

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A COHESIVE THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN LIVING:  
PRINCIPLES FROM THE BOOK OF DANIEL

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A Thesis Project Submitted to  
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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By

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March 25, 2011

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LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A COHESIVE THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN LIVING: PRINCIPLES FROM THE BOOK OF DANIEL**

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011

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The propensity to force preconceived ideologies and theological systems upon the interpretation of the book of Daniel is evident. The purpose of this project is to provide a proper interpretation of Daniel 1-6 so that proper applications can be made for preaching and teaching, trying to eliminate any preconceptions along the way that are forced upon the text. A six-part theology of Christian living is developed from the preaching outlines of each chapter, all connected to the book's theme of sovereignty and thereby forming a cohesive unit. Ultimately, a greater appreciation for the value of the Old Testament in Christian living is at the core of this project.

Abstract length: 108 words

## **DEDICATION**

To my wife Rebekah and my two children Grace and Luke, you are my pride and joy this side of heaven. God only knows how much I love you and appreciate you. You have encouraged me to stay on track even when I did not feel like it. You have been there for me and I could not have done it without you.

To my parents, Charles and Linda Shaffer, who have raised me to be a servant of Christ. I am a product of your hard work, example, and prayers.

To my editor, Lara Rodkey, who spent many hours reading, editing, and critiquing. Your suggestions and proficiency have been invaluable. Thank you.

To those scholars and authors who believe that the book of Daniel is not just a collection of prophecies and predictions. You have the depth and insight to make theology relevant for Christian living. You challenge us to live in light of His coming!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Proper Interpretation that Leads to Proper Application**

Faithfully interpreting a text of Scripture is one of the primary goals of any student of God's Word; yet, in the same breath it is the most difficult task that a diligent student will undertake. No interpretation of a Scripture passage will ever be perfect. The problem of interpretation does not lie with God, it lies with man who is imperfect and fallible. However, the student of God's Word knows that he cannot ignore this difficult task of interpretation solely based on his humanity or any baggage. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard note that, "We need to take into account the presuppositions and pre-understandings we bring to the task of interpretation. To fail to do so leaves us open to distortion and misunderstanding."<sup>1</sup> The student must steadfastly persevere and continually agonize over a text, with the Holy Spirit as his guide, until a proper interpretation is realized. If he chooses not to practice this discipline then what he applies and proclaims from the pulpit could potentially have damaging effects, even heretical, on his people. Herein lies the paramount task than any interpreter of God's Word faces: to faithfully interpret the text so that proper applications can be made.

Faithfully and properly applying the first six chapters of the book of Daniel relies heavily upon one's interpretive process. To realize the full potential and great weight of

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<sup>1</sup> William K. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 7.

the interpretive process, four concepts relating to application of the text must be observed, for if we omit application then "we short circuit the whole purpose of Scripture."<sup>2</sup> While these four concepts and/or subjects defend the rationale of the problem at hand, they also can stand alone as separate issues themselves.

### **Relevance of the Old Testament**

The first factor that defends the premise of the project is the relevance of the Old Testament. Its value and supreme importance in the believer's life today cannot be overstated. Too many negative reactions to the Old Testament seem to surface in the lives of church members because they not have a good understanding of it. Acts 15:1-2 suggests that this problem of understanding the Old Testament was not a new one: "And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question."

In churches today, the lack of preaching Old Testament texts from the classroom and pulpit can be traced to many factors.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the larger issue relates to continuity between the Testaments. How can a person expect to fully understand the New Testament if there is no desire for a basic comprehension of the Old Testament?

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<sup>2</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh: How to Preach from Old Testament Narrative Texts* (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2007), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 16-25. Greidanus points out four major reasons for the lack of Old Testament preaching: (1) use of lectionaries, (2) critical Old Testament scholarship, (3) rejection of the Old Testament, and (4) difficulties in preaching from the Old Testament.

Old Testament scholar John Walton says, "Christians often make the mistake of discarding the Old Testament simply because the New Testament provides the exciting conclusion."<sup>4</sup> The average Christian seems to casually ignore the Old Testament as either too difficult to understand or too far removed to be of any permanent value.

One cannot honestly understand the New Testament and its worldview without first understanding the foundation upon which it was built – Jesus Christ and the Old Testament that revealed Him. The thinking and living of God's people in the New Testament was based upon their understanding (and interpretation) of the Old Testament. After looking at the relationship of the Old Testament with the New Testament, Greidanus makes this hermeneutical conclusion: "The Old Testament must be interpreted not only in its own context but also in the context of the New Testament." The well-trained preacher, teacher, and student knows that context is king! However, while believing this fundamental hermeneutical principle, he fails to see the larger issue at stake. The larger context of a New Testament text (the Old Testament) is frequently overshadowed by the immediate context. In other words, a New Testament passage is often interpreted from a New Testament perspective without giving much thought to the Old Testament foundation upon which the text relies upon for proper interpretation.

To believe that the Old Testament has no significance or relevance for daily living in this New Testament world is to say that food has no value or importance for our physical bodies. Although the Old Testament was composed more than three thousand years ago, it still has value and significance for the believer. Three quarters of God's Word is contained in the Old Testament; do we believe that God was wasting his breath?

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<sup>4</sup> John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill, *Old Testament Today: A Journey from Original Meaning to Contemporary Significance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 390.

## Power of the Narrative

A second contributing factor to this project's rationale is the power of the narrative. Narratives, speaking from a practical standpoint, are stories. People relate with stories more than other types of teaching because stories are real, personal, and experiential. Mathewson aptly comments, "When preachers open up the text of Scripture each Sunday morning, they face twenty-first century audiences who are programmed to think in stories. They speak to people who unknowingly get their theology from stories they've watched on HBO or MTV."<sup>5</sup> Biblical narratives, being the predominate genre, constitute a large part of the Old Testament – roughly forty percent.<sup>6</sup> Narratives also have great appeal; Tucker has listed six specific reasons: (1) narratives grab our attention and hold it, (2) stick in the memory, (3) have persuasive power, (4) clarify the truth, (5) add aesthetic value to any sermon, and (6) we see ourselves in those stories.<sup>7</sup>

The master storyteller, Jesus Christ, used narratives (stories) time and time again to help his audience relate to what He was teaching. The average person is familiar with Jesus' narratives (e.g. the phrase *being a good samaritan* is used to describe an act of compassion and responsibility) as much as they are familiar with the classic Old Testament narratives like David and Goliath, Jonah and the big fish, and Daniel in the lion's den. The point is that "The way the Bible is written is every bit as important as what it is written in: narrative..."<sup>8</sup> It seems plausible then to understand that the

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<sup>5</sup> Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Austin B. Tucker, *The Preacher as Storyteller: the Power of Narrative in the Pulpit* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 11-20.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 48.

narrative not only has immense influence but it also positions itself as the key to understanding the Scriptures. God chose to reveal Himself and His plan to redeem mankind through one grand and capacious narrative. Does this not hold any weight in our attempts to connect the two Testaments? God's wisdom is perfect.

### **Problem of Familiar Stories**

The third rationale for this project is the issue of familiar stories. The problem is not with God's Word; the problem lies with man's understanding of God's Word. The seasoned church member or believer could state with clarity that they have heard the classic narratives: David and Goliath, Daniel and the Lion's Den, Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark, Jonah and the big fish. The problem of familiar stories is two-fold. The first part of the problem is the presuppositions that are brought to a familiar text by the interpreter. If the interpreter has previously done his homework and has already delivered a message on the text at hand, then there is a logical tendency to use what has already been exegeted from that text. This is also true for the congregation who may be familiar with a certain narrative because it has been preached to them often. In this case the tendency for them is to direct their minds elsewhere because they feel that they already understand the text and there is nothing more that is new under the sun. The problems related to presuppositions, especially as it relates to familiar stories, is a fundamental issue that all interpreters face. "We must realize that just as the biblical text arose within historical, personal process and circumstances, so interpreters are people in the midst of their personal circumstances and situations."<sup>9</sup> Sometimes that familiarity of a text of Scripture can be more harmful than helpful.

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<sup>9</sup> Blomberg, Hubbard, Klein, 7.

The second part of the problem of familiar stories relates to the process of interpretation. If a proper grammatical-historical method of interpretation is not used, then the tendency is to skip over valuable steps that are designed to keep the interpreter faithful to the original intent of the text. The desire to find what is practical and personal in a text is commendable, but methods that overlook the original setting and intent of the narrative risk misinterpretation of the text.<sup>10</sup> Chisholm notes that a preacher will sometimes ignore the original intent of the text and push an entirely different message on it.<sup>11</sup> He further explains the reasoning of the misguided preacher:

A preacher wants to preach from the Old Testament. He doesn't take the time to determine what the story is saying in its original context, or, having determined what it meant back then, he decides that the message is irrelevant for today. However, the story does illustrate a biblical theme found elsewhere. Rather than choosing that other passage as his target text and using the Old Testament to illustrate the theme, our hypothetical preacher pulls a sleight of hand trick, imposes a foreign theme on the text, and gives the impression that the original author intended to teach this lesson.<sup>12</sup>

Skipping certain steps of the interpretive process is not just a lack of character on the part of the interpreter, it is also a sure way to start heresy. The simple fact is that God's Word is endless. More is learned every time a person reads it and applies it. Yet, the thinking that revisiting a familiar text is pointless is hard to combat. On a positive note, the benefit of studying a familiar text is that the interpreter gets a chance to dig deeper into God's Word, mining out those gems and nuggets that are hidden under the surface – the ones that can often be life changing.

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<sup>10</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 124.

<sup>11</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 222.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.



## A Clearer Picture of Christ

A fourth and final reason for this project entails the person and work of Christ. Gaining a more accurate perspective of a concept sometimes means gaining a larger picture of that same concept. A person can easily become confused by giving all attention to the details. However, when they step back from the object in hopes to get a better perspective, they often get a clearer perceptive. Ironic as it seems, a clearer picture of Christ is attained when stepping back from analyzing the New Testament texts to study the Old Testament. When studying Christ, like many other biblical concepts, a context must be established – that context is the Old Testament.

If Christ is not seen in the Old Testament, then we truly do not understand the design of the Old Testament. Greidanus notes the influence of Christ saying that, "Since the heart of the New Testament is Jesus Christ, this means that every message from the Old Testament must be seen in the light of Jesus Christ."<sup>13</sup> Greidanus explains that Paul spoke of this same concept in 2 Corinthians 3:15-16: "But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." He [Greidanus] further explains the passage by recalling an illustration used earlier:

Earlier we saw that the Old Testament by itself is like an incomplete painting. The revelation in and of Christ in the New Testament completes this painting, and we must now see every part of the Old Testament in the light of the whole painting. This analogy is nothing other than a form of the standard hermeneutical circle: one cannot really know the meaning of a part until one knows the whole, and one cannot know the whole until one knows its parts.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the clearest evidence for gaining a clearer picture of Christ from the Old

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<sup>13</sup> Greidanus, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 52.

Testament is from the words of Christ Himself. Jesus reminds his followers on two different occasions about how the Old Testament gives a clearer picture of His work and His person. He says, “You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn’t it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?” (Luke 24:25 NLT). A few verses later He says, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44 NLT). The more a person understands the Old Testament, the more in focus Christ becomes.

### **Scope**

The overarching goal of the project is to show that proper interpretation leads to proper application. Each chapter of Daniel 1-6 will be interpreted using the accepted historical-grammatical rules of interpretation. Then, the interpretation of each chapter will form the foundation of a preaching outline.

### **Statement of Limitations**

Some of the more difficult interpretive areas and areas of the text that have been debated at length will be placed in the appendix where more space and time will be provided for a proper treatment of the issues. It is important to note that in the main body of the paper, these issues will receive this writer’s interpretation which have been presented in the appendix. Therefore, it might be beneficial for the reader to consult the appendix for a fuller explanation when a major interpretive issue is casually mentioned in the body of the work. The only pericope that will not be dealt with in this project is Daniel 2:31-45. While the king's dream will be referenced and mentioned, its

interpretation and description will not be discussed because it deals with prophetic elements that are not relevant to the current study.

### **Theoretical Basis**

The theoretical basis for the project is that proper interpretative methods will lead to proper understanding and flow into proper application. The value of the project is not to allow preconceived ideologies or theologies to have a major effect on the chapters that are interpreted; rather, the value is to let the text speak for itself – what every Bible scholar, preacher, teacher, and author alike desires. In order for a person to let the text speak for itself, the matter of listening to the Holy Spirit is primary, and using the accepted grammatical-historical method of interpretation is secondary. Unfortunately, the latter concept is abused frequently in the interpretive process, especially in the book of Daniel. As much as humanly possible (remembering that communication of the text is not a problem with God but with man), there will be no respecters of person when dealing with interpretation and theologies/ideologies that are forced upon a text before the interpretive process has commenced.

### **Methodology**

This project will cover the narratives in Daniel 1-6. Each chapter of the book of Daniel will function as one narrative, and accordingly function as one chapter in the project (exact book chapters of Daniel will not correspond to exact project chapters). Each chapter of the project will have two sections entitled, "Interpretive Outline" and "Preaching Outline." Accordingly, each of these sections will be given a title suitable for their content. The first section will seek to discover the meaning of the text (through the interpretive process) and the second section will seek to apply the text to Godly living

(through a preaching outline). The chapters of the project that *will not* have these two sections and deviate from the above methodology will be chapters 1, 2, and 9.

### **Review of Current Literature**

The literature that was consulted for the project is divided into three sections: commentaries, topical studies, and book of Daniel chapters. The commentaries and book of Daniel chapters aided with the interpretation of the words, grammar, and syntax. The topical studies illuminated the text from a historical and cultural standpoint, resulting in a better understanding of the context. Each section uniquely contributed to the interpretative process.

#### **Commentaries**

This section of the literature review is classified into technical, expositional, and pastoral/devotional. Technical commentaries work directly from the original languages and interact with them throughout the work. Many of these works provide the reader with the author's translation of the text. One note of interest is that most of the technical commentaries support a critical viewpoint of the book of Daniel. The expositional commentaries provide an interpretation based upon an accepted English translation of the Bible, consulting and noting original language concerns in the footnotes. By far, this category contains the most work done on the book of Daniel. Some works in this category may be appropriate for the technical and pastoral sections respectively; however, because the main body of the commentary was expositional, they were chosen to be included here. Devotional/pastoral commentaries involved a more practical approach to the text. These commentaries are geared towards a devotional, pastoral, and practical viewpoint being more sermonic-oriented. One concern that arose with this

category was the tendency to make applications that did not match up to the text. The end result was that those applications were used because they made good preaching and teaching material. This is why it is absolute necessary to have a proper interpretive method because it will allow for proper application.

### Technical

Some samplings of the major works consulted for technical commentaries are as follows: James Montgomery, *Daniel* from the *International Critical Commentary Series*; Louis Hartman and Alexander DiLella, *The Book of Daniel* from the *Anchor Bible Commentary Series*; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Ezekiel-Daniel* from *Commentary on the Old Testament*; John J. Collins, *Daniel* from the *Hermeneia Commentary Series*; and John Goldingay, *Daniel* from the *Word Biblical Commentary*

### Expositional

Some samplings from the expositional commentaries section are as follows: William H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide*; Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*; Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel* from the *New American Commentary Series*; Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* from the *NIV Application Commentary Series*; John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*; Danna N. Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics in the Book of Daniel*; John C. Whitcomb, *Daniel* from *Everyman's Bible Commentary Series*; Gleason L. Archer, *Daniel and the Minor Prophets* from the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

### Pastoral/Devotional

Some samples from the pastoral/devotional commentaries are as follows: Warren Wiersbe, *Be Resolute*; David Jeremiah, *The Handwriting on the Wall*; George M.

Schwab, *Daniel: Hope in the Midst of a Hostile World*; Michael P.V. Barrett, *God's Unfailing Purpose: The Message of Daniel*; Donald K. Campbell, *Daniel: Decoder of Dreams*; James M. Boice, *Daniel*; Bryan Chapell, *Standing Your Ground*; Gene A. Getz, *Daniel: Standing Firm for God*; David O. Dykes, *Character Out of Chaos*.

### **Topical Studies**

This section of resource material deals primarily with specialized topics that surface in the study of the book of Daniel. These materials will also divulge pertinent background information that is necessary for proper interpretation. While much of the material in this section will likely be used for the chapter two: *Putting Daniel in His Context* and the *Appendix: Historical Issues in Daniel 1-6*, these materials can also be helpful at other junctures and crucial points in the text. The topical studies section, because of its secondary nature, was not deemed necessary to be listed out and divided into sub-headings at this juncture. However, the majority of the source material can be classified in a general fashion under the following headings: Aramaic/Hebrew of Daniel, Archaeological Background, Babylon and Ancient Near Eastern Religions, Chronological Aspects, Darius the Mede, History and Geography, Persian/Greek Words, Identity of Historical Characters, Literary/Structural Features, and Theology of Daniel. These topical studies are filtered throughout the work and consulted when necessary.

### **Book of Daniel Chapters**

This section of the literature is devoted mostly to materials such as: journal articles, magazine articles, and chapters in books, essays, dissertations, and conference papers that dealt specifically with just one chapter or narrative in the book of Daniel. Some of these resources cover the entire chapter, but the majority cover small verses or sections within a chapter that posed a major interpretive and/or theological issue.

### Daniel chapter 1

Not many resources (other than commentaries) encompass this first chapter of Daniel. Here are some samples: Kalimi and Purvis, “King Jehoicahin and the Vessels of the Lord’s House in Biblical Literature,” from *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*; Mark Mercer, “Daniel 1:1 and Jehoiakim’s Three Years of Servitude,” from *Andrews University Seminary Studies*; Alberto R. Green, “The Chronology of the Last Days of Judah: Two Apparent Discrepancies,” from *Journal of Biblical Literature*; Bill T. Arnold, “Word Play and Characterization in Daniel 1,” in *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*; and Frederick F. Bruce, “Daniel’s First Verse,” from *The Bible Student*.”

### Daniel chapter 2

Many articles and essays have been written about the second chapter of Daniel, mainly concerning the prophetic sections. However, some material written on the chapter does not include prophetic sections. Here are some samples: P.R. Davies, “Daniel Chapter Two,” from *Journal of Theological Studies*; Jack N. Lawson, “The God Who Reveals Secrets,” from *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*; Aron Pinker, “A Dream of a Dream in Daniel 2,” from *Jewish Bible Quarterly*; and G.T.M. Prinsloo, “Two Poems in a Sea of Prose,” from *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*.

### Daniel chapter 3

Much of the material written on chapter 3 deals with the towering statue described by the text; however, there is some material on the character of the three Hebrews. Some samples of material would be: Jan Van Henten, “Daniel 3 and 6 in Early Literature,” an essay from *Composition and Reception of the Book of Daniel*;

William H. Shea, "Daniel 3: Extra-Biblical Texts and the Convocation on the Plain of Dura," from *Andrews University Seminary Studies*; T.C. Mitchell, "The Music of the Old Testament Reconsidered," from *Palestinian Exploration Quarterly*; and P. W. Coxon, "Daniel 3:17: A Linguistic and Theological Problem," from *Vetus Testamentum*; and Charles H. Dyer, "The Musical Instruments in Daniel 3," from *Bibliotheca Sacra*.

#### Daniel chapter 4

Chapter four contains much material written about Nebuchadnezzar's madness; some of that material doubts the historicity of the claim. There are also some dissertations written about this chapter as well. Some samples of the material for chapter four are as follows: Matthias Henze, "The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar," doctoral dissertation; Byron Burkholder, "Literary Patterns and God's Sovereignty in Daniel 4," from *Direction*; William H. Shea, "Further Literary Structures in Daniel 2-7: An Analysis of Daniel 4," from *Andrews University Seminary Studies*; and Tim Meadowcroft, "Point of View in Storytelling," from *Didaskali*.

#### Daniel chapter 5

As with the material of chapter 4, much has been written of chapter five that is skeptical of its historicity. Some samples of material from this chapter are: Daniel Watson, "The Writing on the Wall: A Study of the Belshazzar Narrative," doctoral dissertation; Lester L. Grabbe, "The Belshazzar of Daniel and the Belshazzar of History," from *Andrews University Seminary Studies*; E.G. Kraeling, "The Handwriting on the Wall," from *Journal of Biblical Literature*; Al Wolters, "The Riddle of the Scale in Daniel 5," from *Hebrew Union Annual*; and Al Wolters, "Belshazzar's Feast and the Cult of the Moon God Sin," from *Bulletin for Biblical Research*.



### Daniel chapter 6

Materials were lacking from chapter 6, assuming the familiarity of this chapter. Besides the commentaries, a few results appeared which mainly emphasized the person of Darius. Here are some samples: John Walton, "The Decree of Darius the Mede in Daniel 6," from *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*; William H. Shea, "A Further Note on Daniel 6: Daniel as 'Governor,'" from *Andrews University Seminary Studies*; and Shalom Paul, "Daniel 6:8: An Aramaic Reflex of Assyrian Legal Terminology," from *Biblica*.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PUTTING DANIEL IN HIS CONTEXT

#### Historical Background

##### Setting

The book of Daniel opens by giving the reader a chronological marker. The time is 605 BC and the threat of exile and deportation is becoming a reality. More than one hundred years had passed since the Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians, and now the Southern Kingdom of Judah realizes that the same fate is coming to them, only this time the captor will be the Babylonians.

More than twenty years earlier, Assyria was beginning to show signs of a weakening empire as the last Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, died in 627 BC.<sup>15</sup> For the Israeli, these new events and the weakening Assyrian Empire may have looked like a ray of hope in the midst of a dark and dismal time. However, the reality became nothing of what Israel hoped for as the transition to the next period of history only meant a changing of power. In 626 BC, the Babylonians declared independence from Assyria and crowned Nabopolassar as their king.<sup>16</sup> Over the next decade several unsuccessful attempts of regaining Babylon were made by the Assyrians while new alliances were made: Egypt backed Assyria, and the Medes and Babylonians began negotiations.

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<sup>15</sup> Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary*, vol. 20 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 37.

<sup>16</sup> David Noel Freedman, "The Babylonian Chronicle," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 19, no. 3 (1956): 51.

The Medes made the first move, under the leadership of Cyaxares, when they captured the former Assyrian capital city of Asshur in 614 BC.<sup>17</sup> After the fall of the city, Nabopolassar arrived with his forces and the two kings finalized their treaty of mutual assistance. Two years later, following three months of battle, the capital city of Nineveh was finally captured (612 BC) by this newly formed Medo-Babylonian alliance.<sup>18</sup> The Assyrians that managed to escape the city fled back to Harran on the Euphrates River; an attempt was made to reconstitute the kingdom with the help of Egypt, but it proved unsuccessful as the Babylonians drove them out of Harran. In 609 BC a final attempt was made by the Assyrian-Egyptian alliance to retake Harran, but it failed and thus ended the Assyrian empire.<sup>19</sup> Although the Assyrian dominance had ended, there were some biblical repercussions. King Josiah made his move of independence at this tumultuous time of shifting power. However, it was his effort to thwart Egypt's assistance to Assyria (in 609 BC) that led to his untimely death in the same year (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:29-30). This, as Lucas states, "set off the trains of events which eventually led to the end of Judah as a kingdom."<sup>20</sup>

After 609 BC, Assyria was virtually extinguished and now the only nation in the way of Babylonian dominance was Egypt. For about three years these two superpowers were content to have some spars and short battles, not attempting to engage in any major battles<sup>21</sup>; history would prove otherwise. Egypt and Babylon finally locked horns at

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<sup>17</sup> Freedman, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>19</sup> Lucas, 37.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Leon Wood, *A Commentary On Daniel* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1973), 24.

Carchemish (605 BC) with Nebuchadnezzar leading the Babylonian forces.

Nebuchadnezzar engaged Egypt with a frontal attack and decisively defeated them. The Egyptians were driven back down into Palestine, but before they can reach Judea, the news of the death of Nabopolassar reached Nebuchadnezzar. Nabopolassar had died on August 16, 605 BC,<sup>22</sup> and now Nebuchadnezzar rushed back to Babylon to take control of the kingdom on September 7, 605 BC.<sup>23</sup> Once matters were settled in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar journeyed back to Palestine to receive tribute from the defeated nations, collect any riches from them, and deport their young men back to Babylon to serve his purposes.

### **Authorship**

The authorship and dating of Daniel (discussed in the next heading) have been two of the most controversial and contested issues in the long-standing debate of the book's authenticity. Although many have had issues with the internal contents of the actual book, much of the debate is reserved for these two background issues. If a person can discount the book's authenticity and show the uncertainty of its authorship, then he has no need to resort to debating internal problems. It is much like those who do not believe the Bible; they would rather not spend their time disproving its internal content, but instead focus on disproving its authenticity.

The book of Daniel yields clear, internal evidence that proves Danielic authorship. Daniel 8:1 says, "In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared *to me*—to me, Daniel—after the one that appeared to me the first time." In

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<sup>22</sup> Freedman, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

three other specific references (9:2, 20; 10:2) Daniel affirms his authorship in first person. When closely examining the book, Daniel also writes in third person, which is not out of the ordinary,<sup>24</sup> for the customary practices of the day were such. In the book of Ezekiel, Daniel is referred to three different times (14:14, 20; 28:3), showing that Daniel was a contemporary of Ezekiel. However, some have set out to disprove Daniel's authorship by citing that the Daniel mentioned in Ezekiel is really the "Danel" of Ugaritic mythology mentioned in the "Tale of Aqhat."<sup>25</sup> Dressler sums up his thoughts in these words:

A close scrutiny of the Ugaritic Aqht Text has shown that the Ugaritic Dnil is not reported to be particularly wise, nor righteous.... With regard to the Daniel-figure in Ezekiel no compelling reason was found for rejecting the identification of the Daniel mentioned by Ezekiel with the Biblical Daniel. Extra-biblical literature, too, has revealed no variant traditions for the Ugaritic Dnil.<sup>26</sup>

Identifying the Daniel of the Old Testament with some extra-biblical legend or Ugaritic myth is just another attempt by critics to find new evidences to disprove Danielic authorship.

In the New Testament book of Matthew, Jesus Himself affirms Daniel's authorship when he says, "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet..." (Matthew 24:5). Archer explains the grammar of the text to demonstrate the strength of Christ's statement: "Since  $\delta\iota\alpha$  [by] with the genitive

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<sup>24</sup> Gleason L. Archer Jr., *Daniel-Malachi*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1985), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Harold H.P. Dressler, "The Identification of the Ugaritic Dnil with the Daniel of Ezekiel," *Vetus testamentum* 29, no. 2 (April 1979): 152.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-161. Also another article written just one year later defends a contrary view: John Day, "The Daniel of Ugarit and Ezekiel and the Hero of the Book of Daniel," *Vetus testamentum* 30, no. 2 (April 1980): 174-84.

case is used to express agency, this commits Christ—if his words are correctly reported here and in Mark 13:14—to Daniel’s authorship of the predictions of the latter-day “abomination.”<sup>27</sup> Further, Miller lists four significant points from Christ’s words and the context of the passage that relate to authorship:

First, Christ demonstrated his belief that Daniel was a real, historical person who was an instrument of divine revelation (“spoken of through the prophet Daniel”). Second, Christ held that the prophecies contained in the Book of Daniel (from which he quoted) came from Daniel himself, not a later anonymous individual. Third, Christ assured that this prophecy describes future events, for the context shows that “the abomination that causes desolation” to which Christ referred was yet future. This means that arguments based on the premise that the prophets never foretold the distant future are invalid. Fourth, apparently the only view in vogue during the time of Christ for the setting of the prophet Daniel was the sixth century B.C.; therefore if Christ treated Daniel as a historical individual, he also assumed the sixth-century date.<sup>28</sup>

Christ’s words, in both the Matthew and Mark passages, provides many reasons for Danielic authorship in the sixth century BC.

One of the greatest difficulties for proving Danielic authorship lies in the change in pronouns that occurs between chapters 1-6 and 7-12. In chapters 1-6, Daniel speaks from a third-person perspective – a storyteller, which is not uncommon for a writer to do during this period of history; but, then in chapters 7-12, he speaks from a first-person perspective. Those critical of Danielic authorship seize on this point and come to the assumption that the book is the work of several authors.<sup>29</sup> This assumption is summarized well by Peter-Contesse:

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<sup>27</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, New American Commentary, vol. 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 35.

<sup>29</sup> Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 23 (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 13-14. These authors believe in a more radical theory of 10 distinct authors, one for each major section of the book of Daniel.

They see the possibility that the final form of the Book of Daniel may have been the result of an anonymous editor working at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, but using material originally produced by Daniel or some other sixth-century writer, or by Daniel and the other writer. According to one version of this theory, the stories in chapters 1-6 may have been written at an earlier period and circulated independently before being reworked and inserted in a later second-century document. In this case Daniel would have been a real, historical figure who was a well-known hero. The later editor would have then attributed the visions of the second half of the book to him.<sup>30</sup>

If it is proven that a document had two different authors, then it becomes easier to follow the path of two different times of writing for that document. Then, the theory that the book could be written at a different time than shortly after the events in the book happened, seems to become plausible. This is a crucial issue.

However, the authorship of the book of Daniel is not as settled as one would think within the realm of scholarship. In fact, a few authors and scholars (although still believing in a second century BC date) believe the work to be the product of one author.<sup>31</sup> The difficulty still remains. Does the structure and pronoun usage in the book of Daniel allow for several authors? Hill gives a fantastic explanation of the book's content while showing single authorship. He says, "...it seems likely that the book represents an anthology or edited collection of selections of Daniel's personal journal or memoirs and adaptations of more formal chronicles documenting his service in the Babylonian royal court."<sup>32</sup> Every day, people all over the world dive into the latest biography that is hot off the press, and yet the world accepts the work as the product of one author even though

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<sup>30</sup> René Péter-Contesse and John Ellington, *A Handbook of the Book of Daniel*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 3.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper Collins, 1948), 761. A couple of those authors are James A. Montgomery and H.C. Leupold.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew E. Hill, *Daniel-Malachi*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, rev. ed., vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 25.

others may have contributed to it, nor do they discount its authenticity because more than one author makes up the content of the book.

Ironic as it may seem, the critics may not necessarily have issue with one sole author as much as they have issue with the content. Could they be diverting attention away from the areas of predictive prophecy? Maybe this is why the date of writing for the book of Daniel is so contested. If a person can prove that the book of Daniel was written after the predictive prophecies happened, then they can ignore those God-given prophecies and cease to believe that God is capable of giving them. Man has always wanted to control his own destiny, and it should be of no surprise that he is concerned with the book of Daniel for "the absolute sovereignty and transcendence of God above all angels and men literally permeate the book."<sup>33</sup> Much material has been produced in the last couple of centuries that has attempted to disprove Danelic authorship, and while this section has provided a summary of the ongoing debate, the evidence clearly aligns itself with Daniel being the sole author.

### **Date of Writing**

Only two plausible suggestions have been offered to date the book of Daniel. The first suggestion is the traditional dating of a sixth century BC composition. This dating is termed traditional because it follows the norm of culture and the writing of historical documents. Normally, the author would compose the work shortly after the events happened, giving himself several years to edit and finalize his work before it is published and circulated. Therefore, logically, the traditional date of Daniel would be a sixth century date because the events of the book occurred during that time period. Archer best

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<sup>33</sup> John C. Whitcomb, *Daniel*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 17.



explains the traditional date concept and gives a date of writing at 532/530 BC.

He further explains that:

Daniel seems to have revised and completed his memoirs during his retirement..., when he would be close to ninety years old. The appearance of the Persian-derived governmental terms, even in the earlier chapters composed in Aramaic, strongly suggests that these chapters were given their final form after Persian had become the official language of government.<sup>34</sup>

Many<sup>35</sup> scholars and authors, both past and present, hold to this date, not just because of its traditional nature, but also because of the historical evidences.<sup>36</sup>

The second suggestion that is posed for the date of writing is a second century BC date (i.e., a late date). The proposal of a late date originated from the pen of Porphyry who lived during the third century AD. While he was residing in Sicily, he wrote a fifteen volume work entitled, *Against the Christians* that was purposed to refute Christianity.<sup>37</sup> Porphyry's logic and presuppositions were based upon his desire to discredit Christianity. Archer comments about his thinking saying that "the underlying assumption for Porphyry was the absolute impossibility of predictive prophecy. He rejected the idea that a personal God by special revelation could have foretold a sixth-century Daniel what was going to happen through the centuries to come."<sup>38</sup> According to

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<sup>34</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Some authors that hold to a sixth century date: Gleason Archer Jr., John Walvoord, Leon Wood, Robert Dick Wilson, Stephen Miller, Thomas Constable, William Shea, Andrew Steinmann, John Whitcomb.

<sup>36</sup> Other selected historical issues that relate to the book of Daniel are discussed in some detail in the appendix. For a specific listing of evidences pertaining to an early date see Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 6-18.

<sup>37</sup> Bruce Waltke, "The Date of the Book of Daniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133, no. 532 (October-December 1976): 320.

<sup>38</sup> Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Modern Rationalism and the Book of Daniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no. 542 (April-June 1979): 130.

Steinmann, those who suggest a late date do so based upon historical problems and literary-critical concerns.<sup>39</sup> However, while this is demonstrated in their writings, it has also been demonstrated that there are underlying issues and foundational assumptions that cause a person to endorse a late date as well. Ferch defines these assumptions:

...the book of Daniel was composed (at least in part) and/or edited in the second century by an unknown author or authors who posed as a sixth-century statesman-prophet named Daniel and who pretended to offer genuinely inspired predictions (*vaticina ante eventum*) which in reality were no more than historical narratives under the guise of prophetic predictions (*vaticinia ex eventu*)...this Maccabean thesis presupposes a reflection of second century Judaism of the time of the Maccabean struggle against Antiochus.<sup>40</sup>

Originally endorsed by Porphyry and brought back to life by German rationalism, the late date theory started to evolve. Within the last century, "Maccabean Thesis"<sup>41</sup> became the key phrase for the majority who espouse a late date.

Despite the convincing arguments of conservative scholars and the new archaeological evidences<sup>42</sup> being brought to light, critics of Daniel still hold to a late date. Archer adds his distaste saying, "Ever since 1806 the rationalist school of biblical criticism has been content to restrict their reading to the works of one another. They have felt no need of working out any serious refutation of evidence advanced by conservative

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<sup>39</sup> Steinmann, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 129-130.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur J. Ferch, "The Book of Daniel and The "Maccabean Thesis," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 129.

<sup>42</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi has contributed several works to this field of study: "Archaeological Backgrounds of the Exilic and Postexilic Era, Part 1: The Archaeological Background of Daniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 545 (January-March 1980): 3-16; *Stone and the Scriptures* (Philadelphia: JB Lippicott, 1972); and *Greece and Babylon: Early Contacts Between the Aegean and the Near East*, Baker Studies in Biblical Archaeology (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976). Other helpful articles are: Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Old Testament History and Recent Archaeology from the Exile to Malachi," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127, no. 508 (October-December 1970): 292-299 and Merrill F. Unger, "The Use and Abuse of Biblical Archaeology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105, no. 419 (July-September 1948): 297-306.

scholarship.”<sup>43</sup> With this unscholarly attitude, it is not surprising that they have become entrenched in their beliefs. It also begs an indirect thought that maybe they don’t want to read the conservative scholarship because it might actually influence them!

Without hesitation, the late date suggestion has been passed down from generation to generation without any real evaluation. Harrison writes his concern in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, stating that “objections to the historicity of Daniel were copied uncritically from book to book, and by the second decade of the twentieth century no scholar of general liberal background who wished to preserve his academic reputation either dared or desired to challenge the current critical trend.”<sup>44</sup> How can a supposed scholar accept the suggestion of a late date without weighing the matter out from all evidences? If they do not at least consider all the evidence, then quite frankly their opinion on the matter should not be worthy of consideration, either. While much more can be debated and addressed concerning the issue of dating the book of Daniel,<sup>45</sup> a clear conclusion can be formed. Both the internal and the external evidence proves that the traditional or early dating of Daniel is to be the only scholarly and acceptable one.

### **Social Setting**

The social setting of the book of Daniel relies heavily upon the time frame in which it is placed. This means that those who propose a late date theory will have a very different outlook than those who propose the accepted and traditional early dating of the

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<sup>43</sup> Archer, “Modern Rationalism,” 130.

<sup>44</sup> R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 1111.

<sup>45</sup> The issues presented for the dating of the book of Daniel in this section are not intended to be comprehensive but concise and in summary fashion. Other matters that relate to the methods of dating the book of Daniel, the language of the book for example, will be addressed later on in this chapter. Other matters, like historical problems, are addressed in the Appendix.

book. Concerning the late date theory, Collins says that it is difficult to determine the social setting of the book because it is pseudepigraphic and, therefore, by nature would be fictional.<sup>46</sup> Others who agree with Collins on a late date, have attempted to construct the social setting of the book by using certain literary genres.<sup>47</sup> These new<sup>48</sup> genres, they postulate, give credence to the late date theory.

Mark Twain once said, “If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember anything.”<sup>49</sup> Mark Twain clearly was not addressing the issues of the book of Daniel when he wrote that statement, but that statement depicts what these critics of Daniel are doing. They believe in a late date and so they have to make sure that all their bases are covered; nothing can be contradictory. So what happens when a contradiction comes up? What do they do to remedy the problem? The social setting of the book of Daniel provides a perfect example. They create new literary genres (that otherwise would not be necessary) to explain the social setting and how it aligns with their late date theory. What man will do in attempt to cover his own tracks and support his own ideologies has been affecting biblical interpretation for millennia. Maybe some advice from another intellectual named Albert Einstein might help these scholars: “The only thing that

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<sup>46</sup> John J. Collins, “Current Issues in the Study of Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 2, eds. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2002), 9.

<sup>47</sup> John J. Collins, “Daniel and His Social World,” *Interpretation* 39, no. 2 (April 1985): 131-143; “The Court-Tales in Daniel and the Development of the Apocalyptic,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94, no. 2 (June 1975): 218-234; *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1994); and *Daniel: With An Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, Forms of the Old Testament Literature, vol. 20 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984).

<sup>48</sup> Two relevant works that speak to these new genres are as follows: W. Lee Humphreys, “A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tale of Esther and Daniel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 2 (June 1973): 211-223 and David M. Valenta, “Court or Jester Tales? Resistance and Social Reality in Daniel 1-6,” *Perspective in Religious Studies* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 309-324.

<sup>49</sup> Albert Paine, ed. *Mark Twain's Notebook* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), 240.

interferes with my learning is my education."<sup>50</sup> If a person does postulate a late date of the book of Daniel, then he has a difficult task of remembering quite a bit of material in order to back up his claims. Again, it must be remembered that man desires to control his own destiny (a sub-theme of the book of Daniel) and do whatever he can to push God out of the picture.

