SERVICE AND SUBVERSION IN THE COURT OF THE KING: AN ANALYSIS OF RESISTANCE AND ACCOMODATION TO FOREIGN IMPERIAL RULE IN DANIEL 2

By

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DISCLAIMER

The beliefs and conclusions presented in this thesis are not necessarily those of the administration of Oral Roberts University, the Graduate School of Theology and Ministry, or the faculty.

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ABSTRACT

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Service and Subversion in the Court of the King: An Analysis of Resistance and Accommodation to Foreign Imperial Rule in Daniel

William L. Lyons, Ph.D.

Many scholars and laypersons alike turn to the book of Daniel because of its political message. Yet, there exist a number of mutually exclusive interpretations of the stories in Daniel, particularly in regard to how these stories interact with and depict foreign imperial rule. This thesis will focus on one Daniel story in particular, Daniel 2; and will seek to answer the following question: Is the political stance toward foreign imperial rule in Daniel 2 primarily one of accommodation to the empire, one of resistance, or a hybridization of the two?

This thesis will begin in chapter 1 with an introduction to the problem of Daniel 2's political stance toward foreign imperial rule. Chapter 2 will provide helpful background information for the book of Daniel generally and Daniel 2 in particular, followed by an exegetical analysis of Daniel 2:1–23. Chapter 3 will conclude the exegetical portion of this thesis, by providing an analysis of Daniel 2:24–49. Finally, chapter 4 will analyze and interpret the findings from the exegetical analysis, in order to determine Daniel 2's stance toward foreign imperial rule. Chapter 4 will also offer application for the Church universal, and specifically, the American Church.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Saralyn, who has encouraged me, and has inspired me to search the Scriptures intently, that I might better understand and practice its vision for justice and peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank both Dr. William L. Lyons and Dr. David K. Hebert for their great help in the writing of this thesis. I also wish to thank my parents, Kevin and Nicole Wagner, both of whom instilled in me a love for the Bible at a young age. Thanks also to my pastor and my friend, Daniel McIntosh, whose teachings on the "stone that was cut from the mountain not with hands," which represents the indestructible kingdom of God (Dan 2:44–45), have stirred within me a desire for said kingdom, and have reminded me that the kingdoms of this world are not ultimate. I also want to thank my wonderful wife Saralyn Olson-Wagner, who has encouraged me throughout the entire process of researching for and writing this thesis, and whose commitment to justice on behalf of the marginalized and dispossessed has always inspired me to find within the pages of Scripture calls for social change, peace, justice, and, at times, stiff resistance to the powers that be. Finally, above all, I want to thank God, to whom belongs all "wisdom and power," and who "changes times and turns, removing kings and establishing kings" (Dan 2:20–21).

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CHAPTER 1

RESISTANCE OR ACCOMMODATION TO FOREIGN IMPERIAL RULE IN DANIEL 2?

Background and Statement of the Problem

Is the political stance toward foreign imperial rule in Daniel 2[1] primarily one of accommodation to the empire, one of resistance, or a hybridization of the two? John J. Collins concludes that "Daniel 2 maintains a generally positive attitude towards the king and other wise men."[2] On the other hand, Matthew S. Rindge, contends that "Daniel 2 offers Daniel as a model of 'moderate resistance'" to foreign rule, "as one who resists the claims of the empire."[3] These two readings of this one story uncover the inherent tensions within Daniel 2.

The narrative of Daniel 2 details the rise of the Judean exile Daniel in the court of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar following Daniel's successful interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. This story is one of a number of stories about Daniel and his

[1]Unless otherwise indicated all English Bible references in this thesis are to the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) (New York: Oxford Press, 2018).

[2]John J. Collins, "The Court-Tales in Daniel and the Development of Apocalyptic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94, no. 2 (1975): 224, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (21 September 2021).

[3]Matthew S. Rindge, "Jewish Identity under Foreign Rule: Daniel 2 as a Reconfiguration of Genesis 41," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 1 (2010): 95, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (13 September 2021).

fellow Judean exiles who served in the courts of the Babylonian, Median, and Persian Empires after being taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:1–4). These initial stories which make up the first half of the book of Daniel (Dan 1–6) are formally quite different from the apocalyptic visions in the second half (Dan 7–12). Whereas in Daniel 7–12, Daniel is a recipient of heavenly revelations, in Daniel 1–6, Daniel primarily functions as an interpreter of other people's dreams and visions.

The majority of recent scholars posit that these stories (with the possible exception of Daniel 1)[4] were written either in the Persian Period (539–333 BCE) or early Hellenistic Period (333–63 BCE), and prior to the composition of the visions in Daniel 7–12, which seem to reflect the Antiochene Crisis of the mid-second century BCE.[5] Others, like Joyce G. Baldwin and Tremper Longman III, argue for a sixth-century BCE date for

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[4]John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 38; Ida Fröhlich, *"Time and Times and Half a Time": Historical Consciousness in the Jewish Literature of the Persian and Hellenistic Eras*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 19 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 15, 17, n. 23; Matthias Henze, "The Narrative Frame of Daniel: A Literary Assessment," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 32, no. 1 (2001): 10, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (6 October 2021).

[5]See Collins, "Court-Tales," 229, 234; Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 36–37; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Daniel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 20; Paul L. Redditt, *Daniel*, New Century Bible Commentary (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 4–6, 24; Lester L. Grabbe, "A Dan(iel) for All Seasons: For Whom was Daniel Important?," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 1, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, with the assistance of Cameron VanEpps (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2001), 230; Henze, 7; C. L. Seow, *Daniel*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 8; Sharon Pace, *Daniel*, Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2008), 3–4 (E-book accessed on 19 August 2021, from EBSCOhost eBook Collection).

both the stories and the visions of Daniel.[6] Yet, even Longman III notes that the book itself does not claim to be a sixth-century BCE composition, and that the Daniel stories are "accounts about the sixth century, not necessarily compositions of the sixth century."[7] Thus, by no means does the text itself force one to date the stories to the sixth century BCE.

Yet, as Carol A. Newsom and Brennan W. Breed point out, the book's bilingualism complicates questions of dating and authorship as well as the neat division between Daniel's stories (Dan 1–6) and visions (Dan 7–12). For while the language of Daniel 1:1–2:4a and 8–12 is Hebrew, Daniel 2:4b–7:28 is written in Aramaic.[8] Collins lists a total of four possible theories that have been proposed to explain Daniel's bilingualism: (1) a bilingual author wrote the entire work in two languages; (2) the book was originally written in Hebrew, with certain sections later translated into Aramaic; (3) the book was originally written in Aramaic, with certain sections later translated into Hebrew; or (4) the Aramaic material was incorporated "into a work whose final stage was

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[6]Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978) 35–46; Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 23.

[7]Longman III, 21.

[8]Carol A. Newsom, with Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 8.

composed in Hebrew."[9] Yet, no scholarly consensus has been reached and no theory is without its problems.

The author of this thesis finds most compelling the proposal that a collection of Aramaic stories (Dan 2–6)—likely originating independently of one another in the Persian (539–333 BCE) or Hellenistic Periods (333–63 BCE)—was later combined with a series of visions (Dan 7–12) as well as an introduction (Dan 1), which were composed in the second century BCE.[10] Yet, no matter when one dates the book of Daniel, John Goldingay's wise words on the subject should be kept in mind: "Whether the stories [and visions were] . . . written by Daniel or by someone else, in the sixth century B.C., the second, or somewhere in between, makes surprisingly little difference to the book's exegesis."[11] While questions of authorship and dating are important, they need not drastically affect one's reading of the book as a whole or of a single story (Dan 2).[12]

Furthermore, the author of this thesis believes the bilingualism of Daniel to be significant for the overall purpose of the book, and should not simply be understood as

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[9]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 12–13. See also David M. Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions: A Satirical Reading of Daniel 1–6*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 12 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 29.

[10]This is the position taken by Collins and Anathea E. Portier-Young in Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 38, and Anathea E. Portier-Young, "Languages of Identity and Obligation: Daniel as Bilingual Book," *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010): 100–101, *AtlaSerialsPLUS®*, EBSCOhost (6 October 2021).

[11]John Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 30 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), xl.

[12]For a more detailed discussion of the dating and authorship of Daniel, see chapter 2 of this thesis.

evidence of the book's compositional history. Rather, following the lead of David M. Valeta and Anathea E. Portier-Young, this thesis will argue that the use of both Hebrew and Aramaic in the book of Daniel is intentional and has its own rhetorical aims.[13] Portier-Young summarizes well the view of this thesis when she writes, "while the languages of Daniel may well reflect aspects of the book's complex composition history, they also reflect conscious choices on the part of the book's author(s)."[14] And as Jin Hee Han notes, the fact that the book's languages do not exactly coincide with the book's genres "prevents the book from falling apart into two big chunks. While the dual aspects of the book can be clearly delineated, they do not let the reader put the book asunder."[15]

As stated previously, the stories of Daniel trace the activities of Daniel and his fellow Judean exiles as they serve in the foreign courts of a number of empires. These "court tales," as they are termed by some scholars,[16] are preoccupied with the rise and fall of the kingdoms in which they are set, and with the conduct of God's people living under

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[13]David M. Valeta, "Polyglossia and Parody: Language in Daniel 1–6," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, Semeia Studies, no. 63, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 96–99 (E-book accessed on 21 September 2021, from EBSCOhost eBook Collection); Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 31; Portier-Young, "Languages of Identity and Obligation," 107–115.

[14]Portier-Young, "Languages of Identity and Obligation," 115.

[15]Jin Hee Han, *Daniel's Spiel: Apocalyptic Literacy in the Book of Daniel* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 93.

[16]W. Lee Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, no. 2 (1973): 217, *AtlaSerialsPLUS®*, EBSCOhost (15 September 2021); Collins, "Court-Tales," 219.

the shadow of such empires. It is not surprising, then, that in recent years, particular attention has been given to analyzing the political perspective(s) of these court tales.

Yet, as is evidenced by the divergent readings of Daniel 2 presented above, there is no consensus within scholarship concerning that story's political stance, much less the stance of the entire collection of stories (Dan 1–6). Almost fifty years ago, W. Lee Humphreys analyzed the stories of Daniel, and determined that "the tales are not essentially critical of the foreign court."[17] In these stories, the foreign monarchs—except for Belshazzar—are even "regarded in a favorable light," according to Humphreys.[18] Since the publication of Humphreys' article, a number of scholars have followed in his footsteps, ultimately concluding that the court tales are optimistic about life under imperial rule; and that they depict foreign rulers positively.[19] More recently, however, the tides have turned. One finds a number of scholars treating the Daniel stories as resistance

[17]Humphreys, 221.

[18]Humphreys, 221.

[19]Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, Anchor Bible, vol. 23 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 34; John J. Collins, "Daniel and His Social World," *Interpretation* 39, no. 2 (1985): 135, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (9 October 2021); Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 44, 51; Redditt, 4; Donald E. Gowan, *Daniel*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 21.

literature against the powers that be.[20] Still other scholars recognize within these stories both resistance and accommodation to imperial rule.[21] Thus, the question of the political stance of these court tales, including the narrative of Daniel 2, remains unresolved, which leads to the purpose of this thesis.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze themes of resistance and accommodation in Daniel 2, in order to establish the story's political stance toward foreign imperial rule.

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[20]Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Gandhi on Daniel 6: Some Thoughts on a 'Cultural Exegesis' of the Bible," *Biblical Interpretation* 1, no. 3 (1993): 331, 338, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (11 September 2021); Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 20–21; David M. Valeta, "Court or Jester Tales? Resistance and Social Reality in Daniel 1–6," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 32, no. 3 (2005): 323, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (30 September 2021); Shane Kirkpatrick, *Competing for Honor: A Social-Scientific Reading of Daniel 1–6* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2005), 3, 30, 38 (E-book accessed on 19 August 2021, from ProQuest Ebook Central); Valeta, "Polyglossia and Parody," 108; Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 1–2, 21, 38, 154, 157; Richard A. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 33–35; Rindge, 95, 97–98; Michael J. Chan, "*Ira Regis*: Comedic Inflections of Royal Rage in Jewish Court Tales," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 103, no. 1 (2013): 23, 25, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (13 September 2021).

[21]P. R. Davies, "Daniel in the Lions' Den," in *Images of Empire*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 122, ed. Loveday Alexander (Sheffield, UK: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1991), 161; Danna Nolan Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics in the Book of Daniel*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 126, 129–130; Donald C. Polaski, "*Mene*, *Mene*, *Tekel*, *Parsin*: Writing and Resistance in Daniel 5 and 6," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 4 (2004): 667–669, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (2 October 2021); Han, 49, 51; Anathea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 226–227; John J. Collins, "Apocalypse and Empire," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 76 (2011): 6–8, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (2 October 2021); Newsom and Breed, 16; Carol A. Newsom, "'Resistance is Futile!': The Ironies of Danielic Resistance to Empire," *Interpretation* 71, no. 2 (2017): 169, 171–172, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (28 September 2021).

This will be accomplished by conducting an exegetical analysis of Daniel 2. Particular attention will be given to how the narrative of Daniel 2 depicts foreign rule, whether that be critically or admirably. Attention will also be given to how the Judean exiles relate to the Babylonian Empire within the narrative.

Studies on resistance and accommodation in the court tales have primarily focused on Daniel 1, 3, and 6—stories in which the Judean exiles reject assimilation or disobey the laws of the land[22]—or on Daniel 5, which tells of Belshazzar's death and the end of the Babylonian Empire.[23] Only a few scholars have provided sustained treatments of resistance in Daniel 2 specifically.[24] For this reason, one objective of this thesis will be to add to the work of those scholars by offering a detailed exegetical analysis of Daniel 2. Furthermore, while most of the aforementioned treatments of Daniel 2 have focused solely on resistance in Daniel 2,[25] another objective of this thesis will be to give ear not

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[22]Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 117–130; Philip P. Chia, "On Naming the Subject: Postcolonial Reading of Daniel 1," in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 171–185; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 258–262; Greg Goswell, "The Ethics of the Book of Daniel," *Restoration Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2015): 130–139, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (15 October 2021).

[23]Athalya Brenner-Idan, "Who's Afraid of Feminist Criticism? Who's Afraid of Biblical Humour? The Case of the Obtuse Foreign Ruler in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19, no. 63 (1994): 48–51, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (11 October 2021); Polaski, 651–660.

[24]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 23–37; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Prayers and Dreams: Power and Diaspora Identities in the Social Setting of the Daniel Tales," in Collins and Flint, 266–290; Kirkpatrick, 67–91; Rindge, 85–104.

[25]The exception is Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 23–37.

only to voices of resistance, but also, to accommodating voices in the text. And yet, there are a number of ways in which this thesis will, of necessity, be limited in its scope.

Delimitations

While a detailed analysis of the entire collection of Daniel stories is beyond the confines of this thesis, the focus of this thesis will specifically be on the political stance toward foreign imperial rule in Daniel 2. Though Daniel 1–6 now constitutes a literary unit, it is likely that some of the stories originated independently of each other. Therefore, approaching each story on its own terms is not without justification. As Collins explains, "The attitude towards the Gentiles can only be discerned by attention to the emphasis in each particular tale."[26] Also, although an analysis comparing variants between different versions of Daniel 2 would certainly be enlightening, this thesis will focus solely on the Hebrew-Aramaic version of Daniel 2 as it is found in the Masoretic Text (MT). Next, this chapter will define a number of key terms that will be of importance in this thesis.

Definition of Terms

Two key terms in need of definition are "resistance" and "accommodation." Portier-Young, rather than giving a straightforward definition of resistance, offers three main points

> that provide a conceptual framework for the understanding of resistance . . . 1. Domination, its strategies, and the hegemony that reinforces it provide the conditions for and objects of resistance. 2. Acts of resistance proceed from the

[26]Collins, "Court-Tales," 220.

> intention to limit, oppose, reject, or transform hegemonic institutions . . . as well as systems, strategies, and acts of domination. 3. Resistance is effective action.[27]

By "hegemony," Portier-Young means the ways in which a dominant culture controls its subjects: not through "physical coercion"—that is, stealing, torture, and even killing—but "through cultural institutions . . . systems of patronage . . . social networks, and the structured practices of everyday life."[28]

While resistance can take many forms, Daniel L. Smith-Christopher explains that many scholars wrongly "equate violence with resistance."[29] Portier-Young similarly notes that armed revolt is an "obvious, and extreme, form of resistance that frequently attracts scholarly attention."[30] Yet, violent rebellion is not the only form of resistance available to the oppressed. For example, Smith-Christopher notes that stories which are told and crafted by marginalized groups, like the Daniel stories, "can become a creative world of resistance in which heroes are drawn from among their own people, standing against the dominant majority culture."[31] According to Portier-Young, such resistance literature can stand alongside other "embodied practices" of resistance, such as fasting,

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[27]Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 11.

[28]Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 11–12.

[29]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 32.

[30]Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 5.

[31]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 30.

prayer, and even martyrdom.[32] Thus, both Smith-Christopher and Portier-Young describe Daniel's form of resistance as "nonviolent resistance."[33]

The converse of a resistant stance—violent or otherwise—is an accommodationist one. A story with an accommodationist leaning would ultimately serve "to legitimate the empire's claims to power," as Newsom points out.[34] The term "accommodation" is interchangeable with plenty of other terms, such as "compromise," "submission," and "assimilation." All these terms help capture what P. R. Davies refers to as the "practical accommodations to life under imperium" that one finds in the Daniel stories generally, and in Daniel 2 in particular.[35] In the court tales of Daniel, choosing to eat the royal food (Dan 1) or bow down to the statue established by King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 3) would be explicit examples of accommodating to foreign imperial rule. The choice before the Judean exiles in these stories is whether or not they will accommodate to the dominant culture. Before analyzing whether or not Daniel 2 promotes a resistant or an accommodationist stance toward imperial rule, however, it is important to clarify this author's presuppositions and assumptions in approaching the biblical text.

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[32]Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 13.

[33]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 28; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 186–187; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 229, 277–278, 387. See also Greg Carey, "Daniel as an Americanized Apocalypse," *Interpretation* 71, no. 2 (2017): 192, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (20 October 2021).

[34]Newsom, 171.

[35]Davies, "Daniel in the Lion's Den," 161.

Presuppositions or Assumptions

The author of this thesis presupposes that Scripture is, in the words of Paul the Apostle, "inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Divine inspiration, though, does not necessarily mean that the biblical text must always be historically accurate, or that it intends to be. As Robert Gnuse points out, a dominant view even within more conservative and evangelical circles is that Scripture is "[c]ulturally and historically conditioned literature," which is "inspired and infallible in regard to theology and morals but not inerrant in matters of history and science."[36] This will be the view adopted by this thesis.

As it pertains specifically to the stories in the book of Daniel, the inspiration of Scripture does not necessarily indicate that these stories are factual or historical accounts about exiled Jews living under foreign domination. Goldingay notes that one should not approach "the stories with the *a priori* conviction that they must be pure history," for God is "capable of inspiring people to write both history and fiction."[37] Close examination of the biblical text, as well as attention to historical and archaeological evidence, should guide one's conclusions on whether a given story is fictional or historical. With these presuppositions now clarified, this opening chapter will conclude with a summation of the author's methodological approach.

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[36]Robert Gnuse, "Authority of the Bible," *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 88.

[37]Goldingay, *Daniel*, xxxix.

Methodology

The opening chapter of this thesis has served as an introduction to the problem of whether Daniel 2's political stance toward foreign imperial rule is one of accommodation, resistance, or a hybridization of both. Chapter 2 will provide helpful background information for the book of Daniel generally and Daniel 2 in particular, followed by an exegetical analysis of Daniel 2:1–23. Chapter 3 will conclude the exegetical portion of this thesis, by providing an analysis of Daniel 2:24–49. Finally, chapter 4 will analyze and interpret the findings from the exegetical analysis, in order to determine Daniel 2's stance toward foreign imperial rule. Chapter 4 will also offer application for the Church universal, and specifically, the American Church

CHAPTER 2

AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF DANIEL 2:1–23

Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis will primarily consist of an exegetical study of Daniel 2. The exegetical portions of this thesis will highlight themes specifically related to the political stance of this narrative. Special attention will be given to how characters are depicted and contrasted with one another (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, the court wise men), as well as how narrative elements—such as language, plot, genre, and setting—help readers to interpret the story's political leanings. Before beginning the exegetical analysis of Daniel 2, this chapter will first examine the dating, authorship, and audience of Daniel, after which a brief overview of Daniel 1 will be provided.

Dating

As stated previously in chapter 1, there is somewhat of a consensus within critical scholarship that the stories in Daniel 2–6 originated either in the Persian (539–333 BCE) or Hellenistic (333–63 BCE) Periods. The visions of Daniel 7–12 and an introductory chapter (Dan 1) were likely added to the collection of Daniel stories in the second century BCE, specifically during the Antiochene Crisis (175–164 BCE).[1] Many scholars point to

[1]For more on this, see pages 2–4 of this thesis.

what seem to be a number of historical problems within the stories as evidence that these stories originated long after the events that they describe.[2]

For example, the book of Daniel dates Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem to the "third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim" (606 BCE; Dan 1:1); Nebuchadnezzar, however, did not begin to reign until 605 BCE (see Jer 25:1). Newsom and Breed are typical of most commentators when they observe that "no evidence exists for a Babylonian siege of Jerusalem before 598/97, as both 2 Kgs 25 and the Babylonian Chronicle independently attest."[3] Yet, Baldwin notes that there is evidence in both 2 Kings 24:1 and 2 Chronicles 36:6 that Nebuchadnezzar was, at least, present in Jerusalem prior to the siege of Jerusalem in 597 BCE.[4] Baldwin further argues that the events described in Daniel 1:1 should be considered a "possibility," given the different systems for reckoning the reigns of kings in the ancient Near East (ANE).[5]

Also, Davies argues that Darius the Mede (Dan 5:31; 9:1) was not a historical individual, but rather, a combination of multiple Persian rulers who bore the name Darius: Darius I, who reigned from 522–486 BCE, and Darius II, who reigned from 423–

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[2]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 29–33; Gowan, 18–21; Seow, *Daniel*, 4–7. Pace, 3–8 draws attention to a number of other "internal clues" in the Daniel stories, besides historical problems, that seem to indicate that they arose much later than the sixth-century BCE. But, compare with James H. Sims, "Daniel," in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 328, who makes the unique argument that Daniel's historical inaccuracies are both intentional and "an integral part of the book's literary technique."

[3]Newsom and Breed, *Daniel*, 39.

[4]Baldwin, 19.

[5]Baldwin, 20–21.

404 BCE.[6] Likewise, Collins believes it is most likely that Darius the Mede was originally the Persian King Darius I, who was, at some point, mistakenly labeled a Mede, and was placed chronologically *before* Cyrus the Great of Persia, rather than *after* him.[7] D. J. Wiseman, however, argues that Darius the Mede should not be treated as a purely fictitious figure, nor that one should assume the author of Daniel has been historically inaccurate. Rather, Wiseman proposes that Darius the Mede should be identified with Cyrus the Great.[8] Wiseman argues for this interpretation because: (1) Darius is said to have been "about sixty-two years old" at the time of Babylon's fall (Dan 5:31)—which could potentially have been the age of Cyrus when he conquered Babylon in 539 BCE—and (2) on the basis of Daniel 6:28, which he translates as "Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, even (namely, or i.e.) the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (cf. 1 Chr 5:26).[9] There are compelling and data-driven arguments both *for* and *against* the historical accuracy of the Daniel stories. Yet, the number of potential historical inaccuracies[10] leads this author

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[6]P. R. Davies, *Daniel*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield, UK: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1985), 27.

[7]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 30–32.

