

DANIEL

By Ashby L. Camp

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I. Introduction

A. Date and Author

1. The book of Daniel is an account of events involving a Jew from Jerusalem named Daniel. The events that are specifically dated in the book run from 605 B.C. down to 536 B.C. Having just studied Lamentations, which focused on the suffering attendant to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C., I thought it would be timely to explore Daniel's experience as a Jew in exile in Babylonia.

2. The first half of the book appears to have been written by an unidentified author *about* Daniel, as indicated by the numerous third-person references to Daniel. The second half of the book, however, includes much that was written and spoken by Daniel himself, words in first person. So it seems that the inspired writer of the book incorporated into his composition material directly from Daniel.

3. The book was written no earlier than 536 B.C., since 10:1 reports a vision from that date. Daniel 1:21 reports that Daniel served Babylonian kings until the first year of the Persian king Cyrus, which would be 539 or 538 B.C., so it is made clear from the beginning that the book was not composed until at least the latter part of the sixth century.

4. Scholars disagree over how long after 536 B.C. the book was composed. Whenever it was written, it is the word of God and reports events and prophecies given to Daniel in the sixth century. I am with those scholars who think the book probably was written in the late sixth century B.C. not long after the last reported events occurred and prophecies were given.

B. Language and Structure

1. The first six chapters of Daniel are relatively straightforward stories of faith under pressure. The final six chapters, however, are bewildering apocalyptic visions. Tremper Longman remarks: "The simple division between chapters 6 and 7 masks a radical shift in genre and complexity. While children resonate with the lessons of Daniel 1-6, seasoned Bible scholars scratch their heads over Daniel 7-12 with the move from simple stories to obscure apocalyptic visions."¹

¹ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 19.

2. Daniel is written in two different languages. Daniel 1:1–2:4a and 8:1–12:13 are written in Hebrew whereas 2:4b–7:28 is written in Aramaic. So there are six chapters in Aramaic that are sandwiched between chapters in Hebrew.

a. Aramaic was the native language of the people from the southern region of Babylonia known as Chaldea, the region from which Nebuchadnezzar's father came. (Note that Chaldeans is commonly used in Scripture for the people of Babylonia generally.) It was becoming the *lingua franca* of the Near East and was used throughout the Neo-Babylonian and Persian empires. However, the older language of the region, Akkadian, which had a very complex writing system, was still in use. Hebrew, of course, was the language of the Israelites.

b. Many have speculated on the matter, but it remains unclear why two languages are used. Edward Young's explanation is perhaps as good as any:

All in all, the solution that seems to be most free from difficulty is that Aramaic, being the language of the world is used in those portions of the book which outline the future history of the worldly empires and their relation to the people of God, and Hebrew is used in those portions which interpret for the Hebrews the meaning of the visions of the world empires. The present writer is fully aware of the difficulties which are entailed in this position, and hence, has no desire to be dogmatic upon the point.²

3. One interesting aspect is how the Aramaic (chapters 2-7) overlaps and thus ties together the narrative (chapters 1-6) and vision (chapters 7-12) sections of the book. In addition, the Aramaic section seems to have a chiasmic structure which sheds light on the meaning of the vision in chapter 7. As Joyce Baldwin outlines the Aramaic chapters:³

- A. Four empires and God's coming kingdom (ch. 2)
- B. Trial by fire and God's deliverance (ch. 3)
- C. A king warned, chastised, and delivered (ch. 4)
- C'. A king warned, defiant, and deposed (ch. 5)
- B'. Trial in the lions' den and God's deliverance (ch. 6)
- A'. Four empires and God's everlasting kingdom (ch. 7)

4. The narratives in chapters 1-6 are in chronological order and the visions in chapters 7-12 are in chronological order, but the chronology of the visions overlaps that of the narratives. More specifically, the visions of chapters 7 and 8 occur before the events narrated in chapters 5 and 6. This chronological interlocking of the narrative and vision sections is perhaps better appreciated visually.

Ch.1 Ch.2 Ch.3 Ch.4 Ch.7 Ch.8 Ch.5 Ch.6 Ch.9 Ch.10 Ch.11 Ch.12⁴

² Edward J. Young, *Daniel*, Geneva Commentary (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 22.

³ See Longman, 19 (fn. 1).

⁴ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2008), 2.

C. Greek Additions to Daniel

1. I just want to mention that the ancient Greek translations of Daniel, what is called the Old Greek (probably from the late second century B.C.) and the translation attributed to Theodotion (perhaps from the early first century A.D.), contain three major additions that are not found in the Masoretic Text, the Hebrew/Aramaic manuscripts of the book. These additions are known as (1) the story of Susanna, (2) the account of Bel and the Serpent, and (3) the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men. The account of Susanna is found in different places in the Old Greek and Theodotion versions; Bel and the Serpent concludes the book in both the Old Greek and Theodotion versions; and the Prayer of Azariah is inserted after 3:23 in both versions.

2. It seems clear these stories are in fact additions to the book and not part of the original text, and the Jewish tradition has never considered them as part of the biblical canon. Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox churches, however, treat these additions as part of the canon and include them in what is called the Apocrypha.

D. Historical Background

1. We discussed much of the relevant historical background as part of the introduction to the study of Lamentations last quarter. You recall that after King Solomon's death in 931 B.C. the united kingdom of Israel divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. All the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel were bad, and Israel was judged by God through the conquest by the Assyrians that was completed in 722/721 B.C. The southern kingdom of Judah had more than its share of evil rulers and wicked conduct. God repeatedly warned Judah of the judgment he would bring if they did not repent, but they for the most part chose to ignore him.

2. Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign (around 640 B.C.), and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem (2 Ki. 22:1). He was a good king (2 Ki. 22:2), and it was during his eighteenth year that the high priest, Hilkiah, reported finding in the temple the Book of the Law, which likely refers specifically to the book of Deuteronomy. Apparently it had been removed from its place next to the ark of the covenant (Deut. 31:26) during the long reign of the evil king Manasseh and forgotten. Josiah embarked on a program of religious reform, but it was insufficient to stave off God's judgment.

3. After Josiah was killed at Megiddo in 609 B.C., his son Shallum (known as Jehoahaz) reigned for three months. Pharaoh Neco replaced Jehoahaz with another of Josiah's sons, one named Eliakim, and gave him the throne name Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim reigned from 609-598 B.C.

4. Daniel 1:1 refers to an assault on Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar "in the third year of Jehoiakim king of Judah."

a. Jehoiakim's third year was from 606-605 B.C., and the reported siege fits events of 605 B.C. when the then Crown Prince Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco at Carchemish and pursued the Egyptian troops into central Syria to finish them off. The Babylonian Chronicle says that at that time Nebuchadnezzar conquered "all Hatti-land," which included Judah. Soon thereafter word reached him that his father Nabopolassar had died, and in September 605 he arrived in Babylon to claim the throne.⁵

b. It was during this time that Daniel and some other youths were taken to Babylon, perhaps in early 604. Jehoiakim remained for the time being on the throne of Judah but now as a Babylonian vassal.

c. Jeremiah 25:1 equates the fourth year of Jehoiakim rather than his third year with Nebuchadnezzar's first year. That seeming discrepancy evaporates if Jeremiah is using the nonaccession-year system for counting the years of a king's reign. Under that system, if a king began his reign in the middle of the year, that year still was counted as the first year of his reign. Under the accession-year system that was current in Babylon under the Babylonian and Persian kings, the first year of a king's reign was his first full year.

5. Jehoiakim eventually rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Ki. 24:1), which led to a massive invasion in 598/597 B.C. Jehoiakim died probably in 598/597 and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin (2 Ki. 24:6; also spelled Jehoiakin).

6. Jehoiachin reigned for only three months. He surrendered to the Babylonians without a fight in order to avoid complete annihilation of Jerusalem. Jehoiachin, the royal family, and a large portion of the Judean elite, including the prophet Ezekiel, were led into exile (2 Ki. 24:14), and more treasures from the temple and royal palace were carried off. Jehoiachin fared relatively well in Babylon. He was freed after 37 years of captivity when Evil-merodach succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylonia (2 Ki. 25:27-30) and enjoyed the favor of the king.

7. After taking Jehoiachin captive in 598/597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar installed Josiah's son (Jehoiachin's uncle) Mattaniah as a puppet king in Jerusalem and gave him the throne name Zedekiah. After a number of years, Zedekiah foolishly initiated a rebellion against the Babylonians, which resulted in a furious retaliation. This culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 587/86, following an eighteen-month siege of the city (2 Kings 24:17 - 25:26).

E. The Man Daniel

1. Daniel 1:6 identifies Daniel as one of the youths taken from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar to be trained for service in the king's palace. He was probably in his early teens when taken. According to Dan. 1:3-4, he was from the royal family or the

⁵ See Steinmann, 80-83.

nobility, had a good appearance, and was intelligent and well educated. He was from the cream of the Israelite crop.

2. The prophet Ezekiel, who was himself taken into Babylonian captivity some seven years after Daniel, speaks of a Daniel who was known for his righteousness, wisdom, and ability to unravel secrets (Ezek. 14:14, 20, 28:3). Even though Ezekiel spells Daniel slightly differently, the description seems clearly to fit the picture of Daniel in the book that bears his name. The dated prophecies of Ezekiel fall between 593 and 571 B.C., so apparently Daniel was highly esteemed by the Jews from early in his life.

II. The Book of Daniel

A. Chapter 1

1. In chapter 1, Daniel and three other youths from the tribe of Judah, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, are brought to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar's chief official ("eunuch" could be literal or may simply refer to a court official) Ashpenaz pursuant to Nebuchadnezzar's order. All of these boys were the cream of the Israelite crop.

2. It is noted in v. 2 that the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. This was the first of three deportations to Babylon (605/604, 598/597, 587/586). God was beginning to punish Judah, but by doing it incrementally he gave them every possible chance to repent. As we know, they would not, which led to the catastrophe of 587/586 that is mourned in the book of Lamentations.

3. Daniel and his companions were brought to Babylon to be prepared to serve in the king's palace. As vv. 4-5 indicate, this involved their being educated for three years in the language and literature of the Chaldeans, after which time their suitability to serve would be assessed by the king. If Chaldeans is here used broadly, their training would include learning Akkadian.

4. The king assigned to them a daily portion of the food *he ate and drank*, which in his eyes was only the very best. So he naturally assumed, as v. 10 suggests, that it would be most beneficial for the health and conditioning of his prospective servants.

5. Each of the four men was given a Babylonian name: Daniel was called Belteshazzar, Hananiah was called Shadrach, Mishael was called Meshach, and Azariah was called Abednego. This renaming was no doubt designed to help bring them into Babylonian culture by weakening their identification with Judah and God. Their Jewish names all were related in some way to God.

6. Verse 8 says that Daniel resolved that he would not *defile himself* with the king's food or with the wine that he drank. He was concerned about consuming something that the Mosaic law forbid being consumed.

a. The O.T. prohibited Israelites from eating certain kinds of meat (Leviticus 11, 20:25; Deut. 14:3-21) and any meat not slaughtered in such a way as to drain the blood (Lev. 17:10-16, 19:26; Deut. 12:15-25). To avoid the risk of doing so, and also the risk of consuming meat that had been offered to an idol, Daniel chose not to eat any of the meat from the king's table.

b. He presumably refused the wine out of fear that it too may have been tainted by idolatry. It seems that also would be a risk with whatever vegetables he was provided, but perhaps Daniel knew something about their source that removed that concern.

c. Daniel 10:2-3 implies that Daniel had no problem eating meat or drinking wine later in his life, but the source of that food is not specified. This was after Cyrus had decreed that the Israelites could return home, so it is reasonable to think a supply of clearly non-defiling meat and wine was available to Daniel.

