



Daniel

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The Book of Daniel
A Vision of God's Majesty
Cross-Cultural
Pastoral and Exegetical Notes

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Introduction: To Be Studied and Learned

In the centuries (primarily) before Christ's birth there were many books written about what was happening, or would happen, in history. Many of these books had common characteristics and formed what scholars now call "apocalyptic literature". Daniel is an apocalyptic book. Characteristics of this kind of writing included:

1. "Revelations" or unveilings are made known to heroes, or to the writer of the book. Sometimes there are visions, journeys or interviews with angelic guides that are concerned with the nature and end of history, good and evil spirits, the final judgement, and heaven and hell.

2. Symbolism served as a kind of language (In the Bible symbols are also quite personal.) that tried to express something too big for words. Numbers were often used symbolically, and are related to each other in patterns.

3. Pessimism: "Evil was powerful in the affairs of men. This world was in a bad state and it would get worse." But God would intervene, God would triumph, and the righteous minority would share in the new age blessings.

4. Determinism: "God was sovereign over evil and suffering. God's hand is in everything, and everything would happen as he planned."

5. Dualism: "The forces of evil are arrayed against the forces of God."

6. The triumph of God; and the extension of God's purposes to all humanity.

7. Encouragement: The primary aim of the apocalyptic was to strengthen and comfort those whom they saw as serving God. They aimed to confirm them in their right ways, not to reform them. But, with the judgement coming, men could not put off repentance and amending their way of life.

8. Prediction: "The Apocalyptic foretold the future that would break into the present." They were interested in the way God would enter into this world of time and bring an end to this whole present system.

9. Historical Perspective: These writers "saw more clearly than others [of their time] a great divine purpose being worked out from the beginning of creation to the end of time...It was a grand conception."

Daniel has most of these characteristics; but they are present to varying degrees in modified ways. For example, the latter chapters of the book tell about many wars. In some of these wars, the forces of evil fight one another. But in the big picture, these forces are fighting against the purposes of God and his people, those who are wise. At the end of time God will win and the "wise will instruct many" (11:33). But along the way "for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered." (11:33) In the face of these events, some of the wise will "stumble so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the

appointed time.”(11:35) There is no rigid dualism portrayed here. All the bad people are not lined up on one side, and the perfect people on the other.

The characteristics of the apocalyptic are as much

The book of Daniel raises more questions than any other book in the Bible, with the exception, perhaps, of the book of Revelation. These questions center largely on the problem of prophecy. They center on the reality of miracles, the nature of prophecy, and the many technical questions that surround the two parts of Daniel.

A German scholar named Wellhausen theorized in the 18th century that in order for the interpretation of an Old Testament book to be right, the book had to speak to a recognizable historical situation that was happening at the time the author wrote the book. This way of thinking arose from at least two sources. Beginning in the 18th century the principles of literary and historical criticism were being applied to the Bible as though the Bible was just another human book.

In this view, for example, the eighth century prophets addressed their political, economic, and religious practices, and when they talked about things like prosperity and blessings, those passages were judged inauthentic, and thus added by a later editor.

Secondly, much of western thinking had turned against the idea that God could, or would, tell man things that he could not know by his own discovery or reasoning. In part this came with the religion of deism, which said that God existed but that he had nothing to do with this world.

Consequently, many (if not most) scholars have doubted both the unity and the authorship of Daniel. Some say that it had two (or more) authors, the first writing during Babylonian times, and the second writing during Maccabean times. And other scholars have said that someone (not the Daniel of the Bible) wrote the whole book during the Maccabean period. Conservative scholars do not accept this conclusion. But having said that, we must admit that Daniel has many peculiarities and many unanswered questions. Among these are:

1. The Book of Daniel is unlike other prophetic books, and instead of being placed in the prophets, it is placed in "The Writing" or the Hagiographa, in the Hebrew Bible.

2. Daniel has two very different, but related parts:

- a. Chapters 1-6 "History"
- b. Chapters 7-12 "Visionary Chapters"

3. The Book contains two different languages (So does Nehemiah).

- a. Hebrew 1:1- 2:4a
- b. Aramaic 2; 4b- 7:28 "O King, live forever! Tell your servants the dream and we will interpret it."...
- c. Hebrew 8:1--through the end of the book

4. The book contains many historical details that are not found anywhere else in ancient chronicles:

- a. The siege of Jerusalem in 605.
- b. King Belshazzar (for many years referred to in no king list).
- c. Darius the Mede: The question is "Did Cyrus, or 'Darius the Mede liberate the Jews?" This question will be explored more, but for now it seems right to translate 6: 8 "So Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, that is, in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."
- d. The use of the term Chaldean to refer to both an ethnic people and a group of court advisers.

5. Depending on ones eschatology (the understanding of last things, or the end of history) the second half of the book raises a variety of questions. Almost all these questions involve the relationship between the near and distant fulfillment of prophecy.

For example, in Daniel 7, four beasts arise, and on the fourth beast there was a little boastful horn. These symbols can be related to events that occurred into Roman times. Yet, the vision seems expand to the final victory of God (vv. 13-14). Do these verses refer to the ascension and exaltation of Jesus, or his second coming? Or perhaps, in a sense, both? These kinds of questions test our understanding of time, knowledge, and prophecy. At the same time, they open up wonderful visions of God's nature and his work in history.

Important Dates for the Book of Daniel

On one level, Daniel's story and his prophecies relate to a great amount of history. It is important for the student to become familiar with the civilizations in which Daniel lives and about which he speaks. This helps one understand the life and times of Daniel, his prophecies, and the period before the coming of Christ.

Babylon:

612	Fall of Ninevah. Effective end of Assyria
605	Battle of Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt and deported Daniel and his friends. Succession of Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562)
597	<i>Jerusalem taken by Nebuchadnezzar</i> ; many Jews exiled; city subjugated but not yet destroyed.
587	Fall of Jerusalem
562-550	Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach 2 Ki. 25; 27-30) King of Babylon
556	Labashi-Marduk

556-539 Nabonidus (Belshazzar acting in Babylon)
 539 *Fall of Babylon*

Persia

539-530	Cyrus: the Achaemenid dynasty.
530-522	Camyses
522-486	Darius I
486-465/464)	Xerxes I (Ahasuerus)
464-423	Artaxerxes
423-404	Darius II
404-359	Artaxerxes II
359/358- 338/337	Artaxerxes III
338/337-336/335	Arses
335/335- 331	Darius III

Greece

334-331	Conquests of Alexander of Macedon (331-323)
323	Death of Alexander; empire divided into four kingdoms; of which the Egyptian and Syrian become predominate.

Egypt: (Ptolemies)

323-285	Ptolemy I
285-245	Ptolemy II
247-221	Ptolemy III
221-203	Ptolemy IV
203-181	Ptolemy V
198	Syria took over Palestine from Egypt

Syria: (Seleucids)

312-281	Seleucus I
281-260	Antiochus I
260-246	Antiochus II
245-223	Seleucus II and III
222-187	Antiochus III, or "the great"
187-175	Seleucus IV
175-164	Antiochus IV "Epiphanes"

ROME: the Rising Power.

