

Daniel Bible Study

Introduction

Daniel 1:1-7

I. Authorship:

- A. The author of this book does not identify himself. Even though the book is named “Daniel,” this title indicates the primary character of the book rather than the author. Tremper Longman writes, “Nowhere do these chapters claim that Daniel or anyone else wrote them.”¹
- B. The story of Daniel is told by a narrator (the author). However, we know this person had a close connection to Daniel because he was able to quote him extensively and record Daniel’s direct communication with God which was supposed to be a secret from much of the public until a later time (Daniel 12:4).
- C. Possibilities for Authorship
 1. This could have been a faithful Hebrew servant and/or scribe of Daniel.
 2. This could have been Daniel himself writing in some portions of the book as a narrator.
 3. This could have been a faithful Hebrew student of Daniel who wanted to preserve the great man’s story and visions.

II. Date of Writing:

- A. The earliest events in Daniel begin in 605 BC (the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim in Judah) and the latest events in Daniel are in 536 BC (the third year of the reign of Cyrus in Babylon). This means the content of Daniel is mostly that which took place in the 6th century BC over a span of about 66 years.
- B. However, some have claimed that the detail in Daniel’s prophecies are too precise to be foretelling of future events. They must be, some claim, reporting of past events in a prophetic form. Thus, they place the writing of Daniel in the second century BC after the majority of the events described in Daniel’s prophecy actually came to pass in history. This view, however, is not in harmony with idea that the Word of God is true for this claim casts the author of the book of Daniel as a deceiver who wrote a book claiming to be much older and must more inspired than it actually was. There is sufficient evidence to exclude this as a possible date of writing yet it remains the date chosen by some.
- C. Most likely the book of Daniel as we have it was written shortly before or shortly after the death of Daniel in the sixth century BC.

III. Purpose of Writing:

- A. The overall purpose of the book was to encourage Jews living in the exile and in the aftermath of defeat that God is still sovereign and faithful.
- B. Tremper Longman writes that “the overall message of the book is uniform: In spite of present appearances, God is in control.”² He continues, “God is all-powerful, and this narration and demonstration of his power has one important purpose: the encouragement of a beleaguered people.”³

IV. Literary Concerns

- A. Language
 1. The book of Daniel is somewhat unique because significant portions of the book are written in different languages.

¹ Tremper Longman III, *The NIV Application Commentary: Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 21.

² Longman, 19.

³ Longman, 20.

2. Chapter 1 and chapters 8-12 are written in Hebrew (as most of the Old Testament) while chapters 2-7 are mostly written in Aramaic. C. Hassell Bullock points out that, “to write a book in Hebrew and Aramaic, even though the latter is a dialect of the former, is a strange phenomenon to the modern reader.”⁴
 - i. Aramaic is found both in the Old Testament and the New Testament but usually in short phrases or sections. This is the longest Aramaic section in the Bible. Other OT texts in Aramaic include:
 - a. Ezra 4:8 – 6:18
 - b. Ezra 7:1-26
 - c. Jeremiah 10:11
 - ii. Aramaic was a Semitic dialect that was spoken in Syria and elsewhere in the region.⁵ Because its span was wider than of the Hebrew language it was considered a regional tongue useful for trade and diplomacy. Thus, Bullock suggests that “the Aramaic portion in 2:4b – 7:28 was the part of the book most germane to non-Jews. Thus it was written in the language of the empire for their consumption.”⁶
 - iii. Thus, the message of Daniel was largely designed for a wider audience than just the Jewish exiles. The author wanted to communicate a message about the God of the Jews to the whole region.

B. Genre

1. The book of Daniel does not fall neatly into one Biblical genre.
2. The first six chapters are more narrative (like the historical books of the Old Testament.) These are the easiest portions of the book to read and remember. Tremper Longman writes, “Clear and encouraging, these six stories have spoken forcefully to many believers, including the youngest of children.”⁷
3. The last six chapters are more prophetic and apocalyptic (much like the book of Revelation in the New Testament).
 - i. Apocalyptic literature is found within other prophetic books but not to the extent that we find it within Daniel and Revelation.
 - ii. Bullock writes that “Apocalyptic [literature] arose directly out of the prophetic experience” but the difference is that “apocalyptists became more intent upon the end times, compared with the prophets’ concentration upon repentance to divert the disaster anticipated on the Day of the Lord.”⁸
4. Bullock points out that “Daniel is not included among the Prophets in the Hebrew canon of Scripture. Rather it is contained in the Writings.”⁹

C. Based on the language and genre issues, we should read Daniel differently in these sections.

1. The first six chapters (Aramaic narratives) are more for general audiences.
2. The last six chapters (Hebrew apocalyptic visions) require much more study and humility when reading and interpreting.

V. The Main Characters

- A. In general, the main characters are mentioned in these first few verses.
- B. Daniel
 1. His name is mentioned first in Daniel 1:6

⁴ C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 286.

⁵ Merrill F. Under, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 77.

⁶ Bullock, 286.

⁷ Longman, 19.

⁸ Bullock, 293.

⁹ Bullock, 289 - 290

2. He was a member of the Jewish nobility. Whether or not he was a member of the royal family is debated but he must have ranked among the noble class to be taken to Babylon to serve the king (v. 3).
3. He was a healthy young man:
 - i. Had no physical defect (v. 4)
 - ii. Noticeable healthier than others of his own age and background (v. 15).
4. He was intelligent:
 - i. Had aptitude in his education (v. 4)
 - ii. Previously educated (v. 4)
 - iii. Sharp in understanding (v. 4)
 - iv. Able to serve a king – familiar with a royal court and duties (v. 4)
5. He was a man of integrity (as seen in the rest of the book). Bullock describes Daniel as “a man of impeccable character.”¹⁰
6. He was faithful to God. Again, Bullock describes him as an example of “the loyalty of the laity to the Mosaic law.”¹¹

C. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah

1. Physically and mentally, they must have met the same requirements of Daniel to serve in Babylon so they could also be described as Daniel above.
2. Spiritually, they also served as examples of faithfulness to God.
3. Longman also points out that the Rabbinic tradition identified all four men as “descendants of King Hezekiah”¹² but this is not mentioned directly in Scripture.
4. All their names were changed. Names were much more significant in their culture and were closely connected to a person’s overall identity. Changing the name was part of the Babylonian tactic to make these men into the image of Babylon. Longman writes, “The Babylonians began the process of reeducation by giving their captives new names.”¹³

Hebrew Name	Meaning	Babylonian Name	Meaning
Daniel	God is my judge	Belteshazzar	may Nebo protect his life
Hananiah	Yahweh has been gracious	Shadrach	the command of Aku
Mishael	who is what God is?	Meshach	who is what Aku is
Azariah	Yahweh has helped	Abednego	servant of Nego

D. God

1. God is first mentioned in 1:2 but will be spotlighted continuously in Daniel. Tremper Longman writes that “Daniel’s main function is to reveal God to us, the readers.”¹⁴
2. Here, God is introduced in a strange way. He is introduced as the force behind Judah’s defeat and enslavement to Babylon. We know this was God’s response to a rebellious people:
 - i. Jeremiah 22:24-26
 - ii. Ezekiel 23:28-30
3. God will be described in Daniel as one who still cares for his people even as they struggle in judgment and exile. He is intending to deliver them.

¹⁰ Bullock, 279.

¹¹ Bullock, 280.

¹² Longman, 48.

¹³ Longman, 50.

¹⁴ Longman, 20.

4. The book also shows that even through Israel is defeated, the God of Israel is not defeated. He raised up Babylon to defeat Judea but God demonstrates again and again that he is still omnipotent even in Babylon.
5. That God would “hand over” his own people is not a sign of his malice but of his love. Just as Paul describes handing over someone to Satan as a form of discipline in 1 Corinthians 5, God sets the example of how handing over people for discipline is necessary in order to form them into the people God wants them to be.

E. The Kings of Babylon

1. The first to be mentioned is Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 1:1. Others will follow and take their place in the story.
2. Nebuchadnezzar is called king of Babylon at the time that Daniel’s captivity began. However, according to the time in Jeremiah 25:1 and the historical record, Nebuchadnezzar was heir apparent at the time of Daniel’s initial captivity. Nebuchadnezzar was the leader of the army but his father, Nabopolassar, was king. However, by the time Daniel reaches Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar’s father has died and the son has been crowned king. However, this perceived discrepancy has caused some to reject Daniel as authoritative. Bullock points out that “Daniel has been shrouded by doubts concerning its historicity and authenticity.”¹⁵

VI. Historical Context

A. God’s Judgement on the Southern Kingdom of Judah

1. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had already been judged by God and defeated and exiled by the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:9-12).
2. The Babylonians had now overcome the Assyrians and were targeting Egypt and everything in between (including Judah).

B. The exile described by Daniel 1:1-2 was the initial strike by Babylon on Judah before the complete defeat and destruction.

1. 2 Kings 24:1
2. During this initial strike Nebuchadnezzar takes important people (like Daniel) and important things (like articles from the temple) but does not completely destroy Judah. He allows them to exist as part of his kingdom as long as they obey him and pay him taxes.
 - i. The goblets he took from the temple are mentioned in Daniel 5:2
 - ii. Other items are mentioned in Ezra 1:9-11.
 - iii. These items were eventually returned according to Ezra 5:14
 - iv. The purpose of taking the items was not only to steal treasure but to show that the God of the land was defeated. However, just as the Philistines learned that defeating Israel and taking the ark was not defeating the God of Israel (1 Samuel 5), Daniel wants to show that the God of Israel is not defeated in Babylon.
3. The people were taken “to train them in Babylonian ways for political and propaganda purposes.”¹⁶ This was the plan of the Babylonians but God was able to take that situation and use those kidnapped for evil as ministers for good.
4. Eventually Judah would be completely defeated by Babylon (2 Chronicles 26:5). Bullock points out that “Ezekiel’s exile to Babylonia in 597 BC occurred almost a decade after Daniel’s banishment to that land in 605 BC.”¹⁷

C. Jehoiakim

1. The king of Judah was Jehoiakim when Daniel left.

¹⁵ Bullock, 288.

¹⁶ Longman, 47.

¹⁷ Bullock, 280.

2. His original name was Eliakim. Like Daniel his name was changed by a foreign power to Jehoiakim when he came to power as the puppet leader of Egyptian Pharaoh Neco (2 Kings 23:34)
3. He was a young king who did evil in the eyes of God (2 Kings 23:36-37).

VII. The Tension of Living for God in a Pagan Land

- A. These four young Hebrew men felt strongly the tension of living faithfully for God in a culture opposed to Him. Tremper Longman writes that “They must have suffered as they were forced to work for the good of the nation that oppressed them.”¹⁸ We will see this throughout the book but it is interesting here to consider even in chapter 1 what they were willing and not will to do.
- B. What they were not willing to do:
 1. Later in chapter 1, we will see that they were not willing to defile themselves with the pagan food of Babylon since it conflicted with the food laws stipulated in their community’s covenant with God.
 2. We will also see that they are unwilling to bow down to idols, place men in God’s place, and cease their prayer life. They will not do anything that will harm their relationship with God (they saw vividly the results of that in their homeland).
- C. What they were willing to do:
 1. Serve in a pagan kingdom. They could have refused to serve and suffered the consequences.
 2. Take on pagan names. They could also have refused the names just as they did the food.
 3. Learn in the pagan educational system. History tells us that this pagan system of education would have included witchcraft and other studies in ungodly practices (divination, etc.). Longman writes that “Daniel was educated in the ways of Babylon, which surely included [evil] arts.”¹⁹ They were willing to learn but not to practice (when Daniel interpreted dreams, it was by the power of God).
 4. They did not let fear of death influence their decisions because they show us they are willing to do die in other parts of the book. They were motivated by faith rather than fear in these decisions.
- D. Living for God in a hostile land requires a delicate balance of faithfulness but flexibility. As we study Daniel, perhaps we will be better able to discern how to strike that balance in our lives.
- E. Daniel and his colleagues in Babylon faced some difficult decisions. Sometimes they were flexible: they worked for an enemy king and took on pagan names. Other times they were firm: they refused to bow to idols or cease their prayers. This is the situation we will find ourselves in as we attempt to live Godly lives in a pagan society. As we make our decisions about whether to be firm or flexible we should, like Daniel, be influenced by faith and not fear.

¹⁸ Longman, 20.

¹⁹ Longman, 50.

Daniel Bible Study

Daniel 1:8-21

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” – Matthew 10:16

“God does not reveal himself to us in the abstract but rather in relationship to his people and through his action in history. . . Indeed, there is no better way to learn than by a good story.”²⁰

I. Nebuchadnezzar:

- A. Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar will be major character in Daniel until chapter 5.
- B. His name means “Nabu, protect my firstborn son.”
 - 1. Nabu was worshipped as a deity among the Assyrians and the Babylonians.
 - 2. Nabu was considered a god of wisdom and he is often seen holding tablets and writing instruments. Even his temples and offerings incorporated images and instruments of writing. He was considered to be especially at work among scribes.
 - 3. This false god is mentioned in Isaiah 46:1 and Jeremiah 48:1
- C. He is also a major character in the latter New Testament appearing in the following passages outside of Daniel:
 - 1. 2 Kings 24-25
 - 2. 1 Chronicles 6:15
 - 3. 2 Chronicles 36
 - 4. Ezra 1-2 & 5-6
 - 5. Nehemiah 7:6
 - 6. Esther 2:6
 - 7. Jeremiah 21-22, 24-25, 27-29, 32, 34-35, 37, 39, 43-44, 46, 49-52
 - 8. Ezekiel 26, 29-30
- D. Nebuchadnezzar was the son of Nebopolassar.
 - 1. Nebopolassar led in the overthrow of the Assyrian Empire with the defeat of Ninevah, the Assyrian capital in 612 BC. Until then Assyria had been the dominant force in the region and the conqueror of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
 - 2. Nebopolassar became the ruler of the Babylonian Empire and his son, Nebuchadnezzar, eventually became the leader of the Babylonian military. Under Nebuchadnezzar’s military leadership and then under his royal leadership, Babylon overthrew the Southern Kingdom of Judah as well as other nations.
- E. Babylon
 - 1. Babylon would continue to be the dominant force until the Persian Empire expanded and overthrew the Babylonians around 539 BC.
 - 2. The capital city of Babylon was possibly the largest city in the world at the time of Daniel’s residency there. It was located south of modern-day Baghdad on the Euphrates River. Exact population size is unknown and debatable but the number may have been around 200,000 people. The city was said to hold one of the seven ancient wonders of the world: the hanging gardens of Babylon built by Nebuchadnezzar for his wife. The actual existence of this garden (at least to scale described in history) is debatable.
 - 3. The Babylonian Empire extended west to the Mediterranean sea, south to the Egyptian border, north to the eastern edges of what we now call Turkey, and east towards the Persian Gulf.
- F. Stephen R. Miller writes, “Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest ruler of the Neo-Babylonian period and one of the most competent monarchs of ancient times. He brought Babylon to

²⁰ Longman, 57-58.

the zenith of its economic affluence and political power. . . Nebuchadnezzar played a large part in biblical history. With the possible exception of the pharaoh of the exodus, more is said of Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament than of any other foreign ruler.”²¹

II. Defilement

A. By Order of the King

1. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are being trained for service in the government of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. Burge and Hill write, “The royal academy is supported by the king, who supplies the students with a daily quota of food and wine. The curriculum lasted some three years, during which time the young men were to develop into competent statesmen to be used for the advance of the Babylonian kingdom. The royal grant was to perpetuate the Babylonian system of cultural, political, social, and economic values. The education was intended to brainwash the youths and to make them useful Babylonian subjects.”²²
2. The food ordered by the king was the best in the kingdom. He wanted his future court to be the healthiest and strongest in the kingdom. Remember, he only chose the best (physically and mentally) to join the school. Now they were will eat a diet similar to that of the king himself which apparently included a lot of meat and wine.
3. Even though Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were enrolled in the royal, pagan school and took on the royal, pagan names, they were not prepared to eat the royal, pagan food. They saw this an issue about which they could not be flexible. They saw how disregard for the law of God brought death and destruction to their homeland and people. Now, they resolved to keep the law in spite of their people’s failures and their present circumstances of captivity in a pagan land.
 - i. This was remarkable considering that their fathers were unwilling and unable to keep the law in the Promised Land yet they would keep the law in a foreign land.
 - ii. Their fathers had the best conditions for law obedience and Yahweh worship. They had perhaps the worst condition.