7. Daniel asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself, but the chief refused to grant the request because he feared he would be killed if Daniel's condition suffered and it became known that he had allowed Daniel not to eat what the king had provided. The statement in v. 9 that God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of eunuchs refers to the fact that the chief eunuch did not perceive Daniel's request as an act of defiance or rebellion, which would have brought punishment.

8. In vv. 11-16 Daniel approaches a lesser official, the steward that the chief of eunuchs had assigned to them, with a new plan. Rather than a permanent change, this time he asks only for a ten-day trial to be judged by the steward at the end of the period. The steward agrees to the test, and Daniel and his three companions are given vegetables to eat and water to drink. At the end of only ten days they are more healthy looking than all the other youths who ate the king's food, so the steward continued taking away the king's food and wine and giving them vegetables during the time of their training. The implication is that God rewarded the faithfulness of these young men.

9. God grants the four Jewish youths learning, skill in all literature, and wisdom and grants Daniel understanding in all visions and dreams. The entire group of candidates was taken before Nebuchadnezzar and interviewed by him. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah stood out above all the others and were chosen to serve the king. Verse 20 is probably a general statement that over their years of service they proved themselves to be "ten times" better in matters of wisdom and understanding than all the advisors, the magicians and enchanters, that were in his kingdom. This is born out by what follows.

10. Verse 21 notes that Daniel served in the court of the Babylonian kings for as long as there was a Babylonian king to serve, that is, until the first year of the Persian king Cyrus (539/538 B.C.). If Daniel was fourteen when he was taken into captivity in 605 or early 604 B.C., he would have been in his early eighties when he retired from royal service.

B. Chapter 2

1. In 603/602 B.C., when Daniel is still a teenager, Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream.⁶ He summoned all his advisors who were thought to have insight into such matters – magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldeans, the last being used in a specialized and derived sense meaning some kind of a diviner (omen-reader) and possibly encompassing the other kinds of diviners – in the hope they could interpret the dream for him.

2. The Chaldeans said they would tell the king the interpretation of the dream after he described the dream to them, but Nebuchadnezzar was having none of that. He told them that they were either going to tell him both the dream and its interpretation or

⁶ Regarding the seeming chronological discrepancy between chapters 1 and 2, Steinmann writes (pp. 111-112):

Critical scholars often point to the date notice at the beginning of chapter 2 as an inaccuracy in Daniel and a sign that the author was confused over the sequence of the historical events. That confusion allegedly created another contradiction between chapters 1 and 2. The second year of Nebuchadnezzar (2:1), they argue, would occur before the end of the three-year period (1:5) prescribed before the young Judean men would complete their training (1:18). Their promotion to positions of prominence in Babylon (2:48-49) would then come before their interview with Nebuchadnezzar, which completed their training (1:18-19).

However, there is no conflict here. Nebuchadnezzar's second regnal year is actually the third year in the Daniel narratives. The Babylonian system of reckoning the years of a king's reign did not count his first partial (accession) year. Nebuchadnezzar's accession year lasted from 1 Elul 605 BC to the end of Adar 604 BC (September 7, 605 - April 1, 604). His first (full) regnal year was from 1 Nisan 604 to the end of Adar 603 (April 2, 604 - March 21, 603). His second regnal year lasted from 1 Nisan 603 to the end of Adar 602 (March 22, 603 - April 9, 602). Since it was normal for people in the ancient Near East to count partial years when reckoning time spans, the Judeans would have been in training during part of Nebuchadnezzar's accession year, his entire first year, and part of his second year, making three years according to Hebrew count, fulfilling the "three years" in 1:5. Thus the notice that the events of chapter 2 took place in Nebuchadnezzar's second year (2:1) implies that it was shortly after Daniel and his companions had completed their training (1:18).

Therefore, chapter 2 immediately illustrates the statement in 1:20 that Daniel was superior in every way to Nebuchadnezzar's other wise men.

Thus the time notices in Daniel 1 and 2 imply this sequence of events:

Nebuchadnezzar's Accession Year, Which Was the First Year of Training for the Judean Captives

- Sometime between June 605 and January 604, Jerusalem capitulates to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:1-2). (Nebuchadnezzar assumes the throne in September 605.)
- In February 604, captives from the Judean nobility (1:3) are taken to Babylon.
- Sometime between February 604 and April 1, 604, Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael begin their training (1:3-7). This is year 1 of that training.

Nebuchadnezzar's First Year, Which Was the Second Year of Training for the Judean Captives

- From April 2, 604, to March 21, 603, Nebuchadnezzar's first regnal year, the Judeans are in training to serve in Nebuchadnezzar's court (1:8-17). This is year 2 of their training.

Nebuchadnezzar's Second Year, Which Was the Third Year of Training for the Judean Captives

- Sometime between March 22, 603, and fall 603, during Nebuchadnezzar's second regnal year, the Judeans complete their training (1:18-19, fulfilling 1:5). This is year 3 of their training.
- Also during his second regnal year, in fall 603 or winter 603-602, Nebuchadnezzar dreams the dream recorded in Daniel 2; God reveals the dream and its interpretation to Daniel; and the Judeans are promoted (2:48-49).

they were going to be torn to pieces and have their homes destroyed. If they were able to tell both the dream and its interpretation, they would be richly rewarded.

