The Bible as Revelatory Word

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2 Scripture as Providential Text (Late Old Testament Narrative)

By

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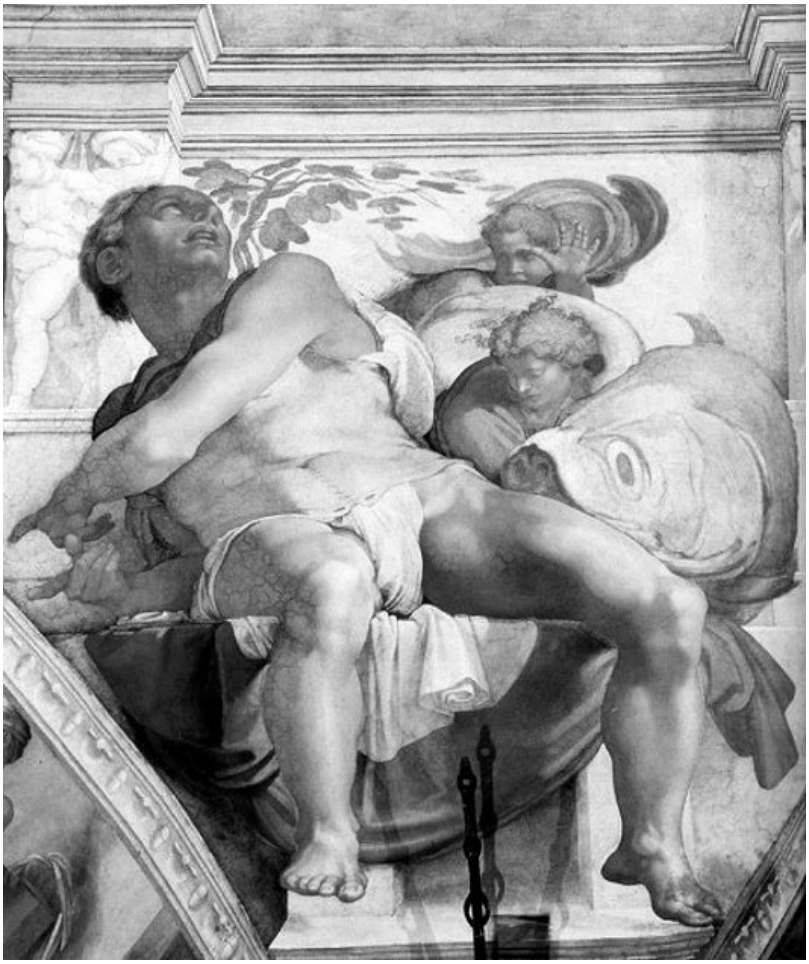

Fig.1 Frontispiece: Jonah (Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel, 1508-12)

“For thy power depends not upon numbers, nor thy might upon men of strength; for thou art God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forlorn, saviour of those without hope. Hear, O hear me, God of my father, God of the inheritance of Israel, Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of the waters, King of all thy creation, hear my prayer!” (Judith 9:11-12)

“The nations are those that gathered to destroy the name of the Jews. And my nation, this is Israel, who cried out to God and were saved. The Lord has saved his people; the Lord has delivered us from all these evils.” (Esther 10:9)

“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:40)

"Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Hebrews 13:1-2)

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LIST OF BIBLICAL ABBREVIATIONS

The Old Testament

Am	Amos
1 Chron	1 Chronicles
2 Chron	2 Chronicles
Dan	Daniel
Deut	Deuteronomy
Eccles	Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)
Est	Esther
Ex	Exodus
Ezk	Ezekiel
Ezr	Ezra
Gen	Genesis
Hab	Habakkuk
Hag	Haggai
Hos	Hosea
Is	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Job	Job
Joel	Joel
Jon	Jonah
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
1 Kgs	1 Kings
2 Kgs	2 Kings
Lam	Lamentations
Lev	Leviticus
Mal	Malachi
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Neh	Nehemiah
Num	Numbers
Obad	Obadiah
Prov	Proverbs
Ps (pl. Pss)	Psalms