Bible-believers who believe that Daniel was written in the sixth century BC, taking the traditional dating of the book, don't have to create new genres to back up their claims. They trust what the Bible says, and in fact, the Bible does speak specifically to the social climate of Israel during the exile. Besides the actual narratives in Daniel 1-6, passages in Jeremiah 29 and Ezekiel 8 and 14 give insight into life during the exile.

Jeremiah 29:4-7 reads

‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.’

Several concepts are noted in this passage that helps dispel the mystery of living in the exile. Notice that the first thing that the LORD does is makes sure that His people know that He is allowing this exile to take place. He does not want them to get bogged down with trying to figure out who or what brought about this terrible ordeal. He continues to give them instruction to carry on normal lives, have children, not start any insurrections, and pray for the leadership of this foreign nation. Feinberg says,

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<sup>50</sup> Don Herweck, *Albert Einstein and His Theory of Relativity* (Minneapolis: Compass Point Books, 2009), 9.

Verses 5–7 are so remarkable for their advice to the exiles that they are without parallel in the literature of antiquity...History shows that in all the centuries of their world-wide dispersion, the Jews have tried to follow this pattern. They have identified themselves with the country of their residence, while at the same time looking toward eventual restoration to their native land.<sup>51</sup>

However, while God's requirements for daily living were given through the letter sent by Jeremiah, many seemed hard-headed and stubborn. Some even believed that God had abandoned them and therefore decided to live with their own rules.

The passages in Ezekiel 8 and 14 give more insight into exilic life. Ezekiel 8:1 seems to infer that the elders of Israel took the advice of Jeremiah and sought out a normal life by constructing some sort of governmental rule. However, Ezekiel 14:1-5 shows some problems that both the leaders and people were having:

Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.'

On the outside, the people of Israel, especially the leadership, were giving credence to their God, but the LORD saw the inward reality (cf. Jer. 17:10). They were once again worshipping other idols and deities, and they were seeking guidance from false prophets. No true guidance can be obtained because they are worshipping idols within their hearts. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." The problem that the nation had with idolatry, even during the exile, is

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<sup>51</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 553.

congruent with the content of the book of Daniel. In Daniel 1, eating the defiled meat would mean idolatry; in Daniel 2, Daniel tells the king that he serves the “God of heaven,” not the gods of Babylon; in Daniel 3, the three Hebrews refuse to worship the graven image; in Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar finds out first-hand that there is only one true God; in Daniel 5, Belshazzar used the sacred vessels from the temple to offer worship to foreign gods; and in Daniel 6, the enemies of Daniel make the king a god by getting him to sign a law. Daniel 1-6 is permeated with the idolatrous practices of Babylon.

### **Composition and Reception**

#### **Literary Genre**

When looking at the content of the book of Daniel, one must understand and take notice of its form. The word *genre* is of French origin, and Duvall and Hays explain how this word is used in a biblical sense: “When applied to biblical interpretation, the expression *literary genre* simply refers to the differing categories or type of literature found in the Bible.”<sup>52</sup> Many linguists use the analogy of playing a game when trying to explain the importance of genres. Hence, “...readers have to play by the rules when it comes to recognizing literary genre. For communication to occur, the author must be on the same page as the author in terms of genre.”<sup>53</sup> Genre is of inestimable importance – through this vehicle the modern reader is able to understand what the original author meant. However, identifying a genre can become quite difficult especially when scholars are not in general agreement about a book’s authorship, time of writing, and purpose.

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<sup>52</sup> J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 120.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

Therefore, it is of no surprise that much has been written on the book of Daniel in order to ascertain its genre.

The book of Daniel is composed in two differing literary forms that are narrated in two distinct voices. Chapters 1-6 of Daniel are principally in the form of third-person narrative. These chapters include the famous narratives (and stories) that most were taught as children. These chapters are normally labeled as "court stories" because they comprise a series of narratives about the encounters of Jews in a foreign court.<sup>54</sup> The stories of Joseph in Pharaoh's court and Esther in Xerxes' court would also fit into this literary form as would Nehemiah's tenure in Persia. Critical scholarship that believes Daniel was written in the second century BC (late-date view) has labeled these chapters under the form called, "court tales" or "court legends."<sup>55</sup> They do this because the forms *court tales* or *court legends* do not recognize the genre as reporting history; they are instead viewed as fiction that adheres to the literary patterns of legend and folklore.<sup>56</sup> A better term, "court narratives,"<sup>57</sup> for understanding the genre of Daniel 1-6 has been proposed by Patterson and will be used for this study. Patterson uses the term to describe "stories that deal with the exploits of a godly exile in a foreign court whose piety and wisdom enable him to emerge triumphantly from various tests and rise to personal prominence."<sup>58</sup> Patterson's research also attests that "the presence of the genre over such

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<sup>54</sup> C.L. Seow, *Daniel*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>55</sup> Collins, *Daniel: Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 42.

<sup>56</sup> Hill, 30.

<sup>57</sup> Richard D. Patterson, "Holding On To Daniel's Court Tales," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 4 (December 1993): 447, n.13.

<sup>58</sup> Patterson, 447.



an expanse of time would suggest that dogmatic attempts to place the original of Daniel corpus in the second century BC are ill-found."<sup>59</sup> In other words, identifying the right genre for Daniel 1-6 becomes an evidence for dating the book of Daniel in the sixth century BC.

Chapters 7-12 of Daniel are principally in the form of first-person apocalyptic prophecy. These chapters include the intriguing prophecies of end-times events. At this point it must be noted that contenders of a late date for the book of Daniel do not believe these chapters are prophetic and go to great lengths to prove its inaccuracies. In doing so, they create new genres and forms that would not be otherwise necessary if they believed in the normal, traditional dating of the sixth century BC. These late-date advocates normally designate chapters 7-12 as a genre called *historical apocalyptic*.<sup>60</sup> Because they believe Daniel was written in the second century BC, they relate these prophetic sections to that current historical period claiming that Daniel wrote those prophecies right after they occurred – this is called *Ex Eventu Prophecy*.<sup>61</sup> *Ex Eventu Prophecy* is just one of several forms under the genre of historical apocalyptic. Concerning the book of Daniel as a whole, Goldingay, a late date advocate, cites several sub-genres that he believes are part of the book of Daniel: romance, legend, myth, midrash, court tale, vision, quasi-prophecy, and apocalyptic.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Patterson, 453.

<sup>60</sup> Collins, *Daniel: Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. He defines the term as the prediction of events which have already taken place.

<sup>62</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 30 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 6-7, 320-322.

The literary form of the book of Daniel is vital for interpretation and understanding meaning. However, as it has been clearly noted, not all scholars agree on the genre of the book. All scholars would say that chapters 1-6 and 7-12 have different genres, but not all would agree as to what kind, type, or how that genre would be termed. Those that believe in the traditional early dating of the book attach one kind of genre and those who believe in a late date attach yet another. Ultimately, one's belief in when the book of Daniel was written affects the genre they attach to it.

### **Structure and Language**

Interpreting the book of Daniel relies heavily, as previously noted, upon the literary genre attached to the book. However, the structure of the book is mainly concerned with its arrangement and composition. Using the analogy referenced before, the literary genre is a set of rules that the interpreter must follow to properly interpret the book, whereas the structure of the book puts the rules into the right arrangement or sequence. Therefore, the structure of the book is contingent upon its genre and thus shows how these two concepts relate to each other. Accordingly, another factor in understanding the structure (and unity) of the book is the language in which it was written. Daniel 1:1-2:4 and 8:1-12:13 is written in Hebrew, while 2:4-7:28 is written in Aramaic. The change in language is not customary for a Bible book, nor is it happenstance. Daniel has a reason for this change and that reason will ultimately unify the book.

Most scholars accept that the book of Daniel has ten major divisions. Chapters 1-9 form nine divisions and chapters 10-12 form the tenth and final division of the book.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> J. Paul Tanner, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160, no. 639 (July-September 2003): 273.

As discussed previously under the heading *Literary Genre*, “The traditional division of the book of Daniel into two halves (1-6; 7-12) has usually been justified on the basis that the first six chapters are historical and the last six chapters are apocalyptic or predictive.”<sup>64</sup> Though this division is accurate and provides the genres for the book, it neglects to see the importance of the change in language. Therefore, to understand the structure of the book, the linguistic changes must be factored into the equation.

Tanner notes two significant studies that have attempted to understand the structure of Daniel.<sup>65</sup> The first study was done in 1972 by A. Lenglet who proposed a concentric structure for chapters 2-7. He observed a paralleling relationship between chapters 2 and 7, 3 and 6, and 4 and 5. These relationships are based on thematic concerns.<sup>66</sup> The second study, done by Gooding, appeared nearly a decade later, taking a more radical structure. He proposed, “...the pattern is deliberate, that the book’s ten component parts were intentionally arranged in two groups of five each, with chapter 5 forming the climax of the first group, and chapters 10-12 the climax of the second.”<sup>67</sup> Tanner notes that Gooding’s proposal has the advantage of being more intricate,<sup>68</sup> but the problem with his structural proposal is that it does not match up with the literary genres found in chapters 1-6 and 7-12. The preferred solution to the structural problem of

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<sup>64</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 15.

<sup>65</sup> Tanner, 273. Those two studies were A. Lenglet, “La structure litteraire de Daniel 2-7,” *Biblica* 52 (1972): 169-190 and David W. Gooding, “The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel and Its Implications,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 32 (1981): 43-79.

<sup>66</sup> Some proponents of this chiasmic structure of Daniel are John Walvoord, John Whitcomb, H.C. Leupold, William Shea, Andrew Steinmann, Stephen Miller, and Leon Wood.

<sup>67</sup> Gooding, 52.

<sup>68</sup> Tanner, 275.

Daniel is Tanner's proposal of an overlapping structure. Tanner states the structure of the book is a little more complex than simple division of chapters 1-6 and 7-12. He says, "Two major divisions – chapters 2-7 and chapters 7-12 – overlap. Thus chapter 7 belongs to both halves."<sup>69</sup> Tanner goes on to cite several convincing evidences that prove his assertions. Additionally, Steinmann has helped as he has taken the works of Tanner and Lenglet and refined them into what is the best understanding of the structure of the book and the one this study will use. Steinmann proposes not just an overlapping chiasmic structure but also one that is interlocked<sup>70</sup> (see the next page). The reason for the literary structure of Daniel is so that chapter 7 will rise to the surface as the most important. Chapter 7 is the hinge that connects the two parts of the book. Patterson writes, "Not only is it the key to the structure of the book, but it provides the framework by which the prophecies of Daniel may be understood."<sup>71</sup> Steinmann writes:

It is this chapter that introduces the Son of Man (7:13-14), an important messianic concept that is taken up by Jesus himself in the Gospels. It is this chapter that first discusses the role of the saints in God's eternal kingdom. Therefore, Daniel 7 is the key to understanding the major themes that run throughout the book: God's control over human history, the eschatological kingdom of God, the messianic promise, and the protection God affords his people even during the darkest hours of persecution. Thus Daniel, like Scripture as a whole, revolves around Christ, his kingdom, and his work for the benefit of his people.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Tanner, 278.

<sup>70</sup> Steinmann, 22.

<sup>71</sup> Richard D. Patterson, "The Key Role of Daniel 7," *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1991): 261.

<sup>72</sup> Steinmann, 24.

	Introduction 1: Prologue (1:1-21)	NARRATIVE	Hebrew
A	Nebuchadnezzar dreams of four kingdoms and the kingdom of God (2:1-49)	NARRATIVE	Aramaic
B	Nebuchadnezzar sees God's servants rescued (3:1-30)	NARRATIVE	Aramaic
C	Nebuchadnezzar is judged (4:1-36)	NARRATIVE	Aramaic
C'	Belshazzar is judged (5:1-6:1)	NARRATIVE	Aramaic
B'	Darius sees Daniel rescued (6:2-29)	NARRATIVE	Aramaic
A'	Introduction 2: Daniel has a vision of four kingdoms and the kingdom of God (7:1-28)	VISION	Aramaic
D	Details on the post-Babylonian kingdoms (8:1-27)	VISION	Hebrew
E	Jerusalem restored (9:1-27)	VISION	Hebrew
D'	More details on the post-Babylonian kingdoms (10:1-12:13)	VISION	Hebrew

FIGURE 1. INTERLOCKED CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF DANIEL<sup>73</sup>

### Canonicity

Normally, the issue of canonization is not a debated issue for many Bible books. However, it seems that when "something" is being compared to the book of Daniel, that "something" always seems more plausible and realistic. Why does the book of Daniel seem to always receive the short straw? Why can't the book at least get the benefit of the doubt? The reason why much has been written and debated on the canonization of

<sup>73</sup> Chart adapted from Steinmann, 22.

Daniel is because it effects the date of writing. According to the English Bible, Daniel is the last of the major prophets coming right before the twelve minor prophets. Thus it has been termed and classified as part of the prophetic sections of the Bible. The Hebrew Bible is different – Daniel is placed into the section called, "the Writings." Furthermore, Protestant Bibles are based on the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic versions of Daniel which come from the traditional Masoretic text, whereas the Catholic Church bases its Scriptures on the Greek version of Daniel that is a product of the Septuagint (LXX). The issue here is that the Greek version of Daniel, which the Catholic Church upholds, includes some "additions" found only in the Greek.<sup>74</sup>

<b>Law</b>	<b>Prophets</b>	<b>Writings</b>
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms
Exodus	Judges	Job
Leviticus	1 and 2 Samuel	Proverbs
Numbers	1 and 2 Kings	Ruth
Deuteronomy	Isaiah	Song of Songs
	Jeremiah	Ecclesiastes
	Ezekiel	Lamentations
	The Twelve	Esther
		Daniel
		Ezra
		Nehemiah
		1 and 2 Chronicles

FIGURE 2. HEBREW BIBLE BOOK ARRANGEMENT

<sup>74</sup> The Greek version of Daniel includes "The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Holy Children," inserted between Daniel 3:23-24; "Susanna," before chapter 1 or after chapter 12; "Bel and the Dragon," is placed at the end of the book.

Where should the book of Daniel be placed? Should it be included in the Writings portion as the Hebrew Bible classifies it, or should it be included in the prophetic section where English Bibles place it? Critics of Daniel make this a big issue because if they can classify Daniel in the Writings of the Hebrew Bible, then they can add another evidence for a second century date of the book of Daniel. The critics also cite that the Writings were some of the last books to be canonized.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, Finley has traced the history of the issue. He concludes, "Evidence from the first century and earlier favors the view that the Book of Daniel was originally a part of the Prophets, and only later was moved to the Writings. Therefore any arguments for the lateness of the book based on its placement in the Writings is not valid."<sup>76</sup>

One need look no further than the contents of the book itself to realize why the early believing community and religious leaders had trouble deciding where to place the book. The book of Daniel contains material that could be suited for placement in the Prophets or the Writings. However, a careful analysis of the subject matter proves that the book of Daniel should be classified as part of the Writings, which is why it was moved from its original designation in the Prophets section to the Writings section. Two basic evidences have been given to credit this assumption. First, as Robert Dick Wilson points out, "It is more probable that the book was placed in this part of the Heb. Canon because Daniel is not called a prophet, but was rather a seer and a wise man."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church: And Its Background in Early Judaism* (1986; repr., Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 138-53. Beckwith says that completion of the Old Testament canon took place between the second century BC and AD 90.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas J. Finley, "The Book of Daniel in the Canon of Scripture," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165, no. 658 (April-June 2008): 208.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Dick Wilson, "Book of Daniel," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, ed. James Orr (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1930), 783.

Walvoord agrees with Wilson saying, "Daniel was primarily a government official, and he was not commissioned to preach to the people and deliver an oral message from God as was, for instance, Isaiah or Jeremiah."<sup>78</sup> A second line of evidence is advanced by Beckwith who comes to the conclusion that the rationale for the arrangement of the four historical books in the Writings section of the Hebrew Bible is chronological;<sup>79</sup> therefore, Daniel's placement is logical.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and documents from the Qumran community attest to the canonicity of Daniel, and some scholars say argue for a early date. It is astounding that such a disputed book has such a large witness of its authenticity, as well as accuracy. Flint makes two keen observations. He writes, "Works represented by a large number of manuscripts were extensively used at Qumran, which may be indicative of their scriptural status...the relatively large number of copies (eight) of Daniel at Qumran is surprising in view of the small size of the book."<sup>80</sup> The evidence of Daniel's complete witness can suggest that Daniel was already canonized centuries early. Regardless of the helpful evidence from these sources, the book of Daniel was accepted into the canon of Scripture soon after it was written. Whitcomb makes a great closing statement: "Daniel was a canonical book of the Old Testament Scriptures as soon as it was written in the sixth century B.C., because divine inspiration guaranteed canonicity, and that is why our Lord quoted from it."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Walvoord, 19.

<sup>79</sup> Beckwith, 157, 160

<sup>80</sup> Peter W. Flint, "The Daniel Tradition at Qumran," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 2, eds. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 365.

<sup>81</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 16.



### Daniel and the New Testament

The New Testament does not include many direct appeals or quotations to the book of Daniel; chapter seven's reference to the "son of man" is most significant. The book of Daniel also includes hundreds of allusions to the New Testament text. However, identification of such an allusion is dependent upon one's definition of what constitutes an allusion, which will not be taken up in this study. By far, the book of Revelation has provided the majority of references and allusions to the book of Daniel. Hill states that "...more than fifty-five percent of the 'Index of Quotations' citations in the UBS Greek NT are to the book of Revelation, while forty-two percent of the citations in the Nestle-Aland Index are to the book of Revelation."<sup>82</sup> Craig Evans states that the book of Daniel is vitally important for understanding the New Testament and "has made significant contribution to Jesus' understanding of the kingdom of God, his suffering and rule as son of man, the co-regency of his disciples, and the day of judgment."<sup>83</sup>

<b>Book of Daniel</b>	<b>New Testament</b>
3:6	Mat. 13:42, 50
7:13	Mt. 24:30; 26:64; Mk. 13:26; 14:62; Lk.21:27
9:27	Mt. 4:5; 24:15; Mk. 13:14
11:31	Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14
12:11	Mk. 13:14

FIGURE 3. NEW TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS AND APPEALS TO DANIEL

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<sup>82</sup> Hill, 41.

<sup>83</sup> Craig E. Evans, "Daniel in the New Testament: Visions of God's Kingdom," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 2, eds. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 526

### **Theology and Purpose of Daniel**

Daniel's theology and purpose for writing are intertwined, and this is not coincidence, for they must be connected. The way a believer conducts himself is based upon his understanding (theology) of the Word of God. The way that Daniel and his three friends conducted themselves in the exile was based upon their theology. Theology ought always to lead to application. If there is no application with theological truths, then a missing link causes the Word of God to become ancient, removed, and irrelevant. Therefore, Daniel's theology, that is, his understanding of how to live righteously based on the Word of God, is directly joined to his purpose for writing. All biblical authors have a purpose for why they wrote what they wrote, and Daniel is no different. The very essence of his study is to show that proper understanding of a text (i.e., its theology) leads to proper application in one's life. For these reasons, Daniel's purpose for writing will unveil his theology, and Daniel's theology will unveil his purpose for writing.

Throughout the text of Daniel, several theological truths rise to the surface. Three in particular will highlight Daniel's purpose in writing. First, and foremost, is the theme of God's sovereignty over all the kingdoms of man. Daniel 5:21 says "...the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses." However, according to this verse and many others in Daniel, one's perspective of Daniel is often wrapped up in the prophetic elements of his work. This is logical; after all, chapters 2 and 7-12 deal with prophetic dreams and vision. The sovereignty of God has a practical aspect to it, and in fact, it should be the most comforting truth for believers in all generations. Barrett sums up the practicality in this way:

Undeniably, Daniel predicts the end times in certain terms, and all of us naturally entertain some interest in the last days. But Daniel's purpose in his detailed

eschatology was not to satisfy curiosity about the future but to engender peace of mind for the present. Knowing that God controls the future irrefutably proves that God controls the present. It was proof for those living in Daniel's day as well as for all those who would live from Daniel's day until the future itself becomes the present. It functions, therefore, as proof for us who live in one of the "in-between" periods on Daniel's chart of history. God expects us to think and to make the necessary deductions from His Word. Since God has controlled the past and determines the future, He manages all the in-betweens as well.<sup>84</sup>

For the Jews in Daniel's day, the prophecies of God's kingdom ruling over all the earth in the future gave them hope and encouragement. Coming back from the exile and beginning the rebuilding phase was not going to be an easy task. Walvoord notes that "The book of Daniel undoubtedly gave hope to the Jews who returned to restore the temple and the city, and it was particularly helpful during the Maccabean persecutions."<sup>85</sup>

It is interesting that the New Testament counterpart to Daniel, the book of Revelation, was written under much of the same circumstances. When John wrote the book of Revelation, he had been exiled to the isle of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian. Barrett comments saying that "If God was going to manipulate and frustrate the coming Anti-Christ, then believers had no cause to worry about Domitian. The unchanging fact of God's sovereignty was the truth of comfort. It put their times in the proper perspective."<sup>86</sup> God's sovereignty transcends time, and therefore, it should be a truth of encouragement and hope for the present generation.

A second thematic element that relates to Daniel's purpose for writing is the example of his integrity. Throughout the book, and even in comparison to the rest of the

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<sup>84</sup> Michael P.V. Barrett, *God's Unfailing Purpose: The Message of Daniel* (Greenville: Ambassador Publications Ltd., 2003), 158.

<sup>85</sup> Walvoord, 13.

<sup>86</sup> Barrett, 25.

Old Testament's exemplary characters, Daniel and his three friends model a lifestyle that maintains purity in a culture where idolatry is commonplace. The very first chapter of the book shows us that Daniel and his three friends had to make a decision. Did they want to fit in and be like the Babylonians? Or were they to follow God's law and be a light to the Babylonians? (cf. Isa. 49:6). Daniel's visions and prophetic dreams did more than just give him an inside track on end-time events; they motivated him to live a holy life. Beware comments on the vital connection between prophecy and piety:

"Without the perspective of prophetic truth, living holy lives is far more difficult... A believer who gets out of bed in the morning thinking *My Lord Jesus could return today* will probably not let sin take root in his life. But Christians who rarely, if ever, reflect on the realities of the future life, the Lord's coming, and the judgment seat of Christ are far more vulnerable to temptation and sin. And perhaps that explains something of the sin and apathy seen in the church today. Could it be that many are saying, "My Lord delays His coming?"<sup>87</sup>

Christ teaches in Matthew 24:48-51 that an attitude that denies the Lord's soon return is an attitude that causes sinful behavior and activities.

The final thematic element that relates to Daniel's purpose for writing is the uselessness and utter vanity of trusting in false gods. Daniel 1-6, each chapter, has a thrust of competition or contest between the one true God and the false gods of Babylon. Daniel and his three friends are forced to commit some act of idolatry, but as they rebel, God vindicates them and even rewards them for their faithfulness to him. Archer says, "the whole narrative in Daniel relates a series of contests between false gods of human invention and the one true sovereign Lord and Creator of heaven and earth."<sup>88</sup> The court

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<sup>87</sup> Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006), 15.

<sup>88</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 4.

contests in Daniel are similar to the court contest that Moses and Pharaoh had in Egypt.<sup>89</sup> Like Moses, Daniel shows the utter vanity of trusting in false gods and that compromising their religious beliefs so that they will fit in is not what God wants. God wants his people to serve Him and Him alone; therefore He demonstrates that the Babylonian gods are false, useless, and powerless – He desires Israel to turn away from these false gods and return to Him.

Knowing that God holds the future, past, and present in His hands provides comfort for those living in Daniel's time, but it also provides immense comfort for those living today. Sovereignty, the key theme of the book of Daniel, is not far removed from practical Christian living. If God had placed theology and doctrines on the top shelf, what good would they be? And how would we ever understand them, let alone reach them? Theology is meant to be relevant, and Daniel makes it extremely relevant for all generations. The theology and purpose that Daniel gives is this: rest in God's sovereignty, but remember He is coming again – live like there will be no tomorrow!

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<sup>89</sup> Thomas Constable, "Daniel," in *Expository Notes on the Bible* (Garland: Galaxie Software, 2003).

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE NARRATIVE IN DANIEL CHAPTER 1

#### Interpretive Outline: The Exile and Early Days in Babylon

##### The Exile of Judah Begins (Daniel 1:1-2)

Egypt and Babylon were destined to go to war in the late seventh century BC. In the early summer of 605 BC, these superpowers would clash in one decisive battle. Under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians attacked the Egyptian army at Carchemish on the upper Euphrates River. Jeremiah 46:1-12 bears the record of Babylon's victory forcing the Egyptians back to their homeland. As a result, Palestine became vulnerable to Babylonian attack and by August of 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar took control of the city of Jerusalem.<sup>92</sup> Nebuchadnezzar thought he was in control, but Jehovah allowed him the victory; this was part of His sovereign plan. Notice that Daniel includes a small phrase that allows the reader of the book to see the real purpose behind this event: "and the Lord gave." Look closer at the phrase and note the special use of the term *Lord*:

This is the Hebrew name Adonai; not Yahweh (Jehovah), which occurs only in chapter nine. Adonai speaks of God as supreme master. The significance of using His name here is to say that, though outward signs did not seem to show it, God was the master of the situation, as Jehoiakim was given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. It was not Nebuchadnezzar's strength nor Jehoiakim's weakness that really decided the matter, but God's good pleasure. Kings like to think of themselves sufficient as rulers, but they are as much under the supreme

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<sup>92</sup> Samuel J. Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1960), 233-234.

control of God as any person. There is comfort in knowing that no governmental authority can go beyond the bounds permitted by God.<sup>93</sup>

This is the first instance in which the theme of the book is mentioned. The theme of Daniel is the sovereignty of God; specifically, the sovereignty of God in the kingdom of men.

On August 15/16 Nabopolasar, Nebuchadnezzar's father, died in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar rushed home to claim the throne and was crowned on the day of his arrival, September 6/7, 605 BC.<sup>94</sup> Not far behind were the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem along with some select Jewish young men. Among these men were Daniel and his three friends. Shea notes this common practice: "Taking hostages from captive countries was standard policy exercised by both the Babylonians and the Egyptians."<sup>95</sup> The purpose of taking young men was to train them for future service in the empire. These trained nationals were ready to be placed into positions of leadership; they understood the customs and practices of their homeland, but they were also loyal to the empire through education and training.

Nebuchadnezzar placed the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem into the temple of Marduk, who was the chief Babylonian god.<sup>96</sup> This was a common practice among rulers in order to show gratitude to their god for the victories that he had granted

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<sup>93</sup> Wood, 30.

<sup>94</sup> Schultz, 233-234.

<sup>95</sup> William H. Shea, *Daniel 1-7: Prophecy as History*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), 57.

<sup>96</sup> Shultz, 233-234.

and to exalt his god and humiliate the other gods by asserting superiority.<sup>97</sup> No nation could conquer another unless its gods were more powerful than that of the other nation; this was the pagan mindset.

### **Jewish Captives Enrolled in the University of Babylon (Daniel 1:3-7)**

After Nebuchadnezzar became king, he commanded the chief eunuch of his court, Ashpenaz, to enroll the best of the Judean captivities into the royal training school. There were specific physical and mental requirements for those who were chosen to attend this royal school. They had to be physically healthy with no handicaps.<sup>98</sup> Mental abilities, social skills, and competence were also required of these men. Proper manners, poise, confidence, and knowledge of social proprieties were also needed.<sup>99</sup> It was the hope of the king that the above skills could be fine-tuned along with the addition of a new literature and language. This specific language is called *Chaldean*.<sup>100</sup> Scholars say this language is called the Akkadian language, a very difficult one that would have taken several years to master. Baldwin notes that “these young men from Jerusalem’s court needed to be secure in their knowledge of Yahweh to be able to study this literature objectively without allowing it to undermine their faith.”<sup>101</sup> The pre-exilic prophetic and preaching work of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk was certainly beneficial.

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<sup>97</sup> Renald E. Showers, *The Most High God* (Bellmawr: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1982), 2.

<sup>98</sup> Wood, 33.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> This term is hard to define precisely. Chaldeans were a specific class of wise men; the kings of Babylon belonged to this class. However, the term seems to speak more of Babylon’s origin, much like an Israelite would say that they were Hebrew/Jewish.

<sup>101</sup> Joyce Baldwin, *Daniel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 23 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 80.



Part of the dietary requirements for these young captives was an apportioned meal that the king himself chose. These dietary requirements were, in fact, designed to keep these men in top notch condition for the rigorous physical and mental training that was ahead of them. Young notes that “It was an oriental custom to feed officers of the royal court the choice food and wine from the King’s table.”<sup>102</sup> The qualities necessary to be enrolled in the royal school show the reader that Nebuchadnezzar wanted first class servants that would be loyal to him. These young captives were the cream of the crop and in Nebuchadnezzar’s eyes fit to be molded into great leaders. However, Nebuchadnezzar could not fathom the impact and influence that four particular captives would have within his own kingdom. Ironically, this was prophesied about in Isaiah 39:7, where Isaiah said that the offspring of the royal family of Judah would be taken captive to Babylon where they would become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.

The age of Daniel and his three friends is not mentioned in Scripture;<sup>103</sup> however, it is mentioned that the royal school in which they attended was a three-year course of study. Later Persian history reveals the same method of educating young men. In fact Plato says that the educating of young men began at the age of fourteen; Xenophon speaks of age seventeen as the year of completion. Babylonian customs may not have been the same as later Persian, but an approximate parallel seems plausible.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Edward J Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (1949; repr., Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 42.

<sup>103</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Ezekiel and Daniel*, vol. 9 (1866-91; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 539. Keil observes that the 4 young men were probably between 15 and 20 years old.

<sup>104</sup> Wood, 33.

Verses 6 and 7 give names to four specific captives that were part of the training mentioned earlier; these four become the main characters in the first six chapters of Daniel. Their names were of particular interest because they were names that honored Jehovah, the God of Israel. *Daniel* means “God is my judge,” *Hananiah* means “Jehovah is gracious,” *Azariah* conveyed the meaning, “Jehovah has helped,” and *Mishael* expresses the question, “Who is what God is?”<sup>105</sup> These four captives were all from the royal tribe of Judah; however, their heritage would soon be brushed aside as Ashpenaz gave them new names which honored the Babylonian gods. The exact meaning of their names is debatable, but many agree that the new names given to them contained some reference to Bel, Aku, and Nego (Nebo), three different Babylonian gods.<sup>106</sup> Daniel’s name was changed to *Beltshazzar*, Hananiah to *Shadrach*, Mishael to *Meshach*, and Azariah to *Abednego*.

Eradicating an exile of their heritage was paramount if that exile was to serve a new master. Logically, Nebuchadnezzar tries to accomplish this with those who were educated at his royal school. Ironically though, the four young captives needed this kind of training in the Babylonian culture – it would become very helpful to them in the future as they rose to positions of authority and influence within Nebuchadnezzar’s realm.

### **Daniel and His Three Friends Avoid Defilement (Daniel 1:8-16)**

The four Jewish youths were in a dilemma. If they ate the food and drank the drink they would kindle the wrath of Jehovah, the God of Israel; if they did not eat the food and drink the drink, then they would kindle the wrath of their captors. The point of

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<sup>105</sup> Walvoord, 36.

<sup>106</sup> Constable, “Daniel.”

abstaining from the meat is not that Daniel was afraid of the physical effect of indulging (getting overweight), for he was a self-disciplined man; neither was his refusal to be based on Levitical food laws, for there was no restriction against wine. Baldwin asserts that:

By eastern standards to share a meal was to commit oneself to friendship; it was of covenant significance...the defilement he feared was not so much a ritual as a moral defilement, arising from the subtle flattery of gifts and favors which entailed hidden implications of loyal support, however dubious the king's future policies might prove to be.<sup>107</sup>

The text does not explicitly say that the meat from the king's diet was offered to idols, but the text does say that Daniel did not want to defile himself. This implies that Daniel knew that the meat had been offered to idols. A common practice in many of the pagan cultures in the ancient near east was the offering of meat to their gods. If Daniel did eat the meat that was offered to a god then he would be showing his approval of that particular god, thus transgressing the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Furthermore, committing idolatry was the one sin that initially caused Israel to be sent into exile; it was the habitual sin that Israel had long battled with since it's very beginning. Daniel knew that Israel's past was saturated with the sin of idolatry and Daniel also knew that the reason Israel was brought into exile was because of their failure to observe the law.

In order to avoid defilement, Daniel asks the chief supervisor in charge that he and his three friends be exempted from the command. The supervisor is unable to grant his request for fear of his life. Daniel then approached his immediate supervisor and requested exemption by means of a test. Instead of being placed on the king's diet,

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<sup>107</sup> Baldwin, 83.

Daniel suggested a diet of vegetables and water. The Hebrew word translated as *vegetables* in the text means “food that comes from seeds.”<sup>108</sup> This would have included fruits, vegetables, and grain products such as bread; ultimately, this was the diet of a vegetarian. The ten-day test was granted and the results showed that Daniel and his three friends were in better condition than the others who ate the king’s meat. Daniel and his three friends were allowed the privilege to continue with their new diet.

### **God Blesses Daniel and His Three Friends (Daniel 1:17-21)**

These four young men were rewarded by God for their faith and obedience. Looking ahead, it seems obvious that these special abilities were needed for the tasks that were ahead of them. Keil notes, “Daniel needed to be deeply versed in the Chaldean wisdom, as formerly Moses was in the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:22), so as to be able to put to shame the wisdom of this world by the hidden wisdom of God.”<sup>109</sup> Baldwin agrees with Keil who makes the concept applicable for daily life: “The Christian today must work hard at the religions and cultures amongst which he lives, if different thought worlds are ever to meet.”<sup>110</sup> However, Whitcomb counters the idea with a warning: “Although that may be appropriate in certain specialized situations, the danger of immersing one’s mind in current expressions of Satan’s religious perversions is enormous.”<sup>111</sup> While there are many opinions, listening to the text is paramount - “God gave them.” The reason or intent for God giving them these abilities is not directly

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<sup>108</sup> David O. Dykes, *Character Out of Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004) 15.

<sup>109</sup> Keil, 541.

<sup>110</sup> Baldwin, 80-81.

<sup>111</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 32.

stated. All four were blessed by God with knowledge and wisdom; however, Daniel was privileged to receive the ability to understand dreams and visions.

At the end of the three years of training, Nebuchadnezzar requested of Ashpenaz that he bring the Jewish trainees before him. After examining the entire group, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, stood out as more excellent than the rest. The king commanded that they be placed in his court as counselors in all matters. Time and time again when the king needed some guidance from his wise men and counselors, he found that the wisdom and counsel of these four youths far excelled<sup>112</sup> his most seasoned and expert advisors.

The last verse of chapter 1 becomes a summary statement of Daniel's life. Daniel lives until the first year of the reign of Cyrus. From the time of the captivity until the first year of Cyrus was 66 years.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, Daniel could have been around 80 when he died. Later in 10:1, Daniel at least lived until the third year of Cyrus, making his death at the age of about 82.<sup>114</sup> Daniel gave more than 60 years of service to the Jehovah God of Israel in the midst of one of Israel's most terrible and difficult times. Daniel stands beside Moses and Joseph as Old Testament saints who displayed character, integrity, and unwavering trust in a sovereign God.

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<sup>112</sup> The phrase in the text, "ten times better" is taken to be more expressive rather than a literal.

<sup>113</sup> Wood, 47.

<sup>114</sup> This is contingent upon relating his age during his three years of training to be 14-17 years old.

## **Preaching Outline: Responding with Poise in a Compromising Culture**

### **Introduction**

The first chapter of Daniel serves as an introduction to the book. Basically, it attempts to furnish the reader with a compacted version of the book, highlighting the big picture. The big picture that is replete throughout the book is that God is in control of all things at all times. This major theme is woven through the narratives, pointing the reader towards the truth that God's kingdom is sovereign over all the kingdoms of men.

Daniel's ministry in Babylon began in 605 BC with the coronation of king Nebuchadnezzar and ended in 539 BC when great Babylon fell to the Persians. Daniel's ministry spanned all seventy years of the Babylonian captivity. Daniel was truly faithful to God throughout his entire ministry in Babylon, but for Daniel the end was sweeter than the beginning. During the last years of his life, he witnessed his fellow Jews return to their homeland. God keeps his promises.

These four youths lived most of their lives in Babylon, with Daniel himself serving three different monarchs. Yet in all the confusion, temptations, and difficulties that they found in a strange land, these four youths chose to remain faithful to the God of heaven, Jehovah. Therefore, it is of no coincidence that the reader finds a test of compromise in the very first chapter of the book. The literary nature of this first chapter leads the reader to assume that this test (eating the king's meat) is an essential one. It not only will set the standard for the other narratives, but it will also serve as a spiritual foundation in the lives of these teenagers.

## **Proposition**

Knowing that God is in control at all times should cause us to respond to life's circumstances with poise and conviction.

## **Preaching Manuscript**

### Circumstances that can derail our faith (1:1-7)

Growing in the faith has often become a daunting task for many believers. Life is filled with every sort of interruption or circumstance that often comes at the most inopportune time. We know that the trials that come our way are meant to grow us and not discourage us; however, it is one thing to believe such a truth, but it is quite another thing to put it into practice. In this first section of Daniel chapter one, we find several circumstances that had potential to derail the faith of Daniel and his three friends.

**A new home** (1:1-2) was the first circumstance that these four Jewish captives had to face. They were uprooted from their homes, town, and life altogether and were transplanted into a culture and land that was unfamiliar to them. Fear and uncertainty of what the future held for them was surely at the forefront of their minds. As the Babylonian army swept in and took thousands of captives, God was still in control and he was still on the throne. The greater truth that each believer needs to remember is that when God uproots us, He always has a plan. Even though we might not see it with our eyes, we must believe it with our faith.