3. They again asked the king to tell them the dream, but he told them their fate was sealed if they did not do as he commanded. He was sufficiently bothered by the dream that he wanted to ensure that he received its real meaning, and to make sure of that he was requiring them to demonstrate their insight by discerning something regarding which he could gauge their accuracy: the content of his dream. As he says in v. 9, "tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation."

4. The Chaldeans protested that no one on earth could do that and that no king had ever demanded such a thing from any diviner. That was something only "the gods" could show to the king.

5. That was not the response the king wanted. He no doubt felt this proved that they had been frauds all along, and he ordered that all the wise men be killed. When Arioch, the captain of the king's guard who had been assigned to carry out the executions, came to kill Daniel and his companions, Daniel replied to him with prudence and discretion. Arioch told Daniel what was behind the king's edict, and Daniel went in and asked the king, probably through a senior official, to give him time to interpret the dream for him. Unlike the Chaldeans, he did not protest the king's requirement; rather, he simply sought an extension of time in which to meet it. This served as a stay of execution.

6. At the time Daniel made the request, he had no idea what the king had dreamed. He only knew that the situation was desperate and that God knows all things and can reveal to people what he chooses. He went home, informed his three companions of the situation, and urged them to seek God's mercy that he might reveal the mystery, the content and meaning of the dream, so that they could be spared.

7. The mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision that night, and Daniel praised God for his mercy in vv. 20-23. He then immediately went to Arioch, who then brought him before Nebuchadnezzar announcing that he had found among the Judean exiles a man who would interpret the dream.

8. The king confirmed what Daniel presumably knew – that he would have to provide both the dream and its interpretation – by asking whether he was able to do that. Daniel told him that no wise man, enchanter, magician, or astrologer could do what the king demanded but that the God who is in heaven could reveal to the king what will be in the future (v. 28). He tells Nebuchadnezzar that God made known to him, Nebuchadnezzar, what is to come and that the interpretation was revealed by God to him, Daniel, not because of his superior wisdom but in order that the king might know the interpretation.

9. In vv. 31-35 Daniel tells the content of the king's dream. The king saw a great, bright, and frightening image or statue in the form of a human. Its head was gold, its chest and arms were silver, its stomach and thighs were bronze, and its legs were iron with clay mixed into the iron of the feet. A stone was cut out by no human hand, which points to

divine activity, and struck the image on its feet of iron and clay smashing them to pieces. Then the entire image was broken into chaff or dust and blown away by the wind so that there was nothing left of it, and the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

10. In vv. 36-45 Daniel gives the king the interpretation. The image is a series of kingdoms, a series beginning with the Babylonian kingdom represented by its great king Nebuchadnezzar. In the days of the fourth kingdom in the series, the eternal kingdom of God will come, a kingdom that will never be conquered (shall never be left to another people), and its coming will mean the end *of all these kingdoms* (v. 44).

a. The identification of these four kingdoms has been a controversial matter since the rise of modern biblical criticism a few hundred years ago, but the traditional Christian understanding, which I think is correct, is that they are: the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Grecian Empire, and the Roman Empire. These are the successive gentile empires that exercised political control over Israel.

b. The Babylonian Empire is expressly identified as the first kingdom (v.38), and the Roman Empire is the fourth because the New Testament makes clear that Christ ushered in the kingdom of God in the days of the Roman Empire (e.g., Mat. 12:28; Lk. 11:20, 17:20-21; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:5b-6).

c. Though these four kingdoms are said to come after one another, and do so historically, in the vision they coexist as part of the one statue. In other words, the successive kingdoms are together the representation of something larger, something symbolized by the one statue. I believe they are the symbol of human kingdoms generally, worldly political governance that stands in contrast to the kingdom of God.

d. In the days of the kings of the fourth kingdom (v. 44), the days of the Roman Empire, God will establish his eternal kingdom which will bring to an end "all these kingdoms," meaning all human kingdoms, all worldly political governing powers as symbolized by the statue made up of succeeding expressions of that governing power.

e. The kingdom that Christ inaugurated in the first century A.D. will culminate at his return in the perfect, all-encompassing reality of love and fellowship in the immediate presence of God. The Messianic kingdom that comes as a small stone that strikes the feet of the statue ultimately will result in a great and all-encompassing reality. In the words of v. 35, it becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth.

f. It is in this sense that the kingdom of God that Christ inaugurated spelled the end of all worldly kingdoms. The end has begun, has broken into the present age, and we await only its final expression. Jesus made this point in a number of parables: the growing seed in Mk. 4:26-29; the mustard seed in Mat. 13:31-32, Mk. 4:30-32, Lk. 13:18-19; the leaven in Mat. 13:33, Lk. 13:20-21; and the wheat and the weeds in Mat. 13:24-30, 36-43. To quote just one scholar regarding Paul's perspective on the matter, Michael Bird states in *Introducing Paul* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 114, 116:

Fundamental to Paul's theology is that the future age (the eschaton) has already broken in and has been *inaugurated* through the life, death and resurrection of the Son of God. . . .

The coming of Jesus has inaugurated a new era of redemptive history and God's new age has been launched upon the world, something like a covert operation seizing key nodes along the rear echelons of an opposing force. Those people who confess faith in the Messiah and experience the transforming power of the Spirit of God are living billboards in our global metropolis advertising God's activity in the world and pointing to things soon to come. At the same time, the old age continues, death and evil are realities that need to be confronted and endured, but their power has been broken in principle and even in practice. What is more, the day is coming when God will finally do away with them and the old age will be no more. On that day God will be 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28).

g. The fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire, is portrayed as an ethnically divided kingdom, one in which the various groups of people mix, engage in social and economic intercourse, but do not unify, as iron and clay do not combine when mixed.

(1) In the literal (and unusual) words of v. 43, "mixed they will be among the seed of man." Though some understand the phrase to refer to marriage alliances, and even translate it as referring to marriage, it need not refer to that (see Steinmann, 155). NIV and TNIV translate the clause: so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united; NET translates it: so people will be mixed with one another without adhering to one another.

