *mar'eh*, "vision," described in 10:4-9. While the vision remained disclosed, the prophet was commanded to seal the "word" about the conflict (cf. v. 4).

"Closed up and sealed." See the *Notes* on Daniel 12:4 and 6:17.

"The time of the end." See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:17.

12:10 "Many." This is the fourth occurrence of the word *rabbim*, "many," in chapter 12 (cf. vv. 2-4). See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:27 and 12:2. This term is used here in parallelism with the word "wise."

"Purified, made spotless, and refined." The

use of threes is a common poetic form of prophetic speech (for example "grain, new wine, and oil" in Hosea). Three similar terms are used in Daniel 11:35, where they describe the experience of the persecuted wise. The first two verbs here are clearly reflexive, saying "purify themselves and make themselves wise," even though it is understood that God is the Agent who performs these actions in behalf of the faithful. The last word in this list alludes to difficult times, such as persecution, through which the faithful are refined.

"The wicked." The original Hebrew says *w'hirst'u fsa'm*, "the wicked will act wickedly." This is another case of cognate accusative (paronomasia) built on the root *rs'*, "to be wicked." It describes a habitual action.

"Wise will understand." It is implied at the end of this verse that the wise will understand the message revealed to Daniel. In the Bible, especially in the wisdom books, wisdom is a virtue that is descriptive of a person's character, so it is spiritual in nature. This verse presents a clear contrast between the wicked and the wise. The context of Daniel's visions confirms the fact that the wise are those people who have understanding of prophetic revelations. The book of Daniel repeatedly and emphatically states that only God gives this type of understanding.

12:11 "The continual sanctuary service." See the *Notes* on Daniel 8:11.

"The abomination that causes destruction." See the *Notes* on Daniel 9:27.

"1,290 days." It is difficult to come up with a symbolic meaning of this number. In the context of this apocalyptic passage, the word *yamim*, "days," should be understood as prophetic days, meaning years. A proposed application of this time

expression to the history of the church suggests this period stretches between AD. 508 and 1798.

12:12 "Blessed." The word 'asre may be translated either as "happy" or as "fortunate." In biblical wisdom passages, this term is often applied to a person who in his or her life takes God's revelation seriously (Pss. 1 and 119).

"The one who waits." Although the subject here is in the singular, it should be understood as being collective and referring to all who wait. In the Bible, the concept of waiting is paralleled with the concept of living a life of prayer and devotion to God (Ps. 130:5).

"1,335 days." What is true of the number 1,290 also applies here. It is difficult to come up with a symbolic meaning of this number. In this case, too, the word *yamim*, "days," should be understood as prophetic days, meaning years. From the literary point of view, the three numbers, 1,260, 1,290, and 1,335 are given in a numerical progression. A proposed application of this time expression to the history of the church places this period between AD. 508 and 1844.

Exposition <1Z:5-1Z>

12:5, 6 Having heard Gabriel's report on the long war, Daniel now witnesses a heavenly audition similar to the one that he had at the Ulai canal (8:13, 14). In this vision he sees three heavenly Beings. The first One is **the person clothed in linen**, whose description is given in Daniel 10:4-9. A new element that is found here is that Daniel sees him standing **above the waters of the river**. In Daniel 8:16, the humanlike Person was standing between (the banks of) the Ulai. While at the be-

ginning of chapter 10, Daniel mentions the Tigris River (v. 4), in this text he gives a Hebrew name that is most often used of the Nile River. In biblical prophecy, these two rivers stand for Assyria, Israel's enemy to the north, and Egypt, the enemy to the south. Isaiah foresaw the day when God would punish these two powers and rescue his faithful remnant (Isa. 27). In a similar way, Zechariah 10:11 describes God's power over the Nile River:

"They [the remnant] will pass
through the sea of trouble;
the surging sea will be subdued
and all the depths of the Nile will
dry up.
Assyria's pride will be brought down
and Egypt's scepter will pass
away."