Ruth	Ruth
1 Sam	1 Samuel
2 Sam	2 Samuel
Song	Song of Songs
Zech	Zechariah
Zeph	Zephaniah

The Deuterocanonical Books

Bar	Baruch
Ecclus	Ecclesiasticus (=Sirach)
Jud	Judith
1 Macc	1 Maccabees
2 Macc	2 Maccabees
Sir	Sirach (=Ecclesiasticus)
Tob	Tobit
Wis	Wisdom (=Wisdom of Solomon)

Apocrypha

1 Esd	1 Esdras
2 Esd	2 Esdras

The New Testament

Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Apoc	Apocalypse (=Revelation)
Col	Colossians
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians
Eph	Ephesians
Gal	Galatians
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
Jn	John (Gospel)
1 Jn	1 John (Epistle)
2 Jn	2 John (Epistle)
3 Jn	3 John (Epistle)
Jude	Jude
Lk	Luke
Mk	Mark

Mt	Matthew
1 Pet	1 Peter
2 Pet	2 Peter
Philm	Philemon
Phil	Philippians
Rev	Revelation (=Apocalypse)
Rom	Romans
1 Thess	1 Thessalonians
2 Thess	2 Thessalonians
1 Tim	1 Timothy
2 Tim	2 Timothy
Tit	Titus

All citations from Scripture, unless otherwise stated, are from the Revised Standard Version (1881).

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INTRODUCTION

In the Greco-Roman period there arose among the Jews a new genre for retelling Bible stories and for composing new religious stories as well. This genre was the novel, and included texts from the Old Testament Apocrypha, several historical tales, and selections from the Testaments of the twelve Patriarchs. Arising at about the same time as the Dead Sea Scrolls, but before the period of Rabbinic Judaism, these texts exhibit a worldliness that reveals the ambiguities and conflicts encountered by Jews in this period. Taken together they indicate how popular novels arose in the ancient world, and contribute greatly to our understanding of Jewish culture and Classical civilization.[1]

All these books can be regarded as novellas, with two features typifying the designation: the presentation of situations and characters (rather than reporting facts), and a frequent use of dialogue.[2] There are four recurrent characteristics:

1) there is a marked interest in **ordinary people**, focused away from prophets and kings;
2) there is a consistent **intention to instruct as well as entertain**; the divine dimension is ever present, even if concealed (with theological keys unlocking the meaning);
3) there is a **distinctive literary style,** poetic and rhythmic; this possibly resonates with the oral traditions that produced them;
4) there is a self-conscious **authorial artistry in the presentation** for the delight of reader or hearer, a use of narrative technique to a marked degree.[3]

In ancient literature, Apollonius of Rhodes's *Argonautica* (3rd century BC) perhaps best represents a transition between the antique heroic epic and

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[1] See Lawrence M. Wills (ed.), *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (New York: OUP, 2002).
[2] R. Hubbard, *Book of Ruth* in the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdemans, 1988), p. 47.
[3] See E. Campbell, *Ruth*, Volume 7 of the *Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 5, 6.

the more intimate 'novelistic' concerns with ordinary humans, their thoughts and experiences.

Among the books of the Old Testament several works are concerned with the individual rather than the nation, or incorporate the personal experiences of members of the community into the broad flow of salvation history. These are Daniel, Jonah, Ruth, Tobit, Esther, and Judith. Stories such as that of Joseph (Gen 37:2—50:26) could stand alone, but have become part of the Torah because they relate events that are fundamental to the history of Israel. The same could be said of Job (Job 1—2, 42) and Daniel (Dan 1—6) which are incorporated into the wider Prophetic tradition for the same reasons.