(2) I suspect the Roman Empire is singled out for mention with regard to mixing of people without unifying because the mixing was enhanced by the Roman system of roads and protection of the seas but, more importantly, because the social tension within the empire was exploited by God in the ushering in of his kingdom. In the dream, the stone strikes amid the division or social tension represented by the clay feet. At the risk of over-reading this, the division within the Roman Empire was part of what motivated Pilate to crucify Christ. He wanted to pacify the rebellious Jews. So in that sense, the lack of cohesion within the empire was used by God in the bringing of his kingdom.

11. Verses 46-47 report that Nebuchadnezzar was blown away. He fell on his face and paid homage to Daniel and commanded that incense be offered up to him. Perhaps Daniel raised an objection that is not recorded. If not, presumably Daniel was satisfied that Nebuchadnezzar's intent was, as v. 47 indicates, to honor God by honoring him. The king said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."

12. In vv. 48-49 Daniel is given high honors, many great gifts, and is made ruler over the whole *province of Babylon*, meaning the particular province or political

subdivision in which the capital was located. He would, of course, be subject to the king. He also was made chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon, which seems logical given his success as an interpreter of dreams. Daniel also secures a promotion for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were given positions as administrators in country districts of the province. Daniel, however, remained at the king's court.

C. Chapter 3

1. Chapter 3 contains no chronological indicator for its events. For various reasons, Andrew Steinmann (p. 167) speculates that the events occurred around 594/593 B.C. In vv. 1-7 Nebuchadnezzar sets up a huge golden (gold-plated) statue, probably of one of the Babylonian gods (Bel, Marduk, or Nebo/Nabu), in what was called the Plain of Dura in the province of Babylon and summons his advisors and various administrators and officials to worship it, probably as a demonstration of their loyalty to him as their king. The strange dimensions – almost 90 feet high but only about 9 feet wide – indicate it either had a pedestal or was some kind of narrow monument on which the image was sculpted.

2. In light of his acknowledgment in 2:47, you wonder why Nebuchadnezzar is forcing these officials to worship the idol he has built. Of course, polytheists could worship many gods, and this one probably was closely associated with Babylonia. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar concluded that when needing to reinforce political loyalty it was unwise to exalt a "foreign" god.

3. They all gathered for the dedication of the image, and the herald proclaimed the king's command that they all fall down and worship the image when the music sounded. Whoever did not do so would immediately be thrown into a fiery furnace. So when the music sounded, this varied group of people fell down and worshiped the golden image.

4. In vv. 8-12 certain "Chaldeans" go to Nebuchadnezzar and accuse the Jews Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of not heeding the king's authority, not serving the king's gods, and not bowing down to the golden image as the king had commanded. Daniel was not present at the dedication, probably because those serving in the royal court in Babylon were not required to attend. They were under the direct supervision of the king and apparently were presumed, at least at that time, to have unquestioned loyalty to him.

a. I am sure that many of those present thought this was a crazy decision by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These foreigners had status within the kingdom; they were high-level administrators. Nebuchadnezzar had honored them with positions of authority and now they were defying him publicly by refusing to worship a Babylonian god.

b. Can't you just imagine the advice they were receiving from their pagan friends. I am sure they were being told in a hundred different ways that the prudent thing to do was to obey Nebuchadnezzar's command.

c. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could have made excuses for bowing before that idol.

(1) We're not really worshipping it; we're just bowing and offering praise with no heart behind it. After all, we know there is only one God.

(2) If Jews are labeled rebels or enemies of Babylon, it will make it harder to persuade Babylonians to worship the true and living God.

(3) Surely the Lord would not want us to be killed. He is the author of life. Besides, we can do more good for God alive than dead, especially given our positions of power.

(4) The command against idolatry wasn't intended to cover a situation like this. I don't think the Lord meant we had to refrain from idolatry to the point of suffering. He meant we should refrain from it when it was reasonable to do so. After all, reason is a gift from the Lord.

d. Today we don't tend to bow down to statues, but there are all kinds of idols that vie for our devotion. Money, power, status, fame, respect, happiness, ease, comfort, pleasure, and tranquility all compete for our allegiance. We live among a people who worship these things, who make them the focus of their lives, and it is easy to let one or more of them slip onto the throne of our lives.

5. We read in vv. 13-15 that the king was furious. He calls before him Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and tells them they will either worship the image when the music sounds or they will immediately be cast into a fiery furnace. He says in v. 15b, "And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" Though he earlier, in 2:47, praised Daniel's God, he now apparently thinks the "God of gods," "the Lord of kings," is no match for his determination to kill them if they do not comply.

a. Can you imagine being called to choose between obeying God and being burned to death? If your child faced a gunman who commanded her to curse the Lord Jesus or die, what would you prefer that he or she do? Would you think your child had acted foolishly if he or she accepted death for the sake of the Lord?

b. Our culture certainly would say so. You may recall that in August 2006 two journalists from Fox News, Steve Centanni and Olaf Wiig, were kidnapped in Gaza. They were forced at gunpoint to profess their conversion to Islam and were filmed reading from the Koran in Arab robes as evidence of their conversion. When they were released on August 27, the fact they had been coerced into denying the Christian faith was thoroughly trivialized. The opening line of the *NY Times* story stated happily, "Two journalists kidnapped in Gaza were released *unharm*ed today after being forced at gunpoint to say on a videotape that they had converted to Islam."

c. Christians throughout history have faced death for the sake of Christ. You're familiar with the persecution and suffering reflected in the N.T. Let me read to you a section from Eusebius, a Christian theologian and historian who completed his book *Church History* after Constantine became emperor in A.D. 325. In the section I am going to read, he is speaking of the persecution in a region of Egypt that took place under the Roman Emperor Diocletian in A.D. 303-304, that period known as "the Great Persecution." READ Eusebius (Penguin edition, 337-338).

d. Fortunately, in this society we are unlikely to be placed in a life and death situation over our faith, but there still are times when we have to choose between obeying the Lord and avoiding some suffering or hardship short of death. Obedience is not always an easy road; sometimes it is quite costly.