**A new culture** (1:3-4) was the second circumstance that these four Jewish captives had to face. Not only were they uprooted and transplanted in a physical sense, they were also uprooted and transplanted in a cultural sense. Even though there may have been some likeness, the culture of Babylon and the culture of Jerusalem were very

much opposites. Within three years, these royal captives were to look Babylonian, think Babylonian, and act Babylonian. Campbell succinctly writes, “Daniel and his friends had to be reeducated if they were to be of any value to Nebuchadnezzar. They were to be indoctrinated or brainwashed so that they would no longer think or act like Judeans, but like Babylonians.”<sup>115</sup> Even though we are removed some 2,600 years from ancient Babylon, the believer is still being tempted to conform to the world’s culture instead of conforming to the Word of God. Paul reminds us in Romans 12:2 that we are not to be conformed to this present world, but we are to live transformed by renewing of our minds each day. Nebuchadnezzar was certainly not an incompetent king because he knew if he were to change the Jewish ways, he needed to change their thinking – and that is precisely what he attempted to do with these captives. The Babylonian education that they received probably included “a study of agriculture, architecture, astrology, astronomy, law, mathematics, and the difficult Akkadian language.”<sup>116</sup>

**A new diet** (1:5) was the third circumstance that these four Jewish captives had to face. As if changing their culture and location was not enough, the king also desired to subtly change their allegiance to Jehovah. It was a special honor, no doubt a royal privilege, to be served the food and wine from the king’s table. If the captives ate the food, they would be eating what was unclean and thereby defile themselves. However, more importantly than defiling themselves, the captives knew that eating from the king’s table was a principle of association. Baldwin comments on the matter saying, “By

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<sup>115</sup> Donald K. Campbell, *Daniel: Decoder of Dreams* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977), 9.

<sup>116</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, “Daniel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1985), 1330.



eastern standards to share a meal was to commit oneself to friendship; it was of covenant significance.”<sup>117</sup> These four captives were tempted much in the same way that we are tempted today. They could be a part of the crowd and submit to peer pressure in order to climb the ladder of success. Alternatively, they could choose to do what was right and pleasing to God even though it could mean persecution and other losses.

**A new name** (1:6-7) was the last circumstance that these four Jewish captives had to face. These four Jews carried names that honored Jehovah, the God of Israel; perhaps this might indicate that they had godly parents. The practice of changing names was commonplace, especially for captives who had been exiled. It was a way to express complete and sovereign control over these four Jews, and it would have encouraged them to think of themselves as part of the new culture in which they were living rather than the one they came from.<sup>118</sup> Through these four circumstances, King Nebuchadnezzar tried to derail the faith of the captives of Israel so that they would forsake Jehovah and begin to follow the gods of the Babylonians. Every day we are faced with circumstances that can derail our faith ultimately trying to change our allegiance. By changing their way of thinking, eating, and worshipping, Nebuchadnezzar had hopes in changing their way of living.

#### Convictions that can demonstrate our faith (1:8-16)

Following our convictions is vital for the health and livelihood of our faith. They are deliberate, and they involved both a head knowledge as well as a heart knowledge. It is one thing to be convicted about a truth, it is quite another concept altogether to allow

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<sup>117</sup> Baldwin, 92.

<sup>118</sup> Constable, “Daniel.”

that truth to move you. Daniel knew what was right, and he knew what was wrong.

Wiersbe says, “It has well been said that faith is not believing in spite of evidence – that’s superstition – but obeying in spite of consequences”<sup>119</sup> There are two key concepts about convictions that are evident in the text.

**First, convictions are settled beforehand.** Daniel made a commitment in his heart that he would not defile himself, and this kind of conviction does not happen overnight or in the midst of difficult circumstances. Barrett makes an astute observation, “Purity is a matter of the heart, not the environment.”<sup>120</sup> No matter how the culture on the outside tried to change Daniel, his inner convictions would remain unaltered. Dykes rightly comments that of all the possessions that Daniel had to leave behind, “this was the one possession he took with him to this new world.”<sup>121</sup>

The stakes were high for Daniel and his three friends, but they trusted in God to vindicate their religious convictions in abstaining from other foods. These four young men knew that the idols to which the meat was offered were fashioned out of nothing more than wood or metal. However, they realized there was more at stake. The Corinthian Christians faced a similar dilemma. It was more difficult for them because some of their former lifestyles involved eating the meat offered to idols. Whether it was part of the religious rites they practiced or because the meat was offered in the marketplace at a discounted price is uncertain. Paul told these Christians that the only way to be absolutely sure was not to eat the meat at all. In a similar situation, Daniel and

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<sup>119</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: Determining to Go God’s Direction* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2000), 16.

<sup>120</sup> Barrett, 32.

<sup>121</sup> Dykes, 17.

his three friends decided to abstain from eating the meat in order to avoid defilement. In a practical way, Showers lists some reasons that these four young men could have used to rationalize their way around obedience to Jehovah and use situational ethics:

- Under normal circumstances God’s law is to be obeyed, but we are in abnormal circumstances. Surely God does not expect total obedience to every precept of His Law in such a unique situation as ours.
- God is to blame for this. If He had not put us in this awful predicament, it would not have been necessary for us to break His Law.
- If we eat the king’s food, we shall be placed in government posts. Think of the great impact we can have for Jehovah by being in such influential positions. Certainly God must regard this opportunity to serve Him in such a big way as being more important than obedience to His Law.
- If we disobey the king, it could cost us our lives. Surely in God’s value system the preservation of human life is of greater consequence than obedience to Him.
- If we refuse to eat the king’s food, it may cost the life of the official who is responsible to see that we eat. Would not love dictate that we eat the food in order to preserve the official’s life? Does not love overrule obedience to a divine command?<sup>122</sup>

It is also interesting to note that these four boys were not forced into changing. In fact, the exact opposite happened, “Nebuchadnezzar used pampering not persecution.”<sup>123</sup>

This still seems to be the most successful technique in conforming people to worldly standards.

Thankfully, these four young men did not rationalize ways around obedience to Jehovah. What is even more important is the application of this question into present day culture and life. How many Christians have been guilty of rationalizing away

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<sup>122</sup> Showers, 6.

<sup>123</sup> Dykes, 19.

obedience to God in light of what they assume is something better? The problem with that kind of rationalization is that it leaves out the supernatural, the one place that God loves to work. People rationalize away obedience to God because they are not willing to step out in faith believing that God will deal with an endless ultimatum in a supernatural way.

**Second, convictions seek a wise approach.** The obedience that Daniel and his three friends portrayed was not distorted. They did not go to the king and complain about the situation; rather, they went through the proper chain of command. Showers makes note of Daniel's attitude with these words: "When Daniel decided to obey God, he did not go on a fanatical rampage that would have reflected negatively on Jehovah."<sup>124</sup>

Daniel understood the concern of Ashpenaz, and furthermore respected it, and did not get mad or upset or throw a fit. He calmly went to his immediate supervisor and requested to abstain from the king's meat and drink for a testing period of ten days. Daniel's actions were governed by the principle of submission. He set out to abstain himself from defilement but in a submissive way that respected the authority of those placed over him.

#### Commitment that can decorate our faith (1:17-21)

Through obedience and faith, Daniel and his friends trusted in God's sovereign power to deliver them. God honored their commitment to Him, and as a result, they were excused from ever eating the king's meat again. Daniel and his friends were rewarded by God with great wisdom and understanding. However, only Daniel was given the privilege of understanding dreams and visions (something needed later). Daniel and his friends were blessed physically, intellectually, and spiritually.

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<sup>124</sup> Showers, 6.

## Conclusion

Daniel and his three friends knew that God was in control of their circumstances and responded to them with poise and conviction. Standing up for what a person believes to be right and godly is clearly seen in this narrative; but a more valuable truth for the reader is exposed. That truth is what many have termed as preparation. If these young men had not prepared themselves and grounded themselves in God's Word then their choice may not have been as crystal clear. One of the problems that believers face when confronted with an important decision is that they are often unprepared. They cannot make the right decision because they do not know what they believe. Normally, a believer's theology about God and His Word determines their practice, but when a believer does not know his theology (i.e. what he believes), then his practice is left up to whatever he thinks is best. A great example of this is found in the books of Joshua and Judges. In the first chapter of Joshua, the Israelites are instructed to build their lives (spiritually) on God's Word. The Israelites did well for a while but began to slowly forget about God's Word and the laws that He set for them. Soon after the leadership of Joshua and elders passed off the scene, a more rapid decline takes place. By the time the book of Judges begins, the reoccurring phrase, "everyone did that which was right in his own eyes," permeates the book. The problem during the Judges period was that the people did not follow God's standard and instead chose to follow their own.

Back in Babylon, Daniel and his three friends were well prepared on the inside for any battles they would have to face on the outside. If a person is contaminated on the inside, then it destroys their ability to stand up on the outside. When the Israelites during the days of the Judges had become contaminated on the inside, they were unable to stand

up against their enemies on the outside. Thus the lesson from this chapter that is most crucial is preparation. If a person is not grounded in God's Word ahead of time, then how is he to make crucial and difficult decisions when confronted with them? Daniel and his three friends made the decision to not eat the king's meat look rather easy. How? Their convictions about what they believed were settled beforehand, and because of that, God rewarded them.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE NARRATIVE IN DANIEL CHAPTER 2

#### **Interpretive Outline: Nebuchadnezzar's First Dream<sup>125</sup>**

The first phrase in verse one, “in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar,” brings out an interesting chronological question. Did Daniel interpret this dream for Nebuchadnezzar during his three-year training period or after its completion? Many are divided on the issue; however, most of the evidence leads one to interpret the conclusion that Daniel interpreted this dream during his three-year training period. Wood summarizes some of the key points regarding this matter:

(1) Certain situations presented in the Bible do permit a three-year designation to mean something less than three full years, this one regarding the education of young men does not seem to do so. A period of education would have called for a definite length of time. (2) Applying this full three-year period to the case of Daniel and his friends, who likely arrived in Babylon in the spring of Nebuchadnezzar's accession year, the completion of the third year would have been in the spring of the king's third year, not the second. (3) The statement that none of the other youths compared to Daniel and his three friends would still be appropriate whether or not Daniel received his exaltation to a high office before or after the three years of training. (4) The command from the king for all wise men to be killed would have included those in training, and has no bearing on whether at that time Daniel and his three friends received their positions. (5) Furthermore, Daniel was not summoned by Nebuchadnezzar when the regular wise men were and Daniel even disassociated himself from the wise men, as indicated in 2:27.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> As noted in, “Chapter 1” only Daniel 2:1-30 will be interpreted in this chapter. The remainder of Daniel chapter 2 is prophetic and excluded from the goal of this project.

<sup>126</sup> Wood, 49-50.

Keil further notes that the copulative<sup>127</sup> standing at the beginning of chapter 2 denotes a connection between the last verse in chapter one.<sup>128</sup> The last verse in chapter one gives a summary statement of Daniel's life in Babylon. Therefore, the two verses, being linked together, seem to indicate that the reader will now see what Daniel did while he was exiled in Babylon. This gives yet another proof that Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two may have been interpreted by Daniel while he was in training. The time frame that the text is dealing with is from Daniel's arrival in Babylon, pre-training days, to the return of the Jews back to Jerusalem. Since this time frame does not exclude the three years of training, it is possible that Daniel could have interpreted the king's dream while in training. With this conclusion, it seems best to place the events of chapter two between 1:17 and 1:18, before Daniel and his three friends were brought before the king and given a final exam.

### **Nebuchadnezzar's Troubling Dream (Daniel 2:1-4)**

The king calls his counselors, astrologers, magicians, sorcerers, and Chaldeans, to deal with the situation. The men that served in the king's court were not ignorant slouches; they were very intelligent and most likely had political ties making them a good choice for counselors:

Babylonian astronomers kept the records of the movement of planets, comets, and the phases of the moon. The records were mainly for the purpose of determining the influence these "gods" might exert upon men and nations. Beginning about 747 B.C., very accurate records were handed down so that the Babylonian astronomer Naburimannu (c. 500 B.C.) was able to calculate the length of year at

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<sup>127</sup> The basic meaning of a copulative is expressed in the English phrase, "to be." The principal function of a copulative is to mark the surface structure tense, mood, or aspect. Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 72.

<sup>128</sup> Keil, 544.



365 days, 6 hours, 15 minutes, 41 seconds – only 26 minutes and 55 seconds too long. A later Babylonian astronomer, Kidinnu (c. 390 B.C.) made some more measurements that were even more accurate than were known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century A.D. From these calculations he was able to predict solar and lunar eclipses accurately.<sup>129</sup>

This is the caliber of men that Nebuchadnezzar had in his court – men that were mathematically astute and culturally intelligent. His counselors were composed of several different groups. *Magicians* were the scholars, intellectuals, or academics of the day. *Conjurers* had the ability to call up the dead through various types of incantations. *Sorcerers* were those who practiced black magic or witchcraft. *Chaldeans* were skilled in astrology, mathematics, and religious matters. The Chaldeans step to the forefront to inquire about the dream so that they can give the king an interpretation; they seem to be experts on how to handle religious matters. The king is addressed in the normal kingly fashion, “O King, live forever!” a compliment meaning, “may your kingdom last forever.” The Chaldeans inquire about the description of the dream, no doubt an ordinary practice when a king desired an interpretation.

### **Nebuchadnezzar Tests the Wise Men (Daniel 2:5-13)**

The Chaldeans and all the wise men are put to the test. The king tells the wise men that they must not only interpret the dream but also recite its contents back to him before interpreting it. Seems to be a fair test; if the wise men knew the future surely they would know the past. The wording of a few English translations has caused a discrepancy. Some<sup>130</sup> believe that the king actually forgot his dream saying that the king was eager to receive an interpretation and the dream may have been so traumatic that he

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<sup>129</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 37.

<sup>130</sup> Keil, Leupold, and Young hold this belief.

could have forgotten it. On the other side of the argument, the plain language of the text should be taken at face value. There are several reasons for this approach. First, Whitcomb notes that when “God gives special dreams to men, they will be clear, startling, and unforgettable.”<sup>131</sup> Many dreams that are found in the Old Testament were life-changing events for the recipients. Second, the phrase, “the thing is gone from me,” (KJV; NASB) is difficult to interpret. According to the original languages, the text should be rendered with the words *sure*, *firm*, or *certain*. Third, Whitcomb notes the intelligence of the king’s request, “The brilliant young king determined to use his vivid memory of it as a measuring stick against which to determine the claims of his wise men to be instruments of the gods.”<sup>132</sup> Nebuchadnezzar may have had his doubts about the abilities of these wise men. Walvoord elaborates on this idea:

It is entirely possible that the wise men were much older than the king, having served Nebuchadnezzar’s father. It would be understandable that the king might have previously been somewhat frustrated by these older counselors and may have had a real desire to be rid of them in favor of younger men whom he had chosen himself. Nebuchadnezzar might well have doubted their sincerity, honesty, and capability, and may even have questioned some of the superstitious practices...It is significant that the younger wise men, such as Daniel and his companions, were not present.<sup>133</sup>

It seems odd that they would request again for the contents of the dream. If these wise men believed that the king had actually forgotten the dream, then what is stopping them from concocting a fake interpretation? It seems that the wise men knew that the king was testing them. Showers rightly comments, “The wise men knew they could not fulfill the king’s demand. In order to postpone their impending deaths, they pretended

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<sup>131</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 39, and Montgomery, 145

<sup>132</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 40.

<sup>133</sup> Walvoord, 41.

they had not heard the king's requirement. They asked a second time, but this time Nebuchadnezzar, realizing the stall tactic, became more emphatic in his command."<sup>134</sup>

The text says in verse 8, "I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time," literally meaning to "buy time." Nebuchadnezzar knew the wise men did not know the dream and so he gives them an ultimatum. In the Babylonian and contemporaneous cultures, dreams and visions were very much a part of something that was "sent from the gods." Rulers and kings wanted to know what their dreams meant, especially if the gods were informing them about the future of their kingdom. Baldwin states that, "elaborate Akkadian manuals for interpreting various types of dreams have been discovered, thus indicating the magnitude of this ancient pseudoscience."<sup>135</sup> A ruler or king dare not go to battle until he consulted "the will of the gods." If the wise men cannot recite and interpret the dream, then the king is left with the impending decision to do some house cleaning – meaning the execution of all his wise men because of their failure. The wise men concede that they cannot recite the contents of the dream or give the interpretation. Not helping their cause, they further admit to the king that no man has ever been asked to do such a thing and only the gods are able to do what the king requests. WHAT A CONFESSION! The king required all wise men, including Daniel, his three friends, and all the trainees, to be executed. Immediately, the royal guard began corralling all the wise men for a public execution.

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<sup>134</sup> Showers, 13.

<sup>135</sup> Baldwin, 87.

### **Daniel's Request for More Time (Daniel 2:14-23)**

At this point in the story, Daniel enters the picture. Why he was not in the king's court at the beginning of the situation is uncertain. This incident seems to give evidence Daniel was in his three-year training program during this time, or why would he not have been in the king's court if he had already proven himself as one who could correctly interpret dreams? Surely, if this was the case, the king would have requested Daniel by name to handle the situation.

Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, was given the responsibility to carry out the command of executing all the wise men. Even within a potentially bad situation, God's sovereignty appears in the most unlikely of places. Wood notes that it was by God's providence that Arioch came to Daniel's door, because it would require such a person in this authoritative position to make such an arrangement for Daniel to have an audience with the king.<sup>136</sup> Daniel's questioning of Arioch is very subtle. He does not ask, "Why are you supposed to kill all the wise men?" Rather, he questions, "Why is the command to kill the wise men so hasty?" Daniel receives his audience with the king and asks for more time so that he can correctly interpret the dream. The king grants Daniel's request, and he hurries home to seek the help of his prayer warriors: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These four young men sought an answer to their request, and God revealed it to Daniel in a night vision. Immediately Daniel praises the God of heaven for answering his prayer. It is significant that Daniel uses the phrase, "God of heaven." This was "the common designation of the almighty and true God in the time of the

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<sup>136</sup> Wood, 56.

exile.”<sup>137</sup> Baldwin comments, “There were many other meaningful names within Israel, but this was a fitting title for a true God in a country where astral worship was practiced.”<sup>138</sup> It may also be stated that Daniel may have wished to make a distinction between Jehovah, the God of heaven, and the Babylonian gods, the gods of the earth. Daniel praises God and acknowledges Him “as the source of all wisdom before whose penetrating gaze everything lies exposed.”<sup>139</sup> Daniel praises God for his wisdom, power, and sovereignty. Phillips comments that prayer (2:17-19) gave way to praise (2:20-23): “God is both omniscient and omnipotent. He is able to remove sovereigns or to reveal secrets with equal ease. He rules over ‘times and seasons,’ over the rise and fall of empires, and over the tides in the affairs of men that mark the destiny of the nations.”<sup>140</sup>

#### **Daniel Appears before the King (Daniel 2:24-30)**

When Daniel gets up the next morning, he goes straight to Arioch and tells him that he is ready to appear before the king. Daniel also tells Arioch not to kill the wise men of Babylon. Arioch ushers Daniel into the presence of the king, taking the credit for finding Daniel. Walvoord says, “His statement is obviously designed to help him participate in the reward...it is understandable that Arioch would not give God the credit for the interpretation, but rather a ‘man of the captives of Judah.’”<sup>141</sup> This situation is equaled in present day society where climbing the ladder of success is but a matter of

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<sup>137</sup> Keil, 552.

<sup>138</sup> Baldwin, 89-90.

<sup>139</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 296.

<sup>140</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring the Book of Daniel: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004), 48.

<sup>141</sup> Walvoord, 58.

stepping on the right people. Unger observes, “He pompously announced that he had found a man who could tell what the king’s dream meant, apparently willing to claim credit for something he had no part in providing, like a typical time-serving bureaucrat. What a contrast to Daniel, who in reply to the king’s query, was humble and sincerely gave God all the credit.”<sup>142</sup>

Upon hearing the news, the king himself asks Daniel if he is able to do what Arioch has proclaimed. It seems the king is astonished that a trainee like Daniel was able to meet the command of the king. Daniel takes advantage of his audience with the king and replies to the king’s question in a clever manner. He questions the king in an almost innocent manner: “I don’t understand, king? You mean to tell me that your magicians and astrologers, wise men and Chaldeans, cannot tell you the dream or interpret it for you?” Whether irony or sarcasm permeated his statement, Daniel had a reason for his assertions. Daniel’s intent was to show the inability of man’s wisdom to remedy the situation. Daniel wants the king to understand that only Jehovah, the God of heaven, is able to reveal dreams and their interpretations.

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<sup>142</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003), 1615.

## **Preaching Outline: Responding with Prayer When All Hope Seems Lost**

### **Introduction**

Daniel and his three friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah have been taken from their homeland and exiled to Babylon along with thousands of others. They are being indoctrinated with the Babylonian literature, culture, and teachings. King Nebuchadnezzar is trying to rid them of everything that is important in their lives, but these four young men do not bow out quietly. It would be prudent for them to follow the commands of the king, but they cannot follow all of them. They refuse to compromise their convictions about eating the food from the king's table. As a result, God protects and rewards them for their obedience.

As chapter two of Daniel begins, Daniel and his three friends have been attending the royal school for about two years now. They have already been successful in standing up for their beliefs, but this time the situation is different. They soon find out that standing up for their convictions cannot be done without kneeling down in prayer for help.

### **Proposition**

Knowing that God is in control at all times should cause us to respond to life's circumstances with prayer and praise.

### **Preaching Manuscript**

A dream that leads to panic (2:1-13)

**The king's troubling dream** (2:1). As Nebuchadnezzar was lying down in bed one evening, he begins to think about his kingdom and what the future holds for him (cf. Dan. 2:29). As he falls asleep, God responds to Nebuchadnezzar by giving him a dream

that leaves him agitated and troubled, tossing and turning through the night. He must have realized that, first, the dream was very important. In his culture and religion, dreams were a means of receiving revelation from the gods. Second, he had an ominous sense that something was wrong, probably because he was not able to interpret the dream. Finally, realizing that he is not going to get any sleep, he gets out of bed and calls for his counselors, hoping that they will be able to help him.

**The king's team of duds (2:2-7).** The king's counselors come running in at the call of the king. The text identifies four different groups of wise men which shows the veracity of the situation, but also the need for the king to find an answer from someone. The group of counselors provided the king with the best of man's wisdom, but this worldly wisdom that man offers is nothing in comparison to the wisdom that God gives to those that ask Him (cf. James 3). Man's wisdom is utterly inferior and insufficient to solve the most basic spiritual problems that plague men; yet, they (men) still seek after it.

**The king's test of devotion (2:4-11).** After being briefed about the situation from the king, the counselors ask the king to tell them his dream so that they can give him an interpretation. However, the king replies back and says, "Maybe you didn't hear me. I want you to describe the dream I had and interpret it for me. Furthermore, if you don't do as I say then I will kill you and your family, but if you can do as I say then I will reward you handsomely." The fact that the counselors asked the king a second time about his dream reinforce their inability to solve the problem. No doubt some repetition here in this text shows the reader that something is very important and absolutely certain – the king's command.<sup>143</sup> If there was any doubt in the minds of the counselors about

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<sup>143</sup> Constable, "Daniel."



what the king wanted, it is now settled. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make sure that the interpretation was right because he knew that this dream had great significance. The only way he could ensure a right interpretation was by a right description of the dream. On another front, the wise king might also have used this situation as a means of testing his counselors to determine who was fake and who was genuine.

Although Nebuchadnezzar may have been young and green, he was not ignorant or blindsided. He knew exactly what his counselors were doing by questioning him again; they were trying to stall. They were trying to find a way out of this dilemma because they did not have a solution for it. Fewell notes the literary nature of this narrative: “The scene is structured by the popular storytelling device of trebling. Three times the king makes his requests to the sage; three times they answer. With each interchange, the tension mounts.”<sup>144</sup> The tension of the narrative reaches a climax with this third interchange. The counselors were unanimous on one thing: the king was asking them to do something that was impossible. Wiersbe aptly comments on the situation:

Throughout Bible history, you find occasions when God exposed the foolishness of the world and the deceptiveness of Satan. Moses and Aaron defeated the magicians of Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt (Ex. 7-12), and Elijah on Mount Carmel exposed the deception of Baal worship (1 Kings 18). Jeremiah confronted the false prophet Hanania and revealed his wickedness (Jer. 28), and Paul exposed the deception of Bar Jesus the sorcerer (Acts 13:1-12). But it was Jesus who by His life, teaching, and sacrificial death declared the wisdom of the world “foolishness” with God, and that includes all myths and false religions (1 Cor. 1:18ff). The statement of the advisers in Daniel 2:10 wipes out astrology and other forms of human prophecy! Out of their own mouths they condemned their own practices!<sup>145</sup>

The counselors respond to the king with a startling confession that comes in three parts.

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<sup>144</sup> Danna Nolan Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics in the Book of Daniel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 24.

<sup>145</sup> Wiersbe, 26-27.

First, they admit that they could not fulfill the king's demands. Second, they say that nobody on earth can fulfill the king's demands. Third, only a person who is in touch with the gods could describe the king's dream and interpret it correctly.

These two verses (vs. 10-11) form the climax to the entire section showing the reader that man's wisdom is utterly incapable. These verses also prepare the reader to meet Daniel, one who can fulfill the king's demand and one who is in touch with God and one who prays for God's wisdom. We may not act, talk, speak, or look anything like these counselors of ancient Babylon, but often we find ourselves practicing the philosophy they practiced: using our wisdom, education, and experience to solve our problems. When we try to solve the problem in our own abilities and strengths, we often become frustrated and unreasonable. Let's seek God's help first and not wait to call upon Him as a last resort. Let's follow the example of Daniel who sought out God in prayer instead of trying to fix the problem on his own.

**The king's terrible decree** (2:12-13). Instead of fessing up to their lying words and begging the king's mercy, the counselors accused the king of being unfair. Not a wise choice! But what can we say – at this point they didn't have much wisdom to offer. As king Nebuchadnezzar heard the words of his counselors, his face began to turn red; he reared back his head and barked out the command to round up all the wise men and execute them all. Even though they were not present, Daniel and his three friends were also to be executed.

A decision that leads to prayer (2:14-23)

**Prudence is the reaction** (2:14-16). Daniel's reaction to the king's command was completely opposite of how many Christians respond to similar situations. Daniel

could have used any numbers of excuses, or he could have complained to Arioch, but instead he chose to respond differently. Other wise men may have reacted in a hysterical manner, realizing that they were about to be killed. However, Daniel was even-keeled and calm, asking permission to see the king about the matter. Notice that Daniel does not question the command of the king but questions why the king's command was so urgent. Walvoord comments that Arioch's regard for Daniel was different from the other wise men, or why would Arioch take the time to explain the situation to a young man who has been condemned to die?<sup>146</sup> Why would Arioch even consent to let Daniel speak to the king, being just a trainee? Furthermore, why would the king grant Daniel more time when he sent out the decree to kill all the wise men? Could it be that Daniel's calm and controlled response caused Arioch and Nebuchadnezzar to believe that he really was capable of fulfilling this task?

**Prayer is the response** (2:17-19). Receiving more time from the king, Daniel heads home to find his prayer partners and seek God's help in solving the king's problem. In difficult situations like this so many believers often respond with terrible theology for some comfort. Can't you hear someone saying to Daniel, "It's okay Daniel, God will not put on you more than you can bear." That old adage sounds good, but is it biblical? The Bible seems to teach that God will sometimes allow us to carry a burden that is too heavy for us to bear. When we come to that breaking point, we will turn to Him instead of ourselves. As long we believe that we can handle the problem by ourselves, we will not turn to God. But Daniel responded differently by "purposely position[ing] himself into

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<sup>146</sup> Walvoord, 54.

complete vulnerability and dependence upon God.”<sup>147</sup> According to the previous chapter, God had given Daniel the ability to interpret dreams and visions, but he does not depend on those abilities. Therefore, what sets Daniel apart is that he went straight to God with his need, pushing all the abilities and talents he had acquired by the wayside.

Daniel knew immediately what he had to do, but he also knew that he could not do it alone. He went home to enlist the help of his prayer partners: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These four young men were on their knees all through the night seeking God’s mercy. How many times have Christians entered into a prayer meeting when their lives or the lives of others depend on it? They understood the urgency of the matter, a concept that many believers often lose in prayer. Stortz comments about the matter in this way: “I think the reason that we do not pray more faithfully and fervently is because we don’t feel the urgency; we tend to be self-sufficient, and we do not see our God as big enough. So there are times when God bring things like this into our lives and into the lives of our friends to bring us to our knees.”<sup>148</sup>

**Praise is the result** (2:20-23). Daniel’s action after his prayer determined his true character. The focus of Daniel’s praise was on God’s wisdom and power. He praises God for being the Source of wisdom and for being the Controller of natural and political history; he portrays God as involved in human affairs. Daniel takes absolutely no credit for what had just happened to him. In this short pericope Daniel refers to the Lord thirteen times and used only five pronouns to refer to himself and to his three friends.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Dykes, 33.

<sup>148</sup> Rodney Stortz, *Daniel: The Triumph of God’s Kingdom*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 30.

<sup>149</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Daniel: Standing Firm for God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 53.

Clearly, Daniel wants to make sure all the praise and all the glory goes to God. Many are the believers who are happy when God answers their prayers, but few are the believers who stop immediately to give thanks for answered prayers. In a life and death situation as this, one would expect Daniel to find his way to the palace as soon as possible, but he knew that speaking to His King was far more important.

A declaration that leads to a privilege (2:24-30)

After an all-night prayer meeting and praise session with his three faithful friends, Daniel goes to Arioch and tells him that he can meet the king's demands. The execution of the wise men is halted by Daniel's request and Arioch ushers Daniel into the presence of the king. As Arioch introduces Daniel to the king, he obviously wants to take credit for the find hoping that he might get some of those rewards. The irony of this whole section is that a captive is given the privilege of standing before the captor and it's the captor who falls at the feet of the captive.

**Man's wisdom will always fail (2:27).** At first glance, Daniel seems shocked that the king's counselor and advisors are not able to help, but then at a second glance, could a hint of sarcasm be found in Daniel's words? Whether it is sarcasm or surprise, Daniel's intent is to show that all of Babylon's wisdom cannot solve the king's dilemma. Man's wisdom will always fall short and will always disappoint; yet, why do Christians often spend their time trying to attain this wisdom? James 1:5 says that God will give His wisdom to any that ask Him for it.

**God's wisdom will always flourish (2:28-30).** Daniel declares in the presence of the king that there is a God in heaven Who is able to reveal mysteries and that same God has revealed this mystery to him. Notice that Daniel wanted the king to know that

he wasn't the revealer of the king's dream. It seems that Daniel was more worried about making sure that the king knew to Whom credit was due. Daniel points King Nebuchadnezzar to God and not to himself. God forbid that we should take the credit for the things that God has revealed to us. All glory goes to God, it always has and it always will. However, the question remains, "What will it take for us to give all the credit to Him?"

### **Conclusion**

Daniel and his three friends knew that God was in control of their circumstances and responded to them with prayer and praise. In circumstances that are difficult or life-threatening, our belief in the ability of our God is clearly brought to light. Daniel and his three friends not only believed that God was all-powerful and sovereign, but they showed it with their actions. It is one thing to believe in God, which is a relatively safe practice for most Western cultures. It is an altogether different practice to follow what we believe about Him because that can mean discomfort, risk, and bridges we are not ready to cross. Why is it that the eighteen inches from the head to the heart is still the most difficult road for many believers to trek?

When Daniel found himself in a crisis, his first reaction (not his last one) was to go to God in prayer. He went to the One he knew could help him and not let him down. What would have happened if Daniel tried to solve the king's dilemma with his own abilities? Why is it that we find ourselves going to God as a last resort rather than a first response? Why do we waste so much of our time and resources trying to solve life's perplexing problems apart from God? Sounds like many believers need to stop being so independent from God and start being more dependent upon Him. We only shoot

ourselves in the foot when we think that we can handle what life throws at us with our own strength and abilities.

Stepping back and looking at the other side of our beliefs in God may help us gain perspective and even correct the problem stated above. It goes like this: because we do not seek after God in prayer during life's difficult circumstances means that we believe God is not in control of the situation and cannot help us. Because we do not praise God after a prayer request has been answered means that we believe He did not have anything to do with it; we solved the problem with our own abilities, talents, and resources. Let's stop deceiving ourselves. Let's start seeking God in prayer for life's difficult circumstances and be careful to praise Him when He leads us through those dark valleys.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**THE NARRATIVE IN DANIEL CHAPTER 3**

**Interpretive Outline: Nebuchadnezzar's Image of Gold**

In the chronological sequence of the book of Daniel, the timing of the events that take place in chapter 3 are uncertain. The assumption is that the events of chapter three occurred after chapter 2 and before chapter 4. Scholars have offered several views as to the exact timing<sup>150</sup> of this chapter, but there is no specific evidence that affords a precise date. Believing that Nebuchadnezzar used the statue in chapter two as a test of loyalty, a period of one to three years between Daniel chapters 2 and 3 will be the interpretation from a chronological standpoint.

**The Image of Gold (Daniel 3:1-7)**

Why would Nebuchadnezzar erect such an image? His purpose is debatable. According to the common view, Nebuchadnezzar wished to erect the image as an expression of thanks to his god Bel for the great victories given to him over his enemies.<sup>151</sup> Who the image really represented and why Nebuchadnezzar erected it seems to be revealed later in the text (cf. 3:12). The text does give a pictorial description of the image. The Aramaic word used to translate the word “image” is properly

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<sup>150</sup> See Appendix for the differing views on the timing of the events in Daniel chapter 3.

<sup>151</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, “To Bow or Not to Bow? An Essay on Daniel 3,” <http://bible.org/article/bow-or-not-bow-essay-daniel-3> (accessed November 19, 2010)



understood as an image in human likeness.<sup>152</sup> However, this does not mean that the image was a perfect replica of Nebuchadnezzar, but rather that the image was made in the likeness of human form in comparison to some other inanimate object. Some have suggested this image was just that, a replica of the head portion of the statue that Nebuchadnezzar dreamt of in chapter 2. The Aramaic language will not bear out this concept, but within the context of these chapters, many have suggested that this interpretation seems feasible.

Critics are quick to challenge the accuracy of verse one of chapter three as it relates to the dimensions of the image. Several possible reasons for the dimensions of the image are given. First, the dimensions may have been intentional so as to make the statue somewhat grotesque. Much of the Babylonian sculpturing was characterized in this way.<sup>153</sup> Secondly, the strangeness of the dimensions does not argue that the account is unreliable, for why would any writer (whether they hold an early or late date of the book of Daniel) have cause to distort the dimensions unless they were accurate?<sup>154</sup> Third, the archaeologist Julius Oppert<sup>155</sup> has excavated the area in Mesopotamia that he believes to be the plain of Dura. He has found a large brick square with the dimensions of 45 feet square and 20 feet high. It was not uncommon to find a constructed platform or base on which a statue, image, or idol would be placed. If this was the platform for the image, then the statue itself would have had the proportions of 70 feet by 18 feet.

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<sup>152</sup> Keil, 566.

<sup>153</sup> Wallace.

<sup>154</sup> Wood, 80.

<sup>155</sup> Jules Oppert, *Expédition Scientifique en Mésopotamie*, vol. i (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1859-1863), 238-239.

Certainly critics have a problem with the dimensions of the image being fictitious, but they also have a problem with its composition being made up of gold. Whitcomb has advanced the best answer to the critics. The statue was not made of solid gold, but rather was gold-plated.<sup>156</sup> If the statue were solid gold it would have contained 5,467 cubic feet of gold (6 x 60), but all the gold mined in the past 6,000 years would bulk no larger than a cube with fifty-three foot sides (148,877 cubic feet).<sup>157</sup> Scripture sheds some light on the probability of Whitcomb's assumptions. Exodus 39:38 speaks of a wooden altar that is overlaid with gold. Isaiah 40:19 and 41:7 mention idols that are overlaid with gold. Jeremiah 10:3-9 describes the process in which idols are overlaid with gold. Walvoord agrees saying that "the appearance of the image, however, was much the same as if it were solid gold."<sup>158</sup>

The image was erected in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. There are two locations which are identified as the plain of Dura. One is at the mouth of the Chaboras River, where it empties itself into the Euphrates River, not far from Carchemish. The other location is just beyond the Tigris River, not far from Apollonia.<sup>159</sup> This latter location would be the closer of the two and located in a province of Babylon, but it is too far away from the capital to be the place where the statue was constructed. Keil summarizes some of Julius Oppert's conclusions on the excavated area

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<sup>156</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 54.

<sup>157</sup> Peter T. White, "Gold, the Eternal Treasure," *National Geographic Magazine* 145, no.1, January 1974, 7.

<sup>158</sup> Walvoord, 81.

<sup>159</sup> Keil, 567.

of Mesopotamia, giving insight into the actual ruins and location of the plain of Dura.

Keil says:

There are at present to be found in the S.S.E. of the ruins representing the former capital a row of mounds which bear the name of *Dura*, at the end of which, along with two larger mounds, there is a smaller one which is named *el Mokattat*, which forms a square six metres high, with a basis of fourteen metres, wholly built *en briques crues*, which shows so surprising a resemblance to a colossal statue with its pedestal, that Oppert believes that this little mound is the remains of the golden statue erected by Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>160</sup>

Once the construction of the image was complete, Nebuchadnezzar called all the officials in his empire to gather before the image. The royal list of officials, which is mentioned several times in this chapter, is an imposing list of political officials from within his empire. This is Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to both solidify and unify control over his vast empire. Longman states that this imposing list is a "literary effect to heighten the tension and the feeling of danger toward the three friends, who soon will be singled out of the group."<sup>161</sup> Fewell also states, "Through repetition, the narrator creates a scenario in which conformity is normative, disobedience is unthinkable."<sup>162</sup>

After all the officials of the empire were assembled before the statue, the herald signaled the universal call to worship. The officials and all the people were commanded to bow down to the image once the music began to play or else they would suffer the fate of being thrown into the fiery furnace. This method of execution was common during the Babylonian era. Compare this story with the story of Daniel who was cast into the lion's

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<sup>160</sup> Keil, 567.

<sup>161</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 98.

<sup>162</sup> Fewell, 66.

Den – a familiar Medo-Persian method of execution.<sup>163</sup> Montgomery suggests that the furnace “must have been similar to our common lime-kiln, with a perpendicular shaft from the top and an opening at the bottom for extracting the fused lime.”<sup>164</sup>

Satraps	Realm protector; protector of the kingdom
Prefects	Lieutenant governors; high-ranking officials directly responsible to the satraps
Governors	Lord of an administrative district; leaders of smaller territories
Counselors	Advisors; counsel-givers
Treasurers	Treasurers
Justices	Judges; law-bearer
Magistrates	Sheriff; over-chief; police magistrates
All officials of the provinces	A general term for governmental executive

FIGURE 4. DESCRIPTIONS OF OFFICIALS IN DANIEL 3<sup>165</sup>

### **The Chaldeans Accuse Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego (Daniel 3:8-12)**

The text says that the Chaldeans brought a charge against the three friends of Daniel. But, where was Daniel? Scripture does not say why he does not appear in the story. Some commentators and expositors have speculated the bowing down to the image did not affect the conscience of Daniel because he saw Nebuchadnezzar’s actions as political rather than religious. However, this seems very uncharacteristic of Daniel to bow down to any image, whether it is political or religious in nature. The listing of

<sup>163</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 57.