Ruth is an account of ordinary people struggling with adversity but staying faithful. The importance of this for the history of Israel is disclosed in the final verse (4:17) which is a royal genealogical appendix. Tobit is a mixture of domesticity, angels and demons, shaped by a quest. Judith tells the paradoxical tale of a heroine of piety and beauty whose wisdom and cunning serve to defeat the enemy of Israel. Esther is also a heroine of beauty and devotion whose enterprise foils the enemies of the Jews and exacts a vicious retribution. Jonah is really an anti-hero, and his reluctance and disobedience in the context of his prophetic commission, attempting to escape the great city of Nineveh, is used to tell of the loving-kindness of God, even to sinful foreigners. It is instructive to compare these stories with Genesis 24 (Isaac and Rebecca), 38 (Judah and Tamar), 37—50 (Joseph) and Judges 3:15-29 (Ehud and Eglon), all of which share many stylistic and thematic elements, as well as theological features.[4]

Tobit, Judith, Esther and Job show signs of revision by different hands at various times. Ruth and Jonah retain a greater coherence. All of the books demonstrate a lively disregard for historical and geographical facts. Judith and Esther share an anti-Gentile flavour, suggesting memories of the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (b. c.215, reg. 175-163 BC) and the rebellion of the Maccabees (175-134 BC). This event seems responsible for a massive sense of national self-reflection and literary self-projection. The other books present the Gentiles in a neutral or even good light. Jonah has only one unpleasant character, the prophet himself.

The Books of Ruth and Tobit share a theme with Job and Jonah. Naomi, Tobit, Job and Jonah (like Elijah and Jeremiah) all call into question God's fairness and faithfulness. Complaint in the Bible is regularly presented as a formal legal lawsuit. The resolution does not include an explanation. The Lord is accused of pronouncing sentence unjustly and inexplicably. The response is not an answer but a

[4] See E. Campbell, *Ruth*, pp. 4-5.

development. Justice is not static but dynamic in God's hands. The matter is therefore transferred to the future. The faithful God, despite all appearances, still goes about his business, and his people should be about theirs.[5]

Tobit seems to fall between 225 and 175 BC, since both Amos and Nahum are viewed as authoritative, and there is no reference to the Antiochene persecutions between 175 and 184 BC. Job, Jonah, Esther and Judith seem to be Post-Exilic, so probably after 538 BC, with the Edict of Cyrus. Job was possibly composed during the reign of Xerxes (486-485 BC) or Artaxerxes (464-423 BC). Jonah might have originated during the time of Alexander the Great (336-323 BC), Esther during the rule of Ptolemy Physcon Euergetes (246-221 BC), and Judith at the time when Rome took Judea as master rather than ally (64 BC).[6]

These late books of the Bible demonstrate: encoded stories and mystical history (Daniel); enacted parables of prophecy (Jonah); stories of trial and liberation characterized by strong typology, especially in the powerful feminine characters (Ruth, Esther, Judith); reading history theologically (1 Maccabees); and writing history as theology (2 Maccabees).

The spiritual equality of the sexes suggested in the Genesis account of creation (Gen 2) has deepened interest in typology, and especially of Biblical heroines as types of Christ. Jephthah's Daughter, Ruth, Esther, Susanna and Judith all sustain such consideration, analysis and new interpretation.[7]

But these typologies evoke the whole concept of heroism, whether male or female. All the stories reveal the submerged narrative patterns typical of the lives and actions of the mythological scions of world literature. Despite the varieties of incident, setting, and costume, these narratives offer only a limited number of responses to the riddle of life. Daniel, Susanna, Jonah, Ruth, Esther, Judith and the Maccabee Brothers enact simultaneously various phases of a common story shared throughout the literature of the whole world. The typologies of Christ and his central 'Greatest Story' underscore just such a unified *mythos*. All their tales reveal those common tropes deriving from the fundamental call, mission or challenge: the Night or Sea Journey, the Conquest of the Monster, and the triumphal Return or Reappearance of the Hero. These various phases

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[5] Campbell, *Ruth*, p. 167.

[6] Raymond Brown et al. (eds), *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Supplements, Chronological Table.