(1) Paul understood this. In Phil. 1:20 he says, "I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."

(2) Heb. 10:32-34 – But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

(3) Jn. 21:18-19 – Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go."¹⁹ (**This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.**) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

(4) You see, obeying the Lord when it costs to do so is testimony to his greatness. It says that he is worthy of being obeyed despite the cost. If we are only willing to obey the Lord when it is easy, when it does not hurt, we're saying to the world that Christ is not worth the pain that causes us not to obey him.

(5) Husbands, is it hard to love your wife as Christ loves the church? Wives, is it hard to love, respect, and submit to your husband? Is it hard to honor the commitment you made to your spouse before God and witnesses that you would never leave him or her – til death do you part? Is it hard to serve your boss as though serving the Lord? Is it hard always to tell the truth and to keep your word? Kids, is it hard to obey your parents? Is it hard not to be "cool" in a culture that defines as "cool" what is ungodly? Is it hard to forgive those who have mistreated you? Is it hard to love the unlovable, to love your enemies, and not to attack those who attack you? *Difficulty in obeying is not grounds for disobeying; rather, it is an opportunity to glorify the Lord.*

(6) I remember some years ago when brother John was working at a company called ConSyGen. He was offered a job by Motorola doing just what he wanted to get into (Oracle programming) and for \$10,000 more per year than he was making. They told him he needed to start in a week, and John said he could not do that because he had told ConSyGen he would give them two weeks notice. Well, Motorola hired someone else, but to add insult to injury, ConSyGen laid John off three days later.

6. In vv. 16-17 the three young men tell the great king that if God chooses to do so, he is able to deliver them from the fiery furnace. And then they add in v. 17b, "and he *will deliver us* out of your hand, O king." That apparently been revealed to them, perhaps when the king directly defied God in v. 15.

7. Verse 18 is very important. I like the way the TNIV renders it: But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

a. For them, the question of God's supremacy was closed no matter how he chose to act in this particular instance. Even if God chose not to spare them from the furnace, they would not serve the king's gods nor worship the golden image, because God alone is God!

b. We need to remember that when God does not act the way we would like him to act. You remember Mat. 11:1-6, where John the Baptist, after languishing in prison, began to have second thoughts about whether Jesus was really the Messiah. He sent his disciples to ask him if he was in fact the Promised One. Jesus told them to report back to John that he was fulfilling the OT signs of the Messiah, and then in v. 6 he said, "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." He was saying that one is blessed who does not lose faith in him when he does not conform to their expectations.

8. In vv. 19-22 we read that their response enraged Nebuchadnezzar. He ordered the furnace to be made as hot as humanly possible (seven times probably being symbolic for that) and commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be tied up and thrown into it, which was done. They had the fire roaring so much that the flame wound up killing those who threw the Jews into the furnace. Perhaps it caught their clothing on fire which resulted in fatal burns.

9. In vv. 23-25 the king's mind is blown as he sees four men, not three, walking around unharmed in the fire! He says the fourth looks like "a son of the gods," which being he refers to in v. 28 as an angel having been sent by God to deliver those he had condemned.

10. The king calls Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego out of the furnace, and when they emerged everyone saw that they were completely unharmed. They did not even have the smell of fire on them!

11. Nebuchadnezzar then praised the God of Shadrach Meshach, and Abednego and issued a decree that their God was not to be spoken against on pain of death. He also promoted the three within the province of Babylon.

12. Faithfulness is the path of blessing. The rest of the story about brother John is that he wound up getting a job as an Oracle programmer, making more than the Motorola job and working with a group of people he really liked. That job launched him into the position he has now enjoyed for over a decade. The Lord vindicated his faithfulness.

a. I am not saying the Lord will always grant such rewards in this life. You may suffer for your faith and even be killed, but there is a blessing beyond comprehension in store for the faithful of God.

b. Rev. 21:1-5 – Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

D. Chapter 4

1. The events of chapter 4 are likewise undated, but a reasonable case can be made that they occurred during 573-569 B.C. (see Steinmann, 207-208). Verses 1-3 indicate that Nebuchadnezzar is writing to the people of his kingdom to tell them the signs and wonders the Most High God had done for him. Some of this language may have been influenced by Daniel as one who was involved in the reported situation and had the king's favor.

2. Verses 4-18 are the king's account of another frightening dream. He called in the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers, but none of them could interpret it. Perhaps they had learned their lesson about trying to hoodwink the king, but it may be that, given the meaning of the dream, none of them had the courage to interpret it. The king says that when Daniel came in he, the king, told him the dream, as he had told the others, the content of which he reports in vv. 10-17.

a. There was this huge, strong tree that reached into the heavens and had beautiful leaves and such abundant fruit that it provided food for all. It provided shade for the beasts of the field and homes for the birds.

b. An angel shouted a command to chop down the tree, cut off its branches, strip off its leaves, and scatter its fruit. The beasts were to flee from under it and the birds from its branches. The stump, however, was to be left, bound with a metal band.

c. The angel then declared that an unidentified person was to become for seven periods of time (not necessarily years) like one of the beasts of the field in terms of his mind and his lifestyle. This was to be done so that people may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and grants that rule to whom he will.

d. In v. 18 the king expresses his confidence in Daniel's ability to interpret the dream.