In the Bible, the force of unrestrained waters represents a threat by an enemy, so the Bible pictures God as the One who can subdue such forces. Psalm 93:4 says;

Mightier than the thunder of the
great waters,
mightier than the breakers of
the sea—
the LORD on high is mighty.

In the Gospels, Jesus' ability to calm a storm at sea astonished the disciples. "In fear and amazement they asked one another, 'Who is this? He commands

even the winds and the water, and they obey him' " (Luke 8:25).

The majestic Figure that appears in Daniel 12 is described as being "in the centre of the stage and poised above the river."²⁰ Thus he is clearly in control of the events of history. The other two Beings are described as standing on the banks of the same river. It is not very clear from the text who asks the question, "**How long will it be before these astonishing things come to an end?**" From the parallel passage in chapter 8, we may assume that one of these two Beings is the inquirer. The expression **astonishing things** describes the events that mark the end of the long war referred to in Daniel 12:1-4. "The extended literary unit of chapters 10-12 thus begins and closes with a vision at a river; the prologue (10:1-19) parallels the epilogue (12:7-13)."²¹

12:7 The answer given by the Being **clothed in linen** comes in the form of a very solemn oath that this Divine Person affirms by raising his two hands toward heaven. In the culture of the people of the Bible, an oath was pronounced with just one arm raised upward (Gen. 14:22). The raising of both arms shows that this oath is exceptionally solemn and that the Being dressed in linen swears by the eternal God. This oath confirms that which Daniel was told in chapter 7: The saints will be defeated by the persecuting powers, yet God will put a sudden stop to the activity of the op-

pressor and destroy him completely. The literary figure known as a broken numerical progression **{time, times, and half a time}** aptly describes the breaking of the power that had for a long time persecuted God's people. This verse resembles God's words in Deuteronomy 32:40,41:

"I lift my hand to heaven and declare:
As surely as I live forever,
when I sharpen my flashing sword
and my hand grasps it in
judgment,
I will take vengeance on my adversaries
and repay those who hate me."

In the same passage, God pledges to "avenge the blood of his servants" as well as to "make atonement for his land and people" (v. 43).

12:8-10 As Daniel takes an active part in the conversation (cf. Dan. 8:14), he shows that his main concern is not with a given period of time but with **the outcome**—the result—of the long conflict. In answer, the Being dressed in linen reassures him and calls on him to remain faithful because the revelation about the long war described in chapter 11 is **closed up and sealed**. Left unstated but implied in these words is the fact that chapter 10's vision of the Being **clothed in linen** that provided Daniel with an understanding of the conflict remains unsealed.

The lasting impact of the long con-

flict will be twofold: (1) There will be *rabbim*, **many**, who through the conflict will be **purified, made spotless, and refined**. Because they are wise, they will be able to understand God's ways just as through the vision of Michael, Daniel was able to understand the revelation about the long war. (2) The wicked ones, on the other hand, will *not* understand but will go on in their wickedness to the end, just as Belshazzar did in his revolt against God. The term **many** is used here in parallel with the **wise**, as demonstrated in the chiastic structure of this verse:

- A. **Many** will be purified, made spotless and refined,
- B. the **wicked** will continue to be wicked.
- B'. None of the **wicked** will understand,
- A', but those who are **wise** will understand.

A blessing is intended for the people who firmly decide to wait until the end regardless of when the time of the end will come (v. 12). Psalms 1 and 119, which are both wisdom psalms, describe the happiness and fortunes of those who in their everyday lives take God's revealed Word seriously. This stands in contrast to the wicked, who, like chaff, are blown away by the wind. They will not be able to stand in judgment, and in the end, their way of life will perish (Ps. 1:4-6). Verse 10

is alluded to in Revelation 22:11, which says: " 'Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.' "

There is a certain amount of determinism in this chapter that speaks of the wicked who, like Belshazzar, persist in their rebellion against God all the way to the end. It gives a solemn warning that eventually in life and history a line will be drawn that determines the destiny of every human being. It is easy to forget that freedom of choice is a gift from God. The following statement is very insightful in this regard: "There is no such thing as absolute freedom. The word 'freedom' is best used to designate the ability and opportunity to choose between or among more or less equivalent alternatives. The price tag for freedom is always responsibility. Consequently, in Daniel people who make wrong choices will reap what they have sown."²² Galatians 6:7 says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."