B. Defilement from food could take place in at least two ways:

1. Eating food considered unclean.
 - i. Food laws were a major part of the Jewish identity and were clearly described in the Jewish, biblical law especially Leviticus 11.
 - ii. Certain types of meats were forbidden by Jewish law and even the clean meats had to be prepared a certain way (dealing with the draining of blood) before the meat could be deemed acceptable (or kosher).
2. Eating food sacrificed to idols.
 - i. Idolatry was clearly forbidden in Jewish, Biblical law (see Exodus 20:3-5 and Leviticus 26:1 for examples).
 - ii. Yet it was a common practice in Babylon to offer the special food of the palace (meats and wines) first to the gods of Babylon. Elizabeth Williams writes that in Babylon “the choices meats, which were first offered to idols, were served at the king’s table.”²³
 - iii. This practice was also a factor in Daniel’s decision not to take the king’s food. Jewish law did not forbid wine but it did forbid idolatry and if wine had been associated with pagan gods, Daniel did not was to partake of it.
3. The struggle of Jews to keep kosher and avoid food-based idolatry in Gentile, pagan communities extends even into the New Testament:

²¹ Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel* (Nashville: Broadman & Holeman, 1994), 101-102.

²² Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 785.

²³ Elizabeth Williams, *Prevision of History* (Joplin, Missouri: Messenger Publishing House, 1982), 43-44.

- i. Acts 10, 15
 - ii. Romans 14
 - iii. 1 Corinthians 8, 10
- C. The solution was to request a diet of only vegetables and water. This would have been the food of the common people in Babylon and not what the king's associates ate. However, since this was common food, it would not have been offered to idols or tangled up in idol worship. It was also kosher since vegetables were not forbidden.
 - 1. The overseer of the students did not want to allow this. It was his job not only to take care of the students but also to do so in a way that suited the king. If the king saw his students growing thinner and weaker, the overseer would be judged and possibly killed for his failure.
 - 2. God, however, led the overseer to have favor on Daniel and they were allowed to eat the common food on a trial basis for ten days. If there was a noticeable difference in the appearance of the boys, they would go back to the king's diet.
 - 3. It is important to remember that there were perhaps others Jewish boys among those brought into the king's court. Only these four are named but in Daniel 1:3-6, the writer seems to indicate that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were "among these" and "some of the Israelites." It would be reasonable to imagine that other Jewish youth were there who were more reflective of their sinful contemporaries and did not regard the law of God as something to be kept in captivity (or in freedom).

III. A Successful Diet

- A. After ten days, there was a difference between Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and the other boys. The vegetarian water-drinkers were healthier looking than the meat and wine folks.
- B. This made the overseer of the boys take notice. Not only did he allow Daniel and his colleagues to keep their diet, he forced all the other boys to join them. This probably made Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah very unpopular. Like the kid in school who reminds the teacher about a quiz she forgot to give, the other students probably resented these Jewish boys not only for outpacing them but also for taking away their fine foods. Perhaps, this contributed to some of the animosity of the royal court against them later in the story. It may also have provided them opposition even then.
- C. Nevertheless, the king was most pleased with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and found them to be "ten times better" than the others.
 - 1. This superiority was not only because these boys had studied harder and learned better the practices of Babylon. Rather, they had the power of God on their side. If the pagan practices of magicians and sorcerers had even some power, how much more power would the servants of God have when their ability and wisdom was applied and demonstrated in their midst.
 - 2. We see a similar scene in Egypt when Moses and Aaron (having the power of God) were able to out-perform the Pharaoh's magicians and wise men (Ex. 7-9).
 - 3. Ultimately, even though Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah learned the dark arts of Babylon (as well as normal subjects of general education) there is no indication that they practiced these dark arts. They did interpret dreams and solve mysteries but they did it via the power and discernment of God.
- D. Why this diet?
 - 1. The motivation of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to undertake this diet must be examined.
 - 2. First, let us rule out several motivations that probably did not influence them:
 - i. Physical health – Even though the boys may have been making "healthy choices" as we are encouraged to do today, this was probably least among their concerns. We should take care of our bodies but this was not the

primary concern of Daniel in Babylon nor of God when He established the food laws. So called “Daniel Diets” or “Daniel Fasts” may be beneficial but these scriptures were not written for the purpose of setting up methods for diets or fasts.

- ii. Law Requirements
 - a. Even though the boys were concerned about keeping the law, they probably did not view this exercise in food restraint as simply jumping through the hoops of Mosaic Law. They were not just fulfilling a law or mandate. Service to God simply from a legal or obligatory standpoint may seem externally stringent but is actually internally weak. If this has been the motivation of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah they may not have even lasted 10 days. Why obey the law of the God who delivered you, your people, and your homeland into the hands of a murderous, idolatrous, tyrant? The fact they were willing to still cling to God’s law indicates that their relationship with God was far deeper and stronger than mere legal obligations.
 - b. The Law was never intended to simply be a series of hurdles that Israel had to clear or obstacles Israel had to overcome in order to have relationship with God. The Law was the outward expression of an inward work. This inward work of God was of greater worth than the outward demonstration. As God made clear many times in the prophets, God is not after people who merely worship God with their lips but also in their hearts (see Isaiah 29:13 for example). Likewise, Daniel’s practice of keeping food laws was not about simply fulfilling the obligation. It was the product of a person’s life who was deeply influenced by and committed to God.
3. The primary motivation of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah was to demonstrate that their success should not be contributed to any pagan king, false god, or even human will. They did what was counter to the normal means of achieving success to show that their success could only be attributed to their God, Yahweh.
 - i. Remember, a primary theme and message of the book is that even though the people of Israel have been defeated, the God of Israel is not defeated. Even though the people of God have been overcome, the God of the people is still in control. The writer wants his readers to see this even from the beginning of Daniel’s story.
 - ii. Longman writes, “Their minds as well as their bodies are being fed by the Babylonian court. If they prosper then to whom should they attribute their development and success? The Babylonians. However, by refusing to eat the food of the king, they know it is not the king who is responsible. . . Their robust appearance, usually attained by rich fare of meats and wine, is miraculously achieved through a deity of vegetables. Only God could have done it.”²⁴
 - iii. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are not just making healthy choices or just abiding by the prescribed law. They are making a bold proclamation that we raised up by God, not man. The king of Babylon has not made us successful, rather the King of Heaven has caused us to succeed.
 - a. The king’s food did not make them strong.
 - b. The king’s education did not make them wise.
 - c. The king’s religion did not make them powerful.

²⁴ Longman, 53.

- d. They were strong, wise, and powerful because of God. Their faithfulness to God was an opportunity to glorify God even among the pagans in the land of their captivity.
 - e. Even if their pagan names declare them to be people of idols, their holy lifestyles declare them to be people of God.
- iv. Our God is a counter-cultural God. Consider some of the later teachings of Jesus:
- a. If you want to be great you must be a servant to all (Mark 10:43-44).
 - b. If you want to be first you must be last (Mark 9:35).
 - c. If you want to save your life you must lose it (Luke 9:24).
 - d. Thus, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah's success involved going into captivity (slavery), serving the enemy king, and forsaking the finest foods.
4. The message of Daniel 1 is not the promotion of a special diet or extreme legalism. It is the promotion of a counter-cultural lifestyle of being in the world but not of the world. It's about being faithful to God so He can be glorified even it that faithfulness involves difficult journeys, tough choices, and confusing situations. As Longman writes, the book of Daniel not concerned as much with teaching people how to behave as it is focused on pointing people to God.²⁵ The acceptance of God into the Babylonian culture and royalty was the byproduct of a faithful life but not necessarily the reason for or goal of a faithful life. When we reduce faithfulness to simply a method or tool for changing our culture, we miss the point. Faithfulness is not about doing but being. Daniel did not set out and plan to change the Babylonian culture. He set out and planned to live faithfully in the Babylonian culture. Yet God used that faithfulness to confront and change the culture as Daniel became the faithful witness that Babylon needed.
5. It is also important to note that even though Daniel's diet was imposed on the others, it was not the original intent of Daniel. In fact, the text indicates that Daniel worked to keep this a secret rather than publically announce his pious plan. Ultimately, Daniel was more concerned about developing himself into a godly witness than he was developing his new nation into a Godly community. Longman writes, "Daniel teaches us that the struggle is not to make the culture Christian, but how a Christian can live in a hostile culture."²⁶ Likewise the work of the church should be less about propping up a government and more about preparing a people. Governments rise and fall but people will endure for eternity.

IV. God Gave

- A. Three times in Daniel 1 we see the Hebrew phrase "God gave. . ."

 - 1. First, God gave Jehoiakim and Judah into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (1:2).
 - 2. Second, God gave favor for Daniel to guard overseeing the boys (1:9).
 - 3. Third, God gave wisdom (knowledge and understand) to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (1:17).

- B. Thus, this giving of God takes on three forms:
 - 1. God gave to the enemies of God's people something that harmed God's people.
 - 2. God gave to the enemies of God's people something that blessed God's people.
 - 3. God gave to the people of God something that blessed both God's people and God's enemies.
- C. This demonstrates to us that we may not always understand God but we can always trust God. He used a variety of methods and a variety of people to bring about his plan and

²⁵ Ibid, 57.

²⁶ Ibid, 61.

purposes. That is why we must focus on the invisible (faith) more than the visible (physical). What we see with our eyes may be confusing and frustrating but when we view life through the lens of faith, we will find God at work doing what Paul describes in Romans 8:28: “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

- D. Ultimately, all things do work out for the good of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar dies and his kingdom is eventually overthrown but Daniel remains. He outlasts his conquerors and remains a witness for Yahweh in a pagan land.

Daniel Bible Study

Daniel 2

“It is not the content of the revelation of the future that is primary; what is most important here is the face that it is only Daniel’s God that knows that future.”²⁷

I. Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream

A. Timing

1. The chapter opens “in the second year” of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. There are several ways to view this date:
 - i. This could be the second full year of Nebuchadnezzar’s rule after his inaugural year which would actually put this into his third year of ruling Babylon. Thus, Daniel and his colleagues would have completed their training by this time.
 - ii. This could be the actual second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign which means that Daniel and his colleagues are not finished with their training and perhaps why they are not present at the initial discussion between the king and his court.
2. Either way, Daniel would be a new member of the company of “wise men” advising the king which would include more established “magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers” (Daniel 2:2).

B. A Distressed King

1. The dream that Nebuchadnezzar had was so troubling that he could not sleep. It was common for dreams to be considered significant omens or divine messages and this dream in particular must have bothered the king greatly. Miller writes, “The ancient Babylonians believed that dreams were messages from the gods; thus a right understanding of the dream was critical for their future. In this case, Nebuchadnezzar apparently feared that the strange revelation contained an ominous message for him.”²⁸ Though he was a celebrated soldier and powerful king, this vision made him to be quite scared.
2. Stephen Miller writes, “The King probably felt that the dream foretold some terrible disaster that was going to befall him. After all, Nebuchadnezzar had seen a manlike statue destroyed, which he likely associated with himself or his empire.”²⁹
3. He immediately assigns his spiritual advisors to the task of interpreting the dream. This was also a common practice. The king employed a large team of various spiritualists to not only interpret dreams but also foretell the future, decipher omens in the skies and on earth, give advice from the gods, and other pagan practices.

II. Nebuchadnezzar’s Test

²⁷ Longman, 73.

²⁸ Miller, 179-180.

²⁹ Miller, 191.