3. In verses 19-26 the author of the book reports Daniel's giving of the interpretation.

a. When Daniel understood the dream, he was alarmed, so much so that Nebuchadnezzar told him not to be. Daniel told the king that he was the great tree and that the dream meant he was going to be reduced to an animal-like state for seven periods of time, long enough to come to know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

b. The leaving of the tree stump was an indication that the kingdom would be restored to Nebuchadnezzar after he came to realize that rulership is in God's hands.

4. In v. 27 Daniel urges the king to repent in the hope that God would have mercy and lengthen his prosperity, meaning forego the discipline indicated by the dream. But the king apparently did not heed Daniel's advice, as suggested by the next verse which declares simply, "All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar."

5. Verses 28-33 report that a year later, when the king was strolling on the roof of the royal palace, he asked rhetorically, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" Right as he was uttering such a prideful sentiment it was announced from heaven that the dream would be fulfilled, and it was immediately. The great king lost his mind. He was living outside, eating grass like an ox, and his hair and fingernails grew long.

6. Verses 34-37 resume the king's first-person words. At the end of the seven periods of time, the king lifted his eyes to heaven, meaning he humbled himself before the God of heaven, and his reason was restored to him. As a result, he praised God – again with words perhaps shaped by Daniel. The king resumed the glory of his kingship, but now with a new appreciation of the King of kings. He says at the end of v. 37, "and those who walk in pride he is able to humble."

E. Chapter 5

1. The setting of chapter 5 is a feast thrown by the Babylonian king Belshazzar. We can date this feast to October 539 B.C. because the impression is given that little time elapsed between the handwriting on the wall at the feast and Daniel's interpretation of that handwriting in 5:26-28. Daniel 5:30 specifies that on the very night of Daniel's interpretation Belshazzar was killed and his kingdom was conquered. We know from other sources that the Persians marched into Babylon on October 12, 539 B.C.

2. King Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. His son Amel-marduk ruled until he was assassinated in 560 B.C. Amel-marduk was succeeded by his brother-in-law Neriglissar, who ruled until 556. Neriglissar was succeeded by his son Labashi-marduk, who reigned only a few months in 556 before he was deposed in a coup that brought Nabonidus to the throne. Nabonidus ruled from 556-539 B.C., and his son Belshazzar was coregent with him from 553 or 550 until 539.

a. Until the 1860s, the existence of Belshazzar was known only from the book of Daniel and works dependent on Daniel. Many nineteenth-century critical scholars considered Daniel 5 to be a fictional account about a fictional king. However, in the 1860s Babylonian sources were discovered that named Belshazzar as the son of Nabonidus and indicated that he had been made coregent over Babylon.

b. The repeated references in chapter 5 to Nebuchadnezzar as the "father" of Belshazzar are not meant literally. They may simply mean that Nebuchadnezzar was the predecessor king of Babylonia whose prideful spirit and disrespect for God Belshazzar shared, as indicated in the event recounted in chapter 5. It is possible that Belshazzar was a physical descendant of Nebuchadnezzar in that his father, Nabonidus, may have married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar to legitimate his claim to the throne. In that case, "father" would mean grandfather.

3. Verses 1-4 report that Belshazzar commanded that the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem that God had allowed Nebuchadnezzar to seize (see 1:2) be brought to the banquet and used as common wine glasses from which they drank in praise of pagan gods. This is reminiscent of Nebuchadnezzar's putting those vessels in the treasury of his god, as though they had been captured by the power of that god rather than by the permission of the one true God. It also is reminiscent of Nebuchadnezzar's general pride in relation to God.

4. In vv. 5-9 we are told that immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote a message on the plaster of the wall. This scared the king to death, and he shouted for the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. He declared that whoever could read the writing and reveal its meaning would be clothed in purple, given a gold chain, and made the third ruler in the kingdom (behind him and his father). None of them could do either, which alarmed the king even further.

5. In vv. 10-15 the queen tells Belshazzar about Daniel, a man whose wisdom and insight into mysteries was proven in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. She is confident that he will be able to give the king the interpretation and suggests that he summon him.

6. In vv. 13-28 Daniel is brought before Belshazzar and offered the same reward as the others had been. Daniel told the king that he could keep his rewards but that he would make known the interpretation.

a. He begins by reminding Belshazzar that God had granted Nebuchadnezzar a mighty kingship but took it from him when he became puffed up in his heart. He was humbled by being reduced to an animal-like state until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will.

b. He tells Belshazzar that despite knowing this he did not humble his heart but rather lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven. He dishonored the God of heaven, who holds his life in his hand, by using his sacred vessels as common drinking cups at a feast in praise of idols.

c. The message on the wall was from God. It meant that Belshazzar's kingdom was being ended, given to the Medes and Persians, because of his failings.

7. In vv. 29-31 Belshazzar has Daniel clothed in purple, gives him a gold chain, and issues a proclamation that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. But in keeping with Daniel's interpretation, the Babylonian kingdom came to an end that very night. Belshazzar was killed, and someone called "Darius the Mede" received (from God) the kingdom around the age of 62.

a. The identity of Darius the Mede is controversial. There is no historical record outside of Daniel of anyone named Darius gaining rule over the Babylonian Empire in the wake of Babylon's fall in 539 B.C. (This Darius is not to be confused with the Persian king of that name who ruled from 522-486 B.C. and who is mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament.) With a number of commentators (Baldwin, Lucas, Miller, Steinmann), I think Darius the Mede is most likely an alternate way of referring to Cyrus the Great. That is not as strange as it may sound.

b. Cyrus was a Persian on his father's side and a Mede on his mother's side. Cyrus's father, Cambyses I (600-559 B.C.), was a Persian ruler but a vassal of the Medes. Cambyses married a daughter of the Median king Astyages. Their son Cyrus became ruler of Persia in 559 B.C. and deposed his Median grandfather, Astyages, in 550 B.C. Cyrus united the Medes and Persians in his dual heritage and eventually became the ruler of the combined kingdoms of the Medes and Persians.