168 Antiochus expelled from Egypt by the Roman Consul (Daniel 11: 30)

167 (Dec. 25) erection of Greek altar in Jerusalem temple

Conclusion:

Clearly, the message (and study) of Daniel is both straightforward and complex. The book of Daniel tells at first a simple story of very brave men who stood for what they believed and relied on a God who will plainly be victorious in the end. Within that drama, though, it takes the student deeply into the nature and meaning of language, of prophecy, and of history. No other book of the Bible, save for perhaps Revelation, is so very encouraging, but also so difficult to *really understand*. The rewards are equal to the difficulty. And Daniel, once studied and learned, will change ones life.

Chapter 1: Growing Up in a Foreign Land

The Book of Daniel opens with a brief description of the tragedy that took Daniel, a very young man, from his own compound (in Israel) to a place of exile 800 kilometers away. It was not a fine experience. For the rest of his life Daniel would be in another culture. He would live in a strange place. He would live among people who were very different than his own.

The situation prior to Daniel's exile had been filled with trouble. Nebuchadnezzar, the very able king of Babylon defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 BC. He then turned southward to recapture many of the countries that had sided with Egypt's rebellion. The story can be found In 2 Chronicles 36 and 2 Kings 24 and 25. Jehoiachim, King of Judah, had first submitted to Nebuchadnezzar. Then he changed his mind and joined the rebellion of Egypt. Before the king of Babylon could take him away, however, Jehoiachim died and his son was placed on the throne of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar thought that things would go fine with this son, but he was wrong. Only three months later he too rebelled. In anger Nebuchadnezzar sent his army to punish Judah. Jehoachin, many of his officials, and some of the temple furniture (see 1 Kings 7:48-51) were taken away to Babylon. Daniel and his friends were part of this group. Thus, Daniel was caught in a cross-cultural situation.

◆ Daniel's first problem was with the food served to him and his friends. This food was a symbol of one's relationship to the king. To eat together was very important in the ancient world. To eat the food of another was to accept the hospitality of another person. It showed a bond of friendship and loyalty between the guest and the host. In this situation the food represented a kind of covenant between the king and Daniel (and his friends). The king was offering them every thing one could want, and in eating the king's food they were showing their submission and obedience.

◆ However, the ritual laws of Daniel and his people were not followed in the preparation of the king's food. This involved at least two aspects:

- Unclean animals were almost certainly used. In Leviticus 11 God had told his people what animals they could and couldn't eat.
- Also, the Babylonians would not follow God's law as they prepared the food for these young men. (Examples of these laws are in Deut. 12:23; 14:21.) The Yale Babylonian Table number 4644 gives a number of Babylonian recipes, among which are:

RED STEW

You do not need meat. Prepare the water. Throw in fat. Pluck, tripe, and belly, salt, hulled malt, onions, samidu, cummin, coriander, leeks and surummu, crushed together. Before placing on the fire (in the pot) the meat should be marinated in the blood which has been saved (from the animal butchered for this dish).

STEW of a KID

Head, legs, and tail should be singed (before being put in the pot). Take the meat. Bring water to a boil. Add fat. Onions, samidu, leeks, garlic, some blood, some fresh cheese, the whole beaten together. Add an equal amount of plain suhutinnu. ¹

◆ These stews violated at least one key dietary restriction for the Jew: The eating of blood (See Deut. 12: 21-25). Daniel would have understood this to be abominable. He and his friends would have "defiled" themselves by eating this food. This is the real issue at hand; the content of the food *or* how it was prepared was secondary. Ezekiel 4: 12ff. presents a different but, somewhat parallel situation:

"Eat the food as you would a barley cake; bake in the sight of the people, using human excrement for fuel." The Lord said, "In this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where I will drive them."

Then I said, "No so, Sovereign Lord! I have never defiled myself. From my youth until now I have never eaten anything found dead or torn by wild animals. No unclean has ever entered my mouth."

"Very well," he said, "I will let you bake your bread over cow manure instead of human excrement."

Here, Ezekiel was ordered by God to do something unthinkable: To cook his barley cake over dried human excrement (shit). This was not a direct violation of God's Law. But indirectly, it violated the

commandment to bury excrement outside the camp (Deuteronomy 32:12), and thereby maintain decency and holiness.

3. Ethically (for the purposes of good health), it was not a good diet. The food and drink were rich and debauching. Instead of building one up, apparently it made one fat and sluggish. Beyond the religious concerns, God is concerned for our physical well being. There are certain foods that are not healthy for the body, and we can learn to take care of our bodies because they are the temples of the Holy Spirit.

B. Ashpenaz's reluctance to help was genuine. He could have been accused of a conspiracy, and treason, for doing what Daniel asked. Certainly he would have been punished if Daniel and his friends had suffered ('looking worse') under the king's care. This would have been a grave insult to the king, and it is likely that Ashpenaz ("chief of the court officials") would have lost his head over the matter.

C. However, the guard helps. He might have been a person much like Daniel: Someone from another country, captured and after a long time put into the service of the king. As such he would have more willingness to do what Daniel asks.

D. Daniel asks that their food be simply vegetables and water. No meat; no wine. Daniel's character becomes clearer now. He is:

1. Faithful to God in a new situation, and with new temptations. Scripture says he was *"resolved not to defile himself"* (v.8).
2. Assertive, but humble. He speaks his mind to the officials and guards, but is kind in his words. "He asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way." And he is willing to submit to their judgment of the evidence after the ten-day trial. There are wise ways of opposing authority. In this case the way of submission and diplomacy wins. Spiritual fruit wins out.
3. Bold and persistent. These are essential to being faithful to God in a foreign land. Daniel is not afraid of being different, or bold in his present situation. Surely that was not easy, for the cultural pressure to conform must have been very strong. Neither is he afraid to be persistent in his goals. Many people would have asked the official of the king, and would have taken his "No" as a final answer.
4. Disciplined. Daniel has been taught well as a boy. He knows what life should be like, and he goes after it.

D. Though we might consider it "pagan", the education Daniel and his friends receive is a very good one by ancient standards. The breath of their education was amazing. They studied geography (Cuneiform tablets, circa 600 BC. bear a map of the world), astronomy, mathematics, medicine, chemical technology, and art. More importantly, they intensely studied history, law, and statecraft, or administration. The amount of their literature was enormous. Their official language, Akkadian cuneiform with its six hundred signs, could only be mastered after years of careful study. Aramaic, the language in which part of Daniel was written, was widely used in diplomatic and cultural matters. However, combined with all these subjects was the pantheism ("god is everything") of their traditional religion. **Daniel and his friends would not accept this part of their education.**



Homage Given to Assyrian Domination

1. The contents of this education could be described by the word "**wisdom**". In the ancient world wisdom consisted of (at least):

- a. Knowledge, which is much like the things we call "facts", or true statements about the world.
- b. Understanding or the ability to know the meaning of many facts gathered together.

His knowledge of meaning included "all kinds of literature and learning...visions and dreams."

2. This education (all that is true in it) ultimately comes from God.
3. This education equips Daniel to remain a leader in the kingdom throughout his whole lifetime. It accomplishes the purposes of God.

E. The results of the trial period demonstrated that the wisdom of the Hebrews (which included their religious beliefs) was at the beginning superior to the Chaldean wisdom. (Chaldean is another name for Babylonian)

- Questions:
1. In what ways are we strangers in the cultures in which we live?
 2. What are some specific traditions that you feel a Christian cannot participate in?
 3. How do we wisely (in Daniel's tradition) say "No"?
 4. Describe an African who you consider to be like a "Daniel".

