



BIBLE EXPOSITORY

Commentary

Daniel - Malachi

ESV Expository Commentary

VOL. VII

Daniel–Malachi

EDITORS

Iain M. Duguid

James M. Hamilton Jr.

Jay Sklar



EXPOSITORY

Commentary

VOL. VII

Daniel–Malachi

Daniel

Mitchell L. Chase

Obadiah

Max Rogland

Zephaniah

Jason S. DeRouchie

Hosea

George M. Schwab Sr.

Jonah

Jay Sklar

Haggai

Michael Stead

Joel

Allan M. Harman

Micah

Stephen G. Dempster

Zechariah

Anthony R. Peterson

Amos

Michael G. McKelvey

Nahum

Daniel C. Timmer

Malachi

Eric Ortlund

Habakkuk

David G. Firth

 **CROSSWAY**[®]

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

ESV Expository Commentary, Volume 7: Daniel–Malachi

Copyright © 2018 by Crossway

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design: Jordan Singer

First printing 2018

Printed in Italy

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Scripture quotation marked KJV is from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

The Scripture quotation marked MESSAGE is from *THE MESSAGE*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

The Scripture quotation marked NASB is from *The New American Standard Bible*®. Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

The Scripture quotation marked NKJV is from *The New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked RSV are from *The Revised Standard Version*. Copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

There are also brief citations of the *New Jerusalem Bible* (NJB), the *New Living Translation* (NLT), and *The New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV).

Scripture quotations marked AT are the author's translation.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the authors.

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-4652-5

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

LEGO 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Tables	7
Preface to the ESV Expository Commentary	9
Contributors	11
Abbreviations	13
Daniel	17
<i>Mitchell L. Chase</i>	
Hosea	171
<i>George M. Schwab Sr.</i>	
Joel	261
<i>Allan M. Harman</i>	
Amos	301
<i>Michael G. McKelvey</i>	
Obadiah	371
<i>Max Rogland</i>	
Jonah	387
<i>Jay Sklar</i>	
Micah	423
<i>Stephen G. Dempster</i>	
Nahum	503
<i>Daniel C. Timmer</i>	
Habakkuk	533
<i>David G. Firth</i>	
Zephaniah	561
<i>Jason S. DeRouchie</i>	
Haggai	605
<i>Michael Stead</i>	
Zechariah	629
<i>Anthony R. Petterson</i>	
Malachi	729
<i>Eric Ortlund</i>	
Scripture Index	767

TABLES

Daniel

1.1	Body Parts of the Daniel 2 Image	43
1.2	Kingdoms Represented by the Daniel 2 Image	45
1.3	The Second Dream: Order of Recounting, Reiteration, and Interpretation	64
1.4	The Second Dream: Daniel’s Counsel for the King	64
1.5	The Words on the Wall and Their Interpretation	75
1.6	Daniel 1–6: Promotion and Prospering	86
1.7	Parallels between the Accounts of the Fiery Furnace and the Lions’ Den	86
1.8	Years and Locations of the Visions of Daniel 7–12	91
1.9	The Four Beasts of Daniel 7	93
1.10	Kings and Kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7	98
1.11	The Seven Subjects of the Vision of Daniel 7	101
1.12	Different “Little Horns”? Comparing the Visions of Daniel 7 and 8	110
1.13	The “Sevens” of Daniel 9:24–27	125
1.14	Greek Kings Discussed in Comments on Daniel 11:2–35	153
1.15	Possible Parallels between Daniel 11:21–24 and 11:36–39	155
1.16	Parallels between Daniel 11:25–35 and 11:40–12:3	161

Hosea

2.1	Two Loosely Parallel Halves in Hosea 9:10–17	228
-----	--	-----

Jonah

6.1	Three Reasons Why Jonah Was Written	390
6.2	Two Possible Translations and Meanings of Jonah 2:8	409

PREFACE

TO THE ESV EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

The Bible pulsates with life, and the Spirit conveys the electrifying power of Scripture to those who lay hold of it by faith, ingest it, and live by it. God has revealed himself in the Bible, which makes the words of Scripture sweeter than honey, more precious than gold, and more valuable than all riches. These are the words of life, and the Lord has entrusted them to his church, for the sake of the world.

He has also provided the church with teachers to explain and make clear what the Word of God means and how it applies to each generation. We pray that all serious students of God's Word, both those who seek to teach others and those who pursue study for their own personal growth in godliness, will be served by the ESV Expository Commentary. Our goal has been to provide a clear, crisp, and Christ-centered explanation of the biblical text. All Scripture speaks of Christ (Luke 24:27), and we have sought to show how each biblical book helps us to see the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

To that end, each contributor has been asked to provide commentary that is:

- *exegetically sound*—self-consciously submissive to the flow of thought and lines of reasoning discernible in the biblical text;
- *robustly biblical-theological*—reading the Bible as diverse yet bearing an overarching unity, narrating a single storyline of redemption culminating in Christ;
- *globally aware*—aimed as much as possible at a global audience, in line with Crossway's mission to provide the Bible and theologically responsible resources to as many people around the world as possible;
- *broadly reformed*—standing in the historical stream of the Reformation, affirming that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, taught in Scripture alone, for God's glory alone; holding high a big God with big grace for big sinners;
- *doctrinally conversant*—fluent in theological discourse; drawing appropriate brief connections to matters of historical or current theological importance;
- *pastorally useful*—transparently and reverently "sitting under the text"; avoiding lengthy grammatical/syntactical discussions;
- *application-minded*—building brief but consistent bridges into contemporary living in both Western and non-Western contexts (being aware of the globally diverse contexts toward which these volumes are aimed);

- *efficient in expression*—economical in its use of words; not a word-by-word analysis but a crisply moving exposition.

In terms of Bible translation, the ESV is the base translation used by the authors in their notes, but the authors were expected to consult the text in the original languages when doing their exposition and were not required to agree with every decision made by the ESV translators.

As civilizations crumble, God's Word stands. And we stand on it. The great truths of Scripture speak across space and time, and we aim to herald them in a way that will be globally applicable.

May God bless the study of his Word, and may he smile on this attempt to expound it.

—The Publisher and Editors

CONTRIBUTORS

Editors

IAIN M. DUGUID

PhD, University of Cambridge

Professor of Old Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

JAMES M. HAMILTON JR.

PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Professor of Biblical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary;

Preaching Pastor, Kenwood Baptist Church, Louisville

JAY SKLAR

PhD, University of Gloucestershire

Professor of Old Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

Authors

MITCHELL L. CHASE

PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Preaching Pastor, Kosmosdale Baptist Church, Louisville;

Adjunct Professor of Biblical Studies, Boyce College

(Daniel)

STEPHEN G. DEMPSTER

PhD, University of Toronto

Professor of Religious Studies, Crandall University, Moncton, New Brunswick,

Canada

(Micah)

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology, Bethlehem College & Seminary

(Zephaniah)

DAVID G. FIRTH

PhD, University of Pretoria

Old Testament Tutor and Academic Dean, Trinity College Bristol;

Research Associate, University of the Free State

(Habakkuk)

ALLAN M. HARMAN

ThD, Westminster Theological Seminary
Research Professor, Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne, Australia
(*Joel*)

MICHAEL G. MCKELVEY

PhD, University of Aberdeen
Associate Professor of Old Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson)
(*Amos*)

ERIC ORTLUND

PhD, University of Edinburgh
Tutor in Old Testament, Oak Hill College, London
(*Malachi*)

ANTHONY R. PETTERSON

PhD, The Queen's University of Belfast
Lecturer, Morling College, Australian College of Theology
(*Zechariah*)

MAX ROGLAND

PhD, Leiden University
Associate Professor of Old Testament, Erskine Theological Seminary;
Senior Minister, Rose Hill Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina
(*Obadiah*)

GEORGE M. SCHWAB SR.

PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary
Professor of Old Testament, Erskine Theological Seminary
(*Hosea*)

JAY SKLAR

PhD, University of Gloucestershire
Professor of Old Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary
(*Jonah*)

MICHAEL STEAD

PhD, University of Gloucestershire
Bishop of South Sydney; Visiting Lecturer, Moore Theological College (Australia)
(*Haggai*)

DANIEL C. TIMMER

PhD, Trinity International University
Professor of Old Testament, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary;
Faculté de théologie évangélique, Montreal
(*Nahum*)

ABBREVIATIONS

General

b.	born	lit.	literal, literally
c.	circa, about, approximately	LXX	Septuagint
cf.	confer, compare, see	mg.	marginal reading
ch., chs.	chapter(s)	MT	Masoretic Text
d.	died	n.d.	no date
diss.	dissertation	n.l.	no place of publication
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by, edition	n.p.	no publisher
e.g.	for example	NT	New Testament
esp.	especially	OT	Old Testament
et al.	and others	par.	parallel passage
etc.	and so on	r.	reigned
ff.	and following	repr.	reprinted
Gk.	Greek	rev.	revised (by)
Hb.	Hebrew	s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> (under the word)
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	trans.	translator, translated by
i.e.	that is	v., vv.	verse(s)
		vol(s).	volume(s)
		vs.	versus

Bibliographic

AB	Anchor Bible
ANESSup	Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement Series
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
AS	Assyriological Studies
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>

- BR *Biblical Research*
- BSac *Bibliotheca Sacra*
- BZAW Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
- BBR *Bulletin for Biblical Research*
- CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
- CTR *Criswell Theological Review*
- CurTM *Currents in Theology and Mission*
- ETL *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
- FOTL Forms of the Old Testament Literature
- HACL History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant
- HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000.
- HCOT Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
- HBT *Horizons in Biblical Theology*
- Int *Interpretation*
- JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*
- JBQ *Jewish Bible Quarterly*
- JETS *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
- JNES *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
- JSOT *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
- LHBOTS The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
- NAC New American Commentary
- NICOT New International Commentary on the Old Testament
- NIVAC NIV Application Commentary
- NTS *New Testament Studies*
- OTE *Old Testament Essays*
- OTL Old Testament Library
- Presb *Presbyterion*
- RA *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
- ResQ *Restoration Quarterly*
- RevExp *Review and Expositor*
- RB *Revue Biblique*
- SBJT *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*