[7] See Catherine Brown Tkacz, "Typology Today", *New Blackfriars* 88:1017 (Sept. 2007): 564-580; ibid., "Women and the Church in the New Millennium", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52:3-4 (2008): 243-274.

of their common story and their timeless symbols—whether mysterious, exotic, religious or secularized—enact the various phases of a shared narrative reflected in dreams and the words and actions of the great spiritual leaders of humanity.[8]

All of the late books of the Old Testament recount the saving power of God's love in the midst of the perplexities and sorrows of life, and celebrate faith in the hope and strength of salvation.

[8] See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) (Princeton University Press, 1973).

I. PROVIDENCE AND PROPHECY

1. DANIEL

Dreams and Visions, Trials and Witness

The Uniqueness of the God of Israel, and Prophecies of the Times of the Gentiles

The themes of this book are demonstrated in the life of Daniel himself and by the predictions he as prophet is inspired to make of a universal and everlasting reign of peace that God will establish for those who love him.

There are three main versions of the Book of Daniel; a twelve-chapter edition preserved in the Masoretic Text and two longer Greek versions (the original Septuagint version, c.100 BC, and the later Theodotion version, c. 2nd century AD). Both the Greek versions contain chapters that are not found in the Masoretic Text. Theodotion's translation is much closer to the Masoretic Text and became so popular that it replaced the original Septuagint version of Daniel in all but two manuscripts of the Septuagint itself.

The Book of Daniel, traditionally counted among the Later Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, shows striking differences in content and mode of expression from the other prophetic writings. The usual metier of the prophet's work is rooted in a world of everyday realities, among a living community showing signs of unfaithfulness to God's covenant and law, and unresponsive to the prophet's admonitions. The two parts of the book differ from each other.

In Part I all narrative concern is with the Neo-Babylonian Empire, with hardly any interest in the Persian and Greek periods. Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC) is the centre of gravity for the first six chapters. He is the golden head of the dream statue (2:38), the king of kings who rules over the whole known earth (2:37 ff). His power and influence are likened to a mighty tree with great branches stretching to the farthest extremities of the world (4:17-19). Even in the fraught last days of Babylonian domination echoes of Nebuchadnezzar's greatness continue to resound (5:18 ff). The situation of the Jewish exiles is uneventful.

In Part II attention is focused on the age of the Greek Antiochus IV Epiphanes (c.215-163 BC). The persecution of Israel horrifies the writer.

This distress is assuaged not by looking back to a wonderful past, but rather by envisioning the hope of a glorious future. The Babylonian Age has receded in the Four Visions, and the writer describes the Seleucid domination in great richness of detail.

The Book of Daniel transports the reader into a world of dreams and visions, populated by monstrous beasts and manlike angels. Future events in the other prophetic books are only vaguely suggested, but here they are predicted in rich detail and definiteness that reads more like projected history than prophecy. Chapters 7—12 have traditionally been accounted the first sustained instance in the Bible of *apocalypses*, from the Greek *apokalypsis* (revelation), a species of literature which flourished from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD. The visions of Daniel, with those of 1 Enoch, Isaiah, Jubilees, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, are the inspiration for much of the apocalyptic ideology and symbolism of the Qumran community's Dead Sea scrolls and the early literature of Christianity.[1]

In this type of writing a revelation is supposed to have been made by God to a prominent figure of antiquity and has been kept hidden from the people for a long time. The revelations habitually extend over two periods of time, one prior to the writer's time, the other after his time. The former relates to past history in the form of predictions of future events, the other expresses the writer's hopes in terms of future events. The apocalyptic writers derived their motivation and influence from a firm belief in God's promises of a better age and from their faith in his universal providence expressed in a literary form that was the product of their time. This was a principal way of keeping and strengthening the faith of their contemporaries in times of difficulty and persecution, to keep them united to each other in their common belief.

In the Hebrew Bible the Book of Daniel is written in two languages: 1:1—2:4a and Chapters 7—12 are in Hebrew; 2:4b—6:29 are in Aramaic. The Deuterocanonical portions are in Greek. The Greek sections are certainly translations from lost Semitic originals. Probably several episodes and visions circulated on separate leaves in a Hebrew and in an Aramaic form, the one being a translation of the other. The final compiler put the leaves together as they came into his hands. The Greek translation of Daniel and the Vulgate further has sections which are not in the Hebrew-Aramaic text. Three additional narratives are preserved in the Septuagint and the Theodotion, and are considered apocryphal by Protestant Christians and Jews, and Deuterocanonical by Catholic and Orthodox Christians. These additions to Daniel are:

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[1] See Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint, *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997).