12:11, 12 The two time periods that are given at the end of this chapter have challenged all interpreters of Daniel's book. While it is difficult to see literal meanings in these two numbers in the context of the eschatological/apocalyptic prophecy, their symbolic meanings are not obvious either. The most satisfying way to look at the numbers given in this

passage is literary. When these two numbers are put together with the expression **time, times, and half a time** from verse 7, then the three numbers, namely, 1,260 days, **1,290 days**, and **1,335 days**, appear in a numerical progression. This progression lets the reader of the book know that a seeming or apparent "delay" in the expectation of the end is possible from the human point of view.

The concept of a "delay" in the carrying out of God's plans is also found in the beginning of this unit in chapter 10. Gabriel says that he was delayed for three weeks because of the opposition to his coming. The instances at the beginning and the end of this literary unit of a seeming delay form an *inclusio*. The second occurrence informs the reader that those who are awaiting the end may experience a similar delay.

According to Daniel's book, the forces of evil that are at work in the world are real and are so powerful that, without Michael's intervention, human beings are helpless. The topic of waiting upon the Lord to come and rescue his servant is familiar in the Bible. In several places in the Psalms, the faithful psalmist claims that he has put his trust in God and waits on him:

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for
the morning (Ps. 130:5, 6).

Moreover, the psalmist exhorts others to put their trust in God and to be of good courage as they wait on God:

Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD
(Ps. 27:14).

In his speeches about the end of the world, Jesus Christ was emphatic regarding the vital importance of readiness among his true followers. In his Olivet Discourse, he praised the faithful and wise servant who, in the expectation of his master's imminent return, stays ready and keeps busy doing good to others. In contrast to him, the wicked servant attempts to determine the time of the master's return. He concludes that the "master is staying away a long time" and thus, at the end, is surprised by the master's sudden and unexpected return. Jesus concludes that since no one knows the time of his second coming, his followers should be wise, keeping watch and praying at all times (Matt. 24:45-51). They should live in a constant state of readiness for their Master's return.

According to his book, Daniel was wise because he waited on God, keeping watch and praying daily in Babylon. Whether his prayers were answered immediately (chap. 9) or after a delay (chap. 10), his trust in God was constant. In this respect he was very different from Belshazzar, who never learned

to read the signs of the times or to number his days that he might "gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12).

The Rise of Daniel (12:13)

The last words spoken to Daniel, found in the last verse of the book, stress a confident hope in that which God has prepared for those who love him.

"I?esf for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance at the end of time."

Notes

12:13 "Go your way." See the **Notes** on Daniel 12:9. The word *laqqes*, "till the end," is supplied in this verse to give the impression that an ongoing action is in view here, meaning "hold fast till the end (of your life)."

"I?esf." The word *tanuah*, "you shall rest," is a euphemistic reference to Daniel's death (cf. Job 3:13,17).

"Rise." On the presence of an *inclusio* and the meaning of the word *'amad*, "to stand," in the sense of assuming royal power, see the **Notes** on Daniel 12:1. While a general statement about the end-time resurrection is given in verse 2 of this chapter, in this verse, Daniel's own resurrection is predicted (cf. Isa. 26:19).

"Allotted inheritance." The Hebrew word *goral*, "lot," can also mean "destiny" (cf. Ps. 125:3; Jer. 13:25). The language here is borrowed from the drawing of lots when the Promised Land was divided among the Israelites (Num. 26:55, 56; Josh. 15:1). This noun should be taken together with the verb *'amad*, "to stand." The two imply a

firm trust in the future claim of an inherited portion that legitimately belongs to Daniel. Psalm 73:26 says,

My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.