Chapter 2: God Uses A Pagan King

In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (604 BC) he began to have many dreams. This period of dreaming lasted for some time. One particular dream was very different and very troubling to him. Nebuchadnezzar called in a special group of court advisors, "the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers" to tell him what the dream meant. These men were among those that we call the leaders of "traditional religion". There were others in this group, like the priests of the temples, but the king call on these men because of their special role in Babylonian religion.

Religion was all-important to Babylonians. The world was filled with gods and demons. They were very active in the world. And they were as unpredictable as the experiences of life. A person could offend the spirits by violating a taboo (doing something that should not be done), failing in some (personal or moral) duty, or "treating a god with disrespect ", and so forth. ² The list of possible offenses was very long!!

Although the decisions of the gods were arbitrary, mankind was not left without indications of the divine will. The intentions of the gods were supposed to be reflected or foreshadowed in events on earth, even the most trivial. The Babylonian saw the universe as a whole, and believed that what happened in one part was mirrored in another. If a certain event succeeded another in time, there was a possible causal connection, and the same result might be expected to succeed the same event on another occasion. In accordance with this view of things, lists of unusual occurrences with the standard consequences were drawn up, and a great pseudo-science arose directed to the interpretation of omens. The types of phenomena from which omens could be drawn were virtually unlimited, but three main divisions may be made, the three groups concerned being

- Those which employed special techniques, such as divination.
- Those which divined from casual phenomena, such as dreams, the movements of animals, or freak births.
- Astrology. ³

Thus, these dreams caused the king great worry. Something serious was about to happen. Finally, when he dreams a dream like none ever before dreamed in the kingdom,



Babylonian
Demon

he calls for the "magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers". They were among the experts who were expected to understand the actions of the gods. These men were expected to find the meaning of the dream in the reading of the entrails of animals, the position of the stars or other natural events. They were expected to know what things happen as a result of curses. And some simply practiced the "art" of telling what dreams, or other unique events meant. None of their so-called "skills" include telling the king what he already knows. When they refuse (they just cannot) do what the king asks he "ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.

◆ Perhaps the king has forgotten the dream; though it is more likely (v.9) that Nebuchadnezzar does not trust his royal advisors. He wants them to prove their powers of interpretation. Perhaps he has been disappointed, or betrayed by their counsel. The astrologers recognize the significance of what he is asking: He wants to see a truly supernatural exercise of power. However, they do not have it to give. The King is furious at their blunt words. No one tells the king, "No" and lives.

◆ The character of Nebuchadnezzar is clearly revealed in these early chapters. He was much like other ancient tyrants (an absolute ruler who does not obey law or constitution and who often exercises power in a brutal or oppressive way).

- A character study of him reveals a self-absorbed, immature man who is experiencing great spiritual conflict.

- Anxious (Fearful) Nebuchadnezzar is not alone in this fear. He lives in a culture that is fearful. And as powerful as he is, he suffers from that fear. Power does not cure fear; only Christ does.

- Suspicious: Perhaps he has good reason to mistrust his advisors, but as chapter 3 will show, he feels that he must prove the loyalty of those around him.

- Unreasonable: He will not compromise with his advisors. It's his point of view, or else.

- Egotistical: He is the center of everything. His feelings, his opinions are most important.

- In chapter 3 we will see that he conceives of himself as a god. But we should not be too surprised at this. It was quite common for a king in the Ancient Near East to be considered the physical presence of some god. For example, in Egypt the pharaoh was seen as the "living Horus" ⁴, the physical embodiment of a god. In the ancient world the borderline between man and the gods was very indistinct. In verse 46 of Chapter 2

"Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him." (Daniel does not ask for this, nor does this affect him spiritually.)

- If the book of Daniel is Daniel's story, it is very important to see how Nebuchadnezzar's actions change. In chapter 1 he is a proud pagan tyrant; at the end of chapter 4, greatly humbled, he give glory to God.
- More importantly, the Book of Daniel is a story of God's work; he can even work in the heart of a vile king.

◆ Daniel's response to the king is very important, for it shows the difference between the Hebrew and Chaldean views of the world and sets a wonderful pattern for the Godly man.

- Wisdom: He conceives a righteous plan of action, and follows it through.
- Tact/Diplomacy: He uses words most carefully, in a way that will encourage.
- Decisive/Courageous: Willing to take risks.
- Prayer: Nothing is done outside of God's will, and before one acts one must pray.
- Thanksgiving: Daniel knows that God is at work in the worst of circumstances, and is in control of all history. This is the content of his doxology in 2: 20-23. The points of this most Important testimony include:
 - All wisdom and power belong to God.
 - Through his power God makes the changes of history.
 - God knows that which is impossible for man to know, the "deep and hidden things".
 - God has graciously (mercifully--v. 1b) given the needed knowledge to Daniel.

◆ Daniel's ministry to the king in the face of danger is courageous. Clearly, this action involved great risk on Daniel's part, as well as great confidence in God. Among the many consequences of Daniel's actions were:

- Relationships were built on the basis of "wisdom and tact and good communication (v. 14)
- Through his strategy, Daniel helped the king avoid the consequences of an impulsive decision that he later would have regretted. (v.16)
- The faith and prayer ministry of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were strengthened. (v.18) Later this would prove crucial to their own experience.

- Daniel presents the interpretation for the king's encouragement. (v. 30) "this mystery has been revealed so that you, O king, may know the interpretation, and that you may understand what went through your mind."
- Honor is shared with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (v.49), setting the stage for their trial in chapter 3. One spiritual victory lays the foundation for a greater testing.
- Daniel would become a trusted advisor of the king, and protected member of the court. (Chapters 4 and 5)
- Most importantly, glory and honor are given to God (vv. 28, 45); Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges God's greatness. Remember that Nebuchadnezzar is a polytheist (one who worships many gods), and he would be quite willing to give glory to any (or all) of them if he felt like it.



The God Nabu

◆ The Dream and its interpretation is the first in a series of visions about the future. Though its scope is limited, its meaning is simple: God is sovereign over all history, and over all political kingdoms. His sovereignty is demonstrated through the symbolism of the statue (Perhaps much like the one above.)

◆ The statue is composed of different materials, beginning with the head of gold, then the chest and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze, the legs of iron, and the feet partly of iron and partly of clay. It was probably similar to many of the composite statues of that culture, statues made up of several kinds of material and covered with gold or silver. Daniel clearly points out that the different parts of the statue represent different kingdoms:

Head of gold

Chest, Arms of Silver

Belly of Bronze

Neo-Babylonian Empire (The second kingdom set up in the same place

Medio-Persian Empire (The two powers that conquered Belshazzar

Greek Empire (Under Alexander it ruled much of the world.)

Legs of Iron, Feet of Iron, Clay

Roman Empire (Ruling with an Iron hand
the Roman Empire had grave weaknesses.)

The Rock

Kingdom of God

◆ The types of material represent the decreasing value or significance of each authority, from Nebuchadnezzar's absolute power, to Cyrus's bureaucracy, to Alexander's city-states, and on to the republic form of government under the Romans. What seems to be in view here is the strength or cohesiveness of the political center, not the value of the political system. The brutality or corruption of each empire may well have been also in view. However, while the significance of centralized power decreases, the historical durability of the kingdoms increases.

◆ The most important part of the vision is that of the "rock". "Cut out of a mountain--but not by human hands" it smashes the feet, and in smashing the feet of the statue, it causes the statue to come to pieces. There is no doubt that here the rock represents the kingdom of God. It will be an everlasting kingdom--one that will cause the world system (or way of thinking) described in the statue to come to an end. It will be supreme.