[8]D. J. Wiseman, "Some Historical Problems in the Book of Daniel," in *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*, ed. D. J. Wiseman et al. (London: Tyndale, 1965), 12–16.

[9]Wiseman, 12, 14–16. Most translations differ from Wiseman's, taking the verse to mean that Daniel prospered "in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian," thus indicating two different rulers. This seems to be the more natural reading of [פָּרְסָאָה] בְּמַלְכוּת דָּרְיָוֶשׁ וּבְמַלְכוּת כּוֹרֶשׁ פרסיא.

[10]For a detailed list of potential historical problems, see Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 29–33.

to conclude that the stories probably originated well into the Persian Period (539–333 BCE), rather than in the Neo-Babylonian Period (626–539 BCE).

These historical problems, however, are not surprising if one takes into consideration the form and genre of the stories themselves. Many scholars categorize the stories of Daniel 1–6 as "court tales"[11] or "court legends."[12] In this regard, they are more closely aligned with folktales[13] and romances,[14] rather than with historiographical documents. According to Goldingay, the stories in Daniel—like the stories about Joseph, Esther, Tobit, and Ahiqar—are meant to "entertain," as well as to "encourage," their audience(s).[15] For Goldingay, this does not necessarily mean that the stories are completely ahistorical. He is quick to assert, though, that they are "clearly distinguishable in form from OT narrative that does purport to be serious history" (e.g., 2 Kgs 24–25).[16]

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[11]Humphreys, 217; Collins, "Court-Tales," 219.

[12]John J. Collins, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, Forms of the Old Testament Literature, vol. 20 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 42; Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, no. 26 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 12; Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 44–45.

[13]Susan Niditch and Robert Doran identify Daniel 2 with a particular type of "folktale" that centers on a "person of lower status" being called upon by an individual of higher status to solve a difficult problem (cf. Gen 41; *Ahiqar* 5–7), in "The Success Story of the Wise Courtier: A Formal Approach," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, no. 2 (1977): 179–180, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (13 January 2022); and Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 20 describes the Daniel stories as arising out of the "folklore of the diaspora communities."

[14]Hartman and Di Lella, 55 liken the Daniel stories to "religious romance[s]."

[15]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 6.

[16]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 7–8.

With Goldingay—who is himself an evangelical scholar—the author of this thesis believes these stories do "reflect historical experiences and events"; but at the same time, they should not be considered strict historiography, because of their striking similarity to other "genres that make use of fictional features as well as historical ones in order to achieve their aim of telling an edifying story."[17] The Daniel stories were written for purposes other than historiography, and thus, should not be held to the same standards as ancient historiographical documents, much less modern historical records. While the stories probably contain traditional material from the time in which the stories are set, it is likely that the court tales reached their final form much later than the sixth century BCE. This raises the question, then, of who told and composed these stories.

Authorship

Many scholars look to the characters of Daniel and his friends, as well as to the court setting of the Daniel stories, in order to determine what kind of person(s) authored these tales. For example, Collins argues that most likely "the authors and tradents of the tales were, like Daniel, upper-class, well-educated Jews, who found careers in government service in the eastern Diaspora."[18] Even if they were not courtiers themselves, Collins finds it probable that they at least "aspired to be 'wise men.'"[19] Similarly, Lawrence M. Wills, in his study of the court legends in Daniel and Esther,

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[17]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 321. Collins, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 41 makes a somewhat similar argument.

[18]Collins, "Daniel and His Social World," 136.

[19]Collins, "Court-Tales," 229.

concludes that this genre "reflects the orientation of the administrative and entrepreneurial class."[20]

As noted by Matthias Henze, however, underlying these approaches to identify the author(s) of the Daniel stories is a presupposition that "there [is] a direct relationship between the social world constructed by the narratives and the social world from which they stem."[21] Henze questions this line of thinking, explaining that even though the setting of these stories is the foreign court, that does not necessarily mean that those who wrote them were courtiers, or that they arose in a court setting.[22] Henze also points out that the presence of the non-Jewish court tale of *Ahiqar* at the Jewish military colony at Elephantine in Egypt "casts into doubt whether wisdom court legends necessarily circulated in the court and, indeed, whether they were composed there."[23]

Both Smith-Christopher and Gnuse also argue that these stories need not have originated among elites. Smith-Christopher prefers to read these court tales as "hero stories," which probably began as oral stories told by and for lower-class Jews in the

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[20]Wills, *Jew in the Court*, 197. See also R. R. Wilson, "From Prophecy to Apocalyptic: Reflections on the Shape of Israelite Religion," *Semeia* 21 (1981): 88, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (5 January 2022); and Paul L. Redditt, "Daniel 11 and the Sociohistorical Setting of the Book of Daniel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (1998): 467, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (5 January 2022); both of whom argue that the court tales arose among a group of Diaspora Jews attempting to succeed in a foreign court.

[21]Henze, 15.

[22]Henze, 15.

[23]Henze, 15–16.

Diaspora.[24] Gnuse sees within the Daniel stories "the yearning of underdogs—the desires of those who are ruled, oppressed, or at least under political, economic, and cultural pressure from a major world power."[25] Even Wills recognizes that these stories contain a "ruled ethnic perspective," and that they "assert the wisdom and statecraft of the cultural hero of the ruled ethnic group . . . [and] affirm the value and identity of the ruled ethnic group."[26]

While it is impossible to conclude with certainty what kind of group composed these stories, it is simply not necessary to assume they were written by courtiers or upper-class Jews. Even if the court tales *did* derive from elite circles, it does not follow that the authors "stood to gain by maintaining the status quo," as Collins argues.[27] In fact, as will be demonstrated later in this thesis, there are several ways in which the Daniel stories, and specifically the narrative of Daniel 2, resist and challenge the status quo. Thus, the author of this thesis finds it most likely that the Daniel stories were composed by marginalized Jewish groups in the Diaspora, rather than by courtiers. Who, then, was the intended audience of these stories?

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[24]Smith-Christopher, "Gandhi on Daniel 6," 336. See also Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 44, who argues that the Daniel stories most likely began as "oral legends." If true, this would increase the possibility that the stories may have originated among lower-class groups.

[25]Robert Gnuse, "From Prison to Prestige: The Hero Who Helps a King in Jewish and Greek Literature," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2010): 39, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (13 September 2021).

[26]Wills, *Jew in the Court*, 68.

[27]Collins, "Daniel and His Social World," 136.

Audience

The question of audience is inherently connected to the question of authorship. For if these stories *did* originate among Jewish courtiers attempting to succeed in a foreign court, then, it is plausible that they were written with fellow courtiers in mind. Humphreys argues that the Daniel stories "served the . . . purpose of presenting a style of life for the Jew of the diaspora."[28] From this perspective, then, the stories can be viewed as a guide, or even a training manual, for how to succeed as a courtier in a foreign court. Once again, however, there is quite a bit of evidence that may indicate the primary audience was not upper-class courtiers, but lower-class Jews.

As noted previously, Henze argues that because *Ahiqar* was popular among Jewish military personnel at Elephantine, this "demonstrates that court narratives were not enjoyed by educated courtiers exclusively."[29] Furthermore, Henze is critical of Humphrey's view that the tales presented a "life-style" for Jews in the Diaspora. Henze writes, "It appears unlikely that such a 'life-style' would have been met with overwhelming enthusiasm . . . for what awaited the ambitious Jews, at least according to [the] tales, was first and foremost *not* a stellar career at the foreign court, but the lion's den."[30] The foreign court in the court tales of Daniel is a place of reward and promotion, but also of hostility, threats, and near-death experiences.

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[28]Humphreys, 222.

[29]Henze, 15.

[30]Henze, 17.

Valeta also points to the popularity of the Daniel stories as evidence that they were not solely read by those in court circles.[31] For Valeta, the book of Daniel's "many extant versions" (the MT, the Old Greek version, and the Theodotion edition)[32] indicate that it was quite popular; these stories were not necessarily meant for a select few.[33] Also, if one accepts Valeta's reading of the Daniel stories as being satirical in nature,[34] then this too would seem to indicate that they originated among, and were meant for, not well-to-do groups, but disenfranchised ones, who sought to ridicule the powers that be.[35] Thus, it is possible that the intended audience of these Daniel stories was lower-class Jews in the Diaspora, who looked to Daniel and the exiles as heroes.

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[31]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 18.

[32]For a detailed discussion of the book of Daniel's extant versions, see T. J. Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel: A Literary Comparison*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 198 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1995); and Anathea Portier-Young, "Three Books of Daniel: Plurality and Fluidity among the Ancient Versions," *Interpretation* 71, no. 2 (2017): 143–153, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (2 January 2022).

[33]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 18–19.

[34]A number of other scholars have also noted comical and satirical elements in the Daniel stories: John Moore Bullard, "Biblical Humor: Its Nature and Function" (Ph.D diss., Yale University, 1962), 166–171; Edwin M. Good, "Apocalyptic as Comedy: The Book of Daniel," *Semeia* 32 (1984): 41–70, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (15 September 2021); Hector I. Avalos, "The Comedic Function of the Enumerations of Officials and Instruments in Daniel 3," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (1991): 580–588, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (27 December 2021); Albert M. Wolters, "Untying the King's Knots: Physiology and Wordplay in Daniel 5," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 1 (1991): 117–122, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (27 December 2021); Brenner-Idan, 48–51; Chan, 1–25.

[35]Valeta, "Court or Jester Tales?," 311–312.

Questions of dating, authorship, and audience of an ancient text are notoriously difficult to answer. Even coherent and logical arguments in defense of a specific position can never be certain. Thus, modern readers should do their best to reconstruct ancient history with the greatest care. The author of this thesis finds it unlikely that the Daniel stories were written for Jewish courtiers, who were attempting to succeed socially and politically in the Diaspora. Rather, these stories seem to reflect the concerns and longings of disenfranchised groups, and thus, were likely told and composed both *by* them and *for* them. Next, this author will briefly summarize the narrative of Daniel 1 to prepare for the exegesis of Daniel 2.

Summary of Daniel 1

Daniel 1 opens with Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem, presumably in the "third year" of King Jehoiakim's reign (606 BCE). The narrator explains that Nebuchadnezzar not only brought "some of the vessels of the house of God" back "to the land of Shinar" (Dan 1:2), but that he also had "some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility" brought to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar did this in order that they might be "educated for three years" and subsequently serve in Nebuchadnezzar's court (Dan 1:3–6). Among this group of exiles were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

The main conflict of the story in Daniel 1 centers on the "royal rations of food and wine" that Daniel and his fellow Judean exiles were expected to eat (Dan 1:5), for Daniel "resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations" (Dan 1:8). The four Judean exiles requested to be given a test by their guard: for ten days, they would only consume vegetables and water, after which their overseers could compare their

"appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations" (Dan 1:11–13). After the test, much to the surprise of the reader, the Judean exiles "appeared better and fatter than all the [other] young men" (Dan 1:15). Not only this, but the narrator explains that these four exiles were given "knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom" by their God, and Daniel specifically "had insight into all visions and dreams" (Dan 1:17). The story concludes with King Nebuchadnezzar finding them to be "ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom" (Dan 1:19–20). Now that the opening narrative of the book of Daniel has been summarized, the rest of this chapter will focus on the first half of the next story, Daniel 2:1–23.

Daniel 2:1–16

The first major section of Daniel 2 is Daniel 2:1–16, which can be divided into two smaller sections: 2:1–12 and 2:13–16. The opening scene (Dan 2:1–12), which sets up the main conflict of the story, is characterized by misunderstanding, humor, and irony. This scene is followed by a brief response on the part of Daniel in Daniel 2:13–16. The characterization of Daniel in Daniel 2:13–16 contrasts sharply with the characterization of King Nebuchadnezzar in the opening scene (Dan 2:1–12), as will be made clear in the following exegetical analysis.

Nebuchadnezzar's Nightmare (Dan 2:1–12)

וּבִשְׁנַת שְׁתַּיִם לְמַלְכוּת נְבֻכַדְנֶצַּר חָלַם נְבֻכַדְנֶצַּר חֲלֹמוֹת וַתִּתְפָּעֶם רוּחוֹ וּשְׁנָתוֹ נִהְיְתָה עָלָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לִקְרֹא לַחַרְטֻמִּים וְלָאַשָּׁפִים וְלַמְכַשְּׁפִים וְלַכַּשְׂדִּים לְהַגִּיד לַמֶּלֶךְ חֲלֹמֹתָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיַּעַמְדוּ לִפְנֵי הַמָּלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲלוֹם חָלַמְתִּי וַתִּפָּעֶם רוּחִי לָדַעַת אֶת־הַחֲלוֹם: וַיְדַבְּרוּ הַכַּשְׂדִּים לַמֶּלֶךְ אֲרָמִית מַלְכָּא לְעָלְמִין חֱיִי אֱמַר חֶלְמָא לעבדיך [לְעַבְדָּךְ] וּפִשְׁרָא נְחַוֵּא: עָנֵה מַלְכָּא וְאָמַר לכשדיא [לְכַשְׂדָּאֵי] מִלְּתָה מִנִּי אַזְדָּא הֵן לָא תְהוֹדְעוּנַנִי חֶלְמָא וּפִשְׁרֵהּ הַדָּמִין תִּתְעַבְדוּן וּבָתֵּיכוֹן נְוָלִי יִתְּשָׂמוּן: וְהֵן חֶלְמָא וּפִשְׁרֵהּ תְּהַחֲוֹן מַתְּנָן וּנְבִזְבָה וִיקָר שַׂגִּיא תְּקַבְּלוּן מִן־קֳדָמָי לָהֵן חֶלְמָא וּפִשְׁרֵהּ הַחֲוֹנִי: עָנוֹ תִנְיָנוּת וְאָמְרִין מַלְכָּא חֶלְמָא יֵאמַר לְעַבְדוֹהִי וּפִשְׁרָה נְהַחֲוֵה: עָנֵה מַלְכָּא וְאָמַר

מִן־צַיִּיב יָדַע אֲנָה דִּי עִדָּנָא אַנְתּוּן זָבְנִין כָּל־קֳבֵל דִּי חֲזֵיתוֹן דִּי אַזְדָּא מִנִּי מִלְּתָא: דִּי הֵן־חֶלְמָא לָא תְהוֹדְּעֻנַנִי חֲדָה־הִיא דָּתְכוֹן וּמִלָּה כִדְבָה וּשְׁחִיתָה הזמנתון [הַזְדְּמַנְתּוּן] לְמֵאמַר קָדָמַי עַד דִּי עִדָּנָא יִשְׁתַּנֵּא לָהֵן חֶלְמָא אֱמַרוּ לִי וְאִנְדַּע דִּי פִשְׁרֵהּ תְּהַחֲוֻנַנִי: עֲנוֹ כשדיא [כַשְׂדָּאֵי] קָדָם־מַלְכָּא וְאָמְרִין לָא־אִיתַי אֱנָשׁ עַל־יַבֶּשְׁתָּא דִּי מִלַּת מַלְכָּא יוּכַל לְהַחֲוָיָה כָּל־קֳבֵל דִּי כָּל־מֶלֶךְ רַב וְשַׁלִּיט מִלָּה כִדְנָה לָא שְׁאֵל לְכָל־חַרְטֹם וְאָשַׁף וְכַשְׂדָּי: וּמִלְּתָא דִּי־מַלְכָּה שָׁאֵל יַקִּירָה וְאָחֳרָן לָא אִיתַי דִּי יְחַוִּנַּהּ קֳדָם מַלְכָּא לָהֵן אֱלָהִין דִּי מְדָרֵהוֹן עִם־בִּשְׂרָא לָא אִיתוֹהִי: כָּל־קֳבֵל דְּנָה מַלְכָּא בְּנַס וּקְצַף שַׂגִּיא וַאֲמַר לְהוֹבָדָה לְכֹל חַכִּימֵי בָבֶל:[36]

> Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams and his spirit was disturbed, and his sleep came upon him. The king said to call for the magicians, the exorcists, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. And they came and stood before the king. The king said to them, "I have dreamed a dream and my spirit is disturbed to know the dream." The Chaldeans spoke to the King in Aramaic: "O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants and we will reveal the interpretation." The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The word from me is firm: if you will not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be made pieces and your houses will be made a dunghill! But if you reveal the dream and its interpretation, you will receive gifts and rewards and great honor from before me. Therefore, reveal to me the dream and its interpretation." Again, they answered and said, "Let the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will reveal the interpretation." The king answered and said, "Certainly, I know that you are buying time because you see that the word from me is firm: if you will not make known to me the dream, there is one law for you. But you have agreed to speak a lying and corrupt word before me until the time has changed. Therefore, tell the dream to me, so that I may know you can reveal its interpretation." The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a human being on the earth that is able to make known the matter of the king, because no great and mighty king has requested of any magician, exorcist, or Chaldean a thing like this. For the thing that the king requests is difficult and there is not another that can make it known to the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh." Therefore, the king became angry and greatly furious, and he said to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.[37]

The story begins in "the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar" (Dan 2:1). Nebuchadnezzar, who earlier in his reign had conquered Jerusalem, transported its temple's articles to the land of Shinar, and deported its young men of nobility (Dan 1:1–

[36]All Hebrew Bible references are from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th corrected ed., ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1997).

[37]Author's translation.

3), suffered from nightmares in only his "second year." For Danna Nolan Fewell, Daniel 2:1 "shows another side of Nebuchadnezzar. The self-confident military aggressor . . . is a less confident administrator, now that the days of military glory are over."[38] Valeta concurs: "Even though Jerusalem has been successfully subjugated in the first year, the king is already having troubling dreams marked with fear and insecurity."[39]

The text specifically says that Nebuchadnezzar's "spirit was disturbed" (וַתִּתְפָּעֶם רוּחוֹ; Dan 2:1). As Rindge points out, the phrase תִּתְפָּעֶם רוּחוֹ recalls the experience of Pharaoh in the Joseph story, who also suffered from dreams, and whose "spirit was disturbed" (וַתִּפָּעֶם רוּחוֹ; Gen 41:8).[40] The opening of the story, therefore, indicates that Daniel 2 parallels Genesis 41. Yet, Newsom and Breed note that unlike the story in Genesis 41, which "describes to the reader the content of Pharaoh's dream as he dreams it" (Gen 41:1–7), the narrator in Daniel 2 does not disclose the dream here.[41] In fact, the dream will not be revealed to the reader until the very end of the narrative. Considering his response to the dream, however, one can assume that the dream did not bode well for Nebuchadnezzar.

The imagery of the fearful Nebuchadnezzar is carried forward into Daniel 2:2, with Nebuchadnezzar calling for an impressive array of diviners and wise men to aid him. Among those summoned were "magicians" (חַרְטֻמִּים), who appear elsewhere in the

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[38]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 23.

[39]Valeta, "Court or Jester Tales?," 317.

[40]Rindge, 88.

[41]Newsom and Breed, 67.

Old Testament (OT) only in Egyptian contexts (e.g., Exod 8:15; 9:11), most notably in the aforementioned Joseph story (Gen 41:8, 24).[42] Alongside these Egyptian magicians were Babylonian "exorcists" (אַשָּׁפִים; cf. Akkadian *āšipu*)[43] and "sorcerers" (מְכַשְּׁפִים), as well as "Chaldeans" (כַּשְׂדִּים), which, according to Newsom and Breed, was an ethnic designation originally applied to a tribe in southern Babylon, but which later became a term for Babylonian wise men.[44] Thus, the opening two verses depict Nebuchadnezzar as a disturbed and frightened ruler (see Dan 2:1, 3); but, as Newsom and Breed point out, he was powerful enough to "command the whole spectrum of mantic experts from all of the national and ethnic traditions of the empire."[45]

In Daniel 2:3, Nebuchadnezzar explains to his court wise men that "my spirit is disturbed to know the dream." In the ANE, dreams were highly significant, and were even understood to contain messages from the gods and to predict the future. A. Leo Oppenheim, in his seminal work on dreams in the ANE, distinguishes between two types of dreams: "message" dreams and "symbolic" dreams—the former are dreams that do not

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[42]Francis F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, "חַרְטֹם," *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB)* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1907), 355, Accordance Bible Software Version 13.3.2. 2021.

[43]Hayim ben Yosef Tawil, "אַשָּׁף," *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew: Etymological-Semantic and Idiomatic Equivalents with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic* (Brooklyn, NY: KTAV Publishing, 2009), 39–40.

[44]Newsom and Breed, 67.

[45]Newsom and Breed, 67. See also Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 50–51.

require interpretation, while the latter do.[46] Both types of dreams can be found in the OT; but, Oppenheim notes that "symbolic" dreams were "reserved for the 'gentiles,'" and in Daniel 2 this holds true.[47]

Nebuchadnezzar specified his desire "to know" (לָדַעַת) the dream (Dan 2:3), which, as Newsom and Breed and Jonathan Stökl point out, is somewhat ambiguous.[48] Did Nebuchadnezzar want to know the *dream*, or know the *interpretation* and *significance* of the dream? The Qal infinitive construct לָדַעַת can mean "to know," but also "to understand, perceive,"[49] thus allowing for either interpretation. It was commonplace in the ANE for the dreamer to tell what he or she had dreamed to another person.[50] Oppenheim argues that the telling of one's dream was even therapeutic for the

[46]A. Leo Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 206.

[47]Oppenheim, 207, 209.

[48]Newsom and Breed, 68; Jonathan Stökl, "Daniel and the 'Prophetization' of Dream Divination," in *Perchance to Dream: Dream Divination in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Ancient Near East Monographs, no. 21, ed. Esther J. Hamori and Jonathan Stökl (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2018), 147.

[49]Brown, Driver, and Briggs, "יָדַע," 393; Newsom and Breed, 68.

[50]See, e.g., "The Epic of Gilgamesh," trans. E. A. Speiser, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (ANET)*, 3rd ed., ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 75–77, where Gilgamesh reports his dreams to his mother, and she provides an interpretation. Also, in Genesis 40:9–11, 16–17, both the cupbearer and the baker tell their dreams to Joseph, who interprets them (Gen 40:12–15, 18–19); Stökl, 147.

dreamer.[51] Thus, it would make sense for Nebuchadnezzar to have been seeking out the meaning of the dream, rather than the contents of the dream itself.

Nebuchadnezzar's wise men clearly understood his request in this way, and thus, they responded, "O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants and we will reveal the interpretation" (Dan 2:4). The word translated here as "interpretation" is the Aramaic word פְּשַׁר; Collins notes that this term is derived from the Akkadian word *pašāru*, which literally means "to loosen."[52] In the context of dreams, however, Oppenheim explains that *pašāru*—and its derived form *pišru*—can refer to the "reporting" of a dream, as well as the "interpreting" of a dream.[53] In Daniel 2, the primary meaning of פְּשַׁר is "interpretation," which Oppenheim describes as a form of "translating": "The symbols of the dream-language are simply 'translated' into the symbols of the language spoken by the dreaming person."[54]

It is important to note, though, that by providing an "interpretation" (פְּשַׁר/*pišru*), dream interpreters in the ANE were not simply attempting to make the dream understandable, but also less harmful. According to Oppenheim, the ANE understanding was that once a dream had been "translated" (i.e., "interpreted"), the dream was no longer

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[51]Oppenheim, 218–219. See also Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 156–157; Newsom and Breed, 68.

[52]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 156. For a detailed definition of *pašāru*, see Martha T. Roth, ed., "pašāru," *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 12 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2005), 236–245.

[53]Oppenheim, 219.