"The end of time." The expression *qes hayyamim*, "the end of the days," is translated as "the time of the end" in verse 4. While some interpreters believe that these two expressions describe the same time period,²³ others have concluded that in Daniel "the time of the end" is the last portion of "the latter days" or "the end of time."²⁴

Exposition (12:13)

12:13 For a second time Daniel is told to *go* on with his life of faith and hold fast to the revelation. This time however, in anticipation of a seeming delay of the end, he is entreated to live in hope till **the end of time**. Since the events that he saw and heard in the vision pertain to a distant future, he will die before the end comes. He will rest in a state of sleep until the time of the resurrection, when he will rise to life and receive his **allotted inheritance**. Isaiah 57:2 says,

"Those who walk uprightly
enter into peace;
they find rest as they lie in death."

At the time of Moses and Joshua, the Promised Land was partitioned

among the tribes, and lots were cast to decide on the distribution of the land (Num. 26:55; Josh. 15:1). The language used in this verse alludes to that event. It speaks of the time when Daniel will stand to inherit the portion of the Promised Land that legitimately belongs to him forever.

The two concepts that Daniel's book emphasizes are watchfulness and faithfulness, and the prophet is now exhorted to cling to the two till the end (cf. Hab. 2:3). The book closes on a high note,²⁵ with words that must have been very significant to Daniel, because when he heard them, he was a long distance away from his family inheritance in Judea and the prospect of his return was nonexistent. Thus in his old age the prophet could say with the psalmist:

"LORD, you have assigned me my
portion and my cup;
you have made my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for
me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheri-
tance" (Ps. 16:5, 6).

Applications

As stated above, Daniel 12 is a continuation of the revelation found in the previous two chapters. Applications of this chapter focus mainly on the time in history when Michael will rise (12:1-4) and also on the time periods listed at the end of the chapter (12:7-12).²⁶

Application in Church History ("Historicism" J). Without exception, the scholars who apply this chapter to church history hold that Michael is none other than Jesus Christ.

12:1-4 The rising up of Michael follows the events described in chapters 7 and 8 and corresponds to the moment in history when the supernatural stone from chapter 2 strikes the image (w. 34, 35, 44, 45). The books have been investigated, and Christ's high-priestly ministry in heaven is completed. He now sets up his everlasting kingdom. The opening phrase in this verse, "at that time," refers to the end of chapter 11, when the king of the North comes to his end and no one can help him. The end-time trouble reverses the previous tribulation, during which the saints were delivered *to* death. This time they are delivered *from* death.

Maxwell states that the resurrection spoken of in verse 2 includes all of the redeemed and some of the unsaved. The rest of the unsaved will be resurrected later. According to Jesus' words in Matthew 26:64, the persons who contributed directly to Christ's crucifixion will be raised at the Second Coming (see also Rev. 1:7).

The command to close up the words of the scroll does not apply to the book as a whole because the interpretations that are found in the book explain some of the symbols used in it. Rather, Daniel was told to close up only the parts telling

about the events that would occur near the end. Although verse 4 has been used to describe the explosion of travel and knowledge, it more likely refers to the increased understanding of Bible prophecy at the end of time. The two concepts, however, are not unrelated.

12:7-12 While Shea considers the Person dressed in linen to be God, Maxwell considers him to be Michael—that is, Jesus Christ. Michael's raising of his hands is significant, because when the Son of God swears by the living God, the message that follows is very important. That message was that at the end of the time, times, and half a time, "new light would dawn"²⁷ on Daniel's end-time prophecies. Verses 11 and 12 mention two more time periods, but the angel did *not* provide clear end points for them. Maxwell concludes that it is not yet possible to state with certainty how they will be fulfilled. Michael declined to answer Daniel's question, "How long?" (v. 8) because Daniel did not live in the time of the end and did not need to know all the details of the developments of that time. This teaches us that prophecy is provided for practical purposes, not to arouse speculations nor to satisfy curiosity "no matter how spiritual that curiosity may be."