- StBibLit Studies in Biblical Literature (Lang)
 SBT Studies in Biblical Theology
 TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
 TOTC Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
 VT *Vetus Testamentum*
 WAW Writings from the Ancient World
 WBC Word Biblical Commentary
 WW *Word and World*
 WTJ *Westminster Theological Journal*
 ZAW *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Books of the Bible

- | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|-------|-----------------|
| Gen. | Genesis | Song | Song of Solomon |
| Ex. | Exodus | Isa. | Isaiah |
| Lev. | Leviticus | Jer. | Jeremiah |
| Num. | Numbers | Lam. | Lamentations |
| Deut. | Deuteronomy | Ezek. | Ezekiel |
| Josh. | Joshua | Dan. | Daniel |
| Judg. | Judges | Hos. | Hosea |
| Ruth | Ruth | Joel | Joel |
| 1 Sam. | 1 Samuel | Amos | Amos |
| 2 Sam. | 2 Samuel | Obad. | Obadiah |
| 1 Kings | 1 Kings | Jonah | Jonah |
| 2 Kings | 2 Kings | Mic. | Micah |
| 1 Chron. | 1 Chronicles | Nah. | Nahum |
| 2 Chron. | 2 Chronicles | Hab. | Habakkuk |
| Ezra | Ezra | Zeph. | Zephaniah |
| Neh. | Nehemiah | Hag. | Haggai |
| Est. | Esther | Zech. | Zechariah |
| Job | Job | Mal. | Malachi |
| Ps., Pss. | Psalms | Matt. | Matthew |
| Prov. | Proverbs | Mark | Mark |
| Eccles. | Ecclesiastes | Luke | Luke |

John	John	2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Acts	Acts	Titus	Titus
Rom.	Romans	Philem.	Philemon
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	Heb.	Hebrews
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	James	James
Gal.	Galatians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
Eph.	Ephesians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Phil.	Philippians	1 John	1 John
Col.	Colossians	2 John	2 John
1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	3 John	3 John
2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	Jude	Jude
1 Tim.	1 Timothy	Rev.	Revelation

Apocrypha Sources Cited

1 Macc. *1 Maccabees*

2 Macc. *2 Maccabees*

Sir. *Sirach/Ecclesiasticus*

DANIEL

Mitchell L. Chase

INTRODUCTION TO DANIEL

Overview

Slow to anger and abounding in love, God sent prophet after prophet to rebellious Israel, threatening judgment and covenant curses if his people failed to keep their obligations under the covenant made at Mount Sinai (2 Chron. 36:15–16). If the people did not repent, wrath would come. God kept his word, and Israel fell in 722 BC to the Assyrians. Judah’s final demise began a little more than a century later, when the king of Babylon besieged Jerusalem in 605 BC and implemented the first stage of exile by deporting youths from royal and noble Judean families. The book of Daniel is an account of the deportation and subsequent history of one such individual, Daniel, from 605 BC to his last vision in 536 BC. Most of Daniel’s years were spent serving the royal court of Babylon, although he lived through the transition to Medo-Persian rule. Twelve chapters report harrowing stories of judgment and deliverance, as well as graphic prophecies of terror and hope. There are visions of beasts rising and rulers battling, and the atrocities that God’s people would face. Throughout decades of exile, Daniel remained faithful to Yahweh despite external opposition and threat of death. Amid the mayhem, though, a light of hope burns bright that one day God will establish an everlasting kingdom.

Title and Author

The title of the book comes from its key character, who was also the book’s author. The sixth-century-BC authorship of Daniel was widely accepted by Jewish tradition and the testimony of church history. One early exception to this affirmation was Porphyry (AD 233–304), who insisted that a second-century-BC Jew wrote the book long after the events it “predicted.” Many modern scholars have taken a similar view, though there are good reasons for maintaining the traditional dating.

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING DANIEL AS THE AUTHOR

First, the book itself clearly claims to have been written by Daniel. The author writes in the first person in the visionary portion of the book (chs. 7–12) and identifies himself as Daniel no fewer than seventeen times in these chapters.

Second, Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Daniel and understands the events described in the book to be historical. When the author of *1 Maccabees* describes

Mattathias as remembering what God had done for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (*1 Macc.* 2:59–60), Mattathias’s appeal rests on the belief that the book of Daniel describes what really happened to three Jews in a fiery furnace.

Third, Jesus speaks about Daniel as a genuine historical person and prophet. During Jesus’ discourse on the Mount of Olives he says, “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel . . .” (*Matt.* 24:15).

Fourth, the unity of the book suggests it had a single author, namely, Daniel. The frequent use of chiasmic structures suggests a careful arrangement of the material by one mind. The move from Hebrew to Aramaic and then back to Hebrew is a fluid design strengthening the case for a single author. The intertextual connections between earlier and later portions of the book indicate an inextricable relationship between the chapters, forged by a purposeful hand.

ARGUMENTS CHALLENGING DANIEL AS THE AUTHOR

Some scholars deny that the book’s detailed prophecies are genuine predictions. They claim the prophecies must be post-event (*ex eventu*) compositions that merely *seem* to be forward-looking. For example, they say, since much of the final prophecy in chapter 11 relates to events in the Maccabean period (2nd century BC), the book must have been composed in that era. The problem with such a position is its anti-supernatural presupposition. If God can reveal himself, then surely he can communicate about the future, which he perfectly knows and has ordained! And if he can communicate aspects of the future, he can do so either in generalities or in detail, whichever he chooses. Insisting that Daniel’s prophecies were written *ex eventu* is “not scholarship but dogmatism.”¹

Second, scholars sometimes point to lexical features in the book to suggest a late (2nd-century-BC) date. The presence of some Persian and Greek loanwords seems to be the primary basis of this assertion. Yet, since Daniel lived to see the Persian conquest of Babylon, the use of Persian words in the book is not chronologically improbable. Moreover, there are only three Greek loanwords in the book, all in chapter 3, each of which describes a musical instrument. Even some critical scholars admit the use of these words is too sparse to prove anything about the date of composition.² Regarding the book’s Hebrew, W. J. Martin contends, “There is nothing about the Hebrew of Daniel that could be considered extraordinary for a bilingual or, perhaps in this case, a trilingual speaker of the language in the sixth century BC.”³ Regarding its Aramaic, “On the basis of presently available evidence, the Aramaic of Daniel belongs to Official Aramaic and can have been written as early as the latter part of the sixth century B.C.”⁴ Therefore a late date for the book cannot be established on lexical grounds.

1 Michael Shepherd, *Daniel in the Context of the Hebrew Bible*, StBibLit 123 (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 65.

2 Cf. John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 20.

3 W. J. Martin, “The Hebrew of Daniel,” in *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (London: Tyndale, 1965), 30. Cf. Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 8.

4 Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Book of Daniel and Matters of Language: Evidence Relating to Names, Words, and the Aramaic Language,” *AUSS* 19 (1981): 225.

CONCLUSION

If the book of Daniel was not composed by the sixth-century-BC prophet, then its historical accuracy is in question and its supposed predictions may be safely ignored. If the book's events and visions were only fancifully retrojected to a time during the Babylonian exile, then the book is nothing more than a series of man-made documents manufactured to bring (false) hope and confidence to its readers. Rightly put, "The whole theological meaning of the book depends upon Yahweh's ability to deliver his people and declare the future before it takes place."⁵

Date and Occasion

Daniel was exiled to Babylon in 605 BC (1:1), and his final vision was in 536 (10:1). The book was probably completed shortly after that, for Daniel would have been in his eighties by then. During the long Babylonian exile, Daniel glimpsed the future through visions, learning that subsequent earthly empires would be followed by an everlasting kingdom not made with hands (2:34–35). What he recorded in his book would be helpful and important for his own contemporaries and for all future generations of readers as the prophecies neared fulfillment (cf. 8:26; 9:24–27; 12:4). It would be a means of God's grace for their faithfulness and perseverance.

Genre and Literary Features

No single literary genre covers the whole book of Daniel. The book consists of narratives (chs. 1–6) and visions (chs. 7–12). It makes use of chiasm,⁶ first- and third-person points of view, different languages (Hebrew and Aramaic), prophecy, dreams, and apocalyptic imagery. The narratives (except for parts of ch. 4) are conveyed in the third person, and the visions in the first person. Chapters 1 and 8–12 are written in Hebrew. Beginning in 2:4, the language switches to Aramaic through chapter 7. Dream accounts are related from both Nebuchadnezzar (e.g., ch. 2) and Daniel (e.g., ch. 7). Prophecy about the future is recorded in chapters 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12. Chiasms, along with other rhetorical devices, are used in both narratives and visions.

Theology of Daniel

The book of Daniel includes at least eight theological themes.

1. *Divine sovereignty.* God foretells the future and accomplishes it. He raises up rulers and brings them down. He appoints periods of punishment, overrules the murderous intents of rulers, and delivers his people. As Nebuchadnezzar rightly recognized, God "does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" (4:35).

⁵ James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 32 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 32.

⁶ A figure of speech employing inverted parallelism (e.g., A-B-C-B'-A'), often used to emphasize the center (C) of the chiasm's structure.

2. *Worship.* In the opening chapter, the contents of the Jerusalem temple are transported to a Babylonian temple. In chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar sets up an image for everyone to worship. In chapter 5, Belshazzar praises his gods using vessels from the Jerusalem temple. In chapter 6, enemies of Daniel convince the king to command prayer exclusively to him. In chapters 7 and 8, two “little horn” figures act against the true worship of Yahweh. In chapter 11, true worship in Israel is interrupted by a blasphemous ruler.