<sup>164</sup> James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1927), 202.

<sup>165</sup> Compilation of figure 4 is taken from Archer, *Daniel*, 51 and Miller, 111-112 .

officials in the previous verses suggests an exhaustive listing, therefore including Daniel and every other official in the kingdom. Whitcomb speculates a bit further and says that he thinks the king purposely sent Daniel to another part of the kingdom so that he would not “ruin things.”<sup>166</sup> The best interpretation is to let the Scripture interpret itself. Daniel 2:48-49 seems to explain Daniel’s absence. Daniel requests his three friends be placed over the administration of the province of Babylon in his place; Daniel would remain in the king’s court. The statue was said to be dedicated and built in the plain of Dura, some sixteen miles south of the city of Babylon. If Daniel remained on duty in the king’s court, which was in the city of Babylon proper, then his absence at the dedication of the statue seems logical.

The Chaldeans approach the king and charge Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with not bowing down to the image that Nebuchadnezzar has set up. The three Hebrews were accused for 1) showing no regard for the king, 2) not serving the gods of the king; and 3) not bowing down to the image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up.<sup>167</sup> This begs the question: “Was the image for political or religious reasons?” If the statue was dedicated to a specific god, it would seem logical (although not required) that the name would be included in the text. Walvoord says “Nebuchadnezzar may have regarded the image as representing himself as the embodiment of divine power, and the worship of the image would then be a recognition of his personal power.”<sup>168</sup> Wallace says, “The text [of verse

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<sup>166</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 57.

<sup>167</sup> Walvoord, 86.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

12] seems to confirm that the image is a political matter more than religious and that it is a statue of Nebuchadnezzar.”<sup>169</sup> This interpretation does seem feasible and Wallace supports his claim with two reasons:

(1) There is a distinction between the gods and the statue (note that two different verbs are used) and that if the charge were that they were not worshipping this statue as a god, the accusation would probably have put ‘gods’ in the singular, thus equating the two – ‘they do not serve your god, i.e., they do not worship the golden image. (2) The second verb is really a softer term, for it can be used of non-deity (c.f. 2:46 where Nebuchadnezzar ‘does homage’ to Daniel).<sup>170</sup>

The Chaldeans remind the king of his words before they make an accusation against the Jews whom the king has promoted to leadership positions within his government. The literary effect of these verses is specifically set up so that God can step in and take control. All ways of escape have been eliminated and all bridges to cross to safety have been burned. The human element of success has been annihilated and now the situation is ripe for God to step into the affair of these faithful Jews.

### **Daniel’s Three Friends Refuse to Worship the Image (Daniel 3:13-18)**

When Nebuchadnezzar heard about this disobedience, he was furious and demanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego appear before him. As a courtesy to his officials that were being accused, Nebuchadnezzar questioned them himself as to whether or not the accusations against them were true. He warned these three Jews that if they did not abide by his commands they would be cast into a fiery furnace. As he concluded his words to the three faithful Jews, he seems to issue a challenge saying, “Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” Nebuchadnezzar believed that he was more powerful than any god and his accomplishments and abilities far greater.

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<sup>169</sup> Wallace.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answer the king with the uncharacteristic poise that is reminiscent of Daniel's attitude in chapter 2. The response that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego give makes Nebuchadnezzar exasperated; they stood firm upon their convictions. They were not trying to insult the king, but rather they knew that they did not need to make a lengthy oral defense.<sup>171</sup> Leupold does well to sum up the character of these three men: "The quiet, modest, yet withal very positive attitude of faith that these three men displayed is one of the noblest examples in the Scriptures of faith fully resigned to the will of God. These men ask for no miracle; they expect none. Theirs is the faith that says: 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.'"<sup>172</sup>

### **The Fiery Furnace (Daniel 3:19-27)**

If Nebuchadnezzar was angry before, now he is a loaded cannon ready to explode. Steinmann notes, "The refusal of the three men to bow down to the idol was a personal affront as well as public defiance of Nebuchadnezzar's authority."<sup>173</sup> The text says that the expression of Nebuchadnezzar's face visibly changed. Literally, the Aramaic reads, "The image of his face changed,"<sup>174</sup> playing on the same noun used for "image or statue" in verse one. Longman shows the irony of the situation saying, "The one who in his pride has created an image with the purpose of assuring uniform loyalty finds his own image provoked beyond control."<sup>175</sup> Nebuchadnezzar's pride causes some senseless

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<sup>171</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 57.

<sup>172</sup> Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (1949; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 153.

<sup>173</sup> Steinmann, 191.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> Longman, 101.

actions, as it normally does for any man who has his pride challenged. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than it is normally heated. “Seven times hotter” seems to be an idiomatic expression signifying that the furnace was to be heated to its maximum temperature.<sup>176</sup> However, John Alexander has written an article concerning his finding of the matter. He notes, “The ancients were very skilled at regulating the temperatures of blast furnaces for smelting various materials, so it is entirely possible to interpret this literally.”<sup>177</sup> The furnace itself would most likely have been the one used to construct the image of gold; therefore, it would have been close by so that everyone could see the king’s demonstration.

The king commanded his best warriors to bind the men in their clothes. The fact that they were not stripped of their clothing implies a sense of urgency to the command from the king. Wood states, “The force of mentioning the garments at all is to say that the men were well dressed, probably in their official uniforms, having come properly dressed for the grand ceremony.”<sup>178</sup> This all plays in to the urgency of the command, just as the soldiers who bound the men and cast them into the fire were killed because the fire was so hot. The Septuagint (LXX) inserts extra information at this point in the story, specifically between 3:23 and 3:24, called the “Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Children.”<sup>179</sup> While these sections are fictional, one must be inclined to imagine

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<sup>176</sup> Steinmann, 192; Miller, 121; Baldwin, 105

<sup>177</sup> John B. Alexander, “Critical Notes: New Light on the Fiery Furnace,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69, no.4 (December 1950): 375-376.

<sup>178</sup> Wood, 91.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 92. “Included first is a prayer of one of the young men, Azariah, covering 21 verses, which expresses praise to God and requests deliverance from, and punishment upon Israel’s enemies. Then follow 6 verses of description which tell us of the special heating of the furnace and the descent of the Angel of the Lord, who ‘smote the flame of the fire out of the oven, and made the midst of the furnace as



what it must have been like to be thrown into the midst of a burning inferno only to be rescued by an angel of the Lord.

The king situates himself to watch the execution to make sure that these three Jewish youths were given their punishment. As the king was watching the events transpire, he was astonished at what he saw in the fiery furnace. He gets up quickly, calling out to his counselors to confirm what he is seeing. He did have a past of dreaming some strange dreams; therefore, it seems logical that he wanted to make sure that what he was seeing, everyone else was seeing, too. There has been much discussion of this fourth person that Nebuchadnezzar says he saw in the furnace. The text says that Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth person that was “like a son of the gods.” The KJV and NKJV translators show their belief in who this other person was by capitalizing the letters of the phrase “Son of God” to imply a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. However, the best interpretation of this phrase would be “a son of the gods.” Many evangelical theologians agree with the KJV and NKJV translators in labeling what Nebuchadnezzar saw as a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Nevertheless, the debate rages on, specifically as it applies to the dual description that Nebuchadnezzar gives. When he first saw the fourth person, he labeled him “a son of the gods”; then, in verse 28, he called him “God’s angel.” Understanding the pagan mindset of Nebuchadnezzar, one would think that he was using the phrase “son of god” in the same way he would address other deities. Walvoord helps explain that:

The Aramaic form of *elahin* is plural and whenever used in the Aramaic section of Daniel it seems to be plural in number, as the singular is used when the true God is meant. The textual problem in Daniel 6:20 where Darius refers to the true

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though a wind of dew had gone hissing through it.’ Finally a song rendered by the three from the furnace occupies 40 verses. This is a song of praise for the deliverance effected by the Angel.”

God is decided in favor of the singular by Kittel rather than the plural. On the basis of this consistent use, the translation “a son of the gods” is preferable and in keeping with Nebuchadnezzar’s comprehension at this point in his experience.<sup>180</sup>

### **Nebuchadnezzar’s Decree (Daniel 3:28-30)**

It was apparent to Nebuchadnezzar and all his officials that the God of these three Jews was indeed “the Most High God.” They were recognizing that the God of these three Jews was greater and far more powerful than the other deities and gods which they served. The text goes on to note that the officials examined Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and realized that they were not burned in any way, nor were their clothes burned, nor was there any smell of fire on them. The text takes great pains to show the reader that this miracle was not of human origin – this miracle was the work of Jehovah. Ironically, the only thing that the fire burned up was the rope that bound the men so that they could walk freely out of the furnace. Nebuchadnezzar recognized the power of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego but seemingly did not believe in Jehovah as the only true God. Nevertheless, the king would not allow anyone to show disrespect to such a powerful and mighty deity as expressed by his decree.

Nebuchadnezzar assessed the miracle the way he normally would. He believed, along with his contemporaries, that the heathen gods used messengers or agents to accomplish their purposes.<sup>181</sup> There is no clear proof that the fourth person in the furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was either deity or an angel. Whether Christ Himself appeared in the furnace or sent an angelic messenger instead does not negate the power of the miracle. All the text affords the reader is Nebuchadnezzar’s interpretation

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<sup>180</sup> Walvoord, 91.

<sup>181</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 191.

of the situation, which is at best marred and influenced by his religious beliefs in other gods. It is possible that the protector of these three Jews was Christ Himself appearing as an angel. This may explain the dual description that Nebuchadnezzar gives.

An official decree is given by the king recognizing the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Baldwin notes that the edict “does no more than declare legal in the empire the religion of the Jews.”<sup>182</sup> Nebuchadnezzar promoted these men in the province of Babylon. This word “promoted” carries a different context in this verse; these men had already been given a higher position of authority at the end of Daniel chapter two. “Promoted” means “to prosper, cause to be prosperous or successful.”<sup>183</sup> It was not per se the miracle that impressed Nebuchadnezzar the most but more likely it was their courage in such a circumstance that completely dumbfounded the king.

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<sup>182</sup> Baldwin, 118.

<sup>183</sup> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Volume 5* (Leiden; Brill, 1994-2000), 1964.

## **Preaching Outline: Responding with Perseverance When Your Faith Is Tested**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 3 of the book of Daniel contains one of the most beloved and well-known Bible stories in the Old Testament. As the chapter opens, we find that Daniel is not present, probably serving in the king's court in Babylon, and his three friends are the major characters in this unfolding drama. The scene is located some fifteen or so miles south of Babylon in the plain of Dura where king Nebuchadnezzar has built a statue that all his officials in the kingdom are to bow down and worship. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who now are administrators over the province of Babylon, are present at the dedication of this image.

As the dedication service begins, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are forced into a dilemma. If they fall down and worship the image, they will please the king and his gods, but they will not please Jehovah and thereby be guilty of idolatry. According to 2 Kings 17:6-7, God allowed the Assyrians to take the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity (and now the southern kingdom of Israel is in exile at Babylon) because of their sin of idolatry. However, if these three refuse to fall down and worship the image, then they will be cast into a fiery furnace.

### **Proposition**

Knowing that God is in control at all times should cause us to respond to life's circumstances with perseverance.

## Preaching Manuscript

### A decree that seeks submission (Daniel 3:1-7)

King Nebuchadnezzar seeks to build a statue with the purpose of testing the loyalty of all his officials. No doubt the king got the idea of such a gold statue from Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream back in chapter 2. But this was more than a political move; it had religious ramifications for the Jewish faith that believed in only one true God. After the statue is built, being overlaid with gold, the king decides to have an official ceremony that all his officials will attend, a ceremony to dedicate this image.

According to this section, three distinct parts concerning the dedication ceremony come into view: the image or statue, the people groups, and the orchestra. The purpose of the image or statue has already been given in the paragraph above, but who the image represented was not mentioned. Shea notes that in Babylonian theology it was a sin for the king to claim divinity, and if he did, then punishment from the gods was sure to come.<sup>184</sup> This leads to the conclusion that the image, as some have believed, was not an image of Nebuchadnezzar but some other god. Verses 2 and 3 show that all of the kingdoms' administrators and leaders were present, and then verse four tells us that everyone else, all classes and ethnic groups, were also present. In other words, there were no excuses or reasons accepted for anyone's absence. Then, lastly, the Babylonian orchestra, which includes instruments from around the world, is symbolic of the unity the king seeks to produce through his ceremony. The orchestra gives the cue for all to fall down and worship in a prescribed way.

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<sup>184</sup> William H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide* (Nampa: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2005), 73.

The repetition in these verses, as well as the entire narrative, serves a purpose. Fewell notes that “through repetition, the narrator pictures a setting in which conformity is normative, disobedience is unthinkable.”<sup>185</sup> The undertones in this section about conformity to the world’s standards and peer pressure are so strong. Knowing that God was in control of all things caused Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to respond with perseverance. They were not going to give in and conform to the king’s standards when they knew that those standards were against the law of God. Their decision to remain faithful is that it was settled beforehand. Convictions like these are not decided in the heat of the moment. They resisted the temptation to be like everyone else. How do you think these three felt when everyone else around them was bowing to the image? No doubt they felt strange, out of place, and different. No person, no matter how godly they are, likes the feeling of being different.<sup>186</sup> Standing up for what is right is often lonely and painful, and as we shall soon see it can be downright dangerous. However, Scripture comforts those who would remain faithful: “For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.” (1 Peter 2:20)

#### A decision that causes an accusation (Daniel 3:8-12)

The decision of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego not to bow down to the king’s golden image becomes a problem for the Chaldeans. The text says that a group of Chaldeans came forward to maliciously accuse the Jews. The actual rendering of the

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<sup>185</sup> Fewell, 39.

<sup>186</sup> Dykes, 51.

phrase *maliciously accused* means, “ate the pieces of,”<sup>187</sup> carrying the concept of severe hatred. A common English idiom for the phrase *maliciously accused* might be “The Chaldeans chewed them out.”<sup>188</sup> These Chaldeans definitely had an agenda of getting rid of these Jews, and they seized upon this perfect opportunity.

Ironically, comparing these verses with the narrative back in chapter 2 of Daniel, we catch these Chaldeans in their agenda. In chapter 2, when the king wanted a description as well as interpretation of his dream, they were unable to “understand” the king. This time, when their lives are not threatened, they have the uncanny ability to repeat verbatim the king’s command concerning the worship of the image and the punishment for those who do not comply. Interestingly, the accusation against these Jews was not because of their religious beliefs – it was because they were in positions of authority that were subordinate to the king, and they directly disobeyed the king’s commands. This is so much like the double standard, no-absolutes society that we live in today. People often will use any tactic, political or religious, to get a chance for advancement of themselves. Stepping on others is but another rung on that endless ladder of success. Nonetheless, believers today often face decisions that will cause ridicule and criticism from the world. Do we yield to their tactics and become angry and frustrated? Or do we stand strong allowing, God to take care of the matter?

A devotion that leads to frustration (Daniel 3:13-18)

**The tyrant seeks power (3:13-15).** At this point in the narrative, the dedication ceremony has come to a screeching halt, and everyone must be looking on with great

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<sup>187</sup> Montgomery, 204.

<sup>188</sup> Miller, 116.

interest to see what has happened. No doubt rumors of three officials who did not bow down to the image has permeated the crowd. For Nebuchadnezzar, this was an opportunity to show that he would not tolerate insubordination, no matter who it was. The three Jews are brought before the king and given a second chance with the reminder that if they do not worship the image they will be thrown into the fiery furnace. Then, the king adds an interesting challenge saying, “And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” Nebuchadnezzar was claiming that he had more power over these men than any god. These three Jews could have easily compromised and rationalized their disobedience by arguing, “Everyone else is doing it,” or “Our office in the kingdom demands that we obey,” or “We will bow our knees but not our hearts.” They might have said, “We can do our people more good if we stay in our current positions in the kingdom.” But true faith does not claim any of those things. Wiersbe says it well: “True faith does not look for loopholes; it simply obeys God and knows that He will do what is best. Faith rests on commands and promises, not arguments and explanations.”<sup>189</sup>

**The three show poise** (3:16-18). The three Jews responded to the king saying that they did not need to give him answer because he was not their deliverer. God was their deliverer, and they did not need to make a defense to the king. These three Jews knew that the sovereignty of God ruled in the kingdom of men, and if God so chose to deliver them, He would, but they also knew that there would be consequences if God did not deliver them. Throughout the Biblical narratives the concept of deliverance is portrayed frequently, especially in Hebrews 11. Wiersbe comments on Hebrews 11 showing the significance and relation to Daniel 3:

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<sup>189</sup> Wiersbe, 42.



Hebrews 11 lists the names and deeds of great men and women of faith, including these three Jewish men (Heb. 11:34), but at verse 36, the writer says, “and others,” and then lists the people who seem to be failures in spite of their faith (Heb. 11:36-40). The Greek word means, “others of a different kind,” that is, others who had faith but didn’t see God do the miracles He did for those listed in the first thirty-five verses. God always rewards faith but He doesn’t always step in and perform special miracles. Not everybody who prays is healed, but God always gives strength to bear with pain and grace to face death without fear. The three Hebrew men believed that God could deliver them, but they would trust Him even if He didn’t. That is how faith is supposed to operate in our lives.<sup>190</sup>

The faith that these men had is in stark contrast to the faith portrayed by the average Christian today. It seems that Christianity today expects faith to result in triumph. This is preached wholeheartedly by the “health and wealth gospel” advocates.

Scripture is quite clear about the matter. God’s sovereignty may choose triumph or it may choose tragedy. The point is that even if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were roasted alive for their faith, God would still be in control. This concept is lost by so many who preach a loving and compassionate God Who would never let His children suffer. God is a compassionate and loving God; He would not be one if He did not allow His children to suffer trials and tribulations. These are the tests that make the Christian stronger and bring him to maturity in Christ. The point many forget to factor into the equation is that God is the One making the decisions, not man. He knows what is best for His children. Throughout history others have not been so fortunate to experience miraculous deliverance at the hands of God, but their faith is nonetheless the same from those that saw deliverance.

A deliverance that shows authentication (Daniel 3:19-27)

**Price of staying committed (3:19-23).** The three Jews remained faithful and committed to their decision, but now the king’s judgment was ready to fall on them. The

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<sup>190</sup> Wiersbe, 43.

king is so enraged by their refusal to comply that he orders the furnace to be turned all the way up and commands some of his best men to bind up these three Jews. In their festive garments, these three Jews were cast into the fiery furnace. Because the furnace was so hot, the men who were in charge of throwing them in were burned up on the spot. If the story ended here with the death of these three Jews, they would still be considered faithful and committed to obeying their King of Kings. But, the story does not end here because God steps in and chooses to deliver his three servants.

**Privilege of seeing Christ (3:24-27).** As the king positions himself in front of the furnace to see the demise of these three Jews, he becomes perplexed and amazed. He asks his counselors if they see what he sees. Sure enough, four men are walking around in the furnace when the king had only thrown in three men. Nebuchadnezzar is able to ascertain that the fourth man is not of human origin, but is divine – most likely a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. However, Nebuchadnezzar is still uncertain later, calling him an angel. As the king comes near to the door of the furnace, he calls for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to come out. They come out without a hint of fire on them or on their clothes. The only thing that was burned was the ropes used to tie them.

We see three faithful Jews who were willing to die for their convictions, and yet so many Christians today compromise their convictions for the sake or comfort or success. When will the believer learn that success that comes from the world will only last for a moment, but success that God gives will last for all eternity? In the same breath, the believer is also guilty of trying to escape going through the fires of life because of the grief and suffering that they can bring. May I remind all believers alike, that these three Jews would not have seen Christ if they did not walk into fire. Three men came out of

the fire, but where is the fourth man? He's still in the fire, and you'll find him there when you have to walk through the fire yourself. Isaiah 43:2-3a says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

"I want to avoid the fire and walk with Jesus" is what many Christians would like to see happen, but is that reality? Sometimes that is not possible because He is in the fire. The only way you can keep your cool when the heat is on is to look for Jesus in the fire.

#### A decree that calls for exaltation (Daniel 3:28-30)

The king recognizes that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was the one who delivered them and no other god can deliver this way. Still much a polytheist, the king goes on to decree that anyone who interferes with the worship of the Jews will be severely punished. The events of the day play out in irony once again. All of the energy and expense to produce worship of a false god was a complete flop, and the king fell to his knees before the true God of Israel. The king would have never made his decree or witnessed the mighty hand of the one true God unless it were for the faithfulness of three Jews named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

#### **Conclusion**

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew that God was in control of all things and so they responded to their situation with perseverance. They did all they could to remedy the situation in their own strength and with their own abilities, but when deliverance by their own hands was failing, they made room for Christ to take over. And even if Christ chose not to walk in and delivered them, they were poised to be faithful no matter what

happened to them. You cannot help but look at the theology of these three faithful Jews and wonder what is missing in the theology of the modern day believer. Why is it that the modern day believer does all he/she can to escape the fire, when these three Jews did not try to escape it? Why is it that the modern day believer views suffering and persecution, tragedy and hard times, as something that is inherently evil and not the norm? This contemporary theology of many modern day believers is diametrically opposed to what the Bible teaches. James chapter 1 tells us that trials and difficulties serve a purpose in our lives. He goes on further, in verses 17-18, to note that every good and perfect gift comes from above. Now, within the context of this chapter James is telling us that trials and difficulties, suffering and persecution, *are all gifts*. Take a moment to chew on that.

Those difficulties that come into our lives, those fiery furnaces, are gifts because God sees them as beneficial for our faith. The problem is that we still have our worldly glasses on when it comes time to face trials. James (like Paul) is telling us to take off those old glasses and put on these new ones. These spiritual glasses will enable us to see that God's intent is always good, but what happens more times than we'd like to admit is that we often mar that gift. It's like opening a gift at Christmas that we really did not want or just don't like. The look of disappointment covers our faces. I wonder how God feels when we open one of His gifts and react in the same manner.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE NARRATIVE IN DANIEL CHAPTER 4

#### Interpretive Outline: Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream

Chapter 4 of Daniel is different than any other chapter in the book. Its major uniqueness is the fact that it is presented as Nebuchadnezzar's personal account of the events that transpired. Archer notes that this "is the only chapter in Scripture composed under the authority of a pagan."<sup>191</sup> Miller notes some other unique qualities of the chapter:

(1) It contains some features similar to those of an epistle. (2) The chapter is written from Nebuchadnezzar's viewpoint. Actually, Dan. 4 is the king's testimony of Yahweh's operation in his life. (3) There are doxologies at the beginning and the end of the chapter. (4) There is a change from first to third person and then back to first person. For the most part the material written in the third person describes the king's madness, to which the king "would not have been a sane witness."<sup>192</sup>

The reason why Nebuchadnezzar would write such an account is not difficult to imagine considering what happens to him in this chapter. Wood says that "such a report would have clarified to his people the nature and significance of what had occurred during his years of absence from the throne."<sup>193</sup>

The contents of this chapter would mostly likely have been placed in letter form and circulated throughout the entire kingdom. The change from first person to third

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<sup>191</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 58.

<sup>192</sup> Miller, 128.

<sup>193</sup> Wood, 100.

person in several sections of the chapter denotes that either Daniel or a scribe, perhaps, may have helped Nebuchadnezzar in composing the letter. The events that took place in this chapter occurred at the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. Nebuchadnezzar's reign over Babylon lasted from 605-562 BC.<sup>194</sup> Approximately thirty years has passed between the events in Daniel chapter 3 and 4. Daniel is probably around fifty years old.

### **Nebuchadnezzar's Proclamation (Daniel 4:1-3)<sup>195</sup>**

The king issues an official greeting to "all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you." It was not uncommon for Babylonian or Assyrian monarchs to claim rule over all the earth. While their domains did not encompass all the earth, the territories they ruled did encompass the known world.<sup>196</sup> The phrase *peace be multiplied* is also used by Darius (Daniel 6:25) in a similar context of greeting. Thus, the assumption can be made that it was a common form of salutation<sup>197</sup> that is still used today in the Middle East. The form of verses 1-3 follows the usual pattern for letters in the ancient Near East. A royal letter would begin with the name of the sender and the person or party it was addressed to, and then it would be followed with a greeting.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 62.

<sup>195</sup> In the Septuagint (LXX) Daniel 4:1-3 is added to Daniel chapter three, making this chapter have three additional verses at the end (3:31-33). Collins, *Daniel*, 221, notes that it was apparently more typical to end a story with a doxology rather than placing the doxology at the beginning. Chapter divisions are not necessarily inspired, and for that matter neither are verse divisions. Bruce Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 64-65, notes that verse and chapter divisions that are still used in English translations today first occurred in the Geneva Bible, published in 1557 (NT) and 1560 (OT).

<sup>196</sup> Wood, 101.

<sup>197</sup> Biblical examples are Gen.43:23; 1 Sam.25:6; Luke 10:5; 1 Pet.1:2; and many of Paul's letters.

<sup>198</sup> Donald E. Gowan, *Daniel*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 77.

The structure of these verses, as Longman notes, is to “remove suspense concerning the nature of the outcome, but it does raise the reader’s interest in discovering what leads to Nebuchadnezzar’s joyful outburst.”<sup>199</sup> These verses, which can serve as an introduction or conclusion, form the content of Nebuchadnezzar’s proclamation. The phrase, “it has seemed good to me,” tells the reader that Nebuchadnezzar is not being forced into making such a statement. Wood says that “this means that he was neither coerced nor reluctant, but engaged in the matter readily.”<sup>200</sup> Considering what happened to Nebuchadnezzar in this chapter, it seems only natural to expect him to praise the God of heaven. There has definitely been a type of “spiritual progression” in his life, and it seems to peak in this chapter. Nebuchadnezzar finally came to grips with the concept that no other ruler or king could have any power or kingdom except by God’s permission. Archer says that the king “...now realized the transience and uncertainty of even the greatest human potentate compared with the eternal sovereignty of the Lord Almighty.”<sup>201</sup>

### **The Search for an Interpreter (Daniel 4:4-9)**

Nebuchadnezzar begins verse 4 saying that he was at ease and prospering in his palace. The word “prospering” is used to describe luxuriant or flourishing trees.<sup>202</sup> This might be a well-placed stroke of irony by preparing the reader for the symbolic nature of the tree that will follow. Many of the king’s military conquests had finally

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<sup>199</sup> Longman, 118.

<sup>200</sup> Wood, 101.

<sup>201</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 59.

<sup>202</sup> Miller, 130

come to an end and now he had a chance to sit back, relax, and enjoy his success.

Walvoord notes, “In this context of security and prosperity surrounded by the monuments of his wealth and power, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which made him afraid.”<sup>203</sup> The dream caused Nebuchadnezzar to be afraid, and then upon awakening from the dream, his thoughts were troubling or “they alarmed him.”<sup>204</sup> This dream, like the one in chapter 2, was so clear and vivid that it awoke him from his sleep. For this reason, Nebuchadnezzar wanted someone to help him understand the significance of his dream.

The book of Job contributes a remarkable parallel to this passage that is worth noting. It describes perfectly the way in which God worked in order to deliver His message. Man’s arrogance and proud heart often forced God to speak to man through dreams. Elihu, as he gave this advice to Job, seems to have understood his concept. Job 33:14-18 says, “For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens the ears of men and terrifies them with warnings, that he may turn aside from his deed and conceal pride from a man; he keeps back his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword.”

Nebuchadnezzar calls for all his wise men: the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. They assembled together before the king and attempted to interpret the king’s dream. Similar to the events in chapter 2, not one of the king’s wise men is able to interpret the dream. Finally, Daniel shows up to help with the interpretation. The text

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<sup>203</sup> Walvoord, 99.

<sup>204</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. II (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 995.



does not state why Daniel arrived late to the summons. Wood has offered some suggestions as to why he was not there at the original assembly:

(1) The king had simply forgotten him and his remarkable interpretation of some thirty years before. (2) Nebuchadnezzar himself suspected the ominous meaning of his dream and hoped that it might prove to be less unpleasant if it came from the lips of the other wise men. (3) The custom of the day forbade that the chief of the wise men (Daniel's position) be summoned first. (4) Daniel was considered an officer of the state (being the head of the province of Babylon, 2:48) than the chief of the wise men, and accordingly was not called first.<sup>205</sup>

Whatever the reason for Daniel's late arrival, a simple explanation that he was not in the palace might be the best.

Nebuchadnezzar calls Daniel by his Hebrew name first, and then he also uses Daniel's Babylonian name, "Belteshazzar," which most of the native Babylonians used to address him. The king adds the fact that Daniel's Babylonian name originates from his god. Back in chapter 1, Hanniah, Mishael, Azariah, and Daniel are all given Babylonian names which originated from one of the Babylonian gods that was worshipped at that time. The text notes that there was something special about Daniel – he had the "spirit of the holy gods in him."<sup>206</sup> Baldwin notes that on the basis of its later usage by the queen and Belshazzar, the phrase simply denotes the idiom that Daniel was "very spiritual."<sup>207</sup> The king is confident in the ability of Daniel. Daniel is called "chief of the magicians." After nearly thirty years, Daniel was still the leader of the magicians. Job security was scarce in the ancient Near East, so thirty years meant that Daniel had admirably

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<sup>205</sup> Wood, 104-105.

<sup>206</sup> Wood, 106; Young, 99; and Montgomery, 225-226, have noted that Theodotion's text (LXX) uses the singular form for "gods" thereby allowing the text to be translated as "God" or "deity." However, most scholars agree that the plural "gods" is the preferable translation. Further, what else would be expected from a king who is a polytheist?

<sup>207</sup> Baldwin, 111.

performed his duties for the king. The king begins to describe his dream for Daniel, hoping that he can interpret it.

### **Nebuchadnezzar Describes His Dream (Daniel 4:10-18)**

The key image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a great tree that stood in the midst of the earth. The tree's position in the middle of the earth and its great height implies its position of importance. Unger notes the tree's "central position radiating imperial authority in all directions, and its vast extent of Babylon's sway."<sup>208</sup> The use of the tree imagery in biblical tradition was nothing new. Ezekiel 17:1-10 and 31:3-14 both speak to this story; the former reference makes comparison to an Assyrian king and the latter reference to an Egyptian pharaoh. Longman notes, "There is little about a 'sacred' or 'cosmic' tree in the literature of Mesopotamia, but the tree occurs as a major motif in the iconography."<sup>209</sup> Parpola notes about the iconography:

As Parpola has pointed out, "the Tree represents the divine world order maintained by the king as representative of the god Assur, embodied in the winged disk hovering above the tree. He alerts us to the fact that sometimes the king takes the place of the tree in the iconography; "in such scenes the king is portrayed as the human personification of the Tree. Thus is the Tree symbolized the divine world order, then the king himself represented the realization of that order in man, in other words, a true image of God, the Perfect Man."<sup>210</sup>

The tree grew and became strong; its height grew until it reached the heavens thus enabling it to see all the earth and all the earth see it as well. The growth of this tree indicates the rapid growth of Nebuchadnezzar's empire. Not only did this tree reach all ends of the earth, but its foliage and fruit were healthy and strong, implying the health

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<sup>208</sup> Unger, 1627.

<sup>209</sup> Longman, 119.

<sup>210</sup> Simo Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 52, no. 3 (1993): 167-168.

and vitality of the Babylonian kingdom under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. The tree provided sustenance for all living things. Nebuchadnezzar continues saying that a heavenly messenger came down from heaven, which he terms as a “watcher” and “holy one.” The verbs describing “watcher” and “holy one” are singular; therefore, the subject is also singular, meaning that this is one angel who has come from heaven. This is the only chapter in all of Scripture that uses the term “watcher” (4:13, 17, 23) as reference to a heavenly being. Whitcomb notes that this is the only chapter that refers to an angel in this particular way.<sup>211</sup> Quite frankly, “holy watchers” is a good description of God’s angels because they are holy and they watch over the human race.<sup>212</sup> Remember that Nebuchadnezzar is the one who is speaking to Daniel. His understanding of heavenly beings could be marred because of his religious beliefs; after all, he is the speaker. It would seem best to understand this chapter from the perspective of Nebuchadnezzar and the pagan mindset. Walvoord explains, “In the religion of the Babylonians, it was customary to recognize ‘council deities’ who were charged with the special task of watching over the world. The question raised on this passage is whether Nebuchadnezzar used this heathen concept.”<sup>213</sup>

The angel cries aloud and gives the command to cut the tree down, cut off the branches, strip off the leaves, and scatter the fruit, but leave the stump of the tree in the ground. The stump is to be bound up with bands of iron and bronze. Because the stump is left in the ground, the tree has potential to grow again. Binding up the stump with iron

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<sup>211</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 64. Archer, *Daniel*, 61, notes that in the Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran, the term is used as a term for angel. Gowan, 78, says the description would become widely accepted in the Jewish literature of the Hellenistic and Roman period.

<sup>212</sup> Miller, 133.

<sup>213</sup> Walvoord, 102.

and bronze may suggest a method of preserving it; although, the purpose of using bands of iron is not clear. This interpretation “would be strengthened if such a practice were known from the ancient Near East, but no such evidence is available.”<sup>214</sup> However, looking ahead to verse 26, the purpose for binding the stump is unraveled. It is symbolic of the preservation of Nebuchadnezzar’s life and kingdom.<sup>215</sup> Note the subtle change in use of the personal pronouns beginning in verse 15b. Now the description changes from a tree to that which symbolizes a man. He would live out in the field with all the other animals and be exposed to the elements. His mind would be changed into the mind of an animal, “which includes not only the mental process but also the feelings, affections, and emotions, along with all the motivational factors leading to decisions and responses to life situations.”<sup>216</sup> This man would remain in this state until “seven periods of time pass over him.” Although some argue this period of time to be symbolic, the language of the text forces us to conclude that there was a determined amount of time in view. How long that time period will be is not as easily determined,<sup>217</sup> especially noting Daniel’s interpretation of the dream in verse 25. In this verse, Daniel focuses more on the outcome of acknowledging God’s sovereignty than he does on the time period.

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<sup>214</sup> Longman, 119.

<sup>215</sup> Miller, 133.

<sup>216</sup> Archer, “Daniel,” 61.

<sup>217</sup> According to Collins, *Daniel*, 228, seven years was the interpretation of the Old Greek version, Josephus, Jerome, and most medieval Jewish commentators. Noted contemporary scholars who endorse the period of time being seven years are Archer, “Daniel,” 61; Collins, *Daniel*, 228; Miller, 134-35. Noted scholars who espouse an indeterminate period of time are Baldwin, 112; Keil, 152-53; Leupold, 185-186; Steinmann, 236, who lists seven reasons to think that the simple equation of “times” with “years” is mistaken.

The purpose of the decree is implicitly stated in verse 17, "...that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men." The angel is not issuing the decree; he is simply the agent or messenger proclaiming the decree that came from the Most High. Critics like to nullify the prophetic element in these verses with the assumption that the decree came from the angel and not from the Most High. They forget that the decree, which was proclaimed by the angel, came from heaven and did not originate with the angel who delivered the message. The name used for God in verse 17 ("Most High") is of particular interest. The phrase refers to God's sovereignty. "The most High God is the God who rules, not only in heaven but on earth."<sup>218</sup> Nebuchadnezzar believed himself to be ruler over all the earth; therefore, when the decree was delivered to him by the angel, God made sure to let Nebuchadnezzar know that he had no ruling authority.

Nebuchadnezzar next asked Daniel to interpret the meaning of the dream for him because his wise men could not. Could these wise men have properly interpreted the dream? Did they understand the dream? Obviously, they did not understand the divine aspect of the dream; however, it is possible that they could have interpreted the dream because of the familiarity of the tree imagery. Archer notes, "More than likely they were simply reluctant to voice any interpretation adverse to the king; so they chose to remain silent."<sup>219</sup> Nebuchadnezzar had great confidence in Daniel's integrity and his God-given ability. Up to this point, chapter four of Daniel has been recited as a first-person

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<sup>218</sup> James M. Boice, *Daniel: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 51.

<sup>219</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 62.

narrative from King Nebuchadnezzar. “The narrative has a ring of a royal inscription,”<sup>220</sup> but now the first-person usage is replaced by a third-person narrator in verse 19.

### **Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream (Daniel 4:19-27)**

After the king finished narrating his dream, he looks to Daniel for an interpretation that would help him understand it. Up to this point, Daniel has been honest and forthright when speaking to the king, but now the text says that he was dismayed and his thoughts alarmed him. Why was Daniel perplexed? It seems that Daniel knew he was going to be the bearer of bad news. The imagery of the tree had already become part of the Jewish culture:

Just a few years before Nebuchadnezzar had this dream, Ezekiel used a similar figure in describing the pride and fall of Assyria (Ezekiel 31:3-17). So firmly was this tree symbolism rooted in Hebrew tradition that it is difficult to imagine how a Hebrew soothsayer could have failed to fathom the symbolic meaning of the dream – though the pagan seers Nebuchadnezzar first consulted may not have known such clear parallels.<sup>221</sup>

In chapter 2, Daniel seeks an all-night prayer meeting with his three faithful friends in order to interpret the king’s dream. In chapter four, the text does not say that he explicitly sought any guidance for the interpretation. This assumes that he already had a basic understanding of the dream as laid out by Archer’s comments above.

Daniel’s reluctance to give the king an interpretation gives the reader an unusual insight into the relationship between Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. It seems that they had grown to respect one another. Daniel has been at the side of the king for more than thirty years; obviously a strong bond has formed between the two. Longman notes that, “the dynamic between Daniel and the king is a remarkable one, considering that this is the

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<sup>220</sup> Longman, 120.

<sup>221</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 64.

king who destroyed Jerusalem, but God's prophet shows concern for the well-being of the king, not vindictiveness."<sup>222</sup> But there was more at stake than just their relationship. Miller notes, "Nebuchadnezzar evidently had treated the Jews well throughout his reign. If he were deposed, there would be no guarantee of a like-minded ruler."<sup>223</sup> Although probably reluctant to give the message, shown by his desire for the dream to be for the king's enemies,<sup>224</sup> Daniel carried out his God-given task. However, Daniel's statement that the dream be for the king's enemies also showed that "Daniel knew immediately the significance of the dream."<sup>225</sup>

The king's worse fears were about to come true as Daniel interpreted the tree to portray Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian kingdom. Daniel said to the king, "It is you, O King." The phrase is reminiscent of Nathan's infamous words to David in 2 Samuel 12:7, "You are the man." Daniel summarizes the king's dream, but there are at least three notable differences between the king's version and Daniel's interpretation. First, in 4:23, Daniel uses the simple phrase "destroy it" in place of the detailed description in 4:14. Fewell says concerning this omission, "Daniel thus avoids speaking of the complete loss of integrity, power, and influence that the king is to experience."<sup>226</sup> Second, Daniel completely omits the changing of a man's heart into a beast's heart. Rather, he says that the king will live for seven periods of time in the wild. Daniel does

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<sup>222</sup> Longman, 120.