Questions:

1. Have you ever had a dream that you believed was from God? Did you ever discover its meaning? How?
2. Have you known non-believers, even jujus, who had some dream or knowledge of the future? How did you test their vision? From where did it come? Can Satan give knowledge of the future? Cite Bible verses to back up your answers.
3. What effects did Nebuchadnezzar's vision have on his state of mind? How did he react to the vision? Was he fair to his wise men?
4. How did God use his actions?
5. Describe Daniel's character, and the character of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Why do you think that their Hebrew names are used here?
6. What role does faith play in their deliverance? Prayer?
7. Was Hananiah's, Misael's and Arariah's promotion a blessing?
8. What did the stone actually break (Don't answer "the statue" here.) Does the stone represent a physical reality? If so, what?

Chapter 3: Faith and The Fiery Furnace

Daniel does not tell us all the details of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's trial. But in telling this part of their story Daniel returns to the key themes of their experience: the faithfulness of the righteous and the humbling of the king and his

gods. The identity of the idol is not revealed, nor is the reason for the event told. But what he does recount is consistent with Chaldean culture. These points can be made:

- ◆ Statues were made with wood or bitumen (a type of rock), and covered with a layer of silver or gold. And while statues of this size have never been found in the Euphrates River valley, large statues were carved in Egypt. Probably the height of the statue included the base
- ◆ The statue may well represent one god, but their action implies that they disloyal to the king and reject the gods of the kingdom. While this accusation may indicate that they have been under observation by their enemies, the fact is that there were three "Fire-gods, Gira, Gibil, and Nusku...and that they were regularly invoked against demons or witches."
- ◆ While some commentators suggest that the image was of Nabu (the god for whom Nebuchadnezzar was named, "Nebu, protect my son" or "Nabu, protect my boundry"), but other gods, such as the god Shamash (the sun god) could have been the object of this worship. Certainly they were the object of worship, as this incantation from a Assyrian ritual shows:

'O Shamash, great lord, exalted judge, the one who supervises the regions of heaven and earth, the one who directs aright the dead and the living, You are...the holy tamarisk, the pure wood for the form of the statues which I shall cause to stand in the house of so-and-so for the overthrow of evil beings. I have bowed before you. May the thing which I do be completely efficacious.'

- ◆ Though the identity of the god represented by the idol is speculation, it is certain that gods of Babylon were worshiped out of a need for protection from demons and other evil beings. It was such in the case of the fire gods and of Shamash. It was even so in the case of Nabu, the offspring of Marduk, who twice a year in the ritual of the *Akitu*-festival defeated the forces of evil. [The Babylonian Akitu Festival (1926) by S.A. Pallis.]
- ◆ The point of this is the great importance of piety and worship of the conventional gods to the Babylonian sense of mental and emotional security. They believed (hoped) that the idols brought protection. To commit treason against those gods would endanger the kingdom.

What is this ceremony that Nebuchadnezzar forces everyone to attend? Though any attempt to identify it as a particular Babylonian festival would be conjecture, there was a ceremony, the "opening of the mouth", held largely at night by the river Euphrates, in which the divinity took up its dwelling in the statue. Much

ritual, incantation, (music?) and repetition accompanied the ceremony, and afterwards, the idol was installed in its respective temple.

The ceremony at which the men were delivered was a provincial ceremony. The officials summoned included the "satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, (and) magistrates." And, as if to make sure that no one was left out, "and all the other provincial officials " was added. That these were men of every language and nationality indicates that they were probably also captives brought to Babylon by conquest and exile. Whatever religious implications the ceremony had, clearly this was a test of their loyalty, and thus the integrity of the empire.

The furnace nearby would seem to be more than a coincidence, but it could have had other purposes. Babylonians were very skilled in chemical technology (R. Campbell Thompson, *A Dictionary of Assyrian Chemistry and Geology*, 1936), and used heat from furnaces of several different kinds. The furnace itself was pit formed by raised sloping sides. Perhaps the fuel for the furnace was bitumen (a flammable oil-like substance) and at points there were pipes for blowing air through the walls into the flames. Some sort of bellows (a tool used to pump air) would be used for this purpose. The earthen walls would protect the workers heating the furnace, but the heat would consume those who approached the edge of the pit at the top.

It is speculation to connect the identity of the god to the method of execution by fire. But fire was normally not a method of execution; drowning in the Tigris or Euphrates River was the method of choice. But it is not speculation to connect the preparation of the furnace to the test of loyalty that the Hebrews and the others faced. And it seems that the astrologers were at the heart of this connection:

"At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace." (3: 8-11)

Thus the stage was set, and it must have been almost spiritually overwhelming. For days (or weeks) they knew about the edict. The Jews have many enemies. The opposition of the astrologers was very clear. The fire must have been very much in their minds. This is what some might call "psychological warfare". But it had a very important effect.

It gives Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego the time to consider, and pray about the test they are facing. Hence their clear and decisive answer to Nebuchadnezzar's angry (but probably frustrated) challenge.

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (3: 16b-18)

Those who distort the truth attack the three. While these Jews do not serve the Babylonian gods, they certainly are not disloyal to the king. They are setting a pattern for millennia of Jews and Christians to come. In anger Nebuchadnezzar confronts the Lord with the power of his great furnace. He cannot win. The "angel" (some think that he was Christ) appears and the three are kept safe. While all the details of that (evening?) Are not certain, the implications of God's response to the Hebrew's faith are quite clear:

- ◆ The Hebrew's God is a God who sees, who hears, and who responds with his own mind to the faith of His children. No amount of ritual can make an idol do that.
- ◆ The Hebrew's God *is* a God who protects his children. Babylon's belief in idols was futile.
- ◆ Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego's God is worthy of complete loyalty, no matter what may happen. This kind of faith (Biblical faith) is different than the pagan way of faith, hence their words "But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods..." The pagan exercises faith as a transaction, exchanging faith for that which he can get from the "god".

The practical results of their action included:

- ◆ The God of Israel became one of the many gods of Babylon (v. 29)
- ◆ Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego were promoted in the kingdom.
- ◆ And Nebuchadnezzar took a step closer to God.

Questions:

1. Why, do you think, were the reasons Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed the edict requiring all to worship the image?
2. How might the Hebrews have felt as they faced that night?
3. Who do you think was the "fourth man" in the fire? Who did Nebuchadnezzar think it was? What do you think he meant by that?
4. Describe the protection that God gave to the Hebrews.
5. What was the king's reaction to their deliverance? Was this God's reward to them?
6. Describe the faith of Shadrack, Meshach, and Abenego. Is it different than the faith you see in your church? Or in your own life? What are the differences?

Chapter 4: The King Is Finally Humbled

In content, the chapter continues on with the story of the king's humbling and, apparently, his genuine turning to God.

In structure Chapter 4 is very unusual in that it weaves together both the form of a letter and narrative. It opens with the formal elements of a letter (vv. 1-3), continues as a narrative that would be told in a letter (vv. 4-17), and then develops into a story as if were happening at the present (vv. 11-27). The fourth section of the chapter (vv. 28-33) returns to telling the story in the past tense, but this time from a third person's point of view. And finally, the chapter returns to letter format, as Nebuchadnezzar closes with his testimony about God's power, his kingdom, and his goodness.