c. The fact Darius the Mede is called "son of Ahasuerus" in Dan. 9:1 does not mean he is not Cyrus. "Ahasuerus" could be a Hebrew rendition of the Median

name of Cyrus's grandfather, Astyages, or could be a royal title bestowed on one of Cyrus's ancestors (Steinmann, 294).

d. Multiple names or titles for rulers were not uncommon, and both Cyrus and Darius seem to be titles (see Miller, 175). The fact he was ruler of both Persian and Median territories enhances the likelihood that alternate titles would be used.

e. The powers and prerogatives exercised by Darius in Daniel 6 and the statement in 9:1 that he was made (by God) king over the realm of the Chaldeans fit Cyrus well, and Cyrus would have turned sixty-two in 539 B.C., the year Babylon fell. If one understands the conjunction in Daniel 6:28 as epexegetical rather than connective, which is a common usage, the verse identifies rather than distinguishes Darius and Cyrus: So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, *that is*, the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

f. The Jewish scholars who translated the LXX in the third-century B.C (and the later Greek version of Theodotion) seem to have understood that Darius the Mede and Cyrus were the same person. They put Cyrus in the place of Darius the Mede in Dan. 11:1, presumably because Cyrus was at that time the better known name.

g. The author may have used the name Darius to emphasize the king's Median ancestry in keeping with prophecies that the Medes would play a part in the destruction of Babylon (Isa. 13:17, 21:2; Jer. 51:11, 28). By equating Cyrus the Persian and Darius the Mede in 6:28, the writer is giving the fulfillment of Daniel's interpretation of the handwriting in 5:28 that Babylon would fall to "the Medes and the Persians" (see also Isa. 21:2 – Elam [Persians] and Media).

F. Chapter 6

1. Darius (Cyrus) appoints 120 governors (called satraps) over various provinces of his kingdom and places a panel of three men, one of whom was Daniel, over these governors to supervise their activity. Daniel stood out from all the governors and the other two supervisors to such an extent that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom, meaning to grant him authority by himself over all the governors.

2. This apparently became known, and the other two supervisors conspired with the governors to prevent this from happening by finding some fault with how Daniel performed his official duties. They were unable to find anything wrong with Daniel in that regard, so they decided they would use Daniel's well known commitment to God to create a problem.

3. These supervisors and governors all went to the king and said that they and various other officials were all agreed that the king needed to sign into effect an irrevocable law that anyone who petitions anyone other than the king, whether god or man, for the next thirty days should be thrown into the lions' den.

a. This request may have been tied to the fact the Babylonian king Nabonidus (Belshazzar's father and coregent) had brought into Babylon the images of the gods from the surrounding cities in the hope that they would help protect the city. After Babylon fell, Cyrus ordered the idols to be returned to their temples.

b. It may be that the absence of the idols from the local temples made people feel that they could not properly petition their local patron god. Daniel's opponents may have suggested that it would be popular with the newly conquered people if the king suspended all petitioning of gods, whether directly by priests or indirectly through priests, during the thirty days it took for the idols to be returned. During that time, all petitions should be directed to the king making him in essence the sole priest. That not only would feed his ego; it would do so under the guise of political wisdom.

4. Daniel knows of the king's decree, but he is convinced that it would be serving Darius rather than God if he were to cease praying to God as he had been doing, meaning three times a day facing toward Jerusalem. Longman remarks (p. 161):

He is not flaunting his rebellion in the face of the king's orders; it is business as usual. Indeed, the description of his prayer is a statement that he is neither flaunting nor hiding his religious practice. After all, he is praying in an upper room, and with the windows open. He is not on public display, but neither is he hiding from determined spies.

5. Daniel's opponents had agreed to check on Daniel, expecting him to find him praying as they knew he did, which is indeed what they found. They then went to Darius and recommitted him to the law he had signed without first telling him about Daniel. After he declared that the decree stands fast, they told him that Daniel ignores his decree and makes his petition three times a day.

6. The king was distressed and tried to figure out a way to ignore the decree, but Daniel's opponents reminded him that under the law of the Medes and Persians no law signed into effect by the king could be changed. So they basically are holding the king's feet to the fire by appealing to a law that the people apparently considered higher than the king, a law that would cost the king popular support if he violated it. Darius reluctantly went along with their pressure, but he apparently did not appreciate being politically strong-armed, as indicated by what he did to those men in the end.

7. When the king had Daniel cast into the lions' den, he said, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" Indeed, the king felt so strongly about Daniel that he fasted during the night Daniel spent with the lions. At the break of day, the king raced to the lions' den hoping that somehow Daniel's God had spared him. He called out to Daniel asking if God had delivered him.

8. Daniel announced that God had sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths and that he was unharmed. He said God did this because he was blameless, meaning faithful,

before him. He then added that he likewise was blameless before the king in the sense he had done the king no harm; he simply had lived faithfully to God.

9. The king was delighted, and after Daniel was hauled from the lions' den, he ordered that his accusers, along with their wives and children, be thrown into that very place. The lions were so hungry that they immediately overpowered these people and devoured them completely. This highlights the miraculous intervention of God in rescuing Daniel.

10. King Darius then issued a letter to his subjects, as Nebuchadnezzar had done before him, commanding them to fear the God of Daniel because Daniel's God is the living God whose kingdom shall never end. He says that God delivers and rescues and works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, one example being his deliverance of Daniel from the power of the lions.

11. Verse 28 notes that Daniel prospered under the reign of Darius, meaning the reign of Cyrus. We are not told that he was appointed to the position for which he was originally being considered (v. 3b). It is possible that Darius reconsidered for some reason and that Daniel prospered in other ways.