- A. Nebuchadnezzar presents his dilemma to his spiritual advisors in an unusual manner. Miller writes, “Supposedly in touch with the world of the spirits and the gods, these individuals were the advisers to the king on virtually every matter.”³⁰ Miller also explains that these wise men were also dream interpreters with books to help them make sense of dreams. Yet they are expecting Nebuchadnezzar to describe the dream to them but he refuses. Not only does he expect them to interpret the dream, they must also tell him what he dreamed. Why would Nebuchadnezzar ask such a thing?
1. Some have suggested that the King forgot his dream but this highly unlikely since it caused him so much trouble and perhaps the vision of dream itself was preventing him from sleeping.
 2. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was growing skeptical of his spiritual advisers. He wanted to ensure that they were as trustworthy as they claimed to be. If they were powerful, they should be not only able to interpret dreams but also reveal the dream without having to be told. The king want to ensure their authenticity.
 3. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar is so concerned about the situation that he wants to guarantee that the advisors handle it with all seriousness. He doesn’t want just a generic interpretation. He wants a real answer and this method is a way to ensure they give a definitive answer.
- B. Rewards and Consequences
1. There is no middle ground here for the King. There is either complete success or complete failure.
 2. If the advisors can succeed, they will be richly rewarded (Daniel 2:6).
 3. If the advisors fail, they will be severely punished (Daniel 2:5)
 - i. They will be cut into pieces.
 - ii. Their homes (and perhaps families if they have any) will be destroyed.
 - iii. Examples of Nebuchadnezzar’s violent punishments can be seen in 2 Kings 25:7 and Jeremiah 29:22.
- C. The Advisors Protest
1. The advisors are very surprised by this task from the king. Twice they ask him to “tell” his dream (Daniel 2:4, 7) so they can interpret it. They did not have the knowledge and revelation that the king required. They could have given him an interpretation if they knew the content of the dream but they could not begin to explain to the king what he had dreamed.
 2. They complain that the king is asking too much. It is impossible, they say, to do what the king is asking. The only way it can be done is if a god does this task. The advisors admit that they know certain skills and practices but do not have a relationship with the gods that would enable them to obtain this information. Gods do not work that way with humans, they claim. These pagan sorcerers do not realize that they are leading Nebuchadnezzar towards an encounter with the God of the universe who does interact with his faithful people and give them knowledge and wisdom that no other source can grant.
 3. Isaiah 46 describes the futility of pagan practices and witchcraft.

III. Nebuchadnezzar’s Judgement

- A. Nebuchadnezzar is so furious with the inability of the advisors to compete the task that he orders their death. Not only will those present die but all those in the service of the king as spiritual advisors will die including Daniel and his Jewish colleagues.
- B. Arioch, the commander of the King’s guard, was given the task of rounding up all the spiritualists and killing them. Most likely this would not be a one by one death but they would all be gathered for a mass killing.

³⁰ Miller, 165.

IV. Daniel's Response

- A. When Arioch reaches Daniel and explains to him the situation, Daniel decides to act. He goes to the King to plead for time to help. It is unclear why the king allows this or if the king allows this. Perhaps Daniel works against the clock as Arioch continues to round up all the wise men for death.
- B. Why does Daniel act to do this?
 - 1. He was motivated by the threat of death. He did not want to die as a result of the failure of pagan sorcerers.
 - 2. He was also motivated by the opportunity to demonstrate the power of God in this pagan land and before the pagan king.
- C. How does Daniel respond?
 - 1. He begins by gathering his friends (those who are also faithful to Yahweh) to pray for revelation.
 - 2. He and Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah commit time to pray for and receive revelation from God. It comes to Daniel in the night. Daniel receives both the revelation of the content of the dream and the interpretation of the dream.
 - 3. He praises God. Instead of running immediately to the king with the answer he takes precious time to offer God a prayer or worship and thanksgiving. Though the most powerful king of earth is threatening Daniel with death, he understands that ultimately his life is held in the hands of God. He demonstrates trust in God above and beyond that of any earthly power.
 - i. The prayer of Daniel focuses on the glory of God (and the worship he deserves) - Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever (Daniel 2:20)
 - ii. The prayer of Daniel focuses on the omniscience of God (his unlimited knowledge):
 - a. All wisdom is his (Daniel 2:20)
 - b. He is the only source of true knowledge and wisdom (Daniel 2:21, 23)
 - c. Nothing is hidden for his understanding (Daniel 2:22)
 - iii. The prayer of Daniel focuses on the omnipotence of God (his eternal power)
 - a. All power is his (Daniel 2:20)
 - b. He controls the times and seasons (Daniel 2:21)
 - c. He sets up and brings down kings (Daniel 2:21)
 - d. He answers prayer (Daniel 2:23)

V. Daniel Before the King

- A. With the help of Arioch, Daniel comes to the king with good news. It is unclear if Arioch was asked by Daniel for this introduction or if Arioch is doing this on his own initiative. It does seem that Arioch was not excited about his task of killing all the wise men so he is grateful that perhaps Daniel can turn the situation around.
- B. The first question that the King asks Daniel is about the content of his dream.
 - 1. As with the other wise men, the king will not hear any interpretation or accept any counsel unless Daniel can first tell him exactly what he dreamed.
 - 2. Daniel answers in an unexpected way. Rather than immediately describing the dream, Daniel causes the king (and the reader) to recall the original words of the pagan practitioners: No man can do what the king has asked (Daniel 2:27).
 - 3. However, Daniel's understanding of God is different from the pagans:
 - i. Even though God is far above humanity he is not completely removed from humanity. He communicates with humanity and grants wisdom to those who are faithful.
 - ii. The pagans saw the gods as something to be manipulated and used. Daniel sees God as one to be worshiped and obeyed.

- iii. Daniel understood that his wisdom and power did not accomplish his miracle but rather he received this from God and God should receive the credit and worship. Longman writes, “Daniel’s wisdom, contrary to that of the learned Babylonian astrologers, did not come from books of dream interpretation; instead, it came from a conversation, a prayer, with God himself.”³¹
- C. Daniel explains the dream to the King. He emphasizes several aspects:
 - 1. The dream is from God (Daniel 2:28-29).
 - 2. The dream is about the future (Daniel 2:28-29).
 - 3. The dream was meant to teach Nebuchadnezzar about God (Daniel 2:30-47)
- D. See the chart for Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream in Daniel 2 for the details of the dream.
- E. Observations from the Dream:
 - 1. God sees the progression of human power, culture, and rule as diminishing over time. We see progression but God sees diminishment. Ultimately, humanity cannot save itself, we need a savior.
 - 2. The Kingdom of God is coming to fill the earth. Even though earthly kingdoms rise and fall, God’s eternal kingdom will endure forever.
 - 3. There is no threat to the Kingdom of God. Though he may allow human rulers to arise, he is still in control.
- F. Ultimately, God did not give Daniel an exact interpretation of the dream (in terms of what each division of the statue stood for). We only know for sure that Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold.
 - 1. The dream was not designed to give us a definite timeline of the future but to communicate the power and reality of God to a powerful, pagan king.
 - 2. The dream was also intended to illustrate the nature of humanity. Humanity cannot overcome God. All the kingdoms of man will yield to God whether by choice (as seen with Daniel) or by force (as seen by the coming of the rock to force the statue to fall).
 - 3. In the New Testament, Jesus most likely refers to this dream in Luke 20:18 after a quote from the stone of Psalm 118:22. From this reference, we see that the coming of Jesus has some connection to the stone in this dream.
 - 4. This dream will later connect with the vision in Daniel 7.

VI. Nebuchadnezzar’s Response

- A. Nebuchadnezzar was perhaps relieved to hear that he himself was not going to be crushed like the statue of his dream yet he still fell prostrate towards Daniel in order to honor the God of Daniel.
 - 1. Longman observes, “The most powerful pagan in the world lies prostrate before an exiled Jew.”³²
 - 2. Stephen Miller writes that Nebuchadnezzar “had just witnessed a miracle. Daniel has told the king the dream, proof that the interpretation was from God. Had not Nebuchadnezzar’s own astrologers declared to him that such knowledge could only come from the gods themselves? Daniel therefore was a man in touch with the God of heaven. He was one to be honored, even feared.”³³
- B. Daniel received the reward promised and used his new influence to secure important positions for his Jewish cohorts. Ultimately, however, Daniel was pleased to see God exalted and the King come to know more about Yahweh.

³¹ Longman, 87.

³² Longman, 84.

³³ Miller, 243.

- C. There is no evidence of a real conversion for Nebuchadnezzar but he does come to recognize and honor the God of Israel. Though Nebuchadnezzar had defeated that nation, he bowed down before its God and his servant Daniel.

VII. Daniel and Joseph (his ancestor) – see chart

Daniel Bible Study

Daniel 3

“Idolatry, whether of Nebuchadnezzar’s sort or the kind we discover in our own hearts, ultimately has one object. When the masks are ripped away, behind every idol is the self.”³⁴

I. Nebuchadnezzar’s Golden Statue

A. Timing

1. Unlike the first two chapters of Daniel, this chapter does not open with an indication of the timing or date of this events described.
2. It appears that a good amount of time has passed since the events of Daniel 2 as seen by four indicators:
 - i. The statue would have taken significant time to construct.
 - ii. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego seem to be well established in their government positions.
 - iii. Nebuchadnezzar does not seem to remember the greatness of the Jewish God as demonstrated in Chapter 2.
 - iv. It would have taken time to assemble all the governmental officials for the dedication ceremony.

B. The Statue

1. Physical Description

- i. An image of something
 - a. Possibly Nebuchadnezzar
 - b. Possibly a god of Babylon (Nebo or Marduk)
- ii. Golden (most likely gold plated, the make the statue entirely of gold would have been seen as a waste of resources).
- iii. 90 feet (about 27.5 meters) high
- iv. 9 feet (about 2.75 meters) wide
- v. Williams writes that in 1854, archeologists “found a pedestal of a colossal statue that may have been the remains of Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image.”³⁵

2. Setting: The plain (or valley) or Dura

- i. This actual location is not known to us today.
- ii. Most likely it was set up in this location outside the city to accommodate the large number of government officials expected to attend the dedication ceremony.

3. Purpose

- i. Possibly to facilitate idol worship as a result of Nebuchadnezzar’s success. He wanted to honor the god that helped him succeed.
- ii. Possibly to demonstrate the wealth and power of Nebuchadnezzar. He must be wealthy and powerful to erect such a statue.
- iii. Possibly to promote loyalty to him among his government officials. As seen in the description of those in attendance, the government was made up of many different ethnic groups and tribes. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to ensure they were united in loyalty to him. This exercise gave the people a chance to demonstrate loyalty but also it gave Nebuchadnezzar a chance to demonstrate the results of rebellion (death by burning or some other terrible means). Thus, it was perhaps less about bowing to a statue and more about obeying, honoring, and serving a king.

³⁴ Longman, 109-110.

³⁵ Williams, 56.

- iv. Williams writes, “The image represented Nebuchadnezzar’s rule and kingdom, and the worship he demanded represented complete obedience and loyalty to him, the imperial god.”³⁶

C. The Event

1. The main events of Daniel 3 take place at the dedication ceremony for this statue.
2. The Attendees
 - i. Those present are basically the entire government. Officials from all branches, levels, and locations are present. We can assume that local citizens and residents are also attending though they are not the focus of the event. Many musicians were also present.
 - ii. Daniel, however, does not seem to be present for this event. His absence is not explained.
 - iii. Most of those present do not have any problem bowing to the statue. As Longman writes, “most people in the ancient near east were polytheists, used to acknowledging many deities. They could easily assimilate this statue into their religious scheme, especially under the duress of capital punishment.”³⁷
3. The Program
 - i. Musicians were on duty at the event to play as an indication that the time for bowing had come. All in attendance were expected to bow before the statue at the hearing of the music.
 - ii. The king threatened to kill anyone who did not bow by burning them alive in a nearby furnace.
 - a. The furnace may have been there previously as part of the equipment used in constructing the statue. It was left on the site as a convenient tool for execution after it finished its work of preparing the gold plating.³⁸
 - b. The furnace may have been set up just for the graphic and torturous execution of rebellious attendees. Having it on site would have been a deterrent to any who planned to defy the king’s orders. Williams writes, “One of the earlier excavations at Babylon uncovered a peculiar building which at first sight appeared to be a firing kiln used to bake bricks or pottery, but its inscription read, ‘This is the place of burning where men who blasphemed the gods of Chaldea died by fire.’”³⁹
 - iii. It appears that the program was nearly 100% successful as all but three people bow.

II. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego Stand

- A. These three Jewish friends determine that they cannot do what the king has asked.
 1. To obey the king would be to break the first two of the “10 Commandments”:
 - i. “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3).
 - ii. “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything . . . “ (Exodus 20:4).
 - iii. Also, the attitude of faithful Jewish people towards idolatry is summed up in Isaiah 44:12-20.
 2. They had seen the anger and judgement of God upon their homeland and their own people as a result of idol worship. God has miraculously saved them (even though

³⁶ Williams, 58.

³⁷ Longman, 96.

³⁸ Miller, 115

³⁹ Williams, 56.

they were living in exile) and they would not be guilty of committing the sins of their fathers.

- B. These three Jewish friends determine to disobey the king quietly.
1. They did not rise up to condemn the king or announce beforehand that they would refuse to obey. Rather, they silently disobeyed man in order to remain faithful to God.
 2. Being quiet, however, was not an indication of fear or cowardly behavior. They trusted God but also respected the king. They only publically denounced the king's order when forced by the king. Their action thereafter reveal courage, not cowardice.
 3. Faithfulness should not be measured by who has the loudest voice or who makes the most noise. Later in Jewish history, a man named Peter would make loud, boisterous claims about his faithfulness to Jesus yet when the situation became hot, he fell away. Faithfulness is less about how loudly you proclaim your belief and more about how firmly you stand when your belief brings you to the brink of the furnace and you begin to feel the heat.
- C. The three Jewish friends were victims of a plot by jealous leaders.
1. Longman writes that the Jewish men were despised by "professional colleagues who hated to see these gifted foreigners rise so quickly and so high in the Babylonian government."⁴⁰
 2. It appears that both the boys' race (foreigners) and speedy promotion to authority created jealousy and animosity among the other leaders. Some of the astrologers came against them and reported to the king what he had apparently not noticed.
 3. The way they reported the news of Jewish defiance was designed to intensify the king's anger and ensure the removal and death of these three Jews.
 - i. "They pay no attention to you" (disrespect for you)
 - ii. "They do not serve your gods" (disrespect for your beliefs)
 - iii. "They do not worship the image you have set up" (disrespect for your commands)
 4. These leaders were cunning. They realized that this display was more for Nebuchadnezzar's benefit than for the benefit of a god. They focused not on the religious differences between the Jews and the Babylonians but rather on the personal affront that was to Nebuchadnezzar's authority. Yet Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remained very respectful to the king and would perhaps prove to be more loyal to Nebuchadnezzar than even those who did bow.

III. The Religious Views of Nebuchadnezzar

- A. Here we see a little more about the theology of Nebuchadnezzar. He was, like all Babylonians and most people at that time, was a polytheist. He was accustomed to worshipping many gods who represented different powers or aspects of life. He was even willing to add Yahweh to the list of gods he worshipped at the end of chapter 2.
- B. He believed that idol worship was beneficial and provided certain benefits.
- C. Nevertheless, he held a lower view of the gods than what we might expect. He proclaims in Daniel 3:15 that no god is able to rescue Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from his hand. He, a mortal, has more power than the gods. He believes they are powerful but they can be manipulated and even overcome.
- D. Nebuchadnezzar had defeated many nations, including Israel. Those nations worshipped a varied multitude of gods but all had been unable to save their worshippers from the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Yet God will use this event as an opportunity to display a major theme of Daniel: that even though the people of God are defeated, the God of the people is still on the throne and in control.