[54]Oppenheim, 220.

dangerous to the dreamer.[55] Oppenheim lists this as the third meaning of *pašāru*: "the dispelling or removing of the evil consequences of such a dream by magic means."[56] This may help to explain Nebuchadnezzar's fearful reaction to his dream (Dan 2:1)—for as long as it remained untold and uninterpreted, it could be potentially dangerous to him.[57]

The narrator notes that the Chaldeans spoke to the king "in Aramaic" (אֲרָמִית). It is at this point that the language shifts from Hebrew to Aramaic; and the language will not switch back to Hebrew until the beginning of Daniel 8. Significantly, the first words in Aramaic are the courtly greeting, "O king, live forever!" (מַלְכָּא לְעָלְמִין חֱיִי; Dan 2:4b). Valeta convincingly argues that the use of Aramaic here is not simply "a concession to realism in the report of actual speech"; for if that were the case, one would expect the Aramaic to begin with Nebuchadnezzar's initial request (Dan 2:3).[58] Rather, Smith-Christopher, Valeta, and Portier-Young find this courtly greeting to be an ironic statement; for by the end of the narrative, it will be clear to the reader that neither

[55]Oppenheim, 219.

[56]Oppenheim, 219.

[57]See Oppenheim, 217–219, for a detailed discussion on the semantic range of meaning of the word *pašāru*, of which one meaning is the "removing" of the dream's evil effects on the dreamer. Oppenheim provides a fascinating example from the Assyrian Dream-Book, in which the dreamer is instructed to "report" (*pašāru*) his or her dream to a lump of clay, and then throw it into water, in order for it to dissolve, thereby ridding the dreamer of the dream's evil influence over him or her.

[58]Valeta, "Polyglossia and Parody," 98.

Nebuchadnezzar, nor any other earthly ruler, will "live forever."[59] Portier-Young identifies Aramaic as "the scripted language of empire," and as a language of "deference and subservience," which the courtiers used "to reinforce the status quo in hopes of gaining favor and mercy."[60] This "language of empire," however, is now used in Daniel 2 "in a creative and sarcastic manner," according to Valeta.[61] Portier-Young explains that the initial Aramaic phrase, מַלְכָּא לְעָלְמִין חֱיִי, "couches a royal fiction, the pretense that the king might have eternal life and so claim mastery over time and even death. In this very chapter Daniel will relativize, even refute, this claim, in the same language."[62]

Daniel 2:5–6 clarifies what exactly the king desired from his court wise men. Earlier, Nebuchadnezzar expressed his desire "to know the dream" (Dan 2:3), which his courtiers took to mean that he wanted to know the *meaning* of the dream (Dan 2:4). In Daniel 2:5–6, however, Nebuchadnezzar explains that he wanted his wise men to "make known" to him both the dream *and* its interpretation (חֶלְמָא וּפִשְׁרֵהּ; Dan 2:5–6). Oppenheim lists three ways in which mantic experts in the ANE interpreted "symbolic" dreams: (1) intuition; (2) consultation of "dream-omina"; and (3) consultation of the deity

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[59]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 51; Valeta, "Polyglossia and Parody," 98–99; Portier-Young, "Languages of Identity and Obligation," 110–111. André Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, trans. David Pellauer (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 38 also describes the courtly greeting as "paradoxical," and finds that the context of Daniel 2 "gives it an unexpected twist."

[60]Portier-Young, "Languages of Identity and Obligation," 111.

[61]Valeta, "Polyglossia and Parody," 99.

[62]Portier-Young, "Languages of Identity and Obligation," 111.

(or deities) who sent the dream.[63] However, without the contents of the dream itself, wise men were unable to provide any sort of interpretation. Stökl explains that Nebuchadnezzar's request here "is patently unfair to the diviners, as their knowledge and skill enables them to read divine messages in observed phenomena, not to know what the phenomena would be in the first place."[64] Both the Chaldeans (Dan 2:10–11) and Daniel (Dan 2:27) agreed that Nebuchadnezzar's request was unreasonable.

Not only did Nebuchadnezzar require the impossible, but he also threatened his wise men with humiliation and death if they failed: "If you will not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be made pieces and your houses will be made a dunghill!" (Dan 2:5). Similar threats appear in Daniel 3:29 (הַדָּמִין יִתְעֲבֵד וּבַיְתֵהּ נְוָלִי יִשְׁתַּוֵּה; "he shall be made pieces and his house will be made a dunghill"), once again on the lips of King Nebuchadnezzar, and in Ezra 6:11, by decree of King Darius I of Persia: "Furthermore I decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of the house of the perpetrator, who then shall be impaled on it. The house shall be made a dunghill [וּבַיְתֵהּ נְוָלוּ יִתְעֲבֵד]." Nebuchadnezzar, though, had power not only to punish, but also to reward; he promised that if his wise men were successful, they "will receive gifts and rewards and great honor" (Dan 2:6). Newsom and Breed explain that such "displays of power"—whether they were destructive or benevolent—served to showcase the

[63]Oppenheim, 221. See also Stökl, 138.

[64]Stökl, 147. See also Han, 82, who describes Nebuchadnezzar's request as an "'unreasonable' and 'unprecedented' demand"; and Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 120–121, who calls Nebuchadnezzar's request both "absurd" and "irrational."

impressive, yet ruthless, might of imperial rulers in the ANE.[65] Similarly, Smith-Christopher adds, "We are intended to see in Nebuchadnezzar the arrogance of power: 'See how I can punish, or reward, at my pleasure!'"[66]

The response of the wise men in Daniel 2:7 is comical, for it was almost identical to their initial response in verse 4. This time, however, they politely used a jussive verb (יֵאמַר), rather than an imperative (אֱמַר), as noted by T. J. Meadowcroft and Newsom and Breed.[67] Their change in language and tone indicates that Nebuchadnezzar's wise men realized they were in a bind. Also, the narrator has crafted the story in such a way that not only were the wise men beginning to suspect that something was not right, but so is the audience.

Finally, in Daniel 2:8–9, Nebuchadnezzar explains why he required not only an interpretation of his dream, but also the dream itself. First of all, he accused his court wise men of "buying time" (עִדָּנָא אַנְתּוּן זָבְנִין), and also of waiting "until the time has changed" (עַד דִּי עִדָּנָא יִשְׁתַּנֵּא), perhaps in reference to the "time" when Nebuchadnezzar would die and be succeeded by another, as Newsom and Breed suggest.[68] Secondly, he accused them not only of stalling, but also of doing so by attempting to give him a false or misleading interpretation ("to speak a lying and corrupt word"). Thus, Nebuchadnezzar was not only disturbed by his dream (Dan 2:1, 3), but was also paranoid

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[65]Newsom and Breed, 69.

[66]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 51.

[67]Meadowcroft, 176; Newsom and Breed, 69.

[68]Newsom and Breed, 69.

and suspicious of his advisors, which was why he chose to put them to the test. If Nebuchadnezzar's wise men could reveal the contents of his dream, then he would know that they could also give a trustworthy interpretation (Dan 2:9). Collins compares Nebuchadnezzar's behavior to an account concerning the Neo-Assyrian King Sennacherib, who supposedly "separated [his] diviners into groups in order to obtain a reliable report without collusion."[69]

Although some commentators think that Nebuchadnezzar wanted his wise men to tell him his dream simply because he had forgotten it,[70] verse 9 clearly indicates that his intention was to test them, because of his lack of trust in them. Newsom and Breed see within Nebuchadnezzar's actions an attempt to hold on to power:

> Nebuchadnezzar possesses knowledge that the advisers lack: the content of the dream. But he does not possess the skill to interpret the dream. Thus the advisers possess a power of expertise that the king lacks. Moreover, the king recognizes that he cannot judge whether the interpretation the experts render is truthful. . . . Here Nebuchadnezzar uses the knowledge that he possesses (the content of his dream), as well as his power as king to punish or reward, to set a test that he thinks will establish the veracity of the interpreters.[71]

Fewell suggests that perhaps it was because of "political anxiety" that Nebuchadnezzar chose to test his advisors, which would make sense if his dream was about "political insecurity."[72] Indeed, Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation (Dan 2:31–45) did indicate that Nebuchadnezzar's political control was on shaky ground. Fewell also leaves

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[69]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 157.

[70]Baldwin, 87–88; Lacocque, 38; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 46.

[71]Newsom and Breed, 68.

[72]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 23, 25.

open the possibility that Nebuchadnezzar's actions were simply "arbitrary and we are being led to interpret his unreasonable demand as a sign of a dangerous, unpredictable, even sadistic character."[73]

At long last, Nebuchadnezzar's wise men fully realized what the king was asking of them. Daniel 2:10–11 records how they tried to show the king the impossibility of the task he had placed before them. According to the wise men, not only had no other ruler ever required such a thing (Dan 2:10b), but it was also an impossible thing for "a human being on the earth" (לָא־אִיתִי אֱנָשׁ עַל־יַבֶּשְׁתָּא) to do (Dan 2:10a). Only the "gods" (אֱלָהִין) could perform such a task; much to the dismay of the wise men, though, the "dwelling [of the gods] is not with flesh" (מְדָרְהוֹן עִם־בִּשְׂרָא לָא אִיתוֹהִי) (Dan 2:11). The wise men's final statement foreshadows a pivotal moment in the narrative, when the "God of heaven" (אֱלָהּ שְׁמַיָּא) would make known to Daniel the "matter of the king" (Dan 2:19, 23).

Some scholars see in the story of Daniel 2 a polemic against the Babylonian wise men, for they were incapable of revealing and interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream.[74] However, the story is not as concerned with emphasizing the incompetence of the wise men, as it is with emphasizing the inability of the Babylonian gods, as well as the

[73]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 25–26.

[74]Han, 84; Chan, 11.

ineffectiveness of the Babylonian wisdom traditions, on which the wise men depended.[75] As noted previously, the request of the king was unfair to his wise men, precisely because the imperial training they received was not designed to meet such a task; even Daniel confirmed the impossibility of the task for human beings (Dan 2:27).

In Daniel 1, the exiles were taught the "literature and language of the Chaldeans," and were "educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king's court" (Dan 1:4–5). Both Daniel 1 and 2 clarify that it was not "on account of his education in the Chaldean academy," as C. L. Seow puts it, that Daniel succeeded in the Babylonian court, but only because of God's "wisdom and power" (Dan 2:20, 23; see also Dan 1:17).[76] The story in Daniel 2 showcases the inherent flaws in the Babylonian educational system, which is exemplified in the inability of the Babylonian wise men. Shane Kirkpatrick even goes so far as comparing Daniel, who was divinely inspired, to the stone in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which was cut "not with [human] hands," and which crushed the imperial statue (Dan 2:34–35):

> [I]n the contest between the foreign diviners and Daniel, success is achieved not by human ability but by divine favor. . . . Thus Daniel, like the stone, is not fashioned with human hands—not empowered by the foreign education provided

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[75]Both Collins, "Court-Tales," 223–224, and Chan, 11–12 also recognize that Daniel 2 emphasizes the powerlessness of the Babylonian deities. R. Glenn Wooden, "The Witness of Daniel in the Court of the Kings," in *"You Will Be My Witnesses": A Festschrift in Honor of the Reverend Dr. Allison A. Trites on the Occasion of His Retirement*, ed. R. Glenn Wooden, Timothy R. Ashley, and Robert S. Wilson (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 32, 40 argues that Daniel 2 primarily critiques the profession of Babylonian divination itself.

[76]C. L. Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain: The Reign of God in Daniel 2," in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 358–359 (E-book accessed on 20 September 2021, from ProQuest Ebook Central).

> by the king (Dan 1)—but is instead an agent of the divine, a recipient of God's favor, divinely-empowered for God's purposes (2:21–23).[77]

Ultimately, Daniel was able to accomplish the impossible task set before him, not because he was dependent on the "literature and language of the Chaldeans" (Dan 1:4), nor on the inaccessible Babylonian deities (Dan 2:11), but on the "God of heaven who reveals mysteries" (Dan 2:28).

This reading is also confirmed in light of the chronological notice at the outset of Daniel 2: "Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar" (Dan 2:1). Nebuchadnezzar's training program, which the Judean exiles underwent in Daniel 1, lasted *three* years (Dan 1:5). According to Daniel 2:1, the narrative of Daniel 2 took place in Nebuchadnezzar's *second* year. This suggests that the story in Daniel 2 is a sort of "flashback" in the storyline of Daniel, as proposed by Fewell and Valeta.[78] Even without a formal Chaldean education, Daniel succeeded where his peers failed, because Nebuchadnezzar's three-year training program was ultimately bogus, and true "wisdom and power" resided with the God of the exiles (Dan 2:20). Valeta concludes that the entire "scenario pokes fun at the empire's sense of intellectual superiority and self-importance."[79] While there is definitely a contrast between Daniel and his Babylonian counterparts, Daniel 2's harshest critique is reserved for the irrational King

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[77]Kirkpatrick, 88.

[78]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 23; Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 142.

[79]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 144.

Nebuchadnezzar, and the Babylonian Empire's ineffectual religious and wisdom traditions.

In response to the wise men's complaints in Daniel 2:10–11, Nebuchadnezzar "became angry and greatly furious" (מַלְכָּא בְּנַס וּקְצַף שַׂגִּיא), and in his anger, he commanded that "all the wise men of Babylon" be killed (Dan 2:12). Michael J. Chan analyzes the use of "*ira regis*"—that is, "royal anger"—in the court tales of the OT, noting that a king's anger "always either generates or contributes to the atmosphere of suspense, which pervades the court tales."[80] However, Chan also shows that in some court tales—Daniel 2 and 3, Esther, and the apocryphal Danielic story of "Bel and the Dragon"—this motif of royal rage "takes on humorous associations."[81] Specifically, Chan argues that in Daniel 2, "the motif of royal anger is part of a much larger comedic context in which the (foreign) king and his court become the 'butt' of jokes."[82]

Chan is not the first scholar to take note of the "comedic context" of Daniel 2. Concerning Daniel 2, Valeta writes that "many aspects of this dream interpretation story contribute to the sense that the narrative is funny and subverts the king's authority."[83] For Valeta, the entire opening scene of Daniel 2, which centers on the confused conversation between Nebuchadnezzar and his court wise men (Dan 2:1–12), even has a certain

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[80]Chan, 9.

[81]Chan, 9.

[82]Chan, 10.

[83]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 73.

"slapstick quality" about it, as the characters go back and forth with each other.[84] Likewise, Meadowcroft notes that in this opening scene, "[b]oth parties are talking at cross purposes."[85] Goldingay too finds that the two parties became "more anxious and hysterical" as the conversation went on (Dan 2:3–11).[86] The comical opening scene culminates with Nebuchadnezzar losing his temper (Dan 2:12), which, as Chan convincingly argues, is itself another humorous element in the story: "The king's anger and the accompanying actions are inflated to the point of absurdity: after flying into a rage, the king decides to kill *all* the 'wise men of Babylon,'"[87] including Daniel and his companions (Dan 2:13), who had not yet even graduated from divination school. For Paul L. Redditt, the narrator does not present Nebuchadnezzar as a "golden head"—which was how his dream depicted him (Dan 2:38)—but as "a self-centered tyrant."[88]

Daniel 2:12 brings the opening scene of Daniel 2 to a close. The narrator has set the stage for the rest of the story, introducing most of the story's key characters, and presenting the main conflict of the narrative. An unstable ruler, who was gripped with fear over his nightmares, demanded the impossible. When his advisors could not do what he asked, he lost his temper and ordered that they be executed. Far from being *šar mīšri* ("king of justice"), which was how both Nebuchadnezzar, and his father Nabopolassar,

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[84]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 73–74. See also Chan, 12.

[85]Meadowcroft, 176.

[86]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 41.

[87]Chan, 13.

[88]Redditt, *Daniel*, 53.

were known in the ANE, this court tale presents King Nebuchadnezzar as "an emotional basket case," in the words of Chan.[89] With Nebuchadnezzar's command that all Babylon's wise men be executed, the time has now come in the narrative for the protagonist of the opening story—that is, the Judean exile Daniel—to finally appear on the scene in Daniel 2:13–16.

Daniel's Response (Dan 2:13–16)

וְדָתָא נָפְקַת וְחַכִּימַיָּא מִתְקַטְּלִין וּבְעוֹ דָּנִיֵּאל וְחַבְרוֹהִי לְהִתְקַטָּלָה׃
בֵּאדַיִן דָּנִיֵּאל הֲתִיב עֲטָא וּטְעֵם לְאַרְיוֹךְ רַב־טַבָּחַיָּא דִּי מַלְכָּא דִּי נְפַק לְקַטָּלָה לְחַכִּימֵי בָבֶל׃
עָנֵה וְאָמַר לְאַרְיוֹךְ שַׁלִּיטָא דִּי־מַלְכָּא עַל־מָה דָתָא מְהַחְצָפָה מִן־קֳדָם מַלְכָּא אֱדַיִן מִלְּתָא הוֹדַע אַרְיוֹךְ לְדָנִיֵּאל׃
וְדָנִיֵּאל עַל וּבְעָה מִן־מַלְכָּא דִּי זִמָּן יִנְתִּן־לֵהּ וּפִשְׁרָא לְהַחֲוָיָה לְמַלְכָּא׃

> And the law went out, and the wise men were about to be killed. And they sought Daniel and his companions to kill them. Then Daniel responded with counsel and judgment to Arioch, chief of the king's executioners, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. And he answered and said to Arioch, the king's official, "Why is the law from the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made known the matter to Daniel. And Daniel went and requested that the king might give him time to make known the interpretation to the king.[90]

In this next scene (Dan 2:13–16), the narrator finally introduces Daniel and his companions. These Judean exiles were notably absent in the opening scene of Daniel 2. This, however, makes some sense, considering that this story takes place in Nebuchadnezzar's "second year" (Dan 2:1), and the exiles were trained and educated for "three years" (Dan 1:5). Although Daniel and the others had not yet even finished their training program, they too were unfortunately affected by Nebuchadnezzar's rash "law"

[89]Chan, 13.

[90]Author's translation.

(Dan 2:12–13). Moreover, the narrator makes it explicit that "they sought Daniel and his companions to kill them" (וְחַבְרוֹהִי לְהִתְקְטָלָה וּבָעוֹ דָּנִיֵּאל; Dan 2:13).

Yet, even in the face of death, "Daniel responded with counsel and judgment" (דָּנִיֵּאל הֲתִיב עֵטָא וּטְעֵם; Dan 2:14). The word עֵטָא, here translated as "counsel," derives from the root יעט, which means "to advise."[91] The second term, טְעֵם ("judgment"), comes from the root טעם, which can simply mean "to taste" (see Dan 4:25, 32, and perhaps 5:2), but also, "to understand, perceive," and even "to command."[92] In Daniel 2:14, considering its close proximity to עֵטָא ("counsel"), it is best to translate טְעֵם as "understanding" or "judgment."[93] Yet as Newsom and Breed note, "[t]he euphony of the elegant phrase [עֵטָא וּטְעֵם] defies translation."[94] Whatever the expression's precise meaning, it clearly contrasts the character of Daniel with the character of Nebuchadnezzar. While in Daniel 2:12, the narrator characterizes Nebuchadnezzar by his anger and great fury (בְּנַס וּקְצַף שַׂגִּיא), in Daniel 2:14, Daniel responded to Nebuchadnezzar's rash and irrational decree with

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[91]R. J. Kuty, "יעט," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)*, vol. 16, trans. Mark E. Biddle, ed. Holger Gzella (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 356–357, Accordance Bible Software Version 13.3.2. 2021.

[92]G. W. Nebe, "טעם," *TDOT*, vol. 16, 323–324.

[93]The Aramaic term has an Akkadian cognate, *ṭēmu*, which has a number of meanings, depending on the context, including both "command" and "discretion." For more on the meaning of *ṭēmu*, see Martha T. Roth, ed., "ṭēmu," *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 19 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2006), 85–97. Tawil, "טְעֵם," 444–445, notes that the idiomatic expression in Daniel 2:14 (עֵטָא וּטְעֵם) is roughly equivalent to the Akkadian expression *milku u ṭēmu* ("intelligence and understanding").

[94]Newsom and Breed, 62. Note the various ways in which the phrase is translated in a few modern English translations: the NRSV has "prudence and discretion"; the NIV has "wisdom and tact"; and the NASB has "discretion and discernment."

"counsel and judgment" (עֲטָא וּטְעֵם). Daniel was, as the saying goes, "cool, calm, and collected," while Nebuchadnezzar was anything but.

The narrator explains that Daniel went directly to "Arioch, chief of the king's executioners, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon" (Dan 2:14). When Daniel asked Arioch, "Why is the law from the king so urgent?", Arioch was quick to explain the situation to him (Dan 2:15). Daniel's "counsel and judgment" (Dan 2:14) had an immediate positive effect on the situation, as it stalled the "butchering"[95] action of Arioch. Arioch's willingness to lay down his arms and to converse with Daniel is, in Valeta's opinion, another humorous element of the story, for Arioch "is clearly depicted as being on Daniel's side, not the king's."[96] Fewell too notes that Arioch "seems not overly eager to fulfill his task."[97] In this way, Arioch, "chief of the king's executioners," parallels the "chief of the eunuchs" in Daniel 1, with whom God had given Daniel favor (Dan 1:9), as well as the guard set over the exiles (Dan 1:11), who agreed to the test proposed by Daniel (Dan 1:14). According to Valeta, these characters are "collaborators

[95]The Aramaic term טַבָּח ("executioner") derives from the root טבח, which means "to slaughter, butcher," and thus can be rendered "butcher" or even "cook" (see 1 Sam 9:23). See Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, "טַבָּח," *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT)*, Study ed., trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson, vol. 1 (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2001), 368; Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 158.

[96]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 75.

[97]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 27.

with the king's prisoners," who "undermine the king's wishes by their connivance with the exiles," and thus, "destabilize" the Babylonian Empire.[98]

Unlike Daniel 2:14, which describes Daniel's "counsel and judgment" in approaching Arioch, Daniel 2:16 simply states that "Daniel went and requested that the king might give him time to make known the interpretation to the king." Seow compares Daniel's actions here with those of Esther:

> [Daniel] dares to go before the king without being summoned. Such an act would no doubt have constituted a violation of palace protocol and would likely have been a capital offence (see Esth. 4:11). . . . Esther, another Jew living under the rule of foreigners, likewise risked her life by appearing before the Persian king without being summoned and, in doing so, eventually saved many lives. So, too, Daniel's life-risking action would preserve lives (Dan. 2:18).[99]

Daniel, the brave Jew, marched boldly into the court of King Nebuchadnezzar, demanding an audience, and asked for more time to accomplish the impossible task posed by the king. Daniel seemingly "broke the rules" of the king's court[100] not only to save the lives of himself and his companions, but also the lives of the Babylonian wise men. In this regard, Daniel was somewhat *unlike* Esther, which is a contrast that Jin Yang Kim draws attention to: while both Esther and Daniel saved lives, Daniel saved the lives of

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[98]Valeta, "Court or Jester Tales?," 320–321.

[99]Seow, *Daniel*, 40.

[100]In his retelling of the story of Daniel 2, Flavius Josephus notably does not say Daniel went in and requested time from the king, but rather that "he begged Arioch to go into the king and ask a respite for the magicians for one night," in *Antiquities of the Jews*, in *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, vol. 2, trans. William Whiston, rev. A. R. Shilleto (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), 234. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 158 proposes that Josephus makes this change, because he recognized Daniel's "impropriety."

both Jews and non-Jews.[101] In the Esther story, even after the salvation of the Jewish people, "violent confrontation ensues," for the Jews ultimately "destroy their enemies."[102] Kirkpatrick notes Daniel's "gracious benevolence" on display in Daniel 2,[103] which also adds to the sharp contrast between Daniel's character and that of King Nebuchadnezzar. The king's benevolence was something of a *false* benevolence: yes, he was able to provide great rewards and gifts (Dan 2:6), but he could just as easily destroy (Dan 2:5), which is ultimately what he attempted to do (Dan 2:12). While Nebuchadnezzar was quick to kill, Daniel was quick to risk his life for his fellow wise men.