3. *Faithfulness.* Daniel and his friends display unwavering resolve to obey God (chs. 1, 3, and 6). Even when disobedience to God would mean being spared from death, they refuse to compromise.

4. *Revelation.* God alone knows the future, and at his sovereign pleasure he may choose to disclose it, such as through dreams to Nebuchadnezzar (chs. 2 and 4). In chapter 5 God writes a message on the wall revealing imminent judgment against Babylon and Belshazzar. In four visions (chs. 7, 8, 9, and 10–12) God reveals the future directly to Daniel. God “reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him” (2:22).

5. *Wisdom.* As Nebuchadnezzar evaluates the men trained in chapter 1, he concludes that Daniel and his friends are wiser than his Babylonian wise men (1:20). When Daniel interacts with nonbelievers, he is wise and prudent (cf. chs. 2 and 6). The queen in chapter 5 affirms Daniel’s wisdom (5:11–12). During future tribulation, the wise will instruct and be refined (11:33–35). Along with the wise, who will rise from the dead and shine like the stars (12:2–3), Daniel will rise and receive his inheritance (12:13).

6. *Judgment.* This theme can be understood in relation to earthly rulers and to God. The chief of the eunuchs fears the judgment of Nebuchadnezzar (1:10), who orders the deaths of all Babylonian wise men (2:12–13) and threatens anyone who refuses to worship his image (3:1–7). Darius of Medo-Persia makes a 30-day agreement to throw into a lions’ den anyone who prays to someone other than him (6:6–9). This same king orders Daniel’s accusers and their families to be killed (6:24). God displays even greater power to judge, however. He gives Judah into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand (1:1–2) and humbles Nebuchadnezzar’s pride (4:28–37). He writes the judgment of Babylon and Belshazzar on the palace wall (5:26–30). Visions depict God’s judgment on two little horns (7:8; 8:25). The exile was God’s judgment (9:1–19), and more judgment lies in store for God’s people and the temple in Jerusalem (8:12–14; 9:26–27; 11:16, 28, 30–31). At the resurrection of the dead, God will judge the wicked (12:2).

7. *Deliverance.* God delivers the four youths from death in chapter 3. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego go into the furnace, God preserves them so completely that not even the smell of smoke is on them (3:25–28). God delivers Nebuchadnezzar from insanity and restores his majesty (4:34–37). When Daniel is in the lions’ den, God sends an angel to shut the lions’ mouths (6:22–23). In Daniel’s visions, God will ultimately deliver and vindicate his people (7:21–27; 8:13–14; 9:24–27; 11:35). On the day of resurrection, the righteous dead will be delivered from the dust (12:2–3).

8. *Dominion*. John Goldingay rightly observes, “The theme that is central to Daniel as it is to no other book in the OT is the kingdom of God.”⁷ Though Jerusalem was besieged and exiles were taken (1:1–2), God is still king of the cosmos. The dream he gives to Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 2 is a prophecy of future empires being eclipsed by an everlasting kingdom that will achieve worldwide dominion (2:31–45). Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges God’s kingdom will endure from generation to generation (4:3, 34). Darius affirms the everlasting nature of this reign (6:26). Finally, Daniel’s visions depict the supremacy of God’s kingdom (7:14, 27; 12:1–3).

Relationship to the Rest of the Bible and to Christ

In the plotline of the Bible, the book of Daniel tells of the faithfulness of Yahweh and his people during the exile to Babylon and beyond. The book also holds forth hope for the messianic kingdom. Jesus has inaugurated the everlasting stone-kingdom of chapter 2 (cf. Luke 20:18). His redemptive rescue is foreshadowed by the deliverances reported in Daniel 3 and 6. Jesus is the “one like a son of man” who comes to the Ancient of Days in chapter 7 (cf. Matt. 26:64). He receives everlasting authority in heaven and on earth (cf. Matt. 28:18). Jesus is the anointed one of Daniel 9:26 who “finishes” transgression and atones for iniquity (cf. v. 24), and is the firstfruits of all who will be raised (1 Cor. 15:20; Dan. 12:2).

Preaching from Daniel

Sermons from the book of Daniel should address large portions of the narratives and visions. There are ten sections in the book (chs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10–12), and each could constitute a sermon, though a detailed exploration of chapter 2 or chapters 10–12 may require more than one sermon.

The book of Daniel should be read and heralded as a Christian book. Christian sermons should “authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God’s revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament.”⁸ The preacher may rightly discern in the book of Daniel multiple examples of faithfulness to Yahweh, from which hearers may be exhorted to obedience. This emphasis is not mere moralism. The NT recognizes the value of these examples for Christian obedience. In Hebrews 11:33–34, the writer speaks of how, by faith, there were saints who “stopped the mouths of lions” and “quenched the power of fire,” which are allusions to Daniel’s rescue from the lions’ den (Dan. 6:22–23) and the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace (3:25–28). Since the examples in Hebrews 11 are intended to encourage readers to walk by faith (cf. Heb. 10:36–39), a legitimate application of those stories is to exhort God’s people to endure in faith and reject compromise, while at the same time keeping our eyes firmly fixed on “Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).

⁷ John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 330.

⁸ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 10.

Interpretive Challenges

A number of challenges emerge when interpreting Daniel. First is the historical order of earthly kingdoms in the visions of chapters 2 and 7. There is disagreement as to whether the four kingdoms are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—which is the traditional position—or Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece.

Second, relating the little horn in chapter 7 to the one in chapter 8 is challenging. The descriptions of the horns are similar, leading some interpreters to equate them. If the referents of the horns are different, however, their relationship must be explained. Is one horn foreshadowing or typifying the second? Proposing historical or future fulfillment for the horns is controversial.

Third, identifying the heavenly figures in the book of Daniel can be difficult, because they are not all given names. The figure in 8:16–17 is named Gabriel, who appears again in 9:20–21. Other heavenly figures are more ambiguous. In the fiery furnace, interpreters must weigh evidence for identifying the fourth man (who was “like a son of the gods”; 3:25) as the preincarnate Christ or an angel. The same kind of question may apply to Daniel’s rescue from the lions’ den in 6:22. And was the angel who spoke to Daniel in 7:16 perhaps also Gabriel (cf. 9:21)? In the final vision (10:1–12:13), the figure who appears in 10:5–6 is unnamed, leaving the interpreter to consider whether this is again Gabriel or someone else.

Fourth, interpreters must wrestle with the relationship between Darius and Cyrus. In 5:31, “Darius the Mede received the kingdom,” and chapter 6 reports an event during his reign. The end of chapter 6, though, refers to the “reign of Cyrus the Persian” (6:28). Historically, there is no evidence for a Darius who reigned before Cyrus in the Medo-Persian kingdom, so either such evidence is still forthcoming or the two names refer to the same person.

Fifth, the book of Daniel contains many numbers to reflect upon. In chapter 1 there is a ten-day test (Dan. 1:14–15). In chapter 2 there are four parts to a metal man (2:31–35). In chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar will be punished for “seven periods of time” (4:32). In chapter 7 Daniel has a vision of four beasts (7:1–8). The fourth beast has ten horns (v. 7), and among them arises a little horn, before which three of the other horns fall (v. 8). There is a reference to “a time, times, and half a time” (7:25), which may refer to three and a half years. In chapter 8, a ram has two horns, and a goat has one (8:3, 5–6). The sanctuary will be desolate for “2,300 evenings and mornings” (8:14). In chapter 9, Daniel learns about seventy “sevens,” broken into seven, sixty-two, and one (9:24–27; cf. ESV mg. on v. 24). In chapter 10, Daniel mourns for three weeks (10:2), and the heavenly figure contends with the prince of Persia for twenty-one days (10:13). In chapter 12, Daniel hears reference to another “time, times, and half a time” (12:7). And, at the end of the book, there is a reference to 1,290 days (12:11) and 1,335 days (12:12).

Sixth, an interpretive challenge surely exists when we come to the lengthy passage in chapter 11. The prophecy in 11:2–12:3 is the longest in the book and part of the largest unit of the book (10:1–12:13). The kings of the south and north

are manifold, and historical skirmishes are plentiful. Interpreters need to consider specific historical fulfillments of this chapter because the Greek Empire, while future to Daniel, is past to us.

Seventh, there are two Greek versions of the book of Daniel: the Septuagint (LXX), also known as the Old Greek, and the version by Theodotion. The latter was widely used by the early church, although the NT also cites from the Old Greek version. These two Greek versions give insights into how Jews from antiquity understood particular passages from Daniel.

Outline

Multiple structures are common in the Bible, so it is not surprising to find multiple ways of outlining the book of Daniel. The simplest approach is to see the book in two parts: six narratives in chapters 1–6 and four visions in chapters 7–12. Another observation modifies this twofold design, however, for the Aramaic section of the book (chs. 2–7) is widely recognized as a chiasm, with chapters 2 and 7 prophesying about four kingdoms, 3 and 6 recounting rescues from death, and 4 and 5 reporting divine judgment on arrogant kings. Perhaps the whole book of Daniel is a single chiasm,⁹ or even two interlocking chiasms fused together by chapter 7.¹⁰ There also appears to be a three-part Hebrew chiasm in chapters 8–12: “It is with chapter 8 that chapters 10–12 have most detailed points of contact. Reminiscences of almost every verse of chapter 8 reappear here.”¹¹

The chiasms correspond to language changes in the book. Chapter 1 is a Hebrew introduction to the book, followed by an Aramaic chiasm (chs. 2–7), leading to a Hebrew chiasm (chs. 8–12), with chapter 7 as an important transition to the visionary section of the book. The following structure is an attempt to represent the ten parts of the book of Daniel in a way that showcases the Aramaic and Hebrew features:

- I. Hebrew Introduction: Exile to Babylon (1:1–21)
- II. Aramaic Chiasm: Kingdoms, Deliverance, and Judgment (2:1–7:28)
 - A. Vision of Four Kingdoms Preceding an Eternal Kingdom (2:1–49)
 - B. Divine Deliverance from Death (3:1–30)
 - C. Judgment on Royal Arrogance (4:1–37)
 - C'. Judgment on Royal Arrogance (5:1–31)
 - B'. Divine Deliverance from Death (6:1–28)
 - A'. Vision of Four Kingdoms Preceding an Eternal Kingdom (7:1–28)
- III. Hebrew Chiasm: Kingdoms, Seventy Sevens, and the Anointed One (8:1–12:13)
 - A. Medo-Persian and Greek Kingdoms (8:1–27)
 - B. Seventy Sevens and the Anointed One (9:1–27)
 - A'. Medo-Persian and Greek Kingdoms (10:1–12:13)

⁹ Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven*, 77–83.