As a letter, it opens with the standard structure of Babylonian letters:

- ◆ The Address: "To the peoples, nations, and men of every language, who live in all the world."
- ◆ The Greetings: "May you prosper greatly!"
- ◆ The Subject: In the form of a doxology (vv. 2,3) he writes: "It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me." This is actually the conclusion of the story, but the king perceives that the conclusion is the story's subject.
- ◆ The Content: The chapter is actually the story of Nebuchadnezzar's insanity, possibly the disease called lycanthropy, the delusion that one is a wolf (a wild dog-like animal).

The story is told in two ways:

- ◆ In the first person (verses 4-23 and 34-37), indicating that Nebuchadnezzar is writing or dictating to a scribe.
- ◆ In the third person (vv. 28-33), while the king could tell his story in the first person, there was a separate account in an official version, a kind of chronicle. And it seems that part of that chronicle was included with the letter in the final form of the book.

Yet, more important than the form of the story are its continued themes: Daniel's continued, gifted ministry to the king; the intentionality and power of God's actions; and the consequent change in king Nebuchadnezzar's life. These points can be made:

- ◆ Nebuchadnezzar again has a dream. Though the dream is from God (through his power and direction), nevertheless, the polytheist king seems to be a man who is sensitive in spiritual matters. Of course, this does not mean that all pagans listen to God. It does

not means that all dreams are from God. But it does warn one to be careful. **God may speak to, and through the nonbeliever.**

◆ Again, only Daniel can interpret the dream. After chapter 2, it is ironical that the last person that Nebuchadnezzar would turn to would be Daniel. But so it is. **Daniel stands ready to serve the king at any time and under any circumstance.**

◆ The content of the dream contains nothing that would be unusual in the time. Much of the description of the tree comes from the ceremonial language of the period, and in fact, points to the king's greatness in his world. **His beneficence is not questioned; his basic problem is that he thinks that he is the source of all he has and therefore he can do anything he wishes with it.**

◆ In telling the truth to the king, Daniel identifies deeply with the man who now has become his friend. **Daniel is truly concerned for Nebuchadnezzar. (v.19)** And while he shows the king the proper respect, he does not shrink from telling the king a most important single message for the next seven years of his life:

"Therefore, O King, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue." (4. 27)

However, God seems to give Nebuchadnezzar one more chance. Though the "holy ones" or the "messengers" have declared that "the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men." (v. 17) and the dreams have declared that Nebuchadnezzar will be judged, it is not until twelve months later that the judgement is delivered.

Nebuchadnezzar learned nothing from the dream. He is as proud as ever. As he was walking on the roof of his palace he said "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

Judgement strikes. He goes insane, acting like an animal (that he was) and fleeing into the bush for seven years. His sanity was restored by God's mercy (v. 34) and finally, he "honored and glorified him who lives forever"...saying..."Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Questions:

1. What is the difference between Christian contentment and sinful pride? How did this difference show itself in Nebuchadnezzar's life?
2. How can even sinful leaders serve as great trees? How did God judge Nebuchadnezzar? How does God "cut" proud people down today?
3. Why repent if repentance does not prevent God's judgment?
4. In what ways did God show mercy to Nebuchadnezzar?
5. What difference might it have made in Nebuchadnezzar's life for him to admit God's sovereignty?

Chapter 5: Belshazzar and the Fall of Babylon

Nebuchadnezzar's long, stable rule ended with his death in 562. After short reigns of Amel-Marduk and Labashi-Marduk (Neriglissar), Nabonidus came to the throne in 556 BC. For reasons no fully understands Nabonidus became preoccupied with many military and religious distractions in Arabia and the western part of the Babylonian Empire.

To make pursuit of these interests possible, Nabonidus appoints Belshazzar his son co-regent in 553 BC and is then leaves the capital for about 10 years. He returned to Babylon on the eve of its destruction, but flees the city before the certain conquest of Cyrus. The army of Cyrus enters Babylon without a battle. Nabonidus, thinking that he might again have the favor of Cyrus, an old ally, returned most probably to his death.

Belshazzar, the crown prince left with the security of the city is a study in the degeneration of an empire. The picture of this young prince is not a good one. The mixing of men and women at celebrations may well have been a violation of tradition (which explains why the older queen mother would have not been there). And his desecration of the Temple vessels demonstrates his lack of respect for other religions. He is not even a good polytheist.

◆ During one of these "celebrations" (parties) the handwriting on the wall appears

- The King saw it, though it is not certain that anyone else did.
- Since no one could interpret the writing, he offers the third highest place in the kingdom to the one who can read it. He offers the third highest because he and his father occupies the first and second. He is probably drunk, but he is also very desperate.

◆ The Queen (She is either the wife of Nabonius or the wife of the deceased Nebuchadnezzar) makes a recommendation. Two aspects of her request should be noted:

- The queen makes her entrance and treats the young co-regent with respect.
- Referring to "your father", a term for male ancestors in general, she mentions both Nebuchnezzar and Daniel. This suggestion would immediately appeal to Belshazzar's immediate need for security.

◆ Daniel interprets the writing, which is a Babylonian word play on weights and money. With that interpretation he brings three charges against Belshazzar.

- He has sinned through disobedience and pride (v.22).

- He defied God by desecrating the sacred vessels (v.23a).
 - He praised idols, and thus did not acknowledge God (v. 23b).
- ◆ The three words of the writing may refer to the kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar, Nabonidus, and Belshazzar (and their qualities). They all may also apply to Belshazzar's kingdom. The scales on which they are weighed are God's standards. (Job 31:6; Psalms 62:9; Proverbs 24:12)
- Mene could refer both to the mina (a coin) and to the verb "to number".
 - Tekel, to the shekel (another coin) or the verb "to weigh".
 - Peres, to the half-mina, or the half-shekel, or to the verb "to divide", or the nation of Persia.
- ◆ Even while the king and all his nobles feasted, the city was about to fall. This is how it happened: The city of Babylon had strong, high walls. Many people thought it could not be conquered. However, the city had one weakness. The city's water supply, the Tigris-Euphrates River, flowed by the city's western wall, and was a part of the defense of that side of the city. The Medes and Persians diverted the flow of the river for a short time, and a part of the army simply walked into the city through the dry riverbed.
- ◆ The Bible says "That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain". However, it must have been a long, difficult night. And what exactly happened can only be thoughtfully reconstructed. Belshazzar must have taken Daniel's message very seriously. He left the city (thinking it was invincible) to do battle with the Persian Army. Some sources ([Ancient Iraq](#) , 352) indicate that he was killed at the Battle of Opis. The city saw no battle, and the transition to Persian rule was essentially bloodless.

Question:

1. Describe, in your own words, the character of Belshazzar? Have you ever known leaders like him?
2. Describe Daniel's relationship to this young ruler. How do you interpret verse 17 "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else" in light of what happened in verse 29?
3. Is it wrong to take gifts from a traditional ruler?
4. What constitutes an improper relationship to a traditional (or secular) ruler?

Chapter 6: Daniel In the Den of Lions

In many ways the world around Daniel did not change with the coming of Cyrus. Daily life remained essentially the same; the traditional cult of Marduk was re-established; and Babylon enjoyed complete peace through the reign of Cambyses, Cyrus's son. With his death in 522 BC, a period of trouble began. Bardiya, Cambyses's brother, wrongly assumed the throne, and eight months later was slain by Darius.