Specifically, Daniel "requested that the king might give him time [זְמָן] to make known the interpretation to the king" (Dan 2:16). Earlier in the story (Dan 2:8–9), Nebuchadnezzar accused his court wise men of "buying time [עִדָּנָא]," of stalling until "the time [עִדָּנָא] has changed," and even of "agreeing" or "conspiring" together (הִזְדְּמַנְתּוּן) to speak lies to him. As Goldingay and D. Schwiderski note, the root of the latter verbal form is זמן, which is used nominally in Daniel 2:16 and elsewhere, meaning "time."[104] Although Nebuchadnezzar refused to grant "time" (עִדָּן) to his court wise men, he

[101]Jin Yang Kim, "Doxology as the Rhetoric of Resistance in the Aramaic Tales of Daniel 2–6" (Ph.D diss., The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2011), 127.

[102]Kim, 127.

[103]Kirkpatrick, 85.

[104]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 44; D. Schwiderski, "זמן," *TDOT*, vol. 16, 240.

apparently chose to grant "time" (זְמָן) to Daniel.[105] R. Glenn Wooden argues that at this point in the narrative the reader should "read between the lines," and recognize that Daniel was granted "time" only because of "divine intervention" (cf. Dan 1:9).[106] It is seemingly only because God was on the side of this Jewish exile that he could find such success in the court of the king.

With time surprisingly granted to Daniel, this short scene comes to a close. Daniel successfully stopped the executioners in their tracks, due to his "counsel and judgment" (Dan 2:14). With the help of Arioch, a trusted official of the king, Daniel was able to temporarily halt the execution of Babylon's wise men altogether, by volunteering to "make known the interpretation to the king" (Dan 2:16). The next section of this chapter will analyze Daniel 2:17–23, in which the narrator tells of how Daniel was able to accomplish the impossible task of the king.

Daniel 2:17–23

אֱדַיִן דָּנִיֵּאל לְבֵיתֵהּ אֲזַל וְלַחֲנַנְיָה מִישָׁאֵל וַעֲזַרְיָה חַבְרוֹהִי מִלְּתָא הוֹדַע: וְרַחֲמִין לְמִבְעֵא מִן־קֳדָם אֱלָהּ שְׁמַיָּא עַל־
רָזָא דְנָה דִּי לָא יְהוֹבְדוּן דָּנִיֵּאל וְחַבְרוֹהִי עִם־שְׁאָר חַכִּימֵי בָבֶל: אֱדַיִן לְדָנִיֵּאל בְּחֶזְוָא דִי־לֵילְיָא רָזָא גְלִי אֱדַיִן
דָּנִיֵּאל בָּרִךְ לֶאֱלָהּ שְׁמַיָּא: עָנֵה דָנִיֵּאל וְאָמַר לֶהֱוֵא שְׁמֵהּ דִּי־אֱלָהָא מְבָרַךְ מִן־עָלְמָא וְעַד־עָלְמָא דִּי חָכְמְתָא
וּגְבוּרְתָא דִּי לֵהּ־הִיא: וְהוּא מְהַשְׁנֵא עִדָּנַיָּא וְזִמְנַיָּא מְהַעְדֵּה מַלְכִין וּמְהָקֵים מַלְכִין יָהֵב חָכְמְתָא לְחַכִּימִין וּמַנְדְּעָא
לְיָדְעֵי בִינָה: הוּא גְּלֵא עַמִּיקָתָא וּמְסַתְּרָתָא יָדַע מָה בַּחֲשׁוֹכָא ונהירא [וּנְהוֹרָא] עִמֵּהּ שְׁרֵא: לָךְ אֱלָהּ אֲבָהָתִי
מְהוֹדֵא וּמְשַׁבַּח אֲנָה דִּי חָכְמְתָא וּגְבוּרְתָא יְהַבְתְּ לִי וּכְעַן הוֹדַעְתַּנִי דִּי־בְעֵינָא מִנָּךְ דִּי־מִלַּת מַלְכָּא הוֹדַעְתָּנָא:

> Then Daniel went to his house. And he made known the matter to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and he told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, that Daniel and his friends might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then, in the vision of the night, the mystery was

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[105]The text itself does not explicitly say that Nebuchadnezzar granted the "time" to Daniel, but rather, moves directly from the scene in the king's court (Dan 2:16) to the next scene in Daniel's home (Dan 2:17).

[106]Wooden, 45.

> revealed to Daniel. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, "May the name of God be blessed from forever and until forever, for wisdom and power are His. He changes times and turns, removing kings and establishing kings, giving 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. To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for wisdom and power You have given to me. And now You have made known to me what we sought from You, for You have made known to us the matter of the king."[107]

In Daniel 2:17, the setting shifts from the court of the powerful king (Dan 2:1–16) to the private quarters of Daniel and his fellow Judean exiles. This change in setting is significant. Valeta contrasts the two primary settings of Daniel 2—that is, the king's court (Dan 2:1–16, 24–49) and the home of Daniel (Dan 2:17–23)—and shows how Daniel 2, along with the other Daniel stories, "subverts the power of the court directly or indirectly."[108] Valeta continues, "The private dream life of the king and his subsequent fury expressed in the court against his inept advisors in Dan 2 is destabilized through a prayer meeting in Daniel's quarters."[109] P. M. Venter reaches a similar conclusion, when he writes that in the king's court, "everything is directed by the king. He decides on what should happen and he brings about the crisis when his demands are not met. . . . But the king, with all his power, is unable to enforce the divine revelation he is looking for."[110]

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[107]Author's translation.

[108]Valeta, "Court or Jester Tales?," 320.

[109]Valeta, "Court or Jester Tales?," 320.

[110]P. M. Venter, "The Function of Poetic Speech in the Narrative in Daniel 2," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 49 (1993): 1018, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (2 September 2021).

Thus, the story of Daniel 2, via the change of setting, indicates that real power does not reside in the court of the king, but in the quarters of prisoners, exiles, and slaves.

In his own home, Daniel conversed with his companions, whom the narrator identifies not by their Babylonian names, which were given to them earlier in the story (Dan 1:7), but by their Hebrew ones. Portier-Young explains that each of the exiles' Hebrew names "bears a theophoric element, and makes a confession of faith: God is my judge; Yah is gracious; [the one] who belongs to God; Yah helps."[111] In contrast, their new Babylonian names potentially contain references to Babylonian deities, as both Valeta and Portier-Young note.[112] The narrator primarily uses the Babylonian names of Daniel's companions when the setting of the story is courtly (e.g., Dan 2:49; 3:12). When by themselves, however—that is, "away from the 'king's ear,'" to borrow a phrase from Smith-Christopher[113]—the narrator refers to the exiles by their Hebrew names. Han recognizes the significance of both the exiles' changed names in Daniel 1, and the narrator's use of their Hebrew names here:

> [T]he change of name by the colonial power is an invasive measure geared toward the obliteration of the traditional culture of the subjugated peoples. The change of the three youths' names marks them as the citizens of the empire, and their

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[111]Portier-Young, "Languages of Identity and Obligation," 108.

[112]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 69, n. 6; Portier-Young, "Languages of Identity and Obligation," 109. But, compare with Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 141, who does not seem to think that the Babylonian names reference Babylonian gods, except for Abednego, which "is generally recognized as a distortion, whether intentional or not, of *Abed-Nabû*, 'servant of Nabu.'" Lacqoque, 29 contends that the name Abednego contains an "intentional deformation" of Nabu's name.

[113]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 30 compares the Daniel stories to "conversations [that] must take place in the shadows, away from the 'king's ear,'" and to "tales told in whispers."

> original identity is placed at perilous risk. . . . [But] no colonial measure is able to corrupt Daniel and his friends. The change of the names does not transform Daniel and his friends into docile agents of the empire. . . . In their promotion to the imperial service, they are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (2:49; 3:30), but as Daniel's partners of prayer, they are again Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (2:17).[114]

Also, by using their Hebrew names, the narrator calls attention not only to the exiles' Hebrew identity, but also to the "God of [their] fathers" (Dan 2:23), who is the only God capable of providing mercy and revealing the king's dream (Dan 2:18, 23).

Daniel called on his companions "to seek [לְמִבְעָא] mercy from the God of heaven" (Dan 2:18). The verb בְּעָה appeared earlier in the narrative, when the executioners "sought" (בָּעוֹ) Daniel and his companions to put them to death (Dan 2:13). In response, Daniel went to the king, and "requested" or "sought" (בָּעָה) time from the king (Dan 2:16). Finally, however, Daniel and his companions appealed to a much higher power than King Nebuchadnezzar for deliverance: the God of heaven, from whom they "seek" (לְמִבְעָא) "mercy" (Dan 2:18; see also Dan 2:23).[115]

In Daniel 2:19, the narrator explains that "in the vision of the night, the mystery was revealed to Daniel." This "prayer meeting," as Valeta calls it, in the private quarters of the Judean exiles was ultimately successful.[116] Yet, even at this point, which, as Fewell explains, "is a prime opportunity to present the content of the dream . . . the narrator

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[114]Han, 34. Baldwin, 89 also notes that "[i]t is fitting that their Hebrew names should be used in this context of faith and prayer."

[115]Both Goldingay, *Daniel*, 44, and Kim, 142–143 note the repeated use of בְּעָה throughout Daniel 2.

[116]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 149.

refrains from disclosure."[117] Thus, as Newsom and Breed put it, the audience's knowledge of the dream "is teasingly deferred."[118]

In response to the revealed mystery, "Daniel blessed the God of heaven" (Dan 2:19). According to Smith-Christopher and Newsom and Breed, the title אֱלָהּ שְׁמַיָּא ("God of heaven"; Dan 2:17, 19, 37, 44) was used primarily in the Persian Period (539–333 BCE; see also, e.g., Ezra 5:11, 12; 6:9).[119] Collins also explains that it "was the title by which the Persians recognized the God of Israel (thus Cyrus's decree, Ezra 1:2)."[120] Thus, it is likely that the title originated in an imperial context. Within the narrative context of Daniel 2, the title "God of heaven" calls to mind the statement of the Babylonian wise men earlier: "There is not a human being *on the earth* [emphasis added] that is able to make known the matter of the king . . . and there is not another that can make it known to the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is *not with flesh* [emphasis added]" (Dan 2:10–11). The wise men were correct when they asserted that no one "on the earth" (עַל־יַבָּשְׁתָּא) could perform the king's impossible task. They were mistaken, however, about the inaccessibility of "the gods," for the "God in heaven" (אֱלָהּ בִּשְׁמַיָּא; Dan 2:28) *does* reveal mysteries to His servants—that is, the Judean exiles (Dan 2:19, 23).

Daniel's doxology in Daniel 2:20–23 stands out from the rest of the narrative, because of its poetic nature, and as G. T. M. Prinsloo argues, "It catches attention and

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[117]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 28.

[118]Newsom and Breed, 72.

[119]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 52; Newsom and Breed, 71.

[120]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 159.

prepares the reader for something out of the ordinary."[121] Valeta explains that the doxology "slows down time" within the narrative, and as a result, "focuses the reader on God's goodness, wisdom, and power in contrast to the cruelty, foolishness, and false power of the king."[122] Yet, although the doxology is distinct in form from the rest of the narrative, it still fits very well into the story. Goldingay finds that it prepares the audience for the contents (and meaning) of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, but it does so "without revealing it as a whole at this point."[123] According to Newsom and Breed, the doxology accomplishes this by dropping a number of important "hints" about the dream.[124]

The doxology begins, "May the name of God be blessed from forever and until forever, for wisdom and power are His" (Dan 2:20). Daniel's declaration that God's name should be blessed "from forever and until forever" (מִן־עָלְמָא וְעַד־עָלְמָא) recalls the first Aramaic words of the story, spoken by the court wise men: "O king, live forever!" (מַלְכָּא לְעָלְמִין חֱיִי; Dan 2:4). Seow calls attention to these competing claims to eternal life: "Whereas the Chaldeans bid the king to 'live forever' (v. 4), Daniel's hymn blesses the name of God 'forever and ever' (v. 20a)."[125] Furthermore, the next verse claims that "[God] changes times and turns" (מְהַשְׁנֵא עִדָּנַיָּא וְזִמְנַיָּא וְהוּא), using both of the words for

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[121]G. T. M. Prinsloo, "Two Poems in a Sea of Prose: The Content and Context of Daniel 2.20–23 and 6.27–28," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 18, no. 59 (1993): 101, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (4 February 2022).

[122]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 76.

[123]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 42.

[124]Newsom and Breed, 72.

[125]Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain," 363.

"time" that have already shown up earlier in the narrative: עִדָּן (Dan 2:8–9) and זְמָן (Dan 2:16). Despite the wise men's courtly greeting in Daniel 2:4, "Nebuchadnezzar's kingship can hardly be an eternal one! He has no control over time, much less eternity," as Seow points out.[126] If one pays attention to his earlier accusations, one recognizes Nebuchadnezzar's strange paranoia over time, for he accused his advisors of "buying time" and of waiting "until the time has changed" (Dan 2:8–9). Clearly, Nebuchadnezzar had no power over time,[127] for it is God who controls time—both עִדָּן and זְמָן (Dan 2:21).

The reason why Daniel "blessed God" was because "wisdom and power are His" (חָכְמְתָא וּגְבוּרְתָא דִּי לֵהּ־הִיא; Dan 2:20). As Collins points out, this language is strikingly similar to Job 12:13: "With [God] are wisdom and power" (עִמּוֹ חָכְמָה וּגְבוּרָה).[128] The two attributes of God explicitly mentioned in both Daniel 2:20 and Job 12:13 are חָכְמָה ("wisdom") and גְּבוּרָה ("power"). These two terms appear again in the closing lines of Daniel's doxology: "To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for wisdom [חָכְמְתָא] and power [גְּבוּרְתָא] You have given to me" (Dan 2:23). The repetition of "wisdom" and "power" at the end of the doxology creates an *inclusio* around the entire song, and indicates that "wisdom" and "power" are two prominent themes of the doxology.

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[126]Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain," 361.

[127]It is difficult to determine whether or not there is any significance in the narrator's choice to not explicitly narrate Nebuchadnezzar's granting of "time" (זְמָן) to Daniel in Daniel 2:16. Perhaps, the narrator refrains from doing so, in order to make it clear that Nebuchadnezzar cannot, in fact, control "time," for that is a divine prerogative.

[128]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 160.

According to Daniel, God's "power" can be seen not only in His ability to control time, but also in His "removing kings and establishing kings" (מְהַעְדֵּה מַלְכִין וּמְהָקֵים מַלְכִין; Dan 2:21). Smith-Christopher finds that at this point in the doxology, "the politicization of Daniel's prayer is made clearer."[129] Smith-Christopher even goes so far as calling this doxology a "hymn of political protest."[130] Indeed, the language of "removing" and "establishing" kings is politically potent. The changing of "times and turns" is in parallel with the "removing" and "establishing" of kings and their kingdoms; and, the doxology presents both of them as divine attributes. Kim finds that the inclusion of these themes in the doxology prepares the reader for "Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream[, which] concerns the coming of future kingdoms . . . and also the elevating of God's own kingdom."[131] Daniel 2:44 even twice uses the verbal root קום ("to rise" or "to stand"), like Daniel 2:21 (מְהָקֵים), specifically in relation to political rule: God will "establish" (יְקִים; Haphel of קום) a kingdom, and this kingdom will always "stand" (תְּקוּם). Daniel, who had received divine revelation about Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan 2:19), recognized that God would continue "removing" and "establishing" many kings and kingdoms, as He also persisted in changing "times and turns" (Dan 2:21).

While the first half of Daniel 2:21 deals primarily with God's "power," the second half of the verse, as well as the next verse, deals specifically with God's "wisdom." Daniel praised God for "giving wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have

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[129]Smith-Christopher, "Prayers and Dreams," 288.

[130]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 52.

[131]Kim, 141.

understanding" (Dan 2:21b). Because "wisdom" belongs to God, He can "give" (יָהֵב) it to others. Ironically, it is to "the wise" (חַכִּימִין) that God gives "wisdom," which seems to indicate that "the wise men of Babylon" (חַכִּימֵי בָבֶל; Dan 2:12, 14, 18, 24, 48) actually were not "wise," for they did not have this divinely granted "wisdom" (Dan 2:10–11).

Daniel 2:22 continues the exposition of God's wisdom: "He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with Him." Once again, the language of the doxology recalls the language of Job, as pointed out by Collins: "He reveals the deep from the darkness, and brings deep darkness to light" (מְגַלֶּה עֲמֻקוֹת מִנִּי־חֹשֶׁךְ וַיּוֹצֵא לָאוֹר צַלְמָוֶת; Job 12:22).[132] The doxology declares that God "reveals deep and hidden things" (גָּלֵא עַמִּיקָתָא וּמְסַתְּרָתָא; Dan 2:22a). The verbal root גלא ("to reveal") is important to the overall storyline of Daniel 2, for within the narrative context, it is only God who "reveals" (גְּלָא; Dan 2:19; 22; 28, 29, 30, 47).[133] Furthermore, God "knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with Him" (Dan 2:22b). As Smith-Christopher notes, the "light" (נְהוֹרָא) that dwells with God is contrasted with the "darkness" (חֲשׁוֹכָא).[134] Yet, although "light" and "darkness" are opposed to one another, God has power over both.

Finally, in verse 23, the doxology comes to a close. As stated earlier, Daniel gave "thanks and praise" to God, because God gave to Daniel "wisdom and power" (Dan

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[132]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 160.

[133]The court wise men, when offering to "reveal" an interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the opening scene, never used גְּלָא, but always a verb derived from the root חוה ("to show"; Dan 2:4, 7, 10, 11; see also Dan 2:6, 9).

[134]Smith-Christopher, "Prayers and Dreams," 286.

2:23). These two attributes mentioned in Daniel 2:23 are the same ones attributed to God at the beginning of the doxology (Dan 2:20). According to Smith-Christopher, "This inclusio suggests that God, the greatest power, 'deputizes' Daniel and his companions."[135] Seow concurs: "The doxology implies that God's wisdom and power will be mediated through human agents, even through those who are lowly and powerless."[136]

In the context of this court tale, one would expect the protagonist to have "wisdom" (חָכְמָה), for the heroes of such court tales always succeed through wisdom and cleverness. "Power" (גְּבוּרָה), on the other hand, is less expected, for as Smith-Christopher explains, the term is primarily used in the OT in reference to military power (e.g., Ps 66:7; Jer 10:6).[137] This indicates that the "power" God gave to Daniel was not simply "intellectual strength," as Fewell suggests,[138] but was "power" to stand firm in the face of great opposition. The portrait of Daniel that emerges from this doxology, then, is not simply that of a wise courtier, but of a "wisdom warrior," as Smith-Christopher puts it so well.[139] Daniel, though, was not armed with weapons, but with wisdom and divine

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[135]Smith-Christopher, "Prayers and Dreams," 286.

[136]Seow, *Daniel*, 42.

[137]Smith-Christopher, "Prayers and Dreams," 288. See also Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 239.

[138]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 29.

[139]Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology of Exile*, 186.

revelation. Portier-Young concludes, "Wisdom and knowledge, not weapons, are the strength of the faithful in the book of Daniel."[140]

Yet, this does not mean Daniel's "power" was any less potent. As discussed in chapter 1, it is commonplace for many to associate resistance with violence, and to discount forms of resistance that do not resort to or promote violence. This, however, is a misguided conclusion. Daniel 2 shows how divinely empowered individuals, like Daniel, are even more powerful than imperial forces. Susan F. Matthews argues that in the Daniel stories, "[t]he wisdom and piety of Daniel and his companions are shown to be a mighty political weapon," which provides "a convincing alternative to armed rebellion."[141] Similarly, Seow draws a comparison between Moses, whom God "enabled . . . to confront Pharaoh's awesome power" earlier in Israel's history, and Daniel, "who is to confront yet another powerful and oppressive ruler in history."[142]

The doxology of Daniel (Dan 2:20–23), which stands at the very center of the narrative, as both Prinsloo and Kim draw attention to,[143] is the crucial turning point of the narrative. W. Sibley Towner notes that the doxology "divides" the story in half, creating a bridge between the account of the court wise men's failure and the description of

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[140]Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 239.

[141]Susan F. Matthews, "When We Remembered Zion: The Significance of the Exile for Understanding Daniel," in *The Bible on Suffering: Social and Political Implications*, ed. Anthony J. Tambasco (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2002), 115–116.

[142]Seow, *Daniel*, 42.

[143]Prinsloo, 100; Kim, 132–134.

Daniel's success.[144] Daniel's doxology also focuses the reader's attention on the incomparable attributes of the God of the exiles. Thus, the first half of Daniel 2 comes to an end. Now, with the "the matter of the king" revealed to the Jewish exiles (Dan 2:23), Daniel was prepared to enter the king's court and interpret the king's dream.

Conclusion

This chapter examined some introductory matters of importance to the study of Daniel 2—namely, the dating, authorship, and audience of the Daniel stories (Dan 1–6). This author, then, provided a brief summary of Daniel 1—for this opening story introduces the main characters of the entire work and sets the stage nicely for the story in Daniel 2. The exegetical portions of this chapter focused on the first half of Daniel 2, which was split up into two main sections: Daniel 2:1–16, which was further divided into two smaller sections (Dan 2:1–12 and Dan 2:13–16), and Daniel 2:17–23.

The opening scene (Dan 2:1–12) paints King Nebuchadnezzar as an unstable ruler, who not only suffered from nightmares, but was paranoid of his closest advisors, as well as prone to making rash decrees. Although the court wise men were understandably unable to accomplish the king's impossible task, the opening scene still depicts them as comical and dull. The two scenes in which Daniel plays a prominent role (Dan 2:13–16; Dan 2:17–23) portray this Jewish exile as a man of wisdom and sound judgment. His character clearly contrasts with both King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian wise men. Through characterization, humor, contrast, wordplay, and setting, the story of Daniel 2,

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[144]W. Sibley Towner, "The Poetic Passages of Daniel 1–6," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1969): 318–319, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (8 February 2022).

thus far, has subverted and resisted the power of the king, and has shown that true power resides with the God of the exiles, which He graciously bestows on His people. At this point in the narrative, though, the reader still does not know the dream of the king, nor its interpretation. Daniel's telling and interpreting of Nebuchadnezzar's bizarre dream, which constitutes the bulk of the final half of Daniel 2, will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF DANIEL 2:24–49

Introduction

The previous chapter provided an exegetical analysis of the first half of Daniel 2 (Dan 2:1–23), which introduces the main conflict of the story, as well as the major characters. In this chapter, the author will conduct an exegetical analysis of Daniel 2:24–49, once again giving special attention to themes in the narrative specifically related to the story's political stance. In the second half of Daniel 2, the narrator brings the narrative to its climax by finally describing the dream and its interpretation in detail (Dan 2:30–45). In the end, the conflict that was introduced in the opening scene (Dan 2:1–12) finds its resolution in the closing scene (Dan 2:46–49). Daniel 2:24–49 can be divided into three main sections: Daniel's return to the king's court (Dan 2:24–30); Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation (Dan 2:31–45); and Nebuchadnezzar's response (Dan 2:46–49). Because of the length of the middle section, the following exegetical analysis will divide it into two subsections (Dan 2:31–35 and Dan 2:36–45).