¹⁰ Steinmann, *Daniel*, 20–25.

¹¹ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 283.

DANIEL 1:1–21

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. ³Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family¹ and of the nobility, ⁴youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. ⁶Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. ⁷And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

⁸But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. ⁹And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." ¹¹Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²"Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." ¹⁴So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. ¹⁶So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. ²⁰And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he

found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.²¹ And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

¹Hebrew of the seed of the kingdom

Section Overview

When God poured the curse of exile upon Judah in 605 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar transported temple vessels and people to Babylon (1:1–2). Exiled youths faced indoctrination in Babylonian culture and literature (vv. 3–7), but Daniel resolved not to defile himself with royal food or wine. After a time of testing in which Daniel and his friends partake of only vegetables and water, Nebuchadnezzar finds them in better condition than the other youths, as well as superior in wisdom to all his magicians and enchanters (vv. 15, 18–20).

Section Outline

- I. Hebrew Introduction: Exile to Babylon (1:1–21)
 - A. Babylon Besieges Jerusalem in the Third Year of King Nebuchadnezzar (1:1–2)
 - B. Time of Babylonian Education Begins (1:3–7)
 - C. Daniel Asks Not to Eat the King’s Food and Wine (1:8)
 - D. God Gives Favor in the Sight of the Chief of the Eunuchs (1:9)
 - E. Chief of the Eunuchs Speaks to Daniel (1:10)
 - F. Daniel Suggests a Ten-Day Test (1:11–13)
 - E’. The Appointed Steward Listens to Daniel (1:14)
 - D’. God Gives Favor in the Sight of the Steward (1:15)
 - C’. Steward Removes the King’s Food and Wine (1:16)
 - B’. Time of Babylonian Education Ends (1:17–20)
 - A’. Daniel Serves Babylonian Kings until the First Year of King Cyrus (1:21)

The opening and closing verses of this section form an *inclusio*,¹² as A and A’ both name a king and a year of his reign. Both B and B’ mention a time of education, the king’s command, the importance of learning and skill in literature and wisdom, the chief of the eunuchs, the names of Daniel and his friends, and the event of standing before the king.

The main drama in Daniel 1 is verses 8–16. Sections C and C’ match: in the former Daniel requests not to defile himself with royal food or drink, while in the latter the steward removes the royal rations from all the youths. In D, Daniel is shown favor in the sight of Ashpenaz, the chief eunuch, and in D’ he and his

¹² An “*inclusio*” can be described as a literary “envelope” or as “bookends” that frame a body of text by placing similar material at the beginning and end of the text.

three friends seem better in appearance than the other youths. In E the chief of the eunuchs speaks to Daniel, and in E' the appointed steward listens to Daniel.

The turning point of the chapter (F) is Daniel's request to eat only vegetables and water for ten days, so as to avoid defilement with the king's food and drink. He leads the steward to believe their appearance will be more pleasing than that of the other young men. The center of the chiasm highlights Daniel's faithfulness and boldness.

Comment

1:1–2 The book of Daniel begins with an ominous report: Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, besieged Jerusalem in 605 BC. The king of Judah was Jehoiakim, an ungodly king who began his reign at age 25 (2 Kings 23:36–37). God was already angry with Judah “because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him” (2 Kings 23:26) and had resolved to remove Judah from his sight (v. 27).

The words of Daniel 1:2 are unvarnished in their terror. God gave Jehoiakim over to Nebuchadnezzar. The king of Judah was now in the hands of the king of Babylon, though ultimately both were in the hands of God—Nebuchadnezzar was God's instrument of judgment (2 Kings 24:3–4). This devastation of Jerusalem was the outworking of God's plan to judge his people. Still, the city of Jerusalem and its temple were not destroyed in 605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar's actions in Daniel 1:1–2 represent only the first of three stages of Jerusalem's fall. The dates of 597 and 586 BC complete the second and third stages. From 605 to 586 BC, Judah's status seemed dark, unfathomable, chaotic, and hopeless. This judgment was an expression of God's faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant, which contained fitting curses for disobedience and idolatry, one of which was exile: “The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone” (Deut. 28:36–37).

In Daniel 1:2, God's pagan rod of judgment turned against the Jerusalem temple. The spoils from Nebuchadnezzar's siege included temple vessels made during Solomon's reign (1 Kings 7). The king of Babylon transported them to the east, to the treasury of his god (Dan. 1:2). Their relocation to Babylon would play a role in chapter 5, when King Belshazzar uses them in his banquet (5:2), while their repatriation to Judah (Ezra 1:7–11) underscores an important continuity between those who returned at the time of Cyrus and their preexilic roots.

The destination of the temple vessels was the “land of Shinar” (Dan. 1:2)—a significant way of referring to Babylon, for Shinar was mentioned in Genesis 11:2. There, rebels sought to make a name for themselves and, in their idolatry, began to build a city-temple to the heavens (vv. 3–4). Yahweh confused the language of the united idolaters, and therefore, “its name was called Babel” (v. 9), the Hebrew name for Babylon. The notion of not understanding a language is also found in the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28, where Yahweh had threatened to “bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand” (v. 49).

In Daniel 1, the covenant curse was coming to pass as “Babel-onians” arrived in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar, like the rebels in Genesis 11, was interested in making a name for himself. He targeted the city, the temple, the temple’s vessels, and the people of God.

1:3–7 Nebuchadnezzar commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to evaluate Israelites using certain criteria so they could be reeducated after their deportation. The first round of deportees were “both of the royal family and of the nobility” (v. 3). By removing individuals from these groups, Nebuchadnezzar hoped to minimize resistance to his plans and increase allegiance among the populace to his Babylonian rule.

According to verse 4, Israelites who faced deportation were to meet a high standard of physical appearance and intellectual capability. Nebuchadnezzar wanted the cream of the Israelite crop, those who might be able to serve in his royal court. These candidates had to be “youths.” While Nebuchadnezzar did not specify an age, the deportees were almost certainly teenagers, perhaps as young as fourteen. The younger the subject, the longer he could serve in the royal court and the more impressionable he would be to the Babylonian worldview. Nebuchadnezzar wanted deportees to learn the literature and language of the Chaldeans—he wanted to make Babylonians out of these Jews. He wanted to reorient their worship and allegiance.

Nebuchadnezzar’s strategy of Babylonian indoctrination included a predetermined daily menu. He “assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank” (v. 5). The issue of eating and drinking is integral to the drama soon to unfold. In addition to the new location, criteria, and menu of the deportees, Nebuchadnezzar set a three-year timetable for their immersion in all things Babylonian. When that time was fulfilled, they would stand before him for evaluation (v. 18).

Four young men among the deportees are named: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The first is the central character of the book, and the others are his friends. All four are mentioned in chapter 2; only Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah appear in chapter 3; Daniel is featured without his friends throughout the rest of the book.

The young men were of the “tribe of Judah” (1:6). They were not just citizens of the southern kingdom but descendants of the royal tribe. In Genesis 49:10, Jacob said, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet.” Judah was the tribe from which the Messiah would come (Matt. 1:2–3; Heb. 7:14). Now Daniel and his friends were experiencing the demise of Judah. It looked as if the scepter was indeed departing from it. It seemed that a pagan king had seized the ruler’s staff.

The names Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are each connected in some way to either the name Yahweh or the name Elohim. It is significant, then, that a *renaming* accompanied their exile. The new names—Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were each connected to pagan deities. Nebuchadnezzar

explicitly said Daniel was “named Belteshazzar after the name of my god,” Bel (Dan. 4:8). This was part of Nebuchadnezzar’s strategy to make Babylonians out of the Israelite deportees, in both head and heart. The teens faced the challenge of holding fast their devotion to Yahweh in a new place, with new stories to learn and a new language to speak, with a new menu to eat and even new names to bear.

1:8 Daniel resolved not to eat the king’s food or drink his wine. This decision might seem surprising, for up to this point there has been no indication of any resistance to going into exile, receiving the syllabus for Babylonian worldview formation, or learning a new name evoking a Babylonian deity. Perhaps this issue of food and drink was the first thing Daniel could control. He believed partaking of the royal food and drink would be wrong, so he “resolved that he would not defile himself.”

How the king’s food and wine would have defiled Daniel is a disputed question.¹³ Some suggest that the food and wine were first offered to idols, and so Daniel refused to partake because he rejected idolatry. There are, however, two problems with this answer. First, the items he requested as substitutes—vegetables and water (v. 12)—would probably have been offered to the pagan gods as well,¹⁴ and second, later in his servitude Daniel *did* eat meat and drink wine (10:2–3). Another theory is that the food was not kosher. This explanation is unlikely, though, because wine was not forbidden to Israelites. Some scholars posit more specifically that Daniel may have been abstaining from food and wine because of a Nazirite vow (cf. Numbers 6). A prior vow is possible, but the text is not clear that he made one. Another possibility is that Daniel rejected the king’s menu because the food and drink would have been served using temple vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon. Other scholars suggest that Daniel wanted to make it clear to the king that his devotion was ultimately to Yahweh. In the end, Daniel’s rejection of the royal food may have been a personal resolution to maintain his devotion to Yahweh, regardless of who knew of it.