1) **the Prayer of Azarias** (3:24-45; 3:1-22 in Theodotion)
2) **the Song of the Three Children** preceded by a prose interlude (3:46-90; 3:23-90 in Theodotion)
3) **the Story of Susannah** (13)
4) **the Story of Bel and the Dragon** (14).

Some scholars have felt that these sections were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic but were not part of the original book.[2] They belong to the same cycle as those Daniel episodes that came down to us in Hebrew and Aramaic form, and were translated into Greek. When the final redaction of the book was made the original texts were either lost or inaccessible to the redactor. But there has never been any doubt about their canonicity.

Daniel the Prophet

Daniel is called a prophet by Jesus (Mt 24:15), and his predictions are of immense importance, constituting the indispensable introduction to New Testament prophecy. Daniel was of princely extraction (1:3), a circumstance foretold by Isaiah (Is 39:7; cf. 2 Kgs 20:18). He was contemporaneous with Jeremiah, Ezekiel (a fellow exile, Ezk 14:20), then Joshua and Zerubbabel at the restoration to Palestine. His long career extended from Nebuchadnezzar (605 BC) to Cyrus (530 BC).

Authenticity of the Book

Beginning with Porphyry, a Neo-Platonic philosopher of the 3rd century AD,[3] to the present, the authenticity of the Book of Daniel has been questioned. It is usually understood as a product of the Maccabean Era (167 BC). The principal reasons for denying Daniel's authorship are: 1) the minutely accurate picture of the Seleucid-Ptolemaic wars and the career of Antiochus Epiphanes (Chapter 11), which are difficult to accept as genuine prophecies for the rationalistic mindset; and 2) alleged historical inaccuracies in the book. The first objection rests on scepticism, and the second on arguments from silence, plausible but erroneous presuppositions, insufficient data, or untenable interpretations. Many alleged difficulties have been cleared up by archaeological and historical advance, but the Book of Daniel seems to provoke debate between modes

[2] C. Julius, "Die griechischen Danielzusätzen und ihre kanonische Geltung", *Biblische Studien* 3:4 (1901).
[3] See Porphyry, *Contra Christianos*, c. 270 AD.

of interpretation, between faith in revelation as providence and interpretation based on scientific and historical processes.[4]

The Message of the Book

The book is the key to all biblical prophecy. Apart from the great eschatological disclosures in this work, the entire prophetic portions of the Word of God remain sealed. Jesus' great eschatological Discourse on the Mount of Olives (Mt 24—25; Mk 13; Lk 21), the Apostle Paul writing in 2 Thessalonians (2:9) and John the Evangelist in the Book of the Revelation can be unlocked only through an understanding of the prophecies of Daniel. The great themes of New Testament prophecy—the appearing of the Antichrist (the man of sin) (1 Jn 2:18, 22; 2 Jn 7), the future period of the Great Tribulation (Mt 13:21; Jn 16:33; 1 Thess 3:4; Rev 7:14), the abomination of desolation (Dan 9:27; Mt 24:15), the second advent of the Messiah in the times of the Gentiles (Lk 21:24; Jn 10:16; Acts 8:37; 10:14, 15; 1 Thess:1:1; Col 1:27; Eph 2:1) and the resurrections and judgements (Dan 7:9; 12:1-4; Mt 25:31; 2 Thess 1:8; Rev 6:12; 20:5, 11)—are first treated in Daniel.[5]

Part 1 of the Book of Daniel

1) Daniel the man and his character

The book falls naturally into two parts. Part I can be designated the 'Stories Section', and Part II the 'Visions Section'. Part I contains stories about Daniel in the time of the Babylonian Empire. In Part II there are a number of apocalyptic visions ascribed to Daniel and foretelling the future.