<sup>223</sup> Miller, 136.

<sup>224</sup> Gowan, 79, notes that it was customary for the interpreter to wish something favorable for the dreamer.

<sup>225</sup> Miller, 136.

<sup>226</sup> Fewell, 69.

not communicate the full extent of humiliation that is in store for the king. Fewell notes that Daniel “thus deflects the point of the public nature of the king’s humiliation.”<sup>227</sup>

Third, Daniel reminds the king of the divine decree’s purpose by use of the specific reference, “which has come upon you.” Back in 4:17, Nebuchadnezzar uses the phrase “that the living may know.” Therefore, this appears to be a private and personal matter between the most High and Nebuchadnezzar, rather than a public issue.

Verse 25 says that Nebuchadnezzar will be driven from dwelling with men to dwelling in the field with animals. The phrases “you shall be made to eat grass” and “you shall be wet with the dew of heaven” employ impersonal active plurals. These verbs show the manner of life that Nebuchadnezzar would have while living with the animals. Wood notes, “He would not merely live *where* they live, but *as* they lived.”<sup>228</sup> His manner of eating would be similar to the manner in which an ox eats. He would be wet with the dew of heaven suggesting that he would not come inside like man does at evening; he would remain in the open field. Some have wondered why there is no historical record for the account in Nebuchadnezzar’s royal inscriptions. Royal families did not usually make such accounts public information; thus, records of the king’s condition were probably never made.<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, Wiseman says, “Meticulous historical records are available up to about the eleventh year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, after which the chronicles are practically silent.”<sup>230</sup> Not only does the number of

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<sup>227</sup> Fewell, 70.

<sup>228</sup> Wood, 116.

<sup>229</sup> Montgomery, 220-221.

<sup>230</sup> Donald J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1956), 72.



inscription drop, says Ferguson, but also their content changes. He continues noting that “earlier preoccupation with religious wanes, and attention is turned to palaces and politics. Prayers show evidence of being copied from earlier sources. In reworking one of his closing prayers the king manages to insert eight of his own royal titles. Flaunting of his royal traits before deity was totally absent in his earlier prayers.”<sup>231</sup>

The consequences or punishment that the king will receive happens “not for his ultimate destruction, but for his deliverance and restoration.”<sup>232</sup> The basis for his restoration will be the acknowledgment that the Most High rules in both heaven and earth who sets up and tears down both kings and kingdoms. Interestingly, within verse 26, the word “Heaven” is substituted for “Most High.” Walvoord notes:

Daniel, in using the expression *the heavens do rule*, is not accepting the Babylonian deification of heavenly bodies, as he makes clear in 4:25 that “the most High” is a person. He is probably only contrasting divine or heavenly rule to earthly rule such as Nebuchadnezzar exercised, with the implication that Nebuchadnezzar’s sovereignty was much less than that of “the heavens.”<sup>233</sup>

Despite the claims of the critics, Daniel is simply demonstrating a superiority factor of the Most High over all the gods of the earth.

Nebuchadnezzar’s madness was not fiction as many critics like to claim. Langdon notes, “After the year 590 B.C. we have scarcely anything but palace inscriptions with little to say about the religious interest of the king.”<sup>234</sup> The most interesting account,

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<sup>231</sup> Paul Ferguson, “Nebuchadnezzar, Gilgamesh, And The ‘Babylonian Job,’” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 3 (September 1994): 322.

<sup>232</sup> Bob Deffinbaugh, *Daniel: Relating Prophecy to Piety* (Biblical Studies Press, 1995, <http://bible.org/series/daniel-relating-prophecy-piety>), 58

<sup>233</sup> Walvoord, 106.

<sup>234</sup> S. Langon, *Nebuabylonischen Königsinschriften, Vorderasiatische Bibliothek* 4 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912) 67-68.

cites Ferguson, was published by A.K. Grayson in which D.J. Wiseman identifies Nebuchadnezzar II as the subject of a brief narration. Ferguson sums up the narration and makes some remarks at the end:

For some unspecified reason the king becomes extremely disoriented. His orders are contradictory, and he does not even heed the mention of his name. He does not show concern for son or daughter and ceases his care for worship centers. Even his own life is of no value to him. The text ends with the king going to the holy gate and weeping bitterly to the great gods. The text is too small and fragmentary to dogmatically assert that it is the Babylonian version of the account in Daniel 4. It does, however, indicate that a great deal of caution is in order before dismissing the account of the king's madness as nothing more than folklore.<sup>235</sup>

Daniel wraps up the interpretation of the dream with a light shining at the end of the tunnel. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom will not be dismantled; it will remain intact until he is restored to his throne. The purpose of the ring was to preserve the stump so that it would not deteriorate during the period of the king's sickness. The ordinary course of events for such an illness would be to replace the monarch with a competent successor from the royal line; however, this did not take place. Verse 27 needs to be recognized in this chapter as a key verse. It enlightens the reader as to the purpose of Nebuchadnezzar's illness. Daniel explains to the king that if he "breaks off his sin," then it is possible that the discipline from God can be curbed for a period of time. His sins were pride and arrogance, as can be surmised from this chapter and his life up to this point. However, the text specially calls attention to the fruit of his sins which are self-promotion and oppression of the poor. Deffinbaugh makes a vital point in connecting pride with oppression:

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<sup>235</sup> Ferguson, 322-323.

Pride is a kind of plagiarism. It attempts to grasp for ourselves the glory which belongs to another. Nebuchadnezzar took all the glory for the greatness of his kingdom; he did not give glory to God. In effect, he began to set himself in the seat of God, reminiscent of other glory-seeking creatures, including Satan himself (see Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28). Taking glory which does not belong to us causes us to see ourselves as better than others. Pride ignores and denies the truth that prosperity comes from God, as a gift of His grace, and not the reward for our greatness. Pride also interprets others' poverty as proof of inferiority and the penalty for inferiority. Sooner or later, pride justifies the use of power as rightly taking advantage of the poor to gain from their weaknesses.<sup>236</sup>

Daniel is still the compassionate prophet, urges the king to take some preventative measures before it's too late.

### **The Interpretation of the Dream Is Fulfilled (Daniel 4:28-33)**

Beginning in verse 28 and continuing through verse 33, the account reverts back to speaking of Nebuchadnezzar in third person. Some have suggested that the reason for this is that these verses were written by someone other than the king, but the subject matter is likely the reason as Wood states, "The change of person is more likely due to the type of subject matter concerned."<sup>237</sup> Daniel's interpretation did come to pass; however, according to 4:29, the king was given a considerable amount of time (twelve months) to change his actions. Wiseman believes that the king used this time to march against Egypt, further solidifying his kingdom and thereby ignoring Daniel's advice. Contrasting the king's actions in chapter 2 and 4, there is a noticeable difference in the king's actions:

Note the difference here and what is described in Daniel 2. In chapter 2, after Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar his dream and its interpretation, the king honored and promoted Daniel. Here we find no expression of appreciation from the king, nor a promotion or advancement of Daniel. From the silence of the text, the king only politely thanked Daniel at best, choosing not to take his interpretation

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<sup>236</sup> Deffinbaugh, 58-59.

<sup>237</sup> Wood, 118.

seriously. The dream itself seems to have had no great impact on the king's attitude or actions.<sup>238</sup>

Daniel's admonition and encouragement to the king seemed to be of no avail. The king is pictured as walking on a flat roof atop one of his palace, admiring his accomplishments and adoring the kingdom he had built. The king begins to gloat over his accomplishments, believing his success is due to his own personal achievements and influence, rather than realizing God has blessed him.

Babylon was a great city and the crown jewel of Nebuchadnezzar's empire. Babylonian records speak of three massive palaces within the city. The main palace was 350 yards long and 200 yards wide, measuring an astonishing 630,000 square feet. Beyond the palace complex, the great city of Babylon was indeed an architectural marvel of the ancient world. It was the largest city of the known world with a population of approximately two million people. A 1,000-yard-long boulevard ran down the center of the city being encompassed by the city's double-walled system. The inner wall was 21 feet thick with defense towers every 60 feet of wall. The outer wall was 38 feet high and 11 feet wide. The top of the wall was wide enough for chariots to pass one another.<sup>239</sup>

Before Nebuchadnezzar could finish his prideful boast, a voice from heaven interrupted him.<sup>240</sup> Within the hour the illness came upon the king, and he was driven from his palace to live with the animals. He began to act like an animal and his appearance gradually reflected the makeup of one.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Deffinbaugh, 59.

<sup>239</sup> Dykes, 59.

<sup>240</sup> Scripture frequently cites examples where God brings judgment at the very moment of blasphemous words. See Psalm 78:30-31 and Acts 5:1-11, 12:23.

### **The Restoration of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:34-37)**

The king's repentance brought about his restoration. It was not the physical act of lifting his eyes up to heaven that restored the king to his former state – it was his repentance and acknowledgment that the most High God of heaven is sovereign over all the kingdoms of the world. He is the One who sets up kings and kingdoms, and in the same breath, dethrones and dismantles them. It is significant, though, that Nebuchadnezzar says, "I lifted up my eyes to heaven." Throughout the book of Daniel, a continual distinction is noted between the God of Heaven and the Babylonian gods of the earth. Longman notes, "The action of looking toward heaven is obviously meant as an acknowledgement of God's ultimate superiority."<sup>242</sup> Nebuchadnezzar has realized that God of heaven's kingdom is superior to all earthly kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar's theology impressively progresses one step further as he proclaims, "...none can stay his hand, or say to him, 'What have you done?'" No man, not even the most powerful monarch of the world, can thwart the God of heaven; His ways are far above man's ways. Soon after Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God, his reason, majesty, and glory of his kingdom, returned to him.

Some have wondered who ruled for the king while he was unfit to rule the kingdom. Shea explains a cultural concept of mental illness that might add light to the darkness:

The probable reason this did not happen has to do with the ancients' view of mental illness. They believed it was caused by demons, minor gods who were

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<sup>241</sup> It has been suggested that the "seven times" must have been seven years, else how would it be possible for his hair and nails to grow in length.

<sup>242</sup> Longman, 122.

malevolent toward human beings. They also believed that if a person was deliberately killed while suffering from insanity, the demon-god who caused the mental illness would cause it to come upon the murderer. Thus no one would risk acquiring mental illness by killing a person so afflicted. Babylonian theology or psychology, probably protected Nebuchadnezzar during this time of his incapacitation.<sup>243</sup>

Since there was a group of officials on hand to hear Daniel's interpretation, and see it come to pass later, it is probable that Daniel would have ruled in the king's stead.

Scripture is not clear on the matter; however, "it is reasonable to assume that Daniel himself had much to do with the kind treatment and protection of Nebuchadnezzar."<sup>244</sup>

King Nebuchadnezzar concludes his testimony saying, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven." The words, "praise," "extol," and "honor" are all participles in Aramaic which emphasize a continuous action. The king further testifies that God's works and ways are right and just, implying that "he had been proud and that God's judgment of him had been proper."<sup>245</sup> The last phrase of verse 37 proves to be the theme to the entire story: "...and those who walk in pride he is able to humble." At this concluding section of the chapter, many scholars and students of God's Word have considered the question, "Did King Nebuchadnezzar come to a saving knowledge of God after he was restored from his illness?" There are good men on each side of the issue.<sup>246</sup> Walvoord says that the king's spiritual pilgrimage seems to come to a climax in this chapter:

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<sup>243</sup> Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide*, 78.

<sup>244</sup> Walvoord, 108.

<sup>245</sup> Miller, 144.

<sup>246</sup> This is not an exhaustive list. Calvin, Keil, Pusey, and Leupold do not believe that Nebuchadnezzar was converted; while Wood, Young, Luck, Rushdoony, Miller, Shea, Whitcomb, and Walvoord believe he did have a conversion experience.

Nebuchadnezzar reaches a new spiritual perspicacity. Prior to his experience of insanity, his confessions were those of a pagan whose polytheism permitted the addition of new gods, as illustrated in Daniel 2:47 and 3:28-29. Now Nebuchadnezzar apparently worships the King of heaven only. For this reason, his autobiography is truly remarkable and reflects the fruitfulness of Daniel's influence upon him and probably of Daniel's daily prayers for him. Certainly, God is not a respecter of persons and can save the high and mighty in this world as well as the lowly.<sup>247</sup>

Although Nebuchadnezzar does not specifically state that he has come to saving knowledge of God, the content of the next chapter might give the reader a good inclination that he did indeed have a conversion experience. Roughly twenty years later, Daniel appears before Belshazzar telling him that Nebuchadnezzar experienced insanity, "...until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven." (Daniel 5:21b-23a) Could Daniel be implying to Belshazzar that he needs to come to a saving knowledge of Christ just like Nebuchadnezzar did?

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<sup>247</sup> Walvoord, 112.

## **Preaching Outline: Responding with Praise When You're Humbled**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 4 of the book of Daniel, one of the most unique chapters in all of Scripture, is authored by none other than King Nebuchadnezzar himself. This chapter is much like an autobiography of the last years of the king. About twenty to thirty years of time has elapsed between chapters three and four. Daniel, still the chief magician in the king's court, was roughly fifty years old at this time and still faithfully serving king Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. This chapter becomes the personal testimony of how the king was humbled by God on account of his arrogance and pride. Nebuchadnezzar now understands how his pride and prosperity have driven his heart from God, and he wants his experiences to be published so that others might learn from it.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, calls pride “the great sin,” noting these particular words about it:

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when they see it in others; and of which hardly any people, except some Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. There is no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves; and the more we have it in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.<sup>248</sup>

While it is easy to pick up on the theme of pride and humility in chapter four, another more central theme can be seen for all the narratives in Daniel 1-6. Daniel 4:17 is the first occurrence of this central theme: *The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will*. God is sovereign over all the affairs of men; He the One calling shots and orchestrating the affairs of man, not Nebuchadnezzar or any other king. God uses Nebuchadnezzar for His own purposes and to fulfill His plans (cf. Dan. 1:2).

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<sup>248</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 109.



Therefore, because God is in control of all things, the believer can rest and be confident in the fact that God will watch over His faithful people. God may not fix every problem, answer every prayer, or rescue us from every circumstance, but He is in control and knows what is best for us. Our response, like Nebuchadnezzar, should be to praise Him!

### **Proposition**

Knowing that God is in control at all times should cause us to respond to life's circumstances with praise.

### **Preaching Manuscript**

#### Praise God for His mighty works (Daniel 4:1-3)

Ordinarily, verses 1-3 should be placed at the end of chapter four, but because the king wants all people, nations, and languages to learn from his past experiences, the words of praise for God's mighty works are placed at the beginning of the chapter. Interestingly, as world renown as Nebuchadnezzar is in ancient history, he doesn't bore the reader with various royal titles or accolades. He simply states that he is Nebuchadnezzar, king in Babylon. This is an entirely different attitude coming from a king who boasted about personally building Babylon (cf. 4:30). It seems that the king finally comes to grips with the concept that no other ruler or king could have any power or kingdom except by God's permission, and he wants to praise God for this marvelous truth. Much is to be said for the believer who often forgets to offer praise and thanksgiving to God. Paul reminds believers that they are to give thanks in everything! If a powerful potentate has no regrets for praising God for His mighty works and ways, then what is our reason for not speaking up? Have you been brought into direct contact with God in such a way that you can speak confidently of what He has done for you?

Praise God for His merciful warnings (Daniel 4:4-36)

**Dream: God gives a warning (4:4-18).** Nebuchadnezzar says that he was at ease in his palace and all seemed to be well in the empire of Babylon. It was at this point of peace and security that God sends the king a dream. Throughout the Old Testament, God uses dreams and visions to convey a message or truth to the recipient. Job 33:14-18 conveys this concept quite clearly as this passage teaches that God uses dreams to warn men about their evil actions. Now, for King Nebuchadnezzar, having strange dreams was something he had experienced before. Like the dream in Daniel chapter 2, this dream in chapter 4 was more like a nightmare that made for a sleepless night.

The king calls for the wise men of Babylon so that they might tell the king the interpretation of his dream. However, similar to the narrative in Daniel chapter two, the wise men are unable to interpret the king's dream. Why were they unable to interpret the dream? They had elaborate manuals and rule books for interpreting dreams, but why didn't they try? Down a few verses in the text, we find that the king's dream concerned a great tree in the middle of the earth. From what is understood about the imagery of a tree in both biblical traditions and ancient iconography,<sup>249</sup> the king's wise men probably had a basic understanding that the tree symbolized the king. The tree eventually is cut down, which doesn't take a wise man to figure out this was bad news for the king. Only the wise man that wanted to lose his life would take this news to the king. However, Daniel will deliver this fateful message to the king because he knows that it is not King Nebuchadnezzar who holds Daniel's life; it is the King of Kings.

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<sup>249</sup> Longman, 119.

When Daniel arrives in the palace, the king begins to recite and describe his dream to Daniel. The text does not say why Daniel was not with the initial group of wise men. Some have offered reasons for his absence,<sup>250</sup> others note the dramatic effect of Daniel coming in last, or maybe he wanted to give the wise men enough time to show their deficient, human wisdom; whatever the reason, we are left with the simple thought that he was not in the palace at that time. The king's dream involved a great tree that was visible to the ends of the earth, one that was healthy and producing fruit for all the earth. But the tree's beauty and health did not last long as an angel was sent from heaven with a decree to chop down the tree, strip its branches, and scatter its fruit. Interestingly, the tree was not completely destroyed as its roots were to remain, being bound up by a metal alloy. Now, at this juncture in the text (4:15-16), the tree is directly associated with the king by the change of pronouns from *its* to *him/his*. Further, the king was to be turned into an animal and live in the fields for a period of seven times.<sup>251</sup> The purpose of the decree given in the dream was so that the king might know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever He chooses.

God was using this dream to get Nebuchadnezzar's attention. Dykes notes that listening to God is not an easy task, he says, "One of the greatest abilities is the art of being able to hear God's voice in the midst of all of the noise of this world."<sup>252</sup>

Unfortunately, the king hit rock bottom before he responded to God. The believer needs to learn from the example of Nebuchadnezzar before he/she hits rock bottom, too. The

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<sup>250</sup> Wood, 104-105, summarizes several theories of Daniel's absence.

<sup>251</sup> Many scholars believe this "seven times" equals a period of seven years, but this is not completely settled among all scholars.

<sup>252</sup> Dykes, 66.

believer needs to practice the art of silence, or maybe it is better termed the discipline of silence: the art of getting rid of all the noise and clutter that fills the mind so that God's voice can be heard. It seems that many people are too distracted by the cares of the world to hear the still, small voice of God.

**Daniel: God affirms that warning (4:19-26).** After the king describes the dream to Daniel, he is immediately stunned. He knows that the dream and its meaning is for the king and his kingdom, yet his desire is that the dream be for the enemies of the king. It is quite evident that Daniel had compassion on this pagan king; he sought to introduce the king to the one true God. Jeremiah notes the sensitivity of Daniel's heart towards the king, he says, "Daniel gives us a superb pattern of how to preach the judgment of God to people. It needs to be done with a broken heart, with a true concern, pointing out the consequences with mercy."<sup>253</sup> With great integrity, Daniel, like the prophet Nathan pointing his finger at King David, tells Nebuchadnezzar, "It is you!"

Daniel continues telling the king that he has become strong, his greatness has grown, and his kingdom reaches the ends of the earth. The king will soon be cut down just like the tree, and he will be changed into an animal, living in the fields like a wild beast. His punishment will last for a period of time so that he might know that the Most High rules in the kingdoms of men. However, the king and his kingdom will be restored to him again only after he recognizes that God rules. Daniel made it clear that God was humbling Nebuchadnezzar in order to bring him to his spiritual senses. If God is able to bring cocky, proud, and boastful rulers down from their high horses by reminding them

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<sup>253</sup> David Jeremiah and C.C. Carlson, *Handwriting on the Wall: Secrets from the Prophecies of Daniel* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 92.

who is in charge, then surely each believer needs to make sure they avoid that trap of pride. Longman notes how our Western perspective of the world can be deadly, he writes, “Christians are not immune from a pride that removes our eyes from God and places them squarely on ourselves. Indeed, it is precisely in situations like ours in the West, where we do not face active persecution, that this danger is most obvious.”<sup>254</sup>

**Decision: God allows repentance (4:27).** Like all good preachers, Daniel presses the king for a decision. He urges the king to turn from his sins and humble himself before God. Kaiser notes, “God wanted to see evidence of an inward change, as shown by the way Nebuchadnezzar left off his wickedness, stopped all oppression of the harassed, and acted in kindness toward the afflicted.”<sup>255</sup> Daniel knows that stopping wrong is not the only thing that king needed to do; he needs to do right in its place. Daniel provided the king with a brilliant type of replacement theology which is essential to any change of behavior. The fastest road back to our sin or addiction is when we cease a behavior and do nothing in its place.

Daniel’s exhortation is very unique in that Daniel is able to link prophecy with piety. Frequently, popular and well-known scholars and authors have great abilities to unfold the prophecies of the Scripture and show their future significance, but few seem to have the depth to explain what God expects of His people in the present. The late President of Moody Bible Institute, William Culbertson, says these words: “You do not

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<sup>254</sup> Longman, 128.

<sup>255</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *The Majesty of God in the Old Testament: A Guide for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 47.

truly hold the truth of the doctrine of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ until that doctrine holds you and influences your manner of living as the Bible says it should.”<sup>256</sup>

God shows His mercy to king Nebuchadnezzar by giving him twelve months of time to change his ways. God gave the king several warning signs along the way. First, God warns the king through a dream; second, He affirms this warning through the interpretation He gave to Daniel; third, Daniel told the king that he needed to repent of his ways; fourth, God was longsuffering and patient with the king giving him a full year to get his life back in order. For the believer who needs to change his ways, God is littering the road to judgment with warning signs; those who pay attention to those warning signs will avoid future heartaches and enjoy continued fellowship with God.

**Destiny: God Gives out punishment (4:28-33).** Nebuchadnezzar has been given multiple warning signs, and yet he chooses to ignore them. The king was walking atop one of his palace buildings looking over Babylon and in pride he says, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built?” The first person pronouns are readily noticeable to show that Nebuchadnezzar’s pride is what causes his fall. God is longsuffering with sinners, but when the time comes for Him to act, He does not delay. As soon as the words came out of Nebuchadnezzar’s mouth, a voice resonated from heaven with the fulfillment of what Daniel had interpreted. The king lost his power and position, even his humanity.

Praise God for His marvelous ways (Daniel 4:34-37)

In a prideful boast, Nebuchadnezzar looks around and downward at his great accomplishments never to look up again for a long time. Ironically, when the time of punishment for the king was fulfilled, the first place he looked was up. Our God is the

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<sup>256</sup> William Culbertson, *The Faith Once Delivered* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 54-55.

God of second, third, and fourth chances. He lifted his eyes to heaven in an act of supplication and dependence as his sanity was restored to him; he has finally come to grips with the reality that God is sovereign over all the affairs of men. It is truly amazing that “the end result of Nebuchadnezzar’s humbling was even greater exaltation. Once brought low by God, he could safely be elevated back to the heights and restored control of his kingdom.”<sup>257</sup>

Once the king realizes that God is sovereign and in control, he immediately begins to praise and worship God. He uses three active participles (praise, exalt, glorify), which stress a continuous action, to form the core of his doxology. Walvoord, in his commentary on Daniel, aptly brings this chapter to a close with these words:

In chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar reaches a new spiritual perspicacity. Prior to his experience of insanity, his confessions were those of a pagan whose polytheism permitted the addition of new gods, as illustrated in Daniel 2:47 and 3:28–29. Now Nebuchadnezzar apparently worships the King of heaven only. For this reason, his autobiography is truly remarkable and reflects the fruitfulness of Daniel’s influence upon him and probably of Daniel’s daily prayers for him. Certainly God is no respecter of persons and can save the high and mighty in this world as well as the lowly.<sup>258</sup>

In these closing verses of chapter four, Nebuchadnezzar describes the Lord as the Most High, Him Who lives forever, and the King of heaven. The wording of the king’s proclamation has allowed some to conclude that Nebuchadnezzar came to saving faith in Jehovah. What can be said is that “Nebuchadnezzar moved from acknowledging the sovereignty of no one but himself to acknowledging Yahweh’s sovereignty over him.”<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Daniel*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2008), 71.

<sup>258</sup> Walvoord, 112.

<sup>259</sup> Constable.

## Conclusion

The two themes that are stressed in chapter 4 of Daniel are pride and sovereignty; albeit, they are more connected than what a person might actually believe. The heart of sinful man tends to rebel at the very thought of a sovereign God because the human heart wants to be free from all things. Ironically, sinners think that they are free because they are in control of their lives, but they don't realize how much they are in bondage to their sinful nature, the world, and the influences of Satan. If a person like Nebuchadnezzar is able to be humbled and restored, then surely no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy. This narrative also becomes an encouragement to the Jews who were still in captivity when the events of this chapter transpired. Israel itself was like a tree that had been cut down and destroyed, but the stump still remained intact. If Nebuchadnezzar could be forgiven and restored back after he humbled himself, then surely Israel, too, could be forgiven and restored, as well. In fact, this concept might just be what Daniel was praying for in Daniel 9:1-20.

It has often been said that the most glory God can receive is when a sinner comes to the cross and places saving faith in Christ. The Gospel is a humbling message, as Duguid notes, "The only way for us to enter God's kingdom is with empty hands, lifting our eyes to heaven and confessing our desperate need of a savior."<sup>260</sup> When we stand before God, our problems are not simply our weaknesses and failures but also our successes and strengths because all of these lead us to take pride in ourselves. The believer should be thankful that God humbles the prideful and brings them low because the worst thing would be for God to leave us comfortable and at ease in our prideful

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<sup>260</sup> Duguid, 72.



ways. When a believer is humbled by God, he should not consider it as something evil or wicked, but something good and great. After all, was it not Christ who humbled himself and became a servant (Phil. 2:6-8)? Suffering and difficulties teach us to depend on God. If we are to depend on him more and more each day, then the reality is that we must experience suffering and hardships more frequently.

The famous city of Babylon is gone – buried under the sands of Iraq. All of Nebuchadnezzar's accomplishments are destroyed. The only thing that the king produced that still remains today is his personal testimony found in Daniel chapter four. Nebuchadnezzar heard God and allowed Him to change his heart; in the next chapter of Daniel, Belshazzar heard God too, but refused to change his heart. The outcome for Belshazzar was not so great. Pay attention to the warning signs that God is graciously placing along your road, because if you ignore them, then the direction you are heading might just lead to judgment and destruction.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE NARRATIVE IN DANIEL CHAPTER 5

#### **Interpretive Outline: Belshazzar's Banquet and Babylon's Fall**

Chapter 5 of Daniel begins abruptly as a new king named Belshazzar is ruling in Babylon. From the end of chapter 4, roughly twenty-five years pass until Belshazzar's debut in chapter 5. While the text of Daniel does not seem to skip a beat between these two chapters, several kings ruled Babylon during this time period. After ruling for 43 years, King Nebuchadnezzar dies in 562 BC. Nebuchadnezzar had taken great pains to unify and expand his kingdom – an undertaking that would soon deteriorate after his death. Pentecost rightly comments about this time period saying, “The ensuing years of Babylonian history...were marked by progressive deterioration, intrigue, and murder.”<sup>262</sup> Evil-Merodach succeeds Nebuchadnezzar, his father, as king. He rules on the throne for a short two years (562-560 BC; cf. Jer. 52:31-34). During his reign, Jehoiachin, was released from prison<sup>263</sup> and given an honorable place in the court of the king (2 Kgs. 25:27-30). In 560 BC, Evil-Merodach was murdered by Neriglissar, a military general (also his brother-in-law) who served under Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC. Four years later Neriglissar dies (556 BC), and his son Labashi-

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<sup>262</sup> Pentecost, 1344.

<sup>263</sup> William H. Shea, “Daniel 3: Extra-Biblical Texts and the Convocation on the Plain of Dura,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 37, 49. Shea concludes that a plausible reason why Evil-Merodach was kind to Jehoiachin was because Abednego (Azariah) served as the king's secretary while he was ranked under Nebuchadnezzar as the crown prince.

marduk assumes the throne.<sup>264</sup> He lasts on the throne for a mere nine months and is executed by the party that brings Nabonidus to the throne. Nabonidus is recognized as the last king of Babylon since he was ruling when Cyrus entered Babylon and brought the kingdom to an end (539 BC). Nabonidus was not a royal heir to the throne.<sup>265</sup> Some have suggested that Nabonidus may have married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar to help legitimize his rights to the throne and gather the support of the people.

History records Nabonidus' rule over Babylon for 17 years (556-539 BC). Consequently, the text of Daniel 5 says that Belshazzar was ruling Babylon during this time, even to its last day (539 BC). Can two kings be ruling the same kingdom? History clearly recognizes not only Belshazzar's existence, but also that he was the son and co-regent with his father Nabonidus.<sup>266</sup> Belshazzar was the king that the people served, his father Nabonidus played no part in the drama; therefore, the narrative's usage of Belshazzar as king is accurate.<sup>267</sup> Major archaeological discoveries have given new evidence for this co-regency that existed between Belshazzar and Nabonidus.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 68.

<sup>265</sup> Raymond P. Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar: A Study of the Closing Events of the Neo-Babylonian Empire*, *Ancient Near East: Classic Studies* (1929; repr., Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 73. Dougherty states that in one inscription Nabonidus refers to his predecessors of Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-Merodach, Neriglissar, but does not claim descent from any of them.

<sup>266</sup> Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 90. According to Beaulieu, there are 37 texts dated from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Nabonidus, that attest to the existence of Belshazzar.

<sup>267</sup> If the book of Daniel was written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, as critics and liberals alike assume, then even the most accurate historian would have penned Nabonidus in place of Belshazzar. Miller, 148, comments that both the Jews and Babylonians would have been familiar with the idea of co-regency.

<sup>268</sup> For more information relating to Nabonidus and Belshazzar see the Appendix.

### Belshazzar's Banquet (5:1-4)

Belshazzar is throwing a party and a thousand of his lords are invited. This size of a party was not an unusual Oriental custom. Montgomery cites that one Persian king entertained 15,000 persons daily at his table and that Alexander the Great entertained 10,000 guests at a marriage festival.<sup>269</sup> Banquets of this caliber were not only known for their size but also for their extravagance and pomp. The book of Esther (1:1-4) opens up with Xerxes holding a gathering for a large number of people for 180 days. Normally in a setting as this one, the king would sit in another room, entertaining a private selection of guests for that evening. However, at this party, Belshazzar chose to deliberately sit in a place where those gathered could see him – probably on an elevated platform.

Belshazzar sets the tone for the feast as well as the drinking.<sup>270</sup> The purpose of

Belshazzar's feast seems reminiscent of Nebuchadnezzar's image in chapter 3 of Daniel:

So, what was his father doing in chapter 3? Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, it was argued, represented his attempt to insure political and religious unity in his kingdom. His requirement that all his officials pay homage to the image was a symbolic demand that they swear complete allegiance to him. What then of Belshazzar's feast? Does it not serve the same function? It is not like Adonijah's feasts in 1 Kings 1, a feast designed to allure the political allegiance of subjects and to consolidate political power?<sup>271</sup>

Belshazzar was most likely throwing this party to gain political and military support, or why would he have assembled so many nobles? As Fewell implies, the scenario of gathering high ranking officials in this chapter is similar to that of chapter 3.

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<sup>269</sup> Montgomery, 250.

<sup>270</sup> Péter-Contesse, 131, notes that the more common word for *banquet* comes from the verbal root "to drink." Therefore, at a banquet or feast, drinking wine is the norm.

<sup>271</sup> Fewell, 82-83, shows some excellent comparisons between chapters 3 and 5 playing heavily upon the father-son role of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.

The purpose for the gathering of high ranking officials in chapter 3 was so that they all would bow down to the statue and pledge their allegiance to the king. Shea, however, has different theory and purpose of the banquet in mind. He believes that the purpose of the banquet<sup>272</sup> was not at all to boost morale or flaunt the magnificence of Babylon; rather, the purpose of the feast was to celebrate Belshazzar's establishment as sole ruler of Babylon.<sup>273</sup> Walvoord notes, "Nabonidus had previously gone forth from Babylon to fight the Medes and the Persians and had already been captured."<sup>274</sup> If this was known to Belshazzar, then surely the cause for throwing such a banquet was either for the purpose of boosting moral or flaunting Babylon's greatness in the face of its enemy. Shea's and Fewell's observations both play on the father-son role. The idea that Belshazzar wanted to be better than his father and make a name for himself is a concept that will become clearer in this chapter, especially as it pertains to Daniel's confrontation with Belshazzar. Whatever purpose Belshazzar had in mind for this banquet is still debatable. It can be safely noted, however, that a feast of this caliber was not something that occurred often, but had a specific agenda and was reserved for a special occasion.

Belshazzar calls for the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem to be used as drinking cups. Whitcomb notes, "Nebuchadnezzar had at least enough respect for the God of Israel to place His sacred vessels 'into the treasure-house of his god.'"<sup>275</sup> The

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<sup>272</sup> Al Wolters, "Belshazzar's Feasts and the Cult of the Moon God Sin," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995), 199-206. Wolters gives evidence from the research of Beaulieu that this banquet that Belshazzar threw was actually part of the *akitu* festival of the moon god.

<sup>273</sup> William H. Shea, "Nabonidus, Belshazzar, and the Book of Daniel: An Update," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 142.

<sup>274</sup> Walvoord, 117.

<sup>275</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 74.

phrase, “when he tasted the wine,” is taken by most to mean that the drinking of wine is what caused this lapse in judgment. Many scholars assume the above conclusions, but Fewell believes otherwise saying that Belshazzar’s actions were carefully planned in his favor. The repetition<sup>276</sup> in verses 2 and 3 is noticeable as the subtle differences are shown:

A clue to the answer might be found in a comparison of Belshazzar’s command (vs. 2) with the narrator’s report of its fulfillment (vs. 3). The command concerns “the vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem.” The narrator’s report describes the vessels as the “vessels that were taken from the temple which is the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” The variances are subtle but significant. The two statements represent two different points of view. For Belshazzar, the importance of the vessels lies in the fact that *Nebuchadnezzar his father* had taken them. But, for the narrator (as also for the implied reader), the vessels are significant because they are from *the house of God* in Jerusalem.<sup>277</sup>

Belshazzar, like all the other rulers of Babylon, had a list of gods that he worshipped and offered sacrifices to. Why is Belshazzar so concerned with the God of Jerusalem? Does his motive for desecrating these vessels run deeper? The fact Belshazzar called for these vessels by name and did so in front of a thousand of his lords, leads the reader to believe that this event was planned and Belshazzar wanted all to witness it as well. Fewell believes that Belshazzar was trying to show himself superior to Nebuchadnezzar:

One way to outdo his father is to take his father’s accomplishments and values lightly. Hence, he sends for the vessels, not because they belong to the god of Jerusalem, but because they represent his father’s greatest deed. He discredits his father’s values by demonstrating that what his father considered sacred is not sacred to him. And he shows himself to be more courageous than his father by

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<sup>276</sup> Bill T. Arnold, “Wordplay and Narrative Techniques in Daniel 5 and 6,” *Journal for Biblical Literature* 112, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 481. Arnold says that repetition is not redundancy as some may think, but rather it is a way of intensifying a role or signaling a concern of the narrator by slightly changing the wording or phraseology in the repetition.

<sup>277</sup> Fewell, 84.

doing something his father would never do – drinking from a vessel dedicated to a god.<sup>278</sup>

The command of the king to drink out of the temple vessels was followed by the entire party.<sup>279</sup> As they drank the wine, the text says that they praised the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone. At this point Belshazzar brings judgment on himself by committing idolatry. Longman notes, “He is not only committing blasphemy, he combines it with idolatry. Here is where his profanation surpasses that of Nebuchadnezzar. He used God’s holy goblets to toast to the lifeless idols of his own religion.”<sup>280</sup> Even for pagan standards, Belshazzar’s profanation of the temple vessels were nothing less than irreverent.<sup>281</sup> According to Jerome, Belshazzar was well aware of Jeremiah’s prophecy regarding divine judgment upon Babylon after the exile had ended and thus decided to mock its failure.<sup>282</sup> Whatever the reason for his use of the temple vessels is still uncertain, but what is certain is that handwriting of judgment was to come.

### **Handwriting on the Wall (5:5-9)**

“The night of revelry became a night of revelation.”<sup>283</sup> God crashes the party of Belshazzar not with trumpets or a loud noise, but with a simple hand appearing out of

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<sup>278</sup> Fewell, 85.

<sup>279</sup> Norman Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 78. He notes that the presence of women at the banquet was unusual in Babylonian culture.

<sup>280</sup> Longman, 137.

<sup>281</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 245. Cogan notes that even the notorious Assyrians showed respect for the sacred items of foreign deities. Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974), 22-41.

<sup>282</sup> Gleason L. Archer, *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 56.

<sup>283</sup> Campbell, 59.

midair writing a message on the wall. The word “immediately”<sup>284</sup> suggests that the appearance of the handwriting on the wall is directly related to Belshazzar’s use of the temple vessels. The wall upon which the hand wrote was a large white plaster wall (chalkboard) in the king’s palace that was illuminated by the lampstand. Since this event, archaeologists have uncovered the very place where they believed the hand wrote on the wall. They cite that the palace walls were coated with some type of gypsum or chalk-lime substance. Beginning in March of 1899, Koldewey led a number of excavations at Babylon. He identified the throne room of the king consisting of a huge chamber with three entrances. He writes, “It is so clearly marked out for this purpose [as a throne-room] that no reasonable doubt can be felt as to its having been used as their principle audience chamber. If anyone should desire to localize the scene of Belshazzar’s eventful banquet, he can surely place it with complete accuracy in this immense room.”<sup>285</sup>

Upon seeing the hand appear and begin to write something on the wall, Belshazzar has a panic attack.<sup>286</sup> The king’s reaction brings about an interesting point. Why was Belshazzar scared of the writing more than he was intrigued by it? Is this a signature in the text that Belshazzar may have known that judgment was coming? Notice the difference of actions between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Both men react the same, they call for their wise men, but their countenance and how they handled each situation is entirely opposite. Fewell notes the different reactions of both kings: “Never once does Nebuchadnezzar allow his fear to be manifested physically in public view,

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<sup>284</sup> Also could be translated as “at that instant,” Collins, *Daniel*, 246.