⁴⁰ Longman, 97.

IV. Into the Fire

- A. The rage of the king was so great after being convinced by the cunning astrologers that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were defiantly disobeying and disrespecting him that he order that the fire be heated seven times hotter. The heat was so powerful that it killed even those solders who stood on the edge of the fire to throw in the condemned men.
- B. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were dressed in their Babylonian attire (robes, turbans, etc). Even though they were foreigners, they were attempting to assimilate into the Babylonian culture to the extent that it did not break with their commitment to their religion. Yet they could not bow to this image.
- C. The king gave them a second chance. Why?
 - 1. Perhaps he remembered their help with Daniel and the king's disturbing dream and extended to them mercy.
 - 2. Perhaps he wanted to show the crowds that even the last holdouts were now going to bow.
- D. Either way, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego give a magnificent reply:
 - 1. They begin with a respectful address to the king (O Nebuchadnezzar)
 - 2. They refuse to argue with him or beg for leniency. They are willing to take their punishment.
 - 3. They proclaim trust and faith in Yahweh who is able to deliver them from the flames and the king.
 - 4. They recognize that God is sovereign and cannot be forced or manipulated into action. Even though Yahweh is able to save, he may not yet we trust him. (But even if he does not . . .)
 - 5. They conclude that they would rather die as faithful to God then live as unfaithful to God. It is interesting that those who eventually died in this story were those who obeyed the king (the soldiers). But the reader does not know this yet.
- E. The men are bound and thrown into the furnace. Yet before they reach the bottom, two miraculous things happen:
 - 1. The ropes that bound them are burned but their clothes, bodies, and even their hair are preserved from the fire to the extent that they do not even smell like smoke. Those who came near the fire died but those who went into fire did not even retain the smell of smoke.
 - 2. They were joined by a fourth person who was recognized as some sort of supernatural being.
 - i. "a son of the gods" in Daniel 3:25
 - ii. "angel" in Daniel 3:28
- F. They were willing to die in order to remain faithful to Yahweh and God used their situation to teach Nebuchadnezzar and all Babylon about who He is. Also, as a result of their action, the religion of Judaism received protected status in Babylon and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego received promotions. The plan of the jealous astrologers backfired severely.

V. God and Culture

- A. We can be sure that the temptation to bow was strong for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
 - 1. Their fellows Jews had bowed many times to idols in Israel.
 - 2. They could have determined that this bowing was necessary to keep their job and even their life. After all, God gave them this job and life and wants them to protect it. Perhaps they could have justified bowing by saying that they must do so in order to preserve their life and fulfill the purpose for which God raised them up in Babylon (even though not bowing was part of that purpose).
 - 3. They could have determined that even if we bow with our bodies out hearts still belong to Yahweh (hiding their faith).

- B. Succumbing to that temptation for any reason would have been temporarily beneficial but eternally dangerous. When we determine how to live out our faith in the midst of our host culture, we must determine to be flexible when we can but uncompromising in areas essential to our faith and relationship with God. Ultimately, God does not want you to be successful in the culture but faithful in the culture. Living this out is difficult.

VI. “Even if he does not”

- A. These powerful words from Daniel 3:18 are key to understanding God. We should be grateful that this short phrase made it into the text.
1. Unanswered prayer is not an indication that God is:
 - i. Unable
 - ii. Unwilling
 2. Unanswered prayer is not always an indication that the person is:
 - i. Unfaithful (lacks faith)
 - ii. Sinful
- B. As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego indicate, God is all powerful. He makes that very clear in his miraculous salvation of the men from the fire. However, God’s omnipotence is not always demonstrated in ways we expect or want. Sometimes God allows the tragedy to play out. If God is able, does that mean that sometimes he is unwilling to intervene? No. Peter reminds us that God is willing that none should perish but all should come to eternal life (2 Peter 3:9). We are not always able to see the work of God in a situation. Thus, when it appears to us that God is absent, we should look from another perspective to find exactly how he is present.
- C. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew they had not sin or unfaithfulness in their life yet they recognized the real possibility that God would not deliver them. We cannot limit how God will work. We should not place the blame for things not working out as we expect on someone’s personal holiness or level of faith. Perhaps those do factor into the situation but we should not immediately assume that the person is at fault. We should rather look for the plan of God in whatever happens in our life.
- D. Though we may not understand why God does not intervene in obvious ways when he is able and willing, we should learn from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that our trust should remain in God no matter what. As Job said in the midst of his distress in Job 13:15, “though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” Ultimately, we understand that despite these temporary difficulties and hardships, God is working out an eternal blessing for us.
- E. We should not allow difficult circumstances to diminish our trust. David demonstrates that we can be honest with God about how we feel in various situations, even when we are upset with God. Yet even in those moments we are upset in trust, disappointed in trust, discouraged in trust that God is working out a better plan for my life.
- F. Many were not saved as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Many have been burned to death for their faith (Hebrews 11). Yet we can find encouragement in God who is working out our eternal salvation even in the midst of our present pain. See:
1. Romans 8:18, 28
 2. 2 Corinthians 4:17
- G. True faith in God is demonstrated in trust. Genuine trust is present even in adverse situations. God may not always intervene as we want but he is always concerned and has initiated a plan for ultimate, eternal salvation. John Calvin reminds us that God saved them in the fire but not from the fire.

VII. The Fourth Man

- A. Many debate the identity of the fourth man.
1. Some say it was Jesus
 2. Some say it was an angel
 3. Some say it was the Holy Spirit

- B. The evidence is too little to make a final determination.
 - 1. Both “some of god” and “angel” were used
 - 2. This person was seen by a pagan who does not know much about God and thus should not be considered an expert witness on the things of God.
 - 3. The writer of the book does not even clarify.
- C. Ultimately, we can be sure that this was the intervention of God. God was at work on behalf of these men in the midst of a terrible situation. Exactly who was there is still up for debate.
- D. Longman writes, “What we have here is a reflection of Immanuel, “God with us.” God dwelt with the three friends in the midst of the flames to preserve them from harm. In the sense, the Christian cannot help but see a prefigurement of Jesus Christ, who came to earth to dwell in a chaotic world and who even experienced death, not so that we might escape the experience of death but that we might have victory over it.”⁴¹

VIII. Comparing Daniel 2 and 3

Daniel 2	Daniel 3
Emphasis on God's omniscience.	Emphasis on God's omnipotence
The faithful Jews rushed to help the king in hopes of preserving their lives.	The faithful Jews determined to disobey the king even if it meant losing their lives (in order to be faithful to God).
Nebuchadnezzar was willing to add Yahweh to the list of God's he worshipped.	Nebuchadnezzar was willing to create protection for those who worshipped Yahweh in the whole Kingdom.

⁴¹ Longman, 112.

Daniel Bible Study

Daniel 4

“A man who thinks he is like a god must become a beast to learn that he is only a human being.”⁴²

I. Theological Emphasis of Daniel 4

- A. The book of Daniel has been teaching the reader a theological truth about God with each story. Perhaps the stories were even selected for inclusion in order to communicate theological truths. As seen throughout the Bible, information about God is often presented in narrative (story) form rather than textbook form.
- B. Theological emphasis thus far:
 - 1. Daniel 2 – God’s Omniscience
 - i. Having all knowledge
 - ii. A theological response to the assertion of the astrologers that “no one can reveal it to the king” in Daniel 2:11b.
 - 2. Daniel 3 – God’s Omnipotence
 - i. Having all power
 - ii. A theological response to the assertion of the king that no “god will be able to rescue you from my hand” in Daniel 3:15b.
 - 3. Daniel 4 – God’s Sovereignty
 - i. Having all authority
 - ii. A theological response to the declaration of the king that Babylon was built by his own “mighty power” and for the glory of his own “majesty” in Daniel 4:29b.
- C. Sovereignty of God in Babylon
 - 1. The book of Daniel has already indicated in 1:2 that Babylon was successful in its military campaign against Judah because God “delivered” the nation “into his hand.” This was ultimately not the result of Nebuchadnezzar’s power or glory or ability but it was the result of God raising him up for God’s own purpose.
 - 2. The dream of chapter 4 is a clear indication that God has raised him up and that God can bring him down. One year after this dream when Nebuchadnezzar declares that he alone is responsible for his success, God initiates the seven year process of dramatically humbling Nebuchadnezzar and confirming to him what was revealed in the dream.
 - 3. The key passage for this theological truth is found in Daniel 4:17.

II. The Unique Characteristics of Daniel 4

- A. It appears to be a letter composed by King Nebuchadnezzar.
 - 1. This letter would have been sent by the King to his subjects in order to share with them his own account of what happened to him during these unusual events.
 - 2. It is unclear why this letter was sent but some possibilities include:
 - i. This could have been an official confession of Nebuchadnezzar as an act of gratitude towards God for being restored.⁴³
 - ii. This could have been an explanation to his subjects about his strange behavior in order to regain their confidence and provide them understanding.
 - iii. This could have been a letter to announce that he, the King, is back in terms of both his mental state and his leadership in the kingdom.
 - iv. It could be a combination of some of all of the above.

⁴² Donna Nolan Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 101.

⁴³ Warren, 63.

- v. Others have claimed it is a forgery.
- B. Regardless of what direction you go, we can be sure that this is the largest writing in the Bible composed by a pagan.
 1. Even though Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the reality and authority of Yahweh in the strongest terms yet (he also recognized Yahweh to some degree in chapter 3-4), we do not see any indication that Nebuchadnezzar converted to Judaism.
 - i. Nebuchadnezzar describes Yahweh as the “most high” in Daniel 4:2
 - ii. Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the eternal greatness of Yahweh in Daniel 4:3, 34
 - iii. Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the sovereignty of Yahweh in Daniel 4:34-35
 - iv. Nebuchadnezzar praises Yahweh in Daniel 4:34, 37
 2. Even in his praise for Daniel and Daniel’s God, Nebuchadnezzar includes statements that reveal his polytheistic beliefs:
 - i. Daniel 4:8 – Nebuchadnezzar describes another god as “my god”
 - ii. Daniel 4:9 – Nebuchadnezzar describes his belief in multiple “gods.”

III. Nebuchadnezzar’s Second Dream

A. Timing

1. Based on the description of Babylon here (contentment, prosperity, beautiful buildings) it seems that Nebuchadnezzar is near the end of his reign when his wars were finished, his building projects complete, and his general attitude content.
 - i. Stephen Miller dates the dream as coming to Nebuchadnezzar in the “thirty-fourth year of his forty-three year reign.”⁴⁴
 - ii. Elizabeth Warren writes that this chapter “is a royal proclamation issued the year Nebuchadnezzar recovered from his insanity and one year before his death.”⁴⁵
2. By the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the grandeur of the city of Babylon was evident.
 - i. Stephen Miller writes that the city, “was a rectangular shaped city surrounded by a broad and deep water-filled moat and then by an intricate system of double walls . . . east of the Euphrates that ran the incredible distance of seventeen miles and was wide enough for chariots to pass.”⁴⁶
 - ii. The Greek Historian Herodotus visited the city and described it as having a circumference of 60 miles (95.5 km) “with the River Euphrates running through it, dividing it almost in half.”⁴⁷
 - iii. The city had 8 gates, three royal palaces, the famed (perhaps fables) hanging gardens, and “a beautifully decorated throne room.”⁴⁸
 - iv. Warren reports that the paving stones from the city streets can still be found in place today.⁴⁹

B. Historical Records

1. There is no historical record outside the Bible describing this episode in Nebuchadnezzar’s life. Perhaps it was intentionally erased from secular history to honor the king and protect the reputation of the kingdom.
2. There are references to a sickness experienced by Nebuchadnezzar but nothing to the extent described in Daniel.

⁴⁴ Miller, 313.

⁴⁵ Warren, 63.

⁴⁶ Miller, 344.

⁴⁷ Warren, 70.

⁴⁸ Miller, 344-346.

⁴⁹ Warren, 68.

3. The lack of extra-biblical historical evidence should not cause us to dismiss this account as fictional. As Longman points out, “It is probably unwise to make much out of the silence of the extrabiblical texts, since the king’s reign is not exhaustively documented and it is not the type of thing that Nebuchadnezzar may have wanted preserved for perpetuity.”⁵⁰

4. The pride and arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar is documented in archeological finds, however, with an inscription by the king found reading: “The fortifications of Esagila and Babylon I strengthened and established the name of my reign forever.”⁵¹

C. The Dream

1. See attached chart for a comparison of this dream with the one from chapter 2.

2. See chart below for the details and explanation of the dream.

Image	(Possible) Meaning
An enormous, strong tree	King Nebuchadnezzar
Located in the middle of the land	Babylon was at the center of worldly rule, authority, etc
Visible to all the earth	The scope of the King's rule and authority
Beautiful leaves	The beauty of the kingdom Nebuchadnezzar built
Abundant fruit	The great wealth that Nebuchadnezzar accumulated
Food for all	The nations looked to Babylon for leadership
Beasts and birds dwelled under and in the tree	The nations looked to Babylon for safety and protection
Cut down the tree	The fall of the king
Trim the branches	The king would be limited in scope and ability
Strip the leaves	The kingdom would lose its beauty
Scatter the fruit	The kingdom would lose its wealth
Beasts and birds flee	The king would lose the confidence of his subjects
The stump and roots remain untouched	The king could be re-established and restored
The stump and roots bound by bronze and iron	God will protect the king even in his fallen state
The stump and roots remain in the grass	The humility (lowly place) of the king after the fall
Drenched with dew	No shelter from the elements
Live among wild animals	No home among the people
Eat the plants and grass	No more royal food
Mind changed from human to animal	The utter decline and humiliation of the king

3. Seven times

⁵⁰ Longman, 117

⁵¹ Miller, 347.