Of these options, the most compelling is the last one. Daniel was maintaining his devotion to Yahweh, and eating and drinking the king’s food and wine would have shown dependence on the king. Daniel had been given a Babylonian name, but that was not unique in Babylon. He was learning the Babylonian literature and language, but those things were part of the cultural milieu. The royal table, though, was unique, and enjoying the king’s food and wine was a distinct privilege closely aligning him with the Babylonian ruler. The problem was not the food or wine itself but the fact that it was *the king’s*. When the food and wine are first mentioned, they are described as “food that *the king* ate” and “wine that *he* drank” (Dan. 1:5). When Daniel wanted to avoid defilement, he would have been defiled “with *the king’s* food” and “with the wine that *he* drank” (v. 8). The chief of the eunuchs reminded Daniel that “*the king*” had “assigned your food and your drink” (v. 10). When Daniel suggested a ten-day test, he referred to “*the king’s* food” (v. 13). After the ten-day test was complete, Daniel and his friends “were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the *king’s* food” (v. 15). Interestingly,

13 Cf. a survey of options in Steinmann, *Daniel*, 99.

14 *Ibid.*, 99.

once the test succeeded, “The steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables” (v. 16), and no reference is made to the items being the king’s. If it is significant that this is the *only* time in chapter 1 that the food and wine are not attributed to the king, the shift was probably due to God’s showing favor on Daniel and his friends during the test.

1:9 Daniel’s request was politically dangerous. Ashpenaz could have reported Daniel to the king for rebelling against royal orders, but there is a different result: “God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.” As in verse 2, God “gave,” highlighting his sovereignty over Daniel’s situation.

1:10 The chief of the eunuchs was honest about his fear. Daniel had asked him to go against the king’s orders, and the penalty for such rebellion could be death. Ashpenaz reasonably enough believed the effects of this different diet would be obvious when Daniel and his friends stood before Nebuchadnezzar for evaluation, and the chief of the eunuchs did not want to appear derelict in his duties.

1:11–13 Although the chief eunuch was too fearful to help Daniel with his request, the steward he had appointed over Daniel and his three friends (v. 11) was more sympathetic. Daniel’s second attempt showed the degree of his boldness and persistence. The steward could have reported Daniel’s words to the king but did not. Though there is no mention of Daniel’s discussing his defilement concerns with his three friends, the reader can reasonably assume they shared his resolve (cf. the resolve they themselves later exhibited; 3:16–18).

Daniel proposed a 10-day test (1:12–13). If the steward permitted a brief season of water and vegetables, he could evaluate the four youths compared to the others and act accordingly. No reason is given for the length of ten days, although obviously the test needed to be long enough to provide a fair physical assessment.¹⁵ If Daniel and his friends appeared better (i.e., fatter) than the other youths after the test was completed, God’s favor could be the only reason. Daniel was so confident of God’s faithfulness during this impending test that he told the steward to “deal with your servants according to what you see” (v. 13): the steward could, if necessary, put them on the royal diet like everyone else or even deal harshly with them in some other way.

1:14 Although the idea of God’s “favor” is not repeated in this verse (cf. v. 9), that the steward “listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days” (v. 14) was evidence of God’s blessing upon the young men. God had preserved them during the besieging of Jerusalem, through their exile to Babylon, through the expression of resistance to royal orders, and now through their ten-day test.

1:15 When ten days had passed, Daniel and his three friends surpassed not just some of their fellow deportees but also “all the youths who ate the king’s food.”

¹⁵ The use of “ten days” in verse 12 may explain why the same timespan appears in Revelation 2:10 in the letter to the church in Smyrna. The believers would be “tested . . . for ten days.”

This vindication foreshadowed the fates of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in later narratives.

1:16 Without consulting Nebuchadnezzar, the steward made the decision to take away “their food and the wine they were to drink” and substitute vegetables. This response fulfilled Daniel’s request in verse 13: “Deal with your servants according to what you see.” It is also possible that the steward removed the king’s food and wine from *everyone*, with “their” (v. 16) referring to “all the youths who ate the king’s food” (v. 15).

1:17–20 Once again “God gave” (cf. vv. 2, 9). He gave the four youths “learning and skill in all literature and wisdom” (v. 17), fulfilling Nebuchadnezzar’s hope for the young exiles. The Babylonian program of indoctrination focused on the literature and language of the Chaldeans, as well as on being skillful in wisdom and knowledge (v. 4). God gave the four young men exactly what they needed in order to have favor with the king. Daniel received from God “understanding in all visions and dreams” (v. 17). This endowment would be integral to the following stories, for Daniel would relay and interpret royal dreams and would see visions directly from God.

The three-year Babylonian education ended, and Nebuchadnezzar ordered that all of the exiled youths be brought before him (v. 18). He evaluated the four young men (v. 19) with tests of wisdom and understanding, and in every matter the king “found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom” (v. 20). The four surpassed not just their Babylonian schoolmates but even the Babylonian seers!

In finding them “ten times better,” Nebuchadnezzar echoes the earlier use of the number “ten” in the passage: Daniel’s suggesting the test for “ten days” (v. 12), the report that the steward tested Daniel and his friends for “ten days” (v. 14), and the announcing of the end of “ten days” (v. 15). Nebuchadnezzar’s estimation of the four as “ten times better” reminds the reader that God was behind their flourishing.

1:21 Like the opening of the chapter, this final verse mentions a king and a year of his reign. While verse 1 informed the reader that Nebuchadnezzar exiled Daniel in the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign (605 BC), verse 21 tells us “Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.” Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon in 539 BC, and Daniel “was there” until that time. This probably means that Daniel served Babylonian kings in the royal court until that time. If Daniel was deported as a teenager in 605, and if the “first year of King Cyrus” (v. 21) was 539, then Daniel served the royal court into his eighties. He showed decades of faithfulness as an exiled worshiper of Yahweh.

Response

The opening verses of Daniel anchor the book in history. The narration of the book’s events should lead a charitable reader to believe their historicity and

theological significance. In a dark and troubled period on Israel's timeline, many Israelites were exiled and their temple and city ransacked. When "all around . . . gives way," Yahweh must remain "our hope and stay."

Our resolve to worship God matters because we too are exiles, redeemed from the slavery of sin but not yet home. A transformed creation awaits us, but for now voices all around us beckon our time, money, and allegiance. The snare of idolatry may be nearer than we imagine. The challenge is to be transformed in our minds instead of conformed to the pattern of this world (Rom. 12:2). We need a devotion to Yahweh purified by the heat of testing and suffering. Our passion for God does not exempt us from pain. The comforting bedrock of God's sovereignty implies we must be willing, for the sake of Christ, to take up our cross. Commitment to Christ is not something we should pursue only when it is convenient, politically correct, or socially acceptable. Daniel reminds us that God's people face opposition, and when they do they must endure with faith in him, believing in both his promises and his ability to keep those promises according to his sovereign will.

The resolve of Daniel and his friends at such a young age was especially remarkable. Their allegiance to God would have been taught them by their parents. Christian parents must be mindful and purposeful in the task of training up their children in the way of the Lord (Deut. 6:4–8; Proverbs 1–9; Eph. 6:4). Away from their home and families, Daniel and his three friends walked steadfastly in righteousness. While Ashpenaz feared Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1:10), the Jewish youths feared *God*. A true fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7). We must pass on the faith "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) and seek to fortify in others a biblical worldview.

Part of a biblical worldview is the awareness that God's people will suffer hardship. While the faith of Daniel and his friends resulted in blessing and favor before others, obedience does not mean things will always turn out well from an earthly perspective. A biblical worldview accepts that God can deliver from death or *through* death, yet obedience is called for—no matter the cost. Daniel 1 is not a chapter about dieting; it is about the courage to live out biblical conviction when compromise would be much easier. We are tempted to compromise because we are sinners, and sinners need a Savior. We are tempted by idols because our hearts are rebellious, and such idolatrous hearts need to behold an all-surpassing Treasure. Daniel believed Yahweh was better than Babylon and anything it could offer.

Daniel and his three friends, and even Nebuchadnezzar and his successors, were characters in an unfolding story that was heading somewhere, and to Someone. One day another young man who loved God with all his heart would come into history. He would be in his Father's house, teaching and amazing those who would listen. Jesus would walk in faithfulness, more so than even Daniel and his friends, and he would be wiser than anyone else who had ever lived. The work he accomplished on the cross would herald a return from deepest exile—captivity to sin and death. This one from Judah's tribe would take up the scepter and reign forever.

DANIEL 2:1–49

2 In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. ²Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. ³And the king said to them, “I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.” ⁴Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, ¹“O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.” ⁵The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, “The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. ⁶But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation.” ⁷They answered a second time and said, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation.” ⁸The king answered and said, “I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm— ⁹if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation.” ¹⁰The Chaldeans answered the king and said, “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king’s demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. ¹¹The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

¹²Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. ¹³So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. ¹⁴Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁵He declared² to Arioch, the king’s captain, “Why is the decree of the king so urgent?” Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. ¹⁶And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.

¹⁷Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. ²⁰Daniel answered and said:

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.

- 21 He changes times and seasons;
 he removes kings and sets up kings;
 he gives wisdom to the wise
 and knowledge to those who have understanding;
- 22 he reveals deep and hidden things;
 he knows what is in the darkness,
 and the light dwells with him.
- 23 To you, O God of my fathers,
 I give thanks and praise,
 for you have given me wisdom and might,
 and have now made known to me what we asked of you,
 for you have made known to us the king's matter."

²⁴Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation."