<sup>285</sup> Robert Koldewey, *The Excavations at Babylon* (London: MacMillan, 1914), 104.

<sup>286</sup> Miller, 156. His hip joints and upper legs went limp, a symptom of extreme panic.



Belshazzar, on the other hand, loses his composure.”<sup>287</sup> Adding to the above comment, Fewell takes note of the narrator’s choice of words:

The narrator’s choice of words sustains a contrast between Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar. The latter, when he needs the sages, *commands*, that they be called (2:2) and on the second occasion, *issues a decree* to this effect (4:6). Although both times in a state of anxiety, he acts authoritatively. Belshazzar, on the other hand, *cries loudly* for sages to be brought (5:7). He responds in panic.<sup>288</sup>

Once all the wise men beckon to the screams of the king, Belshazzar offers a reward to any one of them that is able to interpret the writing on the wall. Belshazzar offers a reward to his wise men; whereas, Nebuchadnezzar threatens his wise men with their life. The text notes three specific rewards. First, was a purple coat. A coat of such nature was only to be worn by royalty.<sup>289</sup> A second reward given would be a gold neck chain. This may be parallel to the gold necklace that was given to Joseph by the Pharaoh of Egypt. Such a necklace would only be worn if given to the recipient by the king himself. The third reward promised is the position of “third ruler in the kingdom,” remembering that Belshazzar was co-regent with his father Nabonidus. Walvoord notes that some scholars believe that the reward of third ruler in the kingdom refers to an office of honor and not necessarily the exact meaning of the word.<sup>290</sup> Although great rewards are offered to the wise men, they are not able to help the king. Commentators have suggested that the writing on the wall was some sort of pun or puzzle. The reasoning is because the message was written in Aramaic, and the wise men would have known this

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<sup>287</sup> Fewell, 87.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Showers, 54.

<sup>290</sup> Walvoord, 121. He also states that recent scholarship has tended to confirm the translation, “the third ruler.”

common language of the day. Wood suggests that the letters were unusually shaped characters,<sup>291</sup> while Miller says, “According to Jewish tradition, the letters were not comprehensible because they were actually written vertically instead of horizontally.”<sup>292</sup> Archer says that “most likely the words were understood, but they simply did not convey any intelligible meaning.”<sup>293</sup> Whether or not the words were readable, the fact still remains that the wise men were unable to give the king an interpretation of the message; Belshazzar’s countenance changes again. This was Belshazzar’s worst nightmare; “an omen his soothsayers are unable to explain and a supernatural power that seems to defy all attempts at manipulation via the usual mantic practices.”<sup>294</sup>

### **The Advice of the Queen (5:10-17)**

Hearing all the commotion, the queen<sup>295</sup> steps into the banquet hall to give Belshazzar some much needed counsel. It seems that Belshazzar was not aware of Daniel’s reputation in the kingdom of Babylon, but Daniel’s reputation must have impressed the queen for she clearly remembered what he had done in the past for Nebuchadnezzar. Lacocque observes that the queen functions much like the role of Arioch in chapter 2, who brings Daniel to the attention of the king.<sup>296</sup> The queen

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<sup>291</sup> Wood, 139.

<sup>292</sup> Miller, 158.

<sup>293</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 71. Collins, *Daniel*, 109, notes from the reading of the Old Greek that the wise men were only mystified about the meaning of the writing, not about its reading.

<sup>294</sup> Daniel R. Watson, “The Writing on the Wall: A Study of the Belshazzar Narrative” (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College, 2004), 19.

<sup>295</sup> The identity of this queen is discussed in the Appendix.

<sup>296</sup> André Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, trans. David Pellauer (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 97.

further says that this Daniel has “the spirit of the holy gods,” which is the same wording in Daniel 4:6. The queen’s speech does one important thing – it connects the stories of chapters four and five, but her speech also has a double meaning as it “*does* more than it *says*.”<sup>297</sup> Fewell further comments:

On the surface, she is communicating Daniel’s credibility: she recommends him on the basis of his service to Nebuchadnezzar. However, by using the phrase, ‘your father the king’ the queen also communicates two kinds of hierarchy. Fathers command the respect of sons and kings command the respect of subjects. By referring to Nebuchadnezzar as ‘the king’ she undermines Belshazzar’s own title. That is to say, we might well hear her words implying that Nebuchadnezzar was a real king while Belshazzar has yet to prove himself. Furthermore, she tells Belshazzar that the king (that is, Nebuchadnezzar) gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar. Not only is she informing Belshazzar that Daniel was highly regarded during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, but by quoting Nebuchadnezzar own word’s concerning ‘the spirit of the holy gods’ being in Daniel (cf. 4:8, 9, 18 [5, 6, 15]), she communicates specifically Nebuchadnezzar’s attitude toward Daniel.<sup>298</sup>

The queen’s speech ends with the call for Daniel to come to the banquet to interpret the handwriting on the wall. This is the third time that Daniel is summoned to the king’s court at the expense of the failure of the wise men. The first thing Belshazzar does is identify Daniel as one of the captives that Nebuchadnezzar brought into exile from Judah. Some commentators believe that this is just the king’s simple way of putting a name with a face, but there seems to be more to the king’s words. Longman notes that “such an address intends to remind Daniel of his place before Belshazzar.”<sup>299</sup> Belshazzar calls Daniel by his real Hebrew name and not his Babylonian name *Belteshazzar*. It also might be suggested that Belshazzar’s reason for doing this was because he did not want to

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<sup>297</sup> Fewell, 89.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Longman, 140.

confuse his name *Belshazzar* with Daniel's Babylonian name *Belteshazzar*. The name usage might also suggest that Belshazzar wants to remind Daniel of his lowly and insignificant place in the king's court or that Belshazzar does not use name *Belteshazzar* for Daniel because that is the name that his father, Nebuchadnezzar, gave to Daniel.

Belshazzar's hesitance to call Daniel may be because "he feared the manner of interpretation that such a man might bring."<sup>300</sup> This may be part of the reason for Belshazzar's "ignorance" of Daniel, but the other part of his ignorance must be his desire to be completely different than his father. Fewell says, "Belshazzar is torn between wanting to understand the writing and yet not wanting his father's chief sage to be the successful interpreter."<sup>301</sup> Nebuchadnezzar wanted his kingdom to be the most powerful kingdom in the world, and Belshazzar wants his kingdom to be better than his father's. Carefully take note that Belshazzar says that he has "heard" of Daniel and his abilities. He has heard of Daniel and his abilities, but he does not believe them to be true. This is contrasted with Nebuchadnezzar's statement in Daniel 4:9, "O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I was and their interpretation." Nebuchadnezzar had full assurance that Daniel was able to interpret the dream for him, but Belshazzar is not so convinced. He wanted to test Daniel, maybe the same kind of policy that Nebuchadnezzar used in testing the wise men in chapter two. Belshazzar also omits the word "holy" that was used by queen when he refers to the spirit of gods within Daniel. Miller suggests that "the king may have been fearful of Daniel's

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<sup>300</sup> Wood, 143-144.

<sup>301</sup> Fewell, 92.

interpretation since this man worshipped the God whom Belshazzar blasphemed.”<sup>302</sup>

Daniel had already proved himself to Nebuchadnezzar, but Belshazzar, not wanting to believe the reports, wants to test Daniel for himself.

- A     You are that Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah whom the king my father brought from Judah.
- B     *I have heard of you*, that the spirit of the gods is in you and light and insight and excellent wisdom have been found in you.
- C     The sages...were not able to disclose the interpretation of the matter.
- B’    *I have heard of you*, that you are able to give interpretations and to solve problems
- A’    Now, if you are able...you will rule as third in the Kingdom.

FIGURE 5. CHIASTIC STRUCTURE IN DANIEL 5:13-16<sup>303</sup>

In Figure 5, Fewell points out a very interesting point as she notes a pattern to Belshazzar’s speech. The speech of Belshazzar moves from humility to great success in just a couple of verses. The speech moves from “pointing out Daniel’s humble status to dangling before him the possibility of a position at the other end of the spectrum.”<sup>304</sup>

Belshazzar’s speech, if not permeated with skepticism, is at least a challenge to Daniel. At the very center of his speech is the inability of the wise men to solve the problem, and in turn, a challenge for Daniel to see if he can do any better than the best in the kingdom.

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<sup>302</sup> Miller, 161.

<sup>303</sup> Adapted from Fewell, 93, who also notes that Belshazzar’s speech has its counterpart with the speech of Nebuchadnezzar to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3:14-15.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

Belshazzar's speech "reveals that his expectations are not high, but he holds out the same reward of royal status to the aged Israelite wise man standing before him."<sup>305</sup>

**Daniel Gives Belshazzar a History Lesson (5:18-23)**<sup>306</sup>

Daniel begins his dialogue with the king in an abrupt manner telling the king to keep his gifts – no rewards of any kind will influence his interpretation. Porteous notes, "Daniel's refusal is rhetorical and even out of character and is perhaps meant to indicate what the attitude of a Jewish sage to a heathen potentate ought to be."<sup>307</sup> In Daniel 2 and 3, the king's gifts are received by Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; but in Daniel chapter 5 the problem lies with the giver of the gifts.<sup>308</sup> Nevertheless, Daniel is not concerned with the reward probably because he already knows it will be of no value in a few hours as a new kingdom replaces Babylon. What Daniel is concerned about is interpreting the handwriting on the wall, and he tells the king that he is able to interpret it. However, before going any further he takes the opportunity to give the king a history lesson (in vs. 18-21) that is followed with a stinging rebuke (in vs. 22-23).

Daniel reminds Belshazzar that the Most High God, not the idols of Babylon, gave Nebuchadnezzar the great kingdom of Babylon and all the honor that went with it. By use of the four terms, "kingship, greatness, glory, majesty," Daniel is defining the "greatness" of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. Nations and people feared this great

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<sup>305</sup> Longman, 140.

<sup>306</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 249, notes that this section is not included in the Old Greek. He believes it is a redactional addition designed to point up the contrast between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.

<sup>307</sup> Porteous, 80-81.

<sup>308</sup> Fewell, 94.

monarch who was given power over all the earth, but he was not in total or ultimate control. From Daniel 4 it is learned that Nebuchadnezzar's heart was lifted up in pride with what he had accomplished (4:30), and when this happened, God took away his kingdom and all the glory that went with it. Daniel then rehearses what happens to Nebuchadnezzar proving that the Most High God was greater than Nebuchadnezzar and held him responsible for the authority that was given to him. In his passage, Daniel was acting and responding like a true prophet. Longman notes, "Beginning with Samuel in his relation with Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 13, 15), a major role of the prophet has been to serve as the conscience of the king... whenever the latter [king] fell to the temptation of power and forgot who the ultimate king was, the prophet was there to remind him"<sup>309</sup>

After the history lesson, Daniel points his bony finger in the face of the king with a stinging rebuke. "And you" or "but you," at the beginning of verse 22 is emphatic with the intent to show a strong contrast between Nebuchadnezzar's response and Belshazzar's response. Nebuchadnezzar was guilty of pride, but he repented of his actions; Belshazzar refuses to humble himself even though he was aware of what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar blatantly refused to heed the lessons from Nebuchadnezzar and chose to do the complete opposite, that is, exalt himself against God. Miller notes, "This made Belshazzar's blasphemy against Israel's God even more inexcusable... Belshazzar had actually issued a challenge to 'the Lord of heaven'"<sup>310</sup>

Daniel goes on to list the three ways that Belshazzar exalted himself. First, he and his guests drank wine from the temple vessels; second, he praised lifeless gods; and third, he

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<sup>309</sup> Longman, 141.

<sup>310</sup> Miller, 163.

did not honor the God who controls Belshazzar's future.<sup>311</sup> After listing Belshazzar's unresponsiveness and direct disobedience, the time is ripe for Daniel to interpret the handwriting on the wall.

### **Daniel Interprets the Handwriting on the Wall (5:24-29)**

For the citizen of Babylon, the famous account of the handwriting on the wall is nothing more than an omen. Millard writes, "Omens were an extremely popular way of trying to tell the future throughout the existence of Babylon."<sup>312</sup> Therefore, the need, especially for the king, to understanding what it said was all the more vital. The handwriting on the wall has coined some common English expressions like "seeing the handwriting on the wall" or "his days are numbered." Throughout generations these expressions have been understood as a paradigm for divine judgment on human sinfulness.<sup>313</sup> While the importance of the story may be clear, an understanding of the handwriting and its interpretation has not been so clear. Further, the handwriting on the wall has a long form as well as a short form.<sup>314</sup> The long form is the familiar version found in the Masoretic Text of 5:25: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN;" while the shortened form is the one that Daniel bases his interpretation on in 5:26-28: "MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN." Wolters notes, "the inscription follows quite naturally from the way

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<sup>311</sup> Steinmann, 284.

<sup>312</sup> Alan Millard, "Daniel and Belshazzar in History," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (May/June 1985): 77.

<sup>313</sup> Al Wolters, "The Riddle of the Scales in Daniel 5," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 62 (1991), 155.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, Wolters notes that five of the six independent ancient witness to the original text of the riddle favor the shorter reading. Since five of the six ancient witnesses have the shorter reading in v.25, and this agrees with the text in vs. 26-28, there can be little doubt that the shortened form represents the original "handwriting on the wall."



we would expect Aramaic words to have been written on the palace wall at Belshazzar's feast, that is, without vocalization, and probably without word-division as well."<sup>315</sup>

Various meanings have been proposed for the handwriting on the wall. One of the more modern proposals that is being accepted believes that the riddle consisted of three passive participles meaning, "numbered, weighed, divided."<sup>316</sup> It is more widely held, however, that these three words are not verbs at all, but nouns designating weights – something many scholars would attest. Daniel interprets the handwriting in a simple manner but has much more to his methods. Wolters has pulled together and codified a reasonable, yet detailed explanation of the inscription – what many scholars have been seeking. Wolters, summarizing his findings, saying:

We know from the ancient versions that the handwriting on the wall in Daniel 5 originally consisted of the nine letters...which can be divided and vocalized to yield a number of different Aramaic sentences. The interpretation given by Daniel divides this series into three words of three letters, each with three levels of meaning, depending on the vocalization chosen. The first level represents scale weights (not coins), vocalized...mina, shekel, half-mina. The second level represents actions of evaluation on the part of God, vocalized...he has reckoned, he has weighed, he has assessed. The third level represents the outcome of God's evaluation of Belshazzar and his empire, vocalized...he has paid out, you are too light, Persia! The three levels therefore all refer to a pair of scales as image of God's judgment. The prominence of this image gains further significance when we realize that the annual rising of Libra took place on the eve of Babylon's fall to the Persians. Daniel not only deciphers an exceedingly sophisticated verbal riddle, but also turns the table on the Babylonian astrologers.<sup>317</sup>

As it has been noted, different rationales have been offered between the inscription and Daniel's interpretation of it, but what the interpreter needs to pay attention to is the words

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<sup>315</sup> Wolters, "Riddle of the Scales," 158.

<sup>316</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 73-74.

<sup>317</sup> Wolters, "Riddle of the Scales," 155.

of Daniel: “The interpretation of Daniel is clear and much more satisfactory than the alternatives offered by some expositors.”<sup>318</sup> He received some divine inspiration so that he could give a divine interpretation for Belshazzar.

Daniel uses the writing to make it clear to Belshazzar that he has been appointed, evaluated, and punished.<sup>319</sup> Belshazzar gives Daniel the three gifts promised to the one who could interpret the handwriting, and by doing so, Belshazzar believed that Daniel’s interpretation was correct. Daniel receives the king’s gifts after completing his task; he did not before because he did not want them to influence his interpretation.

### **Belshazzar’s Death and Babylon’s Fall (5:30-31)**

The last two verses of chapter 5 demonstrate the simple fact that Daniel’s interpretation of the handwriting on the wall came to pass. Miller notes the simplicity of these last two verses saying, “With only a few words the writer of Daniel reported one of the most significant events in world history, the fall of the Babylonian Empire and the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire.”<sup>320</sup> According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, the date for Babylon’s fall was the 16<sup>th</sup> of Tishri, which most scholars would say is October 12, 539 BC.<sup>321</sup> The Persians found a way to divert the Euphrates River that flowed south through Babylon into an ancient lake located to the north, allowing them to walk into the city on the river bed.

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<sup>318</sup> Walvoord, 128.

<sup>319</sup> Goldingay, 111.

<sup>320</sup> Miller, 166.

<sup>321</sup> Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, trans. David Green, *Studies in Biblical Literature*, no. 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 69.

Notice the subtle change of power in these verses, Belshazzar *the Chaldean* was killed and Darius *the Mede* received the kingdom. Darius' age of 62 is given; it [his age] seems to be a way of identifying this person. Steinmann believes that the age of Darius is significant for the people of Judah stating, "Darius would have been born about 601 BC, at the height of Babylonian power and just after Daniel was taken into captivity with the first wave of exiles from Judah in 605 BC. Thus Daniel signals that even at the beginning of Israel's captivity, God had already begun to implement his plan to bring it to an end, as he promised through his prophets."<sup>322</sup>

The identity of Darius the Mede has become one of the most controversial issues in the book of Daniel. Many have offered various<sup>323</sup> explanations, but the one that stays most closely to the text has been offered by D. J. Wiseman. He believes that according to Daniel 6:28, Darius and Cyrus are the same person, noting that this is why the age of Darius is given in the text of Daniel 5:31.<sup>324</sup> Shea, along with others, believes there is more to Darius' identity. When Persia took over Babylon, Cyrus, the ruler of the empire, appointed Darius the Mede to handle the job of setting up the Persian government in their newly acquired province of Babylon. Darius was to rule in Babylon much like a vassal king. Most advocates "who accept the historicity of Daniel 6, believe the premise that 'Darius' is the throne name of someone who was known by a different, personal name before appointed ruler over Babylon."<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Steinmann, 288.

<sup>323</sup> See the Appendix for the views on the identity of Darius the Mede in Daniel 6.

<sup>324</sup> D. J. Wiseman, "Some Historical Problems in the Book of Daniel," in *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*, ed. D.J. Wiseman (London: Tyndale Press, 1965), 15.

<sup>325</sup> Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide*, 83.

## Preaching Outline: Responding with Perspective in a Careless World

### Introduction

Chapter 5 of the book of Daniel transports the reader to the last night in which the Babylonian empire ruled the ancient world. Approximately twenty-five years have passed between chapters 4 and 5 of Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar had died, ruling for more than forty years. During this period of unrest, several other kings rise to power and then are shortly dethroned. It is not until around 556 BC that a stable ruler named Nabonidus assumes the throne and remains ruler of Babylon until its demise. However, the book of Daniel cites a king named Belshazzar as ruling in Babylon. For quite some time, critics have seized upon this supposed inaccuracy to show the Bible's error. However, major archaeological discoveries have given new evidence for co-regency that existed between Nabonidus and his son, Belshazzar.<sup>326</sup> The ideas of co-regency would not be unfamiliar to a Jewish mindset as the books of Kings and Chronicles are filled with narratives that show how co-regencies between the Northern kings of Israel and the Southern kings of Judah existed at that time. Nabonidus, for supposed religious reasons, did not want to live in Babylon and so he places his son as ruler in Babylon in his absence. Therefore, the book of Daniel is completely accurate – Belshazzar was the ruling king in Babylon and that is why his name is on the pages of Daniel chapter 5.

As the reader begins to read chapter five, a sense of déjà vu seems to become apparent. Although many of the characters are different, the plot of this chapter echoes what has just happened in chapter 4 of Daniel. In chapter 4, Daniel focuses on Nebuchadnezzar's pride and now in chapter 5, Belshazzar's pride is the focus. These

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<sup>326</sup> See the Appendix for more information related to Nabonidus and Belshazzar.

chapters show the reader the contrasting responses, and consequences of those responses, by Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Nebuchadnezzar chose to learn from his experience of being humbled by the Most High God; Belshazzar, unfortunately, refused to learn from his experience. Nebuchadnezzar was able to come to a place in his life where he realized that he was not in control of his own destiny and submitted to the sovereignty of God. However, in chapter 5, Belshazzar, being stubborn and unmovable, decides that although there is “handwriting on the wall,” he still wants to control his own destiny.

When a believer falls back into the trap of trying to control his own life (something every believer experiences), he often loses perspective. He becomes forgetful about the past, about what God has done for him. A believer who is filled with pride and has a desire to control his own life often loses perspective. When that perspective is lost, forgetfulness is not far behind. Belshazzar provides a negative example of response to God – what we are not supposed to do. Belshazzar responded with forgetfulness, but the believer needs to respond to life’s circumstances with perspective.

### **Proposition**

Knowing that God is in control at all times should cause us to respond to life’s circumstances with perspective.

### **Preaching Manuscript**

#### Evading the priorities of God (Daniel 5:1-6)

Belshazzar decides to throw a party for a thousand of his lords. Big and elaborate parties were part of oriental customs. Esther 1:1-4 says that King Ahasuerus decided to throw a feast for all his officials, and this feast lasted 180 days! The text does not specify

the occasion for such a large banquet and so some have speculated various reasons.<sup>327</sup>

What is certain, however, is that a feast of this magnitude did not occur every day; there was a purpose and agenda.

**God's holy vessels** (5:1-4). The text does not focus on the drinking of wine as the problem, rather it focuses what was used to drink the wine. Belshazzar sends for the vessels of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Jerusalem temple some years earlier in his reign. The first action the king did wrong was use the vessels in a manner that was inappropriate – he profaned them and the name of Jehovah. Belshazzar wanted to show his power over the one and true God. He defiled and polluted the things that were holy to the Lord (Exodus 30:1-10). The second act that the king did wrong was that he used those holy vessels to worship false gods – the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. This subtle form of idolatry was something that not even the kings of the past committed; in fact, a general understanding amongst the religions in the Near East was to show respect for sacred items of foreign deities. Belshazzar was making false gods subservient to the one true God. Nebuchadnezzar had at least enough respect to put the temple vessel of Jerusalem into storage (Daniel 1:2) and not use them for idolatrous purposes.

Such a subtle form of idolatry seems to be creeping into culture everywhere. Since the days of Babylon, even into our present day culture, people have problems with the exclusivity of Jehovah as the one and only true God. In foreign countries, missionaries deal with the problems of getting the natives to understand that when they

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<sup>327</sup> Many scholars believe the feast had political ramifications to unify the empire, like Nebuchadnezzar's reason for the statue in chapter 3 of Daniel. To boost morale in lieu of the coming destruction is another thought. Celebrating Belshazzar as the sole ruler in Babylon is a third theory.

accept Christ they are not just adding another god to their list of deities. In American culture and other affluent cultures around the world, it is very easy to put God on the shelf with our other gods of sports, money, pleasure, etc. Paul, walking through the marketplace at Athens, found an idol that was engraved to the unknown god – as if the people wanted to make sure they didn’t offend anyone else. Believers need to wake up before God decides to get your attention. The words of Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11 show God’s perspective on the matter, a perspective we need to remember not to forget: “I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols... For my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.”

**God’s handwritten vision** (5:5-6). God crashed the party of Belshazzar, not with the sound of a trumpet, but with a simple inscription written on the wall. The word “immediately” shows a cause-effect relationship between the feast and the handwriting: “The writing appears *when* the king used the vessels from the temple to drink his wine and praise his gods. God revealed his wrath at precisely the moment when what was intended to be kept holy was used for sin.”<sup>328</sup> David Jeremiah, in commenting on Belshazzar’s feast, gives a vivid contemporary picture that shows God’s reason for sending judgment so quickly:

Visualize yourself in church as communion is being served. On the communion table are the little glasses in which the juice is poured, honoring the death of our Lord. Suddenly an inebriated man swerves up the center aisle, grabs a cup from the tray, throws the juice on the floor, and fills it up with a shot of whiskey. He then turns around and shouts to the congregation, “Here’s a toast to the devil!”

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<sup>328</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Standing Your Ground: A Call to Courage in An Age of Compromise* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 128.

That is what happened that fateful night in Babylon. Is it any wonder that God said, “Enough is enough. Your number is up!”<sup>329</sup>

God forbid that the believer would ever think that this judgment was *only* for a wicked and pagan king named Belshazzar. No Scripture states that God will deal less harshly with the sins of a believer. In fact, it’s quite the opposite because the Bible says to whom much is given much is required (Luke 12:48).

Are we really so foolish to believe that the knowledge of biblical truth is some sort of exemption from the judgment of God? No type of protection will hide our sins from the eyes of God. The old adage, “It’s easier to ask for forgiveness instead of permission,” is a horrible thought! It describes a risk taker who just wants to get their own way regardless of the consequences. Yet, this type of “theology” is a favorite for many believers. Yes, God will forgive you if you confess it to him, but there are still consequences for sin that have to be given. Chapell summarizes this judgment on Belshazzar, “If we really knew the God of Daniel, we would not so abuse his Son. It is the worst abuse of faith to try to use the blood poured from Christ’s wounds as spiritual insulation from divine wrath so that we can continue in sin.”<sup>330</sup>

#### Explaining the problem without God (Daniel 5:7-9)

No doubt Belshazzar understands that the handwriting on the wall is not something to add to the celebration. The king becomes petrified, turning white as a ghost with thoughts racing through his mind. The text says that the king was so weak from fear that his legs went limp, a sign of extreme panic.<sup>331</sup> If the handwriting continued any

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<sup>329</sup> Jeremiah, 101.

<sup>330</sup> Chapell, 128.

<sup>331</sup> Miller, 156.



longer, the king might have been “scared to death.” He immediately cries out at the top of his voice for the Chaldeans and astrologers, men who study omens and signs with the “supposed” ability to interpret the meanings. The king promises three specific rewards to anyone who can interpret the handwriting on the wall. Notice the difference between Belshazzar and his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar. Both kings call for their advisors or counselors, but Belshazzar loses his composure and promises to give rewards for those who can help, while Nebuchadnezzar does not show fear and threatens his wise men with taking their lives if they do not comply with his demands.

When a believer falls into the trap of trying to control his/her own destiny, they often follow the practice of Belshazzar, losing perspective of who is really in charge. When a problem arises, effort and resources are exhausted to try to solve the problem without the help of God. People still struggle so much with the desire to be independent and free from anyone else’s help. This section of verses speaks loudly about man’s wisdom and its inability to solve the problem. When we have a problem, we often find ourselves going to the “experts.” The only “expert” that we need to consult is God and His Word; yet, because of our prideful hearts, we desire to solve the problem with our own abilities and resources. Walvoord rightly comments, “Belshazzar’s predicament is another illustration of the insecurity and powerlessness of the rulers of this world when confronted by the power and wisdom of God.”<sup>332</sup>

#### Excusing the past (Daniel 5:10-23)

When a person tries to control his own destiny, he often forgets what he has learned in the past from his experiences. Those who do not learn from history are

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<sup>332</sup> Walvoord, 122.

doomed to repeat it; seems like a fitting description of Belshazzar's failure to learn from what his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar experienced at the hands of the Most High God. Understandably, our experiences of the past are not always to govern our actions in the present or even the future, but they do help at times. However, choosing to blatantly ignore those past experiences and lessons would not only be unwise, but it also would be our attempt to control our own destiny.

**Advice of the queen** (5:10-16). Belshazzar becomes even more disturbed when he realizes that his wise men cannot interpret the handwriting on the wall. Hearing all the commotion, the queen steps into the banquet room offering the king assurances that she knows of a man who can help him. The identity of this queen is uncertain, but she definitely was around during the days of Nebuchadnezzar and remembered what Daniel was able to do for the king. The advice of the queen, from a believer's perspective, is good because she advises the king to seek Daniel, a servant and follower of Jehovah. Again, a parallel is noted. When a problem arises that we are unable to handle, we tend to go to the "experts" first rather than to God. We tend to "reserve" prayer as our last resort instead of our first response.

The queen recommends Daniel as the person to solve the problem. However, the Queen's speech is a bit sharp with a note of distaste for Belshazzar. The queen's speech communicates Daniel's credibility, but it also shows her disrespect for Belshazzar's ignorance.<sup>333</sup> The note of irony here is that King Belshazzar's problem was solved by a woman, a scenario which would have been humiliating in ancient culture. Even more embarrassing, though, is the fact that after the queen tells Belshazzar about Daniel, *she*

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<sup>333</sup> Fewell, 89.

calls for Daniel to come in and help the king. Belshazzar does not call Daniel; the king seems to have lost control of the situation.

As Daniel is brought in, the king questions Daniel about his supposed abilities, the abilities that queen articulated previously. Belshazzar's speech seems to be permeated with knowledge of the past. Has he chosen to completely ignore something or someone that could help him in the present? Notice how Belshazzar knows that Daniel is one of the captives that Nebuchadnezzar brought from Judah, something that the queen never divulged. He also uses Daniel's real, Hebrew name, not the name Belteshazzar which Nebuchadnezzar gave him. Belshazzar says to Daniel, "I have heard...." Obviously, the king does not believe in Daniel's abilities – he seems to treat them as legends – they really have not been attested or proven. It seems that Daniel and his abilities are ignored by the king because of their association with Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar knows very well of Daniel and his abilities – he has simply chosen to ignore them.

It is stunning that the queen's advice leads the king in the right direction and to the right person, but still the king wants to control his own destiny and do things his own way. Belshazzar knew what he needed to do but just refused to do it. It sounds so familiar to the present day struggle of all believers. We have the completed Word of God in front of us with multiple copies on our shelves. We know what the Word says and the direction it tells us to go, but because of our pride, we want to rule our own roost. Is our pride worth the consequences and heartaches that it can bring?

**Admonition of Daniel (5:17-23).** The picture is quite clear. An aged Daniel, pointing his bony finger into the face of the king, speaks up with clarity and conviction to

this proud ruler. The first words out of Daniel's mouth are that he will not be swayed to give the king a flattering interpretation because he serves the King of Kings! With a smirk, Daniel says, this interpretation will be free of charge. However, before divulging the interpretation to the king and all his guests listening in the background, he first gives the king a history lesson from a familiar monarch. In verse 18, Daniel clearly notes that the Most High God had given Nebuchadnezzar power and authority and honor, what Belshazzar desired to have and sought after. Fewell says, "Daniel's implication is that God has given no such power to Belshazzar. Belshazzar has tried to grasp what will never be his."<sup>334</sup> But, God had not given Belshazzar power and authority and honor. Daniel continues noting that the power and authority and honor that were given to Nebuchadnezzar caused pride to swell in his heart, and therefore, God had to deal with that pride by punishing the mighty king. Nebuchadnezzar was restored to his former state only after he acknowledged that his power and authority and honor came from the Most High God.

Now, in verse 22, Daniel takes this history lesson and makes it applicable to what Belshazzar has done. Even though Belshazzar knew about all this history that Daniel recited, he still chose not to humble himself and recognize the Most High God as Sovereign. In verse 23, Daniel delineates what the king has done, being careful not to single out any *one thing* that has caused the impending judgment. Many scholars and authors believe that it was Belshazzar's feast and idolatry that caused the judgment to come; however, Daniel seems to promote a theology of God's judgment that builds up, and this last incident has pushed the cup to overflowing. The three specific sins

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<sup>334</sup> Fewell, 96.

Daniel notes are pride, profaning the holy vessels, and idolatry. All three are placed on *equal level* as joined by the conjunction, “and.” This theology of Daniel would be similar and congruent with the history of Israel. God’s wrath, over the time of more than 300 years, had built up against Israel’s idolatrous ways. Finally, God’s mercy and longsuffering had been maxed out and exile was the “handwriting on the wall” that came for the Israelites. Therefore, Christian, take note of the biblical record, as it shows that God’s judgment, like in Belshazzar’s case, normally stems from constant and continued sin – like the nation of Israel. This is why confession is not only good for the soul, but also for the body! Keeping a current and vibrant relationship with God will help in deterring God’s judgment from coming. However, don’t confuse this theology with the concept that all bad things that happen are because of judgment of sin. Nebuchadnezzar responded to his “judgment” in the right way, and he learned a great deal from it. He might even have become a believer in the one true God as a result.

Embracing the penalty (Daniel 5:24-31)

Deciding to handle life your own way and with your own abilities, keeping God at a safe distance, will always lead to disaster. After Daniel delivered a stinging rebuke to the king, he revealed the judgment from the inscription on the wall. Much has been researched and studied about the actual handwriting on the wall to discover its meaning. However, the interpretation of Daniel from the text has served to be the most beneficial. The actual words of the handwriting on wall deal with weights and balances, images that fit well with lifting and lowering. Fewell says, “The weak king of little value has tried to lift himself, that is, make himself valuable, but to no avail.”<sup>335</sup> The reason that

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<sup>335</sup> Fewell, 100.

Belshazzar is found wanting and weak is that he does not recognize the sovereignty of God, which gives more credence to the thought that the issue of God's sovereignty is more the reason for the handwriting on the wall, than the desecration of the temple vessel and idolatry that ensued. Notorious Nebuchadnezzar was given a change to repent, and *he did*, and his kingdom was restored to him; blasphemous Belshazzar was given a change to repent, and *he did not*, and his kingdom was taken from him that very night. But, while chapter 4 of Daniel and chapter 5 are compared in this narrative, note the ironic twist of events that result from Belshazzar receiving the judgment in this chapter:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are condemned because they do not worship the image of gold. The three Judean exiles do not worship the king's god. In chapter 5 there is an ironic reversal. Belshazzar is condemned because he does worship images and because he does not worship the exiles' god. In chapter 3 the king asks the three men before him, "who is the god who will deliver you from my hand?" In chapter 5, there are also hands at work, not the hands of the king, but the hands of God: One hand holds breath and life; the other silently writes words of death. In chapter 3 the king passes a death sentence upon the exiles; in chapter 5, an exile passes a death sentence upon the king. In chapter 3, the exiles are allowed to defend themselves; in chapter 5, the king is not. In chapter 3 exiles are saved from religious persecution; in chapter 5, the king is not.<sup>336</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The blasphemous ways and idolatrous practices of Belshazzar are at the forefront of chapter 5. They are at the forefront of this chapter for a reason, even though the average believer would not think of himself as a blasphemer or idolater. Now, idolatry, prevalent in Old Testament Israel, has a striking parallel to some of our practices in the modern age. While we may not have gods on our mantles, many things in our lives do a good job of replacing God. And that is the heart of the matter – idolatry is anything that takes our priorities away from God. In Belshazzar's case it was actual, physical images

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<sup>336</sup> Fewell, 105-106.

of gods; in modern day Christianity, it can be much more. David Platt has written a great exposé in his book *Radical*<sup>337</sup> about how the American dream has taken our priorities off of God and placed them on ourselves. What then of blasphemy? That is in the forefront of Daniel chapter 5 as well, and it's not as far removed as we might think. Longman explains the parallels this way:

Blasphemy is not just defacing a church or a cross. It is a misuse of any part of God's creation. An assault against a fellow human being is an act of blasphemy. After all, we are all created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27; James 3:9). An angry word spoken against a fellow believer is an act of blasphemy. After all, Christians are all temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). The destruction of the environment for selfish purposes is an act of blasphemy. The land, the air, the seas are each the creation of our holy God.<sup>338</sup>

While blasphemy and idolatry are at the forefront of this chapter, the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men is what holds it together. The sins of blasphemy and idolatry did not bring judgment – it was Belshazzar's refusal to acknowledge the sovereignty of God.

Until the truth of sovereignty becomes personal, it just remains as a theological term in a textbook somewhere. Sovereignty is to be enjoyed, not simply discussed and debated. Too often we are content in teaching and examining a truth without ever letting it affect us personally. This is why a Christian's perspective is so important. When we lose perspective, the sovereignty of God becomes just another word, and we easily forget that He is in control. Knowing that God is in control of all things allows us to respond to life's heartaches with His perspective. But it all boils down to the choices we make. We can rest in God's sovereignty and plan for our lives, or we can become stressed out trying to control our own destiny. You chose!

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<sup>337</sup> David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs, Multnomah Books, 2010).

<sup>338</sup> Longman, 152.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE NARRATIVE IN DANIEL CHAPTER 6

#### Interpretive Outline: Daniel in the Lion's Den

Chapter 6 of Daniel picks right up where chapter 5 left off. A new king has ascended to the throne and a new government is to be established, under which Daniel will prosper. Chapter six is very much reminiscent of chapter 3; they are connected by chiasmic structure.<sup>341</sup> These two chapters have the same development, same wordings, same phrases, and even the same repetition of key words. The structures are so similar that the only differences seem to be the people involved and the circumstances at hand. Both chapters are intent on building a strong base for the newly established kingdom – the setting up of the statue in chapter 3 and the setting up of administrators in chapter 6. Doukhan notes, “Such a stylistic procedure suggests that Daniel is now going through the same experience as the three Hebrews of chapter 3.”<sup>342</sup>

However, while these two chapters are tightly intertwined, chapter four of Daniel also has some similarities to chapter 6. Fewell explains in these words:

In a sense, the rule of Darius represents a return to the latter days of Nebuchadnezzar as portrayed in chapter 4. The phrase, “it seemed good” begins both stories. In chapter 4, “it seems good” to Nebuchadnezzar to render authority to the Most High. In chapter 6, “it seems good” to Darius to render authority to other people, in particular, to Daniel. Both stories depict the relationship between the sage and sovereign to be one of amiability and cooperation, unlike the stories

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<sup>341</sup> See pg. 35, figure 1.

<sup>342</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 88.



found in chapters 3 and 5 in which the relationship between the sage and sovereign is not without friction and opposition. Both Nebuchadnezzar of chapter 4 and Darius of chapter 6 have the utmost respect for Daniel's ability.<sup>343</sup>

One would image that the overall structure of chapter six, as well as chapter three, would be the deliverance experienced by Daniel from the Lions and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace. However, the development of each chapter seems to flow like a courtroom scene. Granted, chapters 1-6 have been termed as a genre called *court tales*, but there is more courtroom similarities. Hebbard notes these courtroom elements, "The overall structure of this episode plays out like a (mis)trial of a court scene and is inclusive of all the necessary elements: law, allegations of breaking the law, indictment, prosecution, witnesses, defendant, judge, sentence, and execution. However, this trial neglects the involvement of a higher judge and his verdict in the case..."<sup>344</sup>

### **Daniel Is Exalted by Darius (6:1-3)**

King Darius wasted no time in the establishment of his new kingdom by appointing 120 satraps over the entire realm. The term *satraps*, the identical term used in chapter three of Daniel, is defined as realm protector or protector of the kingdom.<sup>345</sup> These "satraps" were lower level officials that might be considered governors over the Persian districts or provinces. There is some discrepancy with number of satraps.<sup>346</sup> Herodotus states that only 20 satraps were created by Darius and

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<sup>343</sup> Fewell, 108.