Part I recounts the personal experiences of Daniel at the court of Babylon. These stories may be based on original material dating from the time of Daniel, but were most likely written down later as they show some unfamiliarity with the history of the period. The main purpose is to exalt the God of Israel over the gods of the pagans through the personal experiences of the prophet Daniel. The stories are thematically tailored

[4] See Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982), pp. 282-93.

[5] See Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody's Press, 1965) and John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan , 1991) for their detailed, more literal analyses of this dimension of the Book of Daniel.

variations to reveal the God of Israel as one, living and almighty. He is further a God who loves and saves.

Chapter 1 introduces Daniel, who becomes chiefly remembered as a divinely inspired interpreter of dreams [**Fig.2**]. We also meet his Three Companions, all of whom are presented as faithful and indomitable worshippers of the one true God. The story begins with a brief reference to King Nebuchadnezzar's pillaging of the Great Temple in Jerusalem and carrying its treasures back to Babylon.[6]

Beginning of Judah's Exile (1:1-2)

The third year of Jehoiakim's reign was 605 BC, but Jeremiah makes the fourth year of Jehoiakim Nebuchadnezzar's *first* year (Jer 25:1). Jeremiah was using the Palestinian system, not reckoning the year of accession as the first year as in the Babylonian scheme, which Daniel apparently used. This early capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, although not authenticated by extra-biblical evidence, is not contradicted by any negative evidence. (Daniel uses the term "king" proleptically since Nebuchadnezzar did not ascend the throne until later.) He had conducted a campaign against the Egyptians down to their borders, but had to return to Babylon to secure his throne from possible usurpation after the death of his father. He marched against Jerusalem on his way back, and as part of the tribute demanded, carried away some of the vessels from the Temple [**Fig.3**].[7]

This date, 605 BC, marks the beginning of the Times of the Gentiles (Lk 21:24), the prophetic period when Jerusalem is under foreign control. It is plain from 2 Kgs 24:1-4 and 2 Chron 36:6 that Judah from this moment on was subservient to Gentile rule. The Jews remained so, even to a degree during the heyday of Maccabean power, and lost even Judea in 70 AD, a situation that continued until 1948 and the establishment of the state of Israel.

Nebuchadnezzar's god (1:2) was Marduk (Bel, the head of the Babylonian pantheon). Shinar is synonymous with Babylonia (Gen 10:10; Zech 5:11).[8]

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[6] See Lucas Grollenberg, *The Penguin Shorter Atlas of the Bible* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959, 1983), "Exile and Return", pp. 173-181.

[7] See Herbert May, *The Oxford Bible Atlas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), "The Babylonian Empire", pp. 74-75.

[8] The cultural background of the story is meticulously described by Henri Frankfort in *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954; Pelican, 1970), Chapter 8 The Neo-Babylonian Period (circa 612-539 B.C.), pp. 200-205.

Daniel's Great Moral Decision (1:3-21)

The story describes how some young members of the Judean nobility, among them Daniel and his Three Companions, are inducted into the king's service. Daniel and his friends are given Babylonian names, but refuse to be ‘defiled’ by the royal provisions of food and wine. Their overseer fears for his life in case the health of his charges should deteriorate, but Daniel suggests a trial for some ten days on a simple diet of vegetables and water. When they miraculously emerge healthier than their counterparts, Daniel and his friends are allowed to continue with their diet.

In this deportation Nebuchadnezzar (the Jewish form of the Babylonian Nebuchadrezzar; the Akkadian being *Nabu-kudurri-usur,* “Nabu protect my boundary”) took only the most noble and promising. Daniel was of royal birth, good looking, highly gifted and showed great promise. It was the practice of Oriental kings to have foreign youths of noble descent among their captives. Such boys had to learn the language and literature of the Chaldeans. Daniel’s moral faith and spiritual courage were demonstrated in his decision for religious separation from the paganism of Babylon. This was emphasized in his refusal to eat certain foods that were prohibited to the Jews (Lev 11), or that might well have been offered to the gods. In order to avoid any possibility of contamination, Daniel asked to be allowed to abstain from food from the royal table. Other instances of abstention from heathen food can be found in Tob 1:12 and Judith 12:1.