Daniel 2:24–30

כָּל־קֳבֵל דְּנָה דָּנִיֵּאל עַל עַל־אַרְיוֹךְ דִּי מַנִּי מַלְכָּא לְהוֹבָדָה לְחַכִּימֵי בָבֶל אֲזַל וְכֵן אֲמַר־לֵהּ לְחַכִּימֵי בָבֶל אַל־תְּהוֹבֵד הַעֲלֵנִי קֳדָם מַלְכָּא וּפִשְׁרָא לְמַלְכָּא אֲחַוֵּא: אֱדַיִן אַרְיוֹךְ בְּהִתְבְּהָלָה הַנְעֵל לְדָנִיֵּאל קֳדָם מַלְכָּא וְכֵן אֲמַר־לֵהּ דִּי־הַשְׁכַּחַת גְּבַר מִן־בְּנֵי גָלוּתָא דִּי יְהוּד דִּי פִשְׁרָא לְמַלְכָּא יְהוֹדַע: עָנֵה מַלְכָּא וְאָמַר לְדָנִיֵּאל דִּי שְׁמֵהּ בֵּלְטְשַׁאצַּר האיתיך [הַאִיתָךְ] כָּהֵל לְהוֹדָעֲתַנִי חֶלְמָא דִּי־חֲזֵית וּפִשְׁרֵהּ: עָנֵה דָנִיֵּאל קֳדָם מַלְכָּא וְאָמַר רָזָה דִּי־מַלְכָּא שָׁאֵל לָא חַכִּימִין אָשְׁפִין חַרְטֻמִּין גְּזָרִין יָכְלִין לְהַחֲוָיָה לְמַלְכָּא: בְּרַם אִיתַי אֱלָהּ בִּשְׁמַיָּא גָּלֵא רָזִין וְהוֹדַע לְמַלְכָּא נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּ מָה דִּי לֶהֱוֵא בְּאַחֲרִית יוֹמַיָּא חֶלְמָךְ וְחֶזְוֵי רֵאשָׁךְ עַל־מִשְׁכְּבָךְ דְּנָה הוּא: אנתה [אַנְתְּ] מַלְכָּא רַעְיוֹנָךְ עַל־מִשְׁכְּבָךְ

סְלֵקוּ מָה דִּי לֶהֱוָא אַחֲרֵי דְנָה וְגָלֵא רָזַיָּא הוֹדְעָךְ מָה־דִּי לֶהֱוָא: וַאֲנָה לָא בְחָכְמָה דִּי־אִיתַי בִּי מִן־כָּל־חַיַּיָא רָזָא דְנָה
גְּלִי לִי לָהֵן עַל־דִּבְרַת דִּי פִשְׁרָא לְמַלְכָּא יְהוֹדְעוּן וְרַעְיוֹנֵי לִבָּךְ תִּנְדַּע:

> Therefore, Daniel went 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 before the king and I will reveal the interpretation to the king." Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king and said thus to him, "I have found a man from the sons of the exile of Judah, who will make known the interpretation to the king." The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I saw and its interpretation?" Daniel answered before the king and said, "The mystery about which the king asks—wise men, exorcists, magicians, and diviners are unable to reveal it to the king. But there is a God in heaven, who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the end of the days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay on your bed were these: O king, as you lay on your bed, your thoughts came up concerning what will be after this, and the One who reveals mysteries made known to you what will be. But it is not because I have wisdom in me that is greater than all the living that this mystery was revealed to me, but so that we might make known the interpretation to the king, and that you might understand the thoughts of your heart."[1]

This section opens with Daniel returning to Arioch and explaining that the wise men of Babylon do not need to die, for Daniel "will reveal the interpretation to the king" (Dan 2:24). Once again, Arioch's role in the story is that of an intermediary, a transitional character. Arioch "quickly brought Daniel before the king" and introduced him, saying, "I have found a man from the sons of the exile of Judah, who will make known the interpretation to the king" (Dan 2:25). For many readers of the story thus far, this reintroduction of Daniel to the king may seem a bit odd. Earlier in the narrative, Daniel himself barged into the court of the king and demanded an audience with him (Dan 2:16). Arioch also described Daniel not as one of Nebuchadnezzar's wise men (see Dan 2:13), but simply as someone "from the sons of the exile of Judah" (מִן־בְּנֵי גָלוּתָא דִּי יְהוּד; Dan

[1]Author's translation.

2:25). Davies notes this peculiarity: "Daniel is presented *both* as one of the king's wise men (thus presupposing the data supplied by ch. 1) *and* as a Jewish captive unknown to the king."[2] This strange reintroduction of Daniel to the king has led some scholars, therefore, to posit an original form of the story in Daniel 2 that did not include verses 13–23.[3] Such proposals, however, are inherently hypothetical, because no form of Daniel 2 exists without these verses.

Also, the reintroduction of Daniel to the king actually serves a number of purposes within the narrative. First and foremost, it adds to the depiction of Arioch as a character. Arioch's "quick" response, once again, indicates his unwillingness to follow through in his task of destroying the Babylonian wise men (see Dan 2:14–15). Norman W. Porteous puts it well: "Arioch snatches at the chance to escape from his disagreeable duty and loses no time in introducing Daniel into the king's presence."[4] Not only does the story present Arioch as a poor executioner, but also as one eager to claim some credit for himself in having "found" someone to help the king (Dan 2:25), according to Baldwin, Fewell, and Valeta.[5] Fewell, though, notes that "if reward is what he seeks he is to be

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[2]Davies, *Daniel*, 45.

[3]Hartman and Di Lella, 139; Davies, *Daniel*, 45–46; Meadowcroft, 172; Redditt, *Daniel*, 50, 53–54; Newsom and Breed, 70. Lacocque, 44 argues that the inserted material begins in verse 14, rather than 13.

[4]Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 43.

[5]Baldwin, 91; Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 30; Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 76.

disappointed. The king immediately turns his attention to Daniel and Arioch is not mentioned again."[6]

Secondly, Arioch's introduction of Daniel to the king also makes a subtle connection between the unique character of Daniel and the unique God whom he serves. The verbal root גלא ("to reveal, uncover") is used throughout the story of Daniel 2 to describe the unique "revelatory" action of the "God of heaven" (Dan 2:22, 28, 29, 47). When in the *haphel* conjugation, however, this verb means "to deport," from which the nominal form גָּלוּ ("exile"; Dan 2:25) is ultimately derived.[7] Meadowcroft explains that due to the description of Daniel as an "exile" (גָּלוּתָא; Dan 2:25), "[a] verbal link is thereby made between God the revealer [גלא] and Daniel the exile [גלו], through whom God is able to reveal."[8] Another wordplay may be at work in Arioch's description of Daniel as one from "Judah" (יְהוּד), who was able to "make known" (יְהוֹדַע) to the king the interpretation of his dream, utilizing two words (יְהוּד and יְהוֹדַע) similar in sound.

Lastly, although the two meetings with the king—the second of which seems to indicate that Nebuchadnezzar did not already know Daniel (Dan 2:25–26)—may strike modern readers as unusual or even contradictory, this need not have been the case for ancient audiences. Adele Berlin, in her seminal work on biblical narrative, notes that even "inconsistencies" and "retellings" in a story "can be viewed as part of a literary technique

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[6]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 30.

[7]Brown, Driver, and Briggs, "גָּלָא," 1086. But, compare with R. G. Kratz, "גלי I," *TDOT*, vol. 16, 166–167, who differentiates between two identical roots (גלי I and גלי II, meaning "to reveal" and "to emigrate," respectively), because of "semantic difference."

[8]Meadowcroft, 182. See also Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 76.

and are not necessarily signs of different sources."[9] For these reasons, the author of this thesis concludes, with Valeta, that "the view that this pericope is original to the chapter is plausible."[10]

In Daniel 2:26, the narrator explains that Daniel was also called Belteshazzar, which creates a link between this story and a number of the other tales in Daniel 1–6 (see Dan 1:7; 4:8, 9, 18, 19; 5:12). The use of the name here not only connects this story to the other tales, but it also indicates a shift in the story's point of view. Proper names and other locutions used for characters can, according to Berlin and Fewell, indicate whose point of view is being presented.[11] In the second half of the narrative (Dan 2:24–49), which is set, once again, in the king's court (see also Dan 2:1–12), the narrator tells the story from King Nebuchadnezzar's point of view, as Fewell explains.[12] To Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel was simply one of the "exiles of Judah" (Dan 2:25), whom he had renamed with a Babylonian name honoring his own god (Dan 2:26; see Dan 1:7). For Sharon Pace, the Babylonian name "accentuates Daniel's subservient status, yet it is this

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[9]Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and Literature Series 9 (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1983), 121.

[10]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 77. For other scholars who consider these verses to be original, see Porteous, 43; Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, vol. 20 (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2002), 71–72. John A. Cook, *Aramaic Ezra and Daniel: A Handbook on the Aramaic Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 129 recognizes the apparent discrepancies in the narrative caused by the inclusion of Dan 2:13–23, but also notes that "not all the perceived difficulties are obviated by positing this section as an insertion."

[11]Berlin, 59; Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 30.

[12]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 30.

same exile who will soon undermine Babylonian pretensions by announcing God's judgment against the kingdom" (Dan 2:44–45).[13]

King Nebuchadnezzar unbelievingly asked Daniel, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I saw and its interpretation?" (Dan 2:26). In response, Daniel confirmed the earlier protest of the court wise men, when they declared, "There is not a human being on the earth that is able to make known the matter of the king" (Dan 2:10). According to Daniel here, "The mystery about which the king asks—wise men, exorcists, magicians, and diviners are unable to reveal it to the king" (Dan 2:27). Daniel's response highlights, once again, the impossibility of the king's request. Where Daniel differed from his Babylonian counterparts, however, was that he did not lament with them that the gods were too remote to be of any help in solving this mystery (Dan 2:11). Rather, Daniel explains to the king that "there is a God in heaven, who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the end of the days" (Dan 2:28).

The phrase "in the end of the days" (בְּאַחֲרִית יוֹמַיָּא; Dan 2:28) is an important one for the interpretation of Daniel 2. At first glance, the phrase carries "some finality," as Meadowcroft puts it.[14] Indeed, it is commonplace to interpret the phrase eschatologically. As Collins notes, the related Hebrew phrase בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים is used throughout the OT (Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Deut 4:30; 31:29; Isa 2:2; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek 38:16;

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[13]Pace, 65.

[14]Meadowcroft, 186. In the Septuagint (LXX), the phrase is translated as ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν ("at the end of the days"), and most likely would have been understood eschatologically. Note, however, the discussion in Meadowcroft, 185–187, on the range of meaning of ἔσχατος in the LXX.

Dan 10:14; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1); but, only in some of these instances (Isa 2:2; Ezek 38:16; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1) does it have "a more specifically eschatological meaning."[15] Both Goldingay and Seow point out that בְּאַחֲרִית יוֹמַיָּא can simply mean "in the future."[16] Also, the related Akkadian phrases *ana aḫrât ūmī* and *ina aḫrât ūmī* always simply mean "in the future."[17] When בְּאַחֲרִית יוֹמַיָּא in Daniel 2:28 is considered together with Daniel's later comments that the dream concerned what would take place simply "after this" (אַחֲרֵי דְנָה; Dan 2:29, 45),[18] it may indicate that the dream was not eschatological in nature, but simply concerned the future. Meadowcroft concludes that Daniel 2 is ambiguous, and that it "is not clear whether the events of the vision represent the end or the next stage."[19] This temporal ambiguity is ultimately connected to the ambiguity present in the imagery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

At the end of Daniel 2:28, Daniel declared to the king, "Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay on your bed were these." Rather than immediately

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[15]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 161. But, compare with John T. Willis, "The Expression *be'acharith hayyamim* in the Old Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 22, nos. 1–2 (1979): 54–71, *AtlaSerialsPLUS®*, EBSCOhost (20 February 2022), who examines each occurrence of the phrase in the OT, and concludes that the phrase simply means "in the future," and that in most instances it should not be understood eschatologically.

[16]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 48; Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain," 364.

[17]A. Leo Oppenheim, ed., "aḫrâtu," *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 1, part 1 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1964), 194; Tawil, "אַחֲרִית," 13; Willis, 64–65.

[18]D. N. Freedman and I. Kottsieper, "אַחֲרִי," *TDOT*, vol. 16, 20 note that the phrase אַחֲרֵי דְנָה "relates the vision to the immediate future," because דְנָה "here means the 'now.'"

[19]Meadowcroft, 186.

recounting the dream's contents, however, Daniel first clarifies that it was "the One who reveals mysteries" who gave Nebuchadnezzar this dream (Dan 2:29), and also explains how he came to acquire knowledge about the dream (Dan 2:30). According to Daniel, "it is not because I have wisdom in me that is greater than all the living that this mystery was revealed to me" (Dan 2:30). Like Joseph before Pharaoh (Gen 41:16), so Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar made clear that it was not on account of his own wisdom that he could recount and interpret the dream, but because of God. Susan Niditch and Robert Doran point out that in this regard, Daniel 2 (and also Gen 41) is unlike other court tales (especially *Ahiqar* 5–7, but see also the story of Esther), in which the protagonist succeeds by his or her own wisdom.[20] Although the narrative clearly depicts Daniel as a wise and discerning individual (see Dan 2:14), Daniel was not able to solve the impossible task simply because of his own ingenuity, but because of divine aid (Dan 2:19–23). With the help of the "God of heaven," Daniel successfully recounted and interpreted the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:31–45), which the following section will examine in depth.

Daniel 2:31–45

In Daniel 2:31–45, the story reaches its climax. Up to this point in the narrative, the reader has not known the contents and significance of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, even though as early as Daniel 2:19, God revealed this mystery to Daniel. As has been noted earlier in this thesis, however, the story foreshadows the dream and its meaning

[20]Niditch and Doran, 190.

throughout. Nebuchadnezzar's fear about the dream (Dan 2:1, 3) suggests that the dream did not signify good for the monarch. Daniel's doxology (Dan 2:20–23) emphasized that God has power to change both times and rulers (Dan 2:21). Lastly, in his lengthy preamble, Daniel explained that the dream dealt with "the end of the days" (Dan 2:28), and "what will be after this" (Dan 2:29). At this point, the reader is now fully prepared and expectant for the dream. This section of Daniel 2 can be nicely divided into two subsections: the revelation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan 2:31–35), and the interpretation of the dream (Dan 2:36–45). The following exegetical analysis will focus on these subsections.

Daniel Reveals Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Dan 2:31–35)

אנתה [אַנְתְּ] מַלְכָּא חָזֵה הֲוַיְתָ וַאֲלוּ צֶלֶם חַד שַׂגִּיא צַלְמָא דִּכֵן רַב וְזִיוֵהּ יַתִּיר קָאֵם לְקָבְלָךְ וְרַוֵהּ דְּחִיל: הוּא צַלְמָא רֵאשֵׁהּ דִּי־דְהַב טָב חֲדוֹהִי וּדְרָעוֹהִי דִּי כְסַף מְעוֹהִי וְיַרְכָתֵהּ דִּי נְחָשׁ: שָׁקוֹהִי דִּי פַרְזֶל רַגְלוֹהִי מנהון [מִנְּהֵין] דִּי פַרְזֶל ומנהון [וּמִנְּהֵין] דִּי חֲסַף: חָזֵה הֲוַיְתָ עַד דִּי הִתְגְּזֶרֶת אֶבֶן דִּי־לָא בִידַיִן וּמְחָת לְצַלְמָא עַל־רַגְלוֹהִי דִּי פַרְזְלָא וְחַסְפָּא וְהַדֶּקֶת הִמּוֹן: בֱּאדַיִן דָּקוּ כַחֲדָה פַּרְזְלָא חַסְפָּא נְחָשָׁא כַּסְפָּא וְדַהֲבָא וַהֲווֹ כְּעוּר מִן־אִדְּרֵי־קַיִט וּנְשָׂא הִמּוֹן רוּחָא וְכָל־אֲתַר לָא־הִשְׁתְּכַח לְהוֹן וְאַבְנָא דִּי־מְחָת לְצַלְמָא הֲוָת לְטוּר רַב וּמְלָת כָּל־אַרְעָא:

> You, O king, were looking and behold—a great statue. That statue was large, and its radiance was extraordinary; it was standing before you, and its appearance was terrifying. The head of that statue was of fine gold, its chest and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You were looking until a stone was cut, not with hands, and it struck the statue upon its feet of iron and clay, and it crushed them. Then they were crushed as one—the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold—and they were like chaff from the threshing floors of summer, and the wind carried them away, until there was found no place for them. But the stone that struck the statue became a large mountain and it filled all the earth.[21]

Finally, beginning in Daniel 2:31, the reader learns what Nebuchadnezzar dreamt. More precisely, one could say that the reader *sees* what he dreamt. As Fewell points out,

[21]Author's translation.

Daniel began his exposition by addressing the king in the second person ("You, O king, were looking"), "but immediately shifts to seeing the dream through the king's eyes" ("and behold—a great statue"), thus enabling the audience to "see the dream as Nebuchadnezzar had seen it on that restless night."[22]

The dream of the king concerns "a great statue" (צְלֶם חַד שַׂגִּיא; Dan 2:31). According to Seow, the Aramaic word צֶלֶם ("statue, image"), and its Akkadian cognate *ṣalmu*, were commonly used in the ANE to refer to statues that depicted either kings or gods.[23] Seow explains that these statues of kings "were typically erected for propagandistic reasons. They were placed in . . . public places, notably in vanquished territories, to remind the populace of the king's majesty and power."[24] In one account from the ANE, recorded and translated by R. C. Thompson, a Mesopotamian king even boasts of having a statue made of himself "out of silver, gold and shining copper,"[25] which is similar to the statue King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream (Dan 2:32). Thus, one might safely assume that this "great statue" represented some sort of royal power, perhaps even Nebuchadnezzar's rule.

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[22]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 31–32.

[23]Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain," 365.

[24]Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain," 365. See also Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 117.

[25]R. C. Thompson, *The Prisms of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal Found at Nineveh: 1927–8* (London: The British Museum, 1931), pl. 16, col. iii, line 49; quoted in A. Leo Oppenheim, ed., "ṣalmu," *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 16 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1962), 81

This statue was "large," "extraordinary," and "terrifying" (Dan 2:31). Donald E. Gowan compares the large statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream to a massive figure described in a dream-report of the Sumerian King Gudea.[26] This figure is described in Oppenheim's translation of the dream-report as "the first man—like the heaven was his surpassing (size), like the earth was his surpassing (size)."[27] Yet, what Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream was not a "man," but rather, simply a depiction of one; Portier-Young draws attention to the fact that the "image" Nebuchadnezzar saw was "anthropoid" in form, but was, in actuality, "static" and "soulless"—it was a "manufactured semblance of the human form."[28] Similarly, James A. Montgomery refers to this statue as "a lifeless creation."[29]

In Daniel 2:32–33, Daniel further describes the different parts of the statue's "body" in detail: "The head of that statue was of fine gold, its chest and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay." Paul M. Lederach notes, "Gold and silver are precious metals. Bronze and iron are

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[26]Gowan, 56.

[27]Oppenheim, 245. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 162 notes that "[d]reams of giant statues are attested from Egypt in the dream of the thirteenth-century pharaoh Marneptah, who saw a giant statue of Ptah, and in that of Ptolemy Soter, who saw a 'colossus' of the god Pluto/Sarapis."

[28]Anathea E. Portier-Young, "Constructing Imperial and National Identities: Monstrous and Human Bodies in *Book of Watchers*, Daniel, and 2 Maccabees," *Interpretation* 74, no. 2 (2020): 164–165, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (1 November 2021).

[29]James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927), 187.

strong and hard"; when taken together, these metals depict wealth and power.[30] Yet, the feet of the statue were "partly of iron and partly of clay" (Dan 2:33). The combination of two materials that cannot properly mix—one strong and one brittle (see Dan 2:41–43)—suggests to Lederach that the statue had "little stability."[31] Baldwin also calls the statue "a top-heavy figure, liable to topple to its ruin."[32]

Indeed, this is precisely what happened, for the statue *did* fall—yet, not on its own. Daniel 2:34 describes a "stone [that] was cut, not with hands, and it struck the statue upon its feet of iron and clay, and it crushed them." As a result, the many elements of the statue "were crushed as one—the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold—and they were like chaff from the threshing floors of summer, and the wind carried them away, until there was found no place for them" (Dan 2:35). The sudden appearance of the "stone" (אֶבֶן) is jarring. Although the statue was both "extraordinary" and "terrifying" (Dan 2:31), Valeta deems that the "even more powerful image in this dream is the stone that is not cut by human hands."[33]

Newsom notes the stark contrast between the stone that was fashioned "not with hands" (בִּידַיִן לָא; Dan 2:34) and "the humanly crafted image."[34] Fewell, too, draws

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[30]Paul M. Lederach, *Daniel*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1994), 65 (E-book accessed on 18 February 2022, from EBSCOhost eBook Collection).

[31]Lederach, 65.

[32]Baldwin, 92.

[33]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 117.

[34]Newsom, 176. See also Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 34.

attention to this comparison and contrast: "[The statue] is composed of elements usually worked by human hands and valued by human society—gold and silver that adorn and give economic power, bronze and iron that make tools and weapons . . . The mountain, in contrast to the image, is raw and undomesticated. It represents something that cannot be tamed by human power"[35] By targeting the weakest point of the statue—the "feet of iron and clay" (Dan 2:34)—the stone reduced the impressive statue to "chaff," which was "carried away" by the wind (Dan 2:35). The dream ended with no trace of the statue to be found (Dan 2:35); in contrast, "the stone that struck the statue became a large mountain and it filled all the earth" (Dan 2:35). The contrasting and fantastic imagery of the dream, even on its own, is potent, and one can understand why Nebuchadnezzar was frightened by it (Dan 2:1, 3). Now that Daniel had recounted the dream, only the interpretation of the dream remained (Dan 2:36–45).