- i. This unusual way for describing the passage or duration of time is translated from the Aramaic word *iddan* which is only found in Daniel.
 - a. The word is used 13 times in 11 verses in Daniel including 4 times in Daniel 4.
 - b. Warren Baker and Gene Carpenter record several definitions for this word including:⁵²
 - i. The passage of an unspecified time
 - ii. The changing of time and seasons
 - iii. The appointed time
 - iv. One year duration of time.
 - ii. Although is debated the exact meaning of the passing of “seven times” most use the “one year” interpretation and say that Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity lasted for seven years.
4. Daniel’s Interpretation
- i. Unlike in the previous dream of Chapter 2, the King is willing to tell his advisors this dream. Even with this exact information, they are unable to interpret the dream. Once again, they prove ineffective in their service and help to the King.
 - ii. Once again, Daniel is able to do what the pagan astrologers and magicians cannot. We are not sure why Daniel was not present at the initial meeting between the King and the “wise men” but apparently he was away and has returned.
 - iii. Daniel hesitates to report this interpretation, perhaps in fear that such a dismal report will rouse the king’s anger towards him. Unlike the dream in chapter 2 where Nebuchadnezzar was only the golden head and the feet which were smashed, here he is the one who will fall. Yet after the king gives Daniel his assurance, Daniel gives the bleak interpretation.
 - iv. In 4:26-27, however, Daniel ends with a bit of optimistic news and perhaps a warning for avoiding the calamity.
 - a. Restoration is possible after this fall has taken place.
 - b. Repentance and behavior change is necessary and may result in a reprieve.
5. The Result
- i. After one year, the dream comes to pass.
 - a. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar had repented and lived differently for one year or perhaps God gave him time to repent but he never did.
 - b. Either way, after making an arrogant statement about his own sovereignty, Nebuchadnezzar was dramatically shown how little authority he actually had over his own kingdom and life and how much authority Yahweh had over all.
 - i. Stephen Miller writes that “a great outburst of pride on the part of the Babylonian monarch became the catalyst for the dream’s fulfillment.”⁵³
 - ii. This happened on the palace rooftop. Longman writes, “It is not unusual that he was on the roof of his house, since roofs were flat in the ancient Near East and therefore provided living space.”⁵⁴

⁵² Warren Baker and Gene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003).

⁵³ Miller, 342.

⁵⁴ Longman, 121.

- c. Nebuchadnezzar suffered from sudden onset insanity which caused him to:
 - i. Be separate from humanity and avoid human interaction
 - ii. Live as a wild animal in the open countryside
 - iii. Eat as wild herbivores eat
 - iv. Grow extremely long hair
 - v. Grow extremely long nails
- ii. In “seven times” (possibly seven years or seven seasons) the mental sickness is cured after Nebuchadnezzar “raised my eyes toward heaven.” This phrase is similar to Psalm 123 where the writer looks to heaven in humility for mercy. This was Nebuchadnezzar’s act of worship and recognition of Yahweh. Longman writes, “The action of looking toward heaven is obviously meant as an acknowledgement of God’s ultimate superiority.”⁵⁵

IV. The Sovereignty of God in the Governments of the World.

- A. This chapter is one of several in the Bible (including Romans 13 and Isaiah 44-45) that has created debate over the extent to which God exerts his sovereignty in the affairs of human governments. There are several standpoints:
 - 1. Those of a Calvinist viewpoint would see God as always involved in the affairs of human life, including government. He works in his sovereignty to establish and bring down governments, kingdoms, rulers, etc. He does this all for a purpose which may be unknown or not understood by believers.
 - 2. Those of an Arminian viewpoint would see God allowing humanity to decide for themselves the path they choose to take or the leader they choose to follow. Perhaps leaders and governments may be forced on them by strongmen and dictators but not God. Occasionally, for very specific purposes, God will intervene in human governmental affairs to create outcomes but generally God allows humanity to choose and then uses even out choices to bring out his will.
 - 3. The Deists viewpoint sees God as completely separated from secular human activity. He will have no involvement in the affairs of human government outside of the influence that his Word and his people may have on their leaders and culture. He will only intervene at the end of time (if that actually happens, they are divided).
- B. Based on the unique characteristics of this chapter in particular and in Daniel in general, it would be difficult to make the case that God always operates among human governments as we see here. The reality is that this chapter is not primarily about how God operates in relation to human governments but the nature of God himself.
 - 1. God is sovereign, whether or not he exerts that sovereignty in ways we expect or anticipate, he remains sovereign.
 - 2. We should take comfort in the reality of God’s sovereignty when we, like Daniel, are living in pagan, hostile cultures. We should not lose or hope in faith in God but trust in him even in difficulties and hardship and be encouraged by his sovereignty even if we can’t easily see it.
 - 3. We should be challenged by the reality of God’s sovereignty when we, like Nebuchadnezzar, are given leadership over others. We must remain humble, respect God’s sovereignty, and lead as God would want us to lead. Remember, both the Old and New Testament affirm, “God opposed the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

⁵⁵ Longman, 122.

Daniel Bible Study

Daniel 5

I. The Kings After Nebuchadnezzar

- A. Although the book of Daniel does not record it, the unwritten, unmentioned timeline between chapter 4 and 5 includes the death of Nebuchadnezzar and all the subsequent kings who ruled until the fall of the Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire (recorded at the end of chapter 5).
1. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC and the Babylonian Empire fell in 539 or 538 BC. If the death of Nebuchadnezzar was immanent at the end of chapter 4 and the fall of Babylon was occurring at the end of chapter 5, this span of time was about 24 years.
 2. The writer probably did not feel the need to include all the kings in this writing because the original audience had a good, working knowledge of Babylon and knew this information well. Also, some of the kings ruled only a short period of time and were of little importance to the purpose of this book.
 3. If Daniel was brought into Babylon around 605 BC, he would be probably be around 80 years old in chapter 5.
- B. Subsequent Kings
1. Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach)
 - i. This king was the son of Nebuchadnezzar and he took over from his father after the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 BC.
 - ii. He is seen twice in the Bible in 2 Kings 25:27 and Jeremiah 52:31. He is noted in both passages for releasing Jehoiachin from Babylonian prison. Jehoiachin was the King of Judah when Nebuchadnezzar first came against Jerusalem in 1 Kings 24 (also mentioned in Daniel 1:1-2). Jehiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and was taken into exile in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar placed a new king over Judah who eventually rebelled against Babylon and brought about a second attack on Jerusalem from Nebuchadnezzar where he completely destroyed the city. Once Evil-Merodach took over, he released Jehoiachin and gave him a seat at the table of the king and a living allowance. There is no reason given for this mercy.
 - iii. He ruled only two years before he was assistance by his brother-in-law, Nergal-shar-usur.
 2. Nergal-shar-usur (Neriglissar)
 - i. Nergal-shar-usur married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar and killed his brother-in-law in order to take the Babylonian throne.
 - ii. He is mentioned in Jeremiah 39:13 as an official in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom while Nebuchadnezzar was alive.

- iii. He reigned for six years until his death in 556 BC. Matthew Easton reports, “He was succeeded by his son, a mere boy, who was murdered after a reign of some nine months by a conspiracy of the nobles.”⁵⁶
3. Labashi-Marduk
- i. The son of Nergal-shar-usur and the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar.
 - ii. He ruled less than one year before he was assassinated in 556 BC.
4. Nabu-na'id (Nabonidus)
- i. Nabonidus was a leader in the assassination of Labashi-Marduk and succeeded him as king afterwards. Although not related to Nebuchadnezzar, he most likely married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar to gain credibility and to make a stronger claim to the throne he has just taken.
 - ii. He was very religious but preferred to worship the moon god, Sin. He eventually honored Sin as a higher god than the chief Babylonian Gods like Marduk and Nabu. It is reported that his mother was priestess in a temple of Sin.
 - iii. For most of his reign, Nabonidus stayed in Haran and Tayma.
 - a. Haran was an ancient city about 900 km (about 560 miles) north of Babylon near the present border of Turkey and Syria.
 - i. It is mentioned in the Bible in 2 Kings 19:12; Isaiah 37:12; and Ezekiel 27:23.
 - ii. This was a key location for the worship of Sin (a moon god) and Nabonidus wanted to restore the temple to Sin in that city. This brought him into his first contact with the Persians who would eventually overthrow him.
 - b. Tayma (Tema), an oasis city in modern Saudi Arabia about 1,000 km (about 620 miles) southwest of Babylon.
 - i. It is mentioned in Job 6:19; Isaiah 21:14; Jeremiah 25:23. This may have taken place for several reasons.
 - ii. This was a strategic location along a vital trade route that Nabonidus wanted to secure or expand.
 - iv. Nabonidus probably did not feel comfortable in Babylon. He assassinated the previous king and may have feared the same would happen to him. He also angered the priests of the prime Babylonian deities and wanted to avoid conflict with them.
 - v. While Nabonidus was away, he left the affairs of Babylon in the hands of his son, Belshazzar. Nabonidus and Belshazzar would rule together until the fall of the Babylonians to the Persians in 539 BC.
 - vi. Nabonidus would eventually return to Babylon as the Persians moved to take the city and overthrow the kingdom. He would be unsuccessful in defending his kingdom and ultimately captured by the Persians in 539 BC.
5. Belshazzar
- i. This Biblical figure was shrouded in mystery for centuries. Extra-biblical information about him seemed to not exist until recently. This led some to speculate that Belshazzar was a work of fiction or a mistake on the part of the writer. However, more recent archeological finds have confirmed the Bible's accuracy on his existence and leadership in Babylon.
 - ii. He is referred to as “king” in Daniel 5 and is described in historical records as a coregent with his father, Nabonidus. Although he was left to oversee the city of Babylon, he was actually the second most powerful in the kingdom (his father was the most powerful). Perhaps this is why he offered anyone who could interpret the writing on the wall the position of “third

⁵⁶ Easton Illustrated Bible Dictionary

highest” in the kingdom. C. Hassell Bullock writes that “we cannot determine the extent of Belshazzar’s powers as co-regent, but they must have been considerable, for he performed royal function that would not have been expected of a mere administrator.”⁵⁷

- iii. There is some debate about Belshazzar’s connection to Nebuchadnezzar. Although Nebuchadnezzar was called Belshazzar’s father in Daniel 5:2, 11, 13, and 18 he is also the son of Nabonidus in all reliable sources. Several theories exist to explain this:
 - a. The most common view is that Belshazzar’s mother was a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar so the reference to “father” here is more appropriately seen as ancestor since Nebuchadnezzar was actually his grandfather.
 - b. A second (minority) view has arisen that claims that Nabonidus sought to legitimize his rule over Babylon after killing Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson by marrying a widow of Nebuchadnezzar who already had a son, Belshazzar. Thus, Nabonidus was the step father to Belshazzar whose biological father was actually Nebuchadnezzar.
 - iv. The reason for Belshazzar ruling as a coregent with Nabonidus is also up for debate.
 - a. Theory 1: The city of Babylon turned against Nabonidus because he minimized the prime deities of the city in order to worship Sin, the moon god, as his primary deity. Thus, he had to leave the city to an actual descendant of Nebuchadnezzar to appease the citizens or at least the leading priests and nobles.
 - b. Theory 2: The legitimacy of Nabonidus was questioned so he fled to a friendlier corner of the kingdom and left his son, a true heir of Nebuchadnezzar to oversee the heart of the empire.
 - c. Theory 3: Nabonidus was more concerned with strengthening other parts of the empire than dealing with the city of Babylon. Thus, he was content to leave the city under the care of Belshazzar while he worked elsewhere.
 - v. The book of Daniel only focuses on the last day (or days) of Belshazzar’s leadership in Babylon. Based on what we see in Daniel 5, we can ascertain some description of this brief character.
 - a. He was very arrogant, perhaps more than his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar.
 - b. He was a polytheist who either did not know or did not care about the revelation of Yahweh to his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar (and Nebuchadnezzar’s decisions to honor Yahweh).
 - c. He was the ruling king of the city of Babylon at the time of the city’s fall to the Persians. His demise was prophesied by the writing on the wall by the miraculous appearance of the light in his banquet room.
- C. While all the above information may be new to us and seem somewhat tedious, it was probably well-known by the original readers and informed their understanding of Daniel as they read the text. This information (and more) should also be considered as we seek to better understand the text ourselves.

II. A Royal Banquet

⁵⁷ Bullock, 283-284.

- A. Daniel 5 opens with a lavish royal banquet for 1,000 nobles and officials in Babylon. The attendees also included Belshazzar's wives and concubines (v. 2). Some information to consider about this banquet:
1. Banquets like this were not daily events but they were also not uncommon. Such events could be annual occurrences or specially called events.
 2. While the banqueters feasted inside the heavily fortified walls of the city and palace, the army of Persia was literally at the gates. They had defeated the armies of Babylon outside the city and had now laid siege to the city itself. Even King Nabonidus had either fled or was captured by this point.
- B. Considering the circumstances, why would Belshazzar host such a banquet? Ultimately, we are told the reason and we cannot be certain. However, there are several suggestions.
1. Blind confidence – Perhaps Belshazzar believed that even though the Persians had been victorious outside the city, they would never breach the city walls or take him captive. He wanted to demonstrate his confidence to both the city and the enemy by having a banquet in the midst of besiegement. The city would have had supplies stockpiled to last for perhaps years so Belshazzar thought they could wait out this attack behind the safety of his walled city.
 2. Morale booster – Belshazzar perhaps knew that a fierce battle and difficult days was ahead for his people. In order to encourage them and embolden them for the fight, he hosted this banquet to boost the confidence of his comrades. After all, his survival was dependent on their faithfulness to his leadership and their willingness to fight on his behalf.
 3. Go out with a bang – Perhaps even before Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall he knew his downfall was imminent. He was watching the army of Persia gather and surround his city and possibly the defeat of his father and feared his last days were upon him. Rather than wait out the inevitable in fear, he was going to party to the last minute. He was living out the slogan, “eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.”
 4. Coronation – Perhaps after seeing the defeat (or at least the retreat) of his father, Belshazzar is crowning himself king. He is no longer a coregent but the true king of Babylon. The banquet is a celebration of his ascendancy and the noble are there to welcome him (by choice or by force) as their ruler. This is a minority view.
 5. Annual Festival – Some suggest that the city was in the midst of a yearly festival when the Persians arrived. Thus, the banquet was not held in spite of or because of the Persians but rather as a normal function on the Babylonian calendar.
 6. Religious celebration – Perhaps Belshazzar was having a religious celebration in order to call upon the help of his gods. He felt that they had helped his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar in military campaigns and now Babylon needed their help again.
- C. Blasphemy at the Banquet
1. Belshazzar called for the cups that had been taken from the Jerusalem Temple by Nebuchadnezzar to be brought to the banquet and used for the banquet.
 2. These goblets were mentioned in 1 Kings 7:48-51 as being created for and dedicated to service in Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem. 2 Kings 25:13-15 and Daniel 1:1-3 describe these as being taken from Jerusalem to Babylon as part of the spoils of war, treasure received by the victor from the defeated people of Judah.
 3. Even though some of the dishes are described as being pure gold in 2 Kings 7, these had survived capture and rather than being melted down for other uses, they have been preserved. This was perhaps for two reasons:
 - i. At first, Nebuchadnezzar had taken the goblets as part of a larger consignment from the Jerusalem temple first to show that he had defeated the people of Yahweh and, perhaps, because he thought he had defeated Yahweh as well. He placed these things in his city (perhaps in an idol's