²⁵Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him: "I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation." ²⁶The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?" ²⁷Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, ²⁸but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: ²⁹To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. ³⁰But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

³¹"You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. ³²The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, ³³its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ³⁵Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶"This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. ³⁷You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, ³⁸and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. ³⁹Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it

shall break and crush all these. ⁴¹ And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. ⁴² And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³ As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage,³ but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. ⁴⁴ And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, ⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. ⁴⁷ The king answered and 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." ⁴⁸ Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹ Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.

¹The text from this point to the end of chapter 7 is in Aramaic ²Aramaic *answered and said*; also verse 26

³Aramaic *by the seed of men*

Section Overview

King Nebuchadnezzar demands that his magicians and enchanters reveal his troubling dream and then its interpretation, but they cannot fulfill his request (2:1–11). The king decrees their deaths, which means Daniel and his friends are in danger as well (vv. 12–13). Daniel prays that God would reveal the dream (vv. 14–23), and, armed with God-given knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation, Daniel relays them to the king (vv. 24–45). Nebuchadnezzar has dreamed of a statue made of various elements (vv. 31–35), with the different elements representing a succession of kingdoms beginning with Babylon (vv. 36–45). Nebuchadnezzar honors Daniel and promotes him and his three companions (vv. 46–49).

Section Outline

- II. Aramaic Chiasm: Kingdoms, Deliverance, and Judgment (2:1–7:28)
 - A. Vision of Four Kingdoms Preceding an Eternal Kingdom (2:1–49)
 - 1. Nebuchadnezzar Responds to His Dream (2:1–2)
 - 2. Babylonian Wise Men Fail to Convey the Dream and Interpretation (2:3–13)
 - 3. Daniel Speaks with the Captain of the Guard (2:14–16)

4. Daniel Praises God for Answering His Prayer
(2:17–23)
- 3'. Daniel Speaks with the Captain of the Guard (2:24–25)
- 2'. Daniel Succeeds in Conveying the Dream and
Interpretation (2:26–45)
- 1'. Nebuchadnezzar Responds to Daniel's Interpretation
(2:46–49)

The chapter begins and ends with the king's responses. Nebuchadnezzar is troubled by his dream and summons Babylonian wise men (1), and later he honors and promotes Daniel for his ability to meet the royal request (1'). Sections 2 and 2' contrast the Babylonian wise men with Daniel: court magicians and enchanters cannot relay the king's dream, but Daniel does. On two occasions Daniel speaks with Arioch, the captain of the king's guard (3 and 3'), while the center of the chiasm (4) recounts Daniel's praise to God for answering his prayer.

The structure of the chapter showcases Daniel's praise, as his themes are integral to the rest of the book. Wisdom and might belong to God (v. 20); he is sovereign over kings and kingdoms (v. 21); he reveals mysteries (v. 22); and he is worthy of thanks and praise (v. 23). This exaltation of God's sovereignty and power is important for the interpretation Daniel will relay to Nebuchadnezzar, as the succession of kingdoms will occur according to a divine timetable and toward a consummation exalting God's kingdom over all.

Daniel 2 is part of a greater design extending through chapter 7. This section of six chapters is in Aramaic rather than Hebrew and is arranged chiasmically:

- Daniel 2—Vision of Four Kingdoms Preceding an Eternal Kingdom
- Daniel 3—Divine Deliverance from Death
- Daniel 4—Judgment on Royal Arrogance
- Daniel 5—Judgment on Royal Arrogance
- Daniel 6—Divine Deliverance from Death
- Daniel 7—Vision of Four Kingdoms Preceding an Eternal Kingdom

Beginning with Daniel 8, the language returns to Hebrew. Since Aramaic was the language of Babylon, the switch from Hebrew to Aramaic at 2:4 may symbolize exile in a foreign land, while the return to Hebrew at 8:1 may represent the promise of return from exile.¹⁶ The change in languages may also be a structural device creating interlocking chiasms.¹⁷

Comment

2:1 Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon, and the following events occurred in his “second year.” This year may seem out of chronological order, for at the end of the previous chapter Daniel and his friends had already completed three years

¹⁶ Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven*, 78.

¹⁷ Cf. Steinmann, *Daniel*, 21–25.

of training and education. According to the Babylonian system, however, a king's partial accession year was not counted among the years of his reign.¹⁸ The "second year" thus refers to two years after the accession year. Nebuchadnezzar's second year spanned from Nisan 1, 603 BC, to the end of Adar 602 (March 22, 603–April 9, 602).

Shortly after the four Judean teens completed their Babylonian education (1:18–19), during his second regnal year in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar "had dreams," with a twofold effect: "his spirit was troubled" and "his sleep left him." He was unsettled by what he saw and did not understand its meaning. This would be especially frustrating for a king who thought that perhaps the gods were revealing something to him about the future of his kingdom.

2:2 The king may have waited until daytime to summon his experts, but since verse 1 reports that "his sleep left him," his summons may have occurred at night. His wise men consisted of "the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers," with "the Chaldeans" encompassing all of them. He commanded them to "tell . . . his dreams."

2:3–4 Nebuchadnezzar disclosed that he had a dream, whose possible interpretations troubled him (v. 3). The wise men in his court spoke to him in Aramaic (v. 4), and from that point through chapter 7, the book of Daniel switches from Hebrew to Aramaic. The men spoke typical ancient Near Eastern words of deference ("O king, live forever!"), perhaps reflecting a prayer servants prayed on behalf of their ruler. Their next statement parsed the situation carefully: first Nebuchadnezzar should tell them the dream, and then they would interpret it (v. 4).

2:5–6 Nebuchadnezzar rejected the terms of the wise men. He wanted them to recount both the dream *and* the interpretation. Only then could he find them trustworthy. If they failed to meet his demand, they and their households would be destroyed, but if they met his demand, Nebuchadnezzar promised "gifts and rewards and great honor."

2:7 Despite the threat to their lives, the wise men again asked to be told the dream's content (cf. v. 4). At this point, it is evident they will not meet the king's demand. Indeed, they *cannot*. Inventing the interpretation would not necessarily have exposed them as liars, but any attempt to describe the king's dream would instantly discredit them. The king was not one to make idle threats (cf. his treatment of Zedekiah in 2 Kings 25:6–7). Their only hope was that Nebuchadnezzar would change his mind and disclose his dream.

2:8–9 Nebuchadnezzar accused the wise men of trying to "gain time" out of fear of his "firm" word of judgment. He also accused them of agreeing to "speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change." This changing of the times probably refers to the transition of rulers or even kingdoms, for Nebuchadnezzar certainly would *not* live forever (cf. v. 4).

¹⁸ Ibid., 111–112.

2:10–11 In view of Nebuchadnezzar’s troubled spirit (vv. 1, 3), warnings of destruction (v. 5, 9a), and accusations of flattery (v. 9b), the wise men declared the impossibility of what he demanded. Note the comprehensive phrases: “There is not a man on earth,” “no great and powerful king has asked such a thing,” “. . . any magician or enchanter or Chaldean” (v. 10). They not only admitted their inability to describe the king’s dream; they also claimed his demand was unprecedented.

Did Nebuchadnezzar himself think such a request was reasonable? Perhaps his encounter with Daniel, who had “understanding in all visions and dreams” (1:17), and who along with his three friends was “better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all [the] kingdom” (v. 20), had given Nebuchadnezzar unrealistic expectations of his own band of astrologers and magicians.

After 2:11, the wise men fall silent, making their final words in this verse significant and ironic: “. . . the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.” The notion of gods dwelling with mortals may have seemed inconceivable in Babylonian lore, but the stories in Israel’s history painted a much different picture. From the beginning of Israel’s Scriptures, Yahweh was a God who dwelled with his people. He was in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:15–25; 3:8), his glory filled the tabernacle the Israelites carried to the Promised Land (Ex. 40:34–38), and he indwelt the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:1–11). The story of the world’s true Lord is that of a God who dwells with flesh. In the outworking of God’s redemptive plan, one day the Word himself would not only *dwell* with flesh but *become* flesh (John 1:14).

2:12–13 The inability of the king’s wise men did not alter Nebuchadnezzar’s threat, nor did their admission of their inability quell his anger. Full of fury, and in fulfillment of verses 5 and 9, Nebuchadnezzar “commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed” (v. 12). This decree of death extended to *all* the wise men of Babylon, including Daniel and his companions (v. 13).

2:14–15 With the decree of destruction hanging over him, Daniel proceeded “with prudence and discretion.” We saw this attitude in chapter 1, when Daniel interacted with Ashpenaz and the steward (1:8–13). Now, Daniel spoke with Arioch, “captain of the king’s guard.” Arioch “had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon,” so speaking with him could have posed a danger, even though Daniel believed Arioch was the right man to answer his question: “Why is the decree of the king so urgent?”

Daniel’s question revealed that he was unaware of what had taken place between Nebuchadnezzar and his cohort. Though Daniel had completed three years of training, he had not become a sorcerer, magician, or enchanter (cf. 2:2); such positions would have compromised his devotion to Yahweh. He would serve the king when summoned (1:19; 2:2), but he had not spoken with Nebuchadnezzar about the recent dream (2:1).

2:16 Daniel went into the presence of the king and requested an appointment. How he gained access is not reported, but the reason for his request is not surprising:

“that he might show the interpretation to the king.” This was an act of faith, for Daniel did not even have knowledge of the dream. Apparently he was persuasive, because he left the palace alive.

2:17–18 After meeting with the king about an appointed time to give the dream’s interpretation (cf. v. 16), Daniel returned to his house and “made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions.” If the three friends were at the house already, this may indicate that the four shared a home together. Or perhaps when the decree of destruction went out (vv. 12–13), Daniel and his companions gathered together in his home.

Daniel told his friends to “seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery,” so that they might not be killed with “the rest of the wise men of Babylon.” Daniel hoped for deliverance from Nebuchadnezzar’s rage, and God, as the God “of heaven,” was the only one who could help them in this earthly predicament.