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Dan 2:36–45)

דְּנָה חֶלְמָא וּפִשְׁרֵהּ נֵאמַר קֳדָם־מַלְכָּא: אנתה [אַנְתְּ] מַלְכָּא מֶלֶךְ מַלְכַיָּא דִּי אֱלָהּ שְׁמַיָּא מַלְכוּתָא חִסְנָא וְתָקְפָּא וִיקָרָא יְהַב־לָךְ: וּבְכָל־דִּי דארין [דָּרִין] בְּנֵי־אֲנָשָׁא חֵיוַת בָּרָא וְעוֹף־שְׁמַיָּא יְהַב בִּידָךְ וְהַשְׁלְטָךְ בְּכָלְהֹון אנתה־ [אַנְתְּ]־הוּא רֵאשָׁה דִּי דַהֲבָא: וּבָתְרָךְ תְּקוּם מַלְכוּ אָחֳרִי אֲרַעא מִנָּךְ וּמַלְכוּ תליתיא [תְּלִיתָאָה] אָחֳרִי דִּי נְחָשָׁא דִּי תִשְׁלַט בְּכָל־אַרְעָא: ומַלְכוּ רביעיה [רְבִיעָאָה] תֶּהֱוֵא תַקִּיפָה כְּפַרְזְלָא כָּל־קֳבֵל דִּי פַרְזְלָא מְהַדֵּק וְחָשֵׁל כֹּלָּא וְכְפַרְזְלָא דִּי־מָרֲעַע כָּל־אִלֵּין תַּדֵּק וְתַרֹּעַ: וְדִי־חֲזַיְתָה רַגְלַיָּא וְאֶצְבְּעָתָא מנהון [מִנְּהֵין] חֲסַף דִּי־פֶחָר ומנהון [וּמִנְּהֵין] כַּפְרְזֶל מַלְכוּ פְלִיגָה תֶּהֱוֵה וּמִן־נִצְבְּתָא דִּי פַרְזְלָא לֶהֱוֵא־בַהּ כָּל־קֳבֵל דִּי חֲזַיְתָה פַּרְזְלָא מְעָרַב בַּחֲסַף טִינָא: וְאֶצְבְּעָת רַגְלַיָּא מנהון [מִנְּהֵין] פַּרְזֶל ומנהון [וּמִנְּהֵין] חֲסַף מִן־קְצָת מַלְכוּתָא תֶּהֱוֵה תַקִּיפָה וּמִנַּהּ תֶּהֱוֵה תְּבִירָה: דִּי [וְדִי] חֲזַיְתָ פַּרְזְלָא מְעָרַב בַּחֲסַף טִינָא מִתְעָרְבִין לֶהֱוֹן בִּזְרַע אֲנָשָׁא וְלָא־לֶהֱוֹן דָּבְקִין דְּנָה עִם־דְּנָה הֵא־כְדִי פַרְזְלָא לָא מִתְעָרַב עִם־חַסְפָּא: וּבְיוֹמֵיהוֹן דִּי מַלְכַיָּא אִנּוּן יְקִים אֱלָהּ שְׁמַיָּא מַלְכוּ דִּי לְעָלְמִין לָא תִתְחַבַּל וּמַלְכוּתָהּ לְעַם אָחֳרָן לָא תִשְׁתְּבֵק תַּדֵּק וְתָסֵיף כָּל־אִלֵּין מַלְכָוָתָא וְהִיא תְּקוּם לְעָלְמָיָּא: כָּל־קֳבֵל דִּי־חֲזַיְתָ דִּי מִטּוּרָא אִתְגְּזֶרֶת אֶבֶן דִּי־לָא בִידַיִן וְהַדֶּקֶת פַּרְזְלָא נְחָשָׁא חַסְפָּא כַסְפָּא וְדַהֲבָא אֱלָהּ רַב הוֹדַע לְמַלְכָּא מָה דִּי לֶהֱוֵא אַחֲרֵי דְנָה וְיַצִּיב חֶלְמָא וּמְהֵימַן פִּשְׁרֵהּ:

> This is the dream. Now its interpretation we will tell the king. You, O king, are king of kings, for the God of heaven has given to you the kingship, the power, and

[35]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 34.

> the might, and the honor. And wherever they dwell, He has given into your hand the sons of humanity, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the skies, and He has made you ruler over them all. You are the head of gold. After you will arise another kingdom inferior to you, and a third kingdom of bronze that will rule over all the earth. And a fourth kingdom will be strong like the iron, just as the iron crushes and shatters everything; and like the iron that smashes, so it will crush and smash all these. And as the feet and the toes that you saw were partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, so the kingdom will be divided, but part of the hardness of iron will be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with the wet clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so part of the kingdom will be mighty and part of it will be brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with the wet clay, so they will mix with the seed of humanity, but they will not stick together, just as the iron did not mix with the clay. But in the days of those kings, the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that will be forever indestructible, and the kingdom will not be left to another people. It will crush and bring to an end all these kingdoms, and it will stand forever, just as you saw the stone that was cut from the mountain not with hands, and how it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. The great God has made known to the king what will be after this. Certain is the dream, and trustworthy is its interpretation.[36]

Finally, through Daniel's interpretation, the reader learns the meaning and significance of the dream. The exposition of the dream in Daniel 2:31–35 suggested that this "statue" (צֶלֶם), like many "statues" in the ANE, represented human power and rule, and Daniel's interpretation clarified that such was the case. Yet, Daniel's interpretation, as detailed as it was, left a number of questions unanswered and problems unresolved. As a result, history has evidenced a number of divergent interpretations of Daniel's

[36]Author's translation.

interpretation of this dream,[37] as will become apparent in the following exegetical analysis.

After introducing his interpretation in Daniel 2:36, Daniel addressed King Nebuchadnezzar directly in Daniel 2:37–38. Daniel declares to Nebuchadnezzar that he was the "king of kings," to whom the "God of heaven has given . . . the kingship, the power, and the might, and the honor" (Dan 2:37). Daniel 2:38 continues by detailing the vastness of Nebuchadnezzar's rule: "[God] has given into your hand the sons of humanity, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the skies, and He has made you ruler over them all." In light of all this, Daniel identified Nebuchadnezzar with the statue's "head of gold" (Dan 2:38).

Because of the language used to describe King Nebuchadnezzar and his rule in Daniel 2:37–38, a number of scholars have concluded that the story of Daniel 2 ultimately does not take an antagonistic stance toward foreign imperial rule, or, at least, not toward Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire. For instance, according to Gowan, "Daniel follows royal protocol by beginning the interpretation with words flattering the king . . . This is an example of the openness to life under foreign rulers that

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[37]For a detailed and thorough study of the ways in which interpreters through the ages have understood the historical referents of the "four kingdoms" described in Daniel's interpretation, see H. H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel: A Historical Study of Contemporary Theories* (Cardiff, UK: University of Wales Press: 1964), 61–173. For a study of how Jews and Christians throughout history have interpreted the "kingdom of God," represented by the "stone" in the dream, see Gerhard Pfandl, "Interpretations of the Kingdom of God in Daniel 2:44," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 34, no. 2 (1996): 249–268, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (17 February 2022).

is typical of the stories in Daniel."[38] Both Collins and Baldwin consider this flattering language.[39] Robert B. Kruschwitz and Redditt see in the identification of Nebuchadnezzar as the golden head a "high estimation of Nebuchadnezzar," which they explain as having a "scriptural basis" in the prophecies of Jeremiah (Jer 21:7; 25:9), which also spoke highly of Nebuchadnezzar.[40] Indeed, the label "king of kings" applied to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:37) is impressive, as is the expansive nature of his rule described in Daniel 2:38. Nebuchadnezzar's control over not only humanity, but also "the beasts of the field" and "the birds of the skies" (Dan 2:38; see also Jer 27:6; 28:14), seemingly connects the figure of Nebuchadnezzar to the primordial figure Adam (Gen 1:28), as pointed out by Lacocque.[41] In fact, Lacocque explains how the LXX even adds to this list of animals under Nebuchadnezzar's control "the fish of the sea" (τῶν ἰχθύων τῆς θαλάσσης; Dan 2:38), which further emphasizes the connection between Nebuchadnezzar and Adam.[42] These verses, then, seem to promote a rather high view of the Babylonian monarch.

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[38]Gowan, 56–57.

[39]John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 16 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 10; Baldwin, 93.

[40]Robert B. Kruschwitz and Paul L. Redditt, "Nebuchadnezzar as the Head of Gold: Politics and History in the Theology of the Book of Daniel," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, no. 4 (1997): 403–404, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (1 November 2021).

[41]Lacocque, 50.

[42]Lacocque, 50.

Yet, a number of authors have noted the ways in which Daniel tempered these words of praise by attributing Nebuchadnezzar's "kingship" and "power" ultimately to God. For Smith-Christopher, Daniel's words "are a challenge to human authority in itself, pointing out that authority is really only in God. . . . To suggest that God has ultimate control is to affirm the weakness and the merely utilitarian nature of human authority, which can just as easily be passed to another at God's whim."[43] Seow, too, notes that "the superlative [of these verses] only highlights the irony that Nebuchadnezzar's kingship is, in fact, derived."[44] Similarly, Fewell draws attention to the hierarchy created by Daniel in his interpretation: "As the head sits at the top of the body, so Nebuchadnezzar rules over the natural world . . . and the political world . . . The 'God of heaven' stands over the 'head of gold.' The God of heaven 'gives' control and 'causes rule.'"[45] Thus, the relationship between the "God of heaven" and Nebuchadnezzar is, as Rindge argues, "that of a vassal and lord, which the former is dependent for his sovereignty upon the latter."[46] Daniel's earlier doxology praised God for His power to both raise up kings and tear down kings (Dan 2:21); such theology can certainly serve to legitimize the rule of kings,[47] but also to de-legitimize their rule.

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[43]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 54–55

[44]Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain," 366.

[45]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 32–33.

[46]Rindge, 97.

[47]See Newsom, 167–177 for an insightful discussion on the ways in which she sees the court tales both undermining and legitimating imperial rule.

Even more significant, however, to the discussion of Daniel 2:37–38 and the view of Nebuchadnezzar presented therein is the fact that the "head of gold" was a part of a statue that ultimately was destroyed (Dan 2:34–35; 44–45). Daniel's interpretation clearly depicted Nebuchadnezzar as a part of a long list of kings and kingdoms that would one day meet their demise. Not only this, but the imagery of the statue in the dream undoubtedly would have reminded most Jewish readers of an idol. Thus, Newsom argues, "Nebuchadnezzar may indeed be the 'head of gold,' but he is the head of gold of a mere idol, whose inadequacy and falsity is disclosed in the dream."[48] In fact, the Aramaic word used in Daniel 2 for this "statue" (צְלֶם), is the same one used repeatedly throughout the story of Daniel 3 in reference to the "statue" (צֶלֶם) Nebuchadnezzar set up for his subjects to worship (Dan 3:1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19).[49] Occupying the most prominent position on an idol is hardly positive within a Jewish context.

Lastly, one must take into consideration the connection made between Nebuchadnezzar and Adam in Daniel 2:38. Although one could view this as high praise, Edwin M. Good finds it to be rather "disingenuous"; by describing Nebuchadnezzar in a way that recalls Genesis 1:28—and thereby, depicting Nebuchadnezzar as Adam—Good argues it indicates that Nebuchadnezzar "will soon fall and be cast out of the Garden."[50]

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[48]Newsom, 176.

[49]For more on the connection between the "statue" of Daniel 2 and that of Daniel 3, see David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, The Oxford Bible Series (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), 175 (E-book accessed on 26 August 2021, from EBSCOhost eBook Collection); and Greg Goswell, "The Ethics of the Book of Daniel," 133.

[50]Good, 65, n. 16.

At first, Good's argument may seem unconvincing, but when taken in conjunction with the description of the Jewish exiles brought to Babylon in Daniel 1:4, his argument is strengthened. Good expands:

> [The exiles] are "good of appearance (טובי מראה), skilled (משכילים) in all wisdom (חכמה), knowers of knowledge (ידעי דעת), understanders of learning (מדע), and strong enough to stand in the king's palace" (v. 4). . . . Do they not possess, among other things, the attributes of the trees in the Garden of Eden (except taste), especially of the tree of knowledge: "desirable of appearance" (Gen 2:9), "a treat for the eyes" and "desirable to bring skill" (נחמד . . . להשכיל, 3:6)? The allusion to the fruit of the tree of knowledge describes the boys subtly as forces that will cause Babylon to fall.[51]

There may also be a significant link between the צֶלֶם ("statue") of Daniel 2 and the צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים ("image of God") in Genesis 1:27. Daniel 2:38 describes Nebuchadnezzar in the same way that Genesis 1:28 describes primordial humanity; but whereas humanity bears the צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים (Gen 1:27), Daniel 2 depicts Nebuchadnezzar—and other kings and kingdoms—as an idolatrous and terrifying צֶלֶם ("statue, image"). Thus, Daniel 2 may, in fact, be using the allusion to Genesis in an ironic way, to undermine the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. Regardless of how one interprets Daniel's statements about Nebuchadnezzar and his derived political authority, Daniel explicitly identified Nebuchadnezzar as the "head of gold" (Dan 2:38).

Next, Daniel explained that following Nebuchadnezzar would arise three other "kingdoms" (Dan 2:39–43). Significantly, Daniel never explicitly identified these three kingdoms with kingdoms or empires known from history. Rather, he simply noted various peculiarities of each kingdom. Daniel 2:39 describes the kingdom immediately

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[51]Good, 49.

following Nebuchadnezzar as "inferior" to Nebuchadnezzar—just as silver is inferior to gold—and the "third kingdom of bronze" as one that "will rule over all the earth" (Dan 2:39). Beyond this, however, Daniel did not say anything about these kingdoms in this immediate context.

Instead, the focus of the interpretation was primarily on the "fourth kingdom [that] will be strong like the iron" (Dan 2:40). According to Daniel, in the same way that iron "crushes" (מְהַדֵּק), "shatters" (חָשֵׁל), and "smashes" (מְרָעַע) everything, so this kingdom "will crush [תַּדֵּק] and smash [תֵּרֹעַ] all these" (Dan 2:40). A total of three different Aramaic words are used to describe the "crushing" violence of this kingdom, in order to emphasize "how devastating the destructiveness of the fourth kingdom," according to Goldingay.[52] Yet, for all its strength, this kingdom "will be divided," for "part of the kingdom will be mighty and part of it will be brittle" (Dan 2:41–42). This was the significance of the statue's feet that were "partly of iron and partly of clay" (Dan 2:33, 42). Furthermore, the unsuccessful mixing together of the iron and the clay in the feet of the statue signified that certain individuals—seemingly the kings of this divided kingdom—"will mix with the seed of humanity, but they will not stick together" (Dan 2:43). This final action of the fourth kingdom—"they will mix with the seed of humanity" (מִתְעָרְבִין לְהֵוֹן בִּזְרַע אֱנָשָׁא; Dan 2:43)—seems to be either a reference to

[52]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 43.

intermarriage, which is the interpretation adopted by most scholars,[53] or to the mixing together of different racial and ethnic groups.[54] Yet, even this attempt at securing stability and strength would be unsuccessful, for "they will not stick together, just as the iron did not mix with the clay" (Dan 2:43).

Finally, Daniel offered an interpretation of the stone that was created "not with hands" (Dan 2:34, 45), explaining that "the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that will be forever indestructible, and the kingdom will not be left to another people. It will crush and bring to an end all these kingdoms, and it will stand forever" (Dan 2:44). A series of kingdoms, which were represented by the various materials of the statue, would be, according to Daniel's interpretation, succeeded by not simply another kingdom, but another *kind* of kingdom. Goldingay explains that "the four empires [are not] succeeded by a further, fifth empire, but by something wholly other."[55]

The uniqueness of God's kingdom is evident in Daniel's description of it. First of all, Daniel 2:44 describes the kingdom as one established directly by the "God of heaven" (see also Dan 2:18, 19, 37). In contrast to Daniel 2:37–38, which clearly depicts God delegating authority to human rulers, Daniel 2:44 seemingly describes God's unmediated

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[53]Porteous, 49; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 50, 59; Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 170; Gowan, 58; Newsom and Breed, 82; Cook, 158. Note, also, the interpretive translations of לֶהֱוֹן בִּזְרַע אֲנָשָׁא מִתְעָרְבִין found in the NRSV: "so will they mix with one another in marriage"; the ESV: "so they will mix with one another in marriage"; and the Common English Bible (CEB): "they will join together by intermarrying."

[54]Montgomery, 190. Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 77. This interpretation of the enigmatic Hebrew phrase may also be evident in the NIV: "so the people will be a mixture."

[55]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 59.

rule on the earth. Secondly, the emphasis of verse 44 falls on the eternal nature of God's kingdom: it "will be forever indestructible, . . . and it will stand forever." The repeated use of עָלְמִין ("forever") in this verse, like the use of similar terminology in Daniel 2:20 (מִן־עָלְמָא וְעַד־עָלְמָא; "from forever and until forever"), creates a contrast between the transient nature of the empires represented by the statue and the eternal reign of God's kingdom. While each of the kingdoms would give way to another kingdom, according to the interpretation, the kingdom of God "will not be left to another people" (Dan 2:44). The significance of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was that his reign would come to an end, along with many other reigns, giving way to God's eternal, unmediated reign.

Before moving on from this potent imagery of the "stone that was cut from the mountain not with hands" (Dan 2:45; see also Dan 2:34), it is important to consider from where this imagery comes. Both Seow and G. Brooke Lester note the striking similarities between the language employed in the description of the stone, as well as the statue's destruction (Dan 2:34–35, 45), and the language of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40–55; see especially Isa 41:15–16; 51:1–2).[56] Isaiah 41, much like Daniel 2, offers a message of hope to Judean exiles. In Isaiah 41:15–16, the LORD, speaking through the prophet, promises the exiles, "you shall thresh the mountains and crush [וְתָדֹק] them, and you shall

[56]Seow, *Daniel*, 47; Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain," 360, 369–370; G. Brooke Lester, *Daniel Evokes Isaiah: Allusive Characterization of Foreign Rule in the Hebrew-Aramaic Book of Daniel*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 606 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 109–112. For a survey of interesting parallels between Daniel 2 and the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, see Naama Golan, "Metal and Stone: An Analogy between the Story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17) and the Story of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Dan 2)," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 131, no. 4 (2019): 631–635, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (15 March 2022).

make the hills like chaff . . . and the wind shall carry them away [וְרוּחַ תִּשָּׂאֵם].” The “mountains” and “hills” metaphorically represented the foreign nations that waged war against and oppressed the people of Judah (Isa 41:12),[57] much like how the materials of the statue in Daniel 2 also represented foreign oppressors. In the same way that the stone of Daniel 2 “crushed” (וְהַדְּקֶת) the feet of the statue, so these exiles would “crush” (וְתָדֹק) the mountains. In both cases, they became “like chaff” (Isa 41:15; Dan 2:35), which the wind then “carried away” (וְרוּחַ תִּשָּׂאֵם; Isa 41:16; וּנְשָׂא הַמֹּוֹן רוּחָא; Dan 2:35). Thus, Lester concludes, “The nations who in Isaiah are threshed to powder are those disintegrated in the statue of Daniel, and they are carried away together on the same wind.”[58]

There are also links between the description of the stone in Daniel 2 (Dan 2:35, 45) and Isaiah 51:1, which encourages the exiles to “Look to the rock [צוּר] from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.” According to Daniel 2:35, the stone in the dream, representative of God’s kingdom, became a “large mountain” (לְטוּר רַב). Likewise, Daniel 2:45 explains that the stone “was cut from the mountain [מְטוּרָא].” The Hebrew word צוּר (Isa 51:1) and the Aramaic word טוּר (Dan 2:45) are cognates, both meaning “rock” or “mountain.”[59] Lester draws a profound theological and political conclusion from these connections between Daniel 2 and Isaiah 51:

> In Isaiah’s metaphor, however powerless the people of Israel may appear, they are urged to see themselves as a hard, heavy stone, hewn of everlasting divine promise. Daniel 2 reappropriates this metaphor with the marker, “a stone hewn

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[57]Lester, 110.

[58]Lester, 112.

[59]Brown, Driver, and Briggs, “צור,” 849; Holger Gzella, “טור,” *TDOT*, vol. 16, 315.

> from a mountain": this people Israel, hewn "not by hands," are made to batter their powerful foreign oppressors and grow into a mountain like that from which they are hewn, into a kingdom that "will stand forever" (Dan 2:44–45).[60]

What, then, can be said about the identity of the stone in Daniel 2? Yes, it represents the kingdom of God; but even more specific than that, Daniel 2 seems to be drawing on the encouraging prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah in order to depict the exiles of Judah as the stone. This is ultimately what Seow concludes: "That stone in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is, therefore, the lowly and despised exiles . . . The stone is the elect people of God, whatever their sociopolitical conditions may be."[61] The dream and its interpretation, therefore, spoke a message of hope to the exiles in the Diaspora that one day God would act on their behalf, and bring an end to the tyrannical rule of foreign powers.

Excursus on the Four Kingdoms

As stated previously, Daniel only explicitly identified one part of the statue: the "head of gold" represented Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:38). The other materials (silver, bronze, iron mixed with clay) were said to represent three other kingdoms, but Daniel did not name them. Even in the vision of Daniel 7, which, like Daniel 2, contains a vision of a sequence of four kingdoms, none of the "beasts" that represented various empires were explicitly named. Ultimately, this lack of clarity has led to vigorous debate and controversy over which kingdoms or rulers were meant. Even the seemingly clear

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[60]Lester, 109.

[61]Seow, *Daniel*, 47.

identification of Nebuchadnezzar as the head of the statue has caused confusion among scholars.

Some scholars, noting that Daniel specifically identified Nebuchadnezzar with the "head of gold," interpret the subsequent materials of the statue as representing not "kingdoms," but kings and their "reigns."[62] Seow explains that the Aramaic word מַלְכוּ, which is commonly translated in these verses as "kingdom," can also be translated as simply "reign" or "kingship."[63] Goldingay and Seow identify these four "reigns," then, as being those of the four kings explicitly named in the stories of Daniel: Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian.[64] On the other hand, both Elias Bickerman and Davies argue that originally the different materials of the statue represented four Babylonian kings, rather than four empires.[65] The statue, then, when taken as a whole, would have represented the Babylonian Empire. Both Bickerman and Davies, however, think that this *original* interpretation of the dream was later replaced with the interpretation now found in Daniel 2, which they do not understand to be speaking about four kings, but about four empires.[66] Therefore, even though the view of Bickerman and Davies is similar to that of Goldingay and Seow, the views are distinct in

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[62]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 51; Seow, *Daniel*, 45–46.

[63]Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain," 367. The word מַלְכוּ clearly means "reign" in Daniel 6:28, as does its Hebrew cognate מַלְכוּת in Daniel 1:1; 2:1; and 8:1.

[64]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 51; Seow, *Daniel*, 45–46.

[65]Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther* (New York: Schocken, 1967), 62; Davies, *Daniel*, 47–48.

[66]Bickerman, 67–68; Davies, *Daniel*, 47–48.

two important ways: (1) the identities of the kings are different, and (2) Goldingay and Seow interpret Daniel 2, as it now stands, as speaking of four kings;[67] Bickerman and Davies, on the other hand, believe that the present form of Daniel 2 no longer presents this as a viable interpretation.

Most scholars do not follow Goldingay and Seow in their argument that the composite statue represents four "reigns." One can see how Belshazzar's reign was "inferior" to Nebuchadnezzar's (Dan 2:39a), and Darius' Median Empire could justifiably be viewed as one that "rule[d] over all the earth" (Dan 2:39b). Ernest C. Lucas, though, is correct that "there is nothing to link [Cyrus] specifically with the fourth kingdom of iron and iron mixed with clay that follows Darius."[68] Lucas also rightly points out that Cyrus does not figure prominently in the book of Daniel[69]; thus it would be difficult to determine why his reign would be given so much attention in Daniel 2:40–43. Even the view of Bickerman and Davies is not without its problems—for as Newsom and Breed explain, Nebuchadnezzar had *four* successors (Amel-Marduk, Neriglissar, Labashi-Marduk, and Nabonidus), not simply three; although, the reign of Labashi-Marduk was rather brief.[70] While it would make sense for the statue in the dream to

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[67]It should be noted, however, that both Goldingay and Seow do not interpret the vision in Daniel 7 as speaking of the same four "reigns" as Daniel 2; in contrast, most scholars interpret both the dream of Daniel 2 and the vision of Daniel 7 as referring to the same four historical empires. See Goldingay, *Daniel*, 174; Seow, *Daniel*, 100, 103–106.

[68]Lucas, *Daniel*, 76.

[69]Lucas, *Daniel*, 76.

[70]Newsom and Breed, 79.

represent one entity—like the Neo-Babylonian Empire—both the dream and the interpretation indicate that the focus is on *kingdoms*, rather than *kings*.

Throughout the history of interpretation, the four kingdoms of Daniel 2—as well as Daniel 7, which most scholars understand to be speaking of the same sequence of kingdoms—have primarily been interpreted as referring to either (1) Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, or (2) Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece.[71] Although the "Roman" view dominated much of interpretation history,[72] the majority of contemporary

[71]For the remainder of this thesis, this author will simply refer to these two views as the "Roman" view and the "Greek" view, respectively.