- temple) as a symbolic act similar to that action of the Philistines in 1 Samuel 5 when they took the Ark of the Covenant from the army of Israel.
- ii. After Nebuchadnezzar's many encounters with Yahweh and his subsequent honoring of Yahweh, perhaps he specifically protected the items belonging to Yahweh's Temple.
4. The goblets which were created and dedicated for use in God's temple were not being used by pagan idolaters to get drunk on wine. This was offensive to God for several reasons:
 - i. There were possibly pagan rituals involved even in the drinking of wine:
 - a. Pagan would often offer or pour out wine to idols before they drank, especially in public or religious events.
 - b. The wine of Babylon in general may have been dedicated to idols. This wine was somehow tainted religiously since Daniel and his faithful friends would not drink it in Daniel 1 as part of the royal diet they were given. God's representative, Daniel, refused to drink this wine but Belshazzar is drinking it even from God's cup.
 - ii. In using these goblets, Belshazzar was intentionally remembering and celebrating the defeat of Judah by the Babylonians. Perhaps he also saw this as the defeat of the God of Judah.
 - a. Belshazzar was facing an enemy at the gate. He wanted to remind his people of the great military victories of the past. He probably brought out the spoils of war from many past victories.
 - b. He also wanted the favor of his native gods and perhaps hoped that by desecrating the other gods he might gain their help.
 - iii. By drinking from the cup that belonged to God, he was sending a message that he was greater than Yahweh.
 - iv. Daniel 5:4 clearly indicates that while they held these cups in their hands, they were worshipping their own idols and false gods.
 5. Temper Longman writes, "He uses God's holy goblets to toast the lifeless idols of his own religion."⁵⁸ It is interesting that the gods worshipped by Belshazzar were gods of gold and silver. These materials, though worshipped by man were relegated to the material of dishes in God's house.
 6. Once again, the primary theme of the book is displayed here. Even though Nebuchadnezzar had defeated the people of God, the God of the people was not defeated. He is about to demonstrate that dramatically to Belshazzar.
 7. We also learn that we must not exploit God or that which belongs to him for our own selfish benefit. That which is holy or dedicated to God must never be used for unholy or selfish purposes.

III. The Writing on the Wall

- A. As the revelers partied on, a hand supernaturally appeared and with its fingers began to write a message on the wall of the banquet hall near the lamp so that it could be seen very clearly.
- B. The sight of this so frightening Belshazzar that he turned pale, shook, and collapsed.
 1. If he was already uneasy with his enemies at the door, this would have pushed him over the edge.
 2. If he was feeling confident with his enemies at the door, this would have broken that confidence that even within the inner sanctum of my fortified city, a foreign hand can still reach me.
- C. As usual, the host of royal advisors cannot interpret the message. Belshazzar offers the highest reward he can possibly give since gold chains and purple clothes represent royalty.

⁵⁸ Longman, 137.

He will even elevate the one who interprets to the third highest place in the kingdom but the “wise men” are dumfounded. Their inability to succeed has been highlighted in every chapter of Daniel thus far. Their pattern of failure in interpreting visions has been as follows:

1. In Chapter 2, they claimed they could not interpret the dream of Nebuchadnezzar because he would not describe the dream for them.
2. In Chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar described his second dream but they still could not interpret it.
3. In Chapter, even though they are able to clearly see with their own eyes what Belshazzar see, they cannot interpret it.

D. Where was Daniel?

1. In Daniel 5:8, the narrator reports that “all” the wise men reported. Thus, Daniel at this time was not part of the official company of royal advisors.
2. Most likely, due to his age and prestige he was able to retire from active service but remained in Babylon.

E. The Queen Enters

1. The reference to the queen here probably does refer to the wife of Belshazzar since we have read already in Daniel 5:2 that all his wives (and even concubines) were present. This must refer to another regal lady in the kingdom.
2. While we cannot be certain, there are several good possibilities:
 - i. Perhaps this is the wife of Nabonidus, the actual but absent king. This would mean she was the mother of Belshazzar and the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar.
 - ii. Perhaps this was the widow of Nebuchadnezzar. She was reported to have lived a long life and remained influential in the kingdom but some reports describe her as having died before the fall of Babylon to the Persians.
3. The Queen’s Wisdom
 - i. This queen’s understanding of the past suggests she was very aware of the activities within the court of Nebuchadnezzar.
 - ii. After greeting the king, she scold the king (Daniel 5:10). Perhaps his frightened appearance was causing fear among the guests at the party. This was a time for confidence and the king looks horrified.
 - iii. She reminds Belshazzar of Daniel: both of his status as the chief advisor and of his success in interpreting visions the time of Nebuchadnezzar. After hearing this Belshazzar calls for Daniel.

F. Daniel Enters

1. Daniel must have seem frail to the king because he asks for Daniel to confirm his identity. Perhaps the young and strong Belshazzar thought, “Could this old man be the man of the hour?”
2. If Belshazzar shows uncertainty for Daniel, Daniel certainly shows disdain for Belshazzar. He beings by refusing the rewards and rebuking the coregent (Daniel 5:17, 22).
3. Despite his age, Daniel is still able to do what no one else in the kingdom can do. His abilities it not tied to his age, strength, or training – it comes from God.

G. The Interpretation

1. Finally, after being rebuked and instructed by an old woman (the queen) and an old man (Daniel), both who were originally absent from his grand banquet, Belshazzar receives the interpretation after a long introduction.
2. An Introduction to the Inscription
 - i. Daniel begins with the traditional greeting “O King”
 - ii. He then reminds Belshazzar of the interaction between Yahweh and Nebuchadnezzar (this is a reminder because Daniel says “you know all this” in Daniel 5:22).

- a. Yahweh gave Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty
 - b. Yahweh gave Nebuchadnezzar greatness and a high position
 - c. Yahweh gave Nebuchadnezzar glory and splendor
 - d. Yahweh gave Nebuchadnezzar discipline and humbled him
 - e. Yet Yahweh also humbled Nebuchadnezzar after he acknowledged the ultimate sovereignty, greatness and glory of Yahweh.
- iii. Daniel now reminds Belshazzar of the goblets
- a. The same God that gave unto Nebuchadnezzar all his success was dishonored by you tonight. You have taken the cup meant for the God who was responsible for the rise of your grandfather and used it for your own selfish and idolatrous purposes.
 - b. Thus, Belshazzar had intentionally:
 - i. “not humbled” himself (5:22)
 - ii. Set himself “up against the Lord of heaven” (5:23) or challenged his authority/power.
 - iii. “praised” other gods (5:23)
 - iv. “did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways” (5:23).
 - c. Perhaps even as Belshazzar was still holding the goblet of Yahweh Daniel tells him that Yahweh holds him as he holds the cup. He thought that by holding that cup he was demonstrating the failure of Yahweh and the victory of Babylon. Actually, by holding that cup he was invoking the wrath of God and the fall of Babylon.

3. The Inscription

- i. The actual inscription was actually three simple Aramaic words. The king and the advisors surely knew this as it was a popular local language. Perhaps they could read the words but did not understand the meaning. Or perhaps God wrote in a code that Daniel could translate into these words. We are not sure but we now have the words: Mene Mene Tekel Parsin
- ii. Mene
 - a. Literally, “an Aramaic noun meaning weight of measurement. It indicates a unit of weight of gold and/or silver.”⁵⁹
 - b. Interpreted as “God has numbered your days [perhaps the idea of measured] and brought it to an end” (Daniel 5:26).
- iii. Tekel
 - a. Literally, “to find the weight of something” or “a unit of weight, a shekel.”⁶⁰
 - b. Interpreted as “You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting” (Daniel 5:27).
- iv. Parsin/Peres (plural and singular)
 - a. Literally, “it refers to something divided up” or “to be broken in two.”⁶¹
 - b. Interpreted as “Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians” (Daniel 5:27).

H. The Reward

- 1. For some unknown reason Belshazzar still gives Daniel this reward even though Daniel delivered extremely bad news. Also, for some unknown reason Daniel accepts the reward.

⁵⁹ Baker and Carpenter, 626.

⁶⁰ Baker and Carpenter, 919-920.

⁶¹ Baker and Carpenter, 1244.

2. We are not informed of the emotional condition of Belshazzar after this interpretation was given. All we know is that his physical condition will soon be threatened and he will die.

IV. The Fall of Babylon

- A. The Persians knew they could not break through the walls of Babylon. They know the only opening was that used by the Euphrates River. Alfred Hoerth reports that “the Persians gained entry into Babylon by diverting the Euphrates and coming in through its riverbed. They met little resistance.” In fact, all over the Empire, “as Cyrus the Persian marched through Southern Mesopotamia, most of the cities greeted him as a liberator. They were tired of Belshazzar and his negligent father.”⁶²
- B. Even secular historians report that the Persians took Babylon while the Babylonians were enjoying a nighttime banquet.⁶³ In fact, some in the city may have helped the Persians to gain entry after being promised that the Persians would restore priority back to the Babylonian gods, something that the present king was not doing.
- C. Nebuchadnezzar brought Babylon to its climax but humbled himself. Belshazzar brought Babylon to its knees by promoting himself. Belshazzar, who ushered in Babylon’s fall with a banquet was, was guilty of committing all the sins of his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar in one night.
 1. The unbelief, pride, arrogance, and idolatry of Nebuchadnezzar was expressed by his grandson in one event.
 2. Nebuchadnezzar had come to honor God. Belshazzar dishonored God until the very end.
- D. The city was taken, Belshazzar was slain, and a new ruler will now appear in Daniel 6.

Daniel Bible Study

Daniel 6

I. The Last Narrative

- A. Thus far in Daniel we have had a collection of narratives concerning the miraculous events surrounding the lives of four Jewish exiles in Babylon. These narratives were told for the purpose of teaching about the nature of God and the truth that even though the people of God were defeated, the God of the people was still victorious and in control. These stories were meant to give hope to those still suffering under or grappling with Judah’s defeat and the status of Israel in exile.
- B. This chapter, however, will mark the end of the narrative portion of the book. From here we will move into the prophetic/apocalyptic portion of the text.
- C. Historical Context: Stephen Miller writes that the narrative told in Daniel 6 “occurred as the new government was being formed. Thus they must have taken place soon after Babylon had fallen to the Persians, likely within the first or second year. By this time some Jewish captives had returned to Palestine under the leadership of Zerubbabel, and Daniel was over eighty years of age.”⁶⁴

II. Darius the Mede

- A. The end of chapter 5 introduced a major shift in Babylonian history
 1. First, the kingdom has now fallen into the hands of the Medo-Persian Empire led by Cyrus the Great. This happened around 539 BC.

⁶² Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). 382- 384.

⁶³ Longman, 136.

⁶⁴ Miller, 421

2. Second, a new ruler has been appointed to oversee Babylon and Babylonian territories named Darius.
- B. Biblical Information about Darius
1. This Darius is different from the Darius mentioned in Ezra (known as Darius I) who was a later king of all of Persia sometime after the death of Cyrus.
 2. This Darius in Daniel, although called king, served the monarchy of Cyrus as a possible military leader and high ranking administrator. Although he may have been considered a regional king (and possibly saw himself as a bit more) he was not the ultimate king (what we might call an Emperor) or the final authority. Perhaps this is why he was unable to go against his own decision in regards to the law of the Medes and Persians (Daniel 6:15).
 3. Darius was a Mede. The Median people were from the region of what is now northwest Iran. The Medes are perhaps the ancestors of the modern Kurdish people.
 4. Darius was 62 when he was appointed to oversee Babylon. Although he was older he was still over 20 years younger than Daniel. (Daniel wasn't a boy when he was thrown to the lions, he was an old man.)
 5. Darius was the son of Xerxes (or Ahasuerus), possibly a noble family in the Median kingdom (Daniel 9:1).
- C. Darius was a high ranking leader in the Medo-Persian Empire
1. The Medes
 - i. The Medes were people of an established Kingdom who rose somewhat parallel with the Babylonian Empire in the East after the fall of the Assyrian Empire. They became the dominant power of their region and their capital was Ecbatana in what is now Northwest Iran.
 - ii. Cyrus, a relative of the Median royal family, rebelled against the Medians with the help of the Babylonian empire and overcame the Medians in 550 BC to create the Medo-Persian Empire which would eventually overcome and absorb Babylon as well.
 2. The Persians
 - i. Darius joined the ranks of Cyrus in the newly formed Medo-Persian Empire and probably became a military leaders and high ranking administrator.
 - ii. The Persians would rise under Cyrus to become "the largest Empire the world had known"⁶⁵ stretching from India to Egypt and Asia Minor.
 - iii. Many Babylonian territories and people welcomed the advance of the Persian Empire and even aided Cyrus due to their rejection of the Babylonian leadership over religious and administrative issues. Cyrus was seen as a liberator from bad governance who would restore traditional Babylonian religious practices. Thus, the city of Babylon and much of the territory came under the Persian Empire without a fight or destruction of infrastructure. The City of Babylon became Cyrus' winter home and headquarters. Hoerth also writes that the Babylonians "were tired of Belshazzar and his negligent father, and they had heard positive reports of the way Cyrus respected people in his new territories."⁶⁶ Further, Cyrus also portrayed himself as being led and enabled by the Babylonian god Marduk as a way to gain the support of the Babylonian people.
- D. The Historical Record (outside the Bible)
1. This Darius is not mentioned anywhere in historical records outside of the Bible.
 2. The silence from the extra-biblical record, however, is not an indication that the Bible is wrong or unreliable here. We saw that Belshazzar was also absent from any historical record outside the Bible until recent archeological discoveries. Now,

⁶⁵ Miller, 429.

⁶⁶ Hoerth, 382.

there is an abundance of evidence outside Scripture to support its accuracy concerning Belshazzar. Thus, we can accept with some confidence that Darius was also real but under-mentioned in the records.