In contrast to this position, Shea and Doukhan propose historical applications of the two timelines given in this passage. Just as is the case with the period of 1,260 days, the 1,290 and 1,335 days

should be understood in terms of years. Moreover, the last two periods cover approximately the same length of time. The number 1,290 speaks of the setting up of the abomination of desolation. According to Shea, this expression describes "the union of church and state"²⁸ that began in the year A.D. 508 when Clovis, king of the Franks and called by some "a new Constantine," was baptized. Shea says this period closed in the year 1798, which was marked by the end of the supremacy of the medieval church. A blessing is pronounced on the one who waits and reaches the end of the 1,335 days. Both Shea and Doukhan apply this period to the years between 508 and 1844. "The year 1844 is one characterized by a movement both multiconfessional and international that situates itself precisely in a perspective of hope and waiting for the coming, the 'advent' of God."²⁹

Application in Personal Life. Maxwell has correctly observed that this part of Daniel's book presents several timelines, the applications of which are not very clear to the reader of today. Anxious to know the precise time when the world will end, some interpreters have attempted to determine the time of Christ's second coming. They have done this despite Jesus' clear statement that " 'no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father' " (Mark

13:32). Some time-setters explain themselves by saying that Jesus talked only of the day and the hour. They say that diligent students of Bible prophecies can know of the week, month, or year. Since it is likely that Jesus spoke Aramaic in everyday life, the meaning of the word *yom*, "day," is important for a correct understanding of his statement. The Bible's usage of this word indicates that it can mean any period of time. It does not mean just a twenty-four-hour day unless it is followed by an ordinal number (cf. Gen. 1:1-2:3). Thus when Jesus said, "No one knows about that day," he probably meant that no one knows the exact time of his coming.

Jesus no doubt had a good reason for not disclosing the exact time of his second coming. A Jewish rabbi liked to tell his followers, "Repent one day before you die." When asked how one can know the time of his death, the rabbi replied, "Repent every day!" A constant state of readiness for the Master's return is an imperative in the life of every believer.

As for Daniel, he walked daily with his God. That is why three times in his book he is referred to as a person "greatly loved" by heaven (9:23; 10:11, 19). In a similar way, God can show his children of today that he greatly loves them. As the end nears, the conflict between good and evil is intensifying in the world. "We live spiritually between D-day and

V-day. The victory has been won, but the fight is still real."³⁰ Only through God-given wisdom can we know how to live our everyday life in anticipation of the glorious future. Each believer is privileged to share this proclamation: "Michael has conquered—let us teach of his victory!"³¹

1. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 183.
2. Baldwin, 203.
3. Ford, 280.
4. Keil, 483.
5. Collins, 394.
6. Walton, Matthews, Chavalas, 751 •
7. Slotki, 103.
8. Ford, 281; Nichol, 4:879.
9. Maxwell, 303; Miller, 321.
10. Ford, 109.
11. Goldingay, 306.
12. Archer, 152.
13. Redditt, 190.
14. Shea, *Daniel*, 270.
15. Miller, 318.
16. Seow, 188.
17. Peter-Contesse and Ellington, 330.
18. Seow, 192.
19. Collins, 399.
20. Baldwin, 207.
21. Seow, 192.
22. Redditt, 193.
23. Goldingay, 310.
24. Pfandl, *The Time of the End in the Book of Daniel*, 317.
25. Arthur A. Stele, "Resurrection in Daniel 12 and Its Contribution to the Theology of the Book of Daniel," (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1996).
26. Shea, *Daniel*, 269.
27. Maxwell, 302.
28. Shea, 274.
29. Doukhan, *Secrets*, 189.
30. Longman, 258.
31. Smith-Christopher, 152.