<sup>344</sup> Aaron B. Hebbard, *Reading Daniel as a Text in Theological Hermeneutics*, Princeton Theological Monographs Series, no. 109 (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 143

<sup>345</sup> See page 83, figure 4.

<sup>346</sup> George G. Cameron, "The Persian Satrapies and Related Matters," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32, no. 1-2 (January-April 1973): 47-56. Cameron reasons that the satrapies may refer to various people groups in the Persian empire rather than to one administrator.

has caused some to doubt the numerical accuracy.<sup>347</sup> However, the biblical figure of 120 straps does match well with King Xerxes (Esther 1:1; 8:9; 9:30) who had a total of 127 satraps. Miller seems to be heading in the right direction with these discrepancies when he says, “Yet Daniel does not say that Darius divided the empire into 120 satrapies but merely declares that the king appointed 120 “satrapies.”<sup>348</sup> Miller continues, “If Darius was a governor of Babylon, these satraps may refer to small divisions of that part of Persia’s domain. If Darius was Cyrus the Great, then the number could possibly speak of divisions throughout the whole Medo-Persian kingdom.”<sup>349</sup>

Over these satrapies were three presidents or administrators, one of whom was Daniel.<sup>350</sup> The reward of being the third ruler in the kingdom that Daniel was granted in 5:29 is carried over to chapter 6 where Darius selects three men to be rulers of his newly acquired territory called Babylon. The reason for setting three administrators over the satrapies was for accountability in civil service; the king did not want to suffer loss in territories due to uprising or in taxation due to graft.<sup>351</sup> It also seems that these three administrators were in a testing phase to see which one would rise above the rest and thereby be placed over the whole kingdom, a logical action for a new king. Archer notes, “In view of Daniel’s successful prediction in Belshazzar’s banquet hall, it was only

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<sup>347</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 264 and Montgomery, 269, believe that the 120 straps is an exaggeration or at least an inaccuracy on Daniel’s part.

<sup>348</sup> Miller, 177.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> The KJV translators get ahead of themselves by denoting that Daniel was first among these three presidents, other translations simply state that Daniel was one of the three. Later on in verse 3, Daniel is promoted to a position over the other two.

<sup>351</sup> Baldwin, 142.

natural for Darius to select him for so responsible a position, though he was neither a Mede nor a Persian.”<sup>352</sup> Daniel is said to distinguish himself above the other two administrators because he has an excellent spirit. It is uncertain what this “excellent spirit” comprised – maybe a good attitude or good abilities or possibly the king realized that Daniel was in touch with the gods. This “excellent spirit” is the same language used by the queen in Daniel 5:12 as she delineates for the reader why Nebuchadnezzar chose him to be master of the magicians. An “excellent spirit” is one of those reasons why King Nebuchadnezzar chose Daniel, and by this association, it can be concluded that the “excellent spirit” described in Daniel 6:3 might be a shortened description of the qualities Daniel possessed as noted in Daniel 5:11.

#### **The Plot Against Daniel (6:4-9)**

The information that the king planned<sup>353</sup> to set Daniel over the entire realm must have been leaked out. Because the king wanted to elevate Daniel in his authority, jealousy from the other two administrators and probably some of the satraps began to surface. Although the text makes the inclusive statement, the “presidents and satraps” sought to find something against Daniel, it is unlikely that all 120 satraps were involved in the plan.<sup>354</sup> Furthermore, in verse 24, the conspirators and their families are cast into the lion’s den. It would be hard to image a den big enough for more than 500 people.

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<sup>352</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 78.

<sup>353</sup> Lucas, 143, says that “planned” is better understood as “was inclined.” Darius was inclined to set Daniel over the kingdom because of his excellent spirit.

<sup>354</sup> Paul L. Redditt, *Daniel*, The New Century Bible Commentary (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 105. Redditt further notes that the Old Greek actually says that only the other two presidents plotted to eliminate Daniel. On the surface that makes more sense than a conspiracy involving 120 other people, whose status would not be affected in any way.

Like so many politicians of the past, present, and future, Daniel's character flaws were sought out as the means by which they might make him fall from his governmental position. However, "Daniel's faithfulness was such that they could not put their finger on any error or fault in the execution of his office."<sup>355</sup> The fact that "no complaints" were registered against Daniel and that "no error or fault" was found in him means that in both speech and deed Daniel remained loyal and trustworthy.<sup>356</sup> These conspirators reasoned that since nothing could be held against Daniel in his political office and duties, his religious obligations might be a better agenda. Fewell notes that "Daniel has a certain religious allegiance, and, while this does not normally conflict with his political allegiant, these allegiances are on a collision course."<sup>357</sup>

The conspirators settle on a plan to get rid of Daniel and take it before the king. The ordinance, as recommended by these conspirators, is all the more persuasive to the king by the exaggerated claim that "all" the subordinate officials are in agreement.<sup>358</sup> The list of officials also has begun to grow as now the prefects, counselors, and governors are added. They further explain the ordinance: for a period of thirty days no man is to pray to any god except the king. Then, they note the consequences for disobedience: the lion's den. The traditional view of this ordinance has been that for thirty days, the only deity to be worshiped is the king. This view seems unlikely and has no parallel in history, certainly not in the time of the tolerant rulers of the Persian

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<sup>355</sup> Walvoord, 135.

<sup>356</sup> Shalom M. Paul, "The Mesopotamian Background of Daniel 1-6," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 1, eds. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2002), 57.

<sup>357</sup> Fewell, 108.

<sup>358</sup> Hill, 119.

empire.<sup>359</sup> Not to mention the great risk “that would be involved in prohibiting prayer to all deities. Within a general polytheistic setting, this would be sheer madness.”<sup>360</sup> The second view sees the decree not as deifying the king but as designating him as the only legitimate representative of deity for thirty days.<sup>361</sup> Walton highlights this second view showing how it best aligns with the context:

Judging by his and Daniel’s reactions, it seems unlikely that it was actually intended to outlaw the practice that Daniel was engaged in. The nature of the ploy of Daniel’s enemies was that they were able to employ sufficiently ambiguous wording so that Daniel could be prosecuted though Darius would never have considered his prayers a violation.<sup>362</sup>

With this ordinance, this group of conspirators goes beyond the group of conspirators in chapter three of Daniel, who were simple tattletales allowing Nebuchadnezzar to deal with the situation as he saw fit.<sup>363</sup> The inconsistency of the conspirators should also be noted; as Hill states, “The law is contradictory in that it is enacted for thirty days and yet it is said to be irrevocable.” Obviously, the plan is designed carefully: building up the king’s ego, building up his new authority as king, and getting the king to sign the ordinance quickly.

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<sup>359</sup> Hartman and DiLella, 198.

<sup>360</sup> John H. Walton, “The Decree of Darius the Mede in Daniel 6,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 3 (Sept. 1988): 281.

<sup>361</sup> Montgomery, 270; Walvoord, 136; Keil, 211; Young, 133; and Miller, 180.

<sup>362</sup> Walton, “The Decree of Darius the Mede,” 279. Walton believes that there are more factors in play noting the orthodox Zoroastrianism of Darius the Mede and later Persian kings. Therefore, he believes that the thirty day period might serve as a way for the king to make a stand for his beliefs against the powerful Magi (defined as technical experts of worship, professional priests not attached to any one religion) who are seen as instrumental in moving toward syncretism.

<sup>363</sup> Seow, 90.

### **The Accusation and Condemnation of Daniel (6:10-18)**

When the law was passed, Daniel did not change his religious behaviors nor did he attempt to hide them. The custom of praying toward the temple in Jerusalem was adopted by Solomon (2 Chr. 6:34–39), but it may have been “symbolic of his hope that someday the children of Israel would be able to return to this city of God.”<sup>364</sup> Daniel 9:1-2 shows us that Daniel undertook a study of Jeremiah’s prophecies – the seventy years of exile. He was concerned about the return of his people to their homeland and even prayed<sup>365</sup> for their national sins; therefore, the prayer posture of kneeling would have been appropriate because it is associated with confession. Daniel knew that there was a higher authority he was subjected to. In this circumstance he could not obey the law of the land, but he also knew the consequences for disobedience. He continued to pray three times a day, like he had always done. The custom of praying three times a day probably comes from Psalms 55:17. Hill notes that Daniel’s prayer schedule might be an indication that praying three times a day had become “a traditional patter of prayer by the time of Daniel.”<sup>366</sup>

Expectantly, the conspirators came to Daniel’s house and found what they had hoped – Daniel on his knees in prayer. This certainly shows Daniel’s faithfulness and loyalty to Jehovah, but it was also convenient for his conspirators. Daniel is found, “making petition and plea before his God.” He is praying to God and asking him for

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<sup>364</sup> Walvoord, 138.

<sup>365</sup> While there are many prayer postures noted in the Scriptures, the Mishnah notes that standing was the normal prayer posture for a Jew. Daniel’s posture of kneeling was special and probably related to his continued confessional prayers offered for Israel’s sins (cf. Dan. 9).

<sup>366</sup> Hill, 121.

mercy or favor. Steinmann notes, “Daniel has specifically requested that God look up to him with favor and save him, even if he suffers the consequences of disobeying the king’s command. While Daniel’s enemies rely on Persian law to rid them of Daniel, Daniel relies on God to rid him of all trouble.”<sup>367</sup> The conspirators bring the indictment before the king saying that Daniel had ignored the ordinance and continues to make petitions three times a day, but they also seem to drag Daniel down and try to destroy his reputation as well. Steinmann notes their strategy:

Their strategy is to accuse Daniel of disobeying Darius, then attempt to place distance between Darius and Daniel, hoping to alienate Darius from his favored official whom he was intending to promote (6:3). The first way they attempt to lower Darius’ opinion of Daniel is by referring to him as “from the exiles of Judah” (6:13). Daniel is suspect, they imply, because he is not a Mede or Persian, nor does he obey “the law of the Medes and the Persians” (6:12), and his loyalty to Judah might lead him to betray Darius. Second, they try to widen the split between Darius and Daniel by claiming that Daniel “does not pay attention to you, Your Majesty” (6:13). In fact, they place this charge before the accusation that Daniel is ignoring the decree. While they have evidence that Daniel has ignored the decree, their first charge, that he is in the habit of ignoring Darius, is unwarranted. In the months since Darius (Cyrus) had assumed power over Babylon, Daniel has distinguished himself as faithful under Darius (6:3). Thus the officials use Daniel’s one area of disobedience to overgeneralize about him so that they can attack him politically.<sup>368</sup>

Upset and frustrated, Darius learns the real intent of issuing the ordinance. He has been deceived and spends the rest of the evening trying to find a way to deliver Daniel. Miller aptly notes, “Darius is not upset because Daniel had been praying but because for the first time he realized the real purpose of the law. It was not to honor him but to eliminate a rival of the jealous officials.”<sup>369</sup> This speaks volumes to the reader about

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<sup>367</sup> Steinmann, 317.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>369</sup> Miller, 184.

Daniel's favored relationship that he held with Darius. Wood notes that the Aramaic word order in verse 14 places Daniel first in the sentence, a position of emphasis. It literally says, "And as for Daniel, he set his mind to deliver him."<sup>370</sup> This notes the value that Darius put on Daniel, and if these conspirators realized how much value, they might not have accused him in the first place. It is not stated what Darius did in attempt to deliver Daniel from the ordinance; it simply says that he exhausted all his resources up to the very last minute. His efforts, again, show the reader the respect and standing Daniel had with the king.

At the end of the day, Daniel's conspirators come to remind the king that he had to follow through with the consequences for disobedience. Not even the king could change the "law of the Medes and Persians." The king gives the command and Daniel is cast into the lion's den. Darius' concern for Daniel is touching as he speaks some last words<sup>371</sup> to Daniel: "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" Interestingly, Darius notes Daniel's lifestyle: he "continually" served his God. A stone was placed over the opening to the lion's den and was sealed with the king's signet and the signet of his officials to ensure that there was no foul play. Darius returns to his palace and spends the night fasting for Daniel. The text says that no distractions, like the entertainment of music, were brought to him and he did not sleep all night.

### **The Deliverance from the Lion's Den (6:19-25)**

Darius' response to Daniel being cast into the lion's den is quite different than Nebuchadnezzar's uncompassionate treatment of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. At

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<sup>370</sup> Wood, 166.

<sup>371</sup> The KJV and NASB misconstrue the wording as a prediction that God "will rescue" Daniel. Most other version consider Darius' words to Daniel in the form of a wish or hope that he will be delivered.



daybreak the text says that the king rushed to the lion's den to find out what happened to Daniel. Lacocque says that the reason why the king rushed to the den as soon as possible was because of the ancient Babylonian custom of pardoning the victim if he had been tortured but remained alive.<sup>372</sup> Not being able to see very well in the early hours of the morning, Darius calls out to Daniel saying, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Darius uses an epithet for God ("living God") that is frequently used in the Old Testament to denote that Israel's God is the true God.<sup>373</sup> Does this suggest that Darius has become a true believer in the God of Israel? Archer notes that the epithet in a different way:

Notice the emphasis on Yahweh as the "living" God; clearly the king regarded Daniel's fate as a test of whether his God was really alive or just an unproved supposition, like all the deities the non-Jews worshiped. If the Hebrew God really existed, he would preserve his faithful servant from death; and if anyone deserved well from his God, it was Daniel, who would not stop worshiping even on pain of death.<sup>374</sup>

Most scholars believe that Darius is simply recognizing the reality of Daniel's God, and it would not necessarily mean that Darius had become a believer in one true God. Most people in the ancient world recognized the existence of many gods.

The king's eagerness seems to imply that his faith in both Daniel and his God was strong, but the fact that he "cried out in a tone of anguish" (lament) tells another story: "He feared that there would be nothing but silence and the growl of the lions in response to his call."<sup>375</sup> Daniel responds to the king telling him how God had sent his angel to shut

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<sup>372</sup> Lacocque, 65.

<sup>373</sup> Seow, 93.

<sup>374</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 82.

<sup>375</sup> Walvoord, 142.

the mouth of the lions. Naturally, there is speculation as to the identity of this angel. Some believe it to be a member of the angelic host<sup>376</sup> and others believe it to be “the angel of the LORD.”<sup>377</sup> Consequently, the identity of the angel may not be a worthy discussion as the Septuagint (LXX) says that God closed the lions’ mouths.<sup>378</sup> Doukhan comments, “Daniel makes no allusion to his great courage, nor to his outstanding faith. He prefers to center his testimony on the living God, who has ‘shut the mouth of the lions.’”<sup>379</sup>

Daniel further explains that the Lord had delivered him to prove him guiltless<sup>380</sup> before God and man. As Daniel was brought out of the lion’s den, the evidence of Daniel’s protection was incontrovertible. The language of deliverance in Daniel six and three is similar: “Just as the three friends do not even have the smell of smoke on their clothes as they are brought out of the furnace, so Daniel doesn’t have a scratch on his body when he is lifted out of the den, even though he spent the night with lions.”<sup>381</sup> Through this ordeal Daniel gained his position in the hall of faith: “who through faith...stopped the mouth of lions” (Heb. 11:33). The conspirators, who maliciously

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<sup>376</sup> Hartman and DiLella, 200.

<sup>377</sup> Miller, 187; Archer, *Daniel*, 82; Steinmann, 321; and Constable, “Daniel.”

<sup>378</sup> W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 85; Hill, 125; and Lacocque, 118. Pieter-Contesse, 172, notes the phrase, “his angel” is the same as in 3:28. Further, grammatically the subject of the verb (who shut the lions’ mouth) is not indicated in the Aramaic and therefore it may be either God or his angel who was fulfilling the will of God. He submits that it is probably better to translate the angel as the subject of the verb.

<sup>379</sup> Doukhan, 94.

<sup>380</sup> Lucas, 144, notes that the word “innocent” (guiltless) is a legal term signifying formal acquittal.

<sup>381</sup> Longman, 163.

accused<sup>382</sup> Daniel, along with their families, were thrown into the lion's den at the king's command. The penalty and punishment for Daniel's accusation was now transferred to his accusers, a common practice in the ancient Near East.<sup>383</sup> The inclusion of the wives and families in the punishment follows the ancient custom of corporate responsibility.<sup>384</sup> The Septuagint (LXX), as noted before at the beginning of chapter six, says that it was the two administrators or presidents who formed the conspiracy party and therefore only their wives and families were killed. The miraculous nature of Daniel's deliverance is shown by how the lions pounce on the conspirators and their families when they are thrown into the den. Miller sums this up saying:

Lest someone get the mistaken impression that these lions were old, fat, or just not hungry, the author points out that when the wicked officials were thrown into the den, the lions pounced upon them before they even reached the bottom of the pit, overpowering them and crushing all their bones. This detail demonstrates the miraculous character of Daniel's deliverance.<sup>385</sup>

### **The King's Decree (6:25-28)**

Just like the narrative in chapter 3, the deliverance in chapter 6 constitutes a royal edit or decree. The king's decree is made up of three parts. First, he states a greeting: "may your peace increase!"<sup>386</sup> This is similar to Paul's classic greetings at the beginning of his epistles, "grace and peace." Second, is the command of the decree: to revere Daniel's God. Steinmann notes that this part of the decree goes beyond the similar

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<sup>382</sup> "maliciously accused" is an idiom that is literally rendered, "who had eaten his pieces." This is the same phrase used in 3:8 about the Chaldeans who accused the three Hebrews of disloyalty.

<sup>383</sup> Steinmann, 322.

<sup>384</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 271.

<sup>385</sup> Miller, 188.

<sup>386</sup> Steinmann, 323.

decree by Nebuchadnezzar in chapter three of Daniel: “The first decree of Nebuchadnezzar, a negative decree, commanded punishment for blasphemy against the God of the Judeans (3:29). This positive decree commands respect for God: all people ‘should continually tremble and be afraid before the God of Daniel.’”<sup>387</sup> Third, is the rationale for the decree, which in a nutshell, allows the reader to understand the purpose of miracles. Miracles are not performed by God to show off His abilities; they are performed to demonstrate that He alone is the true God. Daniel was not delivered for any benefit of his own, but for the purpose of showing a pagan king the reality and power of the one true God.

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<sup>387</sup> Steinmann, 323.

## **Preaching Outline: Responding with Peace in the Midst of Chaos**

### **Introduction**

If most people know any story from the book of Daniel it must be the story of Daniel in the Lion's Den. Babylon had ruled the ancient world for quite some time, but after the events in chapter 5 of Daniel, the new nation of Persian had taken over the rule of the ancient world. Darius the Mede<sup>388</sup> assumed control of former Babylon, making it a province of the Medo-Persian Empire. Most likely Darius was not the actual king of the empire, as Daniel chapter 6 might suggest, but a governor or ruler that Cyrus the Persian had set up to rule over Babylon. The Persian government needed to be established in Babylon and Darius was just the man for the job.

In this narrative, God delivers Daniel from the evil intentions of the conspirators and the powerless king Darius, which illustrates quite clearly that God is able to save his people in the midst of the most horrifying and chaotic circumstances. What seems to be most striking and unusual about this chapter is the attitude and mind-set of Daniel. With a new government comes complete chaos – old jobs are no longer secure, new laws are put in place, political ties begin anew, people are affected in every way. However, Daniel's attitude is peace in the midst of the storm. Do you remember the attitude and response of our Savior who was sleeping in the boat while the seas above were chaotic? When we rest in the fact that God is in control of all things, we can experience peace in all of life's circumstances, even those circumstances that bring us to a breaking point.

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<sup>388</sup> More information about the identity of Darius the Mede is included in the Appendix.

## **Proposition**

Knowing that God is in control at all times should cause us to respond to life's circumstances with peace.

## **Preaching Manuscript**

A command that is problematic (Daniel 6:1-9)

Life is filled with responsibilities and requirements that can become problematic, especially if those responsibilities infringe on a believer's duty to God and His Word. That is what is so applicable about Daniel 1-6. The characters do not avoid the problem, they deal with them, but more importantly, they respond to them in the right way. Serving the one, true God in a society and culture that is polytheistic (whether ancient Babylon or modern America) is going to bring some problems.

**Daniel is favored (6:1-5).** King Darius decides that he needs to decentralize the government and so he appoints 120 officials that are answerable to three prime ministers, and Daniel was one of those prime ministers. Daniel, just like under Nebuchadnezzar's rule, distinguishes himself because of his excellent, God-given abilities. Daniel had previously been the chief of the magicians under Nebuchadnezzar, and now Darius sees his potential and makes plans to set him up as prime minister. However, word of the king's promotion of Daniel must have leaked out. A group of conspirators, probably led by the other two prime ministerial candidates, sought to find a way to get rid of Daniel. High and low these conspirators search, but they were unable to find any disloyalty in Daniel's action or his methods, and no one complained about him either. He was a model employee that all employers would love to have. However, these conspirators knew that the only way they could get rid of Daniel was to challenge his loyalties to his God. When

you live for God, conspirators target you because your faithfulness and honesty only accentuates their lack of integrity.<sup>389</sup>

Daniel's goodness did not win him friends on all sides; some conspirators wanted to bring him down because of jealousy or maybe even because those conspirators wanted to use the "system" for their own selfish gain. The truth is that we live in a hostile world, and when the reality of persecution and suffering comes knocking on our doors, we need to be prepared to handle it the biblical way. "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" should not be construed to mean that our lives will never have any form of unpleasantness. The believer needs to be reminded that he/she is a pilgrim. Living in a world that is not our home, we should not be surprised if we are not welcomed.

**Daniel is framed** (6:6-9). This group of conspirator's plans to make a law that would cause Daniel to have to choose between serving the king or serving His God. These conspirators knew it was a plot that would not fail because when push came to shove, they knew that Daniel would honor God above all else. The conspirators come to the king with their ordinance and the supposed support of "all" the officials. It is unlikely that "all" the officials had agreed to his ploy. Scholars and authors understand the ordinance in one of two ways: first, the only deity to be worship for thirty days is the king himself; second, the king is designated as the only legitimate representative of the king for a period of thirty days. The first view seems unlikely and has no noted parallels in history. In a general polytheist setting of the ancient Near East, understanding the ordinance this way would cause uproar. The second view seems more probable, namely because kings were considered messengers or priests of the gods. Regardless of views,

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<sup>389</sup> Dykes, 74.

the conspirators were able to provide sufficient ambiguity in the wording of the law that the king did not see a problem with signing the ordinance. Besides, playing on the king's ego was a sure win for these conspirators.

The world is filled with conspirators that desire nothing more than to see a believer fall by making the wrong choices. Each believer needs to be prepared to make those right choices when confronted with a dilemma. The only way any believer can be prepared for such a daunting task is to know what the Bible says about the matter and be firm in their conviction for God. Anyone can easily fall into situational ethics if they are uncertain about what they believe. If your religious convictions are not hidden, and Daniel's were not, how would these conspirators know what law to write up? You should be ready at all times to give an answer to any man that asks you about them.

A character that is predictable (Daniel 6:10-15)

**Reaction of Daniel: prayer (6:10-11).** The text notes that "when" Daniel knew the document had been signed, he went back to his house and continued his normal routine of opening his windows toward Jerusalem and praying three times a day. The point of this verse is to show the reader the law had no effect on Daniel; nothing changed. He was not a secret disciple but a man who was not ashamed to let others know that his allegiance was to the God of Israel; he would not compromise, even in the face of death. Daniel was trusting in the Lord to take care of what would happen if he were caught breaking the law and this seems to be exactly what he did in verse 11. When the conspirators came to find Daniel breaking the law, the text says that Daniel was "making petition and plea" before his God. Daniel is praying for mercy and favor from God.



Some view predictability as a bad trait, but in Daniel’s case it was a shining testimony to others around him. These conspirators purposely enacted a law to get rid of Daniel; they knew his lifestyle and were ready to catch him in the act. The law that was signed did not cause chaos in Daniel’s life, as it might have done in the lives of other believers; instead, it caused him to seek God, the One Who could help take care of the circumstance. Daniel trusted in the sovereignty of God; he rested in God’s ability to take care of things. However, trust like this does not happen overnight, but it developed from a lifetime of service and loyalty to the King of Kings. Consider Daniel’s prayer theology: he had a specific place (“his room”), a regular time (“three times a day”), a devoted posture (“on his knees”), and a consistent habit (“just as he had done before”).

Why does the believer look at Daniel and so many other biblical characters and believe that there is no way for them to attain their levels of faithfulness and loyalty? There is nothing super special about Daniel’s reaction to the circumstance – he simply took the matter to God in prayer. So, when we are faced with a similar crisis, do we immediately take our problems to the “experts” or do we take them to the One Who can really help? It is easier to pray in the midst of trouble than daily life; therefore, to the courage of Daniel we must add patience as he disciplined himself to pray on a consistent basis. We often look at Daniel as a hero, but a better perspective is at hand – a saint, who is no different from any believer in Christ. While many people aspire to be considered heroes, becoming a saint has a higher calling: “A heroic gesture is short-lived and public...A saintly action...remains in obscurity and lasts a lifetime...It takes less effort to pray during an emergency or trial than in the course of ordinary life.”<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Doukhan, 92.

**Reaction of the conspirators: punishment (6:12-13).** After the conspirators had caught Daniel in the act, they brought their accusation of him before the king. They strategically reminded the king of the law he had signed and then brought Daniel's name into the mix as one who had broken that law. The speech of these conspirators is not only meant to accuse Daniel but also to degrade him. For them to go to such lengths probably means that Daniel's character was so well established and free from error that an air-tight case against him might not even stick; they had to make him less valuable in the eyes of king. Note the climatic elements evident in the text from their speech: they rehearse the law before the king, they remind the king of the punishment for disobedience, they call Daniel "one of the captives from Judah," and they tell the king that Daniel breaks the decree three times a day. While Daniel's enemies rely on Persian law to rid them of Daniel, Daniel relies on God to rid him of all trouble.<sup>391</sup>

**Reaction of the king: panic (6:14-15).** The king's reaction is not the one that we might anticipate. He is displeased with himself and for the first time he realizes the purpose of the law. The law was not designed to foster loyalty and unify a new kingdom – it was designed for the personal jealousy that these conspirators harbored against Daniel. According to the law, the punishment for the crime had to be carried out that same day. Darius made every effort he could to find a way to deliver Daniel, but at the end of the day, he came up short and the bloodthirsty conspirators called for judgment.

A conviction that is peaceful (Daniel 6:16-24)

**Faith of Daniel (6:16-17).** Daniel was brought before the king and his sentence was carried out. A lion's den was typically characterized by two chambers with a

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<sup>391</sup> Steinmann, 317.

moveable wall between the two. The lion keeper would throw food into one chamber then pull up the wall so that the lions would cross over into the other chamber and begin to eat. This would allow the keeper to clean out the other chamber when needed. Daniel was thrown into one side of the chamber. Then, the king yelled out to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" These words expressed the hope of the king, and they also show that the king took notice of Daniel's lifestyle of serving his God continually. Is our testimony, in the face of helpless circumstances, one that people notice? The chamber was sealed with the signet of the king and his officials, a measure to make sure that either party did not tamper with the opening. Once the chamber opening was secured, the wall between the two chambers was hoisted up and the lions were free to roam into the next chamber.

The striking testimony of Daniel is put on display for all those watching this execution take place. Daniel's attitude, in the midst of everything that was happening, can only be characterized as faith. Daniel's faith was not just a theological one of the mind, it was a practical one of actions. He was simply peaceful in the midst of a chaotic situation. If we are faced with physical lions, financial lions, or maybe relational lions, are we guilty of responding with worry or fear? Christ never said that following Him was going to be easy; in fact, Christ said on many occasion that a believer needs to count the cost before following Christ. We know that Daniel accepted the cost of following God because he never stopping worshipping even when he was confronted with death.

**Fear of Darius (6:18-23).** While Daniel's attitude was one of faith, the king's response was one of fear. The text says that the king went to his palace and stayed up the entire night, even fasted from all distraction, because he was concerned about Daniel.

However, Jeremiah notes, “Darius was just like many of us; he handed out all those pious statements about God’s saving Daniel, but he obviously didn’t believe them.”<sup>392</sup> Darius’ lack of faith was revealed the next morning as he rushed to the lion’s den to see what happened to Daniel. The ancient Babylonian custom stated that if the victim was tortured but remained alive throughout the night and into the morning, then he would be pardoned.<sup>393</sup> When Darius came to the mouth of the lion’s den, he cried out in a voice of lament, hoping that he would hear more than just the growls of the lions – and he did!

Daniel responded to the king’s call with words of praise to God. When God delivers us from an impossible circumstance, what are the words that come out of our mouths first? Daniel informed the king that his God had sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions, proving that he was blameless before both God and man. Daniel’s faith is not in the angel who was sent by God, nor is it in his abilities, but it is in God Who delivered Daniel. When Daniel was pulled up from the lion’s den, his words were confirmed as not a scratch was found on his body. This is reminiscent of when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were delivered from the fiery furnace, and when they were brought out not one part of their bodies were burned nor was there any smell of smoke on them.

**Fate of the deceivers (6:24).** When Daniel was delivered from the lion’s den, Darius set his attention on taking care of the conspirators who tried to destroy Daniel. The text says that they “maliciously accused” Daniel, which literally means they “ate the pieces.” The lions in this narrative were actually Daniel’s accusers who wanted to eat

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<sup>392</sup> Jeremiah, 125.

<sup>393</sup> Lacocque, 65.

him to pieces. Consequently, the principle of *lex talionis* is carried out on Daniel's conspirators: the legal practice of imposing upon those who make a false accusation the penalty that would have been imposed on the accused.<sup>394</sup> The conspirators and their families were thrown into the lion's den and torn to pieces immediately, lest someone discount the authenticity of the miracle by saying that the lions were not well fed.

A circumstance that is purposeful (Daniel 6:25-28)

Facing the lion's den was probably not one of the things on Daniel's bucket list. However, the purpose of Daniel going through this difficulty was so that God would be honored all the more after the difficulty had run its course. In the same manner, when a believer experiences a difficult circumstance, the end result is often better than what was originally anticipated. Wiersbe notes, "Darius' first decree in this chapter declared that he was god, but this second decree declared that the God of the Hebrews was the true and living God! In doing this, Darius joined King Nebuchadnezzar by giving public testimony to the power and glory of the true and living God."<sup>395</sup> God has a purpose in every experience that we endure, and He did not say it was going to be easy or comfortable, but the end result is always for our good:

This too is an important point for us to understand. God is not committed to our comfort. He is not committed to making our path through life smooth. He is committed to sanctifying us and demonstrating his own glory in and through us; and, very often, that commitment means he will subject our earthen vessels to pressures that would certainly shatter us, were his grace not sufficient for us. The Lord will take you into the eye of the storm, to show that he is the storm's master and that he can make your fragile vessel float safely through to the other side.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Walvoord, 143.

<sup>395</sup> Wiersbe, 82-83.

<sup>396</sup> Duguid, 97.

## Conclusion

When a believer can rest in the knowledge that God is in control of all circumstances, he can experience peace in the midst of chaos. Just like Daniel, the believer can be ready to face any challenge with the comfort and the assurance that God has a purpose for it all. But, it is also just as important to note that Daniel's attitude of peace in the midst of chaos was not a one-time event or a high point in his life of service to God – *it was a consistent habit*. He was faithful to God day in and day out, and because of his faithfulness, “he prospered” or had great success (6:28) under the reigns of Darius (in Babylon) and Cyrus the Great who was king over the whole Medo-Persian Empire. Later in the biblical record, we read that this same Cyrus issued a decree to let the Jewish people return to their homeland and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1). God used Daniel's faithfulness and influence to bring deliverance to a nation. All Daniel may have been able to see in his own life was failure, but God saw an opportunity for victory. Why is it that we have many Christians who are willing to sign up for the bigger things in life, even willing to be a missionary in the African bush somewhere, but very few want to be faithful in the little things, disciplining themselves day in and day out?

The strength of Daniel's success rested in his personal relationship with God. He experienced the ups and downs in life, just like every believer does. The only difference is that Daniel allowed those ups and downs to develop his character, something that many believers want overnight. For Daniel, and for all believers alike, character is developed out of chaos.

## CHAPTER NINE

### KEEPING YOUR COOL WHEN THE HEAT IS TURNED UP

#### **The Cohesive Principle: God Is In Control**

For a child of God, knowing that God is sovereign over all the affairs of men is not something new or otherwise revolutionary to his thinking. However, as with all theology, unless it is made relevant for the believer, few will be able to see the value of this principle. We are tempted to surmise that God's sovereign control over all things is relegated only to the prophetic sections of the book of Daniel, however, its first appearance is in chapter 1, and then again in chapters 4 and 5. You see, the fact that God is in control of all things is not only underscored in prophecy, but it is also very relevant for the struggles that a believer faces when trying to live out his Christian life. In a world of many uncertainties, there is only One who remains unmovable. Therefore, because God is in control of all things, the believer should respond differently to whatever life may throw at him.

Living in ancient Babylon was not always peachy; it wasn't always a pleasant experience when the heat was turned up. When we find ourselves confronted with similar experiences may we also choose to respond differently, taking comfort in the simple truth that God is sovereign. Daniel 1-6 provides six key principles of responding to life's circumstances. Each principle is tied back to the cohesive principle of God's sovereignty. Knowing that God is in control of all things should cause the believer to respond to life's circumstances with a different perspective.

### **The Principle of Poise (Daniel 1)**

Responding to life's circumstances with poise is not something that is learned overnight or in a classroom per se. Upon arriving in Babylon, Daniel and his three friends were immediately barraged with several circumstances that had potential to derail their faith. But instead of giving in and compromising, they chose to respond with poise and conviction. These four young men had prepared themselves ahead of time for potential hazards that would surface in a foreign land. If they had not grounded themselves in God's Word, then their decision to respond with poise may not have been so crystal clear. When a believer does not understand or know what he believes, then his practice is left up to whatever he thinks is best – this can be dangerous! Daniel and his three friends were well-prepared on the inside for any battles they would have to face on the outside. They chose to respond with poise instead of compromising their convictions.

### **The Principle of Prayer (Daniel 2)**

The principle of prayer dovetails with the principle of poise. Remaining poised and standing up for one's convictions cannot be done without kneeling down in prayer and asking God for help. The wise men in this narrative represent the world's attempt to use its knowledge, wisdom, and philosophy to solve problems. Why then are Christians guilty of the same practice? When trying to solve our problems with our own talents and abilities, we often become frustrated and unreasonable. Why not call on God to help us in the first place instead of using Him as a last resort? Is this not what Daniel did? According to the previous chapter, God has given Daniel ability to interpret dreams and visions, but he does not depend on those abilities. Believers need to start being more dependent on God and stop being independent from Him. Maybe if we look at the



situation in reverse it will help clarify our perspective. It goes like this: because we do not seek after God in prayer during life's difficult circumstances indicates that we believe God is not in control and cannot help us. Let's stop deceiving ourselves. Let's choose to respond with prayer when all hope seems lost.

### **The Principle of Perseverance (Daniel 3)**

Perseverance is a principle that many believers hope will be manifested in their own lives as they are squeezed with the pressure of the world. In Daniel 3, conformity to the world's standards and peer pressure are so strong that you can cut it with a knife. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego make perseverance look so easy as they inform the king that they will not worship the image, no matter how he punishes them. Many believers compromise their convictions for the sake of comfort or success, but these three faithful followers of Jehovah were willing to sacrifice everything. Ironically, the one place that believers don't want to go is the very place where Christ is waiting for them. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have not experienced the presence of Christ if they had not walked into the fire. Three men came out of that fiery furnace, but where is the fourth man? He's still in the fire and you will find him there when you walk through it. These three Hebrews chose to respond with perseverance when their faith and loyalty to Jehovah was being tested.

### **The Principle of Praise (Daniel 4)**

Chapter 4 of Daniel is most unique in that it was authored by King Nebuchadnezzar himself. Nebuchadnezzar, after God humbled him for his pride, learned his lesson and gave praise back to God. For the believer who needs to change his ways, God is littering the path towards destruction with warning signs; those who pay attention

will avoid future disaster. We might think that there is a drastic difference between a pagan king and a child of the King; but in so many ways we stand alike before God. When we stand before a holy God, our problems are not so much our weaknesses and failures; the real problems come from our successes and strengths that lead us to take pride in ourselves. The believer ought to show gratitude when God humbles them because it would be far worse for God to simply leave him alone. Suffering and difficulties teach us to depend on God; they are gifts from God as the book of James teaches. If a powerful potentate has no regrets responding with praise when he's been humbled by God Himself, then what is our reason for not speaking up in praise to God? Let's respond with praise when God humbles us.

### **The Principle of Perspective (Daniel 5)**

Belshazzar gives us the negative side of responding to life's circumstances: that is, how we are not to respond. In chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar responded correctly when judgment was rendered, but in chapter 5, Belshazzar responds with a spirit of apathy. He knows judgment is coming but refused to repent of his actions. His perspective on life is so much like the world's philosophies and ideologies, which desire to make man the ruler of his own destiny. When a believer falls into the trap of trying to control his own destiny (and we all are guilty), he often loses perspective and becomes forgetful of what God has done for him in the past. If the Christian does not maintain a biblical perspective on life's circumstances, then he can easily forget Who is in control. We can rest in God's sovereignty and plan for our lives, or we can become stressed and frustrated trying to control our own destiny – your choice. Knowing that God is in control of all things allows us to respond to life's circumstances with His perspective.

### **The Principle of Peace (Daniel 6)**

The most striking elements to this familiar chapter are the attitude and mind-set of Daniel. The downfall of Babylon and the establishment of a new government must have been utter chaos. But within this circumstance we find a man who is peaceful, resting in the fact that God is in control. Daniel experienced the ups and downs of Christian living just like every believer does; the only difference is that Daniel allowed those circumstances to develop his character. It is fitting that the principle of peace finished out Daniel's life, as we know it. He doesn't just *know* that God is in control of all things; his behavior *shows* this conviction. True Christian living is when your belief gets hold of your body and mind. Though he was confronted with death, he chose to remain faithful and he never stopped worshipping the One who was really in control. When a believer can rest in the knowledge that God is in control of all things, he can experience peace in the midst of chaos.

## CONCLUSION

Using the first six chapters of the book of Daniel, the overarching goal of this project was to demonstrate that proper interpretation of the text will lead to proper application. Part of this overarching goal was to answer the four major concerns discussed in chapter one: making the Old Testament relevant, showing the power of the narrative, learning new truths from familiar stories, and gaining a clearer picture of Christ. When a proper and accepted method of interpretation was employed, the four major concerns were dealt with successfully and the application process was safeguarded against mistreatment.