The name Daniel (“My God is judge”) occurs with Noah and Job (cf. Ezk 14:14, 20; 28:3). Ezekiel's references to Daniel have been connected with the legendary judge of the widow and orphan in the religious texts from Ras Shamra (Ugarit) named Danel. Daniel had ample time to establish his truly great reputation in Babylon by the time of Ezekiel, who did not begin his ministry until some 13 or 14 years after Daniel’s deportation. It is difficult to imagine that Ezekiel would link Noah and Job with a pagan legendary figure. Daniel’s Babylonian name was “Belteshazzar” (Akkadian *balusu-usur,* “may he [Bel] protect his life”).

At the end of the induction period into the royal household, the king finds the young Hebrews “ten times better” than all the wise men in his service, and it is noted that Daniel has a particular gift for divining. Daniel was endowed with the power of interpreting dreams and visions. This observation serves as a crucial prelude to the narratives that follow, and underscores the fact that Daniel’s skill was not the result of the training he had received, but the gift of God. In a country where the science of dreams was highly appreciated, this was of great importance, especially when the

king, after conversing with Daniel and his companions, found them superior to all the magicians and enchanters of his realm, and chose them as his personal attendants. The superiority of the God of Israel is already implicitly being asserted. The analogy with the young Joseph is one of the most powerful underlying structural principles at work here (Gen 37, Joseph's youthful dreams of self-aggrandizement; and Gen 40, his interpretation of the Baker's and the Butler's dreams in prison).

In the prophecies of Daniel, a revelation of the whole of world history is provided in compression. Daniel as prophet was given the privilege of perceiving the outline of human history and a parallel pathway of expectation, beginning with the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Nehemiah (444-433 BC), and culminating in the Second Coming of Christ. In particular, Daniel 2 in the imagery of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream reveals this future of the world in brief. Daniel 9:24-27 depicts the course of Israel's future, while Daniel 2, 7—8 and 11—12 provide details of the future of the nations in relation to Israel.

2) Nebuchadnezzar's Colossus Vision

Chapter 2 shows Daniel interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's first dream. This powerful situation initiates the central motif of dreams and their interpretation that will be one of the recurrent symbols of this book. The dream depicts the overthrow of all earthly kingdoms, and the establishment of a divine, universal reign. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the superiority of Daniel's God over all others in the first instance of another recurring theme.

The Forgotten Dream (2:1-28)

Nebuchadnezzar has a disturbing dream and asks his wise men to interpret it, but is unable to divulge its content. When they protest he sentences all of them to death, including Daniel and his friends. The dream came to the king in his "second year", commonly considered to conflict with 1:5, 6, 17, 20. The solution is probably that the three years of training were not three full years, but parts of three years: the first year of training was the year of the king's accession; the second year of training the first full year of the king's reign; and the third year of training "the second year" in which the dream occurred. The king summoned the whole class of magicians, enchanters, and sorcerers. These Chaldeans were a caste of wise men, associated with others in a category of diviners and occultists (2:2-5). The crucial point is that the king forgot the dream. If the dream

could be recalled, dream and omen lists could be consulted, as extant cuneiform divinatory tablets attest (2:6-9). But to recall a forgotten dream was a matter beyond human or demonic ability (2:10-16). Despite the royal threats, the magicians were not able to help the king. Implicitly, they acknowledged a superhuman wisdom in Daniel. Daniel and his friends prayed and received help from "the God of heaven" (2:17-23), and Daniel stood before the king (2:24-28), introduced by the king's bodyguard Arioch, just as Joseph in exile in Egypt had once stood before Pharaoh, introduced by the royal Butler (Gen 41:14-36). As in this earlier situation, Daniel's words bring clarity of interpretation and posit a future of vast political implication.