Darius assumed the throne, and was challenged immediately by several satraps (administrators) who had been appointed by Cyrus. Full-scale rebellion followed. At the beginning of 520 BC Darius, finally rid of all his enemies, was recognized as king throughout most of the Near East. He immediately set out to promote a number of major reforms aimed at consolidating his power and cementing together the various regions of his vast empire."(Ancient Iraq, p. 372) Darius re-shaped and enlarged the administrative, but limited their power by the creation of military governors, tax collectors, and royal inspectors.

By this time Daniel could have been close to 100 years old. Because of that some have discounted the accuracy (or truth) of events in chapter 6. However, this is unnecessary. People have retained their strength and authority at that age *and beyond*. Others have suggested that the events of chapter 6 actually happened under Cyrus's reign, and that the name Darius was added only secondarily. (see Chapter 6, v. 28, NIV footnote.)

In either case, the focus in Chapter 6 returns to political conflict and spiritual warfare. Darius both consolidated *and* extended the power and effectiveness of the Persian Empire. His strategy involved appointing 120 satraps (local rulers) and making them accountable to three administrators, "one of whom was Daniel" (Daniel 6:2). This indeed was simply an extension of the traditional management system of the empire.

It was the decision of Darius to appoint one person (in this case Daniel) to be over the three administrators that provoked the jealousy and attacks of the both the satraps and the administrators. They knew that Darius prized honesty. So they sought to discredit him on the basis of his record in the government. No one could discover a bribe that he took, or any instance in which he extorted money. He was not corrupt; he did not sacrifice truth or honesty for his own gain. Scripture says "They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent." (6:4) More importantly, his character included two important positive qualities.

- ◆ He was utterly faithful to God because God was most important person in his life. And because God was most important, he sought to obey the Lord no matter what happened.
- ◆ He was a good steward ("Not negligent"). He treated the king's property and business just like they were his own.

The strategy that the other administrators and satraps sought to use against Daniel seemed as though it would certainly doom the old man. Daniel's enemies knew that Daniel would not betray his God by disobedience or unfaithfulness. They then developed a plan that they knew the king could not resist. In the ancient world the king was generally thought to be the representation on earth of a god. As a god he could claim to be a helper to anyone in need. Those who prayed to him would also then obey him. Thus, they proposed to the king a test of loyalty for any and everyone in the empire: "Anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king shall be thrown into the lions den."(v.7) These things should be noted about the test:

- ◆ It was based on a lie, that "The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers, and governors have *all* agreed..."(v.7) No, they hadn't all agreed. Daniel would never have approved such a test.
- ◆ Perhaps there were political circumstances that influenced the king to sign the decree, and make it law. Perhaps there was unrest in the kingdom.
- ◆ There is a change in the nature of the law in this situation. In old Babylon the law was the King himself. At his will (within limits) the law could be changed. Now, in Persia, the law is even above the king. Once established, the law could not be changed or broken even by him.

Daniel's response to his sentence of execution was consistent with the way he had always lived. They characterize a man who has lived a long disciplined life, who is willing to die for what he believes, but who fervently depends on God to see him through the coming trial. Prayer is crucial in this dependence.

- ◆ He remembers his roots when he goes home to pray (three times a day). The upper room where he lives faces Jerusalem.
- ◆ His first impulse in prayer is to give thanks to God...even in this situation.
- ◆ Then he asks God for help (A direct violation of the edict against praying to any other God for help.)

Learning that Daniel is to be put to death, the court is thrown into great confusion. The king does not want to execute his chief advisor and friend. "...he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. (v.14) However, even though no way could be found to save the old man, the king's actions reveal a man already influenced by Daniel's testimony to his God. Note these points:

- ◆ The king sealed the mouth of the cave that contained the lion's den with a stone and marks that seal with impressions from his own ring and the rings of his nobles in order that "Daniel's situation might not be changed." It seems that Darius expected that something unusual might happen.

◆ "Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep." (v.18) These are not the actions of a grieving man.

◆ Lastly, at sunrise the king goes to what could have been Daniel's tomb and actually called out to him "Daniel servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions."(v.20)

Daniel responded to the point: God had shut the mouths of the lions for two reasons. He was blameless in God's sight and he had not wronged the king. The king took the night's events as proof, not only that Daniel was innocent of rebellion, but that Daniel's accusers were guilty of endangering the empire through their opposition to Daniel's God. If God can protect Daniel from danger, then he can also protect the empire.

This is the question the entire chapter poses. "How powerful is the God of Daniel?" The answer to this question comes from Darius's hand in two parts:

◆ God's kingdom is supreme.

"For he is the living god
and he endures forever;
"his kingdom will never end."(v.26b)

◆ This God, who is active in heaven and earth, cares for his saints.

"He rescues and he saves;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth.
"He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions." (v.27)

Questions:

1. Write a character sketch of Daniel as you have seen him in chapters 1 through 6.
2. What does it mean for someone to be "trustworthy, and not negligent" in the affairs of another person?
3. With what did Daniel's enemies finally charge him?
4. Is the practice of your faith against the laws of you tribe? Your country? In what ways?
5. Can we expect God to glorify himself *today* with "signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth" (v.27)
6. How could Christians prosper in the midst of oppression? (6: 28)

Part Two: Daniel 7 -12

Dreams and Visions of the Future

Chapter 7: The End of the Fourth Beast

The dreams and visions of chapters 7 through 12 occur in the latter part of Daniel's life, beginning with the time of Belshazzar. In addition, the interpretation of those visions and prayers are included. Though some of the historical circumstances surrounding the visions are given, the content of these chapters is not meant to be read as historical narrative. However, these points must be kept in mind:

- ◆ The visions in chapter 7 precede the events of chapter 5 and 6, and in some ways are related to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2.
- ◆ The dream (and the vision) occurred during the first year of the reign of Belshazzar. It could have been a time of change and trouble.
- ◆ For the first time, Daniel's writings are clearly mentioned: "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream." (7:1) It seems that someone has gathered Daniel's journals together into this last section of the book.

The vision of chapter 7 begins with "the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea" and four monsters arising out of that sea. This introduction reflects much Biblical tradition. Exodus 15:10 (ASV) Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: They sank as lead in the mighty waters. Job 7:12 (ASV) Am I a sea, or a sea-monster, That thou settest a watch over me? Isaiah 27:1 In that day Jehovah with his hard and great and strong sword will punish leviathan the swift serpent, and leviathan the crooked serpent; and he will slay the monster that is in the sea. Ezekiel 32:2 Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say unto him, Thou wast likened unto a young lion of the nations: yet art thou as a monster in the seas; and thou didst break forth with thy rivers, and troubledst the waters with thy feet, and fouledst their rivers. These visions are very clearly from a God who controls the things from which dreams are made.

However, these "beasts" are not the leviathans or the sea-monsters of Scripture. They reflect many of the beasts portrayed in the Ancient Near Eastern world. An example of that is the first vision:

◆ The Vision of the lion with wings like an eagle, changed to be like a man with the heart of a man. This vision recounts the nature of the Babylonian Empire (612-539 BC) and perhaps the experience of Nebuchadnezzar. The points should be noted:

◆ The Lion was a symbol of royal power.

◆ "As nearly as it is possible for a beast to become like a man, so nearly did Babylon lose its beast-like nature"

◆ In the Inscription of Nebuchadnezzar this transformation is clearly shown. Part of the inscription reads as follows:

"O eternal prince! Lord of all being!
As for the king whom thou lovest, and
Whose name thou hast proclaimed
As was pleasing to thee,
Do thou lead aright his life
Guide him in a straight path...
I am the prince, obedient to thee
A creature of thy herd
Thou has created me, and
With dominion over all people.