The application of the interpretative process seemed to be the most rewarding as a cohesive theology of Christian living was developed. Each narrative, being tied to the book's theme of the sovereignty of God, expressed a different way of responding to life's circumstances. Chapter 1 demonstrated that *poise* was an essential response; chapter 2 petitioned the response of *prayer*; chapter 3 resolved to show a response of *perseverance*; chapter 4 exclaimed the response of *praise*; chapter 5 uncovered the response of *perspective*; and a chaotic chapter 6 equaled a response of *peace*. Knowing that God is in control of all things allows the believer to respond to life's circumstances with poise, prayer, perseverance, praise, perspective, and peace.

## APPENDIX

### HISTORICAL ISSUES IN DANIEL 1-6

#### Chronology of Daniel 1:1

Critics say that the Bible contradicts itself about the timing of Nebuchadnezzar's siege<sup>397</sup> on Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar's assault on Jerusalem is dated by Jeremiah the prophet in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim, king of Judah (Jer.46:2; 25:1), while Daniel 1:1 dates this event in the *third* year of Jehoiakim. It has been demonstrated that the key to solving this supposed discrepancy lies in the two different calendar systems that Jeremiah and Daniel used. The book of Daniel uses *Tishri* (October) reckoning, while the book of Jeremiah uses *Nisan* (April) reckoning. Jeremiah's calendar system dates the *fourth* official year of Jehoiakim in the spring of 605 BC, whereas Daniel's calendar system would place it in the fall of that year.<sup>398</sup> Therefore, all events occurring between the spring and fall would be off one year. The invasion of Nebuchadnezzar<sup>399</sup> (occurring in the summer of 605 BC) would be in the third year according to Daniel's calendar and the fourth year according to Jeremiah's calendar. Also to be noted is the fact that the installment of Jehoiakim as Judah's king took place after Rosh Hashanah, the fall New Year. Therefore, as Shea points out, the first official year of Jehoiakim's reign began in

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<sup>397</sup> During time frame of the book of Daniel there were three deportations from Judah to Babylon: 605, 597, and 586 BC.

<sup>398</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 22.

<sup>399</sup> Nebuchadnezzar referenced in the book of Daniel is historically titled Nebuchadnezzar II.

the fall of 608 BC. Taking this into account, the third year of Jehoiakim's reign would have begun in the fall of 606 BC and continued to the fall of 605 BC.<sup>400</sup>

Tishri (accession)	Accession Year	1 <sup>st</sup> year	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Daniel 1:1
Nisan (non-accession)	1 <sup>st</sup> year	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Jeremiah 25:1,9; 46:2

FIGURE 6. CALENDAR SYSTEMS OF DANIEL AND JEREMIAH

Whitcomb further questions the certainty of the calendar systems: “How can we be sure that these two methods of reckoning the reigns of Judean kings were being used at that time?”<sup>401</sup> Edward Thiele sheds light on this concern by asserting that the Davidic kings of Judah started the custom of counting the fall as the appropriate time for kings to begin their reigns officially, namely, the first day of the seventh month (Tishri).<sup>402</sup> The harvest time was now ended, and the agricultural and secular life of the nation began anew. Even to this day, the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) comes in the fall, the first day of Tishri.<sup>403</sup> It is quite significant, as Whitcomb points out, the reasons why Jeremiah and Daniel used different calendar systems:

Jeremiah whose main task under God was to prepare apostate Judeans for exile to Babylon would use the Babylonian system (Nisan) as a warning that this foreign empire was about to take over Judea. On the other hand, Daniel would have found it appropriate to use his native Tishri system in order to encourage his fellow Jews. It is also necessary to observe that the time that elapsed between the

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<sup>400</sup> Shea, *Daniel 1-7*, 39.

<sup>401</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 22.

<sup>402</sup> Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1994), 43.

<sup>403</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 22.

king's accession to the throne and the first of Nisan (or Tishri) was called his "accession year" and did not count numerically.<sup>404</sup>

What has appeared to be a serious problem between the writings of Daniel and Jeremiah turns out to be a testimony not just to these men but also to the remarkable accuracy of the Scriptures. Ironically, the claims of the critics prove too much. They claim that the book of Daniel was written in the second century BC. However, if the book was deliberately forged, as critics claim,<sup>405</sup> then surely Daniel would have been careful enough to avoid obvious contradictions with the book of Jeremiah.

### **The Aramaic of Daniel**

The change in language from Hebrew to Aramaic in Daniel 2:4 does more than just make a division within the book – it defends the authenticity of the date of the book of Daniel. As discussed in "Chapter 2," there are scholars who believe that the book of Daniel was forged during the second century; hence the language change, and therefore the prophecies within the book are null and void. Critics and liberal scholars alike have dogmatically denied the Aramaic of Daniel for generations. However, K.A. Kitchen points out an interesting development: "Nine-tenths of the vocabulary is attested in texts of the fifth century B.C. or earlier."<sup>406</sup> This means that most of the findings have been fifth century, as there is a scarcity of sixth century texts, but if Daniel's Aramaic was used in the fifth century, it in all probability was also used in the sixth century.<sup>407</sup>

Therefore, summarizing Kitchen's research, the arguing position of these scholars

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<sup>404</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 22-23.

<sup>405</sup> For a discussion see Montgomery, 113-116.

<sup>406</sup> K.A. Kitchen, "The Aramaic of Daniel," in *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (London: The Tyndale Press, 1965), 32.

<sup>407</sup> Walvoord, 49.

claiming a late date forgery is dismantled on the lack of materials that have become available. Furthermore, the Aramaic language was the common language of the day. Daniel would have been sure to put prophecies relating to the Gentiles in a language that was most familiar to them just as he put chapters 1 and 8-12 in Hebrew; their focus is for the Jewish nation. Putting a message for a people group into a language that they can understand would not be cause for scrutiny, it would be logical.

### **Timing of the Events of Daniel 3**

Four major views exist as to the general dating of the events that occurred in chapter three. First, some believe the events in chapter 3 occurred two or three years after chapter 2; second, others believe the events occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem; third, still others believe the events occurred after Nebuchadnezzar completed his major conquests of the region, truly making him “kings of kings.” The fourth view posed for the chronology of chapter 3 is associated with some recent archaeological discoveries near the place where the events of the chapter were said to unfold.

Those who hold to the first view, two or three years of interval between chapters 2 and 3, prove their assertions mainly from Daniel 2:49; 3:12, 30. Daniel 3:12 says, “There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” The verse shows that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are presently holding positions of authority over the Babylonian provinces. In Daniel 2:49, Daniel asks the king not just to promote him for interpreting the dream of the statue, but also to promote his friends who helped him. Therefore, a period of two or three years would be a sufficient amount of



time between chapter 2 and chapter 3. Wood, who holds this view, explains in more detail his reasoning for the short amount of time between the chapters:

The king wanted to assure himself of the allegiance of his official family to the Babylonian religion, especially those members from the young foreign trainees who had now been appointed to office. In respect to these recent additions, he had earlier solicited their allegiance indirectly by insisting that they eat food which had first been dedicated to the Babylonian gods (cf. 1:4,8), and he could have now desired to force their direct submission by demanding that they openly bow to the image. He may have reasoned that to have them do so in the company of older officers, should provide the proper example for them to follow, and it would also afford evidence of the continued allegiance of those of longer standing. If this was Nebuchadnezzar's thinking, then the occasion likely came soon after the graduation of the young trainees, being thus designed to give the king satisfaction regarding both young and old early in his reign...it should be remembered that he was Babylonian and still believed fully in the Babylonian gods. Two or three intervening years could have sufficed for him to issue this contrasting order.<sup>408</sup>

Pentecost, who also agrees with this view, states a similar purpose for the erection of the image soon after the events of chapter 2:

However, a consideration of Daniel 3, seems to indicate that the events recorded there took place nearer the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's long reign. The events associated with the king's erecting the image suggests that he wanted to unify his empire and consolidate his authority as ruler. The image was to become the unifying center of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom.<sup>409</sup>

The second view states that the events of chapter 3 occur sometime in the middle of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, specifically after Jerusalem had been destroyed. Whitcomb dates the events of chapter 3 at about 585 B.C.<sup>410</sup> This date would place the events of chapter 3 roughly in the middle of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. Moving from the events of chapter 2 into the events of chapter 3, one might expect the attitude of Nebuchadnezzar to

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<sup>408</sup> Wood, 79.

<sup>409</sup> Pentecost, 1337.

<sup>410</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 53.

have changed. If chapter 3 follows on the heels of chapter 2, then the assumption would be that Nebuchadnezzar would have treated this situation differently. However, he does not, suggesting a lengthier period of time between the chapters.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the LXX rendering of this passage are assertions given by those who hold this view. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed and dismantled Jerusalem in 586 BC, as recorded in 2 King 25 and Jeremiah 52. After this, Nebuchadnezzar decided to prove once and for all that he was the supreme ruler and “king of kings.” Therefore, it was after this event that he erected the golden statue and required all to bow down to it. Furthermore, the LXX dates the events of Daniel chapter three to be in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Nebuchadnezzar, which would be about 587/586 BC, attempting to make a connection with the fall of Jerusalem. The LXX reading is not original, but it does provide a reliable history of the events recorded in the chapter.

The third view is a variation of the second in that the specific time frame in which the events of chapter 3 occurred is unknown. Those who hold this view believe that after Nebuchadnezzar won his major battles and defeated all his known enemies, then he erected the image. Swindoll makes an interesting note, although not fond of any particular view. He says, “Note how many times Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as ‘Nebuchadnezzar the king’ in this chapter – seven times, and there are only nine references in the whole book (the other two are in chapter 4).”<sup>411</sup> The emphasis on Nebuchadnezzar as king could give evidence to the fact that he had defeated all his major enemies and now wanted to show that he was the supreme ruler over all mankind.

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<sup>411</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Daniel: God's Pattern for the Future* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), 37.

The fourth view is the most recent view that has been posed for the chronology of chapter 3. It concerns some artifacts that were found near the original site on which the golden statue was erected. In 1982, William Shea published an article concerning his findings.<sup>412</sup> Shea found a clay prism near what he believes to be the original site of the golden statue. On that prism is a listing of over 50 different names relating to some sort of ceremony under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. Actual names are included on the prism, the most important of which are Nebuchadnezzar (at the top of the list), Neriglissar (another king of Babylon), and the names Hanunu, Ardi-Nabu, and Musallim-Marduck. Shea puts forth a rather interesting case for the derivation of these names and translates these last three accordingly as Shadrach, Abednego, and Meshach. Shea continues to add other pieces to the puzzle and furthermore suggests that the events of Daniel 3 are the same events as recorded on this clay prism. The clay prism also noted some other interesting information. In the early part of 594 BC, a revolt broke out in Babylon itself.<sup>413</sup> Nebuchadnezzar had to purge the city of the coup, which included some of his soldiers. After the purging was completed, he went west to collect tribute from his vassals and in the process reaffirmed his authority over all the regions.

If Shea's reconstruction is correct, then the reason for the events of chapter 3 is quite different from most interpretations. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make sure that his leaders and vassals in the other regions were loyal to him, and therefore a show of their loyalty was required. According to one Babylonian text, he actually captured the leader of the rebellion with his own hands! This event would have occurred eight years

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<sup>412</sup> Shea, "Daniel 3: Extra-Biblical Texts."

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

before the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC), making the timing for the events of chapter 3 around 594 BC.<sup>414</sup> Shea's reconstruction of the evidence is intriguing; however, one must not forget that archaeology does not prove that the events of the Bible actually occurred, but rather it gives more evidence to show the authenticity of the Scriptures.

### **Daniel's Use of Persian and Greek Words**

The list of officials in Daniel 3 has been a debating point that critics have used to discount the authenticity of the book of Daniel. The claim within this listing of officials is that there are both Babylonian and Persian terms; Persian words would suggest a much later date of writing. Walvoord says that "the speculation as to why Persian terms should be used is much ado about nothing."<sup>415</sup>

Several reasons are put forth in defense of Daniel's usage of Persian terms. First, it may have been natural for Daniel to bring the various terms up to date by using current expressions.<sup>416</sup> Daniel was a brilliant man who was well adapted to the culture in which God had placed him. Furthermore, it is possible, as some have suggested, that he could have written or at least edited this passage after the Persian government had come to power. Secondly, a total of nineteen Persian words are in the book of Daniel. However, as Kitchen notes, the existence of Persian loan words in the text argue for an earlier date not a late one. Kitchen says, "Words must be weighed, not merely counted."<sup>417</sup> He argues further, giving several reasons for this claim:

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<sup>414</sup> Wallace.

<sup>415</sup> Walvoord, 82.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Kitchen, "The Aramaic of Daniel," 35.

(1) The impact of Old Persian upon Imperial Aramaic was considerable. The Persian kings appoint Persian and Median officials to govern their empire, and Aramaic was the means of communicating between these and the polyglot nations so ruled. In the administrative sphere, the impact was intense. (2) The almost unconscious assumption that Persian words would take time to penetrate into Aramaic is erroneous. (3) The Persian words in Daniel are specifically *Old Persian* words. The recognized divisions of Persian language-history within Iranian are: Old, down to c. 300 B.C; Middle, observable during c. 300 B.C. to A.D. 900; and New, from c. A.D. 900 to the present.<sup>418</sup>

The critics are quick to jump on the term *herald* as they were quick to jump on the Persian terms that were used in the listing of the political officials. Two other terms in question are *psaltery* (stringed instrument) and *dulcimer* (percussion instrument). Once again the critics use the same argument: the Greek terms used in the listing of the instruments confirm a late date for the book of Daniel. Kitchen points out, “Conservative scholarship has fully answered the objections of critics which would tend to reflect upon the accuracy and historicity of the book of Daniel.”<sup>419</sup> Waltke adds to the discussion saying that as a result of recent findings, “One can no longer echo the dictum that the three Greek words depicting the musical instruments in Daniel 3 demand a date after 330 BC. Greek words are now attested in the Aramaic documents of Elephantine dated to the fifth century B.C.”<sup>420</sup>

Archaeologist William F. Albright says that the Greek influence before Alexander the Great is hard to eliminate. He elaborates on the idea:

The idea that Greece and Hellenic cultures were little known in western Asia before Alexander the Great is difficult to eradicate . . . Greek traders and mercenaries were familiar in Egypt and throughout Western Asia from the early seventh century on, if not earlier. As early as the sixth century B.C. the coasts of

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<sup>418</sup> Kitchen, “The Aramaic of Daniel,” 35-36.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 44-50.

<sup>420</sup> Waltke, “The Date of the Book of Daniel,” 325.

Syria and Palestine were dotted with Greek ports and trading emporia, several of which have been discovered during the past five years... There were Greek mercenaries in the armies of Egypt and Babylonia, of Psammetichus II and Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>421</sup>

Scholar Robert Dick Wilson has pointed out that the argument advanced by the critics actually turns against itself. If the book of Daniel were written in a Greek period, then one would expect many more Greek words than just a few.<sup>422</sup> Whitcomb echoes this statement, “The book of Daniel would have been saturated with Greek terms if it was written as late as 167 BC in Palestine... instead of this we find just two or three technical terms.”<sup>423</sup> Yamauchi adds the comment:

The only element of surprise to this writer is that there are not more Greek words in such documents. Thus, the earlier date of Daniel seems to withstand the most rigorous test put forth. Indeed, it not only stands the test, but the fact that these Greek loan words can all be seen to antedate the Attic dialectal influence seems to indicate that the Greek of Daniel may well be quite early.<sup>424</sup>

### **Nebuchadnezzar’s Illness and the Prayer of Nabonidus**

Nebuchadnezzar’s madness was not fiction as many critics like to claim.

Langdon notes, “After the year 590 B.C. we have scarcely anything but palace inscriptions with little to say about the religious interest of the king.”<sup>425</sup> The most interesting account, cites Ferguson, was published by A.K. Grayson in which D.J.

Wiseman identifies Nebuchadnezzar II as the subject of a brief narration. Ferguson sums

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<sup>421</sup> William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Processes* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1957), 377.

<sup>422</sup> Robert Dick Wilson, *Biblical and Theological Studies: A Commemoration of 100 Years of Princeton Seminary* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 296.

<sup>423</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 56.

<sup>424</sup> Yamauchi, *Greek and Babylon*, 94.

<sup>425</sup> Langon, 67-68.

up the narration and makes some remarks at the end:

For some unspecified reason the king becomes extremely disoriented. His orders are contradictory, and he does not even heed the mention of his name. He does not show concern for son or daughter and ceases his care for worship centers. Even his own life is of no value to him. The text ends with the king going to the holy gate and weeping bitterly to the great gods. The text is too small and fragmentary to dogmatically assert that it is the Babylonian version of the account in Daniel 4. It does, however, indicate that a great deal of caution is in order before dismissing the account of the king's madness as nothing more than folklore.<sup>426</sup>

The medical field ascribes the term *lycanthropy* to Nebuchadnezzar's new state.

More specifically, the text tells us that Nebuchadnezzar would believe himself to be a bull or an ox, which is termed *boanthropy*. Many liberal critics and scholars have been quick to discount this disease that was inflicted upon the king. For example Hartman states, "Enough is known of Nebuchadnezzar's forty-three year reign so that it is impossible to fit in such a period of insanity."<sup>427</sup> However, the Scriptures plainly teach the reader that the events did happen and they happened to Nebuchadnezzar. Paul Ferguson notes that, "Those who proceed with the assumption that there are no supernatural elements in the narrative are quick to brush aside the possibility of reality in this incident."<sup>428</sup> His words are timely and true as recent developments in ancient literature has brought a new way of explaining this story.

A recent fragment that was unearthed in 1952 from Qumran Cave 4 shows striking similarities to the narrative in Daniel 4. Archer details the finding:

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<sup>426</sup> Ferguson, 321.

<sup>427</sup> Hartman and DiLella, 178.

<sup>428</sup> Ferguson, 321.

An Aramaic fragment of a prayer of Nabonidus was discovered. The translation by Milik into French is approximately as follows: “The words of the prayer which Nabunai(d), king of Assyria and Babylon, the great king, prayed when he was smitten with an unpleasant skin-disease by the ordinance of God Most High in the city of Teima: ‘I was smitten with an unpleasant skin-disease for seven years...But when I confessed my sins and my faults, he granted me a (favorable) verdict. And there was a Jew from...and he wrote and told (me) to give honor ...to the name of God Most High.’”<sup>429</sup>

When this fragment was published, many liberal critics latched on to it as an earlier form of the story that is depicted in Daniel 4. However, as Archer continues, a careful examination of the documents shows several differences between the story in Daniel 4 and the Prayer of Nabonidus:

(1) Nabonidus’s skin disease was far less serious than Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity. (2) The locus of the narrative in Daniel 4 is apparently at or near Babylon rather than down near Teima. (3) The Jewish counselor, unnamed, is said to have written a letter to Nabonidus rather than advising him personally. (4) The scope of Nabonidus’s authority is said to have included “Assyria,” an unhistorical feature never included in the Daniel account, but very likely a late, intertestamental, legendary feature.<sup>430</sup>

These differences clearly indicate that it more acceptable to understand the Prayer of Nabonidus to be a late oral tradition of Nebuchadnezzar’s sickness.

### **Belshazzar and Nabonidus**

Until recently, critics did not believe that such a man named Belshazzar existed because he was not found in any inscriptions that had been discovered.<sup>431</sup> Liberals and critics find this idea problematic, and as a result, they attempt to discount the book based

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<sup>429</sup> Archer, *Daniel*, 63.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>431</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 33, states that some scholars are convinced that the events of chapter four of Daniel refer to Nabonidus rather than Nebuchadnezzar. Rather than try to justify Belshazzar’s title, then, it is better to recognize that these tales were not greatly concerned with historical accuracy but operated in a manner of folklore, where the type-role of king was more important than the identity of the individual.



on this issue.<sup>432</sup> Now archaeologist's have uncovered and published several inscriptions that attest to the existence of Belshazzar.

Nabonidus lived in Tema<sup>433</sup> for most of his seventeen year reign as king of Babylon. William Shea further observed an inscription which stated that Nabonidus remained in Tema for ten consecutive years during which he did not visit Babylon.<sup>434</sup> Nabonidus' refusal to live in Babylon and rule over it directly is puzzling considering all Babylon could offer a king. Longman summarizes the reason of Nabonidus absence from Babylon:

Nabonidus was a devotee of the moon god Sin, the chief god of his ancestral homeland Haran. While not a monotheist, he was interested in promoting the interest of Sin, which apparently angered the powerful Marduk priesthood. Evidence exists that his son, Belshazzar, did not share his devotion to Sin and may even have led a party that, while not forcing Nabonidus to abdicate, did result in his abandonment of the capital to take up residence at a site called Teima, located at an oasis in what is today Saudi Arabia.<sup>435</sup>

Many agree with Longman that the reason for Nabonidus' absence was religious in nature; however, other motivations may have caused the move.<sup>436</sup> Nevertheless, Nabonidus felt it more appropriate to reside in Tema where the worship of the moon god

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<sup>432</sup> Liberals and critics also believe that there are chronology problems with the kings of Israel – a problem that is easily solved if one understands that kings from both the Southern and Northern kingdom were often times ruling at the same time. See Thiele's work, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, for a further discussion of this issue.

<sup>433</sup> Tema is located in Saudi Arabia; about 500 miles south of Babylon.

<sup>434</sup> Shea, "Nabonidus, Belshazzar," 134.

<sup>435</sup> Longman, 135.

<sup>436</sup> J. Alfred Hoerth, Gerald L. Mattingly, and Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Peoples of the Old Testament World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), 65, Nabonidus' mother, Adad-guppi, has her biography preserved on a tomb inscription that speaks of her remarkable devotion to Sin, the moon god of Haran. This could be the reason for Nabonidus' devotion to Sin, while still paying outward homage to the Babylonian deities.

Sin was prominent. Yamauchi speculates further saying that Nabonidus resided in Tema because he believed that Babylon had been cursed by the moon god Sin.<sup>437</sup> Regardless of the reason for Nabonidus' absence from Babylon, the Persian Verse Account yields the most credible evidence for the existence of Belshazzar as co-regent with Nabonidus, his father. Gruenthaner<sup>438</sup> cites the account as it appears from its inscription:

- (18) He (Nabonidus) put the eldest, his firstborn, in charge of a camp.
- (19) The troops of the land he sent with him.
- (20) He freed his hand; he entrusted the kingship to him,
- (21) while he himself set out on a distant campaign.
- (22) The forces of Akkad advanced with him.
- (23) Towards Tema, in Amurru, he set his face.

It is apparent that Nabonidus did indeed confer powers and co-regency upon his son, Belshazzar, in the third year of his reign. It is interesting that in Daniel 8, Gabriel further explains the identity of the second kingdom (Medo-Persia) to Daniel at a time when this new co-regency has just been established. Was Gabriel trying to show Daniel a connection between this new co-regency and the prophecy concerning the overthrow of the second kingdom? More study needs to be done in this area to before any connection can be made.

Gruenthaner further cites the inscriptions in the Nabonidus Chronicles stating that the New Year religious festivities were not celebrated in Babylon in the seventh, ninth, ten, or eleventh years of the reign of Nabonidus. The king was required to be present in order for the people to celebrate the New Year religious festivities. This allows the conclusion that Nabonidus was still the king but was absent from Babylon during the

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<sup>437</sup> Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures*, 89.

<sup>438</sup> Michael Gruenthaner, "The Last King of Babylon," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (October 1949): 416.

New Year. Therefore, the observance of the feast in Nabonidus' last year as king signifies that he was present in Babylon.<sup>439</sup> Additional evidence states that food was sent to Nabonidus in Tema during his tenth year. Overall, Nabonidus was away from Babylon for about 10 years. He resided in Tema from his 7<sup>th</sup> year to the 11<sup>th</sup> and probably staying until the 17<sup>th</sup> year of his reign. Belshazzar served as co-regent under his father's absence from Babylon. His position when Nabonidus returned to Babylon is not stated.<sup>440</sup> Beaulieu concludes that Belshazzar was demoted upon his father's return.<sup>441</sup>

The Scripture text in Daniel 5 also attests to the existence of Nabonidus. Although his name is not stated anywhere in the book, Daniel 5:7, 16, 29 states that the man who interprets the handwriting on the wall will receive the title, "the third highest ruler in the kingdom." At this juncture, yet another note could be made to the authenticity of the book of Daniel. If the book of Daniel were written in the second century, then how is it that a person would know of this special co-regency that existed at this time? The book of Daniel could not be a second-century forgery, for only a man who was enlisted to serve in the king's court would be able to write an account of Daniel 5 with this accuracy and detail. Only one man would be capable of this and his name is Daniel.

Belshazzar was not a fictional character – he was very real. Biblical faith is not dependent on the archaeological finds of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; if perchance it is, then it is not faith at all. Archaeology simply gives the believer more ammunition against the

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<sup>439</sup> Gruenthaner, 415.

<sup>440</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 243.

<sup>441</sup> Beaulieu, 160.

onslaught of the critics. One must remember that archaeology does not authenticate the Bible; rather, it is archaeology that gives more proof to the Bible as *already* being true.

### **Identity of the Queen in Daniel 5:10**

Who is this *queen*? Many scholars, church historians, and commentators have long<sup>442</sup> given their opinion as to the identity of this queen. Historical records concerning this queen are not concrete enough to give the reader a factual answer, but several clues within this chapter can help narrow down the options. First, the end of verse 2 says that Belshazzar's wives and concubines are already present at the banquet so this was none of them. Second, Daniel names Nebuchadnezzar as the father of Belshazzar as does this queen. This leads to the assumption that Belshazzar was related somehow to Nebuchadnezzar, although not directly as a son. Regarding the usage of the term "father" in Hebrew and Chaldean literature: "Neither in Hebrew, nor in Chaldee, is there any word for 'grand-father,' 'grandson.' Forefathers are called 'fathers' or 'fathers' fathers.' But a single grandfather, or forefather, is never called 'fathers' father' but always 'father' only."<sup>443</sup> Therefore, it is best to understand the term *father* as representative of an ancestor or descendant of the familial line. A third clue is that the queen reminds the king of Daniel's abilities, something she seemed to know well. How could she know this if she had not been related somehow to Nebuchadnezzar? Who then is this *queen*? Several options are offered.

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<sup>442</sup> Miller, 59, cites Josephus (first century AD) as the earliest commentator who identified this queen as either the wife of Nebuchadnezzar or the wife of Nabonidus. Most commentators up to this current century have followed in like fashion.

<sup>443</sup> Walvoord, 118.

The possibility has already been ruled out that it was Belshazzar's wife because she was already present at the banquet. A possibility that remains is that she is his mother, the wife of Nabonidus named Adad-guppi. However, history records that Nabonidus's mother died in 547 BC, eight years before the events of this chapter, so she is not an option.<sup>444</sup> Another theory posed is that the queen is none other than the wife of Nabonidus, named Nitocris. Nitocris was most likely a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar that Nabonidus married to strengthen his rights to the throne.<sup>445</sup> However, due to the fact that Nabonidus was away from Babylon for such a long period of time, one could assume that his wife was with him or she did not show up at the banquet because of the disfavor of the Babylonians toward king Nabonidus. This unfavorable attitude may also be a social reason why Daniel termed Belshazzar as king of Babylon (at the beginning of chapter 5) instead of Nabonidus. Furthermore, some believe that Nitocris was not the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, but the widow of Nebuchadnezzar.

All these possibilities still do not yield a plausible conclusion. One more theory has been suggested by a few scholars. This suggestion is approved by history and attested by the context of the queen's speech in Daniel chapter 5, which is a crucial key to understanding the identity of the queen. Whitcomb suggests that this *queen* is none other than Amytis, the aged widow of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>446</sup> This seems plausible since the information that the queen divulges about Daniel relates more to the incidents at the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign than at the later part of his reign. Therefore, if

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<sup>444</sup> Goldingay, 109.

<sup>445</sup> Dougherty, 39-44.

<sup>446</sup> Whitcomb, *Daniel*, 75.

Nitocris was the daughter of Amytis and Nebuchadnezzar, then it seems unlikely that she would be familiar with such an early part of Daniel's career. Other evidence of her identity of Amytis may be the way in which she entered the room unannounced, commanding the audience of the king and his subjects. Again, playing on the fact that Belshazzar and his father Nabonidus were not well liked, the words of Amytis, the widow of Nebuchadnezzar, would carry great weight in a situation as this one.

All the theories that have been offered as to the identity of the queen have their problems; one cannot be dogmatic as to the identity of the queen. The text remains silent to the reader of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but what is certain is that the people at the banquet knew the identity of this queen. She certainly must have been held in high esteem.

### **Identity of Darius the Mede in Daniel 6**

Critical scholars have long recognized that the reference to Darius the Mede in the Book of Daniel has become the most substantial historical problem in the book.<sup>447</sup> Rowley's assessment has remained in scholarship because no extra-biblical source has been found bearing the name "Darius the Mede." More significantly, "the contemporary records appear to allow no chronological gap between the reigns of Belshazzar and Cyrus in which this Darius might have reigned."<sup>448</sup> Interestingly, as noted previously in the discussion about Nabonidus and Belshazzar, until recent discoveries many critics believed that Belshazzar was a character of fiction. Unfortunately for critics, more evidence than just the Word of God is needed to convince them otherwise. Therefore, it

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<sup>447</sup> H.H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empire in the Book of Daniel: A Historical Study of Contemporary Theories* (1935; repr., Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964), 9.

<sup>448</sup> Thomas E. Gaston, *Historical Issues in the Book of Daniel* (Oxford: TannathShiloh, 2009), 111.

must be remembered that recent discoveries and archeological finds do not prove the authenticity of the Bible, they simply give more weight and support to what the Scriptures have already stated as truth. With all this in mind, maybe in the ensuing decades and years, some new discoveries will be made from extra-biblical records that will confirm the identity of Darius the Mede. Until that time, we are left with some theories that have been offered to explain the identity and existence of Darius the Mede. However, before discussing them, it is good for the interpreter to notice what the text says concerning Darius the Mede:

- He received the kingdom of Babylon after the death of Belshazzar (5:30-31; 9:1).
- He was 62 at the fall of Babylon (5:31).
- He appointed 120 satraps and three presidents over them (6:1-2).
- He reigned as king (6:2ff), made decrees or laws (6:7-9, 25-27), and acted like he was sovereign in his kingdom (6:7).
- He was bound by the law of the Medes and Persians (6:8, 12), therefore he probably ruled after the annexing of Media by Cyrus.
- He was the son of Ahasuerus, and had Median ancestry (9:1).
- Only his first year is recorded (9:1; 11:1).

### **Critical View**

Critical scholarship believes that either Darius the Mede is a fictional character<sup>449</sup> or his identity is Darius I Hystapis. The latter theory, explained by Rowley, notes that the author of Daniel confused the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus (539 BC) with the defeat of Babylon by Darius Hystapis (520 BC); he (the author of Daniel) then confused a number of other things in his writing as well. The sheer number of confusion on the part of the author of Daniel is difficult to conceive, especially since he has already proven himself to

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<sup>449</sup> H.F.D. Sparks, "On the Origin of 'Darius the Mede' at Daniel V.31," *Journal of Theological Studies* 47 (1940): 41-46, and L.L. Grabbe, "Another Look at the Gestalt of 'Darius the Mede,'" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (April 1988): 211.

be accurate on other historical details. Concerning the other theory, that Darius the Mede was just a fictional character, Sparks, and later Grabbe, propose that the character is based on a confused reading of Old Testament texts – namely the reading from the books of Zechariah and Haggai, which date the Temple rebuilding process in the reign of Darius. These critical theories do not line up, nor do they give the Word of God its due place as reliable and true. Gaston rightly concludes, “The most straightforward explanation for the presence of Darius the Mede in the book of Daniel is that its author believed Darius to be a real historical character, perhaps based upon acquaintance with some tradition no longer extant.”<sup>450</sup>

### **Evangelical View**

The discovery and publishing of the *Nabonidus Chronicle*<sup>451</sup> proposed that Darius the Mede is identified as Cyrus’ general, a man named Gobryas. These are the words of the Chronicle:

The sixteenth day, Gobryas, the governor of Gutium, and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without battle. . . In the month of Arahsamna, the third day, Cyrus entered Babylon, green twigs were spread in front of him – the state of peace was imposed on the city. Cyrus sent greeting to all Babylon. Gobryas, his governor, installed sub-governors in Babylon.<sup>452</sup>

This thesis has several good points about it: first, Gobryas was indeed the general who captured Babylon; second, Gobryas appointed sub-governors; third, there are several references in the cuneiform records to a Gubaru as governor of Bablyon.<sup>453</sup> The strongest

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<sup>450</sup> Gaston, 114.

<sup>451</sup> Sidney Smith, trans., *Babylonian Historical Texts Relating to the Capture and Downfall of Babylon* (London: Methuen, 1924), 101-123.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> Gaston, 120.



objection to this theory is that this Gobryas dies shortly after the fall of Babylon.

Recently, John Whitcomb, has revived the Gobryas theory.<sup>454</sup> Whitcomb believes that in the cuneiform documents *Gubaru* is to be distinguished from *Ugbaru*, as both names were transliterated as “Gobryas.” So, Whitcomb believes that Gubaru is identified as Darius the Mede in the cuneiform documents. More recent research, however, has shown that Gubaru did not become governor until the fourth year of Cyrus, remaining in office for about ten more years (534-525 BC).<sup>455</sup>

William Shea carries the Gobryas theory further. He presents that for just over a year after the fall of Babylon (539-538 BC) a certain individual bore the title “king of Babylon,” who was neither Cyrus nor Cambyses, his son.<sup>456</sup> He continues noting that the Babylonian kings bore the title, “king of Bablyon” in documents that were dated in their reigns, but the Persian kings bore the title “king of Babylon, king of Lands.” Shea believes that Cyrus did not take up the title “king of Babylon” during his accession year and most of his first year.<sup>457</sup> This gap in the titular usage was explained by the co-regency of Cyrus and Cambyses. Further, Dubberstein, back in 1938, proposed a thesis noting that the co-regency occurred at the end of reign of Cyrus rather than the beginning. Shea supports this thesis, and therefore concludes that between the years of 539-538 BC,

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<sup>454</sup> John C. Whitcomb, *Darius the Mede: A Study in Historical Identification* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959).

<sup>455</sup> W.B. Fisher, *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 563, and Grabbe, 206.

<sup>456</sup> William H. Shea, “An Unrecognized Vassal King of Babylon in the Early Achaemenid Period I,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 10, no. 2 (July 1972): 147-178.

<sup>457</sup> William H. Shea, “Darius the Mede in His Persian-Babylonian Setting,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 236-237.

neither Cyrus nor Cambyses bore the title “king of Babylon.” So, this leaves the theory that Ugbaru, the general who captured Babylon, was indeed the “king of Babylon” during this time.

Convenient as Shea’s proposal seems to be, it depends on the theory that Cambyses was not king of Babylon during the first fourteen months after the fall of Babylon.<sup>458</sup> Other research has come out that shows the co-regency of Cyrus and Cambyses occurred in the first year of the fall of Babylon.<sup>459</sup> More evidence under this theory is desirable, and hopefully, future discoveries will identify Darius the Mede.

### **Textual/Biblical View**

Of all the theories discussed this one fits the text of Daniel the best, and since the interpreter must be faithful to the text, this theory is probably the best in understanding the identity of Darius the Mede. The theory was first introduced by Donald J. Wiseman, where he suggested that Darius the Mede was another name for Cyrus the Persian, noted in Daniel 6:28.<sup>460</sup> This thesis rests on the dual meaning of the conjunction *waw*, which is generally translated “and” but also may be used to indicate identity. Daniel 6:28 can therefore be translated in two ways:

So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius *and* in the reign of Cyrus the Persian

Or:

So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian

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<sup>458</sup> Gaston, 128.

<sup>459</sup> Jerome Peat, “Cyrus ‘King of Lands,’ Cambyses ‘King of Babylon’: The Disputed Co-Regency,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 41, no. 2 (Autumn 1989): 199-216.

<sup>460</sup> Wiseman, “*Some Historical Problems in Daniel*,” 12.

Wiseman's theory is useful in that it removes the problem of finding where Darius the Mede should fit into the story. This thesis has been more recently helped with the work of Bulman<sup>461</sup> and Colless.<sup>462</sup> Bulman gathers evidence that Cyrus was also known as "Darius" and among many people Cyrus was regarded as a Median.<sup>463</sup> Colless has argued that "the reader is expected to understand, by the author's principle of dual nomenclature for many of the characters in the book, that Darius and Cyrus are one and the same person."<sup>464</sup> The examples of dual names from Daniel and his three friends provide more support to this thought. Gaston makes an interesting observation that "Daniel was in service till the first year of Cyrus (1:19-21) but his (Babylonian) service was ended when Darius received the kingdom."<sup>465</sup>

Some other thoughts have been raised under this viewpoint. One of Daniel's rewards for interpreting the handwriting on the wall is that he will be the third ruler in the kingdom. From the discussion about Nabonidus and his co-regent Belshazzar, this reward seems logical, but does it carry over to chapter 6 of Daniel? If Cyrus is Darius and Cambyses his co-regent, then Daniel becomes the prime minister, third ruler of the kingdom. Could this Gobryas, defended by some, be one of the conspirators in Daniel chapter 6, who sought to get rid of Daniel? He would surely have motive because of his loyalty and service to Cyrus – why would the king overlook him for such a

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<sup>461</sup> James M. Bulman, "The Identification of Darius the Mede," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 247-267.

<sup>462</sup> Brian E. Colless, "Cyrus the Persian as Darius the Mede in the Book of Daniel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 56 (1992): 113-126.

<sup>463</sup> Bulman, 259.

<sup>464</sup> Colless, 116.

<sup>465</sup> Gaston, 125.

prestigious position? What if Darius was a “nickname” used among the Jews? There are too many questions and not enough answers. What is certain is that the Bible verifies the authenticity of Darius the Mede, just like it did with Belshazzar. Time has proven the Word of God’s correctness in using Belshazzar and time will soon tell the story of this Darius the Mede. The British Museum houses more than 130,000 cuneiform texts, about one third<sup>466</sup> of which have never been published – anybody want to help? It is possible that one of those thousands of text will bear the name “Darius the Mede.” Until this time, secular history believes he was just a fictional character, but biblical theologians rest on the authenticity of God’s Word as its accuracy is proven time and again.

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<sup>466</sup> Gaston, 132.

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