APPENDIX G

Literalist and Intertestamental Applications of Daniel 12

1. *Literalist Application* {"Futurism"). The message of Daniel 12:1-4 is the high point in the book and also the focus of Daniel's prophecies relating both to the Gentiles and to Israel. Archer holds that this passage speaks of the fortunes of God's covenant people during this period of the career of antichrist.¹

12:1 The "time" mentioned in this verse is the same as "the time of the end" described as antichrist's reign of terror at the end of chapter 11.² The event described here is not subsequent to the events that precede it in the narrative; rather, it coincides with them chronologically. Whereas chapter 11 deals with the political and religious aspects of the time of the end, chapter 12 relates to the people of Israel. The time of trouble mentioned here applies only to Israel, which is especially aided by Michael. Miller relates this passage to Zechariah 13:8, which says that only one-third of the people of Israel will survive. The deliverance will not extend to all Israel,

only to those who remain faithful, says Walvoord;³ not every individual Israelite will be spiritually ready for Christ's second coming. In contrast to a good number of Christians, he holds that Michael "the great prince" should *not* be confused with Christ. Archer admits that according to Matthew 24:22, Jesus related this passage to the great tribulation with which our present church age is destined to close.

12:2-4 The time of tribulation climaxes with the resurrection of the dead (v. 2). At the coming of Christ, the Israelites who survive the great tribulation will be joined by the Old Testament saints who are raised from the dead. Although the resurrection will come to all men, the wicked will not come back to life at this time but at a later time. It is not unusual for biblical prophets to include events separated by a considerable length of time as if they occurred in immediate relation to each other. Thus future events that are separated by many

years are telescoped together; later revelation clarifies the time difference.

After the resurrection of the righteous, their faithfulness in witness will be rewarded. They will receive eternal life from God. The closing up of the words (v. 4) means that this revelation has primary application to those living in the time of the end. The last part of this verse implies that attempts to understand the truth will require a considerable effort. There is no doubt, then, that those living in the time of the end will have far greater understanding of these things than is possible today.

12:5-13 The two angels who stood on the banks of the river serve as two witnesses to the solemn oath made by the Man clothed in linen. Miller suggests this Person is none other than Christ himself.⁴ The expression "time, times, and half a time" refers to the last period preceding the second coming of Christ, which brings the time of the end to its conclusion. According to Walvoord, it will last for three and a half *literal* years and will be the time of a terrible persecution of the people of Israel. It will take place, as Miller says, during the evil career of the antichrist. Archer says three and a half years is "exactly one-half the full seven years of the seventieth week referred to in Daniel 9:27."⁵ The Jewish nation will be attacked by many nations and crushed "as taught elsewhere in Scripture." The primary purpose of this revelation was to inform those who

would live at the time of the end of these important events.

The period of 1,290 days is tied to the abomination that causes desolation. According to Christ, it is a sign of the great tribulation. As for the exact events that will take place during this period, certainty is not possible. Archer states that the horror will continue just 1,290 days from the time that the covenant is abrogated and the abominable image set up in the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. This period and the 1,335 days given in verse 12 show that the second coming of Christ and the establishment of his millennial kingdom require time. Although for Archer, verse 12 "is one of the most enigmatic statements in this whole chapter," some events that will take place during this period can be conjectured.⁶ What is important to know is that this date marks the official inauguration of the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, although dogmatism on the precise events that fall within the time period involved is not proper.⁷

2. *Intertestamental Application* ("Pretterism"). The beginning of chapter 12 is the completion of the long unit that began with Daniel 10. It informs the reader about the divinely appointed end, "a climax of which Israel would [be] the centre."⁸

12:1 Much like the other commentators, Collins also ties the expression "that time" from this verse with "the

time of the end" when the vile king who invades Israel will meet his death due to an intervention from heaven in Daniel 11:40-45. Viewing the rise of Michael in a judicial setting provides an attractive parallel to Daniel 7, which speaks of God's judgment. In chapter 10, Michael's rise has more of a military character, while in 12:1, his role is both judicial and executive. Michael delivers the faithful, whose names are written in the book of eternal life (7:10). He delivers them from the invasion of the king, yet this deliverance may be understood to extend to his saving them from all dangers. Goldingay says that the unparalleled time of trouble was the period in history when "Antiochus was seeking to terminate the worship of the true God and to annihilate his people."⁹