3. It is also very possible that “Darius” was his noble title instead of his name. Darius could refer to a person mentioned often in the historical record named Gubaru (or Gobryas).
 - i. Gubaru was described in historical records as a leader in the kingdom of Cyrus who “played a significant role in the conquest and governance of Babylon.”⁶⁷
 - ii. According to the historical record known as the “Nabonidus Chronicle” there was an initial leader appointed by Cyrus to oversee Babylon after its fall but he died after only three weeks in office. Then “Gubaru was appointed by Cyrus as governor of Babylon and the region beyond the river, a position he held for at least fourteen years.”⁶⁸
 - iii. Stephen Miller also records that “Gubaru installed subgovernors in Babylon”⁶⁹ which correspond to the appointment of the satraps in Daniel 6 by Darius.
 - iv. Alfred Hoerth summarizes this hypothesis by writing “Cyrus appointed Gobryas subruler over Babylon and that Gobryas took on the trappings of royalty. The name *Darius* was possibly an old Persian royal title.”⁷⁰
4. Unfortunately, there is no certainty about the identity of Darius in terms of confirmation outside the Bible. Nevertheless, based on the historical accuracy of Daniel even before the extra-Biblical confirmation of Belshazzar, we have reason to be confident about the reality of his existence as an appointed ruler of Babylon under Cyrus (though some claim Darius was actually Cyrus himself).⁷¹

III. The New Government of Babylon

- A. Darius quickly began to organize his government to help him carry out his mandate to successfully oversee this new territory of the Persian Empire. As a well-established kingdom before the Persians arrived, Darius had a number of qualified people ready to fill necessary positions and quickly appoints 120 “satraps” to rule over smaller portions of the larger Babylonian region.
 1. Miller points out that satrap means “protector of the kingdom.”⁷²
 2. In this context, Baker and Carpenter define this word as “officials who governed large provinces in Persia as representatives of the Persian sovereign.”⁷³
 3. They were essentially local representatives of the multinational ruler who was often far away. They made judgements but were also the eyes of the Empire in each local area to ensure “that the king might not suffer loss.” Thus they were probably involved in law enforcement and tax collection as well.
 4. They would have covered a large territory and many would not be near the city of Babylon. Thus, when a group of them meet to plot against Daniel, it was probably a much smaller number than the 120 since most would be in far-flung places carrying out their responsibilities unaware of what was happening behind the scenes in the city of Babylon itself.

⁶⁷ Bullock, 285.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Miller, 424.

⁷⁰ Hoerth, 384.

⁷¹ See Stephen Miller’s commentary for an in depth discussion of this possibility.

⁷² Miller, 438-439

⁷³ Baker and Carpenter, 40.

- B. It is unclear how Daniel “distinguished himself among the administrators” but he made such an impression on Darius that Darius considered him for a promotion as the second in command after the governor (king) Darius himself. Essentially he would have been third in command in Babylon after Cyrus (absent) and Darius.
 - 1. His previous position as “third in the kingdom” of Belshazzar may have caused Darius to take notice.
 - 2. Perhaps Daniel’s fame and successful record had been reported to Darius in the same way it was reported to Belshazzar, by eyewitnesses who had first-hand knowledge.
 - 3. Alfred Hoerth reports, “Persian policy was to rule through local people whenever possible, and Belshazzar’s reward, though short lived, perhaps gave Daniel the exposure necessary for the Persians to include him in their new government.”⁷⁴

IV. Daniel’s Promotion

- A. The progression of Daniel in this book has so far been one of promotion – see chart.
- B. Perhaps Darius also saw what Daniel’s colleagues saw, there was not corruption to be found in his work..
- C. This quick promotion caused quite a bit of animosity. Hoerth sees the other administrators as being so jealous over the elderly Daniel that “they could not wait for him to die naturally. Instead, the officials succeeded in having Darius the Mede innocently pass an edict by which Daniel could be accused and sentenced to death.”⁷⁵

V. Daniel’s Test

- A. Daniel’s religious commitment was no secret in his past service or now. His enemies know the only way to compromise Daniel was to set up a trap somehow connected to the devotion of Daniel to Yahweh.
- B. They devised a plan that seemed agreeable to Darius. Like the statue in Daniel 3, this order to pray only to Darius would test the commitment of Babylonian to Darius. They could demonstrate their loyalty to their new leader by following this command.
- C. Also, like in Daniel chapter 3, the issue was not to deny Yahweh but to diminish commitment to Yahweh. Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego were never commanded to abandon Yahweh but rather to add worship of another God. They knew, however that this was essentially a denial of Yahweh who was the only true, living God. Here Daniel is not asked to abandon Yahweh but pause in his prayers to Yahweh in order to demonstrate loyalty to Darius. Daniel was willing to serve this pagan leader but not at the expense of jeopardizing his relationship with Yahweh. Thus Daniel quietly disobeyed.
- D. Elizabeth Williams refers to this as “the aged prophet’s supreme test. . . a trial, a death warrant, as a means to praise the true and living God.”⁷⁶ Certainly such opportunities should not be sought out. Neither should they be shunned if presented to the believer as the will of God.
- E. Daniel was not willing to set aside worship of his God to show devotion to any man or false idol. He could have prayed silently without risking getting caught but instead he maintained his habit of praying three times a way (a Jewish custom of praying morning, mid-day, and evening) towards Jerusalem, where the Temple once stood representing the presence of God among his people. This also showed that Daniel never forgot of lost any love for his homeland.

VI. The Judgement of Darius

⁷⁴ Hoerth, 384.

⁷⁵ Hoerth 384.

⁷⁶ Williams, 79.

- A. Darius was reluctant to carry out his order of death to anyone who disobeyed his order but this administrators warned him about the dangers (and illegality) of breaking a law of the Medes and Persians. This was meant to indicate that the judgement of anyone representing the Persian sovereign was final since the sovereign did not make mistakes (or so they thought). Thus, Darius had to send Daniel to the den of lions. However, he sent him in hopes that Daniel’s God would save him (perhaps he heard the miraculous story of Daniel 3). Darius knew the custom was to release someone who had been sentenced to death if they did not die in the same day they were submitted for death and Darius hoped Daniel could make it with the help of God.
- B. Concerning the historical reliability of the den of lions, Elizabeth Williams writes of as archeologist at work near Babylon who “fell into a well which turne out to be a pit which had been used as an open cage for wild animals. Upon the curb were found these words inscribed: ‘The place of execution where men who angered the king died torn by wild animals.’ No, it cannot be proved this was the actual pit into which Daniel was cast, but it does prove that such a pit of execution did exist.” She also reports of ancient records that indicate that a total of “four hundred and eighty-four men of high rank . . . died in a den of lions.”⁷⁷
- C. Daniel survived with help of God through his angel. Then, to show that the lions were indeed hungry and not just ignoring Daniel, we see them vigorously eating the bodies of the conspirators (and their families). This was also Persian custom to ensure that no children would rise up seeking revenge for their father’s death. The inclusion of this detail is not to be seen as scriptural approval but rather just a description of what took place in a pagan government.

VII. Daniel’s Last Story

- A. Although Daniel still has some stories to tell, this is the last story in Daniel where he is a character and not the storyteller. His last story ends as his earlier stories began.
 1. He turned a pagan king towards acknowledging and worshiping Yawhweh.
 2. Daniel was willing to stand for God even when his life was in danger (Daniel was not ashamed of God nor living in fear of his enemies).
 3. Daniel was faithful to God above all else (he did not let his high position compromise his faithfulness).
 4. Daniel gave God the glory (I am nothing but what God has made me to be).
- B. The chapter ends with a final word about the prosperity of Daniel in the time of the Persians. He was faithful unto the end.

Daniel Bible Study

Daniel 7

I. Apocalyptic Literature

- A. In Chapter 7, Daniel shifts from vision interpreter to vision receiver. Having studied his biography in in chapters 1-6, we now turn to his recorded visions and prophecies. Knowing the man helps us to understand his message.
- B. The nature of Daniel’s visions is not only prophetic, it is a special form of prophecy called Apocalyptic.
 1. The term apocalyptic comes from the Greek word apokalypsis which means “revelation.”
 2. Apocalyptic literature is writings that contain highly visual and symbolic language that most often deal with the end of time and heavenly images. Apocalyptic

⁷⁷ Williams, 82.

literature uses a large amount of symbolism, metaphors, riddles, and poetic language.

3. Robert Mounce defines Biblical apocalyptic literature as “a group of writings that include a divine revelation usually through a heavenly intermediary, to some well-known figure, in which God promises to intervene in human history and overthrow evil empires and establish his kingdom.”⁷⁸
4. A chief characteristic of apocalyptic literature is the use of images to convey a message. Thus, the primary concern of Daniel is not to portray an image that he has seen but rather communicate a message through the image.
 - i. Longman writes, these “images speak truly and accurately, but not precisely.”⁷⁹
 - ii. Kostenberger and Patterson caution that “a rigid literal interpretation or literalism may actually obscure the author’s intended meaning rather than expose it.”⁸⁰
5. Temper Longman writes, “A violent end to history is in the ultimate purview of biblical apocalyptic. However, far from imparting a sense of doom and pessimism, books like Daniel and Revelation radiate with joy and optimism. Why? Because the end is the end of human corruption and the oppression of God’s people and is brought about by the audience’s warring God. Apocalyptic celebrates [and proclaims] God’s victory over the enemies of the godly.”⁸¹
6. We should not become obsessed with attempting to identify every detail of the images. This can ultimately distract us from the overall message which is actually the primary concern of Daniel. Trying to name and date every horn on the head of the fourth beast is not possible nor appropriate considering the nature of the vision. Even when Daniel asked for the meaning, these details were not supplied. The main message, however, was made perfectly clear. God will eventually overcome every force that opposes him and his people. God and his kingdom will be victorious and we will win in the end.

C. The Setting for the Vision

1. In chapter 7 we step back in time chronologically to the beginning of the reign of the coregent Belshazzar.
2. In chapter 5 we saw Daniel’s involvement at the end of Belshazzar’s leadership in Babylon. This vision came to Daniel as Belshazzar was just starting to exert the authority given to him by his father, the actual but absent king.

II. The Vision

- A. The vision of Daniel in chapter 7 is almost certainly connected to Nebuchadnezzar’s vision in Daniel 2. Elizabeth Williams writes, “To a great extent, the revelation [in chapter 7] is a repetition of the dream of the same four great world empires which had been given to Nebuchadnezzar . . . these same mighty kingdoms, idolatrous and tyrannical, were represented to Daniel as fierce, voracious beasts.”⁸²
- B. See chart for a description and explanation.
- C. Additional Elements of the Vision
 1. The Sea
 - i. The great sea most likely refers to the Mediterranean Sea. Even though Babylon was over 800 kilometers from this sea, it was the western boarder

⁷⁸ Duvall and Hayes, *Grasping God’s Word*

⁷⁹ Longman, 178.

⁸⁰ *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 550.

⁸¹ Longman, 177.

⁸² Williams, 83.

of the empire and well known to Jewish people who historically lived close to its eastern shores.

- ii. That these kingdoms all arise from the great sea seems to indicate that these kingdoms will be those that empires that include this geographical location. East of the four kingdoms mentioned in the modern interpretation of this vision are those which are enter centered around or closely connected to the Mediterranean Sean.

2. The Winds

- i. The four winds appearing at once on the sea indicates fear and chaos. Sea travel and the sea in general was fearful to most people even into the Roman Empire. Luke describes the fear of those who traveled with Paul on the sea in the midst of the storm in Acts 27.
- ii. Thus, the rise and falls of these kingdoms will be a time of fear and chaos for the world. Their great strength will not bring calm but calamity.

3. The Interpreter

- i. Just as Nebuchadnezzar sought the assistance of a wise man to understand his vision's meaning, Daniel (though he is wise and able to interpret visions) seeks the help of an angelic being to understand his vision.
- ii. The emphasis of the supernatural interpreter was more on God than the beasts and horns. He did not clearly identify the name and time period of each kingdom but he did clearly describe the ultimate response of God to the evil empires of mankind:
 - a. Daniel 7:18 – God and his people will ultimately and eternally be victorious.
 - b. Daniel 7:26 – God will ultimately and eternally judge those who oppose him and persecute his people.
 - c. Daniel 7:27 – In spite of what he see, God's attributes are not challenged or diminished by any force. He remains:
 - i. Sovereign over the universe
 - ii. Great in power (omnipotent)
 - iii. Glorious
 - iv. Eternal (everlasting)
 - d. Daniel 7:27 – God will establish a kingdom on this earth that will never be defeated. His people will live in and rule from that kingdom. All will eventually submit to God.
 - e. These are the key passages to understand the primary message of this vision.
- iii. The vagueness of the interpreter's description of man's kingdoms may be intentional. God wanted all readers facing opposition and persecution (regardless of the time period) to be able to draw strength and encouragement from the image of God overcoming evil human rulers and kingdoms and saving his people.
- iv. Just as we cannot be sure of the date of Christ's second coming, Old Covenant people could not be sure of the date of the Messiah's first coming. Miller writes, "Just as believers today are unaware of the exact time of the coming of the Lord, so Old Testament saints did not know when Daniel's prophecies would be fulfilled. Eschatological promises of a better world have always encouraged believers in the here and now."⁸³

D. The Little Horn

⁸³ Miller, 478.

1. Those this horn appears later and small than the others, he becomes the chief horn of the fourth beast. He also appears to be the most adamant in his opposition to God and God's people.
2. Stephen Miller agrees with many interpreters when he connected this little horn with a well-known end-time figure in the New Testament. Miller writes that the little horn is also "called in Scripture, among other names, the 'man of lawlessness' (2 Thessalonians 2:3), the 'Antichrist' (1 John 2:18), and the 'beast' (Revelation 13)." ⁸⁴
3. Other interpreters describe the horn not as one person but as "the continuity and increase of evil in the end of days" ⁸⁵ which will be carried out by many individuals and governments.

III. Descriptions of God

A. Ancient of Days

1. This name of God is only found here, in Daniel 7. It describes the eternal nature of God as one uncreated, existing from eternity past. Even though the concept of God being eternal and uncreated is well known and documented in Scripture, only one other reference to this phrase is found in Isaiah 43:14.

B. Son of Man

1. The term "Son of Man" was used in Psalms and Ezekiel to refer to a future Messianic figure. For example:
 - i. See Psalm 8:4-6 (quoted as a reference to Jesus in Hebrews 2)
 - ii. The instruction given to "the son of man" in Ezekiel are often similar to the work carried out by the Messiah in the New Testament.
2. See section below on Jesus in Daniel.