Winged Monster from
Nimrud



Winged Man-Lion
from the
Palace of
Ashurnasipal

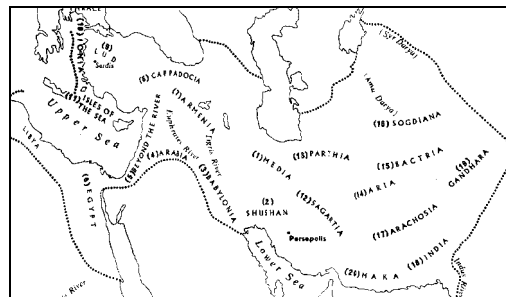
Thou hast entrusted to me
According to thy grace, O Lord,
Which thou doest bestow on
All people,
Cause me to love thy supreme
 dominion
And create in my heart
The worship of thy god-head
And grant whatever is pleasing
 to thee
Because thou hast fashioned my life.

◆ This vision of the beast corresponds to the Head of Gold in chapter 2, or the Neo-Babylonian Empire (Called this because it was the second in the series of kingdoms set up in the same geographical place.) with Nebuchadnezzar at its center.

◆ The difference between this series of visions and those of chapter 2 is that this is a vision of the past as well as the future. This should alert the careful reader to the fact that

more than prophetic visions are being presented here. Daniel has in view the meaning of history as it culminates in verse of 14.

◆ Then the second beast arose, one "which looked like a bear", corresponds most probably to the kingdom described by the "chest and arms of silver" mentioned in chapter 2, and refers to the Medo-Persian federation, and then the Persian Empire. Next to the lion, the bear was the most formidable beast of prey in the ancient world. The Persian Empire was the largest empire that had existed in Ancient Near East, stretching from Asia Minor to India. Why should the bear be lying on its side? To what does the three ribs refer? No certain answers can be given to these questions. The NIV study Bible speculates that the position of the bear refers to the overwhelming strength of the Persian side of the Medo-Persian alliance and the three ribs refer to the alliance's most important conquests: Lydia (546), Babylonia (539), and Egypt (525) [NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, p. 1310.] Whatever the symbolism involves, the facts of history and the text pointed to the great appetite of Persia for conquest and subjugation.



The Persian Empire at Its Height

◆ The Leopard (or the panther) with the four wings and four heads symbolizes Greek power during the time of Philip II (359-336 BC) and Alexander (336-323 BC) Philip II, Alexander's father, doubled the population and territory of the Macedonian state (The northern area of Greece that served as the center of the Greek state of that time) and laid the domestic foundations for Alexander's conquest.

◆ The four wings symbolized the speed with which Alexander conquered the Ancient Near East from Africa to India. This amazing story began in 334. Alexander set out with an army of 35,000 men against Persia. In 333 he defeated Darius III at Issus, captured the city of Tyre in 332 BC, conquered Gaza (in Palestine) in September, 332 BC., and then proceeded eastward to the border of India, where his army simply would go no farther. He had conquered almost everything known of the Ancient Near East through swift and effective use of mounted soldiers. Though he had respected the many cultures he encountered, his conquest brought the indelible imprint of Greek culture to the lands he had conquered. From the border of India, he returned to Babylon in 323 where he died in 323 BC

Alexander the Great, in his strength, from a coin.



◆ The four heads represents the four generals who would divide

Alexander's empire, and then (perhaps) the four kingships which would follow.

The Four Generals	Ptolemy	Seleucus	Philip	Antigonus
The Four Kings	Ptolemy	Seleucus	Cassander	Lysimachus

When Alexander unexpectedly died he was at the height of his military power and glory. He left only two heirs to his throne, a half-brother named Philip who was not capable of governing an empire, and an unborn child who would later become Alexander IV. The real power, however, belonged to the four generals who had served Alexander. These four generals would establish kingdoms that would rise and fall and which would make war against each other for the next 250 years. Daniel 11 chronicles these wars and their consequences in great detail. This prophecy will be more fully discussed at that time.

◆ The fourth Beast ("terrifying and frightening and very powerful") is crucial to the interpretation of the chapter, and thus in some senses to the whole book. Normally thought of (in Bible times) as the Roman Empire, its iron teeth indicate a strong, almost indestructible world power. However, the description of this beast ("different from the former beasts") has led to three very different streams of interpretations.

- The beast represents past fulfillment of prophecy. The Roman Empire of the ancient world was the fourth beast. In this view the fourth beast of chapter 7 corresponds to the legs of iron and feet of clay of chapter 2. In this interpretation the horns represent the emperors of Rome, and the vision of verse 9 may represent both the ascension and glorification of Christ, *or* the Second Coming of Christ. With this second interpretation, there is a great time gap between verse 8 and 9.
- The beast represents the condition of the world at the Second Coming of Christ. Included in these interpreters are the amillennialists, or those who do not believe in a literal millenium. This approach makes much of the phrase "different from the former beast", taking it to mean that the first three beasts are literal kingdoms and the last is symbolic. The little horn that has "eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully" thus becomes the antichrist.
- The beast represents the spirit of the Roman Empire which continued on through the Holy Roman Empire, and which will be renewed in ten actual kingdoms and which will constitute a renewed Roman empire. These interpreters generally place great emphasis on the millenium (Revelation 20), a literal thousand-year reign of Christ before the final judgement, and for them that millenium comes (perhaps) with verse 9. At one time, different commentators saw the 10 nations of the EEC (the European Economic Community) as the ten horns.

And the "beasts" allowed to live are perhaps those who oppose God after the millenium.

◆ **However, the center of the prophecy is in what comes next, in verses 9 to 14, in the vision of God and his majesty. Undoubtedly this is the high point of the book of Daniel. Daniel sees that "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat." (v. 9; Rev. 11:16) The Ancient of Days is normally thought of as God the Father; however, the apostle John later attributes the same characteristics to Christ (Revelation 1:14,15).**

- The Ancient of Days' "snow-white appearance" indicates purity and may well reflect the holiness (or otherness) of God as it is taught throughout the Old Testament

Isaiah 1:18(ASV) "Come now, and let us reason together, saith Jehovah: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Psalms 51:7 (ASV) "Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

- The throne is "flaming with fire and its wheels were all ablaze. (10) A river of fire was coming out before him.." God is powerful and glorious (Compare this to the ineffective fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar.) God's fire destroys evil. "...for our God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:29 (ASV)

Exodus 19:18 (ASV) "And mount Sinai, the whole of it, smoked, because Jehovah descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly."

◆ Countless ("thousands upon thousands"; "ten thousand times ten thousand") beings serve God before the throne. Who are they? Angels? The saints? Or both? A case could be made for each of those answers.

The kingdom of the fourth beast is destroyed. (7:21,22)

- Revelation 19:20 seems to indicate that the destruction of the beast will occur at the Second Coming of Christ.
- The whole earth will be conquered by the king (7:26,27)

Then the Son of Man comes. (7:13,14,27)

- This is a picture of Jesus, who would be called the "Son of Man".