[72]For example, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.26.1 (*ANF* 1:554–555); Hippolytus, *Scholia on Daniel 2.31* (*ANF* 5:186); Jerome, *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*, trans. Gleason L. Archer Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), 31–32; John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 1, trans. Thomas Myers (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 162. Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–370 CE) is unique among early Christian interpreters, as he adopts the "Greek" view: Ephrem the Syrian, "In Danielem," in *Sancti patris nostri Ephraem Syri Opera omnia*, vol. 2, ed. J. A. Assemani (Rome: 1737), 207; quoted in Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Glerup, eds., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament*, vol. 13 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 170.

scholars favor the "Greek" view,[73] with a small number of scholars still arguing in favor of the "Roman" view.[74] Although this debate is routinely caricatured as a controversy between liberal scholarship, favoring the "Greek" view, and conservative scholarship, favoring the "Roman" view, Longman III rightly notes that such generalizations are misleading and unhelpful.[75] For example, Robert J. M. Gurney and John H. Walton provide convincing arguments in favor of the "Greek" view,[76] as do both Goldingay and

[73]Montgomery, 61–62; H. Louis Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel*, Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, vol. 14 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America Press, 1948), 5–23; Rowley, 67–173; Porteous, 46–47; Robert J. M. Gurney, "The Four Kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7," *Themelios* 2, no. 2 (1977): 39–45, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (12 February 2022); Hartman and Di Lella, 142; Lacocque, 49–51; Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 166; Kruschwitz and Redditt, 402; Redditt, *Daniel*, 5, 59; Gowan, 57–58; Lucas, *Daniel*, 76; Newsom and Breed, 79; Brennan W. Breed, "Daniel's Four Kingdoms Schema: A History of Re-writing World History," *Interpretation* 71, no. 2 (2017): 179, 182, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (7 November 2021). Although in his commentary on Daniel, Goldingay interprets the statue of Daniel as representing four "kings" (Goldingay, *Daniel*, 51), in John Goldingay, "The Book of Daniel: Three Issues," *Themelios* 2, no. 2 (1977): 45–46, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (13 February 2022), which was published over a decade prior to his commentary, he adopts the "Greek" view.

[74]Young, 76, 275–294; Baldwin, 61, 65, 67, 161; Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, New American Commentary, vol. 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 93–99.

[75]Longman III, 82.

[76]Gurney, 39–45; John H. Walton, "The Four Kingdoms of Daniel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 1 (1986): 25–36, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (7 November 2021). Walton, 36 identifies the four kingdoms as Assyria, Media, Medo-Persia, and Greece, arguing that "Nebuchadnezzar would be seen as a continuation and culmination of the Assyrian empire."

Lucas, all of whom are conservative.[77] Even within the history of interpretation, the "Roman" view was never the *only* view promoted,[78] though it was the dominant one.

For a number of reasons, the "Greek" view is more convincing than the "Roman" view. When taken strictly on its own, Daniel 2 fairly clearly paints a portrait of the second, third, and fourth kingdoms that corresponds well with what is known about the Median, Persian, and Greek Empires. First of all, the description of the second kingdom as being "inferior" to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:39) is a fitting description of the Median Empire, but less so the Medo-Persian Empire, because, as noted by Gowan, Persia was in no way inferior to the Neo-Babylonian Empire.[79]

A number of scholars see within Daniel's sequence of kingdoms historical inaccuracy here, because the Median Empire did not actually succeed the Neo-Babylonian Empire, but was contemporaneous with it.[80] One should note, however, that Daniel identified Nebuchadnezzar *alone* as the "head of gold" (Dan 2:38). Both Gurney and Lucas thus argue that the inclusion of Media as the second kingdom in this sequence

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[77]Goldingay, "The Book of Daniel," 45–46; Lucas, *Daniel*, 76, 190–191; Ernest C. Lucas, "A Statue, a Fiery Furnace and a Dismal Swamp: A Reflection on Some Issues in Biblical Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (2005): 293–296, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (17 February 2022).

[78]See Rowley, 70–71, and Lucas, "A Statue," 294, n. 6 for lists of Jewish and Christian interpreters prior to the beginning of modern critical scholarship that adopted the "Greek" view.

[79]Gowan, 57. Miller, 94, who identifies the second kingdom as Medo-Persia, argues that the Medo-Persian Empire was "inferior" to Babylon in a "moral sense." However, in light of the many OT texts that speak rather highly of Cyrus and the Persians (e.g., Isa 44:28–45:1), this argument is not convincing.

[80]Rowley, 147; Porteous, 47–48; Hartman and Di Lella, 30, 33.

is not necessarily inaccurate: following the death of Nebuchadnezzar (562 BCE), Babylon began a gradual decline, and the Median Empire established itself as the stronger of the two kingdoms, up to the point of its defeat by Cyrus and the Persians in 550 BCE.[81] For Walton, the identification of Media as the second kingdom also offers no historical problems, since he argues that Nebuchadnezzar was likely viewed "as a continuation and culmination of the Assyrian empire," which was "succeeded (as well as overlapped) by the Medes during the time of Nebuchadnezzar's successors."[82] Even if the "Greek" view is adopted, therefore, this does not necessarily mean that one must conclude the sequence of kingdoms is historically inaccurate.

Secondly, the description of the third kingdom of bronze as one that "will rule over all the earth" (Dan 2:39) fits the Persian Empire well. According to Gurney, the Persian Empire, under the leadership of Cyrus, "was by far the vastest empire the world had seen."[83] Admittedly, this description also coheres with Greece; but then, one would need to explain how the Persian Empire was "inferior" to Nebuchadnezzar. Furthermore, Persia's worldwide rule distinguished it greatly from Media; in contrast, the vast territory Greece occupied was roughly the same, if not less, than that already occupied by Persia, as noted by Gurney.[84]

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[81]Gurney, 41–42; Lucas, *Daniel*, 188–189; Lucas, "A Statue," 295–296.

[82]Walton, 36.

[83]Gurney, 42.

[84]Gurney, 42.

Lastly, the detailed description of the fourth kingdom (Dan 2:40–43) makes more sense if it is a description of Greece, rather than Rome. Gowan explains that the division of the Greek Empire after the death of Alexander the Great is likely what is in view in the description of this "divided kingdom" of iron and clay (Dan 2:41–42).[85] Likewise, Newsom and Breed argue that the reference to "mix[ing] with the seed of humanity" (Dan 2:43) "most plausibly refers to the dynastic intermarriages between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, those of Antiochus II to Berenice in 252 B.C.E. and of Ptolemy V Epiphanes to Cleopatra, daughter of Antiochus III, in 193–92, neither of which achieved a lasting detente between the two kingdoms."[86] In fact, these politically motivated marriages are also alluded to in Daniel's last vision (Dan 11:6, 17), which clearly speaks of the Greek Empire. It is far more difficult to relate these specific descriptions to the Roman Empire.

The focus of this thesis is specifically on the story of Daniel 2; and as made clear in earlier chapters, this author finds it likely that this narrative originated at a different time and among different authors than Daniel 7–12. Yet, it is commonplace for scholars—even those who argue that the visions were added later to the stories—to interpret the dream of Daniel 2 in light of the visions in the latter half of Daniel, especially those found in Daniel 7 and 8. Such an approach actually supports and strengthens the argument in favor of the "Greek" view. For if both the dream of Daniel 2 and the vision of Daniel 7 culminated not in the Greek Empire, but in the Roman, then

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[85]Gowan, 58.

[86]Newsom and Breed, 82. See also Lucas, *Daniel*, 76, 190.

this requires one to distinguish between the "little horn" of the fourth beast in Daniel 7 (Dan 7:8, 11, 20–21, 24–26) and the "little horn" of the male goat in Daniel 8 (Dan 8:9–12, 23–25), which clearly represented Antiochus IV (Epiphanes). Lucas admits that the two horns "have some distinctive features," but these need not necessarily be "contradictory" features, but rather "complementary" ones.[87] Goldingay too writes, "The differences between the two chapters do no mean that at any point the portraits of the small horn are incompatible. They *could* denote different kings, but—juxtaposed in the same book—this is not the natural understanding."[88]

Indeed, the book of Daniel, as a whole—with its stories set in the Babylonian, Median, and Persian Empires, and with the visions of Daniel 8 and 11 that explicitly deal with Greece—seems to be concerned primarily with this sequence of historical kingdoms (Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece), as argued by Newsom and Breed.[89] In contrast, the Roman Empire is mentioned once in the entire book—and then, only in a passing remark (Dan 11:30). For these reasons, it is likely that the four kingdoms represented in the dream of Daniel were the Babylonian, Median, Persian, and Greek Empires.

Yet, no matter how one interprets the four kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the message of the dream and its interpretation remains the same: God would establish His own kingdom (Dan 2:34–35, 44–45), and the reigns of oppressive kingdoms would come to an end. There are even clues in both the dream and its interpretation that seem to

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[87]Lucas, *Daniel*, 190.

[88]Goldingay, *Daniel*, 174.

[89]Newsom and Breed, 79.

indicate that the historical identities of the four kingdoms were not actually of prime importance. Greg Goswell argues rather convincingly "that the four kingdoms in Dan 2 and 7 represent *all* kingdoms (irrespective of their number) that will rise and fall during the historical process."[90] Goswell bases this argument on a number of different pieces of evidence, most convincing of which is that the dream and the interpretation contain "elements of both succession and contemporaneity."[91] For example, in Daniel's description of the dream, he made clear that all the various materials of the statue "were crushed as one [כַּחֲדָה]" by the stone (Dan 2:35). Similarly, in his interpretation, Daniel explained that God would establish His kingdom "in the days of *those kings* [emphasis added]"[92]; and that it would "crush and bring to an end *all these kingdoms* [emphasis added]" (Dan 2:44).[93] Goswell also notes that the dream culminated in the destruction of the statue "from bottom to top," for the stone crushed the feet of the statue first.[94] Daniel

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[90]Greg Goswell, "The Visions of Daniel and Their Historical Specificity," *Restoration Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2016): 129, *AtlaSerialsPLUS*®, EBSCOhost (2 November 2021).

[91]Goswell, "The Visions of Daniel," 131.

[92]Porteous, 48 understands this simply to be a reference to "the kings of the fourth kingdom, not the kings of all four kingdoms." But Goswell, "The Visions of Daniel," 131, n. 10 argues that this is not the most natural reading, because (1) Daniel 2:43 does not explicitly mention multiple "kings," and (2) the phrase "those kings" stands in parallel with "all these kingdoms" in Daniel 2:44, indicating that they should be understood in light of one another.

[93]It should also be noted that when discussing the rise of the fourth kingdom, Daniel explicitly states that it "will crush and smash *all these* [emphasis added]" (Dan 2:40)—that is, all the preceding kingdoms (Babylon, Media, and Persia in the "Greek" view; or, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece in the "Roman" view).

[94]Goswell, "The Visions of Daniel," 131.

even listed the various materials of the statue in ascending order ("the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold"; Dan 2:35; see also Dan 2:45), which, according to Goswell, implies "that this is the order of destruction."[95] The picture that comes forth in Daniel 2 is one of the simultaneous destruction of all four kingdoms by the God of heaven.

The simultaneous destruction of these kingdoms is noted by a number of other scholars besides Goswell.[96] Porteous vehemently argues, "It is a result of the figure employed in the dream, *viz*. an image, that the four kingdoms are represented as if they were all present contemporaneously and vanished at one and the same time."[97] Porteous' objection, however, does not take into consideration the fact that even in the interpretation, Daniel clarified that God's kingdom "will crush *all these kingdoms* [emphasis added]" (Dan 2:44). Even when the constraints of the dream's imagery no longer require such an understanding of the kingdoms, Daniel's interpretation maintains this tension between succession and simultaneity.

The vision of Daniel 7 adds to this understanding of the kingdoms not simply as *successive* kingdoms, but ones that existed *simultaneously*. In Daniel 7:11–12, the fourth beast (representing Greece) "was put to death, and its body destroyed," while "the rest of

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[95]Goswell, "The Visions of Daniel," 131.

[96]Collins, *Apocalyptic Vision*, 43–44; Martin Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (London: SCM, 1984), 206; Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 34; Lederach, 70; Gowan, 58; William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 305.

[97]Porteous, 50.

the beasts" (Babylon, Media, and Persia) had "their dominion . . . taken away, but their lives . . . prolonged for a season and a time." Goswell explains that "the destruction of the fourth beast first, before the other three, who are still alive after the destruction of the fourth beast, supports the supposition that four historically successive kingdoms are not in view."[98] Therefore, even in Daniel 7, "we have that hovering between the idea of successive empires and contemporary empires," as Martin Noth observes.[99] The vision of Daniel 7, like Daniel 2, does not seem to be consistent in its depiction of these kingdoms—for at times, they are depicted as succeeding one another, and at other times, as being contemporary with one another.

Is Goswell, then, correct that no specific kingdoms were intended in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, but that in both there is simply "a symbolic representation of all the kingdoms in history"?[100] A surprising number of scholars have put forth similar arguments to Goswell's, indicating that perhaps there is some credence to what Goswell argues. William J. Dumbrell offers up the suggestion that "[p]erhaps the four kingdoms represent a picture of the totality of human government, symbolic of the human power structure, of the power of the human image."[101] Longman III refuses to unequivocally affirm either the "Greek" view or the "Roman" view, because of the "interpretive confusion" surrounding

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[98]Goswell, "The Visions of Daniel," 136. Dumbrell, 307, similarly writes, "Clearly, the vision is not interested in strict chronology, since the fourth beast is destroyed before the remaining three lose their dominion (7:12)."

[99]Noth, 212.

[100]Goswell, "The Visions of Daniel," 142.

[101]Dumbrell, 305.

the topic, concluding that "we must entertain seriously the idea that the vision of Daniel 2 does not intend to be precise."[102] Baldwin and Goldingay, both of whom take a firm stance in the debate, also recognize that simply identifying the kingdoms correctly is not the goal, and it may even be an inappropriate endeavor, given the lack of specificity.[103] Paul R. House even argues that "the literary scheme [of the four kingdoms] can change as history does. The fourth nation basically stands for 'the most recent empire.'"[104]

Each of these scholars, in their own treatments of the problem, recognize the inherent difficulty in interpreting the biblical text, especially the obscure dreams and visions in the book of Daniel. As it pertains to the dream in Daniel 2, it is likely that four historical kingdoms were meant, and, as argued above, probably those kingdoms were Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. The intended audience seemingly would have understood which kingdoms were intended, especially if they lived during the period of the fourth kingdom, whose description is rather detailed. Yet, the imagery of the statue forces readers, both then and now, to grapple with the existence and persistence of tyrannical rule down through the ages. Thus, it is not altogether wrong to see within the statue of Daniel 2 the oppressive regimes of every age. The metals of the statue, like historical kingdoms, are different from one another, and yet, as Daniel D. Bunn Jr. points

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[102]Longman III, 82.

[103]Baldwin, 67–68; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 51.

[104]Paul R. House, *Daniel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 72 (E-book accessed on 7 October 2021, from EBSCOhost eBook Collection).

out, all of them "make up the same reality, the reality of imperial power in opposition to God—and thus all are equally called into question."[105]

The kingdoms of the world, according to Daniel, will not last forever, but will be destroyed by a kingdom that *will* last forever—God's kingdom. With Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, this climactic scene of Daniel 2 comes to a close. The reader now knows the dream, and recognizes its significance, but is left wondering what will happen next. How will Nebuchadnezzar respond to such a prognostication, which clearly envisioned the collapse and destruction of all kingdoms, including his own? The next section will examine the denouement of the tale (Dan 2:46–49), and will bring the exegetical portion of this thesis to an end.

Daniel 2:46–49

בֵּאדַיִן מַלְכָּא נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר נְפַל עַל־אַנְפּוֹהִי וּלְדָנִיֵּאל סְגִד וּמִנְחָה וְנִיחֹחִין אֲמַר לְנַסָּכָה לֵהּ: עָנֵה מַלְכָּא לְדָנִיֵּאל וְאָמַר מִן־קְשֹׁט דִּי אֱלָהֲכוֹן הוּא אֱלָהּ אֱלָהִין וּמָרֵא מַלְכִין וְגָלֵה רָזִין דִּי יְכֵלְתְּ לְמִגְלֵא רָזָה דְנָה: אֱדַיִן מַלְכָּא לְדָנִיֵּאל רַבִּי וּמַתְּנָן רַבְרְבָן שַׂגִּיאָן יְהַב־לֵהּ וְהַשְׁלְטֵהּ עַל כָּל־מְדִינַת בָּבֶל וְרַב־סַגְנִין עַל כָּל־חַכִּימֵי בָבֶל: וְדָנִיֵּאל בְּעָא מִן־מַלְכָּא וּמַנִּי עַל עֲבִידְתָּא דִּי מְדִינַת בָּבֶל לְשַׁדְרַךְ מֵישַׁךְ וַעֲבֵד־נְגוֹ וְדָנִיֵּאל בְּתָרַע מַלְכָּא:

> Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and worshipped Daniel, and said that offerings and sacrifices should be offered to him. The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and the One who reveals mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." Then the king promoted Daniel, gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over all the province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. And Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the administration of the province of Babylon. And Daniel remained at the gate of the king.[106] (Dan 2:46–49)

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[105]Daniel D. Bunn Jr., "Daniel," in *Wesley One Volume Commentary*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins and Roberts W. Wall (Nashville: Abingdon, 2020), 486.

[106]Author's translation.

Daniel 2:46–49, following the climax of the dream and the interpretation, serves as the narrative's denouement. In response to Daniel's interpretation of the dream, Nebuchadnezzar surprisingly "fell upon his face and worshipped Daniel," and he seemingly even offered sacrifices to Daniel (Dan 2:46). This is surprising behavior from the king, especially in light of the interpretation Daniel gave, which promised an end to human kingdoms and empires, including his own. Because of Nebuchadnezzar's positive response, Collins argues that the narrative of Daniel 2 "is an adaptation of a Babylonian story and that the original prophecy looked not to the demise of the Babylonian Empire but to its restoration."[107] If such a Babylonian oracle did ever exist, it is no longer recoverable. Furthermore, such a hypothetical argument is not necessary in order to make sense of the text as it now stands.

For one must remember that in the ANE, dreams were considered dangerous to the dreamer if left uninterpreted, as shown by Oppenheim; once interpreted, however, "[t]he message of such a dream does not . . . pollute the dreaming person, whatever its content may be; only as long as it remains enigmatic is it dangerous."[108] According to Gowan, therefore, "This would seem to account for Nebuchadnezzar's favorable treatment of Daniel, even though he has been told of the destruction of the statue, including the head of gold, which represented himself."[109] Nebuchadnezzar's fears were

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[107]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 169. See also Collins, "Court-Tales," 221–222; Collins, *Apocalyptic Vision*, 42; Wills, *Jew in the Court*, 82.

[108]Oppenheim, 218–219.

[109]Gowan, 51.

relieved, not because the dream foretold good for him and his kingdom, but simply because he now understood it.

Did he actually understand it, though? Richard A. Horsley thinks not, concluding rather that Nebuchadnezzar must have been "clueless" about the significance of the dream: "Daniel had said that the sovereign God was about to crush Nebuchadnezzar's empire (2:44–45). If Nebuchadnezzar had been paying attention, he would have had Daniel executed for treason."[110] Similarly, Venter contends that Nebuchadnezzar "did not grasp the real meaning of the revelation, that his kingdom will eventually be destroyed by this God's kingdom."[111] Yet, Venter notes that although the king ultimately did not understand the dream and its significance, Daniel did, and so does the reader.[112]

This positive response of the king, then, is another way in which the narrative subtly pokes fun at King Nebuchadnezzar. Much like his earlier fits of fear (Dan 2:1, 3), paranoia (Dan 2:8–9), and rage (Dan 2:12), Nebuchadnezzar's exuberant and extravagant praise of Daniel and Daniel's God here (Dan 2:46–47) adds to the portrait of the king as "an emotional basket case, flung about by waves of anxiety, fear, and then gratitude," according to Chan.[113] Valeta also finds that Nebuchadnezzar's "overblown reaction of

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[110]Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 38. See also Richard A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 176–177.

[111]Venter, 1017. See also Han, 69.

[112]Venter, 1017.

[113]Chan, 13.

homage to Daniel's interpretation . . . is outside of expected royal behavior and serves as a satirical barb against the king."[114]

The prostration of Nebuchadnezzar before Daniel (Dan 2:46) brings to mind, once again, the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 45:14; 49:7, 23), as noted by both Seow and Lester.[115] These prophecies speak of a day when nations (Isa 45:14), along with their princes, kings, and queens (Isa 49:7, 23), will "bow down" to the lowly exiles of Judah with "their faces to the ground" (Isa 49:23). According to Isaiah 45:14, the nations will even "make supplication" to Judah, finally declaring, "God is with you alone, and there is no other." Lester explains that these three motifs of (1) bowing down before Israel, (2) praying to the people of Israel, and (3) recognizing the uniqueness of both God and God's people in Isaiah 45:14 are shared with Daniel 2:46–47 in the reaction of Nebuchadnezzar.[116] One sees, then, a dramatic reversal at play in Daniel 2, which is akin to the reversal found in the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah.

In this reversal, Kirkpatrick sees a great irony, for in Daniel 1, Nebuchadnezzar attempted to forcefully assimilate the exiles of Judah, by teaching them "the literature and language of the Chaldeans" (Dan 1:4), assigning them specific food to eat (Dan 1:5), and placing new Babylonian names on them (Dan 1:7). This attempt at acculturation, however, failed, according to Kirkpatrick:

> [R]ather than Daniel being resocialized to recognize a different heritage, now the king himself comes to recognize Daniel's heritage as superior to his own and

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[114]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 77.

[115]Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain," 360; Lester, 113–114.

[116]Lester, 113.

> Daniel's God as occupying the "top of the ladder." . . . Readers are left to wonder which direction the acculturation really worked—who influenced whom? The king's efforts to bring exiled and enslaved Judeans into the orbit of his sovereignty instead find the king himself not only under the sovereignty of the Judean God but positively acknowledging it as well![117]

Daniel, rather than forfeiting his unique relationship with his God, showed the superiority of his God over and against not only the Babylonian gods (see Dan 2:11), but also the Babylonian Empire and all subsequent empires. Seow even sees an immediate fulfillment of the dream's interpretation in Nebuchadnezzar's response: "The prediction of the collapse of the mighty statue of kingship by a mere stone is foreshadowed, and even set in motion, in this event, for the 'head of gold,' is now on the ground."[118]

Daniel 2:47 records Nebuchadnezzar's confession that "[Daniel's] God is God of Gods and Lord of kings and the One who reveals mysteries." Such language is certainly surprising in the mouth of a Babylonian monarch, especially one who was remembered as the destroyer of Jerusalem (Dan 1:1). It is unlikely, however, that Nebuchadnezzar's confession indicates he "converted" to the Jewish faith, as argued by Hartman and Di Lella and Towner.[119] Rather, Baldwin is likely correct in her assessment that, as a polytheist, Nebuchadnezzar would have had no difficulty with worshipping one more

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[117]Kirkpatrick, 90.

[118]Seow, "From Mountain to Mountain," 371.

[119]Hartman and Di Lella, 150; W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 40.

deity.[120] Note also that Nebuchadnezzar described this God as "your [Daniel's] God," not his own.

Still, the declaration is surprising, as it indicates that perhaps King Nebuchadnezzar was transformed in one way or another. By recognizing the sovereignty of God not only over other gods, but also over earthly rulers and kings (Dan 2:47), Nebuchadnezzar affirmed what Daniel earlier affirmed in his doxology: God can both raise up and tear down kings (Dan 2:21). Indeed, this is also the message of the dream and its interpretation, and of the story as a whole. Nebuchadnezzar finally came to this knowledge at the end of the narrative, thus allowing for the story to end on a high note. This is how most of the Daniel stories end, with the notable exception of Daniel 5.