12:2-4 There is virtually unanimous agreement among modern scholars that the bodily resurrection of individuals from the dead is in view in verse 2. Yet, Collins states, "Contrary to what is sometimes asserted, Daniel provides no indication that the resurrected life is located on earth."¹⁰ For Goldingay, the seer promises here the renewal of life and exposure of the wicked. Verse 2 does not teach a universal resurrection, only a resurrection of those who prove faithful during the crisis of the Hellenistic age. Collins places the word "many" in opposition to "others." The two groups arise to contrasting destinies. Porteous, on the other hand, says that it

"depends on the interpretation of the word 'many' whether we are to think of a general or a limited resurrection as having been in the writer's mind."¹¹ Because a persecution precedes the final consummation, God must do justice to both the martyrs for the faith and to the apostates. The final judgment results in the irrevocable separation of the good from the evil. This will be a great reversal in history, when the powerful are put down and the nobodies are given power.¹²

Verse 3 should be interpreted as saying that the wise made the common people righteous by instructing them, so that instruction, rather than martyrdom, is the means of justification. The risen wise are given angelic status. The wise "are not said to become stars but to shine like them." The last words in this verse can be emended to say "and evil will increase" (Collins) or "and disasters shall increase" (Porteous) in order to make the verse fit better the context of the translation in the old Greek translation.

12:5-13 These verses are not a late addition to the book but an epilogue. The river mentioned in verse 7 is most likely the Euphrates, while the person dressed in linen is an angel. Lifting up of both hands was customary in prayer during Bible times. Collins translates the second half of verse 7 as "at the end of the power of the shatterer of the holy people."¹³ This event, which followed the desecration of the temple, refers to

the death of Antiochus (cf. Dan. 11:45), which was the sign of the coming of the end. The distinction between the righteous and the wicked will continue right up to the end. To Daniel's question in verse 8, the angel answers that no further revelation is available in Daniel's time, and so in verse 10, he merely recapitulates what was said in chapter 11. Because the scroll is sealed, its true meaning is hidden and available only to the wise at the time of the end when the scroll is again opened.

The expression "time, times, and half a time" has the same meaning as in Daniel 7:25. Regarding the two additional numbers found in verses 11 and 12, Goldingay points to the fact that the writers of Old Testament books were familiar with no less than three different calendars (Babylonian lunar, Essene solar, and Hellenistic "luni-solar"). Some scholars have suggested that when allowance is made for intercalation, 1,290 days can represent three and a half lunar years or three and a half solar years, while 1,335 days can also be reckoned as three and a half solar years.¹⁴ Collins, on the other hand, affirms the higher critical view of biblical prophecies by saying, "When one predicted number of days had elapsed, a glossator revised the prediction with a higher number." He states, "It is a well-known fact that groups who make exact predictions do not just give up when the

prediction fails to be fulfilled."¹⁵ As the revised dates came and went, the failures of the predictions did not diminish the authority of the book. Rather, the predictions were just "freed from their historical moorings" and applied to later times—to the destruction of Jerusalem and to the antichrist.

For Porteous, on the other hand, these mysterious calculations show that "an unquenchable faith was strong and active in many "who were living through dark and calamitous days."¹⁶ That faith inspired the book of Daniel and is still essentially the faith of the church. Goldingay summarizes the message of the chapter by saying that God is sovereign in heaven and on earth and no power can rival him. "His purpose can be opposed and delayed, but not frustrated."¹⁷

1. Archer, 149.
2. Miller, 313.
3. Walvoord, 284.
4. Miller, 322.
5. Archer, 155.
6. *Ibid.*, 156.
7. Miller, 326.
8. Porteous, 170.
9. Goldingay, 306.
10. Collins, 392.
11. Porteous, 170.
12. Goldingay, 307.
13. Collins, 399.
14. Goldingay, 310.
15. Collins, 401.
16. Porteous, 172.
17. Goldingay, 312.

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