The Revelation and Interpretation of the Dream (2:29-45)

Daniel intervenes and asks for a temporary stay of execution so that he can petition his God for a solution. Daniel was introduced to the king only when the native wise men failed (cf. also 4:3-5, 5:7-13). He declares that there is a God in heaven who can reveal all secrets and who has, through this medium, revealed future events to the king (2:27-28a). Daniel's wisdom is a gift from God, not a superstitious art. Daniel is motivated by his devotion to God and to the Law of Moses. He is strengthened in this by his Three Friends who are called significantly by their Hebrew names (Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah).

Daniel receives an explanatory vision in the night, and then relays the content and meaning of the king's elusive reverie the following day. Nebuchadnezzar has dreamed of an enormous statue made of four metals, with feet of mixed iron and clay. The image is completely destroyed by a rock that turns into a huge mountain, and fills the whole earth. The idol's composition of metals is interpreted as a series of successive kingdoms, starting with Nebuchadnezzar himself. Finally all of these dominions are crushed by God's kingdom, a kingdom that will "endure forever".

By divine help in answer to prayer, Nebuchadnezzar's forgotten dream was revealed by Daniel (2:31-35), and explained to the king (2:36-45). The great image or colossus, as interpreted by Daniel, symbolizes the entire period known in prophecy as the Times of the Gentiles (Lk 21:24). This is the long era when Jerusalem is politically subservient to the nations, among whom the Chosen People are not to be reckoned (Num 23:9). It begins with Judah's initial captivity to Babylon in 605 BC, and will extend to the second advent of the Messiah, the Smiting Stone (2:34-35), who will destroy the Gentile world system catastrophically. The expression "in the latter times" denotes the Messianic Age (cf. Is 2:2, Mic

4:1). The revelation therefore refers ultimately to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth.

Eschatological imagery is germane to reading und understanding this passage in its immediate and canonical context. Then, and not till then, will the Stone (Christ) become a mountain (the millennial kingdom, Is 2:2, since a mountain symbolizes a kingdom, Rev 13:1; 17:9-11) and fills "the whole earth" (2:35). This is the "kingdom which shall never be destroyed...and shall stand forever" (2:44). After it has run its temporal course (Rev 20:4-5) it will merge into the eternal kingdom of the eternal realm (1 Cor 15:24-28).

The four metals symbolize four empires—Babylon, Media-Persia, Macedonian Greece and Rome (2:37-40). The fourth kingdom (Rome, 2:40-44, cf. 7:7), is envisioned panoramically, as it would exist in its ancient imperial glory, later divided into Eastern and Western Empires in AD 364 (the two legs). These two divisions will enjoy a last-day political revival in a ten-kingdom European United States of dictatorships (iron) and democracies (tile) (2:43) (possibly the Holy Roman Empire, or a concept of the European Union?). Then the supernatural Stone will strike and destroy Gentile world power and restore the kingdom to Israel (cf. Acts 1:6).

The four kingdoms of Dan 3 are identical with those of Dan 7. Perhaps the fourth kingdom cannot be Rome because the beast symbolizing it was killed before the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom? In both chapters this comes after the destruction of the statue. The fourth kingdom could be the Greek empire, although the Jews did not distinguish between Alexander and his successors. There was just one Greek empire symbolized by Antiochus IV. The Messianic future is often represented as following immediately upon a specific historical event, which in reality is separated from it by a long interval. There is no strict chronology bearing on the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.

Daniel's Promotion (2:46-49) (cf. Ezk 14:14, 20; 28:3)Daniel's career once again parallels that of Joseph, who having interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, was made prime minister of Egypt (Gen 41:37-57). It also anticipates the elevation of Mordecai in the Court of Ahasuerus (Esther 16:15-16). The scope of this passage suggests that Ezekiel's Daniel is not to be fully equated with the mythological Babylonian hero Danel of the Aqhat Epic of Ras Shamra (Ugarit); the historical Daniel seems to have only a peripheral connection with such a legend. At Daniel's request Nebuchadnezzar appoints Daniel's Three Companions as administrators over the province of Babylon. The three friends have Babylonian names.