The "happy ending" of Daniel 2 has caused a number of scholars to label this story as one that depicts foreign imperial rule rather positively. According to Collins, the story in Daniel 2 is "remarkably open and tolerant. Unlike the later chapters 4 and 5, it does not even suggest a criticism of the Babylonian king."[121] Likewise, Reddit finds a "more or less sympathetic portrayal of the king" in the court tales of Daniel, and "especially in Daniel 2."[122] Towner also argues that, overall, the tale of Daniel 2 has a "very pro-monarchical, pro-Babylonian tone."[123] These generalized statements, however, do not take into consideration both the implicit and explicit ways in which the narrative

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[120]Baldwin, 95.

[121]Collins, *Apocalyptic Vision*, 36.

[122]Redditt, *Daniel*, 4.

[123]Towner, *Daniel*, 34.

undermines and subverts the power of foreign imperial rule, which have been noted throughout the exegetical portions of this thesis. As Smith-Christopher notes, Nebuchadnezzar's positive response at the end of the narrative shows that "[i]t is a *changed* monarch who is affirmed, not the image that we have throughout the story before his change."[124]

Finally, the narrative of Daniel 2 closes not only with the promotion of Daniel (Dan 2:48), but also the promotion of Daniel's companions Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 2:49). Significantly, when speaking of them in their administrative positions, the narrator uses their Babylonian names, rather than their Hebrew ones (see Dan 2:17). Rindge recognizes that even in Daniel's promotion to a high position in the Babylonian Empire, he continued to identify with and secure the promotions of his fellow Jewish exiles.[125] In this regard, one can see Daniel utilizing what political power he had to help his companions also find success in the court of the king. This political power, however, which was granted by the king, pales in comparison with the power granted Daniel by God (Dan 2:23), to reveal and interpret the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. The narrative ends with the note that "Daniel remained at the gate of the king," therefore setting the stage perhaps for further stories about Daniel at the king's court.

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[124]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 56.

[125]Rindge, 96.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed exegetical analysis of the second half of Daniel 2 (Dan 2:24–49), with particular attention given to themes of resistance and accommodation to foreign imperial rule. This section of Daniel 2 focuses specifically on the content and interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's frightening dream, especially in Daniel 2:31–45, which is the climax of the entire narrative. Prior to the exposition and interpretation of the dream, Daniel returned to the king's court, offered his services, and made it clear that it was God, not Daniel, who was able to accomplish the king's impossible task (Dan 2:24–30). The narrative comes to a close with a denouement, in which the king rewarded and worshipped Daniel, recognized the sovereignty of Daniel's God, and promoted both Daniel and his companions to high positions of power. The following chapter will draw some helpful and important conclusions from the exegetical analysis offered in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis, as well as provide a conclusion to the thesis as a whole.

CHAPTER 4

THE POLITICAL STANCE OF DANIEL 2 IN LIGHT OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

This thesis has sought to answer the question of whether the political stance toward foreign imperial rule in Daniel is primarily one of accommodation to the empire, one of resistance, or a hybridization of the two. Chapters 2 and 3 provided an exegetical analysis of the narrative of Daniel 2, with particular attention given to how the story depicts foreign rule and the Judean exiles' relationship with life in empire. This concluding chapter will attempt to determine Daniel 2's stance toward foreign imperial rule by analyzing and interpreting the findings from the exegetical analysis. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a discussion about the implications that the political stance of Daniel 2 has for the Church.

Service and Subversion in Daniel 2

As previously noted, there is debate about whether the Daniel stories are mostly accommodating to foreign imperial rule, or mostly antagonistic and resistant toward it. For Collins, the "political stance of the tales is one of loyalty and optimism,"[1] and "Daniel 2 maintains a generally positive attitude towards the king and other

[1]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 51.

wise men."[2] On the other hand, a scholar like Smith-Christopher finds that the "perspective of the book of Daniel toward foreign conquerors, even in the first six chapters, is not nearly so benign as is often thought; in fact, it is openly hostile to their authority."[3] Smith-Christopher even contends that Daniel's wisdom in the narrative of Daniel 2 "was a tactic of resistance."[4]

What these mutually exclusive readings of the Daniel stories reveal is that within these stories there is a tension of sorts—a tension between service and subversion, between accommodation and resistance. Within the story of Daniel 2 in particular, one can clearly see this tension at play; and in the preceding exegetical analysis, the goal was to uncover this tension. Now, it is time to bring this tension to the forefront, and to examine both the themes of accommodation and themes of resistance within the narrative of Daniel 2, in an attempt to discover this story's unique political vision.

Themes of Accommodation

The story of Daniel 2, which is set in the Babylonian Empire, during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, is one that deals primarily with life in and around the court of a powerful monarch. The court is filled with interesting characters, including a host of courtiers and wise men, of both Babylonian and Egyptian origin (Dan 2:2, 10, 27). These wise men were well-known for their practice in magic, sorcery, and dream interpretation,

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[2]Collins, "Court-Tales," 224.

[3]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 21.

[4]Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology of Exile*, 186.

and thus, Nebuchadnezzar depended on them greatly. Such magical arts, however, were not regarded favorably within the Israelite tradition (see Mic 5:12; Mal 3:5), and are explicitly forbidden in the legal literature of the OT (Deut 18:10). Thus, one would expect the portrait of the Babylonian wise men in Daniel 2 to be an entirely negative one.

This, however, is not the case. As pointed out in chapter 2 of this thesis, Daniel 2 does not primarily critique the Babylonian wise men, but rather, their gods. The narrative clearly creates a contrast between Daniel and the other wise men. The main contrast, though, is between their respective deities: while the wise men could not depend on their gods to help them (Dan 2:11), Daniel was utterly dependent on his God (Dan 2:18, 23, 28). At a number of points in the narrative, Daniel and his companions are explicitly grouped together and identified with the Babylonian wise men (Dan 2:13, 18, 48). Daniel even went to great lengths to save the lives of these wise men (Dan 2:24). He also agreed with their statement in Daniel 2:10–11 that no wise man could possibly do what the king asked (Dan 2:27). At the end of Daniel 2, the narrator explains that Daniel became the "chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" (Dan 2:48). Daniel's acceptance of this promotion indicates that his *modus operandi* in the exile was clearly not one of separatism, but involvement in the court and in the Babylonian Empire. It is evident that neither Daniel, nor the author of this story, considered such involvement with the Babylonian Empire to be unacceptable for a Jew.[5]

[5]In Daniel 1, 3, and 6, though, the question of whether or not the people of God can involve themselves in the imperial system comes to the forefront, specifically in how it relates to their Jewish identity and their loyalty to the God of their ancestors.

The relationship between Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar in the story of Daniel 2 is an ambiguous one. Clearly, though, Daniel recognized that Nebuchadnezzar—and by extension, the Babylonian Empire—served a key role in the history of Israel, as well as the history of the world. According to Daniel 2:37–38, God used and worked through Nebuchadnezzar, ultimately delivering all the peoples of the world into his power. Daniel 2, therefore, is in line with much of the OT in its treatment of Nebuchadnezzar. Kruschwitz and Reddit argue that most likely Daniel 2 is dependent on Jeremiah (see especially Jer 21:7; 25:9; 43:10), through whom "God promised to punish Jerusalem by using Nebuchadnezzar, and . . . called Nebuchadnezzar God's servant."[6] Daniel 1 indicates that the hand of God was behind Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem (Dan 1:1–2), and in Daniel 2, Daniel affirmed that God delegated power and rule to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:37–38) for the time being.

Daniel 2 ends with the transformation of Nebuchadnezzar and the promotion of the exiles (Dan 2:46–49). This surprising happy ending leaves one wondering about the relationship that the exiles had with the Babylonian Empire. Nothing is said in Daniel 2, nor in the other stories, about what Daniel did with this delegated political power, except that he immediately requested for his companions to be placed in positions of power, as well (Dan 2:49). Beyond this, any suggestions would be conjectural. The ending, however, indicates that with divine help, Jewish exiles could succeed even under foreign rulers.

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[6]Kruschwitz and Redditt, 404.

In conclusion, there are ways in which the story of Daniel 2 affirms and positively interacts with the Babylonian Empire. While Babylonian *gods* are not tolerated, the Babylonian *wise men* are not outrightly condemned, nor do they "lose" in the end,[7] precisely because Daniel saved them from death. Daniel also recognized the important role that Nebuchadnezzar played in the unfolding of God's plan for Israel (Dan 2:37–38), and even chose to accept both gifts and a promotion from him, following Daniel's successful interpretation of the dream (Dan 2:48). In the words of Davies, these are "the practical accommodations to life under imperium."[8] Daniel 2 presents these "accommodations" as a viable option for the Jewish exiles in some circumstances, so long as they do not impinge on one's worship, service, and loyalty to God. The story remains open to the possibility of working in and with the empire. It also clearly depicts the possibility that foreign rulers might recognize the sovereignty of God. These themes of accommodation, however, exist side-by-side with many themes of resistance, which the next section will analyze.

Themes of Resistance

The characterization of King Nebuchadnezzar is one major way in which the story of Daniel 2 resists foreign imperial rule. The high praise of Daniel 2:37–38 notwithstanding,[9] the dominant portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar in this story is not a positive

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[7]Compare with the death of the guards in Daniel 3:22, and the death of the conspirators and their families in Daniel 6:24.

[8]Davies, "Daniel in the Lions' Den," 161.

[9]For a detailed discussion of Daniel 2:37–38, see chapter 3 of this thesis.

one. While he ultimately praised God and rewarded Daniel at the close of the narrative (Dan 2:46–48), even this positive response indicates that he did not understand the significance of the dream. Furthermore, Valeta and Chan understand Nebuchadnezzar's response in these verses to be one way in which the narrative undermines the supposed power of the king, by depicting him in a humorous or satirical manner.[10] The exuberance of Nebuchadnezzar at the end of the narrative contrasts with his earlier paranoia (Dan 2:8–9) and hotheadedness (Dan 2:12)—a king quick to order the execution of his trusted advisors (Dan 2:12), because of an impossible task set by himself (Dan 2:5–6), is not a noble ruler, but rather, a tyrant.

Some scholars, like Wills, however, do not find the depiction of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 to be a negative one. Wills concedes that Daniel 2 portrays King Nebuchadnezzar as both "powerful and threatening"; but Wills does not find the portrait to be overly negative, because Nebuchadnezzar "threatens Jewish and pagan courtiers equally."[11] While Wills is correct that both Jews and pagans were targeted by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2, it is not clear why this makes Nebuchadnezzar any less threatening or tyrannical. In fact, the inclusion of the Jewish exiles in Nebuchadnezzar's decree to have all the wise men killed (Dan 2:12–13)—even though Daniel and his companions were not even present in the opening scene (Dan 2:1–12)—causes one to perceive Nebuchadnezzar as *more* irrational, rather than less. Similarly, in Gowan's opinion, King Nebuchadnezzar "is not depicted as the enemy of God's people" in Daniel

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[10]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 77; Chan, 12–13. See also Han, 69.

[11]Wills, *Jewish Novel*, 47.

2, for the "heroes of the story are very successful people."[12] The success of Daniel and his companions, however, does not mitigate the negative portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar in the story—for it is not due to the goodwill of the king that the heroes succeeded, but because of the goodwill of their God. As Valeta points out, the Jewish exiles had to "appeal to an alternative authority"[13]—one other than Nebuchadnezzar—precisely because the king was the one who needed to be stopped.

For other scholars the identification of King Nebuchadnezzar with the statue's "head of gold" (Dan 2:38) indicates a high regard for the king. For example, Kruschwitz and Reddit argue that the author of Daniel 2 must have regarded Nebuchadnezzar as "golden in comparison with his successors."[14] This identification is, in fact, one of the main reasons why Collins posits that the original dream in this story was a Babylonian political oracle that depicted Nebuchadnezzar's rule as a golden age in Babylon's history, and which expectantly looked ahead to the restoration of the Babylonian Empire.[15] This, however, is making too much of the identification of Nebuchadnezzar with the "head of gold." First of all, although the respective value of the statue's various metals could be understood as indicating the lesser value and degeneration of each successive kingdom following the "golden" Nebuchadnezzar, this is not emphasized in Daniel's

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[12]Gowan, 60.

[13]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 155.

[14]Kruschwitz and Redditt, 403.

[15]Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 169.

interpretation, as pointed out by Porteous and Newsom and Breed.[16] Also, even if one understands the "head of gold" to be a position of prominence and honor, the dream clearly indicates that the *entire* statue, including the "gold," was destroyed (Dan 2:35, 45). Similarly, Nebuchadnezzar would simply be occupying the highest position on an *idol*, as Newsom argues.[17] Thus, it is unlikely that the author or the audience would have considered this identification to be one of honor.

Close attention to the details of the text reveal that there is more than meets the eye when it comes to the character of Nebuchadnezzar. For Daniel 2 shows that Nebuchadnezzar was not as powerful, nor in control, as he ultimately thought he was. Nebuchadnezzar could not understand his dream; he was dependent, instead, on an exile from Judah (Dan 2:25) to interpret it for him. Even though he made a royal decree that all his wise men be killed, this did not ultimately happen, because of the divine wisdom and power at Daniel's disposal (Dan 2:20, 23). Although the court wise men wished that he would "live forever" (Dan 2:4), the story provides a counterargument: only God lives forever (Dan 2:20), and only God's kingdom will remain forever (Dan 2:44). Finally, the conclusion of the story tells of how Nebuchadnezzar rewarded Daniel and even offered sacrifices to him, because of Daniel's successful interpretation (Dan 2:46, 48). Daniel's interpretation, though, was not a message of comfort or goodwill for the king and his rule, but rather, a message of doom—not only for Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, but for all

[16]Porteous, 46; Newsom and Breed, 75.

[17]Newsom, 176.

kingdoms. Whether or not Nebuchadnezzar realized it, he rewarded Daniel for a prophetic judgment on his rule.

As noted earlier, the relationship between Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar in this story is ambiguous, for it is rather complex. While recognizing that Nebuchadnezzar played a key role in the history of his people, Daniel believed that God was ultimately in control of Nebuchadnezzar and his rule, meaning that God could easily take away Nebuchadnezzar's power (e.g., Dan 4). In fact, the doxology of Daniel indicates that Daniel not only *believed* God could take away Nebuchadnezzar's power, but that he *yearned* for this to happen. Daniel praised God, because God "changes times and turns," and showcases His power by "removing kings and establishing kings" (Dan 2:21).

Fewell argues that Daniel showed "diplomacy" and "complete allegiance to the king" when he was in the king's court; and yet, Daniel still harbored "private political hopes," which can be seen in his doxology (Dan 2:20–23).[18] Although one might take issue with Fewell's contention that Daniel showcased "complete allegiance to the king," one can still affirm that there is more than meets the eye when it comes to Daniel's service in the king's court. Smith-Christopher notes that while Daniel ultimately fulfilled the king's request by interpreting his dream—thereby securing Nebuchadnezzar's trust and admiration, as well as becoming a trusted advisor to the king—the story "concludes with Daniel 'advising' Nebuchadnezzar that his regime will come to an end."[19] Han puts it perfectly when he writes, "Daniel's interpretation is tantamount to saying, 'Your

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[18]Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 35–36.

[19]Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology of Exile*, 184.

majesty is blessed with disaster.'"[20] Ultimately, when Daniel's doxology, which thanks God for changing political landscapes, is paired with Daniel's condemnatory interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which forecasts the end of all human empires, Daniel's political vision begins to come into focus.

Daniel's Political Vision

What, then, is Daniel's political vision? Is Daniel 2 a story about the peaceful coexistence of Jewish exiles and their foreign overlords, or is it a story of potent resistance to foreign imperial rule? These questions are not easily answered, precisely because the story of Daniel 2 does not give easy answers. As has already been noted, there is a tension between service and subversion in Daniel 2. Valeta notes this tension, explaining that the Daniel stories, including Daniel 2, are "multi-voiced" tales, meaning that they contain multiple viewpoints, ideologies, and languages.[21]

The story of Daniel 2 is a tension-filled story, and one can see both service and subversion at play within the narrative. The king's court was a public place of power; and in that court, Daniel did what the king requested, and he even received rewards and promotions from his hand (Dan 2:48). Yet, in his own home, away from the court and the king, Daniel praised God for His power to topple kings and kingdoms and to raise up new ones (Dan 2:21). In the king's court, Daniel and his companions were known by their Babylonian names (Dan 2:26, 49); but in private, they went by their Hebrew names (Dan

[20]Han, 82.

[21]Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 181–184.

2:17). Daniel 2 ends with Nebuchadnezzar recognizing God's sovereignty (Dan 2:47); however, this portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar stands alongside many other different portrayals throughout the story, most of which are predominantly negative.

When dealing with a complex and multi-voiced story like Daniel 2, the temptation is to privilege one voice over another. Many scholars emphasize the positive, tolerant, and accommodating voice in Daniel 2 at the expense of the critiquing and resistance voice also in the text. At the same time, however, there are a handful of scholars that do not pay enough attention to the occasional openness and optimism of the Daniel stories. The exclusion of one or more voices in a multi-voiced text not only is poor exegetical analysis, but also results in a skewed understanding of the text in question.

Wills is typical of scholars who do not heed the resistant voice in Daniel 2. Wills argues that Daniel 2 has a relatively "positive view of coexistence with the powers that be."[22] Wills comes to this conclusion, however, by minimizing the importance of both Daniel's doxology (Dan 2:20–23) and Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation (Dan 2:31–45), arguing that both are later additions to the text.[23] Thus, according to Wills, Daniel's overwhelmingly negative interpretation is "restrained by its inclusion in a typical court legend that contains a rather predictable happy ending."[24] While it is certainly possible that Daniel's doxology is not original to the story, the themes contained therein are not foreign to the surrounding context of Daniel 2. Also, as argued previously

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[22]Wills, *Jewish Novel*, 48.

[23]Wills, *Jewish Novel*, 47–48.

[24]Wills, *Jewish Novel*, 66.

in chapter 3, it is unnecessary to posit that an original Babylonian prophecy was later changed by the Jewish author of Daniel 2, as both Collins and Wills do,[25] for the text makes sense without appealing to a hypothetical oracle. Yet, even if one accepts that both Daniel's doxology and his interpretation are not original to the story, readers must still grapple with the many other ways in which the narrative of Daniel 2 simultaneously critiques and undermines foreign imperial rule, especially through the negative characterization of Nebuchadnezzar and the undermining of the Babylonian Empire's supposed power.

On the other hand, some scholars, like Horsley, neglect themes of accommodation and optimism that are clearly present in Daniel 2 and the other Daniel stories.[26] The Daniel stories can rightly be labelled resistance literature, as a number of scholars do.[27] This does not mean that the voice of resistance is the only one in the text, though. In Daniel 2, resistance may be the dominant theme, but it is not alone, for it stands alongside openness and accommodation to the powers that be. Both Collins and Newsom and Breed recognize this, and prefer to use the language of "hybridity" to describe these court tales,[28] which helpfully captures the tensions inherent in the story of Daniel 2. Daniel

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[25]Collins, "Court-Tales," 221–222; Collins, *Apocalyptic Vision*, 42; Wills, *Jew in the Court*, 82.

[26]See Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 33–46 for Horsley's treatment of the court tales in Daniel. See Collins, "Apocalypse and Empire," 5–7 for a critique of Horsley's reading of the court tales.

[27]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 20; Kirkpatrick, 38; Gnuse, "From Prison to Prestige," 44.

[28]Collins, "Apocalypse and Empire," 7–8; Newsom and Breed, 16.

both served and subverted the empire as he tried to stay alive and find success in a hostile environment.

Daniel's political vision is unique, and it cannot be reduced to one of outright rebellion, nor can it be caricatured as optimistic naiveté, nor charged with caving under imperial pressure. Daniel 2 recognizes the line one must walk when he or she is in a strange land with little power. A violent uprising is not an option for a persecuted and oppressed minority; neither is complete assimilation to the dominant culture. What Daniel 2 offers to its audience is a unique political vision of hope and steadfastness.

In the face of death, when all hope seemed lost, God revealed the mystery to Daniel (Dan 2:19, 23), and the people of God were granted wisdom and power (Dan 2:23). That mystery concerned not only the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, but the entire history of foreign imperial dominance. According to Daniel 2, violent and destructive empires will not have the final word, for "the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that will be forever indestructible" (Dan 2:44). Smith-Christopher explains that the dream and its interpretation indicate that "[a]ll forms of inhumanity are destined to end," and it is with this knowledge of the future that the audience of Daniel 2 could know how to adequately relate to foreign imperial rule.[29] Kings and their kingdoms are not ultimate. For as long as tyrants rule, the people of God are encouraged to trust in the God of heaven, who "changes times and turns, removing kings and establishing kings" (Dan 2:21). The next and final section will deal with some of the implications of Daniel's unique political vision for the people of God today.

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[29]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 55.

Conclusion: Implications and Applications

By way of conclusion, this section will offer a few implications and applications regarding the political vision of Daniel 2. First and foremost, the preceding analysis of Daniel 2 has showcased the need for a close reading of the Daniel stories, and by extension, any biblical story. This thesis has provided a close reading of one of the six court tales in the MT of the book of Daniel. To simply assume, though, that the political stance of Daniel 2 is the stance of all the other Daniel tales is misguided; this is even more so the case for the deutero-canonical works found in the Greek version(s) of Daniel. Only a close reading of a text, which takes into consideration the many voices within, will be able to determine the unique political vision of each story.

The findings of this thesis also serve as a reminder to the Church not to domesticate these stories. In his analysis of popularized versions of the Daniel stories in American culture, Greg Carey argues that "American religious media domesticate Daniel into a morality tale, a fable that promotes personal integrity and trust in God."[30] As a result of this domestication, the stories no longer can serve as a conversation partner for those who, like Daniel, find themselves in a strange land and under oppression. Instead, these stories about the three exiles in the fiery furnace (Dan 3), the miraculous writing on the wall (Dan 5), Daniel in the lions' den (Dan 6), and even Daniel successfully accomplishing Nebuchadnezzar's impossible task (Dan 2) are treated as though they were children's stories, rather than stories that paint a complex and honest portrait of life lived under foreign imperial rule. Smith-Christopher contends that "there can be no such thing

[30]Carey, 190.

as a non-political reading of Daniel, if it is to be true to the living spirit of Scripture and to the suffering of those who wrote it under the inspiration of a God who first delivered slaves from Pharaoh."[31] A responsible reading of the Daniel stories pays attention to their political potency.

This naturally leads, then, to another implication: the Daniel stories center on the lived experiences of oppressed and persecuted minorities within a hostile environment, and this "center" of the Daniel stories should not be pushed aside. In many ways, the people of God, whomever and wherever they are, can learn from the story of Daniel 2, and can receive comfort and hope from it. Yet, the unique message that it speaks to refugees, ethnic and religious minorities, and other marginalized peoples in the world today should not go unrecognized. Churches would do well to note the importance of these stories about Daniel and his companions for groups going through similar crises today. Learning from and listening to the voices of those groups will better enable the Church to read Scripture responsibly, and to better implement its principles.

Finally, it is important for the Church to ask what the political vision of Daniel 2 means for the Church's engagement with political powers today. In light of the powerful imagery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the Church must recognize the transient nature of governments and empires; it must also live with the "end" in mind—that one day God will establish His own kingdom over and against all other kingdoms. The God who empowered Daniel in this story is the same God empowering His people today to remind all rulers that He is "God of gods and Lord of kings" (Dan 2:47).

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[31]Smith-Christopher, "Daniel," 34.

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VITA

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