C. The Throne Room Scene

1. Royal court metaphors and analogies are not exact images of what is occurring or set up in heaven. Rather, they refer to the authority of God. Such authority, in earthly terms, was most vividly scene in royal courts.
2. Clouds
 - i. God is often seen in conjunction with clouds:
 - a. God's appearance at Saini was accompanied with thick clouds and God led Israel with a pillar of cloud by day.
 - b. God's presence in the tabernacle was accompanied by clouds in Leviticus 16:2.
 - c. Psalm 68:4 and 104:3-4 as well as Isaiah 19:1 and Nahum 1:3 describe God moving the company of clouds.
 - ii. This most likely refers to the transcendence of God. He is far above the creation of this world including the other "gods" we have created.
3. Fire – Miller writes that fire "is commonly a symbol of judgement, and God's throne being engulfed in flames signifies the wrath of God that is here being poured out upon the wicked." ⁸⁶

D. The Qualities/Attributes of God – see above section on the interpreter's description of God.

IV. Historical Connections

A. The connection between the first beast and Nebuchadnezzar's judgement in Daniel 4

1. This beast's appearance and description may be intended to symbolize Nebuchadnezzar's fall into insanity and restoration.

⁸⁴ Miller, 533.

⁸⁵ Burge and Hill, 793.

⁸⁶ Miller, 510.

- i. The Lion and the Eagle are both regal animals used to kings. In fact, Miller reports that “winged lions, which are believed to have been representative of the empire, have been found in the ruins of Babylon.”⁸⁷
 - ii. The wings being ripped off refer the insanity of Nebuchadnezzar.
 - iii. Rising up on two legs and receiving the heart of man refers to humble restoration of Nebuchadnezzar.
 2. Miller also suggests that “the lion being ‘lifted up from the ground’ indicates that it was God who raised the king to his place of honor”⁸⁸ which is how the book of Daniel portrays Nebuchadnezzar.
- B. The connection between the second beast and the Medo-Persian Empire
 1. The bear being raised up on one side could represent the Medo-Persian Empire since this empire was a union of the Medes (a smaller, localized kingdom) and the Persians (a much larger empire).
 2. It covered more land than the previous Babylonian Empire (eat your fill of flesh).
 3. The three ribs could refer to the three great conquests of the Medes and the Persians: Babylon, Egypt, and Lydia.
- C. The connection between the third beast and the Greek Empire
 1. Everything about this image conveyed speed:
 - i. The leopard is the fastest land animal.
 - ii. The four wings created enhanced speed.
 2. The founder of the Empire, Alexander the Great speedily worked to conquer and create his vast Empire. Miller writes, “within ten short years (by the age of thirty-two) [Alexander] has conquered the entire Medo-Persian Empire to the borders of India.”⁸⁹
 3. The four heads could relate to the four generals who oversaw four portions of Alexander’s empire after his death: Antipater, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy.
- D. The connection between the fourth beast and the Roman Empire
 1. This beast is seemingly indescribable to Daniel, he does not relate it to any actual animal.
 2. Simply based on human history, we see the Roman Empire as rising to overcome and take the place of the Greek empire. There is little in the image, however, to directly connect this beast to Rome except that it was under the Roman authority that Christ was crushed and killed along with many faithful believers.
- E. The Ten Horns (plus one)
 1. C. Hassel Bullock writes that these horns are the “successors of the Roman Empire.”⁹⁰
 - i. They could be political successors, ten manifestations of government after the Roman Empire but in the same geographical region.
 - ii. They could be spiritual successors, ten manifestations of the persecution and attitude of the Roman Empire toward God and His people in various times and geographical locations.
 2. Elizabeth Williams represents the view of some who see the ten horns as a future revived Roman Empire. She writes, “Since the Roman Empire has never been composed of ten contemporaneous kingdoms, it is evident this prefigures the final form of the last great world empire as a federation of the ten kingdoms.”⁹¹
 3. There is little certainty about who (or what) exactly will be the fulfillment of the “little horn.”

⁸⁷ Miller, 492.

⁸⁸ Miller, 493.

⁸⁹ Miller, 498.

⁹⁰ Bullock, 296.

⁹¹ Williams, 86.

V. **Jesus in the Vision of Daniel**

- A. Jesus directly draws upon the images of Daniel 7 when he refers to himself as the Son of Man in:
 - 1. Matthew 26:64
 - 2. Mark 14:62
 - 3. Luke 22:69
- B. Jesus uses this not only to convey that he is both God and man but also to directly identify himself the prophesied messianic figure from the prophet's vision.
 - 1. The confirmation that Jesus is the fulfillment of Daniel 7 is testified by Stephen in Acts 7:56.
 - 2. Peter and the author of Hebrews possibly refer to this Daniel scene in 1 Peter 3:22 and Hebrews 12:2.
- C. Thus, Daniel teaches that we can look for and expect a savior to come from God who is both God (worshipped alongside the Ancient of Day) and human (Son of Man). This is Christ Jesus.

VI. **The bleak picture of the future until the glorious final triumph of Yahweh.**

- A. Even though things may seem bad for Daniel's generation, it will actually grow worse before humanity finally sees the righteous judgement and ultimate establishment of God's kingdom on earth.
- B. Many of the prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah, spurred among the people of God a desire to see the Messiah (the promised heavenly deliverer) appear.
 - 1. The Jews of their day (living in the Babylonian and Persian Empire) wanted the Messiah to arise and deliver from bondage and restore their nation.
 - 2. The Jews living under the Greek Empire's reign wanted the Messiah to arise and deliver them from the oppression of Greek authority in Israel.
 - 3. The Jews living under the Roman Empire' reign wanted the Messiah to arise and deliver them from the oppression of Roman authority in Israel.
 - 4. When Jesus finally came as the Messiah, he did not come as many had expected. Thus, he was rejected by many of the religious and political leaders of Israel.
- C. Stephen Miller writes that through Daniel, "God made clear to the Jewish people . . . that Israel would continue to have a place in history, hat their promised Messiah would come and deliver them from spiritual and national bondage, and that the Messiah would set up his kingdom and reign over the nations."⁹²

⁹² Miller, 478.

Daniel Bible Study

Daniel 8

I. Time and Setting

- A. In Chapter 7, Daniel reports that the vision came to him during the first year of Belshazzar's co-regency in Babylon.
 - 1. Chapter 8 happens about two years later.
 - 2. Hassell Bullock reports that this the "momentous year in which Cyrus the Great established the joint state of the Medes and the Persians."⁹³
- B. Daniel's vision happens in Susa (Shushan) in the province of Elam.
 - 1. Daniel was probably not physically present in Susa but saw the place in his vision and perhaps had visited in the past in his official capacity as an advisor to King Nebuchadnezzar.
 - 2. This was an ancient city still active in Daniel's day. It was once the capital of the Kingdom of Elam (the leading city of the Elamites) located on the eastern side of the Persian Gulf. Elam was a dominant force in the area until it was defeated by the Assyrians before the rise of the Babylonian empire.
 - 3. Susa was 354 kms (220 miles) from Babylon. Elizabeth Williams describes the city heavily fortified (a citadel) where "two rivers, Choaspes and Coprates, were connected by a large artificial canal"⁹⁴ called the Ulai Canal. Stephen Miller reports that the canal "was about nine hundred feet [275 meters] wide and passed close to Susa on the northeast. Today the canal is dry."⁹⁵
 - 4. The safety of the fortifications and benefits of the nearby rivers made the city comfortable for living. The city would become prominent again after Daniel's vision in the Medo-Persian Empire as the winter residence of the Persian kings.
 - 5. Susa in the Bible
 - i. This was the city where Nehemiah worked before returning from the exile.
 - ii. This was the city where Esther lived as the wife of a Persian king (Xerxes) and where most of the events of the book of Esther took place.

II. The Ram and the Goat

- A. See charts for detailed analysis
- B. Answered Questions:
 - 1. This is the most precise interpretation given for any of the visions found in Daniel.
 - 2. Previous only one kingdom had been identified, the Babylonian Kingdom. Now, we have the explicit identification of the Medo-Persian Empire and the Greek Empire. While Daniel, being a member of the royal court, may have been aware of these neighboring kingdoms, he had little to no indication that they would arise to power in the way he describes.
 - i. The critics of this book say that the specificity of this interpretation proves that the book was written in the 2nd century BC and the author wrote in hindsight, not foresight. However, if this was true, we should expect even more specificity than what we have.
 - ii. Those who hold to the authenticity of Daniel believe that perhaps Daniel was given this rare specificity in order to speak clearly to future generations about the awareness of God concerning their dire situation. God knew it would happen before it did. Thus, God is able to victoriously resolve this in spite of how the situation may appear in the moment.

⁹³ Bullock, 296.

⁹⁴ Williams, 92.

⁹⁵ Miller, 555.

C. Unanswered Questions

1. What is the rebellion mentioned in Daniel 8:12? Neither Daniel nor Gabriel is clear on this.
2. It could represent the rebellion of the people of God against God. This was the reason why God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to defeat them. Perhaps it is the reason that God raised up Antiochus IV. Yet we do not see a mass turning away from God at this time.
3. It could represent the rebellion of the Jews against their Greek conquerors. We know that the Jews rebelled against Antiochus both before and after his peak years of wickedness and tyranny. But why would God raise up the enemy of God's people when they rebel against this man?
4. Going against the NIV translation of the passage, it could also represent the rebellion of Antiochus IV against God. Paul declares in Romans 1-2 that the sin of Gentiles is a rebellion to a God they do not know. But if this is true, why would God raise up this man to rebel against him and defeat some of his people?
5. We cannot be sure of the interpretation at this point.

III. Gabriel

- A. This is the first mentioning of Gabriel in the Bible. It appears that he was a chief angel and perhaps the Jewish people had some awareness of him since Daniel did not give him a long introduction.
- B. His name means "God is my strength." This reminds us that angels are totally dependent on God for their power. They are part of God's creation and not independent spiritual beings.
- C. Gabriel will appear again in Daniel 9. He will also appear in Luke 1 to Zechariah (v. 19) and Mary (v. 26) to announce the birth of sons – John the Baptist and Jesus.

IV. The Timeline of these Historical Events

- A. 515 – 330 BC – After Cyrus and the Persian Empire overthrew the Babylonian Empire, they remained the dominant power in the region but experienced slow decline. As the Persian Empire declined. During the time many exiles return to Israel, rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple, and restarted worship and sacrifices there.
- B. 330 BC – The Greek Empire, led by Alexander the Great takes over the Persians and its territories including Israel. From Israel, Alexander would take his forces to Egypt. This is how the Greek language became the unifying language of the lands around the Mediterranean and the language of the New Testament.
- C. 323 BC – Alexander the Great dies and his kingdom (which stretched from Italy to Egypt to India) was divided mostly between four of his generals who often fought among themselves.
 1. Cassander took charge of the Macedonian region
 2. Ptolemy took charge of the Egyptian region
 3. Lysimachus took charge of the Asian regions
 4. Seleucus took charge of the Syrian region
- D. 323 – 285 BC – Ptolemy I (as part of his Egyptian based kingdom) controlled Israel. Although he implements Greek culture in the region, he also allows for Jewish culture and religion to remain. He does not intend to threaten their way of life as long as the Jews are loyal and pay their taxes.
- E. 285 – 246 BC – Ptolemy I's son Ptolemy II becomes ruler of the region which extends from Israel to Egypt. Under his leadership, the Jewish Scripture (the Old Testament) is translated from Hebrew to Greek in 250 BC. This translation was known as the Septuagint or LXX because it was translated using a team of 70 translators.
- F. 203 BC – Control of Israel remained in the family of Ptolemy until Antiochus III from the Seleucid portion of the Greek Empire captured Jerusalem in 203 BC. Antiochus ruled a portion of the divided Greek Empire in Syria and Asia. He wanted to take all the territory

- of Ptolemy but only succeeded in taking portions including Israel. Antiochus III was friendly towards the Jews and allowed them to retain their culture and religion.
- G. 175 BC – Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) takes over control from his father. His name, Epiphanes, translates loosely to “the manifestation of a god.” Antiochus IV was much different from his father in terms of his treatment of Jews. He discouraged expressions of Jewish culture and religion and sought to make all of Israel into a Greek styled region. The process of imposing Greek culture in a region was called Hellenization. Antiochus Epiphanes sought to Hellenize Israel. Some Jews went along with this while others resisted and eventually rebelled.
 - H. 168 – 167 BC – After a riot against Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) broke out in Jerusalem, he began to persecute the Jews severely. He nearly destroyed Jerusalem and even desecrated the Jewish temple by dedicating it to a false idol (the Greek god Zeus) and sacrificing a pig on the altar. He outlawed Judaism and imposed Greek culture on the people as the law of the land.
 - I. 167 BC – Jews continue to revolt against Antiochus IV. The revolt was led by Judas Maccabeus. He was a priest who sought to uphold Jewish culture and Judaism. He was given the name Maccabeus (which means “hammer”) since he was so zealous for his cause. The revolt was eventually successful and the Jews retook Jerusalem and the surrounding territory between 164 - 162 BC. The group became known as the Maccabees and they oversaw the reestablishment of Jewish religious practices in the Jerusalem Temple.
 - J. 160 BC – After the death of Judas Maccabeus, controls of Israel would be overseen by either his brothers or his descendants. This era became known as the Hasmonean Dynasty after the family name.

V. Why Give Daniel this Vision?

- A. God wanted to convey a message of hope of deliverance even in the darkest of time through the prophet word of a Jewish exile who witnessed an earlier defeat of God’s people and God’s temple but never gave up hope and faith in God despite his circumstances.
- B. The theme that even though the people of God is defeated, the God of the people is not defeated is a theme that applies to all generations and not just Daniel’s.
- C. Faith in God is not just a New Testament concept. It was always been the way God wants his people to respond to him. The difficult days of Israel are not indications of God’s weakness but opportunities to turn to him even more in faith and confidence. God assures future Jews of this truth through the work of a victorious and prosperous Jewish exile.
- D. God will often use the negative and difficult experiences of our life to equip and qualify us for ministry to others. This is a type of redemption. Daniel responded to God appropriately in the midst of his turmoil and now he is prepared to speak with authority to those who will face turmoil in the years ahead.

VI. An Exhausted Daniel

- A. Albert Baylis writes that even though Daniel realized that “the ruler will be destroyed, Daniel is ill and appalled by the vision.”⁹⁶ He has seen something very dreadful in store for his people in a future generation and it makes him physically weak and sick.
- B. Daniel also, at this time, appears to still be serving the monarch of Babylon. Balthazar does not seem to be as willing to depend on Daniel as his grandfather was based on what we see in Daniel 5. Belshazzar quickly forgets Daniel until he is reminded on the last night of his rule in the city.

⁹⁶ Albert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 321.