2:19 God answered Daniel and his friends’ prayer. Daniel received his vision “at night,” just as Nebuchadnezzar’s dream had come (v. 1). It is not clear whether Daniel was asleep or awake, as God gives visions during both states (cf. 7:1; 9:20–23); possibly Daniel and his friends remained fervent in prayer until God granted understanding.

Daniel responded to God’s answer with words of exaltation (2:19–23). “God of heaven” (cf. v. 18) is the transcendent Creator who has shown favor to Daniel and his friends. God’s power and wisdom are not restricted to the boundaries of the Promised Land; with global jurisdiction, God is involved in the affairs of his people wherever they find themselves. “God of heaven” recalls Genesis 24:7, where Abraham remembered how Yahweh, “the God of heaven,” took him “from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred.”¹⁹ This connects faithful Daniel to the foremost patriarch. Daniel trusted in the God of Abraham, who had once again removed a man from his father’s house and homeland, this time through exile. God took Abraham *to* the Promised Land, but he took Daniel *from* it. If God were only the God of Jerusalem, Daniel would have no hope. But God is the God *of heaven*, and so to him Daniel prayed, offering thanks and praise.

2:20–23 Daniel transitioned from petition to praise. To God belong “wisdom and might” (v. 20)—the true and living God knows the future and brings to pass what he has planned. Verses 21–22 illustrate God’s “wisdom and might,” although in reverse order—verse 21a concerning his might and verses 21b–22 his wisdom. God’s might is seen in that “he changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings” (v. 21). The second phrase interprets the first: the transition of rulers and kingdoms is what Daniel meant by “times and seasons.” God is sovereign over all powers and authorities on earth—even Nebuchadnezzar—and is not limited only to those who worship him. He determines *who* is in power and *when*.

¹⁹ In the Pentateuch, the title “God of heaven” occurs only in Genesis 24:3 and 24:7. The first reference has a longer version, “the God of heaven and God of the earth,” while the second reference has only “the God of heaven.”

Daniel also praised God because “he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him” (vv. 21b–22). God gave Daniel wisdom and knowledge regarding the king’s dream and its interpretation—Daniel needed to know “the mystery” (v. 19), so God revealed the “deep and hidden things” by taking “what is in the darkness” and making it known.

The final verse of Daniel’s blessing to God (v. 23) pulls together the elements of verses 20–22. He calls Yahweh “O God of my fathers,” indicating continuity with his faithful ancestors, especially the patriarchs—the “God of heaven” was the “God of my fathers” (vv. 19, 23). To him Daniel offered “thanks and praise,” words unpacking what he meant by “Blessed be the name of God” (v. 20). Daniel explained explicitly why he praised the God of heaven: “You have . . . made known to me what we asked of you” (v. 23). The plural (“what *we* asked”) confirms that Daniel’s friends also sought God’s mercy through prayer (vv. 17–18).

The doxology is not only the structural center in chapter 2 (cf. Section Outline above) but also its theological center, and, in fact, God’s sovereignty and wisdom surge like mighty rivers throughout the whole book and figure in other biblical doxologies that praise his might and wisdom (cf. 1 Chron. 29:11; Rom. 11:33–36).

2:24 Ready to disclose his life-saving knowledge, “Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon.” This is their second encounter in this chapter (cf. v. 15). Earlier, Daniel had gone before the king directly (v. 16), but the reason for now going to Arioch is suggested in his opening words: “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon” (v. 24). Daniel perhaps feared that, if he went to Nebuchadnezzar first, the king would not get word out to Arioch in time to spare the Babylonian wise men from death. Since the remainder of chapter 2 does not report the destruction of the wise men, it is reasonable to assume that Daniel’s success resulted in everyone’s survival.

2:25 The harshness and urgency of the king’s decree warranted haste. Arioch rushed Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar’s presence and announced the breaking news: “I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation.” Arioch’s claim may have overstated his own role in the situation, for it was not Arioch who discovered Daniel but Daniel who sought Arioch. Calling Daniel “a man” was especially ironic, since earlier the king’s wise men insisted that no one “except the gods” could grant the king’s request (v. 11).

2:26 We are reminded that Daniel was also known as Belteshazzar, the name the chief of the eunuchs had given him (1:7) because the king had chosen it (5:12) in honor of his own god (4:8). Nebuchadnezzar calls Daniel that name in a later story (4:9, 18).

Daniel had previously gone to Nebuchadnezzar to request an appointment, “that he might show the interpretation to the king” (2:16). Now Daniel has returned, so the king’s question is appropriate: “Are you able to make known to

me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?” Nebuchadnezzar had made the same request of the Babylonian wise men, who had failed him (vv. 10–11). The king did not lower his expectation at this juncture.

2:27–29 Daniel spoke to Nebuchadnezzar at length (vv. 27–45). First he asserted that God had revealed the mystery to him (vv. 27–30); then he told the king the dream (vv. 31–35) and interpreted it (vv. 36–45).

Daniel began by reminding the king that none of his wise men fulfilled what he had asked (v. 27). In contrast to human inability, however, “There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries”; this God had “made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days”; and Daniel was ready to recount it to the king (v. 28). “Latter days” indicated that Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of future events pertaining to kingdoms beyond Babylon (cf. vv. 37–45).

Verse 29 has the same general content as verse 28, only reversed. In verse 28 Daniel spoke about both a God “who reveals mysteries” and the fact that the king had the visions in bed. In verse 29 Daniel said the vision came while the king was in bed and then characterized God as “he who reveals mysteries.” The notion of the “latter days” in verse 28 is repackaged with the phrases “what would be after this” and “what is to be” in verse 29. The semantic and conceptual connections in verses 28 and 29 reinforce that the God of heaven has done what mere man cannot do: reveal details concerning the future (cf. Rev. 1:19).

2:30 After saying that God had revealed the future to Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 2:28–29), Daniel now claimed to know this mystery, as well as a divinely revealed interpretation of it, “that you may know the thoughts of your mind.” Daniel knew the dream “not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living,” an admission that may have surprised Nebuchadnezzar, for he had evaluated Daniel very highly at the end of his three-year education (1:19–20). As Daniel now prepared to tell the dream and its interpretation, he did not seize the opportunity for self-exaltation.

2:31–35 Daniel made a general statement about the dream: “You saw, O king, . . . a great image.” This image is the subject of the rest of Daniel’s monologue. It was “mighty and of exceeding brightness,” and “its appearance was frightening” (v. 31). This intimidating image was a man composed of several metals, and Daniel began at the top of the image as he described it: a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, middle and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay (vv. 32–33). The body parts can be distilled into four sections, with their corresponding elements (table 1.1).

Then Daniel related what happened to the image: a stone, “cut out by no human hand,” struck the image on the feet and broke them (v. 34). The whole statue was affected, for “the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces” (v. 35a). The list of metals is now in reverse order, ascending from feet to head. The shattering was so thorough that the pieces “became

like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found” (v. 35b)—an image of divine judgment (cf. Ps. 1:4). No part of the image could endure the stone, which “became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:35c). This worldwide dominion was something ascribed to no other metal or body part—the metals were all vulnerable, but the stone was invincible.

TABLE 1.1: Body Parts of the Daniel 2 Image

Body Part(s):	Made of:
Head	Gold
Chest and Arms	Silver
Middle and Thighs	Bronze
Legs and Feet	Iron and Clay

2:36 With the words “This was the dream,” Daniel signaled that the time had now come for the interpretation. Since the king had not questioned any detail of the retelling, Daniel had succeeded in part one of his task.

2:37–38 Daniel spoke to Nebuchadnezzar in honorific ways: “O king,” “king of kings,” who possessed “the kingdom, the power, the might, and the glory.” Daniel acknowledged that Babylon was strong and imposing, formidable to those who looked on, yet he gave even greater honor where it was due, referring to the king as the one “to whom the God of heaven has given” and “into whose hand he has given” these things. Nebuchadnezzar held power over a vast and strong kingdom only by God’s sovereign plan. Into Nebuchadnezzar’s “hand,” God gave “the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all.” This “God of heaven” ruled the rulers.

The language of verse 38 recalls the sixth day of creation: “Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen. 1:26). As an image-bearer of God, Nebuchadnezzar was a kind of Adam, charged with the creation mandate—even though he would not be a faithful image-bearer, exercising dominion for his own glory and exaltation (cf. Dan. 3:1–7).

At the end of 2:38, Nebuchadnezzar received the first identification of a metal from the image in his dream: “You are the head of gold.” The head of gold represented the Babylonian kingdom corporately and Nebuchadnezzar in particular.

2:39a Because of the clarity of Daniel’s interpretation, the gold head is the least debated element of the image. The next words, however, divide scholars, as Daniel moves from the present to the future: “Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you.”

This second kingdom (the silver chest and arms; v. 32) refers either to only the Medes or to the Medes and Persians together.²⁰ Our decision on this issue will affect our interpretation of the rest of the image, as the kingdoms in view are successive. If the silver chest and arms is the Median kingdom only, then the third kingdom (v. 39b) is Persia, but if the second kingdom is understood as the Medo-Persian Empire, then the third is most likely Greece. Because upcoming visions in the book of Daniel will incorporate multiple kingdoms that correspond to those in chapter 2, the decision made here will affect the interpretation of later portions of the book.

“Another kingdom inferior to you” probably refers to the Medo-Persian (or simply Persian) kingdom. It conquered Babylon in 539 BC and remained in power until 331 BC. A progression from Babylon to Persia in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision is reasonable because Babylon fell not to the Medes but to the Persians, eleven years after the Persians had absorbed the Median Empire (c. 550 BC). Nevertheless, the Medes continued to play an important role in the Persian Empire, and the Greeks frequently referred to Persians as “Medes,” until the fourth century BC.

2:39b Daniel continued his interpretation with the next element: “a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.” In 331 BC, the Medo-Persians fell to the Greeks, headed by Alexander the Great. The comprehensive description of an empire to “rule over all the earth” denotes the vast reach and greatness of the Greek kingdom, which reigned until 146 BC.