- It foreshadows the Second Coming of Christ (Matthew 24: 30-26:64) as we see Christ coming on the clouds.
- It pictures Jesus' reign (Philippians 2: 9-11)

Daniel does not find it easy to face these visions. In fact, he is deeply troubled and afraid. ("And my face turned pale.") It is not easy to be a prophet, or to bear God's truth. It involves suffering. (Jeremiah 4:19; Ezekiel 3:15; Zachariah 9: 1, 12:1)

Chapter 8: "The Ram, the Goat and the Anointed"

This vision comes to Daniel in the year 551 BC during the third year of Belshazzar. As a vision, it apparently covers the years from 539 to 165 BC

1 In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, I, Daniel, had a vision, after the one that had already appeared to me.

2 In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa in the province of Elam; in the vision I was beside the Ulai Canal. (NIV) Daniel 8: 1-2

The Ram with the two horns represents the Medio-Persian Empire.

- ◆ The one horn that grew longer represented the country of Persia (the meaning is similar to that of the bear laying on one side in chapter 7).
- ◆ It charged towards the west, just as the Persian Empire expanded westward to Egypt and the edge of Greece.

The Goat represents Greece.

- ◆ The Horn is Alexander
- ◆ The four horns are the four rulers, or the same as the four heads.
- ◆ The little horn is Antiochus IV Epiphanes (168-164), a ruler determined to destroy the Jews.

- He was the master of intrigue, the one not the rightful head (hier) to the throne.
- He ended the sacrifices in Jerusalem.
- He established pagan altars there.
- He died in 164 BC

Chapter 9: Repentance and Its Answer

- ◆ Based on Jeremiah's writing (Jeremiah 25: 1-12)
- ◆ Occasioned by the reports of the state of Jerusalem, and the difficulties of God's people there.
- ◆ Contents:
 - A confession of sin.
 - A petition for help.

Chapters 10: Caught in a Spiritual War

Date of the Revelation: 536 BC

The Introduction to the Revelation of the Great War, “a true and burdensome war.”

- ◆ Daniel fasted for three weeks. It was a time of “mourning”.
 - A specific fast, he abstains from choice food (meat or wine) and uses no lotion on his skin. During the dry season this could result in great discomfort.
 - A specific occasion may have been involved in the fast: The return of the Jews to Jerusalem.
 - A specific work is prepared for though the fast. In this, Daniel anticipates New Testament fasts that are limited in duration and focused on a work that God would do.
- ◆ Daniel sees the man of God (vv. 4-6)
 - The vision was his alone.
 - The man in the vision resembled the vision of Christ (a theophany involving the preincarnate Son of God) in Revelation 1:12-16 and Ezekiel 1. Perhaps it was the Angel of God’s Presence (Isaiah 63:9) However, it is not clear who the being is, for an angel speaks through the presence of the man. (vv. 12,13)
 - His response to the man is like that of the apostle John in the Book of Revelation, or that of Saul in Acts.
 - Afterwards he is left alone in a deep sleep.
- ◆ The angel ministers to Daniel.

- The angel touches him: To lift him up, To open his lips, To give him strength.
- ◆ The angel describes and acts out the ministry of angels in the spirit world.
 - Angels are sent personally to people through, and in response to prayer.
 - Angels work together. [Here, Michael and Gabriel (vv. 13,20)]
 - The work of angels is opposed by demons. "The prince of the Persian Kingdom resisted me for 21 days." This was the length of Daniel's fast. Apparently, the next to come in opposition will be the prince of Greece.
 - Angels minister to:
 - ◆ humble "before the glory of god"
 - ◆ reassure "you are highly esteemed"
 - ◆ open our lips. (Isaiah 6:6)
 - ◆ carry the truth (messengers, they are.)
 - ◆ to fight against evil, and to physically protect God's people.

Chapter 11: The Earthly Conflict

The identification of those involved:

- ◆ The three kings of Persia who fought against Greece.
 - Cambyses (530-522)
 - Darius I (522-486)
 - Xerxes I (486-465), the king who attempted to conquer Greece in 480, and the king who brought Esther to the palace.
- ◆ The mighty king is Alexander the Great.

The story seems to be that of the conflict between the Ptolemy and the Seleucids (The two families who controlled the remainder of Alexander's Kingdom.)

- The kings of the south are in the Ptolemy line.
- The kings of the north are the Seleucids.
- Incessant warfare continues until Antiochus III controls Palestine by 197 BC (verse 16)
- His successor, Seleucus IV (187-175), his son, falls prey to a coup.

- Seleucus' younger brother, Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BC) is the subject of verses 25-30.

- ◆ Comes to the throne by deceit. (vv.21-22)
- ◆ Plunders Egypt through force and intrigue. (vv. 25-26)
- ◆ Plunders Jerusalem in 169 BC (v.28)
- ◆ Invades the south, but is stopped by Roman vessels. (vv. 29,30)
- ◆ Sets up the Abomination of Desolation (the altar of Zeus, the Greek high go) in Jerusalem in 168 (v. 31)
- ◆ He will corrupt those who violate the covenant and will vent his fury against the Holy Covenant (Hebrews 11: 36-38) and will kill many (v. 33).

Encouragement: Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made spotless. The purpose of persecutions the purification of God's people.

The End Time: Daniel 11:36- 12:13 The theme of Daniel moves from subjects that are evidently historical to the end of history, the end times.

Characteristics of the Antichrist: This description does not entirely fit the person of Antiochus Epiphanes. (II Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13: 5-8)

- ◆ The Antichrist is a law to himself.
- ◆ He will be guilty of great blasphemy.
- ◆ He will be a great success.
- ◆ He will honor "a god of fortresses"--a war god.

This king does not seem to have been a king of the north or the south. (v. 40)

- ◆ He intends world conquests. (v. 42)
- ◆ Armageddon comes. (v. 45) See Revelations 16: 13-16

Chapter 12: The Inheritance of The Righteous

The rule of the king signals the end of times. (Chapter 12)

- ◆ The end times will a time of great distress.
- ◆ The resurrection occurs.
- ◆ It will be a time of great anxiety.

The meaning of the events of the book will be revealed only as those events occur (13:9), but the book has great significance for Daniel and the saints now:

- ◆ The purification of the righteous is promised, and will occur. (11:35; 12:10)
- ◆ The faithful are encouraged, and the blessings that come from waiting (patience) are promised. (12:12)
- ◆ Daniel is promised a reward ("rest"), his resurrection, and the fulfillment of his inheritance. (12:13)

Conclusion

The Book of Daniel has a special place in the Old Testament. Its heroes live according to the law of God. They live with great integrity, and faithfully serve different kings and governments. Because they serve a living God, they are world citizens. But living by the truth is not easy. The world is full of idols and men who put themselves in the place of God. Being faithful in such a world even involves the risk of death.

In this situation we are not alone. First, and most importantly, God is king. We serve him. He protects us. He sends his angels to help and protect us. He will not be defeated, even though things about us are very discouraging.

Though they may not know it, even kings are responsible to God. He holds them accountable for doing right, and is able to humble even the most powerful.

Kings and kingdoms will rise and fall. The world will not be better. Great evil will arise, will oppress God's people, but will finally be defeated by God. God's people, the righteous will inherit God's kingdom.

Daniel tells us about the need to live pure, holy lives of service in the world. It makes clear that we will face hardship and temptation, but that God's angels will watch over us. It clearly shows that God is in control of everything, but that he will permit evil to arise and nations to go astray.

Whatever happens, God's people must remain faithful. They will have rest; they will rise again at the end of all things; and though they have nothing in this world, they have a wonderful inheritance in heaven.