2:40–43 After the Greeks came the Romans.²¹ Rome was the fourth kingdom in the king’s vision and received the most detail: it would be “strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these” (v. 40). The description is of a triumphant empire, seemingly undefeatable, obliterating its opponents with the strength of iron. Yet Rome was not invincible: “As you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay” (v. 41). The legs were of iron (v. 33) but rested on feet of iron and clay. This mixture denotes division, and division means vulnerability: “As the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle” (v. 42). Daniel sees that “they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay” (v. 43). The meaning of “mix with one another in marriage” is unclear, but seems to refer to intermarriage between ethnicities, perhaps specifically royal intermarriages, creating instability in the empire.

Table 1.2 distills the sections of the image, their corresponding metals, and the kingdoms they represent.

²⁰ Some scholars believe, however, that the number four represents completeness and that, rather than referring to specific historical empires, the four-part statue provides a global perspective on world history.

²¹ Christian fathers like Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen, and Eusebius identified the four kingdoms as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, so there is precedent early in church history for the interpretation argued above.

TABLE 1.2: Kingdoms Represented by the Daniel 2 Image

Body Part(s):	Made of:	Kingdom:
Head	Gold	Babylon
Chest, Arms	Silver	Medo-Persia
Middle, Thighs	Bronze	Greece
Legs, Feet	Iron and Clay	Rome

2:44–45 “The days of those kings” refers to the fourth empire (Rome), which saw a succession of kings (emperors) for several centuries.²² In contrast to the four kingdoms of verses 31–43, which all proved to be temporary, God’s kingdom “shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever” (v. 44). God’s kingdom shall prevail, “just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold” (v. 45).

Note that the rock/mountain was not a part of the four-part image. The Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman kingdoms were purely of this world, while the “stone was cut out by no human hand” (v. 34). It was heavenly in origin and eternal in duration (v. 44), representing a fifth kingdom superior to the previous four.

Jesus reimaged this stone/mountain metaphor when he spoke of God’s kingdom as “a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Matt. 13:31–32). God’s kingdom starts small and grows, much like the stone that became a great mountain and filled the earth (Dan. 2:35). The prominence of God’s rule is depicted similarly in Isaiah: “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it” (Isa. 2:2).

Jesus identified himself as the “stone” from Daniel’s interpretation in a parable about wicked tenants. In Luke 20:17, he cited Psalm 118:22 (“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”; cf. Isa. 8:14; 28:16) and then said, “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him” (Luke 20:18), alluding to Daniel 2:34–35, 44–45.

Having completed the interpretation, Daniel reminded Nebuchadnezzar, “A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this” (v. 45). And because the God of heaven made all of this known, “The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

²² Steinmann rightly warns that if the fourth kingdom were interpreted to be Greece, “Daniel’s prophecy would be false prophecy, not to be honored or believed” (*Daniel*, 137), for God’s kingdom (represented by the crushing rock) was established not during the Greek Empire but during the Roman.

2:46–48 Nebuchadnezzar responded to Daniel’s recounting of his dream and its interpretation. First he “fell upon his face”—perhaps because he was grateful or overwhelmed or fearful—“and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him” (v. 46). Nebuchadnezzar intended to honor Daniel with the offering and incense, not to worship him. He may have spoken other words to Daniel, but all that is recorded is his marveling at the greatness of Daniel’s God. Although the titles “God of gods” and “Lord of kings” (v. 47) denote prominence and superiority, the nature of this confession must not be pressed too far. Nebuchadnezzar was duly impressed with what Daniel did, and more so with what Daniel’s God could do, but this was not yet an embrace of monotheism.

The final response to Daniel’s interpretation involved high honors and promotion (v. 48a). His “gifts” probably consisted of material rewards, and in addition to granting these, the king also “made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon” (v. 48b). He was now chief adviser to the king! Earlier in the chapter, Daniel’s life was in danger (v. 13). Now, he not only was spared from death but also had ascended in rank under Nebuchadnezzar’s authority. Daniel had prospered under God’s favor.

2:49 From his new position, Daniel made a request for the sake of his friends. The king “appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon,” while “Daniel remained at the king’s court.” Like Daniel, his companions had once been under a royal decree of death (v. 13), but now they have ascended to a new rank. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego became overseers in the province, which probably implied managerial duties over the citizenry. The first chapter ended with the king granting Daniel and his three friends a standing in his court (1:19, 21), and the second chapter ends with even greater positions (2:48–49). This pattern of faithfulness resulting in blessing or promotion will be repeated in chapters 3, 5, and 6.

The cycle of Daniel’s life thus far (being taken to a foreign country, remaining faithful to Yahweh, becoming an adviser to a pagan ruler, interpreting a ruler’s dreams, being promoted within the kingdom) is reminiscent of Joseph’s. As God did not abandon Joseph, he has not abandoned Daniel. Rather, God is with Daniel and his people in Babylonian captivity. Further, the Egyptian captivity ended with an exodus when God later raised up a deliverer. Daniel, a new Joseph, is in Babylonian captivity, and another exodus is perhaps in store.

Response

The God of the Bible is the Lord of history and ruler over all authorities. Believers should eagerly affirm Daniel’s words of praise: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belongs wisdom and might” (2:20), for God appoints all rulers (v. 21), while he alone possesses “deep and hidden things,” which he may make known (vv. 22–23). We should be humble before this wise and sovereign God. Like Nebuchadnezzar, who “fell upon his face” before Daniel (v. 46), a bowed heart

should be the worshiper's posture before God. God's kingdom shall stand forever, so he alone is worthy of worship and exaltation.

More than merely predicting the future, God ordains what is to come. He is able to make known to Daniel the coming kingdoms because he has purposed the times and sequence of their arrival. According to God's redemptive plan, during the reign of the fourth kingdom (the Roman Empire) he would inaugurate an eternal kingdom through the stone, which we learn in the NT is Jesus Christ. The coming of Jesus is the greatest revelation God has ever made. Although the Babylonian wise men claimed that "the gods[] . . . dwelling is not with flesh" (v. 11), the modern-day reader of Daniel now knows that the true and living God, who dwelt with Israel in the OT, tabernacled with mankind in the most profound and intimate way when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Six hundred years passed between the Babylonian head of gold (Dan. 2:32) and the stone "cut out by no human hand" (v. 34). Through every century, God's hand has guided the events of history and the powers in charge. He has bestowed political might according to his sovereign purpose (vv. 37–38) and has removed kingdoms and set up new ones at his pleasure. As Isaiah said,

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as the dust on the scales;
behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. . . .
All the nations are as nothing before him,
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness."
(Isa. 40:15, 17)

The God of heaven and earth transcends all he has made, yet he dwells with man. The original readers of the book of Daniel were to trust in this God and remain faithful to him. Although the Medo-Persians (the second kingdom; Dan. 2:32) were ruling when Daniel finished his book, two other kingdoms were still to come (vv. 39–43). The devotion of God's people would be tested and tried under future kingdoms and rulers, but the God of gods and Lord of kings and revealer of mysteries (v. 47) was constant and sure and could deliver his people from death and even through it.

Nebuchadnezzar may have been impressed by the ability of Daniel's God when compared to the silent deities of the Babylonian wise men (vv. 10–11, 47), but Isaiah asks the right questions in view of God's comprehensive control across every moment of time—past, present, and future:

To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him? . . .
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.”
(Isa. 40:18, 28–29)

Believers must do what Daniel and his friends did, no matter the trial or ruler or century: plead for his wisdom, trust his timing, depend on his strength, and remain faithful. Persecution and death, rather than promotion, may come. Still, Yahweh is the everlasting God, and he has all the strength the weary soul will need. By grace, the believer will affirm the words of Paul: “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

DANIEL 3:1–30

3 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits¹ and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ²Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” ⁷Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshipped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁸Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. ⁹They declared² to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! ¹⁰You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. ¹¹And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. ¹²There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Designed to help the church understand and apply the overarching storyline of the Bible, the ESV Expository Commentary series is broadly accessible, theologically enriching, and pastorally wise. It features clear, crisp, and Christ-centered exposition and application from a team of respected pastor-theologians.

With exegetically sound, broadly reformed, biblical-theological, passage-by-passage commentary, this volume was written to help pastors and Bible readers around the world understand the riches of God's Word.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Mitchell L. Chase (Daniel)

George M. Schwab Sr. (Hosea)

Allan Harman (Joel)

Michael G. McKelvey (Amos)

Max Rogland (Obadiah)

Jay Sklar (Jonah)

Stephen G. Dempster (Micah)

Daniel C. Timmer (Nahum)

David G. Firth (Habakkuk)

Jason S. DeRouchie (Zephaniah)

Michael Stead (Haggai)

Anthony R. Petterson (Zechariah)

Eric Ortlund (Malachi)

“The ESV Expository Commentary is one of the best, most useful building blocks for a Bible teacher's basic library.”

PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN

President, Wheaton College

“It warms my heart to know this series is being provided to the church, with the intention to bless the nations with access to faithful, solid exposition of the Scriptures.”

IAN CHEW

Pastor, Kay Poh Road Baptist Church, Singapore

“The ESV Expository Commentary series is truly a treasure of outstanding biblical exposition and thoughtful biblical theology.”

DAVID S. DOCKERY

President, Trinity International University, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“Sheer exposition! This is a commentary I will refer to often in my study and preparation.”

AJITH FERNANDO

Teaching Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka

EDITORS:

IAIN M. DUGUID (PhD, University of Cambridge) is professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary and pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Glenside, Pennsylvania.

JAMES M. HAMILTON JR. (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is professor of biblical theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and preaching pastor at Kenwood Baptist Church.

JAY SKLAR (PhD, University of Gloucestershire) is professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary.

DANIEL – MALACHI
COMMENTARY / OLD TESTAMENT